

The ballot box defeats media and far left trying to usurp democracy

By Janet Albrechtsen, The Australian, 010217

On a dank and foggy Sunday morning in New York, barely a day after the inauguration of Donald Trump, the level of crazy in America's left-liberal heartland became crystal clear. After an early morning run in Central Park, I quip to a man with a horse and carriage offering trips around the park: "Where's your Trump badge?" The man opens his heavy jacket. His Trump badge is hidden inside. "Hey, you don't need to be a shy Trump voter anymore," I laugh, "He's President now."

"I have to hide it. My horse has been attacked by protesters. Democracy is great. People have a right to their views. But don't attack my horse. When your side loses, you have to accept that. This is wrong," Tom says, on the day after the women's march brought this and other cities to a standstill.

Later I venture out from my hotel room wearing a red Make America Great Again cap. It's half experiment, half up-yours to the bad losers. A well-dressed man in his 60s is in the lift as I enter at the 41st floor. "I support you," he says quietly, even though we're alone. "You're brave to be stepping out in that." We talk about how crazy that is after a democratic election and an inauguration.

Later, walking around the Upper East and Upper West Side of NYC, not a single shout or snigger has been directed at the hat or its wearer. It wasn't like that yesterday as the women's march roared through the streets, over-emoting an election result.

In fact, three for three in my favour tells its own crazy story. The second comment is a quick "I'm with you" from a bloke walking towards me. Later, at the annual Winter Antiques Fair at the Park Avenue Armory, I'm finishing off lunch at the cafe when two well-dressed upper-middle-class New Yorkers sit near me. The man asks politely whether my tomato soup is good. Yes, I say, and he tells me about his vegetarian chilli soup. After a few more sips of his soup, he motions to the Trump hat. "You're brave to wear that hat," he says quietly. "But I'm with you," he adds, echoing my two previous interlocutors. Quietly, his wife says she is with me too.

The New Yorkers were born in eastern Europe, one Czech, one Hungarian. Both had parents who were Holocaust survivors. They loathe the offensive side of Trump, the non-presidential tone, but they want economic prosperity and physical security. Simple as that.

In this city at least, something akin to an underground movement has emerged from those two entirely natural human desires. When polite chitchat leads to barely audible talk about supporting Trump, it feels almost subversive. In NYC the shy Trump voter is still shy. Maybe more so now.

The man in the cafe describes his monthly poetry reading group on the Upper West Side. His fellow poetry readers say they can't sleep because of Trump. They don't understand what's happened or why. They don't want to. "It shows how illiberal the so-called left-liberals are," he tells me. "We can't even talk politics with them. It's just crazy stuff."

A few days later, a few remarks from Donald Trump's chief White House strategist Steve Bannon confirm the level of crazy that has settled into the US political landscape. "The media

should be embarrassed and humiliated and keep its mouth shut and just listen for a while,” Bannon tells *The New York Times*.

“I want you to quote this. The media here is the opposition party. They don’t understand the country. They still don’t understand why Donald Trump is the President of the United States.”

Boom. “White House tells media to shut up”, raged the left-liberal media, proving in record speed Bannon’s critique of the media. That is a threat, roared *The Guardian*. The Huffington Post used Bannon’s remarks to accuse the Trump administration, barely a week old, of already looking like the worst of Richard Nixon. CNN’s Christiane Amanpour likened Bannon’s shut-up comment to the working of a totalitarian regime, quipping this is how you angle for an order of merit from the presidents of Egypt, Russia and Turkey.

Dear Christiane, Turkey locks up more journalists than any other country. The US doesn’t imprison journalists for doing their job, whichever way they want to do it. Yours sincerely, Janet.

Default outrage prevented the media from hearing Bannon’s real point: the media should listen more if they want to understand why Trump is President. Like the Upper West Side poetry group, the media still don’t want to listen and learn. Like the anti-Trump protesters, they still don’t want to understand Trump’s supporters.

We know the outraged left-wing press didn’t listen to Trump supporters because even the publisher of the NYT apologised to subscribers after the election for its coverage. *The Washington Post* tried to make amends by running letters from Trump supporters. Pity the *Post* wasn’t interested before the election.

We also know that sections of the left-liberal press openly adopted an oppositional stance to Trump because they admitted as much. Writing on the Daily Caller website last week, Rachel Stoltfoos reminded us that former National Public Radio boss Ken Stern advocated oppositional tactics because Trump is “an affront to American democracy”. Tellingly, Stern admitted the price: “The next time Fox News or Breitbart caterwaul about media bias, the claim will have substantially more bite.”

The bite marks of bias grow deeper and more grotesque the longer the left-wing media refuses to listen. At his first official meeting, Trump spoke at CIA headquarters in Virginia. He was given a standing ovation and cheered during his speech. Over at CNN, TV hosts hyperventilated about Trump’s self-congratulatory remarks while standing in front of the agency’s memorial to its dead officers. CNN’s TV stars didn’t report the audience cheering Trump because they weren’t listening.

Last week *The Economist* downgraded the US from a full to a flawed democracy. Its so-called Intelligence Unit explained the downgrade was due to a “further erosion of trust in government and elected officials there”. Using more intelligent criteria — say, the ability or failure to listen — the Intelligence Unit should have downgraded a media that failed to listen to Trump supporters, not to mention the woman who refused to listen to people she nicknamed deplorables. Where’s the flaw in a democracy when the candidate who listened most to those who are wary of DC politics won a democratic election and is now President?

While American left-liberal media outlets resume normal programming of blocking their ears, top-rating shows on Foxtel’s Sky News Australia will be leaving the studio this year to listen and report on grassroots issues from people outside the big cities. As Sky’s David Speers said:

“It’s incumbent on us in the media to do a better job of listening to those people who genuinely feel they’re not being heard or genuinely represented by the governing class.”

Trump’s win is a wake-up call for our politicians to do the same or else feel the eventual backlash of shy voters emboldened by the privacy of the ballot box.

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