

# What is liberty and what is libertarianism?

A brief introduction...

by Luke McGrath

# What is liberty and what is libertarianism?

- Libertarianism is a *political philosophy*
- Libertarianism gives us a framework for thinking about social issues
  - *“The libertarian creed rests upon one central axiom: that no man or group of men may aggress against the person or property of anyone else.”*  
Murray Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, p.27

# Why care about this stuff?

- We don't live in self sufficiency – we're all members of society
- The majority of people want to live in a free, just and prosperous society

**Objection:** “But don't we *already* live in a ‘free society’? That's what a democracy is, right?”

# How free are we?

- Some news stories from 2010...

# How free are we?

## Aussie passengers face full-body scans

Herald Sun | January 31, 2010 11:11pm | 195 comments | 195 comments

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- New security measures for passengers
- Part of \$400 million announcement
- Includes body scans

AUSTRALIAN airline passengers face tougher security screening - including possible full-body scans on US flights - in a \$400 million-plus strategy to tackle terrorism.

Religious rehabilitation programs to halt the spread of radical Islam in prisons will be unveiled and security at international gateways to Australia, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, will be strengthened.

According to the [Herald Sun](#), domestic travellers can also expect more routine security screening, including swabs to detect explosives.



Passengers will be subjected to full-body scans and the removal of shoes at airports.

# How free are we?

## John Watson likens proposed police powers to those under Nazi regime

Staff writers | PerthNow | February 04, 2010 6:35PM | 188 comments 188 comments

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**TWO retired senior police officers have likened a proposal to give police unprecedented stop and search powers to Nazi Germany.**

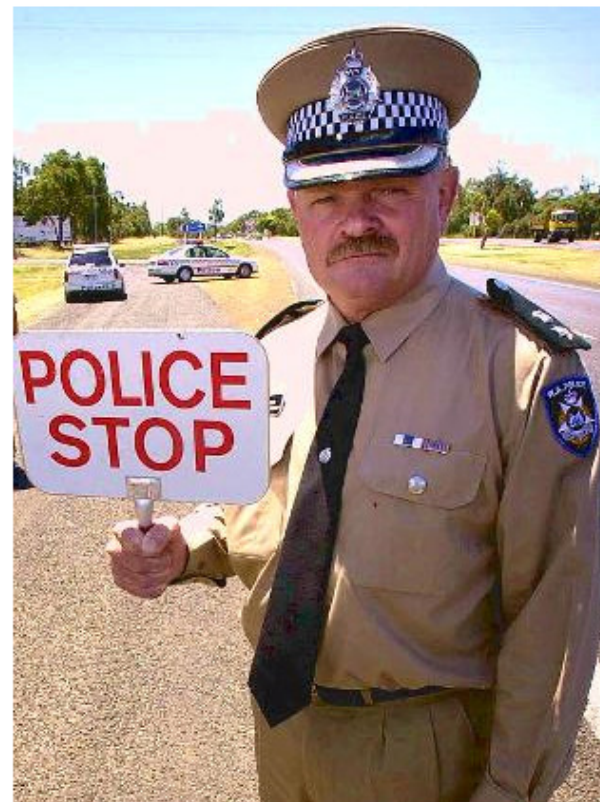
Retired police superintendents Dave Parkinson and John Watson have spoken out against the proposal, which has been at the centre of controversy this week.

They said the laws were draconian, similar to what would have been used in Nazi Germany.

"This is becoming a police state," Mr Watson said. "It is wrong."

The pair claimed that removing the requirement of "reasonable suspicion" for a search to be conducted would affect innocent people, not the thugs it set out to target.

Their comments came after police representatives told a parliamentary committee this week that police did not request the extra powers and failed to guarantee they would reduce crime.



WRONG WAY: Superintendent John Watson, now retired, has criticised stop and search laws proposed for WA. Picture: Ross Swanborough Source: PerthNow



# How free are we?

## I'd like to see legal drinking age lifted to 21, says Kevin Rudd

By staff writers | [news.com.au](http://news.com.au) | February 08, 2010 11:26pm | [742 comments](#) | [742 comments](#) [A+](#) [A-](#) [Print](#) [Email](#) [Share](#) ▾

- Rudd supports drinking age of 21
- National poll backs PM
- Booze 'concerning factor' in crashes
- [The Punch: Kids cane Rudd](#)
- [Alcohol: Age limits worldwide](#)

AUSTRALIA should increase the legal drinking age to 21, according to a national online poll.

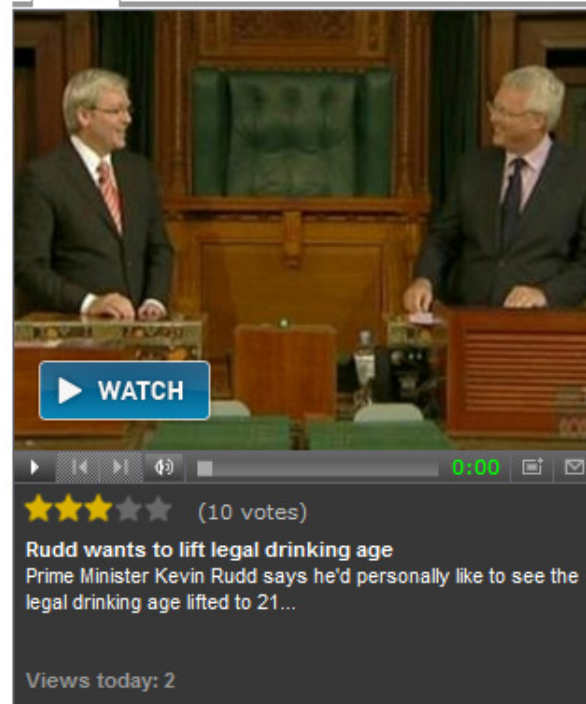
Debate raged after Prime Minister Kevin Rudd last night told a studio full of young Australians on the ABC's Q&A he "personally" supported an older drinking limit.

Asked by host Tony Jones if the legal drinking age should be upped from 18 to 21, Mr Rudd responded: "Of course".

Today, more than 6000 people voted in online polls on News Ltd websites across the country – and 57 per cent backed a booze ban for anyone under 21.

In NSW and Queensland, more than 66 per cent of online voters were on Kevin's more teetotal team.

Video Image



# How free are we?

## Conroy's internet censorship agenda slammed by tech giants

ASHER MOSES  
March 23, 2010

Comments 64

Australia's biggest technology companies, communications academics and many lobby groups have delivered a withering critique of the government's plans to censor the internet.

The government today published most of the **174 submissions** it received relating to improving the transparency and accountability measures of its internet filtering policy.

Legislation to force ISPs to implement the policy is expected to be introduced within weeks. The filters will block a blacklist of "refused classification" websites for all Australians on a mandatory basis.

Most of the submissions called for full transparency surrounding the operation of the list and for all sites placed on the list by bureaucrats at the Australian Communications and Media Authority first to be examined by the Classification Board.



# How free are we?

## Plastic bag ban law introduced

CHALPAT SONTI  
April 1, 2010

[Comments](#) 22



West Australians use about 400 million plastic shopping bags a year.

A bill to ban the use of plastic shopping bags in WA has been put before Parliament.

Labor MLC Sally Talbot introduced the *Plastic Bags (Waste Avoidance) Bill* into the Legislative Council yesterday.

It seeks a complete ban on the bags, with penalties of up to \$20,000 for supplying them.

# How free are we?

## Cafe raid seizes banned soy milk

SARAH WHYTE  
January 23, 2010



Soy long ... a Luxe Bakery Cafe employee helps health officials load cartons of the soy milk into a car. *Photo: Jon Reid*

A black market trade is operating in the banned soy milk Bonsoy in Sydney cafes, even though retailers face \$500,000 fines if caught.

# How free are we?

## New council bylaws slammed as out of touch and impossible to enforce

Anne Wright | Herald Sun | March 02, 2010 12:00AM

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**UPDATE 4.21pm: WYNDHAM Mayor Heather Marcus says the council is still to decide whether it will ban exercising pigeons at certain times of day and leaving dogs unattended in frontyards.**

The *Herald Sun* reported yesterday that the bylaws had been introduced by Wyndham Council last month.

But despite the proposals being drafted, Cr Marcus said the council was undecided on the issue and would not vote on the laws until after the submission period closed on March 25.

The vote would be put to council in the following weeks, she said.

The proposed bylaws could join changes imposed by councils to exert further control on their ratepayers.

The *Herald Sun* reviewed local government laws to compile a list of the wackiest rules Victorians are expected to abide by.



Michael Chizzoniti is outraged that the Bass Coast Shire says that people need to have a permit to pitch a tent in the backyard. Picture: Norm Oorloff Source: Herald Sun

# The libertarian difference

- It's ok to have differences of opinion with each other but things change when we ask the government to intervene...
- Why?
- Laws are not suggestions – every law is backed up by the threat of fine and imprisonment

# Things libertarians emphasise

- Self-ownership
  - You own yourself
  - You own the fruits of your labour
- Nonaggression
  - We have to deal with each other on a *voluntary* basis
- Property rights
  - The great problem solver!
  - The exclusive right to control a resource
  - Homesteading → Contractual exchange



# Things libertarians emphasise

- Why are property rights important?
  - Concern for the good or resource – ownership changes our behaviour
  - Prevents the ‘tragedy of the commons’

**Objection:** “You’re crazy – people are too greedy to protect the environment! Everyone knows the government takes better care than markets could.”

# Government protects the environment?

## **AP IMPACT: Tons of Released Drugs Taint US Water**

By **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Published: April 19, 2009

U.S. manufacturers, including major drugmakers, have legally released at least 271 million pounds of pharmaceuticals into waterways that often provide drinking water -- contamination the federal government has consistently overlooked, according to an Associated Press investigation.

# Government protects the environment?

The Boston Globe boston.com

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**Nation | World**

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**ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE** GOVERNMENT AS POLLUTER

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## The nation's dirty, big secret

Even as the EPA pursues private polluters, certain US agencies preside over some of the deadliest waste sites in the country - and there is little that can be done to stop them

By David Armstrong, Globe Staff, 11/14/99

*First of four parts*

*“The United States government, which acts as steward and protector of the nation's environment, is itself the worst polluter in the land.*”

*Federal agencies have contaminated more than 60,000 sites across the country and the cost of cleaning up the worst sites is officially expected to approach \$300 billion, nearly five times the price of similar destruction caused by private companies. . . .*

*Nearly every military base and nuclear arms facility in the country is contaminated. The pollution extends from the US Mint, which released hazardous chemicals into the air when producing commemorative coins, to the national parks, where leaky oil tanks and raw sewage are polluting pristine rivers.*

*Even the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], charged with enforcing the country's environmental laws, has been fined for violating toxic waste laws at its laboratories...”*

# Government protects the environment?

## Public purse props up fossil fuel industries

Wendy Frew Environment Reporter

May 8, 2007



GOVERNMENT subsidies to some of Australia's electricity generation companies are so big they exceed the profits made by those companies, a report on energy and transport subsidies says.

Government support for the coal industry and coal-fired electricity is so generous that in some cases it has led to the construction of coal-fired power plants when other types of electricity generation would have been cheaper, the report by the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney has found.

Subsidies to fossil fuel energies, worth close to \$10 billion, result in a serious market distortion, create an unfair disadvantage to renewable energy, and help increase greenhouse gas pollution, says the report, written by the institute's research principal, Chris Riedy, and commissioned by Greenpeace.

### Other related coverage

- [Government's \\$10 billion boost for global warming](#)
- [Energy revolution may come at only a small cost](#)
- [Kyoto figures put pressure on Howard](#)
- [Alarm at hidden rise in gas emissions](#)
- [Labor and states to conduct climate study](#)

# Things libertarians emphasise

- Individuals and groups
  - Does society have 'rights'? What are the implications?
  - Could the majority vote away the minority's rights?
- Means and ends
  - If something is 'good', can we use any means necessary to achieve it?
  - Voluntary actions vs. coercive actions
  - When the government pays for something... Where does the money come from?



# Summary

- So...
- Libertarians believe in... liberty!
  - *“You should never be prosecuted for what you own, for what you believe, for what you say, for what you smoke, for what you drink, for what you put in your body. You should be prosecuted only for the physical harm you do to others.”*  
Harry Browne, *Liberty A to Z*, p.121
- Government is coercive
- Civil society and the market are voluntary

# Summary

- If we want to live in a free, just and prosperous society, we have to recognise the difference between voluntarism vs. coercion
- Or to put it in cartoon form...

# Summary



**Thanks for listening!**