



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

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*The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –*

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**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:** *"At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to state this or that or the other, but it is 'not done' . . . .*

*"Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing, either in the popular press, or in the high-brow periodicals."*

– George Orwell

## THE QUESTION OF THE IRISH PRESIDENCY by David Thompson.

There are a number of lessons to be learned by Australians from the recent Irish election for their Head of State – a President. Theoretically, the Irish President is merely a figure-head, with no power, but the very fact that the Irish elect their president by popular vote has meant a high-profile election campaign, with the natural divisions in Ireland behind one candidate or another.

The fact that the main candidates were running on party political platforms is also significant. The "winner" of the election was Mary McAleese, an Irish nationalist and professor of law *from Belfast*. She was the Fianna Fail candidate, and now the Irish perception is that the Fianna Fail-Progressive Democrat government not only dominates the parliament, but has also "won" the Presidency. To become the Fianna Fail candidate, McAleese first had to beat former Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds in a pre-selection battle. McAleese is clearly a "Fianna Fail" President, having won on 46% of the primary vote. The "loser", or the next most successful candidate was the opposition Fine Gael candidate, Mary Bandotti, who achieved 32% of the primary vote.

It is impossible to argue that the Irish Presidency is not "politicised". It is impossible to argue that the Irish Head of State is above politics – it was a political party that put her there!

Another fascinating aspect of the McAleese victory is that for the first time the Irish have taken the unusual step of electing a President *from another country*. McAleese comes from Northern Ireland, which is under British rule, although the Irish constitution allows the Northern Irish to take out Irish citizenship. Can the Australian republicans explain this, or is it just a product of "Irish logic"? One of the main arguments trotted out by Australian republicans is that we have a "foreign" Head of State in the Queen. They deliberately ignore the well established fact that the Queen is distinctly Queen of Australia.



The republican slogan of "a resident for president" appears to be a basic part of the republican platform, yet their republican brothers in Ireland seem quite happy with someone from outside the state to hold the presidency.

Republicans affect to be affronted that Australians grow up without being able to aspire to be "Australian Head of State", as though we have somehow robbed ourselves of an honourable goal. But the British have never been able to aspire to become Head of State of Great Britain. Has this produced poorer government in Britain, or a less stable society? Compare this with the United States, where the Presidency is the ultimate political prize open to every citizen. Is there any evidence to suggest that the United States is or has been better governed than Britain? The reverse is the case.

It was a United States Head of State who was forced out in disgrace when Nixon was widely believed to be guilty of corruption in the Watergate case. Now the United States Head of State is under investigation, and appears certain to face a court case, involving sexual impropriety during his first presidential election campaign. There are also questions hanging over the Clinton presidency concerning campaign donations from Asian countries in return for political favours. It is most difficult to make the case that "a resident for president" in the United States has resulted in more stable government.

As Bishop John Hepworth pointed out in his *New Times* Dinner address, where he was Guest of Honour in October, Pol Pot was also a "resident president", and this fact did not produce stable government in Cambodia. It is difficult to argue that the hereditary principle is obsolete. In an age when the temptation to corruption is higher than ever, the principle of the hereditary monarchy becomes even more relevant.

**WILL LIBERALS COMPROMISE THE CROWN?** Under the pressure of the republican assault, it has been suggested that the Liberal Party may agree to a compromise first suggested by former Victorian Governor Richard McGarvie. His proposal was reported to be to change the Australian Constitution to prevent the Queen appointing the Governor-General, perhaps in favour of the Parliament or the Executive Council doing so. If a Bill could then be forced through the Parliament naming the Governor-General as the titular 'Head of State', this has the "merit" of fulfilling the republican demand that an Australian must be head of state. The Liberals could then attempt to placate the monarchists by arguing that this process will "save the monarchy", since it remains in place in the Constitution.

Such a compromise should be thoroughly rejected, as it serves only to undermine the crown. Once monarchists begin to retreat, they will continue to retreat, and the republican demands merely escalate. In essence, the republican demands are akin to a form of cultural terrorism. When one demand is met, the next appears, until surrender is inevitable.

**THE WIK DEBACLE CONTINUES:** Three Queensland National Party backbenchers crossed the floor of Parliament, and voted against the Coalition (but with Graeme Campbell and Pauline Hanson) on the Government's Wik legislation. Although it did not prevent the Legislation passing the House of Representatives, Bob Katter, De-Anne Kelly and Paul Marek, with strong assistance from Campbell, were making a powerful point on behalf of pastoral constituents. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of their challenge to Mr. Howard and Senator Minchin was that the press hardly reported this significant news.

Although Noel Pearson and other aboriginal interests are scathing about the Native Title Amendment



Bill, the fact is that interests of pastoralists will not be addressed by Howard's amendments. Under this legislation, anyone with any aboriginal heritage at all could lodge native title claims over pastoral leases, so long as some tenuous traditional physical connection with the land in question can be alleged. If the courts decide that such claims are valid (and in many cases they will be) for one member of a tribal or family group, the title then extends to *all those in the group*, which could be thousands of people.

What is native title? As yet, this is not clear. The courts will have to decide whether title is on the basis of hunting, prospecting, cultural, or other connections with land, but for a pastoralist, *there is no certainty* that he can prevent all kinds of people from wandering over his leases if title is granted to co-exist with his grazing leases. No other Australians are subjected to such an intolerable situation.

The amendments put forward by Katter, Kelly Marek, Campbell and Hanson were designed to give certainty to graziers and aborigines alike. The Howard Wik amendments satisfy no-one, except lawyers, and will be almost unworkable. Pastoralists could be tied up for years in courts and tribunals, with legal fees quickly strangling them.

The Wik amendments obviously generate plenty of tension, with the Senate threatening to either block the legislation, or amend it in a manner unacceptable to the Coalition. This could provide Prime Minister Howard with a "trigger" for a double dissolution of the Parliament, any time after March next year. The A.L.P. claim that they are prepared to fight an election on the Wik and aboriginal issues, but they would prefer to avoid it. For Mr. Howard to go to an election on such an issue, which satisfies nobody, could be suicidal.

The plea that the High Court ruling on native title should stand ignores present realities. City Australians should be acquainted with a few facts concerning aboriginal circumstances in Australia. According to Mr. Ian McLachlan, (Liberal, Minister for Defence):

- About 16% of Australia is already owned or controlled by aboriginal people. This is a land area equivalent to most of Western Europe and includes almost half the Northern Territory and 20% of South Australia.
- The Federal Indigenous Land Fund receives \$121 million annually over ten years to provide aboriginal people with a capital fund of over \$1 billion to buy more land for indigenous people.
- The Federal Government provides \$40 million annually to Native Title Representative bodies to assist native title holders and claimants, and spends around \$24 million annually on the Native Title Tribunal.
- Aboriginal people already have statutory access rights under State law to pastoral leases in W.A., the Northern Territory and South Australia.

With the High Court's Wik decision leaving an open-ended opportunity for endless negotiation for more native title, which even the A.L.P. under Keating had believed to be extinguished, the Coalition has little choice but to extinguish native title, and close the pork barrel.

**ASIAN MARKET FALL-OUT AND THE DEBT CRISIS:** The instability in the Australian share-market may be partly because Australian stocks are over-valued, and due for a "correction" as the experts say. But it is quite clear that the problems experienced here have been triggered by what has happened in Asia, particularly the collapse of a number of Asian currencies. If nothing else, the jittery



Australian market is a valuable lesson that the more Australia is welded into the "global market", the more vulnerable we become to problems in other parts of the world. The truth is that we become subject to decisions made by someone else somewhere else. That is, we surrender our sovereignty.

While industries dependent on Asian economies now expect a difficult future, it should be noted that the wool industry, which still depends heavily on European customers, has experienced a sudden upsurge in prices. The importance of the European connection is thus underlined. But the price surge comes more from the changes in the value of the Australian currency than it does from a genuine increase in the prices of wool. As the Australian dollar dropped against other currencies, it becomes cheaper for our Italian, German or British customers to buy our exports.

This, however, means that as the Australian currency is devalued by The Market, so then the Australian debt *increases accordingly*. Available information indicates that the increase in the Australian debt was in the order of *\$10 billion* when the value of the Australian dollar dropped.

The more the Australian economy depends upon export markets to function, the less functional the economy becomes. It becomes progressively *more difficult* to service the debt, rather than the reverse. That is, Australian sovereignty progressively declines, and the decision-making process moves offshore in both economic and political matters.

**PAULINE HANSON AND AID TO INDONESIA:** Independent Member for Oxley Pauline Hanson has successfully embarrassed the mainstream political parties by asking refreshing questions in the House. She asked the Prime Minister about the proposed financial facility of over A\$1 billion to bail out the Indonesian economy. She disturbed a few sacred cows by asking whether the President of Indonesia, Mr Suharto, an extremely wealthy head of an extremely wealthy family, would be contributing to the bail-out, since he had helped to cause the problem.

The question of aid to Indonesia to support the currency in the face of a falling market is explained away as a matter of mutual economic advantage by both Mr. Howard and the Opposition. A blind eye is turned to the matter of morality. The A.L.P. left has complained long and loud that this is the regime that mounted the brutal invasion of East Timor, while Australia did little.

Neither Mr. Howard nor Mr. Beazley were interested in addressing the question of Australia assisting in propping up the Indonesian military dictatorship. That it is also a Muslim military dictatorship is hardly relevant, but nevertheless true, and the way both government and opposition M.H.R's. squirmed under the Hanson questioning was salutary.

Perhaps Mrs. Hanson might also have asked whether the Indonesians would consider returning the massive oil reserves in the Timor Sea, which Australia seems to have handed over, although a substantial proportion of the known oil reserves fall within the Australian continental shelf.

Mr. Howard's statement to Parliament that "It is in the national self-interest of Australia to help when it can to strengthen an economy as large and as potentially powerful as that of Indonesia" is only half the answer. Such help also assists Indonesia to strengthen its military, which in the hands of a dictatorship amounts to underwriting tyranny.

