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“In Support of Progress”

Newsletter

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Winter blues?

How bizarre!

Last week, journalist Charles Wooley wrote that we had become the “Silly State”.

I had been penning this edition of the newsletter when his article appeared. I was reflecting that the “silly season”, once the province of journalistic licence (read lack of news) at Christmas time, had become transferred to the middle of winter with the actions of various folk providing bountiful examples of silly things for journalists to write about.

Thinking that Charles had pipped me at the post I walked away. However, recent events have encouraged me back to the theme, but this time “silly” has been replaced with “BIZARRE”.

USA

President Trump has been endeavouring to negotiate a round of talks with the North Korean leader, using a novel form of diplomacy – sarcasm (eg Little Rocketman) and threats (my arsenal is bigger than your arsenal etc) - to reach a win-win situation. On again and off again, the talks are presently back on.

Former basketball star Dennis Rodman is on his way to help the talks, while Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, has offered the following less than helpful commentary while addressing an audience in Israel:

“Well, Kim Jong Un got back on his hands and knees and begged for the summit to proceed, which is exactly the position you want to put him in.”

Trump's Secretary of State has been quick to point out that Giuliani does not represent the administration, but who knows these days. Meanwhile, Trump has met with Kim Kardashian who was pleading for a prisoner to be pardoned. Trump granted that pardon. Celia Pacquola said that perhaps Trump has got his Kims mixed up. I hope she was joking.

CANBERRA

The Canberra scene is in the same mould.

In the Senate:

Pauline Hanson has proven once again that the One Nation party is not a party at all. The latest implosion has NSW Senator Burston refusing to be expelled for standing by a commitment made which she broke. She began with four Senators, now she is down to two. One more to go? Meanwhile Hanson has gone to London to recover from her latest trauma. It's all been just too much!

Jacqui Lambie, who walked out on the Clive Palmers party, has faced a similar coup with Steve Martin walking away from her party (read “Network”) to join the National Party. He didn't stand aside to let her back in. What was she thinking?

Both incidents show up the unique difficulties experienced by movements based around a single ego-driven personality.

Burton and Martin join a growing band of Senators who, having been elected by the electorate to represent one platform, have shifted (or are being shifted) to another platform. These include Tim Storer (NXT to Independent), Fraser Anning (One Nation to Independent to Katter), Lucy Gichuhi (Family First to Liberal), and Cory Bernardi (Liberal to Australian Conservatives)

Added to this list are those nine Senators who have had to leave through the dual citizenship saga. Read Larisa Waters, Scott Ludlum, Nick Xenophon (who left before he was pushed), Steve Parry, Jacqui Lambie, Fiona Nash, Malcolm Roberts, Skye Kakoschka-Moore and Katy Gallagher,

No-one could call the Senate calm, quiet and sedate. The situation is bizarre.

Dual citizenship

The dual citizen fiasco needs to be resolved sensibly. Changing the Constitution is a very messy and time-consuming slog. The document was written at a time when Australians were British citizens, and thus the situation did not arise. None of the above-mentioned former Senators and MHR's can be accused of having a dual loyalty, and yet each has been caught up in a birth or parental situation not of their choosing, many within the "British" or "British colony" orbit. Four MP's now face by-elections because of similar circumstances and join the list of John Alexander and Barnaby Joyce.

A matter of judgment

Barnaby's tell-all showed a man on the edge. Having found himself in a crisis of his own making, his response to it and his handling of the matter was - well, sad. It was a matter that should have been kept private - by him. Trouble was although on the one hand it was a private matter, on the other he was Deputy PM. And his state of mind was and is therefore very much a public matter.

Meanwhile, in Charles' Silly State...

Of health...

The Federal byelection has brought the big guns back into the state. Cable cars, TAFE funding, Hydro pump storage and anything else politicians can think of are all on the table. The electors of Braddon should be truly flattered.

Brett Whiteley is the Liberal candidate for Braddon, and it was Whiteley who as shadow state Minister for Health argued so passionately for the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) to be rebuilt on its present site. Seeing campaigning with him was the present Minister for Health, who has made blaming his predecessors an art form and complains that the Opposition is "playing politics" with Health. It would have been an interesting discussion between them regarding the RHH.

While making the non-existent and totally irrelevant point that there was a leadership challenge in the offing within the Opposition (which I suspect he believes is not playing politics) he reiterated that all was fine at the Royal. Meanwhile the RHH ramped up its operating level to Level 4 (read emergency) yet again. Perhaps the Minister should stop wandering around the countryside and return to his desk where the situation at the Royal has become acute.

It is obvious the Minister has no solutions to this ongoing problem. And if he believes the new wing of the hospital will relieve the crisis he had better think again. It's not just the extra space which is the issue. He should spend some time considering how the new building will work in with the old. He might be in for a big and a very unpleasant surprise!

...and housing

The Minister for Housing continues to believe that controlling the private rental market will somehow alleviate the housing crisis that is engulfing him. Issues are being raised about putting the brakes on BandB accommodation ie the private market. However, that would only put a brake on tourism. The fact that house prices have risen so rapidly is as much a signal of a failure of past public housing policy as it is a signal of a growing economy. Because both statements are true.

The President of the REIT, writing recently in a personal capacity, advises that the problem has been some time in the making, that tourism and university students have "soaked up" much of the available private housing, and that the answer lies in more public housing.

The availability of housing stock, or rather the lack thereof, is the fundamental issue, and the Minister must come to terms with this.

As an aside, it is also of interest to note that one Hobart alderman has made the point the current "planning environment" has slowed down the Council's approvals process for private development, exacerbated by a culture of anti-development within Council's ranks.

These are government issues to resolve, and that will not be done by clamping down on private landlords.

Hobart City Council

Another councillor, a Greens alderman, has declared she will resign from the Greens to stand as an independent candidate in the upcoming mayoral elections. She is obviously taking a leaf from the Senate!

She will need to stand both as an alderman and as mayor - a ridiculous legislative requirement as mayors should be chosen from the ranks of the aldermen elected. She believes such action will enable her to appeal to a wider audience. I suspect just the opposite will occur, as she will be seen to be walking away from her principles for personal aggrandisement.

Mind you, the current mayor has made some rather peculiar decisions recently. As an act of reconciliation with the aboriginal community during Reconciliation week he endorsed from one faction of that community a new name for the City of Hobart. This is fascinating from a number of levels.

The first is that this faction did not consult with other members of the aboriginal community – their argument was that they knew what the name should be so they did not have to. This is totally at odds with demands to be fully consulted on other matters which may or may not affect them. It may well have been that the full community may not have agreed on the name, or even whether such a name should be submitted at all. Certainly, other groups have complained of this autocratic approach

Secondly, I can fully understand geographic features having names - hills, mountains, rivers, regions, coastline. But a European settlement? That is another issue altogether. Bizarre!

Dark MOFO - But is it art?**Street burial**

There was a time when university students would carry out pranks, as part of Orientation Week. One such prank was to walk up the Hobart Rivulet to the grille at the Elizabeth Street/Liverpool Street corner, and to cry out for help through the grille. Passers-by were sufficiently "disconcerted".

These days Council digs a hole in the main street big enough to house a small container, in which an artist will live "entombed" for three days while the traffic passes overhead. The artist claims that this represents a cry from the past -

"to memorialise the victims of twentieth century totalitarian violence in all of its ideological forms, including the shadow cast by the genocidal violence of nineteenth century British colonialism in Australia".

If only the students had come up with that line, so many years ago! Then again, they would have been ridiculed by the authorities. Once it was called a prank – now it is called art. For me, it is bizarre. It is still a prank – just more expensive.

All of this is of course very important business for Council. Maybe they could also consider traffic and parking priorities. Lesser matters to be sure! Then again, digging a big hole in the main road may well be their solution.

Dark and Dangerous Thoughts

This is indeed an exciting and novel prospect. A range of speakers speaking on matters that to them represent life and death decisions. "Opinions worth dying for". It's a big call.

A former jihadist, now a resident of London, was to speak of his experiences and of his turning away from such a calling. However, his visa application has been "delayed", and instead of appearing live he will now appear on a big screen. I think banning him (delay by another name) was not a smart thing to do, as the experience would be of great value in generating greater understanding. The biblical saying "know thy enemy" is most relevant here.

My favourite QANGO

As you know Macquarie Point, after all this time, boasts a tin shed and a carpark. Whatever plans there have been remain plans, without approvals.

The General Manager of the increasingly infamous Macquarie Point Development Corporation was to fly to an international Antarctic conference in Switzerland to promote the virtues of Macquarie Point as a base for Antarctic endeavour. The MPDC is to host a cocktail party at the conference to talk up the advantages of the site. It seems though that the GM will now not be in attendance and the task is to fall on the shoulders of the Chair of the Tasmanian Polar Network, which is an interesting development.

This could in fact be a big deal, and I would have thought the appropriate host should be the Minister for Infrastructure. I would certainly promote and encourage that engagement by him. It might even encourage the government to make a firm decision about the site.

Glenorchy

Meanwhile, just north of Hobart, in the neighbouring city of Glenorchy, a decision has been taken to have prayers read at the start of each council meeting by a rabbi, an imam and/or a priest, each of whom would be preaching to the same god.

AS Charles Wooley rightly clipped..."Did you hear the one where a priest a rabbi and an imam walk into a Council meeting..."

They are obviously very busy in Glenorchy also. As I said at the beginning, it seems to be the season for it.