

PIBCI - Monthly Perspective

November 2022

Resignation or reinvigoration?

As the ALP delivered its weak-kneed 2022 budget, the devastating floods that have swept across the eastern states have begun to subside along with the media coverage which tends to ebb and flow on a tide of crisis and sensationalisation. The way in which the media and the mainstream political parties treat crisis begs the question: are we being desensitised to crisis and catastrophe? As we all try to process the latest international conflict, the emerging global economic crisis, the climate emergency and global pandemic, our attention is masterfully diverted from one crisis to the next. Is such an unstable, unequal and insecure world normal? Or are we witnessing the immense failures of our political and corporate leaders being dressed up as naturally occurring disasters? Over the past decade, those who have been at the helm of power appear to have grown comfortable preaching of the inevitability of catastrophe in all its shapes and forms. Viewing social, economic and environmental disasters from the lofty heights of a corporate board room, a ministerial suite or private jet perpetuates the disconnect between the wealthiest and most powerful 1% from the real world issues the rest of the population endure on a daily basis. Reluctant to tackle issues head-on, the wealthy and powerful 1% have normalised crisis by perpetuating the myth that it is natural and here to stay. Are we being conditioned to accept fear, uncertainty and instability? How is this unprecedented level of instability and uncertainty feeding anxiety and stress within the population? And how is it contributing to broader levels of apathy and resignation amongst the public? Are we being groomed to condemn ourselves to the status quo that is leading us down the road to nowhere?

Daily diet of insecurity

On a daily basis, the corporate owned and government-controlled media shifts our attention from one crisis to the next. Reporting on the proxy war in Ukraine has taken precedence across the mass media, whilst the disastrous war in Yemen, Syria and the aftermath following the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan are all but forgotten in the mass media, despite the ongoing suffering and devastation. Meanwhile, the federal ALP government locks in a US sponsored deal to host nuclear-capable B-52 bombers in the Northern Territory, which has gained little traction in the mainstream media. The mainstream media has also neglected the climate emergency, yet the disasters that stem from the worsening state of the environment have not disappeared. Nor has the pandemic vanished,

as public safety precautions have all but disappeared as we are encouraged to wine and dine, and shop as Christmas is around the corner.

Never waste a crisis

The billionaire owned press parade each crisis and catastrophe like fashion items. Carefully curated, the latest crisis is sized up and ideologically outfitted for mass viewing. Through the filters of the corporate owned and government-controlled media, the new crisis is presented to the population in a simplified format for effortless consumption. As the adage goes, news sells. With multiple disasters unfolding on a regular basis, the corporate owned and government-controlled media do their job by amping up fear that promotes the narrative based on insecurity and instability. Little regard is given to unpacking the reasons behind the cause of each crisis, or what lessons we can learn from them. Opinion pieces are written by the usual talking heads on the payroll of media moguls, and the public is presented with a cartoon-like version of each catastrophe designed to instil shock and fear until the next reportable event. The broader public is left with a kaleidoscope of graphic images and loaded opinions minus in-depth investigation, root-cause analysis and solutions that our political and corporate leaders should be implementing.

Culture of shared anxieties

Waves of lockdowns, job losses, financial insecurity, persistent homelessness, rising energy prices and the recent floods are but a few of the real-world problems that the Australian public have had to endure. As a consequence, many Australians have been subject to rapid change both individually and as a community. The short timeframe that such changes have taken place have made it incredibly difficult for individuals to adapt to and manage successfully. Psychologically, the impact of rapid change disrupts our ability to plan and set in motion a regular routine and some semblance of security. For many, such disruption coupled with the loss of a job and financial insecurity feeds rising levels of anxiety, stress and depression. In Australia, it is estimated that a quarter of women (27 per cent) and about 15 per cent of men under 35 are living with a diagnosed depression or anxiety condition. More broadly, one in four Australians (one in three women and one in five men) will experience anxiety at some stage in their life.

Political Apathy

The manifold catastrophes comprising of global conflicts, the ongoing economic roller coaster ride of casino capitalism, the worsening climate emergency and global pandemic provide a grim backdrop to immediate issues such as job instability, financial insecurity, homelessness and strained relationships. The mainstream media's constant amplification of crisis and catastrophe helps to fuel

our collective anxieties and sense of insecurity. This is further exacerbated by the high levels of atomisation within our society which contributes to social isolation that translates into social disengagement and political apathy.

The anatomy of apathy

Apathy is best described when a citizen is indifferent in their attitude to politics and political activities. Such individuals attach little value to the political process and have little regard in exercising political agency. Unlike abstention, political apathy is reflected by people who cannot be bothered to participate in political elections, lack political opinions, and avoid exercising civic responsibility and political agency. Invariably, political apathy generally stems from low levels of political awareness and the lack of understanding of politics and how governments operate. Unfortunately, political apathy provides for fertile grounds that helps perpetuate the status quo.

Benefiting from the status quo

The mass media's continual cycle of crisis and catastrophe is a calculated approach that helps to sustain the status quo. On one hand, it is intended to overwhelm the public by saturating us with images and opinion pieces riddled with doom and gloom. This approach is designed to make us feel helpless in amongst a sea of crisis and catastrophe, which in turn conditions us to accept that insecurity and instability form the natural order of things. On the other hand, little is offered by way of solutions and alternatives to the current state of affairs. Over the past four decades, state and federal governments have gradually abandoned their responsibilities to the public, transferring public assets and services to the private sector. Governments have wilfully removed themselves from the table of decision-makers, leaving large corporations and the nation's oligarchs to plot the nation's social and economic course.

The cloud of delusion

With governments of all stripes adopting the neoliberal one-size-fits-all approach, we have been left with large corporations increasingly providing essential services to the public, and a corporate owned media setting the social and political agenda. While Australia's richest individuals make ever more profits, the public is conditioned to accept job instability, financial insecurity, rising inequality and an unstable world in which you or I can do nothing to change. This illusion promoted as the natural order of things simply aims to undermine political activity and public resistance. It promotes a culture of apathy and compliance that leads to resignation. Should the status quo be permitted to continue, the only freedoms the public will be able to exercise include the freedom to consume and compete in a world filled with conflict and crisis.

Shaping our future

For several decades, the public has turned a blind eye to the declining standard of leadership exhibited by our political and corporate leaders. As a consequence of their poor decision making, self-interest and fundamentalist adherence to the neoliberal ideology, our democratic system has been placed in serious trouble. Instead of taking the necessary responsibility and repairing the damage, our nation's leaders have promoted the myth that the multiple crises that they have helped create are now branded as natural events that we all need to get used to. Inequality, insecurity and instability have always been here and we need to get live with it. Meanwhile the wealthiest 1% of society continue to extract larger profits whilst their media normalises the rolling cycle of crisis and catastrophe in the public consciousness adding to the high levels of stress and anxiety which invariably leads to a culture of political apathy and resignation.

As citizens, we deserve better. We deserve quality democratically elected representatives rather than the current batch of battery-farmed politicians espousing the same old neoliberal approach to running society. We demand a quality health and education system fit for a wealthy nation like Australia rather than the apartheid approach that divides systems along public and private lines best serving those who can pay more.

We also demand the reversal of poverty and homelessness. Our society needs to put an end to the luxury of sustaining the large number of billionaires whilst our most vulnerable members of society go without food, shelter and a bed each night.

We also demand that our community have a voice that is heard across the nation. The lion's share of media rests in the hands of billionaires who set the social and political agenda. Reversing media concentration that places community voices ahead of corporate owned media commentators will better reflect the needs of our community and culture. Furthermore, it will promote political dialogue and accountability that keeps our politicians honest and one that scrutinises their decisions and policies.

An informed public is key to battling apathy and resignation. Promoting diverse views and alternative social, political and economic perspectives is vital if we are to dismantle the status quo that promotes inequality, insecurity and instability as a natural way of life. The greatest danger lies in doing nothing and accepting the status quo, one which has been leading us from one crisis to another.

It is time to reverse the tide of political apathy and reinvigorate the public so we can make society safe, secure and stable.

Join PIBCI and help us put an end to the status quo.

Anthony B – Website Editor

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