



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"With the Cold War over, the masks can be drawn aside at least slightly, and elementary truths, sometimes expressed in serious scholarship, can be publicly entertained. Among them is the fact that the appeal to security was largely fraudulent, the Cold War framework having been employed as a device to justify suppression of independent nationalism – whether in Europe, Japan, or the Third World. 'The USSR's demise has ... forced the American foreign policy elite to be more candid in articulating the assumptions of American strategy,'... We can no longer conceal the fact that 'Underpinning US world order strategy is the belief that America must maintain what is in essence a military protectorate in economically critical regions to ensure that America's vital trade and financial relations will not be disrupted by political upheaval...'"*

– "World Orders, Old and New" by Noam Chomsky, 1994

WHY IS THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE NOT AN ELECTION ISSUE? by Jeremy Lee:

The series of blunders and scandals besetting the ATO are now so blatant and anti-business that the whole realm of taxation and the department itself should be in the minds of every candidate of every party.

The latest is a damning report from the National Audit Office which implicitly labels "INCOMPETENCE" all over the blundering colossus which has become the bane of small businesses and taxpayers throughout the nation. Over 90,000 applications are now made annually for 'private rulings'. Such a phenomenon is only possible where tax laws are so obscure that department officials themselves are uncertain what they mean.

It is difficult to say whether obtaining a private ruling is a benefit or not, or whether it would be better to be left in limbo. The Tax Department can reverse its own rulings, deeming them "illegal" for up to six years after. There is no such thing as certainty for the taxpayer who conscientiously tries to meet his obligations.

The National Audit Office found that, even when "private rulings" were made, one tax officer had great difficulty in discovering what rulings fellow officers had made. Different rulings on identical situations were a natural outcome.

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"..... The lack of integration of systems and inadequate systems controls undermine certainty, fairness and consistency of treatment for taxpayers,' the office said,....." (*The Australian*, 18/7/01)

Commenting on the tax mess, and the current rumour that an international firm of accountants was about to be employed at a further cost of \$300 million to sort it out, Adrian Tame (*The Sunday Herald Sun*, 22/7/01) commented:

"How have we come to this? A year and several million of our taxpayer dollars ago, when some idiot on the box was burling about unchaining our hearts, many of us truly believed we were going to be delivered from the world's most needlessly complex tax system.

"Because that's what the Howard Government's promise was – a simpler, less costly and more effective tax system, which would reward the honest and penalize the rorters.

"Twelve months after the introduction of the GST, four out of five businesses believe it is more complex and costly than the system it replaced – according to a Price Waterhouse Coopers survey this month.

"More than 70 percent of small and medium-sized businesses surveyed had spent up to \$250,000 on transferring to the new system. More than 40 percent said they would go on spending between \$10,000 and \$50,000 a year on GST compliance.

"The company's expert, Kevin O'Rourke, pointed out there had been 1800 'fine tuning' amendments in the GST's first year, with another 1,000 in the wings; the Taxation Act had increased from 3,000 pages to 8,500; this year's TaxPack is 350 pages, up from its already cumbersome 200 pages before John Howard came to power"

My standard Bible has 1,250 pages. The Taxation Act, according to O'Rourke's figures, is well over six times the length of the Bible! And this is what the Howard Government is pleased to call "simplifying" taxation in Australia!

THE ASTON BY-ELECTION: The poll-pundit witchdoctors are having a field day interpreting the results of the Aston by-election. Has Beazley done his dash? Has Howard turned the corner? Etc., etc. – we've heard it all before.

The most significant result is hardly mentioned: *The Australian Financial Review* (18/7/01) put it this way:

".....Recent elections show gathering public disaffection from the major parties. In Aston, the first preference vote for independents and minor parties equaled 23 percent. In Ryan, this vote was 18 percent. In the West Australian State election this number was 28 percent. In the 1998 Senate election, 24 percent"

The preferential system of voting masks, for a time, the bleeding away of votes from the main parties. But there comes a point where it bursts into the public consciousness. Will it be in the coming federal election? If it does, it will be in rural Australia that it is most apparent.

THE 'GANG-OF-FOUR' DOES IT AGAIN: The banks – bless their gold-braid cotton socks – have earned about \$6.3 billion from fees alone last year – a 14 percent increase over the year before. The figures are from the Reserve Bank's annual survey of Bank Fees – no less. Monthly account-

servicing fees have risen from \$2 to \$5 since 1995. Over-the-counter withdrawals have jumped from \$1 to \$2.75.

It must be all that competition from foreign banks, which then-Treasurer Paul Keating told us would produce more competitive services.

We notice that in the latest controversy over his piggery, Paul Keating received favoured treatment from the Commonwealth Bank – before the Labor Party flogged it off, of course.

'ILLEGALS' VANISH INTO THE COMMUNITY: How do 46 escapees from the Villawood detention centre simply disappear and remain undetected? The answer is that a well-prepared ethnic organization is in place and operating to frustrate the lawful authorities. *The Australian* (24/7/01) told us:

" The 46 escapees from Villawood are already being provided with money, food and medical attention through the city's various ethnic communities, refugee activists said yesterday.

"The networks are so well organized the fugitives can not only keep off the streets, they can also send messages back to any relatives left behind in Villawood"

The whole refugee saga has become a farce that is making a mockery of any valid attempt to police Australia's borders. If this is allowed to continue it will set the scenario for an "ethnic-versus-government" confrontation with dangerous consequences that could well match Brixton, Bradford and Oldham in the UK.

GM CROPS IN AUSTRALIA: Despite surveys showing widespread community concern over the use of Genetically Modified Organisms, the number of hidden GM trials is increasing day by day across Australia. The Federal Government's Office of the Gene Technology Registrar has released details of 629 crops in Australia experimenting with controversial genetic material.

Queensland's *Sunday Mail* (22/7/01) gave details of what is happening in the State:

"Camouflage, decoys and deliberately misleading directions are being used to hide 41 genetically modified crops growing in Queensland.

"Many of the GM crops are surrounded by ordinary crops; the GM crops are disguised with shade cloth and guarded night and day."

Crops being tested include apples, cotton, lettuce, pineapples, pawpaw, sugarcane and canola. Among those responsible for the trials are the University of Queensland and the multinationals Monsanto and Aventis. The Gene Ethics Network and other lobby groups have warned that the crops pose a potential threat to other cropping, particularly through cross-pollination.

THE BENEFITS (?) OF GLOBALISM: Australia's Treasurer Peter Costello is about to launch a campaign selling the benefits of globalisation. This will follow the allocation of \$60 million to be used in Australia's schools, plugging globalism.

It never seems to occur to politicians that, if a particular programme is producing benefits, they are self-evident. Launching a campaign of "persuasion" is really an admission of failure. Ordinary Australians know whether things are better or worse. They don't need their tax money to be spent on campaigns telling them that black is white.

We have now had a quarter-century of changes heading towards de-regulation, free-trade, the level playing field, national competition, the lowering and elimination of protection for local industries, and so on. The politicians in the major parties are convinced - or dare not say otherwise - that we are all better off. The poverty, stress and suicide figures, as well as unemployment, downsizing, foreign and household debt, say otherwise.

All of which is reminiscent of Squealer in George Orwell's "Animal Farm" who, as things got worse, always had the latest set of figures "proving" things were really better.

Kay O'Connell, the Manager of the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service at St. Albans, Victoria, had a straightforward, truthful and hard-hitting letter in *The Weekend Australian* (14,15/7/01), replying to Mr. Abbott's suggestion that those in poverty must largely blame themselves. Her letter included these points:

".... Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service is a community based organization providing a range of services to people who are disadvantaged and living in poverty. We work daily with people who are facing extreme hardship due to circumstances beyond their control. Every day we see people who are worn down by the poverty they experience in their lives. It is a constant struggle to make ends meet Poverty is not a function of their individual behaviour. They have not made mistakes that have caused them to be less well off than they might otherwise be. They are simply not receiving an adequate income".

Taxing the better off to provide a welfare net for the increasing number of destitute is not, and never has been the answer. Social Credit offers the alternative.

BOSSES RIGHTS ERODED by Antonia Feitz:

Once upon a time people who employed others in their businesses could select whomever they wanted. If the owner/manager of a car yard wanted a blonde bimbo on the front desk he could advertise for a young woman and select the most buxom. These days that's discrimination and illegal. Consequently our employer must go through the motions of interviewing men and older women, but he'll still employ a bimbo if that's what he really wants.

A local cake shop owner told a jobs agency that he wanted a female employee, but they wasted everybody's time sending along hapless lads who didn't stand a chance. The owner bided his time and selected a girl. There's no doubt these sorts of busybody laws bring the law into disrepute.

Why should governments concern themselves with such matters? Why shouldn't the owner of a restaurant be allowed to employ buxom young women, Koreans, redheads or midgets as his staff - if he wants a certain image? It is highly objectionable that governments have banned this sort of discrimination.

Then there's maternity leave. Employers break the law unless they offer a returning woman her old job or one of equal status. While that may work for government bureaucracies and large organisations it's simply impractical and often burdensome in small businesses, and not so small ones too. A recent survey showed that 43 percent of chief executive officers and general managers rising to 45 percent of senior managers said women on maternity leave shouldn't expect to return to their old job or one of equal status (*SM*, 17/7/01).

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