

PIBCI - Monthly Perspective

July 2020

Smoke signals from abroad

The simmering tensions in the United States have finally spilled out onto the streets following the abhorrent murder of George Floyd. Floyd's needless death is not unique, as his name enters a long list of victims of institutional racism. However, what is different is that Floyd's death has served as a catalyst for the broad support that Black Lives Matter has garnered from across social and cultural divides. To date, successive US administrations have carefully managed social divisions by simultaneously keeping them alive and contained. Yet, the current administration has cynically fanned the fires of division in order to promote its political agenda. However, the Covid-19 death toll in the US has reached over 120,000 lives, largely due to the government's mismanagement. This has been coupled with spiralling unemployment with some 40 million Americans out of work, which has stretched the public to its limits.

The immediate response by the US mainstream media has focussed on dividing protesters by labelling them as looters and thieves. The irony is that corporate America has conveniently forgotten its own history of theft and looting; namely, the native people, local and overseas environments, and enslaved generations through to today's economic exploitation of America's poorest and most vulnerable. All this has kept a small number of wealthy people running the richest corporations; aided by government legislation. Today, the wealth gap in the US is greater than ever with the top 10% holding 70% of total household wealth. The link between the blatant racism and the uprisings across the US can be found in inequality – the gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have nots.'

Back down under

Many of the issues in the US are reflected here in Australia; the taking of land legitimised by the legal fiction of terra nullius, the growing number of Aboriginal deaths in custody, institutionalised racism, the harsh conditions imposed on refugees and the exploitation of the poorest sections of society. This is a familiar formula that forms the basis for social divisions that are fuelled by inequality; that engine room of racism, hatred, greed and power.

See our Policy on Treaty

Inequality is not sustainable

Across the globe, the rich keep getting richer. Globally, the wealthiest 1 per cent of people in the world have more than double the wealth of 6.9 billion people. This trend is mirrored in Australia. According to Oxfam, the top 1 per cent of Australians have more than double the wealth of the entire bottom 50 per cent. With so much wealth being hoarded by a wealthy few, our communities inevitably suffer. Public

schools are poorly funded, our health system lacks sufficient resources, workers are poorly paid, our infrastructure is stretched to its limits, and there is a growing number of homeless people on the streets. How can this continue in one of the richest countries in the world? How long can we, the public, keep subsidising this small section of society?

The economy & education

As Covid-19 persists as a serious health threat, the global economy will continue to stall, impacting our national economy. The visible signs surround us, with local businesses closing their doors and international trade winding down.

The prospects for the majority of Australians is far from bright, as the unemployment figures steadily rise, whilst the government signals an end to the Jobseeker scheme in September. The government has been loath to hand out financial support to growing sections of the public in need. It has also gone out of its way to exclude sections of the community.

One notable sector has been higher education, with the large number of university staff being excluded from the Jobseeker scheme. This has been followed by the recent shake up of fees for degrees. Clearly, the government's ideological proclivities come first, as the role of higher education during the last decade has been undergoing a neoliberal transformation. Under the cover of Covid, push has now come to shove as our universities are being transformed from places of learning and critical inquiry into training institutions to fill gaps in areas where there are so-called skill shortages. As a shuffling of the deck takes place for course fees, the reality sees the continued cutting of funding to the sector. The upshot for young people is a future being saddled with debt, which will significantly impact students from vulnerable backgrounds. Instead of making education accessible to all Australians, the government's recent moves will place a university education out of the reach for many.

See our policy on Public Health, Housing and Education

Furthermore, it is unclear whether the proposed changes in fees and the Federal Education Minister's 'price incentivisation' for certain courses will translate into jobs for the future.

Universal Basic Income - A modern solution

We recognise that the nature of work is changing, and the approach to such changes need to reflect the current reality. PIBCI's policy on Universal Basic Income (UBI) offers a practical solution to the difficult times ahead, and lays solid foundations for the future.

As the major political parties continue to apply an outdated model that attempts to promote job creation, and continue to rehash their approach to social security, the reality is that regular full-time employment is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Many jobs today are short-term and casual which effectively means that employment for many is precarious. It is little wonder that anxiety and stress related

to employment amongst Australians have risen over recent decades. In relation to anxiety, Australians are the second most medicated people in the world.

PIBCI's UBI aims to overcome the structural inequalities that exist under the current economic system. At the core of the UBI is the capacity to provide a materially adequate income, regardless of the economic situation. It will also decouple reliance and stigma associated with social security, and the inherent bureaucracy. A UBI will go further and insulate the public from the vicissitudes of the national and global economy.

The benefits of the UBI are many, and provide a contemporary approach to the unfolding economic challenge we face as a nation. For example, the UBI will be key to reducing poverty, it will support vulnerable groups, reduce costs associated with health and support the public pursuing education. The health benefits of a stable income will assist in the reduction of stress and anxiety that are linked to the nature of work and unemployment. The social and cultural benefits are also important to note. The UBI will facilitate in freeing up time to spend with family and friends. It will also free up time to participate in voluntary work and promote alternative forms of work such as cooperatives and communes.

See our policy on Cooperatives & Communes

A UBI provides the necessary insulation to the widespread casualisation of employment. It is a modern approach to addressing contemporary social and economic challenges such as the increasing reliance on technology and automation of work that could help society, rather than be viewed as a threat to employment. More importantly, the UBI will go a long way to addressing inequality in our society.

If you seek to play a progressive role in Australia's political, economic and cultural future, join PIBCI so we may put public interests first.

Anthony B – Website Editor
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