

Forget past, Mr Bropho

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ROBERT BROPHO talks about Aboriginal demands for sovereignty and his people living in a stolen land (report, 5/6).

Yes, Mr Bropho, I can understand that atrocities were committed against your people and I can feel abhorrence and be sorry that they were committed, but I did not commit them. I can also feel sorry for the many innocent settlers who fought (sometimes vainly) to protect their lives and those of their families against tribes intent on massacre. Nevertheless, I would agree that the greater number of incidents was attributable to the new "white man's government".

In response to your claim that you are living in a stolen land, I can only say, welcome to the real world, Mr Bropho. While you and your ancestors were living here in relative peace, my home country, Britain, was invaded by the Romans, the Celts, the Vikings, the Danes, the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans and no doubt countless others. In more recent times, descendants of those same invaders repelled further invasions from the Spanish, the French and, of course, the Prussian and German armies and protected Australia from a similar fate.

Despite these massacres, bombing and the gassing and mutilation of millions of my 'ancestors' none of Britain's ancient tribes or periodic invaders claims they are living in a stolen land. Neither do they expect handouts or pursue massive land claims to the detriment of the incumbent population. Quite simply, it is history and it is not within our capacity to re-write it.

However, I could spend the rest of my life pursuing each one of those countries to say sorry or I could experience and add to the richness of the culture derived from them. This does not endorse what has occurred but simply illustrates that we cannot bear the burden and atrocities of a thousand generations long since gone. Surely for us to justify their sacrifice we must learn from our past, have more compassion for our fellow man and try to ensure that it never happens again.

For this philosophy to succeed it needs to be embraced by all racial groups without recrimination and attempts to inflict guilt and blame on innocent adults and children. This obsession with historical morbidity can only drag the nation down, deter conciliation and strike the wedge that separates our two cultures.

No matter what religion or spiritual background we come from, we cannot live consumed by the compounding grief of each generation.

DENNIS NEWLAND, Forrestdale.