



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance -

Print Post Publication Number 381667 00258

Vol.32, No.6

February 23rd, 1996

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "There is confusion nowadays about what it means to be a 'nation', and a 'nation-state' ... essentially a nation is a sort of extended family. It links individual and group, parent and child, past and future, in ways that reach beyond the rational to the most profound and elemental in the human experience."
— Peter Brimelow in *Alien Nation*

THE POLITICIANS VERSUS THE ELECTORS by Eric D. Butler:

West Australian Independent candidate Graeme Campbell, along with the team of candidates he is sponsoring around Australia, is the only prominent candidate contesting the Federal Election who says he trusts the Australian people to have a direct say by referendum concerning their own affairs. The three major party political leaders, Keating, Howard and Fischer, have by now surely exhausted the list of lavish promises they have made to the people. But the reality is that apart from the relatively few party faithful, the great majority of electors is completely cynical about party political promises. Unless Paul Keating can pull a major political rabbit out of the hat over the next week, or John Howard makes a bad stumble, Graeme Campbell is almost certainly correct when he says that he expects Howard to win. He stresses the point that a Howard win makes it essential that he survive as an Independent Member to offer some real opposition. Campbell might have added, that he will be needed to act as a focal point for the tensions which are going to surface in the Coalition parties.

In spite of the party manipulators making every endeavour to keep immigration and multiculturalism off the election agenda that has emerged, Keating and Bolkus have attempted, with the aid of sections of the media, to charge that the Coalition is badly tainted with "racism". Federal National Party leader Tim Fischer was called upon to disown North Queensland National Party candidates, Burgess and Katter, for making "racist" remarks. But the problem for Fischer, and for John Howard, is that there is widespread support for Burgess and Katter throughout Queensland, where the anticipated loss of Labor Members is expected to benefit the Nationals more than the Liberals. Already Members of the Queensland National Party, both State and Federal, have made it clear they are strongly opposed to the Hilmer Report and other manifestations of "economic rationalism". There has also been growing support among Queensland Nationals for the concept of citizens' initiated referendum.

In their desperate attempt to avoid the dreaded "racist" smear, the Liberal Party last week withdrew their support for their candidate in the safe Labor seat of Oxley, Mrs. Pauline Hanson, who made the comparatively innocuous remark that what most people perceived to be excessive welfare payments to Aborigines was causing community resentment. As Graeme Campbell has pointed out, the manner

in which a multicultural growth industry has been fostered, at the expense of the great majority of taxpayers, is causing growing resentment throughout the nation. A flood of letters supporting Pauline Hanson in *The Queensland Times* provides striking proof that large numbers of people agree with her. And there is a growing number of John Howard's Federal Liberal Party who **privately** express their concerns about the direction in which current immigration and multicultural policies are taking the nation.

If John Howard and his minders believe that they can effectively deal with the multicultural, immigration and associated issues simply by suppression of all discussion they are making a big mistake. They are attempting to tighten down the valves on a rising ferment which will ultimately lead to a major explosion. The current American situation contains a message. The dramatic increase in electoral support for republican candidate Patrick Buchanan is because of his strong opposition to "globalism" and the American immigration rate. Much of the social violence in the United States has its roots in the growing frustrations of the American people. The same frustrations are starting to emerge in Australia.

Assuming that John Howard comes to office, he will be taking over a situation which, in the absence of constructive action, is certain to produce growing social friction and a political upheaval. Under orthodox finance-economics, John Howard cannot possibly deliver the numerous promises he has made. This can only lead to a further increase in poisonous cynicism. The only way to avoid disaster is for the politicians to demonstrate that they believe the time has come to start trusting the people, to let them have a say concerning issues which worry them. Graeme Campbell the Independent could prove to be the catalyst for a political movement across present political divisions, which would bring Australians together as a true nation. Whatever happens on March 2nd, Australia is on the verge of turbulent developments which will shape the destiny of the nation.

ANOTHER REBUKE FROM BILL HAYDEN by David Thompson:

The departing address of the Governor-General, in the middle of an election campaign as it was, provided an object lesson for those who were scathing about Mr. Hayden's original appointment. It is true that Bill Hayden was offered the vice-regal post as a balm to political injuries suffered at the hands of Bob Hawke in particular, but the Labor Party in general. Faced with an election that even "a drover's dog could have won", Hayden was elbowed aside as A.L.P. leader in favour of Hawke. It is also true that Hayden went to the job as an avowed republican, so far as senior politicians had then declared themselves. And it is true that the appointment of an avowed agnostic, if not atheist, to the vice-regal office was not in keeping with the Christian flavour of the monarchy. But Bill Hayden is a living demonstration of the truth that no individual is beyond redemption: people **can and do change**. This, of course, is the very crux of the Christian message.

Apart from having rejected "democratic socialism" as a political ideology, perhaps the most notable change of emphasis in Hayden's position has been on the issue of the republic. In a very pointed reference to Mr. Keating's campaign launch, in which he proposed a 'plebiscite' to ask Australians whether they would prefer "an Australian Head of State", the Governor-General described himself as **Australia's Head of State**. Although the Constitution specifically refers to the Queen as the Head of State, Hayden obviously subscribes to Mr. Howard's argument that for practical purposes, the Governor-General is effectively Australia's Head of State, and is **already an Australian**.

At other times, Mr. Hayden has warned that the republican proposal should be carefully and fully considered, before a system that has a proven success record like the monarchy is discarded. He has also stressed that his previously-expressed republican sympathies **should not be taken for granted**. It is clear that the responsibilities that the office of Governor-General places upon the individual have had an effect on Bill Hayden.

HAYDEN HITS OUT ON SENATE: The second point of Mr. Hayden's departure address that must have made Mr. Keating squirm, was his references to the Senate. Keating is on record as working towards the objective of eliminating the Senate, which he describes as "unrepresentative swill". But Hayden emphasised the importance of the Senate, harking back to the 1975 dismissal of Whitlam. This, said Hayden, provided a lesson on the significant extent of authority that the Senate could wield in response to executive government.

"It is also becoming a house of public resort," he said. "That is, the public is increasingly seeking Senate intervention on matters of concern in the community. As its committee system evolves further, I suspect it will become a parliamentary chamber of enormous significance to the community . . . in any event, the power of the Senate is not likely to disappear. The public will not allow that. Even less likely is that the public would allow it to be abolished."

With the advent of the Democrats in the Senate, it has become clear that no Government in the immediate future can expect to control the Senate. Mr. Hayden has clearly identified the public disgust with politicians and governments, and decided that the Senate is the key to resisting the worst abuses of the system. His views, pointedly expressed in the heat of the campaign, cannot be interpreted in any way other than as a rebuke for Mr. Keating. It should be remembered that the Prime Minister had refused to permit other Ministers to appear before Senate Committees of Inquiry. Such an outrageous evasion of public accountability deserves every possible rebuke, and it is entirely appropriate that the Governor-General should rebuke Mr. Keating publicly.

REFERENDUM ON UPPER HOUSE IN QUEENSLAND: If the role of the Senate needed emphasising at all, the resurrection of Mr. Borbidge's pre-election promise to hold a referendum on the re-introduction of the Queensland Upper House does this admirably. It should be recalled that it was **the Labor Party** that abolished the Queensland Upper House in 1922, by having the Legislative Councillors first vote themselves their salary for life, and then vote themselves **out of existence**.

As a House of Review, Legislative Councils have a critical role to play in curbing the excesses of the Legislative Assembly. This is best demonstrated in States where the government does not control the Upper House. In N.S.W., for example, republican Premier Bob Carr was prevented from removing all references to the Crown from the N.S.W. Parliament **because he did not have the numbers in the Upper House**. For the same reason, Mr. Carr has refused to recall the N.S.W. Parliament to debate the downgrading of the role of the Governor, even though legal advice indicates that he is most unwise to proceed without the consent of Parliament. Mr. Carr knows that the proposal for a part-time Governor would not be approved by the Legislative Council, which he does not control.

In other States, where the State Government **does** have a majority in the Upper House, like Victoria, the role of the chamber of review is corrupted by **Party politics**. Premier Kennett has insisted that the Victorian Legislative Council pass his draconian legislation on such matters as local government and Albert Park simply by exercising party discipline.

The one Legislative Council that is unique in Australian politics is that of Tasmania. In this chamber, political parties have relatively little influence. For historical reasons, Tasmanians traditionally elect Independents to the Legislative Council. There is no suggestion that this makes Tasmania ungovernable, or even that Tasmania is any less stable than any other State; in fact, the reverse is the case. It should be remembered that when Dr. H.V. Evatt attempted to remove 14 key constitutional powers from the States during World War II, it was **the Tasmanian Legislative Council** that confronted Evatt. Refusing to countenance such a massive centralisation of power, the Tasmanian Upper House forced Evatt and the A.L.P. to the famous "Fourteen Powers Referendum" of 1944, which the Australian people rejected.

If Mr. Borbidge and his Queensland National Party colleagues are serious about a new era of consultative politics in Queensland, then the referendum for a restoration of the Legislative Council is a good start. When arguments surface about "more politicians" getting their snouts into the public trough, perhaps Mr. Borbidge could foster a debate on **what type of politicians** should be elected to the new Upper House. For example, if **no member of the Upper House** could serve in the ministry, the temptations of power might be modified. If a genuine Upper House Committee system was proposed, which could call ministers before it to account for public expenditure, etc., widespread public support could be generated. And if Mr. Borbidge really did want to offer Queenslanders a part in the consultative process, why not introduce the opportunity for Queenslanders to initiate their own referendums, the results of which could bind the government to ACTION.

BRIEF COMMENTS:

The Coalition tactic of not revealing policy details until well into the election campaign appears to have frustrated the A.L.P. tacticians, and mystified the voters. But with the myriad of policies promising Nirvana to voters, the less credible they become. By the time Mr. Howard finally launched his campaign in Sydney last week, the campaign environment produced a cynical response. Mr. Alan Wood, writing in *The Australian* (19/2/96) was scathing: *"Enough is enough. By more than doubling his election spending promises to \$6.2 billion yesterday, John Howard has moved the campaign to new heights of fiscal irresponsibility . . . The two biggest jokes of Howard spending are \$2.7 billion for his family tax package, and \$1.1 billion for a rebate on private health insurance. In his campaign speech he invited us to add them together and conclude that they represented a 'comprehensive but economically responsible attempt to provide relief to families raising children'. No, they don't. They are an economically irresponsible attempt to buy votes by extending middle class welfare . . ."*

Such a response from Wood is mirrored by other economic journalists, and has been applied to the policies of **both party groups**. The truth is that neither of the big parties are to be trusted with their campaign promises. The electorate will undoubtedly identify the "policy promises" for what they are – little better than simple lies.

NATIONALS ON THE FAMILY: One post-election diversion that could wreck any possible Coalition "honeymoon" period, is that of divisions between the National and Liberal Parties. Some National Party back-benchers, for example, are openly rejecting the Hilmer reforms, providing heart-burn for Mr. Howard. And the National Party have served noticed that while they support Mr. Howard's policy pitch directed at "the family", this **definitely does not include homosexual couples**. It seems a pity that the conservative position that the National Party holds on some issues cannot be broadened out, and pushed up to the Liberals in the strongest possible fashion, rather than the Nationals simply tagging along with Liberal Party policy that is almost indistinguishable from that of the A.L.P.

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"ON TARGET" is printed and published by The Australian League of Rights,
145 Russell Street, Melbourne. Telephone: (03) 9650 9749, Fax: (03) 9650 9368.
Subscription \$30.00 p.a.