

Session 10

Paternalism Revisited - Intervention in the Northern Territory

Convener:

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RATIONALE

On 21 June 2007 Prime Minister Howard and his Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs announced an 'emergency intervention' into the northern territory. The intervention came following a report on child sexual abuse commissioned by the Northern Territory government, and another by the Cape York Institute recommending radical reform to the welfare system as it affects Aboriginal people. A raft of complex legislation to quarantine welfare payments (removing CDEP employment and forcing large numbers of people on to welfare) and to take control of Aboriginal land was introduced in Parliament on August 7th. It passed with the support of the opposition on the same day. A one-day Senate Inquiry took place on August 10th. The papers in this session examine whether the process of the intervention has been appropriate, and whether the outcomes will be positive or detrimental for the communities that it affects.

Session comprises three presentations, and is to be followed by a round-table discussion:

1. Leaching the poison – the importance of process and partnership in working with Yolngu

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of Prime Minister Howard's announcement of a 'national emergency' in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, this paper brings a reminder of the need to focus on process and partnerships in working with Aboriginal people. Increasingly, calls for accountability from governments are framed in terms of financial obligations or in terms of law and order. These approaches are disrespectful of our own ideas and processes. It does not

recognise or respect that there is capacity in Yolngu (Aboriginal people from northeast Arnhem Land) communities that can exercise their own accountabilities. Therefore, these accountability structures are often one-way, the balance is missing. We are writing this paper to share our concerns about right process in working with Yolngu and to raise some discussion about how to be more accountable to us. This paper draws on powerful Yolngu metaphors, like leaching the poison from Cycad nuts, to share our concerns about the importance of process and partnerships in working with Yolngu. It considers issues of governance structures and recognises the structures and processes Yolngu people use to ensure accountability to their communities. Like the cycad nuts that have poison within the flesh, so has this government intervention. Leach the poison out, let it be cleansed.

2. The twelfth measure will cut deepest – The multiple effects of abolishing CDEP

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ABSTRACT

The abolition of CDEP in the NT on 23 July 2007 was the twelfth measure of the Howard government's NT emergency legislation announced a month after the other eleven. This measure will undermine the multiple goals of the CDEP scheme: community development, employment creation, income support and enterprise development and has the potential to undermine significant economic progress made in extremely difficult circumstances. This paper will examine the why such bad policy that will shift many Indigenous people from work to welfare and that could destroy robust Indigenous organisations was made; some of the consequences of this decision; and what might be done to reverse it.

3. Reporting from the frontline: The legal, practical and social consequences of the takeover of Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory

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ABSTRACT

The take over of Northern Territory Aboriginal communities has suspended rights that all other Australians enjoy, rights guaranteed by international law. The government's radical programme has been justified as an urgent response to an emergency situation. This presentation questions whether the suspension of rights is justified, whether the solutions proposed will be effective, and whether the necessary development of Aboriginal communities demanded for decades could be achieved with more appropriate methods. Now more than four months into the intervention process this paper presents an interim report card from the perspective of those most affected, the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.

NB THIS SESSION WILL BE FOLLOWED BY SESSION 13

Round Table discussion on the Northern Territory Intervention