



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance —

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be."

- U.S.A. President Thomas Jefferson

THE MESSAGE OF COMPASS by Eric D. Butler:

I attended the rally of the embattled Compass Airlines company in the Melbourne Town Hall square on Thursday, January 23rd, and absorbed some of the spirit which could yet save Australia. From a conventional viewpoint, Compass is but one more company which has failed because it failed to meet the requirements of orthodox finance-economics. But the Compass drama touches the very heart of the crisis now gripping Australia. The Compass question is not merely one of accountancy; it concerns the subject of whether Australia has the spiritual strength to survive. The amazing spirit being demonstrated by Compass staff and supporters is a tremendous tonic at the present time. This is the type of spirit required to save Australia. Bryan Grey, the inspiration and driving force behind the Compass project, belongs to that breed of Australians who made the nation by "having a go".

Compass revolutionised air transport throughout Australia. The social impact has been enormous. For the first time Australians could move around their own country at a reasonable price. Members of families who had never previously been able to come together, now found that it was possible to do this. During a time of severe depression conditions, Compass generated growth. While the accountants will argue that Compass discounted airfares to an unrealistically low level, they demonstrated that the Australian public had been exploited for years by the comfortable arrangements imposed by the two-air service policy. The no-frills policy of Compass was typically Australian. Those who flew Compass can vouch for the friendly, efficient and generally excellent service. One of the most inspiring aspects of the Compass operation, as witnessed by the efforts of the Compass staff, is the spirit of the staff. It is difficult to recall any parallel in Australian history. It has been stated by a repre-

sentative of an overseas airline that Compass has developed an asset which is the envy of other airlines: the tremendous esprit de corps of Compass staff.

Compass has been a genuinely all-Australian project. Bryan Grey was in comparative retirement when the at long last policy of airline deregulation was introduced. From a strictly financial aspect, he did not need to return to aviation. But clearly he was a man with a vision and he believed that Australians deserved better than they had been getting. He decided to "have a go". His capital base was almost certainly too small, but it was provided by Australians. There was some bad luck. All of his chosen aircraft were not delivered on schedule. The unforeseen Gulf War forced oil prices upwards and had a devastating effect on fuel costs. But one of the biggest problems Compass had to face was its inability to gain ready access to air terminals.

Generally overlooked is the fact that in the conflict with Ansett and Australian concerning heavily discounted airfares, Compass lacked the financial backing which Ansett and Australian enjoyed.

One of the most revealing aspects of the Compass affair is the manner in which the mass media has been used to feed out disinformation. There has been little reference to the fact that Rupert Murdoch is the joint owner of Ansett, along with Mr. Bob Hawke's close friend, Sir Peter Abeles. There is little doubt that what can only be described as "dirty" tactics have been used against Compass. But in spite of all this, and the fact that large numbers of people have been left holding Compass tickets, there is overwhelming public support for Compass. The instincts of the Australian people have been sound on this issue, which could eventually have far-reaching political implications.

There is no good reason why Federal Government should not underwrite the finance required to get Compass back into the air. In financial terms, the amount required is relatively small compared with what has been wasted on foreign aid and a lavish contribution to the terrorist from Africa, Nelson Mandela. It is probably true that airfares were forced down to an unrealistic figure.

But even airfares 10 percent above present levels would be acceptable compared with what was being demanded before Compass. There is no doubt that the Compass project has captured the imagination of the Australian people. There is little doubt that the majority of Australians want Compass to continue. What is required is the maximum of pressure on individual Members of Parliament, demanding that they demand the appropriate action to get Compass in to the air again as soon as possible.

THE CANBERRA BLOCKADE from David Thompson:

The proposal to blockade the Commonwealth Parliament until a list of demands are met by the Prime Minister could eventually be seen as counter-productive, unless objectives are clearly defined. We agree with the general strategy - to force a change in policy direction on issues such as deregulation, "free trade", interest rates, the creation of credit, and others. However, the tactics brought to bear in the service of such a strategy should be re-examined.

The tactic of organising at least a thousand people to stand in the summer sun on a picket line around the Parliament, and prevent anyone from leaving or entering until the demands are met, is ambitious. If this is seriously being suggested, it is unrealistic to the point of irresponsibility. The following points should be carefully considered:

1) The concept of a vigorous, limited objective campaign cannot be achieved by a "blockade". For many years the League has taught actionists the merits of such a principle, often with spectacular results, like those on the Eyre Peninsular Bankwatch campaign. If all available resources, including energy, money and time, are focused on one simple, limited objective, results are much more likely.

2) It is a great temptation to believe that if only a large number of people will concentrate in one place, sheer weight of numbers will force a change in policy. Unless the numbers are truly great - 100,000 or more - recent history demonstrates that this is not so. The Melbourne rally, led admirably by Mr. Danny Johnson, is a prime example. A mob of people energetically shouting demands and chanting slogans every time a television camera is pointed at them, is little threat to Members of Parliaments. Mobs can in fact be exploited, with tragic results.

3) The personal cost, and logistics of running such a blockade are daunting. If, say, 1,000 people take part, travel, living expenses, and suspension of income earning activity must cost \$100 per person per day. That is, \$100,000 per day! A great deal of effective grassroots campaigning could be achieved for such a sum; an election campaign for an independent candidate, an advertising campaign for a limited objective, etc. The League's annual Basic Fund is less than three-quarters of such a figure!

THE APPLICATION OF PRESSURE: In order to change policy, only one strategy is successful - the application of sufficient pressure on Members of Parliament to FORCE a change. A great many tactics are available, but the individual action of hundreds of people who take personal responsibility for their actions is the key. This is the hard option. In comparison, it is easy to gather with 1,000 others and demonstrate for a few hours, a day, or even a week. It is not what these people do at a demonstration that counts. It is what they do when they get home that counts. How many will commit themselves to the long-term grassroots activity necessary to change policy? Only those with the longer vision.

If the Canberra Blockade is to proceed, there are a number of suggestions to make it more effective. One or perhaps two limited objectives should be identified, and agreed upon. The issues should be well understood by all concerned. All those who take part in the Blockade could be organised to personally visit their own Member, and press for the limited objective. A blunt declaration that the M.P. is the electors' servant, and that electors will vote according to the response to the limited objective, should ensure that M.P.'s. get the message. Such a visit must then be followed up with written demands from as many electors as possible. The press can then be used intelligently to increase the pressure. All this requires organisation - and personal responsibility. It should be backed up with local, grassroots action campaigns around Australia. It is not even necessary to go to Canberra to personally visit M.P.'s. - they all have electoral offices.

ROLE OF THE INDEPENDENT: If, as is possible, the grip of the party machine upon M.P.'s. is too strong, the ultimate action programme is to replace an unco-operative M.P. with an independent representative. The example of Mr. Ted Mack is invaluable. Mack has done something that only a very few Commonwealth M.P.'s. have ever done - he has been elected in his own right, on the strength of his integrity, his commitment to his electorate, his track record, and his ideas - not simply as a party nominee. Such qualities are rare, and increasingly sought in Australian politics. No political party nominee can offer them. Perhaps an intelligent assessment of all vulnerable rural seats should be made, and committed independent candidates sought to contest them, with a major effort concentrated in a few seats.

Many years of experience have confirmed that the League's programme is indispensable; in-depth educational work to inform the community of answers to issues, and the training of action oriented people is the key. A current example is the Rural Action Movement, operating in most States. Their campaign is well-organised. Their work on finance is generally first-class, reflecting a sound understanding of financial realities by a minority in the rural community. Of course, the Action Movement has quite unjustly been accused of being a League "front" by the likes of the N.F.F. This is certainly not the case, but the Rural Action Movement draws upon the League's legacy of long-term educational work.

NEW JAPANESE CITY PROPOSAL: We note press reports last week (The Australian, 24/1) that plans for a new technology-testing city are being drawn up by the Japanese construction company, Shimizu Corporation. Under the proposal, the city would be built near Broome in the Great Sandy Desert, in W.A. It would have a population of 300,000, and could become the international headquarters of a future Pacific economic community, according to the reports.

It would now appear that the M.F.P., upon which the League sounded the alarm in 1989, has become a bureaucratic nightmare, and has lost significant Japanese support. This must be partly due to grassroots Australian opposition. It is likely that much of the cost of the M.F.P. at Gillman, near Adelaide, will be borne by Australia, while foreign investors/speculators may or may not decide to use the facilities. We have been left "holding the baby". Perhaps Japanese ambition will be transferred to a new city in the W.A. desert? (End of David Thompson comment.)