

## This season's bumper crop from Left's Long March

By Judith Sloan, *The Australian*, 25 August 2020

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Timing is everything, and so it is with the onset of [COVID-19](#) and the culmination of the long march through the institutions.

This march has taken a while, led by the universities veering to the left and inculcating students on the full agenda of woke topics — the evils of capitalism, colonialism, racism, women's rights, inequality, diversity, multi-culturalism, globalism, intersectionality, climate change etc.

It's not just humanities and law students who've been subject to this politically correct thinking. Courses ranging from medicine to science, from engineering to business include large dollops of woke material, strange as this might seem.

As graduates fanned out into the public service and teaching, the pace of the march quickened — any workers holding different views from the full woke complement were effectively silenced lest their careers be endangered.

At a time when we need our public institutions at the top of their game and for people to have confidence in them, their activities and the expressed opinions of their leaders too often work against their original objectives.

Rather than perform their roles quietly and efficiently, most taxpayer-funded institutions are off on self-directed frolics based on the on-trend progressive fads.

Look at Victoria's Chief Health Officer, Dr Brett Sutton. As COVID-19 struck, he was busy putting the finishing touches on a paper about climate change and public hospitals. As the virus spread, his deputy, Dr Annaliese Van Diemen, using Twitter, likened COVID-19 to the arrival of Captain James Cook. (Perhaps she meant Governor Arthur Phillip — history is not one of her strengths.)

Generally, chief health officers positions — often political appointments — were never taken seriously by the medical profession. While public health can be a fairly dreary pursuit, with preventive measures necessary but sometimes costly, it is a crucial activity for the public sector.

But lured by trendy and worthy-sounding alternative endeavours, state health departments ended up underinvesting in public health and pandemic preparation, with Victoria leading the pack of neglectful bureaucrats. Now we are expected to hang on their every word and the punitive directions they issue almost daily.

Of course, the long march through the institutions doesn't end with state health departments. There is nary a part of the state or federal public services not infected by the rise of politically correct thinking and distracted from the pursuit of the rightful objectives.

Take the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A glance at its top-heavy organisational structure is terrifying. There is the Sustainability and Climate Change branch and the Human Rights and Social Inclusion branch. We even have an Ambassador for Gender Equality and,

of course, a Gender Equality Branch. Evidently, people smuggling and human trafficking also need their own ambassador.

Most people would be able to remove about two-thirds of the activities of DFAT and conclude the country would be better off saving the cost of those highly paid officials as well as discarding all that pointless meddling.

It's hardly necessary to mention the Australian Human Rights Commission here. What started off as a modest venture to offer some remediation for tightly defined violations of human rights – the states already had their own machinery – it has ended up as a vehicle for grandstanding presidents and commissioners pursuing personal agendas.

Then there is the ABC which is wall-to-wall woke with the possible exception of regional radio.

The Bureau of Meteorology should be a dull agency undertaking the useful task of predicting the weather, short-term and slightly longer-term. There were jokes about the inaccuracy of its forecasts but most people held BOM to be reasonably trustworthy. Climate change has completely altered its activities. The agency regularly makes grand statements about this day or month or year being the hottest on record without revealing the true adjustments it makes to these claims. The BOM wants to be a player in the climate change debate, underpinning its demand for more resources.

Even organisations that should be regarded as undertaking boring, utilitarian roles have lost the plot. The Australian Prudential Regulation Authority – doing a very bad job regulating superannuation – insists climate change be taken into account by the companies it regulates.

The Reserve Bank of Australia is also on the climate change bandwagon, with the deputy governor giving a second-rate speech on the connection between climate change and monetary policy – a connection he was unable to make. But fear not, there is an international cabal of central bankers – the RBA is a member – working on climate change.

The Australian Taxation Office, at some stage, decided to make life difficult for independent contractors by arbitrarily removing Australian Business Numbers and refusing to issue new ones. It was impossible to escape the conclusion the ATO much preferred PAYE-tax paying employees over independent contractors.

Some of the government agencies regulating the National Electricity Market are also hotbeds of woke thinking – most particularly, the Australian Energy Market Operator headed by American lawyer Audrey Zibelman.

Audrey Zibelman Managing Director and CEO, Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO). Picture: John Feder

In its latest version of how the NEM should develop, the Integrated System Plan, two heroic assumptions are made: central planning works and the price of gas will be so high that renewable energy is the only way forward. Central planning has a nasty habit of going badly wrong – a lesson that AEMO might have taken on board.

And in order to support its preferred future reliance on renewable energy – something like California — the AEMO technocrats worked with extraordinarily high gas prices as well as the assumption that backup batteries would only need to last for two hours, on average. It’s a good example of garbage in, garbage out. That taxpayers and consumers must stump up \$25 billion in new transmission lines and drive up electricity prices didn’t seem to worry the ideologues.

The Treasury and the Productivity Commission are just holding the line in terms of resisting the onslaught of woke obsessions influencing recommendations. Having said this, Treasury is dominated by Keynesian thinkers who see higher government spending as the answer to economic problems. Supply-side reforms struggle to get a look-in.

The bottom line is that we are being badly served by a large clique of woke public servants whose pay has been unaffected by the pandemic but who continue to deliver predictable, politically correct nonsense.

Does it really surprise anyone that the guards engaged to work at the [quarantine hotels in Melbourne received training in diversity but not in infection control?](#)

Actual performance was less important than meeting diversity quotas even if the failure to manage the quarantine process has led to untold economic and social harm.

This is where the march has landed us.

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