

Dump failed model for return of public good



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Lead Editorial

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The neoliberal economic model, which was merely a rebadging of the old British liberal system which allowed the British Empire to colonise and loot much of the globe, has destroyed our capacity to deal with crises of any kind—be they financial meltdowns, bushfires or pandemics. Ironically China has best demonstrated the success of the public investment policies we abandoned (p. 9), which it copied from us and other nations (Almanac), but it has been demonised to such an extent (p. 5) that most people are blind to it.

The good news is that the gravity of the crisis is forcing political factions across numerous nations in this direction anyway. Stunningly, the Democratic National Convention, which launched the Democratic Party's campaign for the US Presidency, featured three webinars run by the Coalition for a National Infrastructure Bank, which brings together numerous Congressmen, economists, infrastructure and industry experts, union organisers, and more. The group is behind a bill currently on the floor of Congress to establish a national bank which will inject US\$4 trillion into infrastructure investment. This is a big breakthrough, significant for the world, and there are other nations pursuing a similar policy (p. 9).

Two scandals arising from Australia's public health response to coronavirus are exemplary of exactly why the current model must be replaced:

Aged care. All the debate over Australia's preparedness to deal with a super-contagious virus in our aged care system glosses over the reality that our entire health system was privatised and dismantled according to the free market standards ushered in by both parties, under Prime Ministers Hawke, Keating and Howard. The Citizens Party has warned for decades that these policies would have murderous outcomes, and exposed the international think tanks propagating the destruction not only of health care, but of our entire productive economy.

Hotel quarantine and private security. That any government would be castigated for outsourcing functions to the private sector was unthinkable just months ago. That was the model! The catchcries: Governments can't pick winners. Governments are inefficient. Leave it to the private sector.

The casualisation of the workforce, insecurity of work and the gig economy are all products of the takedown of a real, productive economy. The just-in-time, just-enough economy has thrown the workforce into a dog-eat-dog world where the profit motive reigns supreme. The common good, whether it be in relation to public health, national infrastructure or banking policy, has been written off. National banking, GlassSteagall, nationalisation of resources and a myriad of other policies don't fit the bill.

Damien Davie from the United Workers Union raised such issues in a Sky News interview on 19 August, regarding the infected security guard who appears to be a source of coronavirus spread in Sydney, who was working in hotel quarantine as well as two other sites. His employer, security provider SNP, uses practices similar to those seen in Melbourne's hotel quarantine. The Singapore company runs the Sydney airport, where they use dodgy subcontractors that pay below award wages and utilise casual labour. These practices are rife in the industry, said Davie. Driven so hard by profit, we can't put people first, he explained. Everything is skimped on.

Following the experience of the 1918 "Spanish flu", by the 1920s Australia had a well-oiled quarantine system with large-capacity human quarantine stations in all capital cities, but they were progressively closed. Despite increasing globalisation and common overseas travel, remaining quarantine measures still in existence in the 1990s were all but stripped. COVID-19 is not the first warning that we may

have taken this dismantling too far—Lassa fever, Marburg virus, previous SARS and MERS outbreaks and Ebola should have rung the alarm. Such a capability, such thinking—for the public good—is a thing of the past. Until now. The current crisis is a wake-up call—heed it!

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