

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 05 2000

Three recent developments in the Australian political scene should distress the many decent, right-thinking people of this country. The first is the Australian Federal Government's decision to wind back its involvement with UN Committees on the grounds that its human rights record is being unfairly criticised. Of course Australia's human rights are far better than that of [China](#), Pakistan or Angola. But surely the definition of a developed country should be its willingness to continually address and improve whatever injustices there are of its society. To say, as the Federal Attorney-General did so smugly, that ours is not a country where we chop off its citizens hands, is not to the credit of a person who holds such office.

Every day we hear of reports about the miserable conditions under which the original inhabitants of this country live. Be it in housing, [health](#) or infrastructure, there is no doubt that the Aborigines of this country face serious problems as compared to other settlers. Of course billions of dollars have been spent over the decades to correct the situation and wrangling within the Aboriginal community has not helped the situation either. But to childishly take up your bat and ball and go home simply because a UN human rights committee pointed out these obvious short-comings is certainly not worthy of a great country.

Of course the United Nations has numerous faults. But its continued existence, surely, is essential if there is to be some order in an increasingly chaotic world. To dismiss its deliberations as biased and unworthy of notice, especially when it relates to the most disadvantaged section of Australian society is, to our minds, churlish.

Which brings us to the second point, which is, the attitude of both major political [parties](#) towards the Aboriginal question in general. While one of the greatest fighters for human rights and justice this century, Nelson Mandela - who is currently here - pleads for reconciliation among people and nations, an unknown MP of the Australian Labour Party describes the Aboriginal portfolio as "taking on a [job](#) as a toilet cleaner on the Titanic." The Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley, says he will sack the MP if he ever finds out who he is. But is it the view of only one MP? Or, is catering to the Hansonite element in this country becoming part and parcel of Labour ideology too? Note the recent Labour political compromise over Aboriginal rights in Queensland which forced Shadow Minister Daryl Melham to resign in disgust.

Isn't it sad that a [party](#) which was formed on the sweat and labour of the working class, the oppressed and the disadvantaged would view the Aboriginal question in such a disdainful way? Is it now the fashion for both major political parties to quietly shed the ideals on which their parties were formed, crawl in to bunkers and pretend the world doesn't exist?

The Liberals were once identified as the party where freedom of expression reigned supreme. Yet, in a bid to limit that freedom, they have now passed into law the use of armed forces to quell the protests of its citizens. The

Labour Premier of Victoria ominously warns us of anarchy on the streets of [Melbourne](#) by s11 members during the forthcoming economic summit at the Crown. He seems oblivious to the fact that the hard-won rights we enjoy today were won through such citizens protests.

There will be many protest groups at the s11 demonstration next Monday. But the dominant group will be focussing on a threat which is upon us already. It is called globalization and it is dictated to by the economic policies of huge multi-national companies. It respects no sovereignty, no national boundaries. It will stifle the power of the citizens to make their voices heard, to demand better working conditions, to end the exploitation of labour in poor Third World countries.

Political leaders of all hues will try to defend globalization as the reality of the future. They dare not raise their voices against its force for fear of making them more irrelevant than they are now. And they will attempt to stifle any protest of the people for fear of upsetting their new economic masters.