

# After Mudginberri

WHETHER the Full Bench of the High Court upholds this week's Mudginberri decision or not, the ramifications of Mr Pendarvis' victory over the meat workers may prove to be a pyrrhic one for all of us.

The danger of the Mudginberri decision lies not in the successful action under the Trade Practices Act. It does not lie so much in the fine on the AMIEU. Nor for that matter is it so much a danger in the industrial relations field. At the end of the day the Pendarvis victory is an interpretation of the rules by the umpire. Those who do not like it should cop it sweet until such times as someone changes the rules by the due processes.

The real danger of the decision lies in the momentum that it will give, not to main-stream business who together with their employees cannot afford the luxury of industrial confrontation, but to those visionaries of the New Right who seek confrontation both as an end in itself and as a disguise for their own inadequacies.

Whatever the merits or otherwise of the Mudginberri case, the emotion released is the long-term threat to Australia rather than the decision itself.

In the first instance those of the New Right who believe that money is the solution to everything and apply that philosophy to political hit funds will be tuned up like a mercenary army after a motivation session.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with the NFF funding legal challenges and court action on a continuing basis. It is an action that the trade unions have often used themselves.

The damage that these funds represent however, is a debasing of the political system whereby, as in parts of the United States, the contest becomes who can get the most campaign funds by tying themselves to special interests. Needless to say, for every action there is a ridge and the escalation of a money war in Australian politics could be dangerous. Already there is deep suspicion in the ALP about supposedly non-political funds which all appear to be tightly run

## Politics



Gary Punch

by people espousing anti-Labor rhetoric.

The second danger and far more serious for our nation is that Mudginberri will give impetus to those who cannot face hard times and seek to transfer their burden to others.

The Government has told Australians that the old game is up. Living off the sheep's back or digging up another pile of rocks for the Japanese simply doesn't pay our way in the world anymore. That is nothing the Government can control. Overseas prices are set on the market and unfortunately Liberal and Country Party politicians a couple of decades back built us an economy vulnerable to today's world prices.

The Government has also realistically said that to get out of this hole we have all got to work together. We have all got to give a bit. A nation of 15 million on the edge of Asia cannot afford to squabble with itself over the small change.

The unions have been told of the need for industrial peace and lower real wages and have agreed. Social Security recipients it seems will be asked to accept less. And business is being told that the cream that they previously got for free will now have to be paid for.

We can no longer subsidise through the tax system the meals, the car, the kid's school fees and the home mortgages of some, at the cost of the majority. It is simply unfair and not com-

pliant with a nation's needs that must see lower expectations for the moment.

The fuss that has emerged over these fringe benefit changes leads me to believe that the Pendarvis victory will be seized upon by those who call for sacrifice by others but not by themselves. History shows that in times of economic hardship it is an unfortunate human trait that scapegoats are found. In the 1930s the nazis found the Jews. In 1986 the New Right, unwilling to support equality of sacrifice, blames the unions despite all the facts to the contrary.

Cliches play a great part in this. Like Katherine West, who talks about the givers and the takers. Like the businessmen who can't compete against the Koreans or the Japanese in Pacific trade but who talk a lot about free enterprise in terms of the tax-subsidised lunch, the company car and the cash in hand.

It is easier for some to to whinge and moan about others than face the reality of their own inadequacies. It is easier to justify that all the unemployed are dole bludgers, that all the single mothers are really hiding a bloke under the bed and that there is not one public servant who puts in an honest day's work.

And every one of the adherents of the divide-Australia-and-pass-the-wine philosophy have a definition of hard work that features only themselves and their mates. That bloke up the road who is making a go of it is just lucky, they content themselves.

No rationale, no courage to face the future. Whether Pendarvis is right or wrong is a matter for the courts, and one that we should all abide by. But the danger that people will use the man and his case to justify their own ends and their own prejudices is the danger of an orgy of division and diversion of the national will and the national interest.

Meanwhile, the real hard-working businessmen, of which I have seen quite a few lately, will be out there side by side with the unionists trying to take advantage of new export potential and the courage to practice what they preach.