

John Howard loses another Federal Election!!

Now that the dust is starting to settle after the recent federal election, Australia is looking at a hung Parliament with no party having a clear majority. We now wait to see what back room deals will be done.

As the parties search for answers for what they did wrong and what they could have done better. I hope that the Liberal Party does not continue to delude itself.

It is my firm belief that the Liberal Party would have emerged from this election a clear winner with a workable majority had it not been for the legacy of John Howard.

When John Howard engineered the “Gun Grabs” he alienated hundreds of thousands of former Liberal voters.

Many years ago when the Liberal Party had a different set of values and supported peoples ownership of property, they had defended Firearms owners against attempts by the Labor Party to move against firearm ownership.

I can remember reading an article by a Senior Labor advisor at the time, who when questioned why the Labor party had not pressed harder, admitted that it was a lose/lose situation for any Party which tried to restrict firearm ownership in Australia.

He went on to explain that the real extremists who were calling for Gun Control were not Labor voters and no matter what they did in this arena, they would never get those peoples votes. There was no gain there.

The firearms owners in the main, were either Liberal or Labor voters. To confiscate firearms he believed would not get them support among the general mass of Liberal voters and would only make the Liberal voting firearms owners a little more resentful of Labor. The loss he conceded would be among his own Labor supporters who would not take kindly to losing their firearms. The reality was that the end result would be a loss of Labor Party support. In an age where every party is trying to attract that small percentage of swinging voters at each election, no one wanted to do anything that would alienate any voters, particularly the ones you already had.

Another article had charted the demographics of firearms owners and the findings were very interesting. The writer had come to the opinion that the majority of firearms owners in the country were most likely be conservative voters (Liberal and what is now known as the National Party). The logic being that many firearms owners lived in rural areas and would have been National voters and that in the urban areas, that being involved with firearms was an expensive past time which would see people with greater incomes and therefore most likely Liberal voters attracted to it.

It is a pity that this information was not available to John Howard when he chose political opportunism over reality and decided to take the firearms off the people who had not done anything wrong. Or if it was available, that he chose to ignore it! Worse still, he chose to ignore it for ideological reasons, not party ideological, but Howard ideological and the Howard ideology was embraced by his co-conspirator Tim Fischer, despite furore from rural areas.

Many firearms owners (myself included) had felt secure (foolishly) in the fact the Socialists were pragmatic enough not to want to try any major attack on firearms ownership and felt confident that were they to try; that the Conservative coalition who had always protected property rights would come to their defence, irrespective of the fact that conservative voters were by far the largest percentage of firearms owners.

With that act of betrayal by John Howard and the Liberal Party, many conservative firearms owners swore that they would “Never vote for the Liberal party again”. There is proof of this in the defeat of the National Party in the 1998 Queensland elections and at the 1998 Federal election the Coalition was returned to power despite a loss of over 800,000 votes compared with the 1996 election. Some of these firearms owners would have also voiced their dissatisfaction by either joining or supporting the new One Nation Party which attracted over 1 million votes in the Senate.

Many, of these quiet, conservative, law abiding but badly hurt former Liberal Party supporters have not rallied in the streets, have not become politically active by joining other parties. They have simply just voted with their feet.

The Liberal Party still continues to proffer the blinkered argument that those laws made Australia safer, despite several reputable peer reviewed studies (Dr Don Weatherburn 2005, Dr Jeanine Baker and Dr Samara McPhedran 2006, Dr Wang-Sheng Lee and Dr Sandy Suardi 2008), all of which concluded that the 1996 legislation had little effect on violence and that the National Firearms Agreement did not have any large effect on reducing firearm homicide or suicide rates. As long as the Liberal Party continues to deny the reality that Howard got it wrong; they will continue to alienate people. The Liberal Party has to become big enough to move away from knee jerk populist policies which are designed by spin doctors for the evening news voice grab.

All that these laws have achieved is a draconian process whereby law abiding firearms owners are fined annually (licensing and registration) and subjected to intrusive inspections at any time of the day and night by their State police, when the money being wasted on this futile exercise and the time of the officers could be better directed towards catching real criminals. Sadly, no street gangs or criminal families seem to attract the same attention, yet they are able to acquire the guns with which they seem to shoot at and murder each other with, quite freely. Criminals simply do not bother with licensing and registration. Not to mention that nearly a billion dollars was wasted on the two Gun Buy Backs. Bad laws not only fail to achieve anything, they also alienate law abiding people by causing them to lose respect for the law.

Every time a law abiding firearms owner is subjected to the humiliation of being treated with contempt and like a criminal by his State authorities they are reminded of their betrayal by John Howard and the Liberal Party.

I am sure that if even half of the voters that are still alienated as a result of the unfair treatment by Howard came back to the Liberal party, that the result of the 2010 election would have been considerably different and Tony Abbott would have a clear path to the Prime Ministership and would not be needing back room deals.

Will Tony Abbott be smart enough to see what John Howard would not?

Knives

Recently there have been similar populist policies attacking knives here in Australia; during the recent election campaign, PM Gillard promised to toughen up on a range of imported knives (despite the fact that they are already heavily controlled) and the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott countered with a tightening up of laws on hunting knives (whatever he perceives these to be).

The great pity is that none of these so called law and order initiatives are evidence based.

We already have many items that are on the Prohibited lists of Australian Customs and the various State authorities for no good reason other than they may look nasty, not because there is any evidence that their existence has contributed to crime. It is very sad, that when there is a perceived problem, that modern day politicians are so possessed by the desire to look as if they care, that they will grasp at straws in an attempt to look as if they are doing something. Whatever happened to carrying out some research to actually find out what the real problem is and then, tackling it? Making laws about inanimate objects are futile when the criminal acts are carried out by people! Making laws that in reality, only effect law abiding knife collectors are counter productive.

The fact is, that the Investment pieces, Artistic collectables and Museum pieces are NOT the knives being used by criminals. Even if they were, it is unreasonable to punish the people who did not commit the crime. Solutions to criminal problems should be based on punishing the offender, not by victimising the innocent. The truth is, that the greatest source of edged weapons used in committing offences are kitchen knives; freely available in every household, department and hardware store across Australia, then followed by screwdrivers, so called box cutters or Stanley knives, broken bottles and other items. It does not matter what security arrangements are placed on the so called prohibited collectables, they are simply out numbered by such quantity as to make any restrictions placed on them a futile exercise. It has also been observed that mental health and drug issues are significant factors in many of the crimes. A large percentage of incidents also involved people known to each other, such as family, friends and neighbors. These were not gang related.

It is alarming that many young people believe it necessary to carry a knife for self defence. It seems to me that identifying the threat that the youth live under and taking steps to remove it, might be a more substantial way of solving the problem. When there is no threat there will be no need to carry a knife for defence.

I don't believe we need any new laws against knives, swords or any edged device. It is already illegal to stab someone, to murder someone or to rob them. The answer is very simple, enforce the existing laws and punish the criminal offenders.

Hopefully Australia will not go down the same futile, repressive path with knives, that it has done with firearms. Because that is un Australian!!

There is a very large community of knife collectors in Australia. For many reasons they like their privacy; fear of theft among them and as a result they remain virtually hidden. They are no physical threat to anyone, nor are the knives they collect.

Any political party that attacks legitimate knife owners for political gain runs the same risk of alienating large numbers of core voters, just as the anti gun legislation of John Howard did to the Liberal and National parties in 1996. The 2010 election has shown that even a small number of votes can make a big difference. It would take a very brave or very foolish political leader to go down that track.

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24 August, 2010
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