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Pearson sparked a revolution that emboldened PM to act

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THE FACT that Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough rang Noel Pearson 15 minutes before his press conference with the Prime Minister last week announcing historic action to protect Aboriginal children from sexual abuse tells you just how important the Cape York leader has been in stiffening political will.

Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue says scathingly that Pearson "is not our new Messiah" but the revolution in Aboriginal affairs that has occurred over the past five years would never have happened without him.

After 30 years of failed welfare policies, Pearson has been speaking a resonant new language, decrying the evils of "sit-down money", of alcohol as "a poison stronger than love", of the need to rebuild "basic social norms".

He has advocated draconian solutions, including using welfare payments as a weapon against bad parents, that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago, and unacceptable from anyone but him.

Pearson alone created the atmosphere wherein the Federal Government was emboldened to act.

Last Tuesday he gave former army officer Brough a report, From Handout To Hand Up, outlining his plan for radical welfare reform for Cape York.

The next day Brough acted. The trigger was the Northern Territory's damning report on Aboriginal child sexual abuse, Little Children Are Sacred, released eight weeks ago and still without action from the territory government. The report found evidence of sexual abuse of children in every community investigated. It tells of depravity so normalised that a raped five-year-old boy just says, "He f---ed me".

Brough announced the Federal Government would take over Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, with bans on alcohol and pornography, mandatory health checks and quarantined welfare payments to ensure children are fed and educated.

"We've been too timid about intervening," Howard admitted at Wednesday's press conference, "because we'll be accused of paternalism and all sorts of other things. Well, frankly, the care and protection of children is more important to me than slavishly following some philosophy or doctrine."

On cue came the adolescent clamour from professional activists and leftists such as ACT chief minister Jon Stanhope complaining about "racism" and "paternalism".

But that's yesterday's talk. Pearson moved on long ago.

"I don't know what planet Jon Stanhope lives on," he told ABC radio on Friday, "but how anybody could put the protection of children as a second priority to anything else, I can't understand that. Every child that is being subjected to neglect and abuse is calling out for us to take decisive action. Not in six months, not in two years' time, not when Jon Stanhope can deliver nirvana in our times; rather they require relief now."

The utopian socialist fancies of the 1970s are at the root of the crisis in remote communities. A push by then-fashionable economist H.C. "Nugget" Coombs led to the creation of 1200 remote tribal settlements where indigenous people were supposed to live a delightful Stone Age life.

The result is 90,000 people living in Third World conditions, with a life expectancy to match, most of them totally dependent on welfare, with such little education many can't even speak English.

Professor Helen Hughes chronicles the "devastating impact" of these separatist policies in her new book *Lands Of Shame*, published by the Centre for Independent Studies.

"The neglect of children by mothers and fathers in the throes of alcoholism, drug abuse and domestic violence is a damning indictment of 'living museum' societies," she writes.

The architects of the disaster and the ideology that underpinned it have never been brought to account; perhaps because they meant well.

In contrast is the self-flagellation about the so-called stolen generations, even when few victims of past policies of removing Aboriginal children from their families have materialised.

The only effect has been to ensure the authorities are so terrified of being accused of "stealing" another generation they leave children in abusive homes.

Of course there should not be separate laws for Aborigines, but Howard has moved to answer that criticism by saying his welfare reforms could extend to anyone. And so they should. Taxpayers never intended welfare money to be spent on alcohol, drugs and gambling at the expense of proper care for children.

And, of course, indigenous social dysfunction is not confined to the Northern Territory.

In NSW a report last year into Aboriginal child sexual abuse was met by imperceptible government action. NSW Aboriginal Affairs minister Paul Lynch was a blathering idiot on radio on Friday night, babbling about 88-point plans, even after 48 hours in which to digest the import of the federal reforms.

What else would you expect from a state government that puts such a priority on indigenous welfare that it once gave the portfolio to Milton Orkopoulos, a politician notable only for the fact he has been charged with child sex offences, of all things.

