

A WEEKLY COMMENTARY



ON TARGET

- NEWS HIGHLIGHTS
- BACKGROUND INFORMATION
- COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance -

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"As night does not come at once, neither does oppression. In both instances there's a twilight where everything remains seemingly unchanged, and it is in such twilight that we must be aware of change in the air, however slight, lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness."*

– William O. Douglas, US Supreme Court Justice

THE LEGEND OF TIM FISCHER by David Thompson:

The fulsome praise from both sides of politics for Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer when he announced his resignation from the Ministry is not a true reflection of his contribution. So far as the fortunes of rural and traditional Australia are concerned, Fischer's reasons for leaving - in the interests of a young family - are much better than his reasons for staying.

Indeed, Fischer cited his brutal international programme over the next nine months as one reason for his resignation. This is simply a reflection of the nature of "globalism". If we are to compete on a global market, we must be prepared to sacrifice the interests of the individual to the pursuit of our economic interests in every far-flung corner of the globe. Is Fischer conceding that his commitment to 'globalism' is a threat to his own family? Yet he is quite prepared to sacrifice other families on this same altar.

The political record of Mr. Fischer - particularly in the Federal Parliament - is a dismal one. He has presided over the disintegration of the National Party, which is a direct reflection of the increasing irrelevance of the National Party to its constituency - rural Australia. The Nationals have refused to stand firmly for rural interests when they have been in a position to do so, slavishly following the Liberal Party lead. Fischer and his colleagues have done little - if anything - to address the depopulation of rural Australia, let alone reverse it. They have done little to defend the interests of the farming family, and have steadfastly refused to consider any alternative financial policies that might have provided essential relief to farmers.

As Minister for Trade, Mr. Fischer's slavish commitment to "free trade" has further committed Australia to the global market, and seen the erosion of the last of Australia's manufacturing industries. He has also contributed to the economic and political regionalisation of Australia, in helping to construct an Asia-Pacific economic bloc. This trading bloc will develop into a regional political structure that could absorb Australia's political sovereignty, as "Europe" is absorbing Britain's.

On other issues, Fischer's record is equally disastrous. Our "Fischer file" is littered with correspondence from him deriding the issue of financial reform. Over the years, supporters have presented the

overwhelming evidence of the basic banking reality of the creation of credit. His blunt refusal to acknowledge this reality hints at an invincible stupidity.

It also hints at a well-developed talent for political survival. He has maintained an anti-League attitude when challenged by supporters on his denigration of the League. To one such challenger in 1995 he wrote *"I understand that many supporters of the League of Rights are not themselves racists, however I believe all Members of Parliament must be very cautious about with whom they associate."*

To another supporter, Fischer wrote *"I am a great believer in freedom of speech, however I personally find racist views to be unacceptable and I would not associate myself with any association which holds these views to be truthful."*

Irrespective of his commitment to free speech, Fischer was scathing about former ALP MP Graeme Campbell appearing on a League platform. *"Both sides of politics are opposed to the racist views held by the League of Rights, and politicians have no place in attending or addressing League meetings."* Mr. Fischer's opposition to the proposal for initiative and referendum puzzled many National Party supporters. He obviously adheres to the "mandate" philosophy of government, rather than any suggestion that representative government means consulting electors.

The betrayal that will perhaps be longest and most deeply felt by rural people, was that concerning firearms. Fischer simply refused to represent the National Party constituency on this issue, and lamely followed John Howard's insistence on punitive firearms measures.

Although a colourful politician, there is little in Mr. Fischer's record to distinguish him from any other party political hack who has strutted the political stage.

RIISING HIGHER AND HIGHER by Jeremy Lee:

Once again Australia's Current Account Deficit has risen – just over \$1.5 billion for May, compared with April's \$1.9 billion. The May figure is a bit over \$2 million an hour. It is now expected the 1999 total deficit will be round the \$40 billion – an average of about \$3.3 billion a month.

The discrepancy is explained in these words by journalist Stephen Koukoulas in *The Australian Financial Review* (1/7/99):

"... an item not reflected in yesterday's data is that each month there is an additional \$1.6 billion to \$1.8 billion shortfall which adds to the deficit on the net income balance – the interest and dividend outflows to foreigners ..."

So each 60 minutes – 24 hours a day – we have a trade loss of about \$2 million, and a further outflow of about \$2.5 million an hour in interest and dividends to foreigners.

To put it another way, each morning at breakfast every living Australian is up for \$6 to cover the Current Account Deficit and the outflow of dollars to foreign lenders and investors – 365 days a year. If the government-of-the-day actually charged us this way, there'd be a revolution in a week, a few political heads would roll, and the matter would be dealt with.

So they just stick it on the foreign debt and hope you won't notice. By the time our kids have to pay, they hope – like Mr. Macawber – some other answer will have turned up.

If you think Australia's figures bad, consider New Zealand. *The Ashburton Guardian* (NZ, 15/6/99) reported:

"New Zealand's overseas debt increased \$2.4 billion to \$102 billion – or 103.6 percent of Gross Domestic Product – in the year ending March 31, 1999. That was approximately in line with market expectations.

"Statistics New Zealand said \$1.8 billion of the increase came from currency depreciation.

"This 2.4 percent rise reflects relative stability after the 25 percent rise between March 31, 1997 and March 31, 1998," Government Statistician Len Cook said . . ."

With less than a quarter of Australia's population, New Zealand is in an even worse mess.

BIGGEST LOSS IN HISTORY: BHP, once the icon of Australian industrial genius – has made a loss of \$2.31 billion, which follows last year's loss of \$1.47 billion. This is the first time in the Company's 114-year history that it has made a loss two years in a row.

In the strange, Alice-in-Wonderland world of the stockmarket, BHP's shares rose slightly at the news!

GENETICALLY-ENGINEERED COALITION: Just as it did over the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, a new, non-party single-issue coalition is quickly developing over the issue of genetically-engineered seeds and foodstuffs. At issue once again is freedom of choice. Should consumers have the right to know whether food and seeds have been genetically engineered?

In July 1998 Australian and New Zealand Health Ministers set a standard to regulate the sale of genetically-engineered foodstuffs, which came into effect on May 13th, 1999. However, because companies had not complied with this deadline, ministerial approval was given to place 20 genetically-engineered varieties of six food crops – soybeans, corn, canola, cottonseed, potatoes and sugarbeet – onto our tables. These foods have not yet been assessed by the Australian and New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) for their safety to human health, and are not labelled as genetically-engineered. Engineered ingredients could be present in most processed foods with imported ingredients – breads, pasta, snack foods, confectionery, soft drinks and many others.

Now, with the main emphasis from the Australian GeneEthics Network, an offshoot of the Australian Conservation Foundation, an alliance is forming which already includes the AMA, the Public Health Association and the Organics Federation, plus about 4,000 individuals round Australia. Action is needed by August 5th, when Health Ministers decide whether labelling of genetically-engineered products is necessary. The Food Authority says no labels are needed. With enough letters and submissions this decision can be overturned.

Those requiring more information should contact Bob Phelps, Australian GeneEthics Network, 350 Gore Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 3065, Phone: (03) 9416 2222, Fax: (03) 9416 0767, E-mail: ecfgenet@peg.apc.org Web Home Page: www.zero.com.au/agen

Behind the push for genetically-engineered foodstuffs are the multinational giants set to make huge profits from their development of these products – and for the development of patented seeds that won't reproduce: Monsanto, Du Pont/Pioneer, AgrEvo, Rhone Poulenc. Original research in genetic engineering was pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation.

WAKE-UP TO NATIONAL FARMERS' FEDERATION: Rural papers in Queensland and New South Wales have carried front-page articles telling of major dissatisfaction with the NFF – the body that has claimed for years to speak for farmers without discussion.

The Land (24/6/99) described how there was major dissatisfaction expressed by the smaller States, who complained of "heavy-handed" leadership and dominance from the power-brokers in NSW and Victoria.

Among issues which brought the conflict to a head was the sudden resignation of former National Australia Bank chief Nobby Clarke, who has been Chairman of the Australian Farmers' Fighting Fund. *The Land* said:

"... Nobody – including Mr. Clarke – will reveal the reasons for his departure which occurred during the last AFFF trustees meeting but it has been claimed he was angered by NFF attempts to influence the AFFF's staffing arrangements ..."

Farmers have never been allowed to know how much money is in the Fighting Fund, which has been in the keeping of Mr. Clarke ever since the Fund was launched in 1985 by former NFF Director Ian MacLachlan. The fact that farmers donated the money apparently made no difference!

The NFF has never spoken for family farmers, who have gone to the wall in their tens of thousands in the 14 years since the Fund was set up. It has simply moved into the establishment, becoming a rural echo for the globalism that has ruined terms of trade for the man on the land. The NFF's legacy can be seen in the current devastation of rural Australia.

We predict the issue of genetic-engineering will be an innue to really test the NFF. Will free trade and global markets overcome all other issues in considering the rights of consumers to have free choice? We wouldn't put our money on the NFF.

Y2K – ANOTHER VIEW: Since March there has been an increasing amount of reassurance from government spokesmen that Australia is well prepared for Y2K – right up there with the leading nations.

Over the last couple of weeks we have noticed an unmistakable air of anxiety in some communications. A South Australian reader has sent us a circular by the Bank of South Australia to all customers. After pointing out:

"It is NOT just a computer problem. There is NO quick fix." – the circular continued by quoting Lou Morris, Managing Director of the Bank: "The Year 2000 problem is one of the most serious business-wide risk issues a company will ever face."

It went on: "Some of Australia's largest insurers plan to limit cover for Year 2000 failures and damage. Up to 75-80% of Australian SMEs (i.e. Small to Medium-Size Enterprises – ed.) are believed to be under-prepared for the Year 2000. Major organisations may not deal with businesses that fail to take action on the Year 2000. Addressing the Year 2000 Problem is not negotiable ... the dangers are clear, as is the deadline."

Obviously someone does not believe the political watchman's witching-hour call – "Past 2000 – and all's well!"

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