



Technocrats Are The Quiet Revolutionaries Hiding In Government

This is an important article from Australia that correctly identifies Technocracy in its historical context and modern Technocrats who are the radical and hidden danger hiding behind political structures and politicians. □ TN Editor

The familiar sight on television screens over the past few months of the prime minister and the state and territory leaders flanked by, and often deferring to, their senior health experts, suggests a comfortable, and wholly workable, relationship between those elected to govern and those with particular expertise to contribute.

There is little in what we have been watching to indicate tensions - yet, the ongoing debate about the appropriate role of experts in a democracy reveals tensions aplenty. Indeed,

it might be argued that there is no more pressing problem in both public

policy and democratic thought than this relationship between the rulers and the experts, and by implication, between what people want and what experts agree to. It is not just a dry academic argument.

The highly contested role of experts in government is now widely seen as a major contributing factor to the global surge in populism as populist leaders urge people to “take back their lives”. It is a significant factor in the current rise of nationalism in Europe, with populists leading the charge against the “undemocratic technocracy” of the European Union; it played a crucial role in the Brexit debate that led Britain out of the EU; and it is very much a part of Donald Trump’s America.

The parameters of the discussion are broad in the extreme. They range from zealots at one end of the spectrum arguing for the replacement of politicians by experts in a system in which leaders are chosen for their relevant skills and proven performance, as opposed to whether or not they fit the majority interests of a population, to the other end of the spectrum represented by Donald Trump who, according to Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig in their book, *A Very Stable Genius*, repeatedly told his chief of staff John Kelly when lining up experts to brief him: “I don’t want to talk to anyone. I know more than they do. I know better than anybody else.”

The idea of technocracy began to develop in the early 20th century as a public policy concept designed to advocate the application of the scientific method to solving social problems.

The term was coined by the American engineer William Henry Smyth in 1919, and adopted as a key theme by the sociologist and economist Thorstein Veblen in his influential book, *Engineers and the Price System* (1921).

It was further popularised by James Burnham in his widely read *The Managerial Revolution* (1941). The term has come to mean “government by technical decision making.”

As a social movement, technocracy gained prominence, predominantly in the United States and Canada (but also in Germany and the Soviet Union) briefly in the 1930s, advocating the replacement of elected

politicians and business people with scientists, engineers and economists who had the technical expertise to manage the economy and address the problems of the Great Depression.

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