

Herald Sun

Legacy of chaos and contempt

DEMOCRACY was rocked yesterday in the appalling scenes at the US Congress. In an era of unprecedented change and uncertainty, the sight of Congress being stormed by a mob challenged notions of freedom and free speech across the western world. President-elect Joe Biden, whose election win was being certified by congress at the time, spoke on "an unprecedented assault" on democracy. It was true enough; Congress was last besieged in 1814, by British troops.

Mr Biden was joined by a chorus of former presidents, both Republican and Democrat, to condemn the violence in which a female protester was shot dead and Washington DC was put under curfew. Images of windows being smashed, teargas and elected politicians collectively running for safety were once unthinkable in the United States.

The man responsible for inciting the scenes, President Donald Trump, sought to end the protests. He told the protesters to "go home", adding that "we love you" and that the election was "stolen from us".

His mealy-mouthed rejection of the November election result had inflamed the rioters; indeed the protester insurrection followed a rally in which Mr Trump once again challenged the legitimate result.

The tensions flared after the Democrats won two run-off elections in Georgia, handing the party control of both houses of Congress for the first time in a decade, and easing Mr Biden's political obstacles to tackling the pandemic crisis. The results followed Mr Trump's campaigning in Georgia and reflected a rejection of his hateful rhetoric.

Mr Trump has led the nation as an anti-authority renegade who held the political system and its balances in contempt. His weak response to the virus pandemic contributed significantly to the horrific toll in the US. His desultory and dismissive approach, unshackled by truth,

fairness or wisdom, propelled his opponent to the White House in an election from which no evidence of wrongdoing has been found.

Mr Trump's main weapon of communication — abuse and tirades posted to Twitter — was temporarily cancelled by the social media platform yesterday. After the riot, Republican politicians began distancing themselves from the President. He was also isolated by many of his backers.

Amid chatter of White House aide resignations, Vice-President Mike Pence told a reconvened Congress: "Those who wreaked havoc in our Capitol today, you did not win. Violence never wins. Freedom wins. This is still the people's house. As we reconvene in this chamber, the world will again witness the resilience and strength of our democracy."

Mr Trump has failed in his duty. He did not condemn the protesters for their "UnAmerican" rebellion, to borrow from the language of numerous US politicians.

There were suggestions Mr Trump's own cabinet should invoke the 25th amendment so he would be replaced by his deputy for the final weeks in office for failing to "discharge the powers and duties" of the presidential office.

Regardless, Mr Trump's legacy seems doomed to be chaos. He has glowered as a malignancy to values that have endured for centuries. He has been a monument to pride and vanity and all their shortcomings.

That Mr Trump has showed an almost delusional disrespect for proper process, and triggered the insecurities and fears of many millions of Americans, has been a blot on democracy that should never be forgotten.

As leader, Mr Trump is compelled to restore the peace he jeopardised. Anything less conflicts with the enshrined values of a country that boasts of being the world's greatest democracy. As Mr Biden said yesterday, the world was "watching". And the world has been horrified.

Where there's a Will

THE 460th Australian to play Test cricket, Victoria's Will Pukovski, on Thursday received his baggy green in the traditional team ceremony before the game and set about proving his place.

The fact the talented youngster made it at all is an inspiration for anyone who has suffered mental health battles.

Pukovski, a precocious talent, was pencilled in for international selection years ago. But many hurdles stood in his way. He was hit in the head, again and again, and has suffered nine concussions, prompting many health experts to question his future in the game.

His debut was only four weeks

after being struck in the head while playing for Australia A against India. In November, Pukovski removed himself from Test consideration, citing mental health issues.

He has been open about his challenges and spoken of the steps he has taken to overcome his demons.

At just 22, he is a symbol of courage for not hiding his weaknesses, but expressing them. His approach has helped destigmatise issues which are, finally, being understood and recognised as matters of health rather than character.

He is a testament to resilience and belief in a time when Victorians have had to dig deeper than ever before.

GIVE US BACK OUR HUMANITY



TANIA DE JONG

DEAR leaders, health officers and others. I am sure each and every one of us wants this to be over. We want to move on with our lives, work, families and communities.

Many people lost loved ones to COVID-19 or as a result of the fallout from it. Small businesses and whole economies collapsed under lockdown. Unemployment, suicide, domestic violence, divorce and addiction rates have reportedly risen, along with global hunger and homelessness.

We are a planet and a nation in grief and disarray.

No matter whether we are white, black, male, female, binary, gay, straight, red, blue, rich, poor, young or old, we are made of the same stuff. And we are all here for such a short time.

And that time should be precious. Lived with love, passion, compassion, joys and sorrows ... lived how we choose to live, so long as we do no harm to others.

Over these past months of pandemic hysteria we have increasingly seen bitching, sniping, dobbing, petty power struggles, one-upmanship and increasing self-interest and authoritarianism, and with it the loss of our mental and physical health and many of our freedoms. Freedoms we have fought for and which are part of our birthright as a human being living in this great nation.

Last week it was announced by our Prime Minister the lyrics of our national anthem were being changed from "young and free" to "one and free".

These are important words. Yet we are neither one nor are we free.

As the latest COVID outbreaks show, our daily life is now at the whim of our premiers and their chief health officers.

There is no shared discussion and no sense of a cohesive plan forward for Australia.

We try to make plans to live our precious, short lives; to see our loved ones; to create meaningful work and businesses; to relax, take holidays and to just be. Yet the noise never stops.

With every single case of COVID, the reaction is disproportionate and the imposition on our lives more and more untenable.

It needs to be said: we are not children. And the more we are treated like children by those who



claim to know better, the more we behave like children.

We give up on our dreams and simply take the handouts that are offered. We turn off the toxic news and turn on Netflix to escape. We are silenced into submission because we simply cannot be bothered to resist any more.

The more we are talked down to like children, and the more our internal and external borders are shut, the more divided we become. We are no longer one cohesive and inclusive nation.

When we are forced to wear masks and quarantine in unliveable environments, it takes away the essence of who we are and who we want to be.

Masks hide our true intentions and submerge our emotions. Our real self begins to fade away as this new masked being gains power and takes a hold of our psyches.

The more we wear the mask, the more we are silenced. We become voiceless, invisible ... puppets pulled by the strings of governments, health systems, media, big tech retailers, and at their mercy.

It's time to speak with one another as grown, mature human beings. We all want a better future.

Let's stop dividing and putting up the walls between us. Remove the boxes and labels that isolate and separate us ... and turn off the phones and TVs that keep us distracted from what really matters.

We are becoming more disconnected from ourselves, each other, and the planet each day that goes by.

We have to accept this virus cannot be eradicated permanently, like all the ones before it, and the

ones to follow. So let's start looking after one another with kindness and compassion and find a way forward.

As Viktor Frankl said in *Man's Search for Meaning*: "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

Freedom is found when we change ourselves and how we relate to each circumstance.

I encourage every one of you who is playing the role of Father Government or Mother Medical expert to look inside and think about how you want to live this one precious life.

Take off your masks and free us from ours so we can get back to who we really are at the core of our beings.

Imagine if we could start to light up everything that was deep within us ... speak our truth and respect the other.

Imagine the light that we could shine into the cracks and crevices, revealing the true beauty of each man and woman, each human being, unmasked, free, vulnerable yet whole.

So dear leaders, it's time you give us the opportunity to really grow up and take responsibility for our own lives. Then we might actually have a chance to solve this and many of our other wicked problems collectively.

And we can honestly sing in unison, with the full passion of our human spirits, we are one and free.

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