

# What Happened to You, Australia, during that Pandemic?

Shôn Ellerton, October 18, 2021

*What will future readers learn from Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic? Here's my account.*



*“A nation of sheep begets a government of wolves” – Edward R. Murrow*

I was at odds whether I should have written this article or not. And then I deliberated that rather being intended for *today's* audience, perhaps it might be better served for *tomorrow's* audience, including my son when he grows up and possibly stumbles upon this article in later years.

This article was written during the height of lockdown-mania, vaccine mandate and passport proposals, restriction of travel over state borders and prohibition of international travel during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. What once was the luckiest country to live in has degenerated into a chaotic near dictatorship with a general populace who are generally reluctant to question the many draconian proposals and policies set in place to control its citizens. I genuinely hope that life as it once was before the pandemic has returned to pre-COVID times although I have my doubts. Now that we have vaccines available and life is re-emerging to something akin to normalcy in many other countries scoured by the pandemic, I also hope that the deleterious effects of COVID including the worldwide mania surrounding it will decline to something of the past and neatly forgotten.

## Life Before the Pandemic

To start with, what was life in Australia *before* COVID set in, which was early 2020?

First and foremost, there was freedom to travel. You can drive to any state or territory in Australia without any hindrance. You can book an overseas holiday, provided you have the right passports.

Second, there were no QR codes for checking into every establishment you visited. No one tracked your movements and, frankly, no one cared. Let it be known that around 2019, there was a lot of news about the Chinese government tracking its people through facial recognition and how most of us Australians were shocked at how liberties in China were being attacked.

Third, the wearing of masks was strictly for the medical professionals, those workers who wanted to protect themselves from obnoxious substances and of course, those who wear masks to conceal themselves, as in an armed robbery or some other nefarious activity.

However, hygiene in public and retail establishments was definitely below par as to what it was during the pandemic. Hand sanitisers, for example, were not provided unless you bring your own. Public transportation was not kept as clean. People on trains with a cough just carried out coughing as if no one else really mattered whether they get a cold or not.

From a flexible work aspect, working at home, even when perfectly viable, was usually frowned upon by many businesses of the day, except for the more progressive ones who condone flexibility and work/life balance, such the likes of Cisco, Nokia and Google. The pandemic helped pave the way to more flexible ways of working.

## But Changes Were Already Underway

Pre-pandemic, there was a general change in the mindset of the younger generation who first started to attend colleges and universities from 2013 onwards. In the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind* by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, the rise of *safetyism* and the rapid increase in the number of speaker *disinvitations* suggested that a new age of dis-enlightenment began to take place in which, instead of tolerating the views of others who may not be in

alignment with another's view, those views should be quashed or censured for the sake of collective and emotional safety of others. In short, the genesis of constrained ideas and groupthink took precedence over free-thinking and reason. The authors' original article was published in *The Atlantic*, [The Coddling of the American Mind](#).

Mixed in with an emerging pandemic during 2020, an extremely potent and toxic situation began to develop. The confluence of the power of social media, big tech giants, government, celebrities, and other high-profile figures managed to convince the masses that the accepted narrative of the day should not be questioned but rather to simply accept the conclusions based on authority. Much like sheep to put it plainly. So many in society had disavowed their support for free-thinking and enlightenment and began to suggest that those who did were conspiracy theorists, science deniers or, to throw in a little hyperbole, enemies against the state because they steered off the path of conformance and the general narrative. Some of those I know very well personally had already gone through this transformation.

We cannot ignore Trump, who at the time, was considered by so many, the great Satan of the world, particularly from those who were immersed and peer-pressured in social media, led comfortable middle class lives, constricted to mainstream news and the inability to coherently state why they hated Trump so much without resorting to coarse and rude language or making accusations of racism and sexism. Perhaps in the future, Trump might be simply remembered as one of the more controversial characters in the history of US presidents. What may be more of interest to historians of the future is the extent of the extreme hatred of Trump from those who just didn't like him as a character, an infliction we called *Trump Derangement Syndrome*, or TDS for short. In short, Trump was hated so vehemently, that it really didn't matter who was to be the successor. As long as it wasn't Trump. Instead, we were left with Biden, who was left to steer, albeit with no helm, an already divided and chaotic administration in its place plunging it to an all-time low, as popular polls go, with the Afghanistan crisis, a debacle worthy enough to get the attention of *The Economist*, a publication well-known for its neutrality and objectivity.



For me, the end of enlightenment might best be summarised with Ricky Gervais's brilliant, frank and highly berating Golden Globes awards speech in January 2020. The [link](#) is here, but if not, search for *uncensored Golden Globes speech Ricky Gervais*. It is around 10 minutes long. From that time on, much of the western developed world as I knew it, had collapsed into chaos, mistrust, witch hunts, tyranny, and the spread of hatred and lies.

Once COVID was identified as a *pandemic*, the roads were aligned perfectly for political hegemony and medical tyranny.

## So why the move to Australia?

A common question that I have often encountered was, "Well, if you think things aren't going well in Australia, why not leave, or why did you come in the first place?"

It's a perfectly legitimate question. One of the reasons why I left the United Kingdom back in 2007 for Australia was for a more 'open' way of living, the time to live the way of a larrikin, at least, just a little bit. To live in a land with fewer irritating little rules which have become more commonplace in western Europe. Less political correctness and more common sense. I enjoyed my first rendezvous with Australia back in 2004 whilst visiting a friend. Australia at that time had a strange but delightful feel of old-time USA and England. My friend and I were on finals landing from Alice Spring to Sydney and I still had a bottle of Crown beer in my hand. I asked the stewardess what I should do with it, and she said, 'That's ok. You can drink it during landing.' It was, just, so typically Australia.

My love of Australia went back much farther whilst living in the US as a youngster. Even the movie, *Crocodile Dundee*, gave me, and so many others, a romantic inspiration of a beautiful land with tough and genuine people. Even now, I equate Mick (Paul Hogan) as the liberal and larrikin minded, I don't care what the eff you're doing with the more libertarian of us. And on the other side, the would-be husband (of Sue, the female lead) who represented everything I didn't like about the Ivy League-type, elitist, snobby, greedy, unfriendly, virtue-signalling, and condescending types.



Over the years I spent in the United Kingdom, from 1987 to 2007, I noticed a big rise in political correctness, social justice activism, police surveillance (the UK during 2007 was the world's most heavily watched-over state in the West), and an increasing barrage of irritating little council policies, mainly safety or ethnically oriented, which seemed totally deluded to me. Examples include the banning of snowball fights (a rare occurrence in the UK admittedly), playing conkers (banging chestnuts together), and trying to make Christmas un-Christmassy for the sake of not upsetting those who do not celebrate Christmas.

Australia, at that time, seemed like a nice escape from this madness, but as soon as I had landed on shores down under, the Howard government got replaced by a totally new one under Rudd and a whole new era of political correctness began. Years later, when the pandemic arrived, Australia demonstrated to be one of the most draconian nations of the West in terms of restricting individual liberties for the sake of 'public safety'. Australians, in general, not really wanting to get too wrapped up in political affairs and speak openly about them proved to be the perfect targets for the development of a strictly controlled society. In other words, that very same aloofness and larrikinism which many Australians exhibited and enjoyed backfired much to the benefit to those in power.



## An outbreak of a virus happened in China. So what?

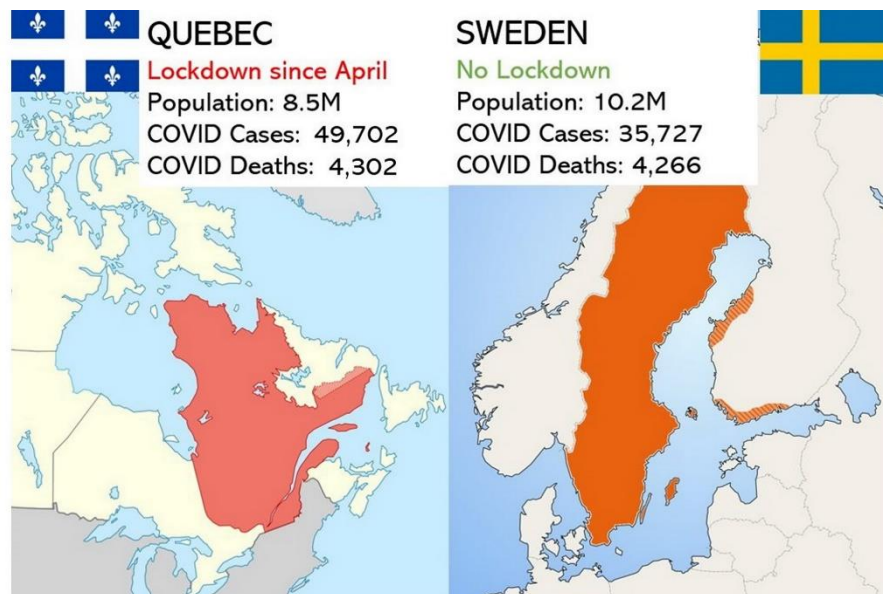
Early in 2020, an outbreak happened in Wuhan, China. Few cared about it. Few were concerned. There were some who posted on social media, including myself back in March 2020, to avoid large crowds and gatherings. Many of those who commented me on being alarmist became those very same people a year later who remain convinced that Australia should remain an impenetrable fortress and continue down the line of exterminating COVID from our shores, an impossible task, as was too evident when case numbers began to surge quickly after mid-2021 in the eastern states.

Two months later, after my ‘alarmist’ statement in March 2020, I became convinced that COVID was here to stay and that we will have to ‘adopt’ it sooner or later. It was at this time when those same people who thought I was fearmongering became the fearmongers outcrying to their state leaders to shut our borders immediately and keep us safe. Anyone familiar with the story, *War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells may remember how day-to-day living just carried on as if nothing happened even after the first of the missiles flying from Mars to Earth plunged into the Earth leaving a capsule which appeared to be dormant or do nothing for quite some time. Once the capsules began to open and the Martians emerged with their heat rays to enact their reign of terror on an unprepared ambivalent human society did panic ensue. That is exactly what had happened in March 2020 in Australia. People were going to sports matches, concerts and other big gatherings knowing full well that an epidemic had already begun in China but not taking the prospect seriously that it could spread to Australia. Once it hit Australia, the great unknown was encountered and then the chaos and panicking began.

## Don't talk to Australians about Sweden

During the pandemic, Sweden had been a very poor social point of conversation with many Australians as I found out on social media. Sweden, you see, took a rather different path during the emerging pandemic. Instead of mandating lockdowns, the wearing of masks and restricting travel, the Swedes decided to recommend to its populace to exercise sensible measures to curb the spreading pandemic. Business and schools remained open and the populace, in general, trusted its government to make the right decisions and the government, in return, trusted its populace. By far and large up to 2021, Sweden had done no

worse than other nations. In fact, they fared better than many other nations who had set draconian policies in place to severely restrict the movement of people. During mid-2020, many Australians, with the help of mainstream news, accused the Swedes of killing off its old people believing that they should be held to account on being highly irresponsible on the world stage of the pandemic. They consistently and dogmatically compared Sweden to its Nordic neighbours who, in terms of cases and deaths per capita were lower than Sweden's. However, and this is what frustrated me immensely when debating this, a more accurate comparison could have been made between Sweden and the Canadian state of Quebec, who, in terms of population, urban density, culture diversity, area, and latitude, was far more like Sweden and proved to be a better comparator. Sweden had no lockdowns. Quebec did. But the comparative data in terms of cases and deaths per capita was astonishingly similar.



The problem comes down to most people's understanding of data and how to interpret it meaningfully. In one month during mid-2020, Sweden got itself in trouble with the deaths of more than five thousand aged people, most who were confined to large old-people's homes in dense suburban areas. It is of note that Finland, Norway and Iceland tended to have a larger number of much smaller old people's homes which, naturally, formed a natural barrier against the spread of the virus. However, and this is the most irksome thing about discussing Sweden with so many, is that *after* that bad event, which Sweden openly admitted was a massive failure, Sweden did no worse than other states. Moreover, many other countries with strict lockdown policies were doing considerably worse. However, much like Trump Derangement Syndrome, the

initial five thousand deaths had been permanently emblazoned in the minds of those who refused to accept that Sweden might be doing the right thing. The adage, *first impressions count*, could not be more apt here. No matter what Sweden did after will sway the minds of those who have already made their minds up, regardless of the availability of objective data to hand.

Sweden was seldom covered in Australia's mainstream news, and if it was, it was only to point out how irresponsible it was not to enforce lockdowns and mandate mask wearing. The mainstream news of the day became ghostly quiet on Sweden later upon the realisation that Sweden did not have a massive rise in deaths in later months in relation to its neighbours. It was almost as if there was a sense of disappointment that Sweden did not break down into a national crisis leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths. Independent or alternative news sources covered Sweden in a more neutral or positive light; however, their viewer numbers have always been far lower.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Sweden removed most of its pandemic-related restrictions. During the whole of the pandemic, Sweden never enforced a lockdown, never mandated vaccines and mask-wearing, never restricted its own citizens from travelling to and from Sweden, never closed schools or businesses and above all, kept a healthy trust between its citizenry and its government. This good news was never mentioned on Australian mainstream news. How could it at a time when more than half the population of Australia was in strict lockdown? That would not have fared well with the majority trusting Australia's mainstream news networks.

## Lockdowns and more lockdowns...

It would be grossly misleading to suggest that Australians loved lockdowns; however, a great many did, especially those who were able to work remotely and/or receive a government payout for not being able to work. A surprising number of Australians took lockdowns as a bit of a holiday, a break, to get away from work, have a BBQ in the yard and enjoy a few drinks. The Australians, with that strange mix of 'Englishness', larrikinism and nonchalance sort of took things by its stride that everything was OK here and the rest of the world was not. Things would return as they were. Have a beer and chill out. And, initially, that was the case. The Australians were in blissful isolation. In fact, Australians always loved that sense of being a little in isolation; separated by the seas and



oceans away from the madding crowds. We were protected. New Zealanders, I suspect, felt even more so.

Now, Australians, in general, tend to have much larger houses (many with gardens) with relatively small family sizes per capita than other nations. The severity and effects of being locked down for many wasn't all that terribly bad. In South Australia, we had been extremely lucky not to be under any sustained lockdown except for two short days, the upshot being that many South Australians wanted a 'little more time off' when the lockdown was summarily cancelled due to a bit of mix-up with a pizza parlour worker who lied about being somewhere or another. That worker was given the unenvious title of being the state's most unpopular person by those who ran small businesses having had to shut during that time. Let me just say that the *whole* state of South Australia was put under immediate lockdown because of a couple of cases that materialised in the northern suburbs. Just hold that thought for a moment. The *whole* state!

Why? South Australia held the enviable position of having no cases for many weeks and its politicians were proudly boasting about it. Bloggers on social media were saying, 'Well done, South Australians!' or 'Premier, keep the borders closed!', 'Thanks for keeping us safe!' and so on. Despite many Australians having been stranded overseas, bloggers who had no cause to travel or not have been in the situation of having a family split apart because of the borders, cried to their politicians to keep the borders closed at all costs. The more critically thinking of us knew without a shadow of a doubt that the virus would make its way in sooner or later. And that's what happened in the eastern states.

Whether lockdowns really worked or not had always been a source of fierce debate. Historically, when an outbreak of the plague or some other form of disease took place, the intention was to isolate the affected or the sick. Albert Camus's book, *The Plague*, depicts the fictional account of the plague-ridden city of Oran in Algeria being surrounded by a 'wall of steel' to prevent movement into or out of the city, although the residents could move about freely inside the city. Similarly, in China, the whole city of Wuhan was barricaded but further so by locking down the residents *within* their abodes. Taiwan, upon hearing the news of the new virus, quickly reacted by sealing its own international borders leaving its citizens to wander freely albeit requiring the use of facemasks and practicing *social distancing*, a cringeworthy phrase that

was born into common use during 2020 and after. Short, sharp lockdowns may, perhaps, reduce the likelihood of an initial rapid spread of a virus and may assist in ‘flattening the curve’, in which the ingress of patients into hospitals were spread over a longer period. Unfortunately, Australia took the stance of shifting from the goal of ‘flattening the curve’ to the elimination of the virus, an impossible task that anybody with average intelligence would agree on. Eventually, the states *did* concede with this most unrealistic of strategies but not for more than 18 months after the onset of the pandemic.

In the early stages, once the epidemic was officially named a pandemic by the World Health Organisation, the infamous Biohazard Act was triggered giving extended and unprecedented powers to the government to enact laws with little or no warning to restrict movement and enforce draconian measures to curb the spreading virus. A surprisingly low number of Australians knew very much about this act along with its future implications. The implications, as of writing, had made itself known internationally when Australia had ceased to remain part of the free West and joined ranks of a regime in which dissent is unlawful and obedience to higher authority unquestioned and unchallenged for the sake of public safety on medical grounds.

The lockdowns continued for weeks and even months on end, with Melbourne, being the most locked-down city in the world. Government payouts were becoming more difficult to come by subject to ever-growing conditions in being able to get them. Small businesses suffered very badly. Contractors became unemployed. The retail and tourist trade virtually disappeared. However, big businesses like Coles, major petrol stations, and other large corporations did remarkably well. Large online businesses boomed, especially that of major online businesses like Amazon and Zoom.

Still, lockdowns persisted, especially by the trigger-happy Dan Andrews, the premier of Victoria, who advocated no less than six prolonged lockdowns in the metro region of Melbourne plunging the city into a sort of dystopian open prison.



## I'm alright, Jack! I'm by the seaside!

The lockdowns were consistently championed by most of the main news networks of the day of that being a necessary measure to stop the spread of the virus. Most Australians listened and compliantly obeyed with the ever-changing rules and continued to do so for many months after the advent of the pandemic. However, dissent grew, and the cracks were starting to appear, despite the belligerent effort by mainstream media to avoid reporting it.



I would suspect that most of the affluent and well-to-do in Australian society live quite close to the sea or live within areas which are nice to be in. Most of those who hold the reins of power tend to live in such areas well. So, when lockdown rules were put in place to restrict one's movements within a five-kilometre radius for exercise, that, naturally, did not go down very well for those who lived in the drabber suburbs of western Sydney rather than the affluent suburbs with the pristine seashores. Those living in small apartments with large families in the western suburbs of Sydney for example must have had it particularly hard. It turned out during the later months that many of these lockdowns were largely ignored in Sydney while most of the police tended to grow weary of enforcing the rules seeking to concentrate their efforts on true crime. With respect to policing and lockdown complacency, it was not quite the same in Melbourne as will be mentioned later.

What made the matter worse was that selfish attitude and mindset.

*‘...if it doesn’t affect me, why should I spend any energy bothering about someone else’s problem?’*

This attitude is, by no means, exclusive to Australians, but it is more prevailing in the Australian mindset than, say, the American.

## Quick! Put a Ring of Steel around Melbourne

If the *I’m Alright Jack* mentality wasn’t bad enough, there were many who pleaded with their politicians on social media to quarantine *others* living in *other* cities, affected by an outbreak, to lock them down and restrict their movements. Moreover, this selfish and uncaring behaviour [to those living in Melbourne] was openly announced during mid-2021 when Dr Anne Webster, an MP for Mallee based in Mildura, Victoria, stated that a ‘ring of steel’ be placed around Melbourne so as not to affect regional communities.



The news was taken down from many websites not long after, presumably, on grounds that she asked them to do so realising that her comment offended many Melburnians. But the Internet being what it is, not all of them!

## And shut all our borders as well...

Since the pandemic began, Australia seemingly dissolved into chaos on formulating any coherent strategy for the nation as to how to deal with the growing pandemic. Quarantining, vaccinations, contact tracing, lockdown measures, and state border controls were handled, by and large, independently by each state or territory.

State borders opened and closed with little or no notice to travellers. Cities straddling state borders like the Gold Coast and Albury-Wodonga were suddenly divided like the former 'Iron Curtain' that divided Berlin during the Cold War. Checkpoints were introduced from state to state with queues of cars lining up the roads with travellers desperate to get home. Odd townships like Broken Hill in far northwest NSW, being more closely aligned to South Australia, for a time, lived in a strange limbo in which travellers couldn't go anywhere but had to camp out in the region until they could be allowed to move. Reminding me of Orwell's ever-flipping war with Eastasia and Eurasia in his book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it was not uncommon for a premier of a state to announce that the state border with such-and-such a state was now opened but now closed with that other state. This, of course, made it almost impossible for a traveller to travel to another state with the confidence that returning home could be possible. Understandably, many just gave up travelling interstate altogether which accentuated the difficulties faced by the tourism trade.

As for international travel? That border was sealed as soon as the pandemic started, and still, at time of writing it remained so. During that time, there were many nations which did seal their borders; however, Australia took this to another level and prohibited its *own* citizens from travelling in and out of the country, effectively leaving many thousands of Australians stranded abroad, many of which had close family in Australia. Much debate had been had whether this contravened the Geneva Convention and other international legal frameworks relating to human rights; however, the overarching power provided by the various emergency acts had blurred any certainty to decide this.

The Afghanistan crisis made this even more problematic with respect to the intake of refugees who fled from the hands of the Taliban after the United States pulled out. The United States and its allies, which include Australia, having had a presence in Afghanistan felt obliged to welcome Afghan refugees. This was all well and good but for one major embarrassing problem: Australia's citizens and permanent residents have not been able to return to their own country since the start of the pandemic. Much anger and frustration were expressed by those families affected by the border restrictions to learn that refugees could enter. And quite rightfully so!

Exemptions for travel abroad were available; however, they were very difficult to come by and extremely expensive. As of writing, the United States had returned to 70% of its international airline capacity and Australia remained at



less than 20%. Seats on international flights were incredibly expensive and hard to come by. Even if the international border opened, it could take quite some time to bring international airline fare prices back to pre-COVID times rendering international travel inaccessible for the average Australian.

Meanwhile, the embarrassment of the situation went further. Border rules were relaxed for celebrities, Olympic athletes, sports teams, politicians, and any others who had the money, or had influence to generate money. Australians were becoming incensed that after months of being re-assured by politicians that they were being 'made safe' by sealing the international and state borders, to find that those with money and power could just waltz into the country or travel from state to state without hindrance. One of the most egregious and publicised examples could be that of former Olympian, Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner), who was allowed entry to Australia to participate in a celebrity version of Big Brother. Interestingly, Jenner, during that time was a gubernatorial candidate for the governorship of California.



Australia works as a federated system of states, much like the United States in which the states make and enforce most of the policies and laws that its residents must adhere to. However, the United States has a constitution in place to protect the rights of its citizens including the freedom to travel. Australia has no human rights equivalent, and this is, arguably one of the failures of having a federation of states without an overarching framework of human rights.

However, out of all this, and announced just at time of writing came a surprise from the then-new premier of New South Wales, Dominic Perrottet, who's predecessor, Gladys Berejiklian, was ousted due to a corruption scandal. NSW announced it would be the first Australian state to scrap quarantine and allow international travel starting from November 2021.

No doubt that this major shift in policy upset many Australians who became indoctrinated into the belief that its borders should remain closed indefinitely until the virus is eradicated. During the Dan Andrews administration in Victoria, having had most of its populace been bombarded months on end with news propaganda that lockdowns were necessary for the safety of all Victorians, many genuinely became frightened at the prospect of lifting the lockdowns and opening the borders. As with opening international borders, it came as no coincidence that many of those opposed to opening had no family overseas nor had a reason to travel.

## We want to know where you were!

Back in 2019, there was a lot of news coverage on how China was tracking its citizens. Facial recognition technology had become advanced enough to identify its people in a myriad of public spaces. How they behaved. What they bought in supermarkets. What they posted in social media. It was Big Brother 2.0 and Australians, being part of the free West, in general, recognised this as a threat to democracy and our freedoms.



Roll on 2021 and most Australians gladly complied to tracking themselves at every opportunity for the sake of public health. In every establishment, Australians, would whip out their phones and scan the QR code as part of the strategy for contact tracing. Now there was a valid reason for having had this put in place, especially during the days before vaccines were available. It was an effective method of finding out if one happened to be in proximity to someone who might have been infected. One would be alerted to the fact and be asked to take a test, and, should it indicate as being positive, that person would be asked to be in quarantine and under close watch.

However, not long before this article was written, news came out that the data held from contact tracing would not be deleted after 28 days, despite the public been told this some months ago. However, and this is something which many of us probably do not realise. [Data is never deleted](#), a subject I wrote about not long before this article.

## On facemasks

Australians, being in general, a rather unquestioning and compliant lot, seemed perfectly comfortable wearing masks as per government policy, regardless of whether it was common sense or not. That is all well and good but what if the policies are so patently absurd or do not make sense? In short, most of Australia's facemask policies were so peculiar and bizarre as to position them completely outside the sphere of reason or explanation.

Take this one for example. I came across some news stating that Victorians could remove their masks while consuming food and drink; however, if it was an alcoholic beverage, the mask could not be removed. I honestly took this as a joke but recoiled in surprise when I found out, indeed, that it was a true policy set by the Victorian government until it was phased out in October 2021.



Victorians, during their many lockdowns, were ordered that, not only did they have to wear masks in indoor settings, but outside as well. South Australia's policy was somewhat different by stating that masks had to be worn in public spaces; however, the definition of public spaces was extended to parks, the streets and even the beach. As of writing, there were many people wandering almost empty streets in Adelaide, or wandering through the parks, or even driving *with windows closed* in their cars with a mask on! Paradoxically, and this became even more surreal and absurd, it was okay to remove one's mask

while drinking or sitting down at an al-fresco table in a busy marketplace while shouting (along with little droplets), slurping and munching on food. It really made absolutely no sense at all. The obvious loophole for those who wanted to wander around the marketplace legally without a mask on had a drink in one's hand!



Do I believe in masks? Yes and no.

Most masks that are worn simply do not stop the virus from spreading. The virus is so small and can be compared to the size of a garden pea to Mount Everest (if a human could grow to such a size!). The space between interlocking fibres of a cloth masks are vastly bigger than the 100-nanometer diameter of the virus. Even their conventional surgical counterparts have gaps large enough to freely transmit a virus.

Absurdly, South Australia had a policy in which, if one could not make himself understood, the mask could be removed. Doing such a thing, of course, defeats any purpose of what the mask was designed to do. To stop the egress of spit droplets!

However, there are situations which I rather approve the use of masks; more for bacteriological reasons than virological. Having once travelled to many hotels whilst on business, I often wondered about the hygiene of those all-you-can-eat breakfast and dinner buffets. Many a time, I came across people chatting away loudly as they served themselves food and, without a shadow of a doubt, there must have been droplets of spit flying in all directions and landing in the food. So, absolutely, yes, in these sorts of situations, masks should be freely provided and businesses and establishments should be given the rights to make masks



compulsory. But not by the state. Customers should be given the choice where to go and they may not opt to go to a restaurant in which hygiene is not treated as priority.

In certain circumstances, and this is where common sense should have been exercised. That villainous country, Sweden, allowed its people to exercise common sense with masks. The principle was this. If it was crowded, such as in public transport or some other busy premises where social distancing was near to impossible, it was highly recommended to wear a mask. And the Swedes did just that and it worked. The principle of [Occam's Razor](#) applied beautifully here, in that, the simplest and most common sense of solutions was preferable to the complicated. Those who suggested this in Australia were often ostracised by not *following the science* and the 'experts', who were often affiliated strongly with a political party. New discoveries in science may warrant changes in medical direction; however, changes in the political landscape does not. In the United States, one of the chief medical advisors during the pandemic, Anthony Fauci, may have proved to be the best example of such a politically affiliated character who balanced precariously on a fence separating science and politics.

## Escape is not possible! Quarantines and hotel linen.

Australia, especially the state of Victoria, had been the butt of many jokes regarding its strategy on quarantines.

Why?

Because they so often failed to prevent an outbreak by those in quarantine. Many incidents occurred due to the most embarrassing of reasons often explained by the most ridiculous excuses.

Travellers who entered a state were often required to quarantine for usually two weeks in a state-approved facility. The reasons were quite sound, especially during the earlier stages of the pandemic at the time when the virus was spreading rapidly with no vaccine was in sight. The quarantined were essentially locked in with food and other requirements being brought in by trained personnel geared up in hazmat suits. I am sure that conditions varied enormously from facility to facility, but I am reasonably certain that, in general, conditions were probably never too uncomfortable. Certainly, being banged up in prison would have been far worse!



The problems were generally two-fold. First, the selection of the approved quarantine facility. And second, the training given to those running the facilities.

Let's start off with the first problem. The usual choice for a quarantine facility was an inner-city hotel which was 'modified' to fit the requirements of being a quarantine centre. Such a facility was aptly named a *medihotel*. Most of us are acutely aware that inner-city hotels are often surrounded by lots of people. Moreover, converting existing hotels to function as quarantine centres often simply did not work and, should they be given an audit to prove that they were, most would have failed. One obvious solution would have been to use or build facilities *away* from a busy environment. But, somehow or another, and for reasons that were still not clear to me, it was not done.

Second, and this can be further divided into two glaring divisions of failure, the training of staff and pay. Victoria, during 2020, had seen the breaking out of the virus due to gross mismanagement in its medihotels. Contracted out to private firms, the then government denied responsibility for its failings when staff breached safety protocol on many occasions mostly related to inadequate training. However, there were more interesting breaches in protocol, one of which involved an affair that began to take place between a staff member of the medihotel and one of those in quarantine.

In Adelaide, a breach from a medihotel occurred when one of the staff members presented himself to a *second* job after completing a shift at the medihotel staff. The staff was reprimanded by doing so but explained that he needed the money to make ends meet. It indeed, turned out that staff were not paid commensurately in line with their important responsibilities. The result was that the virus was reported to have been spread through his second job as a pizza worker in northern Adelaide which promptly threw the whole state of South Australia into lockdown. Clearly the cost of paying extra for the medihotel workers would have been far less than the cost of shutting down an entire state. Hindsight is a wonderful teacher goes the adage.

There were many stories of 'escapees' from quarantine facilities. One which captured my attention was the case of a 39-year-old man in Western Australia, a Travis Myles who, in true let-down-your-hair Rapunzel fashion, escaped from a fourth-storey window by tying bedsheets together to make a rope long enough for him to climb down. Whether Mr Myles, who had been previously charged

many times prior for family violence matters, was pulling this off as a daring stunt for publicity or out of desperation wasn't clear but he was fined \$4500 and reprimanded by the magistrate for displaying 'breathtaking arrogance'.



## The continuing lockdowns showed signs of failure

Around the middle of 2021, it was globally accepted that lockdowns became regarded as a futile strategy to eliminate the virus, particularly that of the very infectious Delta variant. But not so for Australia, at least up to September 2021. Australia continued down the path of elimination with states opening and re-closing their borders at the drop of a hat and summary lockdowns being implemented.

The most severe and draconian lockdowns took place in the city of Melbourne, the city that changed its title from the most 'liveable' city in the world to the most 'miserable', to quote many of the critics of the lockdowns. Dan Andrews, the premier during this time, was given the moniker, '*Dictator Dan*', in which he ran the state of the '*Democratic Peoples' Republic of Victoria*' for his fervour in implementing a series of lockdowns which lasted, in total, for more than 250 days. The most any city had had to endure.

In defence of Dan Andrews, and other politicians in the era of social media, there could have been an explanation for this belligerent tact of continued enforced lockdowns. Social media could have been part of the blame. I remember looking at Dan Andrew's Facebook feed and being quite surprised at the number of fans who wanted Mr Andrews to remain firm in keeping borders closed and enforcing more lockdowns. No doubt, that those who supported this

stance had nothing to lose from being in the lockdowns; however, those small business owners or those relying on working contract labour, for example, construction workers, were, understandably not so enamoured with the prospect of being locked down and using up their life savings. Most politicians have a team of data gatherers whose job is to tally up sentiment from their social media feeds. The data *did* suggest that a great swathe of the population was extremely supportive of Andrew's measures. Unfortunately, unlike the olden days of letter-writing, phone calls and local town hall get-togethers, in which far more effort was required to give an opinion and voice concerns, social media attracted far more 'voices', many of which simply followed the crowd in choosing the 'right' answer for fear of being labelled a conspirator, rebel or worse. The result is a consensus accommodating for the lowest common denominator in terms of intelligence, understanding and reason.

This phenomenon was famously demonstrated by the Asch conformity experiments in which a series of cards with differing line lengths was shown to eight students, seven of which were actors. The actors were told what to say in advance but managed to coerce the one student who was not acting to state that such and such a line was longer or shorter, even if it was clearly not.

Returning on the draconian lockdowns in Melbourne, police were given unprecedented powers to arrest and detain anyone who contravened the rules. A new 'scary' looking breed of police armed with teargas and pepper-spray, emerged onto the streets. To me, they looked ominously reminiscent of the Combine military police in a first-player shooter up game I used to play in the early 2000s called *Half Life*! No, but seriously, they were kind of scary looking with little or no sense of humour. Prior to the pandemic and George Floyd (the black guy who got killed by a cop in the United States during 2020), many people looked up to their local friendly policeman on the street corner, but since then, many shunned them or became frightened to look in their direction for fear of attracting attention.



There were several cases of arrests and detentions which were deemed as totally unreasonable, one of the most memorial being the case of a pregnant woman in Ballarat, a medium-sized town not far west from Melbourne, who was charged with posting something on social media about organising a peaceful protest and then had police raid her house, charge her and tie her hands together behind her back while her young son was watching on. She was led to the police station and charged with incitement to riot. Little did the police know that the whole event was captured by livestream using a smartphone by her husband!

Meanwhile, these sorts of arrests and detentions continued but they were largely unwatched or even known to the masses who knew nothing more than mainstream media and/or accused anything other than mainstream media of that being that made of conspiracy and misinformation. Mainstream media, particularly that of Australia's governmental television network, the ABC who had its offices raided by the Australian Federal Police during 2019 due to alleged leaked military documents, became very cautious not to report news which might seed doubt as to the integrity of the decisions being made by the politicians in power of the day. However, the Murdoch press with its Sky News Australia network and various other independent news networks such as Rebel News were determined to capture news which the 'government-approved' mainstream media news networks avoided. They were often accused of spinning unfounded rhetoric and hyperbole, some of which it was certainly true. However, they most often allowed commentaries in their newsfeeds and posted unredacted videos of various events, such as the protests that took place, which were largely peaceful. Although, paradoxically, the reverse sentiment took place during the BLM protests that were held in 2020.



As for the protests, they were largely peaceful. The violence that had occurred between the police and the protestors took place on the fringe and, naturally, it was when those moments occurred when the press took avid interest. The reality was that most people never realised how frequent protests were taking place, even in their own towns and cities, but the mainstream press seldom reported them, probably on account of becoming old and tired news. Biases were portrayed to news consumers depending on what they were watching or reading. The ABC persisted to attribute the violence to right-wing extremists taking glee at attacking any policeman on the street, whereas the opposing news networks would accentuate any violence conducted by the police onto peaceful protestors. The ABC, unfortunately, generally refused to cover any of the peaceful protests, particularly those from those medical professionals including nurses who protested the mandate of vaccinations.

## Rebellion and the falling dominos

*“I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical”* – Thomas Jefferson

During mid-2021, it all seemed to get out of control and, thus, began the disintegration of keeping the borders watertight and successfully enforcing lockdowns. Something had to give, and many Australians were becoming increasingly tired of the situation. It was clearly not sustainable to keep Australia sealed off from the outside world and persist with lockdowns, which by then, had made a serious impact with mental health, job losses and the economy in general.

Krystle Mitchell, who was a senior member of the Victoria Police, bravely gave [an hour-long interview](#) on YouTube with her resignation paper in her hand proclaiming her concerns that the Victoria Police were no longer acting independently from the political party. Promptly after the interview, she resigned. Not long after, signs of dissent were showing in the police when vaccine mandates were ordered over the police force. Senior police officials in New South Wales refused to enforce the requirement of vaccine certificates. When trust between the political party and its enforcement agencies began to break down, it was a sure sign that an inflection point had arrived.





Coincidentally, during October 2021, corruption enquiries were made into the affairs of the then-premier of New South Wales, Gladys Berejiklian, who resigned from her position being succeeded by Dominic Perrottet. Not long after, the Labor party in Victoria under Dan Andrews were accused of [branch-stacking](#). Within the space of two weeks, the new premier of NSW, Perrottet, to the surprise of Australians, announced that in November, international travel will resume and lockdowns to end. Likened to dominos falling, one week after that, Dan Andrews, announced the end of the lockdowns and another week later, the premier of Queensland, Annastacia Palaszczuk, announced that Queensland would open up.

Whether the confluence of all these events, including that of the corruption enquiries and the seating of the new premier in NSW, had anything to do with the quick change of heart was mainly conjecture; however, I had a sneaky hunch there might have been something to do with it, without sounding overly conspiratorial.

In any case, it was certainly good news to see light at the end of the tunnel regarding the end of lockdowns and border closures. But not good news for those who, having been under the influence of the [Stockholm Syndrome](#), remained in fear of the borders opening and the lockdowns to end.

## The fear of opening up, but not the reasons you may think

Naturally, when the news arrived of Australia having to eventually open its borders and cease lockdowns, many Australians were afraid of doing so for fear of the virus; however, there was another reason.

Returning to Albert Camus's book, *The Plague*, the story ended when the bubonic plague, which had ravaged the city of Oran, disappeared as quick as it appeared several months prior. The borders opened and many went back to their previous lifestyles. However, it did not for all. In the book, there was a wheeling-dealing character by the name of Cottard who was largely loathed prior to the plague that settled in. During this fictional plague, Cottard became wealthy by wielding the black market to provide services to its city-bound residents. Many became over-reliant on his services and, he too, became greedier and greedier. The plague and the 'ring of steel' surrounding Oran was the perfect setting for his business to flourish. When the city re-opened and life went back to normal, Cottard was shunned and eventually became mad.

Cottard was, indeed, an interesting character in the book; however, many did profit out of the pandemic in Australia, and other nations around the world. There is no doubt that the richer got richer and the poorer got poorer. Online giants became the gods of the people whether they were entertainment streaming services, social media and communication platforms like Facebook and Zoom or marketplaces like Amazon. The fear of the devaluing of fiat currency led to a marked rise in the property and commodities market. House prices boomed. Precious metals boomed. Many cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum boomed. Many companies share prices sank abysmally during early 2020, especially those which were heavily affected such as travel, fuel and shipping. Those who invested during this nadir did very well come mid-2021.

Those individuals and businesses who did exceptionally well under closed borders and a continually locked-down society would have to re-adapt to a return to normal, or as near-as normal conditions.

## Vaccines and blood clots

Having a conversation about vaccinations was a sensitive and complex subject in the arena of mainstream discussion. My opinion on vaccinations is that they worked based on existing data at the time, but I was also sceptical on the need to vaccinate young and healthy people. I suffered from many bouts of bronchial infections over a period of years after contracting a particularly nasty case of pneumonia during 2005. Therefore, I was open on taking the Astra Zeneca vaccine and, subsequently, got double-vaxxed with it, despite the ridiculous overreaction spruiked by mainstream media to steer clear of Astra Zeneca due to the possibility of developing a blood clot.

Australia's problem with the vaccination rollout is that it fell deeply behind the vaccination rollout strategies put in place by many other nations in the developed world. The media scared half the nation into taking Astra Zeneca regardless of the miniscule likelihood of getting a blood clot. The Australian government put in place a complicated set of rules as to who can receive the vaccine and frequently changed the age brackets as to who received Astra Zeneca and who received Pfizer. Supplies of the vaccine were ill-coordinated and news of vaccine mandates and passports being introduced in the future did not help Australia's vaccine rollout.

Media blackouts of anything that contravened the national strategy of vaccination rollouts, passports and mandates were put in place by many online platforms. Alternative therapies and therapeutics were not only discussed but fiercely opposed by the mainstream as being dangerous, but only in the context of COVID-19. Alternative therapies and therapeutics for heart disease, influenza, high blood pressure or other afflictions continued as normal, including those like homeopathy, which in my opinion seems too absurd to hold any grounds of being noteworthy as a cure to anything. But I could be wrong. I'm open-minded but would need some serious convincing!

## Conclusion

When writing this, I wonder how well this article holds up in say, a couple of years' time or maybe even ten. Will life be as it was pre-pandemic? Would the history books reflect what happened in an objective and neutral light freed from political biases? I am certain that there will be a steady feed of new findings that took place during the pandemic. Will there be ongoing vaccinations, booster shots or pills that are regularly taken to reduce the chance of COVID? Will COVID still exist or mysteriously die out? What will our future generations think of us during the pandemic? Nobody knows.

The biggest question that Australians may face for quite some time is whether Australia did the right thing, or did they overreact? The same, of course, could apply to Sweden as well who took a very different course. Proponents of Australia's model always took the view that Australia's low death count made it a successful model, but this was done using simple extrapolation, hugely distorted by Sweden's initial debacle with the old age people's homes as discussed earlier. Detractors took the view that likening Australia to Sweden was like comparing apples to oranges. Australia had the luxury of being in

isolation geographically with a far less dense population. In any case, it must be remembered that attributing death to COVID includes co-morbidities.

Interestingly, those first-world nations with a high percentage of obesity fared far worse than others, the United States being a prime example. From the beginning of the pandemic up to when this was published, approximately 4.8m died of COVID complications; however, out of this number, most were either old or suffered from other issues, for example, obesity and heart disease.

Bearing in mind that approximately 60m people die annually, in the 19 months from the start of the pandemic, that would bring the number up to 85m. In terms of excess mortality, the difference in overall deaths over a sequence of years, the data may have suggested that we may have overreacted.

If it's anything to go by, I hope that Australia never experiences such a gross overreach of governmental power over its citizens as it did during the pandemic. I hope that Australia provides a better framework of human rights and that we will never have the situation re-occur of our citizens being denied entry into their own country. I hope that Australia remains united and we never again experience living in a country where we need to have checkpoints along our internal state borders and have premiers boasting that its state is doing better than that state and so on. Ultimately, I do hope that Australia returns to that wonderful country I remember when I first stepped on its shores back in 2004.