

Afterword

The first Australians occupied the continent Terra Australis Incognita for longer than 80 000 years. The British came in 1770, claimed the land, and in the next 200 years proceeded to take the continent by force, systematically subjugating its Indigenous peoples. By 1901, when the British colonies became federated, each state maintained the right to dispossess Indigenous peoples, to clear them from lands on which they lived, smash their culture, deny their belief systems, remove any inheritances from them, and impoverish them and their descendants.¹

When Jack and Jean Horner first became aware of the plight of the first Australians they had neither, like the majority of the white British population, set eyes on the remnant Indigenous populations, nor did they know of their horrible and tortured past. Jack's book chronicles the rise of the political radicalism of a small group of largely white and urban Aboriginal individuals. These people created the basis of a reform movement in the aftermath of World War II. They also sought to make a conformist democratic system of government function better for a small group of non-conformists. They looked for a pluralistic solution to bring democracy to Indigenous peoples across the continent, but it was no task for Christians and pacifists alone.²

I begin by evaluating some of the theoretical problems contained within the contradictions of paternalism and reform from 1957 to 1972, termed by Jack Horner the 'Aboriginal advancement movement'. My focus will then be on the continuing paradox of white nationalism and Indigenous post-colonial aspirations, followed by the 'interregnum' from Fraser to Howard, 1975–1996. Finally, I give some thought to 'Howardism' and what is to be done with 'self-determination'?³

From advancement to civil rights

This Afterword seeks to recapture an understanding of two things from the past: first, an understanding of the Indigenous past from a political and historical perspective, as Jack Horner has done; second, the underlying theory that gave rise to the circumstances in which Indigenous peoples find themselves, in the last decade of the old and the first decade of the new millennium. The idea of advancement emerged out of, on the one hand, the dissatisfaction of ‘protection’ policies originating under British colonialism, and, on the other, the emergence of a genocidal assimilation policy of Australian colonialism, which Jack and Jean Horner tried to explain and overthrow. Following the involvement of the Aboriginal people Jack has identified, there came a thirst for civil and human rights through international support.

In 1945, World War II heralded the commencement of a ‘brave new world’, followed by, in 1949, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, a covenant of international law. Australia, still a colonial outpost of Britain, possessed the ‘racist’ philosophy of White Australia. This special ‘racial’ strategy integrated Australia’s Indigenous peoples as British subjects.⁴ The Menzies Liberal–Country Party government came to power with a nationalist approach to ‘race relations’. The state-based Aboriginal organisations — principally Christian Aboriginal and welfare bodies — reacted by protesting against ‘new assimilation’. The focus was a reaction to British atomic testing, poverty and health of bush people; urban reserve housing, and land policies. Out of these protests came a desire for a national body: the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) in 1958. This organisation became more representative by 1964, forming the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI).⁵

A shift from statism to federalism: welfare to human rights

New issues arose in the 1960s, from debates on welfare and prejudice, to a focus on liberty and human rights. There were debates on state housing, employment and discrimination, and on federal issues such as social security and voting rights. In 1963 the Presbyterian Church and Yirrkala peoples presented a ‘Bark Petition’ protesting the damage

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done by Nabalco to sacred sites at Gove; unions sued Northern Territory pastoralists, in 1963, to pay equal wages to Aboriginal stock workers; and human and land rights became an issue.⁶ There was UN support of FCAATSI and self-determination, and, finally, the Australian Labor Party gained government with 'race relations' policy.

Don Dunstan, a supporter of Indigenous rights, went to seek UN support for Indigenous self-determination with FCAATSI, the parent body of other associated Aboriginal reform groups. Jack Horner described the 'political split' well (in part caused by black nationalism), in chapters 10–12.⁷ However, the rise of a number of educated urban Aboriginal people contributed not only to other political actions, but to the demise of Liberal–Country Party power in 1972.⁸

From self-determination to self-management and self-sufficiency?

The ALP won the election of 1972 with a reform program based on 'self-determination', which included Aboriginal health, legal reform, human rights, land rights, employment and housing programs.⁹ The Labor government lasted two terms—land rights programs fell into the hands of lawyers and anthropologists, and a health policy never really materialised. The 'ten-year health plan' could not be put into action; state bureaucrats railroaded the policy and it fell to the ground.

Employment and housing policies suffered because political promises had to be carried out by truculent state governments that lacked the knowledge to make the policies work. Legal and land reforms were dominated by Aboriginal activists who had little idea how to handle the windfall arrangements. The ALP lost sight of an externally designed set of policies of which they had very little understanding. Human and land rights ideologies were plundered from the processes of the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO)—processes of which Aboriginal people and Australians in general knew next to nothing!

'Self-determination', a concept originating in European history, was a further case in point.¹⁰ When Gordon Bryant became minister for Aboriginal affairs in 1972, he adopted a policy of self-determination. His express aim was to get away from the nationalist racist assimilation policies described by Jack Horner. These policies

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promoted ‘individualism’, and used government laws to dispose of Aboriginal identity by way of behavioural change. Bryant described self-determination as a process of shifting the emphasis to ‘ . . . Aboriginal participation in the making of policies and in decisions about the programs affecting them and their future’.¹¹ Bryant also took on board reforms captured in the work of FCAATSI, but the ALP was deposed in 1975 leaving unfinished business.¹² One item was the legislating of the recommendations of the Land Rights inquiry. Another was the initiation of the Cabinet-approved National Trachoma and Eye Health program.¹³ The Land Rights inquiry was passed by the incoming Fraser government. The anomaly was that in 1972 most Aboriginal people believed that Whitlam’s promise meant land for all Indigenous peoples. Whitlam’s interpretation of what he meant when he promised rights to land came from the minds of white lawyers, anthropologists and bureaucrats. To the ‘Ocker literati’ and the ALP, all it meant was a return of heritage and lands not wanted by pastoralists, to those people classified as ‘traditional owners’. In time this interpretation would not only become more important, but would take legal form, restricting further the dreams and aims of many people who identified as Aboriginal, whose rights had been eroded by dispossession, colonialism and racist oppression.¹⁴ The Liberal–National Country Party made some changes for the better, but was more inclined towards dissembling.

Fraser did pass the *Land Rights Act 1976* (Cwlth), but in the meantime, Liberal policies worked to erode special programs put in place to provide better health services to Aboriginal people. These policies shifted the emphasis away from equality towards welfare and the issues of the consumption of alcohol and self-harm. Similarly, the right to an equal wage was changed from ‘money-in-the-hand’ to community ownership of resources and employability. The Liberal–National government brandished the ‘National Interest’ each time the state was confronted over land and resource ownership issues. Overall, government policy changed from self-determination to a ‘play-on-words’. For example, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘self-management’ replaced what Indigenous peoples came to recognise as a liberating force from white society’s contempt for Indigenous people in general—the Liberals changed approaches to equality back to depend-

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ence. Community development employment programs (CDEP) returned to old protection and assimilation strategies, implying that Aboriginal people were uncivilised and could neither manage finances nor feed their families.

From Hawke to Keating: democratic pluralism to reconciliation?

Other changes to national policy occurred in the Hawke and Keating period. The governments attempted to satisfy Indigenous political interests with bureaucratic solutions: was democracy to be solved by bureaucracy or by Aboriginal people themselves?

In 1982 the Hawke government restructured the then Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Reviews and legislation occurred in the late 1980s, introducing a new advisory body: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). What began as a promise for 'national land rights' ended as a strategy to use democracy as a way to allocate resources to powerless groups. On the one hand, federalism dominated Indigenous political interests, while on the other, state governments and rural land and mining interests provided the greatest obstacle.

The new minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jerry Hand, oversaw the creation of ATSIC, the 1988 bicentennial protests and the pending Native Title court cases. The latter involved authoritarian bureaucrats as well as lawyers, historians and Torres Strait Islanders, all suing the Queensland Government to repeal access laws preventing people from returning to their traditional lands.

Land rights issues set up a series of legal battles that ended up in the hands of lawyers and anthropologists, who interpreted land ownership on behalf of property owners and government, thereby undermining self-determination. In 1992, Native Title struggles came to a head when the High Court ruled, among other things, that 'native title' was a valid form of land title claimable by Indigenous peoples, under certain customary and cultural conditions.¹⁵ In 1993 the Keating government passed legislation staggering both conservative lawyers and political parties, including the rabid Nationalists. As Justice Sir Harry Gibbs hinted, it undermined the notion at the base of British law, which is: 'before the laws, there was no property: take away laws, all property ceases.'¹⁶ British law had been unable to

consider what lay beneath the challenge. Moreover, whereas past land rights legislation could cater for peoples other than ‘traditional owners’, Native Title caused greater contradictions in Aboriginal society. The compromise lay in the granting system. The old Protection Board solutions, and not Indigenous democracy, answered the question: were these state-based Indigenous peoples the new colonisers (on our selection)?

Under Paul Keating the two important issues were Native Title and ‘Reconciliation’. Both issues were to be dealt with in the pluralistic ATSIC solution.¹⁷ Native Title was to dispose of the old colonial legacies of dispossession, oppression and policy indifference. These issues were to recognise that white people acknowledged past injustices while at the same time they implemented a democratic solution through ATSIC. Furthermore, Keating had said ‘sorry’ for past wrongs in the Redfern Speech, clearing away the possibility for Indigenous peoples to conform and be like everyone else.¹⁸

Marcia Langton, rising to define what she meant by ‘reconciliation’ at the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention, imagined, like Jack and Jean Horner, that she was appealing to a world of pacifists and prayers. She must have thought too, that Indigenous peoples should take on the wisdoms of her pleas, not just for ‘the larger good’ but also for the option of Indigenous ‘well-being and success’.¹⁹ Marcia, like everyone who attended the convention had no idea they would face the rage of the other side of democracy—one that promoted conformity, a single Australian identity. That is a land owned by everyone of equality, where an image of ‘one nation’ would predominate over aberrations of pre- and post-contact heritage, and which would buckle under Liberal–National applications of arbitrary governance.

From Hansonism to Howardism: the end of reconciliation and beyond?

Keating’s image of Australia included a very long view of Australian identity, including a 40 000-year-old Indigenous heritage and a ‘ . . . brutal assault on the Liberal hegemony of the Menzies era . . . ’²⁰

When John Howard came to power in 1996 he did so on what he believed was a wave of nostalgia towards ‘Britishness’. Combined

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with this was the idea of clawing back historical ideas of the Menzies tradition smashed by ‘black armband historians’. In this political crusade Howard was supported by Keith Windschuttle.²¹

Of the many things Howard most vehemently and disgracefully vented his spleen upon at the Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne in 1997 was the idea of Indigenous difference and international legal protections. His contempt spelled the end of any hope that Indigenous people’s political demands for justice would prevail over his own political interests. Moreover, prior to the most recent election, Howard’s government closed down the ATSIC body. In large part, the rise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party proved a possible threat to Howard’s government, but of the two party ideologies, Howard’s critique was supreme.

The future

The removal of ATSIC, to some extent, brings to an end Indigenous political pathways to pluralistic democracy while the Liberal–National coalition rules the country. Liberal Party political theories on race relations that dispose of Indigenous interests to the dustbin of history will ultimately fail. In the meantime, however, Indigenous peoples must find new ways to come to grips with their political weaknesses.

FCAATSI produced political strategies to dispose of some of the wrongs of the past. The Council’s management by missionaries, unions and pacifists at least created a non-government organisation that raised its own funding and resisted controls from both state and federal bureaucracies. Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders must begin to realise that their only road to democratic self-determination—that is, the protection of our rights—is independence rather than dependence. FCAATSI made us realise that we have, most importantly, recourse to the protection and intervention of international law.²²

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