

Clifford, Julia (SEN)

From: Ben Wadham [ben.wadham@flinders.edu.au]
Sent: Thursday, 24 April 2003 1:36 PM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: Submission re Changes to HREOC



Over the past thirty years Western democracies have undergone a degree of liberalisation. The needs of some women, indigenous Australians, people with disabilities and others have been met with the institutionalisation of these groups needs and representatives to meet those needs in the machinery of government. This process arose from a widespread experience that the state and its agents (PMs to bureaucrats and service providers) were operating largely through the dominant white, male and Australian cultural vision and position. In the last decade or so (or ever since John Howard, Peter Costello and people like Geoffrey Blainey began complaining about 'the culture of complaint') the Federal government have been systematically undoing these gains and reinstating this dominant position as the only way of doing things in Australia. The changes to HREOC reflect the ideology of these people and not the interests of all Australians, they are discriminatory and prejudicial by their conception.

Indeed in contemporary global relations the question of difference and discrimination is writ large. The changes to the organisation of HREOC expresses the neo-conservative ideologies of this government, ideologies that work to suit these people and their communities and not the interests and needs of those disadvantaged in Australia. In effectt his legislation works to reinforce the dominance of white Australian cultural experince and privilege and further entrenches the subjugation of indigneous Austrealians and others. By removing the specialisation of Commissioners, the experience that is needed to address sexual harrassment, indigenous rights and disability claims is removed. Such claims will be addressed by the 'generalist professional': who is an 'Australian' just like the rest of us (sic). These changes reflect the idea that we are all 'Australians' and therefore all the same. This naive nationalism took us to war this year and on the domestic front works to subsume the cultural differences within Australians under the hollow idea of 'the Australian'. For this Bill this means that people with inadequate experience and skills will be addressing human rights claims as if they were generalist claims. Indiginous rights are not generalist claims and require Commissioners with expereince and knowledge of whte/black relations in Australia, which includes all the things that this government and its bananas despise - an engagement with our 'black armband' history, an understanding of white Australian racism and racialisation, and a committment to addressing human rights based without favour or obligation to the parochial 'Australian'.

By reforming the HREOC into a monocultral and monological entity this government will be contributing to the global Western project of 'globalising whiteness'. This means attempting to create things like 'free trade', 'global development' and 'global democracy', all ideas that emanate from the USA and other countries with similar cultural dispositions, which work against the contemporary global need for reasserting our committment to addressing difference rather than reaffirming sameness. This legislation when considered in tandem with other recent government practices and policies that achieve the same ends lead Austrealia to a point in history where we will be forced to once again go over the struggles over the past three or so decades. This time however it may be more terminal with the current divides that these ideologues are generating across the globe. Refute these changes and remove the white blindfolds from these people. This legislation is regressive, it takes us back to Menzies and beyond. We should be working to meet the needs of all Australians of difference not reasserting the dominance of one cultural group, who many - white or otherwise - Australians disagree with.

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