

## Invasion or peaceful settlement?

The *Daily Telegraph* newspaper got upset at the Sydney Council stating the First Fleet land at Port Jackson was an invasion. Although the newspaper gave no supporting reasons as to why it believed Australia was peacefully settled, the editor roundly condemned the Sydney Council's position. The dictionary defines invasion to mean, '*the act of invading as an enemy; entrance as if to take possession or overrun*'.

So much for free speech. The Daily Telegraph would do well to remember the dictum of one of its own, Winston Churchill: *the truth is incontrovertible, malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it; but in the end, there it is.*

When all is said and done, the Sydney Council only stated what seems to be a fact.

The *Daily Telegraph* went further claiming that anyone who subscribes to the view that whites invaded Aboriginal people's lands in 1788 should go back where they came from! If the argument cannot be beaten, send 'em home so we can ignore them. Does not pay to speak out in NSW, it seems.

What do we know of the landing in 1788? Historians agree that of the 9 British ships that made up the first fleet, two were warships. Between them, these warships carried 18 cannon on deck, and were backed up by 245 marines armed to the teeth. Another 306 ship's crews were on standby. It was a small army backed up by a powerful part of Britain's navy.

When they landed at Port Jackson in 1788, the 1,373 newcomers intended to establish a colony on the shores of the lands of Aboriginal people. Just in case, a further 6 cannon were ready to be taken ashore to protect the colony against any opposition. The intention was clear: one way or another, consent of the natives was never a consideration.

If that landing could be described as a peaceful settlement, then so too could the US led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam. Like the western invasions of the countries mentioned above, the British stayed here, created government, an economy and imposed their own legal systems with force.

And today the boat people are told to get visas, and immigrants to learn the language and culture to blend in!

Strangely, ultra-right wing Liberal Senator Eric Abetz claimed the use of the term 'invasion' to describe events in 1788 meant native title could not exist. What nonsense. It is because there was an invasion in the first place that the British legal rules for conquered peoples applied, one of which is native title. No wonder the good Senator declined *Tracker's* invitation to elaborate his argument.

The invasion of a people's country is a political and not a legal matter, the High Court regularly reminds us. The white law does not consider the rights or wrongs of the invasion but simply applies rules to the consequences of that invasion. Native title was recognition of Aboriginal land interests that survived the dispossession and slaughter.

The editorial of the *Daily Telegraph* also urged the Sydney Council to stop looking backwards. Would the same newspaper tell the ANZACS to give up celebrating a war in some forgotten country nearly 100 years ago, or abandon the divisive celebrations on Australia Day? Or is it a case of look to the past but only when it is convenient?

The nation is quick to claim national pride but slow to acknowledge national shame. As Pulitzer prize winner Herbert Agar once said,

*'The truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear'.*

**Michael Mansell**