

The Woke Supremacy



Sowing The Wind: The backlash against wokeism will be made much more aggressive by the difficulties its opponents encounter in making their voices heard. The mainstream news media – and especially the state-owned media – have become increasingly intolerant of ideas and opinions which directly, or indirectly, challenge the wokeists' view of the world.

IT IS DIFFICULT to attach a name to the ideology currently guiding the actions of the New Zealand ruling-class. For the past twenty years the Left has been content to call it neoliberalism, but in the third decade of the twenty-first century that term has less and less purchase on reality. The new ideology which has emerged, let's call it "wokeism", is a radical fusion of neoliberalism, environmentalism and identity politics – and its powerful enough to disrupt profoundly the political, social and economic institutions of New Zealand society.

That wokeism will generate massive resistance is certain. Its assault on the traditional order will leave more and more people feeling unmoored and vulnerable. Inevitably, a political movement will arise to contest the wokeists' claims and policies. This movement will not, however, be driven by the traditional Left, it will be the creation of an angry and radically populist Right. What's more, the transformational ambitions of wokeism will provoke its opponents into advancing an equally comprehensive programme of revocation and reconstitution. The result will be a deeply divided society, with tolerance and empathy in short supply.

The backlash against wokeism will be made much more aggressive by the difficulties its opponents encounter in making their voices heard. The mainstream news media – and especially the state-owned media – have become increasingly intolerant of ideas and opinions which directly, or indirectly, challenge the wokeists' view of the world. Stuff, the largest newspaper publisher in the country has embraced wokeism wholeheartedly and set its face resolutely against the errors of "racist" New Zealanders. Even more significantly, citizens determined to spread "unacceptable" ideas can no longer rely upon the major social media platforms for their dissemination. Increasingly, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are "de-platforming" individuals and groups (including a former President of the United States!) whose beliefs have been anathematised by the woke.

This de-platforming of dissenters by the woke media – often facilitated by threats from major corporate advertisers to withdraw their financial support – will complicate the mobilisation of wokeism’s opponents, but it will not prevent it. Inevitably, the sheer number of New Zealanders shut out of the wokeist discourse will persuade conservative investors to offer them a Fox News-like outlet for traditional views and values. As Rupert Murdoch knows well, there are big profits to be made out of alienation and anger. Those corporates hitherto persuaded to embrace (and enforce) wokeism may experience second thoughts when the enormous size of the traditionalist audience is revealed.

Right-wing political parties will likewise be forced to decide whether or not the game of accommodating themselves to the demands of wokeism is, in the long term, worth playing. If they decide not to place themselves at the head of a movement fuelled by rising anger and resentment and strongly supported by a major media outlet devoted to its cause, then, most assuredly, someone else will. National and Act will not be slow to understand that if they do not get on board the radical right-wing populist bandwagon, then it will roll right over the top of them. As with the Republican Party in the United States: they may not like it, but they will not fight it. Their biggest challenge will be to find a Trump-like politician to front it.

The key insight of the world’s most successful populist leaders is that the voters will not punish a politician for farting in the wokeist church: who simply refuses to be daunted by charges of racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, or any of the many other “thought crimes” promulgated by the woke. The politician who responds to all such accusations with a straightforward “Yes, I am. And if you expect me to apologise for it, you’re going to be bitterly disappointed!” That sort of politician: Trump, Duterte, Bolsonaro, Orban; receives as many cheers as jeers – probably more. Yes, liberal Americans were horrified when Trump branded Mexican border-crossers drug-dealers, rapists and thieves; but conservative Americans were delighted to have finally encountered someone willing to “tell it like it is”.

The other key insight of the right-wing populists is that most people really don’t like the news media. The politician who viciously attacks reporters: who accuses them of manufacturing “fake news”; who bans them from his press conferences and brands the newspapers and networks they work for “enemies of the people”; will emerge from the conflict stronger – not weaker. So long as they have their own equivalent of Fox News to carry their message to their “base”, it simply does not matter if wokeist media outlets rebuke and revile them as right-wing “fanatics”. Indeed, such charges will only succeed in further burnishing their reputations as champions of the “deplorables”. CNN didn’t bring Donald Trump down. What defeated him was his own woefully inadequate response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Couldn’t happen in New Zealand. How often has that “argument” been advanced by those whose salaries depend upon it being true? If these political Pollyannas had the slightest familiarity with the history of their own country, they would know that it already has.

Much of the populist National Party prime minister Rob Muldoon’s popularity was generated by his heated exchanges with journalists. Long before Donald Trump crossed swords with CNN’s White House correspondents, Muldoon was ordering the removal of the *Listener*’s parliamentary

reporter, Tom Scott, from the Beehive theatre. When the TV news showed the prime minister ordering his aides to “take him away”, liberal New Zealand was horrified. For “Rob’s Mob” of conservative New Zealanders, however, it was thrilling proof of their leader’s strength. The media had it coming!

Muldoon’s most apt pupil in the dangerous game of right-wing populist politics was Winston Peters. Openly challenging the news media and arguing aggressively with journalists live on television became a key component of his enduring electoral appeal. Once again, liberal New Zealanders were perplexed: what could Peters possibly hope to gain by such vulgar displays of political truculence?

What Peters understood, and his well-educated and refined critics tended to forget, was that half the population falls on the wrong side of the bell-curve. Instinctively, the vulgar masses recoil from the lofty condescension of professional middle-class journalists. By attacking the news media, and its “sickly white liberal” assumptions, Peters, like Trump, secured the votes of the “poorly educated”.

All of which raises the critical question: Who will take on the right-wing populist mantle of Muldoon and Peters? Certainly, National’s Judith Collins and Act’s David Seymour would like to, but are they temperamentally suited to the role? Do they have the necessary slivers of ice-cold steel driven deep enough into their souls? Are they able to deploy the sort of cruel humour that lacerates their opponents’ self-confidence? Can they make people laugh at their vicious jokes in spite of themselves? It is certainly very difficult to imagine either Collins or Seymour successfully delivering Muldoon’s brutally funny quip: “I have seen the shivers running around Bill Rowling’s back, looking for a spine to crawl up!”

There is no shortage of applicants for the job of radical right-wing populism’s “drummer”: the leader who will make the hearts of the angry and the marginalised beat faster. The rabble-rouser who will cause them to clench their fists and clutch at their grievances more tightly. The messiah who will inspire them to set aside their ingrained sense of inferiority and their deep fear of being laughed at and/or condemned, and demand their own version of paradise. The demagogue who will impel the unmoored and vulnerable towards the clamour of ideological battle with the relentless and pitiless beating of his rhetorical drum. Oh yes, we’ve seen Billy Te Kahika, Jami-Lee Ross, even Hannah Lee Tamaki, make their pitches. But – no sale. The next drummer has yet to step out upon the national stage.

While New Zealand waits for that perilous person to appear, the woke supremacy will continue. Hate speech will be outlawed. The nation’s history will be re-written. Even the country’s name will be driven relentlessly towards the memory hole. Were these assaults upon tradition to be offset by decisive governmental action making rents and homes affordable, forcing the rich to pay their fair share of tax, and restoring a rough balance of power in the workplace, then they might be forgiven. If the democratic rights of New Zealand citizens were being beefed-up – instead of being whittled away – then wokeism might have a future. But, they aren’t, and it doesn’t.

Only when the drum-beat of right-wing populism starts to shake New Zealand's windows and rattle its walls, will wokeism's fondness for silencing its enemies finally begin to make a kind of desperate sense.

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