

Will of the people be damned as the 'virtuous' elite browbeats all

By Chris Kenny, The Australian, 21 September 2019

Jacinta Price with family and friends. Price was told by the Coffs Harbour council that she had to get permission from local Aboriginal groups to speak in the NSW mid-north coast town, an edict she wisely ignored.

We are rapidly transitioning from the end of history to the demise of rationalism. Much of what underpins the success of Western liberal democracies — what Francis Fukuyama saw as the pinnacle of human history — is under threat.

Our societies are dumbing down dangerously, ignoring what has delivered our success and indulging in self-loathing and delusion. Leading the charge are members of the self-proclaimed intellectual elite.

Just look at the hysteria, misinformation and rigid conformity of the media, political and academic classes in the US as they continue to rail against the democratic result of the 2016 presidential election. They will exaggerate any fault, invent any fake news and pursue any conspiracy to defy the will of the people and flatter their own vanity; hoping to have their misgivings endorsed so they can consign to history their misinterpretations of Donald Trump.

The more information and voices available, it seems, the less public debate is beholden to facts and reality.

Opposing the US President has become an identity trait, and facts are irrelevant when the aim is to demonstrate or reinforce defining characteristics.

When hating the President reflects your virtue and defines your values, getting Trump, no matter how, becomes essential to your public image and sense of self. Especially in the digital age (as Douglas Murray, Jonathan Haidt and others have examined) issues are used to define people, rather than the other way around.

We see this most strongly with climate change, people identifying with global warming as a means of displaying their priorities and qualities. Nothing so banal as temperature records, global emissions trajectories or policy options are allowed to derail them from emotive, onanistic postures. Climate protests and solar panels help people feel fulfilled and virtuous.

Economic, social, intellectual and political freedoms are under assault. In large part they are being undermined by the adaptive forces of the socialist left who, having morphed into the green left, are sustained in universities, bureaucracies and quangos by taxation revenue from the capitalist operations they abhor. We can see Trump, Brexit and Scott Morrison as correctives against this trend — and that was clearly the intention of voters — but having won their democratic battles, all are under assault from the anti-democratic rearguard actions of the so-called elites. These are the democracy deniers, and they are chalking up the wins.

In Britain the parliament deliberately defies the will of the people on Brexit and undercuts Prime Minister Boris Johnson's EU bargaining position. In the US the Democrats and the courts conspire to thwart the implementation of election policies such as temporary

immigration bans and a border wall, while the political apparatus is used to pursue never-ending conspiracy theories.

In Australia activists and courts thwart successful immigration policies repeatedly endorsed by voters, journalists barrack incuriously on climate alarmism, and local councils intercede on climate and foreign policy issues outside their remit.

This activism is given intellectual and ideological succour by the academic and media classes, who choose to side with what they perceive as the elite view against the choices of the mainstream. This frustrates the democratic will of the people and ultimately may test their patience.

It is difficult to resist pessimism. Perhaps Fukuyama's end of history was essentially correct, except that the evolutionary high point of the liberal democratic state, through complacency and indulgence, inevitably leads to self-destruction; so the process restarts.

By global standards Australia remains a beacon of prosperity, opportunity, fairness, tolerance and security. But while we continue to toy with our success, the West's strategic and ideological rival, China, works assiduously to extend its economic and political reach, all the way into our universities and parliaments.

In a country committed to Paris emissions targets and already paying a high economic price from climate-related policies, schoolchildren, medical students, council staff and state public servants were encouraged to join a global strike for climate action on Friday. Questions about what action, at what cost, for what benefit were ignored by participants, media and political supporters.

In Coffs Harbour on the NSW mid-north coast, an elected local council allowed its bureaucracy to impose a special condition on an Aboriginal woman speaking in the town. Jacinta Price was told to get permission from local Aboriginal groups, an edict she wisely - ignored. While the ABC joined the illiberal pile-on and eventually apologised for doing so (after media pressure), Coffs Harbour mayor Denise Knight refused to apologise or even explain whether these demands were placed on Price because she was a woman, an - Aboriginal or a conservative — or all three.

It is not hard to imagine the likely outrage had this episode played out around different figures: perhaps a council resisting an Aboriginal activist spruiking a treaty; a city rejecting the visit of a climate evangelist; or a media organisation demonising a female progressive. But Price — indigenous, female and right-of-centre — was fair game.

Never mind that Price's views reflect the mainstream; the self-proclaimed elites reject majority opinion in favour of attempts to slander and silence their opponents. If democracy can't deliver on green-left aims, they find other ways; this is the disintegration of civil society.

Elsewhere in recent days councils have abandoned Australia Day and rejected Christmas celebrations — they embrace a climate “emergency” but reject traditional community. In state parliaments gender is eradicated from birth certificates or becomes a matter of timeless and unconstrained choice. In government departments and major companies, signs invite

people to select the bathroom that suits their chosen gender. Yet the same people passionately advocate for gender-based quotas in parliaments and boardrooms. Go figure.

On any given Sunday, on the public broadcaster's premier political panel show, we are likely to see a host and three panellists who all picked the last federal election completely wrong and repeatedly have misread border protection and climate change for the best part of a decade. Yet they are proffered as experts — reality and election results are not allowed to interrupt their circular discussions.

This week *The Conversation* — an online publication that is publicly funded, is supported by leading universities and operates under the motto of “intellectual rigour, journalistic flair” — announced it would not publish or tolerate comments from anyone with sceptical views on global warming, or indeed, anyone it dubs a climate change denier.

This is the polar opposite of intellectual rigour and journalism. And it comes from a publication that talks about carbon dioxide emissions “destroying the planet” and has often published the likes of Tim Flannery, renowned alarmist and promoter of erroneous climate predictions. So silly extremes are tolerated only if they exaggerate global warming.

Water Minister David Littleproud received the full “gotcha” media treatment for daring to be ambivalent about the role of human-induced emissions in climate changes.

There is more journalistic investment in such nonsense than there is in pursuing answers from either major party on how their climate policies can deliver any benefit while global emissions continue to rise.

Labor MP Matt Thistlethwaite promised me this week that the ALP would always “do more” than the Coalition on climate action, but would not commit to cutting emissions beyond the Paris targets. The position is a paradoxical nonsense.

Labor cannot claim to be doing more on climate without further reducing emissions. But, surprise, surprise, there was no media interest in this own-goal policy gotcha.

This month we have heard experts and authorities describe the Queensland bushfires as unprecedented. They were not.

Victorian Water Minister Lisa Neville says it is not worth building dams because rain will no longer fill them. She wants to spend more on desalination plants instead.

It is hard to know how the desal plants will be powered because Victoria has clamped down on gas exploration, forced the closure of coal-fired electricity generators and boosted its renewable aspirations. This is emotion, gesture and ideology trumping rational thinking, and people will suffer.

In NSW a coalmine was rejected partly because of what it might do to the climate — so South Korean generators will probably burn dirtier coal from another country. Medical students joining the climate strike told us global warming could damage the health of the elderly in the future — but just this winter a study has shown that the number of people dying at home or being admitted to hospital from the cold has risen by 34 per cent because pensioners can't pay their power bills (which have more than doubled across a decade largely

because of climate-driven market interventions). Hardships of the present are ignored in favour of scares about the future.

Facts are being subsumed by feelings. Democracy is being usurped by so-called elites. Liberal democracies will forget what has made them great at their own peril.

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