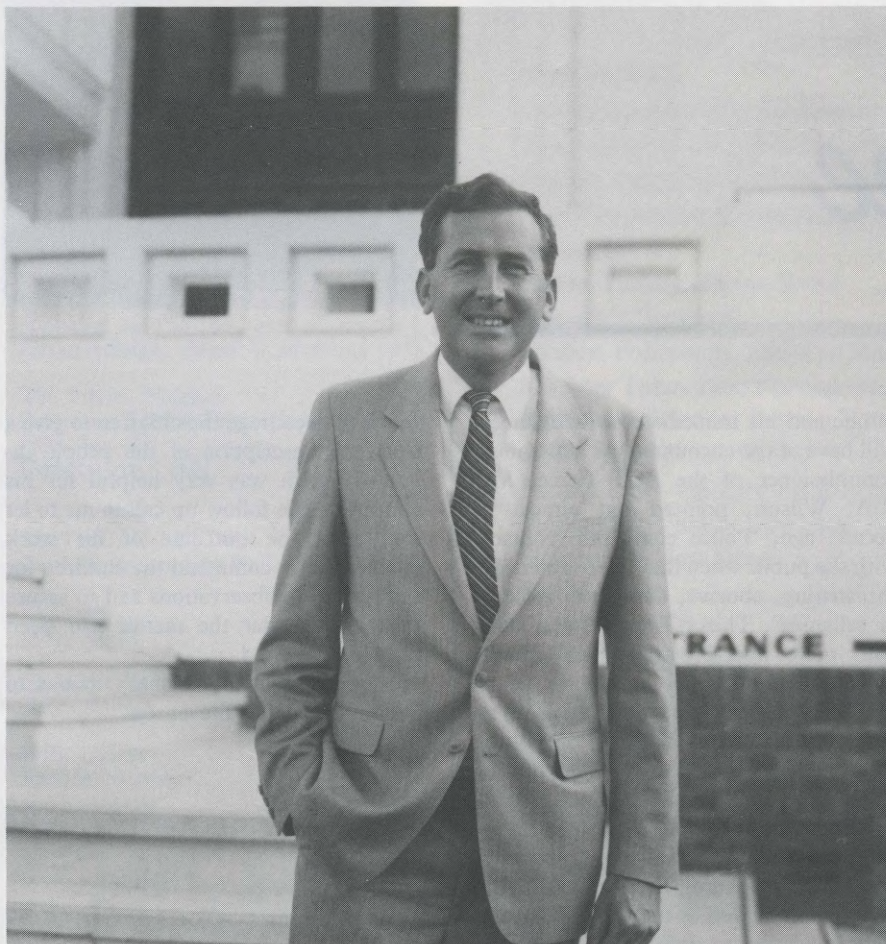


SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE SENATOR MICHAEL TATE TALKS TO PHILIP CASTLE



ON the 16th of February the Government announced that Senator Michael Tate would be appointed Special Minister of State with the move of Mr Mick Young to become the Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

Senator Tate, 41, was born in Tasmania and has completed a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Tasmania, where he later lectured from 1972 to 1978 and was the Dean of the Faculty from 1977 to 1978. He also took a Master of Arts in Theology from Oxford University. He is the president of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship. He was first elected to the Senate for Tasmania in 1977 and was re-elected in 1983. He takes the place in the Ministry vacated by Senator Don Grimes. Until now, Senator Tate has become well-known in Parliament for his work in committees particularly on Constitutional and Legal Affairs. Last month Senator Tate spoke about his role as the Minister responsible for the Australian Federal Police.

'What I want to do is to create a society and help create a society with other Australians of course where the sort of values in which I believe in can prosper where families and households can make decisions to live according to their convictions and to do that we have to take away the spectre of criminals which presently haunt a lot of households. The criminals are only too ready to prey on and devour their young. I hope to be in the forefront of doing something about that.

'No criminal figure will be immune from investigation or prosecution. I don't believe there are any untouchables in the Australian criminal scene anymore. Criminal figures and organisations know now that they are likely to be targetted. It has been shown already in some of the arrests and charges, but more than that, I think it's the sense of being under surveillance and being in jeopardy that is a completely new factor in the Australian underworld.

'Insofar as it is fulfilled I think Australian society is beginning to see the AFP in a very good light. Just look at

some of the operations such as Operation Lavender and the recent case of the alleged importation of the heroin in the soccer balls, there is an impact which brings the work of the AFP to the fore.

'I don't think we have to accept that crime on the scale we see it has to be with us at all. In fact I chaired the Senate committee which established the legislative framework for the National Crime Authority and I have always believed that criminal activity needs to be combatted in a very strong and cooperative way. This needs to be done in a sophisticated way using all the resources and combined weight of the various law enforcement agencies. Insofar as the general structure we devised for the NCA is beginning to work then my hopes have been vindicated. But I think we have to not only target particular criminals but also to target particular criminal activities and put resources into that.

'I understand that some of the AFP officers and others see the fight as a war. Some might see it as being lost. But in my few weeks coming into this office I have been astounded at the amount of excellent work being done by the AFP, the excellent detective work I see as it crosses my desk. As you know I see every warrant to do with telecommunications interceptions for example and the arrests that flow from that and the excellence of the presentation of evidence which quite often leads to no contest from the accused. I look at it from a lawyer's point of view but also from the public's point of view and the results are coming through.

'I believe that with the resources that are being brought to bear will enable the war to be won. What struck me walking around at lunchtime at the Barton Five area was the youth of the people there and their enthusiasm and I would hope that with the experience that they will gain in the next few years that you have there a very able and effective law enforcing group, who with sufficient resource back-up, can use their talents in a very effective way.

'The fact is that we are introducing new legislation to disrupt organised crime such as the confiscation of assets which is more than a simple arrest and conviction but that we can actually strip these people of their assets which will hurt them even more. This also satisfies a sense within the community that these people should not profit from their nefarious deeds.

'It's one thing to jail someone for three years but it's somewhat empty if at the end of three years they can enjoy the fruits of their crime.

'There are two different elements for the AFP: there are the responsibilities in

the ACT — community policing and its importance to the ACT can't be understated to provide effective policing — and then there is the charter given by Government to the AFP by the setting of its priority list. This must remain our guiding light, that is drugs, organised crime and so on.

I don't want to be seen to be putting the concerns of the ACT to one side by emphasising the national role of the AFP. I live in the community and I live in Narrabundah and I'm part of a Neighbourhood Watch area. In fact I have a little Neighbourhood Watch card displayed on the door and on the back window. As I understand it those areas that have had Neighbourhood Watch for twelve months or more have shown a remarkable decrease in burglaries with a drop of more than 25 per cent. I'm very conscious of the good policing practices in the ACT where I spend a good portion of my life. I regard that as an important part of my portfolio: the policing of the ACT'

Are you a bit overwhelmed with the extent of the crime problem facing the AFP?

'I haven't received briefings to such a depth yet to fully indicate. But I have said right from the beginning that the awareness of possible targets is going to be one of the frustrations. But priorities have to be set and I understand that the way these are now set by the AFP are the envy of other police forces in Australia and even overseas. This is going to provide a model for other agencies and departments in the Commonwealth.'

Does the community support the work of the AFP?

'It is true that the community is concerned about the sorts of crime that affect all Australians. There is no doubt that when Mr Costigan erupted onto the scene in Australia with his extremely well-written and colourful reports he brought in a new awareness not only of the scope but of the diabolically clever criminal activities that are being engaged in. I think people realise that you need an equally clever and sophisticated police agency to combat it'.

Is the AFP too hamstrung to do this with criminals having few controls?

'Seeking the proper warrants is necessary and has to be followed. Seeking it from a

third party is proper. But judging from the notification of warrants that pass across my desk the police work supporting the applications is very good and I'm very pleased that it satisfies the judge. I think that is very healthy. I mean we don't want a crime-free society at the price of no restraints of police powers.

'The AFP has a remarkable record of integrity. It's a clean force. We need to emphasise this more and get it into the public arena that this is an elite police force which so far has not had the taint of corruption even to be dispelled about it.

'And of course under the Commissioner, Major General Grey, there is a good reason for confidence in a force with him in command who demands the highest levels of propriety. Sometimes it takes a remarkable Commissioner to create such a force. I think with Major General Grey you not only have some one who can engender a greater deal of loyalty within the AFP but present a public image of incorruptibility and firmness. I think it is in the leadership that the results are seen and then in its image. This new image will penetrate the general public's consciousness.'



'When I chaired the Parliamentary Committee into the setting up of the NCA I was constantly told of petty jealousies, protection of turf, self-agrandisements of the various law enforcement agencies particularly State-by-State. If I have become aware of anything over the last four or five weeks it has been the change that I've seen in the degree of cooperation and I think genuine friendships across the jurisdictions. Such things as the Staff Police College at Manly which I have visited last week, help play a role in this. I think at that level there is much evidence of it. I mean there is competition to get in there to the various courses and that provides a tremendous setting for a network of police officers who mutually respect each other right around Australia. It is also seen at the levels of the various task forces and at the ABCI at all these levels. There is tremendous collaboration going on.

'It's essential to have this of course. We won't win the war against crime without this collaboration. I'm sure that is why we are seeing the change that is coming about.'

Are you going to become a new factor against Australia's major criminals?

'Yes, but I don't want in answering to throw any reflection on my immediate predecessor Mr Mick Young who did a pretty good job in securing resources particularly for the AFP and in the three year plan in which we have given an extra \$10 million to upgrade the personnel resources. I think that is a tribute to the fact that certainly Mick Young took the AFP's role very seriously.

'I hope they will find that I'm the same. I was thrilled to take it over. My history in the Senate has shown that I'm prepared to stand up and be firm when it comes to dealing with the evidence. If the evidence is presented to me then I'm prepared to take a stand whatever the political cost. Yes this was shown with Mr Justice Murphy but also with my work on the Parliamentary Committees. AFP members would be aware that I chaired many committees which examined the 'Age tapes' and then further allegations against Mr Justice Murphy. I came to conclusions based on an honest assessment on that which was presented by way of evidence to those committees. I then took the political consequences which at the time put me in jeopardy of political oblivion. But clearly the party, at least the Caucus, regarded those qualities as useful in a Minister and I was given a guernsey.'

Why the Special Minister of State?

'The Prime Minister gives the portfolio and I think the Prime Minister knew of my interest in these areas over the years. Of course Mick Young was being moved into Immigration and I was slotted in here. But it is certainly absolutely compatible with what I wanted. I'm thrilled. The adrenalin is flowing and beginning to stagnate a bit. I could chair a Parliamentary committee quite easily and successfully but it wasn't fulfilling anymore. Now this has put me in a situation where I've got to make real decisions and not merely recommendations.'

Being a very junior minister, will this affect the way in which the AFP is treated in the Government's priorities?

'I can understand that concern. I have very ready access to the Prime Minister. With good briefings from the Commissioner and the department, I have been able to go into the Cabinet room and get helpful decisions in the face of opposition sometimes. I've been quite able to put a strong case and argue very forcibly for it.

'The message I would like to get across to the AFP is that they have someone there who has got the time and wants to get around and meet them, who is interested in retaining their services and keeping their morale up in the AFP. I don't want them to burn out and I want to stop them from leaving when their experience is greatly needed. I'm interested in them feeling a part of a very professional service needed by Government. The Government needs the AFP to help create an Australia that is worth living in, free of the destructive elements of organised crime.'

Are drugs the biggest threat?

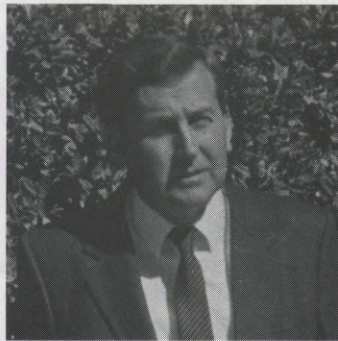
'Well, I stay with the charter and drugs have to be the major concern, mainly because of the absolute horror and distress caused when you see young lives ruined by them. I'm familiar with the Kings Cross area having spent time with the Reverend Ted Noffs whom I know well and have been a supporter of him for many years. When you see the effects of drugs, it's quite horrifying. I have gone around with them on their night patrols occasionally, so I have seen that consequence of organised crime and particularly drug trafficking. You feel an anger which requires satisfaction, but also of course the moneys generated which allow for the further corruption of some law enforcement officers which degrades the whole system and society and brings it all into disrepute.'

Will being a qualified lawyer help you in the portfolio?

'Well, you see I never actually practised law but I taught law. Basically due to a very bad car accident from which I still limp I didn't complete my articles so in fact I never practised law. So my other

interest was in lecturing in law which I did at the University of Tasmania. I returned there after doing my theology degree at Oxford University. So I lectured and specialised to some extent in constitutional and administrative law — the public law areas.

'If your question is have I stood up in court and dressed down some police officers. No, no, far from it.



Do you have any concerns about the civil liberties aspect of policing?

'The contest between civil liberties and law enforcement is sometimes overstated. For example most of the concerns about handling suspects and the correct way of doing this; their charging and arrest is pretty well laid out in common law and the judges rules. I think there is already a body of protective procedures there which are supplemented by rules.'

Would you like to see the six-hour rule operating in other areas apart from Victoria?

[These apply to the AFP when it is operating in Victoria.]

'I can make the comment of course that the AFP operates in accordance with whatever rules cover the jurisdiction it finds itself in and is therefore operating under those very strong constraints wherever they are. In the ACT that isn't the case. Well you know at the moment I'm not looking to introduce any hard and fast specific time changes.

'The AFP's access to taxation records is essential. I'll be pressing for that in regard to serious indictable offences and I would see it as essential that the full resources available from Government be brought to help either in sheer intelligence or help put together what is going on or as evidence. While I have only been holding the portfolio for a few weeks now, last week I went to Sydney

and I made a special point of visiting your Northern Command people based in Redfern and some of the senior officers who gave me a pretty good description of activities. The range of policing work is quite extraordinary and once again I was particularly impressed by the training programs of new recruits and their use and the way in which they are introduced to their police work. And of course some operations were described to me including the alleged soccer ball importation. It was very good, very good indeed, extremely good intelligence work, in depth research and excellent surveillance work and of course very timely coordination of the arrests.

'I then went out to the International Airport, not only to speak to the police officers working at the barriers but also the bomb squad which is based there to gain insights into that aspect of AFP work. Of course it is quite clear that as far as anti-terrorism is concerned in Australia it's my judgement anyway that it is bombing and assassination attempts rather than siege situations that is the real danger and the expertise of that group was very evident.'

Why a degree in theology?

'Basically I needed to be liberated from a pretty strict upbringing as a Christian Brothers' boy in a very close Catholic household and I really felt I wanted to pursue these great insights into the spiritual life but in a very tolerant academic atmosphere, not in a seminary, which in turn was of course the alternative for a Catholic boy. And that was exactly what happened. I had the opportunity to rethink my whole outlook and it did lead me ultimately to change my politics because I fell under the spell of Dr Martin Luther King, whose photo hangs above my desk in Hobart and was the great Baptist Pastor as you know. He, by non-violent means, effectively overcame segregation, or apartheid, which applied then in the southern United States. That led me to question our participation in the Vietnam War and that it was perhaps unwise. I had some concerns about peoples' consciences and that these were not properly protected.

'I have a strong personal faith, I'm a practising Catholic. I don't believe in parading personal piety as a political garment which a lot of people do, but I do think the Christian faith can help put things in perspective and give you a value system which isn't dependent on day-to-day politics which is very important.'