

Comment by Michael C H Jones

History is a funny phenomenon. Coincidence and dates often seem linked.

I was first elected President of Chamber on the 17th November 1989, which happens to be my birthday. Over my life so many things have happened on that day. Hence I was not surprised by the date for US President Obama's address to the Australian parliament next week.

Back at the end of 1964 I was selected by competition to represent Australia at a World Youth Forum over 4 months in New York and London - this was just after Democrat Lyndon Johnson beat Republican Barry Goldwater for President of the USA. It also followed the notorious lie of the Tonkin Incident which was the justification for the US engagement in the Vietnam Civil War.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Tonkin_incident

In a number of selection interviews I was asked about my attitude to America and made it very clear that I was neither for nor against the USA but simply for Australia. I have consistently maintained that position over almost 50 years.

That has caused me to be an outsider in Australian politics.

I have written elsewhere that Australian history in some respects is a history of rationalisations, excuses and alibis to explain our inability to be genuinely independent and to emerge as a mature entrepreneurial society. On the Conservative side this is fairly well understood, the grovelling transference of allegiance from the United Kingdom to the United States during the 40s under Labor and the 50s under the Liberals, but highly disguised among Progressives. Put simply the broad church of the Left during my lifetime has been associated with the Australian Labor Party and its trade union and academic support bases, the various Communist Parties never had much influence despite the best efforts of the Packer and Murdoch media and certainly nowhere near the effectiveness of the current Bob Brown Greens. The Labor Right was 'Labourist' and Catholic - pro USA. The Labor Left was either, organisationally speaking, ideologically neo-marxist at least in rhetoric - anti USA, or intellectually libertarian and free trade certainly in Sydney as distinct from Melbourne. For example the New Left at Sydney University between 1965 and 1972 was very vocal in its rejection of both sides of trade union/labor party institutional politics and emphasised values and attitudes, in part because of it's significant christian membership. If you read the literature of those years what has happened to the ALP over the last four decades was predicted, the only surprise is that it took so long to implode.

The self-serving litmus test of adherence to US capitalist values and attitudes is now seriously challenged whether via the impact of the GFC in both the US and EU or through the rise of China. This challenge is infinitely more serious than that posed by the old Soviet Union with it's Leninist structures, arguably destined to fail and clearly failing by the late 1970s. President Ronald Reagan did not defeat the 'Evil Empire', he just set in motion the near destruction of the US 'Homeland'. Bill Clinton, a Democrat, balanced the Budget, whilst the younger George Bush, a Republican, spent like a drunken sailor. It will be interesting to see if Barack Obama can put humpty dumpty together again.

Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, in some ways a latter day Christian Socialist, and former Leader of the Opposition Malcolm Turnbull, a libertarian progressive conservative, appear to understand the trends of modern history with their global institutional and multicultural inclusive dynamic. The reliance on political-military alliances, the unregulated 'free enterprise' of transnational business, and

manipulated media information designed to generate populist hysteria, will no longer wash - the danger of China is that it has learnt too well from the USA and may try to follow suit.

And so we have the Australian candidature for the United Nations Security Council and the address to the Australian parliament on Thursday 17th November by US President Barack Obama, the man that 1960s hero Rev Martin Luther King dreamed about. What will he say and what should he say? The strategic issues are certainly out there - China including Taiwan and the South China Sea, Israel and the Palestine and Iran situations, the failed states of North Korea in East Asia and Pakistan in West Asia, near economic collapse in Italy and Greece amongst others in Europe, Russia's growing intemperance, Japan's continued stagnation, South Africa's possibly social implosion, and so the list grows by the days. Will we hear about US alliances and military bases or global leadership and social justice. Will it be the America of Teddy Roosevelt's nationalist imperial reach or the America of Franklin Roosevelt's global equal opportunity. The continued negative votes by the US and Australia concerning Palestine's admission to Unesco and other UN bodies seems to be the answer.

The bottom line question is why Australia is so apprehensive about winning a seat on the UN Security Council. Yes Australia lost against Sweden and Portugal in 1996. But this time the opposition for the two seats are Finland and Luxembourg. As a member of the G20, APEC, EAS, CHOQM and a range of other global 'governance' institutions, there should be no contest, even with the votes of EU countries. Is it simply that Australia is far too 'up the backside' of the USA, in a very diplomatically unhealthy way, such that even those countries on the US financial drip throughout Africa, Asia and South America can not bring themselves to vote for Australia. Will it be a Frank Lowy and his World Cup bid situation - surely Australia will get more than one vote !