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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"Apart from a more realistic stand on the Wik decision and pastoral leases, the National Farmers Federation has been an expensive albatross round rural Australia's neck. It has betrayed family farmers much as the A.C.T.U. has sold out working families, and the Business Council of Australia has sold out Australian-owned businesses. Each in turn has made its peace with globalisation and the world order scenario."*

"What Will We Tell Our Children" by Jeremy Lee

THE DAY THAT GOD BROKE INTO HISTORY AND CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

by Eric D. Butler:

The obviously true statement that Christmas has become over-commercialised tends to obscure the basic reality of what Christmas reflects. One of the mysteries of history is that over the centuries it has had a powerful effect on large numbers of prominent non-Christians. It was the famous French agnostic Renan who observed that if Christianity did not exist, Man would have had to invent it. Renan was reflecting on what he saw as the many beneficial effects which Christianity had upon man's behaviour. The famous English novelist Charles Dickens could not be described as a dedicated Christian, but through his writings Dickens had an enormous influence in popularising Christmas throughout the English-speaking world. In the world described by Dickens, Christmas was a time when families came together, a time of happiness and goodwill between all men. Who can forget Dickens' story of the man who was the very antithesis of the Christmas spirit, Scrooge, a name synonymous with meanness and lack of charity. Life for Scrooge was grim and earnest, far removed from that of the Founder of Christmas, who said that He had come that the individual might enjoy the life more abundant.

In his essay *The Realistic Position of the Church of England*, C.H. Douglas commented on the concern of many clergy about preserving the traditional liturgy of the Church, "the mirror of a nobler day", but who purred with delight every time new crushing taxes were imposed, these increasing the power of Caesar (government) over the individual. It is, of course, important that all reflections of a "nobler day" be preserved, but it is of vital importance that concentrations on reflection do not obscure the reality which produced the reflections.

No one but a sectarian bigot would deny that the High Mass of the Roman Catholic Communion is an exquisite form of art. The Book of Common Prayer was written in a magnificent form of the English language which, when first threatened with "modernisation", brought both Christians and

non-Christians together in its defence. In the long run defence of the many stations of the culture of Christianity – literature, paintings, the great cathedrals, etc. – can only be sustained if there is a more widespread understanding of the basic roots of Christianity.

While it is true that no civilisation in the recorded history of man has ever developed in the absence of an undergirding coherent value or religious system, and while it is true that the development of Christmas owes much to the Greek and the Roman Civilisations, it is a major mistake to depict Christmas as anything but an extension of those Civilisations. The revelations brought by Christians were a complete break with all past revelations. Never before had the uniqueness of every single human being been proclaimed; never before had the divinity and value of divinity of each individual been stressed, with the Kingdom of God within every individual being available to those who searched for it; never before had it been insisted that institutions existed to serve individuals – "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"; or that while the individual required governments – Caesar – the power of government should not be so great that the individual was left with no power with which to serve God.

Christians had a religion of both Faith and Hope. The individual was no longer the passive creature of a history he could not control; through the use of freewill he could release his creative energies and actively participate in the making of history.

Christmas should be remembered as that moment when God broke into history in a manner which dramatically not only changed the course of history, but divided history between Before Christ (B.C.) and After Christ (A.D.).

The most inspiring celebration of Christmas is a determination to go back to Christian roots and to foster a continuous programme of regeneration.

HOW "WIK" OPENS THE DOOR FOR GST by David Thompson.

By the end of March next year, Prime Minister Howard expects to be equipped with the "trigger" to ask the Governor-General to dissolve both houses of Parliament, and call an election. This "trigger" is the failure of the Senate to pass his Native Title Amendment legislation, which is widely slated as "divisive" at best and "racist" at worst. Many fear the prospect of "an election based on race". Why is this so, if the same people regard living in a society with land title laws that are, equally, "based on race" with equanimity?

It is clearly the case that the land title laws are now based on race, since the High Court ruled (in the Mabo and the Wik cases) that one group, identified by their racial heritage, can qualify for certain land-use titles unavailable to others.

Mr Howard has now "nailed his colours to the mast" concerning native title, and it appears certain that there will be no retreating on the legislation while he is Prime Minister. Why is he prepared to risk his office by fighting an election campaign on such a highly emotional issue as native title, given that it has been "adopted" by those of the 'politically correct' outlook?

The answer to this has been carefully considered in the Coalition back-rooms months ago. Some senior Liberals are confident that, after a full-blooded election campaign, the perceptions of native title as an issue of social fairness and moral probity will disintegrate to the point that not only can the Coalition win an election on the issue, but that they would even *win control of the Senate*.

In our view, this is going too far. It would take a better class of politician than is presently available to revive public confidence in politicians to the point that Australians would be prepared to give a government control of the Senate. But in our experience, the opinion polling on the Wik issue is misleading.

There are several hidden implications to the Wik issue that are not understood in the cities. If Howard's legislation is not passed, there is still the strong possibility that freehold title will be affected. It may not become possible for aboriginal groups to *claim native title on freehold land*, but there are other issues. For example, what about water rights? If areas such as river frontage could be claimed, this leaves many freehold titles deeply affected, as their value is sharply eroded without free access to water. And what about urban areas that depend on river systems as metropolitan water sources. The Murray River is presently under claim by the Yorta Yorta people, and if successful, would have a huge impact on the irrigation areas, towns, and even Adelaide's water supply. This, and the fact that up to 79% of the land area of the nation is potentially open to claim could have a substantial effect on voting patterns if debated in an election campaign.

On top of this, Howard's Wik bill legitimises some tens of thousands of leases granted since 1994 in the post-Mabo era, which are now thrown into doubt by the Wik decision. If this fails because the Wik legislation fails, then either the leaseholders, including miners, find themselves in a hopeless position, or the government legislates to protect them, *and pays heavy compensation* to any native title holders.

Finally, there is every chance that those responding to opinion polls, are lying to the pollsters. It is not politically correct to dismiss the native title interests of aborigines, and in the super-charged environment of present public debate, few care to run the social risk of doing so. But the privacy of the ballot box is another thing altogether. There will be strong support for Howard's attempt to deal with this issue from voters. The fact that the Howard legislation will almost certainly not deal with the problem will not become evident until much later.

If Mr Howard can win a double dissolution, his Wik legislation is almost certain to pass at a joint sitting of both houses of Parliament. But this will not be the only bill before a joint sitting. Howard has until at least next October before going to the polls, and other issues that the Senate blocks would also be considered.

ENTER THE GST: It is not native title for which John Howard wants history to remember him. It is becoming increasingly clear that Mr Howard wishes to be remembered as the Prime Minister that overhauled Australia's tax laws. Under orthodox economic rules, this means the introduction of a goods and services tax (GST), for which corporate Australia has been pressing for years.

There is plenty of evidence that the electorate still opposes the GST. Many back-benchers still remember Dr John Hewson, whose leadership was aborted in flames after losing "the unloseable election" by campaigning on a GST. Mr Howard might have great difficulty in pushing a GST through the Senate, but if this was also dealt with at a joint sitting after the election, *it could be pushed through* with little debate.

There is one more, equally dangerous, issue that Mr Howard might like to deal with at a joint sitting: *the voting method for electing Senators* in the future. Earlier in the year Liberal strategists "flew a kite" on the issue, claiming that the Senate was "obstructive" and "unrepresentative". The language was reminiscent of Paul Keating's "unrepresentative swill" comment. It is clear that both major party groups would like to sweep away the influence of minor groups and independents in the Senate. Thus, while ALP Senators would join Democrat, Greens and independents in opposing such legislation, *the ALP would not campaign heavily against this*.

There is every reason to believe that Mr Howard would use a joint sitting, following a double dissolution, to sneak through all sorts of legislation he could otherwise not get through the Senate. It is one thing to have a double dissolution trigger, but Mr Howard still has to win the election.

THE MITCHAM WARNING TO PREMIER KENNETT

Last weekend's extraordinary swing of approximately 16% against Mr Kennett's Liberal Party candidate in the Mitcham by-election must surely penetrate even Jeff Kennett's horny political hide with a message for the future. As yet there is no evidence that Kennett has received the message from Mitcham - his response was not to acknowledge that his arrogance and policies need correcting, but to undertake to "explain" his policies better.

It is quite clear that Kennett's back-benchers have heard the electoral warning delivered in Mitcham, which means there will be some stormy Coalition party-room meetings. Kennett had to bulldoze the work cover legislation and the privatisation of the auditor-general's office through his own party room, showing scant respect for his own MPs.

Already MPs are feeling the public heat over new work cover regulations. One constituent is now before the courts because, having visited his MP to enquire about the impact of the new laws on his own situation, could not resist jumping across the desk, and punching his Member of Parliament.

The truth is that Kennett faces his last year in office, unless he is prepared to change his "style" and his policies. He has ensured the destruction of the National Party, and other States use the Kennett policies as an example of what not to do. For example, in NSW the ALP refused to countenance privatisation of power systems because of the results in Victoria. And NSW councils now fear talk of forced council amalgamations because of what was done in Victoria.

If Kennett is too arrogant to change his attitude, he will either be thrown out by his colleagues, or defeated at the polls. Perhaps Mitcham was his last warning.

GLOBAL UNION MUSCLE FOR WORLD ORDER

The international coalition of trade union forces that was used to defeat the training of former Australian servicemen on the Dubai waterfront heralds the emergence of the new global union force. The structural 'bones' of the global government gradually begin to take their form as time passes. Irrespective of the fact that most of our representatives deny the possibility of world government.

Already multinational corporations span the globe, many with budgets larger than some nation-states. Last week's Kyoto greenhouse conference illustrates the emergence of the United Nations as the model of the global "parliament". Prime Minister Howard is fulsome in his praise of Senator Hill, because Hill was able to preserve the interests of Australian industry into the next century in the global forum. The truth is that Hill had to *compromise Australia's interests* in order to be able to sign the Kyoto agreement. Our interests should not be submitted to any "global parliament" in the first place; certainly not without consulting the Australian people. We already have plenty of Parliaments to fulfil the decision-making process. We should be using them.

THE PRICE OF KNIGHTHOODS

News has 'leaked' out in the weekend press that the homosexual rock star, Elton John is to be knighted in the New Year's honours list, apparently for his fund-raising efforts for the Princess Diana Memorial Fund and AIDS research. This clearly offers another fillip to the powerful homosexual lobby. The message is that sodomy is now socially acceptable. It is perhaps ironic that Elton John will have to be knighted under his real name of Reginald Kenneth Dwight.