

Priority is people, not land: Pearson

Padraic Murphy
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LEFT-WING policymakers have failed indigenous communities and social order is more important for Aborigines than land rights, says Noel Pearson .

The director of the Cape York Institute says urban critics of John Howard's intervention plan are misinformed, and he dismisses claims the plan is an attempt to take control of uranium-rich land.

``If political circumstances became such that one was forced to prioritise, I place social order ahead of land rights," Mr Pearson writes today in *The Weekend Australian*.

``Of course the land problem is being overstated. If there is a `land grab', then it is principally being grabbed for the benefit of Aboriginal families obtaining private leasehold title for housing and businesses."

Mr Pearson, whose institute last month hosted the Strong Foundations conference in Cairns, sponsored by *The Australian*, says the failure of indigenous communities to maintain social order was the reason the federal Government had been forced to intervene.

``(Conference speaker Marcia) Langton cut to the chase: non-conservative indigenous and non-indigenous people's failure to take sufficient political and practical responsibility for social functionality in indigenous communities made the recent intervention by conservative leaders inevitable," he says. ``Of course the conservative leaders would ultimately intervene, Langton explained, and it is hardly surprising that their plan is shaped by their conservative ideology."

Mr Pearson says Aborigines need to force their way into the mainstream political agenda and look to the future: ``The principal psychological problem of indigenous leaders is they have got bile in their livers about the fact of the Howard Government and its history over the past decade.

``Our progressive non-indigenous supporters can afford to devote all of their energies to willing the New Jerusalem -- after all, even a conservative government looks after them notwithstanding their contempt -- but our people cannot afford this indulgence.

``We have to deal with the government and the politics of the day and devote our maximum energies and talents towards making good of things that otherwise seem

bad."

Mr Pearson says the Howard intervention is needed because abuse in Aboriginal communities is so widespread.

``Urban-based critics just simply do not know the realities. Neither did 90per cent of Australia until recently," he says.

Mr Pearson says Northern Territory Chief Minister Clare Martin abandoned Aboriginal people because her Government had become obsessed with its media image. ``Martin put more energy and political angst into combating Lateline and federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough in relation to the Alice Springs town camps than in relation to the problems that were exposed," he says.