

SAMMUT

IDENTITY POLITICS TAKES US BACK TO THE SHAME CULTURE

The more tolerant we've become, the less we tolerate those who dare to disagree

JEREMY SAMMUT

writes that

Aug. 27/9/17
Wednesday



It's a sign of our virtue-signalling times that an employer would boast on Facebook about their decision to sack a teenage Christian employee for endorsing the marriage survey's No side. The sacking and the boasting were abhorrent, but perhaps not surprising to anybody who has watched the growing identity politics phenomenon.

The more puzzling question, however, is the apparent paradox lying behind that phenomenon. Ironically, the more tolerant contemporary Australian society has become overall, the more identity politics we've ended up having to

Think of the grovelling apology Coopers made earlier this year for associating with the anti-marriage equality Bible Society of Australia. Think also of all the education officials who waved the Safe Schools program through without apparently voicing any concerns about greenlighting the indoctrination of Australian children with radical gender fluidity theories. ^{and refers to a}

Identity politics is really about the politics of moral embarrassment. It is, therefore, ultimately a primitive way of conducting politics.

For all its modern trappings of relativism and non-judgmentalism, identity politics represents a reversion to the shame culture of traditional societies, whereby dissenters face exclusion from the tribe — from the charmed circle of approved progressive opinion — for transgressing politically incorrect taboos.

The way alternative opinions are thereby silenced makes identity politics not only a threat to free speech and democracy but also to the true Enlightenment traditions of rational enquiry and debate.

endure. By all objective measures, we live in an unprecedented era of tolerance, acceptance and equality for all, compared with the bigoted social attitudes of far less enlightened earlier times.

But although there has never been less racism, sexism, or homophobia — thanks to the social changes that began in the 1960s — there have never been more people claiming the country is allegedly plagued by these social problems.

In recent times, these complaints have spanned the spectrum of identity politics: from Julia Gillard's misogyny speech; to the offence taken over the late Bill Leak's "indigenous parenting" cartoon; to the calls on social media last week to boycott Woolworths because the bloke who ran the company a decade ago supports traditional marriage. The

Yet the notion that the so-called "deplorables" are bigoted oppressors who deserve to have their privilege checked, including their right to freedom of speech, thought and conscience, in the name of promoting equality and diversity, is wearing thin.

Those who are sick of being told they don't know how to treat others decently, and are tired of being lectured and hectorred by their so-called betters, are the people who voted for Donald Trump, for Brexit and, locally, for One Nation. The growing political revolt against political correctness is a warning that the identity warriors should be careful what they wish for lest this lead to the ultimate paradox.

Because of its intolerance towards so-called "intolerants", identity politics risks becoming a disastrously self-fulfilling prophecy, which will end up fostering ever deeper political and social divisions over issues of race, gender and sexuality.

Jeremy Sammut is a senior research fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies.

rise of identity politics can be explained in part by the malign influence of universities that have embraced postmodern theory in recent decades.

We now have at least one generation of tertiary-educated Australians who have been politicised, and are deeply invested in the identity politics notion that certain groups in society remain the perpetual victims of bigotry and prejudice at the hands of the dominant culture — despite the enormous social changes that make a nonsense of this theory.

Nevertheless, identity politics is integral to the "intellectual left" sense of identity and status as an enlightened class, which not only supposedly possesses superior insight into how society marginalises assorted victim groups but whose members consider themselves morally superior to what they view as the great unwashed, bigoted "ordinary Australians".

This is why the identity warriors invest so much time and effort finding and backing causes and issues that can validate their identity and status — whether by demanding changes to marriage, or by de-

It has become a secular sin to harbour anything seen as resembling sexist, racist or homophobic views

manding changes to statues of colonial explorers and governors.

Yet the reason the warriors get traction, and seem to enjoy so much success in contemporary debates, is actually due to the fact social attitudes and values have changed so dramatically.

It has become a secular sin, in most walks of public and corporate life especially, to harbour anything seen as resembling sexist, racist or homophobic views, with the mere perception often leading to social and professional death.

This is the downside and consequence of how much more tolerant society has come, as this can lead to ideological bullying, forcing individuals and organisations into submission behind cultural and political agendas to avoid being labelled bigots.