

TAXI NEWS

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The taxi industry magazine that says it as it is!

Issue 1: March 2000

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Taxi News*.

The magazine is published simultaneously as hard copy and online.

The contents of both are essentially the same, save for differences in online material and/or online links. To maintain our independence, we do not accept any paid advertising.

Unlike the majority of other so-called taxi industry magazines in Australia, we are not 'controlled' by any major vested interests or corrupt organizations.

While we are Victoria-based we seek to publish about taxi-related matters Australia-wide.

The magazine seeks to be an annual publication in the first instance, but we may increase the frequency if we deem it necessary.

Back issues of this magazine will be archived online so that students and others may be able to use the resource. We also address the serious issues of corruption and vested interests that control industry and make it dysfunctional.

The magazine can be found online at <http://www.smuggled.com/t1>

And mirror sites. We can be contacted at: adder@smuggled.com

In time our websites may include the webaddress <http://www.taxitalk.com.au/t1>

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MURDER, COVER-UP AND MEDIA MANIPULATION – THE TRUTH ABOUT THE VICTORIAN TAXI INDUSTRY.

(From the book – Victoria Police Corruption – 2)

There are criminals working for the Victoria Police. There are rapists, murderers, drug traffickers and so on. One of the points I make in this and other books is that these rogues are not being weeded out. In fact I make it clear that many are being protected.

The same applies for taxi drivers. As one who has driven taxis on and off for some 15 years (most of this period, full-time), I think I have reasonable qualifications to make some comments. At the time of writing this book, I am President of the Victorian Taxi Driver's League which also happens to represent more taxi drivers than any other body in the state and has done so for some years. But you'd probably never know this based on how often our comments or views get printed in the papers.

Getting back to the rogue taxi drivers, there are the real rogues, namely those who rob and rape their passengers and use their job to conduct other criminal activity. Because of the relative lack of opportunities of corruption type activities in taxi driving, when compared to other occupations (including Police) these rogues are relatively few in number.

The few of these criminals that are industry are sometimes protected by friends in authority, read Victorian Taxi Directorate or another body, the Victorian Taxi Association (VTA). While both publicly at least deny harboring any criminals or criminal activity, the record speaks for itself. This includes a number of court hearings that have gained wide publicity over recent years, where members of both groups have given evidence in favor of known criminals they seek to keep within the industry. The VTA is a so-called taxi owners association, but in reality is little more than a cartel of a small number of multi-owners (of taxi plates) who maintain an iron-fisted control over the industry in conjunction with Terry O'Keefe, David Robby and their subordinates at the VTD. All have been in control of the industry for more than a decade so any ongoing faults must surely be blamed on them.

Both the previous Cain/Kirner Labor Government and Kennett's Liberal Government have made strong public pledges to 'clean-up' the taxi industry. Yes they promised to weed out the rapists, murderers, etc, and the newspapers have given them miles of column inch telling us this is the case.

However the rhetoric is far from the facts.

Also bear in mind that O'Keefe himself and VTA president Alan Lang have repeatedly said in public that their screening process for drivers was 'stringent and there were no loopholes' (O'Keefe).

If that is so, then how come O'Keefe let the following through?

The Ballarat man with over 50 criminal convictions including armed robbery and fraud. In one case the man even used a taxi to rob a TAB. O'Keefe and his subordinates gave the man a licence.

When the coalition MP for Ballarat, Barry Traynor complained about the licence being issued, he was told to 'butt-out' and mind his own business. Traynor reflected public opinion when he said 'I believe that a man who has been convicted of an armed robbery involving a taxi shouldn't be allowed to drive a taxi in the community'.

In 1997 another case came to light where a well-known robber and drug trafficker Bill Kraja of Carnegie had also been able to corruptly get a taxi licence.

Then there were the earlier cases of a convicted murderer and a multiple sex offender able to get taxi licences from O'Keefe's department. Or the case of brothel king Geoff Lamb who was able to pay a Policeman who in turn paid taxi officials in order to get a taxi licence that he was otherwise ineligible for. In yet another case the VTA went to court to try to get a well-known criminal a licence. I won't go into the details of the case here, but suffice to say it did little for the public confidence in the state of the taxi industry.

Or the known rapist, Dermot Brereton Senior who used his connections in authority to keep his taxi licence and avoid being charged for yet more rapes committed while driving his taxi. More recently we had the case of Joseph Matuschek convicted of indecently assaulting a woman in his taxi at Collingwood. The VTA and O'Keefe's department together took the matter into their hands, the result being that he only got a token short-term suspension from his job.

While all this is going on, who are the over 300 odd drivers who have had their licences (officially called 'driver's certificates') revoked in the last 3 years alone. Most have lost their licences for things that the general public would have no concern about at all. What could be called 'non-of-

fences'. These include such 'serious' crimes like failing to wear a uniform, double parking when picking up wheelchair-bound old ladies, doing 67 in a 60 zone and so on. Then of course things like 'multiple-hiring'; well that is regarded as far more serious than murder. Many a taxi licence revocation hearing has centred on this one single 'offence'. The stupid part of course is that according to the VTD's own rule books multiple hiring remains legal!

I won't list all the names of the drivers who have had their careers cut short on the basis of the most trifling things or what these things are because you'll probably kill yourself laughing and this book is meant to be serious.

However the sort of 'criminals' that the VTD and police want to drive out of the industry are people like taxi driver John Poore. His 'crime' was to park in a driveway for 30 seconds in order to help an invalid passenger walk to her front door. For that he got a \$100 fine and a 'permanent record'. The fine clearly shows the man has contempt for the law and is by the VTD's own stated criteria his 'worthiness' to continue to hold a licence, or 'DC' as they called, must be questioned.

Now the above case is serious, even though it may not sound so. However I'll get back to the things that most 'normal' people consider wrong. Stuff like assault, rape, murder, robbery and so on. Now before I get accused of giving my fellow taxi drivers a bad name, may I again state that the ones who do the wrong thing are in the minority. Like I've already said, the disincentives for doing the wrong thing are just too high. For example, if a taxi driver overcharges, the passenger will usually know and more time would be spent arguing over the matter than any extra to be made from over charging. Likewise if a driver goes the long way, is argumentative and so on. The hassles that would arise from doing the wrong thing for a potential gain usually measured in the cents rather than dollars just simply isn't worth it.

However noting the career rapists and criminals that O'Keefe and his subordinates have given licences to, with full knowledge of his authority (confirmed by O'Keefe himself in November 1996), is it really surprising that a substantial proportion of Victorians don't feel safe in a taxi? A survey by the *Herald-Sun* on 13 November 1996, confirmed this, finding 57.7% of Victorians felt unsafe in their taxis.

THE OTHER SIDE

Reversing the picture of taxi drivers and passengers we have a far worse story. While over 99% of the general public are quite hassle free for taxi drivers, there remains that hard core element who are not. These are the thieves, robbers and so on. For them there is a strong incentive to maintain their behavior, not least of

all because of Police and VTD indifference to the problem. Not only that but there are now countless cases of VTD and Police officials relying on these criminals to give false evidence in court in order to revoke licences of relatively normal honest and hard-working taxi drivers.

Put simply, if you are a criminal and you bash and rob a taxi driver, the fact is that unless the driver defends himself there and then (or runs away), you will probably get away with it. Try almost any other form of theft or violent crime and the odds of success start to drop.

Now although less than 1% of passengers give drivers any grief, with drivers picking up hundreds of people (most of whom are perfect strangers) each week, the odds against the driver in terms of having a drama start to go up.

For years Melbourne has been the fare evasion capital of Australia. *The Hoser Files* explains why that is so. By late 1994, things were worse than ever for taxi drivers. Robbings, bashings and murders were all now part of the job description. On top of that drivers had to put up with constant Police harassment and the fact that in any dispute, the Police would always side against the taxi driver. That often included when there were witnesses and other evidence that proved the contrary. In those sorts of cases, Police would usually find a half-baked excuse to do nothing (sounds a bit like the Ombudsman, Barry Perry).

A person in Melbourne could (and still can) rob, bash and do anything else they like to a taxi driver with relative immunity and an effective green light from the Police. Now this isn't always the case, but as a general trend, what I've described is totally accurate. Likewise if a taxi driver manages to defend himself in an attack, the driver will be charged with assault. For that, there are few if's, but's or maybes. The record of the VTD and Police speaks for itself.

The reason I mention this as being the case by the end of 1994 is because by that stage Jeff Kennett had been State Premier for two full years. He had also gained a heap of media coverage describing himself as a friend of the taxi driver who was allegedly determined to help them and their industry.

Unfortunately his media rhetoric didn't match the facts. The reality was that nothing changed. Taxi drivers were still getting robbed and bashed on a daily basis. (The taxi radio networks registers of M13's (code for driver's attacks) confirms this.

There were also a few other events of note under the new Kennett regime. One was the spate of attacks on drivers in late 1993, early 1994. Drivers getting locked in boots of taxis, stabbings, broken bones and that sort of thing.

Driving at the time, it became a bit of a joke as

passengers got into the taxi. 'Do you want to end up in the boot' became a fairly common remark. You'd hear the 'joke' half a dozen times a shift. While I never suffered that fate, other drivers did.

DEFENCE AND ATTACK

Seemingly out of the blue there was a series of attacks by taxi drivers on passengers. That was in early 1994. One driver shot at a jumper (one who jumps and runs) at Essendon. The man was hit by a bullet in the left testicle. That case got a lot of coverage. A few other runners got run over by the cabbies, while some who attacked the cab driver found themselves on the receiving end by being stabbed. As I wasn't physically present when these things happened, I can't go into detail as to the facts and circumstances. However almost overnight, taxi drivers found their passengers giving them a bit more respect. There was that more nervous sort of feel. The new joke became 'you won't have to shoot me, because I'm gonna pay the fare'.

This situation didn't last for long. You see on a busy Friday night, VTD, Police and Sheriff's officials sought revenge on the taxi drivers for asserting their rights. The main feeder ranks at Tullamarine airport were blocked at both ends. Every single taxi driver was 'checked' for outstanding traffic fines (warrants) and other matters. By virtue of the fact that taxi drivers have always been a prime target of traffic Police and they average 60 hours a week on the road (more than most people do in a month), the officials certainly hit pay-dirt. Drivers found themselves being arrested and carted off over unpaid traffic fines and related matters.

Parked cabs were left all over the place. Then there were the other matters, the things that the VTD officers get right into. Unroadworthy stickers on cars for tiny tears in the back seat and similar 'dangerous' things, as well as busting drivers for not wearing uniforms and so on.

However the real reason for the 'blitz' was to disarm the taxi drivers. Every taxi driver and their cab was searched for weapons. Over half were busted. The weapons included knives, guns and last but not least wheel braces. You see it is illegal for taxi drivers to carry such weapons.

So it transpired that the drivers who sought to defend themselves from attack found themselves under attack. Notable is that the very Police who formed a part of the blitz had guns sitting in their holsters for their own self defence. I suppose it was just another case of double standards. Oh and by the way, far more taxi drivers get killed by the public than Police.

Now for the record, I've never carried weapons in the cab (except perhaps a concealed tape recorder) and fortunately I've never needed one (the times I've been attacked, I wouldn't have

gained by having such a weapon). But I do believe that in the circumstances under which we work other drivers should have had the right. Also I wasn't a driver busted on that fateful night, nor have I (as yet) ever been accused of carrying a weapon, legal or otherwise.

As for the wheelbrace being a weapon and drivers getting busted for that, well I thought that was way below the belt. You see that is a crime I have been guilty of, even if only inadvertently.

You see many drivers stick the car's wheelbrace down the side of the front seat. They do this for their protection. At the end of the shift, the wheelbrace gets left there. The next driver doesn't even notice it's there and he does the same at the end of his shift. That is, he leaves it there. And so on down the line and with up to fifty different drivers working on the same cab over a given month. Of course many (including myself) wouldn't notice or care where the wheelbrace is kept. That is unless they get a flat tyre, which is the only time I ever look for a wheelbrace.

So what ended up happening on that fateful Friday night was that cabbies got busted for having weapons that they didn't even know they had!

BACK TO SQUARE ONE

By end of 1994, we were back to the same scene as a year earlier; Kennett telling the media he was mates of the cabbies and consulting them all the time; Kennett in actual fact hiding from cabbies as best he and his minders could and cabbies on the roads getting robbed and bashed.

As for the VTD and Police, well they'd made their colors known years ago and due to their constant reminders of where they stood, there was little to be gained by talking with them, even though we tried. January 1995 saw more drivers getting held up, locked in boots and bashed. As president of the Taxi Driver's League myself and others sought appointments with the VTD, Kennett and the Police.

None wanted to see any of us. Most seemed preoccupied with stopping publication of my book (*The Hoser Files*), even though Kennett had previously promised a gathering of Liberal Party faithful that the book wouldn't be banned. Anyway, why did Kennett want to see me? He had the media eating out of his hand and they were constantly pushing the crap that his government was looking after the taxi drivers. The closest he ever got to the taxi drivers in terms of meeting them seemed to be with the VTD officials, many of whom hadn't even sat in a taxi for years.

One of his own constituents, taxi driver Peter Toner couldn't even get to see Kennett to discuss the safety matters. This effectively proved that it wasn't just myself that Kennett and his minders seemed to have had contempt for, but all drivers.

Numerous letters were written to newspapers explaining the problem in a bid to get Kennett and the VTD to do something about the safety issue. It was hoped that they'd be embarrassed into meeting a delegation of drivers. Although most letters weren't published, some were. This included one in the *Herald-Sun* on 13 January 1995 (reproduced on the previous page).

Even then Kennett, the VTD and the then Transport Minister Bill Baxter refused to meet us. I suppose that said something for their skin.

So there we have it. By mid January 1995, crime against taxi drivers was endemic and everyone who counted now knew that Kennett and all those below him refused to do anything serious about it.

Among the many attacks and robberies on taxi drivers was one by a pair of youths at Preston. This was an armed robbery of taxi driver Alexander Kons on January 31 at Preston. The young men stuck a knife to his throat and took his takings of \$130. Like in most such cases the Police seemed disinterested and the two youths who did it weren't pursued or charged. Thus they'd effectively been given the green light to strike again.

They did.

They attacked a taxi driver four days later (February 4, 1995). The place was the same. The driver's name was Peter Coe.

The youths got into the cab at Cynga Street, Preston. They immediately threatened Coe with a knife. Coe activated his foot alarm, which then broadcasts the activities inside the cab to the base and if necessary on to Police. But like dozens of other alarm activation's that go on every day, nobody seemed too concerned (you see it would probably turn out to be another false alarm like the last one and/or the dispute will be over within a few minutes!).

But regardless of who was thinking what, the broadcast showed Coe who was normally a quiet inoffensive person, pleading with the youths not to stab him. His pleas got nowhere. A few minutes later he'd been stabbed to death. It is not certain if there was a struggle, but based on how Kons escaped alive, it is fair to assume that some sort of struggle may have occurred. Had Police come the moment the alarm was activated, Coe may well still be alive, but that is only conjecture as we cannot undo what has already been done. Had the youths been charged over the earlier robbery (and remanded in custody), it is a dead certainty that Coe would still be alive, but again I could be accused of being hypothetical. Likewise if Kennett had met our delegation and taken firm action to stop the rising crime against taxi drivers. Particularly after the letter was published in the paper less than three weeks earlier.

When Coe's body was dragged out of the front

seat of the cab, it was seen that his throat had been slit. He'd also been stabbed in the head and back. Coe, 41, of Elsternwick never had a chance. The two youths who killed him were just 13 and 14.

Kennett's true colours on the matter of driver safety had been shown just the day before when he'd told federal MP, Kevin Andrews that 'there is no value' in meeting a delegation of cab drivers to discuss safety issues. The letter is reproduced on page 54 of this book.

REMORSE – FORGET IT!

In spite of a horrific murder, the response of Kennett, the VTD and Minister Bill Baxter was anything but remorseful. They still refused to meet with myself or the other taxi drivers.

A mass meeting of drivers was called at TWU house South Melbourne. The meeting was one of taxi drivers and not the TWU as such; the union merely providing the venue. The VTD, Police, Minister Baxter and Premier Kennett were all invited. None showed up. Again they had treated Victoria's taxi drivers with contempt.

Recall the meeting in question was where over 200 taxi drivers and other interested parties fronted.

Driver after driver got up and complained about the VTD and said that they and the Police were actively protecting many who committed crimes against taxi drivers. Several stood up with their summonses issued to them for 'assault' after they'd done no more than defend themselves against attack. There is little doubt Coe would have joined them had he survived the attack and the attackers been caught.

Most speakers made scathing comments about O'Keefe. Clearly he was regarded as one of the bogey men of the taxi industry. The meeting was also recorded.

Towards the end I stood up and without making a speech like everyone had before me, I simply proposed a series of four resolutions. A fifth one to do with security shields (something I have a slight preference against) was added by others. These, the only resolutions put to the meeting, were passed unanimously (two dissenting votes on the fifth were by non-taxi drivers).

A media release was drafted and faxed to all major media outlets as well as handed to the journalists present.

As for the result, well the other side had the cat in the bag.

REMORSE - NO ... DAMAGE CONTROL - YES

On the other side of town the VTD side were doing their own job of telling the TV stations and papers what to run. Deliberately timed to coincide with the mass meeting, Baxter called a press

conference where he announced a series of so-called safety initiatives to supposedly make it safer for taxi drivers. The key problem of lack of support (and actual deliberate green-lighting) by the VTD and Police wasn't addressed. At the taxi driver's mass meeting, Baxter's proposals were booed and rejected.

That evening, Baxter and his so-called taxi safety plan got a clean sweep of all the television news bulletins. Likewise for the papers the next day. As for the resolutions at the mass meeting, well, they weren't even mentioned. 200 affected taxi drivers had been effectively trashed! Obviously the qualified views of the 200 taxi drivers had no significance to the government side who were instead simply trying to save face in the wake of the mess that they had themselves effectively created.

Eventually and after numerous phone calls and complaints, the *Age* printed a letter signed individually by over 200 taxi drivers. The *Herald-Sun* steadfastly refused to print it. This wasn't the only time that paper was guilty of misrepresenting the facts by only printing what the government side wanted to hear (refer to the Press Council Judgement (number 990) against the *Herald-Sun* re the Silk/Miller shootings in 1998). As a result, Minister Bill Baxter, Terry O'Keefe at the VTD and Jeff Kennett were able to prevent most of the public from ever knowing what the taxi drivers themselves had voted on in terms of securing their own safety in future.

Following the Coe killing, O'Keefe suddenly professed a new interest in driver safety, which he promoted through a column in the VTA magazine. He also formed a so-called driver safety committee. Because O'Keefe refused to sit with a number of people nominated for the committee it was regarded by many as merely a publicity exercise. It seems to have since died a quiet death with few if any tangible results. The committee had just one meeting in 1998 and at the time of writing in early 1999, no further meetings were planned. At one stage the committee touted the statistic that there had been 90 violent attacks, robberies and threats of same against taxi drivers in the previous year. A second set of figures showed at least 900. I know which ones I'd believe.

Then there was Billy (The Lyrebird) Conway a Transport Workers Union (TWU) representative on the O'Keefe appointed committee. He was noted for publishing lies in a column he had in the VTA magazine. He also got blind drunk at a meeting and smashed up his car on the way home. He'd rammed a parked car. He was unable to flee due to the fact that his car was undriveable. Police came and he was busted for DUI (driving over the alcohol limit). Initial attempts to hush up the matter

failed. To the arresting officer's credit, he refused to drop the charge. Conway was found guilty and he then quit the so-called safety committee.

Another TWU member came under investigation in December 1997 after it was alleged that the union paid \$1 million more for its Port Melbourne offices in 1990 than the then estimated value of the land and building (\$3.9 million instead of \$2.9 million). Not surprisingly there were a number of serious questions raised about the extra million dollars.

In February 1999 there was a major internal dispute within the TWU over an election for the union executive. The ruling group (names deleted following legal advice) were accused by a challenger of using 6,000 phantom names to rig the election results. These 'phantoms' included former and dead members, whose ballot papers were routed via an address at Tullamarine. The papers were then filled in as desired by persons on behalf of the existing executive, thereby ensuring a given result and entrenching the power of the incumbents. Calls for a proper inquiry were rejected and the matter was buried. Similar allegations had arisen at earlier elections.

Returning to the O'Keefe and co. damage control exercise after Coe's death, it is interesting to note that the *Herald-Sun*, itself a major player in the misinformation exercise apparently jumped ship somewhat, when it published an editorial on 6 December 1995, extremely critical of O'Keefe and his committee. The *Herald-Sun*'s change of position was no doubt motivated by Supreme Court Judge Phillip Cummins' stinging criticism of the Taxi Directorate (O'Keefe) and government and their aiding and abetting criminals in the period preceding the murder of Coe as well as the cynical damage control exercise since. Cummins came out with the apparently radical idea that 'taxi drivers had a dangerous occupation and deserved the full protection of the law'.

CRASHING OUT

Meanwhile back in damage control land, a number of Baxter's key taxi safety proposals were quietly modified or crashed out after the furore had died down later in 1995.

Even MP's within the coalition parties began to take the relatively unusual step of criticizing O'Keefe and the taxi directorate. National MP, Julian McGauran said that the VTD 'are hardly an independent umpire'. He also described them as 'rude' and 'unhelpful'. Now almost everyone who dealt with them knew this, but it was rare for government MP's themselves to come out and admit it.

Then there was the 'idea' of 'safety ranks' in the city. The theory here was that an 'inspector' would take down passengers details and then should something happen to the taxi driver, the

passengers could be traced. It is logical that lines of people only waited at these ranks at busy times of taxi shortage. Thus the concept was only ever viable in the city late on weekend nights or after major events.

Even on the limited basis as outlined above, the theory seems OK. The practice however was another story.

Take for example the taxi driver who picked up at the Rialto 'safe rank' and took his fare to Glenroy, only to have the passengers jump and run. The driver didn't give chase (lest he get charged with assault) and returned to the city to see the 'inspector' at the rank. The cabbie was told, I throw the details away after the taxi leaves.

On other occasions cabbies have returned to be told that it's only their plates that are getting recorded, not the passengers.

A PERVERSION OF A DECENT THEORY

Things took a turn for the worse when the VTD and VTA started putting their own inspectors on these 'safety ranks'. Instead of trying to manage things in something resembling a smooth manner, the inspectors now seem to spend more time getting their pound of flesh out of the poor hapless drivers rather than assisting anyone in getting home. A recent scene before Christmas 1998 was cabbies finding their vehicles declared unroadworthy at the Princes Bridge taxi stand. Meanwhile hundreds of irate passengers stood there waiting to be taken home, while cabs that were now 'prohibited from picking up passengers' stood parked and waiting.

Also if a taxi driver beat the roadworthiness gauntlet and tried to take more than one fare (often only a single passenger), regardless of how many stood in line, then they'd be hit with an on-the-spot 'touting' fine, (increased in late 1998 to \$5,000). They'd probably lose their licence as well. The net result of all this was people waiting longer for cabs, lines getting longer, people getting more irate and then more aggro people getting into taxis.

Thus before long Melbourne's dysfunctional taxi industry got even worse. Word soon got around as what was happening and before long only the uninformed or foolish drivers frequented the ranks with inspectors. The rest now go elsewhere for their fares.

As for the robbers and thieves, they simply say that they don't have ID, give false address details to inspectors and still get away with their crimes. You see the inspectors don't strip-search them for ID! Or if all that's beyond their intellect, they simply walk elsewhere before hailing a cab.

KENNETT'S TRUE COLOURS

Kennett the master media manipulator spent much of 1996-7 getting himself into the papers as the 'cabbie's friend'. The stories usually included him

shaking hands with one or more cabbies as if to 'prove' that he was at one with them. The fact is, nothing could have been further from the truth. Most of the time, Kennett seemed to be hiding from drivers; except when he arranged for cameras to be present and knew in advance that the particular drivers wouldn't give him trouble.

You see at the time, Kennett had effectively vetoed a proposal by cabbies to be allowed to demand fares up front when they feared the risk of not getting paid. (The same rule applies to trains, trams, planes and toll-ways). This was on top of his earlier, out of hand rejection for all the proposals at the taxi driver's mass meeting immediately following Coe's death.

The one time I recall Kennett actually doing an impromptu walk around to speak to cabbies waiting on ranks, he ended up fleeing back to his car with his minders. This was after he copped a barrage of flak over the improper Police and VTD harassment of drivers and effective protection of criminals who prey on the drivers.

ONE DEATH LATER AND THINGS ARE NOW NO DIFFERENT

So what was the result of the so-called safety initiatives and cynical media damage control exercise, some years after Coe's murder and the cynical media damage control campaign? By 1999, the reality was that nothing much had changed. Violence against taxi drivers continues unabated and more taxi drivers have been murdered. Many of those who have defended themselves against attacks have been charged and prosecuted with the full force of the law.

In Victoria, Kennett, the VTD and the new 'yes Minister' Geoff Craigie still seem to prefer the idea of hiding from taxi drivers who wish to raise the key issues of violence, crime and official protection of criminals. Obviously there are no votes in appeasing taxi drivers.

That things have got worse is demonstrated by the fact that fewer and fewer drivers want to drive night shifts as fears of fare evasions and attacks increases. And so lines of people waiting grow longer and longer.

With an average wage of about \$10 an hour for a night driver, more and more are saying, why put up with the hassles and the risks.

So, Peter Coe got murdered, and after Alexander Kons pressed his matter, the youths were charged and convicted over both the murder and the attack on himself. The two youths got very soft sentences. They were sent to youth training centres instead of jail. Both were convicted of manslaughter not murder. Oh, and both got short sentences, which are under review and may be shortened further. Thus on that score it seems that little if anything positive resulted from his

death. Put it this way, there was not a great deterrence in the penalty.

PUNISHED FOR SELF DEFENCE

Moses El-Fahkri, (one of those I drove a cab for) copped flak from David Robby and Terry O'Keefe. He's had his licence improperly revoked several times for doing no more than defend himself against aggressive fare evaders, armed robbers and the like. In one case Robby was a party to having him charged after a drunk passenger vomited on him. It goes without saying that the passenger wasn't charged. Although the charges were laughed out of court, they were used as a basis to revoke Moses' licence in the period leading up to the hearing.

Moses is one of the luckier ones. He's fought and won the multiple assault and other charges brought against him. To say that the VTD and certain Police don't like him is putting things mildly. You see none of them like to loose a case and they are very good at carrying a grudge. They take El-Fahkri's licence off him and he takes them to court and gets it back. Then they take it again. O'Keefe and Robby simply don't abide by the umpire's decision when it goes against them. The key here is that it seems that as far as O'Keefe and Robby are concerned, cabbies are such scum, that they deserve to be robbed. No wonder most drivers don't like them.

One of the drivers that worked at the El-Fahkri's depot (name deleted) confided me one of his 'incidents'. This was sometime after the Coe slaying. He picked up a fare from the Tunnel nightclub in the city and took the man to Avondale Heights. The man in his 20's jumped and ran. The driver gave chase and caught him. After a struggle he grabbed the man's wallet and ran back to the car. He drove off. Inside was a \$50 note, a driver's licence and a Freddy (Police badge). He took the money and ditched the rest down a drain. He later said, 'If I complained to the police they would probably charge me, so what was the point'. The next day he donated \$50 to his kid's school.

The driver didn't want to be seen as a robber (the fare being evaded was \$16). Rather it was the principal that counted. The key to the story is as follows. Here was a Police officer (the licence matched the ID) who in spite of having more than enough money to get home, decided to rob a soft target, namely a taxi driver. How many other times had he gotten away with it?

Like I said, the robbery of Alexander Kons on 31 January 1995 at Preston by two youths followed by the same youths robbing and killing Peter Coe four days later was just a part of a far wider pattern that is ongoing today.

THE WAR ON THE STREETS

Now if you don't believe what I've said about Coe

getting charged if he'd successfully defended himself, I shall refer to the following case by way of example. There was the cabbie who decided to 'do the right thing' and went to jail for it.

On New Year's eve/morning, driver Hanna El-Rahi, 27, of Coburg was with his girlfriend Gretchen Prosser to see in the 1996 New Year. Among the thousands of people in the city trying to hail a cab was Scott George Sumner and his girlfriend. They'd been out partying and then waiting for some hours for a cab.

Although El-Rahi's cab was 'not for hire', Sumner accosted him at a set of traffic lights. He asked El-Rahi to 'do the right thing' and take him and his girlfriend to South Oakleigh. El-Rahi picked them up..

Within minutes, an intoxicated Sumner started arguing about the fare and accusing El-Rahi of wanting to rip him off. After further abuse, El-Rahi asked Sumner to get out of the cab. Sumner refused, by that stage effectively hijacking the cab. Eventually Sumner did what was asked and got out. He then went bezerk and kicked in the rear light. It was smashed and shattered. Sumner yelled 'I've been waiting for this all night. I've been waiting for someone to fight'.

After Sumner's attack, El-Rahi responded in kind, causing Sumner to fall on the ground. An autopsy later found that he died instantly from a ruptured left vertebral artery, which is a blood vessel in the head.

While there is no doubt that Sumner's death resulted from being hit by El-Rahi and then falling on the road the facts are also as follows. Sumner had attacked first and initiated the defensive response. Secondly that Sumner died as a result of the blow/s by El-Rahi was probably relatively unusual when compared to the force of the hit/s and only a result of the ruptured blood vessel.

While not saying the death was an accident, it was clearly inadvertent and any coroner worth his salt would have to blame Sumner for causing his own death.

However instead of not charging El-Rahi (as it was he who was initially attacked), or hitting him with manslaughter (see above), Police went the full hog and hit him with a full-blown murder charge. Suddenly a man with a clean record and five years of incident free taxi driving found himself locked up behind bars and bail refused. All this after he had done 'the right thing' and picked up two stranded people.

Lawyers at the time noted that even a manslaughter charge against El-Rahi would have been based on very weak evidence. But that didn't seem to matter, because he was only a taxi driver.

El-Rahi went down in court and unlike the youths that had attacked and killed Coe, El-Rahi got a

severe sentence. The difference I note is that the first case involved persons who attacked, the second a person who was himself attacked. Justice John Coldrey sentenced El-Rahi to six year's jail.

(By the way, for the record I should state that I always prefer a peaceful resolution to disputes or if such isn't possible, to avoid or run away from them).

Taxi drivers were outraged at how a taxi driver acting in self-defence had been charged with murder. Shortly after El-Rahi was charged, several hundred of his taxi driving colleagues blockaded Tullamarine airport for several hours on January 6. It was a strong protest gesture which called for the charges to be dropped. The story was effectively kept out of most the media. The VTD wrote off the protest as being conducted by 'a small group of rogues', and alleged just 15 drivers had been involved, which was just another lie that they had promulgated (I had nothing to do with any of it, nor was I present). In other words, O'Keefe and his men made it clear whose side they were on. It wasn't that of the taxi driver!

SOME OTHER BATTLES

El-Rahi won the battle but lost the war. He knocked out his attacker, but that knocked out his taxi driving career. Other drivers lost the battle but effectively lived to tell their tales. Rather than go through hundreds of similar cases of taxi drivers being robbed and bashed by crooks some of whom appear to be protected by VTD and Police, I'll detail just a few relatively recent incidents to give readers a jist of the status quo some years since Coe's death. This is just to demonstrate how nothing much has changed and that the rhetoric of Kennett, his Ministers and the VTD re taxi driver safety is just that, mainly rhetoric.

25 January 1997. 25-year-old taxi driver, Tolga Azgan was kicked and punched in the head before being robbed of his night's takings. The attack occurred at Racecourse Road, Newmarket when one of the male passenger's grabbed at his throat.

7 March 1997. Taxi driver Malmood Abbasi had three passengers who decided not to pay their fare. He decided to report the matter to the Police but the passengers retaliated after the fact and decided to report him. It goes without saying that the Police accepted the passenger's version of events over that of the driver. That was that Abbasi had agreed to accept \$20 in lieu of \$26.40 as was on the meter, (yeh, sure thing!).

Abbasi then fronted court on 13 March 1998, charged with 6 counts of assault arising from when he approached the passengers outside the cab for the unpaid part of the fare.

Abbasi had no hope when it turned out Susan Blashki was the magistrate hearing the matter

(refer to *The Hoser Files* pp. 289-291). She said she didn't believe a word the taxi driver said. (It seems she never does!). He was convicted and fined. It seemed that the message was clear. Fare evasion in taxis is OK.

20 November 1997. A similar incident happened to taxi driver Hua Gao. He had passengers who didn't want to pay the fare. Police were called in and there is no prize for guessing who they sided with. He too went to court facing multiple assault charges. Magistrate Frank Hodgens committed Gao to stand trial at the County Court. At the time of this case, VTD staff made it clear: Any taxi driver who attempts to approach or apprehend fare evaders will be charged with assault. Now what's that if it's not 'green-lighting'? (I'd like to see Jeff Kennett say the same thing for toll dodgers on his City-Link tollway!). For the record, if you evade a \$2 toll on the City-Link toll-way the full force of the law will be applied to having you charged, convicted and the money recovered.

29 July 1996. A 36 year old cabbie was robbed at 5 PM on the corner of Koroit Creek Road and Lommon Street, Williamstown. The man got into the taxi and shoved a screwdriver to his throat, before fleeing with cash. The driver later said that Police told him to 'write it off as an experience'.

7 April 1997. It was at 4 AM after a night out, that two women attacked taxi driver Abdirashid Abdulle causing him to crash the car near Ringwood. They later admitted that they didn't have the money to pay the fare. Notwithstanding this, Police still charged Abdulle with a series of offences. Although Abdulle pleaded innocent to the charges, it was again a case of his word against that of the intoxicated women. Magistrate John Hutchens stuck to his past form and sided against the taxi driver. Abdulle was convicted. He lost his licence.

27 October 1995. Two drunken youths went ballistic and attacked Sami Aboujabar's taxi smashing the front passenger's window before fleeing on foot. He then went after the pair and got them both. For that he was charged with assault related offences. On 19 May 1997, Judge James Duggan sentenced Aboujabar to three years jail.

11 September 1997. A 64 year old taxi driver was stabbed and robbed of his cash at Clayton South.

21 December 1997. At 4 AM another taxi driver was robbed at knifepoint outside Parliament house in Spring Street. The two men demanded and got the driver's cash before fleeing.

15 July 1997. Taxi driver Rakesh Kumar picked up Tina Joy Dillon, 27 from the 7-Eleven store in North Melbourne and took her to Moonee Ponds. She then said she wasn't paying the \$9 fare. Kumar then drove her to the Flemington Police Station outside which she unexpectedly pulled a knife and stabbed him several times in his head

and body.

26 October 1996. Matthew Sidwell and a friend decided to attack a taxi and its driver at Ivanhoe. Both were totally drunk. The car had \$2,600 damage and the driver was injured. The attack started when the two men wanted to hire the taxi and the driver simply said he had to wait for his passenger to get money from the ATM. The other passenger returned and came to the driver's rescue. He forced the matter and unusual for such matters, Sidwell was charged. Magistrate Jillian Crowe lectured Sidwell about the seriousness of his offences, but then let him off with a light sentence, effectively fining him just \$1,500. He didn't even have to pay the \$2,600 damage bill for the taxi!

13 September 1997. One of three teenagers who had bashed and robbed a taxi driver fronted court. They had also stolen the car and crashed it into a pole. The magistrate virtually let the youth off by placing him on an 'attendance order'.

13 May 1998, A taxi driver was attacked by three male passengers in South Melbourne. The three men aged about 20, shoved a plastic bag over the 40 year old driver's head then bashed him in the head knocking him unconscious. He was lucky he didn't suffocate. The same day a 41-year-old driver foiled an attempted assailant armed with a knife. It was at Glen Waverley when the attack occurred and the quick thinking driver fled the taxi with his keys.

KEEPING THE PUBLIC IN THE DARK

The facts and circumstances leading to a climate where fare evasion, robberies and even murder are every day risks for taxi drivers is something the VTD and State Government have been successful in covering up. By and large they've managed to keep out of the media things like the fact that VTD and Police have used protected criminals to frame innocent taxi drivers who have done no more than try to assert their legal rights. But in spite of their winning the propaganda war, all has not gone their way.

In spite of saturation propaganda coverage in the VTA magazine for many years, Terry O'Keefe remains despised by many (if not most) within the taxi industry. That was long before *The Hoser Files* came out and not much seems to have changed. Obviously I am not alone in my negative judgements of the man.

You see it's probably hard to fool cabbies about what's going on in the streets. You see the cabbies are on the receiving end of much of the crime and corruption that I've talked about here.

Outside the taxi industry and the criminal fraternity that systematically prey on cabbies, few people have an idea of the above status quo. That is evidently how the VTD and government like it.

Hence the cover-up after Coe's death and the simultaneous suppression of the Taxi driver's meeting and resolutions.

A break came in late 1996 when Trevor Kirk the editor of the largest Victorian Taxi Industry Magazine *Taxi Call* spoke to printer Peter Toner about articles for the magazine. Toner, a driver and owner of 'On the Spot Printing' referred him to me, telling him about the Coe murder, The taxi driver's resolutions and how they'd been suppressed. I was asked to write an article. That was published in October/November 1996.

To say the shit hit the fan was putting it mildly.

David Robby and Terry O'Keefe sent faxes to all outlets from where the magazine was distributed and ordered the seizure and destruction of all 2,500 copies. They alleged that material in the article was defamatory (refer to my earlier definitions).

I soon found out about the illegal censorship, noting that nothing in the article was defamatory (see definitions) as all was true and in the public interest. I then sent faxes and media releases all over the place to try to reverse the action.

Neither the *Age* nor the *Herald-Sun* were interested in the story. O'Keefe's good friend John Connell (whom he worked with) had already knobbled the *Herald-Sun*. Someone else apparently got to the *Age*.

Fortunately I was able to arrange through a friendly journalist to slip the story into the *Herald-Sun* computer system at a time that would hopefully make it hard to spike the story.

The plan worked and a small piece about the ban ran in the paper on 4 November 1996.

That started the ball rolling. I then did a series of radio interviews over the illegal ban. The story was newsworthy, it's just that O'Keefe and Robby didn't want it in the news. By that stage they were backing down and the 'defamatory statements' in my article had become 'potentially defamatory'. We all know that there is a quantum difference between the two.

Robby and O'Keefe obviously felt they were on shaky ground. It was becoming a bit like the *Smuggled* ban in 1993. Raymond Hoser on his own was no threat to them, but if the media turned on them and grilled them over the illegal ban, then the two of them could really land in the proverbial shit! They obviously worried about this. So their next step was to send new faxes to the outlets telling them that it was now OK for them to circulate the *Taxi Call* magazines again. The first fax was to be disregarded.

As it happened, they needn't have worried. You see other than that small burst of publicity, the mainstream media followed instructions and avoided the story.

As for the *Taxi Call* magazines that carried the article in question – well most had been destroyed by the time the order came out that they could be circulated.

As for the businesses that spent good money advertising in the magazine, well all I can suggest is that they sue O'Keefe and Robby for loss of income. But who would dare sue the state Government over such a matter?

While talking about the way the Kennett government supports small businesses, *Taxi Call* is one that is no longer. The magazine is no longer in circulation. The O'Keefe/Robby ban was enough to put them out of business. I understand that the company that published the magazine is now working on other magazines for distribution in Queensland only. I assume that's ones that don't upset Robby, O'Keefe, Perton or Kennett.

STRATEGY

After the effective banning of *Taxi Call*, the editor of an excellent non-mainstream newspaper, Ray Platt got onto the story and was justifiably outraged. Platt then ran the original taxi call story and a follow up story about the illegal ban by Robby and O'Keefe in his newspaper called *The Strategy*.

Robby and O'Keefe had no hope in terms of suppressing *The Strategy*. The reason for that was because the paper goes out by mail order only and all go at once. By the time they would have found out about the article printed in it, everyone would have got their copy!

Plus there was second advantage. Ray Platt wouldn't put up their illegal threats and other crap. Keith Moor of the *Herald-Sun* later improperly labelled *Strategy* an 'extreme right publication'. Since when has reporting the truth been the exclusive province of the extreme right?

CYBERSPACE

Two months before the *Taxi Call* magazine came out, O'Keefe and Robby had attempted to wipe my websites from my then Australian server Lexicon. It was the usual stuff, long legal letters to the ISP and illegal threats. That in itself was significant. You see at that stage I essentially had nothing about them on the sites. The closest to them I got was a site selling copies of *The Hoser Files*, but that site only talked about Police corruption.

O'Keefe and Robby, like Perton, seem to have become somewhat obsessive about myself and even when I'm having nothing to do with them they seem intent on harassing me and closing me down. At the time all my efforts were directed at promoting *Smuggled-2* in Sydney and I hadn't even driven a cab for over

12 months!

Their attempts to wipe the sites failed. I simply shifted them from the server to a USA site and shoved hyperlinks to them. For those not used to cyberspace all it means is that the sites were out of their reach, but within everyone else's!

It goes without saying that the *Taxi Call* article and the media release following it's banning have been sitting on the world wide web since November 1996. No doubt they've been read and downloaded countless times.

It seems that in these times of media control and censorship, the truth can still seep out.

Oh, and I almost forgot to mention who else weighed in on the side of O'Keefe and Robby in their attempts to suppress the truth about Coe's murder. The Ombudsman's Office (Barry Perry) sent me a letter siding with Robby and O'Keefe in wanting me wiped from the internet. Then Victor Perton surfed in with an e-mail demanding I move the specific file with the story about Coe's murder and the banning of *Taxi Call*. Instead, I simply noted that on the site. Of course now Perton will whinge that that's defamatory too!

A PRECEDENT?

The case involved Melbourne barrister Gerald Grabau. He decided to have a night on the town and get drunk. As he didn't want to pay a \$5.50 fare he bashed up the taxi driver instead. The case was unusual in that the Police actually charged the assailant. However as it turned out, they needn't have bothered wasting their time.

Magistrate Jelena Popovic found him guilty, but let him off without conviction. Perhaps it was just a case of giving a soft run to a fellow lawyer.

ANOTHER PRECEDENT?

On 26 January 1996, four men hired a taxi to the Sydney suburb of Rooty Hill before they decided to brutally attack the driver and flee without paying the fare. Driver Said Malak apparently took the law into his own hands when he did a U-turn and drove back towards the men. He then ran 39 year old thief Carl Hipwell.

True to form the NSW Police charged Malak with murder. However on 12 April 1999 and in spite of clear encouragement from Justice Carolyn Simpson to convict, a jury acquitted Malak of the charge, meaning he walked from court a free man.

Several commentators suggested that Hipwell got what he deserved. Other Sydney cabbies who'd been similarly bashed and robbed by thieves hoped that the case would be used as a precedent. However there would be little chance of that.

HOT WHEELS

Then there was the car stealing rackets and laundering of reborn car's identification details through Terry O'Keefe's department. Readers of

The Hoser Files will recall the particulars of a series of scams detailed there. The rackets by necessity involved both Victorian Police and Vicroads personnel as each department's computer systems shared the same data. Therefore the laundering process had to be done at both ends (hence the corruption in both).

Recall, there was one racket in O'Keefe's department involving drug trafficking and car theft. That scam, first publicly exposed in 1989 had outside contacts within the Police and named politicians. In another case, over \$30 million worth of vehicles were illegally traded by Vicroads officials without roadworthy certificates. One official within the department who tried to expose his corrupt colleagues was threatened with the sack. One of O'Keefe's co-workers at Vicroads went to jail for a year after putting more than \$28,000 in bribes through a TAB account.

In another scam Vicroads instructors were earning up to \$8,000 illegally selling driving licences. John Kenneth Brooke who worked at Vicroads with O'Keefe was found guilty of rigging Vicroads computer records to cover for a million dollars worth of stolen cars. When caught he took the rap for just \$1,200 in fines giving others incentive to do the same. They did. Three others from the same office later came unstuck, when bent Police became unable to cover for them. Included was an assistant manager, Italo Pogari.

There were at least 458 known cases of fraud at Vicroads, most at Carlton at the time when O'Keefe was a senior manager there. Although he managed to escape the rap for any corruption activity, insiders have said it would have been almost impossible for him not to have known what was going on. Allegations by former Vicroads staff against O'Keefe cannot be printed here for legal reasons.

Closer to home for O'Keefe was the scam where at least 11 people who couldn't speak English paid bribes of up to \$1,000 each to get taxi licences. That was on top of another racket which involved Vicroads officers handing out taxi licence plates for a dollar each at a time when they were worth over \$100,000 each. No one in the department took the rap for either. Those that paid the bribes to the officials did.

Following the public disclosure of these and other scams, Chief Executive Michael Roux and later, Ian Roy, a senior bureaucrat with Vicroads went public with a series of statements saying that things had now been cleaned up and that there was no way that these scams could be repeated. They went on with the usual crap about safeguards now being in place and so on.

As seems to be usual for such corruption matters, all Roux's and Roy's statements were, was a smokescreen to dupe the public into thinking that

all was now well. Noting that all this predated 1995, it is relevant to note what has happened since. If I were to detail all the car stealing rackets and other corruption involving Vicroads personnel (often in partnership with Police), from 1995 to the present, I would probably fill several books, so instead will here mention just one case that typifies what has gone on since. Bear in mind that most of the corruption is deliberately kept out of public view and most of the time, no one ever finds out about it; or it is covered up before the 'wrong' people find out.

One of the rackets involved Vicroads employee, Mr. Enzo Caputo who registered hundreds of stolen cars allegedly without sighting them for friends who he knew were stealing them. The cars in question included expensive late model BMW's worth several million dollars.

So many cars were being stolen that the syndicate were at one stage the largest BMW dealership in Australia, with cars being stolen in NSW and resold in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. Professional car thieves were being paid a 'spotter's fee' for each car stolen. The cars were being 'laundered' (reborn) by corrupt staff at Vicroads in Melbourne, including Caputo, although evidence suggested it was impossible for him to have done all this on his own. This is notable as he appeared to be the only one to lose his job over the matter (the fall guy).

The racket came unstuck in early 1998, due to its sheer scale. However it wasn't the diligence of the Victorian Police that did this. You see evidence suggested that they too were involved in allowing the operation to go on. Instead the first moves to break up the operation came from NSW as Police in that state found themselves investigating an increasing number of thefts that implicated Victorians and corrupt Vicroads officials.

Victorian authorities were then forced to act, although at all stages it seemed that they were more interested in covering things up, rather than getting to the bottom of the problem.

By late September 1998 about 230 stolen cars had been seized from unsuspecting buyers. Most had been seized by NSW Police, not their Victorian counterparts, even though the racket appeared to be centred in Victoria. Those that had bought the stolen cars usually had no legal recourse and had effectively lost their money once Police had taken the cars.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Chief Executive of Vicroads, career bureaucrat Rob McQuillan was accused of trying to bury the matter by quietly sacking Caputo. However at the time, he refused to initiate Caputo's prosecution for what McQuillan himself described as blatant 'impropriety'. Two others were convicted of 13 car-theft related charges on 11 March 1999. On 24 March, Judge

John Dee sentenced the men, Rodney Joseph Tyrell of Box Hill to 3 years jail (minimum 14 months) and Christopher Griffiths of St. Kilda to 4 and a half years, (minimum 2 years). Dee said their scam 'knew few bounds'.

Then there were the road building contracts being issued by Vicroads. By law these had to be advertised for tender and the process was supposed to lead to the cheapest and most efficient quotes being accepted. Instead the process was allegedly perverted whereby former staff of Vicroads and their friends were being given the inside running so that they got all the plum jobs. On top of that outside businessmen complained that it had become almost impossible to get any roadbuilding contracts in Victoria unless the right people were being paid off.

While denying the allegations, Vicroads chiefs steadfastly refused to have a public inquiry into the matter. This in turn fuelled speculation that there was even more corruption being swept under the carpet.

SECURITY IN THE JOB

The security business is one area of economic activity that, in Victoria, has all but been taken over by ex-cops. Take for example places like the Melbourne docks or Crown Casino. Part of the reason includes the obvious synergies. The other part includes allegedly corrupt links between the ex-cops and their mates in government who can 'sling' them contracts and/or give them an unfair advantage over competitors when tendering for lucrative contracts. When this involves breaking the rules, it seems that there is rarely anything done about it, again because the Police connections seem to ensure this.

In August 1998 it was found that at least two Police officers (names deleted) were found to have done unauthorised work for a cash collection firm, Advent Security. The Police officers were working for the company which also happened to be owned by an ex-cop. Their job was to move cash funds from Vicroads offices. The firm itself was facing 23 charges of employing unlicensed guards. It is understood that several other unlicensed guards were also ex-cops or their family members.

Advent was subcontracted by a Sydney-based company called Australia-wide Security Brokers. When they were tendering for and later won the Vicroads contract on 10 June 1997, the company didn't have a licence to provide security services in Victoria. Instead of being prosecuted for the breach, the Victoria Police simply let them off with a warning. They were then allowed to get a security firm's licence on 11 July 1997. The contract was worth over \$1 million.

When the irregularities were revealed, Vicroads management denied that there were irregularities in the tendering process. However the original

tender documents issued by Vicroads clearly stated that the successful tenderer had to comply with all State and Federal laws governing their line of work. The documents went on to say that the contractor must obtain all the necessary licences before starting work and provide them to Vicroads before a final certificate/contract could be issued.

Opposition frontbencher Rob Hulls alleged that the process of probity checks on companies tendering for government contracts in Victoria was a sham.

INSIDER TRADING

This may be illegal in the stock exchange, but certainly isn't at Vicroads. Yet another scandal emerged in the so-called privatisation of a part of Vicroads. This involved a \$42 million dollar contract for the sale of the equipment supply division of Vicroads to 'Australian Highway Plant Services' (AHPS) completed on 18 October 1994. The company was allegedly a shell organised primarily by four Vicroads officers who were directly involved in the tendering process until after the winning tender was announced, whereupon they left Vicroads for their new positions within their company. Another major shareholder in the company was Federal Liberal MP Julian Beale. It was alleged that the Vicroads employees had effectively arranged the tender in such a manner that they had to win it and at a rate that meant the sale of public assets at well below what they were really worth.

Opposition leader John Brumby said that there was a clear conflict of interest and that it was against the State Government's own stated tendering guidelines. 'It's patently wrong, it is morally wrong' he said.

One employee at Vicroads had however expressed concern over the deal. That was after he became aware of a lunch and meeting between Roads Minister Bill Baxter and Charles Abbott of AHPS on 3 August 1994. Vicroads external projects manager Peter Robertson immediately sent a memo to his superiors alerting them of the situation saying 'having been at pains to ensure we avoid direct contact or impact in any way, I regret that the above was beyond my control. I believe we should be aware of it immediately...'

In spite of these complaints no action was taken against the four employees or to review the AHPS tender. Critics labelled the ensuing internal investigation a whitewash.

However in February 1996 Judge Fagan of the AAT ruled that it was doubtful that Vicroads had taken sufficient steps to isolate the four employees from the tender process in which their company won the contract. The AAT had become involved when the opposition had lodged an FoI request and been refused documents by the state government.

UNINVESTIGATED

As for the Victoria Police, a deputy commissioner admitted under duress that over 90% of corruption within Vicroads goes uninvestigated and unprosecuted. He claimed that Police didn't have enough resources. Others within the Police department said that the real reason was that because most scams by Vicroads employees involved police protection and/or police themselves, senior Police feared that investigations into the department would backfire. They thought that too many Police members coming under a cloud over their roles. Recall 1,500 odd Police got found out for their roles in taking bribes over the shutter scam (Operation BART). It was suggested that various rackets

involving Vicroads officials could implicate a similar number of Police. When a mid-ranking official, Daryl Keith Ford was convicted for taking bribes totalling thousands of dollars he asked the court for leniency. He claimed to be the 'fall-guy' for others higher up in the bureaucracy. His lawyer told the court that the corruption went to the highest levels. However none of his superiors were prosecuted over these rackets.

From the book – *Victoria Police Corruption – 2*

To order copies either go to your nearest bookshop or go to:

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WHO REALLY IS TO BLAME FOR TAXI DRIVER PETER COE'S DEATH? –

THE ARTICLE THAT CAUSED THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT TO TRY TO BAN AND SEIZE THE ENTIRE PRINT-RUN OF A MAGAZINE.

BY RAYMOND HOSER,

(President, Taxi Driver's League)

On 4th February 1995 Taxi driver Peter Coe was brutally slain by two youths. Since that tragic death, there has been much in the media about how and why this man died. Unfortunately many of the true facts have been kept out of the papers and denied to the public. Most taxi drivers are aware of the circumstances pre-empting the attack on Coe and are disgusted with efforts by the Taxi Directorate, Victorian Government and others to whitewash the real reasons behind the increase in violence against taxi drivers which perhaps culminated in Coe's death. A summary of some of the media manipulation, lies and deception is given here.

Fare evasion and attacks against taxi drivers often go hand in hand. Someone decides not to pay the fare and when the taxi driver attempts to get payment, the evader gets violent. Associated with this are those who pull knives on drivers, rob them and related criminal acts. The two attacks on taxi drivers by the youths that killed Coe were not the first. Violence against taxi drivers in Melbourne has been going on for years and the incidence of it has been increasing steadily. For years myself and other drivers haven't been saying '*what if a taxi driver gets killed*' but rather '*when*'.

If you ask any experienced full-time taxi driver what is the reason for this steady increase in attacks on taxi drivers almost all will tell you the same

thing. That is that Police and Vicroads (AKA Taxi Directorate) not only refuse to take action against those who bash and rob taxi drivers, thereby giving these criminals further encouragement, but they even side with them when taxi drivers themselves attempt to take action against these criminals.

Over the years I've become aware of several cases in Melbourne whereby taxi drivers have been charged with assault for either attempting to apprehend fare evaders (jumpers) or defend themselves against attacks. In a number of court cases I've attended, (including as defendant), I've seen Police and Vicroads (AKA Taxi Directorate) officials entice fare evaders to perjure themselves in court in order to convict innocent taxi drivers who have done no more than assert their rights. (In my own case, the current chief Solicitor of the VTD David Robbie, enticed a pair of fare evaders to perjure themselves in a failed attempt to convict me of assault). That perjury has since been openly admitted by one of them on publicly available, official court transcript!

In order to combat the rise in violence against taxi drivers, myself and several other drivers have attempted to meet the powers that be (namely Vicroads/VTD and politicians) for several years (since 1986) to discuss these issues. Without fail, these groups have refused to discuss the issues. A senior bureaucrat with Vicroads is on

the record stating that taxi drivers must 'expect to be attacked and that attacks and thefts are 'an occupational hazard'. Try telling that to a Police officer. I for one don't expect Police to be robbed or bashed. Nor do I expect the same of taxi drivers.

Since Jeff Kennett's election as Victorian Premier, myself and others in the Taxi Driver's League (a lobby group of over 200 professional drivers) has attempted to meet with him to discuss taxi industry problems, including violence against taxi drivers. While Kennett hasn't hesitated to pull various media stunts to profess his alleged concern for the taxi industry, his rhetoric hasn't matched his actions. He has point blank refused to meet myself or any other concerned drivers who wanted to raise the violence issue. Peter Toner, a taxi driver who was repeatedly refused an appointment to see Kennett, lived in his electorate, within walking distance of his Ashburton office and was even a paid up member of the Liberal Party. Roads and Ports Minister Bill Baxter and VTD officials also refused to discuss the issue of attacks on drivers, thefts, etc., with VTD staff on the record as stating that all attacks on drivers were provoked by the drivers themselves. While I'd be the first to agree that not all taxi drivers are saints, the philosophy emanating from VTD offices is beneath contempt.

In order to combat the violence against taxi drivers, myself and others wrote a number of letters to the papers seeking some form of action to combat the problem. Although most letters were screened out of the papers, some were printed (albeit heavily edited).

In response to my campaign for tougher action against the criminals who bash and rob taxi drivers, the current hierarchy at the Taxi Directorate attempted to drive me out of the industry (with periodic successes). At the time of his appointment as head of the renamed Taxi Directorate, Terry O'Keefe made much mileage out of a campaign to do in a taxi driver for any alleged indiscretion, while choosing to ignore safety and other concerns of drivers.

At the end of 1994 and in January 1995, what may have been a record number of taxi drivers were bashed and robbed by passengers. Some were even locked in the boots of their cabs. Myself and two other taxi drivers in January wrote a number of letters seeking appointments with then Roads Minister Bill Baxter, Premier Kennett and the VTD to discuss their inaction over safety matters, including non-prosecution of those who bash and rob drivers. I personally have a massive number of files of cases where Police and VTD have refused to charge offenders, even when evidence against them is overwhelming and in many cases not even disputed!

I had a number of letters published in January

1995, just one month before Coe's death calling for a change in attitude by the above authorities. A letter to this effect was printed on page 14 of the *Herald-Sun* on January 13, 1995, just a month before Coe's death.

Instead of getting support from the authorities, Kennett and Baxter still refused to meet us, while the VTD people simply made a series of threatening/nuisance phone calls telling me to get off their case. (They were also unsuccessfully attempting to stop publication of a book detailing corruption in their department).

Following Coe's tragic death on February 4, there was a mass meeting of taxi drivers at TWU house in South Melbourne, where five resolutions were made and passed unanimously. These were

- 1/ The immediate reversal of current Police practice of not taking action against those who rob and bash taxi drivers.
- 2/ Immediate introduction of a policy that Police must prosecute anyone who avoids paying taxi fares, assaults or robs a taxi driver, or who in any other way harasses a taxi driver.
- 3/ The IMMEDIATE DISMISSAL of Terry O'Keefe (Head of Victorian Taxi Directorate) and all others in the Victorian Taxi Directorate who were formerly employed by Vicroads.
- 4/ A 150 per cent tax write-off for all monies spent by taxi owners on taxi safety equipment such as barriers, alarms and so on.
- 5/ Immediate introduction of some sort of shields to protect taxi drivers who want shields.

Instead of adopting these resolutions, the State Government, in co-operation with the VTD went on a cynical damage control exercise which not only failed to address the key concerns of taxi drivers, but kept out of public sight the real concerns of Melbourne's taxi drivers.

On the opposite side of town, Minister Bill Baxter called a press conference to announce his 'new' safety measures for taxi drivers. This was done in an attempt to negate the anger of taxi drivers and in the eyes of the media neutralise their protests. This tactic worked as Baxter managed to entice most media away from the TWU house meeting and get a clear run of the evening news Bulletins. His departmental media unit also made sure that the only material in the next days' papers was what he and his minders wanted. No paper ran stories covering the five resolutions made by the taxi drivers. This was obviously not a chance happening. Incidentally, when Baxter's so-called safety measures were read out to the TWU House meeting of drivers, it was greeted by loud booing.

In the March 1995 issue of *Taxi Talk*, the TWU printed a piece detailing 'resolutions' made at the conference. Not only were the alleged resolutions lies, but so too was most of the article. When I

raised this matter with publisher of *Taxi Talk* Stan White, he said he'd been advised by Frank Hart (of Martin Meters) that the TWU piece was untrue, but that he'd printed it as they were paying him for advertising. Hart had attended the TWU house meeting, while White hadn't. Both men are close friends and Hart had apparently given White an accurate account of what transpired.

A letter written by myself and signed by over 200 other drivers, detailing the exact resolutions passed at the TWU house meeting was sent to all major papers, *Taxi Talk* and others. An edited version of the letter was printed in the *Age* on 10th February 1995. The text of the (unedited) letter appears at the end of this article. While the letter was written more than a year ago, all the key points in the letter remain true today. Notably Stan White failed to print the letter in his magazine, even though he admitted in several conversations, he knew it's contents were accurate.

Since Coe's death, violence against taxi drivers continues. Baxter's duress alarms have proved of little benefit to taxi drivers, while GPS, as good as it is, really only assists in finding a driver's body after the attack, not in stopping the attacks. Police and VTD officials continue on the whole treat taxi

drivers as '*the enemy*' and soft targets to fine for the most menial of alleged indiscretions. Fare evaders and those who rob and bash drivers continue to get the green light to do as they please from Police and VTD officials.

Meanwhile, while taxi driver's are constantly getting booked and harassed by Police for even the most minor of offences, many loosing their licences as a result, Premier Kennett is let off for doing over 140 kph on a main highway - an offence that would have cost me my licence, if not my liberty. In other words, double standards in the taxi industry remain the norm and while this goes on the risk of more attacks and untimely deaths of taxi drivers will remain unacceptably high.

Perhaps it's also worth asking, what would have happened to Coe if he'd managed to defend himself against his attackers or even escape them. I have no doubt at all that he'd have been charged at least with assault. I know of several other drivers similarly charged. This surely is an indictment of those in charge of the VTD and that substantial number of Police who adopt similar policies towards taxi drivers.

ARTICLE WRITTEN BY RAYMOND HOSER.

(RAYMOND HOSER HAS DRIVEN A TAXI IN MELBOURNE FULL-TIME FOR OVER TEN YEARS. HE HAS ALSO WRITTEN A BOOK ABOUT CORRUPTION IN THE VICTORIAN TAXI DIRECTORATE AND POLICE, WHICH HAS BEEN RAISED IN PARLIAMENT SEVERAL TIMES. THAT BOOK IS CALLED *THE HOSER FILES - THE FIGHT AGAINST ENTRENCHED OFFICIAL CORRUPTION*. HOSER HAS ALSO WRITTEN SEVERAL OTHER BOOKS AND IS A WORLD RENOWNED ZOOLOGIST.

HOSER WAS SUED FOR DEFAMATION OVER HIS BOOK *SMUGGLED-2: WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING CRIME AND CORRUPTION IN AUSTRALIA*. THE DEFAMATION SUIT WAS DISMISSED AND ALL COSTS WERE AWARDED IN HOSER'S FAVOUR. THAT NOBODY HAS SUCCESSFULLY SUED HOSER OVER WHAT HE PUTS IN HIS BOOKS, SPEAKS VOLUMES IN TERMS OF THE ACCURACY OF WHAT HE WRITES).

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**(UNEDITED) TEXT OF LETTER PUBLISHED IN THE AGE
ON 10TH FEBRUARY 1995.****LETTER TO THE EDITOR .**

We refer to the recent brutal slaying of taxi driver Peter Coe and the flurry of media activity since. Since the murder, it appears that State Transport Minister, Bill Baxter's media office has been working in overdrive in a bid to cover-up for his inaction over taxi violence for some time. It is also notable that he refused to attend the meeting of over 300 rank and file taxi drivers on Monday February 6th which was specifically convened to discuss the violence against taxi drivers in Victoria.

Bill Baxter's announcement that he will make duress alarms and boot releases mandatory falls far short of taxi driver's demands and is best described as a political stunt for damage control.

There appears to have been a scarcity of reports in the media as to what the taxi drivers themselves wanted to combat the growing problem of violence against them. It is for this reason that we ask your paper to balance it's reporting and publish this letter with the resolutions passed by an overwhelming majority of drivers at Monday's meeting.

The resolutions passed were as follows:-

- 1/ The immediate reversal of current Police practice of not taking action against those who rob and bash taxi drivers.
- 2/ Immediate introduction of a policy that Police must prosecute anyone who avoids paying taxi fares, assaults or robs a taxi driver, or who in any other way harasses a taxi driver.
- 3/ The IMMEDIATE DISMISSAL of Terry O'Keefe (Head of Victorian Taxi Directorate) and all others in the Victorian Taxi Directorate who were formerly employed by Vicroads.
- 4/ A 150 per cent tax write-off for all monies spent by taxi owners on taxi safety equipment such as barriers, alarms and so on.
- 5/ Immediate introduction of some sort of shields to protect taxi drivers who want shields.

All but the fifth resolution were passed unanimously.

When the third resolution for Mr. O'Keefe's removal was put to the meeting there was a standing ovation and cheering. Taxi drivers believe that their industry should be run by someone with recent taxi driving experience and not a career bureaucrat. Furthermore the appointment of Mr. O'Keefe as former licensing manager at Vicroads went directly against the recommendations of the all-party Crime Prevention Committee Report of 1993, which stated that Vicroads people should not run the taxi industry as they were not fit and proper to do so. The report documented corruption in the department with relation to taxis.

We also refer to a petition by over 700 taxi drivers in 1991, which called for similar measures to those above. Furthermore the introduction of the above resolutions will not only cost the government nothing (in the immediate term), but save money in the long term. The time to act is now - not after the next murder.

YOURS SINCERELY.

RAYMOND HOSER and over 200 other taxi drivers (names, addresses and signatures provided),

PO BOX 599, DONCASTER, VIC, 3108.

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1995 MEDIA RELEASE ABOUT ILLEGAL CENSORSHIP OF THE TRUTH BY CORRUPT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

KENNETT GOVERNMENT BANS TAXI MAGAZINE.

This month's issue of the main Victorian Taxi Industry magazine, *Taxi Call*, has been withdrawn from the streets following disapproval by the Kennett State government.

The Magazine, which has now been published for some time has never previously aroused the ire of the State government. The 2,500 copy print run was released about a week ago through major taxi depots and other industry related places. Within days, the Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) arranged for remaining copies to be seized and/or taken out of circulation. However there have been no legal actions of injunctions.

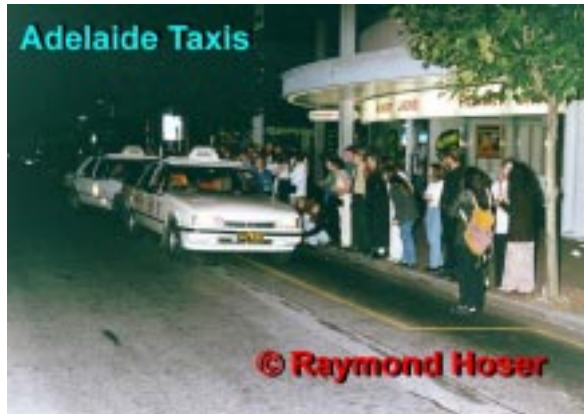
The articles that caused the government concern was one which was highly critical of the Kennett government's running of the Victorian taxi industry, in particular safety related matters. The major article, by Taxi Driver's League president, Raymond Hoser pointed out that less than a month prior to the slaying of driver Peter Coe, himself and other drivers had unsuccessfully attempted to meet with Kennett and Taxi Directorate bosses to discuss safety matters. They were told that neither were concerned about these things. A series of letters simultaneously published in papers and taxi industry magazines, less than a month prior to Coe's death, also failed to entice Kennett or Taxi Directorate officers to meet drivers to discuss safety concerns.

This month's *Taxi Call* magazine noted that in spite of a string of media stunts by Kennett and Taxi Directorate officials, the reality is that based on their actions, neither are genuinely concerned about taxi driver's safety and related matters. The article itself, which was based entirely on material already on the public record further noted how the Kennett/VTD media machine attempted to hide taxi driver's concerns after the brutal killing of Peter Coe. A further letter published in the magazine and signed by over 200 rank and file taxi drivers noted how four resolutions passed unanimously by a mass meeting of several hundred taxi drivers was effectively blocked from being reported in the media. The article also referred to the State Government's failure to implement recommendations of it's own *Crime Prevention Committee Report* into the taxi industry, particularly with regards to earlier corruption among officials in Vicroads who had been in charge of the taxi industry and those who remain in control.

The Taxi Driver's League regards the effective banning of their industry magazine as a direct attack on their freedom of speech. This action is also believed to be illegal. Equally disturbing is how the large numbers of advertisers, (garages, taxi companies, equipment sellers and others), many of whom are struggling small businesses, have been effectively robbed of their opportunity to sell products. As a result of the "banning" of *Taxi Call* some of these businesses may in fact go out of business. The Taxi Driver's League (representing hundreds of taxi drivers) notes that this latest action goes against all Kennett's public pronouncements about his concern for small business. The publisher of the Magazine, the Magazine Publishing Company (based in Queensland), has been publishing for the Victorian Taxi Industry for some years. There is now a possibility that their assistance's to the Victorian taxi industry may cease due the ongoing risk of further "politically incorrect" publications being banned. The Taxi Driver's League regards this censorship as unacceptable and hope that it is reported as widely as possible.

FURTHER INFORMATION PHONE: (03) 9857-4491

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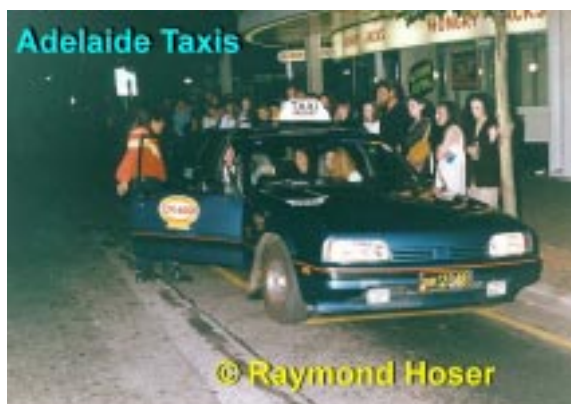


NEW YEAR'S EVE IN ADELAIDE - 1993/4

MULTIPLE HIRING

Multiple hiring is the practice of taking more than one fares at times of taxi shortage. The online version of this magazine and this page have photos of this activity going on in Adelaide on a New Year's Eve.

The main benefit is that members of the public don't get stuck waiting for taxis. At busy times this can mean time savings of hours for passengers. An added benefit is the increased financial return for taxi drivers. Because taxi authorities (transport authorities) in some states tend to view taxi drivers as "the enemy" and treat the general public with contempt, they try to stop multiple hiring. In Victoria at least two taxi drivers have been jailed after authorities decided to put a stop to them multiple hiring. The irony is that multiple hiring is written into the law in Victoria as legal. To stop the practice, the officials from the Victorian Taxi Directorate use a host of legal and illegal means, including the routine falsification of charges and evidence. Refer to the book *The Hoser Files* by Raymond Hoser.



TAXI!

NEW TAXI DRIVING BOOK DUE OUT SOON!

Later this year (2000) we will see the release of a new book – TAXI.

THIS “MUST READ” book is a confessional by professional taxi drivers of what happens in their job.

It is the uncensored version of what happens during the life and times of a taxi drivers. A warts and all coverage of the taxi driver’s job. The book is a light-hearted read that details such things as passengers vomiting in taxis, fare evasions (and the creative methods used), taxi drivers and crime and so on.

Written by professional taxi driver Raymond Hoser, the book has been in the making for some two decades.

It is being published by Kotabi Publishing and will be advertised on their corporate website when available. The book will also be available in most Australian bookshops. The book is being designed and layed out at the moment and may in fact be split into two volumes due to the huge amount of material within it.

The target audience isn’t just taxi drivers, but also those who have always wondered what really goes on in the job and wondered about the interesting passengers we get.

The expected publication date is late June 2000 and interested persons may also bookmark the Taxi News site because the book’s availability will be made known on the Taxi News webpage.