

AUSTRALIA: PIONEERING THE NEW POST-POLITICAL NORMAL IN THE BIO-SECURITY STATE

by Paul Tyson

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Australia: Pioneering the New Post-Political Normal in the Bio-Security State

Paul Tyson

Abstract

This paper argues that liberal democratic politics in Australia is in a life-threatening crisis. Australia is on the verge of slipping into a techno-feudal (post-capitalist) and post-political (new Centrist) state of perpetual emergency. Citizens in Australia, be they of the Left or Right, must make an urgent attempt to wrest power from an increasingly non-political Centrism. Within this Centrism, government is deeply captured by the international corporate interests of Big Tech, Big Natural Resources, Big Media, and Big Pharma, as beholden to the economic necessities of the neoliberal world order (Big Finance). Australia now illustrates what the post-political ‘new normal’ of a high-tech enabled bio-security state actually looks like. It may even be that the liberal democratic state is now little more than a legal fiction in Australia. This did not happen over-night, but Australia has been sliding in this direction for the past three decades. The paper outlines that slide and shows how the final bump down (covid) has now positioned Australia as a world leader among post-political bio-security states.

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This paper argues that liberal democratic politics in Australia is in a life-threatening crisis.¹ Under such circumstances anyone – be they of the Left or the Right – who believes that parliamentary power should be an expression of political authority that is derived from the discursive and free will of citizens, should work together to save liberal democracy.

Australia now provides a distressingly good case study for what happens to liberal democracies when national politics devolves into a state of perpetual emergency and invasive security measures, to keep citizens ‘safe’. Firstly under the 9/11 War On Terror (incorporating an existing War On Refugees), and now under COVID, an ideology of executive power that rides over the top of inconvenient minorities in the name of emergency necessity, has been increasingly normalised. It is

¹ This is no novel argument. For one recent exposition of this theme from the perspective of a journalist covering international affairs, see Stan Grant, *With the Falling of the Dusk*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2021.

now the sad case that once strong liberal democratic institutions and dignified public liturgies in Australia have been reduced to a mere theatre of callously pragmatic power politics. Australians now live in a nation-state where power is no longer genuinely accountable to citizens, and where the judiciary no longer has much it can say to the executive other than greenlighting whatever extraordinary powers parliament has given to ministers via the drafting of far-reaching security and emergency laws, so that they can keep us ‘safe’.

Centrist non-politics verses old fashioned Left-and-Right politics

It is time that both the Left and the Right shake off a Centrist Conformism to the new normal of the post-political, post-capitalist, bio-security state.

David Graeber points out that the antimonies defining the Culture War – characterized by a vitriolic antagonism between Progressives and Conservatives – is in reality a ‘divide and conquer’ diversion within liberal democracy, whilst all the time the new post-political normal is quietly settling in.² This new normal is equally opposed to Progressive and Conservative political ideologies, because it is opposed to liberal democratic politics. Techno-feudal Big Money is effectively already ruling the world, and if people who actually believe in liberal democracy don’t stop fighting each other, we are going to wake up one morning to the horrifying realization that the politics of meaningful citizen representation, the accountability of power to citizens, and open and vigorously contested public debate is simply gone.

² David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, London: Penguin, 2018, 266–269.

What Graeber describes as “moral envy”³ between Progressives and Conservatives, is a wonderful tool to promote the theatre of cultural warfare when all the while the underlying real causes of resentment, the real causes of the loss of meaningful purpose, and the real causes of the loss of community cohesion and values (for *both* Progressives and Conservatives) have nothing much to do with whether Progressives or Conservatives are morally right or wrong. In reality, the twentieth century decimation of the productive employment sectors of agriculture and manufacturing by automation and off-shore exploitation has totally re-drawn the workplace and economic realities of consumer societies. Today the Left politics of ‘workers’ and Right politics of ‘the owners of the means of production’ is totally irrelevant to most people’s actual lives within consumer society. Meaningful productive work (actually growing or making things that people really need) is hard to get and often (such as in agriculture) horrifyingly squeezed by the powerful retail cartels that producers are forced to deal with, and caring work is almost by definition highly stressed and poorly paid. Nearly everyone else in the workforce has “bullshit jobs” that are not genuinely productive and that do not do (and often hamper) real caring work. This broad context is very damaging to the human soul.

Graeber describes the bullshitization of the workplace as spiritually violent and emotionally depleting, making many of us miserable in our work and resentful of those who do meaningful work, even if they are very poorly paid (or, like home makers and many artists and unemployable academics, not paid at all). And then we have the toxic myth of consumerism which promises satisfaction through

³ Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 248.

purchasing, and the delusional myth of ‘a strong economy’ which we have a responsibility to uphold, even if most of the economy’s wealth is derived from non-productive and non-caring sectors. Most of the Australian economy wealth is derived from various forms of property and rent, the finance sector, labour-minimal natural exploitation, on-selling, and the burgeoning wages and contractual arrangements ‘produced’ in the bullshit sector by private corporations, state bureaucracies, institutional management, and regulatory and administrative red-tape applicators. We are an unhappy people, and our unhappiness is used as fuel for the fires of social and cultural division, such that we simply don’t notice the quiet takeover of politics by high financial power, the insidious takeover of communication, culture and our mind-scapes by financializing Big Tech/Media, and the quiet reduction of liberal democracy to a bizarre and meaningless theatre wherein power has no longer been made accountable to citizens through their parliamentary representatives.

The point of the above is that people who care about liberal democratic politics need to unite across Left and Right lines because they are now both alienated from the Centre which is entirely uninterested in liberal democracy. This new Centre is pursuing safety, submissive subservience to economic and external threat ‘reality’, and is civically paralysed by resentment, insecurity, meaningless discontent, cultural atomization, and fear.

Australia is pioneering this new post-political normal, and shows the world what it can expect if the present Centrist trajectory is simply accepted. Let us look, then, at what is going on in the Land Down Under.

Australia's new (post-political) normal

“Stay Safe” is the most oft-repeated tag-line of Australia’s (as I write) Prime Minister, Mr Scott Morrison. This safety trajectory has been central to the Centre-Right of Australian politics from at least as far back as Prime Minister John Howard. In the late 1990s, amping-up ‘border security’ against refugees (‘boat people’) was a successful way of harnessing Anglo-origin resentment towards multi-cultural immigration⁴ at the same time that the neoliberal recessions that we ‘had to have’ were making the less affluent more aware of the growing wealth

⁴ Contemporary Australia is built on post-war immigration. Greeks and Italians, in particular – as well as people from all over Europe including a large Jewish cohort of holocaust survivors – came to Australia in large numbers in the post-war boom years, under the White Australia immigration regime. This immigration regime was implemented because Australians were fearful of a pending ‘Asian Invasion’ after grappling with the Japanese in World War Two, so Australia wanted to increase the size of their ‘white’ (non-Asian) population, sitting, as Australia does, as a British-Isles-origin colony at the bottom of Asia. When Australian politicians ended the White Australia immigration regime in the 1970s and welcomed Vietnamese refugees to Australia – who were, after-all, fleeing deadly reprisals because of their involvement in the failed US lead war against the Vietnamese Communists (in which Australia participated heavily) – Australia embraced a vibrant multi-culturalism that had strong European and Asian influences. This made our cuisine and cultural life really sensational, and many Anglo Australians of my generation who grew up in the multi-cultural Australia of the 1970s married the children of immigrants (as I did) and embraced a richly cosmopolitan cultural ethos. But the post-war boom also ended in the 1970s and from the 1980s on, large income distribution inequalities became the defining difference separating the Neoliberal globalized era from the Keynesian nationalist era that preceded it. Insecurity breeds resentment and xenophobia, and this has been a potent political fuel for the politics of safety, economic necessitism (neoliberal ‘growth’ at whatever social service degrading and equality slashing cost) and a new militant nationalism (promoting a largely ‘white’ World War One ‘Digger’ mythology of ‘true’ Australian identity) since John Howard’s era in the late 1990s.

and opportunity inequalities in Australian society.⁵ When one feels insecure, picking on someone more vulnerable than yourself and making them a scapegoat for your own sense of insecurity has proven to be a sure-fire road to electoral victory with swingable middle Australia over the past 30 years.⁶ The past few decades have seen the steady move of the entire political spectrum in Australia to the Right, as a fear-harnessing, safety-requiring and economic nirvana promising electoral mantra has become highly effective in attracting swinging votes. In this context the Left seems to think that the only way it can win at the polls is to trumpet how safe and neoliberally successful it too can make Australia.

Over the past 30 years, Australian politics has experienced an ever-escalating race to abandon old Left and old Right ideological commitments. Both Centre-Right and Centre-Left political parties in Australia are now appealing to ‘traditional’ – and mythological – nationalist identity (World War One ‘Diggers’),⁷ demonstrating their neoliberal economic management orthodoxy,⁸ and protecting insecure and vulnerable feeling Australians from as many external threats as our

⁵ Michael Pusey, *The Experience of Middle Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁶ Perhaps this politically exploitable dynamic illustrates a structural weakness that any representative democracy has in pressured times when a sizeable proportion of ‘the middle’ feel like their circumstances are getting worse.

⁷ See Marilyn Lake and David Reynolds, *What’s Wrong With ANZAC? The Militarization of Australian History*, Sydney: NewSouth, 2010. This text describes the political production of the new nationalist ANZAC identity myth in the 1990s.

⁸ Michael Pusey documents the take-over of key Federal Government offices by ‘economic rationalism’ in the 1980s, which become the only ideological game in town. See Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

politicians can find⁹ (excepting climate change). The effect of this race to the Right has been to neutralize any significant ideological differences between the two 'sides' Australians can vote for, giving voters a Tweedledum and Tweedledee 'choice' at the poles. Thus has the entire political spectrum moved firmly to the Right making old fashioned conservative political leaders from the 1970s look positively socialist now. That is, Australian Centrism is now heavily authoritarian, militantly nationalist, aggressively neoliberal, unconcerned about human rights, and actively seeking of sweeping executive state powers. Let us be frank. This is soft fascism.

This spectrum movement to the 'Right' is exactly not a libertarian Right. This movement to the 'Far Right' is actually a Big State soft fascist category, with distressing similarities to the authoritarian and militarist nationalism that Germans found themselves living under in the 1930s. That is, we now have a very strong and powerful state that is firmly in charge of citizen affairs and reaches deeply into citizens lives to make sure they are being good Australians. The old Right that wants less state power is as ostracized from our political 'realities' as is the old Left that wants more egalitarian state support for the less fortunate.

When Australians go to an election, they get to 'chose' between two brands of the same 'Centrist' (actually Far Right) political product.

⁹ The collective psychology of fear and the intuitive political understanding of the use of that psychology is documented in Australian politics in these three books: Anthony Burke, *Beyond Security, Ethics and Violence: War Against the Other*, London: Routledge, 2007; Anthony Burke, *Fear of Security. Australia's Invasion Anxiety*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008; Andrew Wilkie, *Axis of Deceit*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2004.

Genuine ideologically egalitarian social welfare advocates and cosmopolitans on the Left, and genuine ideologically conservative and libertarian advocates of minimal state power on the Right, are entirely excluded from the Centre and have nowhere they can meaningfully put their vote so as to have their views represented in the party-political system. Voting has become a donkey's choice¹⁰ for anyone who votes on the grounds of strong political commitments to traditional Left ideologies of a socially progressive, inclusive and egalitarian nature, as well as strong political commitments to traditional Right ideologies of values preserving conservative or a libertarian personal freedom nature. What this means is that voting is not defined by political ideologies any more, but it is a theatre in which two teams of apparently opposed Centrist (actually Far Right) actors market their 'leadership' products to the consumer audience of the Australian voter. Do you want a red tie or a blue tie over the same grey suit of the neoliberal security-state power? This makes a mockery of the genuine citizen choice component of liberal democracy.

A seriously anti-political role in this theatre of 'representative' politics is played by social media.¹¹ Informed and responsible citizens of

¹⁰ In Australia, one form of protest that our compulsory voting system allows is called a "donkey vote". That is, one goes to the polling booth and fills out the voting form in such a manner that the vote will be invalid and uncounted. The idea here is that if one is given a donkey's choice between equally idiotic alternatives, the only sensible thing to do is to negate the impossible dilemma by just not playing the voting game. The donkey (intelligently!) just sits down, rather than going in one of two impossibly unsavoury directions.

¹¹ As Siva Vaidyanathan points out (*Antisocial Media. How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), calling Facebook et al "social media" is the same type of nomenclature as George Orwell's *Nineteen*

a liberal democracy should think hard about their politics, should act together to limit non-citizen power, and should freely and vigorously argue the merits and risks of alternative political platforms in the public sphere if the very idea of a discursive and responsible liberal democracy is to actually work. But social media (and news media works the same way) is defined by a constant barrage of attention deficit inducing disaster and salacious grabs where producing an immediate emotive responses is the main driver of the process. Social media is commercially designed to deplete serious and focused intellectual attention, but also to endlessly hold emotional attention by the time-honoured marketing and demagogue public manipulation tools of voyeurism, disaster fascination, fear and greed.¹²

Responsible citizen discourse is in constant threat of being entirely drowned out by a powerful and commercially aligned mass-media designed to thwart careful public discourse. The ‘for profit’ algorithms of social media are designed to close down complex and rigorous debate, to arouse irrational fears and prejudices, and to kill off common good civic decision making guided by genuinely high ideological aims. The result of the post-iPhone age is the capture of the political process to mass-media integrated commercial forces at an individual

Eighty Four Ministries of Love and Peace (government arm set up to perpetuate hatred and war).

¹² See: Johan Hari, *Stolen Focus. Why you can't pay attention*. London: Bloomsbury, 2022; Peter W. Singer and Emerson Brooking, *LikeWar. The weaponization of social media*. New York: HMH, 2018; Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change. How digital technologies are leaving their mark on our brains*. London: Penguin, 2014; Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. London: The Bodley Head, 2018.

surveillance and manipulation level that we have never seen before.¹³ In adapting to this environment our political 'leaders' are almost forced to become populist front men and women who are judged to be a success or a failure based on whether or not they can ride the social-media popularity wave. Serious ideas and high common-good vision is forcefully back-seated to a machine pragmatism of populist manipulation. In this calculative pragmatic environment branch level politics is now heavily engineered by professional political apparatchiks so as to facilitate party 'winners' over fair and citizen initiated grass-roots party membership.¹⁴ This is the degradation of democracy to populist mob rule. Demagogue leaders and authoritarianism follow eagerly in the wake of such a dynamic. Australia, with its mindless rapid take-up of any new concentration depleting communication technology, is probably more 'advanced' in the separation of meaningful and serious civic discourse from populist political power than most other 'free' and 'democratic' Western nation-states.

Over a number of decades, the Centrism of party political power in Australia has become defined by a rapacious socially and ecologically

¹³ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. London: Profile, 2019.

¹⁴ See this interview with Catherine Cusack MP discussing toxic branch culture in the Liberal Party over the past 20 years: Catherine Cusack and Fran Kelly, "NSW Liberal MP encourages female colleagues to "break the silence" on toxic culture." Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio National, Breakfast, 25 March 2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/mps-to-break-the-silence-on-toxic-culture-nsw-politics/13273234>. This interview is centred around violence to women in the Liberal Party branch structure, but this problem – the Hon Cusack MP insists – is equally apparent in all political parties now, and is as much a problem for men as it is for women. That is, this is not firstly a misogynist problem, it is a problem caused by a culture of brutal instrumental power in our political parties.

destructive economic ideology that simply doesn't work,¹⁵ has embraced a frighteningly militant and delusional notion of its own glorious national identity, and has willingly thrown away commitments to universal human rights and civil liberties in the name of safety.

In reality, liberal democratic politics disappeared in Australia some time ago. Four key event-horizons in the downward passage to our present post-political bio-safe big-tech-and-big-pharma captured security state are now clearly evident. These four steps down show the overall trajectory of civic erosion: Tampa, 9/11, Carbon Tax, and COVID.

Tampa: the end of Australia's commitment to Human Rights for the vulnerable

Wikipedia accurately sums up the key events of the Tampa affair¹⁶ thus:

In late August 2001 [before 9/11], the Howard Government of Australia refused permission for the Norwegian freighter MV Tampa, carrying 433 rescued refugees (predominantly Hazaras of Afghanistan from a distressed fishing vessel in international waters) and 5 crew, to enter Australian waters. This triggered an Australian political controversy

¹⁵ See John Quiggin, *Zombie Economics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010; Steve Keen, *Debunking Economics*, United Kingdom: Zed books, 2002; Michael Pusey, *The Experience of Middle Australia. The dark side of economic reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur*, New York: Zed Books, 2011.

¹⁶ For more detailed accounts of the Tampa affair see, David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory. How a government lied its way to political victory*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005; Abbas Nazari, *After the Tampa*, Auckland: Allen & Unwin, 2021. A similar incident in October of 2001, but where Australian intentional neglect resulted in the drowning of 353 asylum seekers is documented here: Tony Kevin, *A Certain Maritime Incident. The sinking of SIEV X*. Melbourne: Scribe, 2004.

in the lead-up to the 2001 federal election, and a diplomatic dispute between Australia and Norway.

When the Tampa entered Australian waters, the Prime Minister ordered the ship be boarded by Australian special forces. This brought censure from the government of Norway, which said the Australian government failed to meet its obligations to distressed mariners under international law at the United Nations. Within a few days, the government introduced the Border Protection Bill into the House of Representatives, saying it would confirm Australian sovereignty to “determine who will enter and reside in Australia”. The government introduced the “Pacific Solution”, whereby the asylum seekers were taken to Nauru where their refugee status was considered, rather than in Australia.¹⁷

Through a heavily and intentionally distorted presentation of events, and in direct contradiction of previous immigration policy and international human rights conventions, the Howard government was able to paint desperate asylum seekers as illegal immigrants who posed an invading threat to the integrity of Australian sovereignty. In a strong display of keeping Australia safe (from desperate asylum seekers in unseaworthy boats), the Howard government came from a position of serious electoral doubt to firm victory in the polls in November of 2001, strongly assisted by the heightened terrorist threat sensibility produced by 9/11. The harnessing of public fear for political purposes, the conflation of refugees with terrorists, and the total reworking of formerly UNHCR¹⁸ compatible immigration policy settings regarding claiming asylum. was achieved in 2001. This lead to

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tampa_affair

¹⁸ United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

the trajectory where Mr Scott Morrison, as Immigration Minister in 2013, effectively “stopped the boats” by completely militarizing immigration policy (what was actually done to would-be boat-arrival asylum seekers was made a national security matter and a state secret) and by making indefinite off-shore detention the *only* fate that any would-be boat arrival asylum seekers would ever get. Australians accepted this abandonment of human rights, we accepted an indifferent and callous dis-regard for the humanity of the most internationally vulnerable.

As we shall see, once humanity and the upholding of human rights becomes optional for anyone, once actual people become mere objects of political manipulation, and the public is primed by fear and frames of ‘morality’ that simply confirm cultural prejudice, it becomes potentially possible that everyone can be treated inhumanely and in violation of their human rights.

As the 1946 poem by the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller put it:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.¹⁹

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_they_came_...

Niemöller's confession is now unavoidably relevant to Australians. Protestors against various state and federal governments who do not comply with, in some cases, ridiculously draconian bio-security 'safety' measures can now expect to be shot at with rubber bullets, rounded up with armed vehicles, pepper sprayed, heavily fined, arrested and jailed.²⁰ But the very public and politically effective slip away from a firm commitment to basic human rights and ordinary human dignities started with the Tampa in recent Australian history.²¹ We (Australians) have moved from humanity and respect to force and the objectification of people. We have allowed fear and interest to triumph over reason and humanity. We have abandoned the necessary civic ground required for a healthy and humane liberal democracy.

9/11: the birth of the Australian Security State

Since 9/11 the Australian Parliament has passed more than ninety new national security bills giving the government and its surveillance and law enforcement agencies sweeping powers to reach into the private communications and activities of Australians.²² The extent to

²⁰ Andrew West and Justine Nolan, "Police power during a pandemic." Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio National, The Religion and Ethics Report, 25 August 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethicsreport/policing-in-a-pandemic/13511504>

²¹ The "recent times" here refers to Australian history since the 1970s. Australia has always had a brutal and violently othering tendency, deeply entailed in its originating de facto conquest of the Indigenous peoples of the Southern Continent, its own brutality, particularly to the Irish, as a prison colony, and the unregulated frontier profiteering of many of those who made their fortune here in the 19th century. See Shireen Morris (ed.) *A Rightful Place. A Road Map to Reconciliation*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2017; James Boyce, 1835, *The Founding of Melbourne and the Conquest of Australia*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2012; Mal Garvin, *Us Aussies*, Victoria: Haydon, 1987.

²² Phillip Adams and Lizzie O'Shea, "How Australia's pile of national security legislation stacks up." Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio National, Late Night

which, in the name of national security, the Australian government can now know almost anything it wants to know about almost any citizen for almost any reason – this is the internal eye of the security apparatus – is staggering. And we now all have biometric photos on our driver's licences and passports (for our convenience and safety of course). We can be identified from video footage by the State.

Every time something bad happens in the world, this can potentially be used to justify stronger security measures. Every time a new threat of any nature is uncovered (excluding climate change), this provides an opportunity for our parliamentarians to give themselves greater surveillance powers and more executive emergency response powers such that we are never going back to an open and free society. Safety justifies a thousand emergency powers, and this is a sure-fire political winner with an electorate that feels insecure and watches anxiety inducing news outlets in an addictive manner. But we are choosing 'safety' over 'freedom', and the risks of a free society are being continually removed making us less adult and more herded and conformist than we were in the past. The Australian state now has much stronger and more far-reaching powers over its citizens than it has had at any time in the post-war past.

Carbon Tax: The capture of the state to mining and fossil fuel interest

In 2007 Kevin Rudd became the 26th Prime Minister of Australia on the promise of addressing what he described as the most pressing

Live, 22 September, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/how-australias-pile-of-national-security-legislation-stacks-up/13553368>

moral issue of our times: climate change. He sought to implement a carbon tax and make emissions reduction targets meaningful and achievable. He did not succeed. Mr Rudd's political opposition was able to harness the support of big business and couple that with rural scepticism about climate change and the idea that job losses and higher costs for business would result from making serious steps to address the issue. Money and interest, carefully harnessed by politicians for electoral leverage, overcame moral responsibility towards future generations and a respect for serious science. We have not recovered from that step down.

COVID: the establishment of the corporately captured Bio-security State

By the time we get to the COVID pandemic in 2020, the Australian polity had been wonderfully primed for its peaceful take-over by the corporately captured, bio-security, emergency state. Here is a credible scenario as to how this take-over happened.

Academic vitality has been in a perpetual state of collapse in Australia since the mid-1990s when federal government funding for universities was slashed and the collegiate government of academics by academics was replaced with corporate style institutional managerialism.²³ Academics now face perpetual bureaucratic stress, perpetual funding pressure, and perpetual job insecurity, particularly among the growing army of non-tenured contractual scholars and teachers.

²³ For just two accounts of the horrors of university life in Australia see: Richard Hil, *Whackademia*, Sydney: NewSouth, 2012; John. B Woolcock, *Within the Hallowed Halls of Learning. Reflections on 37 years of university teaching*. Brisbane: CopyRight Publishing, 2006.

Knowledge has become a function of funding games, branding games, wooing commercial interests, and following politically authorized fads over this period. University administrations have become corporate business ventures. This, as the former Professor of microbiology and infectious diseases John Woolcock points out, has had a profoundly degrading effect on the teaching of the sciences.²⁴ The university is now deeply financially ‘captured’ by its reliance on full fee-paying overseas students mainly from China and India. University funding is now heavily industry-linked, relying on pharmaceutical, mining and technology money. Functionally, rigorous academic objectivity, blue sky research, and intellectual freedom have become vanishing myths that one really has no time to risk pursuing if one wants to stay on-task to the real business of the academy; winning the publishing and funding games in order to simply survive.

It is not only the universities that have been radically degraded. Australia’s premier scientific research organization, the CSIRO, has been relentlessly shrunk and firmly re-directed away from climate science problems, since the failure of the Rudd government’s attempt to address climate change.²⁵ Alas, careful and accurate climate science modelling in 2008 warning of a pending catastrophic fire season in 2020 – which was uncannily accurate – was entirely ignored after the

²⁴ Woolcock, *Within the Hallowed Halls of Learning*, 118–193.

²⁵ Conor Duffy, “CSIRO has ‘cut into the bone’ to implement successive government cuts, chairman says” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, news, 12 Dec 2014. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-12/csiro-cut-to-the-bone-after-funding-cuts/5963994> CSIRO Staff Association, 23 June 2020, “Staffing numbers deteriorate as CSIRO faces funding squeeze.” <https://csiros-taff.org.au/news/2020/06/23/staffing-numbers-deteriorate-as-csiro-faces-funding-squeeze/>

Rudd government was voted out.²⁶ In this context scientists have learnt that your job depends on you doing the right sort of research producing the right sort of findings, be you working for industry or government.

Over the same time period (the 21st century) investigative journalism has more or less gone to the wall with the demise of newspapers and the rise of social media. Anything that is considered some sort of breach of national security interests – particularly if it concerns government authorized human rights abuses – will be met with a raid from the Australian Federal Police.²⁷ The academy, state funded science, and the media are pretty well brow-beaten into compliance with whatever narrative the powerful (being the government and super-wealthy corporate interests) wish to project to the Australian people.

In this context of the profound capture of knowledge and public information to corporate and political interests, disbelief in official pronouncements is at an all-time high.²⁸ People are turning to social media, which is indeed unregulated (and this does allow for nut-bags and grifters) but it can also be free from conflicts of interest and gaging in

²⁶ Ross Garnaut, “The Garnaut Climate Change Review: Final Report. 30 September 2008.” Analysis and Policy Observation, <https://apo.org.au/node/3028>. The report can be read here: <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20190509071611/http://www.garnautreview.org.au/synopsis.htm>

²⁷ John Lyons, “Australian Federal Police raid on ABC reveals investigative journalism being put in same category as criminality.” Australian Broadcast Corporation, news, 15 July 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-15/abc-raids-australian-federal-police-press-freedom/11309810>

²⁸ Hence the need for an international super public information filtering organization, the Trusted News Initiative. See note 35.

comparison to official government and even academic outlets that are now deeply tied to commercially and politically captured agendas.

In this context the Centrist political class has formed deep relationships of mutual support with the dominant commercial powers of the international corporate world in Big Media, Big Resources, and Big Finance. Capture is in the air. Is it any wonder that conspiracy theories are also in the air?

In 2020 the COVID pandemic erupted. The Australian government did what our island mentality always does in the face of an external threat, it pulled up the draw-bridge and used our natural advantage of being a long way away from everyone else as a means of shielding Australians from the virus. Lockdowns, masks (though there was prevarication about that initially) and internal and international border closures followed. This, of course, was killing our economy which is heavily reliant on entertainment, services and bullshit for employment. This put the government in a serious bind. Its two central electoral success narratives – keeping us safe and making us rich – were in serious trouble. After playing the saving lives game as hard as possible (with particularly draconian lock-downs and protest suppressions in Melbourne)²⁹ a ‘living with the virus’ solution had to be found. At this point an alliance with Big Pharma was the obvious place to look.

Big Pharma has gone into hyper-drive to produce COVID vaccines, and the testing protocols have been astonishingly shortened (and

²⁹ Topher Field, *Battleground Melbourne*, YouTube documentary, Melbourne 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzfjGC1_yPo

potentially seriously fudged)³⁰ and mRNA vaccines have been given pre-licence Emergency Use Authorization outside of the normal vaccine development protocols by the US Food and Drug Administration (and hence, in Australia), to get them out as fast as possible. Dangerous myocarditis side effects³¹ – sometimes fatal – for fit and young people (those least likely to have serious risk of debilitation or death by COVID) are known, as are Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome as a risk factor for people over 50. The actual data on side effects is hard, arguably impossible to access and rigorously investigate, and the long term effects cannot be known yet. Significantly, when our governments sign up to get these vaccines they indemnified the vaccine providers for future court action or compensation in regards to people who die from or are seriously debilitated by the vaccines. David Chau, explaining leaked Pfizer contracts between various governments, notes that to get the vaccines governments had to “indemnify, defend and hold harmless Pfizer from and against any and all suits, claims, actions, demands, damages, costs and expenses related to vaccine intellectual property.” And we do not know if the Australia government’s contract with Pfizer has this indemnity

³⁰ Paul D Thacker, “COVID-19: Researcher blows the whistle on data integrity issues in Pfizer’s vaccine trial”

British Medical Journal [BMJ] 2021;375:n2635], 2 November 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n2635>, <https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/375/bmj.n2635.full.pdf>.

Canadian COVID Care Alliance, “Pfizer inoculation for covid-19, more harm than good.” [No date or author provided.]

<https://www.canadiancovidcarealliance.org/media-resources/the-pfizer-inoculations-for-covid-19-more-harm-than-good-2/>

³¹ Alida L P Caforio, “Receipt of mRNA Vaccine against COVID-19 and Myocarditis” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, December 2, 2021; 385:2189-2190. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMe2116493. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMe2116493>

because, as the Australian Department of Health statement put it, “the details of the Advance Purchase Agreement (APA) with Pfizer for the purchase of their COVID-19 vaccine are commercial-in-confidence.”³² The business logic of commercial-in-confidence secrecies, not citizen accountability, not scientific transparency, defines how our government runs our lives now.

Two things can be known for sure: Big Pharma is in the COVID vaccine business for profit,³³ and the Australian government needs a ‘living with the virus’ solution and is presumably prepared to grant indemnity to Big Pharma to get its solution, whatever the long-term cost may prove to be. The present government is, after all, thinking about winning the next election, but arguably not much past that. Commercial, political and economic imperatives are driving the Australian government in the way it comes up with its bio-security solution to COVID for the Australian people. Science and citizen dignity are of no real significance to those interests, and may actually be obstacles that need to be driven over by commercial, economic and political imperatives. Here is where it gets frightening. There will be no other sorts

³² David Chau. “Pfizer has power to ‘silence’ governments and ‘maximise profits’, consumer group alleges.” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, News, 21 October 2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-20/pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-contracts/100553958>

³³ Aavushi Pratap, “Pfizer Expects \$33.5 Billion In Vaccine Revenue In 2021.” Forbes, 28 July 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aayushipratap/2021/07/28/pfizer-expects-335-billion-in-vaccine-revenue-in-2021/?sh=3dc9oof4217d>. As the 2021 movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio “Don’t look Up” – starring Leonardo De Caprio – imaginatively postulates, the super-rich are happy to see the end of the world as a fortuitous opportunity to make a lot of money. And because in the US campaign funders are the super-rich, they have a tacit but highly persuasive way of bringing our democratically elected leaders into line with their own commercial imperatives and opportunities.

of solutions countenanced, no opposition to the government's solution allowed, and all Australians will be functionally forced to 'consent' to the Australian government's bio-security solution or else be movement restricted and venue excluded from many public places and workplaces. We have left liberal democratic politics, free and open debate, and the sanctity of informed adult consent behind.

The tight control of a single public narrative of correct thinking is astonishing. Things we were once authoritatively told were baseless conspiracies now seem to be quite credible.³⁴ The Trusted News Initiative³⁵ actively sensors any dissent in the mainstream media, and tech and social media providers are filtering the on-line world so as to censor out anything that seems to them to be "anti-vax". Synchronized with the TNI, our state and federal governments (in Australia) actively surveils, targets and in some cases arrest citizens who seek to express disapproval of official public health directives and recommendations, and who organize to publically protest lock-downs and functionally compulsory vaccination.

³⁴ See this very carefully researched work of investigative journalism by two-time Walkley Award-winning journalist: Sharri Markson, *What really happened in Wuhan*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2021.

³⁵ See "AFP joins Trusted News Initiative plans to tackle harmful Coronavirus disinformation." 27 March 2020. <https://www.afp.com/en/inside-afp/afp-joins-trusted-news-initiative-plans-tackle-harmful-coronavirus-disinformation> This short article points out that "The partners within the Trusted News Initiative are: BBC, Facebook, Google/YouTube, Twitter, Microsoft, AFP, Reuters, European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Hindu, CBC/Radio-Canada, First Draft, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism." And, of course, the AFP. This is not the Australian Federal Police (ha!) but Agence France Presse.

Normal discursive public debate, trust in citizens to make free and informed decision, and the right to organize peaceful protests have been excluded in Australia under the banner of Public Health. For we live in a state of continuous emergency. Under this new normal we have ‘no jab, no entry’ imposing an apartheid of minority exclusions on those who do not consent to government ‘recommendations’, and techno-enabled contact-tracing gatekeeping ordinary freedoms of movement and association. We will only be ‘rewarded’ with open borders and our beloved café culture conditionally: a high enough entire population conformity with vaccination ‘recommendations’ must be reached first. Those who do not comply are holding us all up. Thus is the majority primed against the non-conformist minority. Any voices preposing alternative medical solutions to the new vaccines are actively silenced from mainstream media. Any intellectual or ordinary person who has either theoretical or anecdotal reasons to be concerned about medical risks associated with the vaccines is black-listed as an anti-vaxxer and is considered a crack-pot and a risk to public health, by definition.³⁶ Many Australians who have sought to protest against extended lock-downs and functionally compulsory vaccination ‘recommendations’ have been treated in a very heavy handed and

³⁶ The idea that anyone who gives any sort of support – intentional or otherwise – to the “vaccine hesitant” to not get jabbed, is a risk to public health, is hysterical and oppressive. For the record, I am double-jab vaccinated against the covid virus, and I am not a medical expert and have no pretensions to be one. I am a sociologist and the use of knowledge in the public context for political purposes is something I have a valid scholarly interest and expertise in. If I get denounced and de-platformed as a threat to public health and trustable news on account of this paper, this is very worrying and would demonstrate the central thrust of my argument quite decisively.

intimidating manner by police,³⁷ and protest organizers and protest supporting Facebook posters have been charged with incitement and jailed.³⁸ This is the mind and body controls that our 'stay safe' emergency powers under the bio-security state now exert.

Conclusion

We do not need vaccine passports in Australia as we already must be vaccinated to work or study in many of our public and private institutions, and we must use a contact tracing app to get into most commercial and public venues. The State now effectively owns our bodies, controls our minds, and watches our every movement and communication very closely (all for our own safety, of course). It seems like force and quiet compliance governs our lives and our public intellectuals are pretty well all conformists with the astonishingly forceful state powers evoked by our constant state of emergency. We create sub-citizen problem minority classes – anti-vaxxers now understand how we have 'solved' Aboriginal problems over the past 200 years – which follows naturally from the entrenched lack of concern,

³⁷ Caitlin Cassidy, "Victoria COVID update: police arrest 44 people and fire rubber pellets during Melbourne construction protests." *The Guardian*, 21 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/21/victoria-covid-update-rubber-bullets-fired-on-second-day-of-construction-protests-which-block-free-way>

³⁸ Caroline Schelle, "Pregnant Ballarat mum Zoe Buhler to argue police search wasn't legal" *The Australian*, 30 January 2022, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/breaking-news/pregnant-ballarat-mum-zoe-buhler-to-argue-police-search-wasnt-legal/news-story/off35793350adc2a8b319a5a48605d09>

David Escourt, "Judge rejects police bid for strict bail conditions on anti-lockdown leader." *The Age*, 22 September 2021, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/judge-rejects-police-bid-for-strict-bail-conditions-on-anti-lockdown-leader-20210922-p58tsy.html>

even disdain, for vulnerable or non-conformist minorities that we have allowed ourselves to be formed in over the past 30 years. Liberty, dignity and humanity seem like sweet dreams from a by-gone era.

The Australian citizen has become the property of the bio-security state. That state is captive to all the Big commercial powers of our age. We no longer have independent, courageous and secure citizens or scholars. And a dull (Far Right) Centrism makes politics itself a tiresome theatre of despair. This is the new post-political normal in the high tech, perpetual emergency, bio-security state. “Australians all, let us rejoice...”

We have fallen, fallen with the times. Shall we ever recover the free, equal, humane, and independently minded dignities we once had?

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