

1950-1980's

WGIP 84/06E AUS 17

The event called 'Maralinga Atomic Testing' is a current example of the continuing past, present and future events in Aboriginal history. The Maralinga episode illustrates, in living memory, the history of white/black relationships: being the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their land and their forced resettlement in concentration camps, the physical domination by white over black in all aspects of life, the destruction of Aboriginal land in the peoples forced absence, and, the belated, inadequate recognition of a right to survival by the invading group through Government Land Rights Legislation.

The British Imperial Government in collusion with the Colonial Australia Government used and destroyed the land in a way and for a purpose which they would not, carry out on their own land.

forced

The physical dislocation of ^{Aboriginal} people began in the early 1950's. These moves affected the Kokatha people in South Australia around Woomera, the Yangkuntjatjara, Ngaanyatjara and Pitjantjatjara people in South, West and Central Australia, the Pintubi and other groups in Central Australia, as well as ^{other Aboriginal} peoples in the Kimberley region. ^{in North West of J. WA} The area directly affected by these actions cover half the continent of Australia. In the south and west of the country special settlements were established to hold the people who were removed from their land.

Throughout the 1950's and early 1960's there were continued efforts made by the British and Australian Government to locate and remove other Aboriginal groups from the region.

Those people removed from their land and prevented from returning for over twenty years have suffered extremely high levels of illness and death in the ^{concentration camps} ~~resettlements~~ and settlements. ^{Importantly, these people} ~~and even now~~ are still attempting to return to their homelands despite the very real question of radio active contamination of their lands and water and the actions of big business to keep them contained. It is clear however that not all Aboriginal people were removed before the tests. The ^{exact} number of Aboriginals left in the prohibited area of the tests ^{atomic} during the period of testing is unknown. Reports from both the Aboriginal ^{people} in the area and non-Aboriginal defence personnel tell of many deaths and illness ^{which were the} result of exposure to radiation and nuclear fall-out. Since the official end of defence activities in 1967 Aboriginal people have re-entered the area both with ^{unauthorised} official sanction, and as part of the hop

lands movement of re-occupation. Some of these people have been affected by exposure to contaminated country. Whilst in South Australia ~~the~~ State Government has 'granted' a version of Aboriginal Land Rights to enable some of the nuclear-test refugees to return home, the extent to which the country has been contaminated by the tests is uncertain and this uncertainty is effectively ~~preventing~~ ^{inhibiting} the people from returning home.

I now come to the basis of my intervention;

The Australian Government has been forced to establish a Royal Commission to attempt to ascertain effects of the Atomic Testing on the Aboriginal people but it is ^{highly} unlikely ~~to~~ ^{will be uncovered} ~~uncover~~ the whole story ^{in the minds of Aboriginal people} through this process.

The position taken by both the British and Australian Governments in relation to the Maralinga issue reflects their attitude to Aboriginal Rights ^{and reality} in Australia ~~and Land Rights in particular~~. ~~The only valid course of action for them is to recognise Aboriginal ownership of the land and pass all control over land matters to the Aboriginal people, admit the crimes against this land and its people, compensate the people for the period of dispossession and decimation in whichever form demanded by the people, and continue to recognise Aboriginal 'sovereignty' by paying a Rent.~~

I must point out Madam Chair that it was not until the death bed statements of a non-Aboriginal serviceman that the Government was stirred into action despite the fact that the Pitjantjatjara Lands Council had been advocating the establishment of an inquiry for almost 10 years

The terms of reference of this Royal Commission do not enable the introduction of one vital facet of information, that of the effects of the dislocation and dispersal of Aboriginal people and the very real effects of being kept from their lands. The Commission is to concentrate on the physical effects on Aboriginal people, and others of radiation and other acceptable medical effects of atomic detonations.

In the opinion of the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation and many others including the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress that there is a very real medical consequence attributable to the forced separation from our lands. I am saying there is a real and quantifiable medical effect on our people when that special relationship with our land is interfered with.

The non-Aboriginal people responsible for the establishment of this Commission have refused to accept that this real and quantifiable medical consequence of forced separation has any place in the deliberations of the Commission. This is despite the fact that our sisters and brothers ~~face~~ from the Kokatha, Yankutjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara people were militarily removed and restrained from the pursuit of our special relationship.

with our hand so that these tests could proceed.

Clearly Madam Chair, if you are separated from your mother, and you get for her and become sick is this not a ~~clear~~ clear and direct association.

Such has happened with our Sisters and Brothers from Kekatha, Yangkuntajana, Nganyajana and Pitjantjajana nations.

I am saying Madam Chair that this deduction on the part of those responsible is as gross a cover-up and crime, and worthy of condemnation as is the many, too many other experiences shared with you and your working group by my Indigenous sisters and brothers.

Madam Chair I am mindful of your request to be brief however there are two other recent issues which must be mentioned however briefly. These include the continuous spraying over a number of years of Aboriginal agricultural workers with dangerous, and it is suggested carcinogenic herbicides and pesticides while working in the fields.

Occupational health and safety
issues have also come to light
recently including terminal illnesses
attributable to the mining of asbestos
~~mining~~ under grossly inadequate
standards

It has been the experience of our
people that we do the work, we
get sick and die and non Aboriginal
society gets the benefits

I note here that such a rip off and
bribe was mentioned earlier in respect
of Canada and India. The discussion
of Aboriginal sovereign Rights and
Reality, the existing pattern of
economic underdevelopment and rip off,
the unique ~~not~~ purpose and structure
of an Aboriginal economy as an
important consideration for your
working group. The interwoven nature
of Aboriginal land use, and land
responsibilities, inadequately described
on the one hand as a traditional
economy must, we believe be included
as a matter of consideration within
the Aboriginal Land Rights report of
this session.

Madam Chair if I might digress
for a moment I have heard much
around this room about equality.
We have been told of equality, i.e.
having the same rights, the same
freedom, the same employment

opportunities, it is the word same. Being the same Madam Chair is not equality it is assimilation. Equality is the right to be different and not be disadvantaged because of it.

Madam Chair I appreciate that these matters might also be appropriately addressed by other bodies such as the ILO, however we believe it vital that your working group be kept informed, for the purposes of your deliberations of the diversity of challenges and issues imposed upon Aboriginal peoples.

Thank you Madam Chair.