

Australia's unprotected rebel against the political elites

By Grace Collier, *The Australian*, 9 July 2016

Here, now, we are seeing the rise of the “unprotected”, as defined by Peggy Noonan, a columnist with *The Wall Street Journal*.

In February, Noonan wrote a piece under the headline “Trump and the rise of the unprotected”. In it, she sets out to explain the defiant political mood rising across the Western world.

Noonan says that in the US, and much of Europe, the political elites cannot make sense of the world they created. The theory is deeply insightful and has real relevance to our present political predicament.

Noonan says the terrifically intelligent types who “do politics for a living” seem to be the only ones who cannot see what is right in front of their noses. “In America now only normal people are capable of seeing the obvious”, and normal people think it is obvious that Donald Trump will be the next president.

The journalist writes that society is dividing into the protected and the unprotected. “The protected make public policy. The unprotected live in it.” The protected don't live in the world of the unprotected so they can't see and feel what the unprotected do.

Noonan's “protected” are accomplished figures in government, politics and media. They are successful, live in nice neighbourhoods and their children go to good schools. In Washington or Brussels, some “literally have their own security details” and “because they are protected they feel they can do pretty much anything, impose any reality. They're insulated from many of the effects of their own decisions.”

In the US and western Europe, Noonan's “issue of the moment” is immigration. This subject, she says, is a “real and concrete one but also a symbolic one: it stands for all the distance between governments and their citizens.” Immigration is the problem that “made Donald Trump”.

Trump promises the “unprotected” protection. The unprotected are angry and Trump is the bomb they are sending to Washington. The unprotected can't wait for the day that Trump lands in the White House to tell the elites: “You're fired.”

The unprotected in Britain are fed up, too. We have seen in the Brexit vote how the establishment, the protected, big business, government, media elites, all wanted to remain in the EU. The protected demanded the unprotected vote to stay so the protected could continue on living their comfortable lives. The unprotected don't have comfortable lives; they had little to lose. They voted to leave.

In Australia, though immigration is perhaps not the hottest issue, the unprotected are fed up, too. When defining the Australian unprotected, it is important not to confuse members of this group with the disadvantaged. Though some unprotected are disadvantaged, many people who are not disadvantaged — indeed, are quite well off — consider themselves unprotected.

The rage of the unprotected is not a left-right thing, it is an in-out thing. The unprotected ranks include far more than low-skilled workers worried about job security and wage growth.

A person may consider themselves unprotected because while they may be comfortable, or even successful, they are not in the policymaking class. They may see themselves as the mug who just pays for the policymaking class to indulge themselves endlessly, and they see the protected class as having a good time while they pay for it all.

An unprotected person could be any of the following: someone running a business and overwhelmed by taxes and red tape; an elderly person struggling to keep up with all the ever-changing list of words considered offensive; a young person in Sydney who has to pay \$100,000 in stamp duty on their first home and can't understand why governments have made childcare so expensive; a self-funded retiree who feels slapped in the face by the unfair superannuation changes.

Just as there is elsewhere, in Australia there is a divide between those who make public policy and those who live in the world that the public policymakers create.

In the media, the unprotected see a focus on the banal. We see endless reports on the latest thing a politician said instead of a concentration on the important issues of the moment, such as who is going to pay for all of the bills we are racking up.

In our governments, the unprotected see an infuriating inability to confront the finances of the country. No matter how much tax we pay, it is never enough and the cost of living is getting out of hand. The hand of the state seems forever reaching into our pockets. Those who pay the most feel rage, resignation and then demotivation. Waste of public finances is rampant and obvious to everyone except the people who waste it.

Governments meddle in areas they shouldn't while failing to provide core services at an adequate standard. There is a complete lack of will. No one has the guts to speak frankly and then lead us back to a healthy position. We are fed up with the timidity and absence of common sense, the languid, lazy attitude to public duty.

At this election, the unprotected sent a message to the men who wouldn't listen. We expressed our disappointment. We don't have our version of Trump yet. There is, at the moment, only an angry crowd and an empty chair. It will be interesting to watch who tries to fill it.