

Remember -

By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail.

-- Ben Franklin

### **By David Heather Pascoe**

Dear Men and Women of Australia,

A photograph of a woman was taken in the Great Depression of 1934. Her name was Florence Owens Thompson, a 32 year old mother of seven children who was sitting homeless in a tent. The photograph was published in the newspapers of America and it enraged the nation, because people could not believe that Americans could be treated in such a way. It forced President Roosevelt to act, to step up and become a leader for his times: he launched soup kitchens, work gangs, programs for the homeless, dams and roads and railways were built - and he gave his people hope.

John Steinbeck later wrote a book called *The Grapes of Wrath* which became an American literary Icon.

It was about a drought that made the farmers penniless - and how the banks had forced them off their land so they could sell it on to the big corporations. What happened to the farmers of Oklahoma carved a deep and shameful scar across the American identity that was felt throughout the Twentieth Century.

The second photograph on this page is of Charlie Phillott, 87, an elderly farmer from Carisbrooke Station at Winton. He has owned his station since 1960, nurtured it and loved it. He is a grand old gentleman, one of the much loved fathers of his community.

Not so long ago, the ANZ bank came and threw him off his station because the drought had devalued his land and they told him he was considered an unviable risk. Yet he has never once missed a single mortgage payment.

Today, Charlie Phillott, Grand Old Man of the West, is living like a hunted down refugee in Winton, shocked and humiliated and penniless. And most of all, Charlie Phillott is ashamed, because as a member of the Great Generation - those fine and decent and ethical men and women who built this country - he believes that what happened to him was somehow his own fault. And the ANZ Bank certainly made sure they made him feel like that.

Last Friday my wife Heather and I flew up with Alan Jones to attend the Farmers Last Stand drought and debt meeting. And after what I saw being done to our own people, I have never been more ashamed to be Australian in my life.

What is happening out there is little more than corporate terrorism: our own Australian people are being bullied, threatened and abused by both banks and mining companies until they are forced off their own land

So we must ask: is this simply to move the people off their land and free up it up for mining by foreign mining companies or make suddenly newly empty farms available for purchase by Chinese buyers? As outrageous as it might seem, all the evidence flooding in seems to suggest that this is exactly what is going on.

What is the role of Government in all of this? Why have both the State and Federal Government stood back and allowed such a dreadful travesty to happen to our own people? Where was Campbell Newman on this issue? Where was Prime Minister Abbott? The answer is nowhere to be seen.

For the last few months, The Prime Minister has warned against the threats of terrorism to our nation. We have been alerted to ISIS and its clear and present danger to the Australian people.

Abbott has despatched Australian military forces into the Middle East in an effort to destroy this threat to our own safety and security. This mobilisation of our military forces has come at a massive expense to the average Australian taxpayer which the Prime Minister estimates to be around half a billion dollars each year.

We are told that terrorism is dangerous not only because of the threat to human life but also because it displaces populations and creates the tragedy and massive human cost of refugees.

Yet not one single newspaper or politician in this land has exposed the fact that the worst form of terrorism that is happening right now is going on inside the very heartland of our own nation as banks and foreign mining companies are deliberately forcing our own Australian farmers off the land.

What we saw in the main hall of the Winton Shire Council on Friday simply defied all description: a room filled with hundreds of broken and battered refugees from our own country.

And all over the inland of both Queensland and NSW, there is nothing but social and financial carnage on a scale never before witnessed in this nation.

It was 41 degrees when we touched down at the Winton airport, and when you fly in low over this landscape it is simply Apocalyptic: there has not been a drop of rain in Winton for two years and there is not a sheep, a cow, a kangaroo, an emu or a bird in sight. Even the trees in the very belly of the creeks are dying. There is little doubt that this is a natural disaster of incredible magnitude - and yet nobody - neither state nor the federal government - is willing to declare it as such.

The suicide rate has now reached such epic proportions right across the inland: not just the farmer who takes the walk " up the paddock" and does away with himself but also their children Continued on page 9 7

From Page 8 An Open Letter To The Australian People: and their wives. Once again, it has barely been covered by the media, a dreadful masquerade that has assisted by the reticence and shame of honourable farming families caught in these tragic situations.

My wife is one of the toughest women I know. Her family went into North West of Queensland as pioneers one hundred years ago: this is her blood country and these are her people . Yet when she stood up to speak to this crowd on Friday she broke down: she told me later that when she looked into the eyes of her own people, what she saw was enough to break her heart And yet not one of us knew it was this bad, this much of a national tragedy. The truth is that these days, the Australian media basically doesn't give a damn. They have been muzzled and shut down by governments and foreign mining companies to the extent that they are no longer willing to write the real story. So the responsibility is now left to people like us, to social media - and you, the Australian people.

And so the banks have been free to play their games and completely terrorise these people at their leisure. The drought has devalued the land and the banks have seen their opportunity to strike. It was exactly the excuse that they needed to clean up and make a fortune, because once the rains come - as they always do - this land will be worth four to ten times the price.

In fact, when farmers have asked for the payout figures, the banks have been either deeply reluctant or not capable of providing the mortgage trail because they have on-sold the mortgage - just like sub-prime agriculture.

This problem isn't simply happening in Winton, but rather right across the entire inland across Queensland and NSW. The banks have been bringing in the police to evict Australian famers and their families from their farms, many of them multigenerational. One farmer matter of factly told us it took "oh, about 7 police" to evict him from his first farm and "maybe about twelve" to evict him from his second farm which had been in his family for many generations. You think they are kidding you.

Then you see the expression in their eyes. And there was something far worse in the room on Friday: the fear of speaking out against the banks: when we asked people to tell us who had done this to them, they would immediately start to shake and cry and look away: They have been silenced to protect the good corporate image of their tormentors called the banks. What in God's name have the bastard banks been allowed to do to our people?

This is a travesty against the rights and the human dignity of every Australian So it's only fair that we start to name a few of major banks involved: The ANZ is a major culprit (and they made \$7 billion profit last year). Then there is Rabo, which is now owned by Westpac (who paid CEO Gail Kelly a yearly salary of some \$12 million) According to all reports, the NAB is right in there at the trough as well - and all the rest of them are equally guilty.

For any that we have missed, rest assured they will be publicly exposed as well. But here's the thing: when these people are forced off their farms, they have nowhere to go. There are no refugee services waiting, such is the case for those who attempt to enter the sovereign borders of this nation. The farmers simply drive to the nearest town - that's if the banks haven't stripped their cars off them as well - and they try and find somewhere to sleep.

Some are sleeping on the backs of trucks in swags. There is basically no home or accommodation made available to take them. They camp out, shocked and broken and penniless - and they -are living on weet bix and noodles. If there is someone that can lend a family enough money to buy food, they will: otherwise they are left completely alone.

And consider this: not one of them has asked for help. Not one. They just do the best they can, ashamed and broken and brainwashed by the banks to believe that everything that has happened is completely their own fault There is not one single word of this from a politicians lips, with the exception of the incredibly courageous father and son team of Bob and Robbie Katter, who organised the Farmers Last Stand meeting.

The Katter family have been in the North since the 1890's, and nobody who sat in that hall last Friday could question their love and commitment to their own people.

There is barely a mention of any of this as well in the newspapers, with the exception of a brief splash of publicity that followed our visit. The Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, attended the meeting in a bitter blue-funk kind of mood that saw him mostly hunched over and staring at the floor. He had given \$100 million of financial assistance in a lousy deal where the Government will borrow at 2.75% and loan it back at 3.21%.

The last thing these people need is another loan: they need a Redevelopment Bank to refinance their own loans: issuing a loan to pay off a loan is nothing more than financial suicide.

The reality is that Joyce cannot get support from what he calls "the shits in Cabinet" to create a desperately needed Redevelopment Bank so that these farmers can get cheap loans to tide them through to the end of the drought.

Our sources suggest that those "shits in Cabinet" include Malcolm Turnbull - Minister for Communications and the uber-cool trendy city-centric Liberal in the black leather jacket, Andrew Robb - Minister for Trade and Investment and the man behind the free trade deal, the man who suddenly acquired three trendy Sydney restaurants almost overnight, the man who seems to suddenly desperate to sell off our farms to China - and one Greg Hunt, Environment Minister and the man who is instantly approving almost every single mining project that is put in front of him.

At the conclusion of the meeting, we stood and met some of the people in the crowd. My wife talked to women who would hug her for dear life, and when they walked away people would suddenly murmur "oh, she was forced off last week" or "they are being forced off tomorrow". Not one of them mentioned it to us.

They had too much pride. The Australian people need to be both informed and desperately outraged about what is being done to our own people. This is about every right that was once held dear to us: human rights, property rights, civil rights. And most all, our right to freedom of speech. All of that has been taken away from these people - and the rest of us need to understand that we are probably next.

In the last four weeks the Newman Government has removed all farmers rights to protest to a mine and given mining companies the rights to take all the water they want from the Great Artesian Basin - and at no cost to them at all.

And all of this has happened under the watch of both Premier Newman and Prime Minister Abbott.

Until Friday, we used to think of Winton as the home of Waltzing Matilda: it was written at a local station and first performed in the North Gregory Hotel. I think it was Don McLean who wrote, "something touched me deep inside...the day the music died"... in his song American Pie, and for us, last Friday was the day music died.

We will never be able to sing Waltzing Matilda again until we see some justice for these people, and all the farmers of the inland.

This is no longer the Australia we once knew: no longer our country, no longer our people, no longer the decent caring leaders we once remembered. Right now, the banks, the mining mates, the corrupt politicians and all the 'mongrels in suits' have won - and the Australian people don't have a clue what has been done to them.

Like the American Depression and the iconic photograph of Florence Owens Thompson, there is a terrible, gaping wound that has been carved across the heartland of this nation

We need to fully grasp that, and to understand that our people dignified, decent and honourable old men like Charlie Phillott have been deliberately terrorised, brutalised - and sold out.

So if we are ever going to do something, then we'd better realise that its two minutes to midnight so we'd better move fast.

Regards

David Heather