

The Big Picture

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“News to use & amuse”



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The enemy is...?

Whether we look at the growing debacle that was Victoria's 'protection' against bushfires, the leadership, management and planning failures that have delivered too few medical professionals or skilled tradespeople, or the financial failures that resulted in so many companies and government miring themselves in debt, it's clear that we need to shift our thinking into a different mode to change our situation.

Orlov has listed some of the modern risks to our social structures as...

1. Financial collapse (e.g. excess debt, dodgy securities)
2. Global warming
3. Overpopulation
4. Habitat destruction and mass extinctions
5. Fossil fuel and other resource depletion
6. Political and religious extremism
7. Nuclear proliferation
8. Ozone hole
9. 'Democracies' that elect criminally insane leaders

On p 69 of his book [Putting Systems to Work](#) Hitchens shows the pathways that systems take that lead to decay and collapse. The main 'cause' of decay and collapse is the growing dominance of one idea or response to the overall environment which leaves the system exposed when changes supercede the idea's usefulness.

As illustration, here's [Orlov's](#) concept of how to use bureaucracy to prepare for social collapse – e.g. that threatened by severe climate changes etc as above...

1. Formulate comprehensive plan
2. Generate community enthusiasm
3. Get 'buy in' from industry/government/UN/Vatican etc
4. Use mass media to create public awareness
5. Form action committees and grant structures
6. Develop legislation and lobby parliaments
7. Secure corporate sponsorships
8. Execute pilot programs
9. Publish papers, present results at conferences
10. WATCH THE COLLAPSE!

The natural and proven survival strategy is variety or varied responses and ideas. The reason for this is that the system is more likely to be equipped to deal with unpredictable change because it has a wider range of responses available to it.

Our best response to the growing complexity of our environment will be the creative development of new ideas of thinking and living for ourselves and our communities.

As if in response to this need, the dinosaurs in the ALP mob has now banned the use of the word 'lie' or 'liar' in Tasmania's parliament. Green MP Kim Booth has just been [prevented from representing his electorate](#) for a week because he used one of

those words in the parliament.

Can you imagine?

Here's a chamber filled with our top 'decision makers' who believe that editing common words and descriptions from their speech will make a useful difference to our situation. Just at a time when we need greater debate, more ideas, greater creativity.

One dysfunctional response to threat is denial – like the Chamberlain government in the UK pretending that Hitler wasn't a threat, the ALP in Tasmania is trying to hide from other people's opinions and to create the false impression that their favoured industries, like forestry, do not speak untruths.

What next? Ban the use of words like 'failure', 'over budget' and 'waste'?

This is victory of spin over substance and denial over openness.

Equally important is that the government has effectively prevented the people of Tasmania from being represented by Mr Booth. They are taking our taxes but refusing us representation – again.

We are all paying politicians to represent us in the parliament but that's not what's happening.

Instead of government finding ways to help community groups work together, or build bridges across industry and community divides, Labor governments are throwing their weight behind a selected group while denying a voice to the people who pay them.

As the Tas parliament bans elected reps for using words like 'liar', we read that even after 2 years of 'intervention'...

INDIGENOUS children are six times more likely to suffer abuse or neglect than non-indigenous children and 28 times more likely to wind up in jail, a report has found. [TheAge](#)

Why is it happening? Or not happening?

NOT one of the hundreds of new houses promised in 2007 for remote communities as part of the Northern Territory intervention has been built.

A day after Kevin Rudd declared that indigenous disadvantage was worse than previously thought, [The Weekend Australian](#) can reveal that layers of bureaucracy are strangling a \$700 million plan to address poor and overcrowded housing.

Perhaps the enemy is the State?

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That was the week that was

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Governance & spin

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Chinese billionaire funding our MPs [SMH](#)

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Pulp mill pollution fallout [Mercury](#)

Poll reveals mill doubts [Mercury](#)

Pulp mill refuses to die [Australian](#)

Urban sprawl eats Sydney food supply [Telegraph](#)

Dire economy hinders organic sector [TheAge](#)

Climate/water/energy/environment

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Alarm about NSW water auction [SMH](#)

\$1.2 bn Qld desal plant a dud [CourierMail](#)

Huge opportunities for Aus bus in energy revolution [TheAge](#)

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Quiet week on this front for some reason

Economy/social/shelter/transport

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Ex fed MP flights cost \$8.3 million [TheAge](#)

Children are more than little consumers [TheAge](#)

Howard policies reverse gender equity [SMH](#)

Bris public transport too costly/unreliable: Survey [CourierMail](#)

Melbourne housing too costly for key workers [TheAge](#)

Report on Aborigine health achievements 'devastating' [TheAge](#)

Brothel led recovery defies downturn [TheWest](#)

Vic transport – failure subsidised – success penalised [TheAge](#)

World

Huge US military offensive in Afghanistan [RealNewsVideo](#)

Should Punishment Be Profitable?

By Clair MacDougall © [NewMatilda](#) 1 July 2009

The furore about prison privatisation in NSW raises important questions about who should be permitted to enforce punishment.

In last year's mini-budget, the NSW Government announced plans to privatise two prisons: Cessnock Correctional Centre in the Hunter Valley and Parklea Correctional Centre in Sydney. Opposition to prison privatisation was spearheaded by the NSW Public Service Association (PSA) and resulted in the plan to privatise Cessnock prison being [scrapped](#).

The PSA's "Stop the Cell-Off" [campaign](#), widely supported by prison workers and officers, coincided with a NSW Legislative Council inquiry into the privatisation of prisons and prison-related services, the [results](#) of which were released last month. The committee cautiously endorsed the privatisation of Parklea prison but recommended that no further prisons be privatised in NSW. Significantly, it pointed to the need for increased government monitoring of private prisons and greater transparency. The NSW Government will continue to assess whether prison-related services, such as transportation and court security, will be privatised.

The PSA, on the other hand, argues that the proposed Parklea privatisation will compromise the welfare and safety of both prison staff and inmates on the grounds that private companies will be looking to cut staff and costs. Furthermore, it claims that it is ethically wrong to profit from the "suffering" of others, suggesting that the profit motive of private corporations may lead to higher levels of incarceration.

The push toward privatisation in Australia began in the late 1980s and the motivation was cost-reduction. There are currently [seven privately-run prisons](#) in Australia: Fulham Correctional Centre and Port Phillip Prison in Victoria, Junee Correctional Centre in NSW, Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre and Borallon Correctional Centre in Queensland, Acacia Prison in Western Australia and Mount Gambier Prison in South Australia. The NSW Government's privatisation proposal, reportedly initiated by Commissioner of Corrective Services Ron Woodham, also focused on cost reduction. The recent parliamentary inquiry, however, found no conclusive evidence that privatisation of the two prisons would cut costs by \$15 million. A 2005 NSW parliamentary inquiry into prison privatisation also found that no definitive conclusions could be drawn as to the cost-effectiveness of privately run prisons.

Worryingly, several privately operated prisons and detention centres in Australia have already been closed down or reverted to state control due to mismanagement and abuse. The Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre in Victoria was taken into state control after widespread reports of abuse, drug use and self-harm led the Correctional Services Commissioner to launch an independent investigation. The Commissioner found the contractor — the Corrections Corporation of Australia — had failed to maintain security and address drug abuse problems within the prison. Woomera Immigration Detention Centre was [closed down](#) in 2003 after reports of detainee abuse.

Internationally, the major push for prison privatisation began in California during the 1980s, due to the growth of the prison population and the consequent overcrowding of the state's prisons. California now has the biggest prison system in the western industrialised world, and over two-thirds of the 348 prisons and detention centres in the US are privately operated.

By 1998, prison privatisation had become such a politicised issue in the US that *Atlantic Monthly* journalist Eric Schlosser coined the now ubiquitous term "[prison-industrial complex](#)". Schlosser used this term to reflect the "set of bureaucratic, political and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment, regardless of the actual need", and to draw attention to the problematic relationship between corporations, profit and punishment.

The growth of the prison system in California shows that the profit imperative of privately run prisons, coupled with government policy, can lead to increased levels of incarceration. There is a great deal of evidence that prison privatisation — rather than giving rise to a more cost-efficient and "effective" penal system — in fact encourages higher levels of sentencing and incarceration of non-violent offenders and increased spending on corrections.

There are significant differences between the size, scale and ethos of the criminal justice and penal systems in Australia and the US. However, the companies that are major players in private prisons in Australia are subsidiaries of US prison companies, such as the GEO group, Management and Training Corporation, and Australian Integrated Management Services — as well as Australasian Correctional Management, the operator of Woomera Immigration Detention Centre and a subsidiary of American company Wackenhut Security Corporation.

Privately owned prisons can't be held accountable in the same way as state-run bodies because of "commercial privilege". This means that what goes on inside privatised prisons is often not disclosed to the wider community because commercial law and privileges inhibit disclosure of information to the public. Furthermore, there is often insufficient government monitoring and regulation of private prisons, and state and federal governments are not always informed about what is happening on the inside. This was evident in both the cases of Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre and the Woomera Immigration Detention Centre. While private operators are ultimately accountable to the state, the lack of transparency and government oversight that is a product of the commercial nature of the relationship, means that they cannot be held accountable by the public.

Advocates of private prisons argue that a clear line can be drawn between the sentence handed down by the courts, and the enforcement of that sentence within prison. However, Wollongong University finance academic Jane Andrew, who has written extensively on the issue of accountability in relation to private prisons, draws special attention to the quasi-judicial powers of private prisons, which are not subject to the same checks, balances and procedures of the legal system. Many decisions regarding the mode and methods of punishment are made within the prisons themselves, rather than by the courts. For example, prison management can transfer inmates between different security levels, place them in solitary confinement, strip them of certain privileges and even play a role in determining the length of a prisoner's term. Because private companies are not democratically elected, nor are they accountable in the same way state bodies are, granting them the power to make decisions about the length and methods of punishment is ethically fraught.

Our society justifies punishment in the name of democracy, but that means we need to make sure our system of punishment is run according to democratic principles — principles such as justice, transparency and democratic accountability. Can we realistically expect these principles to be upheld if we allow private companies to play a significant role in enforcing

punishment?

Bitz

I couldn't resist sharing this devastating description of reaction to a reality makeover show...

The premise — if you were lucky enough to miss the entire series before its timely and thankful demise last Wednesday — was simple enough: find an ordinary pair of Australians and, over the course of 10 fun-filled days, with the help of a team of kindly "industry specialists", make them feel inadequate, repulsive and negatively judged by the general public before moulding them into some kind of rigid, stitched-up plastic mannequin whose very perma-grinning existence validates every hateful, self-serving myth the beauty industry has ever dished up to a salivating race of human beings terrified of nature's ineluctable creep. [SMH](#)

The Overkill Emergency

1st July 2009 Brenda Rosser

Two years after the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#) a former Professor of American Civilisation at Brandeis University, Max Lerner, published his book entitled 'The Age of Overkill'.

Mr Lerner – whose column for the New York Post earned him a place on the master list of Nixon political opponents [1] - noted that the early 1960s represented an historical epoch when, for the first time, at least two great powers have sufficient strength to obliterate each other – to overkill any and all enemy nations.

Lerner went on to describe what was then, and now, “the core of ‘classical politics’” [2]. He wrote that the crucial difference between classical economics and classical politics was that:

“the core of classical economics was wealth, while the core of classical politics was power. In the case of economics, with the acquisition of wealth at its heart, once could cling to a self-regulating system, but only so long as the naïve cult of self-interest could still sustain an economic order. In the case of classical politics, with power at its heart, there could be no question of laissez faire and self-regulation unless the balance-of-power principle is viewed as an automatic self-regulatory mechanism; power was the arbiter as well as the prize, and there was nothing to replace unless it was power itself.”

The animus of classical politics, Lerner explained is prescriptive, competitive and hostile. “The aim of each state is not only to acquire more power for itself, but to prevent enemies and competitors from acquiring more – or any.” [3]

The world, under this system of thought and action, becomes a world of enemies, potential enemies, allies and potential allies. The way to have peace, on the other hand, is to have bigger and better arms than the enemy. “The trouble is that the history to which [the followers of classical politics] point for confirmation is one that confirms the wrong thing. True, the world has always organized for war, but then the world has always got to war it organized for, and has had to pay for it. The payment this time will be intolerably high, which is why overkill has transformed the power problem.” [4]

“The fact is that the nation-state has ceased to be a viable unit of world order exactly because it cannot get along without at some point using its showdown war power, which it dare not do under overkill conditions; yet, when faced with a threat to its identity and survival as a nation, it dare not refrain from invoking its war power, however powerless it be.” [5]

Lerner didn't suggest that the ‘power principle’, which he also refers to as ‘the principle of evil’ would be discarded in the then, near future. But he does point out that the ruling elites know that the dominance of this principle is a “**short range perspective**”.

“I suppose that relatively sane men still play with the idea of getting universal peace through universal empire....But, unilateralism aside, the road to world empire is unlikely to be achieved except by a world nuclear war – which might mean that there would not be very much of a world to enjoy the blessings of universal peace.” [6]

Today, forty five years after the publication of Max Lerner's book, global citizens urgently need to use a much broader definition of ‘overkill’ and to treat the issue as the planetary emergency that it is. “Overkill is the use of excessive force or action that goes further than is necessary to achieve its goal.” [7] A glaring example of this, in the environmental and industrial context, would be the widespread use of residual and very toxic chemicals that are [applied in a manner GUARANTEED to drift](#)

[into drinking water catchments](#). This abuse is happening even when there are no [long term economic justifications](#) for the use of these toxic chemicals.

In Siberia “the new rich Russians are hunting Siberian wolves from helicopters.” In Venezuela corporations interested in oil extraction and soya cropping send menacing guards to stop the Indians tribe of Guarani from “trying to protect the remnants of the forest in which they find all their needs for building their huts, natural medicine for health and food.” [8] In Australia – in our time of desperate climate emergency [9], [10], [11] - the world's most carbon dense native forests are continuing to be intensely logged and converted to woodchip for sale to Japan and China. [12]

It turns out that overkill in classical politics has its equally threatening counterpart in economics. Max Lerner wrote that the historical concern in the classical form of economics was “largely with cyclical and fiscal theory, and with the controls needed to set the malfunctioning right.” In the postclassical stage of economics this discipline “cuts across capitalist and socialist systems, and focuses on economic growth.” [13] “These growth ideas are being introduced largely into cultural systems where they are not at home” It turns out that economic growth is also “not at home” on a *finite* planet.

Economics, though, has always served the political agenda.

“The Government is not now and never has been an independent engine operating in a vacuum under its own momentum”; rather, it had ties to the profit economy by the common ideas and connections among people in influential positions. Men in government could not escape a philosophy of private advancement inherent in an economy characterized by intense competition for advantage, for raw materials, and for markets. “In short domestic politics and economics enter into foreign policy and influence its course.” [14]

Today we have, not one, but six global crises as a result of the long term use by Governments of the ‘power principle’ in both economics and politics. They are: the prospect of nuclear overkill; climate change; peak oil; global resource depletion; alarming species extinction rates and global economic collapse. They're all related to each other.

Activist Paul Gilding tries to give a picture of what just one aspect of one of our global crises may look like. Taking the example of sea level rise from climate change:

“We thought maybe 0.3 to 0.5 metres by 2100 was the average sea level rise forecast, a few years ago. It's now gone from 0.3 to 0.5 to 0.8 to 2 or more. Right? So 0.8 to 2 metres by 2100 is a, technically speaking, a shitload of sea level rise. This is a lot of ocean increase, remembering especially that storm surge, in a storm goes in obviously according to geology, around 50 times the level of sea level rise, so a metre of sea level rise takes a storm surge 50 metres more inland, right? So the impacts of this are very, very severe, and very, very significant, and actually not the most important issue in climate change but the one we understand the most because it makes for good graphics.” [15]

We need to find a way to deny every nation its war-making power. We need to also coexist with diverse other life forms on the planet. Quickly. Our form of ‘civilization’ is killing the planet. Our predicament is that we cannot save ourselves with our own will power alone, for to do so “will only make the evil in us stronger than ever.” [16]

“The instinct to command others, in its primitive essence, is a carnivorous, altogether bestial and savage instinct. Under the influence of the mental development of man, it takes on

a somewhat more ideal form and becomes somewhat ennobled, presenting itself as the instrument of reason and the devoted servant of that abstraction, or political fiction, which is called the public good. But in its essence it remains just as baneful, and it becomes even more so when, with the application of science, it extends its scope and intensifies the power of its action. If there is a devil in history, it is this power principle. "

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin

[1] Max Lerner http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Lerner on 1st July 2009

[2] 'The Age of Overkill – a Preface to World Politics' by Max Lerner. 1964. Publisher William Heinemann Ltd, Great Britain. Page 20.

[3] Ibid. Page 21

[4] Ibid. Pages 253 and 254

[5] Lerner qualifies this statement by pointing out that in actual fact the nation-state no longer exists in any sovereign sense "except in diplomatic abracadabra and in its formal voting in the Un and other international bodies. The working power units have become the power systems, which operate from power centers." They hold " a moving power equilibrium in the world..." Ibid. Page 254

[6] Ibid. Pages 254 and 255

[7] <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Overkill>

[8] Overkill in Conservation and in the Pristine Forests. <http://www.en.articlesgratuits.com/overkill-in-conservation-and-in-the-pristine-forests-id2597.php>

[9] Outside of the Vortex. Brenda Rosser. Wednesday, March 18, 2009

<http://econspeak.blogspot.com/2009/03/outside-of-vortex.html>

[10] Australia's catastrophic Summer of 2009. Brenda Rosser. Friday, February 6, 2009
<http://econspeak.blogspot.com/2009/02/australias-catastrophic-summer-of-2009.html>

[11] Climate Code Red. The case against carbon trading
Brenda Rosser. Tuesday, May 19, 2009
<http://econspeak.blogspot.com/.../climate-code-red-case-against-carbon.html>

[12] Preserving old-growth forests is vital to saving the planet
GAVAN McFADZEAN. June 2009
<http://tasmaniantimes.com/index.php?/weblog/article/preserving-old-growth-forests-is-vital-to-saving-the-planet/>

[13] 'The Age of Overkill – a Preface to World Politics' by Max Lerner. 1964. Publisher William Heinemann Ltd, Great Britain. Page 153.

[14] American historian Charles Beard from his "Idea of National Interest" pages 89 – 120 as quoted in 'The American Century – the rise and decline of the United States as a world power' by Donald W White. Yale University Press. 1996. ISBN: 0-300-05721-0. Page 6.

[15] 'The great disruption' 14 June 2009
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/backgroundbriefing/stories/2009/2592909.htm#transcript>

[16] Heini Arnold.