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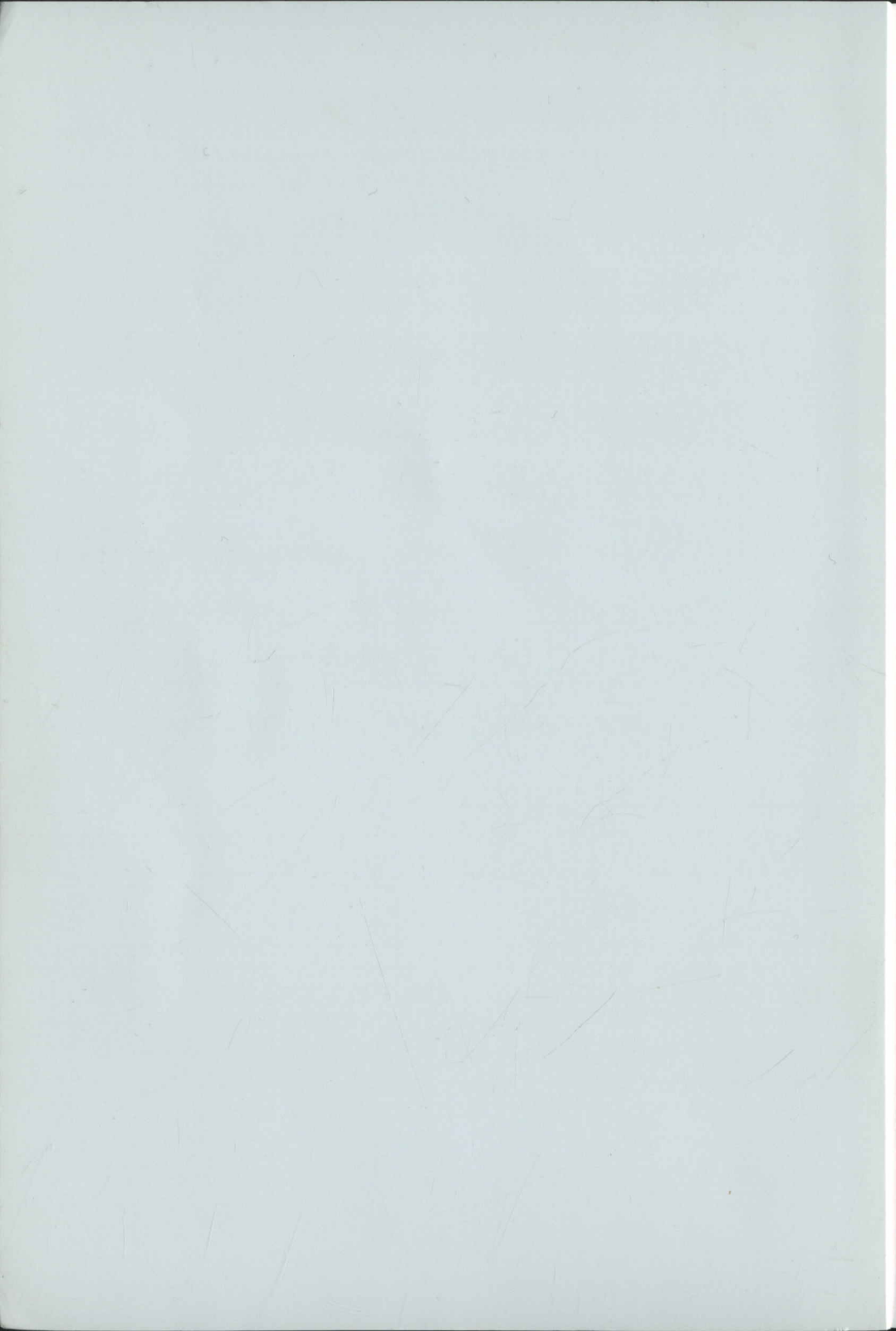
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# *Shame on Us!*

## *Essays on a future Australia*

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H.C.Coombs



The Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies  
The Australian National University



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## FOREWORD

*There is little in the history of the decade since the referendum about which white Australians can feel complacent, but the way ahead is clearer and the ferment of ideas necessary to open that way has begun. Above all, Aborigines are developing the sense of a common identity, the institutions of political action and the intellectual and spiritual leadership which will give increasing authority to their claim to move along this way by their own efforts and at their own pace. Hope for the future lies essentially in their growing capacity to maintain these trends. That capacity would of course be more effective if it were matched by an increasing desire and determination among white Australians generally to welcome and support Aboriginal initiatives.*

HC Coombs  
*Kulinma*, 1978



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There is little in the history of the decade since the  
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of their necessity to open their eyes and hearts to the  
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## FOREWORD

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For many years the signature of HC Coombs was not only the most familiar in Australia but the most desired. Not because Nugget was the sort of celebrity pursued by groupies waving autograph books, but because his characteristic squiggle was reproduced on those desirable collectibles, Australia's bank notes. HC Coombs, HC Coombs, HC Coombs, countless millions of HC Coombs, signifying Nugget's personal endorsement of the currency. This in his role as Governor of the Reserve Bank.

Yet Herbert Cole Coombs, universally known as Nugget, is the last person on earth to indulge in self-advertisement. Indeed, his reticence, his self-effacement, call it what you will, exasperates many of us who love him. Take his fragment of autobiography, its title borrowed from accountancy: *Trial Balance*. While the book is generous to others, its author remained elusive, all but invisible behind the discretion he's practised for a lifetime.

So don't look into Nugget's biography for Nugget. You won't find him there. Nor will you find him in Who's Who entry. Not that you can find anybody there — whole lives reduced to a dozen lines of terse, abbreviated text. For many entrants even such a minuscule bio. requires padding and hyperbole. Whereas

to attempt to abbreviate Nugget's brilliant career into a few lines smacks of engraving not only the Lord's Prayer but much of the New Testament onto the head of a pin. Or a fantail wrapper.

Oh, the entry proffers Nugget's academic alphabet, the MA, the PhD, and the honorary doctorates. And it rattles off official milestones in the endless journey of his public life. But Nugget would need a mini-series to begin to hint at his official achievements, let alone his private ones.

Chrmn Aust. Cl Aboriginal Affairs 1968-76; Chrmn Aust. Cl Arts 1968-74; Chancellor ANU 1968-76; Govr Reserve Bank Aust. 1960-68; Chrmn Aust. Elizabethan Theatre Trust 1954-68; Bd Cwealth Bank 1951-60; Govr Cwealth Bank Aust. 1949-60; Dir.-Gen. Post War Reconstruction 1943-49; Dir. Rationing, 1942; Economist, Cwealth Treas. 1939.

See how things run backwards in Who's Who? You've got to dig down, like sifting through archaeological layers. And excavating the life of Nugget is like digging on a particularly auspicious site — every shovel load bringing up another piece of the past. Of civilisation.

Take the last but certainly not least of his appointments — his chairmanship of the Australian Council of Aboriginal Affairs. I suspect that of all the lofty positions Nugget's held, that meant the most to him.

After decades of being involved with the mightiest people in Australian life his latter years have been devoted to the most marginalised.



After the role call of official position, Who's Who lists the publications. *Other People's Money; The Fragile Pattern; Kulinma: Listening to Aboriginal Australians; Trial Balance; A Certain Heritage; Towards a National Aboriginal Congress; Land of Promises; Return of Scarcity; From Curtin to Keating; The 1945 and 1994 White Papers on Employment; Issues in Dispute: Aborigines Working for Autonomy; Aboriginal Autonomy: Issues and Strategies.*

All in all, pretty impressive. Yet it doesn't begin to explain why the pint-sized Nugget looms so large in our landscape, why his five-foot-nothing casts such a long shadow. This can only be explained by his idealism, his decency, his tenacity, his wisdom.

Nugget worked with more prime ministers than we've had hot breakfasts. The likes of Curtin, Chifley, Menzies, McMahon and Whitlam. He was respected by both sides of parliament, not because he was an ingratiating Sir Humphrey but because he was an honest broker. A wise counsel. At a time when governments around the world are bulldozing the public service, either turning over its functions to the private sector or expensive consultancies, or abandoning the social responsibilities they implemented, it's time to look again at the life of Nugget Coombs so we can see what values the neo-Cons are so joyfully destroying, what skills they seem determined to lose.

Nugget has never walked away from a fight. Now 90, he still crusades against ever-mounting odds. Yet he manages to do so without too much bitterness or self-pity. His dignity and decency is marvellous to behold.

These days 'public servant' is a pejorative term. Or it's rejected as an oxymoron. To know Nugget is to realise what a cheap,



tawdry view that is. He has served this country as well as anyone alive, or dead. And he has not done it for the honour or the glory (incidentally, whilst he's accepted honorary doctorates, you'll find no gongs recorded in his Who's Who entry because he resigned from the Order of Australia when the 'knights' were introduced and he discovered that John Kerr was the leader of the Order). But, for all its faults, he loves the place. For damned near 60 years he's given honourable advice to PMs of all persuasions, hiding his light under their bushels. In his own words, he's helped 'make other men's dreams come true'.

Just as Edmund Hillary would never have got to the peak of Everest without Sherpa Norgay Tensing, no ambitious prime minister can succeed without the help of a Nugget or two.

Nugget speaks respectfully of Menzies, kindly about Holt, sardonically about McMahon and admiringly about Gorton 'one of our most underestimated prime ministers'. It was Whitlam, however, who most excited Nugget because he came to power 'with a program, with a vision'.

Yet it's in the twilight of his years that Nugget's been at his brilliant best. It's since he gave up government and running statutory corporations that he's been willing to reveal, and share, his passions. Principal amongst them, his devotion to Aboriginal Australia. I used to chide Nugget for hiding his emotions behind the role of the objective, muted civil servant. All that vanished once Nugget, in company with friends like Judith Wright McKinney, nailed his colours to the mast of indigenous affairs, to issues of Aboriginal dignity and land rights. So much so that I was both surprised and delighted to see Nugget weeping when interviewed by Robyn Hughes for a Film Australia series. Oh, it only lasted a couple of seconds before Nugget got himself under

control but those tears came as a great relief to many of us. They were not the tears of a grandstanding polliwog, the tears of someone impressed by his own sensitivities. They were the tears of a man who'd finally abandoned the great inhibition of his life, the need to keep a bureaucratic distance from the issues under examination. They allowed us to glimpse the deep grief of someone who mourns over an ongoing atrocity that lies at the heart of this nation.

Nonetheless, Nugget's tears were as astonishing as Malcolm Fraser's whose marmoreal face was moistened on the night of his election defeat. Both displays of emotion verged on the miraculous, as if we were confronted by a couple of those statues of the Madonna that evince tears for the faithful.

We live in a time when government is characterised as a bad thing, when governments do their best to abandon governing, or as much of it as they can get away with in their first term. We live at a time when bureaucrats, like welfare recipients, are characterised as bludgers, when citizens in need are characterised to have their 'snouts in the trough', when people are expected to serve an economy rather than an economy serving the people. We live at a time when anything with 'public' used adjectivally is a target for neo-conservatism — whether it's a public space, a public broadcaster, a public defender, public education, the public health system or the public good. Society is now seen as a business and, where possible, run by businesses. To argue against this ideological juggernaut, as arrogant in our time as communism used to be, is to be identified as a fool, or worse.

It's a time when the protections for the vulnerable are being progressively discarded — not only the safety nets are being dismantled but the miserable buggers are even sweeping up the



sawdust — whilst the regulations constraining the powerful are being scrapped. In these days the warnings are falling on ears blocked by defiant forefingers and his immense experience has not been called upon.

Rather like Galbraith in America, Coombs in Australia is characterised as an historic relic. But those of us who've been fortunate to know Nugget and work with him, feel very differently. We know his brand of political ethics remains indispensable to civilised life, and that if we ignore what he's been trying to teach us about Aboriginal Australia we'll condemn our indigenous people to deepening injustice and our nation to ongoing shame.

Phillip Adams



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## Preface

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In late 1991, Bruce Stannard, the editor of *Australian Business Monthly*, invited Dr Coombs to write a series of nine or ten short articles on economic and other matters of importance to Australia. Stannard knew enough about Nugget to write to him in December 1991 saying, 'Although as we agreed, the articles are to deal generally with your views on economic matters, I agree to give you complete freedom to tackle any subject you wish in your own style. No changes, of style or substance, are to be made to your copy without proper prior consultation with you'. Nugget felt he had to respond to the challenge and it is not surprising that these essays reflect his long-standing interests in the economy and economic policy, the national identity and its institutions, scholarship and its functions, and Aboriginal affairs and justice.

*ABM's* undertaking was honoured and Nugget only had cause to complain about a few minor editorial changes and inappropriate titles. We are grateful to Bruce Stannard for initiating and promoting the articles and to Australian Consolidated Press and its Managing Director, Colin Morrison, for giving us permission to publish these important articles.

In this collection we have used Nugget's original manuscript, most of the *ABM* titles and subheadings, and rewritten the introductory abstracts. In producing this volume, apart from minor editorial changes, we have not changed any of the original

text. We have only added an occasional footnote to explain the context of some statements or to add bibliographic references.

Nugget wrote these articles while he was Visiting Fellow of the Australian National University during 1992 and 1993. His Fellowship gave him two bases: one at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) in Canberra and the other at the North Australia Research Unit (NARU) in Darwin. Canberra, his usual home, gave him access to the ANU, numerous friends and colleagues and many of the nation's policy makers and scholars. At the time, however, he was in his late 80s and found the Canberra winters inimical to his health. NARU and Darwin during the dry season agreed with him and had the added benefit that it was located in an area near to many of the Aboriginal people, communities and organisations close to his heart.

At the time he was busy as usual. He was completing his book *Aboriginal Autonomy: Issues and Strategies* (published by Cambridge University Press in 1994), giving lectures, attending seminars and conferences, and being interviewed by many — especially the ABC — who valued his understanding and knowledge about Australian public affairs during the last fifty-five years. He was also undertaking visits to isolated Aboriginal communities in north Australia, helping young scholars and friends, and stirring the Australian conscience. In spite of some sickness he still found time to attend functions appropriate to him being an adviser to six former Prime Ministers, an economist involved in fiscal and economic policy for some fifty years, a scholar and former Chancellor of ANU, a former Chairman of the Australian Council for the Arts, an activist in Aboriginal and environmental affairs, and an avid Australian Rules supporter.



Nugget valued his contact with CRES and NARU and it is significant of the man and his ethics that he donated the royalties from *ABM* to general research funds in both these organisations. It is also significant that over the door of his office at CRES was a notice reading 'Subvert the dominant paradigm', and that on his desk during much of his working life he had a quote from Oliver Cromwell facing him (not his visitors), 'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken'.

We gratefully acknowledge Judith Wright McKinney for prompting us to publish these articles; her daughter Meredith, who with Judith, offered to help underwrite the project; Ettie Oakman who typed both the original articles and this manuscript; Diane Smith and Sue Kesteven, who both assisted in editing this publication; also Janet Sincock, Colleen Pyne, Samantha Wells, Michelle Dewar, Lesley Ashford and others at NARU who acted as assistants while Nugget was working on the articles. We would also like to thank John Coombs for his support and encouragement to publish this book.

Nugget Coombs became a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, at the Australian National University in 1976, at the invitation of Frank Fenner, the then Director of CRES. Since then, successive Directors, Michael Denborough, Stuart Harris, Geoff Taylor and Henry Nix have continued to provide him with an office and secretarial support. We would like to thank Ettie Oakman who has been Nugget's secretary for the past twenty years, Diane Smith, CAEPR research fellow and Nugget's long-standing research officer, Valda Semets (Executive officer), Alan Martyn (Resource



Manager), Rosemary Boyden, Fay Goddard, McComas Taylor, George Fletoridis and so many other colleagues and staff at CRES who gave Nugget their continuous support during his twenty years at CRES.

Henry Nix  
Director  
CRES

David Lea  
Former Executive Director  
NARU

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Manager), Giovanni Natta, Ted Giddens, McCann, and George Fletcher and in many other colleagues and in this book. I am grateful to the staff of the CRES who gave me the opportunity to work with them in the last twenty years of CRES.

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# 1. Banana Republic? No, Banana Colony!\*

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*There was some wisdom in Keating's 'Banana Republic' statement. Australia faces increasing economic dependence, increasing loss of national assets, and increasing public and — most importantly — private debt. There is a need for increasing national and regional self-sufficiency.*

It is a pity that Paul Keating in announcing the success of his challenge for the prime ministership repudiated his earlier judgment that 'this was a recession we had to have'. Like the utterances of all oracles, this statement was cryptic and its meaning obscure. But it at least conveyed the suggestion that the recession could be a consequence of what had gone before — that it derived from perhaps unwarranted assumptions and misguided judgments which, at least in part, underlay our government's earlier policies. It therefore could have been interpreted as expressing a willingness to think again.

Such an interpretation would have accorded more closely with Keating's earlier one-liner that he feared Australia was on its way

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\* ABM, March 1992, pp.26-29.



to becoming a 'banana republic'; that is, an economy so burdened with debt to the outside world that it had lost the ownership and control of its own resources and industries and had become simply an instrument of the capital, the enterprise and the technology of its dominant imperial power. There was wisdom in that judgment. Unfortunately, Keating identified the destructive debt only as that arising from the government's borrowing. To his credit he acted forcefully to redirect fiscal policy to the reduction of that debt. However, he ignored the need to reduce the greater burden on the economy imposed by payments abroad to which the private sector was increasingly committed. Enterprises taken over by, or merged into those of overseas interests, are now committed to remit interest and dividends; to hire technological property from their principals; to employ expensive consultants, accountants and others providing professional services from firms associated with those principals or with their Australian branches or subsidiaries. These commitments, like those of governments to overseas creditors, have to be met from the proceeds of the Australian economy's production or (and this increasingly) from the sale of the nation's assets. Had the government acted as promptly to see that these commitments too were repatriated and the relevant services provided by our own knowledge and skills and financed from our own savings, as it had to bring government indebtedness under control, the dilemma now facing the economy would be less absolute.

That dilemma is classical. At present we are impaled on the horn of unemployment, flagging expenditure and investment. But if the government is too enthusiastic in action to blunt that horn or to enable the economy to evade it we may swing to face the horn

of even greater deficits in the balance of our international payments, of increasing losses of our national assets and of rising levels of inflation. But that is not all.

So far the businessmen and women, union and community leaders with whom Prime Minister Keating has chosen to consult seem to be interpreting the recession as just another minor hiccup in the flood of expenditure which essentially has been running strongly for the last forty years. This flood had its origins in the colossal scientific and technological innovations stimulated by World War II and had been financed largely by the vast accumulation of international purchasing capacity which the United States derived from the obligations towards it incurred by the allies and enemies. That international purchasing power has been used to help rebuild the war-damaged economies of Europe and Asia, to set in train the industrial colonisation of the Third World and to provide the authority to impose a pattern of international trade specialisation on the world highly favourable to United States interests and those of other industrialised and creditor nations.

But clearly the drive of that exercise in economic imperialism is flagging. The rate of innovation has slackened and the incentive to spend on research and development and on investment has slackened with it. Furthermore, the very optimistic assumptions which underlay the attempt to industrialise the whole world now seem to have been mistaken. The physical world is in revolt against the progressive exhaustion of resources and rising pollution and against population growth beyond the capacity of world agriculture to feed it, even after the so-called Green Revolution. In other words, it cannot be assumed that this recession is a temporary or limited phenomenon, or that the



Australian economy can be kick-started into renewed consumer and investment spending, and so resume and maintain its confident progress.

We, in Australia, have substantially shared the optimistic assumptions of the surging industrialisation and have acquiesced in the pattern of international trade specialisation which has gone along with it. Our economy as well as those of other colonised countries bears the marks of their effects. As we come to look more closely at what our businessmen and community leaders propose I fear that we will realise that those marks are evidence of structural defects in our economy, in its priorities, its allocation of resources, and its relevance to the world in which we will have to live.

But first let us look quickly at the relationship between the threats embodied in the two horns of the dilemma of unemployment and flagging investment to which I have referred: at how far it is possible to stimulate domestic expenditure without dangerous inflation or unacceptable deficits on our balance of payments. It is, in considering this question, that we will have to return to the Prime Minister's previously expressed fear that we may be on the way to the economic status of a banana republic.

It is easy to increase employment but it is not possible to do so without changing other aspects of the economy. Employment is closely linked to levels of expenditure. Action can be taken to stimulate consumption expenditure, for instance, by increasing social security benefits, by tax concessions, by subsidies, or even by allowing Aboriginal people a modest share in the profits arising from the exploitation of the minerals and other resources of the lands we have stolen from them. However pessimistic



industry may be, there are urgent capital investment tasks appropriate to the public sector crying out for action: to reduce pollution, to restore the waterways, the forests, the beaches; to protect the ozone layer; to provide adequate well-equipped schools, health and other facilities for all communities and their children. The submissions to the groups recently studying the prospects for sustainable development, especially those deriving from the CSIRO, the Australian Conservation Foundation and other science-based 'green' sources, have brought under notice opportunities arising from resources and research results available in Australia. These could provide a more sustainable stimulus comparable in effectiveness with that from which the imperialist expansion of the post-war world emerged. Action to increase expenditure on any of these would increase the incomes of those employed in the projects and lead to increased production of the goods and services on which those incomes could be spent.

But any action to increase domestic incomes and employment would bring us sharply on to the other horn of the dilemma: the effect of increased domestic spending on the balance of our international payments and on the level of our prices and costs of production. As employment increases, expenditure abroad increases also — partly by consumers' choice of imported goods and services, but also because Australian industry incurs costs directly or indirectly in foreign currencies in the process of producing, financing, transporting and marketing their nominally Australian-made goods and services.

It is the increasing participation of non-Australian enterprise in the Australian economy which has brought closer and more sharply under notice the reality and imminence of this horn of the

dilemma. Between 1969-70 and 1989-90 our total expenditure on imports of goods and services, debt servicing and other debits rose from \$5,865 million to \$91,133 million and that on services and other debits from \$2,304 million to \$40,342. We have, for decades, tended to ignore that part of this remarkable increase which was incurred through the costs of Australian production. An important part of this increase is in the servicing of private sector debts, in the greater dividends and other shares in the profits of Australian-based enterprises, in payments for the use of foreign-owned technology, patents and the like, and in the hiring of foreign experts to design, organise, transport, advertise, market, deliver and service the goods and services produced by the Australian private sector.

Successive balance of payments problems arising, at least in part, from these growing costs, have been deferred by fiscal and monetary policies including relatively high interest rates and progressive downward adjustments in the price of Australian currency abroad. This process has encouraged the sale to non-Australian interests of the natural capital resources of the country and the ownership of profitable enterprises. It is hard to remember that when the gold value of the Australian dollar was fixed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the time decimal currency was introduced, it was set at \$US1.1. Such policies have not merely made it easier and cheaper for non-Australians to buy our goods and services, but also to own the enterprises which produce them and the natural resources which they consume and often progressively exhaust.

In contemporary 'Newspeak' this phenomenon is referred to as 'foreign investment' rather than a loss of capital, and talked of as if it were the solution to our problems rather than merely their



deferment. Recent trends in the foreign exchange market and in official responses to them, indicate that the mind of the new Treasurer is running on similar lines, and decisions affecting our mineral and forestry resources suggest that the 'new' government is even more determined to sell off what remains of the farm as rapidly as possible — a certain recipe for the realisation of the Keating oracle's prophecy of our descent into 'banana republic' status.

Much is currently being said about the 'benefits' to farmers, mining companies and other exporters from the increased money incomes which they derive as a result of depreciation. Let it be clear that those benefits derive internally; from decreased real incomes of other Australians, especially consumers, wage and salary earners, pensioners and others who live on fixed incomes. Such income shifts may be justifiable components of economic policy but the real advantage to the government of achieving them by exchange depreciation is that it does not have to justify them to Parliament nor to suffer the electoral effect of the reaction of those who are on the losing end of the deal. If one can judge by past experience, it should also be realised that some of the effects of these shifts are promptly offset or reversed. For instance by the highly organised or politically powerful, such as key unions or members of Parliament. The stimulus to export production provided in this way can to that extent prove to be temporary and, therefore, to serve as a misleading guide to enterprises affected.

A glance at the economic history of acknowledged 'banana republics' will show a long record of progressive exchange depreciation and inflation followed by increasing domination of productive enterprises by foreign owners, combined with

declining real domestic incomes and employment for the peasant and wage dependent populations. Is it a road we wish to travel?

If we wish to avoid it we must earnestly and promptly seek an alternative economic strategy from that we have been following in recent decades; one which will enable us to confront or evade *both* horns of the dilemma: which will halt the growth of our overseas indebtedness and commitments, private as well as public; which will enable us to begin to stop selling off the farm; to maintain, indeed increase, Australian ownership of the productive enterprises upon which our international and domestic income depends; which will progressively enable us to rely more adequately on our own savings, our own science and technology, our own skills, initiative and enterprise, and in due course to buy back some of those assets which have been passing into foreign hands. But also, in the immediate future, we must find ways to restore total domestic expenditure to levels so as to revive employment opportunities and provide access to essential living standards for the Australian people.

These immediate objectives are vital and urgent and their achievement requires that governments increase some levels of expenditure and accept an increase in their indebtedness, at least for the present. If this is not to call in question the practicability of these policies it is important that:

- the new expenditure should create jobs and productive opportunities in sustainable enterprises in a more independent Australian economy; and
- the new indebtedness should be internal, owed to Australian citizens and balanced by increased savings including debt reduction from personal and corporate incomes. The critical,



and most difficult component of this recipe, is to achieve the higher level of savings.

I suggest, therefore, that Mr Keating's *Economic Statement* should announce a ten-year program to restore Australia's economic independence; to work towards more debt-free governments, households and enterprises, public and private; and to stimulate sustainable use of Australian labour, natural resources and human creativity. Such a program should include plans to increase personal and corporate savings; to limit the depletion of exhaustible resources; to redirect development policy to give greater emphasis to regional and national self-sufficiency in meeting basic needs; to make better use of the natural resources of the continent; and to raise the level and use of Australian science-based technology. To these ends it is essential that the government and community has regular and significant access to information by which to assess the performance of corporations engaged in industry and commerce in Australia.

The adoption of such a program with its emphasis on debt reduction, increased saving and Australian ownership, would minimise the risks of the economy being driven onto the second horn of the dilemma by a blow-out in our balance of payments. It would also help to reduce the threat of the third horn — a descent into the status of a 'banana republic' by promoting a significantly more independent economy, more regionally based both in its use of domestic resources and in its relationships with the rest of the world.





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## 2. Miners still in dreamtime<sup>\*</sup>

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*The working group set up to explore sustainable development in the mining industry has made no attempt to pursue its stated aim. The mining industry has had a good deal of freedom from constraint or ecological accountability. Mining's net contribution to the Australian economy is questioned and a code of conduct in dealing with Aboriginal groups is proposed.*

One of the most important actions of the Hawke Labor Government in its declining phase was to establish a series of working groups to explore possible strategies by which major industries might achieve ecological sustainability. These groups would not undertake or sponsor original research but rather they would draw upon work already done, and in particular they would seek consensus among the various interests involved. Where this did not prove possible the Government stated that alternative views 'may need to be put'. Generally the groups seem to have been constituted so that major commercial interests were effectively represented as well as government, which usually identifies itself with those interests, and some community organisations with primary concern for conservation and

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<sup>\*</sup> ABM, April 1992, pp.50-52.

sustainability; with these 'green' interests less effectively represented in terms both of numbers and access to resources.

Such terms of reference for groups so structured make it almost inevitable that their reports will limit proposals for change to marginal modifications of the status quo, however much the behaviour of the industries and interests involved are incompatible with, or destructive of, sustainability. This does not necessarily mean that the exercise would be wholly purposeless. Indeed, some of the reports indicate that the representatives of conflicting interests in the groups seem to have identified common ground. For instance, those groups concerned with energy use and production, and manufacturing, have drawn attention to technological innovation and research from which significant progress towards sustainability may well be achieved.

But this is certainly not true of the group on mining. Here the constraints inherent in the structure and procedures of the group have been dominant. The sustainability considered seems to have been primarily that of the companies in the mining industry, based on their continued freedom from restraint or accountability.

The report and its executive summary begin with a eulogy in advertising mode of those companies' performance in which almost every sentence is subject to serious qualification. I quote from the executive summary:

The mining and minerals processing industries are major sources of Australia's export income and contribute substantially to the material and non-material well being of Australians. Most of Australia's consumer goods are made from, or are packaged in products of the mining sector.



Mining is also important for regional development and employment. How effectively it will contribute to the total well being of Australians will depend upon a number of things, including the level of employment and the economic and environmental performance of the industry ... including the need to achieve Ecologically Sustainable Development. Many leading enterprises in the mining sector have substantially improved their environmental performance.

Little or no attempt was made to provide hard data in support of these claims. The 'promotion' from the executive summary ignores the fact fundamental to the whole issue of sustainability: that every kilogram of minerals consumed or exported reduces Australia's capital assets; that when a mine is exhausted our children will be the poorer; that some new capital assets may have been created from its proceeds but it is unlikely they will be predominantly in Australia; and even less likely that they will be in the region from which the minerals came. On the contrary, another step for Australia will have been taken on the road to quarry colony status.

It is true that mining is a major source of export proceeds, but the proceeds referred to are gross and cannot be identified with net international income earned, or as providing equivalent foreign exchange for the purchase of goods and services abroad or for the servicing of other obligations. The industries are themselves substantial users of foreign exchange — *inter alia* for the purchase of supplies of capital goods, of rights to technology and other property, for payment for professional and commercial services and especially for the service of debt and the payment of dividends to foreign shareholders. The net contribution from the proceeds that would be available for other enterprises and the

community generally would be substantially smaller than the gross figure.

Professional studies of the impact of the mining industry on a regional Australian economy are seriously handicapped by lack of adequate data to support their judgments. The industry shows great reluctance to provide access to relevant information to serious researchers, whether academic or from government. However, Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh (1987) obtained information about the expenditure pattern of one of the uranium ventures in the Kakadu region and was able to follow through that part of the proceeds which was spent or distributed in the Northern Territory as payment for wages or other costs of production, or as rewards for capital. His conclusions were presented to a conference sponsored by the Northern Territory Government. To its distress they showed that the only significant share of the proceeds which flowed to the Northern Territory economy was that part paid to the Aboriginal people in respect of the Commonwealth *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*. It has not been possible to obtain comparable data about the proceeds of the Argyle diamond venture in the East Kimberley region, but it is certain that the same general conclusion would emerge; except that the share obtained by the Aboriginal people from the so-called 'agreement' with the company and the Western Australian Government was, by comparison with the Northern Territory, shamefully inadequate.

References to the contribution of the mining industry to employment call for similar scepticism. Studies by university economists in Western Australia demonstrate that in terms of the capital cost of jobs provided, the mining and mining processing industries are amongst the most expensive. Many corporations in



the industry do not employ Aboriginal people in their mining or processing activities even in areas where the population is almost wholly Aboriginal. They prefer to fly in white labour a thousand miles on a fortnightly rotation.

In more general terms the relationship between mining enterprises and Aboriginal communities outside the Northern Territory is a record of discord and bitterness. From Noonkanbah, Argyle and Weipa to Marandoo, the inheritance persists in declining, disillusioned fragments of communities. Among their people, faith in government, industry and white promises generally, as well as their hopes for the future, are being progressively destroyed. As a crowning achievement the Western Australian Government has drafted a bill enabling it to remove sacred sites in potential mining areas from the protection of the Heritage Act. This makes it possible for mining enterprises physically to 'remove' those sites to locations outside the areas to be mined in 'an archaeological salvage operation' and to 'administer' the sites. (No doubt the companies will even find some way to justify such removals as being part of their program of ecological and social sustainability!)

A good example of the mining industry's capacity to constrain the scope of the Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Group's work exists in my own failure to persuade them to consider the contemporary scene in Western Australia and to recommend a procedure for mining companies seeking to explore for, or mine minerals. The purpose of the procedure would be to ensure 'peace, order and good government', in the relationships between the mining industry and the Aboriginal people.

At the invitation of the chairman of the Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Group I attended an early meeting where

I drew attention to a recently published book *Aborigines and Diamond Mining* edited by Michael Dillon and Rod Dixon (1990) which in my view called seriously in question the propriety, the integrity and indeed the legality of some of the actions of the mining company leading up to the establishment of the Argyle diamond venture and the conclusion of a so-called agreement between them and certain Aboriginal traditional owners of the lands concerned. I also referred to reports, of which I was aware, suggesting that actions similar to those reported in that book were being repeated in the Kimberley and Central Desert lands of Western Australia. I urged that the ESD working group consider these matters and in particular that it recommend procedure to be followed when a mining enterprise wishes to explore or mine within Aboriginal, Crown or other lands in which Aboriginal people have or claim interests. A draft as a basis for discussion was provided.

My reference to these matters was received with aggressive hostility by a representative of the mining industry. I responded by providing him and the working group with a copy of Dillon and Dixon's book and inviting them to read it, undertaking to continue our debate when that had been done. In the event, I received no response to that invitation nor to subsequent material provided to the working group. This material included the draft procedures amended in the light of my own discussions with other interested parties and my participation in a public session held in Alice Springs. Aboriginal people were conspicuously absent at this session and the 'public' was dominated by representatives of mining interests and members of the working group's and the government's staff.



The report of the ESD working group which I have now received makes no reference to the problems in Western Australia arising from mining company claims for access to lands in which Aborigines have interests, despite the importance the companies have elsewhere claimed for such access. No mention was made either of the procedure I suggested, nor of any alternative means of ensuring orderly negotiation for mutually acceptable agreements. It is interesting to observe that the Australian Conservation Foundation in its now published review of the work of the ESD writes, 'The working group on mining was dominated by the hostile attitude from industry representatives' and that 'in summary the Report goes little way to achieving ESD but sets out a basis for the ongoing evolution of minerals policy debate'.

As a contribution to that debate, I set out a possible procedure.

1. Any mining enterprise wishing to explore or mine within lands in which Aboriginal people have interests shall apply to the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Regional Council for permission to negotiate with the responsible Aboriginal group or community.
2. The elected members of that ATSIC Council shall, in consultation with the group or community concerned satisfy itself that
  - the appropriate traditional owners have been fully consulted and consent to the negotiation and that it is the wish of the group or community that the negotiations proceed;

- the group or community will be represented by an appropriate Aboriginal controlled organisation such as an Aboriginal Land Council or other appropriate independent body with access to professional advice including where necessary anthropological, mining, environmental, financial and legal expertise.
3. If so satisfied, the elected ATSIC Council may, by resolution, recommend that tenders for the exploration or mining, or other actions be called for by public advertisement and a procedure established to determine the successful tenderer. When this has been determined the Council shall inform the Aboriginal Lands Trust of its recommendation for their consideration of any application for a permit to enter the relevant lands.
  4. The ATSIC Council shall require that it be kept informed of the progress of the negotiations and of the terms of any provisionally agreed settlement before the settlement is confirmed.
  5. The Council will refuse to endorse or recommend acceptance of any provisional agreement not conducted in accordance with the above principles and will make its refusal known to the Commonwealth and State Governments and their agencies, to other ATSIC Regional Councils and Aboriginal Land Councils in the State.
  6. Any agreement between a mining enterprise and an Aboriginal group or community will be registered with the relevant ATSIC Regional Council and be accompanied by a statutory declaration on behalf of the enterprise that no payments or other benefits have been made, delivered or



promised to any person for any reason in respect of the agreement other than those specified in the agreement.

7. Any Aboriginal person or group believing that an agreement has been improperly reached or denies him or them natural justice, may lodge a complaint with the Regional Council concerned which shall consider the complaint and may refer the complaint to an appropriate judicial authority for action.

*The Commonwealth and the States' Response to the Royal Commission on Black Deaths in Custody is a disaster because it is a 'top-down' process that tends to ignore Aboriginal organisations and leaves too much responsibility for action to the States. It is suggested that Aboriginal organisations are empowered to negotiate actions with the Commonwealth Government and that some Aboriginal communities should administer their own community justice mechanisms.*

Such information and gossip as is available, suggests that the Commonwealth Government plans to deal with the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody within the framework of the Prime Minister and Premiers' consultations on Commonwealth-State relations. An early discussion is contemplated about immediate action to be taken which will apparently concentrate especially on increased expenditure in two areas.

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*ABM, June 1991, pp. 126-172.*





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### 3. Black deaths — who has custody?<sup>\*</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> ABM, June 1992, pp.126-128.

- improvement of the conditions of jails presumably to reduce the risks of suicide and other deaths, due to violence, neglect, etc; and
- increasing funds available to existing Commonwealth and State programs for Aborigines.

If these suggestions are correct, what is contemplated is, in my view, a disaster. It adopts a procedure designed to guarantee that only marginal change will occur, effectively excluding Aboriginal-controlled organisations and their ideas from the debate; denying the basic principles which the Royal Commission itself says should underlie all action arising from its reports.

Placing the consideration of this issue in the Commonwealth and State context, guarantees that any proposals to increase the access to resources or the functions of Aboriginal organisations, will be seen as impairing the status and careers of Commonwealth and State officials, and is likely to be resisted effectively. Even more, it conflicts directly with the Royal Commission's judgment.

In that part of its national report which deals with the complex interrelationship between those issues which underlay the deaths, the Commission wrote:

... solutions imposed from outside will only create their own problems. The issue of giving back to Aboriginal people the power to control their own lives is therefore central to any strategies ... designed to address these issues.



The importance of Aboriginal organisations is reiterated ... and the need to afford them adequate control over resources and decision making is emphasised (Vol.4, Ch.27).

The chances of these basic considerations being given weight in a procedure where decisions will be made by Commonwealth and State chief ministers on the advice of Commonwealth and State bureaucrats is negligible. The Commission's comments clearly require that earnest negotiations proceed between the Commonwealth Government and Aboriginal organisations before the former presumes to debate issues with the States and Territories. I greatly fear that the choice of extra expenditure on jails and on Commonwealth and State programs, as the first areas of action, demonstrates that, *de facto*, a decision has already been made; i.e. that incarcerations will continue to dominate the justice system for Aboriginal people, and white officials responsible to the Government, rather than to Aboriginal organisations, will continue to dominate the daily lives of Aboriginal people. It is essential that non-Aboriginal people working in the communities should be there as 'employees' responsible and accountable to the Aboriginal management, and that the decision to employ them be made by Aboriginal initiative.

Are the interests of multi-national mining companies and racist minorities to stand in the way of justice for Aboriginal people until the international community takes action against us as it has against white South Africa? What has happened in South Africa demonstrates beyond doubt that racial problems in any country fall within the international responsibilities of governments and has removed any doubt that the 1967 referendum has

overwhelmingly given the Commonwealth power to legislate in relation to Aboriginal people in Australia. As Gough Whitlam said in 1972, 'We are all of us diminished while Aboriginal people are denied their rightful place in our society'. What right have the largely transient residents of the North to diminish the whole nation in the eyes of the world?

### ***Appropriate agencies***

The matters which apparently are intended to be dealt with as issues between Commonwealth and State governments are essentially matters between the black and white peoples of Australia, and the Commonwealth Government is the appropriate responsible agency to organise the necessary consultation and negotiation between them. In that task weight should be given to the Royal Commission's judgment that Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are undoubtedly those which get the most broad-based support from the Aboriginal people as the appropriate agencies to address issues of concern; and its recommendation that governments negotiate with appropriate Aboriginal organisations to determine procedures to ensure that the self-determination principle is applied in the design and implementation of any policy or program.

If such negotiations are to be held in conditions guaranteeing reasonable equality of bargaining capacity, to ensure 'a level playing field', it would be necessary greatly to strengthen Aborigines' access to knowledge and research capacity. A recent series of events in the Kimberley demonstrated the capacity of Aboriginal people to prepare for, and to conduct, such negotiations.



## **Crocodile Hole**

In October last year a very successful conference organised by the Kimberley Land Council and the Waringarri Resource Centre (Kununurra) at Crocodile Hole in the Kimberleys, reviewed the impact of development on their communities. More than 500 Aboriginal people from the East and West Kimberleys and the Western Desert communities set up a working party composed of nominees of the various Aboriginal-controlled organisations in the region, to prepare an outline strategy for Aboriginal action, including a review of the work of the Royal Commission. I have just received from the working party a copy of the report on the Crocodile Hole conference and workshops, and an analysis of the party's initial response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission and Government reaction to them so far. These documents are impressive and warrant careful and urgent attention.

It is, at this stage, not their precise content to which I wish to direct attention, but to the importance of their initiative and the process which it demonstrates.

The final report of the Royal Commission, in the chapter headed 'The Path to Self-determination', draws attention to the gap which exists between the Aboriginal-controlled organisations which undoubtedly command the most broad-based support from the Aboriginal people, and the ATSIC Regional Councils. This is even more true of the Commission of ATSIC which continues to be dominated by its bureaucracy, accountable to the Commonwealth Government and seen by Aboriginal people as its agent and serving its purposes rather than theirs. The Royal Commission concluded that while this structure and its relationships persists, 'it cannot be assumed that ATSIC will be

any more certain of how to apply the principle of self-determination than its predecessors (the NACC and the NAC, both of which the government abolished).

The report of the Crocodile Hole working party, I believe, shows the path to be followed. The working party is the instrument of the Aboriginal-controlled organisations. Its members are in close touch with the ATSIC Regional Council of the Kimberleys, and its report has gone to that council. When that communication is strengthened — when the regional councils are the agent of the Aboriginal-controlled organisations, and the council members are responsible and accountable to these organisations, there will be the beginning of a 'bottom up' democratic political structure. When the link between the regional councils and the Commission is similarly strengthened, Aboriginal people could reasonably identify with it, and work to control it. They would then have the means to fight for their rights and to negotiate with governments and corporations with some prospect of orderly relationships in their conduct, and significant change on their outcome.

It is significant, in relation to the Government's attitude towards 'level playing fields', that the whole Kimberley experience, from the preliminary research to the conduct of the workshops and the establishment of the working party, was financed very largely by private foundations, academe, and similar sources, and was conducted mainly by academic researchers working with Aboriginal organisations. It is essential that such organisations have access in their own right to both the resources and the skills to conduct such operations directly.



## **Suggestions**

I suggest that:

- the Prime Minister remove the reports of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody from the agenda of the conferences of the Prime Minister and Premiers until effective negotiation between Aboriginal organisations and the Commonwealth has taken place, at least to achieve an agreed procedure and an agenda which established priorities among the many issues raised in those reports;
- the ATSIC Regional Councils be funded to enable Aboriginal-controlled organisations in each region to set up working parties of their own representatives to review and comment on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and to put forward a short program for immediate action;
- funds be provided to enable these working parties to employ appropriate research and consultancy support, and to establish effective communication with one another;
- the working parties be invited to consider possible procedures for negotiation between their representatives, the regional councils and the ATSIC Commission, for the purpose of establishing an interim negotiating group responsible to them to negotiate with the government in relation to action arising from the reports of the Royal Commission;
- the negotiating group should call for immediate action to end deaths in custody by substantial elimination of

incarceration of Aboriginal people, and for the transfer of the administration of justice in Aboriginal communities substantially to those communities.

In relation to the last point, I suggest that the Commonwealth inform the interim negotiating group that it is prepared, at their request, to legislate, within the *Commonwealth Aboriginal Councils and Corporations Act 1976*, to enable Aboriginal communities to administer their own community justice mechanisms similar to that proposed to the Law Reform Commission by the Yirrkala community (East Arnhem Land). Such would be, except for indictable offences, the first law enforcement agency, and generally the only one to deal with Aboriginal people charged with offences, and should be backed by the Commonwealth and its agencies.

The Yirrkala proposals are a modified form of the traditional dispute settlement procedures of Arnhem Land Aboriginal people, and have considerable similarities with voluntary community justice procedures operating in New South Wales and in some states in the United States of America and received support from Law Reform Commission in its report on the recognition of Aboriginal law.



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## 4. Towards a new federation\*

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*Australia's best future lies along a middle way between the severity of Keating's 'One Nation' and the bleakness of a 'sundered country'. The metropolis-rural dichotomies and conflicts between the States, and between the States and the Commonwealth, suggest the need for a new form of federation of smaller territories which have a sense of community, geographic and social reality and the power to negotiate special arrangements with the Commonwealth.*

The image of 'One Nation' chosen by Paul Keating for his economic package has a long history among Australians who have always been conscious of divisions and have hungered after unity. The word has an echo of Edmund Barton's slogan, 'There is a nation for a continent and a continent for a nation'. The image has, however, always been an illusion and often a dangerous one: an excuse and a cover for domination and intolerance for the White Australia Policy; for religious discrimination; for the unemployment and other inequities of economic rationalism and its 'level playing field'; for the continuance of imperialist dispossession of Aboriginal lands and

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\* ABM July 1992, pp.146-148.

culture. In a debate about issues immediately relevant to the next election the idea is a distraction. It is thereafter that the government must face the issues which divide us.

### ***One nation***

The Prime Minister's package is probably deliberately, an interim 'on hold' document, in which not even his favoured hobby horses 'the debt burden' and 'the banana republic' get saddled, let alone a gallop. Within those limits it is a competent document providing the critical components of a short-term anti-depression policy. It gives an immediate stimulus through social security expenditure to sustain vital consumption standards. It prevents a collapse of new capital formation by expanding public investment in economic infrastructure while the much vaunted enterprise and innovative powers of the private sector flag in inanition like a wet Union Jack in a London drizzle. These measures put a floor under employment and incomes, halting the slide into economic collapse and thus giving time to consider the relevance of this limited scenario to the major issues looming in the future. At best it holds out hope that the economy will in due course again yield a profit to the owners of enterprises. At worst it may provoke inflation greater than that endured by our trading partners and a major blow out in our current account deficit.

On balance it is a modest and plausible scenario which offends nobody provocatively, could be mildly encouraging to private sector decision makers and may bring sufficient short-term improvement in profitability to make probable (given the present ineptitude of the Opposition), the Keating government's return to office after the next election. In the meantime, however, that



Government has inherited international and domestic commitments to:

- halt the destruction and pollution of the natural and humanly created environment;
- use the continent's resources sustainably; and
- ensure acceptable levels of employment and income for those dependent on it — especially the increasing number of the young.

Soon it must begin to give substance to those commitments and to consider whether action to this end is practicable given the issues which divide this one nation.

It is interesting to note that the economic pundits of the Labor party and those speculating on the implication of the Wills by-election result are launching an internal debate which calls in question the government's commitment to economic rationalism and even speculates on whether the report of the death of Keynes may not have been premature. In such circumstances it is not necessarily premature to turn our minds to the basic conflicts which divide us.

### ***Divided nation***

Truly at present Australia is a 'sundered country' as the headline in Hugh Morgan's article in the May issue of the *Australian Business Monthly* acknowledged — perhaps with malice rather than Mackellar in mind. Perhaps the oldest focus for the division which tears us asunder and one which powerfully persists is that of 'Sydney or the bush', where Sydney is seen as a symbol of the metropolis repeated in every State. The phrase expressed, not

just a gamble to be taken, but a deeply felt mutual envy and dislike, both derived from a sense of being neglected, exploited and misunderstood. After federation the various States to some degree took over the real or imagined character of the metropolis or the Bush, with New South Wales and Victoria, being seen as 'draining the wealth of the land' or seeing themselves as subsidising their poor relations, the claimant States.

The metropolis-rural dichotomy is a reality reflecting widely differing problems. Increasingly the metropolis with its city and suburbia grows in all States like a cancer — crowded, polluted and obsessed with security systems, directed against its own citizens, following with apparent inevitability the unhappy path set by New York, Mexico City and Tokyo. The bush, on the other hand, grows emptier: its forests denuded, its soils eroded and its rivers polluted, algae-breeding drains for sewage and chemical wastes and intermittently channels for overwhelming flood waters. Functionally, the bush becomes a quarry for multinational corporations to exploit and a desert wilderness for all of us, where Aboriginal people can be forgotten.

It is a dichotomy which seems likely to be intensified rather than ameliorated by the concentration the 'One Nation' package proposes in its plan to join the south-eastern metropolis from Brisbane to Adelaide in one vast competitive 'conurbation' to create a bigger more polluted metropolis and coastline and an emptier hinterland. It is a dichotomy at which Australians have, on the whole, refused to direct their very real capacity for political and institutional innovation. We do not need to accept this image or its dichotomy of overcrowding and emptiness. Aboriginal people 'humanised' the continent from end to end. Even the harshest desert was a source of sustenance and a focus



for delight and affection. Can we not, with our vast repertoire of knowledge do as well?

In the early 1940s, John Curtin, fearing envious eyes on our empty spaces and convinced that we must justify to the world our right to occupy this continent, set up, jointly with the States, studies to design a pattern for a regionalised Australia. The move was not just a notion dreamed up by a few visionary politicians and bureaucrats. Around the country local communities were forming associations to work for more decentralised locations for development. Queensland had already begun a pattern of port-hinterland infrastructures. New England, the Hunter Valley, the Murray Valley, Australia Felix, the Barossa, the Centre and the North, even the Kimberleys, had active citizens' groups envisaging themselves as part of regions as richly diverse as Burgundy or the Dordogne of France, each with its own domestic economy, characteristic lifestyle, its own tradition and culture and with political institutions designed to express both their unity with the Federation and their own sense of regional identity.

The Australian constitution had from the outset envisaged greater diversity by the creation of new States; the problems of differing economic aspirations had been to some degree anticipated in the creation of the Inter-State Commission and by Curtin's time the Commonwealth State Grants Commission had been established as a quasi-judicial and politically powerful instrument to negotiate and resolve the problems of differing financial capacities. This Grants Commission, together with the Arbitration system, a culturally diversified education pattern, and the establishment of Territories whose constitutions had been negotiated with the Commonwealth to meet their special

circumstances has proved to be a major contribution to the theory and practice of federalism.

The regional studies begun by Curtin were abandoned in 1949, along with much else of political creativity with the defeat of the Chifley Government and the beginning of the years of the 'unleavened bread'. But I believe the time is ripe for them to be resumed and for Australians to reconsider the basis of their federation as a step towards a nation united in its dedication to diversity.

### ***Ideas for a new federation***

That reconsideration can, in the light of our hundred years of experience, start with the presumptions that:

- a federation is the most appropriate form of government for Australia;
- we have on the whole, demonstrated ingenuity and some wisdom in the way in which we have adapted our federation to the changing realities of our time;
- the original States are no longer the most appropriate units to compose the Federation;
- experience suggests that States should be replaced by Territories of the Commonwealth whose individual constitutions had been negotiated with the Commonwealth at the time of their establishment but renegotiated from time to time;
- economically and socially, Territories especially the larger ones should reflect natural, physical and social regions with a significant sense of community;



- there should be room for smaller territories like Lord Howe, Christmas and other islands, which for historical, functional, social, ethnic or racial reasons, need special status, perhaps even for city states, such as Canberra, Darwin and Alice Springs;
- arrangements for local government and similar services should be flexible, allowing the maximum reasonable choice to individual communities especially where social or cultural issues are involved; and
- the Commonwealth should be the sole taxing authority but should rarely be engaged in the conduct of programs, or the delivery of services, and then only where direct Commonwealth responsibilities are involved;
- there should be two permanent quasi-judicial Commissions, including a:
  - Commonwealth Equalisation Grants Commission to function like the existing State Grants Commission but for all levels of government and executive agencies;
  - Federation Commission to report generally to Parliament on the operations of the Federation, including proposals for new Territories, constitutions and their amendment and the resolution of inter-government disputes.

The existing convention which ensures that the reports of the Grants Commission go direct to Parliaments without amendment by governments should be maintained for both of these Commissions.





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## 5. Multi-function parks\*

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*'Two-way education' and joint management of national parks are two instruments which could be powerful weapons for reconciliation between black and white Australia.*

Aboriginal and white ways of thought have come more closely together in recent years over National Parks than over any other issue, especially when judged by events in Uluru, Kakadu, Nitmiluk, and Gurig — all in the Northern Territory. In relation to these national parks, the interest groups have negotiated their dogmas: traditional Aboriginal owners and white conservationists; Commonwealth and Territory Governments; 'hard line' lovers of pristine wilderness untouched by humankind, and advocates of commercial tourism. The outcome has been a pattern of Aboriginal-owned national parks providing controlled access to our national estate and to the Aboriginal heritage under joint Aboriginal and white professional management. Probably none of the protagonists is entirely happy with the pattern, and the changes, particularly about the policy and practice of park management which have already been made. But the pattern and the procedure of negotiated change within joint management seem secure.

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\* ABM, September 1992, pp.138-140.

### ***What are parks for?***

However, despite acknowledgment of Aboriginal ownership and the establishment of joint management, even these national parks remain essentially white institutions. Generally the primary purpose of the parks is seen and justified by governments as an adjunct to the tourism industry, and as a source of international income for the 'economy'. However, despite this obsessive commercial advocacy, they serve a valuable function as an instrument of education about the national estate and as a source of pride and delight in its diversity and manifold splendours. This educational role is capable of dramatic and functionally-valuable expansion.

At present it is the white Australian and international tourists who are most visible and benefit most from these parks. Despite effective information services and the increasing presence of Aboriginal park rangers, it is hard for a visitor to experience a significant sense of sharing in an Aboriginal patrimony and its culture. He/she certainly does not see the culture in action, nor are they exposed to the strength and persistence of the Aboriginal 'way'.

This is changing slowly. Under the influence, the contribution to policy and management and the enthusiasm and skills of Aboriginal rangers, programs are progressively being devised which throw light on the richness of the Aboriginal cultural heritage. However, it touches only marginally on the power and complexity of the view of the world and its creatures which traditional Aborigines share with the indigenous peoples of the world.



It is only recently, in writings by indigenes from northern United States and Canada, and by rare scientists like David Suzuki, that western society, even its most cosmopolitan members, acknowledges the richness and universality of that view. And yet increasingly it challenges the 'reductive' scientific view which dominates our western minds, and some of the most renowned scientists and philosophers in our society are responding to it with increasing respect.

This indigenous view of the natural world and the relationship with that world and its creatures, characteristic of traditional peoples from the Arctic to southern Tasmania, is one which derived from an intimate association with, and direct dependence on, that world. It is therefore a view which is progressively being denied to Aborigines, denied by their alienation from the land, by their compulsory incorporation into a commercial economy and by the imposition on them and their children, of an alien pattern of education.

### ***Patterns of learning***

Traditionally, Aboriginal children came to understand the world they lived in and the knowledge and skills it required of them, by sharing from infancy in the daily lives of their parents and kin; learning by observation, experiment, imitation and progressively by doing; accepting almost from infancy a role within the group appropriate to their age and gender. It was a style and pattern of education now impossible in a society where parents and kin must dedicate many of their waking hours in 'employment' to earn a living and in which the State requires that Aboriginal children attend school. There they are instructed by alien teachers

to prepare them for employment in a world wholly different from that in which even their parents grew up.

But they have not become wholly isolated from that world. Wherever they have access to it, however limited, they continue to use and enjoy the bush; its tucker, its medicines, its creatures and its solitude. Whatever non-Aboriginal attitudes and lifestyle they may adopt or accept, the great majority retain relationships, loyalties and obligations which derive from their, perhaps half-forgotten kinship system. In their homes their children continue to hear at least fragments of dead or dying languages, ancient stories, songs and vocabularies, and acquire patterns of behaviour and the bases of moral judgments which tie them irrevocably to that world.

When they get to school they become progressively aware that they are there to be changed; that a battle is being fought over their minds and their souls; that acceptance requires that they cast off their past and their kin. The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the evidence placed before it is rich in examples of the psychic stress provoked in growing Aboriginal children by this conflict between school and the Aboriginal world.

### ***'Two-way' learning***

I know no Aboriginal parents who do not wish their children to have effective command of English and numeracy: to understand and to be competent in the white man's world. At the same time I know almost no Aboriginal parents who do not value their identity as Aboriginal people and wish their children to continue to share it. It is for these reasons that where Aboriginal people



control, or wish to control, their own schools, to devise their own curricula and their own pedagogic style, they think and talk of 'two-way' education; where they will have the opportunity to involve parents, kin and their elders in its design and practice, calling upon the knowledge and wisdom of their own experts in its development. It is for these reasons too, that much of this education is delivered, not by instruction in a classroom, but by participation in 'workshops' carrying out real activities in the community and the bush. Like the great educationist, Ivan Illich, they believe that knowledge both of white society and of their own, can be learned by participation in experience and by reflection on it, but cannot be taught simply by instruction: education to a significant degree must be 'de-schooled'.

The precise meaning of 'two-way' in relation to education is disputed even among its advocates. To some it is no more than a bi-lingual instruction in English and the mother-tongue; to others it means education for two separate domains of living in both of which the student must acquire competence; others envisage that teacher and student occupy and fill both roles as teachers and learners; but increasingly it means that Aboriginal children must learn from the beginning the separate foundations of their own culture and understand and value its differences from that of the white man's world. But in all of them there is an assertion of, and a demand for, respect for the Aboriginal way of doing things.

In this process of 'two-way' education there is an important role for national parks and similar reserves especially where Aboriginal families must bring up children in an urban context. Many Aboriginal families in city ghettos, in and around country towns and their fringe camps, are isolated from the experience of the bush and their children are confined to State and church

schools whose function and purpose is blatantly 'one-way'. This matters less at higher levels of education. Aborigines must learn to confront and deal with white society sooner or later. But it is at the levels where their own personal identity is still being formed that such confrontation can be most psychologically destructive. They will be best equipped to deal with that confrontation if in their early years they have learned not merely the basic language and numeracy skills of both societies, but have at all stages been conscious that there are two ways and to recognise and assess the qualities of each.

### ***New Aboriginal reserves***

The report of the National Estate Inquiry, a much neglected repository of conservationist wisdom, strongly recommended a great extension and diversification of national parks and other natural reserves. A valuable component of that process would be the establishment of specifically Aboriginal reserves or parts of reserves dedicated to the preservation of the culture of the various tribal groups which compose the societies linked with their territories.

One such reserve at least should exist within the territory of every significant tribal or language group. It is well known that Aboriginal people rarely identify themselves simply as Aboriginal people, but rather as Nyungah, Wiradgeri, Walpiri, Yolgnu, Murri, Koori, or comparable terms, and that they value the significant, even the minor differences in language, manners and customs, which mark the fact of that more specific identity. Reserves identified with such groups, identified with their territory, presenting their history and their culture, would



command valuable loyalty and influence. An Aboriginal society is built on, and values, diversity. *Vive les differences.*

Such reserves, and indeed all reserves which protect and preserve nature, for forest, for genetic diversity, for the protection of water sources and quality, for scientific enquiry, should be based upon the Uluru model of Aboriginal ownership and joint management with the authority professionally dedicated to the non-Aboriginal purpose for which the reserve is established, and Aboriginal participation and presence should at all times and in all activities be evident. There are few if any of such purposes which would not benefit from such involvement — or with which such participation would not be compatible.

Furthermore, all of the reserves could be seen as instruments of the 'two-way' educational process. Collaboration between their joint managements, and Aboriginal educators could design programs of visits by school and community-based groups on long weekends, in school vacations or even for longer residential courses. In these, the 'hunter-gatherer' component in Aboriginal socialisation, their identification with the natural world and with the indigenous peoples of all lands would provide a basis for communication with those involved professionally in the reserve concerned.

'Two-way' education is something which non-Aboriginal children (and adults) also need — indeed often desperately. They need it to help their sanity. Aboriginal people need it for survival.

### ***Promise of reconciliation***

The Council for Reconciliation seems, to an outside observer to be groping for a way to go; for an understanding of its functions;

for a job to do. I urge the Council and its members to consider national parks and other reserves as primary instruments of reconciliation; as a task to be shared and in the performance of which reconciliation may be achieved.

In Uluru, in Kakadu, Nitmiluk and Gurig, there is success and promise of even greater achievement. In Arnhem Land where Aboriginal people have significant control of their children's education, their curriculum and teaching style are bringing enthusiasm and competence to Aboriginal teachers, parents and children, and incidentally are stimulating white educationists to rethink their purposes and their pedagogy. Let the Reconciliation Council marry these two components of success.

Wherever there is a group, community or township, let the Council help it establish a core of citizens, black and white, to work for a national park or reserve in its area, and dedicate it both to the protection of our national estate and to 'two-way' understanding. The Council would at once be swimming with the 'green' tide and promoting the United Nations year of the Indigenous Peoples of the World — no longer just a government agency, but part of a revolution.



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## 6. Promises of a new world order<sup>\*</sup>

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*The United States of America took advantage of World War II to achieve dominance in international trade and finance. This should make us wary of powerful leaders needing the support of mighty corporations and sceptical electors, in the post-Gulf War environment, promising a 'new world order'.*

Promises of a new world have long been associated with wars. In my own lifetime such promises have acquired a distressing familiarity. In 1914 we were urged to join in the war to end wars for ever; in 1939 war was to destroy fascist despotism and bring mankind into an era free from fear, want and other terrors; and sadly in 1990 I listened to George Bush's promises of the 'new world order' that the Gulf War would introduce. And in this latter I listened even more sadly to our Prime Minister echo the earlier colonial responses of Hughes and of Menzies.

These promises were simply components in military strategies. Ever since war ceased to be a game between professionals, becoming total, involving civilians and whole communities, it has demanded the sacrifice of all human constraints, decencies and

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<sup>\*</sup> ABM, November 1992, pp.74-77. (ABM titled this article 'How the West was Won'. Dr Coombs protested that the title was inappropriate. We hope he would approve this title.)

compassions. Since then every military leader has had hanging over his head fears powerful to the point of obsession; that his allies would not join or would quit; that the civilian population would repudiate the war and him, or that the soldiers would 'vote with their feet' for peace; and above all that whether the war was won or lost, civilisation as he and his masters knew it would be overwhelmed by revolution or simply by chaos. Promises were the back-dated currency with which he and his government hoped to buy off the realisation of those obsessive fears.

Today the fears and threats inherent in all those wars are bursting or drifting helplessly into actuality. Civil wars, revolution and chaos envelop the earth and no nation can be confident that it is exempt. And to this is now added the dire threat that the earth itself is being overwhelmed with pollution and its resources depleted so that it may soon no longer be a habitat for humankind. Nevertheless the old currency of a new world order is again being offered.

It may be salutary, therefore, to look back on our own experience and that of our relatively immediate predecessors and reflect on how best to respond or how far it is wise to trust in or to wait for world leaders.

### ***Past promises***

In the dark days of 1940-41, France had fallen and Britain was blitzed and threatened with invasion. Those were days of promises and manifestos of 'new world orders', and of how victory would introduce the 'century of the common man'. They were also the days when the Allied leaders had already begun



their hard-nosed bargaining about who should give aid or open a second front, and about how the spoils of victory were to be shared. It was critical to ensure that Stalin did not join Hitler's camp, that Russian resistance should be maintained, and above all, that the US should enter into the war and become utterly committed to it.

The last was not easy. There was a strong sentiment in the US that it should remain aloof from quarrels among the rival European imperialist powers, and that neutrality and trade with both sides was an attractive option. There was practical unanimity that if aid or participation was to be granted, a realistic price should be exacted.

Economically at that time the US faced critical decisions about its economic future. Its emergence during the early decades of the century as the largest and wealthiest free-trade area and international market, endowed with tremendous natural resources and in the forefront of technological innovation, had been achieved within a domestic economy largely self-sufficient, behind a wall of tariffs and other protective measures. But its industries had begun to eye international markets, both as exporters and investors. A strong conviction had developed in academic and other intellectual quarters that the US was now economically powerful enough to compete successfully in, and probably to dominate, a free-trade world. This conviction was strongest in the policy-making State Department which had persuaded Congress to give the President authority to negotiate reductions in tariffs in exchange for the effective access to worthwhile markets for American products and enterprises. However, strong resistance to the acceptance of this 'free-trade'

philosophy remained (and still remains) in major industrial and rural industries and in their congressional lobbies.

The chance to bargain about the price warring countries must pay for American aid would make it possible for the State Department policy makers to press for changes in international trade policies and practices so as to maximise the benefits to the country from a freer trading. The strategy was directed as a priority at the abolition of the system of 'imperial preferences' which linked to Britain the exports, the markets, and the investment opportunities of British Empire countries, together with the associated 'sterling area' in which the international reserves of those (and other) countries were pooled in London, and invested in sterling currency, and other financial assets. The strategy was directed also at the use of negotiating power of the President to open up promising markets, to the products of US industry and to the investment capital which trade with the belligerent countries, was already so dramatically accumulating for US citizens and corporations.

### ***A price to pay***

From the outset of negotiations there was a powerful emphasis on the commercial quid-pro-quo the US intended to exact. Article VII of the Mutual Aid Agreement bound the recipients to the reduction and the ultimate elimination of all tariffs, import quotas and similar barriers, to free movement of goods and capital, and to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and preferential treatment for the products and the enterprises of particular countries or groups of countries. In brief, the devices by which the burgeoning US had climbed into economic maturity were to be denied to later entrants in the race. The economic



foundations of the American world empire were to be well and securely laid.

By 1943 it was possible to believe that the military tide had turned. The negotiations took on a more realistic tone. Unfortunately, between then and the end of the war the US found itself negotiating with bankrupts. The productive economies productive of the defeated would by then be in ruins: Germany, Japan, and Italy had been bombed almost to extinction, and the European victors were not in much better shape. All had suffered grave physical and human damage; had run down to exhaustion their reserves of gold and foreign currencies; had sold or pawned their international investments; were desperately in debt; and their credit ratings were significant only because their creditor, the US, feared to force them into desperation and despair. A widespread repudiation of debts and obligations by the governments of countries which a few years before had formed the core of the international finance capitalist system, could well have marked its collapse as effectively as a communist revolution.

If such a fate was to be avoided, it had to be made possible for war-torn, near destitute economies to be reconstructed, for enemies to earn the resources to pay the reparations the victors demanded of them, and for newly emerging political and economic powers to develop; and perhaps most importantly, for peoples weary of sacrifice and the acceptance of authority, to believe. Only in an effectively functioning world economy could the US reap the harvests of dominance that its Yankee blend of generosity and tough bargaining had sown for it.

## **Keynes and the IMF**

For once the economic intelligentsia did not fail its masters. A strange competitive partnership had emerged between Keynes in England, and a 'brains trust' in the US Treasury. The result was a series of bilateral debates sponsored between the brains trust and nominees from a wide range of countries with Keynes in the background, stimulating and provoking the protagonists into more creative thinking. Bankrupt economies must be given time, access to capital and to the burgeoning technology the war had spawned and, above all, to internationally convertible currencies, so that world trade could revive. If this was not achieved the dreaded return to the stagnation, unemployment and poverty of the 1930s, seemed inevitable. Institutional changes must be designed to ensure the financial means to this miracle. This was the task of the brains trust and its bilateral negotiations.

Keynes proposed an international 'clearing house' for the settlement of international payment balances by drawing on a newly created international currency, rather than in gold, as had been the long-established practice. All member nations would be allotted quotas in this currency which would be accepted and guaranteed by them all.

A plan involving the disappearance of gold from the international financial world was too revolutionary a concept for the US Treasury to contemplate putting to Congress. They argued that much the same result would be achieved by establishing a fund to which each participating country would contribute in its own currency, plus a modest notional amount in gold. Contributions were to reflect the potential economic and political strength of the member and were dominated by those of the US itself. Each member would be allocated a quota of rights to draw on the fund



related to its contribution and to its share in international trade. This quota could be drawn upon in convertible currency to meet deficiencies in its balance of payments.

From this debate emerged proposals for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) strengthened from the US point of view by powers given to the management of the Fund (also dominated by the US and other 'creditor' countries), to provide advice to a country drawing heavily upon its quota; advice about how its domestic policies should be changed; advice obviously backed by potential sanctions.

The IMF was to form the key component of a group of institutions which would include also:

- a World Bank for reconstruction and development similarly financed by member nations primarily in their own currencies, to make and to stimulate international development loans — of which the US capital market was to provide a major share;
- an agreement on tariffs to set in train the negotiations to reduce and progressively eliminate tariffs and other trade barriers in a series of simultaneous bilateral negotiations, the results of which were to be generalised to be enjoyed by all member countries; and
- an organisation for international trade which was to arrange the tariff negotiations and to administer a charter to regulate international commerce progressively towards a free-trade world and to act as monitor and arbitrator in that progress.

### ***The IMF influence in USA***

From 1943 to 1948, negotiations continued towards the achievement of this package. In those negotiations it became clear that the rehabilitation of the post-war economic world was almost wholly dependent upon the financial support of the US, and that the powers being given especially to the IMF to influence domestic policies and to impose sanctions, would be exercised to accord with the wishes of the US.

Marginal compromises were negotiated in conferences, but except for those relating to the trade charter, they did not question significantly the US plans. Agreement about the charter however proved difficult to achieve. Doubts about a free-trade world were widespread. Countries dependant upon exports of foodstuffs, raw materials and minerals were aware that fluctuating international markets could confront them, from time to time, with overwhelming balance of payments problems. Countries in the earlier stages of industrialisation, with entry into only limited markets doubted their capacity to progress without resort to protective devices. Above all there was a widespread conviction that only in a world in which the major industrial and creditor nations maintained high levels of domestic employment and effective demand for the products of other countries could the commitments demanded by the US be met.

As a result, the charter as finally negotiated, had developed a much less rigid free-trade character, and with the concurrence of the US negotiators became an instrument:

- to impose obligations on major industrialised and capital-rich nations to pursue domestic policies which would increase the demand for internationally traded goods and to promote



development and make possible progress towards more liberal trade policies in more dependent economies; and

- to organise and monitor negotiations between countries when modifications of general rules of liberal trade were sought to enable them to achieve development without damage to the interests of other nations.

Despite the US support in negotiation for this change of emphasis, powerful business interests in the US were far from happy with them. The negotiated tariff and related reductions were approved by the exercise of the President's existing discretion and the charter was placed before Congress to be debated after the Presidential election due in November 1948. During the campaign for that election, President Truman was apparently persuaded to announce that if elected, he would not submit the charter to Congress for decision.

So ended ingloriously the only serious attempt to negotiate a new commercial 'World Order'; not defeated, but rather cast out, scratched before the start.

### ***Whose benefits***

It was the failure of the economic system in the 1930s to provide a basis for a livelihood for the peoples of the world which made the 1939-45 war seem inevitable, and its conduct and outcomes were pervaded by the persistent fear of the return of that failure. It was awareness of that fear which led the negotiators of the charter to take account not only of the imperial ambitions of the powerful, but the demands for some security for those exposed to the harsher realities of international commerce. It was awareness of that fear also which led the US negotiators to agree

that even they should be accountable to the world for the international effect of their domestic policies.

If there is to be a 'World Order' neither powerful governments nor multinational corporations can be exempt from accountability nor from sanctions. At a time when unemployment again is rife and the fear of depression is loud in the land and when we must fear also that mankind's habitat is threatened with exhaustion and destruction, let us remember that the words of world leaders can, like a lover's vows, be 'Springes to catch woodcocks', and that even the most desirable international agreements or conventions will carry little weight when those leaders need the support of the mighty corporations or sceptical electors.

Perhaps the environmentalist's advice 'Think globally but act locally' has the sound of wisdom.



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## 7. Independence or bust\*

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*If we are to regain control of our own affairs we must reduce bureaucratic and intrusive aspects of government, increase savings, reduce debt, reduce the costs of employing labour, pay more than lip-service to the concept of sustainable development, and give all Australians — particularly youth — access to a reasonable livelihood.*

An acceptable blueprint for Australia's future can emerge only after wide community debate based upon much clearer and more honest information than has so far been available to us. It will require debate about what kind of society we, individually and socially, wish to live in.

A time like the present, when our economy is in disarray, unemployment widespread, levels of debt — private and public, domestic and international — threaten us with the status of a 'banana republic', and political discussion of the way to go is violently polarised, is not an appropriate time for sober reflection, considered judgment or united effort. Essentially we have lost control of our own economic affairs. Our business leaders, our ministers and their advisers respond to the dictates

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\* ABM, January 1993, pp.60-63.

of a 'market' which is increasingly dominated by external influences.

We need time to pause and reflect on the changes in direction which we need to make. But unless we can demonstrate promptly that we recognise the nature of the major weaknesses in our situation, even if not their full extent or inter-relationships, and that we possess the will and the capacity to deal with them, that time may well be denied us and our subordination be the more complete.

In the first part of this article I propose to consider briefly what seem to be the major economic, ecological and social problems which we face, and suggest an interim agenda of measures which could win us that time during which we could convince ourselves and the ruthless market, within which we function, that we can resume control.

In the latter part of the article I hope to contribute briefly some ideas for the debate about the kind of society Australia could be and the ways in which we could act to build it.

### ***Evidence of failure***

At present, as in earlier decades, the economy is failing to provide the Australian population with access to a reasonable livelihood:

- There is widespread unemployment and a lack of opportunity for young people.
- Manufacturing and industries based upon the natural renewable resources of the earth and its waters are in serious decline.



- Industrial and commercial enterprises have become increasingly dependent on foreign capital, innovation, technology and managerial skills.
- Progressively the costs of production for enterprises based in Australia become the source of income for non-Australians.
- Levels of expenditure for both consumption and investment have increasingly been financed less from our own incomes and savings, and more from debts incurred often to non-Australian lenders.
- A balance in our international payments is increasingly being achieved only by the transfer of ownership of Australian assets to non-Australians.

From the outset it will be necessary to take action directed to countering these evidences of failure. Such action will not be easy and will be resisted by some. Policies to give effect to that action will need wide community conviction that those policies will restore access to a reasonable livelihood for Australians generally and to re-establish economic independence. To achieve that conviction such policies must be seen to be concerned to reduce the hardships which at present are suffered by the unemployed, their families, the young and other disadvantaged groups and to ensure that the consequent burdens fall at least proportionately on those best able to bear it.

The necessary policies can be seen as early phases in the development of a strategy to restore independence. In the first phase the emphasis is on those aspects of them designed to ease the burdens of the present recession and protect the welfare of those most in need. They will therefore be directed primarily to:

- liberalising social service benefits and reducing their bureaucratic and intrusive aspects;
- increasing support for private social welfare organisations to enable them to humanise and supplement government social services;
- reducing or removing constraints on supplementary income-earning activities by recipients of social service benefits;
- supporting voluntary organisations operating or establishing educational, cultural, travel and sporting activities for students and unemployed youth, preferably on a local basis; and
- supporting the development of local cooperative self-sufficiency programs capable of reducing dependence on the 'economy'. The time may well be ripe for a revival of the best aspects of the alternative life style plans of the late 1960s and 1970s — perhaps especially in cities and suburbia on models common in suburban USA.

### ***Payroll tax iniquitous***

This agenda should also include measures to reduce or eliminate government taxes which increase the cost of employing labour — the most important of which is the pay-roll tax, an iniquitous burden in a time when so much of this resource is idle and industries complain of their inability to become competitive.

Equally, these policies should include measures to increase the level of savings by the Australian community and by corporations operating in Australia. Measures proposed and implemented by past governments, Liberal and Labor, to increase savings by



incentives in the form of taxation concessions have resulted substantially in increased tax evasion, wasteful and extravagant expenditure and the bidding up of the prices of existing assets and so stimulating inflationary situations highly conducive to unconstructive expenditure.

I believe therefore, that at least for the present, savings should be compelled by steeply graduated savings levies from incomes of individuals and especially of corporations, allowing substantial rebates for the prior allocation of funds to the reduction of debt to an increase in financial assets.

The need for action to offset the effects of the elimination of payroll tax and the introduction of savings levies on the revenue of States could also be used to make a significant contribution to the balance of payments problem and to the beginning of a worthwhile program to control the pollution and destruction of the environment by the imposition of a substantial excise on carbon-based fuels, together with a commitment to their progressive elimination.

The recent studies by the Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Groups, set up by the Hawke Government, despite their inconclusiveness, assembled valuable data and ideas for consideration in the comprehensive study and debate about a pattern for the future we must undertake. Two examples, immediately relevant to proposals which so far loom large in the government's ideas, can be mentioned.

The first relates to the emphasis on grandiose plans to expand public utilities in ways beneficial to private interests which would stimulate even more wasteful use of already scarce resources especially in cities at the expense of other communities. The

studies demonstrated that, in many instances, especially related to water supply, electricity and other sources of power, differential charges on high levels of consumption could prevent wasteful consumption and encourage more rapid moves towards solar and other forms of alternative fuels less hostile to the environment and potentially readily available on a regional basis. We need intelligence and concern rather than grandiloquent projects to flatter the vanity of politicians.

Another example exists in the lack of attention to the need to halt the pollution, indeed the environmental destruction, of riverine waterways and coastal lands and waters. Action taken in these fields would be geographically spread, could increase productivity as well as amenities and could provide a basis for the involvement of local government, community groups and organisations in the activities required.

### ***The will to act***

These interim measures would, I believe be sufficient to demonstrate the will and capacity to act, and their effects would begin to emerge quickly. They, and the intention to make use of the work of the representative and expert Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Groups, would be an acknowledgment of the contribution of those groups and their value for the more comprehensive studies and debate which should follow. A central study group should be established with independent expert membership to prepare a strategic study of the means to greater Australian economic independence through sustainable economic activity.



In summary, the strategy to restore autonomy would provide:

- action to reduce the cost to industry of employing labour;
- protect low income earners from damaging poverty;
- impose an increased level of savings from income earners with special emphasis on corporations to help to reduce interest rates and to check expenditure abroad;
- impose a significant tax on carbon-based fuels to reduce health-damaging pollution and the international burden of imports of motor fuel;
- substitute more careful use of water, electricity and other urban services requiring extravagant capital-intensive infrastructures;
- speed up of the technological shift in the sources of power towards solar and other cleaner and potentially sustainable and therefore cheaper domestic sources of energy; and
- assemble information from the Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Group studies as a basis for reflection and debate about means to a more sustainable and economically independent Australia.

This debate should devote special attention to:

- action to conserve and economise in the use of limited natural resources and to direct a substantial part of their proceeds to sustainable enterprises and to community services and incomes;
- studies to identify the appropriate components of a sustainable manufacturing sector in Australian industry and the means to ensure its security and efficiency;

- action to expedite the development of Australian research-based technology; and
- action to initiate international consultation to reassert the responsibilities of major industrialised and capital-rich nations and multinational corporations in the liberalisation of international trade and commerce.



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## 8. The Betrayal by the intelligentsia?

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*Are the intellectuals — bureaucrats, the academics, the professionals — identifying themselves with the powerful, and seeking special privileges while tolerating hatreds such as racism, ultranationalism, class and so on. Are they serving mainly the rich and the powerful? Is this a betrayal of their responsibilities, social functions and traditions?*

Any one who is involved in or who observes the chaos of the Western world today and recalls, or has a sense of the history of the period between the First (1914-18) and the Second World Wars (1939-45) cannot fail to be struck by the similarities between these periods. Both are marked by widespread and intense social, economic and political change expressed in dramatic realignments in the relationships between nations, cultures, classes, and religions. In Europe, the first of these periods saw the Spanish Civil War, ethnic strife in the Balkans, the rise of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, and the

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\* ABM February 1993, pp.116-119. (ABM titled this article 'Who owns the intelligentsia? Dr Coombs protested privately that the title was inappropriate because no one owns the intelligentsia. The problem was that the intelligentsia had betrayed society and themselves.)

establishment of the Russian Communist dictatorship. In America the dramatic rise to economic dominance had begun; in Africa and the Middle East the battle between major powers for control of the world's material resources had begun to shift its emphasis from nation states to multinational corporations sometimes incorporating indigenous elites. In Asia, the Japanese had emerged as an ambitious and potentially powerful international military power.

Especially in Europe traditional political divisions were disintegrating and being reformed in radically different patterns. Conservative parties were no longer exclusively or even primarily the defenders of social structures inherited in modified form from medieval times and progressively were becoming the political instruments of the owners and entrepreneurs of the burgeoning capitalist system. New parties committed to change sought power, less to control the action of kings and the nobility but rather to seize or control the instruments of production, distribution and exchange in the interests of the participants (other than owners) within the capitalist system.

### ***The 'treason of the clerks'***

It was a time of intense intellectual speculation about the causes and processes of these changes and their impact on society. It was the time when Keynes wrote *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, his critique of the Treaty of Versailles analysing and foreshadowing the direction of some of these changes and predicting the early return of war. In 1927 an even more significant piece of social analysis appeared in a small book entitled *La Trahison des Clercs* translated into English as *The Betrayal of the Intelligentsia*. The author, Julien Benda, a French



philosophical writer recognised the emergence of the intelligentsia as a small but growing and potentially powerful group within European societies. He saw also that this class was being transformed from its largely ecclesiastical origins in medieval society, to develop new and significant roles and functions in the emerging capitalist societies of Europe and that major struggles were to develop within it to determine the principles which would guide its actions and between it and among the major competing social and economic classes for access to and control of its services. These struggles have continued to our own time with their outcome never wholly or finally resolved. Benda saw these struggles as critical for the future of Western civilisation: a judgment which has even greater relevance and significance, to societies the world over, in our own time.

The nucleus of this class (the clerks) existed in medieval times as a significant component in the structure of the universal Christian Church usually as 'clerks in holy orders', like Chaucer's character 'the clerk of Oxenford'. In those times its members were characteristically monks of the scholarly and contemplative orders who had taken vows of poverty and chastity and who devoted their lives to study, contemplation and charitable works. Such men and women commanded great respect for their dedication, wisdom and humility. They were granted some privileges including in some States immunity from arrest by the civil law authorities and a modest degree of economic security, if only that of the 'begging bowl' of the mendicant friars.

It was within the establishments of the orders themselves that groups of independent scholars gathered gradually to become the nuclei of universities and other centres of learning where men

like Thomas Aquinas gathered colleagues to dedicate their lives to the pursuit of knowledge and of truth, free of the cares of the world and uncorrupted by its material concerns.

It was probably from such orders that kings, great nobles and the princes of the church sometimes recruited their administrators. These recruits were perhaps the first to betray the dedication of their class to unworldly cultivation of the mind and the spirit to the exclusion of material concerns by accepting positions of power with their rewards in authority and material benefits.

Benda identified this class of 'clerks' fairly narrowly, seeing the great philosophers like Aquinas, Bacon, Galileo, Newton Spinoza as representative, although he would have been aware of lesser mortals within the category. But he charged that the clerks of his time generally had become willing to betray the cause of honest enquiry and the integrity it demanded in the interests of political, racial, religious, national and class passion — particularly the passion of hatred.

### ***Remarkable transformation***

By then the numbers of those who by birth, patronage, affluence or exceptional ability had access to the opportunity for education, leisure and congenial institutional contexts which had previously been exclusive to the clerics of the church, had been multiplied by the growth in the numbers of the affluent 'bourgeoisie', the owners and entrepreneurs of the rise of capitalism and the pillars of its society. Far from all those in that society who by then had access to such privileges wished to devote their lives to study, contemplation and charitable works or were content to accept the limited security of a life of poverty



and a 'begging bowl'. Indeed the growth of the 'intelligentsia' in all its levels and in the diversity and complexity of the roles it performs in contemporary society is perhaps the most remarkable social transformation in Western history since the renaissance. All other groups desiring or capable of exercising power have now in fact become dependent on its members. Yet it has been only within academia that it has expressed or asserted a characteristic or collective influence. In education, medicine and law and other professional activities, in commerce, industry and finance and above all in government bureaucracies there were increasing opportunities for those who had acquired the skills, analytical and practical, which a 'liberal' education provided. It was the religious orders, the universities and other academic institutions which had developed from them that were able to offer potential 'clerks' such an education.

A 'liberal' education had, in its origins and early development been linked with a powerful 'socialisation' — a moral training to accept the values of the medieval clerics — to esteem intellectual and spiritual values above the material and worldly; to pursue truth and justice; to live by their principles and to defend them in the world by example and precept.

### ***The cultivation of hatred***

However, Benda saw that in his time many who had been exposed to this pattern of education and socialisation no longer adhered to these principles. Indeed, on the contrary, he saw them identifying with causes based upon the desire for special privilege, and upon animosity, indeed hatred, of those who in one way or another were 'different' or foreign. He saw the rise of Fascism, Nazism, the Spanish civil war and other forms of civil

strife as an expression of the hatreds inherent in extreme nationalism, anti-semitism, class and religious schisms and antagonisms. He blamed the 'clerks' and those who had trained them for their failure to counter or contain these hatreds.

This failure he saw as a betrayal of the social function and responsibility of those who had been granted the privileges of becoming 'clerks': a responsibility properly to be fulfilled both by example in their personal lives and by training in and the practice of disinterested thought and judgment uncorrupted by the desire for, or concern for material benefit. The medieval noble families were generally 'socialised' to believe *noblesse oblige*: that nobility and its privileges carried with them an obligation to 'care for' those who owed them loyalty. It was logical and persuasive to believe that those privileged to become 'clerks' shared parallel obligations.

Whether Benda was justified in so attributing blame is perhaps immaterial. It is certainly true that in his era the western world was torn by the hatreds he identified and by the wars which were their outcome and that many members of the intelligentsias of the nations or ethnic communities concerned shared those hatreds, used their knowledge and their skills in their service and in the advocacy for and the conduct of the wars, with the hatreds, destruction and inhumanity which characterised them.

Indeed it might almost be said that the outcome of the Second World War (1939-45) which both Keynes' and Benda's arguments foreshadowed, was determined by the relative abilities and dedication of the intelligentsias committed to the belligerents concerned. But a great price had to be paid for that outcome: not merely in deaths and destruction. The war, the peoples were assured, was to prevent the domination of the civilised world by



the fascist values of our enemies, values sponsored by the clerks identified with those enemies. Those who opposed the war generally tended to condemn it as simply an unworthy battle for the control of the world's material resources. The corruption of the traditional values of the clerks by their acceptance and involvement in it, tended where it was observed, to be ignored as a sickness that would pass 'after the war'.

Unhappily, to win the war the allied belligerents had come consciously or unconsciously to accept those fascist values; the cultivation of hatred of those against whom they fought; the subordination of moral, intellectual and spiritual values to the material needs of the 'war effort'. Their leaders failed to see that even temporary acceptance of these values was both a demonstration that the end does not justify the means but also that the means 'rough hew' and determine ends — glamorise them how we will.

### ***The corruption of the intelligentsia***

The acceptance of those fascist values began in the schools, the colleges and the universities. The socialisation of the young, emerging 'clerks' to value truth and justice and to pursue and defend them in their daily lives were among the first casualties of the war and the preparations for it and the damage was and continues to be exacerbated by the glorification of material affluence and the subordination of the sense of obligation which traditionally had been part of training, the functions and the privileges of the intelligentsia.

The clerks had become impersonal resources empty of moral values, factors of production to be bought and sold in the market

place. In the hard-nosed bargaining at the Yalta Summit they were counters to be traded. I remember my own astonishment and distress when the Secondary Industries Commission in the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction was required to list the names, qualifications, interests and occupations of German scientists, technicians and top managers, who would be valuable in the post-war developments we hoped for, so that they could be demanded of the enemy as part of the 'reparations'. Those demanded included the experts of the uranium industry in its potential both for the massive build up of instruments of mass destruction and for the 'Atoms for Peace' initiatives.

In the cold war period there was a joke widely circulated in the US scientific community which made clear the role the 'intelligentsia' gained in 'reparations' were expected to play. 'It isn't true that the Soviet Star Wars program is better than ours', said the US scientists, 'it's just that they got better Germans than we did'.

Benda was right. Over the decades since he wrote, the intelligentsia increasingly has betrayed its social function and obligation to counter the prejudices and hatred which dominate western societies, by example in their personal lives and by defending, in its educational and intellectual institutions, freedom to practise disinterested thought and judgment. On the contrary it has acquiesced in the subordination of the institutions of education, research and the critical analysis of our civilisation to the demands of the greedy, the selfish and the unscrupulous.

And yet in numbers and potential intellectual and spiritual significance they alone have the capacity to restore sanity to our civilisation. A recent article in the Bulletin reported a Professor of Political Theory in the University of Sydney as saying, 'An



intellectual is one whose ideas have mass effects'. On the contrary, it seems that intellectuals have chosen to rely for the effects of their ideas on the owners of resources and on those who exercise political power.

*This is the praise of time, the harp cried out that we betray all truths that we possess.* (Judith Wright McKinney)

organisations — often multinational — who have chosen to ignore Aboriginal peoples' rights and interests. While the Mabo judgment has failed to spell out a fiduciary relationship between Aboriginal people and the Crown, or resolve 'sovereignty', it does provide the opportunity to negotiate lasting, just and sound agreements between black and white Australia.

The search for a response to the High Court judgment on the Mabo case has got off to a bad start. This is a pity because within the limits of its purposes and assumptions, the court has produced a competent and wise judgment. Its purpose was to clarify the present state of Australian law in relation to Aboriginal rights, especially in land and its resources. The judgment was wise in that it has seen as its purpose not simply to maintain the status quo, but to assess its implications for peace, order and good government of Australian communities, indigenous and migrant, and so to provide the basis for legal and political change.

intelligentsia is a more complex idea than it is often taken to be. It is not simply a matter of education, but of a certain social and cultural orientation. It is a group of people who are concerned with the progress of the human race, who are interested in the future of the world, and who are willing to sacrifice for the sake of the common good.

Ministry of Post War Reconstruction. The Ministry of Post War Reconstruction was established in 1945, and its main task was to help the German people to rebuild their lives after the war. It was a very important organization, and it played a key role in the reconstruction of Germany. It was responsible for the distribution of food, clothing, and other necessities, and it also helped to rebuild the infrastructure of the country. It was a very difficult task, but it was one that had to be done.

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## 9. Grasping the Mabo opportunity\*

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*For too long Australia has been dominated by powerful interests and organisations — often multinational — who have chosen to ignore Aboriginal peoples rights and interests. While the Mabo judgment has failed to spell out a fiduciary relationship between Aboriginal people and the Crown, or resolve 'sovereignty', it does provide the opportunity to negotiate lasting, just and sound agreements between black and white Australia.*

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\* ABM, August 1993, pp.38-41.

Despite the wisdom of the judgment and the generally enthusiastic reception it received from Aboriginal people and those concerned for their rights, some powerful interests and organisations Australian and multinational — especially those interested in exploiting the natural resources of the continent — complain that it has left uncertainties impairing their capacity to conduct their affairs.

For too long, discussion of these issues, which affect all Australians, has been dominated by these powerful, often multinational, interest groups, ignoring Aboriginal people in the process.

Since establishment of the British colony in 1788 and throughout the successive transfers of administrative and legislative powers to Australian states from the British Crown, culminating in final approval of the Australian constitution, there were occasions when the option of negotiation could have been explored. Despite evidence in official documents that the Crown in the British Government at various times was concerned that a fiduciary obligation of care for the indigenous people existed but was not being honoured (indeed was being grossly repudiated), at no time was significant action taken.

It is not surprising therefore that many of the 'treaties' and agreements between indigenous peoples and colonial governments in British territories purporting ostensibly to ensure the continuance of indigenous property and other rights were in fact part of this procedure of 'ex-post' validation and more effectively concerned to record what they hoped could pass for a legal action of cession by indigenes of sovereign powers — including radical title to land generally.



Equally, it is not surprising that indigenous peoples continue to be suspicious of legislative acts or 'agreements' which purport to be primarily the recognition or grant of 'native' title to land which they believe has always been theirs, when an at-least equally important purpose of such acts or 'agreements' is to validate the earlier dispossessions. Furthermore it cannot be denied that such a purpose is involved in both the official discussion paper issued by the Commonwealth Government and even more so in proposals being floated and advocated by state governments and some private commercial corporations.

One can be seriously disappointed in the High Court's failure to clarify adequately the question of whether these and other aspects of the history of black-white relationships in Australia or contemporary moral political wisdom have created a fiduciary obligation in the Crown of trusteeship for indigenous people.

Such a fiduciary relationship between the Crown and the Maori people of New Zealand is now acknowledged; that country's Court of Appeal has declared that the negotiated Treaty of Waitangi is binding on the Crown. The processes for clarifying the implications of that treaty demonstrate impressive progress in advancing 'reconciliation' between Maori and Pakeha (whites).

Similarly, the High Court of Australia has failed to clarify the question of 'sovereignty': an issue that is vexed and emotionally charged. It cannot be denied that before 1788 sovereignty — a right and the power to govern — was exercised by the various social groups of indigenous people who occupied this continent and was valid in international law as it was then understood, even in imperial states. No Aboriginal Act ceding that sovereignty was or has since been made. Many Aborigines believe that in the

absence of such an Act of cession, morally and in international law, that sovereignty persists.

The closest the court comes to dealing with the issue of sovereignty is in its judgment that the acquisition of the territory of the Australian continent by the British Crown cannot be challenged in an Australian municipal court. That judgment cannot be disputed.

But it leaves unanswered the question of whether there is any international court in which it could be challenged; whether there are international considerations — legal, economic, political or moral — which those exercising sovereignty should consider.

Equally it does not consider how sovereignty can in fact be changed, suggesting that the court considers sovereignty to be indivisible, absolute and unchangeable except by force of arms. Such a belief is clearly unsound.

In Australia sovereignty is divided between the Commonwealth and states by the constitution; between the Commonwealth and its various territories by agreement validated by Commonwealth legislation; and between the Commonwealth and Aboriginal communities and their councils at local and regional levels by Commonwealth legislation.

### ***Sovereignty qualified***

The Commonwealth's sovereignty is qualified by Commonwealth acceptance of the right of the International Court of Justice to adjudicate certain matters and by the Crown in the Commonwealth becoming a party to a number of internationally negotiated covenants affecting a wide range of social and economic policies: a range which seems likely to include a



covenant establishing a code recognising certain rights of indigenous peoples.

Even more important is Australian participation in the Bretton Woods Agreements and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade as part of the post-World War II settlement which granted effective power to United Nations subsidiary institutions such as the International Monetary Fund to influence and in effect to control economic policies of member nation states. Less precise but of increasing importance is the growing authority of the Security Council and other United Nations agencies to impose policies on nation states and, where that council thinks it necessary, to enforce them by sanctions including armed force.

Furthermore, the political reality is that multinational corporations are now so international and so economically dominant in their effect on nation states that even the most powerful must take account of their interests and wishes. The legal significance of this economic and political fact has, I understand, been strengthened by the International Court of Justice accepting the responsibility of adjudicating in the event of disputes between the parties to certain agreements between international corporations and national states.

Thus the realistic condition of sovereignty in Australia assumed by the court to be an indivisible, absolute and unchangeable right and power to govern apparently in fact is significantly divided, limited and has been varied in its history by decisions of the court, by constitutional change and by acts of the Crown in the Commonwealth, often after negotiations and agreements with other authorities.

Thus it can reasonably be argued that a primary objective of the Crown in the Australian Parliament and government in the present situation is to secure with Aboriginal consent an act of cession of either complete or partial sovereignty in a form which could legitimately be presented as an act of self-determination by the Aboriginal people.

Most existing agreements between nation states and their indigenous peoples have in effect been an exchange of such an act of cession in return for constitutional guarantees of effective powers of self-government within acceptable limits, the recognition and guarantee of human, land, property and other rights, and where title has validly been granted elsewhere compensation will be negotiated.

To withstand challenge internationally, an agreement between the Commonwealth and Aboriginal people embodying such an exchange must be clearly an act of self-determination by those people or their legitimate agents. In the absence of such an act, the continued exercise of sovereignty by the Crown in Australia will be tainted by the aggression by which it was originally achieved and consequently increasingly exposed to international judgment and possibly sanctions. The imposition of sanctions against South Africa because of its racial discrimination policies and against China because of its breaches of human rights must be a salutary warning to nation states including Australia.

The concept of the nation state is in the process of radical change, and a realistic assessment of the world would suggest the wisdom of limiting power, however nominally sovereign, within the confines of natural justice to those affected.



## **A lasting agenda**

Of course, Aboriginal Australians also have a clear interest in such an exchange if by it they achieve the 'composition' with white society which, according to [the late Australian anthropologist] WEH Stanner has been their agenda since first it became clear that the invaders were here to stay and that Aborigines lacked the 'fire-power' effectively to prevent them from staying.

In Stanner's judgment, the composition they sought and seek is one which preserves their access to the land and a fair share of its resources, allows them to live in the manner they choose and guarantees them the right and capacity to maintain and develop their traditional law, religion and culture.

Such a composition would, I believe, be seen by many Australians, white as well as black, as preferable to the continuance of the state of uncertainty, the barely suppressed sense of grievance among Aboriginal people, and the shame and sense of benefiting from injustices which poisons white Australians' self-esteem.

Sovereignty is clearly important but its significance is limited by international realities. Equally clearly it is divisible and capable of modification by agreement following negotiations leading to an act of self-determination.

The Mabo judgment provides an opportunity to negotiate such an agreement between the Crown in the Commonwealth and the Aboriginal people and their legitimate agents.

The Aboriginal Peace Plan (a good and temperate document) recently published in the *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* (June 1993) is

evidence of a strong desire among Aboriginal leaders for such negotiation. Such an agreement would be capable of satisfying the need of white Australian society for legitimacy of its presence and of the Aboriginal society for the composition it has sought, while providing both with confidence that its constitution and practice divides the right and the power to govern fairly. Such an agreement would be compatible with a social and economic climate as certain and secure for enterprise as any in the Western world.

### ***An end to confrontation***

For such an agreement to be reached requires that the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth government put an end to confrontation and to the practice of specious consultation, and work with Aborigines and their organisations to establish procedures for negotiation.

I have stated as a requirement that the negotiations should be between the Crown in the Commonwealth and the nominees of the Aboriginal people. This is a matter in which state governments should have no direct role. The division of sovereignty cannot be different from state to state.

If international judgment on the status of Aborigines, for instance in Western Australia, is adverse, it is the Commonwealth which will be held accountable and the burden of international shame and the penalties of sanction will fall on the residents and enterprises in all states.

As the negotiating parties, it will be for the Commonwealth and Aboriginal people to take account of the special interests of the states and of aspects of the private sector. For this, Aboriginal



people need desperately at least a provisional structure to organise their negotiations. They should be financed by the Commonwealth to revive the Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations to which any Aboriginal-controlled organisation could send a delegate.

Such procedures will require significant change in the present practices of the Commonwealth Government. The switch from consultation to negotiation calls for a fundamental change of heart: the practice of selecting individual Aboriginal people and isolating them from the communities and organisations from which they come by co-opting them into the black bureaucracy or into other positions of apparent influence rewarded by status, titles and salaries must give way to a willingness to deal openly with Aboriginal leaders acting as delegates of and accountable to Aboriginal-controlled organisations.

The achievement of such a change of heart and of practice would be greatly facilitated if the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission structures were based more closely on the 'bottom upwards' federalism which seems characteristic of Aboriginal structure for joint action.

It is noteworthy that several regional councils have managed to have as their councillors the chairmen or senior office-bearers of the more important Aboriginal-controlled services and other managerial organisations. They then have the opportunity to debate with members of those organisations issues on the agenda of the regional councils and to report back about its proceedings. It is, I believe, in such councils that the most effective work is being done. If the regional councils were effectively delegates of and accountable to their regionally-based organisations, in turn accountable to the members of their communities, under the

umbrella of a commission similarly based on and accountable to the regional councils, there would be a structure familiar to Aboriginal practice.

This would provide both an automatic channel of communication upwards and downwards and an effective sounding board for Aboriginal response to negotiations in progress.

### ***Aboriginal career paths***

Such a structure would also provide an Aboriginal career path for potential and emerging leaders which would not isolate them from their communities and groups and expose them to overwhelming alien influences. The draining off of black leaders into the bureaucracy of ATSIC and of government generally has had a debilitating and corrupting effect both on individuals and on the capacity of Aboriginal society to maintain and develop its autonomous culture.

Aboriginal people within the various regions and their organisations should be given the opportunity and the resources to explore the scope and potential of such a 'bottom upwards' form of democracy. If that opportunity were extended to enable the ATSIC regional councils to recruit a bureaucracy of their own choice, the first step would have been made and the current distrust among Aboriginal people of ATSIC's present bureaucracy as simply an instrument of a white government could begin to change. Aboriginal people would therefore be able to explore and negotiate with the Commonwealth about the means to self-determination in this post-Mabo period.



Only an agreement freely negotiated between equals will be adequate to qualify internationally as an act of self-determination. Until such an act is achieved, the task begun in the Mabo case will be unfinished.

This bibliography presents a selection of the major publications, newspaper articles and some public lectures and addresses written by Dr HC Coombs on issues concerning Aboriginal Australians. The listing covers the period commencing 1977 - the year prior to the publication of *Kuliner: Listening to Aboriginal Australians* - to 1993. The bibliography is not comprehensive, a great number of smaller unpublished papers, public lectures and official reports have not been included. The majority of references listed below are held by the library of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.

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1977. *The Quality of Life and its Assessment*. CRPS Working Paper No.2. Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University.

Only the agreement to negotiate between equals will be adequate to putting Aboriginality at the centre of all decision-making. Until such an act is achieved, the task begun in the Mabo case will be unfinished. This would provide both an automatic channel for upward and downward movements and an effective means of broadening Aboriginal response to negotiations in progress.

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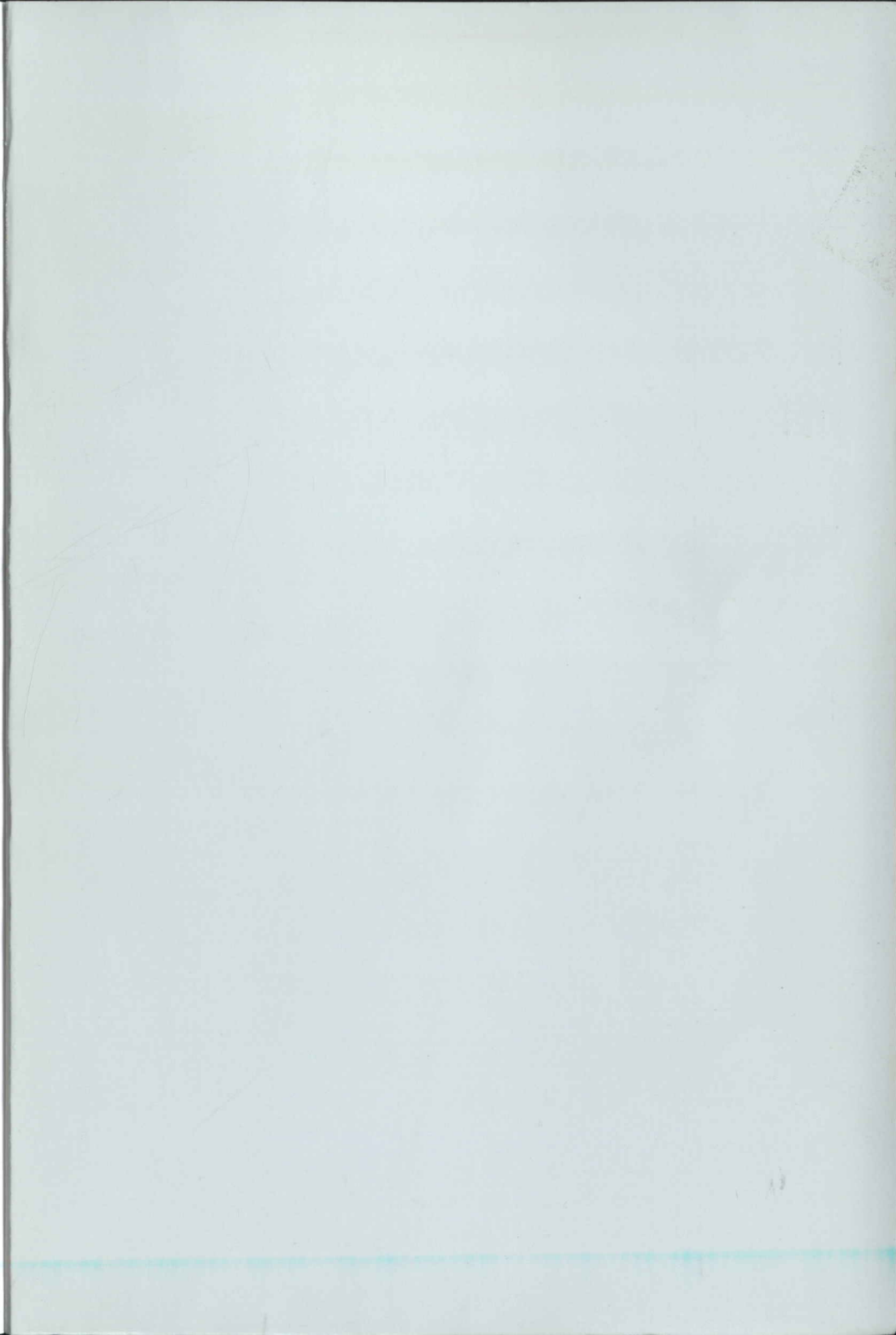
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In recent years Dr H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs has worked, spoken and written eloquently on the economics of resource use, the environment, contemporary economic trends, national identity, and strategies for ongoing Aboriginal self-determination and autonomy. In late 1991, the Australian Business Monthly invited Dr Coombs to write a series of short articles on these matters of importance to Australia. Together these articles now form a lively book which makes readily accessible his recent ideas on these long-standing concerns. Written with conviction and insight, *Shame On Us!* is a passionate plea for a just Australian society, from one of Australia's most influential and eloquent advocates.

*'At a time when governments around the world are bulldozing the public service ... or abandoning the social responsibilities they implemented, it's time to look again at the life of Nugget Coombs so we can see what values the neo-Cons are so joyfully destroying, what skills they seem determined to lose. Nugget has never walked away from a fight. Now 90, he still crusades against ever-mounting odds. ... His dignity and decency is marvellous to behold.'*

Phillip Adams

After a long and distinguished career of public service, Dr H.C. Coombs remains a Visiting Fellow of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (Canberra) and the North Australian Research Unit (Darwin) at the Australian National University. A former Governor of the Reserve Bank and a Chancellor of the Australian National University, he has also been Chairman of the Australian Council for Aboriginal Affairs, The Australia Council and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Upon 'retirement' he wrote *Aboriginal Autonomy* (1994), *The Return of Sea*, *Trial Balance* (1981), *Kulinma* (1978) and a number of reports.

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