

Racist ABC eager for us to live in misery, says Noel Pearson



Noel Pearson with Paul Keating in Sydney yesterday. Picture: Hollie Adams

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- CAROLINE OVERINGTON

Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson has described the ABC as a fundamentally racist organisation, content to see Aboriginal people languish in poverty in order to wallow in hand-wringing reports of misery, incarceration and - tragedy.

Mr Pearson's searing assessment came at the launch of Troy Bramston's biography of Paul Keating, who made true reconciliation with the Aboriginal people, via Mabo and native title legislation a cornerstone of his prime ministership.

Mr Pearson said many of Mr Keating's most promising reforms in the arena of indigenous affairs had been "wrecked by ignorant ministers and malign bureaucrats, aided and abetted by the media, not least the country's miserable, racist, national broadcaster". The ABC was, he said, "a spittoon's worth of perverse people willing the wretched to fail".

“They need blacks to remain alienated and incarcerated, leading short lives of grief and tribulation because if it were not so, against whom would they - direct their soft bigotry of low expectations?” he said.

“About whom could they report of misery and bleeding tragedy?” He said that between the ABC on the Left and *Quadrant* on the Right lies “the common ground of mutual racism”.

He praised Mr Keating’s staunch advocacy for the Aboriginal people, based on true recognition and empowerment, even as Mr Keating’s opponent “sought to cast us as a black albatross around his electoral throat”.

He said Mr Keating’s commitment never wavered “because it was the right thing for the nation”.

In a statement, an ABC spokesman denied the claims, saying the national broadcaster “provides more coverage of indigenous issues and has a broader indigenous staffing profile than any other Australian media outlet”.

“It has given an extended platform and broad audiences to a range of indigenous commentators including Noel Pearson, Josephine Cashman (and) Marcia Langton,” he said.

The statement acknowledged the ABC’s willingness to “canvass issues like welfare dependency, alcohol abuse and violence against women” but said the ABC “covers the everyday experiences of indigenous communities and provides a range of programs to give voices to indigenous Australians and showcase their achievements”.

The statement also cited “award-winning series *Redfern Now* and *Gods of Wheat Street* and the recent hiring of journalist Stan Grant, whom Mr Pearson has described as ‘speaking for black Australia’.”

Mr Pearson praised Bramston’s biography, *Paul Keating: The Big Picture Leader*, and its subject, as well as Mr Keating’s oratorical majesty, as evidenced by his Redfern speech, and the ode to the Unknown Soldier, which is widely regarded as one of Australia’s greatest speeches.

The book includes Mr Keating’s pitch for the prime ministership, delivered in an interview with the journalist Laurie Oakes in 1991.

“I can provide better government in terms of direction, strategy, esprit de corps, enthusiasm,” Mr Keating said, adding: “And, dare I say it, where necessary, a touch of excitement.”

“Who could resist a case so put?” said Mr Pearson. “Where does one enlist?”

Mr Pearson noted that Mr Keating “came for Bob Hawke from the front. Vicious, yes. Vengeful, yes. Merciless, yes. But treacherous, no.”

Bramston’s biography is not authorised, but Mr Keating agreed to assist, if only in fruity terms: “Don’t f..k it up.”

In launching the book, Mr Keating said he was as a rule wary of biographers because “I’ve had the odd dud”.

He wouldn’t write his autobiography because, he said, “if you’re good enough, people will write about you”, but he enjoyed “standing back professionally” to watch Bramston’s obsession unfold.

Bramston’s book was unveiled at Gilbert + Tobin’s offices at Sydney’s Barangaroo — appropriate, since Mr Keating is today regarded as the father of the development (he bullied no fewer than six NSW premiers in order to save the waterfront enclave for the people).

Bramston recalled some of Mr Keating’s famous zingers, such as when he described Alexander Downer as “the Christmas turkey” and said of John Hewson: “He’s a shiver looking for a spine to run up.”

Mr Keating urged Mr Pearson into politics, saying: “I hope Noel plays a greater role in leadership than he has to date. Our country likes leadership of this kind.”

But, he said: “Noel has to learn one thing: you have to make commitments.”

Mr Keating also thanked his partner, Julieanne Newbould, for “her love and support”.

And then, as he stepped down from the lectern, he was instantly mobbed.