

THE SATURDAY PAPER

OPINION

Marcia Langton

The folly of Jacinta Price

No one with a revulsion for the influence of the alt-right or neo-Nazis in our body politic would be surprised to learn that an aspiring Aboriginal candidate for the House of Representatives could graduate from the role of children's entertainer "Yamba the Honey Ant" to darling of the Country Liberal Party and the federal Coalition. Still, the average pundit would not be aware that the majority of this person's social media followers are the rabid racists who claim to support a pro-Aboriginal cause by backing the aspirant's bizarre political agenda.

This hopeful candidate is Jacinta Price, Alice Springs Town councillor and daughter of a Warlpiri woman, Bess Price, and David Price, an enigmatic white Australian who has lived in the Northern Territory for more than four decades. In April, Jacinta won preselection for the seat of Lingiari. She has been a favourite of the prime minister's since. She is also a favourite of Mark Latham's, and the face of his "Save Australia Day" campaign. She argues – for the benefit of anyone looking to blame Aboriginal people for their own oppression – that domestic violence is an

innate part of Indigenous culture.

THE DAMAGE SHE CAUSES TO THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY IS WELL KNOWN.

Bess Price was elected as the Country Liberal Party member in the NT seat of Stuart in 2012, with an 18 per cent swing, standing against her nephew, Labor candidate Karl Hampton. She was soon appointed to the ministry by chief minister Adam Giles. His grip on power was tenuous from the beginning, having taken the leadership in a midnight coup against the hapless Terry Mills, who had flown to Japan to negotiate a trade deal. Giles also took Luritja woman and member for MacDonnell from 2005 to 2016 Alison Anderson into his fold when she switched sides from the ALP to the CLP. Anderson instigated a period of instability by then switching to the Palmer United Party, taking two other sitting Aboriginal members with her. As his numbers walked out the door, Giles appointed Bess Price to several portfolios – from 2013, she was minister for community services, parks and wildlife, statehood and women’s policy, in 2014, minister for local government, and, in 2015, minister for housing. In a landslide vote that left two of its members remaining in their seats, this rump of the old Country Party lost power at the 2016 NT election. It is rumoured the party now has about 20 members.

The younger Price’s tilt at power is another colourful turn in the circus of Northern Territory parliamentary politics, not just because of her alt-right following or the dynastic family play involved, but also because her constituency is, unlike her mother’s, majority white. She is also a political naif with none of the mongrel factor that Anderson displayed in her contentious career.

Both mother and daughter Price have been the victims of domestic violence. It is their public opposition to domestic violence that reveals their strange relationship with the alt-right. While both appear sincere in their comments about the impact of

violence on their own lives, their failure to extend sympathy to other Aboriginal victims raises questions about their motives.

Of 12 siblings, only Bess Price and her younger brother still survive. Her younger sister, Rosalie, was murdered. Her policy responses to the senseless loss of life among her Warlpiri people was straight out of the pages of Noel Pearson's published works, although I doubt they have met. She advocated employment and a disciplined life, because these saved her from an abusive Warlpiri husband. Ever since, her revulsion for the "culture" of her people has been hinted at in her style of speaking.

Leaving aside appearances on mainstream television, many of Bess Price's speaking engagements have been at the invitation of the right-wing think tanks. It is important to communicate with all Australians on this issue, as I have a number of times myself, but speaking at the Bennelong Society or the Centre for Independent Studies to the exclusion of other organisations raises the suspicion that Bess and Jacinta have become the useful coloured help in rescuing the racist image of these conservative outfits. Bess Price delivered the Bennelong Society's inaugural Peter Howson Lecture in December 2009, also on the topic of Indigenous violence, and received the Bennelong Medal. She spoke at the Centre for Independent Studies in Sydney on March 23, 2011. In 2012, as a very public supporter of the Northern Territory intervention, Bess Price took on Amnesty International for opposing the government action. The influence of the Bennelong Society was apparent. She complained that Amnesty's view was formed by "a white blackfella from Tasmania ... and a woman from Victoria claiming to be Indigenous".

In a written response to Amnesty, she said: "When Aboriginal women in Central Australia ask for help, when they are killed, raped and beaten, when they cry for their abused children, you ignore them and you support those who are oppressing them. When the government tries to do something for them you call them racist and you blather on about the UN."

Launching Stephanie Jarrett's book, *Liberating Aboriginal People from Violence*, in 2013, she reminded her audience of the Coniston massacre of 1928. According to a report by Peter Coleman, she said white Australia had changed since that massacre. "But too many Aborigines have not changed – or not yet. Too many have tragically clung to an ancient tradition of violence, especially against women."

Jarrett's book uses selected and highly suspect evidence to trace the tradition of violence against women and the sexual abuse of children to "pre-

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contact origins” – that is, before the coming of the white man.

This very public contempt for her own culture, and participation in its depiction in stridently derogatory and primitivist terms, lost Bess Price her seat in the 2016 election. At 30 per cent of the population in the NT, Aboriginal people have shown themselves to be savvy voters, causing major swings and deciding elections. Bess Price learnt this lesson the hard way. The question is whether Jacinta Price is sufficiently aware of the NT realpolitik to pay attention to her Aboriginal constituents. There are no signs so far that this is the case.

In a profile for *The Weekend Australian Magazine* this year, Matt Garrick revealed the extent of local outrage at Price’s behaviour and political agenda. “In her desert hometown, some have begun striking out against Price’s firebrand commentary,” he wrote. “A perception that she hasn’t properly consulted with women in town camps and communities has added kindling to the blaze.”

Fellow Indigenous councillor Catherine Satour read a statement to the town council on behalf of the “Aboriginal women of Central Australia”, taking aim at Jacinta Price. She quoted federal Labor MP Linda Burney, saying Indigenous leadership did not come from media or money or other white constructs. “... it is given when you have proven you can deal with responsibility and you understand that responsibility.”

Garrick described the “stoush” that erupted afterwards. A screaming match broke out on the lawns of the council. Jacinta Price was not there, but her family was. Security was later upgraded at the building.

While councillors are pretending that Jacinta Price’s growing national profile – exploiting her mother’s brand of anti-violence campaigning and appeal to the scientific racism of the alt-right – has no relevance to Alice Springs council matters, the reality is a deeply divided council and growing tension in the town.

During Bill Shorten’s visit to the Northern Territory to attend a large Aboriginal meeting at Barunga in June, Price attacked him on 2GB for his comments about too many Aboriginal children being removed from their families. She said, “The last thing they need is some know-it-all whitefella to come in paternalistic, as has been happening for 200 years, and say, ‘Listen, you’re just children and we’ll just fix it all for you.’”

The unnecessary removal of Aboriginal children and

failure of the child protection system is a hot-button topic with Aboriginal people throughout the country, and especially in the Northern Territory. Did Price select this issue herself, or did her advisers?

Thousands of Aboriginal people have attacked her on Facebook for her hypocrisy about it and her statements on domestic violence. In response, thousands of Price's followers, most of them barking mad racists, attack Aboriginal interlocutors online. This past month alone, I have blocked about 400 of Price's alt-right followers on Twitter.

Jacinta Price is useful to politicians. She legitimises racist views by speaking them against her own people. When she walks through Alice Springs and Tennant Creek with the prime minister, she waves a flag for the increasingly normal brand of race politics coming from Canberra.

The damage she causes to the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory is well known. The Tangentyere Council's Women's Family Safety Group, a service at the frontline against violence, is one of the victims of Price's play for power. Price declined to invite them to the meeting in Alice Springs with the prime minister. There is more to be said about her attacks on local Aboriginal people. She turns her Mr Hyde face to these people and her Dr Jekyll face to the conservative politicians and rabid racists in her constituency. In the current political climate, it may be that only Aboriginal people can stand up to this gothic personality and her dangerous agenda.

In 2013, in a brief stint as a singer, Price recorded an album entitled *Dry River*. There was no follow-up. The title may yet be portent of the political career she hopes is about to come.

This story was modified on August 27, 2018, to remove an earlier reference to Jacinta Price being assaulted by her "first white husband". Price's first husband was not white and he did not assault her. The Saturday Paper apologies to the parties involved.

This article was first published in the print edition of The Saturday Paper on Aug 25, 2018 as "A Price not worth paying". [Subscribe here](#).
