



Indigenous leaders welcome defeat of Howard and Brough

AAP - Sunday, November 25, 2007

Author: Adam Gartrell

Some indigenous leaders have welcomed the end of the Howard government and expressed relief that Mal Brough has been forced out of parliament. Mr Brough - the outgoing minister for indigenous affairs - lost his Queensland seat of Longman to Labor candidate Jon Sullivan after suffering a swing of more than 10 per cent.

With the likely exception of outgoing prime minister John Howard himself, Mr Brough was the the most high-profile coalition MP to be unseated. Mr Brough, the architect of the government's dramatic and controversial intervention into Northern Territory indigenous communities, was a divisive figure. His approach was supported by such high-profile Aboriginal leaders as Noel Pearson and Galarrwuy Yunupingu, but others deemed it racist, draconian and unworkable.

Mr Brough has called on Labor to continue the NT intervention, to which it gave bipartisan support earlier this year, but it will almost certainly be watered-down. Indigenous affairs more generally also will undergo change.

Olga Havnen, CEO of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the NT and spokeswoman for the National Aboriginal Alliance, said the change of government could be transformative for indigenous people.

"Mal Brough has lost the trust of Aboriginal people and John Howard has lost the trust of the Australian people," she said. Mr Havnen said the magnitude of the swing against Mr Brough showed the intervention was a critical factor in the election. "Not only is this intervention a travesty against Aboriginal people's rights, but it has been a shambles."

Eileen Cummings, former policy adviser to the NT chief minister said the election result was a "moral victory" for Australia. "Aboriginal people have supported the Labor Party," Ms Cummings said. "Now it's time for the Labor Party to show us that our support is justified."

Indigenous policy expert Professor Jon Altman said he was relieved Mr Brough was gone. "I thought that he was a very poor minister for indigenous affairs," Prof Altman said. "I think there was no prospect that his approach would have delivered for indigenous people on a long term sustainable basis. "And I think that ultimately his major initiative, the intervention, is going to be a very costly mistake."

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation national director Gary Highland said the change of government could start "a new era" for indigenous affairs. "But we

certainly can't take anything for granted and we'll still need to effectively make the case for change to achieve the sorts of things that we want," he said.

Tasmanian Aboriginal leader Michael Mansell said Aboriginal people across Australia would be relieved to see the backs of Mr Howard and Mr Brough. "Both Brough and Howard missed the cynicism the electorate had towards the motives of the coalition for invading Aboriginal communities in the lead up to the election," he said.

AAP