

Welcome to HELL: On the Australian election

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The battle is lost, the city burns, the barricades fall, the forces are routed. The river of history turns colder, and drier, and darker. The river is stained, it is coagulating, it is more than a setback. It is a fork in history in which one moderately important segment of the human race turned downward, and inward, and made one step closer to the edge. The children will cry longer, they will be scarred deeper, they will live less as human beings. It was an opportunity to step back — to step back from all the indulgence in outrage, to step back from the period of excess in criminality, and to reclaim however little space for minimal decency in public life. The outrages will continue. The truth will matter no more. There will be no principle. There will be no decency. There will be no leniency, and there will be no respite for at least 3 more years. The forces of power — status quo power — will have carte blanche, proclaiming wealth for the rich, gifts for the privileged, and mockery and stern lectures for the poor. The army will grow, the navy will grow, the economy might grow, the hospitals might sink, the schools will sink, the universities will sink, the concentration camps will stay, and the soldiers will stay on their mission of oppression.

It's a sad, sad day. And with control of both houses gone I am glad I am out of the country. Say goodbye to unions - both trade unions, and gay unions - say goodbye to Telstra, goodbye to equitable education, un-monopolised media, unfair dismissal laws, the national broadcaster, national health insurance, the whole bit. All those gains made with such effort in the postwar era, the whole establishment of a welfare state with some small guarantees of social rights - just say goodbye to what remains of it, the rollback will soon be complete.

After all that Howard has done... I just can't believe it. Just flying in the face of human rights and basic decency, every day for almost a decade. Flouting the UN, or locking up innocent arrivals in concentration camps, or psychologically destroying their children, or driving their parents to suicide, or licking US arse, or taking away civil liberties, or talking about reintroducing the death penalty, justifying torture, denying homosexual people basic equality before the law, removing the potential for workers to better their conditions, making unfair dismissal legal (can you even imagine that? Changing the law so that dismissal which is demonstrably unfair is declared no problem?), destroying irreplaceable

pristine wilderness, penny-pinching from the hospitals, redistributing the education budget to the rich, ramping up debt on students, putting the army on civilian boats, just lying and deceiving continuously, egregiously, blithely, and then brazenly - what gall! - declaring his trustworthiness as an election issue.

Actually, I can believe it. So many people just loathe the guy. But so many people just don't give a shit about any of this. And they are right: it is RIGHT to be cynical about the whole process, it is RIGHT not to listen to any of these politicians... they just market different brands of capitalism, with all the inhuman consequences that entails, with as much respectability as the most unscrupulous salesperson... but it does not follow, that on these very basic issues of civilization, that they are all the same. How little understanding does it take to realize that all the worst, all the crimes we have seen committed by our government — in whatever terms you prefer to look at it — are not entirely identical between brand A and brand B.

How narrowly must one's eyes be focused, how shallow must one's grip be on reality, how disconnected must one be from the external world beyond oneself, how slow must the brain function, how much of an automaton must one be, how little can one count oneself a human being to somehow see straight past all this, dismiss it as some far-off unimportant yapping, and rather vote — reluctantly, of course, you don't want to vote at all — for the party which has bribed you more, scared you more into thinking it will save you, and which you think will give you lower interest rates.

And a society is no longer a society, then, but when we are just disconnected, demoralized, tv-watching, consumer-good-buying, wage slaves. We are atoms of consumption. We are the points that are summed to make up the economist's demand curve. We are zero-dimensional, we are uninteresting numbers, with no feelings that cannot be cured by going shopping, and no love but that for our family, our children whom we will make sure we send to the right schools, and who we will make sure inherit our fortune, if we have one.

And those who prick our conscience, how they are despised! Well, they are just ignored, if we listen to the right people and the right radio stations. But if we do see them, the elaborate twisting we may perform in an instant! The reflex denunciation of those elites, barking like crazed rabid dogs, irrelevant, highfalutin, do-good, anti-american, pro-saddam, terrorist-justifying, abo-loving, loony-bin feral chardonnay socialist losers. It is an amazing part of human psychology, the rationalizations we perform to justify our hatred of those who can show us that we are wrong.

Those interest rates! They are so important! In a society which does not deem us fully human unless we own large amounts of property, so that we are held in the thrall of usurers for half our lives to repay the debts, and at the mercy of the markets in which the slightest hint of fairness will unleash a frenzy of economic disaster for the poor, the weak, and the indebted. And so they vote for the status quo, to reinforce the system to which they are bound.

As more children are dismembered by the forces we support in Iraq — as we oppress and psychologically destroy an entire population (have you seen the estimates for psychological trauma among the population?) — as more children

grow into emotionally scarred adolescents for god knows how much longer in the concentration camps, it just doesn't matter — or worse, it is justified.

And it's not like the interest rates were going to go up under Capitalist Party B. Oh no, they are always going out of their way to show that they are even better at it than Party A! Remember Latham signing his "interest rate pledge" at the start of the campaign? All those budget costings, all that competition to see who can deliver a bigger surplus, all that pandering to do whatever is best for the markets and for anyone who is rich, they just try to do it better. Good old Capitalist Party B, always going out of its way to make sure it has nothing to do with unions, showing its "strength" by taking a stand against them, playing the I-can-balance-the-budget-better-than-you game, playing the I-can-be-tougher-and-more-oppressive-than-you game. They are worse than Party A, in the sense that, despite all this, they pretend to have something they don't - a social conscience. They will sell whatever principles are necessary to bribe the ignorant, to appease the powerful, and to gain credentials with the suits.

Because that is what it is all about. It's not about the people we are killing. Not about the people we are killing fast in Iraq, with the declared strategy of killing innocents en masse in lieu of the guilty. Not about the, lightning fast, September-11 worth of deaths in Africa every day, which we won't give a penny to prevent. Not about the people we are killing slow in Iraq, who are dying in the heat without any electricity (did you know that? Did you know it's because the American private contractors who are due to repair them just don't want to do it yet?). Not about the people we are destroying, fast, in the concentration camps. Not about the lives we are ruining, continuously, of homosexuals. Not about the people who we are killing, slowly, in poverty in one of the richest regions of the planet. Not about the entire population we are killing, slowly, the subpopulation of this region who live out of sight and out of mind, underground, occasionally raising their heads in Redfern to be bashed by power again. Not about the people we are killing. Not about the environment we are killing, refusing to sign the most minor contract that might but probably won't slow down the rate of acceleration into planetary death. Not about the warrant of death we sign in our relationship with the United States, whose stated policies of preventive war, global domination, obstruction of justice across the world, increasing terrorism and militarisation of space are the most likely potential causes of the short-term extinction of the human race.

No, it's not about any of those. It's about the amount of money in my pocket, whether the government will give me more money. It's about the interest rates. It's about the economy. As if the government can change the economy by pulling on its two or three ineffective levers! As if the government has thrall over global capital, and not the other way! Or it's about fear. The safest place in the world! The most serene republic! The lonely country down the corner of the world that most still think just minds its own business! Yes, get scared and vote for the guy who will continue his policies to increase the threat from that which he has personally created!

We are kidding ourselves if we think there is much of a difference between two sides. Representative capitalist democracy is rule by elites - economically

it is rule by large corporations, private dictatorships - and politics is played on the margin. But we are really kidding ourselves if we think the other side is no better. The smallest difference, is a difference, and isn't it something - having begun to see the corruption here - that you don't just have to choose one or the other, but you can decide which is to go last, and which second-last. Doubt not that there is an ordering. Coke IS better than pepsi, Hungry Jack's IS better than MacDonalds, Reebok IS better than Nike.

It may be done now. But you don't have to like it. And there are much more important things one can do than put some stupid numbers next to some stupid boxes.