

quality as the primary cause of health problems. If the concern is with income relativities, more money would be targeted at single parents, one of the poorest groups in the community. This would alleviate some of the stress suffered by single parents, but it is likely to also increase their number by making this a more attractive financial option.

A short review of *Unhealthy Societies* must be negative, because its central argument is unconvincing. There are too many other plausible explanations for the observed health differentials to place as much emphasis as Wilkinson does on income inequality. Nevertheless, for a reader such as myself familiar with the debates on inequality but knowing little of medical sociology, the book was worthwhile. There was much interesting material on how social conditions affect health. Sundry other discussions on topics from Japanese policing methods to how economic growth figures understate improvements in living standards were also interesting. *Unhealthy Societies* does not end up where its author wants to go, but it is an intelligent and informative piece of work.

Reviewed by Andrew Norton.



The Human Wrongs of Indigenous Rights

by Ron Brunton, IPA
Backgrounder, Institute of Public Affairs, Perth, 1997, 12pp., \$8.00.

The colonial histories of many nations are riddled with injustice and harm suffered by the indigenous inhabitants. Over the last twenty years the plight of the indigenous habitants of New Zealand and Australia has been subject to various legislative initiatives. However the ongoing concern for the 'cultural health' of indigenous people may yield some dangerous outcomes.

In his IPA Background Paper *The Human Wrongs of Indigenous Rights* Ron Brunton tackles one of the most disturbing manifestations of the modern ethnic revival – the United Nations Draft Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Although the document is only a declaration, and not a treaty, should it be adopted it could have profound implications for race relations in Australia and New Zealand. Brunton notes that its supporters, such as the Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, have said that the Declaration is only the beginning: 'the floor not the ceiling'.

In 1985, the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) commenced the formal process of preparing a declaration of indigenous rights. By 1993 a draft had been completed, comprising 45 articles which supposedly 'constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples of the world'. Many of the articles are unexceptionable, but as Brunton points out there are a number that give indigenous inhabitants of a nation rights and privileges

well beyond anything available to other citizens – cultural or ethnic rights if you like. The Draft Declaration rests on the pillar of the right to self-determination. This is the unqualified right that would allow indigenous people to establish independent indigenous states. Major articles include:

- Article 3 asserting that self-determination gives indigenous people the right to 'freely determine their political status'
- Article 31 which provides that 'Indigenous peoples, as a specific form of exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, including culture, health, education and so on.

Other articles which do not specifically mention self-determination do however convey cultural rights that are just as expansive. The effect of this is to 'flesh out' the minimum standards of indigenous autonomy covered in the major articles of the Draft Declaration. The overall effect of the Draft Declaration is to give indigenous leaders the right to create independent nation states on the basis of ethnicity.

Brunton attacks the Draft Declaration on the grounds of the 'virtual impossibility of establishing a logically defensible bounded category of "indigenous people".' He suggests that the criteria used in attempting to define the category involves arbitrary and highly contestable distinctions.

The crux of Brunton's attack on the Draft Declaration is on the 'sentimentalisation' of indigenous culture and the distortions this creates. He suggests that the terms and parameters of these distortions are set by Western concerns and yearnings. Brunton argues the shift in thinking that

characterises much of the Draft Declaration should be viewed in terms of the cultural revolution that has occurred among Western intellectual elites over the past few decades. Brunton argues that representations of indigenous cultures have played an important role in legitimising at least some aspects of the critiques of Western ideas and practices that have developed. He suggests the best example of the willingness of indigenous people and organisations to assimilate indigenous cultures to Western fantasies is the case of environmentalism. Brunton expands this point by reviewing a number of studies that suggest indigenous reverence for the environment is in fact extremely slender.

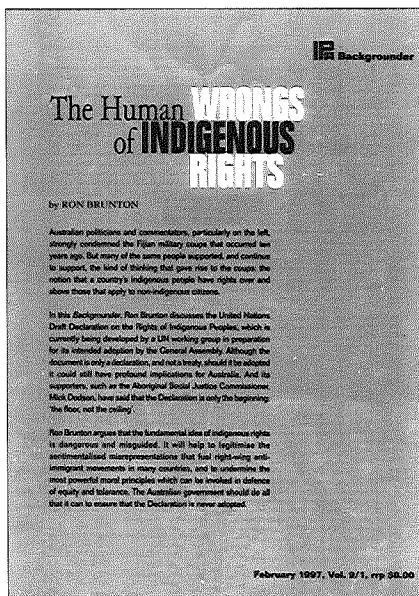
Brunton expands on this point by suggesting that there are two reasons for being concerned about possible consequences of these fantasized reconstructions. Firstly the current definition of 'indigenous people' is not without its dangers. Brunton argues that indulging in such fantasized reconstructions can lead to a politics of exclusion and racism. In the extreme case this may result in the exclusion of 'non-indigenous' people from a community. He continues that in the name of diversity, legitimisation will

be given to the establishment of what could easily become mono-ethnic indigenous states, thus repeating, though on a smaller scale, the ill-advised measures that were implemented in Europe in the aftermath of

attempts to improve their disadvantaged position and threatening their individual liberties. Brunton sums up this point by arguing that the whole emphasis on collective rights and preferential treatment deflects attention from the kinds of developments that may be necessary to overcome the legacy of the past. He suggests that the notion of cultural rights allows debilitating feelings of victimhood to flourish, and perpetuates the dependency that indigenous spokespeople and leaders claim to be against, yet from which many of them individually benefit.

Brunton concludes by saying that it would be highly desirable to bring the whole process of developing international indigenous rights to a halt. He suggests that Australia should withdraw from the working group developing the Draft Declaration and focus its efforts on articulating the moral arguments against such instruments. Brunton claims a better approach would be to respect the basic human rights of indigenous individuals and to attempt to create a realistically achievable environment that is likely to ensure such respect.

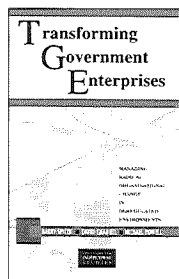
Reviewed by Alastair Pope.



World War I.

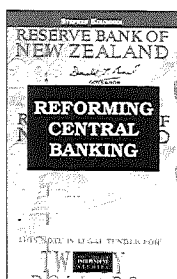
The second reason Brunton says we should be concerned about the sentimentalised misrepresentation used to justify cultural rights is that it is likely to constrain indigenous people themselves, undermining at-

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