

AUSTRALIA: THE SPIN OF THE HATE-MONGERS

The following report was printed in the "Weekender" Section of The Bendigo Advertiser" dated Saturday, August 21, 1999. Half of the front page contained a full colour picture of a copy of "The Strategy" in the background, overprinted by a fiery Cross.

It's hard to think of Bendigo as a vigorous right-wing battlefield. Yet some would argue the symbol for such a Bendigo would be an outlaw with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other. In this survey of the political-fundamentalist arena, the Advertiser sought a range of views, from Left to Right. Some of them were shocking, some were incredible, and some were just silly. One name became prominent: Ray Platt. ALISTAIR PATON reports. . . ,

SHIRT unbuttoned at the collar and wearing a woollen cardigan, Ray Platt is the image of a kindly uncle.

He sits at the plastic furniture setting in the backyard of his Bendigo home. He rolls his own cigarettes, and grins when he senses he has made a connection in the interview.

For him that connection is winding a common thread from strands of insecurity and prejudice; of big banks, immigration, gun laws and the push for an Australian republic, which in Mr Platt's mind are the foundation of a government conspiracy.

He can see on the horizon a single world government, headed by the United Nations, and an Australia not only unwilling to stand up and fight, but a government ready to lie down and willingly surrender our sovereignty.

Like any uncle worth his salt, Mr Platt has a study. A study crammed with papers, files and books, and on the wall a portrait of Jesus, framing a small clock.

From that tiny room in a home which is essentially the same as thousands of others in Bendigo, the retired contractor and farmer collates, edits and distributes what has been labelled in Federal Parliament as Australia's most powerful extreme right-wing publication, The Strategy.

The monthly newspaper has a circulation of 30,000, with readers in all Australian states and in 16 countries overseas.

Mr Platt spends up to 18 hours a day, seven days a week, collating the paper - his vehicle to enunciate his extreme views, and those of like-minded individuals.

While Mr Platt denies he is anti-Semitic, The Strategy makes much of exposing "the Zionist movement", an omnipotent force to which all Jews belong, and which is heading the push for the one world government, or, as it is known in conspiratorial circles, the new world order.

A typical article, on page six of the April edition, raises the threat of "Zionist-ordered covert paramilitary terrorist operation during the Sydney Olympics", apparently being planned to justify a UN military strike on Arab countries to shore up 'Zionist oil interests'.

The story, written by Jonathan Graham, picks up on the conspiracy theory popular in extreme right circles, that the Port Arthur massacre in April, 1996, was planned and executed at the direction of the Australian Government as an excuse to disarm the population.

Mr Platt insists The Strategy just prints the truth, which the mainstream media is too afraid to report because it offends the powerful 'Zionist lobby.

'That's the nuts and bolts of it, " he says. "Yes, we're radical - to anybody who can't accept the truth, the truth is radical."

It would be easy to label Mr Platt as crazy, and dismiss his views and threats.

But, as he himself points out, "I'm only just a little cog in the wheel".

BUT Mr Platt can be seen as a central cog in a large mechanism, made up of components ranging from pro-gun vigilantes to religious fundamentalists.

Danny Ben-Moshe, executive director of the Anti-Defamation Commission of Jewish service organisation B'nai B'rith, says the two extreme ends of the extremist spectrum are drawing closer together, and the implications are frightening.

The blurring of the line between religion and politics began in Bendigo in the early 1980s in the Ascension Life Centre, a church which sought to exercise political influence by establishing a lobby group in 1983 to fulfil 'the vision of taking the city of Bendigo for the Lord.

The group, exposed when minutes of one of its meetings were leaked to the Advertiser, sought to achieve this aim by having group members elected to local council and other influential committees.

Candidates' links to the Life Centre were not to be revealed - the minutes recorded "the local body of Christ must not be seen to be, involved in politics" in a move disturbingly similar to the modus operandi of the extreme right political organisation, the League of Rights.

This is not surprising. given documents obtained by the Advertiser outlined contact between the Ascension Life Centre and League of Rights national director Eric Butler.

The Life Centre split in 1994 into the Bendigo City Church, with former ALC, Pastor Terry Hunter at its head, and the Apostolic Church, which brought Pastor Bruce Claridge from the US to fill its vacancy at Valentine Street.

However, many of the ALC devotees left church altogether after the split - among them Ray Platt.

Several years after the split Mr Platt founded The Strategy, the publication through which the growing movement which eliminates altogether the line between religion and politics is seeking to gain supporters.

The Christian Identity movement possesses a theology to which Jewish conspiracies and a new world order are a natural extension, has sponsored murder and terrorism in the name of the Lord, and is searching for a foothold in Bendigo.

The Klu Klux Klan, which has branches in Victoria - though not yet in Bendigo - and is in the midst of an Australian recruiting drive, is one of a number of extreme right groups to adopt Christian Identity teaching as part of a massive growth in the phenomenon in the US.

Christian Identity started as an eccentric 19th Century Protestant notion that the lost 10 tribes of Israel described in the Old Testament, and lost to history after being captured by the Assyrians, in fact migrated across the Caucasus (and so were called Caucasians), eventually settling in northern Europe and the British Isles.

This idea that Anglo-Saxon People are the real chosen people of God described in the Bible became known as British-Israelism, a notion adhered to by at least two Bendigo churches - the Revival Centre on High Street, Golden Square, and the Revival Centre International in Strickland Road.

In the US, individual British-Israel churches refined their beliefs, pushing the white settlers of North America to the top of God's chosen, and Jews to the bottom.

In recent years this has culminated in the 'seedline' doctrine, a belief Jews are direct descendants of Satan, having been born to the Serpent and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Blacks do not even qualify as human, and are often referred to as "mud people".

While Christian Identity in Australia is yet to match the popularity of its American counterpart, there are strong Christian Identity churches in Australia, led by the Covenant Vision Ministry. Based in Sydney, the CVM is headed by Pastor Frank Dowsett, who has a regular column in The Strategy and describes Ray Platt as 'a good friend' and fellow believer.

The threat to Australia from Christian Identity is clear in his April Strategy column, which describes all the evil in the world as originating from the same Satanic origin and in accordance with a highly organised and deliberate plan".

"This is not a battle that can be fought on earthly or human terms," he writes.

"What we are now experiencing is the final fury of the most far-reaching battle that has ever been waged, the Great Controversy between God and Satan."

In a phone interview, Pastor Dowsett says Christian Identity in Australia is booming, with more than 1000 devotees on the CVM mailing list including some in Bendigo, representing only a fraction of believers.

"Most people who belong to the Identity movement belong to their own individual churches. There are literally thousands of people who believe in Christian Identity, but they are not necessarily tied to any particular group," he says.

Alistair Paton's series of articles will continue next week. (End of article).

(Note by the Editor, F. Dowsett). We really should thank the above writer for the free coverage of at least some aspects of our beliefs, in particular, our origins. But isn't it interesting how that every time the media decides to have a swipe at us, they bring in the ADL of Bnai Brith, the Klu Klux Klan, and any other derogatory organisation and/or belief they can lay their hands on.

When are they going to get real? The fact that some members of the "Clan" hold the same beliefs as to our Israel identity does not in any way connect us with them. But perhaps Mr. Paton believes that because the Catholic Church has its headquarters in Rome, we can now refer to all Catholics as Italians. As to the "seedline" theory, this is held by a minority of Identity believers, and totally rejected by the great majority of us. His comments regarding our alleged beliefs about the black races are as offensive to us as is his pathetic attempts to handle and abuse a subject of which he has demonstrably such a pitiable lack of knowledge. We have replied to these accusations many times in the past, but of course, good journalists cannot allow facts to interfere with what they are told to print.

The point that interested me in particular was the phone interview to which he referred. I have never ever spoken to Mr. Paton, either personally, or by phone. However, in mid June, I was phoned by a Mr. Ian Walker, who introduced himself to me as a producer with the ABC, and during the course of this phone conversation, I mentioned that there would be about 1,000 people who read our publication, "The Covenant Vision". The remaining comments made by Mr. Paton were fairly accurate in the context of my conversation with Mr. Walker, but they were never made to Mr. Paton. It would be interesting to know just how a young reporter from a provincial newspaper is able to quote from a phone conversation held some two months previously between myself and an ABC producer. And they accuse us of believing in conspiracy theories.

His follow-up report should be most interesting. I found a very interesting passage in the Bible which seems to me to be fairly appropriate to what is going on as far as the opposition which is being constantly hurled at anyone who has the faintest connection with the Israel Identity movement. It is found in Acts 17, verses 5-8, which reads as follows;

"But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, (read Platt, Dowsett, Campbell, Barley, Peters, Mohr, , etc..) and sought to bring them out to the people.

And when they found them not, they drew Jason (etc) and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

Whom Jason (etc) hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things."

Isn't it great to know exactly Who is on our side!!!