



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET



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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"The 20th century ended with a single surviving model of human progress,' the president told the cadets. How humble is that? '...We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name' thundered the president. But which is the evil side in Chechnya, Sri Lanka and Kashmir? In the Afghan war, we were aided by Iran, Libya, Sudan, Pakistan and Northern Alliance generals accused of massacres. In Desert Storm, we were assisted by Assad, in World War II by Stalin, in the Cold War by the Shah, Pinochet, Marcos and the South Africa of the Botha boys. 'Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time and in every place,' said the president. As a Christian, he rightly believes it.*

"But, Mr. President, ask the Germans if what we did to Dresden was moral. Ask the Japanese if what we did to Nagasaki was moral. Ask your own family if abortion is moral. By dividing the world into good and evil, and threatening pre-emptive wars on all 'evil ones', we may persuade the targets of our pre-emption to acquire the only kind of weapons able to deter a crusading US president."

Robert Fisk: *Gangsters, murderers and stooges used to endorse Bush's vision of 'democracy' – June 10th, 2002*

GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-TERRORISM LEGISLATION FLOUNDERING by Jeremy Lee:

At the time of writing the Howard Government is in disarray over the future of Attorney-General Darryl William's Anti-Terrorism legislation. This is not due to the cut-and-thrust of the ALP Opposition, but a significant split in the ranks of the Coalition. For the first time in a long while there is a back-bench revolt against a cabinet plutocracy. The same split is evident over the impending ratification of the International Criminal Court.

What's behind this back-bench revolt, which hasn't occurred since the attempt over a decade ago to foist an Identity Card on the Australian people?

It is the result of what Prime Minister Howard described from Washington this week as "the most significant change that I have witnessed in the 29 years that I have been a member of parliament" (*The Australian*, 14/6/02)

He was referring to the new tendency of Australians to abandon their usual party and group loyalties, changing their support and voting intentions on the basis of specific issues.

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On this point Howard is right. The old divisions of Left and Right – which were always played for all they were worth by party manipulators – have largely disappeared. A new voting pattern is emerging.

On the issue of the International Criminal Court, latest developments must be bitter gall to the likes of Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, who has been pushing the concept since 1996, and Darryl Williams, whose authoritarian tendencies have become more and more obvious.

The Australian Financial Review (14/6/02) reported:

"....The Liberal chairman of the House of Representatives legal and constitutional committee, Bronwyn Bishop, said ratification of the ICC statute faced near certain defeat in the Coalition party room, with over two-thirds of the back bench opposed 'The highest court of appeal in Australia should be an Australian court, not a foreign court, in a foreign land, with the power to charge our brave soldiers with genocide just for doing their duty,' Mrs. Bishop said. 'These people who try to defend the ICC cannot answer our questions, and any risk to Australian sovereignty for me is too great and when in doubt, do nothing.'"

It's a long time since we heard a coalition politician talk in such terms.

Receiving reports from trusty minions at home, while sitting at the knees of George Bush in Washington, Prime Minister Howard came up with the most adroit of backdowns in an attempt to diffuse the revolt in his party ranks:

".... Strong indications that the Government would reverse its policy to ratify the statute emerged on Wednesday when Prime Minister Howard said in Washington that the US had made 'a very powerful case' against the court....." (The Australian, 14/6/02)

So the Prime Minister could hear in America what he couldn't hear from the thousands in Australia who wrote in to his government!

Alexander Downer was even more disingenuous:

"Long time champion of the international court, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, played down the prospect of cabinet being told to undo five years' work in support of the court, but admitted there was strong opposition within the Coalition.

"'What I've always said, right from the time I became Foreign Minister, is we should not rush off and ratify treaties and conventions in secret. We should have due process, parliamentary scrutiny of conventions and treaties the Government may wish to sign, Mr. Downer said. (ibid.)

We look forward eagerly to such sentiments when the daddy-of-them-all – the GATS treaty – comes up later this year.

With regard to the "anti-terrorism" legislation, the same back-bench revolt is growing. Already, the government has promised, with Labor's support, to 'amend' the legislation. But, led by the Law Council of Australia and the Government's own committee, comes the view that there is no need for the legislation at all; all necessary legal provisions are already in place without removing existing safeguards and rights for individuals.

PEOPLES' VOICE GROWS LOUDER: The anti-terrorism legislation is due for further debate and consideration on Monday (17th). But the terms have been changed by the massive influx of letters and E-mails received by all parliamentarians. The League has been one of a number of organizations urging supporters and subscribers to make their voices heard.

While we have had strong disagreements and philosophical differences with the Citizens' Electoral Council (CEC) in the past, including the organisation's attacks on the Royal Family and support for an Australian republic, we acknowledge the initiative and discernment with which they have tackled the anti-terrorism legislation.

On June 12th, a full-page advertisement initiated by the CEC appeared in *The Australian* under the heading: "THE DRACONIAN 'ANTI-TERRORIST' LAWS: END THEM, DON'T AMEND THEM!" The advertisement gave a short, succinct history of the legislation, showing its similarity to the legislation rammed through by the Nazis on February 28th, 1933, suspending civil liberties. The advertisement was signed by hundreds of former parliamentarians, councillors and community leaders, from former Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer Jim Cairns to branch and State leaders of One Nation. In other words, it confirmed that the old demarcations of Left and Rights have long since disappeared.

Apart from illustrating the widespread opposition to the legislation from right across the political spectrum, the advertisement prompted a major article by Dennis Shanahan in *The Australian* two days later. While conceding the disappearance of Left and Right, Shanahan attempted (and failed) to pour scorn on the signatories:

".... If Tommy the Toucan had been at the top of the list instead of former deputy prime minister Cairns, there couldn't have been more fruit loops in this packet ..."

In the time-honoured fashion of establishment journalism he brought in both the CEC and the League of Rights in the vanguard of "fruit-loops". Readers, one supposes, were expected to react with horror! But, the indiscriminate use the smear is also fading as a weapon.

Even while the accusation of "conspiratorialism" is bandied about, leaders like President Bush point to their own versions of "conspiracy" to justify their power-plays. More Australians are looking past smears towards issues. Of course there are still important differences. But by concentrating on those areas where there are agreements, rampant political opportunism is occasionally pegged back.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS? The days of new and old parties are going. So are the days of big rallies. The era of "consensus politics" are beginning to appear. Right and Left veterans are gradually being lured from their bunkers, are meeting each other, and are even working together where they can. Younger Australians spurn the old-style seminars, preferring to pick up their information in action groups, workshops and even coffee-clubs. There's little talk about philosophy, but a lot about action. As usual, the internet is the new "hub".

Sooner or later this new development is going to result in a more mature version of "voters' unions", which approach elections with a new form of "enterprise bargaining". Candidates for office will have to negotiate and make commitments well before election day. Voters, sooner than party officials, will decide policies.

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If the Howard Government is forced to back down over the International Criminal Court and Darryl Williams "Anti-Terrorist laws", this will be a tacit admission that 'people-power' still counts, and that the removal of the democratic process by globalism is not a fait accompli. Building on this, the infamous GATS agreement, brainchild of the World Trade Organisation, which Australia is scheduled to ratify by November, can also be defeated.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR INTENSIFIED ACTION: The success to date should be a signal for intensified action. Bronwyn Bishop should be congratulated on her stand. Copies of letters to her should be sent to local federal members, with a polite demand that they also take a stand. Every letter should point out that the approaching GATS agreement is an even greater danger to Australia's future. Politicians should be asked how things could have got so far before parliamentarians began to wake up. Every letter and communication counts!

HOWARD IN AMERICA: We can understand Prime Minister Howard wishing to extract every drop of publicity from his Washington trip. But the gratuitous way he endorsed every facet of George Bush's performance left a nasty taste in the mouth. Shades of Harold Holt's "All the way with LBJ!"

PROPAGANDA SCAM: It appears the widely-publicized story of Jose Padilla, arrested in the US for allegedly planning the launch of a 'dirty bomb' is largely fictional. Padilla is being held in a South Carolina military jail as a "military combatant", which means he can be held indefinitely without trial. European papers are reporting that there is no evidence to support the charges. *The Australian* (13/6/02) reported:

"British and European security officials have expressed scepticism about the US Government's claims that an alleged al-Qa'ida supporter was preparing to launch a 'dirty-bomb' radio-active attack ..."

Newspaper articles claimed the Bush administration admitted lack of any evidence. What was it all about, then? Just an attempt to keep the jitters alive in American society?

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT ABOUT-FACE? Mr. Howard has cooled on the idea of Australia setting up an arm of the International Criminal Court, according to a *Sydney Morning Herald* report; "Cabinet split as Howard cools on international court", 13/6/02.

Why the 'cooling off'? It is revealed, *"After a White House briefing, Mr. Howard became aware he and the Australian forces might be prosecuted by the ICC"; if the Court "became stacked with anti-US judges who would prosecute its forces involved in anti-terrorist and peace-keeping missions."*

The article continues, *"Deep divisions have emerged within the Federal Government over its backing for a new international court to try war criminals with the Prime Minister saying that United States arguments against it were 'very powerful'."*

While there could be quite a few anti-US judges who would like to have George Bush Jr. (and George Snr. for that matter) before them on charges of war crimes. Methinks there are very powerful arguments against the setting up of the court in Australia in John Howard's case. What a thought! You mean there is a chance we might yet see little Johnny alongside Bush – and Milosevic?

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