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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

Print Post Publication Number 381667 00258

Vol.30, No.29

August 5th, 1994

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "Equality of rights might seem that which is fairest and most likely to make for unity and peace. But the backward race may be really unfit to exercise political power, whether from ignorance ... or from a propensity to sudden and unreasonable impulses."

– Lord Bryce in Romanes Lectures, p.38.

INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA by David Thompson:

The Canberra 'C.I.R. Conference' organised by Liberal Party front-bencher Peter Reith last week, had the dual virtue of promoting an idea of great merit, and acting as a cathartic catalyst in smoking out the political charlatans who think they know better than those who elected them. As the dust cleared from what turned out to be a gun-battle by news media, both Liberal Party leader Downer and National Party leader Fischer were clearly carrying political wounds, these being mainly self-inflicted.

Representing the League at the Conference, and also at the National Press Club Luncheon, I was enormously encouraged by evidence of strong grassroots support for C.I.R. that obviously sustained Mr. Reith, Democrat leader Kernot, Ted Mack, former Queensland Premier Russell Cooper, and others who were prepared to take political risks in supporting the principle. An observer almost needed to pinch himself on hearing speakers like Mr. Reith remark that it was time that the **interests of the nation** were placed **before those of party politics**, at the Press Club, and that C.I.R. ensured this.

As *The Sydney Morning Herald* pointed out, although the idea of C.I.R. had been on the A.L.P. platform for 70 years, genuine support for the principle has largely been confined to the League of Rights until about 1980. While all reference to the League at the Conference was strictly muted, it is clear that the role of the League has been critical in nurturing and fostering the initiative and referendum principle.

TIM FISCHER'S POSITION: The role of Mr. Fischer and the Nationals in sabotaging the Reith promotion of C.I.R. has been critical. Mr. Fischer, perhaps influenced by Queensland Senator

Boswell, is scathing about C.I.R., weakly arguing that it will discriminate against country people. The Nationals' record in tamely following Liberal Party leads in betraying the interests of country voters again and again is now legendary. Fischer claims that city voters would swamp rural interests in such things as daylight saving and kangaroo culling. As Professor Geoffrey Walker pointed out in his brilliant opening address, such objections are spurious, and do not reflect overseas experience.

Mr. Fischer might also note **the Australian** experience. In W.A. and in Queensland, Labor Governments attempted to introduce daylight saving several times. **On every attempt**, daylight saving was defeated at referendum. He might also note that the famous referendum of 1951, in which Sir Robert Menzies hoped to outlaw the Communist Party, **was also rejected**.

Mr. Fischer challenges proponents of C.I.R. to name an issue of major importance to the nation (*Herald-Sun*, 1/8/94) that is **not** being dealt with by the political system, and to name 10 issues in the past 20 years that needed C.I.R. to resolve them. While this is a false challenge (since C.I.R. operates also as a pressure valve, as Reith points out) we accept it. The main issue that is **not being dealt with** which presently threatens Federation itself, is the Commonwealth abuse of the "external affairs" power, through which "treaties" like U.N. Conventions have poured into our system of law, poisoning it beyond recognition. **This is not being dealt with**. Even Mr. Downer's proposal to provide a commission to scrutinise new "treaties", deals with the **effect**, not the **cause** of the problem.

There are easily 10 issues that could have been resolved by C.I.R. in 20 years. What about the I.D. Card issue? What about **immigration** and the policy of **multiculturalism**? C.I.R. could also have defused the festering sore of the 1975 dismissal of Whitlam by putting the role of the Governor-General to the people. Other issues that would have benefitted from C.I.R. include: land rights legislation, the Native Title (Mabo) Act, fluoridation, compulsory voting, defence of the flag, the national anthem, the external affairs power, the Racial Discrimination Act, and the new race vilification bill. Still counting, Mr. Fischer?

Other critics of the C.I.R. proposal, like Malcolm Mackerras, have also been answered. Peter Reith dealt with the criticisms at length at the National Press Club. Professor Walker did so at the Conference in the Main Committee Room of Parliament House. Walker noted that in no place where C.I.R. has been introduced, **has it ever been thrown out!**

THE WAY FORWARD: Mr. Downer appears to have done a deal with Fischer: if Reith ceases promoting C.I.R., Fischer will cease to attack it, and no latitude then exists for Keating to drive a wedge into the Coalition. Does this mean that the idea dies? No, it does not. The Downer-Fischer political balancing act will be **undermined by events**. Former Queensland Premier, Russell Cooper, in a courageous, defiant address to the Canberra Conference, refused to be silenced on the issue. He gave notice that, supported by his leader Mr. Borbidge, he will be campaigning strongly for C.I.R. The Queensland Liberals are also considering adopting the idea, and it is possible that the Nationals could go into the next Queensland election campaigning on C.I.R.

It is also possible that the A.C.T. could introduce C.I.R. this year. If it is introduced, and used successfully at State or Territorial level as it has been at local government level, then it will be forced upon the likes of Downer and Fischer at Commonwealth level.

THE SHADOW OF THE LEAGUE: Throughout the Canberra Conference, Press Club Luncheon, and much of the media coverage about C.I.R., there is the mainly unmentioned, but almost tangible shadow, of the role of the League of Rights. The issue was raised only by former M.P. John Hyde at the Canberra Conference. In an unjust (and politically unwise) comment, Hyde noted that the fear of "extreme" groups like the League exploiting C.I.R. should be rejected. He claimed that there was no chance of the type of "racist garbage" the League promoted being endorsed by the public. Challenged privately after the conference, Hyde had to admit that such comments were unjust. Professor Walker had already noted that such fears were baseless, since any group who could raise a petition, **would have to argue their case**. For example, a referendum on capital punishment is also feared. Reams of statistics are used to demonstrate that capital punishment is a poor deterrent, but little attention is given to the virtue that with capital punishment, there are **few repeat offenders** of the worst crimes.

Critics of the League are in the difficult position that, if they are prepared to concede that C.I.R. is a useful mechanism to reverse the centralisation of power, then perhaps they must concede that the League might also be right about a number of other issues!

A FURTHER LOOK AT AFRICAN REALITIES by Eric D. Butler:

There was a time when the famous Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who spent much of his life serving the Africans of South-West Africa, was the hero of the left-liberal do-gooders around the world. But the hero worship came to an end when, in answer to a cynical journalist's question about how he really regarded the Africans he was serving, "Did he agree that the Africans were his Christian brothers" Schweitzer replied, "I certainly do, but my very junior brothers by thousands of years". If true history is ever written, the main criticism against the Western colonial powers will not be that they went into "Darkest Africa", but that having set a primitive people on the ladder up which they could advance, then suddenly kicked the ladder away, with the Africans collapsing back into a new barbarism. Only the handful of Europeans who have stayed on prevent the former Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) from sinking to the level of other "liberated" African States.

Nigeria, former British colony, one which was going to be the showpiece of how a Western-style democracy could operate successfully, has provided a devastating example of what has happened in "liberated" Africa. First there was a bloody civil war, basically between the northern tribes, predominantly Muslim, and the southern Christianised tribes. Generally forgotten is that at least 3 million perished. General Abacha, a key figure in three coups over the past decade, took power last November from a weak transitional government. He has proved to be the most despotic of the military leaders who have ruled for 24 out of the 34 years since Britain granted "independence". General Abacha has closed newspapers, jailed his critics and used his troops to crush any demon-

strations of opposition. But, needless to say, Nigeria has remained a member of the United Nations. Currently there is a strike of workers in an attempt to force the military out of office. There is a direct threat to the oil industry. In an attempt to halt the violence, the Clinton Administration has had to face the reality that sending a white American to Nigeria could be disastrous. He has therefore sent black American politician Jesse Jackson.

It can be predicted with certainty that Nigeria is going to witness another bloody period of disintegration. Then the call will go out for some more United Nations "peacekeeping". South Africa is destined to go the same way. The most sensible policy for South Africa would be for the West to have accepted African realities and permitted the Zulus to have established under their monarchy the type of government which is traditional. It is high time that the West stopped trying to pretend that Western-style democratic governments can be successfully established in Africa.

BRIEF COMMENTS: It is not surprising that the Germans had the greatest difficulty keeping Doug Collins, the rugged British born Canadian journalist, in prison. Author of *The Destruction of English Canada*, Collins uses his formidable pen to criticise what he calls "multicultural madness". In one of his recent newspaper columns Collins provides the following piece of information, which will interest Australians: "One sometimes thinks the whole world has gone mad. But that isn't quite so. Here's an immigration story that will never happen in Canada. 'Swiss to deport refugees. Switzerland plans to deport about 1,000 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers. Despite opposition from Swiss human rights groups.' Good on you, Switzerland." In a recent comment to an Australian friend, Doug Collins says he still hopes to visit Australia one day to talk about "multicultural madness".

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The move by the State Premiers to create a new Australian Federation is all right so far as it goes. But it should be noted that while Premier Kennett of Victoria is supporting the concept of bringing government closer to the people, in Victoria he has been ruthlessly undermining Local Government by compulsory amalgamations. But Mr. Kennett is right when he says that "The Federal Government is a creature of the States, it was formed by the States. So the States are now saying, 'All right, we are going to review the effectiveness of the creature we set up. And if we can determine a better way for us all to work, then we'll articulate that with the public.'"

Mr. Kennett has not pointed out that the original concept of the Federation was that of an association of **sovereign** States, with the minimum of power for the Federal Government. Originally the States had control of Income Tax, with provision for State Banking. No new Federation will be successful unless there is effective decentralisation of financial power, thus making the Federal Government the servant of the sovereign States.