

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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Coalition Attacks on Public School Curricula and the IPA

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Mr Dutton has promised to make ‘a debate over the national curriculum’ that he says is at risk of being hijacked by unions and activists a key political battleground for the next federal election,’ What our children are bringing home from school’ a key foundational value-based issue for the Liberal Party to fight on. (*The Australian*, July 2-3 July 2022 1.) And his Shadow Minister for Education has been only too happy to denigrate public school teachers at an independent schools Conference. He blamed [‘dud’ public school teachers for declining results](#). The opposition parties are also attacking public school teachers and the curriculum in the upcoming Victorian election.

It seems that, as the coalition party lurches further and further to the right, they are attempting to sing from the same hymn book as the Republicans in the American mid term elections. Public school supporters will do well to note these concerted and manufactured attacks on public education.

DOGS are not alone in recognising this trend in Australian politics. The following article by Lucy Hamilton on the John Menadue website entitled ‘Pearls and Irritations’ is a very interesting analysis of the influence of the ‘think tank’ The Institute of Public Affairs (so called) on Coalition policy and, in turn the influence of American right wing politics on their thinking.

<https://johnmenadue.com/ipa-and-teachers/>

The IPA launches campaign to harass teachers. Why???

By Lucy Hamilton

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The IPA has become a culture war factory with barely any research to justify the label “think tank” and the tax perks it claims. Their campaign to harass teachers, however, is utterly self-defeating.

Michael Pascoe's excellent column savaging the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) illustrates its commitment to greed at the expense of everything. At a moment when Australia is beginning to reckon with which low-lying (and forested) communities will soon become uninsurable in the face of the climate emergency, the IPA is still pushing false doubt about the science.

It seems shortsighted to fight tooth and nail for one's own children to live in a world much harder and more expensive than the one the combatant was raised in. It seems confused, if not hypocritical, to demonise just policy for asylum seekers at the same time as hounding politicians to shape policy that will displace millions in the next few decades.

Their campaigns, however, are much more myopic than even these contradictions suggest. Teachers learnt with glaring clarity over the worst of the pandemic (so far) that their allocated role in society, stripped of romantic imaginings, was childminding. Teachers are intended to keep youth off the street until they too grow old enough to join their parents in wage slavery and debt peonage.

And yet the IPA, shorn of actual research, has filched from American playbooks the savaging of teachers and schools as the culture war that will keep it relevant and bring its chaotic political arm back to power.

Teachers battle a grinding job that makes holidays a necessity to avoid harming hyperactive masses of children and recalcitrant teens. Constant pressure of arbitrary benchmarks and counterproductive testing makes teaching too often a matter of training children to surmount pointless hurdles rather than to relish all that is around us to be learnt. Battalions of demanding parents treat teachers as servants or miscreants, while administrative demands bow shoulders under an unbearable load. At night, while friends gather to socialise, teachers contemplate the preparation and marking that must be done. Metrics, data entry and reporting are constant nagging requirements.

Most young people would rather be playing or socialising, as any parent who tries to marshal unwilling offspring will tell you. Trying to galvanise the PlayStation, TikTok and Netflix generation to engage with lessons they resent is a constant demand on energy that leaves the teacher exhausted at the end of the day. The computer in the classroom (laptop, iPad or phone) will offer instant excitement compared to mastering the use of apostrophes.

Too many teachers are older, and could not have safely taught in the classroom during the pre-vaccine pandemic, with threats to their own health or those in their care at home. Nonetheless, the distance education option of the lockdown era was extraordinarily difficult and has brought back a generation of children of vastly different accomplishment. Some cannot sit still for a class's duration while others were nurtured and extended by parents who had the time and capacity to do so.

Looking out for the mental wellbeing of students, while trying to meet impossible standards is a constant struggle. There are so many conflicting roles demanded of a teacher that day to day, they are worn away to bare bones.

There are few experiences as exhilarating as igniting the magic of excitement in young people about a new idea or a challenge mastered, but buried in the erosive rest, it is not enough to keep many teachers in the profession.

We are facing a teacher shortage at the moment, as a result of all these drains, with many deciding that there are much easier ways to pay the bills that don't leave one a sickened wreck at the beginning of every holiday (before reengaging with the preparation for the following term).

So for the IPA to choose this moment to declare war on teachers is to shoot itself in the face. Who is going to provide childcare so that all the wage slaves can keep churning out the profits for its residual funders?

Bella D'Abrera is the voice of the IPA's campaign on schools, Class Action, named in a threateningly legalistic fashion. In July, the IPA promoted an advertisement for the campaign on Facebook aiming to arouse average Aussie parents to work to control what is taught to their children. The linked video is labelled with a "Warning" with an accompanying warning logo, followed by "insane racial ideology at Aust schools." The post claims that "Critical Race Theory"(CRT) is being taught at Australian schools. This is arrant nonsense. CRT is a university level discourse in some American law schools that aims to see where old racism is encoded in longstanding systems. This fabricated culture war battle over schooling was invented by Republican activist Christopher Rufo, who believed it offered a frightening sounding name that would galvanise ignorant Red-state parents.

The label is applied to any attempt to convey history in any but the most bowdlerised fashion to suit white bigots who will not hear any of the pain of the settler colonial experience. (In Britain the label is used to criticise any but the most celebratory account of the British Empire.) It is not about teaching guilt, as the IPA and radical right activists chant, but about teaching a more balanced view of history than most adults are aware existed. Our historical understanding is so partial because the history taught has been so sanitised.

D'Abrera also harps on about the "identity politics" taught in schools, and apparently fostered in universities, omitting the fact that there is one and only one identity they do want taught. Any allowance for diversity in schools is made the subject of hysterical scandal.

As Noel Turnbull pointed out here, schools are exciting and busy places, because of the hard work of teachers, with no sign of the perversion and shame that the IPA's American gambit would have us believe.

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