



Sunday, 23 September 2007

## MATTHEW HOOTON: What next? Yellow stars?

**The early building blocks of fascism are being put in place in our country.**

How long before the Labour Party decides that some people should be made to wear yellow stars?

Many will find it difficult to believe that the early building blocks of fascism are being put in place in our country, especially under a Labour banner. That is exactly what is happening under Helen Clark's government, and intentionally so.

This week, Steve Maharey, a man Labourites seriously promote as a potential prime minister, told parliament: "The intention of (the Electoral Finance Bill) is to capture people like the Exclusive Brethren, not the Catholic Church." A potential Labour prime minister actually said that in our parliament, but it gets worse.

No less than the deputy prime minister, Michael Cullen, asked the justice minister to amend the bill so that the Catholic Church's planned anti-poverty campaign would be allowed to proceed, on the grounds that it would support Labour's Working for Families policy, in contrast to something the Brethren might say.

That, too, was actually said in our parliament. Our deputy prime minister and a potential Labour prime minister are openly arguing that some religious groups should be allowed to express their views, while others should not.

It is difficult to believe this is happening in our country, but people need to wake up to the fact that it is. If it goes on, we risk reaching the moment of political crisis, when the people must act.

Lest it be thought I'm a Brethren sympathiser, the truth is that my poor daughters are far more likely to endure parental readings from Richard Dawkins than anything from the Bible or Koran. With the decline of organised religion in New Zealand, I may even be in the majority, but that is exactly why the Brethren's right to free speech must be defended, and why Maharey and Cullen's statements are so evil. Both would once have recognised it.

As an historian, Cullen must have read the words of Robert H Jackson, the chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials: "The price of freedom of religion, or of speech, or of the press, is that we must put up with a good deal of rubbish."

Maharey has surely read Noam Chomsky: "Goebbels was in favour of free speech for views he liked. So was Stalin. If you're in favour of free speech, then you're in favour of freedom of speech precisely for views you despise. Otherwise, you're not in favour of free speech."

Both must have read George Orwell: "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

Labour's desire to control what we can say and write, and read and hear, extends beyond the bill.

On Thursday, it launched its emissions trading scheme, a system broadly supported by government and opposition; industry and environmentalists. It's a non-partisan issue.

Nevertheless, Labour stopped the environment ministry booklets and brochures from being written by Madeleine Setchell, by firing her because of her links to another party. Instead, the ministry contracted Clark's former press secretary to do the job. How much was he paid?

The ministry is now pressing ahead with its register of the political activity of all its employees' family and friends. Under the Electoral Finance Bill, everyone involved in anything but the most minor political activity in election year will also be required to register with the state.

This week, we also learned that health ministry call centre workers were being instructed to outline the "achievements" of the "Labour-led government" to people wanting to find out about a flu shot. The health minister defended this blatant abuse of the public service.

To their credit, once caught, ministry bosses rushed to remove the politics.

Politically motivated sackings. Ministers deciding which religious groups should be allowed to speak. Bureaucrats being instructed to peddle propaganda for the ruling party. Registers of political activity. This is not a scene from Sleeping Dogs.

It's our reality, today, under Clark.

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