

Address to the CIS Consilium

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1 Introductory greetings and thanks

It is of course my privilege to have been invited by the Centre for Independent Studies to speak at the opening of this Consilium.

2 The Australian Right are not extreme social libertarians

The aim of the CIS is to 'engage in support of a free enterprise economy and a free society under limited government.' This mission statement could be interpreted in an extreme libertarian direction, economically and socially.

But the majority of the supporters of free enterprise in Australia, including our federal Government and our hosts, are not extreme libertarians. Particularly, there is a strong sense of social responsibility including an anti-libertarian rejection of substance abuse, which as an Aboriginal Australian, I have come to appreciate.

3 The Australian Right concentrates on the economy as the main road to progress and is more passive in social policy

However, the main objective of our federal Government is economic reform. Passion, energy and political skill are expended in tax reform, industrial relations reform and so on.

This is understandable. Non-Aboriginal Australia is largely socially functional and productive. From this perspective, it is logical to launch the strategic offensive on the economic front, in order to secure growth, which is a prerequisite for social improvement.

The political Right does not expect to make a breakthrough in the struggle for a better society on the social policy front. Whilst parts of the Left have attempted this strategy, the aim of the Australian Right's limited operations on the social policy frontline is to liberate resources and people for the decisive battleground, the economy. On the social front, the strategy of the Coalition parties is predominantly defensive: to hold the forces of chaos at bay.

4 As an Aboriginal Australian, I have a different perspective

I understand this prioritisation. Still, as an Aboriginal Australian, I have a different perspective, because we live in an inferno of social disintegration and in many places we suffer not from slow economic growth, but from the absence of a real economy altogether. As you know, I have been talking for many years about how negligence in the areas of passive welfare and the epidemic spread of addiction are destroying us. Not that we are dying out; our numbers are increasing, but what a miserable fate awaits our children!

There is no point in me talking to you about Australian economic reform, since I have no original viewpoints that would be of interest to the participants at this Consilium. I will not talk about the economic development that we are trying to facilitate within Cape York Partnerships. And it is not necessary for me to talk about welfare reform, because the federal and Queensland Governments are already working with us in the right direction. I will talk to you about substance abuse.

5 The division between the nominal Right and the nominal Left is not useful for Aboriginal Australians

First I want to give you a different perspective on the Australian political landscape from an Aboriginal point of view.

In parliament, we have the nominal Left and the nominal Right, the party machines. The Aboriginal political movement in a very broad sense has been an ally of the nominal Left.

There are real differences between the two sides, but this division is currently not useful for us Aboriginal people. There is no question of critical importance to us that follows this divide.

6 The socially responsible factions in the Left and the Right should be Aboriginal people's allies

Instead of thinking that we have to choose sides, Aboriginal people should recognise that there is a socially responsible 'faction' in both the official Right and the official Left.

The 'party' that we should seek support from is the combined forces of socially insightful politicians in both camps. Those who have the right policies for fighting social disintegration who are truly progressive.

7 The socially responsible Left and Right should cooperate

Among ordinary people there is a natural majority strongly in favour of social order, irrespective of which side they vote for. It is therefore the duty of anti-progressivist politicians to take the lead on both sides of the political divide and cooperate across that divide.

In the House of Representatives Hansard I read some speeches by Mark Latham and Philip Ruddock. In the debate about the 'Reconciliation and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Legislation Amendment (Application of Criminal Code) Bill 2001', Mark Latham (then a Labor backbencher) spoke about a visit to Cape York Peninsula and about his appreciation of our efforts in Cape York Partnerships. He said that he saw problems similar to ours among the socially and economically marginalised in his own electorate, and that the mainstream debate in Aboriginal affairs concentrated on second or third order issues.

The Minister for Indigenous affairs Philip Ruddock replied that Latham's speech was an extraordinarily comprehensive speech. Latham had linked the right to receive welfare with a need for responsibility and he had talked about the need for enforced treatment for substance abusers. Ruddock said that Latham had done us all a public service and that somebody like Latham had to be given the opportunity to develop solutions. In this debate Anthony Albanese officially spoke for the Labor opposition. About this speech Philip Ruddock said that if Mr Albanese's views were advanced as the opposition's alternative the opposition would not contribute to progress.

This exchange shows that the socially responsible Left and Right could unite and do away with the progressivist confusion that is prevalent on both sides of politics. In parliament, the socially responsible Left and Right should unite their forces whenever possible for the sake of the most downtrodden.

8 The Right's thinking about social cohesion is undeveloped

Those of you who are active in the political Right might not share this perspective on Australian politics because your people are not as dysfunctional as mine. It is natural for you to use the majority of the Coalition to push your economic reforms through and to pay less attention to the social implosion among my people.

But it is not enough to take a generally conservative stance, declaring oneself 'tough on drugs' and think oneself finished with these problems intellectually. The Right needs to think about the problems that haunt my people and other underclass Australians as carefully as they elaborate on their economic policy.

Every graduate student who has written a paper about economic liberalisation is encouraged and nurtured by think-tanks and conservative/liberal parties all over the world. Organisations such as our hosts, the Centre for Independent Studies, keep track of every free market economist and welfare state critic and serve their audience of decision-makers a distillate of wisdom.

It is therefore remarkable that the political Right is ignorant about the most useful authority in the policy area of preventing social disintegration by means of intolerance of abusive behaviour, the late Swedish Professor Nils Bejerot.

This indifference towards a social thinker whose life's work would be of benefit to our country cannot be because he was fringe prophet. The Karolinska Institute where Nils Bejerot earned his doctorate, worked as a reader when his practical work permitted, and finally received the title of professor, bestows the Nobel Prize in medicine.

My own summary of Nils Bejerot's main points most likely does not do him justice, but very briefly I think that his principal ideas were these:

The symptom theory of substance abuse is wrong. Addiction is a condition in its own right and not a symptom of underlying issues. Only *experimenting* with a substance is possibly such a symptom.

Addiction is an artificially induced drive. The addict has learnt to associate wellbeing with taking the drug but the connection between the later negative effect and the drug is only made intellectually.

Widespread abuse of an addictive substance is a psychosocial epidemic, and not *directly* caused by the historical legacy of the affected group and social and personal problems. Such epidemics can break out in rich and poor environments when five factors are at hand: availability of the drug, money to acquire the drug, time to use the drug, the example of drug use by a few 'pioneers' in the immediate environment, and a permissive social ideology in relation to the use of the drug.

When an epidemic gains momentum it becomes less of a breach of social norms to use the substance so an increasing number of people become susceptible. When a drug epidemic is fully

established in a community and the social standard in relation to its use has crashed to the ground, the social norm is no longer a barrier to the youngest of people stepping into drug use.

Of course miserable environments like many Aboriginal communities are over-represented among those plagued by substance abuse epidemics because there are many *susceptible* people there to pioneer the abuse, but when the epidemic grows, the existence of the epidemic is in itself the main cause of its further spread.

An addict is usually not helped by being offered social and material improvements and voluntary rehabilitation. Addicts will choose both the offered resources *and* continued abuse.

And even if an addict is helped by voluntary rehabilitation, it is too late from the point of view of fighting the epidemic, because addicts accept help first after many years of abuse, when they have already introduced other people to the abuse.

The two important elements in any successful policy against substance abuse must be firstly to make it very difficult and unappealing to experiment with the addictive substance and secondly, to control the behaviour of people found guilty of a drug offence for a realistic period of time.

9 The progressive Left is not the only problem

The political Right's relative lack of interest in social thinking compared to economic thinking is a problem. It is not only the reality-evading progressivist Left that I fear will impede our attempt to restore social order in Cape York Peninsula. Unfortunately there is an upswing for something called an 'economically conservative but socially progressive' Right.

It is a bad sign that people with drug liberal ideas have been elected to the highest State leadership positions of the political Right. I am not criticising those people for fighting for their ideas and I am not advocating factional purges; minorities should have fair representation in parties, parliaments and cabinets. I criticise the socially responsible Right for not getting their act together.

An important year lies ahead. Many culturally and journalistically powerful people in Australia spend an enormous amount of energy promoting this blend of conservative economic orthodoxy and social progressivism. As an Aboriginal Australian, I would be very worried if this process led to an increased influence for the so called 'socially progressive' Right.

10 The socially responsible Right is losing control

It is bad enough as it is. There are signs that the national leaders of the Right have lost control. Because they are not interested enough, their official tough stance on drugs easily degenerates into harm minimisation and drug liberalism in the practical implementation of their policies.

If you think I am exaggerating then let me tell you about a recent government initiative in Queensland. According to this plan, drug offenders who are caught by the Police in possession of what the Queensland Government defines as 'small amounts' (for example up to one gram of heroin) and meet certain other criteria will be sent to a counselling session. This initiative is pursuant to the National Drug Policy administered by the Federal Government.

'Socially progressive' journalists claimed after the Queensland Premier's announcement that '[r]ecreational drug use has been all-but decriminalised in Queensland', and that '[d]rugs are

finally being seen as a health problem, not a law-and-order issue'. The public was given the impression that the Queensland Government have embarked on a 'program of backdoor reform'.

And the drug liberals immediately seized upon the initiative as a first step, a concession: 'Alcohol and Drug Foundation chief executive Bob Aldred welcomed the plan and backed more controversial proposals, such as safe injecting rooms'. Mayor Jim Soorley, who is reported as supporting heroin injection rooms, was quoted as saying: 'In six month's time when this has gone well, we will look at the next step.'

The drug liberals are winning the debate by saying that 'this is not a moral issue or a law enforcement issue, it is a health issue', thereby defining their opponents' position. Most of us do not realise that we should reply that this is a *political* question. How will a proliferation of drugs affect our capacity for social progress?

Like gambling and alcohol, an increase in illicit drugs in our society would make life a lot harder for the great mass of lower class people. The last burden lower class people need is substance abuse. Who would have thought that the licensing of poker machines would result in Australians having *1 in 5 of all of the machines in the world?*

Everybody understands that taking a drug is not 'naturally' wrong and immoral in the same way as for example maiming somebody, and that we have an arbitrary situation today when it is legal to sell alcohol to dysfunctional households where people are abused, but illegal to sell most other drugs. These opinions are correct, but most people do not understand that this arbitrariness (which has historical reasons) is not the same thing as lack of logic. It makes political sense to prevent yet more drugs becoming endemic to our society, and the only way to prevent that is to be intolerant of their use.

Intolerance of the use of illicit drugs is unwarranted only if you make the question private and apolitical. A member of the public wrote in a letter to the editor that '[i]t would be a shame if the trials fail to go ahead, as those who would benefit have really committed an offence against no one but themselves'. The logical conclusion of this would be that peaceful production and selling of drugs is no crime either. The error in this reasoning is the failure to understand that both trading and consumption are behaviours that we want to eradicate for *political* reasons. It gets harder and harder to make social progress for every drug that becomes endemic.

It is true that the illegality of drugs increases certain types of crime, but the choice is between capitulation (adding a range of drugs to the 'accepted' ills of alcohol abuse, gambling and so on) and a genuine attempt to attack the *use* of drugs. We cannot *treat* or *inform* the problem away. People who argue that do not understand the dynamics of substance abuse epidemics.

It is an insincere escape from the problem and bad excuse-making to advocate attacking the big bad guys and make the user untouchable. The real effect of publishing a list detailing what quantities of drugs are 'permissible' is to further entrench the irresponsible attitude among a large part of the population that people's personal use of drugs should not be penalised because we need to attack (i) the 'underlying issues' that make people use drugs and (ii) the criminals at the top of the pyramid.

Those who try their best to turn our country into a drugged country by using drugs or making excuses for drug use are said to express 'community attitudes' which it is the governments' duty to 'understand'. The drug liberals say that you 'need to be realistic and acknowledge that drug taking is a part of contemporary society'. Why this understanding attitude towards criminal activity?

It is of course good to have a national strategy to divert minor drug offenders into rehabilitation and keep them out of jail, because there is no point introducing people into bad environments. But the alternative, while being humane and respectful, must contain an element of *coercion* of the offender's behaviour for a long period of time and a *message of intolerance*, not just a message of concern.

A good alternative to criminal convictions must be based on a *period of drug testing*, whatever the other components are. I suggested this at the meeting with two officers from the Queensland Premier's department and one of them replied that it would be expensive and *inconvenient*. I can understand the objection that resources are limited, but I cannot understand why a proposed substitute for a criminal conviction should be rejected because it would be 'inconvenient' for the offender!

This is the *fundamental confusion* in our entire approach to the drug problem, in a nutshell:

- intolerance towards the illicit drug industry – the so-called 'Mr Bigs' (which is a secondary phenomenon, not a primary cause) and
- tolerance towards the users at the base of the pyramid – the so-called 'smalltime users', whose own use and recruitment of novices are the indispensable prerequisites for the emergence of a drug culture.

At that same meeting I also questioned the notion that 'recreational' drug use should be seen as a health problem. The young first time offenders that this initiative is aimed at *don't have a health problem*, they break the law and behave foolishly.

The *Courier Mail* journalist wrote approvingly that 'students and nightclub revellers caught experimenting with drugs will get a chance to avoid criminal convictions and to learn the facts about the dangers of drug abuse'. This is not honest. These users know enough about drugs. They do not need information, they need effective, long-term controls of their behaviour.

The intractability of the drug problem is not real, it is a construct based on the offenders' right to 'integrity' or whatever name the liberals give their excuse-making. They say drugs are difficult to prohibit. Well, theft is difficult to stop because it is difficult to prove, and those thieves who are caught at all are convicted only for a small fraction of their crimes. But the drug offenders carry the evidence in their bodies for weeks or months, and we have a very good idea about where to look for them. Drug testing in certain environments would be a very efficient form of prevention compared to, for example, the random roadside breathalyser tests, which nobody objects to.

Mining communities (such as Comalco at Weipa) and (increasingly) other workplaces institute zero-tolerance policies to drug taking, using regular and random drug testing. This simple behavioural control is the greatest help and the most effective prompt for addicts to change their behaviour, and to deter young novices from considering 'recreational drug use'. Prior to drug testing at such mine sites, recreational drug taking was in epidemic proportions and part of the destructive social life of such communities. The regime introduced by Comalco delivers benefits far beyond providing a safe workplace for its employees – it helps hundreds of workers and thousands of their family members to stay away from 'recreational drug use'.

I can see no reason why persons who have been convicted or would have been convicted of personal drug use should not be subjected to regular drug testing for an appropriate period of

time. This is the decisive and effective measure to help them to change their behaviour. 'Counselling' and 'education' about drugs will achieve nothing.

How can it be progressive to condone abuse and hinder efficient restrictions until the majority is convinced that 'prohibition doesn't work' and we have to capitulate and add another endemic menace to the burden ordinary people have to carry? It is testament to the degree to which the official Left have lost their way that they represent the most consistent advocates of social policies which compound and worsen the predicaments of those for whom they profess such sincere empathy and compassion.

Queensland Young Nationals' President Martin Klibbe told the *Courier Mail* that 'Queensland youth would be encouraged to buy hard drugs if the penalty was simply a counselling session'. I do not know Mr Klibbe, but judging from this statement it is Martin Klibbe (nominally on the far Right) who is truly socially progressive and the lower classes' political ally.

Why am I so insistent in relation to the disastrous direction which drug policy is taking in the wider society? Because as an Aboriginal Queenslanders I have realised that false 'social progressivism' is our main problem. How are we going to make social progress in Aboriginal Australia, where all control mechanisms already are so dysfunctional, if we are surrounded by a mainstream laissez faire-society that doesn't even try?

The ultimate political responsibility for this deterioration (and Queensland's diversionary program is said to be the most conservative of all of the programs being proposed by state and territory governments under the National Drug Policy) lies with the Federal Cabinet, because the policy changes in the direction towards harm minimisation and decriminalisation take place as part of a joint State/Commonwealth programme. The Federal government is funding policies that are incompatible with the Coalition leaders' social outlook.

11 Conclusion

Members of the federal opposition are taking part in this Consilium. People to the left-of-centre might object that I am wrong when I talk about a socially responsible group within the political Right because the Right neglects developing innovative policies against social exclusion, or they might say that the Coalition is attacking the welfare state and does not take social responsibility for low income earners.

Well, if that is so, then that is the reason why we should have a socially responsible Left. Without the welfare state, the Aboriginal Leader Noel Pearson would not have been: I am a beneficiary of the universal provisioning of educational opportunity provided by Federal Australian governments to my people from the 1970s which enabled me to attend a private boarding school of the highest quality, and one of the country's premier law schools. I advocate the responsibility of the state for education and health care and I support organised labour.

The problem is that Leftist ideas usually come as a package. Let me return to Anthony Albanese who I mentioned earlier. In his maiden speech he described how he was raised by his mother under very difficult economic circumstances and how she instilled in him a strong sense of social justice and fairness. He said that his policies as a democratic socialist had been developed from his experiences in life.

In a later speech Albanese spoke in favour of heroin trials and against the policy of zero tolerance. Zero tolerance was lacking in compassion or understanding of what is essentially a medical problem, he said.

The Leftist confusion about the issues most important to Aboriginal people creates an unbridgeable gulf between us and large sectors of the Left, even if we appreciate their ‘strong sense of social justice and fairness’.

You may wonder why I talk so much about substance abuse. It is for two reasons. First it is a useful indicator. Those who do not understand what we say about substance abuse in Cape York Peninsula are not likely to be of any use to us in other areas such as welfare dependency, education, social order and economic development. And this goes for the political Right as well as the Left.

Second, Aboriginal affairs is dominated by what I call the intellectual middle stratum: journalists, academics, politicised clergy, politically active medical doctors, party careerists, writers, musicians, actors, cartoonists and other inner city dwellers with socially suitable left-liberal opinions about everything. The question about substance abuse can be used by Aboriginal people to either help such people to get rid of their confusion and force them to come to their senses, or if they are irredeemable progressivists, alienate them so that they stop meddling with our affairs and our attempts at social recovery. It is a healthy sign that most of the people who talk loudest about Aboriginal disadvantage and reconciliation are silent about Cape York Partnerships.

Let me conclude by saying that you in the Right and the Left who are in favour of social order based on responsibility must put more effort into the social policy debate . You must struggle intellectually with social questions as much as economic, so that you can advocate your doctrine with authority. I and my people have suffered the intellectual and cultural hegemony of the progressivist scribes for decades, and that was *not* what we needed after the ending of state-sanctioned dispossession and discrimination.

I wish us all the best for this Consilium.