

We The People
Program 35
Snobbery in Education



Most people would be familiar with the British aristocracy and the English class structure. English status is influenced by birthright, wealth, occupation, and education and Oxford and Cambridge are home to the world's famous and prestigious universities. They sometimes produce academics who believe they have a superior place in society and hence reinforce the class distinction. There is the upper class and the rest are commoners. Have no doubt that the class structure is alive and well in Britain while ever the Civil Service exists and Cambridge and Oxford produce graduates with various academic qualifications. However individuals who neither sow nor reap are of little real use in society.

Surely there is less place for the upper class now and especially so in Australia. However the class structure is the exchequer of many qualities people aspire to and some would argue that without that structure society would let go part of history and culture that's important. Apparently class is the way we humans naturally organise ourselves and where some believe leadership, order and higher thought comes from. In England the House of Lords represents the hereditary or upper class while the House of Commons represents everyone else. However part of this class mix embraces snobbery which is the belief that a person is superior by birth, station or academic qualifications. Snobbery is the fundamental belief that an equal or egalitarian society is not possible. I would hate to think that a class structure exists on the Gold Coast but it does and with the upper class comes arrogance and there is plenty of that around.

Sadly, education and snobbery go together in my view. In Queensland less than 30% of high school students go to university and yet that's where the most emphases lies. Vocational education where skills are taught is considered a lesser class by many teachers who relentlessly reminisce about their days on university campus. In other words a tradesman is in some way not as qualified or worthy as a graduate from Bond or Griffith Universities. Its entrenched in the secondary school system that going to university is everyone's ideal goal but if you can't then they have the term 'pathways' to sanitise their disappointment. It took a long time to even get the teaching fraternity to acknowledge vocational education played an important role but it's still deep down considered a second rate choice as far as the education sector is concerned.

There is tantalising visual proof of academic snobbery and superiority and I refer to the academic dress worn at university graduations including hoods, hats, stoles and robes. All have colours and shapes to denote status and importance and one's class and the like and all this imported from England. By default the so called trades people who make this country function don't get to play dress ups and therefore their status is less. Once ordained university graduates call themselves professionals even though they sometimes make doubtful citizens. I'm all for a university education but wish to point out that a vocational education certificate, diploma or apprenticeship is just as worthwhile and just as tertiary and graduates can be just as professional. The question is, why does this class of snobbery exist and why do otherwise reasonable Australians see fit to ram home their qualifications as though we all should be impressed and that they are superior to carpenters, plumbers or hairdressers. One should be proud of achievements and study but it should not descend into a parade of self indulgent acclamation. That's snobbery and its wrong in Australia and its sets a bad example to the 70% of school leavers who don't go to university on the Gold Coast. So let's recognise people and especially our younger members of society who study hard but choose a different path than university. Some years ago TAFE Queensland had a brilliant TV ad running with cheer leaders chanting no PHDs just JOBS. It was a really effective way of levelling the playing field. However the universities quickly flexed their political muscle and had it taken off air never to be heard again. Now that's a snobbery and its time we stopped playing the class card in schools for the benefit of our young people.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley