



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "To 'declare war' on terrorists, or even more illiterately, on 'terrorism' is at once to accord them a status and dignity that they seek and which they do not deserve. It confers on them a kind of legitimacy... to use, or rather to misuse the term 'war' is not simply a matter of legality, or pedantic semantics. It has deeper and more dangerous consequences.

To declare that one is 'at war' is immediately to create a war psychosis that may be totally counter-productive for the objective that we seek. It will arouse an immediate expectation, and demand, for spectacular military action against some easily identifiable adversary, preferably a hostile state; action leading to decisive results... Any suggestion that the best strategy is not to use military force at all, but more subtle if less heroic means of destroying the adversary are dismissed as 'appeasement' by ministers whose knowledge of history is about on a par with their skill at political management.

Figures on the Right, seeing themselves cheated of what the Germans used to call a *frischer, fröhlicher Krieg*, a short, jolly war in Afghanistan, demand one against a more satisfying adversary, Iraq; which is rather like the drunk who lost his watch in a dark alley but looked for it under a lamp post because there was more light there..."

– Sir Michael Howard, from speech to *Royal United Services Institute*, October 31st, 2001

THE CORROSIVE EFFECTS OF EGOPOLITICS by Jeremy Lee:

It is November 11th, one of Australia's 'holy days', when we remember with gratitude the sacrifices of those who have fallen in battle for our freedom. One can only think with sadness that yesterday's election was as great an assault on freedom as some of the battles in past wars.

The Coalition, campaigning on an openly fear-based platform, not only improved its own position in the House of Representatives, but gained control of the Senate. It can now force through unopposed any legislation which it sees fit to design.

As a result, our Federal Government for the next three years, which has to steer through problems unlike anything encountered so far since federation, may well end up as the most disliked administration in a century – surpassing that of Keating, Hawke, Fraser and Whitlam.

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Four days before the election the Editorial in *The Australian* (6/11/01) described this campaign as follows:

"The phony campaign has run all year. It started when the Government used taxpayers' money for 'educational' advertising. It transformed into the Government using more of our money for pork-barrelling in marginal seats and reversals on policy. Then it extended to the parties delaying their official campaign launches to suck more public money into their own coffers before that had to foot the bill themselves. Now we have two over-scripted, backward-looking leaders who wouldn't risk coming up with a creative idea or policy reform any more than they'd risk showing some leadership on just how Australia should make its way in the world"

This description is apt. The Prime Minister's victory speech was a complete parody of everything the Coalition said and did. He told us he regarded himself as "the servant of the Australian people". A true servant would have behaved in an entirely different way. He would firstly hold the Constitution as sacred – not to be changed, distorted or diminished until its basic amending formula, the considered consent of the Australian people on one-thing-at-a-time, had been activated. Every International Treaty entered into by the Australian Government defies the intent of the Constitution. The Treaties currently under discussion – the extension of the World Trade Organisation and, particularly, the signing of the GATS agreement, due to come into operation in November 2002 – is a profanity in the face of constitutional integrity.

Like a presidential dictator the Prime Minister now consigns young Australians into faraway wars without even asking his own assembled parliament. If there is any debate, it is carefully screened from public view.

Such a tactic is dubious, to say the least, in the weeks leading up to an election. It is possible to stampede the electorate, and this was cynically the case in yesterday's election. But such tactics carry huge risks. A backlash when further facts emerge is always a probability. If our war partner – in this case the United States – has not been up-front in its reasons for war, the consequences in popular anger are likely to be shared by all those involved.

The Editorial in *The Australian* continued:

".... This has been a fake campaign between two politicians whose stance is the same on key issues and so close on others that they pretend to find points of difference. John Howard speaks ominously of dangerous and disturbing times ahead. But he speaks to his empty mantra of economic management and national security The sad reality is that this election campaign represents a low point in Australia's political governance – a competition for the lowest common denominator. Will it come down to who can fool the most number of people on one Saturday in November?..."

And that is exactly what happened. As events unfold in 2002 and beyond, many Australians are going to ask themselves how they could have been so short-sighted in November 2001.

THE GHOSTS YET TO COME: Having cynically campaigned on defence issues, the reality of Australia's position is yet to break on the public consciousness. The 'boat-people-invasion' continues unabated since the Tampa incident, which could have been activated months before, and should have

been. If boats continue to come, and refuse to turn round at the orders of Australian naval vessels, what action will be taken? Will they be fired on? Of course not. What will happen when those island communities which have kindly, and temporarily, given us a breathing space by taking refugees off our hands can take no more? Their capacity, to say the least, is limited, and any law-and-order or security problems will quickly add to their reluctance for any future influx.

What if it is shown that, like the current situation within Australia, the refugees include a quota of organized terrorists? Any suggestion that this is unlikely or impossible is wishful thinking.

What happens when Australians put two and two together, perceiving that the dreadful treatment handed out to civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine is a direct cause of the burgeoning refugee crisis on our shores?

What happens when the stories filtering back to this country from our troops overseas begin to conflict with "the official line" about what is *really* happening beneath the massive carpet bombing and in the thousand-foot gorges above the snow-line in the battle-zones of Afghanistan?

Will Australians continue to trust the statements of our politicians as the war and the refugee crisis bleed us white? These are the questions that Howard's administration will have to face.

THE GHOST OF ECONOMICS: These issues are bad enough. But if they require answers at a time of economic deterioration, with its attendant down-sizing, business collapses and rising unemployment, there will be added cynicism and anger throughout Australia. Most already suspect the truth that the unemployment figures are "fudged". Including part-time work and work-for-the-dole in the "full employment figures has been pointed out more than once in the Morgan Poll, and is understood by not a few Australians.

There have already been conscious efforts by politicians to ignore or sideline the big and increasing poverty sector in Australia. What an opportunity Beazley and Crean missed in sidestepping these matters, to the advantage of the government. A few ads on "cooking the books" on the unemployment figures would have had a great impact.

But both knew that they, in turn, would have had to outline their own policies in these areas – and they hadn't any!

It is impossible to accept the current financial dogmas, and pocket large donations from the corporate world and genuinely challenge the consequences.

The suggestion by Will Bailey, former ANZ Bank chief, that it is time for Australia to re-establish a 'peoples' bank' should have been Manna from Heaven for Kim Beazley. It was his own party which established, and used so sensibly in its early years, the Commonwealth Bank. His predecessor in the seat of Fremantle – John Curtin – campaigned on the issue in 1934.

But not a peep out of Beazley and Crean. They're globalists and economic rationalists, and know full well where *not* to tread.

The Australian dollar is hovering round the 50-cent mark, about 25 cents lower than when the Howard Government first gained office. It is kept at that level by maintaining interest rates at least 2 percentage points above the greenback, which is reeling in crisis. If we lower interest rates further – as we should – the price we pay is an even lower dollar.

Despite the ever-diminishing dollar, which aids exports, our Current-Account Deficit is still rising. More and more of our export income is needed to pay interest and dividends to overseas investors, owners and multinationals so our Foreign Debt continues to expand. Treasurer Costello's boast that Australia will ride out this crisis will return to haunt him.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE: We can convince ourselves that the majority of voters are invincibly stupid; but this is not so. Even Hitler discovered that you can't fool ALL the people ALL the time. The period ahead will be extremely painful, but also a voyage of discovery for Australians. The smallest candle glows more brightly as the darkness deepens.

The discovery that elections change nothing will be clearer than ever before. More people will look for alternative mechanisms. It will take more than political promises and how-to-vote cards to turn things round.

The basic education the League offers – the Social Dynamics course, the journals and the educational material – will be seen as the priceless asset they are. Everything must be done to maintain and enhance them.

New generations are beginning to appear that won't tolerate the deceit and compromise. They will want better answers than those offered by Howard, Costello, Crean and Boswell in the period ahead.

We knew – did we not? – that such a period was coming. It's here. The faith to move forward will be the biggest test of all.

My father, who I have increasingly discovered was a wiser man than I, gave me this homily:

*"Don't mope, if you can't cope.
Put this under your hat.
Faith, hope, and a bar of soap –
You can get through life with that!"*

Do we have any Australian-owned-and-made soap left? If not, the future is bleak indeed!