

INQUIRER

Lefty media elite live cut off from where real life happens

Chris Kenny, The Australian, 12:00AM August 19, 2017

Let me float a theory about how the socialising tendencies of journalists help to ruin our politics. Like any clique, most journalists yearn for peer acceptance and earn it by trying to fit in with their colleagues and floating with the zeitgeist.

Yet one of the most profound influences on contemporary politics is the widening chasm between journalists and the mainstream, the audiences they are supposed to serve. This failing is easily recognised by anyone prepared to join the dots, yet it is seldom addressed by media: it tends to be phlegmatically accepted by the public as a fact of life.

This great divide has played out dramatically of late. The accepted wisdom is that through the election of Donald Trump, the Brexit triumph and the rise of protest parties and figures of the extreme left and right, the established political order has been rejected by large slabs of voters in Western liberal democracies.

That these trends were missed by the vast majority of journalists proves the disconnect. And if we look closer we can see how media coverage actually fuelled this backlash.

To see how this chasm is widening we only have to look at how, instead of learning from these mistakes, much of the media is doubling down on the misinterpretations and railing against democratic outcomes.

Hysterical coverage of Trump remains the touchstone on these insights, as does ongoing activism to overturn Brexit. But on our own shores the trends are evident in coverage of gay marriage, climate policy, border protection and, this week, the wearing of the burka.

We can start with Tim Minchin's musical incursion into the marriage debate. Borrowing the famous Peter Allen song I Still Call Australia Home, Minchin suggests the same Australians who idolised and loved Allen are homophobic. "I'm always travelling but wherever I stay, people love Aussies and they generally say," sings Minchin, "they think we're kind of fun and funny, tall, tanned and toned — and a little bit racist, and a little bit homophobic." Just in case there were any doubts, Minchin's ditty goes on to denounce the plebiscite and say, "at least we'll know how many Aussies are bigoted c..ts." Now, keep in mind that on the face of it, aside from any self-promotion, this bloke is trying to convince people to vote yes.

This is the sort of hectoring that saw Hillary Clinton canvass for votes by dubbing half of those aligned against her as "deplorables" who were "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic".

We saw how well that worked out for her.

Minchin, like Clinton, was playing to the superiority complex of the media/political class and was rewarded with its warm embrace. On ABC TV's *Insiders*, host Barrie Cassidy ended the show with a craggy smile to "cue" Minchin's slur against his compatriots.

When I criticised the singer on Twitter it led to an unexpected exchange. I disagreed with his characterisation of Australians as homophobic and racist, and he urged me to listen again. "I comment on our international reputation for being a bit racist," wrote Minchin, "I don't assert it myself."

So the song is not about what he thinks, it is just what others think. Bit of a cop-out but nice that Tim tried to withdraw his slur. The point here is the chasm between this progressive media/political class and the mainstream; and the way it is so often expressed in a sneering, insulting way.

In this age of identity politics the easiest way to identify as one of the enlightened ones is to deride the views of others, usually people portrayed as selfish suburbanites or regional rednecks who may vote for the Coalition or even flirt with One Nation.

Obviously Minchin and Clinton and any politician or voter has every right to run any line they like, whether you or I see it as virtue-signalling, self-defeating or not. The dilemma for our politics is that at least part of the reason we are seeing so much acrimony and dysfunction is that the media/political class, including academe, the bureaucracy and large swathes of the corporate world, is at odds with the priorities of the mainstream. We know most of the population supports strong border protection and cheap and reliable electricity, and is derisory about the false priorities and wasted efforts in social engineering that infiltrate our schools and government agencies.

Yet the media/political class is antipathetic to immigration security, committed to climate gestures over practical solutions on energy and fully subscribed to every bit of social engineering that springs forth, from safe schools to Invasion Day, and from the Australian Human Rights Commission to the public broadcasters.

These are the people dubbed insightfully by Robert Manne, from within, as the "permanent oppositional moral political community". This political/media class, for instance, will welcome an "LGBTQI helpline" to help ABC staff through the gay marriage plebiscite while mainstream voters are likelier to roll their eyes and wonder how governments find such ways to spend our money.

But here's the thing. Political journalists in Canberra and elsewhere seem to have succumbed to Stockholm syndrome. They are supposed to hold politicians accountable on behalf of the mainstream but they have become captive to the political class.

Journalists want to be respected by politicians who want to be respected by journalists. And journalists write stories to impress other journalists who affirm each other's view of the world and share a disdain for the rough-hewn logic of the masses they serve.

Social media was supposed to democratise the media and give consumers a direct line into this world. But, log on, it has become an extended echo-chamber where members of the political/media class stroke their egos by agreeing with their shared assessments and deriding any view not firmly rooted in the green left.

It at least gives us a window on their true thoughts and provides an alarming insight into the distance between their views and those outside inner suburbs of the capitals.

So when Pauline Hanson went for the cheap and provocative stunt of wearing a burka into the Senate, we saw over the top condemnation from the Coalition, Labor, Greens and most of the journalists. Somehow the burka — a medieval garment used by some Muslim cultures to hide women from prying eyes when in public — was given the status of a “religious garment” and apparently was beyond mockery.

Surely it was possible to criticise Hanson’s stunt and oppose her proposed burka ban yet not overreact in a way that offers respect for this uniform of oppression. Most Australians, including most Muslim Australians, surely don’t want little girls growing up in this country to face the possibility of this kind of cultural imprisonment.

Instead of a nuanced response, we had people parading their tolerance by denouncing Hanson. They seemed to accord Islam a level of sanctity or protection that no other religion in this country is given. We can indulge the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and Piss Christ but don’t dare question the antiquated discrimination of forcing women to cover up.

My Sky News colleague Caroline Marcus dared to write a Daily Telegraph column this week arguing that people such as Minchin and other media haranguers for the yes case may drive wavering voters to the no side. Her harshest critics were fellow journalists. Some of her critics pretended not to understand her point; either that or they didn’t notice Trump’s win, Brexit’s success or the resurrection of One Nation.

As we worry about all the chaos and dysfunction in Canberra, volatility in the White House and uncertainty in Europe, we need to consider more than the voters and the politicians. We need to think about the media’s role as a two-way conduit between these blocs and how they should be aligned with the voters but are more embedded with the ruling class.

What is worrying is not to see journalists in disagreement but to notice how most of them only ever agree with each other. If they dare air a contrary view, like Marcus, they’ll be ostracised or learn to meld their views so they all fit in to the same insiders’ club, and we all lose.