



## Why Politicians Are Going Nowhere

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The refusal to celebrate Australia Day by a handful out of the more than 500 local councils around the country represents more than just another example of “political correctness” apparently run amok. The symbolism of local councils holding citizenship ceremonies on the day devoted to celebrating the country of which immigrants have just become citizens is powerful.

No less powerful is the symbolism of councils telling new Australians that their adopted country has a shameful history which we should apologise for.

A poll commissioned by the Institute of Public Affairs last year found 85 per cent of Australians believe “Australia Day is a day for celebration”, 78 per cent believe “Australia has a history to be proud of”, and 92 per cent believe “Australia is a better country than most other countries”. Based on these results not many Australians would share the view of ABC broadcaster Stan Grant the country was “rooted in racism”.

Explaining the difference of opinion between the majority of the public on the one hand, and of

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that of political and media elites has become an urgent subject of study around the western world in the wake of Brexit, Donald Trump's election, and the supposed rise of "populism".

One of the most thoughtful contributions to this discussion is a new book *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and Future of Politics* by David Goodhart, a member of the British Labour Party, the founding editor of Prospect, and former director of the UK's foremost centre-left think tank Demos.

At one level *The Road to Somewhere* is Sociology 101. Instead of dividing the population into capitalists and workers, or the haves and have-nots, Goodhart separates it into people who see the world from "Anywhere" and those who see it from "Somewhere". It is a division based on both economic circumstance and values.

"Most Anywheres are comfortable with immigration, European integration and the spread of human rights legislation, all of which tend to dilute the claims of national citizenship."

Anywheres are likely to be highly educated with professional jobs who have a commitment to notions of mobility, and novelty and who place less emphasis on "identity, tradition and national social contracts [faith, flag and family]".

"Somewheres are more rooted and usually have 'ascribed' identities – Scottish farmer, working-class Geordie, Cornish housewife – based on group belonging and particular places, which is why they often find rapid change more unsettling." Goodhart estimates that in the UK Anywheres are about 25 per cent of the population, Somewheres 50 per cent, and the rest are "Inbetweeners".

The thesis of *The Road to Somewhere* isn't complicated. A "populist" backlash against "elites" was inevitable. In a democracy it is unsustainable for the interests of the Somewheres to be ignored for as long as they've been.

Goodhart has a nice summation of "populism": "If there is a single idea that unites almost all variants it is this: that the interests of the virtuous, decent people and the corrupt, liberal elites are fundamentally opposed."

How much of what Goodhart writes on public attitudes applies to Australia will be debated. But what he says about political parties in Britain and his description of how policy is made is very relevant to this country.

On the parties Goodhart says: "Conventional party politics has become narrower, less ideologically distinct, more insider-dominated, both in personnel and also in the interests represented."

The truth of this as operates in Australia is easily demonstrated. For example, how Coalition and Labor MPs talk about big business or multinational corporations is indistinguishable.

The federal Coalition plans to increase the top marginal rate of personal income tax to 47.5 per cent in 2019, yet describes Labor's policy of a top rate of 49.5 per cent as verging on "socialist".



This leads to how insiders make policy as it “is assumed that domestic and foreign policy consist of a set of discrete problems, each of which has an optimal solution upon which rational, disinterested, nonpartisan individuals can agree. The style of Insider Nation is that of corporations, think-tanks, consulting firms – soft-spoken, analytical, emotionless.”

Whatever the populist revolt is – it most definitely is not emotionless.

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