

CARGO CULTS AND THE BIG BAD WOLF

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On 25 January, the final Sunday of 2015 Queensland election campaign, we were subjected in both print and digital media to the Premier wearing his smiley face and offering a paragon of domestic bliss. This continued the image projected for almost all of the unscripted broadcast at which he and the Leader of the Opposition answered questions from an 'undecided' audience at the Brisbane Broncos Club the previous Friday.

Voters are expected to have forgotten his 'strong, serious face' full of foreboding about the evil dragons he has fought in the past, particularly public servants, doctors, lawyers and nurses. Failing a suitable question being asked, he was desperate to remind his audiences about the Very Big Bad Wolf who was lurking under grandma's night-dress. His 'attack' advertisements later focused on the same imagery of sexual innuendo borrowed from inter-state.

His smiley face did, however, reinforce the message from various local LNP candidates that the goodies stolen from grandma's basket of assets would only be given if the electorate said thank-you for all the promises by returning the candidate. No local LNP member, no goodies. Or at least no goodies from the basket of the 'non-core promises' – if the LNP government continued despite a few setbacks, there were other infrastructure goodies which were guaranteed to flow, so – like public servants last time around – voters in marginal electorates had 'nothing to fear'.

But some goodies were only available on the basis of local patronage and the more powerful the patron the bigger the benefit. As the *Sunday Mail* editorial remarked in building the predictable case for its editorial headed 'The LNP deserves chance to finish the job', addressing the electors of Ashgrove, the leader-writer warned that 'it must be noted that the luxury of having the Premier as your local MP should not be under-estimated'. The choice of the word 'luxury' is interesting in its connotation of unwarranted privilege or excess.

Cargo cults featured in the curriculum of social anthropology, which I studied as part of my doctoral work in Africa. Cargo cults are an outcome of contact between primitive societies and what Lamont Lindstrom describes as 'commodity fetishism'.¹ Originally, theories about cargo cults assumed that the Melanesians were stupid as well as ignorant but later analyses emphasized the benefits to believers in their strengthening of social relationships.

The name derives from the belief that various ritualistic acts will lead to the bestowing of material wealth ('cargo') – in the local context, the required ritual is the exercise of the franchise to support the typically Melanesian political system based on the Big Man. Campbell Newman's stature may not fit the term exactly – given Leahy's regular representation of a military dictator standing on a small box – but the personalisation of this relationship is central to the notion of delivering cargo. What is less clear is how this notion of giving special rewards to localized cult believers accords with wider principles of equity and democratic processes based on the wider Queensland

¹ Lamont Lindstrom, *Cargo cult: strange stories of desire from Melanesia and beyond*, University of Hawaii, 1993.

community. Tony Fitzgerald drafted a widely-publicised open letter which identified these principles.²

The Big Bad Wolf which Newman wished to return to centre stage was the Bikie Gangs and those across the whole of the social spectrum who could be linked to them, including lawyers, the trade union movement and the ALP itself. Conveniently he ignored the fact that the ALP wishes not to repeal but to amend and review the VLAD laws just as the LNP does, but with more concern for civil liberties and freedom of association along the lines of wider criticism from various legal and judicial figures. Similarly his remarks offended these same authorities when he made accusations of union and thus ALP funding links and argued that he was not required to provide evidence. The onus of proof was placed on the accused to demonstrate a negative. He could say whatever he likes and if anyone called him a liar they could be prosecuted for defamation (as he has with broadcaster Alan Jones' accusation that Newman lied to him).

The real 'Big Bad Wolf' from the perspectives of the legal profession was the Attorney General, Jarrod Bleijie, and he has been hidden away in case he too says something offensive and/or in an offensive way. As our e-monograph noted he was drawn in a favourable *Courier-Mail* caricature on a campaign bus accompanying the Premier and Deputy Premier.³ He then disappeared from all party literature, replaced by the member for Nanango (now distracted by fighting the Ackland protestors as well as Ray Hopper) and the Speaker, who is firming in the betting as a potential LNP leader if a vacancy occurs.⁴

The expunging of Bleijie from the party advertising, in the Stalinist model of creating 'non-persons', suggests an awareness admitted by the Premier in the main election story in the *Sunday Mail* that mistakes had been made and someone (someone else) must pay. But, in a comment unlikely to be reassuring to public servants, he warned the electorate not to expect anything different next time around:

We've listened and we acted and we've never deviated and if we are re-elected you will continue to see what you've seen in the way we acted.

Studies in social anthropology take us back to the 'Big Man' political system – the more wealth a man can distribute, the more people in his debt and the greater his renown.

Clearly the ALP cannot match this on stature, policy or gender grounds and must appeal to a different set of moral and political values - and leave it to the electorate to decide who is the Big Bad Wolf.

² 'LNP refuses to explain stand against Fitzgerald principles': <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/queensland-state-election-2015/queensland-election-lnp-refuses-to-explain-stand-against-fitzgerald-principles-20150122-12w6fy.html>

³ Ann and Roger Scott, *Queensland 2014: Political Battleground*, http://www.tjryanfoundation.org.au/dbase_upl/Queensland_2014_Political_Battleground2.pdf

⁴ It is interesting to students of the Westminster model of parliamentary government that she could accept the Speakership as a consolation prize for not getting a Ministry, do it extremely well by comparison with her federal counterpart and then aspire to resume a central leadership role within the party.