

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 525#

FIJI, DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION , AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

12 September 2013

Australia has elected a Coalition Government with a Prime Minister who has declared that his Party has ‘Private (religious) schools “*in their DNA!*”

This means that Australia can expect to be taken backwards in its historical development to a denominational system dominated by Mr Abbott’s church.

Denominational Systems of Education: Fiji

Even Fiji is attempting to remedy the lessons of entanglement of religion with the State. In that country the Methodist Church dominates the State and its educational system. The result of their denominational system – as Australia discovered in the nineteenth century – is to leave the majority under-educated, while providing the minority with sectarian schooling.

Fiji Education is a combination of cross culture and multi-racialism based on the guidance and administration of numerous religious organizations. The Republic of Fiji has approximately 700 primary schools and 150 secondary schools, some of which are run by the government but most by private groups, such as religious organizations. School attendance is not required by law, but most children go to elementary school and a portion also receive some part of a secondary education.

Around 20% of children in villages miss out on primary education altogether. In towns, class sizes are much bigger and one teacher may often be in charge of up to 50 students. For many an education is dependent upon ‘charity’ and can never be regarded as a ‘right’.

The mission statement of the Ministry of Education is that government schools in Fiji will *provide a holistic, inclusive, responsive and empowering education system that enables all children to realise their full potential, appreciate fully their inheritance, take pride in their national and cultural identity and contribute fully to sustainable national development*. In April 2008, however, interim Education Minister Filipe Bole called attention to the stark difference between theory and reality. Speaking of the problem of retention in Fijian schools, he said: “In statistical terms, around 15 per cent of Fiji's children do not survive the full eight years of their primary education,” and even fewer students make it through their entire secondary education

[.http://www.go-fiji.com/schools.html](http://www.go-fiji.com/schools.html)

Fiji has suffered from entanglement of religion with the State and, in its new Constitution has a clause dealing with the separation of Church and State. This provision could be interpreted as a preferential rather than a strict separationist clause, but it is at least a recognition of the problem. It reads:

Extract from the new Republic of Fiji Constitution proclaimed 6 September 2013:

Secular State

4.—(1) Religious liberty, as recognised in the Bill of Rights, is a founding principle of the State.

(2) Religious belief is personal.

(3) Religion and the State are separate, which means—

(a) the State and all persons holding public office must treat all religions equally;

(b) the State and all persons holding public office must not dictate any religious belief;

(c) the State and all persons holding public office must not prefer or advance, by any means, any particular religion, religious denomination, religious belief, or religious practice over another, or over any non-religious belief;

and

(d) no person shall assert any religious belief as a legal reason to disregard this Constitution or any other law.

The denominational system espoused by Mr Abbott has been tried and found wanting, not only in Fiji, but in Australia. As early as 1844 a Commission of Enquiry in New South Wales found that the principle of the denominational system was to leave the majority of children uneducated while imbuing the minority with sectarian beliefs.

For 90 years, (1872-1964) Australia enjoyed a public system which kept sectarian interests at bay through the withdrawal of public funding of such institutions and separation of religion from the State.

But the return of State Aid, and now, the preferential treatment of the denominational system is turning Australia back into the misfortunes of an unfair, sectarian society.

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