

Pick a Side

We see it daily: “the left’s attack...”, “the right’s stance on...”. The constant and incessant polarisation of issues social, fiscal, and even factual, politically, by our media. Nothing is deemed ‘unpolitiseable’ any more, and the consequences of this are rearing their heads all around us. From climate change, to statistical analysis, no matter, it seems, is simply objective or ‘just so’ - but is a matter of political persuasion; from the left or the right. This social mechanism is something that seeks nothing but to divide us and is the product of New Zealand’s public interest journalism sector.

The existence of this idea, and the capitalisation upon it, by our media, is not something specifically characteristic of current times, but something that, over the past few years, has grown and grown. Conceptually, it is embedded in our society to view matters from the perspective of some sort of political bias, but this doesn’t excuse our public interest journalism sector’s persistent and divisive exploitation of this construct. To put the matter frankly, the propagation of the idea, from our media, that there exists a predetermined and ever present agenda, from which every matter concerning the public stems, is unethical in that it both targets the people in our societies who can’t make decisions for themselves, and that it unnecessarily polarises another aspect of our culture, in a divisive and pointless way.

There are many issues with the prevalence of this luring tactic used on the public, by our public interest journalism sector, the three most pressing and overt ones being the corruption of factual validity, the marginalisation of social - and more general - issues, and finally, as I have touched on above, the divisive nature of this tactic. Firstly, the corruption of factual validity is seen, scarily, through this idea, in that providing a scaffold for the basis of common information, which revolves around a perceived sense of political conviction makes said information seem like a matter only of a certain group; something which only concerns a select group of people. This is an ever-growing issue within societies both domestic and international, the most obvious example of which is climate change. Climate change, an objectively existent global concern, has long been ignored - and in recent times tried to be disguised and disproven - by groups of people, many of whom consider it to be a fictitious matter, brought alarmistly into notoriety by radicals operating under a ‘leftist’s agenda’. It is because of the now common association of the acknowledgment of climate-related issues to the left wing, that such an extremely pressing issue is trivialised, ignored, and suppressed by groups of people under this impression - exponentially worsening the impending climate crisis (which we are already beginning to see the disastrous effects of). This, while being the most obvious example, is not the only one - issues too relating to things such as immigration and human rights endure scrutiny and disregard, due to their association to particular ‘agendas’. Secondly, marginalisation of issues concerning the public, due to the public interest journalism sector’s approach to their discussion too is observed. This consequence is more of a ‘subset’ of the above, in that the marginalisation of issues is very closely related to the corruption of validity; they are the same issues, but from a different perspective. Finally, and as I have discussed a little bit previously, the nature of this tactic is one of acute divisiveness - and, furthering its unethicalness, is in no way needed or necessary in the production of any media. This method is one that, for no reason other than ‘attention

grabbing' for fiscal benefit, enforces and exploits a construct that can (and does) have such terrible consequences for all of us.

With fifty five million dollars to contribute to the improvement of New Zealand's Public Interest Journalism sector, I would like to address this issue of unnecessary and extreme political polarization of New Zealand's media, by starting at the roots - the very foundations of journalism - the reporters themselves. I would invest this substantial sum of money into specialty programmes, which would be available to all New Zealand journalists, to educate them on means and methods of writing from a perspective of non-biased political discussion. It is important here too to discuss the difference between forcing objectiveness and the limiting of discordant media. To limit the media in the ways I have proposed is not to force - in any sense - an ideology or philosophy of writing in which opinionative matters cannot be discussed. Blatant, blanket-censorship and limitations on the means of content propagation are in no way akin. These courses would not be compulsory or requisite for every journalist, but upon completion of the course, official recognition of accomplishment would be granted, and at some point or in some situations, may be sought after by employers.

I think that through the establishment of these courses, the issues of which I spoke above would be both addressed, and consequently diminished. We as the public should not have to work to discover the truth, the cause, the reason - that is the job of our journalists, and our public interest journalism sector. Right now, the media is failing at its job, and right now, more than ever, we need to be able to rely whole-heartedly on what we are told. We need to be able to think together, understand together, and, above everything else, we need to be able to work together.



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