

The West Australian
Wednesday, April 8, 2020

PAGE 13 OPINION

Fanatics keep your distance



PAUL MURRAY

Hopeful signs in virus fight have Left and Right in spin mode

There are dangerous signs that the evidence suggesting a flattening of Australia's COVID-19 infection rate might be creating a premature sense of complacency.

One of the unlikely early indicators of such foolhardiness is the upsurge in political opportunism off the back of the crisis.

It's a clear sign that the immediate sense of threat is lessening when the usual suspects start using the pandemic's human misery to fly their political kites.

But a (hopefully) short-term viral infection should not be replaced by a long-term ideological cancer.

Last week saw spear-throwers from both sides of politics sharpening their weapons on whatever they could take from the virus' fallout.

The Right argues that government attempts to contain the death toll are not worth the expense of long-term economic harm.

The Left sees the pandemic as a failure of capitalism and the efforts being made to bolster Australia's economy as a sign that socialism works.

Both are wrong. Down at the Trotskyite end of journalism, Guardian Australia editor Lenore Taylor was preparing for a new world order when the pandemic recedes.

"Those imagining a different post-crisis world, something fairer, kinder or greener, need to assemble their thoughts and arguments now, and Guardian Australia is publishing as many voices as we can to further that discussion," Taylor wrote last weekend.

She cited Richard Dennis, the head of a left-wing think tank, lamenting that the Coalition "had embraced bigger spending by government, rather than bigger government, restricting the potential for the

crisis to change things, and benefiting business in the end".

Most people just want their lives to return to normal. There is no evidence that a Big Government revolution is part of that longing.

The ABC's business editor, Ian Verrender, pondered whether capitalism was dying, or just in isolation.

Verrender strangely used Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton's warning to people plundering supermarket shelves and "profiteering" from the practice to posit that the whole free enterprise system was under question.

"For many, (Dutton's) comments made perfect sense," Verrender wrote. "In a time of crisis, as vast numbers of Australians faced unemployment and businesses large and small across the globe faced either drastically reduced revenue or total shutdown, the idea of profiteering from human misery seemed abhorrent."

"There's just one problem. Our entire system of economic production and social organisation is structured around profiteering."

In fact, the real problem was Verrender's flawed argument.

Profiteering means to "make or seek to make an excessive or unfair profit, especially illegally".

Surely a business editor should know the difference between profiteering and profit?

He should also know that the history of pandemics is that stock markets come roaring back to life on the back of the competitive impulses of

capitalism, providing the revenues for governments to

rebuild economies.

And then there was former foreign minister Bob Carr's provocative declaration last weekend: "If capitalism is so good, why does it need socialism to save it every decade?"

"When something akin to a massive natural disaster strikes a country, help from the state is precisely what people want," Carr wrote. The ultimate uncontested motherhood statement. But Carr could not point internationally to a successful result of his beloved Fabian socialism other than the Hawke-Keating government, which was resolutely free

enterprise in nature, shaming previous conservative administrations with the extent of its privatisation of state-owned assets.

Maybe Carr, the well-known China shill, should reflect on where this pandemic started, how it got away to run rampant through the world and how that is still being covered up by the world's biggest socialist (read repressive and secretive) government.

Even closer to home, The West's ubiquitous Jenna Clarke, expressed amazement on Monday at "a conservative Federal government . . . pivoting to socialism".

The truth is that our home-grown form of national government traditionally provides a high level of social support with bipartisan consent.

What else explains Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, our extensive system of family payments and pensions — and progressive taxation? All paid for by free enterprise, Australian pragmatism.

However, the worst example of ideological opportunism came from the deep thinkers at the Institute of Public Affairs which demands the lockdown restrictions to be dropped, just when they were starting to have an effect, to "save the economy".

Don't they see what is happening in America and Italy, where more than 60 doctors and healthcare professionals have died already?

Don't they know our hospitals ramp ambulances each winter because they often can't contain our usual seasonal flu epidemics?

Don't they understand that up to 30 per cent of populations could be asymptomatic to COVID-19, a time bomb waiting to be uncovered by wider testing?

Now is not the time for a retreat from vigilance.

Nor for spurious political grandstanding.



Now is not the time for a retreat from vigilance. Nor for spurious political grandstanding.

MORE OPINION
PLUS Alston P24-45



Stock up on good etiquette for that supermarket mission

Shopping for groceries in this brave new world of COVID-19 can be exceptionally challenging — the everyday shopper faces a trolley full of logistical issues that stretches from a shortage of supplies to long queues.

Amid the pandemic, shoppers and workers alike will agree on one thing: when it comes to supermarkets, it is not the prices but customer etiquette that has hit rock bottom.

It seems a quick brush-up on supermarket etiquette is fast approaching its "best-before date". Topping the docket is the

GARY MARTIN



need to remain safe. Don't go to the supermarket if you don't need to. If you need to go, go during one of the quieter periods. And if you are unwell, stay home.

Be aisle smart by using a shopping list to expedite your visit, head for where it is slow and return to the more frenetic aisles when the crowd thins. Practise social distancing like

your life depends on it because it does — as do others' lives.

Resist the temptation to bite off more than you can chew — strike a balance between purchasing only items that you need for a week or so but, at the same time, avoid visits to the store for just one or two items.

Remember the number one rule: you touch it, you buy it. It is OK to change your mind about an item already in your trolley but avoid the dump and run. Remember that pack of feta you no longer want does not belong in the laundry aisle. Cutting the line at the deli

counter is the mother of all evils and you will likely be called out by fellow shoppers.

If on approach to the cashier two trolleys arrive at the same time, the accepted protocol is for the trolley with fewer items to be allowed to move ahead. At the checkout, be patient and don't storm in front of other shoppers if a nearby checkout suddenly opens.

Refrain from abandoning your trolley in the checkout line to run off to grab an item you had forgotten and remember that arriving in the express checkout lane with

more items than allowed is the height of bad manners.

Appropriate behaviours include having your payment ready and knowing where your loyalty card is.

If you have received great service by one of the hundreds of wonderful supermarket staff working tirelessly on the front line, pass on your gratitude. Chances are it will make them feel they are the best thing since sliced bread.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive with the Australian Institute of Management WA