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### This Our Land

# Stewart Harris

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### Introduction

When I was a young man, about twenty-five years ago, on the remote Barkly Tableland in the Northern Territory, I got off a horse one dark night, with very great difficulty and little dignity. It was the end of a hard day's ride, twenty-five miles, and the beginning of a big mustering camp. I was the cook. The head stockman was white and so was I. All the other stockmen were black, Aborigines. I remember that the two whites camped together and the blacks camped a little way from us, but we all worked happily together and that night, hearing laughter from the blacks' fire, I went across to join them. One of the blacks was doing a wonderful re-enactment of my tortured dismounting earlier that night.

Back at the homestead on the cattle station the Aborigines lived with their families and, being a stranger, I accepted their situation, which seemed happy enough at the time. But I do remember that some of their names were Brandy, Waistcoat and Top Rail. So it was recognised that they were different. I doubt if white Australians would have wanted to be called by these names.

Five years later, in 1951, I began to work as a reporter, first on Australian papers for several years and then for *The Times* (London). Several times I returned to the Northern Territory, camping once on the Murranji Track, the stock route for cattle from the Kimberleys going into the Territory. At Newcastle Waters I met Captain Major, who was later to lead the first strike by Aboriginal stockmen in the Territory. By now I was becoming aware of Aboriginal suppression, but Aborigines were still politically invisible and I did not write about them, except incidentally. It was typical that I should commission an

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article about them for *The Times* from an anthropologist. It was learned and interesting, but not in any way stirring.

In 1965 I was at last made to take notice of the plight of Australia's Aborigines. In that year Charles Perkins, the first Aboriginal to graduate from a university, led a 'freedom ride' of students through some racist country towns in New South Wales. I began to report the Aboriginal issue better. I asked Charles Perkins to write an article for *The Times*. It was very unlike the anthropologist's article.

But not until 1971 did I begin to talk seriously with Aborigines, with some of the young radical Aborigines who protested against the South African Rugby tour of Australia. They were protesting against the treatment of their own people in Australia just as much as against apartheid in South Africa.

It was this year, 1972, however, that for the first time a tiny minority of Australia's 150,000 Aborigines began to shock and educate the twelve and a half million of their white fellow-countrymen. On 26 January, Australia Day, a very few young radicals responded brilliantly to what the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon, W. McMahon, believed to be a historic new statement of Aboriginal policy. He announced some improvements, but it was clear that his government would not give Aborigines the kind of land title granted to indigenes in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. Immediately the young radicals confronted the government by setting up a tent encampment of protest on the lawns outside Parliament House in Canberra. It lasted almost six months, and in that time, peacefully, they taught Australians about their terrible situation within Australia. Interviews from the tent were featured on Australian radio and television whenever an issue arose affecting Aborigines anywhere in Australia.

Then on 20 July the government's patience, which had much to do with the growing public sympathy with the Aborigines, finally snapped. The police were ordered to remove the tent encampment. Bitter fighting erupted when the police moved in against the last of the tents, which the

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Aborigines had called their 'embassy'. For them it symbolises their feeling that they are foreigners in their own country so long as they have no legal freehold title to any part of Australia, even to Aboriginal reserves. Six Aborigines and two white supporters were arrested that day. Of course the government won, but the question remained, and it was put by an Aboriginal poet, Kevin Gilbert:

What is it you want, whiteman? What do you need from me? My culture? My dreams? You have leached the substance Of love from my being. You have leached the substance Of race from my loins. Why do you persist? Is it because you are a child Whose callous inquisitiveness Probes, as a finger questing To wreck a cocoon To find the chrysalis inside? To find, to explore, To break open, to learn anew That nothing new is learned And, like a child With all a child's brutality, Throw the broken chrysalis To the ground. Then run, unthinking To pull asunder the next? What do you seek? Why do you destroy me. Whiteman?

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One of those arrested was Bobbi Sykes, a remarkable young woman from North Queensland. One week later, when the Aborigines once again put up their tent, as a gesture of defiance and a reminder that their condition within Australia had not changed, she shouted at supporters protecting their embassy from the police:

'What do we want?'

'Land rights!' they shouted back.

'When do we want them?'

'Now!'

'And what have we got?'

'Fuck all!'

This savage exchange, angry, effective, and shocking to the vast apathetic majority of Australians, seems to me wholly justified. Something has been done for Aborigines during the last few years, but precious little in terms of need and urgency.

I wish I could have taken every single Australian into Redfern with me recently to see within the great city of Sydney undernourished, almost starving, Aboriginal children, little children, battling enthusiastically to learn within a quite impossible system of education. I wish I could have taken every single Australian into the streets outside the Empress Hotel one Saturday night to watch plainclothes policemen from D21 Squad intimidating a group of Aborigines with drawn batons. As the great Russian writer and Nobel prize winner, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, persecuted in the Soviet Union and once grimly imprisoned in Siberia, said in August 1972: 'There are no internal affairs left on our crowded earth! And mankind's sole salvation lies in everyone making everything his business.'

### 1 Sordid Business

'While I remain Prime Minister the interests of my people, the Aborigines, are my paramount concern', said the Rt Hon. the Prime Minister, W. McMahon in Adelaide on 25 July 1972. Then he had his photograph taken with his arm around an Aboriginal girl, Iris Hunter, aged 18.

After fifteen years of political reporting in Canberra, however, I have learned that a major part of the art of politics is to confuse people about the truth. This has made it very hard for Australians to feel strongly the need to hear and respect Aboriginal opinion. 'Development' has been the great political theme, and Aborigines have seemed to stand in its way. So white Australians have had to be 'guided' by ministers and public servants. The result has been to confirm Australia's Aborigines in their belief, based on 200 years' experience, that white men are not to be trusted.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate the position. On 30 June this year I was the guest of Swiss Aluminium Limited and the Australian group of companies which have developed a \$300,000,000 bauxite and alumina project at Gove in the Northern Territory, about 2000 miles north-west of Sydney. The consortium had brought Swiss journalists from Zurich, and I was one of several invited Australian journalists.

The project is right in the middle of the Aboriginal Reserve, Arnhem Land, which was meant to be reserved for the use and benefit of the Aboriginal people.

Eight years ago, on 28 August 1963, about 500 Aborigines from tribes and clans gathered from Yirrkala, a settlement about twenty miles from Gove, sent a petition written in the Gubapuyngu tongue to the Parliament in

Canberra protesting against the excision of land from the reserve for the project. The petition said 'The procedures of the excision of this land and the fate of the people on it were never explained to them and were kept secret from them'.

It was a sad beginning to a sordid affair. Eight years later the Aborigines of Yirrkala were still fighting for their land, not physically, but politically and legally. In a historic judgment on 27 April 1971, the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, sitting in Alice Springs, found that Aborigines have no legal title to their ancient tribal lands. So there was no hope for the people of Yirrkala from the white man's law.

In the plane going up to Gove in June I asked the company, whose guest I was, if they could arrange for me to go to Yirrkala. I was told that everything would be done to get me there, but it would be very difficult because the Prime Minister was coming up to open the alumina plant and all local transport would be reserved for VIPs. However, the journalists would be taken in a special bus around the town and works of Gove. I begged to be excused from this bus ride and, when it proved impossible to get me to Yirrkala officially, had no trouble hitching a ride with a young Australian working in Gove. I told him I wanted to meet Galarrwuy Yunpingu, who is leader of the Gomatj tribe.

'Oh, he's a friend of mine', said my young driver. 'He's great.'

We found Galarrwuy dressed up in a smart suit with shirt and tie.

'Why are you all dressed up?' my friend asked him with a smile.

'Haven't you heard?' answered Galarrwuy, 'the Prime Minister's coming this evening.'

Galarrwuy, 25, speaks good, articulate English, having been three years at the Methodist Training College in Brisbane, Queensland. Last year he was in Switzerland for a Moral Rearmament Conference.

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Yirrkala is a beautiful place on the edge of Cape Arnhem, overlooking the Arafura Sea and the Gulf of Carpentaria. For thousands of years Galarrwuy's ancestors have lived in these parts. They were supposed to be reserved for these people. That evening he said to me very simply, "The company came and when we said "No" they did not listen to us'. Then he added, 'The government fooled us'. Galarrwuy thought for a moment and went on, 'A township must have a hotel, but we didn't know this'.

When the Aborigines had realised that white men could not have a town without a place to drink, they opposed the building of the hotel in the Licensing Court in Darwin because they feared the effect of drink on their people. Their case failed in the Court and for a time they refused to provide bricks from their new brickworks for the building of the hotel. Now, thoroughly disillusioned, the Aborigines at Yirrkala have had to accept what has been done.

But they have always made their feelings thoroughly clear. On 6 May 1971 Roy Marika, 44, the elected chairman of the Yirrkala Council, flew to Canberra with two other Aborigines and personally presented a petition to the Prime Minister. Written in the Gubapuyngu language, it said the people of Yirrkala had been deeply shocked at the result of the Supreme Court case:

We cannot be satisfied with anything less than the ownership of the land. We have the right to say to anybody not to come to our country. The law must be changed. The place does not belong to white man. They only want it for the money they can make. They will destroy plants, animal life, and the culture of the people.

Marika, now an M.B.E., was also at Yirrkala that evening on 30 June, but on this occasion I did not meet him because he was busy preparing for the Prime Minister's visit. However, earlier this year, soon after McMahon had made his Australia Day announcement that Aborigines would not be getting land rights, Marika said his people were 'fed up with people who take our land'. He was

referring to plans by the same company at Gove to establish a wood-chip industry over at least 1000 square miles of the Arnhem Land Reserve, a condition of its establishment being that Aborigines would not be given title to the timber or the land. The company argued that it could not be expected to negotiate with 'people who at this stage lack the necessary experience and knowledge'.

It is quite apparent that the Australian Government, in any case not deeply concerned to hear and heed the wishes of Australia's very small minority of Aborigines (with very, very few votes) is under continual pressure from big companies to remain unconcerned.

I left Yirrkala with my young Australian friend just as a fleet of large black cars arrived with the Prime Minister and his party. We drove back to Gove where I explained to the company's publicity manager what an interesting time I had had, and that McMahon had suddenly turned up. Immediately my fellow journalists, Australian and Swiss, back from their conducted bus ride around the town and the plant, asked why they had not been taken to Yirrkala to see the Prime Minister, with 'my people, the Aborigines' as he put it in Adelaide. It was, indeed, surprising that McMahon, so naturally interested in publicity, especially in an election year, should have been denied his press at Yirrkala. One can only assume that the company, which certainly knew all about his itinerary, did not want any journalist to hear what Aborigines had to say, least of all the journalists from Switzerland, where the behaviour of Swiss Aluminium Limited with regard to Aboriginal rights is a big issue.

Next day, on 1 July, it was noticeable that the Chairman of Swiss Aluminium Limited, at a very splendid luncheon for the Prime Minister, spoke without once mentioning McMahon's Aboriginal people. But the Prime Minister said that Australia's objectives must be based on plans which 'recognise the wishes and aspirations of the Aboriginals', though a fair balance had to be struck between Aboriginal and community interests, he said.

Earlier that morning the Prime Minister, cool and

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debonair in pink shirt and slacks, had opened a residential school for Aboriginal children at Dhupuma. I wish I could adequately describe the artificiality of this occasion and of every occasion I have ever seen when politicians, senior public servants, and big businessmen meet Aborigines. There is no reality in what they talk about with Aborigines, because they will not take the trouble to sit down with them and spend time quietly listening and trying to understand. It is no wonder that the Prime Minister was able to say, in Adelaide, of his visit to Gove, 'Wherever I went up there I found goodwill, real goodwill, and they said that they did not like other people down here complaining.' I wonder if the Prime Minister has ever heard the recording made by Galarrwuy Yunpingu, accompanying himself with a guitar while he sings the Land Rights song, 'Tribal Land'.

My boy, said the old Yirrkala man I've a very sad tale to relate The balanda<sup>1</sup> says we lost our land In seventeen eighty eight.

It seems that in that year of grace One Captain Phillip landed At a place in the east called Sydney Cove But he didn't come empty handed.

For he put up a flag And he said this land Now belongs to George the Third And if anybody wants to challenge this Then let his voice be heard.

The only thing that's wrong my boy Is that we were never told That this applied to the tribal land Which we are pledged to hold.

If Governor Phillip had landed here And tried to take Yirrkala It wouldn't have taken us very long To fix that English fella But there was no fight
And when the white man came
We welcomed him as a friend
But we never told him he could have our land
For that would be the end.

For haven't I told you often my boy That the land was all created By Wuyal and by Djangkawu<sup>2</sup> And then it was populated

By the Yiritjar and the Dua<sup>3</sup>
Of the Yolngu<sup>4</sup> at Yirrkala<sup>3</sup>
The Riratjingu,<sup>3</sup> Gunatj,<sup>3</sup> Dhalwangu<sup>3</sup>
And the other rata and mala

But after what has happened my boy I wonder just what you'll say For if we don't own the tribal land I've taught you things the wrong way.

The Madayln<sup>5</sup> system can only work If we own the land today As we did for the many thousands of years Before Phillip came this way.

We're supposed to keep the tribal laws And sing of the Janbuwal<sup>6</sup> Of Baram<sup>6</sup> and the Wawilaks<sup>6</sup> And the sugar-bag man Wayal

But the Bunggul<sup>6</sup> has no meaning boy If we don't control the land The older people can't pass things on To the Djamarkuli's<sup>7</sup> hand

Perhaps we should have known better boy Instead of the songs we sing We should have pledged allegiance to A mad blind English King.

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white man.
 Spirits.
 Tribe names.
 Aboriginal people.
 traditional.
 Ceremonial life.
 Children's.

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Dr H. C. Coombs, Chairman of the Council of Aboriginal Affairs, which is the government's own advisory body on Aboriginal policy, said in a broadcast on 5 January 1969 that the people at Yirrkala had no part in or sense of identity with the mining venture at Gove. 'To them it is an alien intrusion, already destructive of things important to them.'

He continued, 'We must with patience and understanding try to talk with these people', and he reminded listeners that

all communication, in so far as it occurs, between the people of Yirrkala and white Australians, if it happens at all, happens in a language which they alone must struggle to comprehend, and which is concerned with concepts and events utterly beyond their experience.

But haste was all to the mining venture, he added, so the Aborigines had taken legal action against the government and the company.

It is in a way touching that they should appeal to the law, to our law. I am no lawyer, but I understand that our law is intended as an expression of natural justice and that its very basis is the recognition and protection of rights and obligations established in a time (as the lawyers say) beyond which the memory of man runneth not. It will be interesting to see what attitude it takes to rights and obligations of even greater antiquity, but derived from the needs and disciplines of a different society.

We know now that the white man's law of Australia dismissed the appeal by the people of Yirrkala. But there remain profound problems in the sharing of Australia with Aborigines. These problems, according to Coombs, 'are of a kind which are unlikely to be solved with intelligence and honour unless there is a genuine public interest in their solution'.

Public interest has developed remarkably. The Australian people should now, perhaps, ask themselves whether their government has the understanding or the will to try to solve these problems.

## 2 Dreamtime into Nightmare

How long are we, you and I, men and women who can be moved by compassion, who can recognise virtue in diversity and who can wonder at a people who could survive in harmony with this continent, perhaps for thirty thousand years, how long are we going to tolerate this continued destruction, to permit these people day after day to be driven into despair?

—H. C. Coombs, December 1971.

Implicit in these words there is, I think, a condemnation not only of Australia's treatment of the Aborigines for 200 years, but also a plea for an end to any policy of quick impatient assimilation.

Kath Walker, Australia's most famous Aboriginal poet, feels the same way. She has written:

Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river And where is your wine? There is only the river. Must the genius of an old race die That the race might live?

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What, then, is the present position of the Aborigines, and what brought them to this state? In dry, unsensational, and so the more telling terms, the Council for Aboriginal Affairs reported to a Senate Standing Committee of the Australian Parliament early this year (1972). To summarise: the report sets out the background, present conditions, and prospects of the Aboriginal people.

Today's Aborigines are descended from a unique stock of people who probably came to Australia 30,000 or more years ago, and in their isolation developed over that immense period of time a very specialised way of life in harmony with their environment. In 1788, when Captain

Phillip brought out the First Fleet from England, there were probably some 300,000 Aborigines in Australia. Today there are about half that number. They comprise about 45,000 of unmixed Aboriginal descent, the remainder are of mixed race. About 5000 are Torres Strait islanders, a Melanesian group.

Almost all the pure blood Aborigines are in the north and centre of Australia where white settlement has been sparse. Most Aborigines (about 68 per cent) live in the country, unlike white Australians, but recently the numbers of Aborigines in the capital cities have doubled. The Aboriginal population is increasing at a rate more than double that of the Australian population as a whole. By the end of this century there will probably be about 500,000 people of Aboriginal descent.

The report stated that all Aborigines were 'severely disadvantaged' compared with white Australians, and it went on:

Aboriginal health is distressingly poor. Evidence of malnutrition is widespread. Infant and maternal mortality is many times the general Australian level. Respiratory disease, gastroenteritis, ear diseases and deafness, trachoma and other serious eye infections, hook worm and leprosy are markedly more common than among other Australians.

Aborigines, said the report, were 'unsatisfactorily housed' and at least 1000 new houses a year were needed. In education and employment, too, the Aborigines were a long way behind white Australians.

Until 1967 the responsibility for all Aborigines living in the states of Australia lay with the individual state governments. The Commonwealth government was responsible only for Aborigines in federal territory, most of which is the Northern Territory. In 1967 the Australian people voted overwhelmingly at a referendum to give the Commonwealth government the power to legislate for all Aborigines anywhere in Australia. As one outcome of the referendum two new bodies were set up: an advisory Council

for Aboriginal Affairs and an Office of Aboriginal Affairs. They recommend policies and programs to the Commonwealth government and implement them through relevant Commonwealth and State departments. Initially, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs was within the Prime Minister's Department, but McMahon placed it within a junior Ministry, under a Minister also responsible for the Environment and the Arts.

In the five years since the referendum, annual federal expenditure on Aborigines has increased from \$9·3 million to more than \$50 million (the states have increased theirs hardly at all, from \$11 million to only \$12 million a year). These increased funds have enabled the building of about 1000 more homes, the provision of more schools and preschools, individual grants for education, more hospitals, clinics and health services, employment training, encouragement for Aboriginal cultural and sporting activities, and assistance in setting up all kinds of businesses.

On the legal status of Aborigines the report claimed that 'While equality before the law is almost assured, it remains true that Aborigines sometimes suffer discrimination in practice.' (This, as we shall see, is a fine understatement.)

The Senate Standing Committee was told that individuals had achieved a satisfactory place within the dominant Australian society, but in general

a people without links with the past, without social and family cohesion, without material resources, without self-respect and hope for the future is unlikely to be able to cope with the demands of a complex, industrial society, largely alien and indifferent to their difficulties.

'Given adequate finance', the Committee was told, the Aboriginal situation could be greatly improved; and the Council's report concluded strongly: 'Unless the vicious circle of paternalism, dependence and pauperism is broken within the decade of the 70s, the problem will become much more difficult, if not impossible to solve.'

Earlier, in a sensible appeal to Australian materialism,

the report said that Aborigines could become an economic asset instead of a continuing and growing burden. At present the potential Aboriginal workforce, at least 20,000, made a negligible if not negative contribution to the gross national product of Australia.

In contrast with this is the passionate, but equally truthful, passage in the Australian Union of Students' periodical *National U:* 

'End the Australian war now!' said the heading on this article, and it went on:

Let us teach the children the real history of this country. Let us teach black children that their forefathers died resisting the enemy. Let us tell the children the truth . . . Babies die, children die, hungry pregnant women are making babies that are doomed to die. Better that we die resisting than we let the babies do all the dying, while we sit still and let it happen.

Later in this book I shall give facts and figures to justify this kind of savage writing and deep feeling.

Dispassionately and factually the Council for Aboriginal Affairs has delineated the degradation of the Aborigines. How did they reach this condition?

According to Professor W. E. H. Stanner, one of Australia's great anthropologists, an expert on Aborigines, a member of the Council, and a man of profound experience and humanity, the first five years from 1788 were critical in forming the character of Aboriginal-white relationships for the next 200 years. In his Boyer lectures for the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1968, called After the Dreaming, Stanner said that Governor Phillip, soon after he landed in January 1788, determined that there would be no show or use of superior force against the native people. He wanted them, in his own words, to have 'a high opinion of their new guests'. But the Aborigines apparently held back. Phillip was disappointed and blamed both them and the convicts for many incidents. He tried to convey his good intent, without a word of the language, and of course failed completely. Violent incidents continued and

by October in that first year he had determined that the Aborigines must be kept at a greater distance.

By this time, however, the whites were facing serious trouble. Starvation seemed not far away. By the end of 1788 Phillip concluded that he had made a mistake and decided to bring Aborigines into the settlement, perhaps to help it with their experience. He kidnapped three Aborigines, Arabanoo, Colby, and Benelong, and brought them into the settlement. Arabanoo died from smallpox and the others eventually escaped. Again Phillip had failed. Finally, in September 1790, poor Phillip, brave and good-hearted but unwise, nearly met his death from a spear thrown during a chance encounter with Benelong and 200 other Aborigines at Manly Cove.

At the end of 1790 Phillip's personal huntsman, a convict named M'Entire, was speared at Botany Bay. He was a bad man but his murder roused Phillip, who sent out a punitive party which he ordered to kill ten Aborigines and return with two captives whom he would then hang in the presence of as many of their countrymen as can be collected, after having explained the cause of such a punishment'— no doubt by signs, for no one knew a sentence of the language.

The expedition failed completely. However, despite the murder and its aftermath, there were now many Aborigines within the settlement of Sydney. The whites were no longer frightened of them; nor did they need them, nor did they care about them.

Thereafter, according to one historian, 'The native question sank into unimportance', and Stanner's comment is 'Which I understand to mean that no one bothered any more about it'.

At this point in the story he tried to correct some of the traditional white Australian folklore about Aborigines. They were not by nature a weak and submissive people, without character. They were, in their own way, highspirited and militant. But they were not an organised martial people. They had no need for the larger social and political organisation or for the kind of leadership that turns courage into the service of a great cause. Their weapons were light, against guns, and, because they were scattered, they found it difficult to concentrate a large force or to keep it together once assembled, because it had to scatter in order to find food: 'The continent was lost and won, not by campaigns and operations of scale, but by local attrition. It was inched away.'

Stanner recalled the great Aboriginal warriors, Yagan and Midgegooroo of Western Australia and Durmugam of the Northern Territory, whom he knew personally for many years, and he continued:

It is high time that our histories were renovated to do justice to the other side of the struggle that was still going on in the Northern Territory in the early 1930s. There were then several regions where police, cattlemen and prospectors were reluctant to go.

But no Aboriginal, because of his culture, ever believed in the thrusting, assertive style of European leadership.

By the 1880s, according to Stanner, 'a good half of the continent's 600 and more tribes, including those within the 20-inch rainfall belt, had been more or less obliterated'. The great wrecker had been the pastoral industry.

Stanner believes that the apparent mildness and passiveness of the Aboriginal today is a product mainly of four things: homelessness, powerlessness, poverty and confusion; that there is no more terrible part of Australia's nineteenth-century story than the herding together of broken tribes into artificial settlements and institutions, under alien authority.

Having dispossessed and dispersed the Aborigines, the whites found consolation in the current theories: the law of progress and the survival of the fittest. This convenient doctrine claimed that Aborigines were one of God's special creations, outside the line of true man, who were destined to die out, so nothing could be done for them except to isolate them in reserves, and 'smooth the pillow of a dying people'.

Inconvenient facts were easy to ignore, and few were more inconvenient than the success of the Aborigines who lived and worked on the Victorian Coranderrk Reserve of 4850 acres. Here, in the 1870s, the five remaining great tribes of Victoria were doing remarkably well. Most spoke good English. Many read, and a few even wrote to the newspapers. Some were good farmers. They built houses, erected fences, grew cash crops, and ran some cattle. They sold craftwork and some went shearing for European wages outside the reserve. The manager of the reserve was John Green, a man with ideas 100 years ahead of his time. He gave to his people, whom he described as 'very proud and sensitive', full responsibility for their own discipline.

However, in 1886 the government forced 'half-caste' Aborigines to leave reserves, and most of the able-bodied men had to leave Coranderrk. Gradually Coranderrk was broken up and taken over by the whites.

By 1926, after many years of white Australian urban and suburban ignorance and indifference, reports of atrocities in the outback began to reach the cities, but the extinction of the Aborigines was still presumed to be inevitable, their passing 'predestined'. The authorities knew very well what was happening. Indeed when Stanner first went to the Northern Territory in 1932 he was told what to expect. He is remarkably honest and revealing about his own attitude in those days:

Apparently what lay before my eyes seemed to me to be a natural and inevitable part of the Australian scene, one that could possibly be palliated, but not ever changed in any fundamental way.

Any possibility of regeneration of Aboriginal economic, social, and political life was not even thought of.

Stanner's own conversion came in 1934 when he went to the gold rush at Tennant Creek in Northern Territory. I had to keep a gun hard by to guard my stores, which just then were nearly as good as gold . . . there were no police. I remember the first trooper coming, with some savage dogs, after there had been a shooting.

He was angered by the decision to move the local Aborigines, the last of the Warramunga, away from the waterholes and out of the way of the miners, who needed the water for panning. Human need for water ran a poor second to mining requirements.

The 1967 referendum was the first great hope for Aboriginal people because it showed that a huge majority of Australians wanted the federal government, which disposes of the great mass of Australian revenue, to take up the Aboriginal issue at last. But the government has not yet acted, presumably on the assumption that the voter does not want his pocket hurt, just for Aborigines. Is the government right? Kath Walker thinks so; she said that the referendum simply 'cleared the guilt from the conscience of the majority of European Australians, who feel they have done their duty to the Aboriginals by placing a large "yes" on the ballot paper'.

Today's treatment of Australia's natives by its white settlers is not paralleled in other countries. In the United States, for example, by 1945 about \$800,000,000 had been paid to Indians for the purchase of their land. Since 1946 the Indian Claims Commission in Washington has approved claims from individual tribes for another \$370,000,000.

About two years ago President Nixon announced a new policy to let America's 800,000 American Indians, most of whom still live on or near reserves, run their own affairs, and the United States Senate voted overwhelmingly to give the Taos Pueblo Indians title to 48,000 acres of Carson national forest in New Mexico. Early this year (1972) Congress passed the Alaska Native Land Bill which gives to Indians and Eskimos \$1,000,000,000 and 40,000,000 acres of land. The money will be paid into indigenous corporations, for such projects as education and housing. It will come from government grants and from royalties from mineral production from all public land in the state.

The United States Government now encourages young Indians not to leave the reserves for jobs in the cities and

is creating Indian-owned services on the reserves, so that a dollar earned on the reserves will stay there, not flow out into white cities.

In Canada and in New Zealand, too, much land is also owned by the original inhabitants.

Jack Davis, the Western Australian Aboriginal leader and poet, has written beautifully of his people's tragedy:

Where are my first-born, said the brown land, sighing; They came out of my womb long, long ago.

They were formed of my dust—why, why are they crying And the light of their being barely aglow?

I strain my ears for the sound of their laughter, Where are the laws and the legends I gave? Tell me what happened, you whom I bore after, Now only their spirits dwell in the caves.

You are silent, you cringe from replying. A question is there, like a blow on the face. The answer is there when I look at the dying, At the death and neglect of my dark proud race.

Reprinted by courtesy of the author

But Jack Davis's 'dark, proud race' is beginning to stir. There has been a revolution in the expectations of the Aborigines all over Australia. They are no longer unaware of the world beyond their shanties and their settlements. They know about wealthy white Australia. They know that New Guinea is about to get self-government and that its people own much of their land. Some are beginning to realise that the gap between the average real conditions of the Aborigines and of white Australians is widening, not narrowing.

Charles Perkins said recently that white people and Aborigines were moving apart, and he added: 'while it is unfortunate, everything points to this trend continuing'. Perkins, a family man who works with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, ought to be heard with respect. He is no 'irresponsible young radical'. He predicted growing bitterness and possible violence between white and black people within Australia.

### 3 Broken Promise

In the Aboriginal magazine *Identity* there is a poem whose author is not named, just his initials, S.W., are given. His irony seems aimed at the Australian government, as representing rather than leading the Australian people.

Anyway, here is the poem.

WHY?

Why do they stare at my brother and sister? Why do they turn up their noses at me? Why do they ignore that my mouth is moving And that I am an Aborigine?

They think I'm no good and, like my elders, They think, as a teenager, I should know better. No notice is taken of what I am saying, No answers are given after it's said. Why are they ignorant and inconsiderate? Is it because I am black or are they misled?

The government's Council for Aboriginal Affairs should appreciate that line, 'No notice is taken of what I am saying'.

In the five years since the referendum, though a good deal of notice has been taken of the Council by the Gorton and McMahon governments, little action has followed; there has been a failure of will by both governments, which have assumed that the people do not care enough about Aborigines. Certainly the governments have not cared enough, themselves, to get out and lead the people.

In both the last two financial years the government has very significantly reduced the amount of money recommended by its Council for spending on Aboriginal development. For 1971-2 the Council recommended a vote of

\$30,000,000. It received a little over \$14,000,000; for 1972-3 the Council's recommendation was reduced by \$10,000,000.

Yet the Hon. Peter Howson, Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, said in Parliament last year that the government was not spending 'anything like the amount that is needed to shoulder all the tasks that need to be done'. If not, it must be asked today 'Why not?' Coombs told the Senate Committee in Canberra recently:

We are keeping alive children who would, in the past, have died, and we are producing a race of cripples, children who will be so physically handicapped that they will not be able to live normal lives and earn their own livings, even if the other obstacles were not there.

Every one of these children, Coombs went on, would survive as kinds of invalids costing the states great sums of money. He concluded:

Every year that we leave the condition of the Aborigines definitely unimproved makes the problem so much worse and so much more difficult to solve. Therefore we think it is important not to step up expenditure little by little, year after year. It would be wiser and more economical to throw into it right away a big increase so that you could from the outset make a major impact on the conditions of Aborigines.

C. D. Rowley, author of three books in the Australian National University Press's major series, Aborigines in Australian Society, has said 'The core of the Aboriginal situation is political'; or, as an Aboriginal said the other day more brutally, 'We Aboriginals have had the arse surveyed off us'.

Gorton began well by appointing as Minister in charge of Aboriginal affairs his friend, the Hon. William Wentworth, who had for many years been genuinely interested in Aborigines. Then, perhaps because it was still very small, he doubled the vote for Aboriginal development, from \$5,000,000 to \$10,000,000. After that he lost interest, except to have his photo taken dancing with an

Aboriginal debutante at a ball in Sydney on National Aborigines Day.

McMahon has in fact done more for Aborigines than any other Australian Prime Minister, but in the context of their need nothing like enough. He has not had the will to overcome the meanness and ignorance of his Country Party colleagues in Cabinet. 'I thought him a very insecure little man', said Mrs Faith Bandler, General Secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Mrs Bandler, an Aboriginal, was speaking in Canberra after a meeting with the Prime Minister.

It is incredible that these two successive Liberal-Country Party governments have refused on the issues of real substance within Aboriginal policy to heed the advice of Coombs, whose advice on the whole Australian economy was taken with such confidence for two decades by Sir Robert Menzies and his successor, the Rt Hon. Harold Holt.

It would be difficult to dismiss Coombs as 'a do-gooder', although that in fact is what he has always been, in the most practical, skilful and responsible of ways. Most Australians know his public record very well: Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction, 1943-9, Governor of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, 1949-60, Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, 1960-8. But not many people know the range of his experience and humanity. He is a man of very great character and humility, very much at ease with Aborigines, and they with him. Kath Walker has said:

My main ambition in life is to see Dr Coombs Prime Minister of Australia. Australia needs men like 'Nugget' Coombs. He is always prepared to go into the field, mix with the people and get down to brass tacks.

Coombs was born 66 years ago at Kalamunda, in the hills near Perth in Western Australia. His father was a railway station manager, so the family moved around a

good deal. But Coombs got himself to the University of Western Australia and then became a teacher in the country. He remembers the problems of teaching a small minority of Aboriginal children in his classes but he remembers particularly their problems, not his. As a teacher he experienced some of the racist feelings of Australians in country towns like Katanning and Pingelly.

He and Mrs Coombs now live in Sydney and they have four children, three sons and one daughter. One of their sons, John, is a barrister, who has defended a lot of Aborigines in court. One of the four girls in John Coombs's family is an Aboriginal, Sue, whom they adopted about four years ago when the settlement on Melville Island near Darwin, in the Northern Territory, was closed.

I have heard many stories about Coombs in the field, which is where he very often is and likes to be. When he meets Aborigines in the bush, he will sit on the ground and listen to them. 'This is wonderful, that a great man has come to us and listened to us', said one Aboriginal after a meeting with Coombs. It had never happened before, apparently. On another occasion in central Australia at Amata settlement, Coombs was introduced to an Aboriginal named 'Nugget'. 'I'm "Nugget" too', said Coombs happily, and it was not the response of a superficial man, clutching at some slight identification with strange black men. At Groote Eylandt, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Coombs was mobbed by children who loved his simplicity and his small size. Coombs went off with them holding hands.

Coombs once told a meeting in Sydney of an experience he had at Wingellina in the Western Australian desert. Nickel had been discovered there, and he went to investigate reports that sacred sites had been destroyed. He was taken to the sites by what he called 'a rather broken and derelict group of old chaps'.

We set out in a rather broken down old truck, shot a few kangaroos for food and went on to Wingellina. There they took me to the sites, sacred to them and to their ancestors, and to see the damage that had been caused . . . As the day progressed there was an obvious increase in stature, an increase in authority in these men. Increasingly I became conscious of being a learner, someone who was being instructed in a mystery of infinite complexity. . . .

#### He went on:

We went out that night and sat in a circle in the sand with two or three fires between us as they sang the songs of the cycle. They were songs sung in a kind of Gregorian chant-style melody, while they beat the rhythm of the song into the sand with a stick. I sat amongst them, putting my hand on the hand of the man next to me, trying by moving with him to feel the complex rhythm of the song. The night was dark, there was no moon, the only light being from the stars and the fires. For me this was one of the most moving, aesthetic and emotional experiences of my life.

In that circle I realised that these people, whom I had presumed to think of as derelicts, had dignity and authority backed by a tradition which ran back through time infinitely beyond that which our own could claim.

It is difficult to imagine either McMahon or Howson, or any Country Party minister who has been responsible for the Aborigines in the Northern Territory, being able to talk to the Australian people in this sensitive, natural way. Indeed, I cannot imagine any of these politicians courting such an experience.

But there is nothing self-righteous about Coombs. He has admitted that the council of which he is chairman was slow to realise the enormous significance of testing all their recommendations by the criterion, will it give Aborigines more freedom to manage their own affairs?

As befits a vastly experienced public servant, Coombs has never criticised the government, except by implication. For example, when police removed the Aboriginal tent 'embassy' opposite Parliament House, Coombs immediately said that one form of protest was now closed but he hoped others would continue to be used.

Again, after the Prime Minister had announced that Aborigines would not be given land rights, Coombs issued a statement saying that the council had placed before the Cabinet a wide range of proposals concerning land for Aborigines. Some had been rejected, others adopted either wholly or in part. 'The Council is disappointed about some aspects of the outcome', he allowed himself to say, and he went on to encourage Aborigines to give the new proposals a chance, describing them as improvements. But he said that much would depend on the spirit in which the decisions were administered, adding 'the outcome could well depend less upon the content of the policy than upon the integrity of its administrators'. I interpret these remarks as a criticism of some politicians and public servants, especially those associated with the Northern Territory.

Speaking on assimilation Coombs has also said:

I think it is assumed that Aborigines should and will want to be absorbed into the general Australian society. The best we could hope for them, so to speak, is that they should become like us. This attitude, I think, underlines the Government's policies.

He commented that governments tended to reflect very much what the community demanded of them, then observed:

Most Australians are largely ignorant of traditional Aboriginal life and they think of it as poor and poverty stricken in all senses. Most have no knowledge of their culture and ceremonial life and this makes it difficult for them to conceive that Aborigines might prefer their own way or wish to preserve something of it. It is true that some hope that the Aboriginal arts and craft should be enabled to survive as a kind of decoration rather than as elements in a way of life.

#### Coombs concluded:

Also, because of this emphasis on assimilation, many unconsciously fear action which is taken by Aborigines as Aborigines, particularly in groups. So long as an Aboriginal is an individual

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he is on his way to absorption or disappearance. When he starts to think or act along with others, this is often suspect as a tendency antagonistic towards a single society.

Again, it is a reasonable interpretation to say that Coombs was ascribing these feelings as much to ministers and senior public servants as to the generality of Australians.

The emergence of an Aboriginal intelligentsia is, in Coombs's view, critical:

In fact, we should be seeking the potential intellectuals, [he said] identifying and helping them, helping them into places where they can develop their capacity, giving them the instruments they need—audiences to speak to, journals to write in and access to media, to film, television and the like. We must open the channels of communication so that they can talk to us, but more importantly so that they can talk to their own people.

This sort of talk is a far cry from government attempts to denigrate radical Aborigines and to keep them away from Aboriginal settlements, in case they 'stir' the people there. But then Coombs believes that the council should aim, 'firstly to strengthen the sense of Aboriginal Australians as a distinctive group within our society'.

Coombs is a doughty fighter. Several times in the four years he has chaired the Council for Aboriginal Affairs it has been strongly rumoured that he was about to resign, with his council, but in 1970 he made clear his determination:

Neither withdrawal nor revolution are for me. [While sympathising with those who drop out,] I remain unwilling to leave the field of decisions to those who profit and those who conform. I hear, too, the voice of Ben Chifley [Australia's last Labor Prime Minister], the least corrupted of all the men of power I have known, saying 'Never resign! While you're there you may lose the battle, but you're still fighting. Once you've resigned you're finished'.

Coombs's understanding of the importance of the land

in the lives of the Aborigines is revealed later in the same lecture:

There are, across the north and centre of Australia, major mining and processing developments largely owned by foreign companies. Many of these enterprises bear heavily upon Aboriginal communities, some of which, until these encounters have maintained almost unbroken continuity of tradition since before the days of Cook, or indeed before the visit of the Macassans from what is now Indonesia, back beyond the dawn of our history. Some have until recently preserved significant elements of a way of life which is of incredible antiquity, making the Greco-Judean-European civilization of our own epoch like a Johnny-come-lately on the scene of history.

There is no single instance where the impact of these projects on the Aboriginal communities can be judged wholly satisfactory. Several companies have approached the problem humanely, and even generously... but the difficulties are acute and the outcome is at best likely to remain obscure... By what calculus can one assess the relative importance of instant profit from the dispersal of wasting assets against the irretrievable destruction of a way of life unique in the world?

#### Coombs concluded:

It would be unrealistic, as well as unwise, to seek to preserve these people as a kind of museum piece. Their future lies inevitably in association with other Australians. But it should be, and with patience and imagination it can be, an association between equals to which they will contribute much that is distinctively Aboriginal and Australian.

Finally—and I think this means that he is squarely on the side of those who want land rights for Aborigines he said:

To defer the exploitation of minerals in lands which we have claimed to set aside for their use and benefit would give time for patience and imagination to do their work and would in no way endanger the ultimate development of the resources.

Coombs's colleagues on the Council for Aboriginal Affairs are also men of distinction and humanity.

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W. E. H. Stanner, Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the Australian National University in Canberra from 1964 to 1970, first went into northern Australia in 1932 and again in 1934-5. In 1938 he was working in Kenya. His war service was remarkable. Early in 1942 he was asked by General Blamey to conceive and then to raise and command a special force which would watch for the coming of the Japanese throughout the enormous, remote area of northern Australia. They were expected to land by air or sea, within weeks. Stanner commanded a force of 600 men, in four squadrons, the North Australian Observer Unit, which worked closely with Aboriginal groups between Normanton in Queensland and Broome in Western Australia, about 1300 miles as the crow flies.

After the war he studied six dependent territories in the south-west Pacific, and became the first Director of the Makerere Institute of Social and Economic Research in Uganda. Here and in Tanganyika and Kenya Stanner studied the effect of European intrusion upon native peoples.

In 1950 he joined the Australian National University, and made repeated visits to north Australia for research purposes. Stanner is married, with two children. He is no mere academic, but a rounded, experienced practical man. In 1932 on the Daly River he became a friend of the great warrior Aboriginal, Durmugam, believed by Europeans to be 'the most murderous black in the region'. Durmugam told Stanner that he had killed at least four men. Stanner does not pretend to approve, but 'I felt compassion for Durmugam. He typified the vital will of the blacks to make something of the ruined life around them.'

Stanner has tried to remain circumspect about his disappointments with the Gorton and McMahon governments, but at times his concern to have the issues publicly understood has mastered his discretion. And Australians ought to be glad about this. Thus, when the Country Party Minister responsible for the Northern Territory and for the administration of Canberra, the Hon. Ralph Hunt, made

the ordinance which empowered the removal of the Aboriginal embassy, Stanner announced that the Council for Aboriginal Affairs had not been consulted:

The fact of the existence of the so-called Embassy and the question of its future [he said] are not matters parochial to Canberra. They are the subject of close attention throughout and beyond Australia and within Australia, not least by Aborigines.

The handling of these affairs has much significance for the future of national policy towards the Aborigines . . . For that reason they are of direct concern to the Council.

Another occasion was when McMahon made his Australia Day statement on the new Aboriginal policy. Stanner wrote an article for the *Canberra Times* which began:

The recent statement of Commonwealth policy towards Aborigines was not based on direct consultation with them, was directed as much towards a European as an Aboriginal public, and was couched in words that to a considerable extent must have passed over the heads even of English speaking Aborigines.

Stanner stressed what should have been the obvious when he said that it was essential that the Aborigines should understand the statement. He added, I suppose from bitter experience, 'A few flying visits by Ministers or officials will just not do'.

His disenchantment is evident in a lecture he delivered at Monash University in May 1972. In it he referred to a book he had partly written in 1937, Some Australians Take Stock. He recalled that he had written then: 'Political sincerity can be tested by the question "How much will you spend?" 'And added bitterly 'But then I was young at the time'. Stanner also observed: 'There is nothing half-baked about the Commonwealth Public Service. It is baked so hard it can only be described as "case-hardened".'

The third member for the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Barrie Dexter, is another able, unusual, dedicated man. He is 51.

He began as a school teacher, but, in 1941, as a corporal, he went to New Guinea with a Commando squadron. Malaria and other sickness put him into hospital for eight months and he left the army to teach again, briefly. Then he joined the Navy (which knew nothing of his medical record) and was commissioned as a lieutenant in destroyers.

After the war Dexter completed his degree at Melbourne University, gained a Diploma of Education and joined the Australian Foreign Service. In Beirut, Lebanon, Dexter learned Arabic for two years. He then served in Cairo, Karachi, Washington and Accra. In 1964 he was appointed Ambassador to Laos, where Holt picked him for his present job. With his wife and three children he settled in Canberra.

As Director of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and an established public servant Dexter has been able to say much less than Coombs and Stanner. However, in March 1972, he told the Senate Committee, 'There are still some aspects of the Queensland legislation which may, I think, be considered by the Commonwealth to be discriminatory'. This was strong criticism of the government which has still not honoured a promise to remove all legal discrimination against Aborigines by the end of 1972. It was a promise made rather carelessly by Gorton in 1969 and he repeated it strongly at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in Singapore in January 1971.

The quality and character of the government's chief advisers on Aboriginal affairs have been sketched in some detail here because I believe their bearing and sincerity should be compared by the Australian people with (it seems to me) the inferior distinction of their political masters—excluding W. C. Wentworth, a man who tried hard for the Aborigines when he was Minister in charge of their affairs, but did not have the political weight to get what he wanted.

Let me illustrate what I mean about the behaviour of men in this government by recalling what happened on

Sunday, 23 July 1972 when police, trying to remove the re-erected Aboriginal embassy tent before Parliament House, fought with Aborigines protecting their tent. I was there as a reporter.

About ten minutes before the police went in, an independent message was taken to McMahon explaining the critical situation and advising him that moderate Aboriginal leaders might well take over the meeting, if only a Minister would come to talk to their people. With the Prime Minister were three other ministers, Anthony, Snedden, and Sinclair. Not one of them emerged. The Budget, a material thing, remained more important than a unique human need which they must have seen from their window.

I had talked to the Police Commissioner, R. A. Wilson, and to the officer-in-charge, Inspector W. J. Osborne. In my judgment, neither of them (nor their men) wanted action against the tent embassy, which was surrounded by men and women, black and white, arm in arm, hand in hand. They had already waited half an hour. Both police officers were now told that the message had gone to McMahon. But in a few minutes Inspector Osborne ordered his men forward. If he or Wilson had doubted for a moment the government's intransigence, the order would have been delayed.

The Aborigines were more or less equally divided between those who were moderate and wanted a compromise with the authorities and those who were radically determined to keep up their much-loved tent, come what may. After several hours of speaking through a hand microphone, Mrs Shirley Smith, a moderate, handed the microphone to her nephew, Paul Coe, and suggested that he make a final appeal to the government. Coe appealed to Hunt, the responsible Minister, to 'come to speak to the people here today'. His manner was desperate now, because the tension was very high and there was an air of time running out. Coe went on: 'Is there somebody there, either police or representative of the government, who can

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make a contact with Hunt? Give us time to speak to Hunt.'

In fact Hunt was not in Canberra but senior Ministers were, just across the street. As usual, no official would take the initiative, because it was understood that no Minister would want to be bothered by this sort of thing, and a man would seem to be a fool to care about Australians hurting each other, hating each other. So McMahon and his three senior colleagues in Cabinet stayed inside.

Later I went to the hospital and saw the aftermath of government indifference. That evening Mrs Smith told me (and she is a remarkable woman, of tremendous dignity and honesty): 'I think if Ministers had come out this would have been enough'. Again, anyone who has spent any time at all with Aborigines would know perfectly well that they will respond to natural courtesy and concern, like all of us. They like to be listened to.

But the Ministers did not come out that day, so Paul Coe had to have his skull and his stomach X-rayed, and policemen were hurt, and many people thought a lot less of men who are supposed to protect instead of attack. I wish the Ministers had seen all this, but they never do.

There is a further point about this whole sorry business. The police do have a discretion when it comes to enforcing the law, so the police could have allowed the Aboriginal embassy to stay. But the government was determined to have it removed, and to have it removed with a show of force.

I don't want to be politically partisan in this book. If the Labor Party is voted into office in the 1972 elections, it will have to prove itself sincere and active in its stand for Aborigines, who are, I think, suspicious, because they will see it initially as just another white Australian government. In fairness to Mr Gough Whitlam, leader of the Labor Party, it should be recalled, however, that he had the good grace and lack of arrogance to visit the Aboriginal embassy within two weeks of its establishment. He spent one hour inside the tent discussing radical Aboriginal policy with the young men there and at one stage

he was joined by Mrs Whitlam. When he came out he stood in shirtsleeves in the hot sun and promised that immediately after the next elections in Australia a Labor government would give Aborigines legal, freehold title to land where they could be identified as a community, tribe or clan. Then he remained quietly attentive while the Aborigines were questioned about their reactions.

I reported that day to *The Times* in London: 'The occasion was remarkable in the context of a country where Aborigines have been degraded for years and their courage and confidence sapped.'

Paul Coe, who is a law student from the University of New South Wales, described it all as 'very encouraging' and he went on: 'We admired the man and what he did. He came to us. But they are promises. It is up to us to make him live up to them.' The policy also declares that 'Aboriginal land rights shall carry with them all rights to minerals in those lands'. It was, however, the first time that an Australian political leader had promised freehold title for Aborigines to what must be hundreds, perhaps thousands, of square miles of Australia.

I questioned Whitlam outside the tent that day: 'Would this be a legal freehold title?' I asked him.

'Yes, yes, community freehold title, certainly', he answered.

This is very good, but Aborigines will watch Labor's behaviour in office very closely. They have good reason to be suspicious. For example, in the middle of May this year, twenty-six Labor M.Ps. signed a declaration that they would stand between the government and the Aborigines if an attempt were made to remove the Aboriginal embassy. When the crunch came, several Labor M.Ps. were present. They spoke well in support of the Aborigines. But they did not stand between the police and the Aborigines protecting the tent. Nor did they link arms with those who were protecting the tents. And the Aborigines noticed.

So much for Labor. Now what of this government?

Aborigines are angry because they see so much money being spent on special groups like immigrants from Europe and ex-servicemen, under the Department of Repatriation. They wish that much, much more would be done for them, as another very special group within Australia. As Kath Walker said recently: 'Ex-servicemen were away from our country for only six years, yet Australia recognised their need for rehabilitation. And if there was this necessity after six years, surely the Aborigines' need is far greater.'

Charles ('Chika') Dixon, one of the older radicals, wrote the other day,

For some years now the Australian Government has been encouraging migrants to come to Australia and help develop our country. These migrants, Greek, Italian, English and so on, on arrival to our glorious shores, are placed in hostel accommodation, found employment and remain in their respective hostels until they can be absorbed into the general community.

Not so the Aboriginal migrants, who because of the lack of job opportunities, migrate from dirty government missions, river bank dwellings, reserves and fringe dwellings, to seek a decent way of life in the city. You may think the Aboriginal migrant differs from the overseas migrant, but I say my people have similar problems to the overseas migrants.

### Denis Walker, a son of Kath Walker, has said:

The basic reason for the failure of all attempts to solve the problems of the Aboriginals is that the wrong approach has been used. We have been treated as just another social problem, along with the pensioners and the mentally retarded. Governments have refused to recognise that we, as a race, have distinctive problems based on our culture and our history and that the solutions must be racial solutions, not social ones. This is the major problem.

This is not an acceptable doctrine to the government. In September 1967, in Parliament, Holt, then Prime Minister, said:

The Government believes that the needs of Aboriginals should

continue to be kept in their true perspective as predominantly social problems and not magnified or misrepresented to suggest that the problems are racial.

He also pointed out that the Commonwealth Parliament was now in a position to make laws and to prevail should a conflict arise with the states.

Holt's successor, Gorton, promised more than once to use the Commonwealth's new overriding power to end all discrimination against Aborigines by the end of 1972. When McMahon replaced Gorton, in March 1971, he was quick to go to Brisbane, in April, to meet the Premier of Oueensland, the Hon. J. Bielke-Petersen, who was then wrestling with the need to draw up new legislation. (The resulting Act has still not been proclaimed.) After their meeting McMahon and the Queensland Premier, a typically conservative Country Party man, issued a joint statement. It said the existing Queensland legislation was designed 'to assist in protecting persons who, without guidance and assistance, could be subject to exploitation and that it was not therefore to be seen as discrimination against Aboriginals'. The statement went on to say that the two governments wanted to meet the desires of the Aboriginal people but promised only 'to do all that is possible'.

This kind of equivocation, this kind of procrastination, runs through all sorts of government statements on Aboriginal policy. On 12 July, the Prime Minister said that he had just returned from Gove in the Northern Territory; that after meeting and 'having the pleasure of associating with them [the Aborigines] it is fair to say that they believe that they are being satisfactorily treated'. What they said is recorded at the beginning of this book.

In April 1971, soon after he had met the Queensland Premier, McMahon sent a message to the annual conference of State and Commonwealth ministers responsible for Aboriginal Affairs in Cairns, in Queensland. He said that he disliked attempts to embody complex policies in single words like 'assimilation' or 'integration', and added, 'We believe that Aboriginal Australians should be assisted as individuals and, if they wish, as groups to hold effective and respected places within one Australian society.'

At the same conference Hunt said the government needed to try 'to get a greater public understanding of the basic policy of assimilation and of the total concept behind that term'. Hunt, like his predecessor, the Hon. Peter Nixon, is a Country Party man and Country Party ministers have not been able to understand that Aborigines must be encouraged, if they so wish, to form their own self-contained, confident groups within Australia, before there can be any question of their joining wholeheartedly in Australian white society. In the same statement Hunt said, 'A primary requirement in the allocation of a lease [for Aborigines or others] is that there is a definite economic land use in prospect.' Leases for Aborigines would be 'in harmony with general land policy in the Territory', and 'with the rational utilisation of the land resources of the reserves'.

In other words, Aborigines were not to decide for themselves what to do or what not to do with their leases.

In May 1971 McMahon announced the appointment of a special Cabinet committee to develop policies for Aboriginal advancement. The members were to consider the land question. The outcome of their deliberations was the Prime Minister's famous statement of Commonwealth policy on Australia Day, 26 January 1972.

It was quite an impressive statement of what has been done. It also announced new developments. The most important new provision was for 'general purpose leases' which would be granted to Aborigines if they could demonstrate to the Land Board of the Northern Territory that they had the intention and ability to make reasonable economic and social use of the land applied for. The recognition of 'social' use was very important and something of a victory for Coombs. These leases were to be for fifty years. However, the Aborigines were still to be

beholden to the government, because the Land Board would have to satisfy itself from time to time that reasonable progress was being made in achieving the purposes of the lease.

A second major achievement for Coombs and his council was that groups of Aborigines living off the reserves would be able to buy land for themselves and not simply continue to squat on other peoples' land, at their mercy. The government decided that it would make available funds, up to \$5,000,000 this year, and more later, to purchase the leases of these areas as they became available. Meanwhile, exploration and development by mineral companies would continue on Aboriginal reserves. A new code relating to this was published, but the application of it cannot really safeguard any fundamental Aboriginal wish, when that wish is inconvenient.

Soon after McMahon's definitive statement Hunt issued another short statement. He said that the concept of free-hold titles for Aboriginal communities was wrong because it would 'lock up substantial areas of land for small groups of favoured Aboriginals'. The Canberra Times very properly reminded him next day that he should be aware that 'favoured white people had locked up substantial areas of the Northern Territory since it was first grazed'.

In August 1972, Nixon said that recognition of traditional Aboriginal land rights would lead to apartheid in Australia. Addressing a Synod of the Methodist Church he said it would be 'a grave error of humanity towards Aboriginal people if our wishes to help should lead to unwise decisions which ignore long-term implications'. On the same day a Senator of the Democratic Labor Party, which helps to keep the Liberal-Country Party government in office, said the only thing worth preserving in Aboriginal culture was bark paintings. Senator Little was overlooked next day by the *Canberra Times* but Nixon was not. His reference to the possibility of apartheid was dismissed as a 'quite ridiculous ploy'. The paper said:

To accept that tribal communities have a title to the land on which they have dwelt since The Dreaming necessarily casts doubt on the title claimed by the white Australians, many of them Country Party supporters, who had dispossessed the original inhabitants in only the last few generations.

Mr Nixon's case, of course, is nonsense. To set up a poverty stricken 'Bantustan', dump a black population on to it and then prohibit their departure, is one thing. To acknowledge the title to a parcel of land of a community associated with it for millennia and provide for their life upon it, but not deny the choice of an alternative life, in their own good time and when they have achieved a measure of dignity and economic independence if they wish, is another. Most certainly it is not apartheid.

Apartheid is much more apparent in the policies which have led to racial humiliation and the creation of black slums near our country towns and in some places in the bed of the Todd River, outside Alice Springs, than in the arguments of the crusaders for land rights. Mr Nixon and his colleagues would do well to examine the consequences of their own actions before indulging in politically motivated fantasy about the effects of alternatives.

It has to be remembered that the only member of Parliament for the Northern Territory is a Country Party man, Sam Calder. It has also to be remembered that the present Secretary of Hunt's Department, George Warwick Smith, is a man who tried to have responsibility for Aboriginal affairs throughout Australia seconded to his Department (Territories) in 1967, when Holt was arranging matters following the referendum.

On the whole, Warwick Smith tends to agree with the conservative Country Party point of view. He has served only Country Party ministers since 1949 when the Liberal-Country Party coalition came to power. Also, whenever he has been responsible for Aborigines, Warwick Smith has been aided by John Ballard, a former British Colonial Official and very conservative. He is now Warwick Smith's deputy. The Country Party inclination is to let the Northern Territory become a source of export income particu-

larly in minerals, for the rest of the country. The Territory is already something of a political colony of Canberra. As taxes build up from mining development the Territory will become something of an economic colony, too.

Ever since the days of the leadership of Sir John McEwen, the Country Party had been very close to the mining industry in Australia. In December 1971 when Cabinet was considering revaluation of the Australian dollar the Hon. Douglas Anthony, leader of the Country Party, based many of his arguments on a letter sent to all members of Cabinet by the Australian Mining Industry Council. It would, of course, be incorrect to blame the Country Party for all conservative attitudes towards Aborigines. Howson, a Liberal, told Parliament in February this year that 'exploration rights will be granted on the basis that the granting of development rights will be deferred if, in the Government's view, they would be detrimental to the interests of an Aboriginal community in the area'. In other words, as usual, the Aboriginal interest would be judged not by Aborigines but by the government.

Nonetheless, the Country Party remains the main brake on Aboriginal advancement. Hunt issued a booklet recently on Aboriginal land rights and the Northern Territory in which he raised the possibility that Aborigines would be used for political purposes by Communist elements and left wing union leaders. He went on:

Extensive welfare policies based on race and not on need can create, and in the opinion of a lot of people are creating, a white backlash in many parts of Australia. This would be a shocking thing to allow to happen.

The thought of separate development of Australian Aborigines is completely alien to the Government's intention. It does not want a racist society, it does not want apartheid, whether it is voluntary or enforced . . . The Government recognises the deep attachment that Aboriginal people have to land, but it cannot reverse the whole course of Australian history without interfering with the rights of other Australians. European Australians who have sweated to carve a nation out

of a desolate continent have a legitimate stake in this country and the continuity of title of land is paramount in an orderly society.

Country Party arguments are the classic ones of conservative property owners throughout history. They also contradict policies of other enlightened western countries and of the government's own skilful, specialist advisers, who have nothing political at stake.

# 4 'Ningla a-Na!'

An Aboriginal leader said recently that the Northern Territory of Australia could become to the Aborigines what Israel is to the Jews. Paul Coe wants the Northern Territory under Aboriginal control, to draw Aborigines from all over Australia, just as Israel draws Jews from all over the world.

Jews everywhere are in all degrees of security and happiness, from the rich and integrated to the poor and oppressed. None can be sure when his luck will change and persecution come. For even the most secure of Jews Israel is a comfort because, come what may, he will always be welcome there. I believe this knowledge helps Jews to stand up and be strong, and therefore respected.

Within Australia, the condition of Aborigines varies enormously. A very, very few are thoroughly at home in white society; the remainder live in the far outback on missions and government settlements, on cattle stations, on the fringes of country towns, and in the poorer parts of the big cities. Some are of pure Aboriginal blood, most are of mixed blood. But a great pan-Aboriginal feeling is beginning, based on a new feeling for Aboriginal culture and on a determination to gain and hold forever significant areas of land. Once the Aboriginal people have this land they will feel secure, because, on their own land, they will know they cannot be hurt or dispossessed again. On their own land, they will be able to lead their own developing lives, free from the interference of dominant white Australians.

Many Aborigines will never perhaps choose to live on Aboriginal land, but it will be there, just in case.

'Ningla a-Na!' is the Arunta for 'We are hungry for our land!' It was adopted in Alice Springs during a conference at Easter 1972 when the Federal Council for the Advance-

ment of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders discussed with Arunta elders a good slogan for land rights. Black Aboriginal organisations throughout Australia have also adopted a flag divided equally into three colours: black (for the people), red (traditional ochre for the land), with a yellow circle (symbol of life and sun). These colours symbolise the unity of Australia's black people with their land, which is symbolic of their life.

Denis Walker, the young Aboriginal leader in Brisbane, has said: 'Our main economic base, land, has been taken from us, and all our social, economic and political structures were based on these lands. Once you took that you smashed everything, absolutely everything.' Walker is a city Aboriginal of mixed blood, educated and mobile. But a similar appeal was made recently by the elected Aurukun Council, on behalf of its people, about fifteen miles south of Weipa on Cape York Peninsula in northern Queensland. The Aboriginal people here have been deeply affected by the work of the Tipperary Land Corporation, prospecting for bauxite. Mr Yunkaporta, Chairman of the Council, said the company had

promised all sorts of things, but they seldom kept their word. They did not keep us informed about what they were doing, as they said they would. Tipperary has been tricky with us.

We do not want other people to sign documents and agreements for us. No agreement is to be accepted unless the Aurukun Council has been represented in all discussions by the Chairman and a legal adviser, and the Chairman has signed the documents.

We want our own legal advisers and we want them to advise us about land and mining rights and forming companies. Surely there are some people in Australia that think of other things besides money that we can trust?

But the crunch of the matter is, of course, the land. If the Aborigines owned the land, the companies would *have* to treat with them.

Yunkaporta went on:

The land was taken away from Aboriginal people by force, by

the power of the gun. Now it is being taken away from us by the power of law. There is no use in the whites saying that they do not have a treaty with Aboriginal people and hence do not have to recognise our natural rights. Laws are made by man, and new laws are made, and old ones are thrown away. It is time that new laws were made about our land rights. We have had to change in meeting the whites and it is time they changed for us.

I find this a sound argument.

In Australia only three states, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, have made land over to Aborigines. The necessary Acts were passed in South Australia in 1966, in Victoria in 1970, and in Western Australia in 1972. They provided for the recognition of Aboriginal title only to residual areas of Crown land currently 'reserved' for the use of Aborigines.

When the colony of South Australia was founded in 1836 the government in London instructed that care should be taken that 'the Aboriginals are not disturbed in the enjoyment of the land over which they may possess proprietary rights'. In 1966 the Premier of South Australia, the Hon. Don Dunstan, said wryly, 'It never got off the ground, since the Aboriginals laid no claim to proprietorship rights of the kind existing in the European society which had now invaded South Australia.'

What land was set aside for Aborigines, as reserves, was poor and undeveloped, again contrary to the instructions from London. It had been intended that about sixteen acres of every eighty acres of land sold to a colonist would revert to the Aborigines, in a developed form, after a period of years. Once again the Aborigines were betrayed. In December 1966 this fact was recognised and an Aboriginal Land Trust was set up, comprising Aborigines only, using government funds and trained staff. The Trust is assuming title to all Aboriginal reserves within the State. Dunstan had intended to grant mineral rights to the Trust as well, but the reactionary Upper House of the Parliament of South Australia refused to allow what Dunstan had hoped would be a kind of compensation to the Aborigines.

#### Stanner has commented:

Two things have happened recently in South Australia that seem to me very significant. The first Aboriginal rights in land have been created, and the policy of assimilation has been replaced by one which allows the Aboriginals the right to determine their own social future. If they wish, they may make themselves into a racial community within the Australian nation, with the State's blessing.

This is a mountainous change of front and because of it much may now be possible for some Aborigines that hitherto had been impossible. In a hundred senses it gives them firm ground for their feet.

In the last few years small groups of Aborigines have started to squat on land which does not belong to them under the law of Australia, and in some cases they have had their right to this land recognised. They have followed the example of the early white squatters, who simply squatted on the land (the so-called Crown land) and took it. These small groups of Aborigines have been quite successful because newspapers, radio and television have reported their struggles to the cities of Australia, where they have found sympathy. After several years of trying to discourage this movement in the outback, the government has had to recognise the justice of it: McMahon's Australia Day policy announcement said that \$13,000,000 would be provided over five years to buy land for Aborigines.

Generally it will be cattle country, which means that the areas will be big and the land will be leased from the Crown. But the title to it, owned by the groups of Aborigines, will be affirmed as if it were owned by white Australians. One of the first parcels of land which will be bought back by the Australian Government from white pastoralists for Aborigines is owned by the Vestey family in Britain. In August 1966 almost all the 170 Aborigines on Wave Hill Station, owned by Vestey's, walked off in protest against poor living and employment conditions. They were people of the Gurindji tribe and their name has become famous.

They began by camping just across the river from the

Wave Hill welfare centre, which is run by the Northern Territory administration and is about seven miles from the homestead. In March 1967 they moved to Wattie Creek, about four miles from the welfare centre, where there is a waterhole and the country is sweeter.

Wave Hill covers more than 6000 square miles and in May 1967 the Gurindji, helped by Frank Hardy, a Communist writer, sent a petition to the Governor-General, Lord Casey, asking for the return of 500 square miles of their tribal land. Part of this land is on Wave Hill and the other half on two adjoining Vestey stations, Limbunya and Inverway. The Aborigines said that they wanted to set up a mining and pastoral business, paying rent for the lease. If their business failed they would return the land to the government.

The Governor-General rejected the petition, but he pointed out that an application for land on an Aboriginal reserve or on vacant Crown land would be considered. However, the government could not consider land that was already leased. The Governor-General's reply advised the Gurindji to take care that they did not break the law. The Gurindji did not accept this advice and stayed where they were for five more years, the men going away from Wattie Creek during the dry season to work on cattle stations, leaving mothers, young children and old men in the camp.

In April 1968 Wentworth, the Minister in Charge of Aboriginal Affairs, flew to Wattie Creek from Canberra and announced later that he was investigating how to resume from Vestey's lease the eight square miles of land around Wattie Creek which the Gurindji wanted. It looked promising. But three months later, in July, a joint statement by Wentworth and Nixon, the Minister for the Interior (responsible for the Northern Territory) said the Gurindji would not get their land at Wattie Creek; instead, a small town would be developed on Crown land at the existing Wave Hill welfare centre.

Once again the Country Party had made itself felt, and a determined effort was made to persuade the Gurindii at

Wattie Creek to give up their plan for land of their own, and \$500,000 were spent developing the township at Wave Hill.

Then came a movement of Gurindji spokesmen from Wattie Creek into the south-eastern cities of Australia, thousands of miles away, and a movement of supporters, especially students, from the cities up to Wattie Creek.

Hardy organised a meeting in Sydney, in July 1970, to form a 'Save the Gurindji' committee. It has over 500 members, of all political parties, paying a minimum subscription of \$2 a year, and has sent to Wattie Creek a bricklayer and a carpenter as teachers; it has also sent citrus trees.

One of the elders of the tribe, Vincent Lingiari, is the Wattie Creek spokesman and late last year Vincent's son, Peter, and another Gurindji leader, Mick Rangiari, visited Sydney where they were given \$10,000 by the Waterside Workers' Federation. This money is being used to fence (illegally) 500 square miles of land, which the Gurindji have claimed as their tribal land. Rangiari told the Aboriginal magazine *Identity* that their housing at Wattie Creek was primitive,

... just huts, with dirt floors. ABSCHOL [the student organisation] helped us make our own bricks from anthill nest mud and they sent up timber from Melbourne....

We will never give up fighting until we get our own land back.

Finally, on 2 June 1972, more than five years after the Gurindji first sent their petition to the Governor-General, the government announced that it would acquire from Vestey's some 25 square miles of land at Wattie Creek and lease it back to the Aborigines. Hunt said the decision was part of a general decision to obtain land by excision or sub-lease from pastoralists in the Northern Territory to provide areas for the development of Aboriginal communities.

The Gurindji still want their 500 square miles, but the

government's advisers in the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and others believe they need to be given about 1500 square miles if they are to run cattle successfully. It now seems certain that the Gurindji will also get their cattle property, following discussions which Howson, Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, said he had had with Lord Vestey in June.

The only cattle station so far acquired by the government under its new policy has been Everard Park, 2356 square miles, in South Australia, where about one hundred Aborigines have been living independently and strongly at Betty's Well. The decision to buy it was announced by Howson in July and it seemed a good one because Everard Park is rich in Pitjantjatjara tradition, but the Country Party and conservative public servants spent so long making up their minds to accept the decision to give this huge area of land to Aborigines that a big pastoralist, Byron McLachlan, was able to step in and buy the property before the government.

Howson began by implying that this did not matter because he understood that some land on the existing 27,000 square miles Aboriginal reserve in South Australia was much better cattle country than he had previously been told. 'The reserve is two miles from the border of Everard Park', he added. 'If we can get South Australia to develop these reserves we won't have to buy properties in this part of South Australia.'

It was an embarrassing situation for the government, when McLachlan (whose family company already owns 5 per cent of South Australia's land area) told the Prime Minister that he would sell it back to the government at cost price.

The government is also negotiating to buy Panter Downs in Western Australia and Willowra in the Northern Territory.

Meanwhile the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Canberra has found that, if strict commercial principles are applied, Aboriginal cattle enterprises in Arnhem Land will

not be viable. However, as Tom Connors, an experienced agricultural journalist on the *Financial Review* has commented:

Harsh economic forecasts should not be an excuse for the Government to take a hard line on land rights and financial aid.

Australia, which has spent millions propping up white farmers in the south, could surely be a little generous in dealing with the underprivileged Aboriginals of the north.

One of the best-known folk songs in modern Australia is probably the 'Gurindji Blues', which tells an ironical story of the past six years at Wattie Creek:

Poor bugger me
Gurindji
Me bin sit down this country
Long time before Lord Vestey
All about land belongin' me
O poor bugger me
Poor bugger blackfeller this country
Long time work no wages we
Work for good old Lord Vestey
Little bit plour, chugar and tea
For the Gurindji
From Lord Vestey
O poor bugger me

Poor bugger me
Gurindji
My name Vincent Lingiari
Me talk all about Gurindji
Daguragu<sup>1</sup> place for we
Home for we
Gurindji
But poor bugger blackfeller this country
Gov'ment boss him talk long we
Build you 'house with electricity
But at Wave Hill for can't you see
Wattie Creek belong to Lord Vestey
O poor bugger me.

Poor bugger me Lingiari Still me talk long Gurindji Daguragu place for we Home for we Gurindji

Poor bugger me
Gurindji
Up come Mr Prank Hardy²
ABSCHOL³ and talk long we
Givit hand long Gurindji
Buildim house and plantim tree
Long Wattie Creek
For Gurindji
But poor bugger blackfeller this country
Gov'ment law him talk long we
Can't givit land long blackfeller see,
Only spoilim Gurindji
O poor bugger me

Poor bugger me
Gurindji Peter Mixon<sup>4</sup> talk long we
Buy you own land Gurindji
Buyim back from Lord Vestey
O poor bugger me
Poor bugger blackfeller Gurindji
Spose we buyim back country
What you reckon proper fee
Might be plour, chugar and tea
From the Gurindji
to Lord Vestey
O poor bugger me

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Gurindii word for Wattie Creek.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Frank Hardy, author of The Unlucky Australians.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Aboriginal Scholarship Scheme of Australian Union of Students.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Peter Nixon, Minister for Interior (1967-71) responsible for Northern Territory.

The white Australian is today beginning to understand the Aboriginal and his attitude. Until very recently he viewed the black man in Australia as hopeless. As Stanner has put it: 'At the outset of settlement there was a pervasive unwillingness or incapacity to conceive of the Aboriginals as a landed people', and he illustrated by examples: the early navigators thought the Aborigines were only 'naked, beach-roving wretches'; Phillip simply did not believe that they could possibly survive away from the coast; a judge called Barron Field said they roamed the countryside like 'beasts of the field'.

What then was the real relationship between the Aboriginal and his land?

One of the best summaries I have found is in the Report of the Gibb Committee. It points out that the largest kind of Aboriginal territorial grouping was the tribe, which was not so much political as social, its members intermarrying and being together enough to maintain the same language and culture. Within tribal boundaries the land was divided into parts, each part 'owned' by members of a particular clan or jointly by several clans. Generally the boundaries between the parts of each tribal area were not clear. The clans based their 'ownership' on their use of certain spiritual, ritual sites. But the clans also 'owned' their land for hunting. Many tribes believed that the individual spirit travelled from one of these sites and entered the mother's womb on conception.

Each clan's part of the whole tribal area was not an economic unit in the sense that it could in all seasons and in all years supply enough food for the clan. In fact the clan was not the basis of the food-seeking group. The whole tribe used to organise itself to exploit the countryside, and the size of the food-seeking groups depended on the state of the season.

When seasons were good and there was plenty of food in the bush, people tended to keep together, but during bad times they had to disperse into small family groups to survive. Even in a normal year numbers of clans would

range over parts of the tribal area which did not belong to them and, in very bad years, they might even enter the territory of a neighbouring tribe, if it was prepared to share food and water with the starving and the thirsty.

Thus the Aborigines were closely linked to their land, through spiritual sites and also because of their knowledge of its resources in all seasons and in all years: 'Both of these factors, social and economic, combined to produce in Aboriginals intensely sentimental and emotional attitudes towards their land', the report concluded.

In Stanner's words, the land united the body and the spirit in Aboriginal life. Each body had one or more spirits which had entered the embryo at about the time of conception. The spirits had existed before the person's conception and would live after death. They came from a particular place, and that place was the source of a man's life-force, and he was inseparably connected with it.

Ownership of land did not have to be asserted; it was recognised without question. It was accepted in all sorts of ceremonies and arts.

Obviously ownership of this kind could not be taken away, given away, lost, or abandoned:

How could a man sever himself from a spiritual and physical continuity of which land was an essential vehicle? Or be severed by the actions of others? This is the reason why the Yirrkala clans will listen with incredulity to any assertion that the Crown owns their land.

So much for the general Aboriginal land situation. Now what of the particular situation at Gove, in Arnhem Land, immediately before the Supreme Court began to hear the test case which decided Aborigines have no legal title to any part of Australia?

The Superintendent of the Methodist mission at Yirr-kala, Reverend Edgar Wells, told a Select Committee of Parliament in Canberra in 1963:

No one in Australia is naive enough to think that the stories of

the cattle round-up practices of 1918 and the indiscriminate shooting on the Queensland border areas touching the Territory before the declaration of the reserves in 1931 have left no scars. I myself know an elderly Aboriginal who has pellets still in him as a memorial of those days. Even though buried in the past by years of more friendly treatment, such things leave a residue of mistrust that is difficult to overcome.

The present alienation of land only represents a different technique in the minds of the local people. But that this should come after the steady teaching of missionaries concerning a place of sanctuary created for them by the Government of the white people is indeed a most baffling development.

The absolute and final authority generally exercised by white man over black has suddenly loomed again. I believe a serious error in management was made when a section of the reserve was alienated without previous consultation with anyone residing in the area.

It came as a complete surprise to the Superintendent of Yirrkala to discover that the official lease, No. 6, and including some two hundred square miles, was altered in 1956 to a special purpose lease to be renewed from time to time. Quite obviously the legal grounds were then in course of preparation, making a dramatic announcement of February 18, 1963, concerning the granting of the bauxite lease to Pechiney, appear a reasonable proposition to the public. The fact that that altered attitude was not known to either the people or the local missionary in charge must be borne in mind.

To be suddenly reduced from about two hundred square miles to an unknown area creates immediate uncertainty which communicates itself at once in a small community.

It is very cold comfort to tell an Aboriginal that he may still walk over land that was once his own but that by a mysterious process has been acquired by someone else. That, as the original owner, he can hunt across it until the new owner needs it, bit by bit, for special sale, upon which it is to be removed in very large boats. Insult is added to injury in a final humiliation when he is offered money to shovel away his own sense of spiritual security.

Stanner has recalled that Arnhem Land was gazetted a reserve in 1931. After 1931, for many years, the govern-

ment's attempts to keep the reserve exclusive to Aborigines must have encouraged them to believe that the land was recognised by government as their own, which they never doubted it to be.

The hearing in the Yirrkala case lasted almost one year. Finally, on 27 April 1971, Mr Justice Richard Blackburn found against the Aborigines.

The suit was in the names of three men and eleven clans. Two men, Mathaman and Mungurrawuy, as head men of their clans, claimed to own the land which had been leased to the mining company. The third man, Daymbalipu, on behalf of the remaining nine clans, claimed that they had a proprietary interest in the same land, having been given permission by the first two clans to share the use and benefit of those lands. The first two clans were the Rirratjingu and the Gumatj.

Perhaps the most significant witness for the Aborigines was R. M. Berndt, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. Since 1939 he had spent a total of more than twenty-four months at Yirrkala and in other parts of north-eastern Arnhem Land. He spoke, reasonably well, several of the dialects of the people of Yirrkala. He described the two claimant clans as 'Mada'. In an affidavit to the Supreme Court he describes a Mada as 'a land owning group bound to its area by spiritual, emotional and ritual ties'.

Land is held in trust, collectively in terms of a time perspective which extends backwards to the mythical creative past and forward into the future as in inviolable heritage of Aboriginal man (specifically, man of the Mada concerned), as part of the concept of the eternal Wongar (Dreaming) linking man with the land and the great Spirit Beings. This concept remains unimpaired at the present time.

My study of their culture reveals that the Rirratjingu and the Gumatj have, in their own right, held the land represented as theirs on the map exhibited with this affidavit from time immemorial....

There is no question that the local Aboriginal of this area

not only exploited the surface of the land but excavated for various purposes, over and above digging for roots, small animals and so forth. Special areas were regarded as quarries, and the products obtained were the focus of organised trade built up between recognised trading partners and extending over wide areas. Certainly, the nature of their land holdings extends below the surface of the earth.

Berndt recalled that in about 1885 J. A. Macartney took up pastoral leases over four or five thousand square miles of north-eastern Arnhem Land which might have included Gove Peninsula. His homestead was built about one hundred miles from Gove. He ran 6000 head of cattle. The official report for the Northern Territory that year said that the natives were numerous and dangerous and that Macartney had been attacked in numbers. In 1889 the report said, 'The blacks are beginning to understand the conditions under which the white man holds the country of which they consider they have been robbed.'

One old Aboriginal had said to a station manager: 'I say, boss, white feller stop here too long with him bullocky. Now time white feller take him bullocky and clear out. This fellow country him blackfeller country.'

Berndt said that during World War II Gove had been a Royal Australian Air Force base, but it had been abandoned in 1946. Early in the 1950s small camps, representing mining companies, had come into the area, but until very recently 'Aborigines have not understood nor have events in the Gove area given them cause to appreciate, that their traditional rights in and to their own land have been questioned'.

Arnhem Land was proclaimed a reserve in 1931, after a Federal Report in 1928 by J. W. Bleakley, who told the Commonwealth Government that the Arnhem Land natives should be protected and the area should be reserved for them. 'There should be no obstacle to this as the country is very poor, no one requires it, and those who previously have taken some of it up have abandoned it'.

Berndt concluded:

Their land is the most obvious, the most enduring and most consistently visible and tangible form, not only of their own wealth and source of wealth (wealth in our terms as well as in theirs) but, even more importantly, it is a symbol of their own traditional as well as present day way of life. There is no question at all but that the blocking off of their land in the way which is occurring today, and is planned to take place in the near future, will destroy the structure of their society.

During the hearing, sacred relics were produced as title deeds and ten Aboriginal leaders gave evidence with dignity and authority. The Commonwealth Government paid the Aborigines' costs, but no government official in the Northern Territory helped them and none gave evidence on their behalf. The Solicitor-General appeared for the Crown. Finally, in a 262-page judgment of historic importance, Mr Justice Blackburn found that the Aborigines had no legal basis for the claims to their land on the Gove Peninsula.

Briefly, he found that the relation between clan and land did not amount to proprietorship as that is understood in our law; that the clans had not sustained the burden of proof that they were linked with the same land in 1788 as now; that no doctrine of Common Law ever required or now requires a British government to recognise land rights under Aboriginal law which may have existed before the 1788 occupation; that Aboriginal land rights were never expressly recognised; and that if the clans had had any rights they would have been effectually terminated by the Mining Ordinance in 1968.

But the Judge did find that the Yirrkala Aborigines formed a community which was in principle definable: that they had a system of law which they accepted as obligatory on them; and that the system of law was cognisable as such in our Courts.

Mr Justice Blackburn said that the central question in the case was whether the doctrine of communal native title existed at common law and applied when New South Wales was founded in 1788. He found that the doctrine of native

title 'does not form, and never has formed, part of the law of any part of Australia'.

At one point in his judgment the Judge said that acquisitions of territory by the Crown fell into two classes, 'conquered or ceded territory, and settled or occupied territory'. Whether a colony came into one category or the other was a matter of law. He continued: 'In my opinion there is no doubt that Australia came into the category of a settled or occupied colony'.

No Aboriginal would accept this finding, certainly not the old man with the pellets still in his body at Yirrkala.

One of the most trenchant criticisms of the judgment came from John Little, a junior counsel for the Aborigines, who said on 14 July in Canberra on National Aborigines Day:

Our great heritage from England, the Common Law, has been so strangled and so subverted by the traitor class who run this country for foreign money that the common people, black and white, will not be blessed with just laws until they drive the traitor class out of that mockery of a Parliament and put them down once and for all.

The situation now is that the Aborigines of Yirrkala have applied for a general purpose lease for 50 years for the area from Arnhem Bay to Blue Mud Bay. But their solicitor, Frank Purcell, has made it clear that 'We do in fact still want absolute title and that any other measures we take, like considering a general purpose lease, would only be a stop-gap.'

The Aboriginal reaction to the present land policy situation, with the government inching its way reluctantly forward, has been impatient and angry. Mrs Faith Bandler has commented bitterly on Mr Justice Blackburn's findings:

According to British Law, Australia was settled peacefully. British land law is therefore the only law for the Aborigines. We know this is absurd. For one thing, Australia was conquered brutally. The history is one of abuse, continuous horror and callousness.

She is bitter about the power of money to get what it wants, when it comes to walking over Aborigines: 'We have also seen an application for a mining lease by the people at Oenpelli Mission, in Arnhem Land, held up on a technicality of the law. Strangely enough, a later application for the same lease by the firm, Union Carbide Limited, was accepted.'

Mrs Bandler has pointed out that the international view of this whole business has been well expressed in the I.L.O. Convention 107, published by the United Nations in 1955, which sets out the human rights of native people in an independent country like Australia. Article 11 reads: 'The rights of ownership, collective or individual, of the members of the populations concerned over the lands which these populations traditionally occupy shall be recognised.' Kevin Gilbert, the Aboriginal poet and writer, has bitterly declared that Australian nationalism is great, 'if you're white, acceptable and vote Liberal'. So he thought that he would write a new Australia Day anthem to be sung to the tune of 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport'. The words are:

You can't get your tribal land back, Jack Can't get your tribal land back. Our Billy's made it a fact, Jack, You can't have your tribal land back.

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#### <sup>1</sup> Prime Minister McMahon.

Gilbert asserted that the Aboriginal people were victims, not problems.

You don't solve victims. But 200 years after the original theft it is still possible for public opinion to make governments cease compounding the felony and make restitution to the victims....

To support the Liberals' new policy Howson claimed that the notion of freehold title to land was alien to aboriginal thought and custom. New legislation providing for leases was to be introduced. Presumably the lease concept is not held alien to aboriginal thoughts and custom.

Gilbert criticises the Australian people for refusing to admit that a wrong was done, and he comments: 'When the thief and the judge are one, what chance has justice? White man, how they hate you for your double-dealing, twisting hypocrisy!'

What exactly do Aboriginal representatives want? Some white Australians, either genuinely frightened because they are ignorant, or clever enough to arouse fear, have suggested the Aborigines want some of the best city real estate in Australia, like Martin Place in Sydney. Gilbert has put the popular white Australian reaction quite well: 'What, land to the bloody boongs? Once they start, where will it end? If I were a boong, I know the bit I'd claim—right on the corner of Market and Elizabeth Streets—in the name of King Freddy!'

Perhaps the most authoritative summary of the Aboriginal demands on land comes from the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. In July 1969 the Council demanded:

- 1. Aboriginal ownership of existing reserves.
- Recognition of Aboriginal ownership of traditional tribal lands at present owned and leased by the Crown.
- Aboriginal consent for, and benefit from, mining and other development on all Aboriginal land.
- Establishment of an Aboriginal land claims Court, to facilitate the awarding of compensation to Aborigines wherever Aboriginal land is alienated.
- Setting up of a National Aboriginal Land Trust Fund to accept and allocate compensation or rent for all the land of Australia which has been alienated from the Aboriginal owners.

Gilbert has gone so far as to draft a Bill on Aboriginal Land Claims in some detail, with the help of legal experts in Melbourne. The draft Bill, which is very interesting, is in the March-May 1972 issue of *Alchuringa*. He has also written, in the *Australian* on 26 January 1972:

White critics have suggested that if land were granted, Abo-

riginals would withdraw to these lands, set up an apartheid settlement and hurriedly re-embrace a Stone Age culture.

This is nonsense. However much today's Aboriginals may still yearn for a freer, happier time, not one of them deludes himself in this manner. We know that we cannot turn back the clock.

Tony Lawson, former Director of ABSCHOL, said bluntly in the Age in Melbourne on 9 August 1971:

The claim that granting land rights is difficult because the Government believes in a policy of leasehold is incredibly shallow. To grant land rights the Government only has to change its policy on leasehold land, which it has just done for land in urban areas like Darwin. Why can't it do the same for Aboriginal land?

One of the most powerful statements on Aboriginal land rights was made in the Aboriginal magazine *Identity*, in July 1971, by Professor C. D. Rowley. He wrote:

These issues have brought out the fact so long overlooked by those trying to 'train' and 'assimilate' the Aborigines, that even where they have been most disorganised, their refusal to play the roles thought proper by the whites, has been motivated by a continuous tradition of resistance.

Peace between two groups fighting for the same assets cannot be established by conquest alone. The Americans have found this out and for years have been seeking out old forgotten Indian treaties and paying compensation for past neglect of them. Because the Aborigines could not organise for war there were no treaties here as there were, for instance, with the Maoris in New Zealand.

To place assets in Aboriginal hands involves obtaining them from other hands, or from government assets, or frustrating someone's economic hope or ambition. Where the common attitude is one of prejudice against the claimant, governments play safe and refuse to change. A statesman might realise that the longer compensatory action is delayed, the bigger the problem. Aborigines are increasing and they will inevitably become more intransigent.

First, there could be consideration of some major symbolic

compensation. This would involve other problems. It should be negotiated with Aborigines by governments: this in turn involves a recognition by governments that they have been perpetuating injustice over a long period. Also, there is the need for Aboriginal organisation to throw up Aboriginal leaders and spokesmen. Perhaps a first move towards conciliation and negotiation should be a statement by the Commonwealth of these objectives.

In view of the history of Aboriginal affairs and migration, the Commonwealth might consider whether winning Aborigines over into full citizenship is more important than importing migrants and making them citizens, especially as Aborigines are increasing more rapidly by far than any other Australians . . . Why not reverse the priorities for a year or two? This could be a major symbolic compensatory effort.

The money could be spent inter alia on land for homes (and houses); on shares in mining companies for Aborigines in whose country (whether reserve or not) the mining operations are carried on; on re-purchasing the leases of cattle stations in tribal 'country' where there develops a coherent Aboriginal demand. This would do more good for us in foreign affairs and in New Guinea (where the Aboriginal issue is becoming prominent among the younger educated leaders) than any other single policy decision.

For a start, all lands now classed as reserves should be made over to those whom the Aborigines living there believe to have rights to them. Generalizations like these, of course, initiate a whole series of legal and other questions. For we have not even made a beginning to deal with the real politics of Aboriginal affairs. The way we do so will be a basic indication of what kind of nation we are to become. The probability is that we will drift on, allowing weak government leadership to dodge the real issues by talking about law and order instead of changing the law to meet the need of all of us for justice.

Aboriginal land rights are only part of the wider race relations question—not only the internal one but the greater external one. A new vision of ourselves and the future is required....

I think one of the saddest and most moving poems I have read is called 'Our Dreamtime', by Ted Rickards:

My tribe had long vanished when I was born, My future belonged to another dawn Another society, one with a wanton tread That turned to dust hallowed ground of our glorious dead.

They erased forever our beautiful past, Killing our animals and ravishing their grass, They took our beautiful life that be, And created a race with no identity.

Now a chance of escape has arisen, With my ancestors making the final decision, I hear them call from the land of the free, All are singing abide with me.

So lay me down my warrior friend, Let my spirit rise and ascend My body will remain tied and bound, But my soul will find a new hunting ground.

Reprinted by courtesy of the author

## 5 'Suffer Little Children...'

We are tired of the benches, our beds in the park, We welcome the sundown that heralds the dark. White lady methylate!
Keep us warm and from crying.
Hold back the hate
And hasten the dying.

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This ineffably sad little poem, by the Western Australian poet, Jack Davis, is called 'Desolation'. It makes a good honest start, I think, to any discussion of Aboriginal health, because the kindest medicine taken by many Aborigines is alcohol. They use it for their souls. Of course it destroys them, and when they drink methylated spirits it destroys them more quickly.

But most of us know that we can feel better and happier and more manful because of drink. Most white Australians don't need drink as Aborigines do, but we have all felt miserable at times; the difference is that we don't feel miserable all the time.

Jean Jans, a visiting nurse who is Aboriginal and lives in Victoria, has said:

Such terms as 'a good Aboriginal' if a man abstains and 'a bad Aboriginal' if he does not are still heard today from both Aboriginal and white people, adding more to the stigma of drinking by focusing attention on Aboriginality. When two people are drunk in public and one is Aboriginal, he is the obvious one. The reaction of a white onlooker is one of discrimination and that of an Aboriginal is one of shame.

Jean Jans says that being an Aboriginal often deprives a man of receiving the early treatment he needs, and so he

becomes an alcoholic. Many Aborigines in Victoria are not being reached for treatment. In fact I doubt if white Australians think of any Aborigines as being alcoholics. They are just 'drunks'.

As Jean Jans has put it, with a gentle and moving restraint, 'In some cases I have found and still find that it is hard to orientate health personnel to the fact that Aborigines are people'. She went on: 'Many Aborigines want to look for guidance from the available health services, but they themselves, the Aborigines, cannot change alone. The services too will have to change.'

I have recently seen something of the Aboriginal Medical Service at 171 Regent Street, Redfern, in Sydney. It was started by Aborigines, without government subsidy or initiative at the beginning, as an Aboriginal response to a real Aboriginal need. The service is simply one small waiting room and one small surgery on the ground floor of a tiny and mean-looking house, with a rough, rather broken-down yard at the back. There is nothing 'flash' about it. And it is this quality which helps to make Aborigines in Redfern feel comfortable about going there. It is not unlike the kind of places where they live.

Their needs are great. They have come from the country and many cannot afford to pay fees or even the contributions to insurance funds. Nor do they understand the forms.

A fine young Aboriginal radical, Gordon Briscoe, discussed the idea with Mrs Shirley Smith, a nurse well known and trusted to her fellow Aborigines in the district. They asked Professor Fred Hollows, Associate Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of New South Wales, for help and he responded. Young Australian doctors staff the clinic voluntarily on a roster basis, but there is always an Aboriginal nurse on duty.

The skilled Aboriginal involvement is the key because many Aborigines are reluctant to attend public hospitals and doctors' surgeries where they feel embarrassed and uncomfortable in the quick, hurried, efficient and cold atmosphere. At the clinic Aborigines are happy enough to discuss their most intimate problems. The clinic treats cases that should no longer be found in a great, rich city like Sydney—a 22-year-old girl with scurvy, children with severe malnutrition, chronic osteomyelitis (bone infection), punctured ear-drums due to untreated ear infections, often leading to deafness, and worm infestations.

Professor Hollows has also worked among the Gurindji at Wattie Creek in the Northern Territory and he is now running a pilot medical scheme at Enngonia, near Bourke in the far west of New South Wales.

Hollows, a New Zealander originally, refuses to accept two standards of eye care, or indeed of any health care in Australia, for Aborigines and for others. He is particularly critical about the general medical attitude to trachoma in Australia. 'Eyelashes grind against the cornea and grind out an ulcer', he told me. 'It's a very painful thing. The eyes stream tears and the flies come.' In the Kimberleys one in five of Aborigines who reach the age of 60 are blind from trachoma.

Hollows told me angrily about the unappreciated work in Australia of Professor Ida Mann, 'the greatest woman ophthalmologist of all time', who was ophthalmic consultant to the government of Western Australia from 1953 to 1961.

An English woman, she is now retired in Perth, Western Australia, where she produced for the government three remarkable reports of great value and a book called *Culture, Race, Climate and Eye Disease*. For about fifteen years the government of Western Australia has known quite enough about trachoma among Aborigines, because of Professor Mann's work, to deal with it. But Hollows told me in Sydney the other day what happened after she had rendered her report to the government in Perth: a Health Department official had phoned her and made the point that she had trained in Britain, asking if she was sure that she could diagnose trachoma.

'It's so bloody incredible!' exploded Hollows.

The government in Perth had then approached the

World Health Organisation asking it to recommend an expert on trachoma. The answer had been, 'Why not consult your regional expert?'

'Who is the regional expert?' asked the government.

'Ida Mann', was the answer.

Hollows' general verdict on all this is 'They don't want to know about the blacks'.

John Austin, a young Aboriginal from Victoria wrote recently: 'I am appalled at the blatant disregard of European Australians towards the problems that are so abundant amongst our people'. He contrasted the amounts of money raised publicly and also voted by the government for disasters overseas with the indifference towards Aboriginal needs.

Coombs told the Australasian College of Physicians in June 1969 that he hoped the allocation of funds by governments would be greater. In the last three years, as we have seen, the states have spent no more on Aborigines and the Commonwealth Government has not spent anything like enough.

Coombs concluded his address with a summary which has become something of a classic, and which has been much quoted in the last three years. He said:

If an Aboriginal baby is born today,

- 1. It has a much better than average chance of being dead within two years.
- 2. If it does survive it has a much better than average chance of suffering sub-standard nutrition to a degree likely to permanently handicap it, (a) in its physical and mental potential and (b) in its resistance to disease.
- It is likely in its childhood years to suffer from a wide range of diseases but particularly ear, nose and throat diseases, and respiratory infections.
- 4. If it reaches the teen ages, it is likely to be ignorant of and lacking in sound hygienic habits, without vocational training, unemployed, maladjusted, and hostile to society.
- 5. If it reaches adult age it is likely to be lethargic, irresponsible and, above all, poverty stricken—unable to break out

- of the iron cycle of poverty, ignorance, malnutrition, ill-health, social isolation, and antagonism. If it lives in the north it has a good chance of being maimed by leprosy and, wherever, its search for affection and companionship may well end only in the misery of venereal disease.
- 6. If it happens to be a girl it is likely to conceive a baby at an age when its white contemporary is screaming adulation at some pop star, and she will continue to bear babies every twelve or eighteen months until she reaches double figures or dies of exhaustion.
- 7. And so the wheel turns.

Coombs commented: 'There is nothing insoluble about the health problems of Aboriginal Australians. Existing knowledge, determination and resources could transform this scene in a decade and eliminate the problem within a generation.'

On the subject of child mortality, Dr Peter Moodie, of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Sydney University, reported that Aboriginal births represented 2 per cent of the total number of births throughout Australia, but Aboriginal deaths represented 10 per cent of all infant deaths, 28 per cent of all deaths in the 1-2 year group, and 9 per cent of all deaths in the 2-4 year group. The rate of 28 per cent for the second year of life is twenty times the Australian average, and is not declining.

The infant mortality is three and a half times what it is for other Australian babies. In the Northern Territory and in Queensland, in the three years from 1965 to 1967, deaths of Aboriginal babies before the age of 2 represented between 12 and 22 per cent of all Aboriginal babies born. Coombs has said: 'It would be a mistake to think of these conditions being restricted to the outback or the Far North'.

A Joint Committee of the New South Wales Parliament in 1967 reported that, in Walgett, about 450 miles northwest of Sydney, the chances of an Aboriginal child under the age of 1 dying are three to four times as great as those of other children. In one town on the coast, it was reported

that 66 per cent of Aboriginal children registered died before they were 4 years old.

Dr J. J. Elphinstone, who surveyed the conditions and eating habits between 1957 and 1958 of an Aboriginal community in Western Australia, which had little or no contact with Europeans, found no evidence of malnutrition in infants or young children. Only in droughts did they become badly nourished and when the season improved so did their nourishment.

On the subject of leprosy, Coombs said:

Most of us have come to believe that leprosy has ceased to be a problem in our affluent society. After all it is a germ infection similar to tuberculosis and is curable. With energy and resources it can be eradicated.

But of 150,000 Aboriginal Australians, 2000 are known to suffer from leprosy. New cases continue to be reported each year. In the Kimberleys in Western Australia there are at least 600 lepers, representing close to 10 per cent of the Aboriginal population, a rate among the highest in the world. As for venereal disease, a report from Bourke in New South Wales stated that of fifty-one cases of syphilis reported, forty-seven were Aborigines.

According to Dr Frank Lancaster Jones, in an official survey of the Northern Territory, one Aboriginal child in six dies in its first four years. So much for statistics. Dr Barrie Pittock, a Quaker scientist, has said:

Those one in six Aborigines who die in their first four years of life in the Northern Territory are just as dead as if they had been killed by bullets or bayonets. Institutional racism in this country is doing violence to Aborigines, and to our professed values, every day.

In a recent series of Boyer lectures, Professor Basil Hetzel, Professor of Social and Preventive Medicine at Monash University in Victoria, discussed the question, 'Health. Whose Responsibility?' He began with a success story, the highly effective campaign waged against tuberculosis in Australia over the last twenty years. In 1950, fifty-

four cases of tuberculosis per 100,000 of the population were notified. In 1970, the figure had fallen to a quarter of that. Hetzel said there was a big difference in the notification rates in the states and in the Northern Territory. In the first the rate varied from 11 to 15 per 100,000 people, and in the Northern Territory the rate was 60 per 100,000 people. The difference was due to tuberculosis in the Aboriginal, originally transmitted to him by the white man. It was caused by poor living conditions and bad nutrition.

Its continuance, in the presence of such effective control of the disease for the rest of the Australian population, is a scandal which should be corrected as soon as possible. . . . Whose responsibility is it?

Hetzel advocated an organisation for Aboriginal health service like that already provided, so successfully, for tuberculosis. With a special Aboriginal health service, the major problems of Aboriginal health could be largely controlled within twenty years. He said that in 1955 the United States Government had established a Commission of Indian Health, concerned with manpower, the collection of data, environmental health and education, and training programs for health professionals. As a result, infant mortality had declined from 58 per thousand births in 1957 to 36 in 1964. Deaths from tuberculosis had fallen from 63 per 100,000 in 1954 to 6 in 1962, in children under the age of 4. The rate for Indians of all ages had fallen from 54 to 24.

#### Hetzel went on:

I believe we have to admit the special health problems of the Aborigines and devise a special programme for them, including the training of Aboriginal health assistants. Significant improvement in the health status of the Indians in the United States did not occur until a specific programme was set up.

Hetzel reminded Australians that they had created in 1961 a National Heart Foundation and that the people had given it an initial sum of \$5,000,000. Recently they were

being asked to give another \$1,000,000 during an appeal which had vice-regal patronage and the strongest support from leaders in all walks of life. He did not suggest that white men who eat, drink, and smoke too much were worth no more public attention than Aborigines, but I do.

Perhaps the Governor-General would be patron of an Aboriginal health service.

Hetzel reminded Australians of the wonderful work being done by volunteers within the Marriage Guidance and 'Lifeline' organisations, and he spoke of the voluntary time given by many people to others in trouble, and especially to the old. He mentioned 'Meals on Wheels'. Surely Aborigines also need their help?

Denis Walker, the young radical Aboriginal leader in Brisbane, has said:

There is a great amount of suspicion among Aboriginal people towards medical people because of the way in which these people treat Aborigines, especially in country towns, as being ignorant, lazy, dirty and shiftless. The suspicion and mistrust is pretty well founded.

I could name you a couple of country towns where this happens, and a great number of Aborigines here in Brisbane are from the country.

What can be done in a country town by a really concerned country doctor has been shown at Collarenebri in New South Wales. Dr Archie Kalokerinos arrived in Collarenebri in 1957. He found an infant mortality rate among Aborigines of one in ten. It was attributed to 'socioeconomic conditions'. But Kalokerinos declared:

The main fault lies with doctors themselves. They have completely closed their eyes to conditions that exist because they are psychologically trained that way. The State and Federal medical authorities sit on their backsides, pat each other on the back, write papers for medical journals, and wait for knighthoods or O.B.E.'s. The medical authorities live for promotion. They ignore what is going on around them and are violently and actively antagonistic to anyone who points out illnesses they do not recognise.

The politicians are laymen and naturally turn to the Health

Departments for advice. They then support each other in a vicious cycle. This has to be broken. The best way to do that would be to produce powerful evidence of illness patterns. But the medical authorities not only refuse to accept what I say but refuse even to investigate the problems.

There is much truth in this. Kalokerinos himself believes profoundly in the need to get plenty of vitamin C into Aboriginal infants, but a major factor in his success at Collarenebri must be the real care he gives to Aboriginal families and the concern he has for them.

On 7 May 1972 the Sunday Australian featured on its front page a report by Philip Cornford on 'Australia's Expendable Babies'. The report came from the Northern Territory. It began:

On February 3, 1971, a directive from the Federal Treasury ordered the Director of Northern Territory Health, Dr. William Langsford, to cut expenditure by \$200,000. Aboriginal babies were already dying at 12 times the rate of white babies. It was inconceivable that anything could be done to worsen their plight. But the message from Canberra meant only one thing: Aboriginals were to become fiscal-fodder.

I can remember the period well in Canberra when the politicians and the economists were very worried about inflation, and it was decided that government expenditure ought to be cut. But no one, I remember, suggested that politicians and public servants, who invariably travel first class everywhere (at the expense of the taxpayer and, it might be said, of dead Aboriginal babies) ought to go economy class instead.

As the report of the Gibb Committee put it in 1972:

In the social change from their nomadic existence to a more settled style of living on mission settlements and pastoral properties, Aborigines have not gained any great appreciation of the improved standards of hygiene necessary where large groups of people congregate for long periods. Recognition of the relationship between disease and standards of hygiene has never been a necessary part of survival in their mobile, traditional society.

Since traditional foodstuffs were nutritionally adequate the

tribal Aboriginals developed no real knowledge of the relationship between food and health. They remained ignorant of the food values, or lack of them, in European foodstuffs. While a crust of bread and sugared tea might well appease hunger pains, they do little for the physical well-being of the child.

The health of the children is not, of course, helped by their 'homes'.

A research worker from the University of Melbourne went to the rubbish tip outside a country town recently, because that was the obvious place to find the local Aborigines. He found their living conditions had improved dramatically just before his visit, because their part of the tip 'was no longer used for refuse'. He reported that they lived in humpies made of 'flattened kerosene tins and rags. There are sometimes as many as ten children and two adults in a humpy.'

C. D. Rowley has reported that one farmer on the south coast of New South Wales, when told by a government medical officer that conditions for Aborigines on his farm were not good enough, replied that he would 'kick them all out' if necessary, and take a truck and 'pick them up' when he wanted them again. The farmer said that if the authorities 'get on to me again, I'll clear the lot'.

A Senate committee of the Parliament in Canberra was told recently by the Council for Aboriginal Affairs that:

many thousands of Aboriginal families are unsatisfactorily housed and new housing needs based on new family formation are estimated at about 1,000 dwellings a year. Until the rate of homebuilding for purchase exceeds the new housing needs a real impact on the backlog cannot be made.

To cope with this vast problem, the Australian governments, federal and state, are spending about \$10 million a year. It seems a lot of money until one realises that \$60 million a year is being spent on War Service homes.

As Mr Gordon Bryant, the Labor M.P., said in Parliament recently:

Honourable Members the other night were giving themselves

dislocated shoulders patting themselves on the back for what they had done for Australian servicemen. They said they had provided 240,000 War Service homes at the most favourable rate of interest that could be obtained. When are we going to tackle the problem concerning Australian Aboriginals with the same vigour?

The articulate Aboriginal reaction to this need is, of course, very strong. Denis Walker has said, 'Put Aboriginals in charge of the housing programmes and of the money being spent, so we can get a better type of house, the type of house that Aboriginals want, rather than the type they are going to get because that is the type Europeans have....'

Another problem is the discrimination many landlords show against Aboriginals. This is very marked in Brisbane. My wife is white and blonde, and I had experienced this discrimination some time before, so I was very cunning, and I said, 'Well, you go out and get the house and I'll wait here'. But unfortunately she had a couple of black kids with her. When she was asked if they were nice little Italian children, she said, 'No, they are Aboriginal'. They said, 'Sorry, the house is taken'. That's another one of the problems that hasn't been effectively approached by governments.

Rowley has done a tremendous amount of research on Aboriginal housing. In the more settled parts of Australia he has depicted a scene of racial prejudice, with white Australians tolerating the most dreadful conditions for Aboriginal fringe dwellers in country towns and local governments strongly resisting Aboriginal housing in white areas.

About 40 per cent of Aborigines pay some kind of rent. Those who do not, live on the fringes of white settlement. These fringes have to be near a town and at the same time inconspicuous, to avoid as far as possible the attention of local councils, which tend to knock down unsightly dwellings, thus solving health and other problems by getting rid of a family and pushing it somewhere else.

In some country towns the Aboriginal shack-dweller will be allowed to put up his house on land liable to flooding;

stockyards and holding paddocks must be on ground higher than flood level, because, I suppose, they are more important than Aborigines. Thus, in flood years, it is the Aborigines who suffer heavily.

Often the land where they live is excluded from the town water supply, from garbage and sanitation services and from power and light, and Aboriginal families are constantly anxious, frightened, and insecure, even the most ambitious and conscientious of them.

When their shacks are demolished, their iron, timber and furniture are stacked on a truck and taken elsewhere to be reassembled. The iron becomes full of nail holes, but remains in use.

Rowley explains why Aboriginal shacks have to be close to the town tips. The town tip is always out of sight, so there is maximum security for a shack there. Furthermore, the tip is a valuable source of builders' supplies—old iron, cardboard, hessian, canvas for example.

At Woodenbong, in New South Wales recently there was much unemployment and, according to the unofficial Aboriginal land board, Aborigines were being asked to pay full and regular rent although they were not working and although they were having to wait three months for unemployment benefits. Eviction notices had been served on several families and the Child Welfare Department had threatened to declare the children of these families wards of the state and remove them from their families.

The same fears were being felt at Purfleet reserve (near Taree, in N.S.W.). Such actions by the government are a disgrace and must be stopped, said a statement by the Board. It also sought an assurance from the government that Aboriginal families in Armidale would not be moved from their reserve to make way for a drive-in cinema, or those in Woodenbong to make way for a sewerage plant.

In the Northern Territory the industrial award requires cattlemen to provide single accommodation for all stockmen, but not their dependants. 'But the majority do not comply with award requirements', according to the report of the Gibb Committee.

### The committee concluded:

Whether it be toilets, housing, education or any other aspect of social living, the interested observer of Aboriginal life on pastoral properties in the Northern Territory cannot escape the conviction that there has been very little interest in Aboriginal cultural habits and values and very little attempt to bring to their ways the benefits of western technology. Rather the action seems to have been to offer them the conditions once endured by our own pioneers and to envisage their movement into the present by an accelerated passage through the same staging white settlers traversed in the past century.

The overwhelming need for housing is steadily growing. In Western Australia alone, according to the Commissioner for Aboriginal Planning, Frank Gare, up to \$30 million are needed to overcome the immediate problem of housing Aborigines. (This is three times the amount which will be spent this year for Aboriginal housing throughout Australia.) Gare said that housing was barely keeping pace with the present demand and was making no impression on the backlog. Last year only 150 houses had been built for Aborigines. Yet 1500 families were living in 'substandard housing' in cities and towns, and more than 200 new families were appearing every year.

The government of Western Australia is now hoping to build small specifically Aboriginal 'villages' all through the outback, believing that many Aborigines would prefer not to live in or near bush towns. The idea is to build about fifteen of these villages in the Kimberleys, the Pilbara, the Gascoyne-Ashburton area and in the East and North-Eastern goldfields.

It is an enlightened idea and seems to accept what happened when the Bardi tribe decided to leave Derby, Wyndham, and Broome and go back to their traditional land at the top of King Sound, led by the elders of the tribe upset by its disintegration. Now they are happier, healthier, and beginning to establish a fishing industry, which will exploit their traditional skills. But they do need housing and it looks as if they will get it.

### 6 'Walkabout' for Work

'Although unemployment among the general Australian community is negligible, it is a standard part of life of Aboriginal families', said Coombs recently. The rate of general Australian unemployment is now a little under 2 per cent, and the government may fall partly because of it. The rate of Aboriginal unemployment has been 7 per cent for a long time—but this is not a political issue.

Professor Leonard Broom, an American sociologist at the Australian National University in Canberra, has emphasised that many of those Aborigines who do have work are underemployed and underpaid; almost 70 per cent of them are manual labourers.

In 1966, of the 103 Aborigines who had matriculated, 63 were only manual labourers. In view of the tremendous personal effort required and the background of family struggling before a young Aboriginal can succeed in matriculating, this result must be heartbreaking.

There is a deep well of ability in the Aboriginal which can be drawn upon, but he must do the drawing his way:

We might one day make a lot of money from this mine, and if we do that will be good, but it doesn't matter. This is our country and our work and we want to do it. So long as we have work to do we are happy, even if we don't get wages for it, because this is what we want.

The man who said this was the leader of a small group of Aborigines in the Northern Territory who had formed the Yuendumu Mining Company. The Reverend Jim Downing, of the United Church in Alice Springs, reported recently that they had put in a few years of hard work and sustained interest for little financial return, but they did not seem to mind because 'prospecting and development of that particular mine was the group's own chosen goal'. The Inspector of Mines for the area had said that, without any European supervision, the group had effectively prospected a large area of country and with very few primitive tools had stockpiled an amazing quantity of ore. They had also kept the little mechanical equipment they had in remarkably good condition.

This kind of corporate action does not come naturally to Aborigines, for obvious cultural reasons, but throughout Australia corporate action by Aborigines is going to be needed more and more if they are going to be happy and strong. The government's advisers are encouraging this growth wherever they see it beginning, and capital is being provided for Aborigines with business prospects to set up on their own account.

In the remote Pilbara area of Western Australia some Aborigines have formed themselves into a limited liability company and persuaded the state government to allow them to occupy an abandoned cattle property which has been converted to an Aboriginal reserve. Only a few of them, particularly the old ones, live on the property. The others work on surrounding cattle stations or on the wharves at Port Hedland, or mine a little tin and tantalite. From their wages and from pensions they live and pay the rent. There is no supervision by officials or missionaries. Apart from the part-time help of a friendly pastoralist and the paid services of a firm of accountants the Aborigines manage their own affairs, in their own way. They want to re-establish the traditional ways of their people. On their own initiative, these Pilbara Aborigines have reversed the old trend-from freedom and independence into dependence on missions and government settlements and the care of cattlemen and their wives.

At Yirrkala, in Arnhem Land, the Aborigines have turned away from Gove and its huge bauxite-alumina project and are returning to their smaller, traditional communities, reoccupying their ancestral lands. At the same

time they are keeping close to the mission settlement, as a focal point for the education of their children, amongst other things. For a living, they are going back to the old way but they hope to make small businesses out of these old ways. They will fish, and gather oysters and trepang (a sea slug for eating), grow vegetables, keep livestock ond perhaps breed turtles and crocodiles. They hope to extend their bark painting and sculpture into new forms and media. Inland, they will run cattle, cut timber, and also do their traditional hunting and gathering.

Working in these smaller groups, generally away from the settlement at Yirrkala, they expect to revive the truth and strength of their old social structure. From the security of this base of their own, they expect to deal, as equals, with the sophisticated white community at Gove.

I have taken these two examples of corporate Aboriginal effort from a talk given by Dr Coombs in Adelaide in March 1972. But I remember Galarrwuy Yunpingu describing for me what was going to happen that night on 30 June just before the Prime Minister arrived. He speaks well, and it seemed strange to think of this young man, quite experienced in the life of Brisbane and of Europe, going back into the bush to update the ancient life of his people. How much better this way than the artificial, propped-up existence of the Aborigines on missions, in government settlements, and on the controlled reserves of Queensland. As Denis Walker has said to white Australians generally:

This is one of the basic rights you people have, that you are some way economically self-reliant. In a great majority of the cases on reserves, the Aborigines there are dependent on a handout mentality with regard to a job. If you are a good boy to the white manager, you'll get a job at \$16 a week, to keep eight kids. If you are a bad boy, you won't get that job.

He referred to the Department of Labour's special Aboriginal Employment Section, with regional offices in each state and its own officers out in the field. (Four of these

twenty-eight officers are Aboriginal.) Walker mentioned this special section with approval, but he added: 'It is staffed by whites who treat us as just another social problem. They don't know the family background of the people who are trying to get jobs and when these people don't show up for the jobs they don't understand why.'

Coombs, Stanner, and Dexter would agree with this. As Coombs has said, 'The role of the white man must cease to be that of the supervisor and become that of the employee or consultant'. Speaking of the missions and settlements, Coombs continued,

It is important that the Aboriginal is permitted to become a full man again, standing on his own feet, winning his own livelihood and looking at us squarely in the face. We should be secure enough in our own society to welcome diversity and, who knows, we might even be enriched by it.

White confidence is indeed very important. Up in the Northern Territory in the depression days, 'conditions were often about as hard on many Europeans as they were on most Aborigines, relatively', according to Stanner. Writing some years ago on 'Industrial Justice in the Never Never' he remembered 'one desperate man, deserted by his labourers, going after them with a stockwhip, in the knowledge that their work stood between him and ruin'.

Since 1968 Aborigines in the Northern Territory have been working under the same cattle station industry award as white stockmen. But there is a catch, and radical Aborigines would probably think of this as yet another white man's trick. The award applies only to members of the North Australian Workers Union, and few Aborigines are members of the union. Perhaps this is why the Gibb Committee found that forty-one of the eighty-one cattlemen they visited were paying wages and providing accommodation below the award rates.

Furthermore, as the great cattle stations are bought up by big companies, with bigger capital resources, the demand for stockmen is declining. For example, helicopters are

being used for mustering and more fencing has also meant fewer stockmen. Cattlemen are no longer willing to employ more men than they need, nor to look after the old and the retired. The boss and the boss's wife are doing much less to look after the Aboriginal camps. (I remember that the family I was with twenty-five years ago in the Territory had a real affection for their Aborigines.)

Today, Coombs's analysis is that the drift from the cattle stations to the missions and settlements and on to the towns and cities is likely to continue. The small communities dependent on cattle will wither away if more and more Aborigines are not enabled to become partners and, in

some cases, owners in the pastoral industry.

Coombs is not happy about missions and government settlements, although he acknowledges they have had their value. Aborigines were attracted to them by food, services, money income, accommodation, and schooling for their children. 'But Aborigines on them do not make any significant contribution to their own economic independence', he has written. At Port Keats mission, for example, only 12 per cent of the total annual income of all the 650 Aborigines does not come from the government in training allowances, pensions, and child endowment. The 12 per cent comes from work on surrounding cattle stations and from a crocodile-hunting team.

'I believe missions and settlements, in the north at least, must give way, at speeds dictated by the Aborigines themselves, to communities under their own control', is Coombs's conclusion.

As for Aborigines in the cities, recent experience does not support the white folklore which maintains that Aborigines, wherever they are, must 'go walkabout', giving up jobs to do so. Department of Labour figures show that Aborigines are as willing to stay with a job as the average Australian and they have no particular tendency to absenteeism. And this despite the fact that, discussing generally the Aboriginal attitude to work, Coombs says: 'It is hard to imagine a society whose values were so inappro-

priate to the demands of an industrialised economy'. This did not mean that the values were wrong or irrational; they belonged to a particular environment and to particular social and economic circumstances. For many thousands of years the Aboriginal may have been called on for great effort and endurance but rarely for sustained, unchanging, boring routine. The scene and the activity were constantly changing.

Aborigines neither depended on material possessions nor valued them highly. They thought of possessions as burdens to be avoided or thrown away. Captain Cook wrote in his journal how he had found again and again that the gifts he had given to Aborigines and which he expected to be highly prized, although received with courtesy and apparent gratitude, were thrown away on the beach or among the trees within twenty-four hours.

Coombs rounds off his assessment of the Aboriginal employment position in these words: 'The magnitude of the problem is known, the pattern of policy is clear, and the people are available to give effect to it. The time has come for a major leap in expenditure. Economics as well as humanity demand it.'

Well may we wonder with Broom, who has written:

How well would Aboriginals be integrated into the economy if the lessons learned in administering immigration or repatriation were applied to them? How well would they be integrated into the economy if beginning in 1945 a suitable proportion of the resources, energy, and imagination given to immigration had been devoted to drawing Aboriginals into the workforce—indeed, into the society?

Aboriginal educational opportunity is so poor that it is doubly hard for them to get work—and good work. 'Malnutrition during pregnancy or early infancy results in a child with decreased brain size and decreased learning ability, unable to achieve his genetic potential'. This conclusion of modern medicine, expressed by Dr Leslie

Lazarus, Director of the Institute of Medical Research in Sydney, means that most Aborigines are in real trouble with education long before they are even born.

When they get to school, and some do not, perhaps their major problem is coping with white Australian children and teachers, almost all of whom are totally uneducated about Aboriginal culture. As Denis Walker said last year,

The aim of the education of black children has always been to make them as much like whites as possible. We'd like to see our own pre-schools set up and I believe that in educating our people to their environment, past, present and possibly future, we can teach white people something about how to live.

Walker has succeeded in having introduced into Brisbane schools the Koorie Begadgera scheme. This provides classes with a map of Australia showing all the tribal areas, about 500.

The idea is that the children, as a project, find out all they can about each area and when the class has finished each area they colour it in.

We will provide a suggested list of questions and a list of books and other source material. Over the course of a year, or perhaps a few years, the class will colour in all of the maps.

About 10 per cent of Aboriginal children throughout Australia, between the ages of 5 and 14, do not attend school. As Manfred Cross, a Labor M.P. in Queensland, told Parliament recently: 'No one chases them up in the same way that they would if they were white children'. Most Aborigines over 45 have had no education at all and most over 20 have had no education or only a primary education. Also, Aboriginal children start later and leave school earlier than white Australian children.

Coombs has said: 'The dead weight of educational failure will continue to bear heavily on Australian society and younger Aboriginals for decades to come. . . . Up to 1966 the Australian educational system had failed the Aboriginals.'

Since the referendum in 1967 it has improved and good

men are trying desperately, as usual without adequate resources. About 5700 Aborigines are now receiving special annual grants worth \$500 to encourage Aboriginal children to stay in their secondary schools beyond the legal leaving age for all children.

Altogether, perhaps 7000 Aboriginal children are in secondary schools. Based on the Aboriginal population as a proportion of the total Australian population, 1 per cent, the figure should be 13,000.

The government is also giving about 600 special study grants each year to help Aborigines to continue after school to acquire vocational and higher education. So the situation is a little better than it was when Kath Walker said:

Those who have higher-paid jobs are mainly men who fought during the second world war and were able to avail themselves of further education through the ex-servicemen's schemes, or Aborigines who have been convicted of a crime and given a heavy sentence in gaol. Usually, these men leave the gaols with a trade and it is a fact that Aborigines, when they speak of bettering themselves, are advised by the outspoken of their group to commit a heavy crime and learn a trade.

Some sincerely think that this is their only chance of bettering themselves.

Of course there are some good opportunities for Aborigines to learn beyond school. But the opportunities remain slight and few. For example, Tranby College in the Sydney suburb of Glebe accommodates a maximum of twenty residents, generally under the age of 25. The college, opened in 1958 and run by a co-operative for Aborigines, teaches among other things business and co-operative administration. Roy Marika, of Yirrkala, studied the fishing industry at Tranby in 1965.

In the Northern Territory there will soon be three residential schools for Aborigines, in Darwin, Alice Springs and Gove, designed to bridge the gap between Aboriginal schools and community schools and vocational training centres. But these have been criticised as tending to alienate the children from their communities and their culture. Also,

there is in Alice Springs an Institute for Aboriginal Development which was started by the United Church of North Australia and is very much admired by Barrie Dexter. He told a Senate Committee of Inquiry recently that the institute was bringing together 'Aborigines, doctors, teachers and all sorts of people and in its courses of language you will find learning the Pitjantjatjara tongue, people as widely dissimilar as the local nurse and the local policeman'.

But it remains true that very, very few teachers know anything of the tribal language of their pupils, whose problems they do not really understand.

Rowley, writing in *Outcasts in White Australia*, has told how parents will take away their children from schools at 15 'as a form of protest and assertion of independence'. He mentions one particular girl in one Aboriginal home he went to:

... she sat alone and lost in the high school uniform ... Her family was about to go to Young for the fruit picking, and she would go with them. The manager told me that hers was the sixth such case in the short time he had been there; that the other five girls who had gone away for seasonal work had all come back pregnant.

Rowley's bitter comment is: 'After all, this is what the average middle-class Australian expects of Aboriginal girls'.

Many Aborigines come from homes where the basic language of their childhood is still a tribal language, supplemented by a defective sort of English.

Coombs has pointed out that work done by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in South America and in Asia suggests that, even when the intention is for literacy ultimately to be in English, there is a great deal to be said for the first steps to be in the vernacular. We have in Australia tended to ignore the Aboriginal languages almost completely. Indeed there are some who regard education

as a means almost of destroying the Aboriginal language in the minds of Aboriginal children.

So the Council for Aboriginal Affairs is concentrating very much on pre-school teaching for Aborigines. Here the need is desperate. It has been shown by the work of several researchers including Dr B. Nurcombe, of the University of New South Wales, in Bourke, in the far west of New South Wales, that by the time Aboriginal children get to school they are already eighteen months to two years behind the standard white intellectual performance. 'There is no reason to doubt that, other things being equal, Aborigines can be expected to perform equally with other ethnic groups—but things are anything but equal', Coombs commented.

When I was in New Zealand this year, it stuck out a mile how proud the Pakeha (European) was of Maori history and culture, and of his Maori blood, if he had any. Things are very different in Australia, where history teaches children that 'the natives were friendly, unfriendly or not to be trusted'.

## 7 Australia's Apartheid

'I was not born with an inferiority complex. I did not acquire one. I had one forced upon me and was made (by law) to accept this complex as my just lot', wrote Revel Cooper from a training prison at Geelong, in Victoria, four years ago.

Cooper continued:

I have had some wonderful opportunities to make good, but as usual the law comes nosing around, and I usually pull up roots and drift on. When things got really bad, I never hesitated to help myself to other people's belongings. The crimes I have committed were done without any feeling of committing a crime or to do someone else an injustice. Being a weakling, I took to breaking the law and have been in and out of gaol for a considerable number of years.

I have spent a little time in the Sydney suburb of Redfern this year with radical young Aborigines who have not helped themselves 'to other people's belongings'. But they and, I think, most Aborigines throughout Australia would share Cooper's view that the law is not their law. It is the law of an occupying power applied to a conquered people. This means that Members of Parliament, Ministers, public servants, the judiciary and the police force—all in varying ways tied up with the law—are suspect. I hope this book has helped to explain why they are not trusted.

Take Cooper's experience. As a child he was "warranted' to Carrolup settlement, Western Australia. After leaving school at 14 he was sent to work on a farm. 'I was to be paid five pounds a week, plus keep. After three months of working from daylight to dark I was given five pounds. I returned to my home town, Katanning [where Coombs was

once a teacher], and was generally accepted by the white community.' Then came discrimination one night at the local picture show and 'from that time on I became more conscious of the discrimination towards Aborigines, and began to expect and look for all signs of discrimination and became embittered towards the white society'.

Cooper's case is not unusual. The whole of Australia still reeks of social injustice, from an Aboriginal's point of view.

I look on the Aborigines as being a sort of link between the upper and lower forms of the animal kingdom. I do not think they will ever be the equal of the white man, and I say it is dangerous to put them into society. Aborigines should be put out of society and into Cape York Peninsula.

A North Queensland grazier said this on an Australian Broadcasting Commission television program in 1970. It was an extreme statement, but the ignorance and prejudice it expresses are not untypical of much Queensland thought today. And yet the rest of Australia and the best of Queenslanders have failed to force the government in Canberra (which has had the power since 1967) to honour its repeated promises to end all discrimination in Queensland this year. As Stanner has said savagely, 'I feel confirmed in my early view that the referendum would not herald a blazing new dawn for the Aboriginal people'.

Now what is the situation in Queensland? On my desk is the Aborigines Act 1971, assented to by the Governor of Queensland in December 1971, and not yet promulgated, because the Premier, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, is still drawing up the regulations under the Act—and it is these arbitrary regulations, applied by the Director of Aboriginal Affairs, which discriminate most savagely against Aborigines. (For the sake of convenience, I am ignoring the Torres Strait Islanders Act of a similar kind, and the authority of the Director over islanders as well as over Aborigines.)

The regulations must not be inconsistent with the Act, but this is a laughable provision in the context of Queensland officialdom. For example, the regulations deal with

the powers of officials, and the peace, order and proper discipline of reserves, the establishment of police on reserves and their powers, the establishment of gaols on reserves and the conduct of these gaols, and 'all matters and things for which it is necessary or convenient to provide for the proper administration of this Act or for achieving the objects and purposes of this Act'.

Penalties for breaches of the regulations are not to exceed \$50. However, as we shall see from what is defined in the Act, there are plenty of other unspecified penalties which by threat and intimidation may be held over Aborigines 'cheeky' enough to break regulations: in all, the regulations cover twenty-three subjects, including the dissolution of Aboriginal councils, education and training, employment, health and medical treatment, the care of children, the sale of beer, the control of Aboriginal welfare funds, the administration of Aboriginal estates and, it would seem, anything else at all under the Queensland sun. At least this seems to be the meaning of 'all matters required or permitted by this Act to be prescribed and in respect of which the manner of prescription is not otherwise provided for'.

At present, under the old Act, some Aborigines have their property managed for them if they are considered incapable. Under the new Act they will not automatically be entitled to manage their own property but must apply to a district officer who will refer the application to the Director. The Director 'shall grant the application if he is satisfied that termination of the management will not be detrimental to the best interests of the applicant or any member of his family who should be supported by him'. If the Director does not grant the application then he must refer it within twenty-eight days to a magistrate in the district. Even when an Aboriginal has been allowed to take over the management of his property, he is still unable to feel secure and confident because his property may be taken away from him again if the Director thinks there is 'special cause'.

Patently, whatever the motives of the government of Queensland, benevolent or malevolent, all this is thorough discrimination. In Canberra in March 1972 the responsible Federal Minister, Howson, was informed by his advisers that the Attorney-General's Department had found these property provisions 'indistinguishable from the former controls which were considered to be incompatible with the International Convention'. Howson was told quite plainly by his advisers that the Queensland legislation would continue to be discriminatory.

The Act contains other despicable provisions. For example, people may reside on or visit reserves only if the Aboriginal Council and the Director think it good for the person and for the reserve and its inhabitants. Also, people may leave reserves freely unless they are 'being lawfully detained for any reason'. District officers, incidentally, are also clerks of the courts. Finally, attempts to obstruct, intimidate or assault people exercising powers under the Act are liable to a penalty of \$200 or six months in prison. 'Obstruction' can have all sorts of convenient interpretations.

Many reserves will have Aboriginal Advisory Councils and these will look good, with three elected and two nominated Aborigines on them, but they can be dissolved and their powers and functions are prescribed by the regulations. So the councils will not be worth very much.

As Senator Jim Keeffe (Labor, Queensland) said recently:

What happens is that the management usually, but not always, persuades people to go for election who would be sympathetic to white management, but always appoints new councillors who are sympathetic to white management. Has the Commonwealth any power to direct the Queensland Government to carry out free elections on every reserve and make sure that all are elected?

The Senator was questioning Dexter, who answered: 'Its legislation could supersede state legislation in that particu-

lar field', meaning, I take it, that free elections on reserves and local self-government could be insisted on by the McMahon government.

Radical Aborigines like Bobbi Sykes have admitted that the new Queensland Act is an improvement on the old one. She has explained for example that Aborigines may no longer be declared 'assisted', removed from their homes and put into reserves. But both Bobbi Sykes and Denis Walker have condemned the new Act. According to Walker,

Aborigines should own the reserves on which they are now living. The percentage of money allocated to Aboriginal and island affairs should not drop below that at present allocated and Aborigines and islanders should be in charge of spending this money rather than the Director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs. A 24-man elected council should be set up to do this. Queensland could be split up into six regions, each returning four Aboriginal and islander representatives, voted in by Aborigines and islanders.

Walker also thought that an Aboriginal, elected by Aborigines only, should sit in Parliament. Aborigines throughout the state could then say 'Our representative put this forward. Now why isn't it being implemented?'

Aborigines will admit that many of their people need special help and assistance after much suppression and degradation, but they believe profoundly that this help could and should be given by Aborigines. Certainly, in my experience, there are many remarkable Aborigines quite capable of exercising great responsibility, and many more would appear if they knew they were needed to help their people.

No wonder, at times, young men like Walker rightly let themselves go and say, as Walker did,

It's not black people who have power in their hands. It's your stinking Government, it's your stinking Parliament, it's your stinking Director. He is killing blacks. I dare any one of you to say it's a nice system, a just system, a right system. So it's your

stinking system and you shouldn't be sitting here, you should be down there, whipping them out of those offices, because on Tuesday that's what black people are going to be doing, attempting to whip them out of their offices.

Then Walker explained why he had accepted the invitation to go to the Australian Council of Churches' conference on racism at Southport, near Brisbane. It was, he said,

to find out where the people are that are fighting for human rights. We can't fight the system on our own. If you don't believe me, come down on Tuesday and see how many blacks are going to be arrested, because we want to take over the offices that are rightly ours. We want to get them out of there who are gaoling and killing black people. We are here to find out whether you are part of the system, or whether you are going to condone it by passing a few resolutions and then going home saying 'We did the right thing'.

Or do you seriously challenge the right of the white Parliament, the white courts, the white system to deny blacks human rights far beyond what they deny any other person in this country?

Sure enough, Walker and Don Brady, the Aboriginal Methodist minister, were among nine people arrested later that week when they demonstrated at the offices of the Department for Aboriginal Affairs in Brisbane in a symbolic 'takeover' attempt.

All this reads very dramatically. But Walker's demands for Aborigines are not really so far from the careful point of view put by men like Coombs.

I believe the most important aspect of the problem of the advancement of the Aboriginal people [he has said] is that of effectively involving them in the solution to their problems. It is no exaggeration to say that I know of no Aboriginal community in which this is at present effectively done.

Coombs pointed out that white Australians, and sometimes Aborigines, suppose that Aborigines had a traditional incapacity to make social decisions of a major kind for themselves. He continued:

This conviction, going along as it does very frequently with a natural desire to achieve effective action, and with a certainty of what is good for the Aborigines, leads to policies which are paternalist and basically authoritarian, even though these policies are generously motivated and imply an acceptance of genuine trusteeship for the Aborigines' welfare.

I believe a continuance of policies based on these attitudes offers no significant hope for the future of Aborigines. It will ensure the continued disintegration of Aboriginal society, which has marked our association with it for the last 200 years. If Aborigines as individuals and as communities are to become an effective and integral part of Australian society, we must permit them to organise themselves for effective social action in their own way, making use of their traditional sources of authority, and do our best to make it effective.

So much for Queensland. Of course one of the problems is the poverty and helplessness of almost all Aborigines. If they could fight injustice, there would be less injustice. But some have started to get what they need for the fight: a little money and plenty of courage. Charles Perkins, for example, was arrested a few years ago in Alice Springs allegedly for failing to leave licensed premises when asked and he decided to plead not guilty. He spent \$260 in air fares from Sydney and on legal fees, a year's savings, but he won the case.

It was a good case to win [he said], not only on the matter of principle, but because, on this one occasion, it united the people in Alice—black and white. Normally, there is a difference in attitude towards the Aborigines by the white people there. But when I walked out of that court a free man, people of both colours congratulated me on the stand.

Throughout Australia, Dexter told a Senate committee of inquiry, Aborigines get into conflict with the law proportionately more than other people, and 'I personally am not convinced that they are more prone to law-breaking than are the rest of the Australian people'. Dr Henry Schapper, in a recent survey of Western Australia, found

that 11.5 per cent of all Aborigines in the state had been committed to prison, but only 0.4 per cent of white Australians. Further, although Aborigines made up only 2.5 per cent of the total population of Western Australia, in 1968 they made up 44 per cent of those committed to prison in that state. Schapper believes that the figures 'illustrate social failure' and so they 'could not be used as evidence of legal discrimination against Aboriginals'.

Michael Robinson, an anthropologist, found that over 80 per cent of women prisoners in Western Australia were Aborigines. He believes that many Aborigines think imprisonment inevitable at some stage in their lives and that

it is pointless to worry about imprisonment.

Dr Elizabeth Eggleston of Monash University found that there was de facto discrimination in the administration of criminal law in Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria. She accuses police of using improper methods to obtain confessions from Aborigines and of framing Aborigines. For example, one Aboriginal was arrested for drunkenness because he had been 'cheeky' to police the night before. She adds, 'Fortunately he was able to see a doctor who took a blood sample. Since this showed no alcohol he was acquitted.' She found that in some towns police policy was not to release Aborigines on bail and. generally, she found that most Aborigines were unrepresented in court.

In the N.S.W. country town of Walgett three law students made a survey in 1969 and discovered that 95 per cent of Aboriginal defendants plead guilty always, and the clerk of petty sessions there suggested that this was so only because they always were guilty. There was an almost inevitable round of arrests and convictions and 'in drunkenness, the system is almost a tax on Aboriginal drinking. Some Aborigines do not distinguish between their bail and the actual penalty.'

Coombs has said that many young Aborigines go to gaol 'because society does not provide for them'. After doing quite well at school they can find no employment,

wander the town, and get into trouble. Examples are legion. Richard Harding, senior lecturer in law at the University of Western Australia, in his book *Police Killings in Australia*, wrote of a constable called Armour who had called Ken Brindle, an Aboriginal, a 'cheeky black bastard', punched him on the jaw, and charged him with using insulting language. Brindle was acquitted and awarded \$400 damages. Harding found, too, that an Aboriginal in the Redfern area, 'is very much at the mercy of the police'.

A very hopeful development was the founding in 1970 of an Aboriginal legal service, with rooms at 142 Regent Street, Redfern, Sydney. The service was founded by young Aborigines, some of whom were law students, and the intention was to make sure that Aborigines would have reason to feel that the law and the police would operate fairly towards them. The president of the council of the service is Professor J. H. Wootten, Q.C., Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales. About one-third of the barristers in New South Wales have offered voluntary help. There is a 24-hour telephone service which passes messages on to duty lawyers. I was in Redfern recently one Saturday night when a plainclothes squad of police, using batons, arrested more than a dozen Aborigines. Paul Coe and Gary Williams, both Aborigines and members of the Service's council, were soon on the phone for help. Similar services have now been established in South Australia and Queensland and another is developing in Western Australia.

Wootten has commented that in their long history Aborigines 'never had reason to regard the law as anything but an instrument of their oppression'. So there were 'strong feelings against and distrust of police amongst many Aborigines'. In Redfern, because of the legal service, there has already been some improvement in relations with the local police, but everywhere in Australia there is a long way to go. Paul Coe has told me that he decided to study law because 'white police will think twice about trying to kill a black lawyer'.

In 1971 Lionel Brockman became famous when he evaded police for four months, having walked out of a rehabilitation centre only days before his release was due on a three-month sentence for stealing. Brockman had collected his wife and eleven children and headed into the remote Western Australian bush. They were eventually captured by sixteen policemen, with six vehicles, an aircraft and about a hundred helpful farmers in their own vehicles, many carrying guns. The police said the Brockman family was armed, but the only shots to be fired came from the police. Brockman was sentenced to three and a half years' gaol for ten offences, which he admitted.

Brockman had lost his job on a farm in the rural recession in 1970 and had taken to foraging for his wife and family. So he had gone to gaol. After escaping, he explained, 'everything I done and everything I stole was only because the police were chasing us around, and I only done these things to get food for my children and my wife, and to be with them'. After sentence the judge fixed the lowest parole term of nine months, but Australia had been horrified by this extreme example of the white law applied to Aborigines.

It would be much better if there were in Australia, for Aborigines, bodies like the Maori committees in New Zealand, which can impose penalties for minor offences committed by Maori. Maori may choose to be tried either before an ordinary court or by the Maori committee. Professor Colin Tatz, a political scientist at the University of New England, Armidale, has observed that

a genuine community justice is done and seen and felt by all to be done. Here Maori are adjudicating on Maori before open mixed audiences. To me this is a grand example of sensitivity and refinement. It is the antithesis of a private and special code of settlement 'law', which law, as in Queensland, has often been specifically excluded from review or challenge in the ordinary courts.

Australia remains the only country where the customary

law of native peoples is not recognised. It should be. People have a right to be judged by their peers and Aborigines are not so judged. Throughout Australia there is discrimination, intimidation, and exploitation for Aborigines.

Tatz says that between 1953 and 1963 the Welfare Branch in the Northern Territory 'did not bring a single prosecution against a cattleman for his failure to abide by a book full of regulations affecting his conduct towards Aborigines'. Very often Aborigines are allowed into only the public bars of hotels, and on mission stations and government settlements Aborigines often do not get their unemployment payments because their 'training allowances' (in other words, low wages) are regarded as alternatives.

So it goes on. Harry Penrith, an Aboriginal I met recently in Townsville at a meeting of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, has said of Australians, 'You have a long way to go before you can find redemption in the eyes of the Aboriginal people'. Penrith is now middle aged, with a fine presence and voice. For eight years he worked as a clerk in the Public Service of New South Wales. He wanted to set a good example to make 'the road a little easier' for Aborigines following him.

To do this meant that my behaviour had to be faultless, both in private and in public. This meant suppressing all the exuberance of youth, when I should have been free to act in accordance with the various stages a normal person goes through. Instead I was expected to be absolutely perfect in all aspects of living, a thing which I gladly accepted if it meant an easier road for somebody to follow.

Then in 1962, at Wagga Agricultural College, he was recommended for an annual increase in pay. But the recommendation was 'Mr Penrith's attitude and diligence to work leave nothing to be desired, but his limitations are of racial origin'.

On another occasion in Melbourne he was recommended for a position by the Commonwealth Employment Agency, but when he went to the prospective employer he was greeted with'Why didn't he tell me you were an Aboriginal? I would have saved you the long walk up.'

'Why do you feel this way?' asked Penrith.

'Because my clients are professional people and they would tell me to get rid of you.'

Penrith continued:

Aboriginal people have pride. The same sort of thing happens when we look for accommodation. We prefer to live in the not-so-good areas of towns and cities because we are sick of being hurt. At least in these areas rebuffs don't come as often.

When I was interested in taking out a life insurance policy some years ago I was told that I was a favoured person and that it was only by virtue of my stable employment record that I was to be considered. 'Aborigines are a bad risk' I was told.

Only in South Australia is there an anti-discrimination Act, which is quite a recent development under the state Labor government.

Coombs has reported hearing one headmaster claim, 'as evidence of virtue and effectiveness, that his pupils have grown so far away from their parents, their families and their ways and customs that they are anxious to divorce themselves completely. This seems to me to express a fantastic arrogance on our part', he concluded.

The official teachers' handbook, issued by the government of New South Wales, says:

If the principal of a school is of the opinion that there are circumstances in the home condition of Aboriginal children whose enrolment is sought, which justifies refusal or deferment of enrolment or if he is aware that substantial opposition to such enrolment exists in the local community, he should inform the District Inspector of Schools and await the departmental decision on the matter.

At Brewarrina, in northern New South Wales, Aboriginal ex-servicemen are barred from membership and refused entrance to the local returned servicemen's club, except for a couple of hours on Anzac Day. Steve Gordon, an Aboriginal shearer, had been working for two years for a con-

tractor, but, he says, 'I started helping the Aboriginal people in Brewarrina and that year I was told by the contractor that a station owner would not let me work there because I was a "black power man".' Gordon has three children and lives in a falling-down house for \$7 a week rent.

Leonard Broom has written movingly of the way Aborigines are exploited:

Because Aborigines are less able to deal with the world of numbers and words, they are less efficient consumers. They are less able to obey the injunction that the buyer should beware, because they are less likely to know of what they should beware and how to implement their wariness. They are less likely to know about or take advantage of opportunities for and forms of redress or available welfare benefits.

The constraining and inhibitory effects of vulnerability before the authority of the printed word, the official document, the price list or the column of numbers is an inherent part of the life experience of most adult Aborigines. Such conditions make it difficult for them to get value for money or for work and to make the most of what they have. Such conditions make it almost impossible for a man to bargain forthrightly on an even footing or to strike out on fresh ventures with any likelihood of success. He is often dependent on the honesty, generosity, forbearance and friendliness of strangers, at best a poor substitute for self-reliance.

As for intimidation, Douglas Daniels, an Aboriginal counsellor at the Roper River mission in the Northern Territory, has said, 'We want Aboriginal policemen on our mission, not white policemen. Our people are frightened of them.'

The Reverend Jim Downing, in Alice Springs, has referred critically to the power of superintendents of settlements to banish troublemakers from amongst their own people. He had been told by one superintendent:

The magistrate is getting a bit sticky about these Section 18 applications, but so long as I get the right wording on them he puts them through. I'm kicking all the trouble-makers off the

place. Where I was before I could 'vag' them straight away, but here it takes six weeks.

### Downing's comment is:

With his persistent failure to give the people the authority for which they were asking, or to back them with what authority he did give them, no wonder the report for 1967-68 states that Aboriginal participation in the maintenance of order was continually solicited but the response was as a rule poor.

All this social injustice against Aborigines, if it continues, will surely lead to resistance, and the presently passive peoples of the Northern Territory may become the first to resist effectively, because of their isolation from the law and its agents. On 6 May 1972, for example, about forty Aborigines at Papunya settlement, 180 miles north-west of Alice Springs, attacked the house of Constable Basil Smith with spears and rocks, after a fight over an Aboriginal who had been arrested for bringing liquor on to the settlement. Three weeks after the attack, and before the court had finished hearing evidence, police in the Territory began riot training. The president of the Police Association proposed to the Police Commissioner that police stations on native settlements and construction sites be equipped with CS gas grenades, that Papunya settlement be given the standard firearm issue for isolated stations, that outback stations be surrounded by barbed-wire-topped security fences and provided with floodlighting powered from the station's own generator and that communications between isolated and town stations be improved.

# 8 'Black and White Together...'?

White man got no dreaming, Him go nother way. White man, him go different, Him go road bilong himself.

These words, by an old anonymous Aboriginal poet in the outback, are true. And now, despite the terrible history of 200 years and the terrible present, can white and Aboriginal Australians learn from each other, help each other and live together, making a better Australia? I think they can.

No Aboriginal could despise white Australians more than Paul Coe, 23, the young law student from Sydney. Three of his uncles have been shot and killed by white Australians. And yet, for all their anger and their hatred, young black radicals like Coe do have compassion for the white man. They want some of his security, but they pity him for his over-anxious materialism.

On 23 July this year, just before the police moved in against the Aboriginal embassy in Canberra, Coe made a direct appeal to all Australians present, looking across and above him towards their Parliament House. He explained how their vote in the 1967 referendum had still not been honoured, and continued:

Australian men and women, both black and white, have died fighting in two world wars against fascism. They died to protect democracy. Make a stand here today to protect that memory of what these men stood for and what they died for. They died to protect the rights of people. What is happening to the black man here today is surely going to happen to the white man. What will they do to you tomorrow?

Coe was thinking, I am sure, about all the ugly distortions of a good life foisted upon Australians by bad leadership. The embassy was not only an inspiration at the time and now of real spiritual significance to Aborigines, it was also a way of opening ordinary Australian eyes to the lives of Aborigines who have been 'invisible' to them.

To stick a beach umbrella on the lawns before Parliament House and take over that land on behalf of all Aborigines was a brilliant, brave idea. It was done on 26 January. One month later the camp had grown to a dozen tents and the government was still not game to move the squatters. No white Australian had dared to do anything like this, let alone 'some bloody boongs'.

And so, day after day, shy and puzzled white Australian families, tourists to their national capital, would venture across to the tents, to be politely received and to go away a little wiser. Once when the Aborigines were asked to move their tents so that the grass could be watered and mown the reply was, 'They have torn up Arnhem Land, so we don't give a damn for this land'.

On 22 February Parliament resumed and the embassy carried on. On 2 March there was talk of a federal ordinance for the removal of the embassy. On 11 May Hunt, Minister for the Interior, having announced the coming ordinance, suggested that the Aborigines could apply for some land to build a club. When he said that a club would be more dignified he showed that he did not understand the infinite dignity of a suppressed people fighting, in a simple way, for their rights.

Parliament rose for the winter recess on 25 May, but the embassy stayed. 'Given the severe cold in Canberra during winter', the embassy announced that staff would be cut to four and appealed for warm clothing, blankets and second-hand, safe kerosene heaters.

On 2 June Hunt denied that the ordinance, now drafted, would not be used in the absence of Parliament. On 7 June the embassy sent a long and very remarkable petition to

the Queen in London explaining the status of Aborigines in Australia and asking her to reserve the promulgation of the ordinance for 'your Majesty's pleasure'. On 8 June Australia's first Aboriginal knight, Sir Douglas Nicholls, visited the embassy, stamping it thereby with conservative Aboriginal approval. On 27 June there was a meeting of the council of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation in Parliament House and, in the presence of distinguished foreigners, the government must have found the embassy even more embarrassing. Finally, on 20 July, the ordinance was gazetted and police asked the Aborigines to take down their tents and leave. They refused and the police moved in, against about sixty Aborigines, men and women, and white Australians, arm in arm, hands clasped. In the mêlée there was fighting and eight people were arrested. That night on television Hunt said the Aborigines had a case and they would be allowed to continue demonstrating but not camping. As for the fighting that day, it had been caused by 'people from outside, hell-bent on violence'.

However, Hunt said that he had not been present. My cable to *The Times* in London that night ended: 'I was present and patently the Aboriginals were as determined as the "outsiders".

Three days later, when about 100 Aborigines and as many white supporters put up their embassy again, there was even more fighting when police pulled it down. Eighteen people were arrested.

There followed a week of deep anxiety, with government, police and Aborigines wondering how more violence could be avoided. On 30 July about 400 Aborigines and more than 1000 white supporters broke the law again, putting up the embassy tent before 250 police in front of Parliament House. This time, after several hours of strong protest speaking, the Aborigines permitted a few police to move through their ranks and take down the tent. It was a good ending, and the Aboriginal leadership was impressive. 'Chika' Dixon appealed to all Australians to vote the government out of office, adding 'If you are not to be part

of the problem, then you must be part of the solution'. He appealed to 'all white brothers' and one of them spoke, Bob Pringle, state president of the Building Workers Federation.

The whole embassy affair had been important because, on television, all Australians had been able to see how in the end the Aborigines had been helped and comforted by white Australians, young and middle aged.

Also, the experience of the embassy, and especially the brutal way it was ended by the government, brought many older and perhaps more conservative Aborigines in behind the young radical leaders, after much initial doubt and suspicion of their motives. I remember being introduced to Mrs Geraldine Briggs, president of the National Council of Aboriginal and Island Women, who was standing quietly some way from the milling, excited crowd not long before the embassy was finally removed. Mrs Briggs was very well dressed, very much like any lady from the better suburbs in Melbourne, and not a bit like the young Aboriginal radicals, in jeans and T-shirts and leather coats. But as I talked to her it was obvious where her heart lav with them. She had been deeply moved by what we had seen and heard, and she must have admired her young people.

The result was that not only the government, but even its more enlightened advisers were profoundly shocked when a special conference of Aboriginal Advisory Councillors, meeting in Canberra on 10-11 August, accepted young radical leadership. Before the conference the government had made much of the untypical, unrepresentative nature of the young Aboriginal protest movement. They had tried to denigrate it. At the same time, they had tried to build up the conference as 'a representative gathering of Aboriginal delegates', as Howson called it in his opening speech. He had described it thus, because it was expected to be conservative, with delegates coming from all over Australia, including the far north and the centre.

The young radicals, uninvited by the government,

entered the hall during Howson's speech and eventually, by lobbying and leadership, were accepted, first as observers and then as full members of the conference.

This was a big victory for them. As the Canberra Times put it,

After long equivocation about its responsibilities towards Australian Aboriginal people, the Commonwealth Government has at last been painted into a corner. Mr Howson and his colleagues have asked the Aboriginal people what they want, and it is not the status quo. The ball is now back in the Government's court: it has neither an excuse nor the right to delay its response.

The conference demanded especially that the Commonwealth Government should exercise its constitutional power for Aboriginal welfare and advancement throughout the country, overriding the states if necessary.

When Parliament resumed on 15 August for the Budget session, Labor moved a motion of no confidence in Hunt for his removal of the embassy. Kim Beazley (Labor) said the embassy had spoken 'to the conscience of Australia'. He quoted a telegram from Hunt to a Tennant Creek sports club in the Northern Territory, apologising for his inability to attend its opening, because

Left-wing unionists and radicals threaten to cause a violent demonstration and possibly bloodshed in Canberra this weekend. This crisis situation is causing deep concern and if violence does occur the consequences will be alarming nationally.

Hunt repeated his desire to 'find a more dignified presence for the Aborigines in the Australian Capital Territory' and he said that the Aboriginal camp had 'degenerated into a squabbling, untidy, insanitary spectacle'. He also thought that 'the whole situation surrounding this affair has been influenced by the political objectives of certain sections of the Labor Party'.

Within a few days Mrs Pat Eatock, who had been secretary/treasurer of the Aboriginal embassy, announced

that she would contest the A.C.T. seat in the coming elections, as a Black Liberation Front candidate. She said she wanted to give Canberra people a chance to show support for the embassy and its people.

In the electorate of Gwydir, in northern New South Wales, the young radicals were encouraging their people to enrol as voters, so that they could help to defeat the sitting member, Ralph Hunt, the Country Party Minister for the Interior. He was even more discredited on 12 September when the Supreme Court of the A.C.T. upheld part of an appeal by the Aborigines and found that the ordinance which had been supposed to empower the police to remove the embassy did not give them that power, because it had been incorrectly gazetted (after months of fearful preparation) and was therefore not in force. Several Aborigines who were in Canberra that day to appear in court on charges of assaulting the police, for resisting what had been illegal police action against their embassy, quickly re-erected their tattered tent with the aid of two young white Australians. But late that night Hunt had the ordinance gazetted once again, correctly, and in the darkness of the early morning of 13 September, for the fourth time, police removed the tent. Later that day, in Parliament, Jim Killen, a former Liberal Minister, was so angered by the government's behaviour that he voted for a Labor motion which wanted all prosecutions dropped against the 27 people arrested during the first two police raids against the embassy. But the motion was lost.

This kind of arbitrary government action, which confirms Aboriginal contempt for 'white justice', reinforces the case for 'black power'—which Bobbi Sykes has called one of the most misused phrases in Australia. The media in the United States had chosen to link the slogan with violence, whenever it arose, so that the two became inseparable in the public mind. Now the Australian public equated black power with guns, mass slaughter, lootings, violence, bombs, and direct black/white confrontation. Australian fears were being exploited by many young

blacks and 'promoted shamelessly for monetary gain by newspapers and television alike'. She said there was a difference between violence and a militant stand. Black power was simply 'the power of black people to control their own destiny, in whichever direction they choose to go'. In other words, it rejects simple assimilation.

But Bobbi Sykes is worried about the possibility of real violence in Australia in the face of mounting tensions and frustrations.

I find it hard to take these fears seriously, after going to a 'black caucus' meeting recently in a very small house in Sydney. I don't think I have ever attended such a genuinely democratic, unpompous, and human meeting, with babies being fed and small, noisy children spilling themselves all over large legs and boots, as everyone sat around on a bed, a few chairs and the floor.

Nonetheless, the radicals do mean business and they are angry and determined. They want title to Aboriginal reserves, traditional tribal land, and places where Aborigines camp in country districts near towns. In the big cities, wherever Aborigines have congregated together for comfort, they want control of certain municipal areas where Aborigines would run their own societies in their own way with their own policemen protecting their own businesses, the whole financed by compensation for stolen Aboriginal land. Meanwhile, as Coe told me, 'there's a war going on in Australia as far as we are concerned'.

And Australian Aborigines are not so far from fellow blacks elsewhere. In 1970, at the invitation of American black power, a delegation of Aborigines went to the United Nations General Assembly. In December 1971 Oscar Tammur, a member of the Papua New Guinea House of Assembly, was brought to Sydney by the Australian Union of Students and the Amalgamated Engineering Union to take part in a 'march against racism'. Also, in that month, Jacob Oberdoo, an Aboriginal in Western Australia, rejected the British Empire Medal because 'I cannot do busi-

ness with those in bad standing', namely Her Majesty's government.

Of course, many Aborigines will not accept the black power idea. Ted Fields in Armidale has written: 'We Aborigines do not identify with the colour black. Our identity is based on a much deeper spiritual awareness of ourselves as people'. He pointed out that Evonne Goolagong does not identify herself as black. 'She indentifies as Aboriginal, which is more national and specific.'

However, Fields did wish the black power people well in their struggle for recognition.

Black power in Australia does not in itself mean violence but there are dangers, and some good people in Australia remain worried about the future. Don Brady, the Aboriginal Methodist minister in Brisbane, has said, 'When the government lets an Aboriginal baby die of malnutrition every day, this is violence. Well, we are going to meet these things on the same basis.' Brady was speaking symbolically, I think, but I remember seeing someone break a wooden placard pole just before the police moved against the embassy on 23 July. Pieces of the pole, with sharp, jagged ends, were picked up. There was great tension, great emotion at the time, a feeling of crisis, of a great moment after decades of cruel suppression, of a moment not to be wasted by some bad decision.

I remember seeing the tempting pieces of wood thrown away.

Barrie Pittock, the Quaker expert on land rights, has said:

If violence does come, it will be because we have failed to eliminate the systemic violence of injustice from Australian society. Australians are moving inevitably towards a choice between acceptance of the reality that we are a multi-racial, plural society in a predominantly non-white world, or of the development of a white fortress mentality like that of southern Africa.

The ideas of the great world outside are reaching the

long-sheltered land of Australia. Albert Cleage, pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, in Detroit, Michigan, has said:

for nearly 500 years the illusion that Jesus was white dominated the world only because white Europeans dominated the world. Now, with the emergence of the nationalist movements of the world's coloured majority, the historic truth is finally beginning to emerge—that Jesus was the non-white leader of a non-white people struggling for liberation against the rule of a white nation, Rome.

I think one of the dangers is that desperate Aborigines, very few in number compared with the overwhelming majority of white Australians, have come up against what Stanner calls 'a kind of psychological horror of free Aboriginality'.

Pittock writes about 'a barrier of fear, fear of a state of affairs in which more than one way of life exist side by side. It is fear of the very existence of groups of free men who by choice live according to different customs and traditions.'

Conservative people, concerned about their property and about the need for such nebulous things as 'responsible government' and the traditional forms of politics are, I think, sincerely frightened. Hence the gravity of their response to some 'death threats', said to have been made in January 1971 against Howson, the Minister in charge of Aboriginal affairs, who said that the Attorney-General's Department had received certain information.

It seems to me that a good deal of the discussion about violent elements consorting with Aboriginal radicals is not unlike the traditional conservative talk within Australia of Chinese communism coming south. It is meant to stifle change and keep Australia conforming. It is meant to kill Aboriginal integrity or the development of groups going back to the strength of their dreamtime.

I think this is what Kevin Gilbert understands in his poem, 'People Are Legends':

Kill the legend Butcher it With your acute cynicisms Your paternal superfluities With your unwise wisdom Kill the legend Obliterate it With your atheism Your fraternal hypocrisies With your primal urge of miscegenation Kill the legend Devaluate it With your sophistry Your baseless rhetoric Your lusting material concepts Your groundless condescension Kill it Vitiate the seed Crush the root-plant All this And more you need must do In order To form a husk of a man To the level And in your own image

Whiteman

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But all is not lost. There are plenty of Australians today strongly on the side of Aborigines and they are not all students. One of the older ones is Wootten, who wrote a remarkable letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 6 December 1971. He praised

angry, defiant young men and women, proud of their Aboriginality, attacking us not with spears but with our own weapons, the Declaration of Human Rights and all the professed ideals of western society: the researches of our own historians, educationists, doctors, lawyers and sociologists, which document the sufferings and injustices of their people.

How do we answer them this time? As we did last century,

with guns, gaols, violence legitimised by the State we have imposed upon them? or with a rhetoric of untruths and double standards?

Will we piously say that Aborigines are now equal under the law (except in Queensland, of course) and that it would be racial discrimination to give them special privileges to overcome the handicaps and injustices which have enabled the rest of us to get so far ahead?

Do we say that they have constitutional means to seek changes and should not use violence? This should be the answer in a democratic community, but it can be cant and hypocrisy in our mouths. Aborigines have one per cent of the votes in Australia. They cannot achieve results constitutionally without white support.

If they find that the white majority and the white-controlled media take a real interest only when violence erupts, more and more Aborigines will accept the leadership of personalities (sometimes contorted by hatred or personal frustration) who advocate violence, and the support of whites who would welcome it. Everything they see of the distribution of community benefits—to graziers, to unionists, to manufacturers—disproves the suggestion that change comes 'inevitably at its own pace', and not from pressure and manipulation.

It is time for white voters who disapprove of 'black power' to stand up and be counted on the issue of black justice.

Wootten also pointed out that a massive government effort was needed, 'not the current tokenism that gives one-third of 1 per cent of the National Budget to Aboriginal advancement'.

But Wootten is, I think, a little unfair to Australia's only Aboriginal member of Parliament, Senator Neville Bonner, whom he describes as 'thoroughly assimilated and increasingly unrepresentative of Aborigines'. Bonner does, of course, have a problem. As Denis Walker has written:

Under the present political structure, the only way an Aboriginal can do anything is to be elected by white people. I think this is wrong, because it immediately makes that person think of his white electors rather than the black people who are in a much worse situation.

I have talked at length to Bonner and he does have a strong point of view. The most vocal of his people call him an 'Uncle Tom' and, as a Liberal, he is not even within the party which has promised land rights for his people. It cannot be pleasant to be derided so much by fellow Aborigines.

Bonner stresses that he has a responsibility to represent both his own black people and also, proudly, the white citizens of Australia and he does make irritating remarks like 'Aborigines must learn to act responsibly before they are given more responsibility'.

As for his own state of Queensland, he says:

The issue in Queensland seems to be the legislation, but it is strange that it isn't the people who are living in the settlements who are protesting about the Act, it's people who are not affected by it at all. The Queensland Government is doing everything in its power to help the Aborigines. Queensland Aborigines have advanced quite as far as those in any other States.

Now, regrettably, Bonner is not quite right, because at a National Conference on Racism in Brisbane early this year the late Tommy Geia, Chairman of Palm Island Aboriginal Council strongly criticised some of the Queensland administration. However, Bonner does admit that 'there is still plenty of room for improvement. I'm trying to do a lot in my own way through the right channels, through my Parliamentary colleagues.'

Mrs Briggs is more forthright, although she has the caution which always comes with responsibility. She wrote recently:

At last we have been to Alice Springs and I can't describe the feelings I had when I saw Aboriginals living in the Todd River. It was a mixed feeling of sadness and hatred which, when analysed, boils down to frustration. Sadness because my people have to live in such conditions without hope. And hatred to think that anyone could let human beings live in such terrible conditions. Many people we spoke to said 'Aboriginals

want to live like that', but this is not true, as we spoke to all the people living in the Todd River in their different tribal groups.

Mrs Briggs, who comes from Shepparton in Victoria, was not afraid to make it clear that she knew little of her fellow Aborigines in the centre. 'The young babies were carried in coolamons, which was really fascinating to see.' (Coolamons are wooden carriers, carefully gouged into dish shapes.) This was at Yuendumu settlement, where she said she was disgusted with the houses: 'They consist of one room, about 10 x 12. All the family sleep in this room. They have no room for tables or beds. There were toilets and showers, but they were about 100 yards from each house.' In one group of houses there were no toilet facilities and people had to go into the bush.

The pensioners mostly live in humpies made of tin and rags, so low that they would have to crawl into them. They, too, have no toilet facilities. One of these pensioners was crippled, and got around by crawling on her hands and knees. There was also one blind.

The area around where these people live was kept very clean. They have a large church which is as modern as any in the city. I wonder what they think when they go into that church and know that they have to live in these abject conditions. . . .

We were told by one of the men that these people were so grateful to have us go there. They knew that someone had cared.

In this way, Aborigines, all over Australia, educated and uneducated, are getting to know each other. They are feeding on each other's experience, and growing stronger and taller as they nourish each other with their courage.

One family Mrs Briggs met in the dry bed of the Todd River had three children all under the age of six.

The baby was four months old [she said]. They had been there twelve months, waiting for a Commission home, and they were told that they would have to wait for two years. When the river was in flood they moved under the school, which is built very high up off the ground, and the police told them they had to

move. The mother asked them to put the children in a home until they found a place to live, or until the rain and flood cleared up, but they were refused. No wonder the children are sick.

Mrs Briggs reports without emphasis; the facts speak for themselves.

Coombs was asked once if he thought that the acquisitive materialism of Australians, as westerners, was always going to conflict directly with the Aboriginal culture. He answered:

Yes, it will conflict in some ways, but they may find ways of reconciling these philosophies. Mind you, I think they have influenced the Australian attitudes already. Australians are, in many ways, acquisitive, although there are lots of Australians who will not pursue the dollar to the last point. There are plenty of Australians who like to knock off work and have a holiday. It used to be complained bitterly about miners in the Hunter River Valley, that when the prawns were running down on Lake Illawarra, or wherever it was, they used to have a strike, or they would just not turn up for work.

The Reverend Frank Engel, Secretary of the Australian Council of Churches, has written that the two cultures should be re-evaluated. Christianity had been mostly associated with European culture, he wrote, but today that culture was non-Christian, even anti-Christian, and in certain respects Aboriginal culture was nearer the spirit of Christ. 'Obvious examples are the gentleness of Aboriginals, contrasted with the aggressiveness of the European, and Aboriginal insistence on finding the common mind of the group as against the self-assertion of individualistic European leadership.'

Stanner has said that the Aborigines had no great conflict over power, no great contest for place and office.

This single fact explains much else, because it rules out so much that would be destructive of stability. So there are no offices to stimulate ambition, intrigue, or the use of force, to be envied or fought over, or to be lost or won.

And so, from the older, humane academics to the young draft resisters, John Noyes and Michael Hamel-Green, who wrote a letter to the *Review*: 'Draft resisters have been underground for as much as a year, but Aboriginals are underground for all of their lives. They are subject to constant humiliation, police intimidation, and repression from the time they are born.' The two young whites said that Aborigines were struggling not merely against arresting policemen, but against a whole lifetime of degradation, starvation, and humiliation:

We propose that all oppressed groups in Australia, blacks, youths, women, homosexuals, workers, pensioners come together to build a tent city in front of Parliament House on the first day of the coming sitting. Let this become a symbol of our common struggle for human liberation in the face of coercion and violence by which un-young, uncoloured, unpoor rulers seek to perpetuate their domination and exploitation of our society.

The new tent city was not built, but the point is that it was an idea inspired in white Australian society by Aborigines, using their own instinct and interest in a contemporary way.

Stanner has pointed out that two aspects of the Aboriginal struggle have been undervalued. 'One is their continued will to survive, the other their continued efforts to come to terms with us.' He told the story of an old man whose tribe had scattered to a dozen places, who knew that he must give up the bush life and

come more than half way to strike a bargain with us. He was an elderly widower whom I saw destroying something in a fire. I asked him what he was doing and he told me he was 'killing his dreaming'. I had never seen or heard anything like it before. There is nothing within our ken that remotely resembles it. He was destroying his symbol that linked him with his country, with the source of his own life, and with all the continuities of his people. It was a kind of personal suicide, an act of severance, before he came in to find a new life, a new identity amongst us.

But I do not think that white Australians or black ones have to be pessimistic about their future together. After two centuries of horror they are coming together in the most unlikely ways.

In 1973, for example, the Adelaide Wind Quintet will be going to the United States with its Aboriginal didgeridoo accompanist, George Winunguj. Winunguj was born about fifty years ago on Goulburn Island off the coast of Arnhem Land. He is married with eight children and he travels a great deal in the Northern Territory as a teacher in the United Church. He is also chairman of the Administrator's Advisory Council of Darwin and in the late 1960s he was unsuccessful as the first Aboriginal to stand for election to the Legislative Council of the Northern Territory.

He is a virtuoso with the didgeridoo and in October 1970, when the Adelaide Wind Quintet gave a concert at night on the football field overlooking the Gulf of Carpentaria at Yirrkala, Winunguj and several other players took part with their didgeridoos.

Later it was decided that George Dreyfus, the Australian composer, should write a new work for wind quintet and didgeridoo. Dreyfus flew to Arnhem Land for research work and spent some time taping the music of Winunguj. Finally he wrote a piece for western instruments, based on the three moods characteristic of much didgeridoo music (slow, fast, exciting). He wrote no score for the didgeridoo, allowing Winunguj to improvise within the mood of each particular section. Winunguj cannot read music and, in any case, Dreyfus felt it was still premature to intermingle musically the two traditions.

This approach by Dreyfus has, I think, a wider, general application, because he made no attempt to 'assimilate' the Aboriginal music into any strong western form. Instead, the Aboriginal contribution was an integral thing on its own, blending with the whole work and influencing, for the good, the western or Australian part of it.

It seemed to be a perfect example, by chance, of what should be the whole connection between the Aboriginal and the white Australian way. The world premiere for Dreyfus's 'Sextet for Didgeridoo and Wind Quintet' was at the Canberra Spring Festival in October 1971. If the politicians and the public servants went they might have learned something.

Winunguj has also written a play called *The Land is not Empty*, which is a complete answer to the constant and overwhelming argument of the great mining companies. The play begins at the dawn of time and goes on for 30,000 years of the history of the Aboriginal people, ending with the present crisis and a final determination by the Aboriginal people 'to give to the younger civilisation much that they have lost, forgotten or never known'.

Meanwhile the Australian Council for the Arts is sponsoring an Aboriginal Theatre Foundation, with local branches throughout Australia. Coombs has noticed a 'phenomenal revival of Aboriginal ceremonial life'. The year before last there was a chain of Aboriginal assemblies right through from the Kimberleys down to the centre, and from Esperance (in the extreme south-west of Australia) to the centre, far larger in numbers and with greater vigour than for many decades. This revival seems to be continuing and is attracting back to tribal participation Aborigines who had grown away from their own communities, even part-Aborigines who had no previously established tribal background.

Coombs points out that the traditional small organisations of Aborigines meant that they thought of themselves not as one people but many, separated in language, land of origin, and in ways and customs, too. 'Perhaps simply by confrontation with Australians of European origin there seems now to be emerging a sense of being an Aboriginal Australian, as well as a Gurindji or an Arunta'.

In 1972 a company of tribal dancers (who are also, of course, singers and musicians) represented Australia at the South Pacific Festival at Fiji.

Two negro artists, one from South Africa (Bauxha Stone) and one from New York (Carole Johnson), are now working with the Council in its Aboriginal activities. I talked to Carole Johnson in Sydney recently. She is working with Bob Maza and the new Black Theatre in Regent Street, Redfern. Dr Jean Battersby, Director of the Australian Council for the Arts, regards her work as outstanding and says: 'She worked in ghetto conditions in New York and like it or not, in our capitals, we virtually have just such ghetto surroundings for our Aboriginals. But Carole Johnson is doing great things.'

At the Roper River settlement in Arnhem Land, the Australian film director Cecil Holmes has been teaching some Aborigines how to make films. Holmes has said that Aborigines have no tradition of reading and writing, but 'they do have a great tradition of song and dance and graphic arts. And that's where the cinema comes in.'

The Council gave Holmes \$6000 to buy equipment and take it up to the Roper River, where he had done some filming himself. He described what happened:

Next morning (I had called for volunteers) I waited for people to turn up. It was a very long wait. I began to have visions of myself going home to Sydney with all the gear and my tail between my legs.

It was cold and misty and the mists symbolically lifted, and around the corner of my shack came my three prospective students, very shyly and timidly. But they came.

I had an odd prescient feeling that there was something almost historic about this and I realised, very forcibly that what I had involved myself in was not a mere technical exercise but a social experiment.

The Canadian Film Board has succeeded with crash courses for Eskimos and Indians, who are now marketing films of international film festival standard. So why not the Aborigines?

There is much to be learned from them and it is high time we did this learning. Stanner told the story of an old Aboriginal friend of his, who sat with him at a congress

when a speech was being made by a delegate of a certain European body with a political interest. The delegate spoke for a long time, and movingly, of his interest in Aboriginal affairs, which, said Stanner, 'I am willing to believe was a week old'. The delegate finished by shouting: 'We are on your side!' Stanner reports that his friend nudged him and muttered, 'Well, all I can say is that it took him a bloody long time to find out'.

Coombs is clearly fascinated by Aborigines and he has asked the question: 'Who and whence were these people who used the Nullarbor Caves ten millennia before the sea rose to change the shape of Australia and isolate it from the lands of the north?' He asks young Australians to learn that when Cook came to this country

it was a wilderness only to the scaled eyes of the European and had, in fact, been humanised from end to end. It was a continent criss-crossed by established trade routes, along which flowed things precious to Aborigines—not merely the ochres and the shells, the materials for their tools and weapons, but the songs and dances of tribal groups, perhaps from thousands of miles away.

In remote settlements like Yirrkala a new relationship is working itself out between articulate young Aborigines, who may have gone away to the big cities to learn English and much else, and returned, and the traditional tribal elders, without English and inexperienced in the ways of the white man. At a recent conference of Arnhem Land Aboriginal communities, held on Goulburn Island, Coombs noticed that the young speakers seemed to be conscious of important limitations on their freedom in discussions.

I was reminded somewhat [he said] of the kind of relationship which perhaps exists between men who constitute the government of a social democratic party in Italy and the hierarchy of the church. Discussions were never pushed at any session beyond the point where the spokesmen could, in the interval before some succeeding session, seek guidance from their elders. Some people see this limitation on the power and

authority of the emerging intelligentsia as a threat to progress. On the contrary, I feel that it is an essential guarantee of continuity with the past, while providing the means to gradual adaptation of conservative tradition.

Recently the Aborigines at Yirrkala wanted to establish a small brickworks. When the building was complete and the plant installed and operating, the Aborigines conducted a naming ceremony, the purpose of which was, apparently, to incorporate physical aspects of this enterprise into their past. The building itself received a name which meant in effect 'Secret Cave' and every piece of equipment was named similarly with words linked with Aboriginal tradition. Coombs's comment is:

We do not need to despair of the capacity of Aboriginal society to adapt its techniques of decision to contemporary problems. They will no doubt take time to learn and will make many mistakes, but I do not believe that a society which has survived some twenty or thirty thousand years in widely varying climatic and environmental conditions cannot really be incapable of adaptation.

## In July this year in Perth, he said:

We white Australians are inclined to think of Aboriginal Australians as a kind of accidental excrescence on our society towards which we feel resentful, resigned or compassionate, according to our temperament, or the immediacy of our knowledge and experience of them. They are a people of extreme antiquity. They had evolved a way of life which was in harmony with the land and its creatures, with which they identified themselves utterly. They lived as a component of that harmony rather than at its expense. It was for this reason, in part, that the earliest white settlers believed that the Aboriginals were landless wanderers, drifting hither and yon as the spirit moved them. Evidence of their occupancy was invisible to European eyes.

The pursuit of sustenance from an environment in many ways inhospitable and often hostile, was a source of stimulus as well as security to them, and intensified their respect for and sense of identity with it. They were, in contemporary

jargon, the true conservationists and handed down to their children an environment ecologically as rich and unpolluted as that which they themselves had inherited.

The life so provided, though by our standards poor in material goods, was far from poor in other ways. Immediate needs of the group and the family could normally be met, daily, by a few hours of hunting and gathering, the proceeds of which were shared in accordance with time honoured practice. Invariably there was time to spare for games, for songs, for dances and drama, for ceremonies sacred and profane, which were in essence the purpose for which life is lived.

Recently Ginsberg, an American contemporary poet with profound influence among the young, heard something of the song cycles of the Pitjantjatjara people of the Centre. He commented that these song cycles formed part of the last surviving oral epic traditions, comparable in quality and importance with the Greek epics recorded by Homer. He urged that we Australians have an opportunity and an obligation to protect and develop this tradition as a living component of the culture of our own society.

It was a society in which social obligations were accepted in a wholly personal way. No man, woman or child within it was alone, without support, or without mutual obligations. Even in its degradation, on the fringes of our own towns and cities, there is a certain refuge for the outcast, where judgments are not passed and where acceptance can be relied on.

It is a society, in essence, to which the material values of our own are utterly alien: which does not value possessions; which plans not for the future: which links the present with the dreamtime, which all men share with their ancestors and inheritors.

In these times increasingly, thoughtful men and women of our own society are coming to question the material values which have inspired us and to fear their ultimate impact on the physical world which we inhabit. We should, I believe, pause to question whether it is for us to condemn to extinction the surviving components of this so different civilisation. Who knows but in the catastrophe feared by scientists and others, as the infinite demands of our civilisation come into final conflict with the finite resources of our environment, we may have

need of the wisdom which has, for thirty thousand years, inspired the survival of the Aboriginal people.

In the past year my own family has learned a lot from some of the young Aborigines we have begun to know a little. One of them, Gerry Bostock, a returned soldier from Borneo, was in tears when the fight for their embassy ended. He went back to Sydney and resigned from the pensioned, well-paid public service, because it was government work. I met him giving breakfasts to hungry Aboriginal children and poor white ones in Redfern. He and his mates on the job, both black and white, taught me a bit of what we can do together. And so, in the words of a young white schoolteacher, Phyl Vinnecombe—

Will you fight, will you dare? Will you fight, will you dare? Will you help to mend a wrong? Will you stand up now for the dreamtime folk By joining their freedom song?

The dreaming folk are stirring now
They have laid their claim
To a part of the land their fathers roamed
That carried a tribal name.
Where Vestey's cattle brands are scored
And the stockmen's whips are cracked
The dreamtime folk are holding out
There'll be no going back.

Will you fight, will you dare?
Will you fight, will you dare?
Will you help to mend a wrong?
Will you stand up now for the dreamtime folk
By joining their freedom song?

Where the muddy Murray waters pour Red tomatoes rule the weed And the dreamtime folk who planted them Have seen where the road can lead. They can leave behind the pickers' hut

They can leave the fringe of the town They can take their place in this lucky land If you let them then they can.

Will you fight, will you dare?
Will you fight, will you dare?
Will you help to mend a wrong?
Will you stand up now for the dreamtime folk
By joining their freedom song?

Do they have to reach some famous height Before you let them grow? Will you shelter first the tall gum tree Or spring flowers from the snow? The plant is young, but the plant will grow And its fruit will sweeten the town Of the dreaming folk whose bitter bread Has choked their freedom down.

Will you fight, will you dare?

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He is married, with four children, and lives in Canberra. He is author of Political Football, an account of the 1971 Springbok tour of Australia.

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