

The Big Picture

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"News to use & amuse"

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The madness continues

In the news this week, we see that the Victorian government has allowed the outsourcing of media contacts to a call centre in Manila, courtesy of Telstra.

He's a man who likes to spruik Victoria as *the* place for IT jobs, where regional call centres flourish and innovative businesses prosper. But the call centre for Premier John Brumby's own media unit, it turns out, has moved to the Philippines.

And it seems the team of Filipinos taking messages for the Premier's 20-odd media advisers are probably replacements for about 500 Australian jobs — 200 thought to be lost from Victoria — after Telstra late last year expanded its contract with a company called TeleTech.

Last week *The Sunday Age* tried to call Matt Nurse, the Treasurer's media adviser, several times and the phone was answered by operators who struggled to pronounce his name.

When asked where they were located, operators stated they were "one of Telstra's industry partners and I work in the Philippines". [TheAge](#)

Brilliant. With this kind of action, the government displays its true commitment to creating jobs in Australia.

But can the government actually do anything? Are our politicians in control of the our public services, or is it the other way round. Is our system responsive to citizen needs and to dealing with new challenges, or are we stuck with a mass of statutes and bureaucracies that lock us in to molasses like responses and 'can't do' leadership?

This week it was reported that in Queensland, a fish farm on the Noosa River was experiencing 'grossly disfigured' fish with 2 heads...

TWO farm chemicals are being blamed for the spawning of millions of two-headed fish in the Noosa River.

The grossly disfigured larvae were spawned at the [Sunland Fish Hatchery](#) from bass taken from the river late last year.

At least 90 per cent of the fingerlings were deformed and all died with 48 hours. [CourierMail](#)

This seems like a pretty important problem — if fish are displaying such disfigurement, perhaps there are other serious consequences for other animals, including humans? The precautionary principle ('first do no harm') would indicate that the chemicals that may be causing this should immediately be ceased being used until they were cleared by appropriate scientific investigation.

Mais non... instead we learn that the chemicals

may be banned in two years.

Is this why government is there? To allow potentially serious

risks to human and animal health to go on for 2 years until we can prove exactly what the problem is.

We suffer the same attitude in Tasmania where residents drink water from rivers contaminated with chemicals used in forestry...

...forest industry always mis use chemicals. I have photos and evidence of forestry plantation companies spraying properties in our water catchments, in swamp areas and areas with plenty of drains that lead directly into our rivers. Not many farmers I have seen spray their whole property in one go. Forestry plantations operators do. and not only once but sometimes 3 times with herbicides, then insecticides later on.

The APVMA do have guidelines but in Tasmania guidelines are viewed just like the lines in the middle of the road. Here they mean that it would be nice to stay on your own side but definitely not necessary and if you are in a log truck the mean nothing but somewhere to line up with the bonnet decoration.

Our regulators here only apologise, cover up and when they do detect chemicals in our drinking water they don't let on for at least 3 months. Pete Godfrey [Tasmanian Times](#)

As I've pointed out before, forestry in Tasmania relies on massive public subsidies — between \$200 and \$300 million each year, and yet returns a 'profit' of only around \$70 million. Without the subsidies it would be impossible for Gunns to operate. Taxpayers are paying to destroy their own forests.

But it's worse than that. Our governments are also prepared to threaten our health with a range of toxins and biocides used by forestry leaving it up to any victims to prove what poisoned them.

These problems are system wide. The news reveals the same lack of representation, the same lack of care for taxpayers, the same incompetence and corruption all over Australia.

There's one Australian organisation that consumes 50% of our GDP, has the most influence on public affairs and affects our lives in numerous ways yet is not accountable to the public in any way at all. It's the public service — with its own newspapers and job vacancy and transfer system. That organisation is the Australian public service. The two main parties who are supposed to represent the public's interest are failing to do so, relying instead on advice from the public services, and money from large corporates.

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Community versus union rights

Here's an interesting take on the diminished rights of communities versus those of paid unions from Barnaby Drake in Tasmania.

Kiss of death

On Sunday there is going to be a confrontation. Peaceful demonstrators will meet head-on with the police at the Florentine. Undoubtedly there will be arrests and the police will try to prevent these people from accessing the forest. The police, at the instruction of big business, are acting against the very people they are supposedly there to defend. This is tantamount to Gunns Private Army.

Recently there has been an all-out assault on these defenders of our forests. They have been called 'eco-terrorists' when they are actually attempting to prevent this wanton destruction. There have been police exercises against mock 'green' terrorists. They have been accused of 'illegal actions' and 'trespass on public land'. They have been arrested and charged with 'preventing the police from doing their duty'. But in all this, the demonstrators have been peaceful. No damage has been done, except to them.

If this situation were reversed and a Union called a strike, workers have been given legal rights to demonstrate. They can form picket lines and prevent access to sites, sometimes violently, and stop others from carrying out their 'legal duties' or making a living, but all this is condoned and enshrined in the law, yet these people are acting only in self-interest.

When a small group of concerned people act on the part of the whole nation, for no personal gain, but to preserve the remaining fragments of our environment for posterity, and to stop corporate greed from destroying what our highly paid politicians fail to protect, they are vilified, harassed, arrested, fined, face civil action and can find themselves with a criminal record on our behalf. Yet the law actually says they have a legal right to demonstrate. Peter Garret himself confirmed this only a few days ago, yet still there is police action against them as though they are criminals. When the protestors have been attacked with sledge-hammers and had their vehicles torched, this is dismissed as being 'provoked' and no charges laid.

There is no protection given to these selfless people by any of Tasmania's politicians, and our environmental minister is ranged firmly on the side of the destruction of the very thing he is supposedly there to protect. The Premier is silent, as is the opposition and have allied themselves firmly behind Forestry and the fat-cats of industry. They have poured more than a billion dollars of public funds in subsidies for this destructive practice over the last few years and have acted as though the forests are their personal fiefdom to do with as they wish.

So the next time you see them out shaking the hands of pensioners and kissing babies, from the forest's point of view, this is surely the 'Kiss of Death'!

Barnaby Drake

Fun stuff

Check out [Pup ponders the heat death of the Universe](#) if you have broadband as shown on Scott McCloud on comics and visual language at [TED video](#)

In case you missed it

Financial mess

Irish house prices may fall 80% [IrishTimes](#)

US foreclosures up 80% in 2008 [ReutersUK](#)

Vic jobs disappear as local slump deepens [TheAge](#)

Fiscal lifejacket or money down a rathole [ICH](#)

Fear grips UK banking sector [Guardian](#)

Governance

Premier's call centre moves to Manila [TheAge](#)

Hicks passport query dissolves into red tape [TheAge](#)

Gillard defiant on jobs [TheAustralian](#)

Ire grows as guest work plan stalls [TheAge](#)

Environment/food/water/forestry

MIS raises hackles [WeeklyTimesNow](#)

Turnbull urges mill hurry up [TheMercury](#)

Address mill concerns before building [TheAustralian](#)

Farm profits drop 40% in downturn [SMH](#)

Mill pipeline route silence [TheMercury](#)

Climate

Victoria – the dirty state [TheAge](#)

Social/shelter

Asylum seekers 'miserable' conditions [TheWest](#)

Children held 'too long' in detention [TheAge](#)

New reality of home ownership [DailyTelegraph](#)

Out of service [TheAge](#)

Health & education revolution

Miscarrying mother told 'life's a bitch' [SMH](#)

2 head fish chemicals take 2 years to ban [CourierMail](#)

Police evict uni student squatters [TheAge](#)

Communications/transport/energy

Vic rail overcrowding could be deadly [TheAge](#)

Regional broadband grants to be cut [TheAustralian](#)

e- tags drive harbour bridge exodus [SMH](#)

World

Israel's actions foster extremism (Fraser) [TheAge](#)

Israelis use illegal phosphorus shells on civilians [TheAge](#)

Israelis shell hospitals and UN HQ [AlJazeera](#)

Why I won't support Labor's ETS

Barnaby Joyce Jan 14 2009

I'm going to be serious and quite frank with you here as the issues I am about to raise will be contentious not only amongst coalition MP's but also my own party.

Every age comes up with a witch to burn, a sect that apparently if it is not succumbed will bring about the destruction of an empire, an issue that occupies the rigours of the day.

It is almost as if those in the position of power and their surrounding Illuminati with time to spare are terrified of the banality of daily existence and so search for an issue that demands blind obedience to conquer it.

The most dangerous place to be in these times of immense fervour is in the counter position that calls in to question the logic of the euphoria. Those who dare to question are held as heretics. There is a communal life fest in being part of the pack or staying silent.

It is hard for them to separate from the reality that the world is fairly constant and predictable and that things of the greater nature of the universe have remained beyond our control in the past and generally shall remain so into the future.

It was interesting to hear the recent discussion between Freeman Dyson, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, with Robyn Williams, on The Science Show on ABC Radio National, when he rightly stated that the world has many problems but global warming is not one of the biggest ones. As Dyson said:

"Sea level rise has been going on much longer, long before global warming, and it probably has very little to do with human activities. All we know for sure is that sea level has been rising steadily for about 10,000 years and we'll have to do something about that."

I don't pretend for one moment to be a scientist but in my role in the Senate it is implicit in my job to be a sceptic, to question and to consider all sides and be open to the views of many rather than one view.

My current concern with the emissions trading scheme is that a religious fervour has built up around the altar of global warming. Those who serve at the altar have become ruthless in their denigration of alternate views. This fervour has now received its imprimatur by reason of a new tax, or should it be tithe to be paid to the Rudd Labor Government.

The similarity in this newest forte of socialism can be defined by the ultimate purpose of divesting the individual of their asset or income stream on the premise of an apparent greater moral good.

But who becomes the benefactors of this divestment? The administrators and the traders. Their pockets are lined with the property and income of others.

I don't remember anybody paying rural Australia for the vegetation that was divested from their asset, rural land, during the tree-clearing legislation so we could meet our Kyoto target and unfortunately I don't hear any chorus of questioning as to why in the future rural producers, after trying to feed the nation and others, will have to be dragged into an emissions trading scheme that could make many of them unviable.

Where is all this heading?

The National Party has been at the forefront of saying this is all

getting beyond ridiculous and becoming dangerous. They are also being supported by unlikely allies such as the Australian Workers Union who see their own members, who have been part of the process of delivering wealth to our nation from their labours have had their industries now termed 'dirty' by the new environmental high priests. In this new Orwellian frenzy everyone is looking over their shoulder.

Australia is going down a path of an ETS without the co-operation of the major emitting countries. It says that it is morally right to do so. The Rudd Labor Government and others say that unilateral action is a moral imperative. I look forward to that same fervour of moralistic rectitude as they approach the Mugabe issue in Zimbabwe. He is certainly in the wrong and it is on this new platform of morals that we await our dear leader to launch an attack in a very worthwhile and immediate practice of ridding our planet of this tyrant, Mugabe. That is something that would be of an exceptional benefit.

The government is currently honey-coating the fact that it will be collecting a vast amount of money from the Australian people. The ETS will collect \$11.5 billion in its first year, \$12 billion in its second, it will force up the price of goods and services, it will encourage industries to move to where an ETS is not present.

Australia generates 1.5 per cent of global greenhouse emissions and this ETS will reduce world levels by the smallest sliver, which self-evidently will have nil effect on global climate whether you believe in climate warming or not.

People will lose their job or their business because of the ETS. They will be the modern-day witches burning on the environmentalist fanatical pyre because their role in this new dynamic was unacceptable.

For regional Australia we look forward to the ridiculous prospect of 34 million possible hectares of forest to take the place of farming land, formerly the backbone of so many regional towns and generations of good, honest working Australians' lives.

The history of human civilisations has the disturbing trait of devising ways to put themselves out of business, sometimes through no more than their own excesses and belief structures of their governing bureaucracies. The only protection against these excesses is the capacity of the general population to question, to doubt and to disagree.

I have no doubt that as a world we must become efficient with the utilisation of our resources. We must give the greatest number of people the greatest access to the highest standard of living, it is only fair.

Efficiency, more than emissions, must become the trading scheme that brings a cleaner, fairer future. Encourage efficiency and keep the government's hands out of people's pockets and off their assets and that will bring a greater propensity to a long-term broad-based better world for all of us.

END

The End Of An Error

By Ben Pobjie 15 Jan 2009 © [NewMatilda](#)

So he messed up a few things, so WHAT?

The passing into history of another US presidency is always a poignant time. It's a lot like losing a close friend who, after you've invited him into your home and your heart, loved him and nurtured him and given him your nuclear codes, suddenly decides to abandon you and go on a lucrative speaking tour. At least, I assume it's a lot like that — that's never actually happened to me.

Some might say it's a trifle presumptuous for an Australian like me to comment on the Bush presidency. "Who are you," they may ask, "with your Antipodean sensibility and detachment from American life and poor research skills, to pass judgment on a foreign leader?" And they make a good point, but these anonymous critics fail to note two crucial factors: 1) I have for many, many years been a keen student and observer of our great friend across the Pacific; and 2) Australian news is extremely boring.

Just what is the legacy of George W "Buffy" Bush? How will history view the man who some have called "the 43rd President of the United States of America"? Will he be seen as the man who stood up for freedom and democracy when all around were wilting and cowering and sending Christmas cards to Hezbollah? Or will he be seen as the man who could, given a certain number of [practice tries](#), successfully eat a pretzel?

Of course, it's very easy to make fun of Bush — indeed, that's the main reason that I am doing so — but surely such an important historical figure deserves a more considered analysis? Of course he does, which just goes to show that life is not fair.

And it's the unfairness of life which provides the running theme of the Bush years. It was not fair, for example, that Bush had to deal, so soon in his presidency, with the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, after Bill Clinton went eight years without having to cope with anything more serious than the rise of 'N Sync.

Put yourself in Bush's position. You've just settled into the job, looking forward to a nice quiet presidency, getting in some light reading, when BAM! All of a sudden terrorists have attacked and you are forced, against every instinct in your soul, to do something. You can't blame Bush for being a little unnerved, a little stunned, a little immobile and glassy-eyed. Nothing in his previous career — which had consisted largely of heavy drinking and capital punishment — could have prepared him for such a challenge. His bachelor's degree in history was, tragically, rendered almost useless.

Only time will tell whether the War on Terror will be as successful as the War on Drugs or the War on Germans, but at least Bush did something. At least he took action. Seven years ago, we were all terrified that we were about to be blown up, and today, thanks in no small part to the President's efforts, we are merely terrified that we are going to lose our jobs. The imminent possibility of horrific death has been pushed to the back of our minds, replaced with more reassuring paranoia. It's not every president that could achieve that kind of misdirection.

Naturally, Bush has his critics, mostly disreputable hippie types. There are even those who have dubbed Bush the worst president ever. But that's such a subjective judgment, isn't it? How do you compare presidents across eras? How do you say whether Bush

is a worse president than John F Kennedy, a man so inept he failed to complete even one term? Which was worse, Bush's foreign policy or Clinton's philandering? Ulysses Grant's alcoholism or Woodrow Wilson's foot fetish? It's an impossible task. And at least Bush tried. He did his best. If not the Carl Lewis of American politics, he is at least the Tamsyn. There are worse things to be. Probably.

After all, what did he do that was so bad? The war in Iraq? Oh sure, we can say *now* that it was based on faulty intelligence, but at the time the view that Saddam Hussein was sitting in Baghdad with a barrel of warheads and an itchy button-finger was widely accepted, even by impartial international observers such as John Howard. And perhaps the war could have been conducted a little better, but couldn't any war? Isn't it true that World War II would have been over much more quickly if Churchill hadn't lost his map of Germany?

Did Bush drop the ball on torture? Well, it's a matter of opinion whether the US overstepped the mark here. After all, one man's torture is another man's sadistic inflicting of intense physical and psychological suffering for the purposes of extracting information, as the saying goes.

Hurricane Katrina? We're really reaching here. Bush doesn't control the weather, does he? He doesn't make it rain. It is a hard marker indeed who would hold the President responsible for hurricanes or floods or poor people's welfare. And admit it: before Hurricane Katrina you'd never even *heard* of New Orleans.

The financial crisis? Well, as I think is well established, that was [caused by God](#), not Bush. While it's certainly true that Bush is one of God's closest friends — they were on the cheerleading squad together at high school — that doesn't mean Bush directs God's every move. To suggest that the American President somehow "got into" God's ear and told him to ruin the global economy is as silly as suggesting that God somehow "instructed" Bush to invade Iraq.

And so we now enter a new era. The Obama era. An era of hope and inspiration and celebrity and general sexiness. But I can't help mourning a little for the passing of the old ways. Today everything is so slick and media-managed and appearance-driven. George W Bush represents the last of his breed. He represents a time when all you needed to become president was some folksy wisdom, a winning grin, and the dissemination of rumours of [interracial adultery](#).

So sure, you can criticise Bush, for his policies, his dishonesty, his misfiring neurons, but I think, like me, you're just a little sorry to see him go. Not that he'll ever really go away. No, I'm sure we'll see George W again. He'll keep working, keep striving, keep finding ways to give of himself to the world. We all know he's done enough, but he's a giver. He's a trier. He can't be stopped. As they say, you can take the boy out of Texas, but he'll still talk funny.