

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO THE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA

Australia was settled by the British as a penal colony where convicts would provide a cheap source of labour that would enable it, once the colony became self-sufficient, to send wheat, wool & livestock home; it was designed to be a food basket for England – no more. Later, when rich mineral deposits were discovered, it was envisaged that these would also be exported to England. There was no suggestion that the colonies would develop a manufacturing base. This remained more or less the situation until the outbreak of World War II, when Curtin & Chifley ramped up manufacturing to assist the war effort.

After the war ended, manufacturing continued apace for the next three decades, at first both hampered & incentivized by post-war shortages; the late great Prof. Lance Endesbury designed & saw implemented the Snowy R. Irrigation Scheme & later another of his brainchild, the Ord R. scheme in Northern Australia, was developed but some half dozen other schemes lay on the drawing board & were never taken up. Australia produced its own car, the FJ Holden & several other automobile companies commenced manufacturing here, but during the 'eighties outsourcing became the order of the day & manufacturing in Australia became all but non-existent.

The Commonwealth Development Bank was privatized as production centred more & more on the lucrative housing market & credit for primary industries, or indeed any nation building enterprise, became harder to get while opportunities in many fields such as civil engineering became few & far between.

Our ratio of hospital beds per capita of the population fell enormously, especially in regional areas away from the city centres. Wait times for hospital admissions blew out & ambulance ramping became common practice as our health industry struggled to cope, even before the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic in 2020.

Indeed, so inadequate had our health industry become that lockdowns were originally implemented as a stopgap measure to slow the rate of infection until the system could cope! For instance, we had only one remaining manufacturer of surgical masks in the country, forcing us to import shipments from overseas.

Australia has been blessed with rich natural resources, not only for the production of energy but for steel production as well; however, we have failed to value add to these, being content to export the raw materials to more industrialized nations instead of developing manufacturing industries at home. Use of fossil fuels resulted in the eighteenth century industrial revolution; now that fossil fuels, which at least had the advantage of reliability, have fallen into disrepute with a section of the public, must we go backwards to an even earlier time of windmills & water-wheels with their demonstrated unreliability?

The blackouts in southern states not so long ago provided a foretaste of what total reliance on renewables would do for industry & indeed for other aspects of our twenty-first century way of life!

It must also be pointed out that windmills, being made of steel, will eventually wear out, resulting in a landscape littered with unwieldy rusting frames; the same applies to solar panels which require energy for construction in the first place & will pose the same problem of disposal.

Along with uranium deposits, a substance traditionally regarded with disfavour in many circles owing to the risk associated with storage & disposal, Australia also has one of the world's richest supplies of a substance called thorium which, like uranium, produces very little waste but unlike uranium, cannot be used for the production of nuclear weapons.*

Government circles seem determined to ignore thorium as a possible source of power to replace fossil fuels, however it seems to me that, being so light, it could well be the fuel that will power interstellar exploration & usher in a twenty-first century industrial revolution. I wonder if our government may not be as much hostage to the fossil fuel lobby as it is to the tyranny of the banks.

Government policy must change from one of kow-towing to the banks to one of serving the needs of the electors who placed them in power. It must embrace the concept of a national bank in order to reduce dependence on foreign loans, as well as providing a real alternative to the present system of private banking with no redress against high-handed practices employed, such as debanking & branch closures . It will be responsible for development of a trade policy beneficial to Australia; it will fund research & development; organize government procurement; support supply chains & provide skills & training opportunities, as well as the introduction of policies that will attract investment.

Bibliography: China Set to Test World-first Molten Salt Nuclear Reactor