

# PIBCI - Monthly Perspective

**September 2023**

## Question authority

### Summary

*Dare to question, dare to understand.*

*Questioning authority is the lifeblood of a vibrant democracy.*

The act of questioning higher authority is essential if we are to keep our political system healthy and vibrant. In fact, a democratic system worth its salt demands that its citizens question their leaders and take them to task on each and every decision that they make which impacts on the rest of society. Unfortunately, a retrospective glance over the past decades highlights the public's growing disengagement with politics and consequently its lack of persistence to question the nation's political and corporate leaders on issues of public interest. It is little wonder that this lack of public enquiry runs parallel with the decline in the quality of political leadership and the general decay in public services and living standards while corporate profits steadily increase. The public's lack of appetite to question those in authority has provided passive consent for numerous decisions to be made that have resulted in disastrous social policy. As a result, decision makers have been able to walk away unscathed from their ill-conceived or personally motivated policies. Has the public lost the courage to question power? Or, has the public been allured by promises of comfort and security that demand passive compliance?

### Is questioning fast becoming a radical act?

Questioning is a natural act; it is how we learn and make sense of what is really happening and why. In a democratic society, questioning authority is not something novel nor is it a brave act but the duty of all citizens. Put into a broader perspective, the act of questioning authority sits alongside political engagement and social activism. Combined, they make up the key ingredients of sustaining a healthy democracy.

Regrettably, asking important and challenging questions of the minority wielding power is becoming an increasingly difficult task. The mainstream social and political landscape is marked by a scarcity of investigative journalism. What passes for investigative journalism currently lurks in the shadows of a mass media colossus that is concentrated in the hands of a few billionaires or exists on the fringes of

the government-controlled media. As things stand, the legacy media has morphed into the propaganda arm of the neoliberal order that suppresses public inquiry, undermines alternative voices and promotes the decaying status quo as the 'only way.'

The past decade was marked by an arrogant and dismissive political elite that acted with impudence when taken to task about public policy and conflicts of interest. Given the current political environment, there is little to suggest that this will change unless the public develops an appetite for questioning the political elite and demanding a stake in the nation's future.

It goes without saying that the quality of decisions made by policy makers will have a direct bearing on the public. Moreover, the decisions made by the nation's clique of billionaires and corporate leaders should not be viewed as trivial. The choices they make in corporate boardrooms will have consequences on the rest of society. Their ability to channel resources into pet projects, or 'donate' funds to political parties all have a direct bearing on social policy and our political system. Hence, the time for asking hard questions and demanding clear and honest answers is now.

## **Disrupting complacency**

The world is in a state of rapid transformation. A multitude of critical events are taking place all at once (eg. climate emergency, global financial instability and conflict between the major powers). Unfortunately, many politicians and corporate billionaires live in a world that detached from reality, and they are left to make vital decisions on the public's behalf. If the public does not act now, we will fall further into the sinkhole of collective complacency while the current clique of politicians and corporate billionaires continue to strengthen their grip on power and enforce the status quo.

Collective complacency has led scores of nations into some of the world's worst disasters. World War 1 and World War 2 are the direct consequences of populations who fell into a state of collective complacency. Nurtured by a false sense of security and fanned by an over enthusiastic political elite, tens of millions died and millions more lives destroyed in the aftermath of war. The grim lessons of the last century's wars are clear - there is no place for complacency. Do we need more Vietnams, Iraqs and Afghanistans to remind us of the tragedies of the dire mix of public complacency and ill-conceived government decisions. The public needs to be reminded that political leaders make decisions on the behalf of the rest of the population. Governments have the authority to send the nation to war. They determine who shoulders the tax burden and who does not. They exercise the authority to impose lock downs and ramp up the surveillance of the public. Our corporate elite also

dictate what stories make the mainstream headlines, which scandals are smeared over the evening news, and which imprisoned Australian citizen disappears from public view.

For far too long, Australians have forgotten how to question. We have allowed our attention to be drawn away from important issues by a colourful and shining world of glamour and sensationalisation. We have allowed our collective attention to be commandeered by a false narrative prepared in corporate newsrooms or dictated to via government press releases.

### Asking hard questions and expecting honest answers

For a democracy to function properly, the public needs to directly pose questions to those wielding authority. Questioning needs to be persistent until clear and honest answers come in return. The public should not tolerate politicians who ignore challenging questions or respond with meaningless rhetoric. Asking challenging questions and pursuing a deep inquiry into decisions of a public nature helps to disrupt complacency and disturb conformity. It requires the public to ask: why were our troops sent to Afghanistan? Why hasn't Julian Assange been brought back to Australia? Why is Australia the largest funder of Ukraine behind the NATO nations despite being in another hemisphere? Why do we have so much homelessness and child poverty? Why do we have regions where life expectancy is between 45 and 55 years? Why did Australia join AUKUS without public consultation? Will AUKUS membership bring us closer to conflict? Why did the government sign away \$386 billion dollars to purchase US nuclear submarines without public discussion? What would be the backlash from the US if we didn't tow their line? Why is the cost of energy so high in Australia despite having vast energy resources? Why does the USA have over 800 military bases located across the globe including several in Australia?

Such questions are only a few examples of how little we ask our leaders, and how little we know about vital matters that impact us all. Such questions also demonstrate how little we are told, and the total lack of transparency and consultation the major political parties have engaged in when making significant decisions.

## If you don't ask, they won't either

Our world is rapidly changing, and with each shift corporations have been able to extend their power and influence across society, the economy, politics and culture. Despite the mantra of 'freedom and democracy' our lives are increasingly being controlled by a corporatised system of management that pressures us to produce more and meet higher targets. Much noise is broadcast about the choice of

consumer goods available on the market, yet nothing is said about corporations distributing their increasing wealth amongst their workers or supporting a general improvement in living standards.

Despite the over-abundance of marketing and advertising that floods every nook and cranny, consumerism cannot mask the reality of growing inequality and a collapse in the quality of services provided to the public. The silence in the mainstream media about the gap between the haves and have nots will not be addressed by the billionaire owned media, since they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, this very system that sponsors the superrich while poverty, homelessness and decaying public services are permitted to continue.

The pretext for improving security has provided governments with the basis to dismantle laws designed to protect our freedoms and in their place ramp-up surveillance of the population. How have we got to this point? We simply have not questioned authority, we have not challenged the political and corporate elite. If our freedoms continue to be rolled back unchallenged by the public, we will be left with a democracy in name only.

## It is time to question

Across the globe, a confluence of events is taking place in which the decisions made by political and corporate leaders will invariably have an impact on each and everyone of us. Unfortunately, the decision made by those in leadership positions does not necessarily reflect the needs of the public, nor do they take into account broader social and environmental issues. In fact, such decisions are being made with personal gain in mind, corporate profits or knee-jerk reactions following negative press or poor polling. Should the public passively consent to poor decision-making and acquiesce to policies that run counter to the majority's needs and interests, we will open ourselves to the growing dominance of unrestrained power held by that small and self-serving section of society. The consequences of not questioning authority and rolling over at the first sign of push back by the nation's political and corporate leaders are dark and grim for the rest of society. Hence, as citizens in a democratic nation, it is our duty to ask questions of those who hold the reins of power and expect honesty, transparency and accountability in their answers. If we don't ask questions and if we do not get answers, we will remain in the dark and become a poorer society despite all the news that spouts out of our screens and speakers.

It is time you started asking questions and demanding answers. It is time to get active and ask why Australia is not as good as it could be.

Become a member of PIBCI and join in the chorus of people that are asking the hard questions.

**Anthony B – Website Editor**

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