

National security

comes before party politics

Michael Danby

One day in November in our national Parliament, I and other Opposition members were required to do two quite contradictory things on the same day. All morning, and through to Question Time at two o'clock, we railed against the Howard Government's industrial relations bill, the most far-reaching attack on the rights of working Australians since the squatters starved the shearers into submission in the 1890s. During the stormiest Question Time for many years, a record eleven Labor members were evicted from the chamber. I was one of them.

But after all the anger and emotion of the first seven hours of that sitting day we all came back at four o'clock and unanimously passed the Anti-Terrorism Bill 2005 (a bill separate from the major anti-terrorism legislation passed in December), on the joint recommendation of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, and after briefings to senior members of both the Government and the Opposition by the security and intelligence services.

I was not privy to those briefings, but I willingly voted for the bill – not because I was afraid of being 'wedged' by John Howard, but because I trust Kim Beazley and the integrity and professionalism of the security and intelligence services. If Commissioner Mick Keelty says that after the London bombings the AFP needs additional powers to save Australian lives, I support giving them to him. To have rejected the bill out of partisanship would have been harmful to the safety of our fellow Australians.

We are seeing at the moment a strange state of affairs in Australian public life, in which the politicians and the people are in broad agreement both on the nature of the terrorist threat and on what ought to be done about it, while a large slice of the intellectual class is in furious disagreement.

After the attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, after the bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2005, after Madrid last year and London this year, most Australian politicians accept that the terrorist threat to western society in general, and Australia specifically, is real and dangerous. That's why six Labor Premiers have worked co-operatively with a Liberal Prime Minister to come up with a balanced package of anti-terrorism legislation, one which will give our governments the necessary powers to protect Australia against terrorism, while preserving to the

maximum extent the rights and freedoms that make Australia worth defending.

In working co-operatively to defeat terrorism, Australian politicians are doing what the Australian people want us to do. Every opinion poll shows that the Australian people expect us to do what is necessary, within the framework of our democratic system, to stop those who are planning to commit terrorist attacks, and also those who recruit, finance, organise or incite others to do so.

You would never know this, for example, from listening to some ABC commentary or reading *The Age*. In the world of Alan Ramsey and Phillip Adams and Michael Leunig all the world's troubles are somehow the fault of the western democracies, or a witches' brew of Zionists and neo-conservatives. Terrorism is supposedly a myth or a trick by George W. Bush and Tony Blair to divert our attention while they seize the world's oil.

This strange disconnect between the people and the intellectual elite is dangerous and damaging. Countries where the majority of intellectuals are alienated from their societies and think the rest of the population are fools and dupes can drift into serious trouble – as France in the 1930s attests.

I have the good fortune to have been raised in an intellectual tradition which is not susceptible to this kind of illusion – the tradition of European social democracy, which was brought to this country by refugees from Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Dr Frank Knopfmacher, who taught me at Melbourne University, was an outstanding example of this tradition, which is deeply hostile to fascism, communism and the totalitarian temptation in general. Intellectually and by the misfortune of the blood of my family, I recognise the reality of evil in the world and the necessity of fighting it.

I also represent an electorate which knows something about both totalitarianism and terrorism. It has the highest proportion of Holocaust survivors and their families of any electorate in Australia. It has many refugees from the former Soviet Union and communist Poland and Hungary. It also has families who have suffered from the current manifestation of totalitarian extremism, the terrorist bomber. The family of the first Australian to be killed by a suicide bomber, Malki Roth, lives in my electorate. Two of my constituents, Donna Croxford and Sue Maloney, were killed in Bali.

My view is that Australia is at war – at war with a new form of totalitarian ideology, as evil as the fascist and communist forms which the democracies fought during the 20th century. It is not a war Australia sought, nor a war that we can escape by feeding others to the crocodiles in the hope that they will eat us last. We are told that the cause of this war is Australia's involvement in Iraq. But even if we concede that Iraq is currently exacerbating jihadist terrorism, that doesn't alter the fact that it began well before Iraq, and it will continue after coalition forces leave Iraq.

The enemy in this war adopts the rhetoric of Islam, but they are in fact quite alien to the traditions of Islam, and particularly to the traditions of Islam as practised in Indonesia. Some call this ideology Islamofascism, others jihadism or Islamism. Whatever we choose to call it, we know what it looks like and we know what it is capable of. It has already claimed the lives of nearly a hundred Australians, in New York, in Bali, in London, in Jerusalem. That it has not so far claimed Australian lives on our own soil is a combination of good luck and good intelligence work by ASIO and the AFP.

As a social democrat, I believe in a pluralist Australia. I believe Australia should accept, and indeed welcome, migrants and refugees from all countries, including Muslim countries, and that we should prevent victimisation of Australian Muslims. I reject the view that all Australian Muslims are potential terrorists. I am always careful to distinguish Islam from the *Islamist* extremists who misuse it for political ends.

A small number of Australian Muslims are active sympathisers with the jihadist death cult, and some have trained abroad with terrorist-affiliated groups. A few, like Jack Roche and David Hicks, are deluded converts. Others are immigrants, and they are an urgent problem that the leadership of our Muslim communities must confront. The days are over when a minority of imams could get away with incitement in Arabic on the assumption that the genial Aussies were too dumb to notice.

Over recent weeks in Canberra, despite all the shouting, we saw a mature democracy at work. When the national interest is at stake, the mainstream parties work together to achieve an outcome which both protects Australia from terrorism and protects the safety of Australians. When a government tries to trample on the long-cherished Australian tradition of fairness in the workplace, the Opposition resists tooth and nail.

When improved safeguards have been inserted in the major anti-terrorism legislation, I will vote for it, and I don't intend apologising to *The Age* for doing so. I will vote for this legislation not out of political expediency but out of principle. I still want the Liberals and their industrial relations laws voted out at the next election. That I can hold both these views simultaneously is what makes democracy worth having and Australia worth protecting. ♦

Michael Danby is the Labor Member for Melbourne Ports and Secretary of the Caucus National Security Committee.

(Australia's crude oil self sufficiency)

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impact for a decade or more as they all imply a replacement of the existing transport capital stock. Fuel taxation reforms, already rejected by the Government, would favour diesel fuel and its very efficient engine. The accelerated introduction of clean petrol and diesel specifications would enable Australia to take full advantage of the high-efficiency engines now available in Europe. The introduction of fleet fuel efficiency targets, as was done most successfully in the early 1980s, would reduce the absolute consumption of fuel. Whether Australia does or does not have a self sufficiency problem is not the critical issue. The key imponderable is the world's vulnerability to instability affecting Middle East oil supplies and the implications for our secure long-term supply of crude oil, especially as China's need for imported oil keeps soaring. Australia should try to manage its future transport costs and any prudent Government would take these 'no regrets' measures today.

For the long term new, internationally competitive, oil exploration and production regimes are essential but ultimate success in Australia is limited by continental geology. So is a strong, sustainable economy. A Government-industry production risk-sharing contract for the manufacture of diesel from natural gas is the obvious low-risk choice strategically, because such a structure is necessary due to Australia's high natural gas and construction costs. Two plants could replace Australia's total needs for diesel fuel as well as create value for currently stranded deposits of natural gas. This approach would, however, cost serious amounts of public money.

At 43 per cent (and declining) our crude oil self sufficiency situation is a problem. This waning level of self-sufficiency does matter and can no longer be acceptable for risk management of our fuel supplies. The Government should comply with the IEA requirements for strategic storage of crude oils to handle and smooth out short-term supply issues. The Government should also orchestrate a partnership role in a commercial-scale gas-to-liquids project to cope with the long-term structural problems of the international and domestic oil extraction industry. Should this not be done, there are obvious implications, not least for the defence force. If the ADF is required to deploy overseas in strength at some future date, it better make sure that it has enough fuel to get there as well as to return, for such stocks may no longer be available in Australia or as readily available overseas. ♦

Eriks Velins is a retired chemical engineer with some 45 years experience in the international petroleum industry. His senior appointments have included Vice-President, Planning and Oil Marketing at BHP Petroleum, General Manager, Corporate Planning and Economics at Shell Australia, and Head of the Marketing Information Systems Division at Shell International Petroleum in London. A graduate of the Australian Department of Defence's Industrial Mobilisation Course in 1977, he is a council member of the Defence and Industry Courses Association.