

between modernisation and Westernisation and how it is possible for countries to adopt more market-oriented policies which promote modernisation without endangering their cultural traditions. This distinction is a particularly important one to make in light of the fact that many anti-globalisation activists link capitalism with 'cultural imperialism' (a packaging which is probably not without rhetorical force among the ruling elites of many developing countries).

However, the main problem with the book is that while each chapter is packed with interesting ideas and can work as a good stand-alone essay, the book does not hold together well. The development of ideas is uneven, with some chapters (particularly the ones on free trade and the evolution of the political climate from *laissez-faire* to *dirigisme*) being extremely well done, while others were under-developed and almost in the vein of preaching to the converted (for instance his chapter on the Greens).

This unfortunate tendency is exacerbated by parts of the book where Professor Lal proposes novel but plausible theses, sometimes from areas outside his professional expertise, but does not sufficiently explicate his arguments. There is nothing wrong with taking a multi-disciplinary perspective (and indeed this has been one of the strengths of Lal's past works which meld a study of history, culture, institutions, political economy and technical economics). However it reduces the persuasiveness of the book in parts when a claim is made that is outside the professional consensus but is used to bolster a normative argument and is then treated as if it were uncontroversial.

This is the case for instance in Lal's discussion of global warming

(pp 216–17) in his chapter on the Greens. His short discussion of the various heterodox positions on the science of global warming could not possibly do justice to the debate, nor would it sound convincing to the curious observer who might prefer to take the word of a specialist on environmental science over that of an economist quoting a source that in one case was more than ten years old.

In this respect, Lal spreads himself too thin, something that cannot be avoided for a book of such vast ambition that touches perhaps a little too quickly on arguments drawing on a wide variety of disciplines. These include environmental science (he also enters the swamps of the DDT debate), moral philosophy, sociology (where, for instance, on pp 163–4 he seems to glibly accept the standard conservative critique of the alleged deleterious effects of the 1960s) and the history of theology (on pp 155–6 he reiterates his reductionist argument, made in previous works, that the basic institutions behind the rise of capitalism and individualism in the West were laid by a series of papal pronouncements, first by Pope Gregory I in the sixth century and second by Pope Gregory VII in the eleventh century). While this provides for a highly thought provoking experience for the reader, the extent to which he elides on some of the questions raised by his more controversial theses somewhat dampens the persuasive power of his work as a 'case for classical liberalism'.

Reviewed by Jason Soon

Aboriginal Affairs 1967–2005: Seeking a Solution

by Max Griffiths

Rosenberg Press,

Kenthurst, 2006

238pp, \$29.95

ISBN 1877058459

Attempts to solve the problems of native title and racial discrimination thus fell in a heap despite or because of the efforts of parliament', writes Max Griffiths in his new history of the last forty years of indigenous policy making. 'The more laws passed by parliament the more complex and ineffectual became problem solving in the area of Aboriginal affairs.'

Forty years on from the 1967 referendum that gave the Commonwealth Government power to legislate for Aboriginal affairs, it is timely to reflect on what federal policy makers have, and have not, been able to achieve. Certainly, the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio has seen a slew of policies, commissions, reports and ministers seeking solutions to indigenous disadvantage. But the disadvantage persists. 'Its persistence', as Secretary to the Treasury Ken Henry said last November and many would agree, 'has not been for want of policy action. Yet it has to be admitted that decades of policy action have failed.'

Enter *Aboriginal Affairs 1967–2005: Seeking a Solution*, a well researched and thoroughly readable account of the last four decades of policy action at the federal level, 'how we sought a solution, and how and why all solutions so far have failed'.

Griffiths, who appears to have

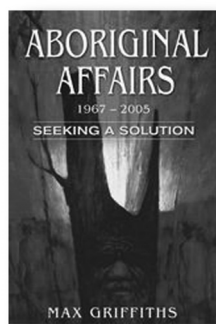
had no association with policy making at any government level, has clearly watched indigenous affairs closely since working in the Royal Flying Doctor Service in the 1960s and 1970s. This is now his second book on indigenous affairs, following up *Aboriginal Affairs 1788–1995: A Brief History* published a decade ago. It is a little disappointing that the book offers no details of the other health, education and welfare services that this passionate advocate is said to have developed in the later decades of his involvement with indigenous Australia.

What this book does offer, however, is a vivid account of how the main issues of the day developed and federal policy makers framed and handled them. It is not a history of indigenous policy so much as a history of the making of indigenous policy.

The strength of this history lies in its extensive use of the federal parliamentary Hansard and, in some later chapters, newspaper reports (though largely confined to the Melbourne paper, *The Age*). Some of the extracts are timeless, as relevant today as they were then. 'Aborigines of Australia are certainly not looking for handouts', the late Aboriginal Senator Neville Bonner says in his maiden speech. 'They have suffered enough from the stigma of paternalism however well-intentioned it may have been.' Also timeless are the words of Labor Member for Kalgoorlie Barry Haase: 'Education, and the teaching of the importance of education, is the future for Aboriginal people ... Communities have a collective

responsibility to recognise the value of education. It is not the sole responsibility of educators to turn schools into a circus to attract children to attend. Parents must encourage their children to take advantage of all facilities ... to equip them for the future.'

Throughout the book and the past four decades, Griffiths sees the pivotal and recurring issue in the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio as land rights and native title. The chapters on the origins of the land rights movement, the



Northern Territory land rights legislation in 1976, the High Court 'Mabo' decision in 1992, and the native title legislation in 1993 provide important background and nuance which is often missing in the public debate. His forecast that the controversy

over land will continue—not because of its spiritual connection, but its economic potential—was borne out last year with the controversy over federal proposals to scrap the permit system and introduce 99 year leases on indigenous land.

His comments on the way forward, in the final chapter, make some compelling points about the need to grapple with the changed demographics of indigenous Australia. Griffiths argues that policy makers need to discard the myth of a single Aboriginal problem. Only around 100,000 Aborigines, he points out, live in remote areas and the vast majority live in urban areas (and not the inner city Sydney suburb of Redfern at that, but in more outlying western suburbs like Liverpool). Yet even though

there are fewer Aborigines in remote areas, he notes, meeting their needs will be harder.

The weakness of this history is its Canberra-centricity. There is little mention of the influence of policy advocates other than the ministers and public servants. Noel Pearson, and the work of his Cape York organisations, barely gets a look in. Griffiths—perhaps by omission rather than commission—largely sheets responsibility for the state of indigenous affairs home to Canberra and does not give a sufficiently nuanced picture of the complexity of responsibilities in this area. Both federal and state governments have responsibility for health and education, but these areas are not covered in any depth.

This history marks a significant contribution to the literature on the history of indigenous policy. Griffiths demonstrates that the Commonwealth Government has tried policy upon policy and poured in dollar after dollar to no avail. However, Griffiths' case for a new direction in indigenous policy is short on detail on why indigenous policy went wrong and how a totally overhauled government policy would look. Land rights may continue to be a significant symbolic and economic issue, but health, employment and education deserved greater attention in this fine history.

Reviewed by Kirsten Storry