

7 October 1981



## CHOGM notebook by Geoffrey Barker



### It was a trying day indeed for people with something to say

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Aboriginal leader Gary Foley was having a bad day at CHOGM. Silver ear-ring dangling, and smoking through a long cigarette holder, he was trying to get a top CHOG to notice him.

He wandered into a news conference given by President Nyerere of Tanzania, determined to be seen and heard. The old African silver fox put on a good show for the media, but walked out just as the Aboriginal silver earring called: "Mr. President . . ."

"I wanted to ask him," Mr Foley said later, "given his apparently highly principled stand on South Africa and Namibia, whether it was not a little inconsistent of him to blindly accept Malcolm Fraser's version of the situation of Aboriginal people in Australia. Did he not think his apparent refusal to meet Aboriginal people and hear their side of the story was hypocritical?"

Unhappily, President Nyerere's apparent aloofness was not the only grievance of Mr Foley, who turned out to be a master of the copulative adjective. Prime Minister Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe had also proved hard to meet.

"Mugabe really pissed us off by going to a . . . white woman, Susan Ryan, to hear the Opposition's version of Aboriginal affairs. If we get to . . . Zimbabwe to ask about black Zimbabweans, we wouldn't go to Ian Smith or any of that mob. That's what he's doing. He's accepting the Fraser version and he's going to a bloody white person to hear the other side of the story. That's basic political . . . stupidity, apart from hypocrisy."

Surrounded thus by hypocrisy and Malcolm Fraser's version, Mr Foley, who is chairman of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee of the Australian Council of Churches, roamed the CHOGM media area giving interviews and looking for visiting black delegates to whom he could impart the non-hypocritical, non-Fraserian version of Aboriginal affairs.

Eventually a couple of chaps from Grenada's revolutionary Government sat down for a chat and a drink, and Mr Foley seemed to cheer up. He claimed that CHOGM had been successful "beyond our expectations" in terms of contacts made with delegation members and international media. "It's part of a longer strategy we

have been developing over five years," he said.

While Mr Foley was thinking five years ahead, harassed officials were thinking only hours ahead as they attempted to thrash out the final communique. There were disagreements over most subjects in the statement on world affairs. Poland was a problem. So were the South Pacific, Kampuchea, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Especially the Middle East.

One Australian official, after a particularly bruising morning, emerged for a cup of coffee. He drank it down and rose from the table with their resignation that marks old campaigners. "Oh well, back to the Middle East war," he sighed as he trudged away.

Soon afterwards, in a small upper room, the CONFIDENTIAL TOP SECRET briefing was given to the Australian Pns by some people who must for ever remain "Australian sources". Here we learned that the final communique would make an "qualified call" for an immediate end to the global negotiations of North-South issues.

At the same time we learned that Australia was pressing for the establishment of two groups of Commonwealth experts, one to study the obstacles to effective North-South negotiations, the other to study how industrial protection policies of developed nations were disadvantaging developing countries.

The un-nameable Austrian sources tried valiantly to persuade reporters, a few of them doing, others yawning, shuffling and coughing, that the expert groups were of global significance. At the cynical consensus seemed to be that if the Australian Government ignored the tariff recommendations of its own expert Industries Assistance Commission, it was hardly likely to fall over itself to follow the advice of some group of Commonwealth experts.

Here it seems appropriate to advise readers that the final CHOGM communique will be a masterpiece of creation by committee. A first draft has been prepared by the Commonwealth secretariat. It is submitted to a committee of officials of all 40 countries who amend or redraft the bits with which they disagree. Then their efforts are submitted to the CHOGs themselves who consider it and release it page

by page for printing at their final session today.

Thus, by a mighty effort of will and co-operation, the final official version will be released sometime this afternoon, only seven or so hours after you have read the essential details in this morning's paper.

As CHOGM chugged towards its conclusion yesterday, jaded reporters were treated to a series of numbing Press conferences by smaller CHOGs.

President Kyprianou of Cyprus, reliably described as the dullest diplomat in the world, began by telling reporters that he wanted to analyse "in a concise way" the Cyprus problem. Thirty-nine pages of transcript later he concluded that "we do not know what the next development is going to be".

Prime Minister Maurice Bishop of Grenada blamed the CIA for a lot of the destabilisation of his country. He also received the most intriguing question yet put to a head of state at CHOGM. From the transcript:

Q: Prime Minister, how has your Christian upbringing affected your consciousness of the most grievous aspect of the human condition and your achievements in seeing the wounded man on the road and truly being his comrade?

Mr Bishop: I think your question has me at a little bit of a loss. I do not really know what the answer to that is . . .

That sort of exchange left you in no doubt that the steam was going out of CHOGM. Not even old Piggy Muldoon could have stirred things up seriously after remarks made by President Nyerere, who was really the star turn of the day.

"I think he has done his best to provoke a fight", President Nyerere said in reply to a question about Mr Muldoon, "but I do not think really he has been obliged by any of his colleagues, so there has not been a fight . . . I hope my friend Muldoon will do better next time — if there is going to be a next time."

The question of whether there will be a next time for Piggy will be decided in New Zealand on November 28. But whatever high-minded declarations are handed the world in the final communique tomorrow, this reporter like most others, will inevitably remember the conference as CHOGM of the Pig.