

Morgan nails up his thesis against the 'greenie' religion

By JOHN LAHEY

Mr Hugh Morgan, executive director of Western Mining Corporation, last night linked Ned Kelly and modern environmentalists as enemies of society.

"It would be no surprise," he said in a speech at Mansfield, "to see Ned Kelly picked up by the greenies, as 'The Age' now calls them, and incorporated into their pantheon of saints."

Part of Mr Morgan's thesis was that the environmental movement had become a dangerous new religion. On his way to expressing it, he quoted from the Old Testament and the Roxby Downs blockade handbook; bestowed the title "archbishop" on conservation leader Dr Geoff Mosley, and attacked the Kellys unmercifully as murderers, horse thieves and bullies who struck at the fundamental elements of order and civilisation.

Controversy will follow these remarks as surely as it followed his suggestion in a speech last May that mining companies had God on their side as much as Aborigines had their own spirituality in relation to sacred sites. Mr Morgan appears to be emerging as an important spokesman for the section of the political Right that wants to return to the old values of free enterprise and order within a Christian framework.

That Mr Morgan chose to make the speech in Mansfield is significant, because it was from here that the four policemen who encountered the Kellys at Stringbark Creek rode out in 1878. A monument in the centre of the main street commemorates the three who did not come back.

Mr Morgan was speaking at a function organised by the Liberal Party, and he eulogised the qualities of Sergeant Michael Kennedy, one of the three men shot, over those represented by lawlessness and Ned Kelly.

Mr Morgan said the major element of the Kelly appeal in today's market place was the identification that could be made between the Kellys and "Nature".

Mr Morgan quoted the view of the American social theorist Robert Nisbet that the overwhelming religious wave of the late 20th century was the environmental movement. "It is, he claims, the new religion, passionately held, of the upper and prosperous middle classes."

He then quoted from the handbook carried by the Roxby Downs anti-uranium protesters: "If property destruction is going to take place it shall be carried out in the spirit of creative affirmation of life and not one of vandalism."

Mr Morgan went on: "That language is, I suggest, language characteristic of the new Australian Prayer Book."

Western Mining Corporation, he said, was now a reluctant participant in an annual religious festival during the August-September school holidays at Roxby Downs.

"It is our unwelcome task to play the role of Satan in that drama festival. As a result of our experience in that role we have become very conscious, just as the citizens of Mansfield became conscious 106 years ago, of the great benefits of having a well-equipped and disciplined group of policemen close at hand for protection against those who seek to transform symbols into deeds."

The Roxby Downs confrontation was just one part of an ongoing drama, Mr Morgan said. The resolution of that drama would determine whether civilisation would continue to grow and develop in this continent.

The threat to society posed by the Kelly Gang had been an open and direct criminal challenge, and society had met it without equivocation, but "the threat to civilisation, to society, posed by this new essentially religious movement... called environmentalism is far more subtle, and much more dangerous..."

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