A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "Public men, by the mid-century, had come to fear these inhibitors too much to tempt their wrath, and any who did risk that ire were defamed by so powerful a machine of the spoken and written word that even the masses, after lending an eager ear of hope renewed for an instant, in the nature of masses then dully turned their backs on the speakers and shunned them, thinking they must be evil after all.

"In that way they were brought again and again to pit themselves against each other, always in the name of 'freedom', for their own mutual destruction and enslavement; thus the short-lived but bloody fiasco of the World State came about. Only when they experienced it did they know the truth and rise; and God must have willed it so, for 'by a *divine* instinct men's minds mistrust *ensuing* danger'. Douglas Reed in "Far and Wide" 1951.

"Foreword in "Far and Wide": What, then, is the offence for which our people must be so severely punished? It is the offence of a single-minded pursuit of personal self-interest, neglect of duty, compounded with the offence of abandoning to persecution the prophets who would warn them."

– Ivor Benson, 1976

WHO GETS THE SUBSIDIES? by Jeremy Lee:

When it comes to free trade we're all becoming used to the United States saying one thing and doing another. Steel has become the latest bone of contention, with both Australia and China threatening to drag the US before the high and mighty at the World Trade Organisation.

Australia won its last case over lamb exports to the US. It's all part of the distorted economic view that putting real wealth onto a container ship and sending it to another nation is a way of getting richer – so long as fewer wealth-laden container-ships come your way from overseas! Our Trade Minister Mark Vaile has just returned from Washington, where he 'lobbied' against further increases in US farm subsidies.

If you belong to the 'export-or-perish' brigade, you'd be shocked that the US will pay its farmers $US32.6 billion a year in subsidies for the next ten years. You'd be even more shocked at just who receives the subsidies!

Brisbane's ***Courier-Mail*** (Feb? 2002) revealed the findings of the Washington-based Environmental Working Group, which has uncovered a staggering network of rorts involving multinationals, banks and imaginary 'paper farms' receiving billions from the Farm Subsidy programme.

Amongst recipients were the media mogul Ted Turner, former Chase Manhattan chairman David Rockefeller and stock-broker Charles Schwab. The report said: *" .... Tens of thousands of paper farms had been created for the purpose of maximizing subsidy payments and avoiding the payment limitations that Congress had established. .... The group has revealed some very well-known names on the list.*

"David Griffin, who sits on an American bank board and serves as President of a John Deere tractor dealership with sales last year of $60 million, has received about $46 million in federal crop subsidies. And there were 100 more members of the farming 'millionaires club'.

"They were given handouts ranging from almost $4 million to $29 million between 1996-2000. Thousands of others who were not dedicated farmers were also given money.

"Some 22,000 residents living in cities such as Denver, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and Washington collected $480 million over the past five years. Thirty-one of the farmers lived in the Los Angeles celebrity suburb of Beverley Hills.

"Fortune 500 companies such as Du Pont (approximately $360,000), Georgia Pacific ($71,000), Boise Cascade ($21,000), Caterpillar ($328,000), Archer Daniels Midland ($69,000), John Hancock Mutual Life Assurance ($242,000), International Paper ($720,000), Chevron ($500,000), Mead Corporation ($28,000) and many others were receiving crop subsidies.

"The average payment to the bottom 80 percent of farm-subsidy recipients on the other hand was a mere $10,000 over those five years ...."

It's the "good ol' boys" club that seems to run everything else in the US, at it again. Mark Vaile is wasting his breath.

HE CAN'T BE SERIOUS? by Jeremy Lee: The well-known international economist David Hale has put forward the idea that the Australian dollar should be at the heart of a new single-currency zone with a number of southern hemisphere nations, including some battered Latin American economies. His suggested name for this most golden of suggestions is the "Gondwana Monetary Zone" or GMZ. David Hale told the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) on March 5th that the collapse of Argentina had led him to this concept. If Argentina had pegged its currency unit to the Australian dollar instead of the $US, it would have ridden the market fluctuation instead of collapsing. (***The Australian Financial Review***, 6/3/02).

It brings a lump to the throat when one realizes the touching faith that international experts have in Australia's own financial geniuses! And where would the zone's Central Bank be? Zimbabwe?

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH ...: President George Bush, in his programme to save the world "in the name of truth and justice" from the "axis of evil" is running out of money. He has asked Congress to raise the debt-ceiling. His request was relayed by Treasury Secretary Paul O' Neill to the House Financial Services Committee. O'Neill said that uncertainty threatened the economy.

The current US National Debt limit, already straining at the leash, is $US5.95 TRILLION. Bush wants this raised to $6.7 trillion - well over $US1,000 for every living person on earth!

But then we never thought Operation Enduring Freedom in the "war for peace" would ever come cheap – did we?

As an afterthought, who will "create" the extra $800 billion and receive the interest thereon?

British economist William Rees-Mogg, writing in ***The Australian*** (14/3/02), believes that this accumulation of debt, added to the enormous US Current Account Deficit, will sooner or later bring about the severe devaluation of the US$. One result will be a breaking free of the gold price. Already, China, Taiwan and Japan are buying gold heavily on the international market.

MAINSTREAM MEDIA EXPRESSING FIRST DOUBTS: So gross is President Bush's claim to be the world's saviour that the first analytical criticisms are beginning to appear Peter Hartcher, author of a full-page article in the Weekend edition of ***The Australian Financial Review*** (16-17/3/02), started with these words: *"With each passing day, it is increasingly clear that George W. Bush accepts no limits to the power of the United States and no restraints on how he will wield it. Under the dicta he has set out in recent days, the US has the right to attack any country, using any weapon, at any time.*

"It is prepared to act if necessary without a mandate from the United Nations, and without the blessing of its friends and allies.

"A US attack may be related to terrorism, but not necessarily. It may be against a hostile regime, but not necessarily. It may be with conventional weapons, but not necessarily – nukes may be OK, too, even against non-nuclear states.

"And the Bush Administration seems to put a much higher priority on making war than peace ....."

Hartcher goes on to ask why this is so, coming to a number of conclusions, not least of which is the public response in America which has lifted Bush's poll-ratings to unprecedented levels. It is only one step further to ask which nation benefits most from Bush's war-drum; and which lobby exerts most pressure on the US Administration.

The question facing Australians, posed by Fred Benchley in a recent ***Bulletin***, is whether Australia can genuinely fashion its own defence policy in the light of the war against terrorism.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE GREENPEACE ATTACK ON SHALE OIL? At the end of the 1800s Australia produced millions of gallons of oil from shale. The skeleton of the basic technology, where shale rock was heated in huge retorts can still be seen at Glen Davis, west of Sydney.

Now, using the latest technology, an all-Australian company, Southern Pacific Petroleum, has successfully produced the first recent oil from shale in central Queensland near Gladstone and is set to increase Australia's self-sufficiency in oil, a vital development in both economic and defence terms as we move into the 21st century.

Australia's shale-oil deposits are immense, stretching unbroken from the Gulf of Carpentaria to central New South Wales. Fully developed, they are capable of meeting the world's needs on their own for 100 years.

Southern Pacific Petroleum is spending $124 million to ensure compliance with Greenhouse standards, and is on line to produce 780,000 barrels this year, up from 233,000 barrels in 2001. Oil produced is exceedingly pure, and at the current world price of $25 a barrel is worth $20 million annually to Australia.

Significantly, this is the first time since the early days of Golden Fleece that Australia's immense oil reserves have moved out of the hands of the international oil companies, sometimes known as "the seven sisters". Why, then, has Greenpeace harassed the Gladstone shale oil project every step of the way? And why have the multinational oil giants, Shell and B.P., apparently sided with Greenpeace by refusing to take Southern Pacific's oil production in its refineries? Why does Australia depend exclusively on huge refineries owned by the major oil-companies? Many have forgotten, or have never been told about a small refinery built by a knock-about Texan called Charlie Smith in the early seventies, for under a quarter of a million dollars. It refined about 20 barrels of crude a day, drawn from the Moonie oil fields. But the oil "ration" allowed through Charlie Smith's refinery was tightly controlled by Ampol, who finally took it over.

Australia should have dozens of similar small refineries in its hinterland, instead of the one or two monstrosities which are on our vulnerable coastline, and which can be used to paralyse a State when there is a strike.

Is it true that Greenpeace has been the recipient of Shell Oil donations in times past? And who is financing it now?

<u>NARRABRI FARMER INVOKES MAGNA CARTA</u> – *The Land* (NSW), March 14th, 2002:
Narrabri grain grower Bevan O'Regan has invoked the 800-year-old Magna Carta in an attempt to get the NSW Farmers Association to take the State Government to court over the Native Vegetation Conservation Act (NVCA).

On Monday night the NSW Farmers' Narrabri branch carried Mr. O'Regan's motion to have necessary funds put aside by the association to mount a legal challenge, based on constitutional law, against aspects of the NVCA that restrict "the right to farm".

Under Mr. O'Regan's motion, the association has just seven days to engage a Sydney barrister, Jeff Johnson, to mount a legal challenge and to employ Queen's Counsel, Leolin Price, in London, to prosecute the action.

Mr. O'Regan, who said he knew both lawyers, believed an overseas QC was necessary because "the Australian legal system doesn't consider the Magna Carta to be relevant".

The Magna Carta, first signed in 1215 and the Bill of Rights of 1688, both uphold the common law rights of land ownership.

The State Attorney-General's Department advised Mr. O'Regan the charters remain an underlying factor in Australian law but are "subject to legal and judicial interpretation by our courts". That is also the understanding of NSW Farmers which has taken legal advice and drafted a 30-page response to a query Mr. O'Regan put six months ago.

NSW Farmers' general manager, Mick Keogh, said the association would love to have a constitutional lever to use on the NVCA but all the evidence indicated that it wasn't available.

"We've looked at the whole issue of constitutional property rights, the judgements are all very clear; there is no access to some ancient common law that might override current legislation," Mr. Keogh said.

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