

## Towards the Emancipation of the Aborigines.

*"No people oppressing other peoples can be free."—Marx and Engels.*

IT is no exaggeration to state that there has been a great awakening of interest in the Australian Aborigines during the last two or three years. Some weeks ago the Minister for the Interior informed the newspapers that he had received a flood of protests against the sentencing to death of eight aborigines who had been charged with the murder of two white men. We can also recall the widespread opposition to the proposal of the Lyons Government to send a punitive expedition to Caledon Bay "to teach the natives a lesson."

To-day, a number of scientific, humanitarian, religious, and working-class political organisations are closely concerning themselves with the problems of the aborigines. Even smug bourgeois scholars, who have reconciled themselves to the early disappearance of the aboriginal race, are eager to see that they depart in peace.

Anthropologists and other observers have provided a considerable amount of literature dealing with the mode of living, customs, and culture of the natives of Australia. Their tribal systems have been described. We know of their amazing skill as bushmen and hunters, of their high degree of intelligence, hospitality, and physical strength.

But on the political and social problems of the aborigines there is a great deal of confusion. Let us, therefore, clarify some vexed questions, and point the way to the emancipation of the aborigines.

### 1. What is the Economic and Political Position of the Aborigines?

There are about 60,000 full-blooded aborigines in Australia. An expert estimate gives 1,000,000 as the population prior to the British invasion. In Victoria, there are only about 50 aborigines alive to-day. Compared with other regions, however, Victoria was never very thickly populated with the brown people. It is in areas such as the Coorong, in South Australia, once teeming with game and fish, and inhabited by thousands of natives, that the decline in population is most tragic.

The principal groupings of aborigines are now in the Federal Government Territories of North and Central Australia. As the principal industries in these regions involve work for which the natives show some aptitude, their exploitation by graziers (and others) is now part of the economic life of the country.

The Commonwealth Year-Book tells us that about 2500 aborigines (one-third of whom are females) are in "employment" in the Federal Territories. Apparently the Arbitration Court draws a "colour line," because the standard wage for these workers is 5/- per week. Two shillings out of the five are paid into a "trust account." Trust funds which are not claimed after six years are confiscated by the Government.

However, it is incontestable that the bulk of the aborigines in "employment" receive no wages at all. M. M. Bennett, in "The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being," says that the majority of the aborigines are employed in the bush; and here "it is the practice for employers to apply to the constable-protector for a general licence, costing 10/- a year, to employ an unlimited number of aborigines without paying them." Bleakley's well-known Report stresses the fact that the natives have no alternative to accepting such miserable conditions, as their hunting-grounds have been invaded by stock.

These Federal Territories, then, together with the Mandated Territory in New Guinea, constitute the "Empire" of Australian capitalism. From the slave labour of the natives are ground the colonial super-profits of the Australian bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, the aborigines, like the million masses of Asia and Africa, suffering under European and Japanese imperialism, are robbed of all political rights. They have no representation in Parliament, and no local government other than what remains of their ancient tribal system, the laws of which are not recognised by the Australian Constitution. The aborigines have no right to own land. They have an inferior position in courts of law compared with white men. Nor is there any "sanctity" for native women, who must submit themselves, whether married or single, as concubines to the white men.

A vast quantity of evidence is available on this first question. But without investigating further we can agree that the aborigines are oppressed and enslaved in a shameless manner under Australian imperialism.

### 2. Has Imperialism Been Beneficial to the Aborigines?

Earlier we have calculated the appalling shrinkage of the aboriginal population since the coming of European "civilisation." Perhaps no people, whether they be the natives of the Belgian Congo or the redskins of America, or the victims of the Spanish invasion of the New World, have been so systematically crushed and exterminated.

Capitalism came to Australia "dripping from head to foot with blood and dirt." The history of the British colonisation of Tasmania is soaked with blood—firstly, the blood of the victims of the convict system, and secondly the blood of the natives.

By 1847, capitalism had virtually exterminated the unique curly-haired Tasmanian aborigines. This crime was soon extended to the more fertile of the coastal regions of the mainland. The few natives who survived were impounded in mission stations.

Organised "shooting hunts" poisoned water-holes, and cyanided meat soon decimated the tribes. Europeans raped the native women and spread syphilis and tuberculosis. Prostitution of

native women was encouraged by gifts of liquor to the males. The "Queenslander," 8/12/1877, reports that "each white man carrying a rifle tries its range on every blackfellow he sees."

In 1904, the Western Australian Government appointed a Royal Commissioner to report on aboriginal administration. The report sets out that blacks were found to be chained by the neck, half-starved, and hammered by the police. The police received a money grant for every native captured. Native prisoners were made to plead guilty at the muzzle of a rifle.

In 1929, the notorious massacre of natives of the Northern Territory, in connection with the killing of a dingo-shooter named Brookes, gave a further illustration of the murderous imperialist policy. A "constable-protector," who admitted having assisted to shoot 31 aborigines, was "white-washed" by a Board of Inquiry. According to a judge, "the police mowed the natives down wholesale."

Already this year we have seen a number of "trials" of natives, resulting in the victims being thrown into tropical gaols for breaches of laws of which they are totally ignorant.

On this second question, therefore, we must find that the aborigines have been brought very close to total annihilation at the hands of the imperialists.

### 3. Are the Aborigines Doomed?

In a foreword to a popular booklet, "Black-fellows of Australia," by Charles Barrett, appears the following statement by Theodore Fink, quoting Sir Arthur Keith:—"The racial map of the world is changing rapidly. In less than a century not a trace will be left of the race which dominated the whole continent of Australia for tens of thousands of years." The verdict of bourgeois science proclaims that the aboriginal race must perish.

It is true that the aborigines are dangerously close to extinction. But the bourgeois scientists reckon without the upsurge of the revolutionary movement among the working class. History has shown that where the working class succeeds in emancipating itself from capitalism, it simultaneously emancipates all oppressed peoples within its territories. There has been no more outstandingly successful feature of the proletarian revolution in Russia than the solving of the "National Question" (i.e., the liberation of oppressed peoples).

The empire of the Czars contained scores of subject nationalities. Kazaks, Uzbeks, Bashkirs, Tartars, Yakuts, Karels, Udmurts, Chuvashes, White Russians, Moldavians, as well as Jews, Poles, Letts, and Esthonians, were facing extinction or assimilation at the time of the October Revolution in 1917. Many of these peoples were of nomadic habits, destitute of education, and totally untrained in industry.

The Revolution halted the doom which threatened to overtake the oppressed peoples of Russia. Lenin, developing the teachings of Karl Marx, pointed out the tasks of the Russian proletariat—the direction of the formerly oppressed nationalities along socialist lines, eliminating the capitalist stage of development. Under the leadership of Stalin, it is becoming "possible for

the backward peoples to overtake Central Russia in a political, cultural, and economic sense."

The changes brought to the oppressed peoples of Russia by proper medical and sanitary systems; education, cultural development, political freedom, collective farming, and stable industries, indicate what Socialism offers the Australian aborigines.

Bourgeois scientists who predict the extinction of the aborigines, also reckon without the broad sections of the population who are vigilantly watching the treatment of the aborigines, and who are exposing and resisting the worst of the attacks being launched against the natives. The growth of the anti-imperialist movement, which may later develop into an international campaign against the oppression of the aborigines, is a vital factor for their preservation.

We must, then, reject decisively the bourgeois theory that the aborigines are doomed to extinction. Even without Socialism, they may be saved from extermination.

### 4. Are the Aborigines Capable of Social Advancement?

Frederick Engels, in "The Origin of the Family," describes the social evolution of the human race. He indicates that the "Australians and Polynesians still remain in the middle stage of savagery." The aborigines in their natural environment had developed the use of fire for the cooking of fish, game, and farinaceous roots and tubers. They thus had a varied diet, and an independence of climate and locality which enabled them to follow the course of rivers and coastlines, and spread over the continent. Stone and wooden implements and weapons were in use. The development of simple domestic utensils, reed baskets, nets, and canoes indicated the evolution of the aborigine towards the higher stage of savagery.

But the geographical position of Australia, and the plant and animal life of the continent, acted as a brake on the evolution of the aborigines. "The superior development of Aryans and Semites," says Engels, "is, perhaps, attributable to the copious meat and milk diet of both races, more especially to the favourable influence of such food on the growth of children."

In Australia there were no native cows or goats to provide milk; there were no beasts of burden. There was no known indigenous grain which could be cultivated. Once again, the production and reproduction of life and its material requirements proved to be, in the words of Engels, "the decisive element of history."

But there is no longer any obstacle, other than Capitalism, which condemns the aborigines to stagnation in conditions of savagery. The Leninist policy of the Soviet Union has changed the whole social conditions of races formerly living in illiteracy, poverty, and bondage to the Czar. National cultures have been preserved and developed, and scores of national languages printed for the first time in history. Agrarian and industrial technique has been mastered by these so-called "backward" peoples.

Animals, food, machines—pre-requisites for the development of the aborigines—now exist in abundance. On this question, then, can we not

determine that the aborigines, under a Soviet Australia, would in time develop rural and urban industries, raise their cultural level, and become completely independent of the white people.

### 5. What Steps Are Necessary to Achieve Aboriginal Emancipation?

The bourgeoisie is not concerned with the emancipation of native races. "We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians," said Sir Joynson Hicks in 1925. "I know in missionary meetings it is said that we conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant! We conquered India as the outlet for the goods of Great Britain."

Hicks was a Tory politician. A similar viewpoint is held by the Lyons Government, which has conducted an offensive against the natives, and answers with its tongue in its cheek that the natives are not ill-treated. Chicanery is the essence of the Lyons Government's dealings with the natives. It utilised a "Peace Mission," organised by missionaries, to lure the Caledon Bay natives to Darwin, where they were arrested and brutally handled in the cells. At the time of writing, the Government is planning a police drive to capture more witnesses for the trial, despite assurances that such action would be avoided.

The Scullin Labour Government effected no changes making for improvement in aboriginal conditions during its term of office. The colonial policy of the Labour administration was exposed at the time when Scullin deported a number of political prisoners of Dutch imperialism who had escaped to Northern Australia. Replying to protests against the deporting of these workers back to the fever-infested Javanese gaols, the Federal Government answered that they were merely "continuing the policy of previous Governments" in such matters. Four or five years ago, members of a deputation to the South Australian Labour Chief Secretary (Whitford) reported that they had received an astonishing reply to their request that a certain aborigine should be permitted to reside in Adelaide and draw rations. The native had complained that he and his sister were thrashed at a mission station because they refused to attend church services. Rejecting the request, the Labour politician said, with cynical

humour, "This man must return to his own country."

We can accept the statements of Professor Wood-Jones, that missionary activities among the aborigines have been a failure. The real nature of the mission work is seen in the case of the "Peace Mission" to Caledon Bay. Here the natives were "apprehended" (to use the expression of the Federal Minister) by a missionary. The alleged "murderers" were then "taken for a ride" to Darwin, where they were handed over to the police. Then the "holy" policemen returned to Melbourne, being applauded by Archbishop Head and other upholders of imperialism. With few exceptions the missionaries cover up the crimes of imperialism against the oppressed colonial peoples.

But we must also realise that the sending of an anthropologist to work among the aborigines, urged by Professor Wood-Jones, barely touches the problem. This plan might assist in gathering scientific data. However, we already possess sufficient information to enable us to formulate policy to save the aborigines. What is wanted is not only more information, but political action to prevent further oppression.

It seems clear, then, that the solution of the problem of the emancipation of the aborigines lies in the setting up of an autonomous aboriginal republic, under the political leadership of the Australian working class. This, in turn, is contingent on the formation of a Soviet Australia.

For the immediate preservation of the aborigines we must depend on the rallying of the widest support in a campaign having as its objectives:—

- (1) Cessation of hostilities against the aborigines, whether by the Government officials, the police, the missionaries, or commercial exploiters.
- (2) The granting of full political and legal rights to the natives, including the right of trial by native juries.
- (3) Full trade union wages and conditions for all native workers.
- (4) The preservation inviolate of all native reserves.
- (5) The provision of free medical, educational, and cultural facilities to all natives.

### STUDENTS AND THE BALLOT BOX.

In a few weeks, many of us will be taking part in the Federal elections. What do these elections mean to us?

They mean that we are being called upon to play our part in the great fraud of "government of the people, for the people, by the people."

It has been very much easier for dominant capitalism to rule when it has been able to persuade the people that they do the ruling.

What, then, is the position of the student who has seen through the parliamentary fraud? Can the elections be tossed aside contemptuously? No. The advanced worker or student, while recognis-

ing Parliament as the basest capitalist deception, nevertheless recognises that its tribune can be used by real working class representatives to expose the reactionary manoeuvres of the capitalist parties, and to bring forward the real questions affecting the masses of the people. It looks back at the record of invaluable services done by the Bolsheviks in the reactionary Czarski Duma, by Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin in the Reichstag.

Parliament is a base deception, but its own machinery can be most effectively used to expose its real character.