

The Drum TV

Mon – Fri 5.30 ABC

Mon 9pm AEST/Tues – Fri 9.30 pm AEST ABC News 24

Snobs and whingers: the new Australia

By Tim Napper

Updated Fri 26 Aug 2011, 10:41am

I am filled with rage. My spleen swells to explosive proportions and it must be vented.

It's been building for a while, this anger. It grows as I see a New Australia growing, a nation increasingly snobbish and prone to complaining. First it irked, then it grated, but now I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore.

The tipping point came last week in an article I read in Crikey, in a piece that represented everything to me about just how pathetic we are. And it was an innocuous article for all that: a light fluff piece by a 17-year-old student about a trip to Canberra. The main focus of the article was how difficult it was for the author to find a good coffee. She was especially confronted it seemed, at how difficult it was to find a quality macchiato, and shocked to find a 'charcoal chicken' outlet in the city. "What is this"? You can hear her thinking, "the nation's capital or South Detroit?".

Yeah, you heard it right, a 17-year-old complaining about the scarcity of some boutique coffee choice and the horror of an unsophisticated food shop. And it was published.

I remember when being 'stuck up' or 'up yourself' wasn't good at all. It was the ultimate put-down. I remember at high-school that while you would be made fun of for a lot of things, most would soon be forgiven and forgotten by your peers. But being considered 'up-yourself' was an unforgivable sin, warranting an immediate (and deserved) excommunication from the company of other teenagers. Now it seems we've come full circle. Now being poor, or down-to-earth, or insufficiently educated on different varieties of Colombian coffee beans is something to be derided. Now we call instant coffee drinkers 'bogans'.

And tell me something else - can a breakfast in a cafe be uncomplicated anymore? Does every dish we eat have to be insufferably pretentious? You can't sit down for breakfast without being confronted with choices like 'Madagascan vanilla quinoa porridge with a side of flambéed quinces'. Can't I just eat some eggs on toast please? You know things are getting bad when you need a working knowledge of French and an advanced diploma in food science before deciding on an inner-city breakfast.

To really understand how pissant Australians have become, just have a think about the environmental movement. On the one hand, an overwhelming majority of Australians think something has to be done to preserve the environment and cut down on carbon pollution. Fair enough. But on the other hand those same people are shocked and appalled when you suggest they have to make some sacrifices and take some personal responsibility. Sacrifice? Responsibility? You say this to an Australian these days and they look at you like you've just spat in their eggs Florentine.

I'm even willing to put a price on the threshold level for the average Australian whinge: three dollars. Why? Well, because this is the extra price we are not willing to pay on airmiles. Three bucks extra on a domestic airfare - that's what a price on carbon will cost you. Three dollars doesn't even buy you a coffee - hell, it buys you half of one of those much-vaunted macchiatos. But this is front page news. The media works itself into a frenzy, howling at the moon at the thought of such an economic injustice. Three dollars extra for your dirty weekend up at the Gold Coast - the sky is falling! Socialism! The tourism industry will be destroyed!

Well, I'm past giving a sh*t. Your electricity bill is going up? Don't live in a McMansion with six bedrooms, a rumpus room and a home theatre. Bananas expensive? Buy an apple. Soy-milk Chai latte not flavourful enough? Give yourself an uppercut.

Our media complicit in this nonsense, with its shrill headlines and me-too philosophy. They have fed the beast of this New Australian culture of entitlement. They're the ones leading the charge, complaining bitterly when people earning more than \$150,000 a year are not given more hand-outs. We've had it so good for so long, that when the last budget came down and the Government decided not to increase some of the giveaways, the Murdoch press nearly had an embolism. "Class War" they cried, indignant at the creeping threat of communism evident in cutting people off welfare at \$150,000. Call me crazy, but my assumption was that not everyone was entitled to welfare. I thought, you know, that poor people were the ones who got the assistance. But oh good god no - in Australia today, everyone is

entitled. And don't get me started on billionaires paying 2 per cent or less tax while having billion-dollar government subsidies for their businesses, just don't get me started.

What happened to the stoic Aussie? The laconic digger? The 'she'll be right mate' attitude? Well that's all as dead and buried as Ian Thorpe's swimming career. We're not stoic, we're like one of those European soccer players flopping around on the field in convulsions at the slightest touch (or perceived touch). We're not laconic, we bleat on endlessly about a thousand petty grievances; it's not "she'll be right mate" anymore, it's "she'll be right when I get my tax cut and belly-rub". And of course there's the voice of Alan Jones always there in the background to stroke that sense of entitlement and misplaced self-pity. We are becoming a silver-spoon nation of whingers.

Our economy is the envy of the world. European bankers turn green with envy when they see our economic data; American bankers would do the same if they ever looked at a country outside America. We've got almost no unemployment, a stable, well-regulated financial sector, solid economic growth and resilience enough to ride out the catastrophic financial mistakes of the US. The OECD ranks us as one of the strongest economies on the planet.

And we've got it bloody good when you compare us to other rich countries: let's not forget the people who really deserve a whinge - the starving kid in Somalia, the Thai sex-trafficking victim pimped out to a Chinese businessman, the family who has been sitting in a squalid refugee camp on the border of Afghanistan for 10 years. These people should be the ones complaining - not some middle class private school girl with a macchiato fetish, not some professional on \$200,000 a year living in North Sydney and driving a Range Rover, not some self-funded retiree squandering their life savings on a yacht and Botox treatments. I'm sorry, but you don't get to lament and gnash your teeth. You get to shut up and be thankful for how good you got it.

Our whinging puts the poms to shame. We are getting soft. We stubbed our toe in the global economic crisis. America had its legs cut off and Iceland was drawn, quartered and fed to starving dogs. So stop whinging. This is the lucky country.

Don't believe me? Well, it doesn't matter. Someone in the media will be along presently to pat you on the head and tell you how tough you got it. They will be there to stoke that burning sense of entitlement you feel down deep in your belly. So think what you want to think, and whatever happens, try not to choke on your next latte.

Tim Napper is an international aid worker and occasional poker player.

Topics: community-and-society

First posted Wed 24 Aug 2011, 3:31pm