



"Solidarity" by Barbara Shaw

INTERVENTION ROLLBACK ACTION GROUP

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SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO THE PROTECTION AND DETENTION OF CHILDREN IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

IRAG (Intervention Rollback Action Group) was formed in 2007 after the announcement of the Northern Territory Intervention (changed to Stronger Futures in 2012). This legislation has continued despite many reports, enquiries and recommendations regarding the ineffectiveness of these laws.

The devastating effects have compounded over the years and include:-

- Disempowerment of communities and undermining of local autonomy by seizure of community assets, takeover of community organisations and programmes, and installation of government business managers in all 'prescribed areas';
- Demonizing of Aboriginal men with the erroneous accusations of child abuse and sexual exploitation throughout the Northern Territory, never proved but never discounted and apologized for - the trauma continues to this day. These negative connotations have had a flow-on effect across the country.
- Increased and more intense policing of people living in 'Prescribed Communities' which also includes town camps. Racial profiling on the streets and at liquor outlets in regional centres.
- Removal of children from families and culture at an ever-increasing rate. Often children are wrongly removed based on the dominant culture's value judgements. Poverty and lack of cultural awareness or understanding plays a large factor in the decisions leading to these removals.
- Increasing rates of suicide and self-harm, particularly amongst young people.
- Huge increase in incarceration rates of Aboriginal people, often for minor offences such as non-payment of traffic fines. More Aboriginal women are now being imprisoned than ever before.

Considered Opinion

It is our view, from our interactions with Aboriginal people, governments, non-government organisations and the general community over the ten years of the Northern Territory Intervention, that the profound negative impacts of this racist legislation have had devastating effects on many of the Prescribed Area communities and have led to loss of autonomy, social dysfunction, disharmony and family breakdown.

Aboriginal management of community programmes, organisations and infrastructure was undermined or disregarded. Shortly after the commencement of the Intervention the Northern Territory Government introduced the shire system of local government which abolished local councils and centralized council business, locating over-arching management hundreds of kilometres away from most communities, leading to further loss of autonomy and less local input into community management. The NT Government's scrapping of the bilingual education programme led to disillusionment at the education system and lack of interest in the schools by many students and parents.

Scrapping of the Community Development Employment Project took away a valuable source of local employment, and shire operations saw many jobs being carried out by contractors. The current Community Development Program now sees people obliged to work for below award wages in order to receive their social security entitlements and being harshly fined for non-compliance.

Income management (initially the Basics Card, now the Indue Card) restricted people's capacity to shop independently or to have choice about where they spent their money. Life was made difficult with limitations on buying power and cash in communities that share resources as a means of survival. Some people are reported to like income management but there are other means of providing protection or support for people who are vulnerable or who request such assistance. The stated purpose of income management, to help people budget, has not been matched by the results. The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, in its review of the Stronger Futures laws, has recommended that income management be on a voluntary basis: this report has been ignored.

Many people moved to larger centres to access shopping venues, medical treatment and social activity. Life in these centres is often harder and tensions increase leading to friction between community members and family violence. Outlets for youth energy and activity are limited in the towns and lead to what is perceived as unacceptable behavior and sometimes minor crime. Discrimination is a large factor in creating rebellious behavior.

Recommendations

Following is a statement from the Stand Up 2917 Conference recently held in Mparntwe-Alice Springs. The conference was attended by many people from Central Australian communities as well as Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra and Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA and others from further north.

STATEMENT FROM THE STAND UP 2017 CONFERENCE
MPARNTWE-ALICE SPRINGS 26th JUNE 2017

Rosalie Kunoth-Monks: ***“You better believe it, when the Intervention first hit in 2007 community councils were decimated.”***

Matthew Ryan: ***“Trying to get the government to listen to us, is like a brick wall.”***

Elaine Peckham: ***“When the Intervention came they took away services from homelands. No health services. I had to move back to town. I didn’t want to.”***

Yarrentye Arltere (Larapinta Valley) Town Camp: ***“Ten years too long. Ten years of hardship, neglect and broken promises. We want Aboriginal control for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people. Apmereke Tweye and Kwertengwerle: Traditional owners and custodians: our Law, our Way.”***

We need to keep our culture strong.
We need to be in control of decision making.
We want self-determination.

After ten years the Intervention has met none of its objectives.
There are more people in jail, more children being taken away, there is more unemployment.

THE STAND UP 2017 CONFERENCE MAKES THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS AND
CALLOUTS

REPEAL RACIST INTERVENTION LAWS

Racist laws introduced through the Intervention have created apartheid and are still with us. Repeal the Stronger Futures laws. Repeal changes to social security law that allow for control over our money. End the ban on consideration of customary law in bail and sentencing. Bring back the permit system.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

Ngarla Kunoth Monks: ***“We have our own structures, our voices have been put down and oppressed.”***

The conference calls for restoring community councils and transferring assets back to the communities from the shires. **This is what will improve peoples’ lives.**

Town camps want more houses, more parks, childcare at the community centres, and **control of their own money. There needs to be compensation for town camps. It’s time to pay the rent.**

HOMELANDS

Veronica and Pamela Lynch: ***“Cultural and land management is real work.”***

Sharon Anderson: ***“Give us back ownership of our lands, so we can benefit our own people through our law and culture.”***

We need to create job opportunities on our homelands. We want to manage our own affairs through our own governance.

HOUSING

Barbara Shaw: *"They took over community living areas and Aboriginal community housing rights."*

We can't be healthy without proper housing as our foundation. We want to make decisions about our own housing. We want to have community control over our housing. We desperately need more houses on all communities and homelands.

EDUCATION

Valerie Paterson: *"**We believe that our children learning in their first language are more confident in themselves and learn more efficiently. We have seen this with our own eyes. We know how to teach our children both ways too.**"*

Sylvia Neale: *"**One hour a day to teach their language, it's not enough**"*

The government must promote bilingual education, and schooling in first languages. Stop punishing parents with fines and Centrelink breaches.

PRISON

Rosalie Kunoth Monks: *"**What I call for is action line, they are our children.**"*

Dylan Voller: *"**If the government wants to help us they should come down to our communities and elders and see what they have to say.**"*

There are many alternatives and improvements that could be made to the prison system. Communities can be supported to have more contact in prison and instead of prison, we need more healing spaces, Bush Mob is good.

The conference believes that children should not be transferred away from Alice Springs to Darwin. We also believe that youth prisons are not helpful, and that Don Dale needs to be closed.

We call for the closure of youth prisons, and a national day of action when the Royal Commission into Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory releases their final report.

JOBS

People used to have jobs in their communities – we need a new jobs program to bring this back. Now on CDP people are starving and being evicted from their houses. We need community control and ownership of community assets. Everyone who works needs at least the minimum wage. Real jobs must receive real wages and real conditions. We need a national movement. No more CDP. We support the First Nations Workers Alliance started by the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

INCOME MANAGEMENT

There is no evidence that compulsory income management works.

Vanessa Poulson: *"**I have learnt to live with basics card now but really would like to have control of my own money.**"*

Scrap compulsory income management

STOLEN GENERATIONS

It keeps going, and getting worse. With the money it takes to look after a stolen kid, communities could fix their problems themselves. Stop stealing our kids. Urgently bring back the many hundreds of children taken through the Intervention. We are going to set up a GMAR group here. (Grandmothers Against Removals). Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA can be contacted with names of stolen children and has pledged to fight to bring them home.

TREATY

Rev Dr Djinyini Gondarra OAM: ***“Australia is the only Commonwealth country in the world that has never entered into negotiations to establish a treaty. There needs to be diplomatic dialogue between the Australian governments and the First Nations. No more kissing the government’s shoes.”***

There must be recognition of our sovereignty which has never been ceded, and which has been undermined by the Intervention. Our law must be recognised by the Westminster system. The governments must stop creating more policy and measures for Aboriginal people without consultation.

Lift the ban on customary law.

We are ready for Makarrata.

Treaty now!

WE STAND TOGETHER

The calls are clear. People want youth prisons to be closed and more healing spaces. They want children to remain with families. They want control of their lives which includes their land and their way of being. Australia in 2009 endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is now time adhere to all the clauses in this Declaration and to repeal the damaging and racist Stronger Futures legislation which has led to increased poverty, more children being removed from families, more incarceration, more substance abuse and more trauma.

Submitted by Marlene Hodder

On behalf of the Intervention Rollback Action Group

Mparntwe-Alice Springs

30th July 2017.