

Wanted: Martyr for Sustainability  
*Terence Jeyaretnam*

The world is in need of a hero. It is an established fact that the greatest threat facing humankind is climate change and associated environmental degradation. The high level policies and strategies have been discussed and developed. But, there is yet no agreement on a global pathway, such as the Kyoto Protocol, to address the issue. Furthermore, and alarmingly, the intent of the policies and protocols created to avoid the likely environmental disasters are not being put in to practice at government, local or corporate level to any meaningful level to bring about change, with only some exceptions.

The Department of Environment and Heritage's web page on sustainable development begins with the sentence "*Australia has a strong record in tackling the difficult task of implementing the principles of sustainable development*". I admit that aspects of implementing sustainable development practices may be challenging, but isn't it the responsible and sensible approach? It mystifies me to find the notion 'difficult'. Yet, it seems that in an economy riding the merry-go-round of growth, that any measure that detracts from the growth mantra, or 'fetish', as recently fabled by Dr. Clive Hamilton of The Australia Institute, seems to be perceived as a challenge.

The approach to development in Australia is linked to environmental impact assessment, which seeks to broadly apply the principles of sustainable development. A quantifiable approach for this process has not been developed, and accordingly almost all assessments are qualitative. This invariably becomes a recipe for creativity in applying principles of sustainability. At a recent conference, Tomothy Piper, Director of the Australian Industry Group, said "sustainability must be attractive to industry in order to make it an ongoing perspective for industry to consider", reflecting the general sentiment towards sustainability.

It is in such times of despondency that a martyr is usually needed to help make a difference. There are the David Suzuki's and John Elkington's of this world who will help create new agendas and shifts in thinking, but what's needed is a revolutionary change – a paradigm shift of the nature that people like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr made. People power needs to be channelled and the currents of common thinking used to deliver changes to the positions of corporates, government and world leaders.

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