

Subject: Your Response to Howard's "national emergency"

Dear Mr Rudd

It is with extreme alarm that I heard you express support for Prime Minister Howard's proposals to take over Indigenous communities in NT, in his averred concern over Indigenous child sexual abuse.

First, the issue has been around for decades; and people such as I warned about it at least 20 years ago. At the time when I stated it at a public meeting in Sydney, I was vilified by the media and politicians as alarmist, and being hyperbolic; others were simply ignored.

For Howard to now characterise this issue as a "national emergency" is nothing more than a political stunt, just at the time when he is facing an uncomfortable election. He needs to divert attention from some of the problems that are raising their very ugly heads within the Liberal Party, not to mention his poverty of thinking on any social issue whatsoever.

But apart from that, the real test of his concerns about Indigenous (or any other) kids being subject to abuse at all and any levels can be more accurately assessed by his previous political stunts, the "Tampa" affair, Children Overboard, the deportation of children born of Refugees in Australian Detention Centres. The man is not only a hypocrite, he is evil (by their deeds shall we know them - as you would know, Mr Rudd, from your Bible).

I would have expected that you'd note it was Howard, who shortly after assuming the office of PM, embarked on a protracted vicious propaganda program of demonising Indigenous Australians, which enabled him to put a fire bomb through Indigenous programs, pretty much with impunity, and cut \$400M from Indigenous Health - never to be restored (by him, at least). This is the PM who is responsible for the virtual demolition of programs which were designed to overcome the very problems which breed child sexual abuse, which cannot be crudely reduced to a law-and-order issue.

I would also have expected you to note Howard's agenda to push the development of the nuclear industry to which uranium is fundamental. And guess what? Uranium just happens to be present throughout the NT, and especially in Aboriginal Lands - just waiting for Howard's mates to exploit it, as soon as he gets rid of the permit system, takes control of the communities, and cuts more moneys from them - thus ensuring their inability to mount any sort of resistance to any nefarious activities he might wish to get up in their homelands.

Far from Howard attempting to institute measures to ensure that Indigenous Australians will indeed get to share a place in the sun with the likes of Howard's wealthy, privileged, mates, he, like so many of his ultra-conservative think-alikes, is once again engaging in the blame game. And he's about to fix it, jack-boot fashion by cutting services in savagely punitive fashion, and metaphorically sending these wrongdoers (Indigenous parents) to ... well ... Hell, really - compounding the present sufferings of the little children, along with all other

members of their communities.

Anyone who ever thought that we'd build a Civil Society in this country must surely have had the blinkers blasted off their faces by this week's pronouncements by this vicious overlord.

That you, Mr Rudd, would put your name to Howard's proposals is a serious indictment of your leadership, not to mention that it signifies an alarming lack of judgment.

While it is expected that you would agree that Indigenous child sex abuse is shocking (by the way, is it any worse than child sex abuse which is endemic in Western society?), it is quite another thing for you to agree to Howard's raft of proposals for dealing with the issue in NT Indigenous Communities, which are punitive, destructive, and frankly racist.

In order to distinguish yourself as a true alternative Leader of the people of Australia (that is, including Indigenous Australians) you need to clarify issues for action, such as: Differentiating between Howard's land grab of Indigenous communities and the issue of child abuse; Making a distinction between Howard's political & economic agenda, and the real crisis of child abuse in communities; Removal of permits and the Commonwealth's control of the territory would enable Howard to place control of the mineral resources on Aboriginal lands into private hands; That solutions to the crisis of child abuse have been highlighted in a raft of domestic and international texts which do not promote deployment of police and the military as the frontline response: it requires a health, education, human services and housing response; That the Commonwealth has had the ability for decades to address this issue and has not had the political will. Let us be clear that Howard and Brough (not to mention Noel Pearson and Sue Gordon) are not the "Great White Hopes" for Aboriginal Communities; Mr Rudd, you can have access to any number of people within the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities who would be more than willing to assist you in establishing a distinguishing platform with the aim of building a Civil Society, which would include happy, healthy Indigenous communities.

There are professional Aboriginal women who have dedicated themselves to this field for some 40 years. It is not the moral outrage of one Aboriginal male such as Noel Pearson. I refer you to Naomi Mayers at the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service, Gracelyn Smallwood from Queensland who has worked with the World Health Organisation and has been vocal on this a issue for years, and Boni Robertson. These women are your reference points. In fact you have within the Labor party, Ms Linda Burney who can clarify for you what and who needs to be considered in your response, so that your leadership position reflects integrity.

I look forward to hearing you outline a more considered policy response to the NT situation, and particularly to John Howard's promotion of further violence and disempowerment in Indigenous communities, and his continuing demonisation of the people.

Pat O'Shane, AM, LL.M