

The Big Picture

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“News to use & amuse”



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Editorial

The financial crisis has slipped in the news this week, with various rallies and promises apparently convincing the media that there's not too much to write about. Instead we've had the sideshow of [WorkChoices](#) being dismantled featuring long parliamentary debates about how many employees should a small business have as a cut off point for unfair dismissal.

Of course, there has been no debate about what kind of working conditions suit the 21st century, nor whether an Australia wide umbrella system. Along those lines we learn that the government wants to apply [one set of conditions](#) to workers in the hotel and restaurant businesses.

Penalty rates, overtime, loadings, allowances and rosters built into the hotel industry over generations will be loaded on to restaurants. Don't tip your waiters for good service; they already may be on a 275 per cent penalty rate. At these penalty rates, don't count on a fine dining-led recovery; it's bistro self-service.

Yet this industrial relations assault on one of Australia's great small business sectors hardly registers in the national political debate. That's because Julia Gillard's IR counter-revolution has been turned into the political issue of the Liberal leadership, and because the policy issue is too complicated for the glibness of today's sound-bite politics.

There seems to be a desire in government to treat everyone the same, to have the same standards for everything except for government itself, which can write its own rules in defiance of the entire body of human knowledge.

The structure of government is failing us in two important ways. The structure itself is dysfunctional with 3 overlapping layers of bureaucracy and regulation strangling Australia's productivity and innovation, and that same structure has taught our politicians to 'manage' by meeting the needs of the bureaucracies rather than changing government performance to meet the community's requirements.

Queenslanders' apparent lack of interest in this strange, irrelevant, funereal state election campaign is understandable. Despite the opportunity to elect a woman for the first time, or endorse the new conservative party, people are struggling even to feign enthusiasm. The evenly poised polls could be read as a surge of support for the Liberal National Party, but *Online Opinion's* Graham Young and others have suggested that really they're a sign of collective ambivalence and resignation. A statewide shrug. This has been described as apathy by some, but I think it could equally be a quite sensible recognition that neither side of politics in the state has any credible plans, any vision for the state, much political talent or any solutions to the looming catastrophe. Further, recent experience will have shown them that state governments won't, or can't, deliver what they are repeatedly told that people want...

There is a larger issue here that goes to the heart of our federation — people are rightly confused about what state

governments are for, and what they represent, at a time when the central government is seizing the initiative in more and more areas but is itself confronted with enormous difficulties in steering the country through its current economic problems. The original federation was created to recognise not only different jurisdictions and different responsibilities, but different histories and identities. So what does it mean to be a Queenslander now? Neither of Queensland's major parties seem to offer much of a clue on this score either. [NewMatilda](#)

Governments are acting as if we don't have the knowledge to avoid the obvious problems.

The recent Victorian plantation, forest and grassland fires are one good example. Tasmania's Brenda Rosser points out how new weather patterns could leave Australia in permanent drought and cause summer temperatures to move above the flash point for eucalyptus and pine oil vapours.

The forest industry has been at pains to try to convince us that fires won't start in plantations because they don't have so much bush trash lying amongst the trees. Brenda's article highlights how impoverished the forestry argument is.

And as if government, left to its own devices, won't screw up enough, an article by Robert Freeman raises the question of 'Weimar moments' for the US with discredited Republicans acting as 'spoilers' for Obama, in much the same way as Rudd is exposed to pro-Howard 'spoilers' at various levels in the federal bureaucracy.

Finally an insightful piece from ICH about the nature of our enemy. While the focus is the US, I'm sure you'll spot plenty of correspondences with Australia.

At least we can rely on the media...

IT'S impossible to judge which program is currently winning the race to the bottom. But while we're on bottoms, let's get stuck into lard-arses. It's difficult to believe a poxy show could get poxier. Particularly when the show is *Biggest Loser*: fat people shrinking through humiliation for our viewing pleasure. If you're after top-shelf low rent you can't go past *Biggest Loser*. Ten has exceeded any of my previous low expectations of exploitative, voyeuristic, cobbled-up, derivative slop. To make this tried-and-true formula not just offensive but boring, takes real talent. [TheAge](#)

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In case you missed it

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IR pub & club grab [TheAustralian](#)

Conroy's parallel universe

The Australian Communications and Media Authority has produced a blacklist of illegal sites that they want to prevent Australian's from visiting. The list is totally secret and its publication is illegal so no-one can find out if they're on the list.

Action by ACMA has been taken to ban other sites that list any of the banned sites ([HeraldSun](#))([Australian](#)) a recent example being Wikileaks, a whistleblowers site. The government even banned access to Wikileaks's press release about the list.

There are severe problems of simple logic that mean the scheme is hopelessly designed and could crash the internet or blackout thousands of innocent Australian businesses and users.

I use the internet intensively and I have never come across a child porn site, or terrorism sites, or DIY nuclear weapons. Since there's virtually no chance of an accidental encounter with one of the banned sites, it's reasonable to assume that the government wishes to deny all access to whatever information they consider to be undesirable. To do this, they also need to remove all links to banned sites that exist in other websites.

So as it now stands, the ACMA system searches not only for banned sites, but also mentions of banned sites with fines of \$11,000 for infractions. This means that any person can put a banned address into another site, like the PM's website, the ATO, or a business competitor, and that site will be banned without the person or business knowing that it's banned because the list is secret. Their site will be on line, it just won't be able to be accessed by anyone in Australia.

The method ACMA proposes even allows a hacker to create a 'bomb' by starting a blank site, populating it's address all over other sites (e.g. government) then changing the content of the original site to something obviously banned. Once ACMA is warned, all of the sites with that address would be shut down without warning or explanation.

In terms of 'tech savvy', the Minister's website delivers users to 'Windows Live' if they choose to '[email the Minister](#)', in other words no link to the Minister is provided. I have written to advise them of this anomaly several times – no response – no action. It's not a good look for the Minister for the Digital Economy. It makes ACMA look 'tech dopey'.

The ACMA web censorship approach goes beyond mere lack of understanding of the internet however, it represents a failure to understand basic logic and a total failure to understand how free speech and the internet actually operates.

[Censorship?](#) Secret blacklists? Huge fines for infractions?

How long before hackers start putting illegal addresses into other groups' websites? How long before innocent victims are fined? How long before ACMA crashes most of Australia's on line capacity?

This is control by the State and bureaucracy run amok yet again.

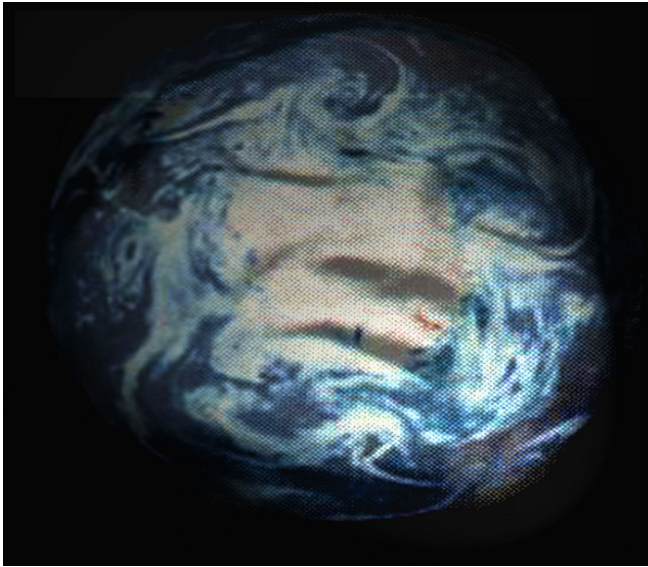
The result of their hamfisted approach has been to [draw attention](#) to illegal or undesirable sites, and attract the attention of people who otherwise wouldn't have ever come across those sites.

Brilliant.

More dysfunction with taxpayers coughing up for every crazy step.

The future is a vortex

Wednesday, March 18th 2009. Brenda Rosser.



Parts of Australia are experiencing unprecedented changes in temperature and rainfall patterns. These changes are associated with an unexpected phenomenon emerging in the Indian Ocean and also in the behaviour of the Antarctic Vortex combined with steadily increasing temperatures from rising greenhouse gases and the depletion of the ozone layer. Observed together they suggest the very strong possibility that Australians are now facing **abrupt climate change**. This is bringing very prolonged drought and extraordinary heat to the most heavily peopled and treed (mostly Eucalypt) regions of the country. As if this prospect is not frightening enough, it can be seen that climate is not the only threshold that is being crossed. The flashpoint for eucalypt vapour is also being breached by high daytime temperatures. This appears to guarantee the setting off of huge fire infernos in these semi-urban 'forests' on a scale that many would simply not be able to imagine.

Southeast Australia has been suffering from a drought over the last 15 years that is of an intensity that has not (as far as we are aware) been experienced before. This has left the landscape very dry. Climatologist [Caroline Ummenhofer](#), a research fellow with the University of New South Wales says that "normally drought conditions over eastern Australia are associated with El Nino, La Nina cycles in the Pacific Ocean (temperature changes that affect the rainfall and circulation over the whole Pacific Ocean and the surrounding areas)."

However, "El Nino is not able to explain this latest drought" says Ummenhofer. "Instead what we found is actually that the cause lies in Indian Ocean temperatures." "The Indian Ocean has a similar phenomenon to the El Nino, La Nina cycle. It's called the Indian Ocean Dipole, and it's a naturally occurring phenomenon and has been known for some time to influence Australian climate and Australian weather. The dipole oscillates between positive and negative phases and has neutral years in between as well, so the negative and the positive are the two extremes. And the normal wet conditions that you experience over south-east Australia are linked to the negative Indian Ocean dipole event which we haven't seen over the last seventeen years.....the last India Ocean Dipole event of the negative phase occurred in 1992. That is unusual. We haven't anywhere in the record over the last 120 years that we've investigated seen a similarly prolonged period without a single negative event"

Ummenhofer [observes](#) that most of the world's oceans are getting warmer, but particularly the Indian Ocean. "There might be indications that this could lead to changes in the characteristics of Indian Ocean dipole events."

The [Antarctic Vortex](#) near the South Pole is, like its equivalent in the Arctic pole region, a persistent, large-scale cyclone in the middle and upper troposphere and the stratosphere. Polar vortices are most powerful in the hemisphere's winter, when the temperature gradient is steepest, and diminishes or can disappear in the summer.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Third Assessment [Report](#) incorporated a chapter on '[radiative forcing](#)' which noted "several ... anthropogenic [man-made] causes for global climate change" These factors, that could be interacting with each other, including rising concentrations of greenhouse gases, the effects of man-made particulates in the atmosphere, and ozone depletion in the stratosphere.

The IPCC noted that scientific studies on these 'forcings' observed that the radiative effects of aerosols circulating in the atmosphere, whilst being largely confined to the Northern Hemisphere, may "propagate into the Southern Hemisphere via atmospheric dynamics". In addition to this, the polar vortex in both the north and south hemispheres were strengthened and the westerly winds in the mid latitudes were contracting and thus moving closer to the poles. These changes, the report noted, may be arising from the rising greenhouse gas concentrations as well as from ozone depletion in the stratosphere.

The implications behind the fact that the westerly winds are moving closer to Antarctica are quite frightening for Australians. "it appears the [vortex is shifting gear](#), and is spinning faster and faster, and getting tighter. As it does it's pulling the climate bands further south dragging rain away from the continent out into the southern ocean." In short, it means that Australia's unprecedented and horrific **drought may not go away!**

Climate (like other complex systems) does not behave in a simple linear fashion. That is, simple linear extrapolation is not always possible. Sudden changes in a regime (such as rainfall) can occur over wide areas. This is what's happened over Australia, even before the 1992 Indian Ocean dipole shift and the contraction of the southern vortex. Around 1945 Australia's summer half-year rainfall increased over large areas in the eastern part of the continent. However, in 1967-72 there was a sudden decrease in rainfall in south-west of Western Australia which has [not reversed since](#). "Now the same thing is happening to Melbourne." In 2003 rainfall there had fallen by nearly 20% in the previous 7 years. This dangerous pattern has continued and, at present, almost every mainland capital city is on increasingly severe water restrictions.

Similar examples of sudden changes in system behaviour often arise from an element of the system reaching a limit or threshold at which instability sets in, and the system moves into a new stable state. When the system is close to a threshold even quite small random events or trends can force the system into a different state. Distance from a threshold of this sort is a measure of system resilience or ability to cope with small variations in conditions ([Scheffer et al., 2001](#)).

So, indeed it does look like Australia is going through abrupt and dangerous climate change right now.

One very important question comes immediately to mind. How resilient is Australia's society and infrastructure now? Are they ready to deal with the biggest challenge in the nation's history?

After the most horrific fires ever recorded? After 15 years of intense heat and drought?

What other thresholds, apart from climate-related ones, are Australians dealing with? One critical and almost entirely [overlooked threshold](#) is the flashpoint for eucalyptus oil. "The flash point of a flammable liquid is the lowest temperature at which there can be enough flammable vapour to ignite, when an ignition source is applied." The 'flash point' for the vapours that rise from Australia's ubiquitous native trees is a mere 49 degrees Celsius. On Black Saturday this year the temperatures, in the shade, were around 47 degrees Celsius. In the full sun, however, temperatures are about 5-6 Celsius degrees hotter!

Another threshold associated with industrial tree plantations is the level of fuel loads that are amenable to control by our fire departments. The Canberra fire chief reported, soon after that city's plantation fires encroached and burnt out hundreds of houses in this urban environment, that the fuel load in tree plantations 3-7 years of age was the limit reached before the fires could be brought under control. {7:30 Report}

Those individuals living in southern Australia have every reason – whether they know it or not - to feel horrified by their prospects for next summer and for many summers after that. After all, "the past decade has recorded the largest expansion ever in [Eucalypt nitens and Radiata pine tree] plantation cover in this country" with an average annual planting of 76,000 hectares per year since 1997. [13],[14]. "The majority...is concentrated along the southern and eastern coasts, Tasmania and Western Australia." a [Senate review](#) reported.

Up until 'Black Saturday' Australians had been lulled into a false sense of security. Many families had no knowledge of the need for fire plans or of local geography as "the hottest day on record on top of the driest start to a year on record on top of the longest driest drought on record on top of the hottest drought on record" approached. Residents are largely oblivious to the enormous hazards the intense and ubiquitous plantings of Eucalypt and Radiata pine monocultures pose to their safety. [16] Residents of the burnt out Victorian township of Marysville saw "what looked like [an atomic bomb](#)" coming over the top of the town but had no idea as to the nature of its genesis.

But the truth is that the Black Saturday fires were the convergence of two huge fire balls that erupted in a tree plantation estate at East Kilmore and quickly joined with another fire front that began in a huge explosive inferno in another tree plantation at Churchill, some one hundred kilometers away. [18], [19]. "A two-kilometre stretch of power line in Kilmore East ... snapped during strong winds and record heat about 11am last Saturday [7th February 2009]. Within minutes a nearby pine forest was ablaze. Within six hours the fire had destroyed nearly every building in the towns in its path..."[20]. Around 4pm the Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) had advised the public that "the fire [was] gaining strength as it head[ed] towards pine plantations near Wandong." [21]. A large bluegum plantation is within a kilometer of the town. [22] From the Churchill end the CFA reported that "by lunch time plumes of smoke could be seen over [the township of] Churchill as a fire began one kilometre south-east of the town in a pine plantation. The fire, out of control, spread rapidly, threatening communities in Hazelwood South and the Jeeralangs. Traralgon South, Callignee, Woodside, Yarram, Carrjung, Gormandale and many more communities came under threat..."[23]. "By February 9, the Churchill fire was still burning out of control, with fronts through the Latrobe Valley and the Strzelecki Ranges" where

further large industrial plantations were burnt out. [24]

"We have seen the future" says Clive Hamilton. [25]. Some people ask whether Australians will continue to survive living within our tall Eucalypt forest digs. Perhaps the real forests will survive, though the trees may change; become stunted and sparse. With a few more fires the ugly industrial tree plantations will surely disappear. The surviving human residents will learn from the wombat and go underground.

US Facing a Weimar Moment

Published on Sunday, March 15, 2009 by [CommonDreams.org](#) By Robert Freeman

In early 1919, Germany put in place a new government to begin rebuilding the country after its crushing defeat in World War I. But the right-wing forces that had led the country into the War and lost the War conspired even before it was over to destroy the new government, the "Weimar Republic." They succeeded.

The U.S. faces a similar "Weimar Moment." The devastating collapse of the economy after eight years of Republican rule has left the leadership, policies, and ideology of the right utterly discredited. But, as was the case with Germany in 1919, Republicans do not intend to allow the new government to succeed. They will do everything they can to undermine it. If they are successful, the U.S. may yet go the way of Weimar Germany.

World War I left Germany utterly devastated. The landed aristocrats, industrial magnates, wealthy financiers, weapons makers, and the officer corps of the military that formed the locus of right wing power were completely discredited. Their failure in provoking and prosecuting the War was catastrophic, undeniable, and complete.

The economy was destroyed. Prices were at 800% of pre-war levels and rising quickly. Agriculture, pillaged for the War, lay in ruins. Social insurance payments for the War's injured, to widows and orphans, and newly unemployed soldiers were astronomical. And all this was before the cost of rebuilding was even begun.

At the same time, Germany faced massive reparations payments to the Allied victors, France and England. But Germany's foreign properties had been confiscated and its colonies turned over to the victors. The combination of these conditions, both domestic and international, made it extraordinarily difficult for the German economy to recover.

As a result of the failure of the right, the German people elected a moderately leftist government to lead the nation's rebuilding. It was named the Weimar Republic for the city in which the new post-imperial constitution was written. The new government was led by Friedrich Ebert, head of the German Socialist Party.

But the country's new parliamentary system had allowed dozens of parties to run, making it impossible for any one party to win an outright majority. Ebert's party had achieved the highest portion of votes, 38%, in the first post-War elections, held in January 1919. Ebert would have to govern by coalition.

It was at this time that the right wing made its crucial decision. Despite its shocking, naked failure over the prior decade, despite the horrific devastation it had wrought on the German people, despite the discrediting of everything they had purported to stand

for, they would fight Ebert, his new government, and its plans for recovery. They would do everything they could to make sure that the new government failed.

Their strategy was two-fold: first, stoke the resentment of the population about the calamitous state of its living conditions-no matter that those conditions had been created by the very right-wing oligarchs who now pretended to befriend the little guy. Rage is rage. It is glandular and unseeing. Once catalyzed it is easy to turn on any subject.

And stoking resentment was easy to do. Just before the War ended, the military concocted its most sensational lie: the German army hadn't actually been defeated. It had been "stabbed in the back" by communists, traitors, and Jews. It was an easy lie to sell. It entwined an attack on an alien political ideology - liberalism- with the latent, pervasive myth of German racial superiority.

The second strategy of the right was to prevent the new government from succeeding. To begin with, success of the left would conspicuously advertise the failure of the right. Moreover, success by the left would legitimize republican government, so hated by the oligarchs of the right. Much better for the people to be ruled by the self-aggrandizing right-wing autocracy that had governed Germany for centuries.

So the rightists set out to do everything they could to make it impossible for the leftists to govern. They would use parliamentary maneuver, shifting coalitions, domination of the new mass media, legislative obstruction, staged public relations spectacles, relentless pressure by narrow but powerful interests, judicial intimidation and, eventually, outright murder of their political opponents.

Contrition for their abject failure, humility for their destructive hubris, compassion for their crippled country-those had nothing to do with it. All they possessed was a blinding, visceral hatred of the left and a masturbatory lust for the return to power.

Eventually, they succeeded. Every setback in recovery - and there would inevitably be many - was met with hysterical demonizing of the left wing government. The lie was repeated relentlessly that the government was run by communists, traitors, and Jews-the same furtive cabal that had purportedly stabbed the country in the back at the end of the War. They steadily chipped away at the efficacy and, thereby, the legitimacy of successive republican governments.

By the time of the Great Depression, Adolph Hitler's ironically named National Socialist Party had become the biggest vote getter in the nation. The Nazis had once been derided as the lunatic fringe of the far right. But the "respectable" right-wing power brokers who had started and lost the Great War anointed Hitler Chancellor in January, 1933.

He immediately suspended the constitution, abolishing most civil liberties. He outlawed opposition parties, began a massive military build-up and a relentless propaganda campaign, and set Germany and the world onto the path of the greatest destruction it would ever know.

America now faces its own "Weimar moment."

The failure of right wing policy and leadership over the past eight years, especially in matters economic, is comparable to Germany's right-wing failure in World War I. It is catastrophic, undeniable, and complete.

Consider:

According to the World Economic Forum, forty percent of the entire world's wealth has been destroyed in the recent financial collapse. In the U.S. alone, between housing and the stock market, more than \$18 trillion in wealth has already been destroyed.

The private mega-banks that anchor the financial systems of the western world are bankrupt. This makes it all but impossible to jump-start the western world's economies which are heavily dependent on bank-system credit to operate.

More than 10,000 homes go into foreclosure every day. More than 20,000 people lose their job every day. And the collapse is accelerating, developing its own self-reinforcing dynamic. Job losses breed foreclosures, reducing demand, leading to more job losses and further degradation of the financial system. None of the stopgaps designed to stanch the bleeding have yet worked. There is no bottom in sight.

Meanwhile, debt has risen to astronomical levels. Reagan and Bush I quadrupled the national debt in only twelve years. Bush II doubled it again in only eight. It is now ten times higher than it was in 1980 when Reagan was elected. Total public and private debt exceeds 300% of GDP, half again higher than it was in 1929.

The government's unfunded liabilities, promises it has made to the American people but for which no payment source can be identified, now exceed \$60 trillion, a literally inconceivable sum that can never, will never, be paid. Federal Reserve economist Lawrence Kotlikoff has suggested that the U.S. government is "actuarially bankrupt."

The full measure of the nation's plight is revealed in Hillary Clinton's first trip as Secretary of State. It was to China, to beg them to fund Obama's new fiscal deficits. Without loans from China, the U.S. economy cannot be revived. The significance of this cannot be overstated: the U.S. no longer exercises sovereignty over its own economic affairs. That sovereignty now resides in the hands of China, the U.S.'s greatest long-term rival.

Thanks to Republican policies of massive debt and shipping jobs abroad, the U.S. has technically become a colony of China. It exports raw materials and imports finished goods, together with the capital to make up the difference. Should the Chinese decide not to lend the trillions of dollars the U.S. is begging for, the U.S. economy will implode, plummeting onto itself in a World Trade Center-like collapse that will leave dust clouds circling the planet for decades.

Notwithstanding the destruction inflicted on the economy by Republican policies, the most devastating breakdown is in the intellectual foundation on which right wing economic ideology itself is premised. Free market doctrine, the secular religion of right-wing America, is in utter, irretrievable shambles.

One of the most lofty tenets on which free markets are premised is their claim for themselves that they are "efficient," that is, that market prices always reflect "fundamental values" of assets. But if that's true, how could the world's largest insurance company, AIG, have lost 99.5% of its market value in only 18 months? How could the world's largest bank, Citibank, have lost 98% of its value over the same period?

How could the world's largest brokerage company, Merrill Lynch, have gone bankrupt and need to be bought by Bank of America? How could the world's largest car company, General Motors, have lost 95% of its value and stand on the threshold of extinction? How could the world's largest industrial

conglomerate, General Electric, have lost 85% of its value in only 18 months?

If the largest companies in the world, those at the very heart of the capitalist system itself, can lose virtually all of their value in only 18 months, what is the possible meaning of the phrases "efficient markets" and "fundamental value"?

The other core tenets of free market ideology are equally compromised. Major actors are clearly not rational - a breakdown of theological proportions admitted by no less an avatar of the cult than its pope himself, Alan Greenspan. Free markets clearly cannot, will not, regulate themselves. It is precisely their innate, irrepressible propensity for sociopathic greed and predatory fraud that has brought the whole of the world's economy to the precipice of collapse.

Free markets clearly do not align risk and reward, allocating capital to its most productive uses, as its promoters advertise. They clearly do not automatically return to equilibrium, but must be bailed out with trillions of dollars of injections from the shrinking coffers of the public to the ever-bulging coffers of a private priesthood of pillage and plunder.

And in perhaps the greatest indictment of all, one going back to its primeval roots in Adam Smith's eighteenth century opus, *The Wealth of Nations*, the unrestrained behavior of self-interested individuals clearly, manifestly, does not "coalesce as if by an Invisible Hand to the greatest good for the greatest number."

These are not peripheral premises that have failed. They are not tangential tenets. Efficient markets. Rational actors. Market equilibrium. Risk and reward. Self interest. These are the essential sacraments on which the entire free market system is founded. They are in tatters. And it isn't that any one of them has been discredited by the glaring, merciless force of events. All of them have been. All of them together. And all of them at the same time.

Free markets have long been the basis for a legitimate - though rightly debated - economic policy framework. But they have become little more than a robotically-recited cultural catechism, a mindless mantra mumbled to mask the looting of the nation's resources that is the true purpose of Republican economic policy as demonstrated by the staggering upward transfers of wealth that inevitably occur under Republican regimes. A more complete, conspicuous, catastrophic, and irrefutable repudiation of right wing leaders, right wing policies, and right wing ideology could not possibly be contrived.

So what is the right wing response?

They have adopted the strategy and tactics of the failed right wing plotters in Weimar Germany. First, stoke the resentment of the population about the increasingly dire state of its living conditions-no matter that those conditions were created by the very right-wing oligarchs who now pretend to befriend the little guy. Rage is rage. It is glandular and unseeing. Once catalyzed it is easy to turn on any subject.

Second, prevent the new government from succeeding in any meaningful endeavor. The Republicans have set all their efforts to doing everything they can to make sure the Obama administration fails. Rush Limbaugh's infamous, "I hope he fails" pronouncement is only the beginning of the fomenting of hatred from the right. As Limbaugh said, "Let's be honest. Every Republican in America is hoping for Obama's failure."

The same malignant hope oozes unadulterated from all the other Dogpatch Demagogues that rent themselves out to the

Republican party to foment resentment against anything liberal: Joe the "Plumber," Rick Santelli, Glenn Beck, Michael Savage, Ann Coulter, and virtually every other wing-nut operative whose intellectual stock in trade has been vaporized by the collision of right-wing policies with objective reality.

Equally so for the "respectable" members of the party, the all-but-three Republican members of Congress who refused to sign on to Obama's first stimulus package and continue to grandstand against every effort toward any form of progress. Contrition for their own abject failure, humility for their destructive hubris, compassion for their crippled country-those have nothing to do with it. All they possess is a blinding, visceral hatred of the left and a masturbatory lust for the return to power.

And what else can they do? Bereft of ideas, bankrupt in ideology, architects of collapse, obstruction is all they have. If Obama is successful, it will not only advertise the full extent of their failure, it will provide a model of liberal governance that would render Republicans irrelevant for decades, much as FDR's success left them out in the political cold for an entire generation. Liberal failure is a matter of life and death for Republicans.

And it's not at all clear that the liberals won't fail. No one should underestimate the task at hand. Never before - not even during the Great Depression - has the country inherited such a daunting, intractable set of economic problems: a debt burden so crushing; inequality so vast; a loss of financial sovereignty so constricting; an intellectual edifice so bankrupt; a private economy so uncompetitive; or an opposition so callously self interested in its own recovery and so cavalierly disinterested in the nation's.

The economy has been so damaged, successful rescue requires threading a series of policy needles, each of them so complex in their own right that none could be solved by any administration of the past 50 years. This includes rehabilitating and re-regulating the nation's banking system, restructuring health care, reducing national dependence on oil, reviving manufacturing so as to reduce the trade deficit, rebuilding the nation's crumbling infrastructure, dealing with a soaring national debt, trying to resuscitate a collapsing housing market, and all the while maintaining the safety net under 77 million baby boomers entering retirement with a net worth 60% what it was only 18 months ago.

Success will require much more than luck, hard work, brilliant policy, or soaring rhetoric. It will require cooperation and contribution from every American. It is those two offerings, cooperation and contribution, that Republicans are intent on withholding, the better to ensure Obama's failure. Simply put, the Republicans hate Democrats more than they love America.

If they succeed in derailing Obama's efforts, the cost will be incalculable.

After World War I, one of the consequences of the liberal government's failure was Adolph Hitler. Hitler had a genius for exploiting the resentment of the German people for their condition. More than 80% of the Nazi party's members were unemployed. It was these legions of idle thugs who made up the ranks of Hitler's brownshirt militia, the SA. The right wing oligarchy that had set out from the beginning to destroy the Weimar Republic recognized the potency of resentment and Hitler's genius at exploiting it. It was they who sponsored Hitler's ascension to Chancellor in 1933.

Resentment and obstruction are all the right wing in America have to peddle. Their policies are utterly discredited. Their

ideology - even by its own standards - is a sham. They are so bereft of leaders, their de facto leader is a former drug addicted, thrice-divorced radio talk show host. That is literally the best they can muster. But they have built a national franchise inciting the downwardly mobile to blame the government, not the right, for their problems, exactly as Hitler did in the 1920s.

The Republican propensity for fascism must not be underestimated. Witness their phony justifications for the war in Iraq, fanning the flames of nationalistic aggression, just as Hitler did with Austria, the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, and Poland in the 1930s. Consider their symbiotic embrace of corporate interests in the oil, weapons, telecommunications, pharmaceutical, finance, and other industries-the same type of corporate interests that sponsored Hitler's ascent to power. Look at their efforts to dismantle civil liberties with the Patriot Act and the Military Commissions Act. Or their relentless, pervasive propaganda laundered through their corporate-owned right-wing media machine.

These are the classic hallmarks of fascism. The strategy is to obstruct recovery, facilitate collapse, and then incite the faux-populism of public resentment to re-install a corporatist oligarchy which has failed, but which will not abide a reduction of its privileges or a diminution of its control. It is a fetid, seditious agenda, awaiting only its own latter day mustachioed messiah for its final fulfillment.

World War I was a once-in-a-millennium upset in the architecture of global power. In four years, it shifted the center of that power from Europe to the United States. But failure now by the U.S. will shift that center once again, from the United States to China, out of the western world where it has resided for the past 500 years. The psychic shock to the billion-odd people living in western civilization, with its liberal democracies, capitalist economies, and Enlightenment ideals, will be incalculable, irretrievable.

This shift may be inevitable and only a matter of time. It is quite possible that the damage inflicted on the western world's economy by rapacious Republicans is already beyond repair. But it will be tragedy beyond measure if such a shift is consummated by the very wrecking crew that took us down the road to ruin, all the while so unctuously proclaiming "patriotism" as its crowning ideal. They are not patriots and their goal is not the revival of American power. It is the revival of their own power, even at the expense of America's. They represent a very dangerous threat to the nation's future.

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We Have Seen the Enemy...

By Timothy V. Gatto

March 19, 2009 "Information Clearing House" -- The United States continues to show its ignorance to the rest of the world by grouping everyone into friends, enemies, and potential friends or enemies. This translates loosely into categorizing the nations or cultures around the world into friend or foe. The worst part of this whole scenario is that many in this country actually believe all this rhetoric. We are a nation that has elevated national opinion into a fine art. In reality, we are a country that has a media that tells us how to think. It tells us what we like, what we approve of, what we despise and how we should act. We have become what we once hated. Politically correct Americans today have become the "plastic people" we criticized in the sixties and seventies.

This has made life easier. We can join the conversation around just about any water cooler and fit right in. We know what we can say safely and what opinions to keep to ourselves. We have developed an entire vocabulary that enables us to sound wise and learned while not really saying anything of consequence. We have come to the realization that the only people who have valid opinions are in the media. If it hasn't been uttered in front of a camera or written about in a newspaper or magazine, it just isn't a valid opinion and not fit for public discussion. We have changed from the most innovative and revolutionary nation on Earth from our beginnings, into a nation of that has perfected the art of "group-think". We have perfected the art of acquiescence and learned the waypoints to the paths of least resistance, and we have done so willingly.

Americans have learned where to tune into current opinions. We have designated the spokesmen for the right, the left, and the vocabulary we need to mimic the same arguments we hear in the media, replete with the "buzzwords" and catch phrases. We have freed ourselves from the burden of having our own opinions and making our own decisions. Critical thinking is frowned upon in our schools and in our boardrooms. Thinking "outside the box" has become a metaphor for saying the same thing in a different way. Those that truly "think outside the box" will find themselves looking up the latest keywords to slip into their resumes.

How did a nation that took so much pride in lively debate and different opinions become a nation that questions the loyalty of people who have dared to disagree with the policymakers in Washington? When did political dissent become a reason to end up grounded at an airport because you found out at a most inconvenient time that your name had been mysteriously added to a "no-fly list"? When did the American government begin building FEMA camps and what exactly is their purpose? When did Congress become the rubber stamp for policies of reading the correspondence and listening in on the conversations of the American public?

9/11 was the start. It doesn't matter at this point who was behind the attack on America and what the reasons were, the results of that day have been etched into the moral fabric of the American nation. "We have met the enemy... and he is us" (http://www.igopogo.com/we_have_met.htm)

Indeed! We have certainly met the enemy and he does appear to be us, who could have known that in 1951 such prophetic words would be written almost sixty years before they came to be the truth? Our society has become afraid of its own people. Who is

the enemy? Why were the Patriot Acts, the Military Commissions Act of 2006, the expanded FISA laws, The John Warner Defense Act (that suspended Posse Comitatus) and all of the draconian attacks on our privacy and our freedoms enacted? Is the enemy of today so much more dangerous than the enemies that came before them? Exactly who ARE the enemies of today? How did it come to be that Congress was threatened with martial law if it didn't pass the first bailout of the financial institutions? Is radical Islam the enemy? Are America's enemies our own dissident citizens? Is our own government acting contrary to our own best interests? Are religions becoming political movements? What exactly is "Christian Zionism" and why are religious leaders praying for Armageddon? What is so wrong with the planet that the only solution to its problems is its destruction?

This nation is clearly at odds with itself. Are we working towards a society that stifles political diversity? Are we truly afraid of our own citizens? While the rest of the world gradually eases religion out of governmental policy, America seems to embrace religious extremes. We criticize Islamic religious fundamentalists; we accept Christian fundamentalists and support a Jewish State that denies the most basic freedoms to its citizens that are not Jewish while they support right wing Jewish leaders that become more radical in calling for the destruction of everything Palestinian with each passing day. These are truly the times that try men's souls by the discourse of the public. These problems exist but they are kept out of sight by a mainstream media that tries its best to ignore them. It won't be too long before we realize that the freedoms we have fought for and respected are non-existent. We already need passports to travel to the Caribbean and laws are in place that will require passports to visit Canada and Mexico. The truth is that Mexico is swiftly becoming a failed State largely because of the American "War on Drugs" that has made drug trafficking such a lucrative business that it threatens the government that tries to enforce nearly impossible drug laws demanded by the United States.

Our "War on Dugs" our "Global War on Terror" and our meddling in other nations politics and our military bases in over 130 different countries have made America a nation to be feared. Meanwhile America can't even come to terms with the problems that besiege it. We not only refuse to come to terms with our problems, we don't even acknowledge them. The worldwide Depression has become the focal point of our government and the people; while we watch out freedoms we have enjoyed for so long come to an end.

We need to confront all the situations that threaten the way we see ourselves. We have seen the enemy and he is us. We may not have started this assault on America, but through our silence and inaction we have encouraged our own demise. America could also become a failed State unless we face our greatest enemy; ourselves

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