

"Justice denied"



By
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My first contact with the Treaty Committee was in answer to Dr Coombs' search for someone to do the mundane tasks of ordering the finances, creating an office and keeping the records of the Committee. A person of high ability in mundane tasks, I suggested I could be useful. (There didn't appear to be too many others offering.)

I had a great deal in common with the vast majority of other white Australians. I knew little about Aborigines and less about a 'Treaty'. But I began to learn. I learnt that the role of the Committee was to publicise the perception of a problem and to educate the community towards the resolution of that problem.

Basic to the nature of our society is a need for the formal recognition of relationships between individuals and groups. We seem to be inherently unable to accept a moral position without its ratification by law or code. While superficially a Treaty would be a mechanism to give justice to Aborigines, it always seemed to me that I, and my ilk, would be the greatest beneficiaries. Aborigines have a clear sense of their cause and their relationship to and with this country. It is we who flounder, patronising or exploitive, unprepared to commit ourselves to a relationship with the Aboriginal people. We lack the directive of law or history to bind us to this country.

I have learnt about loss. I have been able to stand before an ochre painted wall in Central Queensland and realise that what I saw had been made meaningless for me by sheer pig ignorance. How easy it would have been to be a participant of the mind rather than an observer on tour in the country where I was born.

I have learnt about justice denied. Without a clear definition of purpose, my Australia will continue to avoid facing up to the fact that we have denied human rights and often humanity itself to the Aboriginal people. I have seen the alacrity with which we will support our actions by legal precedents which excuse the past, and which will forever be used, unless we are prepared to join in a new foundation.

I have learnt that a group of people prepared to work for a cause can change the order of things. The support given to the Treaty Committee has surpassed our expectations. We may be castigated for "preaching to the converted", but I believe each of those "converted", you in fact, and certainly me, has achieved a deeper understanding; for some a move from sympathy to commitment; for others a focus for that commitment.

An Aboriginal Treaty is not a *panacea*. Its creation will lead us all into areas of painful self-examination. But it will be something that we have done for ourselves, by ourselves. The Committee may be disbanding but I hope the major enterprise is just beginning.

Aboriginal Treaty Committee Papers

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