

We The People

Program 182

The Madness of Population Growth



Good day to you. This narrative is largely the thoughts of Kelvin Thomspon MP a man for whom I have the utmost respect in terms of his unassailable logic on overpopulation and preserving our environment. He says he encountered great unhappiness at the impact rapid population growth was having in Brisbane and South-East Queensland and was not surprised when the Queensland Labor Government was defeated in 2012. In many respects the Queensland Government had fallen victim to the same problems that had beset the Victorian Labor Government which was defeated in 2010. Like the Victorian mob the Queensland Labor Party has now pulled off an astonishing turnaround, apparently regaining office in a single term and toppling an elected Premier in the process. Political commentators are astounded at this growing political volatility. Kevin Rudd was elected as Prime Minister and replaced by Julia Gillard who was then replaced by Kevin Rudd. The recent dissatisfaction and volatility with the federal coalition is also symptomatic. One feature of the past decade is regularly overlooked. In 2004 Australia had a net migration program of 100,000. Then in the space of three years it rose to well over 200,000, where it has stayed. This doubling has given Australia rapid population growth for the past decade with an extra million people every three years.

It's clear that rapid population growth and political instability go hand in hand. This is the Witches' Hats theory of government. Think about those Advanced Driving Courses that require drivers to drive in slalom fashion through a set of orange plastic cones, called witches hats. The driver's mission is to avoid the hats. If they hit a certain number, they fail the test. Think of each hat as an area of public policy, such as education, health, housing, transport, aged care and hitting one is akin to getting it wrong. If a government hits a number of hats it is likely to be voted out, just as the driver who hits the hats won't get their Advanced Driving Qualification. Now it seems pretty obvious that if you're a driver, you are much more likely to avoid the hats if you are travelling at 50 kph, whereas if you're driving at 100 kph, you're pretty likely to hit some hats. If you're a government you're much more likely to solve peoples' problems if you have a population that is growing slowly, rather than one that is growing rapidly.

The Queensland and Victorian Governments were elected on the back of public discontent with issues such as planning, public transport, cost of living, social unrest and job insecurity. But as these things had been caused by rapid population growth and the growth continued, they did not solve those problems, and paid a massive electoral price for it. For example, Governments get punished for trying to sell off public assets. They do it to raise money to build new infrastructure, or pay down debts incurred as a result of past infrastructure building. But they would not need so much money, or so much infrastructure, if the population wasn't growing so fast. The Queensland academic Jane O'Sullivan says that population growth of 2 per cent doubles the infrastructure task compared with that in a stable population. It is not only in Australia that rapid population growth drives political instability. It happens right around the world. Governments in the Scandinavian countries with slow population growth are able to solve people's problems and enjoy considerable political life expectancy. Countries which have high birth rates, like Egypt, Nigeria and the Philippines, have chaos. It is not fashionable to focus on our past decade of rapid population growth as a cause of Australia's political volatility. Some are happier focussing on the alleged personal qualities of our leaders – they heap praise or derision on Anna Bligh, or Tony Abbott when the fact is that a different leader with the same policies would have led to the same result. Others want to interpret election results through a highly ideological prism, and come unstuck as a consequence of believing too much of their own propaganda. It is probably too late for Tony Abbott and Bill Shorten but perhaps their successors, and other political leaders around Australia, might want to ask themselves "do I want to be yet another casualty of our equivalent of the combative Colosseum, or do I want a respectable time in office". There are simply no advantages in population growth just as there are no fast trips to Brisbane on the M1 anymore. The answer doesn't lie in building a new highway, rather its stopping population growth to keep our quality of life and promote environmental sustainability.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley