Dodson vows to make school count for kids

MANY Aboriginal children are deprived of a teacher for up to two days a week, says Australian of the Year Mick Dodson.

Professor Dodson addressed the National Press Club yesterday and said he wanted Labor's "Education Revolution" to reach every classroom.

The indigenous leader signalled a determination to make education the central theme of his one-year tenure, saying the so-called Education Revolution was worth "bugger all" if investment was not poured into teacher quality, relevant curriculums and providing school reports parents could understand.

He also urged a move away from the "practical" versus "symbolic" reconciliation debate. "It's nonsense," he said. "What does impractical reconciliation look like?"

"It is providing the money for infrastructure and not seeing that it's built and serviced properly — putting up the schools and not seeing that kids learn inside them?"

Professor Dodson gave as an example a school on one remote outstation, surrounded by parents who wanted their children to learn.

"But the teacher is only there half the week at most," he said.

"Primarily concerned with reaching national benchmarks and university entrance standards, the responsible officers have decreed that teachers will spend only five or six days a fortnight in the classroom."
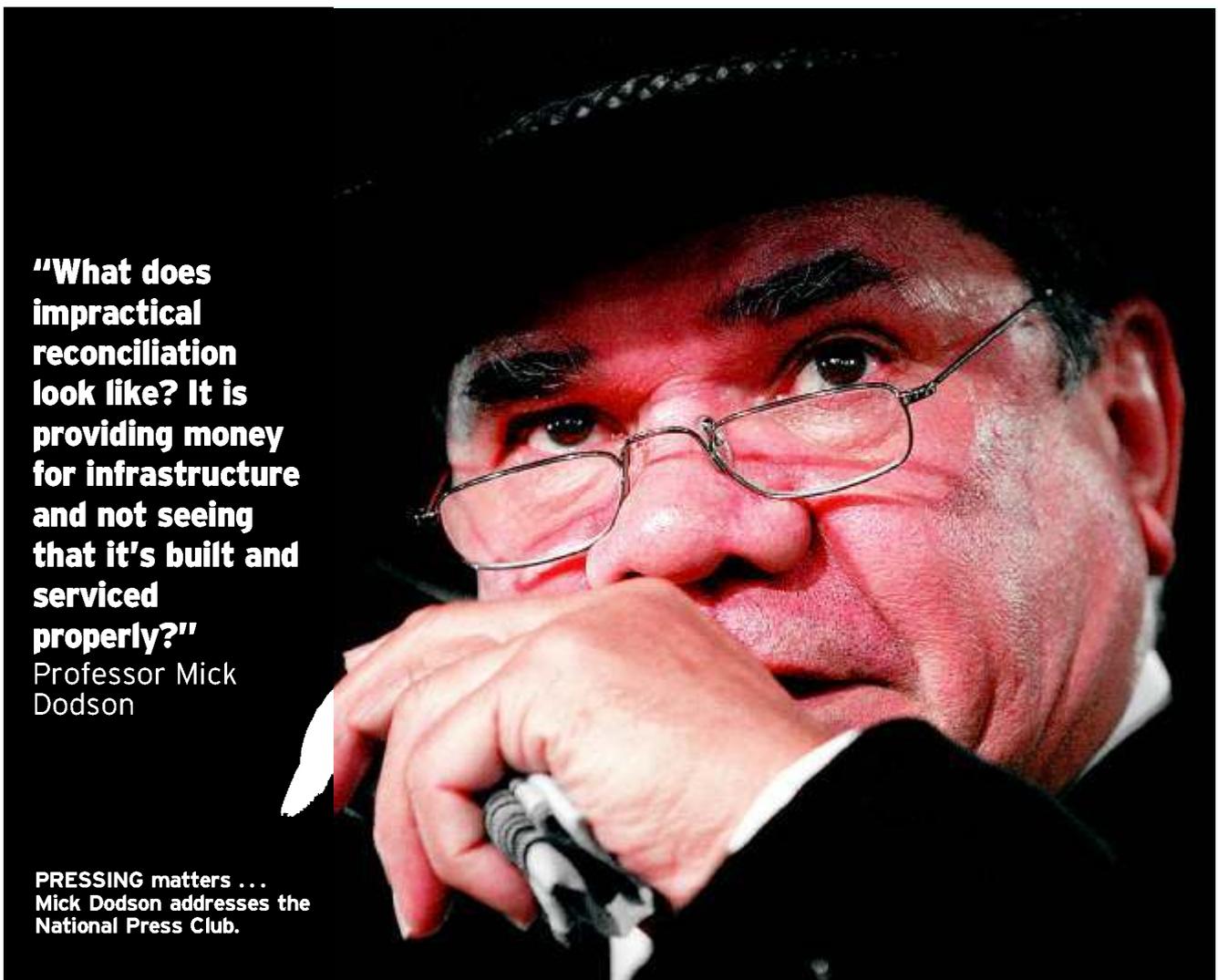
He said his aim was to have every child "geared up" for the new school year in 2010.

"Shoes on the kids' feet, breakfast in their tummies, well rested, ready to learn, willing to learn, able to learn," he said.

Federal Opposition Aboriginal affairs spokesman Tony Abbott said Professor Dodson had expressed "a very worthy goal" but added indigenous communities had to show an unshakable determination to send kids to school.

Michael Madigan

"What does impractical reconciliation look like? It is providing money for infrastructure and not seeing that it's built and serviced properly?"
Professor Mick Dodson

PRESSING matters ... Mick Dodson addresses the National Press Club.