

The Stolen Generations

MICHAEL DUFFY

judicial tyranny at least as well as narrowly political tyranny: 'There are no tyrants where there are no slaves.' In the libel field, as in every other area where legal lunacy prevails, we shall never get sane laws until we dare risk imprisonment for breaking insane laws. That *some* libel laws must remain is undeniable: abolish all legal redress against gutter-journalistic calumny, and you simply grant unlimited power to lupine spivs like Bob Ellis.

Myth 4: Quality journalism depends on statutory guarantees of free speech. Ah yes, statutory guarantees. So brilliantly successful in safeguarding religious freedom under Stalin and Brezhnev (both of whom wrote such freedom into their respective Soviet constitutions). And so efficacious in America, where the First Amendment allegedly ensures that anyone can utter anything. Tell that to Atlanta's most famous citizen, John Rocker, whose incautious late-1999 references to New York ethnic and sexual minorities elicited howls of media outrage (including chillingly totalitarian demands that Rocker undergo 'sensitivity training') as demented as anything Blainey's candour inspired here. Invaluable though the First Amendment is to, say, your average TV director wanting to devote entire screenplays to iterations of the C-word, it extends precious few practical rights to Americans in general.

Rather than perpetuate all these preposterous legends, Australians dreaming of creating an antipodean *Spectator* or *New Republic* would do better to realize that independent journalism needs to mean exactly what it says. There are any number of stories to which a genuinely bold Australian editor could devote such a magazine and triumph, confident that the big boys will indeed fear to touch them. When, exactly, are we going to see them in print?

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T P A

THE transnational human rights industry appears to be setting up Australia as the next international white pariah, the South Africa of the new century. As we approach the Sydney Olympic Games in September, with the possibility of Aboriginal demonstrations before the world's cameras, many Australians are becoming increasingly nervous about this. Others find it terribly exciting.

Last month the conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard was chastised by the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. At issue was mandatory sentencing in northern Australia, where judges must send offenders to prison for certain offences.

According to the Committee, this system 'appeared to target offences that were committed disproportionately by indigenous Australians, leading to a racially divisive impact on their rate of incarceration.' In other words, blacks commit more crime, so they go to gaol more than whites. And this is racist.

Racism is an extraordinarily potent issue in Australian politics these days. Although only about 2 per cent of people are Aborigines, issues involving them have become one of the main points of difference between the two major political parties. The latest explosion occurred earlier this month over a phenomenon known colloquially as 'the stolen generations', which is now the predominant racial issue in the country.

In the first 60 or so years of the twentieth century, some mainly part-

Aboriginal children were separated from their parents and in most cases brought up in church institutions or boarding schools. 'Bringing Them Home', the report of a government inquiry in the 1990s, found that this occurred to between 10 and 30 per cent of all Aborigines, and that the predominant motivation was racial assimilation. It concluded that, as the ultimate purpose was to 'breed out the colour' and destroy the Aboriginal race (it was assumed full-bloods would die off anyway), the practice amounted to genocide. This inquiry received an enormous amount of publicity and, building on other concerns about Aboriginal well-being, has created an atmosphere of enthusiastic shame surrounding the public discussion of Aboriginal issues.

The problem is that there appears to be little truth in almost any of this. The inquiry's attempts to identify how many children were separated were futile, but 10 per cent was probably the top of the range rather than the bottom. (This is the figure provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.) The inquiry did not interview any of the officials involved in the separations. They have subsequently come forward and helped establish that the motivation of the separations was often welfare, not racial assimilation. For instance, some tribes in the late 1940s refused to accept the children born of liaisons between black women and Australian or American servicemen during the war. So their mothers asked the welfare people to take the children to church homes to be brought up.

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Mothers asked the white authorities to look after their children in many other circumstances, too. Charles Perkins is the most famous black activist in Australia. He was heard recently on the BBC predicting that Sydney would burn during Aboriginal protests at the time of the Olympic Games. He is often portrayed as a stolen child, but in fact his mother asked that he be sent from the outback to a boarding school in the city to get a good education (just as white children in the same circumstances were also sent).

Another example of the elusive nature of the 'stolen generations' lies with two of the most tragic stories told in the government inquiry's report. In each case the person involved is suing the government. The cases are not yet finished, but evidence to date indicates that neither was in fact 'stolen'. One brave commentator has compared this with the failure of memory that occurs in other cases, such as people wrongly claiming childhood sexual assault or abduction by aliens.

It is a commonplace in the press that 100,000 children were wrenched from their mothers' arms, and that 'no black family' was un-

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touched by this attempted genocide. The effects of such claims on the feelings of white (and indeed black) Australia can be imagined, yet they are gross exaggerations. Although no-one knows, it's possible the

number really 'stolen' against their parents' will was as low as several thousand.

Unfortunately, this enthusiastic embrace of falsehood and delusion by many white Australians is typical of their approach to Aboriginal matters. In another famous episode in the 1990s, a small number of black women fabricated a religious cult known as 'secret women's business' to stop a bridge being built to Hindmarsh Island in South Australia. This was an enormous national story, and the Labor government of the day banned the bridge. When other members of the local tribe exposed the fraud, they were ignored by virtually all the journalists, anthropologists, politicians and churchmen who had been involved in the story so enthusiastically to that moment. Clearly, the story of black suffering and white guilt (to use a phrase coined by anthropologist Ron Brunton) is, for whatever strange reasons, far more important to these people than the truth.

The shape that black issues are given in the media in Australia today is determined not by what is best for blacks but by the emotional requirements of whites. Some European Australians, particularly those who have been to university, have lost touch with the spiritual roots of their own culture and now patronize a bastardized version of indigenous culture in search of 'authenticity'. Christianity is regarded with contempt, while respect for Aboriginal spirituality is enshrined in Australian law.

Then there is the abuse of black issues for white political gain. The Australian Labor Party and its allies in the 1960s and 1970s did what parties of the Left do well: they established the victim status of Aborigines and the racist behaviour of white Australians, and made governments do something to begin to address the problems of the victims. These policies, intended to reverse the assimilationist programmes of the past, encouraged Aborigines in remote

areas (about one-third of the total) to revive their Stone Age culture by handing back some of their land, encouraging them to take control of

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their own schooling, and providing them with an apparently permanent stream of welfare.

The problem is that under these policies these people are now much worse off judged by almost any objective criteria. Illiteracy, sickness, violence including sexual assault and murder—all have increased in the past 30 years in most areas. According to a 1999 report into violence in Queensland Aboriginal communities, prepared by Aboriginal academic Boni Robertson, 'The degree of violence and destruction ... cannot be adequately described.... Appalling acts of physical brutality and sexual violence are being perpetrated within some families and across communities to a degree previously unknown ... A majority of the informants believe that the rise of violence ... can be attributed to the so-called "Aboriginal industry".'

The huge problem confronting Australia now is not racism, but the refusal of those committed to the policies of the past three decades to recognize that they have failed disastrously. It is time for the Left and its commitment to victimhood to get

out of the way, and allow moderates with new ideas to come in with the jobs that black men so desperately need if they are to regain their self-respect.

Unfortunately, the Left cannot do this. It is addicted to the feeling of easy moral superiority and self-gratification, which it gained from its often admirable Aboriginal policies in the past. To some extent these policies still work for it politically. Labor is the party of the traditional working class, the recent immigrant, and the new class intellectuals. All of these groups can use the racism of the past to attack the government of conservative John Howard today, which stands for a fairly upbeat view of white Australian history.

The word 'racist' is used in Australia with a frequency that might surprise readers in Britain or America. A fortnight ago it was revealed that the government believes the term 'stolen generations' is hardly justified if the number separated (let alone 'stolen') is no more than 10 per cent. This led to a phenomenal uproar and massive continuing coverage in the media. Howard and his ministers were denounced by many as racists.

In Australia today, it is enough to diverge from the Labor Party's presumed moral monopoly in this area to be branded racist. To refuse to apologize on behalf of the nation for the 'stolen generations' (as Prime Minister John Howard is constantly badgered to do) is racist. Merely to seek the truth about the events in question is racist. The government's modest comment on the 'stolen generations' was compared by some, on the front pages of newspapers, with denial of the Holocaust.

Australia, compared with other Western nations, has almost no conservative intelligentsia or media. The broadsheets and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, like most of the churches and academia, are totally supportive of the Labor Party on almost every issue, and passionately so where Aborigines are concerned. The denial of truth involved is extraordinary.

This Kafkaesque state of affairs would be amusing were it not for the enormous suffering it is causing many

Aboriginal people. Black lives are being sacrificed to preserve the political and career interests, and the self-esteem and moral vanity, of well-educated, powerful white Australians. This is done in the name of anti-racism, but in truth it is actually just the latest form of racism. It is, if you like, the New Racism.

Last week a 22-month-old Aboriginal girl was found in her inner-city Sydney home stabbed and covered with bruises and bite marks. Her plight had been reported to welfare workers numerous times by neighbours and police, but they had not dared intervene, lest they be accused of creating another 'stolen generation'.

In 50 years' time, people will look back in horror, just as we do today, and wonder how intelligent and powerful white people could have let such things happen while professing so strenuously their concern for black welfare and their superiority to previous generations.

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I P A

Musing... Equality

MICHAEL WARBY

Equality is a difficult value to discuss because there are so many different dimensions across which equality can be measured. Equality of opportunity, gender equality, equality before the law and equality of outcome are all quite different.

Moreover, beating your breast in public about your commitment to equality has been perhaps the most common way over the last century of making a claim to profound moral superiority over other people.

As black conservative American economist Thomas Sowell said in a column in the *Jewish World Review* of 4 January 1999: 'if you have always believed that everyone should play by the same rules and be judged by the same standards, that would have gotten you labelled a radical 60 years ago, a liberal 30 years ago and a racist today'. Such peregrinations are a natural result of using 'racist'—a taboo very much founded in an ideal of equality—as a moveable tag to claim moral superiority by stigmatizing other people and their views.

The recent campaign by *The Australian* on income distribution seems to fall in this category of ostentatious commitment to equality as a claim to virtue, with journalists earning many times median incomes decrying that the richer are getting richer. Yet the data they base their complaints on show that households with the lowest incomes went up 30 per cent over the last 20 years—twice the rate of growth of any other group.

Besides, theology tells us that God does not believe in equality of outcome—otherwise there would not be Heaven and Hell.

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