

Who decided that private property was subservient to political protest?

Alan Moran

If terrorists were to invade Bob Brown's house and create hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage to his antique collection, he would be understandably irked. His anger would hardly be muted if the terrorists turned out to be Green activists complaining about him as a householder burning greenhouse gases to ward off the cold and to power himself to his Canberra office.

Yet his reaction to an invasion of the Loy Yang Power Station, as part of the APEC protests, was to blame the Victorian and Federal Governments for inciting the demonstration by their climate policies. The invasion cost the station alone some \$200,000.

Four people were arrested for the break-in. One of whom was a spokesperson for Friends of the Earth, a tax-exempt environment group.

Not only that, but the perpetrators—when they are apprehended—are treated lightly. They get bailed to appear some time later and will doubtless be punished with a nominal sentence involving 'community service' of some sort.

Contrast this with the mythical people who might have trashed Bob Brown's expensive antique collection in a violent protest. Doubtless, since all of them have previous form, they would have been remanded in custody awaiting trial and would eventually have faced jail sentences.

It should make no difference that one form of damage is squarely shouldered by an individual, whereas the other is incurred by individuals as shareholders.

Some reacted to the scandalous intrusion by blaming Loy Yang. *The Herald Sun* editorialised, 'It is clear that security at the plant is laughable' and 'Thank heav-

ens they were just protesting against climate change'. But the facility is on 5,000 hectares of land. It has a 40 kilometre periphery and it has a major road running through the middle of it, a road that divides the plant proper from the mine and the conveyor feeding it. In other words, it is less easy to secure than almost any farm in the State.

If the reaction to economic terrorists is to call for property owners to increase security, then the upshot is higher prices. This is the very outcome that the terrorists are hoping for with coal-fired electricity—in other words, we are rewarding them for their anti-social activities.

Whatever happened to the protection of property as a goal of the authorities themselves? Property protection starts with appropriate penalties as a deterrence to those who would attack it. If we set lower standards of protection against those assessed to be protesting about climate change, should we not also apply similar standards to those protesting about animal rights? And what about those protesting against the Infidels who fail to recognise the one God and His Messenger?

In fact, the notion of private property and its protection by the community as a whole is what sets successful societies apart. There is no function of government more vital to the achievement of high standards of living than upholding rights to property and all this entails with a police force and judiciary. And yet we see the protective mechanisms snubbed by protesters, violent or non-violent, secure in the knowledge that the penalty will be a slap on the wrist and lionisation by their co-conspirators.

The damage to property and harm to individuals we have seen with protests, including last year's G20 riots and the S11 protests about the World Economic Forum, have entailed a curious reversal—the protesters have licence to create mayhem

and it is up to individuals and property owners to take evasive action.

We need to see the rule of law restored with appropriate penalties for invasion of property and the associated losses to those whose property or business interests are damaged.

Aside from having the law upheld, several other measures recommend themselves.

First, those involving themselves in such activity should pay a personal penalty which would include forfeiture of their taxpayer-financed payments in unemployment benefits or student allowances that offer them the opportunity to engage in destructive activity.

Second, any organisation supporting that supports breaking the law should lose its any privileged tax-free status they hold. The community should not be offering financial support to those who seek to undermine its basic fabric.

Third, people who believe in private property and the rule of law should be able to fund and proceed with civil cases against miscreants and organisations who have engaged in destructive behaviour.

Unfortunately, we have become so inured to the progressive relaxation of property rights and the elevation of the rights of those who claim to hold strong views with passion that none of this will happen. We will, instead, see a progressive increase in costs to accommodate the 'rights' of those who would trample on the property rights of others.

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