



# ON TARGET

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*The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –*

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**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:** "This progressive restriction of liberties shows itself in every country: it is that the passing of these innumerable series of legislative measures, all of them in a general way of a restrictive order, conduces necessarily to augment the number, the power, and the influence of the functionaries charged with their application. These functionaries tend in this way to become the masters of civilised countries. Their power is all the greater owing to the fact that, amidst the incessant transfer of authority, the administrative caste is alone in being untouched by these changes, is alone in possessing irresponsibility, impersonality, and perpetuity."

– Gustav Le Bon in *The Psychology of the Crowd*

## THE KENNETT FACTOR IN THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTIONS by Eric D. Butler:

Premier Jeff Kennett of Victoria is not noted for being one of the nation's deep political thinkers. But at long last it appears to be dawning on him that what his Government has done in Victoria is not making it easier for the Howard-led Coalition to win the next Federal Elections. He was absent from last weekend's Victorian State Council meeting when John Howard spoke to the Council, stressing that Victoria was crucial to the election of a Coalition Government. When Premier Kennett did address the Council, he conceded that his Government would suffer some losses at the next Victorian State Elections. This statement was made before the first evidence emerged that his compulsory amalgamation of Local Government was in some areas having a devastating effect on the rates of many who are traditional Liberal or National Party supporters. Generally speaking, the Victorian backlash is going to hurt the National Party more than the Liberal Party.

A recent professional survey in Queensland came to the significant conclusion that a major feature in the electoral backlash against the Goss Labor Government was the perceived threat to private property rights. This was not only obvious in the loss of seats directly related to the proposed freeway from Brisbane to the Gold Coast (C.W. Forbes, *"Business Queensland"*, 14/8/95). Other programmes, including the proposals for Cape York Peninsular, were also seen as evidence of a threat to private property rights. It has been estimated that at least five Victorian electorates are at risk as a result of the Kennett Government's controversial transport proposal, with the introduction of tolls designed to force as many motorists as possible to use them. The increased transport costs will not assist the ailing Victorian economy, where the unemployment figures show that the Kennett Government's gambling-led recovery is not proving a great success. The growing social implications of the State Government's promotion of gambling as a means of overcoming the State's financial problems, have brought the major Christian Communion out against the Kennett Government. Kennett's attack on

Church leaders has neither been constructive nor helpful to the Federal Coalition's electoral prospects.

What has happened in Victoria is not unrelated to what happened 20 years ago in the events concerning the Whitlam Government, still being re-hashed by and misrepresented by former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and his army of media supporters. Whitlam was forced to go back to his electoral masters because there was an "umpire". The Governor-General Sir John Kerr, representing the Monarchy, decided that under the Commonwealth Constitution he was obliged to invite the electors to be the final adjudicators. This is presented by the Whitlamites as an undermining of "democracy". The essence of the current crisis in the U.S.A. is similar to what happened in Australia concerning Whitlam's failure to persuade the Senate, actually quite constitutionally, to refuse to grant Whitlam Supply. Only under the American system there appears to be no way to resolve the problem until the next American elections. It appears almost certain that the crisis will continue to poison American politics until the next elections. While the American Founding Fathers correctly perceived that the protection of the individual's rights depended upon power being divided, they did not create a suitable mechanism for dealing with the type of stalemate which could, eventually, lead to the re-election of President Clinton. The Republicans are seen as the "bad guys" who in their ideological zeal for a "balanced budget" have held up programmes upon which large numbers depend for their incomes.

It was the same with the Richard Nixon crisis. Such a crisis could not happen under a Constitutional Monarchy. In Jeff Kennett's Victoria there is no effective division of power; the Kennett Government has an absolute majority in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. Because of this complete monopoly of power, the Kennett Government has even been able to put aside the traditional common law rights of the people. It provides a striking lesson for Australians everywhere. They must never give any Federal Government a complete monopoly of power. Their major objective at the next Federal Elections must be to ensure that they have a safeguard against the unwanted policies of any government, irrespective of its label. With the major political parties in agreement on the same basic policies, they can help to protect themselves by putting them last in their Senate vote. And for added protection, they should insist on preserving the Constitutional Monarchy.

#### DR. LAWRENCE'S LIPS MOVED by David Thompson:

The public response to the Marks Royal Commission finding that Dr. Lawrence had lied about the Penny Easton petition has been accepted as understood by the Australian electorate. So cynical have we become about politicians and their honesty that no-one is surprised by the result. It recalls to mind the little riddle that begins by asking the question: *"How do you know when a politician is lying?"* Answer: *"You can see their lips moving."*

But the Lawrence affair marks a turning-point in the continuing deterioration of the standards of public life. The most outrageous aspect of the whole affair must be the Prime Minister's behaviour. Mr. Keating has used the Parliament to denigrate Commissioner Marks, in order to blunt the effectiveness of his inevitable Report. Thus, the Queen's "first servant" improperly attacks one of her Royal Commissioners for political gain, and apparently departs without being called to account.

Little attention seems to have been given to the effect upon the Commissioner, former Supreme Court Justice Kenneth Marks. Having completed an exemplary career on the bench in W.A. and living a life of measured probity as befits a person asked to pass judgement on many complex issues without his own preferences or feelings intervening, Justice Marks finds himself in a difficult position. Required to do his duty by the W.A. Premier under circumstances that he might well regard as part of a political brawl, Kenneth Marks must now suffer the Prime Minister's attack virtually in silence. A worthy man

with an impeccable record besmirched by an arrogant Prime Minister bent on scoring political points to protect Ms. Lawrence.

**KEITH WILSON SPEAKS OUT:** In his unprincipled defence of Dr. Lawrence, Mr. Keating is also casting the most damaging aspersions upon his own A.L.P. colleagues in W.A. Dr. Lawrence's evidence to the Commission directly contradicted the evidence given by at least eight of her former colleagues, six of whom were her Cabinet Ministers. The Prime Minister supported Dr. Lawrence, who claims she told the truth. Did the others all lie under oath?

One of the former A.L.P. Cabinet Ministers, Keith Wilson, a Minister of the Uniting Church, has now spoken up. In a radio interview, Mr. Wilson declared his opinion that Mr. Keating should resign for his part in the affair. Further, Keith Wilson said he is now ashamed to have been involved with the A.L.P., and that **he wishes he never had been**. As the Prime Minister has implied that Mr. Wilson lied under oath, his reaction is hardly surprising. As with Commissioner Kenneth Marks, Mr. Wilson has little choice but to suffer Keating's attack without the means to effectively respond.

Does it matter that politicians tell lies? Are they not almost **expected** to tell lies? Yes, **it does matter**. It matters because Government is impossible without trust, and **trust is impossible without truth**. Truth partakes of reality, and political policies in conflict with reality **always produce disaster**. Behind the cynicism about politicians telling the truth, voters care very deeply that truth be the basis for trust, and may eventually feel deeply enough about the matter to punish untruth at the ballot box. In the end, it is the voter who must bear the consequences of disasters that result from ignoring reality.

**DEMOCRATS ATTACK SENATE AUTHORITY:** The moral outrage that Democrat Senators effect concerning the finding that Dr. Lawrence lied, is tempered by the decision to do little about it in the Senate. The Senate has the opportunity to send a message to an arrogant Prime Minister, by refusing to pass the necessary legislation for the Commonwealth to pay Dr. Lawrence's legal costs before the W.A. Royal Commission. Dr. Lawrence was not called before the Commission in her capacity as the Commonwealth Minister for Health, but to answer for her activities as W.A. Premier. The Commonwealth has no moral obligation to cover her enormous costs. Why will the Democrats not block the bill?

The Democrats appear to have foolishly placed themselves in a politically compromising position by guaranteeing that they **will never block an appropriation bill** in the Senate. This is a result of the 1975 dismissal of Whitlam, which resulted from a conflict between the House of Representatives and the Senate, which refused to pass Whitlam's budget appropriation bills. The Democrats have pledged "**never again**". The A.L.P. is now arguing that the legislation to cover Lawrence's legal bills is **an appropriation bill**, and that this binds the Democrats to support it.

However, even if the Democrats do vote with the A.L.P., the two Green Independent Senators from W.A. may cast the deciding votes. Maximum pressure is now being applied to the Greens to pass the bill, which they are not inclined to do. They reject the cynical argument that this is an appropriation bill, and are enduring tremendous scorn from the A.L.P. and from sections of the press. The W.A. Greens might well be "out to lunch" on many issues, but they do serve an important purpose: **they break up the monopoly on power** that the parties wish to exercise. This simply demonstrates the vital importance of the Senate in the coming Federal elections.

**CHANGING THE SENATE RULES:** In the interests of political stability, and in the service of the mythology that any Party with a majority in the House of Representatives deserves to have its appro-

riation bills passed by the Senate, Senator Kernot proposes to change the Senate's rules of operation. The Democrats propose that the Senate's power to refuse appropriation bills **should be withdrawn**.

This proposal is a major attack on the independence of the Senate. It was clearly the intention of those who drafted the Constitution that the Senate should be equal in status and power with the House of Representatives with few exceptions. Those exceptions do include money bills as follows from Section 53:

*"The Senate may not amend proposed laws imposing taxation, or proposed laws appropriating revenue or moneys for the ordinary annual services of Government. The Senate may not amend any proposed law so as to increase any proposed change or burden on the people . . ."*

Thus, the Senate **may not amend** appropriation bills, but it is **quite free to refuse them**. Section 53 concludes with the following sentence:

*"Except as provided in this section, the Senate shall have equal power with the House of Representatives in respect of all proposed laws."*

It is clear that the Democrat attempt to hamstring the Senate, and dramatically increase the powers of the House of Representatives requires a referendum to change the Constitution. It would certainly fail. No referendum that openly proposes to centralise further power could expect to be successful. Certainly not when the impression of politicians as being less than honest has just been so thoroughly reinforced by the Marks Royal Commission.

**NIGERIA AND ECONOMIC SANCTIONS:** The journalist Simon Jenkins, writing in London's *The Times*, makes an interesting observation concerning the Commonwealth's determination to impose economic sanctions upon Nigeria. The Nigerian military dictator, General Abacha, directed that political opponents be hanged in the face of international condemnation. Jenkins writes:

*"General Abacha is a lucky man. He is about to receive that foolproof survival pack for any world leader. It contains economic sanctions, disinvestment, cultural boycott, diplomatic exclusion and excoriation by Greenpeace and the Body Shop . . . The longest-serving dictators in the world are the most sanctioned. Their capitals are cleansed of meddling foreigners, businessmen and aid workers. Their opponents are exiled to the London School of Economics, or the Third World page of *The Guardian* newspaper. Their family and friends grow rich on sanctions busting . . ."*

There is some wisdom in Jenkins' observations. Sanctions against Iraq's Saddam Hussein forced Iraq further towards economic self-sufficiency. Iraq became self-sufficient in wheat for the first time, denying Australia an export market perhaps permanently. Under sanctions in Rhodesia, after the declaration of independence in 1965, economic self-sufficiency was essential, and the nation prospered in many respects. It was not sanctions that brought South Africa to its knees, but **financial pressure** from the international banking groups which refused to renew South African loans. Thus, any nation that can make itself financially independent is free from international interference. The "financial markets" hate independence. The West could easily have defeated the Soviet Union at any time by withdrawing Soviet financial assistance. This the international banking groups refused to do.