

## Time to get off the menu

I've been a fighter for justice for Aboriginal people all my life, and while I have been fighting a big personal battle against blood cancer this past 12 months I have had more time than I would have liked to reflect on the current situation for Aboriginal people in Australia. And I don't like what I see and hear.

I was not surprised at the outcome of the last election. Shorten was not the flavour of the month and should not have led Labor. (Is Albanese any better?) But why worry about the election result? Neither major party has any real interest in Aboriginal people. It is not at the heart of their policies for the country, states or territories.

When you look at Facebook you read all the things that are wrong; everybody has an opinion but no one offers a solution. It's depressing as I think we are smarter than that. It's too easy to be an armchair activist, liking or not liking posts on your Facebook or Twitter feed.

I'm going to make a suggestion. You may agree or disagree and that's up to you, but we need to have this discussion so I encourage you to respond.

It's time to move forward! No Liberal/National coalition or Labor Party is going to do for us what we need to be done, or give us the recognition that is rightly ours, or a voice in Parliament, or truth in reconciliation as First Nations peoples and Traditional Owners.

I am not going to go through all of the statistical data that affect us as individuals, our community, our families and our future because we know it all. We live it and feel it.

The removal of our children, the catastrophic suicide rate, the homelessness and incarceration, the poor health outcomes and many more issues you know of that affect us every day of our lives. The stats are there in the public domain for all to see.

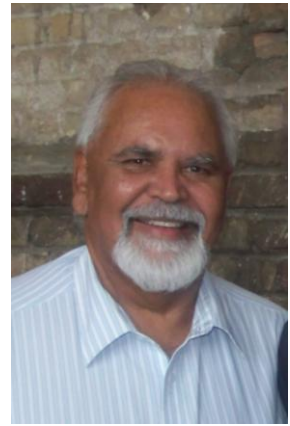
When I was told National Congress had closed its doors it was suggested to me that we need another Peak Body. I immediately responded with "No we don't, what we need is one united Aboriginal political body, established in each state and territory."

Of course there will be a lot of debate: "Let's do it." "Can it be done?" "No it can't be done."

I wouldn't make a suggestion like this if I thought it couldn't.

It was once said to me many years ago that if you're not at the table you're the menu and this is what we've been since invasion - the menu.

To have a voice in the political arena we need to create an Aboriginal political party to run *against* the major parties – and to win seats. This is the only way that we can have a true voice at the table without having to sell ourselves out and bow down and tow some party line.



Some of you will say that there aren't enough Aboriginal people to vote our candidates in. To those of you I would say there are millions of non-Aboriginal Australians who are disillusioned with the chaos, self-interest and downright cruelty of mainstream Australian politics today. Millions who would get behind a positive First Nations political party that has the best interests of the people at heart.

Just take a look at the May 2019 Federal election. It was the lowest voter turnout on record since compulsory voting – up to 1.5 million people on the roll didn't vote – many of them young people. And out of those who did vote, there were 579,160 informal votes! That makes in total more than 2 million people. And then of course there are those who aren't even on the electoral roll, around 490,000.

And what about our fellow Australians tortured and demonised for being unemployed? Around 3 million Australians are job seekers and users of Centrelink, mercilessly vilified for being in need, unable to gain employment that only exists in the minds of our rich and privileged political classes. A total disgrace. Where are their voices?

Let's not forget our youth who are mocked by those in power for their concern about the environment, and the old, who are viewed as past their use-by date unless they are wealthy.

What does all this tell you?

We need to move forward - and when I say "we" I mean not only Aboriginal Australia, but the marginalised, the excluded, the voiceless, the powerless, the poor and the downtrodden right across the country, the "ordinary" Australian.

Unity is strength. We all pay lip service to this but that's about as far as it goes. Our government relies on "divide and conquer" and it's working very well. Different groups of people are turning on each other rather than getting together to fight the common enemy of greed and lies and self-interest that dominates our political parties and country. This is just what they want, to divert people from the real issues.

The discussion needs to start. And then it needs to continue until it bears fruit.

This may not be in my lifetime, but there is a wealth of talented and committed people who can make this vision a reality. If we don't, then the future for all our children and our children's children is pretty bleak.

So let's start talking.

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