

PIBCI - Monthly Perspective

December 2022

Moment of clarity

This month's edition focuses upon the shambles that passes as leadership. Where are our leaders taking us?

This December marks the 168th anniversary of the eureka rebellion which took place on the Ballarat goldfields in Victoria. Led by a diverse range of people from across the world, the eureka rebellion is a timely reminder that we must fight for what is just and what is fair. As we ponder the events that took place in December 1854, it is vital that we keep in mind the vital issues that impact us all as a society, rather than being overwhelmed by the tsunami of filtered news that is drip-fed to us via a vast array of devices. Our culture has been inundated with technological devices that have turbocharged the pace of social change. The broad range of news and events from home and abroad simultaneously hit our screens from multiple directions, and we are expected to process this information in a blink of an eye. The past few months have demonstrated that the world is at the crossroads of multiple crisis, all in motion at different speeds, and all at the one time. It is hard not to feel bewildered by the continuing environmental emergency, the international economic decay, the persistent global pandemic and the array of conflicts across the world. While we try to make sense of it all, it seems that the world's most powerful leaders have lost control, and the public know it. From the recent lockdowns and mandatory vaccinations to the relaxation of wearing masks. From social cutbacks and austerity to slush funds for business. It seems that the apparent lack of imagination on behalf of our political and corporate leaders has locked us into a continuous loop where privatisation, deregulation, corporatisation and globalisation are reconfigured and presented to the electorate as something fresh and new. Meanwhile, we are immersed in a multicoloured spray of spectacle and sensationalisation dressed up as news. The upshot of this form of communication of little substance is designed to leave the public stunned, bewildered and confused. As a consequence, the machine that drives the status quo continues to neglect real human needs.

Who is in control?

As the island of Bali puts away the last podium and the smell of aviation fuel dissipates with as the G20 leaders head back home, we are left with a clear impression that the family of

the world's most powerful nations are more fractured than ever. Indeed, questions are being raised whether the G20 will remain as an effective forum going forward. Images of China's leader, Xi Jinping challenging Canada's PM Justin Trudeau and the conspicuous absence of Russian president Vladimir Putin will be long forgotten as the G20's leaders go back to business as usual placing humanity behind both national and corporate interests. It is clear that the world is at the crossroads of multiple crises. The lack of interest and the absence of meaningful action by the world's leaders at the G20 highlighted that the environmental emergency has been relegated to 'back seat' status. The dire situation of the global economy spurred on by parochial perspectives and ideological imperatives has precipitated global economic decay. The global pandemic that governments would like us to collectively 'get over' is yet to leave our side, as it continues to morph finding comfort in amongst the population. Furthermore, the stakes continue to rise as the proxy war being waged in Ukraine continues to grind on as Russia reinforces its troop numbers and the US reinforces its financial commitment set to hit US \$91 billion, outstripping its monthly commitment to the failed military campaign in Afghanistan.

The state of affairs is quite grim as social, political and economic indicators show. This has been exacerbated by the extremely poor calibre of political leaders that head the world's wealthiest nations. In the US, President Biden continues to struggle to construct coherent sentences and safely traversing stairs and stages. His presidency kicked off with the calamitous withdrawal from Afghanistan after the USA sunk US \$2.63 trillion into another military disaster. Recently, the Biden administration has sought approval for another US \$38 billion to send to Ukraine. Meanwhile, President Biden has been gearing up to unleash a new offensive in Haiti. While war is ever-present in the US administration, President Biden's promises on the environment and his social spending commitments are looking shaky. He is fast losing control of inflation as it hits a forty-year high which has wiped out any hope of wage rises. Under Biden's presidency, Covid-19 has yet to be contained while violent crime surges. As the Biden administration continues to escalate tensions with both nuclear powers China and Russia, Congress has been enthusiastic to hand taxpayer funds over to arms corporations, despite growing poverty and insecurity in the USA. The theatre that passes for democracy in the US is set to hit new heights (or lows) as former president, Donald Trump announced his intention to enter the race for the next presidential elections.

Rivalling the US political circus is the one playing out across the Atlantic. UK politics has been a cascading disaster since Nick Cameron became Prime Minister. During his tenure as

PM, Cameron gave birth to the Brexit hot political potato. Following Cameron was Theresa May's uninspiring term as PM which was marked by Boris Johnson's persistent white-anting. Following May's demise, Johnson accepted the poison chalice of PM. The Tory clown show soon plunged the UK into a social and economic mess marked by the disastrous handling of the pandemic, contracts for the boys network, and pandemic parties that were punctuated by trips to Kyiv when things were looking bad back in London. The eventual collapse of Johnson witnessed the appointment (not election) of the hapless Liz Truss. Truss established a record by being the shortest term British PM. Barely six weeks into the prime ministership, Truss unveiled a disastrous economic plan which prompted her rapid end. Again, the people of Britain were side-stepped as the richest man in the House of Commons, Rishi Sunak was appointed as British PM. Sunak has cultivated his wealth from hedge funds based in the well-known tax haven situated in the Cayman Islands, where former Australian PM, Malcolm Turnbull was criticised by the ALP for his personal investments in the Caribbean tax haven. Well versed in serving the interests of the most rich and powerful, and son-in-law of Indian billionaire businessman, Sunak faces spiking energy prices, a cold winter, and a social system devastated by decades of Tory neglect. Despite the British media spin, UK politics has gone one big circle in which the rich and powerful remain in control, and the will and needs of the wider population have been side-stepped and neglected.

Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) seems content to undermine itself on a daily basis. EU standards and values have proven pointless as NATO policy dictates the EU's trajectory, hell-bent on bringing its largest supplier of oil and gas to its knees at the behest of US foreign policy objectives. As European industry grinds to a halt, and large EU corporations contemplate moving operations to the US, supported by questionable financial incentives and lower energy costs, the European population faces a cold winter with minimal fuel for heating. Platitudes about freedom by the EU elite will not keep European households warm and well stocked in the face of skyrocketing energy prices and rising costs of essential goods.

Back at home, the Albanese-led ALP government continues its close military ties with the USA. Despite the USA's long history of costly military misadventures across the globe, our major parties have been enthusiastic to follow the lead of the world's single superpower. Both our mainstream media and the western media more generally have dedicated an inordinate amount of rage and attention on the devastating conflict unleashed by Russia on Ukraine. Yet, such despicable acts are repeatedly committed by the US, which tend to go unnoticed by the corporate owned and government-controlled media. Despite the hypocrisy

and double standards, the current ALP and former NLP government have racked-up over \$385 million of military assistance to the Ukrainian government. Few have questioned the option to provide humanitarian aid over military aid. Furthermore, the Albanese-led ALP has given the greenlight for the US to station nuclear capable B52 bombers in the Northern Territory. Despite the Albanese and Jinping photo opportunity at the G20 summit in Bali and talk of a 'reset' in Chinese and Australian relations, Australia continues to signal that it is shifting its military posture from defence to offence as the Australian navy awaits the delivery of US made nuclear attack submarines.

Regardless of the political bluster manufactured by the mainstream media, political opposition both federally and at the state level is virtually absent. Opposition parties are weak, and guided by inept leaders. Consequently, governments are not kept to account by opposition parties who lack the will and motivation to muster enough pressure and vigilance to oversee the decisions and actions of incumbent governments.

What we know

As the pace of life gets faster and social, political, and economic decisions are made at breakneck speed, it is time to pause and consider whether our political and corporate leaders are capable of addressing the real needs of society, or whether they have become divorced from real human centred needs?

We know that the neoliberal project has hit a dead end, no longer capable to meet current and future challenges. Public services have been stretched to their limits and are fast becoming dysfunctional. State and federal governments have abdicated their role and responsibility of looking after the essential public services to the private sector. We also know from bitter experience that the private sector does not have the reason nor motive to meet public needs unless fat profits are guaranteed. In short, the provision of social services is not working properly. Does anyone still believe that neoliberalism will create a tide of wealth making all ships rise? The wealthiest 1% across our society may be attached to this conviction for the simple reason that they greatly benefit from the status quo. This is why they perpetuate the neoliberal myth through the billionaire owned media and apply corporate leverage and target political donations to the major parties in order to firmly maintain the status quo.

We also know that our political leaders have run out of ideas. They cannot think beyond the bounds of the neoliberal sandpit. Privatisation, deregulation, corporatisation and globalisation form the perimeter of political and economic thinking amongst the political elite. The neoliberal myopia ensures that all economic or political alternatives must be market-driven, otherwise they are deemed fringe, utopian or simply mad.

Smokescreen of confusion

As the major political parties dip into their neoliberal tool box and tinker with social, economic and political policies, it remains clear that rehashing the same old dross is not sufficient to address rising inequality, insecure employment, growing homelessness, climate disasters and rising stress and anxiety in the community.

The coterie of political and corporate elite rely on both the corporate owned and government-controlled media to set the social and political agenda. The mainstream media is adept in manipulating the public's attention by guiding our gaze onto trivial matters or selectively directing outrage and sensationalising events presenting them as newsworthy. The mainstream media carpet-bombs us with infotainment, turning complex social issues into a cartoon version of reality. We are saturated with well-paid media pundits proclaiming that our western democratic values are superior to those of other nations as our politicians castigate foreign governments for imprisoning and torturing dissident journalists, censoring speech, and using propaganda to brainwash citizens. Yet, such western democratic values are judiciously administered in the shadow of a long line of western invasions followed by the oppression and exploitation suffered by other peoples in the name of democracy. We conveniently forget about journalists and whistle blowers who have been incarcerated for questioning and exposing the hypocrisies committed by the world's most powerful governments and corporations.

The tidal wave of news and information that spews out of the billionaire owned media is designed to overwhelm the public. Discerning fact from fiction, right from wrong is an arduous task. The mainstream media has a knack of making parallel political lines converge, as expert reports are blended with opinion pieces resulting in a cacophony of news and views. It is little wonder that the public becomes detached from political debate and apathy sets in, ultimately solidifying the status quo.

Moment of clarity

The political landscape across western democracies is in decline. Some western nations appear to be in free-fall as their political elite stagger to find new ways to shore up the broken neoliberal model. A line-up of political leaders across the western world quickly reveals a bunch of mediocre people are at the helm of the most rich and powerful nations. As a consequence of the unexceptional leadership of western leaders, fractures in the neoliberal system have been allowed to grow over the decades causing a widening gap in inequality, spurring tensions within society and between nations. The poor quality of leadership and the poverty of ideas from the political class has provided fertile grounds for the status quo to take root and undermine the strength of our democratic institutions.

We live in a nation where effective political opposition is absent. Without a strong opposition, the government of the day is able to wield power whilst disregarding accountability to the electorate. For decades, we have been subject to ineffective public policies, retrograde economic programs and a tide of social conservatism. The failures of the major political parties and corporate elite have been clouded by the selective headlines drip fed into the public's consciousness via the billionaire owned and government controlled media. They have redirected the public's gaze from the real issues of growing inequality, child poverty, precarious employment, stagnant wages, financial instability, rising homelessness and environmental disasters towards the glitz, glamour and sensationalisation spouted by the mainstream media. The overabundance of infotainment has cause to overwhelm the public, resulting in political apathy and resignation. However, we should be reminded that the suffering and injustices experienced on the goldfields of Ballarat 168 years ago is cause for inspiration and change. As we head towards 2023, it is clear that we are at the crossroads witnessing the unfolding of multiple crises. It is abundantly clear that our political and corporate leaders are not up to the current challenges, and those on the horizon. Therefore, it is up to us, the people to put our interests first.

Anthony B – Website Editor

December 2022

