

The New Totalitarianism

I suspect that not many people would announce publicly like this that they're on a rampage with every intention of breaking some pretty lousy laws. In getting into the swing of this new mode of publishing, without the usual dead man's hands and dead-weight hangers-on, we're obliged to break a few laws that have been begging for it for some time. During the forty-year period of decline of the publishing industry, odious anti-human laws were accepted and respected without question in the single-minded push for profit, corporate and individual. We forgot whether publishing was for human beings or vice versa. Nobody seemed to have a clue how damaging these adopted laws were. Or, more like it, they were aware, but demonstrated by their actions that they didn't give a damn. It was as though humans are just maggots whose sole purpose for existing is to create economic activity to line the pockets of a chosen few, and anything that didn't move that process forward was of no consequence, or worse, a declared enemy. We're saying no thanks, shove off: there's a better way.

The first odious law to get the chop here is Sod's Law, so beloved of business of late. Murphy's similarly is out on its ear after a very successful run thanks to a lack of vision and cowardly leadership. Parkinson's too goes by the board. God knows the damage it's done. But the worst by far is one that has inflicted great damage on the publishing industry, on human culture and on civilization generally. Like Gresham's law—that states that good money will always be displaced by the bad—Murstein's Law lies behind every bad decision editors and publishers make. It dictates that the more important it is for an idea to find free expression in blood, for the benefit of all, the more it's likely to fall victim to commercially motivated censorship and be confined to the incinerator. It has a mediocrity guarantee built into it that steamrolls over everything decent in its path. If we were to go hunting for reasons our society has become uncivil, we'd do well to start here. It spills over from commercially motivated censorship into ideological and political expedience—and human culture withers in its wake.

The worst thing about the collapse of Soviet Communism is that it gave the green light for the carte blanche adoption in the West of totalitarian practices we saw in it and rightly abhorred. We've come to see that sleeping with dogs with fleas isn't as bad as we'd thought. We lie and cheat and bully now like they did, both governors and governed. We'll justify torture the way they did if it solves an immediate problem. We'll do anything if it's

in our selfish interest—whatever the cost and whatever it takes (as recommended by Labor head-kicker Graham Richardson—a man who'd crawl over his dead grandmother to get to power). They're the ethics of cultural defeat—a new morality dictated by boorish, uneducated boofheads of the ilk we've chosen to lead and govern us.

We threw the rulebook of life out because it was an 'obstruction to trade and commerce'. And we're living the consequences as our sacred institutions, like publishing, public education and government collapse around our ears and we whine about the injustice of it. The rot has to stop sooner or later. Here, it's stopped. We're showing the way.