

Mandated child abuse

This last week, I had a three hanky night at the movies. My wife Jenny and I went to see the British/Australian film called "Oranges and Sunshine". The film tells the story of a social worker who almost single-handedly brought the attention of the Australia and British public to the plight of some 130,000 British children who were quietly deported to Australia after the Second World War.

The social worker, Margaret Humphries, took as her life work the challenge of locating children separated from their parents, who were mostly individuals struggling with poverty and social stigma. Many were told that their children had been adopted and were in happy homes.

As Mrs Humphries was to see at high cost to herself, the truth was far darker, with thousands being shipped to Australia to live in children's homes without their parents' knowledge of where they had gone. And the result for some was catastrophic, with some being subjected to systematic abuse whilst in these children's homes. The film tracks the stories of several children whose lives were blighted by their treatment. Mental illness, and an inability to relate to others, followed for those subjected to abuse. And whilst there were many who would say they benefitted from the child migrant scheme, there are enough broken people to say that this social experiment went dreadfully wrong.

Of special interest to me was the story of a young boy sent as an eight year old to a remote children's home in the north west of Western Australia. The home was run by an order of brothers, and away from the public eye terrible things happened to the children. They quickly surmised that no one cared about them and that they were worthless, feelings that still haunt them to this day.

And the reason for my interest is that this very week our Government has embarked on another social experiment that entails sending a group of unattached refugee minors to another facility in the same remote corner of Australia. And in the same week we have a spokesman for the AMA, Dr Peter Morris, telling the story of the attempted suicide of a nine year old child in one of our detention centres, and claiming that the detention of children in Darwin was tantamount to child abuse, adding that he would be surprised if it was an isolated event. He went on to say, "We are the only developed country that has mandatory detention - people are seeking asylum so that means they have been in very difficult circumstances and they already have very high levels of post traumatic stress disorder."

What are we as a nation condoning by our silence?

As I See It, we seem to have learned little from the past. Adults and children fleeing from unimaginable horrors arrive in Australia seeking a respite and are imprisoned. And we argue whether we will ship them to Malaysia or Nauru. When will we learn that it is people smugglers that need to be dealt harshly with, not those fleeing oppression!

Thank God for those like Margaret Humphries who at great personal cost, speak out against injustice.

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article.

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