

best but still blissfully assume that somehow everything will work out.

Reviewed by Joel André Malan. He is an Australian now living in Copenhagen.

Up from the Mission: Selected Writings
by Noel Pearson
Black Inc, 2009
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Noel Pearson has been described as one of Australia's most influential intellectuals. He is known for both his work as a lawyer and lands rights activist as well as his social commentary on Indigenous issues. His essays on welfare have resonated with politicians from both sides of the political spectrum. And unlike most intellectuals, his ideas have actually made their way into government policies and legislation.

Up from the Mission: Selected Writings is his first book. It consists of speeches, essays and opinion editorials written over the last 21 years. Taken as whole, the book is not only a repository of Pearson's work but a history of Australia's Indigenous policies and politics.

However, the writings are not arranged chronologically. Speeches or essays have been chosen from various pieces written over the years to illustrate a theme. Although this lends the book a certain disjointedness, it proves his point that he has not moved closer to the Right or changed the substance of what he believes in over the years. 'Reading again what I wrote as a 22-year-old, I am struck by how little my basic convictions have changed.'

Although Pearson disagrees

that the Right have succeeded in a 'cultural war' over Indigenous policy, he has parted ways with the Left. In a section called 'Challenging Old Friends,' he describes how in the late 1990s he started to doubt whether the policies of Left and left-leaning organisations, parties and intellectuals actually serve Indigenous people. 'The Left tends to support policies that can only waste more precious time: further research, rehabilitation, harm minimisation, improved service delivery and so on.'

The Left's failure to see passive welfare as the cause of Indigenous disadvantage (not just a symptom of it) saw Pearson eventually conclude that the Left's way of thinking was more guilty of keeping Indigenous people down than the Right's. 'The freedom to be irresponsible further weakens the weak.'

Pearson is not uncritical of those from the Right. He is fully aware of their failings too, in particular the lack of empathy that some conservative Australians show towards Aboriginal culture. Yet, ultimately he has found that the Right is more interested than the Left in exploring policies that deal with Indigenous people's core social problems. It is this pragmatism that is a hallmark of Pearson's career.

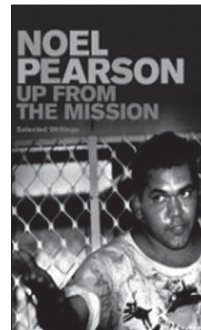
His reason for seeking support from conservative Australians was to help avoid the Left-versus-Right debate and, hopefully, lead to more widespread support for the aspirations of Indigenous Australians. To what extent this has happened is debatable. He hasn't really avoided the Left-versus-Right conflict as many on the Left now see him aligned with the Right and abhor his views on welfare reform.

Pearson's ideas have, however, made their way to the political centre. This is not to say that he is fence sitting or has found a middle-of-the-road compromise; instead, finding the 'radical centre' is his ultimate aim. It takes some re-reading to fully grasp what he means by radical centre because his language has all the clarity of conventional academic text and nothing of the searing prose he uses in his opinion pieces. 'The radical centre may be defined as the intense resolution of the tensions between two opposing principles ... a resolution that produces the synthesis of optimum policy.'

Further on, he describes some of the classical dialectical tensions, including idealism versus realism, rights versus responsibilities, social order versus liberty, structure versus behaviour, and opportunity versus choice. Here, he clarifies what being at the 'radical centre' entails.

The radical centre is not about securing a false compromise between two opposing points of view but about finding the apex where two sides meet. He uses a pyramid metaphor to talk about two qualities of leadership—idealism and realism. 'The best leadership occurs at the point of highest tension between ideals and reality ... The radical centre is achieved when both are strong.'

If one side of a dialectical struggle is weak and the other is strong, 'skewering' occurs. Pearson argues that this phenomenon is apparent today in Indigenous policy. The responsibility agenda has ascended but the rights agenda has receded. While Pearson and Warren Mundine have been championing the Indigenous responsibility agenda, there has been no effective rights leadership and advocacy. For



there to be a successful synthesis between rights and responsibilities in Australia, the rights agenda has to be equally strong. Yet, according to Pearson the rights agenda is seen as politically irrelevant. He argues that it is not possible for one actor to play several roles in the dialectical process, and that it is up to someone else to take charge of Indigenous rights leadership.

Since this book was compiled, Pearson has resigned as Director of the Cape York Institute to fight Queensland's wild rivers legislation, which on environmental grounds would restrict economic development beside rivers flowing through Indigenous land. Has his life come full circle back to his early career as an Aboriginal land rights activist or has he given up waiting for someone else to take up the mantle of Indigenous rights leadership?

Clearly, Pearson sees himself as a leader of his people, and though not everyone welcomes his campaign, he is not wrong in doing so. Pearson has proved that he is prepared to take the burden of responsibility that goes with leadership. He was not prepared to sit back in opposition and just offer perpetual commentary with only one trick up his sleeve—the power to say 'no.' Instead, he chose to set aside his personal distrust or dislike and work with the leaders of the day to put his ideas into practice.

The theme of leadership permeates throughout the book. It forms the basis of Pearson's introductory chapter, where he discusses who have been Australia's great leaders and what it takes to be a good leader. At times, this focus on leadership becomes a little tiresome, but it is interesting to read about Pearson's growing respect for John Howard, his antipathy towards Kevin Rudd, and his take on Barack Obama's presidency.

For this and many other reasons, *Up from the Mission* should appeal to more than just readers of Indigenous issues. Although the language is occasionally verbose and fanciful, most of the time Pearson demonstrates his ability to cut to the chase and get his point across. He can ram points home with a witty phrase and effective use of metaphorical imagery like 'the welfare pedestal.' His articles written for *The Australian* newspaper show that he is master of this genre. Despite the word restrictions, these are not superficial rantings but heartfelt and deeply thought out prose.

This is an illuminating book—both for exposing the causes of Aboriginal disadvantage and for its insight into the life of a very interesting and enigmatic individual. His career as a lawyer, activist and writer support his argument for Aboriginal people to gain the education to live in 'both worlds.' That there is an Aboriginal Australian of his calibre from such a small remote community like Hope Vale is cause for hope. He has shown the way—may others follow in his path.

Reviewed by Sara Hudson

For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom
by Matthew W. Finkin and Robert C. Post

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I recently received an irate letter from one of Australia's moderately well-known politicians. According to my correspondent, academics from my university were distributing pro-Palestinian 'propaganda' via a website.

Some of his constituents found this irksome, and it was incumbent upon me as vice-chancellor to make these academics stop.

On investigation, I found that some of our academics were indeed broadcasting their views on Middle East politics on a website that did not belong to the university. Still, as I wrote in reply, even if the website were ours, I would neither be able nor willing to make them stop. This is what academics do, I explained. They express their views. This does not mean that I, or my university, agree with what they say. However, in a phrase often misattributed to Voltaire, we defend their right to say it.

Even as I posted the envelope, I knew this was not the response my correspondent desired. I soon received a copy of a letter he had written to the federal Minister for Education asking her to intervene. She demurred; universities, she pointed out, were under the jurisdiction of state not federal governments.

The politician and I shared a few more desultory exchanges and then our correspondence died out as it had on many similar occasions in the 13 years that I have been a vice-chancellor. Everyone champions freedom of expression in the abstract but few can resist calling for censorship when they do not like what is being expressed.

Even in the United States, where the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, there were once Sedition Acts that made it illegal to criticise the president; even today, there are laws banning libel, obscenity and hate speech. To paraphrase the title of a popular book on free speech, it is very difficult to get people to grant freedom to ideas they hate.¹

As Matthew Finkin and Robert Post make clear in their book, there