

# PIBCI - Monthly Perspective

## Summer 2024/2025 Edition

### You are invited

*For too long the public have been excluded from social, political and economic discourse. Today, you are formally invited to make a change and have your voice heard.*

The past year has raised several warning signs indicating that our democracy is in serious trouble. 2024 witnessed a considerable number of basic democratic rights being trampled on by the nation's political elite, home-grown oligarchs and large corporations. Such assaults have marked a turning point in the ruling order where the fruits of neoliberalism have turned rotten, and the blame for the stinking mess is being deflected away from those who are benefitting from the state of decay. The expectation that the public keep out of politics and economics is wearing thin as we rapidly approach the fifty-year mark of the neoliberal revolution. Looking backward, we can survey the comprehensive failures brought about by privatisation, deregulation, corporatisation, globalisation and the ratcheting-up of militarisation. Put simply, neoliberalism has failed to deliver on its great expectations and has produced an economic, political and cultural train wreck. The distribution of wealth has been a one-sided affair with the lion's share of profits delivered to the small section of society that owns the means of production, distribution, communication and exchange. Despite Australia's abundant natural wealth, stagnant wages, rising inequality and failing public services have been allowed to plague the nation for decades. With failures too big to cover up, the political elite and corporate bosses continue to **steal our attention** away from the real issues that impact the majority of Australians. Meanwhile, our democratic rights and democratic institutions that once stood firm against the pressures of big business are being eroded. Years of precluding the public from engaging in the decision-making process have laid the foundations for emasculating the workers' movement. It has facilitated today's calls to shut down public protests and ramp up the digital surveillance of the public. Such moves to further erode democratic rights, control public opinion and undermine freedom of expression ultimately lead to a one-way path to authoritarian rule. With this in mind, you are invited to make have your voice heard, and to make a difference by rejoining the social, political and economic debate.

### Eroding democracy

The prevailing political and economic system that operates in Australia is bankrupt. For the latter half of the past century, the major political parties have blindly followed the neoliberal road map and steered the nation into the ditch. Their lofty promises of "raising all ships in the harbor" and brining about cheaper prices through 'market efficiencies' and 'competition' have all but diminished during decades of unemployment, austerity, homelessness, child poverty, rising household debt, anxiety and stress. Such promises cannot be built on a disintegrating education system, a crumbling health system and decaying public services.

Despite the ideological armor-plating provided by neoliberal think tanks and the generous funding provided by national and international corporate backers, the major political parties are no longer able to cover up the slow-motion disaster caused by neoliberalism. Nor can they generate new ideas to bring about social and political progress. The neoliberal ideology has been exposed as a fraudulent shopfront dealing in dubious solutions precured by self-serving politicians and policy makers who actively dupe the public into believing that 'there is no other way' other than the neoliberal way. Meanwhile, decade after decade the peddlers of the neoliberal ideology have enriched their masters who own the means of production, distribution, communication and exchange.

The consequences flowing from neoliberal's half century march have been devastating. The spheres of politics, economics and culture have all been scarred by the rampant ideological virus whose name is kept out of the public's consciousness. While the public have been pushed out of social, political and economic discourse, democracy has gradually been quashed. The public have been led astray, shunted into the mindless world of consumerism. The remaining voices pressing for the public's interests have been drowned out by the amplified voices of the few who control the mainstream media.

### Politics

For decades our political system has been corrupted by corporations who have tightly embraced the major political parties. Political donations, lobbyists, and the powerful billionaire owned media ensure that the major political parties walk the line dictated to by Australia's cabal of oligarchs who hold the lion's share of the nation's power and wealth. Their influence ensures that the nation's politicians playact as servant's of the people whilst doing the bidding of their masters. Selling off essential and non-essential public assets, watering down worker's rights, deregulating financial markets and ignoring calls to crack down on political donations will not take place in the current environment given that political and economic actions are designed to support the status quo. Mainstream politics is a system that battery farms politicians to enter parliament as playactors, only to progress to ministries then landing plumb jobs in the corporate sector spruiking the virtues of their new masters we know as the one percent.

Today, our nation has no meaningful political opposition. The major parties sing from the same ideological hymn sheet and enthusiastically flog the dead horse called neoliberalism. Privatisation, deregulation, corporatisation, globalisation and militarism form the framework from which the major political parties operate. Despite the changeover from one major party to the other, the ALP and the NLP Coalition desperately vie to maintain the status quo that keeps them comfortable whilst serving corporate interests.

The neoliberal ideology guides the dominant narrative that has been grooming the public into abdicating its role as citizens, only to take up the backward role of consumers. Social responsibility, collective action, cooperation, advocacy and political agency have become swear words in today's neoliberal filtered lexicon. Such terms have been swapped out for individual achievement and competition. For nearly five decades the neoliberal order has worked on its 'problem' called democracy. By transforming the public from citizens into

consumers, the one percent now manage politics and economics unimpeded by a population addicted to consumerism. The upshot is that the public are not invited to engage in policy discussions which in turn sets the course of our collective future.

### Economics

With little opposition the neoliberal ideology has implemented its ruinous economic policies across Australia and much of the world. Mantras such as 'anyone can be a millionaire if you work hard enough' and 'the market is the best system to sort out things' have been drilled into generations of voters. For too long, such hollow mantras have been subjected to little or no scrutiny. The billionaire owned and government-controlled media have neglected to ask the question 'what is under the neoliberal carpet'. Meanwhile, decades have passed with the legacy media repeating and amplifying the hollow virtues of neoliberal economics. After nearly 50 years of ingesting the dross, we can see that 'cutting back' and working harder have not translated into personal wealth and prosperity. In reality, the rich have become richer. The mysterious magic hand of the market has turned out to be a big con. The oligarchs we call 'entrepreneurs' have successfully siphoned off public funds, weakened the labour movement, squeezed employees and made more profits. Neoliberalism in 2024 has made the public poorer and not richer. It has delivered a standard of living that is in decline and presented a future that is dimmer and grimmer than the future we had a decade ago.

While the public remains docile, compliant and mute on the most pressing issues, the one percent will continue to drag the rest of society into a dark ditch. Change can only come from the public questioning the dominant narrative and challenging the status quo.

### Social attitudes and culture

Social attitudes in Australia have undergone a colossal shift which has occurred alongside the introduction of neoliberalism. Values such as solidarity and 'mateship' based on collective action and the 'fair go' have long been erased from the cultural memory. Supported by a long line of neoliberal think tanks, spin doctors, PR managers and slick political campaigns, Australians have been weened onto a new set of values congruent with neoliberalism. Individualism, consumerism and competition have been presented as our new values.

The form of individualism that has been promoted by the neoliberal cheer squad designates that everyone is responsible for their own destiny. If you work hard enough, you can be a glowing success. However, if you fall through the cracks, well that's probably your fault and you'll have to rely on state services that are in a state of decay. For decades, the government has been shifting away from governing as public services have been transferred to the private sector.

The dark cloud of competition has also overshadowed previous forms of cooperation and collectivism. Now that neoliberalism has defined us as individual consumers, we are urged to be ruthless and use cunning to outwit the competition, which in reality means everyone else including good colleges, close friends and family. It means pushing your way in front of the line and putting your self-interest ahead of everyone else. Cooperation and collective action have been turned on their head as relying on others is viewed as a sign of weakness..

Consumerism has become the predominant way of life. Having cleansed the public from the sphere of politics, the one per cent reinforce the view that the purpose of each individual is to consume their way from one end of a shopping plaza to the other that dot the nation like a rash.

At the outset of the neoliberal revolution, grand promises were made to the public and high expectations were set by our political leaders. However, neoliberalism's core task was to solve its key problem: democracy. Henceforth, its wealthy and powerful backers instituted an array of think tanks, publications, and the vast machinery of the mass media to influence political parties towards eroding democracy. This strategy has been successful in discouraging public discourse and undermining public agency. To this end, the neoliberal order has established a social, political and economic environment that aims to silence public protest and muffle all forms of dissent that challenges the dominant narrative.

## Normalising decadence

Excluding the public from the social, political and economic debate has led to the wholesale dominance of corporate interests. Such interests are reinforced by the broad media spectrum that is corporate owned and government-controlled ensuring that the public focus is caught up in the dominant narrative web. While the dominant narrative colonises the public's consciousness, it also employs a host of tactics to steal our attention. On-line shopping, celebrity chefs and sporting personalities or the endless array of infinity pools that promote fake conspiracies also serve to divert our time from learning and understanding reality. Such distractions steal our time and rewards us with nothing but confusion, bewilderment, hate and emptiness.

The amplification of corporate interests via the mainstream media assists in solidifying the corporate agenda in the minds of the public. The cogs in the legacy media turn tirelessly to keep issues important to the public off our screens, out of the airwaves and invisible in the press. The mainstream media has also worked to undermine our democratic rights. Vital issues such as poverty, inequality, financial insecurity and homelessness are not deemed important by the one percent to broadcast in the mainstream media. Furthermore, the dangers posed by escalating conflicts, genocide and the environmental disaster have been turned on their heads by the billionaire owned media. The past twelve months have witnessed the virtual normalisation of genocide as the plight of Palestinians in Gaza has relegated a back seat in the kaleidoscope of 'news' that is deemed more interesting by corporate news bosses. The students and the public exercising their democratic right to protest the ongoing genocide in Gaza have been roundly demonized by the mainstream media. Protesters against the weapons expo in Melbourne have been criticized for trivial issues such as halting businesses and traffic. Meanwhile protesters with flags have been hunted down by the police while the merchants of death roam free in Melbourne selling their wares that kill oppressed and unarmed civilians.

The wholesale attack on the labour movement by the federal government further highlights the direct threat to democracy. The government's focus on the entirety of the CFMEU and

its superannuation wing, CBUS rather than pursue individuals or branches of the CFMEU highlights the government's trigger finger when unions are concerned, Meanwhile, corruption levelled at large corporations, government departments and individual politicians gets swept under the carpet and vanish from the headlines. The issues uncovered by corporations providing auditing services to government, RoboDebt, and ministers milking the public purse for personal travel have all been conveniently forgotten and erased from the public's consciousness.

## You are invited to make a difference

Social progress comes from demanding changes in the spheres of politics and economics. Such demands need to be vocalised in workplaces, on the streets and directly to the politicians. Before we hit 50 years of neoliberal order, we need to demand change for the better. Collectively, we need to put the public's interests ahead of corporate interests> Public interests need to come ahead of the narrow self-serving wishes of the nation's oligarchs who use their billions of dollars to fund dubious campaigns, influence political parties and sway public opinion.

Today you are formally invited to demand the roll back of privatisation. You are invited to highlight to your friends, family and colleagues the decades of damage inflicted by successive governments that have sold off public assets. You are encouraged to raise awareness in your community about the collapse in service quality of public services, and the rise in the premiums for services that are now in the hands of the private sector.

You are also invited to make your voice heard through protest. History shows that significant social and political change only comes through the public making their demands heard in the streets. It is time to call for an end to deregulation and corporatisation. It is time to demand the restoration and rehabilitation of our democratic institutions. It is time to call for action that necessitates transparency and accountability by politicians. You are invited to participate in determining the future of the nation. It is time to voice your concerns about our lack of our nation's sovereignty, questionable military alliances and the secretive obligations of such partnerships should we be called to assist in conflicts. It is time to demand a halt to financial and military support in conflicts another hemisphere away. You are invited to ask questions and demand answers about who is benefitting from such alliances, and whether such conflicts support our national interests?

You are also invited to demand democracy within the workplace. Why should democracy in Australia be limited to the political sphere? Democracy should extend beyond politics and into the workplace. Decisions should be made by the majority of employees and profits be distributed to those who do the work, and not to nameless shareholders.

Today, you are invited to think critically and question the dominant narrative. You are invited to challenge the mainstream fiction that passes for reality on our screens. It is time to set aside fear and exercise courage. You are invited to become an active citizen once again.

Anthony B – Website Editor

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