

Could we play our own Trump card?



US President Donald Trump rose to power largely on the back of shallow slogans and thin policies: could we see a similar ascension here? Image: Business Insider.

By Tom Waterwheel*

Australians seem to view the rise of Trumpist populism with bemusement and alarm.

The daily trainwreck of **Donald Trump** and his advisors keeps the political junky on high alert. As if the Trump Bull-in-a-China Shop was not entertaining enough, we now have puppet master **Steve Bannon**, the anti-intellectualist **Sean Spicer** and Dial-a-fact **Kellyanne Conway** sharing the burden of spreading hate, pseudo facts and fear around the globe.

Trump is no lone ranger. For the price of one, the US, and by extension the world, got Trump and his posse of war-mongering deadbeats, who now occupy the White House because of the

collective brain-out of 63 million Americans. Most may by now regret this, but the race was run and won on November 8, 2016 and on that day, too many Americans put number one next to the man who unashamedly campaigned on lies, sexism, racism, war-mongering and plain dumb economics.

The question is: could it happen here?

Trump tapped into a nationwide attention deficit disorder. For whatever reason the punters en masse didn't take the effort to read politics beyond a 140 character tweet. Those of us left bewildered by what we have seen blame Facebook, Twitter, I'm a Celebrity get me out of here, the media etc..

None of that matters. Trump and Clinton faced an increasing number of voters who do not do policies. Instead, they want solutions, quick, easy and on a plate; and on that front Trump was their man.

Where Clinton had thoughtful and considered responses to the challenges facing the USA, Trump had solutions and a little abuse thrown in, 140-characters-or-less. Few of which made sense. But at least Joe Punter heard the solution with little effort. (And he is still at it).

In Australia, we have seen politicians tread down this same path. The 2013 election where Tony Abbott prevailed, was characterised by fear politics.

On the specific policy issues of asylum seekers and climate change, Abbott blazed a trail that Trump made a highway. Whenever a microphone is close, these 'leaders' simply repeated the mantra that progressive policies on asylum seekers and climate change will take jobs away from middle Australia/America.

Trump and Abbott on asylum seekers: "stop the boats", "build a wall", "stop the boats", "build a wall".

Trump and Abbott on climate change: “great big tax”, “Chinese conspiracy”, “great big tax”, “Chinese conspiracy”.

Abbott handed the baton to his neo-conservative colleagues across the Pacific, and run with it they did.

But as we witnessed, Abbott’s ill-considered neo-con policies did not wash with everyone in his party and his stay at the Lodge was cut short. Perhaps Trump’s stay will be short too, however the US political system does not work as does ours, with leaders not so disposable.



Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, Pauline Hanson’s political career has been resurrected. Image: Alchetron.

Our own redhead, **Pauline Hanson**, is our closest version of Trump and it is when we look to her appeal and increasing popularity that we see Trumpism alive and well in Australia.

What is telling about the Hanson effect, is that she, like Trump, appeals to a scattering of the disaffected across the political spectrum from the far right to the traditional working class left. She, like Trump, speaks to their frustrations, often to their yearning of the old days, when

unskilled jobs were seemingly abundant and Australia was by and large a white, Christian society.

Fear is one of our greatest motivators and Pauline does fear well. Furthermore, times are tough for many, and as the USA has experienced over the last decade, the winds of global competition can be unforgiving, and we in Australia are now starting to feel its effects.

In a connected world where capital moves freely across the globe, old stable economies such as Australia, have much to lose. To deal with the acceleration of change, be it capital inflows and outflows, refugees, climate change and so on, requires intelligent, considered responses.

We have seen little of such, indeed the short-term opinion poll obsession of our major political parties suggests the established political class are more focused on short-term survival over long-term intellectual policy, leaving the door ajar for the Prophets of Doom.

So here we are, mid 2017. The UK has lurched towards nationalism in an increasingly global world; the USA has fallen for anti-intellectualism in an ever more complex and sophisticated world; and the French, as did the Dutch, looked closely at following the far-right option.

This at a time when more than ever refugees are escaping poverty, war and political and religious persecution.



When unemployment goes up, so does the appeal of neo-conservative approaches to climate change and asylum seekers. Image: FrumForum.

As it stands, one important ingredient is missing in Australia to cook up a Trump Stew: high and long-term unemployment.

Australia's unemployment rate is 5.9%. Australia is yet to swallow the bitter medicine of a changing world economy where jobs are replaced by robots, computers and machines and unskilled labour exported off shore.

Rest assured, however, it is coming and recent history demonstrates that Australian politicians offer little in the way of long term policies to enable Australia to adapt to an ever changing world. If Australia's economic fortunes nose dive and unemployment tilts up, a reactionary politician may be the sole beneficiary.

Our seat of Wannon doesn't follow national trends: its voters are unquestionably loyal to the conservatives. Wannon will go where the Liberals take them. If Canberra judges a hard right Trumpist is needed to lead the Coalition, then of course they could expect to count on the vote of the Wannon constituents

to support them.

Having witnessed Trump in full flight, would we be wise enough to stand up and say no?

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