



Imagine an aerial view of a city CBD where there is a large square grid of intersecting roads among the office buildings. When all streets in all directions are full of traffic then no vehicles can move and there's grid lock. Put simply, nothing happens and yet it's all managed by the best systems and bureaucratic minds but nothing moves, nothing works. So what went wrong and who is responsible. The answer is, according to traffic control, that nothing went wrong as all systems were working and so no one is to blame in the traffic bureaucracy. But hang on we have grid lock and the system doesn't work. In fact it's apparently the peoples fault for having too many cars and so the bureaucracy says, let's get rid of all the people so the problem goes away. So there you have it, no people, no problem and a perfect system with no congestion. Yes Minister.

A bureaucracy is by definition a system of governance and administration which is structured and often overly complex. We hear most about it in relation to government and in this case the bureaucracy is chartered with carrying out the wishes of our political leaders. This is supposedly the machinery of government which makes things happen. An integral part of bureaucratic structure is that it seeks to resolve everything down to systems which they say means the outcome is known and predictable. However over time a bureaucracy moves to create systems within systems and euphemistically calls them SOPs or Standard Operating Procedures. These SOPs are like a complex spider web without beginning or end and ultimately have strands and threads which no longer produce anything but are guarded well, as they are part of the whole. The bureaucracy takes on a life of its own to snare work and pay for itself by attracting and trapping we the people just like the spider silk does. A bureaucracy ultimately exists simply to grow and expand and to preserve itself for its own sake. At this point of a mature bureaucracy the systems are so impersonal and so complex we can say we have bureaucratic grid lock. Nothing moves but all systems are perfectly adhered to and fully operational and so when the bureaucracy runs a self audit it finds no problem. It alone becomes its own unique outcome under the banner of the greater good.

Now this is symptomatic of most democratic governments and then add political correctness and you have super grid lock where real people with real lives don't matter and nor do real worthwhile outcomes. As an example of bureaucratic futility, grid lock and waste look at Queensland Health and its disastrous IT system which looks like ending up costing \$1.2 billion and will never work. They have had the obligatory review but no one is held accountable and we the people pay yet again. Another example is the same disastrous IT mess with GCCC where, well over \$100 million has been wasted and now they want another \$190 million and a fleet of consultants to pay as well. Once again no one is at fault, no one is responsible and no one is accountable, now how on earth is that possible and surely the Mayor or the CEO should be able to tell us. In fact it appears to me the bureaucracy stifles free speech and enquiry at every turn. Clearly the bureaucracies we have do not subscribe to natural justice and therefore are in conflict with democracy which should be government of the people, by the people, for the people. I will go so far as to say unfettered bureaucracy is a threat to individual freedom.

Democracy calls for responsiveness to the public will through elected officials. Bureaucratic organisation, designed for order and stability, contains, by its nature, an element of self adulation, an appetite for independent power and a stubborn resistance to external political control. These two concepts are in frequent conflict so the challenge is how to make bureaucracy responsible and the servant of democracy. Responsibility implies more than mere accountability for what is or is not done and more too than strict adherence to policy mandates. It implies a high level of specific competence for the job one is called to do, it requires personal character that is loyal, honest and reliable and a dedication to duty and faith in basic values. Bureaucratic grid lock wastes our money, divides the nation and flouts freedom of speech and I want none of it.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley
Ref Odegard/Burke