

Tony Abbott's remarks at the Quadrant Dinner at the Windsor Hotel on Monday, November 13, 2023

There is absolutely no doubt that the person who got the ball rolling and who kept the ball rolling so well with a succession of very well argued articles and oped pieces was Gary Johns.

Gary, you were perhaps the principal godfather of our victory and you deserve a round of applause. All I did was my usual "three word slogan" effort, you know, "race-based constitutions" and things like that.

Two people were obviously indispensable, Warren Mundine and Jacinta Price.

Others played an absolutely vital role behind the scenes, particularly Advance Australia, the centre right counterpart to Get Up, which provided the logistics of the campaign and did extraordinarily well.

Without Peter Dutton coming to the welcome realisation that entrenching race in our Constitution was fundamentally incompatible with a liberal political position, it would have been much harder.

Along with Jacinta and Warren, Peter was one of the indispensable heroes of the referendum.

But I've got to say that our own editor in chief, Keith Windschuttle, was also at the heart of the victory because you cannot win a public debate without the intellectual mastery of the issues.

And...for years Quadrant has been publishing on this issue, Keith himself is probably our most indefatigable and best historian of Indigenous Australia and Indigenous issues.

But, the challenge is to make the most of this. There is no doubt that we of the centre Right, we who believe that Western civilisation has for more going for it than against it, we've had a wonderful victory.

The challenge is to ensure that this victory is built on, not squandered, or largely squandered. such as some other significant victories in recent times: such as the British public's rejection of the sclerotic, statist EU in an embrace of sovereignty and independence. Largely squandered, I regret to say, because there wasn't adequate follow up and the thinkers didn't know how to make the most of what had happened.

Sixty per cent of the Australian public in defiance of overwhelming opinion of what might loosely be described as our elites: big business, big tech, big sport, and most of the media, were vociferously in favour of a yes vote, but showing commendable independence a very large majority of the Australian people voted no.

And yet we have to understand that those no voters are to a significant extent politically and intellectually still homeless.

The Green Left Labor Party can never represent them effectively. While the Liberal National Coalition did represent them effectively on this issue, the challenge will be to represent them effectively on more issues as time goes by.

The overwhelming mindset of the people who voted no was that they wanted security: they wanted cultural security, they wanted economic security; they didn't want to have the country that they loved constantly rubbished, and they didn't want so much that was precious to them routinely overturned.

What that means is: there is a tremendous opportunity for public leadership which respects Australia, which respects its people, and which wants to improve their lives, but doesn't want to insult their intelligence.

And that will be, in my opinion, culturally cautious and conservative, and economically sensible; but not necessarily in the pockets of the econocrats and big business which has shown that it almost completely lacks conscience and character over the last few years.

There's a huge opening for public leadership along those lines, and that's going to mean new and better ideas about how we revive and strengthen our education system at every level.

It's going to mean a much more sensible approach to immigration that's not anti-immigrant, but which is very much pro-Australia.

It's going to mean an approach to economics which first does no harm and then in doing good is careful not to rip off the people who are trying to work hard but have not always been given the chance to do so.

It's going to involve a new approach to industry policy which doesn't have government picking winners, but which likewise does not facilitate our important industries moving offshore because all that matters is short term profit.

So there's is a real opening for a new and better way of doing things, a way that will build community as well as strengthen the economy, create a better society as well as creating a stronger economy.

In fact, this is really what was at the heart of the ARC conference in London, the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship; what they were trying to do was "to tell a better story".

Because for too long we have tended to lament everything that's going wrong rather than celebrate the things that are still going right and to build on our strengths.

There's every reason to think that that will be a seismic point for those of us who think that Western civilisation is worth preserving, defending and spreading