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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

Print Post Publication Number 381667 00258

Vol.32, No.17

May 10th, 1996

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "Society has long recognised the disruptive action of even casual stealing : systematic stealing by threats of brute force has usually ensured prompt protection action. Yet we find actions which are considered immoral and inexcusable in a private individual have become acceptable in governments. The Moral Law has ceased to apply to governments. Governments recognise the laws neither of God nor man; they make their own laws; they are a law unto themselves Having one set of laws for private individuals and another for government officials is sufficient to disrupt any society"

– James Guthrie, B.Sc., in *Our Sham Democracy*

BEHIND THE VIOLENT SOCIETY by Eric D. Butler:

The writer well recalls the chill of horror which ran through Australian society when the first kidnapping in Australian history took place, not long after the Second World War. Kidnapping had been regarded as so alien to Australians that even hardened criminals expressed horror. But over the intervening years violence of all kinds has developed. Not surprisingly, many elderly people no longer feel safe in their own homes. There have been increasing incidents of the elderly being brutally attacked in their own homes, the motive generally being a search for money. The Port Arthur massacre, different only in terms of numbers killed from several other mass killings in recent years, is but the latest example of violence in what has increasingly become a sick society. Not surprisingly the event has generated a type of hysteria, which sheds more heat than light on basic causes. Presumably some of the people who have been ringing up and threatening the staff at the hospital at which the suspected killer was being treated for burns, are normally law abiding people. Did these people want the nursing and medical staff to kill the suspect, or let him die of his wounds? Fortunately in Australia the civilised Christian based rule of law still prevails, and every suspect of a crime, however serious, is treated as an individual and entitled to a fair trial. The Tasmanian Crown Prosecutor has been rightly scathing of the role of the mass media in the Port Arthur affair. It is appropriate to point out that the media, which heads a campaign which urges more "gun control", is not suggesting that it might be an appropriate time to re-establish capital punishment in Australia. Why?

The Christian tradition stresses that every life is unique and precious. But there is nothing in the Christian tradition which says that an individual whose life is threatened by a potential killers does not have the right to protect himself by, if necessary, shooting or killing the person threatening him. Christianity claims to be a religion of realism. The realist knows that after the wave of emotionalism associated with the Port Arthur tragedy, there will be further acts of violence throughout Australia

unless there are reversals of the policies which have produced a sick society. Control of any of man's creations, which can kill or maim, can at best have minimal effects if basic causes are ignored. Police expressed their dismay when in spite of all these warnings, there was a sharp increase in road deaths over last Easter. Presumably all cars involved had been registered, and the drivers had licences. With the statistics revealing that the biggest number of fatal accidents are young drivers, the obvious conclusion is that all the legislation in the world will have little effect until there is a greater sense of **personal responsibility**. But the concept of **personal responsibility** has been eroded in modern society. That wise British statesman Enoch Powell has recently observed that today's younger generation are basically the same as their elders. But the elders have permitted the young to be fed on a cultural diet which is the basic cause of the social disintegration in society.

Assuming that Big Brother John Howard and his fellow politicians permit the elderly to have guns in their homes to defend themselves, as some of them have been doing, this may act as a deterrent against some break-ins, but while the finance-economic policies which John Howard favours, continue to result in an underclass of young unemployed, youth violence will continue. It has been estimated that in recent years, the biggest number of suicides, not all with guns, have been among Australia's rural male youth. Who has been responsible for the type of policies which have led to hundreds becoming so despairing of the future, with a feeling that they have been failures? The answer is those Federal politicians who have religiously defended the debt financial system while sometimes abusing as "extremist" the League of Rights which has consistently warned about what was happening and the inevitable destructive consequences.

It is right and proper that Australians should bow their heads in prayer when shocked by a Port Arthur tragedy. But far more than this is needed to avoid further violence. Is it too much to ask Christian leaders to direct their attention to basic causes?

LESSONS FROM THE PORT ARTHUR TRAGEDY by David Thompson:

The horror of the Port Arthur shootings is one of those dreadful crises that, regrettably, is being exploited, not only by the press, but by those who have a political agenda. Some press groups now find themselves the subject of court action for the way the issue has been reported. Further, any suggestion that it is possible to over-react to the Port Arthur killings is depicted as almost an obscenity. The missionary zeal with which some newspapers have embarked upon the anti-gun crusade merely underscores the ideological bias of the press. In a crisis with emotional undertones it is clear that people will accept centralised controls that they would otherwise find abhorrent.

One of those who has more cynically exploited the Tasmanian agony, is N.S.W. Premier Bob Carr. With seriously depleted electoral stocks, and a series of recent political blunders behind him, Carr was one of the first to identify the perfect political opportunities arising from the slaughter. He moved immediately to capitalise on this by stage managing the attempt to hand over N.S.W's responsibilities for firearms regulation to the Commonwealth. The pious demands for similar action by the other States was an attempt to wring every drop of political mileage from the issue. It is underlined by the fact that Carr's much-trumpeted legislation **is not legislation at all**. This is merely a Bill before the N.S.W. Parliament, and it has gone almost unnoticed that there has been no attempt to have Carr's anti-gun legislation even debated by the Legislative Council, **which was not even sitting**. Perhaps Jeffrey Kennett's scathing criticism of Carr as Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of responsibility, was fully justified.

The truth is that Carr does not really want the Legislative Council to debate this legislation, for two reasons. First, he would be offering a perfect platform for the Shooters' Party M.L.C., Mr. John

Tingle. The moderate, able and articulate Tingle has been responding to the anti-gun hysteria very effectively **when he has the chance**. Second, there is almost no chance that the Carr bill would pass the Legislative Council, where the Government depends upon minority groups like Call to Australia and the Shooters' Party to pass its legislation. The Niles have indicated that they would not support handing additional powers to Canberra unless all other States were likely to do so.

BAYING FOR BLOOD: The self-righteous moralising about the "red-neck gun lobby" is the height of hypocrisy. In a system of representative government, every group with a special interest has every right – even a duty – to seek political representation. The same people who yesterday insisted that the Green Senators who hold the balance of power in the Senate had the right to demand green concessions in the budget, or similar legislation, are today baying for the blood of people like Shooters' Party M.L.C. Mr. John Tingle. Such people are not complaining about the Aboriginal lobby seeking to influence governments, even though they are an even smaller interest group than shooters.

Right around the nation, the centralists are taking the opportunity to centralise further State powers in Canberra. Some interesting political bed-fellows are emerging, such as the Carr and Howard administrations. Irrespective of party label, the impulse to hand powers to Canberra is a centralist, Fabian proposal, and should be identified as such. Problems can rarely be solved by centralising power; this usually intensifies the problem.

One of the great ironies is that the passionate demands for rigid nationwide firearms legislation **will not address the problem**. What is the problem? Sometimes a person kills one or more others. A ban on semi-automatic rifles and a nationwide firearms register cannot prevent this. In fact, according to Dr. Adam Graycar, Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology, **guns are not the primary choice of murder weapons**. Over one third of murders are committed with a "sharp instrument" (knife, etc.) and at least another third of murders are committed with a "blunt instrument". About a quarter of murders are committed with the use of firearms. Some of those are committed by licensed shooters, and as is alleged to be the case in Port Arthur, **some offenders are not licensed**. Indeed, New Zealand research reveals that the majority of "massacres" in New Zealand are committed by licensed firearm owners. Licensing shooters does not help.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE: The principal criminologist at the Institute, Dr. Sat Mukherjee (presumably of Indian background), argues that distinct cultural factors may also be at work here. He refers to British reserve, and wonders at its influence in reducing violence. Japan has a low crime rate, and Mukherjee argues that the country's **homogenous culture**, with its disciplined codes of behaviour and political emphasis on full employment, have played a role in minimising violence. He contrasts this (*Weekend Australian*, 4/5/96) with the U.S. where multiculturalism generates many complex social tensions inflamed by easy access to weapons. It is impossible to ignore reports that the alleged Port Arthur gunman muttered something about foreign tourists before beginning to shoot.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the Tasmanian shooting is that it **could easily have been prevented**. Even without the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the alleged gunman was known to mental health authorities and to police. Press reports indicate that the accused was of very unstable mental background, and quite incapable of handling his own affairs. Under the Mental Health Act, the Tasmanian Department of Health and Community Services applied to the Supreme Court to intervene. On April 22nd, 1994, the Court ordered a trustee company to take over the administration of Bryant's assets, lest he squander his fortune. Doctors from Health and Community Services found him to be suffering from schizophrenia and a personality disorder, and would need continuing medical treatment.

MIND-BENDING DRUGS: Bryant had a very disturbed childhood, being expelled from several

primary schools, set fire to a local hospital, was banned by a bus company for abusing passengers, and had ***an air rifle confiscated by police***. His own parents had referred Bryant to Health and Community Services almost a decade ago when they felt they could no longer control him. It would appear almost certain that Bryant was taking medication for psychiatric disturbances, and herein lies a serious unreported cause of extreme violence.

It is well known that illicit drugs – even marijuana – alter human behaviour, and usually for the worse. But what about prescription drugs? Some prescriptions specify that a patient should not even drive while taking them. Some of the most dangerous prescription drugs are **given to psychiatric patients**. Studies in the United States show that psychiatric drugs have a mind-altering, violence-inducing effect. One of Australia's most violent crimes was committed by Frank Vitkovic on December 8th, 1987, who shot and killed 13 people in the Melbourne G.P.O. before committing suicide. He had been prescribed the anti-depressant Ativan, and according to the Mims Drug Compendium, one of the side-effects is "rage".

Many other cases have been reported. In 1990 a Sydney magistrate was shot dead by a son who had been on psychiatric drugs for many years. In the U.S. in 1981 John Hinkley took several Valium tablets two hours before attempting to murder President Reagan. Many, many other cases are known, **but seldom reported**, and almost never given the significance that they merit, which would result in a challenge to the major drug companies of much greater severity than the challenge to gun laws. It was reported (*Sun-Herald*, 5/5/96) that on the occasion of the apparent suicide of Bryant's father, Maurice, in 1993, **police located a strip of Serapax nearby, with 18 tablets missing**. There is every reason to suspect that the Port Arthur tragedy owes at least as much to mind-bending drugs as it does to availability of firearms.

TINGLE UNDER GUARD: Shooters' Party M.L.C. John Tingle, who supports the banning of military-style assault weapons, does not support a national gun register. This **will not solve the problem**. Tingle's view is that the governments should rather seek the social and psychological causes of massacres. It is ironic that the same lobby that is calling for the banning of guns, and blaming the Tasmanian massacre on the Shooters' Party, has threatened John Tingle with death. Tingle now has a 24-hour-a-day armed guard to preserve his own life.

When it was suggested that if only one other person at Port Arthur on Sunday, April 28th, had a weapon, the gunman could have been stopped, reaction from the anti-gun lobby was scathing. But it is always ignored that in Switzerland, where every able-bodied man is required by law to have a military-style firearm in his home, and know how to use it, **the crime rate is almost the lowest in the world**.

TREAT CAUSE NOT SYMPTOMS: A quick, centralist legislative response at the height of emotional fervour about the Tasmanian massacre, is a dangerous response. It will **certainly not solve the problem**, but may give the illusion of having done so. It is quite likely that we shall then subside, with collective, self-righteous relief, at having "fixed" the gun problem. Will the next major massacre jolt us out of complacency? As Dr. Robert White, Melbourne University criminologist says, "Compared with 20 years ago, the world is much more violent and my own view is that it's going to get worse."

The only possible answer begins in every Australian home. As well as using the T.V. "off" button, we need to be teaching our children the values upon which Western civilisation was built. This is essentially and specifically Christian. But it is more than a legalistic "thou shalt not kill". It is a culture of love that begins in the family, and grows through the Church – the body of Christ – until it permeates even the most unfortunate families, and surrounds them with a genuine care that could see that a young man has a problem, and help him with it, before he helps himself to firearms in a drug-induced haze.