

Green left trashes votes by its contempt for the mainstream

By Chris Kenny, *The Australian*, 21 December 2019

Almost 15 years ago I wrote about the accidental insight of Mark Latham's diaries (which were a minor sensation at the time). My thesis was that the diaries revealed a disdain for mainstream people, the voters the former Labor leader was trying to win over.

Reincarnated first as a political commentator and now as NSW's One Nation leader, Latham seems belatedly to have learned this lesson, becoming an unashamed and articulate champion for mainstream families and values. (To be fair, this is exactly what he threatened to become in the successful early days of his stint as federal opposition leader — the bitterness in his diaries might have been inflamed by subsequent events.)

The point is that you don't win people over by demeaning them. Bob Hawke constantly praised mainstream Australians, flattering them and appealing to their intelligence. John Howard had a similar approach.

As I put it in reference to Latham's diaries in 2005: "The left have developed a sneering attitude to the populace. Latham's description of what he says is half the population is withering: '... the disengaged, self-interested middle class, who tend to delegate economic management to the Coalition in federal elections, but trust state Labor with the health and education services. Apathy Rules.'"

There were many other examples to support my conclusion: "This is a slippery slide — from not engaging with the public, to siding with the elites against an apparently unenlightened public. Eventually there is distrust and even disdain for the very people you are relying on for support."

Clearly the trend has continued; through myriad turns and issues, it seems this divide has become the defining one in Western liberal democracies — those who hold voters in high regard, and those who look down at them.

Apart from turning off voters, it affects how the politicians behave; the more they sneer at voters, the more they think they can fool them and the more cynical their tactics become. And voters see through it.

Take what I think was the most telling moment in the 2016 US presidential campaign. It did not spring from anything Donald Trump said, it came from his opponent, Hillary Clinton.

"You know, to just be grossly generalistic," she told Democratic donors in New York City in September 2016, "you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic — you name it. And unfortunately, there are people like that. And he has lifted them up."

It is not hard to see why this can be politically fatal. It has become a typically left-of-centre failing but it is a trap too for so-called moderates on the right of centre who shy from tough debates and look for the easy way out.

Take the 2012 US election when Mitt Romney notoriously was caught out lamenting that 47 per cent of voters were locked on to Barack Obama because they “are dependent upon government” and “believe that they are victims”. Romney tanked.

In Australia the left has fallen for this trap repeatedly. Sometimes voters are derided indirectly — think about how Labor and Greens politicians, along with many journalists and commentators, have accused the Coalition of “dog-whistling” on border protection policies. Such a charge, by extension, insults voters in three important ways: it accuses them of supporting foolish policies; it hinges on mainstream voters harbouring innate racism; and it tarnishes them as gullible enough to be fooled.

For a decade or two the green left in Australia has accused Coalition politicians and, by extension anyone thinking of voting for them, of being xenophobic or even racist when it comes to border security. They are deemed as selfish deniers on global warming, Islamophobes when it comes to countering terrorism, and greedy and heartless on taxes and welfare.

“But hey,” says the left, “haul your racist, sexist, selfish, denier, Islamophobic and heartless attitudes into the polling booth and vote for us.” It becomes tiresome, especially when the policy arguments lack substance.

And it hasn’t worked. Why do politicians demean voters? You can think of the scorn as the ugly but necessary hull that keeps afloat the colourful spinnakers of virtue signalling, or perhaps the invective is the foundation stone to the cathedral of sanctimony. It is only by demonising others that the green left can demonstrate its own moral superiority. So contempt directed at others becomes a necessary precondition of moral posturing.

The same scenario has been played out on steroids in Britain during the past three years of the Brexit debate, coming to its inevitable conclusion in last week’s election.

In the millions of words of analysis, nothing cut through like this pithy and personalised summary from journalist and bestselling author Douglas Murray.

“As it happens, I share the views of the majority of the country,” Murray wrote in the Mail on Sunday. “I have seen the Leftist robots up close for years. I have sat in halls and studios with them and been insulted by them just as the rest of the general public have. They have called me a ‘Little Englander’ because I happen to think that our country isn’t a good fit with the EU. They have called me a ‘racist’ and ‘scum’ because I’m concerned about too-high levels of immigration. They have called me a ‘bigot’ and a ‘transphobe’ because I refuse to pretend that biological sex does not exist.

“And amazingly, at the end of all that, I felt no more desire to vote for them than I had beforehand. I suspect the general public have the same view.”

Murray went on to conclude that the central political divide now is “between the ugly, intolerant, metropolitan Left and the rest of us”. He has summed it up, in a nutshell.

A defining characteristic of modern politics in Western liberal democracies is that the left is regressing to the discredited socialist goals of the 1970s. The young green left has forgotten the lessons of the collapse of the Soviet Union or, more likely, it never learned them.

Instead, the green left tackles a range of economic, environmental, foreign affairs and social goals, and does it with a sense of moral superiority that is misplaced, evangelical and ruthless. To oppose their goals is to be deemed unworthy as a human being and dismissed or attacked — the issues are not to be debated, the dissidents are to be de-platformed or destroyed.

The modern left is corrupted by the coarse manners and lack of persuasiveness in S11, Occupy Wall Street, antifa and Extinction Rebellion. These extremist activists pollute the movement, their memes are propagated through social media and find their way into mainstream journalism before being spat from the mouths of green-left politicians.

This is the reason the love media is such an ironic term. The hate preached by the green left and its media supporters is beyond the bounds of normal discourse. It scares voters away.

Former Howard government minister Amanda Vanstone got a taste of this during the week when she retweeted my climate change column from last weekend suggesting it was “spot on”. This seemingly harmless act invited an avalanche of vile and idiotic abuse from hundreds of people who clearly had not read the article and based their responses on the headline (the only words not written by the columnist and the least interesting aspect to those responding).

Twitter is not only full of insults and vitriol, its prime fault is that it is overwhelmingly obtuse. Whatever is most popular on Twitter is almost invariably wrong; yet, inexplicably, mainstream media take their cue from it. Because it is easy, I suppose.

In this way, the most ridiculous ideas on Twitter, such as blaming Scott Morrison for bushfires or deifying Greta Thunberg as bringing something new to the climate debate, can soon find their way into the news bulletins of our public broadcasters or the pages of Time magazine. All the while the intelligent life forms who ignore all this are never heard from, either drowned out or scared away.

They have their say on election day. And we are left to wonder why the green left hasn't mended its ways.

The Trump election victory, Russiagate embarrassment and impeachment process, Brexit referendum, Morrison election win and Boris Johnson triumph — the media/political class keep misreading the public and embarrassing themselves. Will they ever learn?

There are only two possible explanations. Either they are too ideological to modify their behaviour — they really do believe their propaganda and despise mainstream voters — or their egos are so warped they forsake the goal of medium-term success for short-term social media gratification.

Either way, they are not offering much hope for working families. And they won't find success until they rediscover mainstream values and learn to identify with the people who hold them.

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