

Indigenous intervention: we need action over mourning

OPINION

By Anthony Dillon

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Indigenous leaders have expressed their anger over the Stronger Futures legislation. They have even declared a day of mourning to show how much they oppose the continuation of an intervention to address the problems facing many Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

So why is it that some Aboriginal leaders are angry and are in mourning?

Could it be that they are angry because they themselves have done very little in the past to prevent the problems we hear about today and have heard about for many years? Could it be that criticising a government initiative avoids having to deal with the tough problems that underlie what is currently happening in these communities?

For the past couple of weeks, we have read stories about the death of an Aboriginal man from a remote community, where it would seem that alcohol was a significant contributor to his death.

There is nothing new about the problems of alcohol in these communities. Obviously, an emergency response of some kind is needed. And whether or not the Stronger Futures response is the best one needs to be openly discussed and debated.

For those who believe the conspiracy theories that the intervention is just a government land grab, and that it is racist, I suggest that firstly, you go and live in some of these communities for a month and experience first-hand what is happening and decide for yourself if you think that the problems are significant enough to warrant the latest action taken by the government.

Secondly, if the intervention is racist, then state clearly what makes it racist rather than issuing the vague cries of 'it violates our sovereignty'. Far too often, opponents of the intervention have only used emotive terms like 'racism', 'paternalism', 'genocide' and 'assimilation' to describe the intervention, but have failed to justify the use of such terms by offering examples or a reasoned argument.

Most would agree that action is needed, but the usual response offered by the Politically Correct brigade of 'let the elders take care of it' or 'more consultation' is simply not working.

In these communities, where there are very few jobs (if any) and welfare is a way of life, we should not be surprised that there is dysfunction. We do not have an Aboriginal problem; we have a people problem.

A solution will mean bringing jobs to the people, or moving the people to where the jobs are. The first option is difficult and often impractical, while the second option is unpopular and resisted by the PC brigade who want to keep Aboriginal people in these communities separate from the rest of Australia, all in the name of promoting and preserving a mythical traditional Aboriginal culture.

It is time to leave the fairy tale behind and move on. These people are Australian citizens, and therefore are entitled to the same opportunities and rights as all Australians.

A major barrier hindering efforts to address these problems is the continued application of politically correct rhetoric that assumes Aboriginal people in these communities are so vastly different to other Australians that they require highly specialised (the politically correct description here is 'culturally appropriate') services to address the needs of the people.

Regardless of one's race or cultural identity, all people have the same underlying needs, which, if not met, result in major problems, like the ones we so often read about in these communities.

Instead of a day of mourning, let's have a year of action where the focus is on matching people with jobs (and relocating if necessary), promoting the importance of education, strong regulation of alcohol use, and the removal of children from immediate danger.

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