

## PASPALUM PLACE

By IAN WARDEN

***But do you know  
anyone who's  
actually seen any  
organised crime?***

**I** HAVE never attended a conference about unidentified flying objects but I should imagine that such a conference would be very like last Thursday's session of the National Crimes Commission Conference in the Senate chamber.

The resemblance derives from the fact that one would expect a conference on UFOs to devote a great deal of discussion to whether or not such things exist and to what, if they do exist, they might prove to be.

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It came as a surprise to hear so many speakers, an overwhelming majority on Thursday, talking about "organised crime" as though one could not be all that sure what it was or what it looked like or whether one could believe anyone who said that he had seen some.

This was a surprise for me because I had believed the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General when they had sounded as sure of the existence of oodles of organised crime as the Pope is of the existence of God.

The Honourable Mr Sam Doumany, the Attorney-General of Queensland, was the first to sound a sceptical note when he blamed a lot of the "panic" about organised crime on "the fervour of journalists looking for an even bigger headline".

Mr Doumany, a large and bluff and generally very Queenslandish person and a man blessed with Godfatherish features which gave his utterances on such things an added credibility, was not at all sure

that a new body should be formed and was one of several speakers who took the view that if there was enough loot to be spent on the formation of a new body then that loot should be spent on existing State police forces to make them wonderful enough to be able to cope with crime in all its guises.

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He noted that it was said that State police forces "lack men of appropriate intellectual capacity" (surely he was not speaking of the police of his own State, who are renowned for their cerebral approach to their work) in which case let the money be used to provide some.

The Chief Commissioner for Police in Victoria, Mr Miller, owned up to the fact that he had some personal as well as professional knowledge of ordinary, "unstructured" crime because he was himself one of the half million Australian victims of crime in the past year in that his own house had been burgled.

This must have caused some sniggering in the underworld. For a Chief Commissioner of Police to have his house burgled is a little like an archbishop having his house struck by lightning.

Mr Miller was another who was not at all sure that "organised crime" was a species in its own right. He thought that it was "an extension of unstructured crime" of which there was, he said ruefully, far too much.

Why, he said, it was scarcely safe to walk the streets of our cities and to enter a bank or a building society was to run the risk of finding oneself "in the middle of an armed robbery". These things were in



Ian Warden, centre right, haggles with US Air Force officials over the cost of hiring a B-52 bomber with which to try to eradicate the pampas grass from his garden.

themselves "shocking erosions of the civil liberties of ordinary people".

There was a refreshing incidence of concerned references to the ways in which the proposed Crimes Commission might infringe our civil liberties.

The ultrasmooth Mr Paul Landa, the NSW Attorney-General and, like his Premier, one of the Barry Manilows of Australian politics, warned that "once civil liberties are surrendered they are seldom regained".

Yes, there now seems to be little hope that the common people will ever regain their right not to vote in parliamentary elections in Australia.

Mr Temby, OC. of the Law Council of

**Mr Temby, QC, of the Law Council of Australia, another who was concerned about which civil liberties might have to be yielded to any Crimes Commission, offered us the spine-chilling possibility of a society in which "Mr Smith is walking, whistling, down the street and is taken in and made to bare his soul".**

**Yes, I suppose this would be unreasonable unless, of course, Mr Smith was whistling Slim Dusty's Greatest Hits or 'Day Trip To Bangor' or Cliff Richard's ghastly version of 'O Little Town of Beth-**

**lehem' in which case one would like to see Mr Smith not only taken in but comprehensively roughed up as well.**

**One of the very few people who claimed to have any finite knowledge of organised crime was Senator Don Chipp who, with his usual Shock! Horror! Crisis! approach to whatever he discusses departed from the hitherto rather dispassionate tone of debate (so superior to the usual tone emitted in the Senate chamber) to cluck about the great and underestimated "magnitude of the problem".**

**"Its profits [organised crime's] are said to be between \$500 million and \$700 million a year," he told us, appalled.**

**Elsewhere in the chamber Professor Gordon Hawkins, a professor of criminology who had spent quite some time on**

nology who had spent quite some time on ABC radio earlier in the week saying that such calculations were wild and silly estimates, shook his wise old head in mute, amused dissent. Senator Chipp was claiming to have seen UFOs with his own eyes but Professor Hawkins seemed disposed to suspend belief till he had seen them himself.

While on the subject of UFOs I think that there is a rational explanation for the

rash of alleged "sightings" over eastern Australia in recent weeks which has put the subject on everybody's lips.

The most plausible explanation that I have ever heard for anyone's readiness to believe in something so palpably daft is that this is a form of messianism or chiliasm in which people give in to their conscious or unconscious desire for someone with superior intelligence to come to the world and sort it out and make it A Better Place.

That Australia should suddenly be a focus of so many "sightings" is nothing but a manifestation of a widespread and completely understandable desire among common Australians that superior beings should intervene to deliver us from the Hawke Government.

While I share this desire, fervently, I am not so superstitious as to expect God or Martians to do it. Nor can one even place one's faith in the CIA in this instance (or

one's faith in the CIA in this instance (as one did in 1975) since there can be no earthly reason why the Americans would want to destabilise an Australian government which is, under Mr Hawke, as fawning and loyal towards the United States as Tonto was to the Lone Ranger or Trigger towards Roy Rogers.