

HD No room for Pyne's flat-earth views in schools

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'Christopher Pyne cannot bear that society has become better, more tolerant and progressive. He would rather see it more hidebound and monocultural.

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The Labor Party, teaching unions, education academics, and P & Cs have all been accused of moving the national curriculum to the left. The curriculum has become too "secular", "Asia-oriented", "left", "progressive", "new age" and "politically correct", to use the words of former Liberal staffer and teacher Kevin Donnelly who has been appointed by Education Minister Christopher Pyne to an inquiry to review the curriculum. Pyne now wants to reverse the trend. He wants students to learn more about Australia's Christian and British heritage. He is being applauded by commentators in The Australian, and condemned everywhere else. But it is not the creators of the existing curriculum who have carried an agenda to move it in a political direction, rather it is Pyne. Pyne wants the curriculum to propagate his narrow view of the world. Previous development of the curriculum was not by deliberately engineered political acts. Rather it was a natural evolution to reflect the changes in Australia and the world. Australia has, in fact, moved closer to Asia. Britain and the US have been replaced by **China** and Japan as our major trading partners. More Australians travel to Asia than Britain and the US. A higher proportion of immigrants now come from Asia. Australia has, in fact, become more secular. Every census reveals a lower percentage of the population practising religion or even nominating themselves as holding a religion. Australia has, in fact, become less Christian as the proportion of people with other faiths grows. Australia has, in fact, become more progressive. Equality of opportunity and support for it has spread and the law of the land promotes it. Discrimination on grounds of disability, race and sexual orientation has become unacceptable and unlawful. Australia has, in fact, become more politically correct, if by that term you mean that rampant racist, sexist and homophobic conversation has become more socially unacceptable. Australia has become more progressive and politically correct if by those terms you mean recognition of wrongs done to indigenous people and legal and other steps to redress them. The changes in the formal national curriculum have merely reflected these changes. They were not some concerted, deliberate plan to subvert Australia's Christian British heritage. The importance of that heritage has been waning without conspiratorial help from the Labor Party or the left. Bear in mind these societal changes were not instigated by the Labor Party or the Greens. They were general trends. Menzies signed the treaty with Japan. Fraser began Indo-**Chinese** immigration and passed the Northern Territory Land Rights Act. The changes are not only reflected in formal education. As new teachers come into the system, they too infuse these changes into their schools - in the way the schools are run, as well as what they teach. In short, Pyne is the political creature. Pyne is trying to turn the schools into propagators of an out-dated and unrealistic view of the world. And that is the fundamental

problem here. Christopher Pyne cannot bear that society has become better, more tolerant and progressive. He would rather see it more hidebound and monocultural. Abbott should move him from a social portfolio where the Tories like government to meddle to make things in their own image, to an economic portfolio where they want government to do nothing. That way he would do less damage.

There is much merit in Tony Abbott's view that the betterment of indigenous Australians can be achieved by economic self-help. This week I came across a case of petty bureaucracy doing its best to stifle that trend. On Badu **Island**, about halfway between Thursday **Island** and Papua New Guinea, there is a quarry owned by the Badu **Island** Foundation Ltd. It employs up to 10 people and produces aggregate for

roads, drains and harbours throughout the Torres Strait. They want to **buy** better plant and equipment to expand and become more efficient. So they applied for a loan to the Commonwealth's Torres Strait Regional Authority. The authority has imposed an absurd and unacceptable condition on the loan - that the directors give personal guarantees for it. That may be standard for small private companies, but unheard of for a public not-for-profit **company**. The directors have no personal interest. They are just being good citizens serving on an indigenous foundation. Obviously, they are liable for negligence or malfeasance, but not for **commercial** failure. The authority says the condition was imposed by the Australian Government Solicitor. The AGS says, no, it was put onto the loan document on instructions from the authority. Impasse. Buck pass. The documents support the AGS view. But the upshot is no loan money. The quarry has a positive cash flow and is a successful business. Some extra finance would enable it to get better. The lives of Torres Strait islanders would be improved as road-making capacity would be improved. Otherwise, the extra aggregate would have to come from a quarry via Cairns 800 kilometres away. This is a small example, but if it is in any way indicative of the hurdles put up against indigenous businesses, small wonder we have such trouble improving indigenous living standards.

If the Commonwealth has a debt crisis, why are 900 Australian Tax Office jobs being axed and the ATO proposing that big accounting and law firms be allowed to sign off on large corporations' tax compliance? This is bound to cost more in the long run. The big accounting and law firms will do what they always do: charge big and play the tune that their paymasters call for. But since when did the Coalition want effective, efficient government when it comes to gathering tax from their rich mates? www.crispinhull.com.au

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