It’s easy being Green

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It is unfortunate but true that ‘the environment’ is flavour of the month at the moment. Unfortunate because, in media terms, this means that next month, when another toxic spill lays waste another urban creek, the response is likely to be - "Oh, environment. Sorry, love, we did that last month."

It’s also unfortunate because, with television’s love of immediate imagery and easy answers, it allows professional green persons to get away with murder.

Murder, in this case, actually means sloppy, soft and generally lazy thinking and rhetoric.

It’s so easy being green right now - save the trees, save the forests, no more wood chipping, no more poisonous paper mills. Sure. Absolutely in fact. But whereas professional green persons to get away with murder.

We must stop logging.

Yes, we must. Sort of. But the people whose livelihoods depend on logging also need to eat, have holidays, clothes and educate their children and be able to look to the future without feeling utter despair and rage. What are they expected to do? Where are the policies and plans for environmentally sensitive development?

Sting jets in for twenty minutes. Great photo opportunity, but what did it mean?

Nothing, because standing on a tree stump railing at timber workers is akin to blaming a fly for our glorious shit-covered beaches.

Where is the will and courage to address the real cause of this catastrophe? Our planet, its environment and us - loggers and logheads alike -- are suffering from advanced greed. Greed is what capitalism is all about: make more money, sell more products, make even more money, sell even more products. Convince people that they want, need, must have them. Go on doing that. And on and on. Never be satisfied with the figures at the bottom of the balance sheet, with three BMWs, with only six palatial homes. And if you’ve got more money than even the most Thurstonian tycoon can imagine doing fun things with, then the world is next: power, more power, greater profits, bigger buildings, giant empires, multi mega-corporations, nation-states. You name it, they can be bought, stripped of life and worth and thrown away, at the laughable cost of a few scrumptious crumbs to politicians and even fewer to their stupid or helpless populations.

While loggers and logheads confront each other across a stripped hillside, the real cause of their anger and anguish is miles away. In board rooms and parliament, in Tokyo, Canberra, London and New York.

Harris Daishowa - and the rest - will remain serenely above the hulabaloo unless we do the unpleasant thing: hit them in the pocket. Witness Noranda-North Broken Hill’s instant sulks over Wesley Vale. They weren’t prepared to lower their profit sights and pulled out - for the time being anyway. But this still doesn’t address the question of how communities which presently rely on the woodchip and other environmentally and economically unsound industries are going to face the future without them.

Not everyone can or wants to run a gift shoppe or bijou eatery and, anyway, tourists, even environmentally sensitive tourists, are as finite a resource as any other. What needs to be looked at, urgently, is a way of converting these exploited profit centres for foreign corporations into value-added industries for Australians. Instead of exporting wood chips and importing quality goods, we have to turn it around.

But we have several problems: Australia has a deserved reputation for lousy manufacturing standards. And we can’t and don’t want to compete with the third world’s supply of cheap labour. And we have to come to grips, rapidly, with the tablet of stone which says that growth and profit must both continue, in perpetuity. They must not. This is what we have to address, not the evil forest workers of Eden and Tasmania; they’re in it with us - up to their necks.