

Island ^{Reprint} Tides

Visit www.islandtides.com for more interesting articles on other BC, national & international topics

Reprint from Volume 12 Number 6

Apr 6, 2000

Dealing With Government X

Avian Genocide - Patrick Brown

It's some combination of competitive politics and budget restraints that has led to the continuing popularity of decisions designed to kill two (or more) birds with one stone.

Despite the fact that the metaphor clearly implies either superb marksmanship or blind luck and governments seldom display either of these, they still attempt to achieve avian genocide far too frequently. Leaving aside the the problem of an inability to identify birds or find stones, there remains the probability that the whole concept of multiple targets is just too seductive to resist.

Here are three examples—all 'multiple birds':

- The fast ferries were supposed to be cheaper than conventional ferries for the same capacity, reduce the number of vehicles waiting at Horseshoe Bay, and kickstart an aluminum shipbuilding industry;
- privatized surgical clinics are supposed to reduce waiting times, shift the financial risks (and rewards) to the private sector, and reduce the power of the health services unions;
- The Federal HRDC Job Creation program was supposed to buy-off people who might organize objections to reductions in Employment Insurance benefits, provide a way of assisting in job creation, and make political brownie points for the government and local MPs.

Previous columns in this series have expounded at excessive length on 'Murphy's Law' and the 'Law of Unintended Consequences'. In the practise of rock throwing, there exists the possibility that, even when the target is nearby and clearly identified, the projected missile may fail to reach the vicinity of the target—bluntly, not even close. Or, thrown with greater accuracy, it may pass close to the target or strike it a glancing blow. Murphy may have a hand in this, and

certainly Unintended Consequences (sometimes termed Collateral Damage) will result.

Aiming the projectile to impact more than one target increases the chance that it will hit neither one, unless, of course, the stone is considerably larger and simple geometry tells us that it has to be a lot bigger to increase the chances of hitting two targets. In fact, it has to be as large as both targets combined, plus the distance between them. And remember the mass of a stone is a function of the cube of its diameter.

Gardeners & Housekeepers

This metaphorical lesson in stone throwing is, of course, not for people who live in glass houses. So most governments should be cautioned against throwing stones at all, but should be limited themselves to housekeeping and gardening. And they should also remember that in most cases, birds are an ornament to a garden.

But should governments be tempted, they should be able to distinguish between problem birds and political birds.

Problem birds are best targeted by gardening; adjusting the ecology with a little manure here, a little watering there. Not to say that initiative isn't a good idea, but most of the time it doesn't have to be spectacular.

Political birds can be dealt with by setting out scarecrows, or installing attractive bird feeders to divert their attention. In neither case is stone throwing a first choice of action.

And, since problem birds walk on the ground and political birds soar high in the sky, there is no trajectory that will hit them both, no matter how skilled or lucky the hunter may be.

Apropos political birds, Newton had a simple rule: what goes up, must come down. If it goes straight up, guess where it will come down? /

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with the following attribution, in its entirety, and notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

'This article was published (April 6, 2000) in 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing across the Southern Strait of Georgia from Tsawwassen to Victoria to Nanaimo.'

Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada. Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com. Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>