

FOLEY CONDEMNS ARRESTS

THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE ABORIGINAL ARTS BOARD, MR GARY FOLEY, TODAY CALLED FOR THE DISMISSAL OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE TOWNSVILLE 5TH PACIFIC FESTIVAL COMMITTEE, MR ROBERT MERRIT, AFTER MERRIT YESTERDAY ORDERED POLICE TO INTERVENE IN A PEACEFUL ABORIGINAL DEMONSTRATION IN TOWNSVILLE RESULTING IN FOUR ARRESTS.

MR FOLEY SAID THAT MERRIT CLEARLY DOES NOT HAVE THE CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT OF THE TOWNSVILLE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY WHICH IS VITAL IF THE FESTIVAL IS TO GO AHEAD AS PLANNED NEXT YEAR. FURTHERMORE, IT WAS AN UNPRECEDENTED DISGRACE FOR POLICE TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO INTERVENE IN A DISPUTE OF THIS NATURE.

TO ADD TO THE FARCICAL SITUATION, ONE OF THOSE ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH TRESSPASS OF THE FESTIVAL OFFICE IS IN FACT THE LOCAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE ON THE COMMITTEE OF THE FESTIVAL, MR EDDIE MABO.

MR FOLEY SAID THAT THIS WHOLE RIDICULOUS SITUATION HAD BEEN ORIGINALLY CREATED BY FORMER MINISTER CLYDE HOLDING WHO HAD IN 1986 ORDERED HIS DEPT TO TAKE OVER ORGANISING THE FESTIVAL FROM THE ABORIGINAL ARTS BOARD WHICH HAD SECURED TOWNSVILLE AS THE VENUE FOR THIS PRESTIGIOUS INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL. MR HOLDING HAD THEN, IN A HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL DECISION EARLY IN 1987, APPOINTED MERRIT AS BOTH CHAIRMAN OF THE ARTS BOARD AND THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE FOR THE 5TH PACIFIC FESTIVAL.

MR FOLEY HAD AT THE TIME VOICED STRONG OBJECTIONS AND GRAVE CONCERN ABOUT MERRIT'S TOTAL LACK OF KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE OR COMMUNITY CREDIBILITY TO FORMER ARTS MINISTER COHEN, AUSTRALIA COUNCIL OFFICIALS DONALD HORNE AND MAX BOURKE AND OTHER GOVT OFFICIALS, BUT HE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT THE APPOINTMENT WAS 'POLITICAL'. FOLEY HAD ULTIMATELY RESIGNED FROM THE ARTS BOARD OVER THIS DECISION AND OTHER BLATANT POLITICAL INTERFERENCE FROM CLYDE HOLDING.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN TOWNSVILLE IS THAT THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY IS OUTRAGED AT YESTERDAYS EVENTS, AND FURTHER SIT-INS AND POSSIBLE ARRESTS ARE MORE THAN LIKELY TODAY AND MONDAY. REPS OF THE TOWNSVILLE PEOPLE HAVE ALSO CALLED FOR MERRIT'S REMOVAL, AND FOLEY SAID THAT HE HAD TALKED TO MEMBERS OF THE ABORIGINAL ARTS BOARD WHO ARE SIMILARLY ANGRY AND IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT MERRIT WILL BE THE SUBJECT OF A NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION AT THE NEXT BOARD MEETING IN TWO WEEKS.

BUT THE GREATEST TRAGEDY WAS THAT THE FESTIVAL, WHICH HAD BEEN ENVISAGED BY FORMER A.A.B. CHAIRMAN CHICKA DIXON AND FORMER DIRECTOR FOLEY AS BEING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ABORIGINES TO HOST A MAJOR EVENT IN 1988 THAT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE BICENTENNIAL, NOW SEEMS DOOMED.

MR FOLEY SAID THAT PERHAPS THIS WAS CLYDE HOLDING'S INTENTION ALL ALONG, AND PERHAPS THATS WHY HE APPOINTED AS CHAIRMAN SOMEONE WHO HE KNEW WOULD STUFF IT UP.....

NEVERTHELESS, FOLEY SAID THAT MERRIT'S POSITION ON BOTH THE ARTS BOARD AND THE FESTIVAL COMMITTEE IS NOW UNTENABLE, AND THE GOVT SHOULD SACK HIM IMMEDIATELY.

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