

on Police and Corrections than any other Australian jurisdiction. It costs \$100,000 per year to house each adult prisoner, and \$200,000 for each juvenile.

The present CLP Government has just opened its new Superjail (originally commissioned by the previous Labor Government) at a cost of \$1 billion-plus.

The Attorney-General has said it will ultimately cost the taxpayer \$1.8B and take 30 years to pay off. It is the largest-ever NT Government outlay for a capital works project. Meanwhile, the present Government regularly makes significant cuts to education and health services.

The Superjail is built to hold 1100 prisoners and is already close to full, so it won't be long until another will be required.

This NT Government has recently decided that rather than spend \$4 million dollars to upgrade the purpose-built juvenile detention facility at Don Dale, it would bulldoze it and place the children into the old, consigned-for-demolition, Berrimah Prison.

So while the NT Government is spending more than \$1B on the adult Superjail, it chooses not to upgrade the appropriate juvenile facility at a relatively small price. Rather, it chooses to herd our NT Aboriginal juveniles into a revamped Berrimah. The detention of boys and girls within the patched-up, derelict adult male jail is the plan, which also includes putting female juveniles in what was the former maximum security and punishment section, B Block.

What is clear from this history and our chronic present situation is that politicians do not have the leadership, integrity, vision nor political will to deal with this difficult and tragic crisis. They are responsible for this situation. They have failed and continue to fail.

Of course, the question to be asked is, how can Australia, sitting up there at the top of the United Nations HDI tables on well-being and wealth, allow this situation to occur? Why does Australia continue to fail at such gross levels?

As a criminal lawyer working in the NT for over 25 years I have watched and been directly involved in this regression.

One reason is that over the past 20 years, all Australian governments, pursuant to vote-winning 'tough on crime' populism, have legislated to change their criminal justice systems in order to obtain more criminal convictions and resultant prison sentences.

Consequently, as intended, more people have been found guilty by our courts and more people have been sentenced to jail, and for longer periods. This increase in imprisonment has cost the community a fortune without a reductive effect on crime levels. In fact in the same period, serious crime levels, namely assaults and sexual assaults, have increased.

This punitive increase in imprisonment has predictably impacted on Aboriginal men, women and children more than any other sector of the com-

munity. This obvious consequence was known to all politicians who brought in these changes to our criminal justice systems.

Politicians will argue they are merely following the will of the people and protecting the victims of crime. But surely pandering to this will is shallow and ultimately self-defeating. We've got nowhere, the cost has been exorbitant and the situation continues in rapid decline. Again how does this happen?

Australia's recent Man Booker Prize Winner, Richard Flanagan, has observed concerning the corrosion of Australian society in the past 20 years: "We have agreed with too much that was wrong for too long."



PRISONER PARADE: The Northern Territory's been locking up Aboriginal people for a long time -- Mounted Constable William Charles Miller with prisoners in chains, Pine Creek, 1 January 1910.

Photograph copyright: NT LIBRARY- from the David R Miller Collection

Consistent with that, he further observes: "The idea now is that many things in Australia are better left unsaid". This issue can't be one of those "things."

Complacency and indifference have been the Australian disease and condition which has led to a significant drop in the country's general and civil standards and its international reputation. Complacency, indifference, acquiescence easily become complicity and collaboration.

When these figures on Aboriginal incarceration are fully outlined and explained to most Australians, they invariably agree that it should not be so and ask, "What's the solution, the bullet, silver or otherwise, that can erase this stain?"

Others, and they are a growing number, say that we have tried everything, and spent even more, and that it just can't be otherwise.

It is the writer's view that this regressive disaster has to and can be stopped and then reversed. However it can only happen if the reality (namely

these figures) describing contemporary Aboriginal Australia are put out to all and sundry for consideration, digestion and discussion.

Over the years I have worked with the Aboriginal Elder, the Reverend Dr Djinyini Gondarra from Elcho Island, who continually makes the point that it can be fixed only by changing the hearts and minds of the Australian people. That can be done only by continually reminding Australians and Territorians that this is *our* situation.

The most powerful human rights movement in history was the campaign against slavery fought by Lord Wilberforce in 18th Century England. After unsuccessfully campaigning and lobbying Members of Parliament for

and more effectively they pressured their MPs into at last voting down slavery. And so the Abolition of the Slavery Trade Act was eventually passed in 1807.

The facts about Aboriginal imprisonment need to be known by all. Only then is there a prospect that the community will seek this oil tanker of a disaster to be stopped and turned around. Only with that will, can the situation be reversed.

It is relevant to remember the gruesome conflict between the IRA and the British Government in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, known as "The Troubles." It was bloody, and real terrorism reigned. It was then considered an unsolvable problem; an historical given with no

years, he changed strategy and took his anti-slavery campaign to the men and women of England, by informing them, loudly and regularly with written propaganda and by countless meetings and gatherings, of the graphic details of what slavery actually entailed.

In meetings and gatherings with literature and pamphlets he displayed what a slave galley was actually like. He had drawings of them posted on the walls of pubs, in trade union halls and gathering places, which showed the galley as a cramped death trap with African men, women and children stacked inside. He also informed them as to how many of the men, women and children died in transit and then how they were treated as slaves -- fellow men, women and children. He would show the people graphic items like shackles and thumbscrews to inform them as to the actual ugly reality.

Having learnt those facts they considered it, acknowledged its wrong and took action to end it. They boycotted sugar entering the ports of England

workable solution. However, in 1998, after years of dedicated endeavour and goodwill, there emerged "the Accord," which to most intents and purposes ended "The Troubles," and that particular political nightmare.

Ultimately, history will judge First-World Australia as to how it fared in dealing with its Aboriginal inhabitants. It will inevitably do so by comparing it with other First World countries which faced the same challenge -- like Canada, New Zealand and some South American countries.

Where will Australia sit compared with others in that comparative table? It won't be up the top with its HDI rating.

Meanwhile, Rosetta continues to sit astride comet C7P, informing scientists back on Earth as it goes around the sun in 2015.

Will the Australian Aboriginal imprisonment rate be higher or lower once it has successfully completed its remarkable mission in 2016?

Everyone knows the answer to that question.