

## Comment

# Echo

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## Let demonstration thrive

There has been a lot of angst in political circles over how to treat George W Bush when he makes his appearance in the Australian Parliament on Thursday morning.

Most people would argue that the office of American President should be treated with respect, no matter how illegitimate its holder, at least by those also involved in the political game. Arm bands, not standing, not applauding – these are proper gestures of disapproval, although the Labor Party leadership prohibits even these mild signals. For our elected representatives to go further would weaken the threads of diplomacy which seek to connect nations with words instead of war.

The corporate-owned neo-conservatives infesting the president's administration aim to destroy any opposition to their primitive perception of the USA's interests. In this pursuit they would willingly tear down not just diplomatic nicety but the very machinery of international law. Let our legislators not behave as insolently to America as American diplomats have behaved towards Europe and the UN.

However, the press and the public have no such duty to conduct themselves with decorum. Through the media and in the streets George W Bush should be left in no doubt that he is as unwelcome in Australia as any other war criminal.

We need to remind ourselves of the enormity of the murderous conspiracy of which Bush is the figurehead. Appointed rather than elected, he represents the interests of a tiny number of plutocrats and the delusions of a larger number of religious bigots. With a creed of dismantling community services, allowing unfettered environmental exploitation and waging perpetual war (both for economic gain and domestic popularity), Bush is arguably the first president to be totally owned by the darker side of American politics.

Owned, and indeed manufactured. With his military career (desertion) sanitised, his police record (drink-driving and cocaine possession) erased, and his virtual illiteracy concealed, George Bush is every inch the deserving heir of a criminal family which gained its riches through wartime trading with the Third Reich, and which a few years ago even had shady dealings with Osama bin Laden.

That Australia should be considered the 'sheriff' appointed by this creature in this part of the world is repulsive enough; that he should seek to congratulate us for our treachery towards humanity by joining his wars is a matter for shame.

It is no surprise that John Howard has made democratic dissent impossible in the Parliament itself (no public allowed in the gallery) and for a wide area around it. Nevertheless demonstrations will inevitably take place and will, it is hoped, receive some coverage in the USA. Bush's bullying slogan, 'If you're not with us, you're against us' is designed to frighten dissenting populations into obedience. Let the Australian public show the American president that we are very much against all that he stands for.

## George W Bush deserves no respect

So it doesn't matter how much we loathe and despise George Bush and his policies, we – or at least our parliamentary representatives – still have to show respect: not for the man but for his office.

Such is the cant delivered to us from those who, surprise surprise, hold various offices of power themselves. It is an idea invented by politicians for politicians, a modern adaptation of the doctrine of the divine right of kings.

It is what the Italian President Silvio Berlusconi relies on when he introduces legislation to save himself from prosecution for criminal fraud – not because of his innocence, but because of his office. It is what British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher used as the basis of her claims that Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet could not be charged with crimes against humanity; he undoubtedly committed them, but his office somehow guaranteed him immunity.

It is what made the politicians of the 1930s fawn on Adolf Hitler and grovel to Benito Mussolini. It is what makes our own politicians lick the boots of the dopey and deranged American president, even though he stole the position for which he now seeks respect – and it should not be forgotten that they will then kow-tow to Chinese president Hu Jintao, a ruthless dictator whose hold on office owes even less to the democratic process.

To pretend that the office can somehow be divorced from the man who holds it is a fraud and a humbug. Some years ago Labor's Mark Latham called Bush the most incompetent and dangerous president in living memory, a remark which led to shrill screams of outrage from both Australian conservatives and American diplomats, who regarded the categorisation as an insult to the office. Actually it was a value judgement which, unsurprisingly, no one bothered to challenge.

But in any case, how can you insult a position – a mere title, a form of words? The idea that a criminal lunatic suddenly ceases to be a crim-

inal lunatic because he gains a few letters in front of his name is too silly to contemplate. George W Bush remains George W Bush, the same mendacious moron who told us that the most influential book of his childhood was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, although it was first published two years after

Anyone who still doubts that George Bush is quite a few stripes short of the star-spangled banner need only refer to the interview he gave last week to some hand-picked members of the Asian press; as a result *The Australian's* star-struck Paul Kelly was able to report breathlessly that Bush now

itely not someone to be invited to the big street party which is to culminate in the formation of a massive free trade block.

Howard bleats bravely that he is fixing deals with individuals – China, Singapore and now Thailand – so that proves we are really part of the scene. But these are consolation prizes. Even in the increasingly unlikely event that America itself produces a worthwhile free-trade agreement, it will only further emphasise our outsider status.

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by Mungo MacCallum



he had graduated from Yale. If he doesn't deserve respect as plain old Dubya, he doesn't deserve it as President Dubya either.

None of which suggests that Simon Crean and the Labor Party should pelt him with rotten vegetables as soon as he appears in our (not his) house of representatives; amusing and edifying as the spectacle might undoubtedly be, they would run the risk of being mown down by Bush's trigger-happy goon squad which, disgracefully, is to be allowed to bring its weaponry on to the precincts of the Australian parliament.

But there is surely nothing wrong with the odd burst of incredulous laughter, a well-timed interjection (perhaps in the form of a raspberry), an ostentatious yawn or two followed by a stately walkout – assuming, as seems likely to the point of inevitability, that the man's speech warrants it. At least it would do something to puncture the pompous posturing that surrounds the President, however comical the man is in reality.

Simon Crean, of course, may consider it good politics to suckhole, as Latham once described it; Howard obviously believes it is even good policy. If that is to be the decision, disappointing as it is, we must accept it. But please, let us have no hypocrisy about it being based on respect for the office. If it is really the office that is important, we might as well bow to the filing cabinet and salute the shredder.

considers Australia to be not just the deputy sheriff, but (gasp) the full sheriff for the south-east Asian region.

This was presumably intended, not just as flattery, but as an endorsement which would give our Man of Steel a well-earned boost among the neighbours. As anyone with even the most cursory knowledge of the area would have known, it had the opposite effect; almost to a man and woman, the neighbours regarded it as confirmation that Australia remains a blow-in, an intruder, a puppet and a fraud, and defin-

It appears that that marathon series of photo-opportunities with which John Howard celebrated that anniversary of the Bali bombing has finally ended, and thank heavens. But one shot should not be forgotten: the one of Howard in Bali, holding the hand of one of the children whose mother was killed in the blast, but whom Howard's government will not allow to enter Australia for even a brief visit to his asylum-seeking father.

The policy itself is cruel enough, but for Howard to exploit the child involved for his own political gratification reaches the depths of sadism. Needless to say, he has not apologised.

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