A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

Print Post Publication Number 381667 00258

Vol.35, No.1 January 15th, 1999

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"As no government can carry on for a month without money, it is not necessary to labour the point that the visible government of a country is obliged to take its orders and to shape its policy, and particularly financial policy, in accordance with the instructions of the dealers in this indispensable implement, so long as they hold a practical monopoly of it."*

– C.H. Douglas, ***Social Credit*** (1924)

MONARCHISTS THANK PRESIDENT CLINTON by David Thompson:

Late last year Prime Minister Howard claimed that the question of the republic was never raised with him as an issue, except by the press. This confirms the general impression that the coming Crown versus republic campaign is an issue of low priority for most Australians. It will take a massive press campaign to "beat it up" into an issue that commands substantial attention, let alone enthusiasm, and it is clear that the monopolised Australian press is preparing for this – **to promote the republic**. Prepare for a media blitz.

It is no surprise that the Murdoch press, spearheaded by ***The Australian***, is already arguing the case for the republican model produced by the Constitutional Convention. This model provides a serious dilemma for republicans. It provides for the appointment of a president by the Prime Minister in consultation with Parliament. It is widely agreed that this model is a poor substitute for the present system, and merely produces a republic in name only. Many leading republicans are disgusted with the "Turnbull camel", and ask "Why bother?".

Such is the division among republicans that some propose to campaign actively for the defeat of the Turnbull model. Former Governor-General Bill Hayden and former Independent Members of Parliament Phil Cleary and Ted Mack have announced that they will do likewise. With the republican camp divided, the fiercely anti-monarchist Murdoch press urges all republicans to heal their divisions and campaign for the Turnbull model, because it is at least a step towards a popularly elected president.

It is clear that the "big guns" are trained on the Australian Crown. The press, the ALP, big business and big money will campaign for the republic. The big money interests are represented by Malcolm Turnbull, with global merchant banking interests, and Australia's allegedly wealthiest woman, Janet Holmes a Court. Both are expected to pour at least $1 million into the republican campaign. In the face of this assault, the traditional supporters of the Crown, the "conservative" political coalition, will, for the most part, stand by and watch the attempt to destroy it. The likes of Sir Robert Menzies would be turning in their graves.

It is ironic that perhaps one of the most useful campaign figures for the monarchists is likely to be **President**

Bill Clinton. Clinton is, of course, anathema to the old-school conservatives of politics everywhere. But even the fibbing, womanising, adulterous Clinton can fulfil a useful role in the Australian campaign on the Crown. He can be held up as a bad example!

Clinton's impeachment trial begins as we go to press, and even if it is a relatively short affair, it is of immense significance, and commands acute attention around the world. It should be stressed that Mr. Clinton is a **popularly-elected president**, in the general mould demanded by many Australian republicans. The Head of State of the most powerful and wealthy nation in the world finds himself threatend with dismissal, not because he is accused of adultery and lying, but charged with perjury and obstruction of justice.

Do Americans regret their choice of Head of State? The evidence so far is that they do not, with opinion polls still supporting Clinton. But do Americans regret the enormous disruption to their system of government by having to try their Head of State for perjury? The evidence is that they certainly do regret it. The contrast with the monarchy could not be more stark. While previous monarchs have stained their reputations with adultery (and worse) it has not affected the stability of the British **system of government**.

This is the key to the Australian debate. Do we insist on choosing our own Head of State, or continue to leave that choice to Providence? So far, Providence has a better track record than the manipulation and corruption that accompanies the selection of the Head of State for the Republic of the United States of America.

RED IN THE MORNING – SHEPHERD'S WARNING by Jeremy Lee:

As we move into 1999 the nature and size of the battlefield emerges from the mist of the dawn. It is, and will continue to be, a battle for the world. It has assumed various guises in the past, but none as ominous as this. Not one family or community on earth can escape the outcome. Both sides claim the objective of "Peace": one through Love, the other through Power. It is, as thinkers on both sides have claimed in past skirmishes, a fight to the death.

On January 8th Mr. Fred Argy wrote a letter to ***The Australian Financial Review***. Fred Argy, more than anyone, was responsible for the implementation of Paul Keating's de-regulation policies, which delivered Australia into multinational hands. In the last two or three years Mr. Agy has spoken increasingly strongly against the results of the policy he administered.

In his letter he said the world was being divided into two: *"We are witnessing a dual economy at work across the world – in the real economy we have moderate to high unemployment, fierce competition in product markets, subdued wages, low product inflation, a decline in the range and quality of public services, a squeeze of low-income home buyers out of inner areas and growing inequalities in wealth and quality of life . . ."*

Ranged against this, Mr. Argy said, was the "asset" economy, booming round the world. In effect, economies were being looted by the powerful, raising the question *"Can this really go on?"* He concluded: *". . . . It creates an explosive contradiction between two economies and between haves and have-nots."*

We have seen that explosion in places like Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia and South Korea. In various forms it will be played throughout the world unless there are big changes in financial policy.

The Prime Minister and his Treasurer seem oblivious to what is really happening. They apparently believe that Australia as a whole is booming. At last month's interest-rate cut, John Howard told Parliament, "This is the most golden of days for the Australian economy." Peter Costello said of his fellow-Australians: "They are out there shopping, I think, because they've got more money in their pockets than they've ever had before."

If he only knew it – and you'd think that even treasurers can glimpse reality now and then – he is NOT talking about Australia as a whole, but a dwindling percentage.

THE GREAT DIVIDE: *The Weekend Australian Financial Review* (9-10/1/99) carried a major report by Stephen Long on what is really happening:

"Since 1993 the share of the nation's wealth held by the richest 10 percent has increased by almost five percentage points, from 43.5 percent to more than 48 percent . . . Over the same period, the richest 1 percent of Australians increased their share of national wealth by almost three percentage points, from a little over 12.3 percent to 15 percent . . . The new wealth divide has been buttressed by globalisation, which is concentrating employment and high income opportunities in the centre of cities while marginalising their industrial fringes and rural and regional Australia . . . In the mid-1980s there were about 25,000 millionaires in Australia. By 1993 there were 71,700 of them according to Access Ecnomics. In the five years since, the number rose by more than 60 percent, to 188,200 people. Their share of total wealth almost doubled to 21.5 percent, rising rrom $136 billion to $377 billion between 1993 and 1998 . . ."

WORLDWIDE DIVISION: Although more than 5 million Australians live on or below the poverty-line, completely unrepresented in the glowing statistics so glibly quoted by politicians, conditions elsewhere are far worse. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for 1998 gave the following sombre picture:

* Global consumption will top $24 trillion this year, twice the level of 1975 and six times that of 1950.
* Global consumption expendiure, private and public, has grown an average 3% a year since 1970.
* Africans now consume 20% less than they did in 1980.
* In 70 countries with nearly a billion people, consumption is lower today than it was 25 years ago.
* The richest 20% of the world's people:
  - Consume 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth 5%.
  - Consume 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than 4%.
  - Have 74% of all telephone lines, the poorest fifth 1.5%.
  - Consume 84% of all paper, the poorest fifth 1.1%.
  - Own 87% of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest fifth less than 1%.
  - The three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined GDP of the 48 least developed countries.
  - The 15 richest have assets that exceed the total GDP of sub-Saharan Africa.
  - The wealth of the 32 richest people exceeds the total GDP of South Africa.
  - The assets of the 84 richest people exceed the GDP of China, the most populous country, with 1.2 billion inhabitants.
  - Estimates show that the world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over $1 trillion, equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the world's people (2.5 billion).

How has this global division, on a scale never seen before, been achieved? And is the old socialist nostrum – to take from the rich and give to the poor– the solution? Are we doomed to a global version of the old class war between the "haves" and the "have-nots" ("Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!" was Karl Marx's version) in which all are finally ground into the dust?

These are the questions confronting us as we approach the millennium. Unless Australians can forge a new initiative in which successful human association can correctly analyse the problem, agree on the right alternative, and strive to co-operate in its achievement, the future is a dark age such as has never been seen before. The alternative, for which we are more technically equipped than any preceding generation, is peace on earth and life more abundant – for all.

GETTING RID OF MORE FARMERS: The Victorian Government now has a policy of buying out farmers, amalgamating the farms, and re-selling them. ***The Weekly Times*** (30/12/98) reported: *"The Victorian Government has offered to buy three Tambo Valley farms under its controversial buyback scheme . . . The Rural Finance Corporation general manager, administration, Malcolm Smith said the farm owners would have until mid-January to consider the offers. 'Three offers went out on Thursday and we expect to make more soon,' Mr. Smith said. 'The offers we made are a confidential agreement between us and the clients but the valuations were based on the Valuer-General's assessments.' So far, six farmers have applied to sell their farms to the Government under the scheme, officially called the Land Aggregation Program . . . The deal includes incentives for sellers and those who eventually buy the land. Those who leave get a $30,000 grant and those who buy may be eligible for a 2.5 percent interest rate subsidy. The State Government set aside $10 million to buy farms in north-east Gippsland's Tambo Valley after a trinity of disasters ravaged the region . . . The rural Finance Corporation administered buyback scheme is the first since it bought and sold farms in the Mallee in the late 1980s . . ."*

We'd like to be able to report that the National Party, on behalf of rural Australia, condemned the scheme as indicative of a disastrous lack of direction for the well-being of the farming community and the whole future of decentralisation in Australia. The loss of farmers over the last quarter of a century has been enormous, the plight of country towns devastating. Rural politicians go round with sticking-plaster, rather than alternatives to rebuild the bush. The most they have come up with so far is that the dwindling number of farmers should have access to the internet!

MORE DAIRY FARMERS TO GO: ***The Weekly Times*** (30/12/98) also reported that Victoria's dairy farmers are thinking of setting up their own supply company to counter the deregulation of the fresh milk market, which is anticipated to force a further 2,000 Victorian dairy farmers to leave the industry. Prices received by dairy farmer have already fallen by as much as 20 percent in the past two years. It is now estimated that deregulation will cut farmgate milk prices by a further 8 percent, resulting in an average loss of $16,000 for dairy farmers in Victoria.

Does this mean that consumers will be getting cheaper milk? Not unless they live overseas. Milk exports are considered much more important than local consumption.

A report by the United Dairy Farmers of Victoria *". . . predicted over the next five years 2,000 farmers would be forced out and dairy companies would have to merge and restructure their businesses . . . The plan also raises concern about the vulnerability of the dairy farmer co-operatives to takeover bids by the big multinationals, such as Parmalat and Coca-Cola Amatil . . ."*.

To all readers – A Happy New Year!

"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 $40.00 p.a.