

Unwoking corporate culture

Robert Oulds and Niall McCrae describe the spread of 'woke' group-think as moralitis - a cultural virus, and show how and why we must protect society from the social justice agitators

There's a right way and a wrong way for businesses to respond to survive the woke onslaught. Recently the British supermarket chain Co-op blundered into an unnecessary spat with the *Spectator* magazine, after a single person complained to the former for advertising in the latter.

Andrew Neil, chairman of Britain's biggest-selling current affairs periodical, showed how to turn the tables on a puritanical culture to which many other companies pathetically acquiesce.

A Co-op customer 'Lisa Fajita' had tweeted:

Hey @coopuk as a trans person I was please [sic] to see your adverts featuring a trans women and celebrating diversity, I visited your stores as a result, but why bother if your [sic] going to turn around ignore your members wishes and place adverts and fund transphobia in the spectator.

A message opening with 'Hey' should immediately alert a company to a woke inquisitor. The complaint was spurred by a statement by Stop Funding Hate, a campaign against media perceived as right-wing (and thus purveyors of hate).

Many will be disappointed to see Co-op UK's management supporting a magazine notorious for transphobia and anti-Muslim propaganda.

The Co-op social media team responded by promising to launch an investigation into its advertising policy, explaining:

This advert was placed as part of a package by our media buyers. We are taking up the issue with them with a view to them not using this publication again in the future.

This submissiveness masquerading as ethics was brought to the attention of Andrew Neil, who immediately banned the Co-op Group from advertising in the magazine.

No need to bother, Co-op. As of today you are henceforth banned from advertising in The Spectator, in perpetuity. We will not have companies like yours use their financial might to try to influence our editorial content, which is entirely a matter for the editor.

Sadly, the *Spectator's* robust stance against cancel culture is a rarity. A few days later the ecological protest organisation Extinction Rebellion blockaded national newspaper distribution centres around Britain, depriving millions of their morning read.

When social justice warriors want to 'start the conversation' it's time to walk away

This act was blasted by politicians as an assault on free speech, but newspaper editors and journalists seemed apologetic, typically pleading that they had regularly publish reports on the climate crisis. This was the wrong response. They should have learned from Andrew Neil: no third party, individually or collectively, should be allowed to dictate content in the free press.

Clearly newspapers have been cowed by the assertive and articulate campaigning of Extinction Rebellion, as they were towards the agitators of Black Lives Matter. For years they have issued uncritical coverage of climate change alarmism, with any sceptics banished.

James Delingpole, a trenchant critic of environmental doom-mongering, warned in his book *Watermelons* (2011) of the Marxist red in a green skin that threatens to destroy the economy and our children's future. No longer invited to write in the *Daily Telegraph*, Delingpole saw newspapers reaping what they had sown.

Far from underreporting the 'climate & ecological emergency', Britain's craven print media has stoked this #fakenews crisis by continually running, almost verbatim, press releases handed to them by eco-fascist organisations like Greenpeace and Fiends of the Earth, as well as by bloated rent-seekers on the environmental gravy train such as the wind industry.

According to Delingpole, newspaper editors are running scared of vexatious legal claims, and of losing the sponsorship of green lobbyists: 'pretty much the entirety of the British print media is now bought and paid for by the Green Blob'. The more that companies allow undue influence in their enterprise, the more they become trapped.

Costly mistakes are being made by big brands that misjudge their market, giving too much licence to the youthful advertising industry to present their product in a progressive light.

In 2019 razor producer Gillette undid decades of brand building that celebrated its core market with the aspirational slogan 'the best a man can get'. Amidst the highly influential #MeToo campaign against sexual harassment, Gillette forsook positive male messaging to hector on 'toxic masculinity'.

As if giving a gender studies lecture, its new advertisements urged men to be more 'accountable' and to stop excusing bullying, sexual harassment and aggressive behaviour. They should learn to be a 'modern man', according to trendy young designers at the agency.

Knowing that this was provocative, Gillette must have expected that bad publicity would be outweighed by liberal plaudits on social media. Instead, it was the alienating misandry of the adverts that proved to be toxic. Following a backlash and calls for a boycott, the owner of the Gillette brand, Procter & Gamble, had \$8 billion of its value wiped off.

However, Gillette CEO Gary Coombe was unrepentant: promoting a negative stereotype of men as predatory brutes demonstrated the brand's progressive virtue. Yet the feminising of men would neither succeed commercially, nor culturally. Many men responded to this insult by growing a beard.

Increasingly commercial organisations strive to project values, often of little relevance to their product. The ice cream brand Ben & Jerry's decided to publicly criticise the British government's policy on immigration.

Thousands of migrants who had made their way to the north coast of France from the Middle East and Africa are illegally entering the UK by crossing the English Channel in dinghies. They are sent to large hotels around the country, these being mostly empty due to the coronavirus pandemic. Home Secretary Priti Patel promised action, but she seemed helpless to deport the incomers due to human rights law.

Ben & Jerry's tweeted: 'Hey Priti Patel' (that onerous greeting again) with a thread of Marxist claptrap about refugees, ending 'and lastly, for those at the back of the class, people cannot be illegal'.

This left a sour taste. Not only did it alienate British customers who think that laws should be obeyed and that economic migrants shouldn't simply be allowed to break into an already overcrowded country, but it also gave the media an opportunity to highlight Ben & Jerry's faults, particularly their exploitation of cheap migrant labour.

The tax affairs of its parent company, the Unilever conglomerate, received unfavourable scrutiny. Before a company takes the moral high ground and self-righteously criticises others, it should first check for any skeletons in the cupboard.

As Ben & Jerry's sales slumped their tubs of ice cream were heavily discounted - a bargain for buyers who could stomach Ben & Jerry's hypocrisy. Ultimately, this foolish act of virtue signalling benefited their competitors.

A worrying trend is for businesses to exert influence on elections. Tyre maker Goodyear banned wearing of caps with the slogan 'Make America Great Again' in its workforce. This was the key message of Donald Trump's presidency campaign in 2016, and was well received in the 'Rustbelt' states where millions of jobs have been lost to the forces of globalisation.

Goodyear, a company that is integral to the US automotive industry, seemed to suggest that making America great again was wrong, perhaps too nationalistic, and that it was more important to distance itself from Trump than celebrate the industrial revival.

This petty action insulted not only employees but also the vast market of customers who voted for Trump. From a 'Main Street' perspective, Goodyear's political bias and censorship is reminiscent of the arrogant and out-of-touch elite that caused them to switch their support from the Democrats to the Republican Party. Indeed, the President called for a boycott of this now politicised product. Goodyear's share price instantly fell by 6%.

Dabbling in woke culture is a risky venture. Many companies have stepped into the minefield of gender politics, to their cost. When moviemakers and video-gaming franchises succumbed to feminist pressure to cast more women leads in heroic action roles, the result was box office duds and an exodus of disgruntled gamers.

Films with female leads were remade and defeminised for a woke audience, but Charlie's Angels flopped, as did the all-female remake of Ghostbusters. To deny that boys are drawn to action and girls to relationships and romance is to put political correctness before profit.

When the Always tampon brand removed the female symbol from its packaging to appease the transgender lobby, explaining that 'some men have periods too', a mixture of outrage and ridicule ensued. The TED talks franchise changed the title of its female-focused event with this tweet:

Hello you! TedxLondon-Womxn is coming back! That's not a typo: 'womxn' is a spelling of 'women' that's more inclusive and progressive. The term sheds light on the prejudice, discrimination and institutional barriers womxn have faced, and explicitly include non-cisgender women.

This tweet was savaged on Twitter. India Willoughby, a transgender broadcaster, responded with derision: 'these people are nutters'. Transgender activists argue that trans women are women, based on self-identity, but the

concept of 'womxn' creates a new category of sex. Perhaps this will become the accepted norm in progressive ideology, but there is only so far that the ordinary people can be pushed.

A few brave business leaders have taken a stand against woke zealots. The energy drink company Red Bull fired two of its North American executives, Stefan Kozak and Amy Taylor, after they promoted the Black Lives Matter movement. Around three hundred employees had signed a petition opposing the company's reluctance to openly support towards Black Lives Matter.

Austrian billionaire Dietrich Mateschitz, who co-founded Red Bull and owns 49% of the company, saw differently. As Red Bull quenches the thirst of all ethnicities, why favour one race over others? Indeed, why would a company risk upsetting customers by allying with a neo-Marxist movement that is wreaking destruction in American cities and calls to abolish police?

'Go woke, go broke' is a warning that company executives should heed. Fashionable causes change rapidly and are almost always in conflict with the socially conservative attitudes of the majority of the population.

Furthermore, woke ideology is becoming more extreme. In our book *Moralitis, A Cultural Virus*, we conceptualised this flight from reason as a social contagion, spread by memes rather than microbes. Social media facilitate this puritanical invasion of minds, causing a form of mass hysteria.

Having lost or failed to develop their powers of critical reasoning, younger people learn to spout absurd ideas that are ultimately to their detriment, such as internalising of shame for their sex or colour.

The Black Lives Matter campaign called for shaming of white people, using work-base training in 'unconscious bias', 'micro-aggressions' and 'white privilege'.

Thankfully, Donald Trump saw the damage this is causing and banned such divisive and 'unAmerican' training in federal agencies. The growing industry of 'diversity and equality' advisors have suffered their first defeat. More must follow. When social justice warriors want to 'start the conversation' it's time to walk away. ■

Robert Oulds & Niall McCrae are the authors of *Moralitis, A Cultural Virus*

