



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY



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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance -

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"A world concerned with values is a very different world from one concerned with virtues... C.S. Lewis saw a similar effect in the change from 'ruler' to 'leader' as the popular name for those in authority or power. We ask of rulers 'justice, incorruption, diligence, perhaps clemency,' but of leaders 'dash, initiative, and (I suppose) what people call 'magnetism' or 'personality'. We see this today in the change in the common vocabulary from 'piety', which requires submission to God, to 'spirituality', which does not, and from 'a book' that has a meaning, to 'a text' in which the reader may find almost anything he wants, and from 'conversion' which assumes the truth is known 'to conversation' which assumes it is yet to be found..' Men do not long continue to think what they have forgotten how to say."* **"To See Truly Through a Glass Darkly"** by David Mills

VICTORIA BUSH SAVAGES GOVERNMENT by Phillip D. Butler:

The old saying that "every dog has its day" should really read, after the results of the elections in Victoria, "every dog has **had** its day" because that about sums up the results in Victoria.

Premier Jeff Kennett has reaped the rewards of his own arrogance in the way he has in particular treated the rural electorates of Victoria. When he "debarked" all Liberal candidates in that they were not to speak to media or take part in public debates, it was the last straw.

However, the biggest bashing the Liberals took was in the bush and the regional cities of Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong. The Liberals have lost, as we go to press, at least 11 seats, including the anointed successor to Kennett – Rob Knowles, the Minister for Health, who has overseen the rationalisation of the health services in Victoria. In fact, the ALP has more Members from rural/provincial electorates than the Liberals or Nationals.

It is quite obvious that the political mould of voting for mainline political parties has had its day in Australia – Kennett claimed it wouldn't happen in Victoria. We are just so much more sophisticated than those yokels in the "Deep North" State of Queensland where they elect One Nation candidates! However, it could be that the Independents will have the balance of power in the new Victorian Parliament.

Just shows what can happen when candidates are prepared to **represent** their constituents. Russell Savage, who overcame a required swing of 20% against the Liberals in 1996 to become the Independent

Member for Mildura (the first Independent in Victoria for 30 years), made it clear in this election he was not a "oncer" by increasing his majority, despite the huge sums both the Liberals and Nationals spent in their attempt to unseat him. You see, it was one of Jeff's political "friends" Craig Bildstein who had helped oversee the forced amalgamation of municipalities and the finish of the "Vineland" rail service to Mildura, who Mr. Savage had defeated.

You can understand the fear Mr. Savage invokes in all the mainline political parties when he then went and had a talk to Carl Ditterich, one of the all time greats and fearless players of Australian Rules Football – according to Carl on the *Footy Show* – to run in the neighbouring seat of Swan Hill as an Independent. As we go to press he could, in fact – on preferences – win it from the Nationals.

It is quite obvious that the Liberals will not be able to govern without the support of the Nationals, and could even then require the Independents. This is where the Nationals can make the difference – by showing they are not transparent Liberals, by sitting in the cross benches and insisting that they look after the interests of rural Victoria.

Russell Savage says it best – *The Sunday Age* (19/9/99): *"The message for the Nationals is to get out of the coalition or just give up and become dinosaurs . . . I am convinced that country people want an advocate. They want members of Parliament that are looking after the interests of the electorate and not a party interest dictated forum in Melbourne. Jeff Kennett is his own worst enemy, and it is important that the coalition gets the message loud and clear."*

LOOSING THE DOGS OF WAR by Jeremy Lee:

The Australia-wide indignation at the atrocities in East Timor contain all the idealism usually found when wars begin. All we have to do, the theory goes, is to send in a "peace-keeping" force. The enemy, while grumbling, will retreat; justice will be done and all will be well.

The burning enthusiasm quickly wanes when the casualties begin, the costs mount, the foreseeable end retreats further into the distance, and the reassurances of political leaders diverge with increasing frequency from the evidence. As the American writer Hiram Johnson said: *"The first casualty when war comes is truth"*.

To put it mildly, the Timor peacekeeping venture is a rocky one. About 8,500 troops will establish themselves in the island of Timor – about as close to Australia's northern coastline as the distance from Sydney to Melbourne. Thirteen nations will make up the force, with Australia contributing over 50 percent. Other nations are – Thailand, 1,500 men; Canada, 600; South Korea, 400; Britain, 250 Gurkhas; and also Fiji, the Philippines, Malaysia, Bangladesh, France, Argentina and New Zealand. Timor itself is some 500 kms in length, with rugged country and high mountain ranges. It is divided into two – West Timor, under direct Indonesian control, and the disputed area of the former Portuguese East Timor.

There are some half-million refugees, with 150,000 of these in West Timor, and a quarter of a million starving in the mountains of East Timor. There are some 26,000 Indonesian troops in the disputed territory who, it is hoped, will withdraw, which merely means shifting from one part of the island to the other. The first, impossibly difficult task facing the peacekeepers will be to stop any movement over the border from West to East or vice-versa – including by sea.

Participating nations in the peacekeeping force are not as single-minded or squeaky-clean as one might think. For example, Britain has been a major arms supplier to Indonesia. *The Australian Financial Review* (Weekend, 11-12/9/99) reported: "Britain faces increased pressure to suspend substantial military ties and arms trade with Indonesia after it became clear yesterday that UK-made Hawk jets were still being deployed in East Timor in defiance of undertakings given in LondonBritain is the European Union's largest exporter of arms to Indonesia, although France and Germany are also major suppliers.

"UK exports to Indonesia, which include Hawk jets, Scimitar armoured combat vehicles, and sniper rifles, are believed to have totalled \$280 million last year. Under a \$600 million contract licensed by the former government, Indonesia bought 16 jets.

"French exports, which also include armoured combat vehicles, were worth about \$440 million last year. According to Mr. Paul Beaver, a spokesman for the Janes Defence group in London, in 1995 Indonesia placed the largest single order for navy ships ever, buying 'all of the former East German navy, 33 ships', as well as new submarines from Germany"

There's an eerie feeling of *deja-vu*. Are we going to see a repeat of the situation in Vietnam, documented by former Hoover Institute researcher Dr. Anthony Sutton in his explosive book *"National Suicide"*, where American soldiers were being killed by American technology in the hands of the Vietcong? And are we going to see a repeat of the self-defeating "No-win" war, where opposing troops have a safe-haven territory, immune from invasion?

Or take Malaysia's stance. While participating in the international force, the following appeared in *The Courier-Mail* (16/9/99): "Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has accused Australia of pressuring Indonesia to allow them to lead peacekeepers in East Timor.

"He said the force should be led by South-East Asian nations, adding Malaysia was ready to play that role.

"'We have given our pledge to Indonesian President B.J. Habibie that if he wants our help we are ready,' Dr. Mahathir said.

"'But it is clear that other countries such as Australia are keen to send their soldiers to East Timor. That is their habit. They really love it when they have the chance to pressure their neighbors, to condemn their neighbors. That is their way....'"

Thus it appears that the token contributions of a number of such countries is little more than 'paper-hanging'. In reality, Australia will bear the brunt of the effort, both financially and physically. Former Liberal leader John Hewson, writing in *The Australian Financial Review* (7/9/99) commented: "...To sustain our contribution to the peace-enforcing efforts for any length of time is likely to go beyond our capabilities. So it will not only cost about \$300 million to \$400 million to just deploy the troops to East Timor, but considerably more to sustain them there for a significant length of time. And it will not be a short engagement"

How good are Australian troops? They are among the best-trained in the world. But there are not

enough of them, and the technological backup is woefully inadequate after years of depleted defence budget allocations.

The Weekend Australian (11,12/9/99) said: "...Asked whether Australia had the military capability to intervene unilaterally in East Timor, our leading Defence strategist, Dr. Paul Dibb, says: 'Absolutely not. We currently spend 1.7 percent of gross domestic product on defence. That is the lowest level since the late 1930s. We would have trouble sustaining a brigade for six months in the field of combat. The contrast with Britain is illuminating. Britain spends 2.9 percent of GDP on defence and it had a credible expeditionary force to send to the Gulf and Kosovo. Australia doesn't have a credible force.'

"There are now 26,000 Indonesian troops and police in East Timor. This is more than five times the size of the 4,500 troops slated for Australia's UN contribution"

There is another factor we should remember. With over 80 percent of its population of 211 million who are Muslims, Indonesia is the biggest Islamic nation in the world. It can therefore expect support from a considerable bloc at the UN.

Indonesia will be determined that a successful independence movement in East Timor will not fan similar aspirations elsewhere in the archipelago. A brief article in the *Courier-Mail* (17/9/99) under the heading MUSLIMS PUSH FOR VOTE said: *"Muslim religious leaders in the Indonesian province of Aceh have agreed to push for a referendum on self-determination, reports from Jakarta said yesterday. About 500 Muslim leaders in the Islamic province also warned of 'further and larger unrest' in Aceh if their call went unanswered."*

The East Timor referendum has started a chain of events stretching into the future the shape of which may be blacker than anyone believes possible.

Writing of the US defeat in Vietnam, the famous Field-Marshal Montgomery of Alamein wrote in his memoirs: *"The U.S. has broken the second rule of war. That is, don't go fighting with your land army on the mainland of Asia. Rule One is don't march on Moscow. I developed these two rules myself ..." (p.318)*

MANUFACTURING IN CRISIS: Employment in Australia's manufacturing sector has fallen to its lowest level on record as a result of the Asian crisis. 13,000 jobs were lost in the three months to the end of August, taking manufacturing employment to 1.063 million – 3,000 fewer than the last recession and the lowest on record.

Since August 1997, when the Asian 'meltdown' started, 76,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector.

Farming, mining and manufacturing are Australia's 'bread-and-butter'. All three are in recession. We can create as many service jobs as bureaucrats can think of, and call it 'growth'. But it is the production of real things that counts in the long run.

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