CHAPTER V

THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION: INTERCOMMUNITY ORGANIZATION ON THE COAST 1920s

There were many elements in the experience of Guris on the coast in the 1920s which were identical with Aboriginal experience in the west but there were also important differences. The critical one was the rate of loss of reserve land and the nature of that land. Particularly on the north coast, the high degree of Guri participation in the acquisition of reserves and the long period of independent Guri cultivation of these areas of land had created an additional dimension to the value placed on the reserves by Guri residents when compared to the attitudes held by reserve residents in most other regions.

The disproportionate loss of north coast reserves which had been evident since 1915 accelerated in the 1920s. (See Figures 5.1 and 5.2). After 1927 revocations virtually ceased as white demand fell away with the onset of the Depression. There had been an initial discrepancy between the total and the north coast reserve loss because the Protection Board was reluctant to part with valuable and fertile land which Guris were not only patently occupying but were utilizing in a manner recognized as "productive" by Europeans. From 1915 to 1926, however, north coast land loss paralleled the total reserve loss. By 1926, the result was that of the total amount of reserve land revoked, 74% by acreage had been lost from reserves on the north coast.

The reserves lost by both revocation and leasing on the north coast from 1913 to 1927 are shown on Figure 5.3. The revocations which occurred in this region in the 1890s had been reserves on poor quality land which Guris had refused to use and had not at that time needed as residential areas. It is immediately obvious from Figure 5.3, however, that the revocations and leasing of the 1913 to 1927 period virtually obliterated the fertile reserve land of the Macleay River and surrounding districts, as well as most of the alluvial land reserved in the far northern rivers region.

That most productive area, the Drew's land at Kinchela, was completely destroyed as a potential economic base with, as noted earlier,
Figure 5.1

CHANGE IN AREA RESERVED FOR THE
USE OF ABORIGINES 1909 - 1930

Regional land district figures not available after 1927
Figure 5.2

ANNUAL LOSS OR GAIN
IN ABORIGINAL RESERVE ACREAGE
1911 - 1926
Figure 5.3

NORTH COAST ABORIGINAL RESERVES

1913 - 1927
a rising population, leasing of a portion of the reserve and then the imposition of the Boys' Home in 1924 with its additional buildings. By 1926 the Protection Board was referring to Kinchula as "the reserve attached to the Home".\textsuperscript{1}

The revocations and leasings of the 1920s, like the leasing of Rolland's Plains and Ballengarra in the 1910s, bore no relation to Guri usage, wishes or needs. Inspector R.T. Donaldson was significant as an instrument in the loss of land and his commitment to "the closing of the reserves" was demonstrated in, for example, the loss of three high quality reserves near Kinchela. As late as August 1919, Board Inspector, H.L. Swindehurst, had emphatically advised against revocation of the two Fattorini Islands and Pelican Island on the grounds that the Guri residents were farming the land efficiently.\textsuperscript{2} In June 1924, however, Donaldson advised the Board that the Fattorini Islands' residents should be relocated to near' Pelican Island and the Fattorini Islands revoked.\textsuperscript{3} Only a matter of 5 months later, Donaldson recommended that Pelican Island too should be "disposed of" and the residents of all three islands concentrated on Kinchela station."

Donaldson's personal views were not, however, a major initiating factor. In agreeing to revocation of these valuable reserves, the Board was actually acting against its own financial interests. It had failed to make any substantial inroads, for its own funding purposes, into Guri agriculture on north coast reserves in the way it had been able to do for at least a short time at Cumeragunja with the wheat crop produced by wage labour. North coast Guris had refused to give up independent cultivation voluntarily and, too late to protect the Cumeragunja farmers, the Board's 1910 Regulations had included an acknowledgement that individual Aboriginal farmers of reserve land could not be deprived of their profits.\textsuperscript{5} The Board's one attempt to gain funds from at least the foreshores of the land Guris would not relinquish had been the oyster beds laid at Urunga, but these had

\textsuperscript{1} APBR, 1925-26, p2.
\textsuperscript{2} APBM, 11/9/1918, 27/8/1919.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid, 27/6/1924.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, 21/11/1924.
\textsuperscript{5} NGG, 8/6/1910, Regulations of Aborigines' Protection Act, 1909. Regulation 32.
been ruined in a series of floods and had deterred the Board from further such efforts.¹

The Board had, however, been able to generate an income from the leasing of reserves like Ballengarra, Rolland's Plains, Pelican Island and Kinchela, and it could clearly have increased its funds by leasing the rich alluvial reserves rather than by allowing them to be revoked. The Board acted in contradiction to the interests not only of Guris but also of itself because of the pressure of white demand for these reserves. As white settlement intensified all along the coast, high quality alluvial land had become scarce in the Macleay valley as it had been for decades in the far northern rivers area. Each of the reserves revoked or leased by 1927 had been the subject of repeated and insistent requests by either the Lands Department or individual whites for a number of years before actual alienation occurred.² The leasing of reserves like Shark Island and Pelican Island had represented Protection Board attempts to stave off this pressure but eventually it capitulated, demonstrating once again that it was a body responsive not to Aboriginal but to white demands.

Aboriginal reserve land was not only alienated for agricultural or other economic purposes. At Karuah, Forster and possibly at Grafton, the reserve land had become desirable for white residential use with the expansion of towns.³

The fact that such comprehensive alienation of reserve land "freed" numbers of Guris into the economy as landless labourers over a period when much casual labour was still required for clearing and harvesting was of benefit to white employers but appears to have been a result rather than a causative factor.

Despite the loss of so much reserve land, the Board continued its leasing policy. The Board's increasing dependence on funds generated in this way is suggested by Table 5.1, in which figures have been drawn from the Board's Sales and Produce accounts. The item "Agistment and Sundries" was the only one in which leasing revenue could

¹ APBR, 1920-21, p4.
² APBM, 1917 to early 1920s, are literally cluttered with these requests. Examples are Land Department (Head Office) requests for revocation of Grafton, 1/8/1918, 11/9/1918, 2/10/1918; Kempsey Land Board for Shark Island, 1/11/1917, 31/1/1918; 30/10/1918, 4/12/1918, 12/3/1919; and for Pelican Island, 30/5/1918, 12/3/1919, 4/6/1919, 30/7/1919, 27/8/1919.
have been recorded. From the Board's Minutes it appears that the use to which lessees put the reserve land was agricultural wherever possible, rather than the slightly less intensive use of agistment, but even in the latter cases, Aborigines were enclosed behind fences while white-owned stock had the freedom of the reserve.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>&quot;Agistment and Sundrys&quot; £</th>
<th>% of Total Income from reserves or stations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>363.18.10</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>1,364.12.5</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>1,338.19.1</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>1,148.10.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>1,328.6.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1,277.9.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>1,491.2.7</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1,345.18.7</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The intensity of Guri bitterness at the loss of many of the north coast reserves was predictable. The reserves had appeared to Guris as a Government validation of at least a small portion of their own land and of their rights to use that land in their own interests. They had taken and maintained possession of the land in the hope of establishing economic independence and the reserves had been worked as successfully as undercapitalization and overpopulation had allowed. Moreover, Guris had had every reason to believe that they possessed independent security of tenure because of the explanation they had been given of the reserve creation process and because of the lack of resident managerial supervision on most of the reserves.

These factors were present to a greater degree on the north coast and to some extent in other coastal areas than in the northern slopes and north western areas. The Maris of Terry Hie Hie, for example, deeply resented the fact that the need to escape Board control had forced them to leave a site on which they had lived since

1 APBR, 1920-21 to 1927-28.
the 1850s and which they continue to regard as their home. The Terry Hie Hie reserve had never provided an economic base, however, and the imposition of managerial control had interfered with the independence of Mari residential occupation.

More comparable situations to that of the coast were to be found in the south west and the intensity of resistance when the Cumeragunja farm blocks were resumed indicates parallel attitudes to the reserve land. Nevertheless, Cumeragunja Giris had not had the opportunity to make those blocks as productive as the reserves on the north coast had been and Cumeragunja had always had a manager in residence. At Cumeragunja, however, at least the land remained as Aboriginal reserve and so the potential existed for restoration of the family blocks. On the north coast, this potential was destroyed by revocation or total leasing in many cases. In the whole region, the only reserves of viable size and quality which escaped leasing or revocation in the 1920s, while remaining free of managerial control, were Bellbrook and Burnt Bridge.

Although this north coast dispossession was the major pressure for Guri communities in the 1920s, the impact of the intensifying Protection Board control and interference in family life continued to generate population movement away from those areas of most intense Board influence. The relatively remote Runnymede station had begun to lose substantial numbers as families left in mid-1922 for the specific reason that they felt their children to be under threat. Guri escape from all north coast stations for the same reason was making the Board extremely anxious throughout 1923 and 1924, leading it to instruct officers first to "dissuade" Guri families from leaving and next to institute prosecutions for abduction of children or to effect summary removal of children. At Grafton station, the

1 See Reay, "Native Thought", p99, for Terry Hie Hie people's comments in the mid-1940s. Terry Hie Hie Land Claim, 1977, reprinted in NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Land Claims in NSW.

2 See Figure 4.1, Chapter IV, p189.

3 APBOL, 18/9/1922. APBM, 25/5/1923.

4 APBOL, 17/9/1922. APBM, 13/9/1922.

5 APBOL, 16/7/1923. APBM, 25/5/1923.
stabilization of population towards the end of the 1910s proved temporary, and it was "loss of population", caused by the Board's own policies, which placed the Board in the position in 1924 of being no longer able to resist the Land Department demands, begun in 1918, for revocation of the reserve.¹

The maintenance of some alternative camp sites for Guris allowed them the avenue of escape from Board control and this process in turn made alienation of reserves more likely. Certainly some Guris were able to move to non-reserved camps like that at Greenhills, just outside Kempsey, but with the contraction of vacant land as well as the closure of access to public schools which was by now general on the north coast, many families moved to the remaining, less-closely supervised reserves where a "special" school existed but where there was no resident manager. To the south, Purfleet at Taree was one such alternative, while in the Macleay valley, Bellbrook and Burnt Bridge offered some refuge.

Even the presence of a Protection Board school with a non-residential teacher created a danger for Guri families, however, and children were taken from Burnt Bridge with increasing frequency after 1920. Jack Campbell has recalled being kept home from the reserve's school one day in 1925, when his parents had apparently received warning that Inspector Donaldson was arriving to "kidnap kids".² As the Inspector approached the Campbell's house, Jack's mother fired a shotgun over Donaldson's head, sending him back into Kempsey to fetch the police. It was clearly imperative for the family to escape the district altogether after this incident and ~ one Campbell s went south down the coast in Jack's fast fishing boat. After a brief period at Putty Beach, the family settled in Sydney but rather than live at the closely supervised La Perouse reserve, they lived at the non-reserved camp site at Salt Pan Creek, joining, among others, refugees from Protection Board control like Paddy Pitman, expelled from Wallaga Lake for defiance of the manager.

In the far northern rivers area, Dunoon reserve became a focus for this enforced migration once Guris had succeeded in having the manager resign late in 1916. Dunoon is a clear example of a reserve

¹ Ibid, 1/8/1918, 21/11/1924.
² Interview TS1. The account of the shooting incident and subsequent move to Salt Pan Creek drawn from this interview.
created on Protection Board initiative in 1887, on land which was not of particularly good quality and which Guris had not wished to use initially. By the 1910s, however, with less available camp sites, Guris began to reside on and cultivate the land. The period of managerial control had interrupted this process, but once the manager had gone and as the need to escape from other centres of Board control increased, Guris began to reoccupy the land. Despite the fact that the Board had leased much of the land in 1917, there was a substantial Guri population again resident in 1919 and by 1922 more people had arrived seeking refuge from either Runnymede or Cabbage Tree Island.¹

To obstruct the movement of families off these stations, the Board decided to remove Dunoon as an alternative by revoking the reserve in May 1922. It met with sustained and effective Guri protest which forced it to retreat somewhat. The result was that 30 acres of the reserve was revoked, leaving a 10-acre strip around the existing huts and the Lismore police were issued with instructions to "discourage" new arrivals.² This still did not halt the growth in reserve population and in 1926 the Board reopened the "special" school on the reserve in an acknowledgement that the Guris there were not going to return to the stations.³ This, of course, increased the Board's power of surveillance once again, and a number of families moved to an unreserved camp site closer to Lismore called Tuncester. From here they sought access to the public school and for a while at least some families were successful until segregation of the school was reasserted in 1928.⁴

It was not only at Lismore that the dislocation caused by loss of reserves and intensified Protection Board activity heightened Guri pressure for access to the precincts and services of the white towns. At Kyogle in 1919, Forster and Karuah in 1923, Wingham in 1924 and Taree and Kempsey in 1925, white townspeople were demanding removal of the increasing numbers of Aborigines in the vicinity of their towns, while Kyogle in 1926 and Lismore in 1927 insisted that the Government fund additional hospital wards to segregate Aboriginal

1 APBM, 14/5/1919; 4/6/1919; 31/5/1922.
2 Ibid, 31/5/1922; 20/7/1922; 13/9/1922.
3 Ibid, 27/8/1926.
South Lismore public school files, 1928, DEIL.
patients more effectively.¹ As in the western areas discussed earlier, such demands reflected wider attempts to block Aboriginal access to the towns.

Further south along the coast, the situation was less drastic, but the patterns were similar. After the segregation of Singleton public school had forced many Guris to move out of town to the Mt Olive station where a "special" school existed, the conditions of managerial control in turn forced Guris away again. The manager was withdrawn late in 1923 and the reserve leased.²

To the west of Sydney, there were some white demands for each of the reserves, but the focus of attention was the prime land at St Joseph's at Burrarong. It had been farmed by Guris since the 1870s³, and was still being farmed in 1918⁴ when local whites approached the police to request revocation or leasing. The Board resolved most emphatically in 1918 that Guris should be allowed to remain in possession of the reserve.⁵ By 1924, however, the Board acceded to Land Department pressure and revoked the reserve.⁶ The land at Megalong had already been revoked in 1916 and one of the reserves at the Peakes was also lost in 1928.⁷ At least some of the Burrarong Guris, the Anderson, Williams and Shepherd families, moved into Sydney and they, too, chose to live at Salt Pan Creek rather than the reserve at La Perouse.⁸

On the south coast, demands for reserve land for white economic utilization were less intense, reflecting both the lower white population of the region and the quality of the reserve lands which had been occupied by Guris as residential rather than agricultural sites. Nevertheless, one of the Braidwood reserves was revoked in 1916 and

---

¹ APBM, 14/5/1919; 25/5/1923; 24/8/1923; 8/2/1924; 23/1/1925; 24/4/1925.
² Ibid. 14/12/1923.
⁴ Ibid, 4/12/1918.
⁵ APBR, 1917; 1918.
⁶ APBM, 4/12/1918.
⁷ Ibid, 14/1/1916.
⁸ APBM, 19/6/1925.
---

Interview TS1.
by 1920 two of the Bodalla reserves and two at Jervis Bay had also been revoked\(^1\) while that at Shell Harbour had been leased.\(^2\) The third reserve at Bodalla was revoked in 1922 and when that at Wallagoot near Bega was similarly disposed of in 1925 most of the earliest land of which Guris had taken possession and had had formalized by reservation had disappeared.\(^3\) Without oral evidence to supplement the brief Board records it is impossible to tell how many of these reserves were still being used as a residential base for fishing, as they had been originally, but certainly some of those around Bodalla were still in use.\(^4\)

The major pressure on south coast reserves was from town expansion, which resulted in the revocation of Ulladulla reserve in 1922 and that at Tomakin near Moruya in 1925.\(^5\) As early as 1918, however, the Bateman's Bay Progress Association had informed the Protection Board that the reserve near that town was standing in the way of white residential development and requested its revocation and the removal of its inhabitants.\(^6\) The Board procrastinated until 1922, when it agreed to "encourage" the reserve residents to move to a newly created reserve some miles out of town.\(^7\) The Guris of the town refused to move from the site where they had built their own houses and from which their children could easily attend the public school.

After further pressure from townspeople the Board in 1924 agreed to revocation of the town reserve, a process which did not occur immediately because the refusal of the reserve's residents to leave sustained some doubt about the proposed development.\(^8\) The Lands Department now put pressure on the Board not simply to formalize the revocation but to remove the Guri community. The Board again capitulated, with the issue of removal orders in June 1925.\(^9\)

---

2 Ibid, 13/6/1918.
3 NGG, 27/1/1922; 4/9/1925.
4 Bodalla Land Claim, reprinted in NSW Aboriginal Land Council: Land Claims in NSW.
5 NGG, 17/1/1922. APBM, 21/7/1925.
7 Ibid, 31/5/1922.
8 Ibid, 14/4/1924.
9 Ibid, 19/6/1925.
people had by this time decided to take matters into their own hands: the local Parents' and Citizens' Association voted to segregate the school in order to force Guris to leave the town.\footnote{Bateman's Bay Parents' and Citizens' Association to Minister for Education, June 1925, Bateman's Bay public school files, DEIL.}

The Huskisson school segregation, initiated in 1921, was still in force, although bitterly contested by the Guri community there, who also refused to comply with the Protection Board's direction through the police that they move to Wreck Bay.\footnote{Huskisson public school files, 1921 to 1925, DEIL.} The Bateman's Bay segregation met the same Guri response, but in 1925 too, the school at Summer Cloud Bay, near Wreck Bay, was also segregated.\footnote{APBM, 23/1/1925; 4/9/1925.}

It was in this context of dispossession, heightened Protection Board pressure and denial of access to town services that the first intercommunity Aboriginal political organization took shape. The organization drew its initial impetus from the north coast Guri communities but rapidly broadened its base of support to include all coastal areas.

An early sign of Guri organization and mobilization of white support reflected the discontent of Guri returned servicemen at the conditions they faced after World War I. Like others of the 154 NSW Aboriginal men who had served overseas, Guri soldiers returning to the north coast found that the facilities of the towns were still closed to them and their families. Just as Mick Flick of Collarenebri, a veteran of Gallipoli and Flanders "started to see after he came back that he wasn't such a respected soldier as a white man"\footnote{Interview T48.}, north coast Guris came to the same conclusion. They organized a petition in 1919, demanding "Civic Rights" for Aboriginal returned servicemen and gained the support of the Casino and Bangalow branches of the Returned Soldiers' and Seamen's League.\footnote{APBM, 17/9/1919; 15/10/1919.}

In 1922, there was public Guri protest at general conditions occurring in the Hunter River area\footnote{VN, 10/11/1922, p5.} and by the following year the people who eventually formed the Australian Aboriginal Progressive
Association had begun working together. Possibly the Guris involved recognized pragmatically that there was more chance of Government toleration of their activities if they used a white person as a "front". The first notice to the Protection Board that organized activity was occurring was in December 1923, when a white woman, Mrs E. McKenzie-Hatton, requested permission to care for "incorrigible Aboriginal girls" and for the payment of a small allowance to enable her to do so.¹

This proposal was undoubtedly the result of planning undertaken with Aboriginal people. Hatton had come from Victoria somewhat earlier and had apparently fairly quickly become known to Guris in Sydney and on the north coast. Her first impression of the burning issue for the Guris she met was the intensely-felt loss of their children to the Board for "apprenticeship" and the intolerable conditions which the girls, especially, faced when in their "situations". Aboriginal parents were not only suffering the summary removal of their children but they were being obstructed by Board officials in their attempts to locate their children. Mrs Hatton began working actively by trying to trace some of these "apprenticed" children², a task much more easily achieved by a white person than by an Aborigine. Her next step, the proposal for a "Home" for girls, was consistent with Aboriginal, rather than white, perceptions of the "apprenticeship" scheme. Girls were usually classified "incorrigible" after repeatedly absconding or defying their employers.³ From an Aboriginal viewpoint, these were the girls most in need of support and an alternative to the Board's "solution", which was to send them to Parramatta Girls' Home. Mrs Hatton's proposed "Home" had the potential to deflect the weight of Board punishment from those girls who resisted most strongly. The extent of Aboriginal involvement in the venture was shown by the fact that although the Board refused to assist Mrs Hatton in any way, the Home functioned at Homebush, Sydney, throughout 1924 and into 1925, indicating the existence of a sympathetic network within the Aboriginal community which directed girls in need to the Home.

The Protection Board was thoroughly alarmed at these activities by early 1925, and called repeatedly for police reports on and sur-

¹ APBM, 14/2/1923.
² VN, 12/6/1925.
³ APBRW.
veillance of the Home as well as asking advice from the Crown Solicitor, who was unable to offer any practical legal remedy.\footnote{APBM, 23/1/1925; 25/4/1925; 21/7/1925.} The Board was particularly sensitive on this issue because the "apprenticeship" scheme had recently come under attack. Mark Davidson, Labor MLA for Cobar, on complaints from Maris at Brewarrina station in August 1924, asked a series of questions in the House concerning wages and conditions of Aboriginal "apprentices".\footnote{NPD, V.96, p1265, 20/8/1924; p1454, 26/8/1924.} It was not, however, the conditions of the girls' employment which raised press interest, but the implications of separating the girls from their communities. Articles in two Sydney newspapers, in October and December of 1924 and again in January 1925\footnote{SMH, 29/10/1924; 9/1/1925.\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} Sun, 27/12/1924 (editorial)} accused the Board of hastening the disappearance of the Aboriginal people by isolating the girls in the city where they were unlikely to meet Aboriginal men and, it being unthinkable that they should marry white men, the result would necessarily be less Aborigines. While this had of course been the stated intention of the Board\footnote{APBR, 1923-24, p2.}, it responded speedily to the criticism by ensuring publication of lengthy articles describing the benefits of "indentures" to the girls and the "holiday" at the end of their indentures which allowed (enforced?) "suitable" marriages with Aboriginal men.\footnote{SMH, 30/10/1924; 10/1/1925; 11/2/1925.\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} VN, 12/6/1925, p13; 10/8/1925, p13.} In this context of public criticism, the Board was most unhappy at signs of Aboriginal organizing aimed at undermining the "apprenticeship" scheme.

The Aboriginal members of the AAPA emerged publicly when the Association was officially formed in February 1925.\footnote{NPD, V.56, p1353, 24/11/1914.} Its letterhead bore the motto "One God, One Aim, One Destiny", suggesting a Christian influence and a unity of interest with whites which was not entirely reflected in the Association's policy. The emblem depicted an Aboriginal man circled by the words "Australia for Australians". While at first glance this is suggestive of contemporary white nationalism, the Association's correspondence at times used the word "Australian" rather than "Aborigine". Its emblem might more
correctly be seen as a veiled reference to an indigenous peoples' assertion of nationhood, than to the White Australian variety.¹

Mrs McKenzie-Hatton held the position of organizing secretary in the new Association, but all other office bearers were Aboriginal. The President was Frederick G. Maynard, a man of both Aboriginal and Afro-American descent, who lived in Sydney but apparently had strong links with the north coast Guri communities. The other office bearers were all men from either the north coast, like L. Lacy and S.W. Ridgeway, or the south coast, like I. and R. Johnson and later, perhaps from the same family, Jack Johnstone.²

In the first six months of the AAPA's existence, Hatton travelled extensively on the north coast developing contacts with Guri communities³, although the Board had refused her request for permission to visit reserves or stations.⁴ On one of these trips and with the cooperation of the Guri community at Nambucca Heads, Mrs Hatton removed an Aboriginal girl from Protection Board control on the reserve at Stuart's Island, to the further dismay of the Board.⁵ Maynard worked in the organization's central office in Sydney, but he too made a number of trips to the north coast in these early months.⁶ The Association received a ready and enthusiastic response: by August it claimed eleven branches and a membership of 500 people, most of whom were from the north coast.⁷ Maynard said he was "amazed" at the north coast response and Hatton reported that news of the Association had preceded her at most of the places she visited.⁸

In the earliest significant press coverage, in The Voice of the North in June and August 1925, the two central demands of the AAPA were clearly formulated: enough good quality freehold land for each Aboriginal family to sustain themselves by farming and the immediate cessation of the removal of children from their families.⁹ The issue

¹ AAPA letterhead emblem on letter from Frederick Maynard to K— B—, 14/10/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
² Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ APBM, 6/3/1925.
⁸ Ibid.
of "apprenticed" children, on which the earliest work of Hatton was focused, received some space in this press coverage, with Hatton writing:

We are surprised to find everywhere such a resentful attitude to the administration now in force. Day after day, letters come from the people, pleading for their children, asking me to find their girls, long lost to them — in service somewhere in this State — taken away in some cases seven years ago and no word or line from them.¹

After six months of intensive organizing on the north coast, however, the AAPA clearly regarded the land issue as dominant and even more urgent than that of "apprenticeship". Hatton wrote:

Everywhere we find [Guris] being thrown out, fenced out of the homes that have long been theirs — their lands, which have long been reserved for them, are being ruthlessly taken from them and sold to the highest bidder or leased to white people, already made wealthy by using the labour of these poor coloured people devoid of equitable recourse.²

The position in regard to land was becoming more and more acute, Hatton reported to the half-yearly meeting of the AAPA held at Surry Hills in August 1925. Deputations of Guris had approached her in many places on the north coast and implored her to appeal to the Government to stop the sale of their land. She described one woman whose reserve land had already been sold to a stranger, who had given the woman notice to be prepared to move at any time, although she had lived on that land all her life. In another example, Hatton spoke of:

... several married men [who] came to me and told me that they had been ordered to move back into the bush by the police ... They had been camped on this place all their lives and now a sale had been arranged and they were told to move away. They were given three weeks to move out back or they would be arrested.³

One of the urgent issues for the AAPA was the threat to the long-standing camp on Crown land at Greenhills, 3 miles outside Kempsey, on the bank of the Macleay River. Its population had increased as Guris were forced off the reserves of the district by revocations or Board interference. As Kempsey township expanded,

² Ibid.
this land had begun to look extremely attractive for white residential development. The Protection Board and the town's Council tried on 5 separate occasions from January to October 1925, to force the 120 Guris at Greenhills to move off the land, using removal and eviction orders delivered by the police.¹ This attempt to alienate still more Macleay River Guris from land they stated was their "birthright" was the immediate issue on which the AAPA appealed in June 1925, to the press and to the Minister for Lands² for each of the families under threat to be given a five to ten acre block of good farming land to allow them to support themselves.³

As a gesture of solidarity with the Greenhills community as well as a reflection of the fact that the organization's most militant strength lay in the area where the most substantial dispossession had occurred, the first country conference of the AAPA was held in Kempsey in October 1925. The three-day meeting was attended only by Guris (with the probable exception of Mrs Hatton) and the Greenhills issue was taken up specifically, as described by a sympathetic newspaper:

Many of these people, as well as their fathers and mothers before them, have worked an acre of ground close to Kempsey, yet a proposal has been made that this land should be cut up and sold to white people. The land is still the property of the Crown, and common justice demands that the Aboriginals who have worked it successfully should be allowed to acquire it as their property.⁴

The whole issue of land was a major one at the conference, which endorsed the AAPA demand for adequate freehold land as a basis for the economic independence of each Aboriginal family. Other items of discussion at the meeting were Aboriginal health and the segregation of hospitals; education and the segregation of schools; the necessity for the retention of the care and control of Aboriginal children in the hands of their parents and, of course, the Board's "apprenticeship" system. The conference argued that Aborigines already discharged their duties as citizens, but were being denied the benefits and privileges of citizenship, such as education and health care. On

¹ APBM, 23/1/1925; ⁶/³/1925 ¹⁰/¹¹/1925
² ¹⁰/¹¹/1925
³ ¹⁰/¹¹/1925
⁴ ¹⁰/¹¹/1925
this basis, the conference demanded that Aborigines be allowed their rights of citizenship.¹

In the campaign to gain public attention and support for the AAPA, Mrs McKenzie-Hatton apparently wrote hundreds of letters to the press, few of which were published.² The major vehicle for the Association's publicity was the Newcastle paper, The Voice of the North, and its editor, J.J. Moloney, was the AAPA's most active white supporter. Moloney was a nationalist, a member of the Australian Society of Patriots (ASP) and apparently had connections with the Australian Natives Association (ANA). He was looking for symbols for his concept of the Australian nation and, unlike some others, he preferred his symbols alive rather than dead. Consequently, his major hobbyhorse in The Voice of the North was the preservation and increase, of both Aborigines and native fauna. The two were often discussed in the same article or editorial by Moloney and, sometimes even in the same sentence³, while a resolution from Moloney's branch of the ASP asked the Premier in 1926 for a new Ministerial Department: "for the better management of the Aboriginals and for the protection and preservation of Australian Birds and Animals".⁴

Moloney was writing editorials about the need to save the "childlike" Aborigines in 1922, at a time when few questioned the prevailing "doomed race" predictions.⁵ As new opposition emerged by the mid-1920s, it emanated from two groups. The missionary organizations claimed that their methods of mission settlement management were more effective than Government control in stopping the decline in "full-blood" Aboriginal numbers demonstrated in the census published each year from 1921.⁶ The second group was composed of anthropologists, whose role escalated in public notice over the decade. The two groups differed in perspective, with anthropologists like Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, during his tenure of the first chair of

¹ Ibid.
³ Ibid, 10/2/1927, p5.
⁴ JJ Moloney, Sec, ASP, Dalley Branch, to JT Lang, Premier, PDCF, A27/915.
⁵ VN, 10/11/1922, p5.
⁶ SMH, 18/5/1927; 20/5/1927; 18/1/1928; 13/2/1928; 19/9/1928; 5/2/1930; Adelaide Register, 29/12/1921; Melbourne Herald, 4/5/1925; Melbourne Argus, 11/7/1926.
Anthropology at Sydney University, being usually more cautious in assessments of Aboriginal capacity to adapt to European culture than were the missionaries.¹ In general, however, both groups proposed the same model for reform, which amounted to segregation of Aborigines under benevolent white "expert" control. The churchmen advocated missionary control while the anthropologists proposed control by administrators trained in anthropology, who might or might not be missionaries. There was essentially little conflict between the two groups, with most missionaries who commented in public paying at least lip service to the value of the new "scientific" expertise of the anthropologists.²

The convergence of missionary and anthropologist thinking, as well as the rising influence of the anthropologists, was symbolized in the person of A.P. Elkin. In the early 1920s, Elkin, the Anglican minister at Morpeth near Newcastle, had completed a Masters degree at Sydney University which had included some psychology and anthropology. Even this early in his career, Elkin demonstrated a capacity to evangelize for anthropology as well as for Christianity and he regularly wrote articles for the popular press explaining anthropology for lay people. His 1920s articles popularized outdated theories³ but at least conveyed the impression that Aboriginal culture as well as morphology was of scientific interest. Such information aided the development of the (generally romantic) white public interest in Aborigines which became more pronounced over the decade in the south eastern cities.

In The Voice of the North, J.J. Moloney printed Elkin's early material and in later years he gave space to all the missionary-anthropologist arguments on the need for alternative policy. Moloney was also, however, very interested in Aboriginal opinion: he was impressed by Aboriginal speakers like Maynard and Lacy, as well as by Mrs Hatton, and he was prepared to print what they had to say, even taking up their grievances himself. To his credit, as his contact

¹ VN, 10/11/1926 (AP Elkin).  
² See, for example, Rev FW Burton, in The Australian Geographer, V.I, 1, August 1928, p67.  
³ VN, 12/2/1924; 10/7/1924.  
with the AAPA developed, the references to "childlike" Aborigines disappeared from the paper's editorial columns. Nevertheless, Moloney did not really appreciate the contradictions between the emerging Aboriginal position and that of the missionary-anthropologist coalition. He often printed, on the same page and apparently without any intention to expose the divergence, the Aboriginal demand for immediate control of and title to land and the missionary-anthropologist proposal for segregation under benevolent "expert" control.¹

Moloney's practical support for the AAPA involved some mobilization of the nationalist groups. The ANA wrote to the Premier in July 1925, endorsing the AAPA request for "repatriation of the Australian people upon their own land on a family basis".² In August, Moloney's ASP branch protested the attempted removal of the Greenhills community and proposed a "farm block system" for Aborigines.³ The Protection Board did consider the "farm block" proposal, but reaffirmed its decision to refuse Aborigines this security and independence in regard to land. It persisted in its attempts to remove the Greenhills community and decided also to exercise more direct control over the troublesome Kempsey area by installing a manager at Burnt Bridge, only to find that a shortage of funds made such a step impossible.⁴

The Board was, however, so alarmed by the directions in which the AAPA was moving that it tried, apparently unsuccessfully, to stop the registration of the organization as a company. The objection raised by the Board was that the aims of the AAPA usurped its own duties under the Protection Act. To discredit the Association, the Board resorted to its usual manipulation of the stereotype of Aboriginal incompetence and poor character, referring to "the unfitness of the promoters, who, with the exception of Mrs Hatton, are all Aborigines, certain available particulars concerning the character of whom" were "to be furnished" to the Registrar General.⁵

¹ VN, 10/11/1927, p6.
² ANA to J.T. Lang, Premier, 31/7/1925, PDCF, A27/915.
³ APBM, 4/9/1925.
⁴ Ibid, 23/10/1925; 22/1/1926.
⁵ Ibid.
The AAPA had broadened its public platform by late 1925. On a speaking tour of the north coast, Maynard and Lacy addressed a meeting in Newcastle, where they included the call for freehold land and the cessation of removal of children in a comprehensive plan for reform which involved a Royal Commission into Aboriginal affairs and the abolition of the Protection Board. Maynard explained that the Board "had outlived its usefulness" and that Aborigines required "a new system of administration ... without the foolish patronage which affects to regard them as children".¹

At some stage during 1926, the organizational link was strengthened between Guri's mobilizing around these issues on the north coast and those involved in similar struggles on the south coast. The Bateman's Bay school segregation had left 15 to 20 Guri children with no schooling at all. Rather than leave the town, however, Guri mounted a sustained and well-coordinated campaign to have the segregation rescinded. Numbers of white supporters, who all stressed their ALP affiliation in writing to a Labor Ministry, appealed to the Government on the issues of the injustice of the segregation and the exploitation of Aboriginal school-age children's labour in sawmills owned by some of the P and C members who had voted for the segregation.²

It was the Guri protestors, however, who put the school segregation in its context, linking it with the attempt to revoke the reserve as a means of forcing Guri out of town. Prominent in this protest was Jane Duren, whose grandchildren were among those excluded from the school. She echoed the practice of other dissatisfied groups in appealing to the monarchy against the government, when she wrote to George V in June 1926. Her letter referred to the hypocrisy of the Australian myth of "fair play" and pointed out the contradictions of a system which declared itself committed to "compulsory" and "public" education and yet excluded Aboriginal members of the public from schooling. The land issue was, however, given priority in her final demand:

1 VN, 10/11/1925, p5; 10/12/1925, pp5-6.
2 BE Fitzpatrick to Department of Education, 28/7/1925; 14/8/1925; to Department of Labour and Industry, 28/2/1926; to Minister for Justice, 22/9/1926.
Ethel Cannan to Minister for Education, 27/7/1925; 17/8/1925; 10/6/1926.
Mrs A Hamilton to JA Perkins MLA, 31/8/1925; to Premier, 14/4/1926. Bateman's Bay public school files, DEIL.
CONTINUED FROM FICHE 2
Let them stay on the land that was granted to them also compel the children to be sent to the Public School at Bateman's Bay.¹

Early in 1927, Duren came to Sydney to see the Education Department officials.² As it did often when a situation became too difficult, the Education Department called in the Child Welfare Department, but in this instance its Inspector declined to remove any children from their families and in fact supported Guri demands for readmission to the school. An assurance was given by this Inspector to white parents that "an influx" of Aboriginal children from other areas would not occur and with State Departmental backing withdrawn, the 2-year long segregation collapse.³ Guri had won both the battle for access to the school and for security of residence in the town: in September 1927 the Lands Department revoked the out-of-town reserve which Guri had "absolutely refused" to occupy and no further attempts were made to move this community.⁴ Jane Duren continued organizing and in November 1927 she was speaking on the AAPA platform.⁵

The white press took little interest during 1926, but Guri political activity did not cease. At least some of this activity was generated from the Salt Pan Creek camp. Jack Campbell has recalled that from the time of his arrival in 1926 until he left in 1932, the camp contained usually around thirteen family groups.⁶ There were not only the dispossessed Burragorang families, and the refugees from

1 Jane Duren to King George V, 14/6/1926.
Other Guri protesters: Mrs H Stewart to Minister for Education, 6/11/1925; 25/1/1926; 22/3/1926.
Mrs Agnes Davis to Minister for Education, 28/7/1925.
Bateman's Bay public school files, DEIL.

2 Internal departmental memo, 16/3/1927. Bateman's Bay public school files, DEIL.

Regional Inspector of Schools West to Chief Inspector, 18/8/1927.
Bateman's Bay public school files, DEIL.

4 APB to Department of Education, 30/12/1925. Bateman's Bay public school files, DEIL.
NGG, 16/9/1927.

5 SMH, 15/11/1927.

6 Interview TS1. Ted Thomas also spent time at the Salt Pan Camp and corroborates Jack's recollections on this tape. The following description of the camp and its residents is drawn from this interview with the two men.
Protection Board control on the north and south coast, like Jack's family, but also some families originally from Cumeragumja including that of Jack Patten, Snr, with his sons George and Jack and their families, and Bill Onus, married to one of the Patten's daughters. Jack Campbell remembers that the older men, particularly the Anderson brothers and old Jack Patten, would talk politics "all the time":

You'd see them old fellas sittin' around in a ring, when there was anything to be done. 'Spec-ially when there was anything to be done with the Aboriginal Protection Board.'

Around these general discussions were the younger men, Onus and the Pattens, who were to carry this political education with them into the next decades. A regular part of the talk was about a petition to the King, to expose their grievances. Joe Anderson told the young boys that he was going to speak to visiting royalty, such as the Duke of York, about Guri demands.

The talk was not limited to the camp. The men used to go to Paddy's market on Friday nights and "spriuku" from a fruit box, like the Domain speakers on a Sunday. Jack Campbell would go down with another of the men from the camp who had a job as night watchman at the markets, and this was how he came to hear the speeches. He remembers that the prime issue was land:

They'd only be spruikin' on land rights, that's all, on land rights ... y'know, 'Why hasn't the Aboriginal people got land rights?', they said, 'The Aboriginal's cryin' out for land rights'.

When he was asked what sort of land they were asking for, Jack replied:

Aboriginal land! They was askin' for the land they was on. That's when they were chuckin' em off. There was places around ... 35 or 40 acres, 60 acres, what Aboriginal people was on, and they [whites] went into'em, run a mob of cattle through their crops and that. They only had dog leg fences then. They were pushin' Lang, at that time, for land rights. That's what it was all about, and to break up the Aboriginal Protection Board.

If little white media interest was shown in these Guri demands in 1926, it was a year in which missionaries, some scientists

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid. The Duke of York was in Australia to open Parliament House in Canberra.
3 Ibid.
(notably the South Australian physician, Dr H. Basedow) and one Aborigine, David Ngumaitponi, gained substantial publicity for their proposal for a "Native State". This was to be located in Arnhem Land and Aborigines were to be allowed to live there as they wished, with minimal white intervention, no separation of children from their parents and no compulsion either to enter or remain within the "State". The proposal did, however, endorse the prohibition of "cannibalism and cruel rites", thus immediately imposing a framework of European value judgement and incidently necessitating a policing system. The work of Christian conversion and the teaching of agricultural skills, again without compulsion, were to be the priorities of the "State's" administrators who were initially to be Europeans. At some very distant time in the future, however, it was envisaged that Aborigines would take over the administration and that the "State" would enter the Commonwealth on equal terms and with equal parliamentary representation to existing States.¹ The models cited for the "Native State" were Murray's administration in Papua New Guinea, considered by whites to be progressive, and the land holding and the parliamentary representation of Maoris in New Zealand.²

Although the Native State proposal clearly focused on "tribal" and "full-blooded" people, and eschewed compulsion, the plan's organizing committee had made the following ominous suggestion in relation to people outside Arnhem Land and it was one of which Gurus in NSW took note:

Natives who have no regular approved employment or are hangers on to the fringe of civilization should be removed far away from possible contaminating contacts.³

There were some obvious superficial similarities in the "Native State" proposal and the platform of the AAPA, such as guarantees of secure tenure of land, an end to the removal of children and at least the hope of ultimate autonomy. These similarities, however, sprang from totally different basic assumptions and the complete lack of

¹ The text of the petition for a Native State and a statement of aims of the initiating Committee were printed in VN, 10/5/1926, p16; 10/6/1926, p13; 11/10/1926, p11. SMH, 9/3/1927, 7/5/1927, 15/11/1927.
² Ibid (both newspapers).
³ VN, 10/5/1926, p16.
common ground between white advocates of change and the AAPA became more obvious during the campaigns undertaken by both groups during 1927.

"For liberty, freedom, the right to function in our own interest..."

The AAPA program had been fully developed by the third Annual General Meeting in January 1927. This was to be a very active year for the Association, with more travelling by the organizers, meetings with the Guri communities in Kempsey, Grafton and Lismore¹, and a series of letters to the Government protesting about Aboriginal housing conditions on the north coast, conveying general Aboriginal grievances, and calling for the "emancipation" of Aborigines by the extension to them of "full citizen rights".² The Association conducted an energetic campaign to gain concessions from the Government, and as a result a number of the Association's documents and letters have survived³, giving insights into the intellectual and emotional basis of the movement as well as details of the actual program.

The resolutions of the Association's third Annual Meeting were sent to the Premier in February⁴, quoted almost verbatim in The Voice of the North⁵ in May and sent again to the Premier in the form of a petition in June.⁶ The first and major demand was that for land, as an economic base and as compensation for dispossession. The AAPA asked that the Government:

... restore to us that share of our country of which we should never have been deprived.

Specifically, each Aboriginal person capable of working the land should "be given in fee simple sufficient good land to maintain a family". By omitting an explicit reference to acreage, the AAPA had made its demand for land as an economic base appropriate to areas where land was less fertile than on the north coast. Further also to

¹ SMH, 22/11/1927.
³ In PDCF, A27/915.
⁴ APBM, 4/2/1927.
⁵ VN, 10/5/1927, p6.
⁶ AAPA petition to Premier, received 10/6/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
the previous demands, the petition insisted that those Aborigines who were incapable of working the land were only in that condition because of past Government policies of oppression and neglect. These people must therefore be "properly cared for in suitable homes on reserves" at the full expense of the Government. These reserves, however, were no longer to be under the control of white men, but were to be supervised by Aboriginal people only, there being already an adequate number who were "educated" and possessed "the requisite ability" to take over the reserves immediately. Effectively, the Association was demanding adequate land to support all Aboriginal people and that all of this land be under direct Aboriginal control.¹

The second major element in the petition was the request that the removal of Aboriginal children from their families cease immediately. The Association sought the restoration of "those family rights which are the basis of community life" in that:

The family life of the Aboriginal people shall be held sacred and free from invasion and that the children shall be left in the control of their parents.²

Finally, the petition demanded the dissolution of the Protection Board, and its replacement by "a board of management comprised of capable, educated Aboriginals". In its only major concession, the Association stated that it was prepared to accept a chairman of this board who was appointed by the Government and who would therefore presumably be white.³

The petition mentioned the "full privileges of citizenship" and stressed that Aborigines were a people perfectly able to manage their own affairs. Its principal demands, however, were based not on Aboriginal similarities to white citizens but rather on the rights of Aborigines as prior owners of the land and as a community whose integrity had been uniquely assaulted by the invasion of family life. The AAPA program was not, therefore, a simple civil rights campaign, as it did not assume an identity of interest or experience with white citizens, although it clearly assumed that Aborigines were entitled to the full benefits of citizenship.

¹ Ibid, Sections A, C and D.
² Ibid, Section B.
³ Ibid, Section E.
The response of the Protection Board to the AAPA petition rested entirely on an assertion of the incompetence of Aborigines to handle their own affairs, and conversely, of the Board's wisdom and understanding in its dealings with its charges. The proposal to give freehold land was "not considered at all advisable", it wrote, because:

... the Board, knowing the nature of the Aboriginal, is of the opinion that in most cases the property would be quickly disposed of for more liquid assets ... ¹

The Premier was assured that Aboriginal family life was already "held sacred", except of course where the Board deemed that children were exposed to "immoral or contaminating influences".² The Board insisted that it offered benefits to Aborigines which were not only adequate but which were far greater than those provided for poor white men, and concluded with a further statement of Aboriginal incompetence, this time in relation to the proposal that Aborigines could supervise reserves or sit on a board of management. The whole idea, the Board insisted, was "impracticable".³

Frederick Maynard's response when this information was conveyed to the AAPA revealed in more detail the basis of the Association's demands. He first attacked the Protection Board's all-pervading assumption of Aboriginal incompetence, writing:

I wish to make it perfectly clear on behalf of our people, that we accept no condition of inferiority as compared with European people. Two distinct civilizations are represented by the respective races ... That the European people by the arts of war destroyed our more ancient civilization is freely admitted, and that by their vices and diseases our people have been decimated is also patent, but neither of these facts are evidence of superiority. Quite the contrary is the case. Furthermore, I may refer, in passing, to the fact that your present scheme of Old Age Pensions was obtained from our ancient code, as likewise your Child Endowment Scheme and Widow's Pensions. Our divorce laws may yet find a place on the Statute Book. The members of this Board [the AAPA] have also noticed the strenuous efforts of the Trade Union leaders to attain the conditions which existed in our country at the

¹ AP8 to Premier, 2/9/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
time of the invasion by Europeans — the men only worked when necessary — we called no man "Master" and we had no king."

Maynard thus firmly asserted the value of Aboriginal civilization and then went on to assert, just as firmly, that "when the treatment accorded them was fully considered", Aborigines had already "conformed remarkably well" to European systems. On this basis, he continued:

... we are, therefore, striving to obtain full recognition of our citizen rights on terms of absolute equality with all other people in our own land.

Maynard was arguing, however, that Aborigines did not have merely equal rights with Europeans, but rather had prior and overriding rights, (which included the right of the indigenous people to the title "Australians"):

The request made by this Association for sufficient land for each eligible family is justly based. The Australian people are the original owners of this land and have a prior right over all other people in this respect.

He returned to the principle of equal rights in the argument for Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs using examples from contemporary Australian society which would therefore be recognizable to white politicians, and drawing attention, incidentally, to the existing diversity of ethnic, racial and religious structures within "White Australia".

Our request to supervise our own affairs is no innovation. The Catholic people in our country possess the right to control their own schools and homes, and take a pride in the fact that they possess this privilege. The Chinese, Greeks, Jews and Lutherans are similarly favoured and our people are entitled to precisely the same conditions.

Maynard denied the Board claims that it adequately provided for the aged and indigent Aborigines, calling the Board's reference to the generosity of ration and blanket issues "a sneer". The falsity of the Board's position was proven by its refusal to agree to a Royal

1 Frederick G Maynard, President, AAPA, to Premier, 3/10/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
Commission, the proposition which, Maynard noted, had first been raised by the AAPA. Maynard accused the Board of being afraid of the truths which such an enquiry would uncover.

The Protection Board replied with an expanded version of its earlier letter, beginning, however, with a revealing statement of what it believed its role to be:

The Board cannot concern itself with the controversy regarding the inferiority or otherwise of the Australian Aboriginal race as compared with Europeans, its duty being to ensure that the remnants of that race now living within this State receive benevolent protection and every reasonable opportunity to improve its condition.\(^1\)

Having avoided the crucial issue with this statement predicated entirely on the assumption that Aborigines were inferior, the Board proceeded with a glowing account of its work, particularly in the area of "rescuing" Aboriginal children from "neglect". The Board even argued that the "larger proportion" of the children it removed had a white parent of "essentially a low type", although this statement is demonstrably untrue in terms of the Board's own records, which show that most of the wards came from families where both parents were of Aboriginal descent.\(^2\)

The Board did, however, make the accurate statement that Aborigines in NSW already held full citizenship rights in theory, with the exception of access to alcohol. It was true that Aborigines in NSW were not technically denied the franchise, although the Moree Municipal Council apparently found no problem in excluding permanent Aboriginal residents of the town from the Municipal electoral roll. It was also true that Aborigines could legally purchase land and property. The Board did not mention the denial of Commonwealth welfare benefits to Aborigines whose homes happened to be on reserves, nor did it mention public education, from which Aborigines in so many places were excluded, nor its own methods of restricting the movement or domicile of Aborigines. Finally, it most carefully avoided discussing the real issue, which was the condition of actual access to the education, employment, health and housing facilities which white citizens regarded as their right. In the final analysis, this Board statement rested, as did its earlier reply to the AAPA, on an assen-

1 APB to Premier, 3/11/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
2 APBRW.
tion of Aboriginal incompetence. "It would be impracticable", stated the Board, "for the Aborigines in this State to be allowed to supervise their own affairs". 

In a further effort to rebut the AAPA demands, however, the Board sought to discredit Frederick Maynard, firstly by claiming that he was not of Aboriginal descent at all, but rather a "full-blood" American or South African "black" and, secondly, by sending to the Premier a letter, intercepted by a Board station manager, written by Maynard to a fifteen-year-old Aboriginal girl who had been "apprenticed". This girl had been removed from the care of both her parents at the camp on Dunsmurral property by the Angledool manager, on the grounds that she was "of an age to be apprenticed out to service". The girl was placed on a property remote from her family and within a year she had been the subject of sexual assault by a white man at her place of employment. She was sent to Sydney to have her child, who died shortly after birth and she was then returned, via Angledool station, to the same place of employment.

Through the Aboriginal community network, the AAPA had heard of this girl's problems and Maynard wrote to her in October 1927, offering help in bringing the man responsible to justice. He asked her for the particulars of the assault which would be necessary for a proof of paternity and it was presumably this aspect of the letter, as much as its criticisms of the Aborigines' Protection Act, which the Board felt would discredit Maynard.

Contrary to the Board's interpretation, however, the letter appears to show more clearly than anything else the degree of personal commitment felt by Maynard to the girls whom the Board kept forcing into intolerable situations; the intensity of the hatred, bitterness and frustration generated by Board policy and white racism; and, finally, the tenacity of hope.

In the letter, Maynard had savagely attacked the Aborigines' Protection Act, which contained no protection for Aboriginal girls

1 APB to Premier, 3/11/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
2 Ibid.
EB Harkness to Premier, 11/11/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
3 Attached papers to APB to Premier, 3/11/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
4 APBRW, Number 655.
5 FG Maynard to K—B—, 14/10/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
All following quotations are from this letter.
against "these white Robbers of our Women's virtues", who "take our girls down and laugh to scorn" yet who "escape their obligations every time". He assured the girl that her case "was one in dozens with our girls, more is the pity". The Act and the Board it empowered insulted and degraded all Aboriginal people, and aimed "to exterminate the Noble and Ancient Race of Australia". These "so-called Civilized Methods of Rule, under Christianized ideals so they claim, of Civilizing our people under the pretense of love" were "nothing more than downright Hypocrisy" and "Stink of the Belgian Congo". Maynard continued:

The tyrannous methods have got to be Blotted out.

We are not going to be insulted any longer than it will take to wipe [the Act] off the Statute Book.

That's what our Association stands for: liberty, freedom, the right to function in our own interest, as right-thinking, Civilized people and free citizens, not as non-intelligents devoid of all reason. That is how we are placed under the Law of the Statute Book.

Anything is good enough — A Blanket, a pinch of tea [and] sugar thrown at us.

Are we going to stand for these things any longer? Certainly not! Away with the Dammable Insulting methods which are degrading. Give us a hand, Stand by your own Native Aboriginal officers and fight for liberty and freedom for yourself and your children.

The Protection Board's opinion of Maynard, expressed by E.B. Harkness, was that he was a man whose "illogical views" were "more likely to disturb the Aborigines" than improve their conditions. The Board was, Harkness argued, in fact "dealing sympathetically with a very difficult social question with due regard to the peculiarities of the race [ie, Aborigines] and with proper consideration for the public funds".1

It was hardly surprising that the AAPA had been unable to penetrate the Protection Board's assumptions about the "peculiarities of the race", as these assumptions formed the Board's very reason for existence. The AAPA fared only a little better, however, with one of the groups of white reformers, the missionaries. In October 1927, a meeting took place between a number of churchmen, including the Bishop Coadjutor of Sydney, Reverend D'Arcy Irvine and the Chairman

1 E.B. Harkness to Premier, 3/11/1927, PDCF, A27/915.
of the Australian Board of Missions, Reverend J.S. Needham and seven Aboriginal representatives of the AAPA, including Maynard and Duren.¹

Both stressed the urgency of the problems of the revocation of reserve lands and of school segregations. Maynard, as the main spokesperson, obviously addressed the meeting in the terms used in his letter to the girl at Angledool, accusing the Protection Act of degrading and insulting Aborigines and demanding new legislation which would give Aborigines "equal status in every respect with white people".² He explained the desperate position of some groups of Aborigines in the Macleay river area, who would not approach the police for food rations:

... as it was feared that the children would be taken away from the parents. That was considered crueller than starvation.³

He argued the AAPA case that Aborigines must have land in their own areas,

... with their own communities, with schools ... and should be supervised generally by educated and capable Aborigines.⁴

It is clear that Aborigines believed that the Native State idea, strongly supported by Needham among others, was indeed a proposal to move all Aborigines by force to the Northern Territory. This opinion was held on the north coast and the strong opposition of Gurrus there to the Native State was reconfirmed at an AAPA meeting at Lismore later in November, where the people stated that "they preferred to live where their homes were".⁵ This was, after all, the essence of the struggle which Aborigines had been waging for almost two decades against the revocation of their reserve land, and it had been the major motivating force in the development of the AAPA. At the meeting with the missionaries, Maynard therefore conveyed the Aboriginal rejection of the Native State proposal on the basis of adherence "to their age-old tribal customs and the place of their birth".⁶

¹ Evening News, 16/11/1927; SMH, 15/11/1927.
² Evening News, 16/11/1927.
³ SMH, 15/11/1927.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid, 22/11/1927. This precise reason for opposition to the "Native State" was also given by a deputation of Western Australian Aborigines to that State's Government, SMH, 12/3/1928.
⁶ SMH, 15/11/1927.
At this meeting, missionaries who had been largely focusing their attention on "full-blood" and "tribal" Aborigines in remote areas were confronted by a group of people from the more densely settled areas of NSW, who were asserting their Aboriginality in spite of being of mixed descent, and who were refusing to acknowledge an inferiority to whites in any sense. They were stating that they were already civilized by virtue of both their Aboriginal culture and their ability to cope with European culture. They were demanding land in NSW on the basis of their Aboriginality and, therefore, of their prior ownership and because they had already successfully worked the land in a European sense. Above all, they were specifically rejecting the need for white control or supervision of any kind.

While this meeting was probably a factor in turning missionary attention to the need for reforms in the more settled States, the experience does not appear to have shaken the fundamental assumptions which the missionaries held about Aborigines. Needham's response was most publicized and he clearly remained unconvinced by the AAPA, arguing against Maynard's assertion of Aboriginal competence:

... quoting many instances where natives had been given all opportunities to improve themselves, but with two exceptions — that of the well-known David Unaipon and a Queensland girl — they had disappointed the white protectors who had endeavoured to help them.¹

Needham's conclusion about the AAPA was that:

Some of their complaints are legitimate, but I am quite certain that a number of their requests cannot be granted.²

The Evening News summarized the missionaries' position, saying:

"Church organizations are not likely to join with the Aboriginal Progressive Association in an assault on the State Government", but that they would instead continue to press the Federal Government for a Royal Commission and an Arnhem Land reserve.³

The AAPA disappeared from white public view after 1927 and did not have the opportunity to confront the anthropologists as it had the missionaries. This confrontation was to come in the following decade. There has as yet been no explanation uncovered for the apparent break-up of the AAPA's organizational structure after 1927.

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.
³ Evening News, 16/11/1927.
Individual members of the Association, however, remained involved in political activity, which intensified in Sydney as white pressure on reserve land reached the metropolitan reserve of La Perouse.

As early as 1926, Randwick Municipal Council had notified the Protection Board that it wanted the La Perouse reserve revoked and its residents moved¹, arguing that increased tourism in the area was interfering with the privacy of the reserve and that it would be "in the interests of the Aboriginals themselves" to be relocated.² The Council was, however, clearly more concerned with the development of its tourist industry, wanting the reserve removed so that "the appearance of the place" would be "improved".³ The board agreed, and went so far as to select another site at Congwong Bay.⁴

While one objection raised by Guri to this new site was that it was "sloppy, greasy and boggy in winter"⁵, their protest was not based on this issue, but rather that of rightful ownership of the land at La Perouse. At the height of the conflict in April 1928, 53 adult residents of the reserve petitioned the Government:

> We, the undersigned Aborigines of the La Perouse reserve, emphatically protest about our removal to any place. This is our heritage bestowed upon us: in these circumstances we feel justified in refusing to leave.⁶

The Protection Board itself raised the issue of the long association of the Aboriginal residents with the reserve: "They had been asked if they wanted to go, but they strenuously objected. It was stated that many of them were born on the reserve and these naturally recognised it as their home".⁷

The conflict was eventually stalemated, as in so many other situations, by Guri refusal to move. With the Protection Board ambivalent after its obvious failures over the decade to remove Aborigines against their will, Randwick Council was forced into a compromise solution, to which, however, the reserve's residents were not party and did not consent. In this agreement between the Council and the

¹ APBM, 27/8/1926.
² SMH, 1/2/1928.
³ APBM, 27/8/1926.
⁴ SMH, 28/3/1928.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid, 14/3/1928.
Board, a portion of the reserve along the waterfront was revoked to become a public recreation reserve under Council control. For its part, the Board was to remodel the reserve housing to bring it into accordance with the Council specifications.¹

The Council kept the Board to this arrangement with the result that the La Perouse houses not only absorbed a great proportion of the Board's Depression budget but created Aboriginal housing of a far higher standard than that on any other reserve or station. La Perouse gained 3- or 4-roomed houses, all with water and sewerage facilities² while housing on all other reserves, which had often consisted of 2-roomed, unserviced, earthern-floored huts deteriorated still further under the impact of the Depression. The Government was not slow to see the opportunity presented, and the Board asked the Director of the Botanic Gardens to assist with a tree-planting program "to make the reserve an attraction" as "the Government Tourist Bureau contemplate including the reserve in its itinerary for overseas tourists".³

La Perouse Guris were not, however, bought off by their unexpectedly improved conditions. Politicised by their struggle against both the Council and the Board for the retention of the land, La Perouse residents were prominent over the next decade in publicising the discrepancy between their housing and that on all other reserves in the State.

The Salt Pan Creek camp Guris also sustained their political activity into the grim years of the Depression, when two of the Anderson brothers were convicted of fare evasion after scaling a train to see a sick relation in Wollongong. Their defence in court was: "This country belongs to us".⁴ The public speaking activity around the city continued and eventually drew some white attention.⁵ Joe Anderson became a known "character" and the white press occasionally used him to reflect the stereotype European images of Aborigines, on one occasion dressing him up in skins and photographing him holding a boomerang and a wallaby, and on others treating him generally

1  Ibid, 28/8/1929.
2  APBM, 31/7/1920.
   APBR, 1929-30, p2; 1930-31, p2.
4  SMH, 12/6/1931.
5  Interview T51.
as a comic character. Only once was Joe Anderson given the opportunity to speak for himself, in a Cinesound news film made in 1933, showing him standing in his own old overcoat among the ti trees at Salt Pan. The film has been heavily and clumsily cut, but something of what Joe Anderson was saying has been preserved.

In this film, Anderson stated that Aborigines "had kings in their own right", long before white men came to Australia, and he himself used the title "King Burraga", in reference to both his traditional country and to the reserve of which his family had been dispossessed. Such an assertion of traditional hierarchy was in some contradiction to Fred Maynard's description of traditional social structures, and Anderson may have been adopting the colonialists' exploitative practice of naming individuals as "kings". It is just as likely, however, that Anderson was insisting on an acknowledgement of the equality of dignity and status between Aboriginal and English spokespeople or figureheads and so was making use of symbols of authority which white people would understand.

Anderson went on to assert the integrity of the Aboriginal community and its laws:

The Black man sticks to his brothers and always keeps their rules, which were laid down before the white man set foot upon these shores.

He commented on the hypocrisy of white people in failing to live by their own maxim of "Love thy neighbour", and continued:

It quite amuses me to hear people say they don't like the Black man ... but he's damn glad to live in a Black man's country all the same!

In his major statement, Anderson said:

I am calling a corroboree of all the Natives in New South Wales to send a petition to the King, in an endeavour to improve our conditions. All the Black man wants is representation in Federation, Parliament. There is also plenty fish in the river for us all, and land to grow all we want.

One hundred and fifty years ago, the Aboriginal owned Australia, and today, he demands more than the white man's charity.

He wants the right to live!

1 The Truth in particular used Anderson in this way.

2 Cinesound Review, No.100, 1933: "Australian Royalty Pleads for His People: King Burraga, Chief of Aboriginal Thirroul Tribe, to petition King for Blacks' Representation in Parliament". (Caption). The following quotations from Joe Anderson are all from the dialogue of this film, recorded within interview T51.
CHAPTER VI

THE DEPRESSION AND THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES' LEAGUE

This chapter will discuss the general effects of the Depression on Aboriginal communities across the State and will then move on to the second Aboriginal political organization to launch an attack on the NSW Protection Board: the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL). The Depression was a major cause of an important turnabout in Board policy, which had implications for all NSW Aborigines but which was acted upon only unevenly across the State. The AAL drew its energy less from opposition to the new Board policy than from the conditions of the Depression itself, as well as from more long-standing issues. The organization was well established before the Board's change of policy became law in 1936 and the AAL regional base was south western NSW, the area least affected by changed Board activity. The AAL and the issues it raised will therefore be discussed here. The changes to Board policy and activity, while concurrent with the development of the AAL, bore a greater relationship to the development of political movements in the north west and on the coast in the 1930s than to that in the south west, and so will be discussed in the following chapter.

THE DEPRESSION

Something of the effect of the Depression can be understood by analysing the major casualties suffered because of it by Aboriginal communities. Employment was obviously the first casualty. In mid-1927, 75% of the enumerated Aboriginal population of NSW was self-sufficient¹, but by the end of that year of drought and rising rural unemployment the Protection Board reported an influx of Aborigines to its stations and reserves and increases in requests to police for assistance. The annual census collected by the police is not a particularly accurate indicator of Aboriginal employment over this period, due to a number of problems in internal categorization which

¹ Annual Aboriginal Census, 1927.
could have led to either an under- or overestimate of employment.\(^1\) This source suggests, however, that Aboriginal unemployment peaked in 1932, as it did for whites, with 85% of the adult, male Aboriginal population unemployed.\(^2\) Correction is clearly required to account for the aged or ill who were not previously part of the work force, but even so this figure suggests that a higher proportion of Aborigines were unemployed than were whites. The general unemployment rate is usually gauged from the rate of trade unionists unemployed, which in itself is obviously an underestimate, but which shows the 1932 peak in unemployment to have been 32.5% of trade unionists.\(^3\) Protection Board records of expenditure, on the other hand, show a peak in 1934 and as little building or other revenue-consuming activity was occurring at this time most of this expenditure, shown on Figure 6.1, can be assumed to have been in rations and aid to unemployed Aborigines.\(^4\) In general, then it seems that Aboriginal unemployment was disproportionately high and probably remained high after the peak of white unemployment in 1932 and until at least 1934.

The Protection Board maintained that Aborigines had been the first to be sacked when the Depression hit\(^5\) while in some of the few documented statements of the early 1930s Aborigines argued that the only work they could get was what white people didn't want.\(^6\) Aboriginal unemployment seems to have been high all over the State and in perhaps the one area where Aborigines had an advantage over whites, on the pastoral properties with a partially self-sustaining camp, Aborigines lost employment also.

For those properties of the Walgett North area where employment records were examined for this study, the number of both white and

---

\(^1\) The printed forms for census collectors to fill in prescribed the categories of "in regular employment" and "living on supervised reserve" as mutually exclusive until 1937. Although a note at the foot of the form indicated that employed Aborigines living on reserves should be placed in the first category, this must have caused some confusion. Furthermore, it appears that some census recorders included the dependents of employed Aborigines in the "employed" category.

\(^2\) Annual Aboriginal Census Returns, 1927 to 1938. (Total, published figures).


\(^4\) APBM, "Financial Statements" for each year from 1929 to 1939 are attached to the Minute Books at various places.

\(^5\) APBR, 1931-1932, pl.

\(^6\) SMH, 24/1/1930.
Figure 6.1

APB EXPENDITURE 1929-1939

Source: APBM.
Note: "Maintenance of Stations" includes portion of managers', salaries and other expenses as well as rations.
Aboriginal employees fell but the proportion of Aborigines employed was higher than previously, in each year from 1928 to 1938.¹ On Bangate, for example, an average of 25% of the property's employees were Aboriginal from 1921 to 1927, but from 1928 to 1938 the average was 27%. At Dungalear the trend is more obvious with the proportions of Aboriginal employees before and after 1928 being 19% and 28%.² This indication of the employment of Aborigines instead of whites for the few remaining jobs suggests that the pastoral camps of these properties still provided a mechanism for the successful exploitation of Aboriginal labour.

This proportional rise in Aboriginal employment can be seen in the records of these properties before 1932, but in that year pastoralists gained a further advantage when Aborigines were excluded from the pastoral workers' award. With the brief exception of a State award which had stood for one year only in 1921, no rural workers, other than those in the shearing sector, had been covered by an award until the 1927 State Declaration of a Living Wage for Rural Workers, which did not exclude Aborigines. In December 1929 the responsibility for NSW rural workers had passed to the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and here too the relevant award did not exclude Aborigines.³

In 1932, however, the graziers' associations of Western Australia and NSW produced witnesses to argue in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court that Aborigines should be specifically excluded from the award covering pastoral station hands.⁴ The Western Australian graziers produced three witnesses for this argument and NSW only one, indicating the greater reliance on Aboriginal labour of the graziers in Western Australia. The other States covered by this award, however, and notably South Australia, produced no witnesses at all.

The AWU advocate, E. Grayndler, cross-examined the Western Australian

---

¹ Pastoral property records, Dungalear, Bangate, Gingie, 1927 to 1938, op. cit.
³ NSW Year Book, 1934-1935, p785; NAF, 1927. CAR, XXV, p626; IXXX, p261.
⁴ Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, Transcript: Graziers' Association of NSW and others vs AWU, and vice versa, before Chief Judge Dethridge, hearings begun 14/6/1932. For NSW grazier's evidence on Aborigines, see pp234-5; for WA evidence, pp1134-5; 1159-61; 1264-5; 1271-2; 1383-4.
grazers and pastoral workers to expose the coerced and exploited conditions under which Aborigines in that State were working, but the union did not offer any argument at all to oppose the graziers' claim for the exclusion of Aborigines from the award. In fact, Grayndler repeatedly supported the graziers' proposition that Aboriginal labour was "inferior" to that of white men. He went on to refer contumuously to "niggers' work" and "niggers' wages" in his arguments opposing the main claim which the graziers made (unsuccessfully) to the court at the time, which was that the award for station hands should be suspended and wages lowered to 30/- a week without keep. With no opposition at all from the AWU to the exclusion of Aborigines from the award and with a statement from presiding Chief Judge Dethridge, during the hearing, indicating that he too believed the value of non-white labour to be lower than that of whites, there was consensus within the court on this issue. It was no surprise when Dethridge ruled that award conditions were "quite clearly not applicable" to Aborigines.

It is difficult to estimate the effect this had in NSW and quite clearly the situation varied from station to station. At Dundalear, while Aborigines appear to have been paid award wages after 1932, the proportion of Aborigines employed increased more sharply from 1932 to 1934 than it had done from 1928 to 1932. At Gingie, an actual drop in Aboriginal wages is clearly shown in the station's Journals. Aboriginal station hands received (at least on paper) the minimum award wage from 1927 but after 1932 they were paid only 30/- a week, 10/- a week less than was paid to white station hands who received much better "keep". Frank Huelin, one of the few white chroniclers of the Depression to have mentioned Aborigines, noted the tendency of western pastoralists to employ Aborigines on low wages rather than whites in the mid-1930s. Reg Murray has commented cynically on employment opportunities for Maris around Walgett over the Depression:

Oh there was plenty of work around — for 30 bob a week.

1 Ibid, pp138A; 1254; 1271 for examples.
2 Ibid, p434.
3 CAR, XXXI, p730.
6 Interview T45.
If prepared to accept low wages then, as many Aborigines and whites were forced to do, there was some work still available to Aborigines in the pastoral industry. Overall, however, there was a loss of employment in the west as in all other regions of the State.

In the agricultural sector, where Aborigines had often been employed in the discontinuous labour intensive work of harvesting, they found themselves under pressure from white unemployed for the same jobs. More oral evidence needs to be collected to establish the exact situation, but on the mid south coast, as an example, Guris found that they were increasingly forced into that harvest work requiring the heaviest manual labour: pea and bean picking. The somewhat lighter work in the area, cherry picking, was more often given to whites.\(^1\) Conditions for all seasonal harvest workers were poor, but, as in the pastoral industry, it was the Guris working on the peas and beans who were faced with the worst conditions. Pearl Gibbs was one of the Aborigines active around the Nowra area in the mid-1930s, organizing stop-work meetings among Guri pea pickers in an attempt to gain even the minimal conditions of access to drinking water and to toilets during work hours.\(^2\)

The second Aboriginal casualty of the Depression was the payment of Family Endowment. When the Lang Government had introduced this measure, Aborigines had not been excluded from it as they were from Commonwealth benefits such as the maternity bonus.\(^3\) The Family Endowment represented the first time that Aborigines had been entitled to social service benefits on exactly the same basis as whites. Actual payments began late in 1927 and in November 1928 the Commissioner for Family Endowment expressed concern to the Protection Board that some Aboriginal recipients were underspending their Endowment and building up accounts in arrears.\(^4\) The Board was asked at that time to take on the administration of Family Endowment for Aborigines but was extremely reluctant to do so. It was facing a reduction in its budget which it feared would necessitate staff cuts and it had no desire for any additional work load.\(^5\) With still further budget

---

1 Interviews TS3 and TS5 (Tape stolen, notes only remain).
2 Interview TS5.
4 APBM, 30/11/1928.
5 Ibid, 19/10/1928; 30/11/1928; 1/2/1929; 10/5/1929; 17/12/1929; 3/6/1930.
reductions over the next year, however, the Board and the Government recognized that Family Endowment could supplement the Board's vote if it were used to cover the cost of all the Board's "ordinary expenditure" on Aboriginal children, namely rations, clothing, medical and dental costs.¹ The Treasurer in fact instructed the Board in 1930 to reduce its submissions for Government funding by the amount it was to receive in Aborigines' Family Endowment payments², while the Board was later to point out that its assumption of control of the payments had saved money for the State.³

This was not, however, the public justification given by the Board in its 1929-1930 Report for taking over the administration of Aborigines' Endowment. The Board again manipulated white stereotypes, alleging that Aboriginal parents had "squandered" money intended for the benefit of their children, although the original "problem" had been underspending.⁴ The Board's assumption of control meant that for all Aboriginal recipients of the Endowment, except those few judged "competent" by the Board's managers or the police, cash payments of the Endowment ceased in February 1930. Instead, the cash went into a Board Trust account, from which the Board's expenditure on children's rations, blankets, clothes, etc., was now drawn.⁵

The amount of the Endowment, 5/- per week per child, was not insubstantial in the 1930s, and as the Board's actual expenditure on children was low anyway, it does not appear to have consumed the full amount of the Endowment in most cases. Aboriginal parents, however, had no guarantee that they would receive the balance of the payments, even in the form of food orders, nor were they guaranteed even information concerning the amount held in balance to their credit. Expenditure of this balance was entirely at the discretion of the Board's officers or agents. If Aboriginal parents wished to use Endowment money for a specific purpose, they had to go to either the police or Board manager and justify their planned expenditure, a humiliating exercise.⁶

² APBR, 1929-1930; 1930-1931.
³ APBM, 3/6/1930.
⁴ APBR, 1930-1931, p1.
⁵ Ibid, 1929-1930, p1.
⁶ APBM, 3/6/1920; 31/7/1930.
⁷ Ibid.
A total of 528 families were affected by the Board's initial assumption of control of Endowment, by which it acquired over £11,000 in lieu of the equivalent amount deducted from its budget and returned to the "white" sector of the economy.1 By 1937, the Board was handling Endowment for 607 families, with nearly £20,000 being paid into its Trust Account, of which only 65% was being expended.2 Although economic times were better, the Boa. became dependent on this injection of funds and in November 1937, reconfirmed its decision that all its expenditure on Aboriginal children was to be charged against the Family Endowment account.3 Just as the Board had come to see reserve land as a source for its own funding, rather than for Aboriginal independence, so it came to see Family Endowment as a legitimate part of its own money supply. For Aborigines, their exclusion (in most cases) from Commonwealth benefits was galling, but the loss of Family Endowment was, if possible, even more bitterly resented as they had actually received and controlled this cash benefit for over two years before it was consumed for the purpose of funding the Board.

The third casualty of the Depression for Aborigines was their widespread exclusion from the systems for unemployment relief, being Food Relief, begun in 1930 and Work Relief, begun in 1932. As has been discussed earlier, much Aboriginal employment was in the discontinuously labour-intensive activities of both pastoral and agricultural industries and traditional food resources provided some support for those Aborigines who received no Protection Board rations as well as for those who did. However, few if any Aborigines in NSW by 1927 survived solely by traditional economic activities. Most of the 75% of the enumerated Aboriginal population who were self-sufficient in 1927 were working for at least part of each year in the capitalist economy. Their unemployment was a direct result of the breakdown of that economy.

Until 1930, relief for unemployed workers was piecemeal and disorganized, with non-official charity playing a significant role. The amount of aid available is, therefore, not only impossible to

1 APBR, 1929-1930, pl. Unsigned memo to Premier, 14/9/1937, PDCF, A37/193.
2 Ibid. PSBR, pp15-16 and Appendix C.
3 APBM, 3/11/1937. EB Harkness to Chief Secretary, 26/10/1937, PDCF, A37/193.
estimate for this period, but was confusing and difficult for the unemployed themselves to obtain. Aborigines had a slight advantage in that the system of Board rations was at least a well-established mechanism for providing aid. Although not officially intended to be available to unemployed, able-bodied people, the Board was openly admitting that its rations were being drawn on for this purpose by 1928.¹

Aborigines had been protesting for many years at both the quantity and quality of Board ration issues and the Board expected, and in fact ordered, that its dry ration issue would be supplemented by subsistence economic activity in many areas.² If refused whatever official or unofficial unemployment relief available before 1930, however, Aborigines did have the alternative of attempting to claim Board rations, which meant making officials acknowledge them as Aboriginal.

When the Government introduced the uniform system of Food Relief late in 1930, Aborigines expected that, like all other unemployed workers, they would be entitled to this benefit. Many were told, however, on application to the police, as Food Relief issuing officers, that they were entitled only to Board rations and not to Food Relief. This raised immediate protests³ as the public notification of Food Relief values had exposed to all involved a discrepancy between that form of relief and Board rations. It was not only Aborigines who could see that Food Relief, meagre though it was, for white unemployed was still more than the Board's rations for Aborigines. The Protection Board pointed out to the Government early in 1931 that "the ration issued to unemployed white men is much more generous than that issued to unemployed aborigines by the Board".⁴ The shortfall in the Board's rations was acknowledged by the Government⁵, by a number of parliamentarians⁶, by public servants in the department supervising

¹ APBR, 1928-1929, p2.
² APBOL, 20/4/1916
³ NPD, V.124, p316, 9/12/1930.
⁴ APBM, 6/2/1931.
⁵ NPD, V.124, p316, 9/12/1930; p1057, 4/2/1931.
⁶ Ibid.
the distribution of Food Relief\textsuperscript{1} and by the white unemployed themselves.\textsuperscript{2}

The exact discrepancy is impossible to quantify as Board rations were costed only at bulk, wholesale prices in the Board's records, and were varied by transport costs, by whether or not meat was included, and then by the quality or that meat. To complicate matters further, even such inexact cost estimates were not recorded over the early years of the 1930s and it was only in 1937 that the Board estimated ration costs in response to Aboriginal political pressure. Aboriginal estimates in 1937 cluster around the figure of 3/2 per adult per week\textsuperscript{3} while the Board estimated that rations cost between 2/10 and 6/9 per adult per week. The major factor in the difference between the two Board estimates appears to have been transport costs.\textsuperscript{4} The Board had in fact claimed in July 1931, that it had been able, with some additional funding, to increase the value of each ration issue by 25%.\textsuperscript{5} There is, however, no evidence to support this claim, with the Board's description of its ration issue in 1937 being identical with the scale notified in the 1910 Regulations.\textsuperscript{6} It is most likely that the funding was absorbed into additional ration issues rather than in any increase in the ration itself.

In 1937, the gazetted (retail) value of Food Relief was 7/6 per single adult per week, with 12/6 permitted as additional income.\textsuperscript{7} Initially Food Relief for a single person had been 5/3½ a week but this had been raised in 1932 to 6/6, with, obviously, progressive increases for dependent family members.\textsuperscript{8} In 1932, with the coming to power of a conservative government, Aborigines in Dubbo (and possibly elsewhere) who had been receiving Food Relief were systematically

\textsuperscript{1} Unsigned annotation on letter from MA Davidson, MLA, to Minister for Education, 7/9/1936. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
\textsuperscript{2} WW, 1/7/1932.
\textsuperscript{3} Sun, 7/10/1937; DT, 8/10/1937; 11/10/1937; 15/10/1937.
\textsuperscript{4} AC Pettit to Chief Secretary's Department, 8/10/1937, PDCF, A37/193.
\textsuperscript{5} APBM, 3/7/1931. APBR, 1930-1931, p2.
\textsuperscript{6} Compare Regulation 19 ([a] to [e]), NGG, No.92, 8/6/1910 with Form describing current ration scale attached to: AC Pettit to Dr ES Morris, 23/6/1937, PDCF, A37/193.
\textsuperscript{7} NSW Year Book, 1937-1938, p175.
\textsuperscript{8} NSW Year Books, 1931-1932, p738; 1932-1933, p785.
refused it and issued instead with the Board's "dry ration", that is, 8 lb flour, 2 lb sugar and 1 lb tea, with no meat. White unemployed in Dubbo stated that this had reduced the value of relief to the Aborigines by 50%. Whatever the precise discrepancy, however, there is no doubt that it did exist.

The immediate result of Aboriginal applications for Food Relief was widespread confusion. Unemployed Aborigines in some places were issued with Food Relief but in many places they were not. The issue was raised in Parliament in December 1930 and again in February 1931, after Aboriginal protests to politicians. The Director of Food Relief attempted to clarify the situation with a circular to issuing officers in July 1931, establishing criteria for eligibility of Aborigines. This instruction indicated that anyone who had "an admixture of Aboriginal blood" could be refused Food Relief unless "the applicant has performed a white man's work" and had not lived "on a reserve or station directly under the care of the Aborigines' Protection Board". When Work Relief was introduced systematically in 1932, Aborigines again applied for acceptance in the scheme and were again widely rejected, necessitating an instruction from the Department of Labour and Industry on criteria for Aboriginal eligibility for this form of relief. This indicated that "men of Aboriginal blood" were eligible only if not "directly controlled" by the Protection Board and had not "resided on" a Board station in the previous twelve months. Even meeting these conditions did not ensure eligibility, however, if there was a Board station or reserve "within reasonable distance", in which case the issuing officer had complete "discretionary power in the matter".

These criteria for eligibility of Food and Work Relief were essentially subjective, particularly in relation to the concept of "a white man's work", and allowed a wide latitude for interpretation, throwing the responsibility for decision making back onto local issuing officers, who were in both cases the police.

1 WW, 1/7/1932.
2 NPID, V.124, p316, 9/12/1930; p1057, 4/2/1931.
3 Instruction to Police issued 13/7/1931, cited in Office of Director of Government Food Relief to Education Department, 28/9/1937, in Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
4 Internal, unsigned memo, Education Department, citing information received from Department of Labour and Industry, July 1937, in Coilarenebri public school files, DEIL.
The first step in this decision making process had to be the identification of the Food or Work Relief applicant as "Aboriginal". Since 1918, the police had been receiving instructions from the Protection Board to recognize as "Aboriginal" only those people who were "half-caste" or "full-blood", that is, those with dark skin colouring. The police had also, of course, been receiving instruction and opinion from local town authorities who identified anyone who was visibly of Aboriginal descent and/or living with Aborigines as "Aboriginal". In their official duties, the police as keepers' of the town's peace had undoubtedly acted on the town's definition, but in their roles as Board agents and census collectors they had acted on the former definition. They had refused rations and other aid to Aborigines of fair skin colouring, thus saving the Government money and they had filled out census forms which prescribed that only those of "predominantly Aboriginal blood" and who also lived with Aborigines were to be counted as "Aborigines".  

With the Food and Work Relief systems, however, the cost-cutting mechanism was reversed: now the more people who could be identified as "Aboriginal" the less money would have to be spent on unemployment relief. This impression was no doubt transmitted to the police, who were as well probably too busy to pursue the information required by the confused instructions on Aboriginal eligibility for relief. Past residential and work records were not, in any case, qualifications required of white food relief applicants and the decision concerning an applicant's "Aboriginality" or otherwise must have reverted in most cases to the simple process of identification by visible physical characteristics. This was the broadest possible legal definition of the word "Aboriginal" and between 1924 and 1936 was used under the Aborigines' Protection Act only in relation to the prohibition of supply of alcohol and the orders to move away from a specified location.

It was the combined effect of movement of Aborigines into towns seeking unemployment relief of some kind and the placing of the burden of decision making concerning eligibility for Food and Work Relief onto local police which caused the marked increase in the number of people counted as "Aboriginal" in NSW in the Annual Census. According

1 APBOL, July 1920 (No.1058). Annual Census of Aborigines, printed forms for police patrol returns.
to these census figures, the Aboriginal population of NSW rose from 6,788 in 1927 to 10,467 in 1937, an increase of 3,679 or 54%.  

Before plunging into the difficulties of interpreting this census material, it is possible to state immediately that this change was not simply a reflection of natural increase, although contemporary white observers attributed the rise in Aboriginal population to a higher birth rate following the introduction of Family Endowment. The figures collected in association with the administration of the Endowment showed, in fact, that the number of children in Aboriginal recipient families had increased by an average of only 0.02 of one child from 1930 to 1937. Smith's demographic study shows that the NSW increase occurred across the whole age range of the Aboriginal population and he has suggested "voluntary reidentification" as the cause. Identification as "Aboriginal", however, put people at such an economic disadvantage, particularly after the introduction of Food Relief, that "reidentification" was unlikely to have been "voluntary". Indeed, as Smith himself has pointed out, the figures of the census reveal nothing about the state of mind of its objects but instead reveal the state of mind of those who recorded the figures.

An analysis of the Aboriginal population increase by Police District is shown on Figure 6.2. Drawing conclusions from the census figures is difficult because the most detailed census material has not all been preserved. Police District figures are available for only five years over the period, being 1927, 1929, 1931, 1934 and 1937, and of these years, individual police patrol returns from

---

1 These are my figures after collating the police patrol returns for both years' censes. The published figures are very slightly higher in 1927 and differ by 146 in 1937. Both differences appear to arise from errors in addition in the original censes, and the discrepancy in 1937 is caused mainly by the counting of two police patrol returns twice.

2 This view was held by the Minister for Education, DH Drummond, and formed after discussions with "prominent [white] citizens, police officers, managers of Aboriginal stations and others". Drummond to BS Stevens, Premier, 10/8/1937, PDCF, A37/193. The same view was held by Caroline Kelly, presumably after discussions with a similar range of people. Attached to "Study of a Small Native Community", p43, Elkin Papers.

3 Departmental memo to Premier, 14/9/1937, PDCF, A37/193.

4 Smith, "Aboriginal Population", p129.

5 Ibid, p126.

6 Ibid, p124.
PROPORTIONAL CHANGES IN THE RECORDING OF THE ABORIGINAL POPULATION BY POLICE CENSUS DISTRICT, 1927 TO 1937.

Figure 6.2

KEY:
- Police Census District Number
- T.E.A.P.: Total enumerated Aboriginal population.

"Total increase" refers to overall increase in T.E.A.P. from 1927 to 1937.
For actual population figures for each district refer to accompanying table.
within each District are not available for 1929. This creates a major problem because, as is obvious from Figure 6.2, the Police Districts cut across coherent land use areas. Districts 4 and 8, for example, each cover areas both of the low intensity land use of large scale pastoralism and of the high intensity land use of agriculture or smaller scale pastoralism. The police patrol returns could be used to redraw the district boundaries to allow more meaningful geographic and chronological analysis. As Food Relief was introduced late in 1930, however, (after the Aboriginal census for that year) the 1929 police patrol returns would be essential for such an analysis. Lacking these detailed returns for 1929, the reasonably economically unified Police Districts such as 10 (pastoral) and 7 (agricultural) must be used as a guide for tentative conclusions.

Table 6.1 sets out the population figures for each Police District in 1927 and 1937, while Table 6.2 sets out the changes in District population between each of the years for which figures are available. As Table 6.2 suggests, the greater proportion of the increase in Aboriginal population occurred before the introduction of Food Relief and the Annual Census totals show that 56% of the increase occurred between 1927 and 1930, with the remaining 44% of the increase occurring between 1931 and 1937. As is clear from the map and tables, the increase in each Police District was not in proportion to the District's revealed population of 1927, and this suggests that varying factors were operating in each area. It can be assumed, however, that the population increase between 1927 and 1930 was mainly the result of actual increases in the Aboriginal population around towns (and therefore within sight of the police), although there may have been some pressure from Aborigines to obtain Board rations if no alternative was available. The actual increases were made up of people of Aboriginal descent of whom the police had not been aware at all and so were in that sense "hidden" prior to the Depression.

The largely pastoral Police District 10 shows its highest increase in the earliest of the periods shown in Table 6.2. While it is difficult to make firm statements without the 1929 figures, a

1 Annual Census of Aborigines, and associated papers relating to NSW, 1927-1937, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.

2 Sources for information in both tables are the detailed police patrol returns where available.

3 Annual Census totals were published annually in APBR.
### Table 6.1
ENUMERATED ABORIGINAL POPULATION 1927 and 1937

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police District</th>
<th>1927 Population</th>
<th>1937 Population</th>
<th>Nett Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 and 2</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,652</td>
<td>2,268</td>
<td>616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>2,505</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>1,753</td>
<td>826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>1,256</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>6,788</td>
<td>10,467</td>
<td>3,679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6.2
CHANGE IN ENUMERATED ABORIGINAL POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police District</th>
<th>Increase 1927-1929</th>
<th>Increase 1929-1931</th>
<th>Increase 1931-1934</th>
<th>Increase 1934-1937</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 and 2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>- 294</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>- 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>- 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>- 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>- 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>- 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETT GAIN</td>
<td>1,555</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>- 47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
comparison of the 1927 police patrol returns for the pastoral areas in Police Districts 8 and 4, with the returns for 1931 and 1934 suggest a similar trend of high increases in the initial period followed by lower increases in later periods. This would imply a substantial "hidden" population in western pastoral areas, presumably those people who had been living on pastoral camps.

In the agricultural Police District 7, however, the increase in the initial period was low, while that in the second and third periods was significantly higher. Again, a similar trend appears to have occurred in the agricultural and intensive pastoral areas of Districts 8 and 4. As there were literally less places in which numbers of Aboriginal people could live unnoticed by and so "hidden" from police in areas of intensive European land use, this trend would suggest that either migration of Aborigines was occurring into these areas or that the police were identifying people as "Aboriginal" whom they would not previously have identified as such.

Oral evidence from Maris in pastoral north western NSW gives no indication that they considered moving into areas of intensive land use in search of either work or aid. On the contrary, people interviewed for this study often considered moving, or do move, across the border into Queensland looking for pastoral work. If there was little migration from pastoral areas, there may have been some within agricultural areas, such as the situation to be discussed later in which Guri families moved from Brungle, in District 9, to Cowra, in District 7. There was also certainly movement from the metropolitan area to rural areas and Bill Ferguson's family, as an example, moved from Sydney to Dubbo, in District 7, in 1933.

There seems, however, no reason to assume that such movement was great, which suggests instead that the higher, later rises of enumerated population in areas of intensive land use reflected more frequent police identification of Food or Work Relief applicants as "Aboriginal". Such people had always been within the range of police notice in the district, but the police had had no reason to define them officially as "Aboriginal" until the discrepancy between Food Relief and Aboriginal rations created a differential and discriminatory set of unemployment relief systems.

It is interesting to compare the changes in the enumeration of the NSW Aboriginal population with that in other States, as shown in Table 6.3. The most comparable situation is clearly that in Victoria
### Table 6.3

**ENUMERATED ABORIGINAL POPULATIONS 1927 and 1937, at Annual Aboriginal Census**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Territory</th>
<th>1927 Population</th>
<th>1937 Population</th>
<th>Nett Gain or Loss</th>
<th>Population Change as a Proportion of 1927 Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW*</td>
<td>6,793</td>
<td>10,603</td>
<td>+ 3,810</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>+ 137</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>17,733</td>
<td>18,024</td>
<td>+ 291</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>3,703</td>
<td>3,837</td>
<td>+ 134</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>25,582</td>
<td>26,327</td>
<td>+ 745</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>21,040</td>
<td>16,887</td>
<td>- 4,153</td>
<td>- 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* It will be noted that these figures differ slightly from those I have quoted earlier for NSW. The ones included in this table are the published figures. Having examined the police patrol returns for NSW in both these years, I found errors in the final additions and in 1937 a couple of communities were counted twice, so my earlier, slightly lower figures for each year are probably more accurate (in terms of the census if not of the actual Aboriginal population).
where, as the work of both Smith and Barwick shows, the actual Aboriginal population had begun to rise, as it had in NSW, soon after the turn of the century. Land use in Victoria was generally intensive and although larger scale pastoralism existed in the west, it is unlikely that pastoral camps remained to provide a source for a "hidden" population. Although the Victorian Aborigines' Protection Act used an even more limited definition of the word "Aboriginal" than that in NSW, the State's small enumerated Aboriginal population did rise substantially in proportional if not absolute terms over the decade 1927 to 1937. Even the proportional rise is not comparable to that in NSW, however, and it occurred extremely unevenly over this ten year period, with no regular pattern discernible. Apart from the lack of pastoral camps in Victoria, the major difference with NSW was that in Victoria Aborigines were routinely included in the normal unemployment relief mechanisms. In other words, the official Victorian practice of identifying as "Aboriginal" only people predominantly of Aboriginal descent was not reversed with the State's unemployment relief schemes as it was in NSW.

The financial disability of being defined as "Aboriginal" did not amount simply to the difference between Food Relief and Aboriginal rations, as Family Endowment must also be considered. Food Relief was means-tested and in effect a recipient family was allowed to receive the value of the Family Endowment for each of their children plus a little more income before the value of their Food Relief was reduced. An Aboriginal family, however, received the appropriate adult Aboriginal rations and then, for each child, a half ration which was deducted from their Family Endowment for that child. As noted earlier, there was then no guarantee that Aboriginal families would receive the balance of their Endowment, but if they did it was in kind or in orders on local stores. In fact, as the 35% of Endowment left unexpended by the Board in 1937 suggests, Aboriginal families often did not see their endowment at all.

The economic disadvantage of the definition "Aboriginal" was not the final one, however, for the issue of Board rations to Aborigines

2 William Cooper, AAL, to BS Stevens, Premier, 19/2/1936, PDCF, A36/404.
3 NSW Year Books, 1931-1932 to 1938-1939.
in the town in which they applied for relief was not the only option open to the police. As suggested by the circular concerning eligibility for Work Relief, it was possible for the police to refuse to issue rations in the town at all and instead to direct Aborigines to the nearest Board station to receive their rations there. As described in Chapter IV, there was often an intense desire on the part of white town authorities to have Aborigines removed from the precincts of the town and the police, although employed by the State, were extremely vulnerable to pressure from such authorities. The decision as to whether to issue Food or Work Relief, Aboriginal rations or nothing at all therefore took on a wider significance. Yet another weapon had been placed in the hands of town authorities who wished to remove Aborigines.

An attempt was made to manipulate ration issues in this way before the organized State system of Food Relief was established. White townspeople at Guyra, near Armidale, complained to police about "a congregation of aborigines" early in 1928 and the police, with Protection Board sanction, refused to issue further rations and instructed Aborigines to move to "regular reserves" for assistance.¹ The tactic of refusing people food proved reasonably effective, forcing some families to move to the only remaining reserve in the area, 64 miles to the south at Walcha.² In 1931, however, there were still 61 Guris at Guyra and the townspeople were still applying pressure to the police to have them removed.³ Further measures, presumably along similar lines, proved more effective and in 1937 there were no Maris in Guyra.⁴ Close by at Woolbrook, in 1937, at the same time that the town's authorities were demanding segregation of the school by the exclusion of Aboriginal children of very fair skin colour, these children's parents, also of very fair colouring, were being refused Food Relief and were under pressure to move to Walcha reserve, 20 miles away, to receive their rations.⁵

1 APBM, 23/3/1928.
2 Police patrol return, Walcha, Annual Census, 1931. In "Comments" section police officer specifies that increase in reserve population caused by Guyra families.
5 Woolbrook public school file, 1937, DEIL.
The possibility of local pressure being exerted on police was more likely with Work Relief than with Food Relief. Work Relief was not only organized and administered by Shire or Municipal Councils, but was also partly funded by them. There was therefore a higher degree of local vested interest in the distribution of work relief opportunities on the part of both local authorities and local white unemployed. One particularly well-documented example of the manipulation of Work Relief to control Aboriginal movement and place of residence occurred at Cowra in 1936. Early in that year, the Municipal Council complained to the Protection Board about "an influx of aborigines" and Inspector E. Smithers (promoted from manager at Urunga) was sent to make "discrete inquiries".¹ Smithers reached the conclusion suggested to him by the Municipal Council, which alleged that because the Shire Council was employing some Aborigines on Relief Work, families had been attracted to Cowra from Brungle station. The solution therefore appeared to be the discontinuation of Relief Work to all unemployed Aborigines.²

In fact the Guris who had left Brungle had done so because of intolerable managerial control there and on arriving at Cowra had camped inside the Municipal boundary on the golf links. They had thereby made themselves ineligible for Shire Work Relief in any event, as this was offered only to those living within the Shire boundaries but outside those of the Municipality.³ Such details did not apparently come to light in Smithers' inquiries and so the police were ordered to discontinue Work Relief to all Aborigines. The result was that six to eight Guris who had been living independently of the Board for a number of years and had received award wages when employed, were abruptly refused Shire Relief Work and offered no explanation by the police other than that they should "see the Board".⁴ Although the "wrong" people had been affected by this order the situation had not been rectified by December 1937 and showed no signs of changing in the future. To make certain that the two or three Guri families from Brungle did in fact return, however, the Board successfully prosecuted the men for abducting their own children from the station and the

¹ OBM, 4/3/1936.
² SC on APB, ME, p70.
³ Ibid, pp68-70.
⁴ Ibid, p69.
fathers spent five days each in gaol.\(^1\)

Whether used as a weapon by local authorities or not, the widespread exclusion of Aborigines from both Food and Work Relief was confirmed by the Protection Board and by independent observers like Caroline Kelly.\(^2\) As Kelly pointed out as well, when Aborigines were included in Work Relief on the south coast, it was usually because some particularly heavy manual work was being done and white unemployed had objected to such conditions.

Aboriginal bitterness at their denial of the unemployment relief available to whites was intense and widespread, as suggested by their early and then continuing protests to politicians.\(^3\) Objectively, the "support" of unemployed Aboriginal workers by Board rations rather than by Food Relief was an enforced conservation of non-capitalist economic activities (the collection of protein resources) to provide an advantage to the capitalist economy. Subjectively, as the instruction to police to issue Food Relief only to Aborigines who had done "a white man's work" indicates, the denial of the unemployment relief provided to whites was seen by both whites and Aborigines as a denial of the Aboriginal role in the capitalist economy and as a disparagement of the value of Aboriginal labour.

Guris at Wreck Bay had supported themselves by fishing before the Depression had destroyed their market. They told Caroline Kelly in 1936:

> The Government gets revenue out of us. We pay on the railway for our fish to go to market and we pay out fishing licences just like the white men. When the Depression came we had a terrible time. We couldn't get the dole although white people got it and this isn't their country. It's our country and yet we couldn't get the dole.\(^4\)

The experience of Arthur Dodd was not atypical of Maris in the north western pastoral areas. After his step-daughter was taken by Donaldson in 1919, Arthur tried to keep out of the reach of the Board. School segregations had forced him to leave his wife and

\(^1\) Ibid, p68.


\(^3\) NPD, V.124, p316, 9/12/1930; p1057, 4/2/1931; V.148, p3780, 1475/1936.

\(^4\) Kelly, "Study of a Small Native Community", p34.
children on Board stations but he had spent the 1920s shearing, as an 
AWU member and for award wages. When he applied for Food Relief at 
Walgett the police refused him, giving him only Board rations. Asked 
if he thought he was entitled to Food Relief, Arthur replied bitterly:

Oh yes, I did. But we had to take what's 
coming. No good arguing the point with 'em 
because they'd wipe you straight off, give you 
nothing. It happened to a couple of 'em, they was 
giving cheek back to the boss bloke [police]. 
They were strict that day.¹

Kylie Tennant has recalled that Aborigines at Coonabarabran 
insisted that they be treated as "workers" and as "just unemployed 
pople", entitled to the same relief as other unemployed workers. In 
this assertion, however, they were opposed not only by the town's 
establishment and the police, but by the town's left as well, its ALP 
branch and others organizing non-official aid to the unemployed. 
These people rejected Tennant's proposal that Aborigines in the 
town's unemployed camps be catered for as well as whites in, for 
example, collections of food. They argued that "provision has been 
made for them [the Aborigines] at the Mission ... they'll get fed 
there and they shouldn't cut in" on relief for white unemployed. The 
"Mission" was Burra Bee Dee, six miles out of town, from which white 
townspeople universally believed Aborigines in the town camp to have 
come, although those Aborigines who spoke to Tennant insisted that 
they had not lived on the Board station previously.²

Yet there were some Aborigines who were refused Food Relief in 
towns, because they were defined as "too black" and told to "go to 
the Mission", only to find when they did so that according to the 
Board's definitions they were "too white" to receive rations. This 
possibility was pointed out in Parliament as early as February 1931, 
but the anomaly remained.³ Perhaps an extreme example was that at 
Cumeragunja, where a newly arriving manager, J.G. Danvers, found in 
1934 that the retiring manager had refused both rations and entry to 
the station to a large number of families who had already been refused 
Food Relief because the local police had defined them as " Aboriginal". 
These families had been camped at Barmah across the Murray river for 
some years by 1934 and had survived with some fishing and on Family

1 Interview T39.
2 Interview T53.
78 NPD, V.124, p1057, 4/2/1931.
Endowment. Danvers' correction of the situation doubled the ration list of the station.¹

The fourth casualty of the Depression was the condition of the Board's reserves and stations themselves. The discriminatory effect of the refusals of Food and Work Relief succeeded in forcing many Aborigines onto reserves and stations. While the total enumerated Aboriginal population increased by 29% between 1928 and 1934, the population on reserves and stations increased by 77% of the 1928 figure. Over the same period, the proportion of the total Aboriginal population living on reserves and stations increased from 28% to 39%.²

The reserve and station populations are not differentiated in census returns, but from the Board's records it appears that station populations increased from the relatively stable 1920s figure of 15% to 17% of the total Aboriginal population to at least 33% of the population in 1936.³ The Board's reserves and stations therefore faced a massive increase in population compared to their mid-1920s levels and this increase represented a greater proportion of the Aboriginal population than had ever before been forced under direct Protection Board supervision.

As suggested by Kylie Tennant's recollections of Coonabarabran, there appears to have been a general assumption that the Board provided adequate food and shelter for Aborigines and that Aboriginal unemployed were offered rent-free housing and other benefits not offered to white unemployed, thus balancing the deficit in Board ration issues. This assumption could have been fostered by the Board's Reports of the 1920s in which it described conditions on its reserves and stations in glowing terms or even by the Board Report of 1930-1931, in which it expressed concern at the condition of both reserve and station housing, but still insisted that Aborigines were:

... provided with housing accommodation, food, clothing, blankets, medical and if necessary dental, attention, and those living outside the Reserves may, if circumstances compel it, return thereto and receive every reasonable assistance.⁴

This statement was virtually a total illusion.

¹ SC on APB, ME, p74.
² Annual Census of Aborigines, 1928 to 1934.
³ APBR, 1920-1921 to 1936-1937.
The Board's housing had in fact been in appalling condition before the Depression, despite the Board's statement in November 1927, that Aborigines were "comfortably housed" and that its program of building and renovations during the mid-1920s meant that Aborigines at a number of stations, including Angledool and Cumeragunja, were "living under conditions equal to and in some cases superior to those existing in some white settlements".\(^1\) Overcrowding on reserves and stations during the 1920s had only been controlled by the artificially low demand produced by the Board's dispersal activity. This brief respite had allowed the Board to complete some of the renovations recommended as urgent by investigating Board members in 1911 and 1912.\(^2\) The evidence of the Board's managers at the Select Committee hearings of 1937 showed that the "renovations" which had occurred at Cumeragunja during the 1920s had been superficial in the extreme and that the total number of houses there had actually been reduced over that time.\(^3\) At Angledool, Maris had been living in two-roomed tin huts with dirt floors and no water supply during the 1920s.\(^4\) Neither situation could be accurately described as "comfortable".

With the Depression causing "a very large influx of Aborigines" to the reserves and stations, conditions deteriorated still further.\(^5\) The Board began to express anxiety in 1928 and pleaded with the Government for more funds for housing and water supplies.\(^6\) The Government not only refused such requests but progressively reduced

---

1. Ibid, 1926-1927, p1.
2. Compare the Inspection Reports of GE Ardill (Snr) and T Garvin, 1911 and 1912, CSIL Box 7121, particularly in relation to recommendations about Brewarrina and Cumeragunja stations, with the conditions exposed to have actually existed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in SC on APB, ME, particularly the evidence of JG Danvers, GN Milne, Sr I Pratt and R Brain. Conditions at Brewarrina station during the 1920s, described in Matthews (ed), Jimmie Barker, pp53-119, demonstrate how far the Board's public claims of improvements to, for example, the water supply (APBR, 1926-1927, p1) fell short of reality.
3. Compare the claims made by the Board in APBR, 1925-1926, to have completely renovated all buildings at Cumeragunja with Danvers' evidence, SC on APB, ME, pp74-76; 78-80; 82-84; 101.
5. APBM, 13/11/1930.
APBR, 1929-1930, p2; 1930-1931, p2; 1931-1932, p2; 1933-1934, p1; 1934-1935, p1.
APBM, 19/10/1928; 10/5/1929; 31/5/1930.
the Board'; Vote.¹ In 1930 the Board's funds were stabilized in real terms only by the addition of the Family Endowment of Aborigines.² From 1931 the Board's expenditure increased, but virtually nothing could be spent on housing as the demand for rations was so great.³

The main source for what little money the Board did receive for housing was the Unemployment Relief Council (URC) which granted funds in the 1930-1931 period on the basis that unemployed men (not necessarily Aborigines) be given work on the building jobs.⁴ The total amount of this funding is not recorded but was certainly limited and after 1933 the source dried up altogether.⁵ The Board was not able to make an equitable or rational distribution of even this funding, however, as its 1929 agreement with Randwick Council committed it to spending the major proportion on "remodelling" La Perouse reserve.⁶ It appears from the Board's records that for the whole of the rest of the State it was unable, apart from the distribution of some tents⁷, to erect any dwellings before 1935 aside from 33 "steel-framed huts".⁸ Aborigines remember these to have been prefabricated, two-roomed, timber-floored construction workers' huts.⁹

For two stations, figures are available for the population increase and so too are descriptions of the housing. On Brewarrina, the population increased from around 70 in February 1931 to 170 in February 1934,¹⁰ a rise of 142%. Over this same time, only "two or three rough huts" were built by the Board on the station and although there was an obvious need for more, no money was available to finance their construction.¹¹ Maris at the station built temporary accommodation and the original two-roomed huts became very crowded. From mid-

¹ Ibid, and 13/11/1939.
³ APBR, 1929-1930, p1; 1930-1931, pp1,2; 1931-1932, p1.
⁵ Ibid, 1931-1932, p1.
⁶ APBM, 12/1/1933; 9/3/1933; 21/7/1933.
⁷ Ibid, 31/7/1930.
⁸ APBR, 1929-1930, p2; 1930-1931, p2.
¹⁰ Ibid, p1.
¹¹ Interview T51.
¹² SC on APB, ME, p73.
1936, an average of two to three families was sharing each of these huts, although a further small number of huts had been built early in 1935.\(^1\)

At Cumeragunja, conditions were similar. From 1927 to 1934, the station population increased from 169 to 352, an increase of 183 people or 108%.\(^2\) There had, however, been no new building at all done on the station at Board expense over that time, although a white neighbour was authorized to cut timber on the reserve land on the condition that some was retained by the manager supposedly for station building.\(^3\) With Danvers' arrival in February 1934, an attempt was made to improve the situation, but available funds extended only to a new coat of paint for the existing houses.\(^4\) There were only 25 of these and Guri residents of the station had responded to the severe overcrowding by building 20 "temporary" camps, with flour-bag walls over bush timber frames, and with earthen floors on which many people had to sleep, having no beds.\(^5\)

There was in fact, then, no "rent-free" housing for Aborigines thrown out of work from 1928. The reserves and stations offered little more than a patch of ground on which to build a temporary camp, with some security against pressure from local authorities to move on. While this was not an unimportant security, it was gained only for the price of the humiliation and indignity of police or managerial supervision.

The overcrowding and the resulting deterioration in housing and hygiene facilities on the reserves and stations led inevitably to a worsening of health conditions among Aborigines there. Tuberculosis appears to have been common among at least some reserve and station communities\(^6\) but there were also epidemics of acute respiratory infections such as influenza and whooping cough recorded on some stations in 1932 and 1934.\(^7\) The most publicized disease, however, and the most significant in terms of the response it prompted, was

\(^1\) Ibid, p16.
\(^2\) Annual Census of Aborigines, Moama, 1927, 1928, 1931, 1934.
\(^3\) SC on APB, ME, pp74-79.
\(^4\) Ibid, p76.
\(^5\) Ibid, pp78-79.
\(^6\) Ibid, pp3,73,88,90.
\(^7\) Ibid, pp5,7,90.

APBR, 1931-1932, p3.
eye disease. According to Board field staff, two of whom were trained nursing sisters, trachoma and conjunctivitis were endemic on many stations and reserves in the 1930s. These included locations on the coast, like Purfleet at Taree, and some in moderate climatic locations like Walcha and Cumeragunja as well as those in the hotter and dustier north west, where the prevalence of trachoma would be more predictable.\footnote{Aborigines at locations such as Weilmoringle, the pastoral camp near Goodooga, and Barmah, opposite Cumeragunja, which were not situated on reserve land also suffered from eye disease.\footnote{The only comparative medical surveys to be done suggested, however, that these eye diseases were less prevalent in the non-reserve camp communities than in those under direct Board control.}} Aborigines at locations such as Weilmoringle, the pastoral camp near Goodooga, and Barmah, opposite Cumeragunja, which were not situated on reserve land also suffered from eye disease.\footnote{The only comparative medical surveys to be done suggested, however, that these eye diseases were less prevalent in the non-reserve camp communities than in those under direct Board control.}

The eye infections were apparently chronic in winter and then flared up each summer as acute disease. In the summers of 1932-1933, 1934-1935 and 1935-1936, however, this pattern occurred with greatly increased severity at Brewarrina, Angledool, Toomelah and Cumeragunja.\footnote{An ophthalmologist called in to survey and treat the Brewarrina station community over the summer of 1932-1933 found that 83% of the residents were suffering from trachoma, corneal ulcers or other serious eye conditions (which, it might be noted, did not include gonococcal ophthalmia).\footnote{Doctors called in to treat the trachoma epidemics and members of the Board's staff who gave evidence to the Select Committee in 1937, all attributed the incidence of eye disease to the physical conditions under which the Aboriginal residents of the reserves and stations were living. The conditions specified were the strong sunlight, the heat, dust and flies, the poor quality of the Board food supplies, particularly the absence of vegetables, and, generally, the overcrowding and the "filthy conditions".}}

\begin{enumerate}
\item[1] SC on APB, ME, pp1,2F,74,86.
\item[2] Ibid, pp2,86.
\item[3] Report by Dr AE Machin, Principal Medical Officer, Education Department, 21/12/1937. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
\item[5] Ibid, p73.
\item[6] Ibid, pp1-6,24-25,72-74.
\end{enumerate}
Such casualties of the Depression led to heightened political activity both on and off the reserves and stations, although organizing on the stations was difficult under managerial surveillance. Nevertheless, conflict on the stations over the work-for-rations system, for example, increased. This was not, of course, a new issue. As early as 1889 the Cumeragunja people had clearly stated their view that rations were compensation, although only partial and unjustly inadequate, for loss of livelihood by dispossession. Station residents at Cumeragunja, Warangesda, Brungle and Grafton had all protested during the 1910s at this system in which managers demanded two days work on the station before rations would be issued. The comparison with Work Relief however, further fuelled Aboriginal arguments that, like white unemployed, they were prepared to work for wages but not for food. There may have been either individual or group protests before 1936 but if so they went unrecorded. In June 1936, however, there was a generalized refusal to work for rations on Wallaga Lake; in August 1937, there was a total refusal to work for rations at Menindee; at the same time Guris at Burnt Bridge were protesting against the system; in December 1937, there was a strike on Brewarrina over the issue; and in August 1938, Guris at Purfleet struck for wages rather than rations. While the protests at Brewarrina and Purfleet occurred in the supportive context of public Aboriginal political activity, there is no reason to suppose that they did not represent general and long-standing grievances.

Off the stations, there was some Aboriginal participation in the unemployed workers' movements in Sydney and undoubtedly more than has been recorded. One Aboriginal family, the Eatocks, were active on the left of the Communist Party and played prominent roles in eviction struggles in 1931 and 1932. Kylie Tennant has recalled an organizer of the unemployed who was Aboriginal and had just been released after a gaol sentence resulting from political actions in Sydney before he

1 Kelly C, "Study of a Small Native Community", p50.
2 SC on APB, ME, p104.
4 SC on APB, ME, p121.
5 Abo Call, August 1938, p2.
6 Nadia Wheatley has collected information on this family.
passed through Coonabarabran in 1932.¹ Bill Ferguson was dismissed from Relief Work in Cabramatta in Sydney in 1932 or 1933 for addressing a stop-work meeting held by his fellow relief workers.² Only the Maris of Dubbo, however, succeeded in directing the attention of white unemployed activists towards the situation of Aborigines. With the exception of the Bourke branch of the Pastoral Workers' Industrial Union (PWIU), which made a call for racial wage equality in 1931³, the Dubbo unemployed organizers were the only white, left group to support Aborigines actively before 1935.

One of these white organizers, Jack Booth, has recalled that the association between Aboriginal and white unemployed in Dubbo had been developing at least as early as the beginning of 1932, when Aborigines took active roles in support of white unionists and unemployed. Tom Peckham, who lived in town and Ted Taylor who lived on Talbragar reserve three miles away, were prominent in such activity and, with a number of other Maris, regularly attended unemployed workers' meetings and gained white support in appeals for aid. "I wouldn't say we were enthusiastic", Jack Booth admitted, describing the distance in the relationship at that stage, "but we used to help them, treat them in a casual way like we would a casual white person".⁴ Even this level of communication was unusual, however, and in July 1932, the white Dubbo unemployed were the only ones to protest when Aborigines, who had formerly received Food Relief, were refused it and issued only with Protection Board rations.⁵

Jack Booth has described the Relief Work camps in which uneducated and often illiterate men like himself, both white and black, would discuss their ideas:

> Around the campfire, night after night, we'd be laying down the law. There was more philosophizing going on then than there is now ... with all their semi-illiteracy, they'd mispronounce their words, the Aborigines too. 'The abolishment of the Aborigines' Protection Board', they used to

¹ Interview TS3.
² Undated and unsourced press clipping in newspaper clipping collection of Mrs Pearl Gibbs.
³ Rank and File Bulletin, (official organ of the PWIU), No.64, 17/11/1931, p2.
⁴ Interviews TS7, TS8.
⁵ WW, 1/7/1932.
punch home hard n that one, Tom Peckha: and Ted Taylor were on eat. 'The abolishment of the Aborigines' Protection Board, and the sooner you do it, the bettr: ... with the mispronouncing of their words, w: still the idea was: were all the time.

Jack's impression was th: the abo: the missions run by the Protection Board was the main : that this was not a demand for r: a:ation of reserve land. He explained:

When they attacked the mission, they wanted to get rid of them alright, but they wanted to be their own masters. They didn't want this idea of white supremacy, the white man master, so to speak. They wanted to be regulated by themselves, with their own elected leaders or whatever. They wanted their home or their tribal land that it was on, they were quite satisfied to remain there, (but) they didn't feel as part of it, because they were under the orders of the white overlord, that was the trouble. And, the very fact that in the final analysis, it was the police force that was the master.1

The emphasis among central western Maris and Guris on the Protection Board and its managerial control was not surprising in 1932 when the redistribution of Board field staff over the previous decade is considered. As the following Figure 6.3 shows there had been only four new stations created between 1921 and 1927: Pilliga, Cowra, the short-lived Bassendean and Carowra Tank, a station which reflected the incursions of white settlement into the most arid zone of the State. The Carowra Tank Wongaibon probably had little contact with Maris at Dubbo in the 1920s, while the Tingha people who formed the nucleus of the Bassendean station were unlikely to have had contact with Dubbo at all. The Dubbo community, however, had links in both northern and southern directions and were aware of conditions not only on Burra Bee Dee and probably Brewarrina but also on the newer Cowra and Pilliga. On this latter station, conflict with the manager was so high in 1927 that his house was "maliciously" burned to the ground and this manager eventually transferred in 1931 with a "warning" to "alter his methods of dealing with the Aborigines".2

With its slightly increased budget from 1931, the Board had imposed managers on the Depression-swollen populations of three north

1 Interviews T57, T58.
2 APBOL, 19/10/1927.
3 APBM, 3/7/1931.
STATIONS IN EXISTENCE 1932

KEY
- Existing Station with date of creation if since 1921.
- Site of Station closed between 1921 and 1932.
coast reserves and of Bulgandramine, just 39 miles to the south west of Dubbo. There was as well a non-residential matron-teacher at Nanima reserve at Wellington, 30 miles east of Dubbo, where a segregated school had operated since 1909. At Gulargambone, 74 miles north of Dubbo, a reserve with a segregated school and matron-teacher had been re-established in 1922 after acrimonious disputes with local whites. In ten years, then, the central west had seen a marked intensification of Board power.

In March 1933, the Mari children of Talbragar reserve, Ted Taylor's home, were abruptly refused entry to the public school at Brocklehurst, a mile from the reserve and four from Dubbo. This school segregation occurred within months of that at Moree, which had been the first since 1929. Together, these two segregations signalled the resurgence of white opposition to Aboriginal access to town services after a respite caused by the early chaotic Depression years. While the wider significance of the Brocklehurst segregation may not have been obvious to Talbragar Mari, its immediate consequences were: their children had no schooling. Even with Dubbo Mari associations with the white left, it took eighteen months to develop a campaign of white support. This culminated in protests at the segregation in July 1935, by the Dubbo ALP who were then joined by a local clergyman and the town's chamber of commerce. Even then, white supporters asked for either readmission to the public school or a separate school on the reserve, the second option being one unlikely to have represented Mari opinion. This second option was the one which was taken up, although not until April 1936.

It was in Dubbo with an established link between Mari and the white left but also with a high degree of tension as reflected in the school segregation, that Bill Ferguson and his family settled in 1933. Ferguson's previous activity in unemployed workers' actions ensured rapidly developed and close relations with the town's unemployed white organizers. So too did his association with the left wing of his union, the AWU, membership of which was extremely common among the

1 SMH, 10/7/1935.
2 Dubbo Municipal Council Minutes, 2/7/1935.
   SMH, 10/7/1935; 12/9/1935.
3 Education Department, Employment Record Cards.
   APBM, 1/7/1936
pastoral-employed Maris of the north west. Ferguson's membership of the ALP also facilitated links with the town's left, although this formal political affiliation was not so commonly reflected among Maris of the region. Ferguson's other major interest was somewhat at variance with the rest of his alliances. He and his family were fundamentalist Christians, with an active commitment which seems to have been more common among Aborigines on the coast than in the west at this time. Ferguson did not, however, approve of white missionaries, regarding them as ineffective evangelists because they were alienated from and patronizing to Aborigines. He favoured Aboriginal lay preaching, such as that being done by his brother Duncan along the Darling river at the time, because Aboriginal lay preachers' political partisanship allowed them to communicate the gospel effectively while at the same time actively supporting the Aboriginal community in its material and political interests.

In the west as on the coast, however, the Aboriginal political movement remained at an informal level over the first five years of the 1930s, as everyone struggled simply to survive the worst years of the Depression.

---

1 Interviews conducted for this study. Only one of the 17 north western men interviewed had not at some time been a member of the AWU. Jack Orcher, Interview T16, appears to be one of probably a number of men who functioned as an unofficial organizer among Maris, encouraging them to join the union and explaining the benefits of membership, at around the same time that AWU advocate Grayndler was discussing a "nigger's wage".

2 Only one of these north western men, Val Mingo of Brewarrina, was a member of the local ALP branch, which he found "very slow" to take up issues concerning Aborigines. Interviews 3 and 24.

3 Interviews conducted for this study suggest that the influence of fundamentalist Christianity was not so widespread in the north west during the 1909-39 period, despite the presence of white missionaries, as it was on the coast and in the south west at the same period or as it is in the north west now. Most professing elderly Christian Maris in the north west today were converted late in their lives.

4 SC on APB, ME, p68, for Bill Ferguson's views. APBH, 1/11/1929; 17/12/1929, for Duncan Ferguson's presence at Pooncarie.
THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES' LEAGUE

The AAL, which launched its challenge to the NSW Protection Board in 1934, was not formed inside the State borders at all, but rather in Melbourne. Unlike the APA, the AAL had an extremely tight community base, being made up largely of exiles from Cumeragunja. Some members of the AAL had close associations with other south western NSW communities and there were long-standing relationships with Aborigines in Victoria but Cumeragunja remained a focal point. Nevertheless, the organization made more claim to being a nationally representative body than the APA had done and addressed itself repeatedly to national issues. It is not know" if the exile community in Melbourne had had contact with the APA, but their concerns were certainly running parallel and it was in 1927, the most active year for the APA, that the Morgan family had made its unsuccessful demand that the Protection Board restore the family farm blocks on Cumeragunja.¹

The motive force behind the AAL was clearly William Cooper, who had applied to the Government for land near Cumeragunja in 1887.² Through the disastrous years for the Cumeragunja community from 1908 to 1933, Cooper had remained on the station, witnessing the sustained refusal of both Board rations and Food Relief to many Cumeragunja families. He had left in 1933 only because his residence on the reserve made him ineligible for the old age pension. At the age of 72, he moved to Melbourne and joined forces with the Cumeragunja exile community there.³ Cooper became secretary of the newly-formed AAL in 1934 and was surrounded in the organization by younger Cumeragunja people like Doug Nicholls, the treasurer and Shadrack James, whose sustained battle with the Protection Board to stay on Cumeragunja has been described earlier. The AAL activists included Margaret Tucker, whose father had : t : from Cumeragunja although she had spent much of her childhood at . . . . . and Moonacullah. Her grim experiences, and those of her sisters, during their "apprenticeships" had given her good reason to fight the Board. There were, as well, families like the Morgans who had farmed the family blocks and whose

1 APBM, 4/2/1927.
2 W Cooper to JM Chanter, MP, 4/11/1887, CSIL, Box 1/2667.
intense bitterness and resentment of the Board for its resumption of those blocks was unabated after twenty years. There appears to have been regular contact between the Melbourne community and those of their families still at Cumeragunja and Doug Nicholls, for example, who had not been formally expelled, could move relatively freely between the two places.

The only white person in the organization was its president, A.P. Burdeu, who was a unionist but whose associations and motivation appear to have been Christian. Burdeu acted as a close personal support for Cooper and worked to generate public interest by forming a white support group, the Aborigines' Uplift Society. He was in close contact with the Sydney-based, all-white Association for the Protection of Native Races (APNR), an umbrella organization in which many Christian and some specifically missionary groups participated. Canon J.S. Needham had been a vice-president of the Sydney organization for some time before 1934, but in that year the missionary and anthropological reformist groups were formally united when the newly-appointed Professor of Anthropology, A.P. Elkin, became president of the APNR.

There were also, however, some close personal connections between members of the AAL and individual members of the Melbourne branch of the Communist Party (CPA), although this caused conflicts with white Christian supporters and, indeed, with the christianity of some of the Aborigines themselves. Burdeu was opposed to and worked against the involvement with the CPA. In 1936, however, the AAL affiliated with the Peace Council, a "united front" organization with considerable communist membership, indicating that at this time associations with the white political left were strong. Cooper's 1936 comment on the nature of white support in general was:

1 Horner, *Vote Ferguson*, p47.
2 Correspondence between Burdeu and APNR in *Elkin Papers*. Burdeu's Uplift Society was functioning in 1939 (*Argus*, 1/3/1939) and had apparently been in existence for some considerable time before but I have no date of formation.
4 Transcript of interview with Margaret Tucker, recorded Alec Morgan, September 1980, pp37-38.
Our friends among the white race are growing in numbers and interest, although we are often sorry to note that some of them regard us as inferior clay.¹

The early activities of the AAL are not well-documented and oral evidence will be essential to a full account of the organization. Some indication of this activity can, however, be seen in the work, during 1934, of Mrs A. Morgan, who had been taken up by the white media in an example of its romantic interest in Aboriginal exotica from the safely-distant past. Mrs Morgan, who was over 60, had given a number of broadcasts on Melbourne radio station 3LO, retelling the folklore taught to her by her grandmother. Eventually, however, like Joe Anderson, she was able to speak for herself about the conditions faced by Aborigines in the present. Mrs Morgan wrote a letter which was published in September 1934, in the Labor Call, in which she attacked the Protection Board theft of Aboriginal land at Cumeragunja and the ensuing disciplinary expulsions of people like herself and her husband, who had "protested against this injustice" and so were "classed as agitators".² Using Cumeragunja as an example, she detailed the NSW Board's dispersal tactics, and condemned the "apprenticeship" system:

At the age of fourteen our girls were sent to work — poor illiterate trustful little girls to be gulled by the promises of unscrupulous white men. We all know the consequences. But, of course, one of the functions of the Aborigines' Protection Board is to build a white Australia.¹

Like Jane Duren before her, Mrs Morgan used the contradiction between the Australian myth of "fair play" and the conditions faced by Aborigines to expose the hypocrisy of white Australians. She denied that Aborigines lived under the British flag, declaring:

We say that we live under the Black Flag of the Aborigines' 'Protection' Board — we have not the same liberty as the white man, nor do we expect the same justice.³

¹ Ibid.
² Labor Call, 20/9/1934. Various members of the Morgan family were expelled from Cumeragunja throughout the 1910s, usually on grounds like "insolence" and "defiance of the manager's authority", eg, APM, 11/10/1917 and 13/6/1918.
³ Labor Call, 20/9/1934.
⁴ Ibid.
Whit Aborigines wanted, Mrs Morgan said, was better conditions and the "abolition of the rule of the Black Flag", but above all:

We want a home. You have taken our beautiful country from us — a 'free gift'.

Mrs Morgan called for support for the new Aboriginal organization and early in 1935 she made at least one public speech, in which she attacked the "poverty, prejudice and injustice" against which her people were struggling and stated that "the Blacks of Australia are trying to emancipate themselves".

This national perspective was reflected in the first campaign of the AAL, which was aimed at the Federal Government and was an attempt to deal with the disenfranchisement of Aborigines at a Federal level. Cooper drafted and circulated a petition to the King, which asked for "royal intervention to prevent the extinction of the race", for better conditions and for Federal parliamentary representation by an Aborigine (or, if that were not granted, by a white person of Aboriginal choice), to be elected from a separate Aboriginal electorate on the New Zealand model." This petition gained between 1,800 and 2,000 Aboriginal signatories before it was presented to Federal Parliament in 1937. Cooper's petition had probably been circulating in Melbourne before he applied successfully to the NSW Protection Board for permission to collect signatures from NSW Aborigines in April 1934. Among those who spread the petition around NSW Aboriginal communities was Helen Bailie, a consistent white supporter of the AAL, and at some time during 1934 Bill Ferguson joined her in this work. By March 1935, the Protection Board had become alarmed at the political organizing associated with the collection of signatures for the petition, and circularized all managers warning them not to let either Bailie or Ferguson onto any station without special permission from the Chairman.

The AAL agitation gained an audience with the Federal Minister of the Interior in February 1935, for Cooper and four other

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Melbourne Herald, 23/1/1935; 24/1/1935.
4 AAL, Annual Report, 1936.
5 Ibid; The Native Voice, I, 1, April 1940, pp3-4.
6 APBM, 13/4/1934.
7 Ibid, 13/3/1935.
Cumeragunja men, in which they presented their case for Federal Aboriginal representation, a national department to manage Aboriginal affairs and administrations in each State composed, at least in part, of Aborigines.\(^1\) There was little response, but the AAL clarified its position on national Aboriginal matters in the following year, when it requested of the Minister for the Interior that any "concessions" made to Aborigines of mixed descent be made to "full-blood" people as well. The Minister apparently replied that it was not intended to make any concessions to "full-bloods".

The AAL responded by making the most unequivocal assertion of Aboriginal unity to be expressed at any time throughout the thirties, totally repudiating the European assumptions and structures of thought which classified and tried to divide people on the basis of skin colour. The AAL Annual Report of 1936 stated:

> We should nail our colours to the mast in respect of this matter, making our slogan, 'Full equality for the dark race with the white race, and no differentiation between the full-blood and those of mixed-blood'.\(^2\)

From February 1936, Cooper's extensive correspondence with the NSW Premier has been preserved, giving an insight into AAL policy and into conditions at Cumeragunja station. Both of these elements are present and interrelated in each of Cooper's letters, but for clarity they will be dealt with separately here.

AAL policy was made up of two parts: a demand for action to be taken immediately and then a proposal for the future development of the Aboriginal community. The immediate action called for was the ending of all discriminatory practices against Aborigines, in "civic, political and economic" spheres.\(^3\) As Cooper stated three times to the NSW Premier in 1936 and as the Annual Report for that year reiterated for the national situation, the demand was for:

> Full Citizens Rights to all Aboriginals, whether living on settlements or not. This to include the payment of sustenance, as to whites, for all unemployed natives.
> We claim the right to work for full wages or the payment of full sustenance (dole) if unable to work.\(^4\)

1 Horner, Vote Ferguson, p47.
2 AAL, Annual Report, 1936.
3 W Cooper to BS Stevens, Premier, NSW, 15/11/1936, PDCF, A36/1028.
AAL, Annual Report, 1936.
The recognition of Aboriginal participation in the economy by a guarantee of equal wages and equal unemployment relief was a central component of the AAL definition of Full Citizens Rights. Cooper pointed out, as had been done in 1889 by Cumeragunja people, that "we are entitled to reasonable comfort, merely from the fact that this land was ours, with assured living, before the whites came".¹ He was insistent, however, that the main basis on which the AAL called for equal unemployment relief was the fact that Aboriginal workers, when employed, provided labour of equal value to that of white workers and that this equality of labour must be recognized by equality of relief when unemployed.² The refusal of Food Relief to Aborigines in NSW went beyond even this principle of justice, Cooper argued, and became a matter of urgency because of the poor quantity and quality of Board rations, which could be "eked out to maintain life, though it could not prevent malnutrition".³ On similar bases of both principle and urgent necessity, the AAL called for payment of benefits such as State Endowment and Commonwealth maternity allowance to all Aboriginal families.

The question of education was also considered urgent, with Cooper protesting at the low standards in all Aboriginal schools and particularly in the "special" schools in NSW. The AAL demanded that the syllabus in all Aboriginal schools be raised to that in white schools and that Aboriginal children have free access to all public schools and be encouraged to proceed to the highest levels. The 1936 Annual Report stated:

> We natives know the value of education and ask that all natives have the same opportunities to qualify as white people have. . . We claim that our race is just as capable.

As part of the demand for Full Citizens Rights, the practices of the NSW Protection Board were condemned, in particular the taking of children to Cootamundra, "which our people regard with dread, as being in the nature of a gaol"; the "apprenticing" of these children, "causing deep perturbation and grief to the mothers"; and the power of the Board managers to expel Aborigines without any avenue of appeal, which had meant that "many good men and women have been expelled for

¹ Cooper to Stevens, 19/2/1936.
² Ibid, 15/11/1936.
³ Ibid, 19/2/1936.
⁴ AAL, Annual Report, 1936.
no good reason as agitators". Finally, there was the AAL demand for Aboriginal representation in Federal Parliament, made with specific reference to the situation in New Zealand where Maoris had not one but four representatives at national level.

As Joe Anderson had done in 1933, Cooper noted that the period of European colonization was approaching 150 years, and in May 1937 he asked the Premier of NSW to make one of the objectives of the approaching sesqui-centenary celebrations "the honest endeavour to lift the Aboriginal to the right to full manhood and British citizenship".

While the issues of increased educational standards and opportunities were forward-looking, the overwhelmingly important demand which Cooper and the AAL made for the future was that for self-sufficiency through land and for financial and technical assistance to develop that land to its full potential. This issue is referred to in every one of Cooper's letters in 1936 and 1937 and in the AAL Annual Report of 1936 and must be seen as the basis of the AAL program. The demand for land in the AAL view arose from Aboriginal prior ownership:

There is room for us, and, in any case, who should have this right to land before the dark race itself.

Cooper referred the NSW Government to the 1934 Indian Lands Development Act in the USA which, although it in fact fell short of Native American demands and was used against them, seemed to Cooper to be an attempt to promote economic self-sufficiency. He condemned the waste of human resources which was occurring because of the refusal to allow Aborigines sufficient land:

Our men have been able to succeed in the past and given a chance we are sure that many of them will succeed in the future.

The details of the AAL proposal were that all existing Aboriginal reserve land should be fully developed, to be worked collectively or cooperatively by Aboriginal residents with the profits returning to

1 Cooper to Stevens, 19/2/1936; 15/11/1936.
2 Ibid, 15/11/1936.
3 Ibid, 9/5/1937.
5 Ibid, 15/11/1936.
6 Berkhofer, The White Man's Indian, pp176-186.
7 Cooper to Stevens, 15/11/1936.
them. More land would need to be acquired immediately for this purpose but the AAL was also proposing that Aboriginal families be assisted to settle permanently on individual family blocks when confident in their skills. It is not clear from Cooper's letters whether the final result was to be scattered family blocks or whether these blocks were to be adjacent and therefore comprise a larger block of Aboriginal controlled land, in an expanded version of the old Cumeragunja situation, for each Aboriginal community.¹

Cooper suggested that Cumeragunja be used as the experimental model for the AAL proposal, and urged on the NSW Premier a detailed and well-considered plan of intensive agricultural development, which included tomato, vine and tobacco culture, citrus growing, some cows and some experimental lucerne and pigs.² He argued that with improvements to the water supply and with adequate Government funds for seeds, stock and machinery, the station would easily become self-supporting. Cumeragunja was for Cooper a symbol of the waste and injustice of the existing system:

Cumeragunja is potentially wealthy. The people are very poor. We feel that such poverty in such potential wealth is wrong.³

The AAL policy can be seen to embody the same elements as that of the earlier AAPA, namely, a call for the granting of immediate and full civil rights, although this time consciously addressed to the national as well as the State sphere, and a demand for land as the essential basis for future Aboriginal development.

Cooper received "scant courtesy" during 1936, the APB having informed the NSW Premier that Cooper's criticisms of the Board's methods were "without foundation" and did "not call for further notice".⁴ In frustration, Cooper limited the scope of his 1937 letters to an effort to achieve the implementation of at least the concrete first stage of the AAL land proposal: the establishing of Cumeragunja as a model agricultural experiment. This seemed to Cooper to be a very realistic proposition. Cumeragunja people already

² Ibid, 15/11/1936.
³ Ibid.
⁵ Secretary, APB to Undersecretary, Premier's Department, 24/3/1936, PDCF, A36/404.
possessed agricultural skills and hungered for a chance to work their land for themselves again; the land itself was of good quality and there was a generous water supply close at hand from the Murray. The water supply became the focus of Cooper's demands, as he explained carefully to the Premier that the earlier tomato culture by Aborigines at Cumeragunja had ceased only because the water pump had failed in the late twenties. This failure had not been rectified and now the water supply was inadequate not only for farming even the small amount of land left after the Board's leasing of the reserve, but also for the Depression-increased population of the station.

There was at last some response: the Protection Board was by 1937 in a better financial position and conveyed through the Premier its intention to build new houses and improve the domestic water supply at Cumeragunja. Cooper was far from satisfied and while he acknowledged the urgent necessity for new and additional houses, with a better domestic water supply, he insisted that there must be adequate water for agricultural development. The next Government response, in May 1937, seemed more promising: the Protection Board was under some pressure both internally and externally, as will be discussed, and instead of dismissing the idea of agriculture at Cumeragunja as it had done with the farm block request of 1927, the Board now indicated that it would "investigate" the AAL farming proposal, although the Board had a far more limited scheme in mind, involving only part-time work for the unemployed men of the station.

Guardedly optimistic, Cooper turned his attention to the other urgent, but more short-term problems at Cumeragunja. Apart from the severe overcrowding, which he thought would be solved by the promised new houses, Cooper saw the first priority as increasing the ration issue to the full dole scale, and the second as rectifying the inadequate sanitation, which consisted of a pan system with most of the "pans" being old kerosine tins. Cooper asked that a septic tank be installed as:

1 Cooper to Stevens, 31/3/1937, PDCF, A36/1028.
2 Ibid.
3 Chief Secretary to Premier, 13/4/1937, PDCF, A36/1028.
4 Cooper to Stevens, 9/5/1937, PDCF, A36/1028.
5 Chief Secretary to Premier, 19/5/1937, PDCF, A36/1028.
... the present lavatories are open to the flies, and the food equally open, with the resultant disease which is so serious a matter on this Station.  

On this issue, the current manager, Danvers, was in complete agreement with Cooper, and had stressed the urgency of the problem to Board members, G. Mitchell and Dr E.S. Morris and Secretary, A.C. Pettit, when they visited the station in February 1936. Danvers had even photographed the existing lavatories, at Dr Morris' suggestion, and sent the photos to Sydney to convince the other Board members of the necessity for new facilities. Nothing, however, was done.  

Cooper was not only concerned with the physical conditions on Cumberfang, but also with the restrictions imposed on Aborigines' lives by Board control and the autocratic powers of the manager.  

Although Danvers was "held in high regard" by Cumberfang people, an opinion shared by Aborigines on other stations on which he worked, his total control, however sympathetically exercised, was deeply resented by the Cumberfang community. The entrenched bitterness in the station's population was revealed in an exasperated report by Danvers during 1936, when he wrote:

The greatest trouble that [we] have to contend with on this Station is the fact that certain families set themselves against any authority by the Board's officers.  

He then recounted as an example an incident in which a woman had shown "the gross impertinence of her attitude towards the Board" and had acted, so Danvers believed, "for no reason except that she wished to show that she was not under the control of the Board". Danvers drew no conclusions in this report as to the source of this resentment, although he said in 1937 that he had heard complaints from Aborigines "that the land was taken from them".  

1 Cooper to Stevens, 7/6/1937, PDCF, A36/1028.  
2 SC on APB, ME, p79.  
3 Cooper to Stevens, 19/2/1936; 15/11/1936; 31/3/1937.  
5 All interviews with ex-residents of Brewarrina station.  
6 Cooper to Stevens, 19/2/1936; 15/11/1936; 31/3/1937.  
7 J.G. Danvers to Secretary, APB, 14/3/1936, PDCF, A36/1028.  
8 Ibid.  
9 SC on APB, ME, p83.
An assistant-manager who was at Cumeragunja from December 1936 to July 1937, actually asked Aborigines what their grievances were, and the replies he received confirmed Cooper's statements. As this officer recalled in December 1937:

Their feelings seemed to be that there was no sympathy with them; that they were only aboriginals, and had to do as they were told; they had no rights at all. They complained about their food and their clothing; that their clothes and blankets were insufficient. They complained bitterly about their housing.¹

This, then, was the level of hostility under the management of Danvers, a man widely acknowledged by Aborigines as the most reasonable of the Board's officers.

By July 1937, Cooper, the AAL and the Cumeragunja community had reason to be hopeful, having been given assurances that the housing and water supply at the station were to be improved and that the agricultural proposals would be paid some attention. What they did not know, however, was that the manager who was about to replace Danvers was A.J. McQuiggen², the Superintendent of Kinchela Boys' Home, whose violent methods of control there have been described in Chapter III. The result of this change in managers could only be heightened tension. This conflict did not explode until 1939, however, and by that time much activity had occurred in the rest of the State.

¹ Ibid, p90.
² APBM, 7/4/1937.
CHAPTER VII

THE DOG ACT

We were under the Dog Act altogether ... They could send you anywhere, do what they liked with you.

Henry Hardy

The 1920s disputes with white towns had shaken the Board and by the end of the decade were pushing it towards a major policy change. As the numbers of Aborigines thrown out of work increased, it was anxiety about white town reaction which prompted the Board to make its first objection in some years to a reserve revocation. In August 1928, when the Lands Department requested that Mt Olive reserve be revoked, the Board refused on the grounds that:

... there is not any other reserve available nearer than Gloucester and Quirindi and that there are now numbers of Aborigines in the town of Singleton whose removal may be requested by the local council as happened at Moree and Yass ...

A further sign of changing Board attitudes appeared late in 1930 when a final town dispute flared before the Depression distracted local authorities from anything other than their own economic difficulties. This dispute was at Lismore, where the school segregation of 1928 was followed by calls for the removal of the Guris at Tuncester. When the Board proposed creating a reserve around the camp site, protest meetings were called and local whites persisted in their demand for total removal.

At Condobolin in 1926 (and after its abortive Walgett experience) the Board had pointed out to white townspeople that it was Aboriginal resistance which made removal an "utter impossibility". The Board's response to the whites of Lismore in 1930 shifted the focus of attention, however, away from Aboriginal resistance and onto the Board's lack of the "power to compel the aborigines to reside at a

1 Interview T50.
2 APBM, 31/8/1928.
3 SMH, 2/8/1930; 12/8/1930; 6/12/1930.
4 See Chapter IV.
given place". The implication was apparently not wasted on the Lismore aldermen and citizens at the meeting in which the Board's Inspector explained this obstacle, and they promptly passed a resolution urging the Government "to grant the Board more extensive powers".

From 1931 to 1934, the Board's Minutes show a marked absence of correspondence with local councils (other than Moree) when compared with the 1920s. Yet in its 1931-1932 Report, it was announced that:

... the Board, realizing the inadequacy of its powers under existing legislation, contemplated seeking certain amendments to its Act, which will enable it to, among other things, concentrate on its Reserves, persons of Aboriginal blood, who are now living on stock routes and alongside of towns, and maintain a definite control over them, so that they will not be at liberty to leave without permission.

(My emphasis)

One of the implications of this statement was made explicit in the Report of 1934-1935: the Aborigines to be affected included those who had "formerly wholly maintained themselves". During a hiatus in conflict between Aborigines and towns, then, the Board had capitulated to both the demands and the definitions of white townspeople.

While there had been a substantial turnover in Board membership and staff during the 1928 to 1932 period, there had also been continuity of some influential personalities at both these levels. The change of policy indicated in the 1931-1932 Report cannot, therefore, be attributed in any great degree to the attitudes of new personnel who might have been more sympathetic to town demands. There were more fundamental forces operating to move the Board to a reassessment of its methods, if not its aim. The effects of the

1 APBM, 27/1/1931.
2 Ibid, 10/4/1931.
3 APBR, 1931-1932, p2.
5 BC Harkness, Chief Inspector of Schools, and HJ Bate, MLA, both joined the Board in this period but on the other hand AW Green, of the Child Welfare Department, was an influential member of the Board from 1916 to 1934, allowing him adequate time to influence the new policy. On the staff, RT Donaldson had resigned as Inspector in 1929, to be replaced by Urungu manager E Smithers. The Secretary of the Board remained AC Pettit, who stayed with the Board until it became the Welfare Board in 1940.
Depression on changing European land use and labour needs formed the context for the Board's policy change and determined the areas in which it attempted to act. The specific effects of the Depression on Aborigines forced the Board into the conscious decision to alter its policy.

Mechanization had been eroding rural labour needs throughout the 1920s in both pastoral and agricultural industries. On the north coast, however, mechanization had a dual effect. Not only were agricultural labour needs reduced but so too was demand for some crops. Mechanization across the State involved greater use of internal combustion powered transport vehicles and tractors, decreasing the use of horses and other draught animals and in turn decreasing demand for maize, the fodder crop which was one of the north coast's major products.1 The Depression unemployment grossly accentuated the trend towards reduced rural labour needs. While this was assumed to be a temporary distortion, it nevertheless underlined the direction of change in rural industries.

More directly, the Depression renewed the pressure for subdivision and closer settlement in the Western Division. In 1930, an amendment to the Western Lands Act was passed which attempted to assist large leaseholders in financial difficulties by extending their leases, set in 1901 to expire in 1943, for an additional period of 25 years.2 By 1931, however, protests were being raised by the smaller scale settlers in the Western Division who were arguably in a worse position because of the Depression than were the large scale lessees. The smaller landholders were demanding that a larger acreage be accepted as the minimum necessary for a "home maintenance" area and that the additional land be acquired from the large scale leaseholds.3 Coupled with this was the pressure generated by high rural unemployment itself, with the argument being raised that the unemployed should be settled on viable living areas withdrawn from the large holdings.4 These two populist demands for changes in land holding patterns were

1 Discussions with J Hagan and B Castle, Wollongong University, undertaking research into Aboriginal involvement in the capitalist economy of the north coast.
2 King, "Closer Settlement", p177.
Western Lands (Amendment) Act, 1930.
3 King, "Closer Settlement", p177.
BMC Minutes, 18/3/1931.
4 Ibid.
addressed in general to the whole of the Western Division but focused specifically on what were assumed to be the more fertile districts, Brewarrina and Walgett North.¹

Before the Protection Board announced its altered policy there were indications, aired in the 1931 Royal Commission into the Western Lands Commission, that there were going to be changes in the pastoral industry's organization in the Western Division. Such changes were clearly to involve a reduction in the size of the largest pastoral properties, and therefore a further reduction in labour needs.

Within this general context, the Depression effects on Aborigines had made obvious to the Protection Board the deterioration of its reserve and station facilities and it was well aware that it was not successfully meeting the increased demand on its resources.² As it could not realistically expect any increase in funding in the short term, the Board was forced to look for ways to handle its limited income more efficiently. One solution was to reduce the geographical extent of the Board's responsibilities by reducing the number of reserves. Services such as water supplies and sewerage systems could then be rationalized by avoiding duplication. "Concentration" of the populations of smaller reserves onto a lesser number of reserves with managerial control was expected to increase the efficiency of building work and in general improve living conditions.³

The possibility of saving money by such a "concentration" had been suggested by various Board members as early as 1911.⁴ The suggestion had not been taken up because it had been inconsistent with Board aims of rapid dispersal of the Aboriginal population and disappearance of the reserves themselves. The change of policy on which the Board had decided by 1932 was far more than a rationalization of expenditure. In fact, such a rationalization was only necessary because of a more fundamental change in Board plans, which led it to expect that the population on reserves and stations would not only be maintained at its high Depression level, but would increase still further. The economic recession of 1921 had also

1 Ibid.
3 Ibid, 1931-1932, p2; 1932-1933, p2.
4 APB Inspection Reports, GE Ardill to Chairman, APB, 15/7/1911.
resulted in an increase in reserve populations, but at that time the Board had clearly stated that this increase was temporary, causing no more than an inconvenient pause in its dispersal program. In the early 1930s, the Board assumed that economic conditions would at some time improve, but it was no longer confident in continuing its former dispersal techniques. As the bag and tin camps of Aboriginal unemployed multiplied around towns, and as Aborigines were rejected from the workforce in disproportionate numbers and from the relief systems, the Board at last had to accept that "mergence" had been an illusion. Once it accepted that its dispersal policy was failing, it had no reasons left for resisting town demands for removal and confinement.

The Board accepted, too, the definition of the situation presented to it by townspeople. This was that the "problem" arose from the behaviour of people of Aboriginal descent, manifested in one way by the fact that they lived "under undesirable conditions on the outskirts of towns". The Board now stated:

... it is due to the lack of requisite disciplinary supervision that Aborigines are living under undesirable conditions.

The solution, the proposed amendments, would give the Board power to move anyone of Aboriginal descent living in such camps to the managerial control of the stations:

... and thereby abolish groups of insanitary and unsightly shanties which are still occupied by Aborigines outside several centres such as Armidale, Moree, Lismore and other towns."

The Board did not see this change as a return to the policy of permanent segregation represented by the cohabitation section of the Protection Act, nor was it adopting the Queensland Government's expectation of and support for permanent, self-contained and self-perpetuating Aboriginal communities. Rather the Board saw confinement as allowing it time to change the behaviour of the confined Aborigines. Once this re-education process was accomplished, via "disciplinary supervision", the Board hoped to be able to disperse Aborigines more

1 APBR, 1920-1921, p5.
2 ibid, 1934-1935, pl.
3 ibid.
4 ibid.
effectively than before.¹ The major differences lay, firstly, in the new Board argument that adult Aborigines and, indeed, people with only the smallest "degree of Aboriginal blood", required behavioural change at all and, secondly, in the time scale now believed to be necessary to achieve the goal of "mergence".

While the Board could comfort itself that its long term goal of "mergence" remained intact, its change of method was totally consistent with the demands of white town authorities, whose own goals were short term and pragmatic and were well served by the Board's new decision to "concentrate" Aborigines. After 1932, whites could be reassured, from the Board's own statements, that its intentions were that Aborigines were not to be "at liberty" until they had "graduated ... to the standards of the white man".² Indeed, the word "gradually" was repeated so often by the Board that the unmistakeable implication was that this "graduating" process was to take a very long time.³ The policy change was, therefore, satisfactory to the two white groups which had previously been in conflict: the Board could retain its commitment to an eventual dispersal, while rural town authorities could hope to have Aborigines out of sight and under control for the foreseeable future.

The language used in Board Reports at this time suggests some influence from the emerging disciplines of psychology and anthropology concerning the possibility of carrying out behavioural change on any group of people and particularly on adults of a "primitive" culture/race.⁴ There was, however, no direct contact between anthropologists and the NSW Board before June 1936.⁵ Board members and staff had probably absorbed some ideas from available literature and the intermittent discussion of Aborigines in the general press since the mid-1920s, but this appears to have been the only avenue of influence. It seems most likely that even at this stage, the Board was adopting rhetoric from groups regarded as "progressive" to clothe political decisions which seem to have been no more than reflections of

¹ APBR, 1932-1933, p2.
⁵ C Kelly describes first interview with AC Pettit and notes that second reading of amending bill is occurring at the same time in "Study of a Small Native Community", pp44-45. Elkin Papers.
persistent white town pressure and then Depression conditions.

The Board had prepared a draft of the amendments it wanted by the end of 1933 and with only minor changes this draft became law.\(^1\) The most important clause in the Board's opinion was draft section 8(a) which empowered the Board to force an individual Aborigine or group of Aborigines onto a reserve or station and then to refuse them indefinitely permission to leave.\(^2\) The criteria for such removal and confinement were to be that the Aborigines were "in the opinion of the Board, living under insanitary or undesirable conditions", phrases which allowed a wide latitude of interpretation. A magistrate's order was required but it will be clear from earlier discussions of the administration of justice in country towns that this in no way guaranteed Aboriginal rights.

Two other parts of the draft dealt with confinement. Sections 10 and 11, relating to employment, gave the Board power to intervene extensively in the relationship between employer and employed Aborigine. On the Board's sole judgement of the "best interests" of the adult Aborigine, it could receive the wages of that Aborigine, act for the recovery of those wages, terminate the employment and remove the employed Aborigine to a reserve or other place as decided by the Board.\(^3\) Section 14(a) allowed the Board to authorize a compulsory medical examination for any Aborigine and, on the basis of the results, remove and confine the Aborigine to any hospital or other institution where appropriate treatment was available.\(^4\)

The enforcement of the new powers was to be aided firstly by broadening the offence of "enticing, or persuading" an Aborigine to leave a Board reserve or Home. Previously, this offence had only related to "enticing" an Aboriginal "child" (as defined by the Act) from a Home or from employment, and was one of the measures designed to enforce the "apprenticeship" system. The 1933 draft, however, made the "enticing" or "removing" of an adult Aborigine an offence as well.\(^5\) When the amendments finally appeared before Parliament, a

1 APBM, 11/1/1934.
2 Ibid, Draft section 8(a) became S.8A(1),(2)and(3) in the principal Act.
3 Ibid, These became S.8C(1)and(2), and S.13B,C & D in the principal Act.
4 Ibid, This became S.14A in the principal Act.
5 Ibid, Draft section 8(b) which became S.8B in the principal Act.
further clause had been added, making "enticing or removing" a "child" an offence even with the consent of the child, an attempt to counter what had been a successful Aboriginal legal defence for taking a girl away from Brewarrina station early in 1936.¹

More generally, the amendments acted to broaden the official definition of the "Aborigine" subject to the Board from the narrow limits established in 1918. In the major confinement clause, (8[a]), the people subject to its power were defined from the first draft as: "Aborigines or persons apparently having an admixture of Aboriginal blood".² This phrase was also eventually included in the final version of the medical examination section (14[a]), which was not the most important measure for the Board in 1933 (although it could be used to the same end as section 8[a]) but which had become a crucial clause by 1936. The most extensive new powers, therefore, were applicable to the widest possible population. To facilitate even this application there was another amendment which decreed that an "averment", by anyone at all, that a person was an "Aborigine" should be "deemed to be proved in the absence of proof to the contrary".³ On an allegation only, then, a person would be assumed "guilty" of being Aboriginal, and so vulnerable to confinement, until proven "innocent".

While the Board was clear on the essential amendments required by the beginning of 1934, it met a mixed response from the Government. The Board actively lobbied for support⁴ and by mid-1935 had received a promise from the Government that the amendments would go before Parliament "at the earliest opportunity".⁵ This time sequence was not unlike that in the early 1910s, when it had taken about two years for a pledge of Government support and then a further three years for the amending bill relating to Aboriginal children to reach Parliament. In the 1930s situation, however, there was apparently some Government anxiety that the powers the Board sought to confine Aborigines were excessive and would "interfere with the people".⁶ The 1930s Board

¹ New section 13(2) in the principal Act.
² APBM, 11/1/1934.
³ Ibid, Draft section 8(c) which became S.18A in the principal Act.
⁴ APBM, 13/4/1934.
⁵ Ibid, 12/6/1935.
⁶ NPD, V.149, p4844, 23/6/1936.
therefore, had a somewhat less enthusiastic commitment from Government but, of even greater concern to it in mid-1935, the pressure from local town authorities for effective confinement powers had been renewed and was increasing.

The short respite caused in the worst years of the Depression by the inability of councils floundering in economic difficulties to take action had passed by mid-1935. As councils attempted to "normalize" conditions, the barely tolerated camps of both white and Aboriginal unemployed came under greater threat. This threat intensified as more of the financial burden for unemployment relief works was passed from the State to local government. As early as 1933, however, the long running dispute between Aborigines and the Council at Moree had culminated in a school segregation and this had been closely followed by that at Brocklehurst. In 1934, Brewarrina Council demanded removal of the town camp and the move the Board had been expecting against Maris in Armidale had come, with pressure from the Local Member who was none other than D.H. Drummond, the Minister for Education. By June 1935, the calls for the removal of Aborigines from Walgett and Lismore had also been renewed. B.C. Harkness inspected the situation in these towns during May 1935, and in his report emphasized the urgency of "the need for greater control of the aborigines, particularly in the matter of their domicile." By February 1936, three more Councils, Cowra, Berry and Nowra, were hectoring the Board for removal of their Aboriginal populations. As school segregations so closely reflected broader conflict between town whites and Aborigines, an indication of the resurgence of town opposition can be gained from Figure 1.

Under this intensifying pressure, the Board needed an argument to push the Government into action. In 1912 and 1915, the Board had achieved its aims of extended power over children by manipulating stereotypes about Aboriginal "immorality" in an emotive appeal

1 This financial pressure was most intense in 1936 and 1937, see Dubbo and Brewarrina Municipal Council and Talbragar and Walgett Shire Council Minutes for these two years.
2 BMC Minutes, 26/11/1934.
   APBM, 13/4/1934.
5 Ibid, 5/2/1936, 4/3/1936.
to the Government to allow it to "rescue" the "endangered" children. In a similar situation in 1936, the Board used similar tactics, but this time the Board played on the fear that Aboriginal communities presented a risk to the health of whites.

Figure 7.1

...homa was endemic among Aborigines on stations long before 1936 and the disease appears to have reached epidemic proportions in the overcrowded and undoubtedly insanitary conditions of the stations in the summer months during the Depression. In the early months of
1936, three or four young children, aged from five to eight, were diagnosed by the Board’s nursing sister at Angledool station to be suffering from gonococcal opthalmia and consequently were sent to Brewarrina and from there to hospital in Orange or to Kinchela Boys’ Home. ¹

All of the Mari children suffering from any kind of eye disease at Angledool at this time were left with the impression that their disease was venereal in origin and it was widely known at Brewarrina that the children brought there were supposed to have venereal eye disease. As one Brewarrina man has described the children’s stay:

Th’ had two or three young kids locked up and they were crying all day, there in the treatment room ... and the rumour went round, the kids were syin’. ‘Don’t go near those kids there, you’ll get the pox off’em, they brought’em down from Angledool with the pox’. ²

While the diagnosis was widely publicized, to the obvious distress of the children concerned, there is very little evidence to suggest that it was accurate. There was by this time no doctor living at Angledool, nor does it appear that the doctor at Brewarrina examined the children. The only qualified doctor to state that these children were suffering from gonococcal opthalmia was Board member Dr E.S. Morris, Director of Public Health, who, as an administrator, had not personally seen or examined the children and who did not record the source of his information. ³

Gonococcal opthalmia is an eye disease which in appearance is indistinguishable from trachoma and which is typically contracted by an infant which comes into physical contact with gonorrhoeal infection in its mother’s vagina as it is born. The disease is difficult to diagnose conclusively as the organism is not easily grown from specimens even in today’s conditions and it is unlikely that a country hospital such as Orange, to which some of the children were sent or to which the diagnosis was publicized, would have had adequate facilities to culture specimens in 1936. The condition is usually diagnosed clinically, that is, in the circumstances described above. Current and authoritative ophthalmological opinion is that it is improbable

¹ Ibid, 5/2/1936.
² SC on APB, ME, P3.
³ Interview T18.
⁴ APBM, 5/2/1936; 4/3/1936.
that any child other than a newborn infant would be found to be suffering from gonococcal ophthalmia.\(^1\)

The evidence that there was, in fact, a "serious outbreak" of gonococcal ophthalmia at Angledool looks extremely tenuous, with the local observers even disagreeing about whether four children or one family or only one child was supposed to be affected.\(^2\) It is most likely that these children were simply suffering the trachoma and conjunctivitis that was epidemic on the station, although we have no way of knowing why the Board's nursing sister suddenly decided that these particular children's eye disease was venereal.

Early in June 1936, the Protection Board was informed of "the outbreak of a serious eye affection [sic]" at Toomelah Aboriginal station, and of the contraction of the disease by the matron of the station, who applied for Workers' Compensation.\(^1\) Gonococcal ophthalmia was not explicitly mentioned in relation to this station and in fact the Board did not make inquiries about the nature of the diagnosis of Toomelah patients sent to Moree Hospital in June until October 1936.\(^3\) Some indication of local white response to news of the "outbreak" can, however, be gained from the report of the regional Inspector of Schools, who made the unlikely statement in June 1936, that 70 people of all ages were suffering from venereal eye disease at Toomelah\(^5\), a figure representing 40% of the station's population then. The sole official statement that gonococcal ophthalmia had been present at Toomelah (at an unspecified time) was made by another administrative doctor, A.E. Machin, Chief Medical Officer in the Education Department. His statement, however, was made in December 1937 and was, like Morris', second-hand and unsourced.\(^6\)

---

1 FC Hollows, Associate-Professor of Ophthalmology, University of NSW, and Medical Director, National Trachoma and Eye Health Program.

2 SC on APB, ME, pp15, 23.
   Inspector JN Harrison to Minister for Education, 29/5/1936, Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.

3 APBM, 3/6/1936.


5 Inspector NW Drummond to Minister for Education, June 1936, Boom public school files, DEIL.

6 Dr AE Machin to Minister for Education, 21/12/1937, Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
The evidence for the existence of gonococcal ophthalmia at Toomelah is, therefore, just as ambiguous and confused as that for Angledool. Board members, however, were probably convinced that some cases of the disease did exist and in it they saw the emotive argument they needed to convince the Government to act on the Board's proposed amendments.

An approach was made to the Chief Secretary after the first news from Toomelah and within two weeks, the amendments had been brought before Parliament as an "urgent" measure\(^1\), on the basis that "the health of our own people is very seriously threatened".\(^2\) Whatever confusion the Board members may have suffered because of lack of specialist medical knowledge or because of misinformation from local officials when making assessments of the existence and extent of the disease, there were no such grounds for confusion in relation to the main argument put with increasing vehemence through the Debates over the amendments. This was that many, most or all Aborigines suffered from gonococcal ophthalmia but that they were not seriously affected by the disease whereas whites who contracted the disease were invariably blinded. This argument, put by the Chief Secretary and two Protection Board members in Parliament\(^3\), was in direct contradiction to the Board's experience in the field. A number of the Board's white staff had contracted eye disease by 1936, (probably trachoma but implied in Parliament to have been gonococcal ophthalmia) and yet all had recovered.\(^4\)

The information about eye disease had been distorted because it had become the tactical lynch-pin of the Board argument for control over Aboriginal domicile.\(^5\) The Board argued that the alleged need

---

1 APBM, 3/6/1936.
NPD, V.149, p4749, 18/6/1936, the day on which the amending bill was introduced.

2 Ibid, p4750, 18/6/1936. This statement was made repeatedly throughout the Debates.

Chief Secretary Captain Chaffey and Board members HJ Bate and GE Ardill (Jnr) were the most vocal Government proponents of this argument.


5 NPD, V.149, p4844, 23/6/1936.
for medical attention and the urgent necessity to safeguard whites was the reason it sought the power to confine. It was specifically on this basis that the definition of those Aborigines to whom the medical examination clause was applicable was widened during the debate to make it equivalent to that used in the confinement clause.¹

Pressed by members of the Labor Party to explain why the other amendments were necessary when the Government seemed so single-mindedly intent on compulsory medical examination², the existence of Aboriginal camps near towns was briefly discussed, with Government speakers describing the camps in consistently emotive and threatening terms.³ When opposition to the confinement clause became strenuous, however, Government speakers again and again raised the spectre of gonococcal ophthalmia. It was a powerful tactic, drawing as it did on a number of layers of white stereotypes about Aborigines and making explicit the underlying assumption that the "disease" so universally attributed to Aborigines was venereal disease. Fears of sickness, of sexual and of racial contamination were all played on and there was the added dimension that the "venereal disease" was alleged to be carried by children. This, of course, was precisely what white parents at Yass had alleged in demanding the segregation of the public school and the charge was implied in most school segregations. The amending bill passed, rapidly and virtually unchanged, into law on July 10, 1936.

THE DOG ACT IN PRACTICE

One effect of the Board's change in policy was that its attitude to reserve land altered, as suggested by Figures 7.2 and 7.3. The Depression had brought a halt to white pressure for revocation of reserve land by 1929⁴ and by 1933 the Board was acting under the influence of its new policy. The area of reserved land began to rise slowly, as the Board acquired land for new stations (as at Menindee and Boggabilla) or for additions to existing reserves which were made

¹ Ibid, p5277, 2/7/1936.
² Ibid, p4849, 73/6/1936.
³ Ibid.
⁴ The attempts to have Karuah and Macksville reserves revoked, (APBM, 28/6/1929, 1/11/1929), were the last until May 1933.
Figure 7.2
CHANGE IN AREA RESERVED FOR THE USE OF ABORIGINES
1909 - 1945

[Diagram showing a line graph with years on the x-axis (1909-1945) and acres on the y-axis (× 1000).]
Figure 7.3

ANNUAL LOSS OR GAIN
IN ABORIGINAL RESERVE ACREAGE
1911 - 1945
stations with the intention of serving as centres of "concentration".\footnote{As occurred with additional land acquired at Burnt Bridge and eventually notified as reserve in 1939. APBM, 4/11/1936; 6/1/1937; 3/3/1937; 7/4/1937. NGG, 30/6/1939.} At the same time, however, and consistent with the Board's rationalization of its operations, the total number of reserves fell. The Board's Reports suggest the loss of 30 reserves but the Government Gazettes show only 10 revocations during the 1930s. These gazetted revocations occurred in all regions of the State, with no particular foci of land loss as there had been in the previous 2 decades.\footnote{Compare APBR, 1935-1936, p1 with APBR, 1937-1938, p1. NGG, 30/6/1939.} Nevertheless, although the total area of reserve land began to increase after 1933, the number of places available for Aborigines to live was being constricted.

The Board's movements of Aboriginal communities began after it decided on a change of policy in 1932 and before it gained the legislative basis for such action in 1936, as Figure 7.4 indicates. This map also demonstrates, however, the regional unevenness of Board action as well as its eventual lack of success in confining Aborigines against their will, despite its legislation. The Board had wanted the 1936 amendments to enable it to respond more effectively to town demands. It did not intend, nor on its budget could it realistically have planned, to begin immediately the confinement of the whole Aboriginal population. Comparison of Figure 7.4 with the earlier Figure 7.1 showing the distribution of school segregation demands suggests how closely the actual or threatened moves were related to the local stimulus of town protest. This was not, however, the only local stimulus at work. The Board's "concentration" policy had given it a new framework for routinely dealing with local crises like the supposed "gonococcal ophthalmia" outbreaks on stations as well as conflict between Aborigines and white townspeople. The "solutions" to all these problems were now seen to lie in forcing Aborigines to live where it was convenient for the Board to provide adequate services, rather than any attempt to improve facilities where Aborigines themselves chose to live.

The more fundamental forces acting are suggested by the frequency of Board actions in the west and on the north coast. Apart from the western communities shown on Figure 7.4 to have been affected, the
THE DOG ACT IN PRACTICE:
A.P.B. MOVEMENTS OF
ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES,
1934 - 1939.
Maris of Collarenebri were threatened in 1938 by the police with removal of either their children or the whole group to Brewarrina or Pilliga station. In 1941 an attempt was made, with the heavy involvement of the Goodooga police, to move the Maris of the Weilmoringle pastoral camp to Brewarrina. There is no record of central authorization for initiation of the latter attempt. It is unlikely that either the Board or local police would have carried out or threatened any of these moves had there been protests from surrounding pastoral employers demanding a labour source.

Lack of reserve creation in pastoral areas in the nineteenth century had indicated not a lack of Aborigines but rather their active participation in the pastoral industry, while Board intervention by creation of reserves had occurred in these areas with either the break-up of or changes to that industry. In the 1930s as well, Board activity in the west reflected changes in the pastoral industry. The conservative Stevens Government had made more concessions to the largest leaseholders in 1932 by the granting of leases in perpetuity but by 1934 it responded to the populist pressure for subdivision with the Western Lands Amendment Act. This was later criticized as being too generous to large scale pastoralists but even so the 1934 Act signalled the end of what had been, effectively, a freeze since 1901 on reduction in size of Western Division holdings.

The pastoral districts specified by this Act as those to be most rapidly and closely settled were Brewarrina and Walgett North. Within these districts, the properties marked for land withdrawals were, of course, the largest and these were the holdings on which Mari camps were located. Gundabluie, Dunumbral, Angledool, Bangate and Gingie were all to lose between 30% and 38% of their acreage, while Dungalear and Boorooma were both to lose 27%. In the Brewarrina District, Weilmoringle was to suffer the major loss. While the reduction was not completed until after 1942, at least one quarter of this

1 BC Harkness, Chief Inspector to WV Allen, Regional Inspector of Schools, 11/12/1936; H Maclean, teacher, Collarenebri, to WV Allen, 16/12/1936: Collarenebri public school files, DEIL. ABQ Call, V, August 1938, p1; VI, September 1938, p1.
2 Interview T16.
land was withdrawn between 1935 and 1938.¹

In the Walgett North and Brewarrina areas, the specific mechanism for the exploitation of Aboriginal labour, the partially self-sustaining camp, had been economically viable because of the large area of the holdings as well as large stock numbers. This form of labour organization was obviously going to change with reduction in property size, even apart from reduced flocks because of drought and Depression and reduced labour needs because of mechanization. The time was long past when the Board was prepared or required to create reserves around pastoral camps as it had done across the northern slopes in the 1890s, as there was no alternative demand for labour in the Western Division.

On the north coast, the Board's activity confirmed the long-evident end of its interest in independent Aboriginal farming of reserves. The imposition of managers at Woodenbong, Purfleet and Bellbrook had indicated the Board's intention to assert more control over a region with a large, and for the Board a troublesome, Aboriginal population and an area where mechanization was also affecting labour requirements. Bellbrook had been one of the few remaining independent agricultural reserves, although oral evidence will be needed to establish how far agriculture had remained possible with the crowding of the Depression. Burnt Bridge alone remained independent of managerial control by the middle of the decade and then in late 1936 even this reserve was chosen as a site for "concentration".²

At the same time that the Board had gained its new legislation, pressure from anthropologists for a foothold in administration had increased with direct overtures being made to the Board.³ In the arguments of Elkin and Caroline Kelly, the Board found a useful justification, after the event, for the policy of concentrating Aborigines under managerial control.⁴ The language in the Board's

¹ Ibid.
² APBM, 4/11/1936.
⁴ See Goodall, "An Intelligent Parasite: AP Elkin", for a discussion of the use which anthropologists and a faction of the Protection Board made of each other, to serve their separate needs.
Reports reflected this influence and after 1936 the phrase "disciplinary supervision" was not to be seen. The aims of the confinement policy were thereafter described as "education" and "training".¹ Yet the details of the advice being offered by Elkin and Kelly were consistent with the Board's earlier intentions. The anthropologists argued for "training" schemes in, for example, agriculture, to "teach" independence but made it quite clear that such schemes were to be firmly under the control of a white supervisor (preferably one who was trained in anthropology).² Such ideas were in contradiction to the demands of Aborigines and were no more than a parody of the successful independent Aboriginal agriculture of earlier decades on reserves on the coast and elsewhere. It was this influence which led the Board to revive talk, in its Reports at least, of the issuing of seed and farming implements to Aborigines, but these were not to be given for independent farming, only for use in "training" schemes under a station manager's supervision.³ This was the context for the Board's agreement, mentioned in the previous chapter, to "investigate" the AAL agricultural proposals for Cumeragunja early in 1937.

For the north coast, an area with decreasing labour needs and for which there was no longer any official sanction for independent Aboriginal agriculture, the small reserves which remained appeared to the Board as simply a waste of its resources. A manager on one large station could "discipline", "supervise" or "train" the residents of a number of small reserves more easily and cheaply once they had been "concentrated". As well as the moves or threats indicated on Figure 7.4, the Board considered the "amalgamation" of Guriis from Purfleet (Taree) and Forster at Tuncurry in 1937 and those from Nambucca Heads, Stuart's Island, bowraville and Ulgun dah Island on an unspecified site in 1939." The far northern rivers area, however, provided a clear example of the difficulty the Board experienced in moving Aborigines who were not already under managerial control.

¹ See APBR, 1936-1937; 1937-1938; 1938-1939.
² C Kelly to Secretary, APB, 6/10/1936. AP Elkin to Secretary, APB, 5/10/1937. C Kelly, "Burnt Bridge Anthropological Survey", August-September 1937. All in PDCF, A37/193.
³ APBR, 1936-1937, p2; 1937-1938, p1.
In 1934, John Howard, the new manager at Stoney Gully (Runnymede) station, was instructed to use "any reasonable means" to end the dispute at Lismore and to centralize the large number of separate Guri communities of the area on Woodenbong and Stoney Gully stations. At Lismore, the Board had proceeded with the creation of a reserve around the Tuncester camp site and the Dunoon school had been transferred there during 1932. The Gurus who had earlier attempted to have their children admitted to the Lismore public school included a number of the Roberts families who had left Cabbage Tree Island station after conflicts with the manager there. Frank Roberts (Snr) was, like Duncan Ferguson, a Christian lay preacher. He wrote an accurate description of the events which occurred at Tuncester once Lismore town protests were revived in 1934. The dates of the Board's authorization of Howard's actions have been inserted into Roberts' account:

Howard, on his first visit to Tuncester, stopped the rations completely, starved the inhabitants, acting on instructions by his Board [12/9/1934; 16/11/1934] ... He then attempted to bluff the people, saying that the Aborigines' Protection Board is forcing them to another reserve and if they don't comply with his instructions he, or his Board, would take the children away from their parents [16/11/1934]. Next step was to demolish the school at Tuncester [5/2/1936] and remove it to another settlement 52 miles away. [Woodenbong, 6/5/1936]. The result is now the thirty-five children are without a school.

Words cannot express what is scandalous treatment by the Destruction Board."

After the segregation of the Baryulgil public school in 1935, Gurus there were similarly refused rations and instructed to move to Woodenbong. Like the Tuncester Gurus, however, those at Baryulgil refused to move, although 29 of their children were being denied access to education facilities. The numbers of children involved in both cases would have been adequate to justify establishment of an Education Department 'provisional' school, but the Department was at this stage still denying responsibility for the education of

1 Ibid, 6/7/1934; 12/9/1934.
3 SC on APB, ME, p55.
4 Ibid, dates are from APBM.
5 APBM, 2/10/1935; 4/3/1936.
Aborigines. In view of the virtually universal segregation of public schools on the north coast, the Board's removal of the Tuncester school and its refusal to establish a school at Baryulgil must be seen as intended to enforce its confinement aims.

In 1938 both communities were still holding out against Howard's pressure and finally the Board decided that the best it was likely to achieve was the amalgamation of Woodenbong and Stoney Gully stations themselves, a move undertaken in 1940.¹ The Baryulgil and Tuncester communities had won their battles to stay in the area of their choice, suggesting the possibility of successful resistance in their circumstances of a prolonged conflict and the absence of residential supervision. The victories had not been easy, however, and at one stage in 1938 Frank Roberts appealed to Aboriginal activists in Sydney for urgent support and the dispatch of an organizer. The Board pressure had intensified with further threats to children and, Roberts wrote, "the people are shakey".² As well as indicating the conditions for successful resistance, the northern rivers area also demonstrated which communities were likely to become targets for the centralization policy. Through all these years of pressure on Tuncester and Baryulgil, the Giris of Tabulum appear to have remained undisturbed, although this small residential reserve was no further from Woodenbong than was Tuncester and was far closer than Baryulgil. At Tabulum, however, there had been no white protests against the presence of the Guri community.

The south west and the south coast also escaped the centralizing activity almost completely. Shifts towards more intensive European land use and reductions in labour needs had occurred earlier in these regions and so the Board's operations were already geographically limited. The south coast had in fact seen an increase in demand for casual and seasonal labour as pea- and bean-growing became more widespread. This created an interesting situation in the one instance on the south coast where the Protection Board did attempt to "concentrate" Guris.

Worragee, a non-reserved camp site west of Nowra, provided the only documented four-cornered conflict (although others may have

¹ Abo Call, IV, July 1938, p2. AWBR, 1939-1940, p3.
² F Roberts to JT Patten, 1/8/1938, included in Collarenebri public school files, DEIL.
   Abo Call, V, August 1938, p2.
occurred). Not only were there the usual combatants, being Aborigines, town institutions and the Board, but in this instance out-of-town employers also became involved. Nowra Council strenuously argued in 1935 for the enforced transfer of Gurus at the camp to Roseby Park station, 10 miles to the east. This, however, brought the town into conflict with the interests of the local small scale pea farmers who were dependent on Guri labour.¹ The emergence of a second white interest group placed the Board in a dilemma as to which group of whites it should support. An awkward compromise was eventually proposed in which the Board agreed to pay for the cost of transport for the "concentrated" Gurus from Roseby Park each week to the Farms round Warragoe. In the event, the Board was spared this subsidy to the pea farmers by the flat refusal of Gurus to move and, as they had the tacit support of their employers, the Board took no further action.²

One major focus of enforced movements was Menindee. The "concentration" of Aboriginal people from Carowra Tank, Pooncarie and Willawarrina onto the new Menindee station in 1934 has been discussed in a number of published works and will be described only briefly here.¹ Wiimpatjjas from the river towns were at least able to remain in country with which they were associated but the Wongaibon Maris from Carowra Tank belonged to the desert country to the east of the river. The movement to Menindee brought them into a situation where they were among strangers and were also on alien country.

Social tensions resulted which were exacerbated not only by the station's poor physical conditions but by its location in a sandhill area which had been a Wiimpatja burial ground. Human bones were visible and bone dust, a traditional poison, was assumed to be mixed in the gritty sand which frequently blew across the station, piling into drifts against the huts and penetrating clothes and food. Tuberculosis was prevalent on this station and the highest death rate was amongst the Carowra Tank Wongaibon, the very people who felt least secure because they were away from their own country. Pankantji river people eventually had a means of escape as employment opportu-

¹ Nowra Leader, 20/9/1935. APBM, 5/2/1936.
² Nowra Leader, 15/11/1935.
ities improved in areas along the Darling and some of these people moved away from Menindee as such alternatives allowed. For the Wongaibon there were fewer employment opportunities in their drier country to the east and so to a greater degree than the Paakantji they were trapped at Menindee.¹

This difficult situation was an important factor in generating political activity to the east as well as on the station itself. Duncan Ferguson had been placed under police surveillance early in 1936 because of his active support for the dissatisfied station residents.² His reports to his brother Bill in Dubbo on the poor facilities and deteriorating health conditions on the station formed a significant portion of the information revealed by the Aboriginal political movement in 1937 which so effectively embarrassed the Board.³

The two other major foci of concentration activity were Brewarrina and Burnt Bridge. These situations will be described here more fully. Both indicate the chaos and dislocation caused in areas affected by the "concentration" policy but also suggest the factors generating the Aboriginal political movements in each region and the range of alliances with white groups from which these regional movements drew support.

Brewarrina: 1935 to 1938

In the mid-1930s the Mari population of both Brewarrina town and station was composed principally of Ngiyamba-speaking river people, who belonged to that country and Muruwari-speaking people, from the land to the north west, who had been forced into Brewarrina in 1911.⁴ The town Mari population had risen over the Depression, from around

1 This account drawn from Horner and Hardy, who drew in part on oral sources but also from SC on APB, ME, pp99-62,103-8; press sources like Smiths Weekly, 10/9/1938; DT, 19/7/1938; and NPD, V.151, pp776-7, 9/9/1937; V.156, p1425, 31/8/1938. Conditions on Menindee confirmed by Will Webster, Interview CS9.
3 For details of this press campaign see following Chapter VIII.
4 Matthews (ed), Jimmie Barker, and interviews conducted for this study. As well as Ngiyamba and Muruwari people there were a few individuals from other areas of the State who had been brought to Brewarrina under the "apprenticeship" scheme and had then married into the Brewarrina community.
70 in 1927 to 150 in 1934, while that on the Mission had risen even more sharply from a similar figure of 70 in 1927 to over 200 between 1931 and 1934.1 White townspeople's anxiety at this increased population in both locations was reflected in the Municipal Council demand in 1934 "that the Black population be removed from the town of Brewarrina to the Mission".2

To the south east, the Wailwan-speaking Maris of Quambone were suffering the same problems faced by other Aborigines over the Depression in towns with no reserve and no work. They had been refused State Food Relief and the local police were issuing them only Board rations as well as controlling their Family Endowment. The police exercised care that the Board's instruction, for all able-bodied Aborigines to support themselves where possible, was carried out. If Quambone Maris refused work offered by surrounding pastoralists at under-award wages their rations were cut off and they were forced to go to the resident missionaries for aid. When they did receive rations, however, the police followed Board instructions to the effect that Aborigines should perform two days work in return. In 1935, while the State Work Relief program was functioning on a work-for-(low)-wages basis, Quambone Maris were working for rations, building a fence around the police station.3

Marl involvement with left-wing organizers in the pastoral industry of the north west had finally, however, generated interest outside Dubbo. Maris in Coonamble established contact with Norman Jeffries, a member of the CPA organizing for the PWMU, who investigated the Quambone situation and wrote about it for the Workers' Weekly.4 This was the first evidence that CPA members (other than the Dubbo unemployed organizers who had joined the party only in 1935) had developed personal contact with NSW Aborigines. The CPA national platform on Aborigines had been formulated in 1931, apparently without consultation with Aborigines and after the party newspaper, the Workers' Weekly, had ignored the AAPA from 1925 to 1927.5

1 Annual Aboriginal Census, Police Patrol returns, Brewarrina, 1927, 1928, 1931, 1934.
2 BMC Minutes, 26/11/1934.
3 WW, 15/3/1935.
4 Ibid.
5 WW, 24/9/1931.
The platform as a whole was consistent with AAPA demands, including inalienable rights to land as well as removal of all discriminatory legislation. In the articles concerning Aborigines in the years immediately following, however, the Workers' Weekly generally assumed that the separate rights referred to in the CPA platform, such as the right to land, were more applicable in the "remote", "frontier" areas of north western Australia.¹ In the longer settled south east, the appropriate parts of the platform were assumed to be those calling for equal and identical rights for Aborigines as "fellow-workers" and this was certainly the tone of Jeffries' Quambone article.²

Jeffries' attempt to open a campaign for Aboriginal rights in NSW had rapid but unforeseen consequences. The press report apparently drew the Protection Board's attention to Quambone, from which it had had no town protest nor any other local stimulus for intervention, and the group of around 20 Wailwan Maris there became the first people to be "concentrated" on Brewarrina station.³

There is little remaining documentation in relation to this move which took place before June in 1935. Jimmie Barker, then handyman at Brewarrina, was ordered to drive the manager to Quambone in the station's lorry.⁴ There, the manager and the local police coerced the Wailwan to move. Emily Sullivan, the only member of the Quambone community to remain permanently at Brewarrina, was emphatic in her insistence that her people had not wanted to leave their own place.⁵ Notwithstanding their reluctance, the move took place but the Quambone Maris did not stay longer than a couple of years at Brewarrina. With the exception of Emily, who married into the Brewarrina community, the other Quambone Maris returned to either Quambone, Warren or Dubbo, where one family, the Carrs, had relations.⁶

The Dubbo Carr family were taking a prominent role in the developing

⁵ Notes on conversation with Emily Sullivan, Brewarrina, 26/1/1977.
⁶ Ibid. Interviews T18, T21.
political activity there from the mid-1930s and it is improbable that they would have been unaware of the events affecting their relations in Quambone in 1935.¹

The Municipal Council at Brewarrina was, meanwhile, becoming more anxious about the increasing numbers of Aborigines in the town. During 1935 it instructed the police to use their powers to remove "the disgraceful humpies" Maris had built near the Bourke road and to maintain the curfew more strictly.²

The next group of people to be moved to Brewarrina were the Angledool Maris, most of whom were Yuvaliai-speaking people living on their own country, although some Gamilarai-speaking people from the land to the east of the Barwon also lived at the station. Angledool was an obvious target for "centralization". It was the Board's only managed reserve in the Walgett North area and by 1936 it appeared that pastoral labour needs in this district were going to be reduced over the long term by subdivision. There was, therefore, no pressure on the Board to continue to supply services, such as segregated schooling and rations during seasonal unemployment, to ensure an accessible Aboriginal work force in the area. With subdivision in the offing, the Board also had no interest in encouraging the continued residence of the Yuvaliai on their own country by improving the poor housing conditions of Angledool station. Trachoma was epidemic among its substantial population, which ranged from 150 to 180 and the township of Angledool had no doctor and was inaccessible in wet weather. The Board's argument for the move was that it could treat eye disease and improve housing conditions more efficiently if the station was closed altogether and the population moved to Brewarrina.³

Closing the station at Angledool and moving over 100 people was a major exercise and preparations at Brewarrina took a couple of months. Over that time the Angledool manager and Board Inspector Smithers held a number of meetings with station residents, in an attempt to convince them of the benefits of the move, with promises

¹ Interviews T57, T58.
Dubbo Dispatch, 28/6/1937.

² BMC Minutes, 28/10/1935, 16/12/1935.

APBM, 5/2/1936; 4/3/1936.
of improved conditions and "fine houses" at Brewarrina. The angry Maris held their own meetings and a letter of protest signed by all the station residents was sent to the Board. Angledool Maris, too, wanted better housing conditions, but they wanted them at Angledool, on their own country. They did not want to be forced to move to a community where the people were strangers and the surrounding employers did not know them, which would make it extremely difficult to gain work.

There were also protests from the town whites of Angledool, who feared the effects on their businesses if well over one hundred residents were removed overnight. The Board pressed ahead with its plans, however, and Angledool Maris began talking of going to Collarenebri or Walgett, towns on the edges of Yuwala country where they had relations and which were accessible to the Walgett North pastoral stations. These two towns were also causing the Board major problems. At Collarenebri, Maris were bitter at their exclusion from the public school and their demands for access were becoming more insistent and aggressive. At Walgett white calls had been renewed for the removal of the town Mari population and the Board was making concrete plans to move them to Pilliga station.

Pressure on the Angledool Maris intensified as their mood became obvious to the Board's staff. Henry Hardy has described Smithers' methods of persuasion:

1 Interviews T5, T6, T50, T52. APBM, 4/3/1936.
2 Interview T18.
3 Interviews T5, T6, T50, T18.
4 Minister for Education to Chief Secretary, 21/4/1936, passing on white Angledool residents' protest, in Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
Interviews T5, T6, T18.
Conversation with P Prentice, now Brewarrina Shire Councillor and (white) resident of Angledool, 1936. August 1976.
5 Interviews T5, T6.
H Maclean, teacher, Collarenebri, to Regional Inspector, 16/12/1936; 16/8/1938.
Rev HF Peak to APB, 2/12/1938.
All in Collarenebri public school files, DEIL.
Interview T48.
A lot of' em didn't like comin' down but they had to come down. A lot of' em started bailin' up, talkin' they weren't goin' to go, they'd go to Collarindabri, Walgett.

But this Smithers come there then. He walked round and put a revolver on and hung it around his hip, walkin' through the crowd ...

They're lookin' then and they started gettin' the wind up.

And he stopped it that time.¹

As Henry described it:

We were under the Dog Act altogether. Just like a dog, they'd get hold of the chain and lead him over there, tie him up over there. What they said, that was the end of it. They could send you anywhere, do what they liked with you.²

It was, however, only the specific groups most vulnerable to Protection Board threats who were really "under the Dog Act". These were the people with children whom the Board could remove and the very old, who were no longer able to work in the European economy nor to survive independently on traditional subsistence resources and so were dependent on rations. As Henry Hardy pointed out, Smithers had "only bluffed'em" with his gun:

A lot of'em just stopped there and he didn't do no more about it. He was just frightenin'em to come this way [to Brewarrina].³

The Maris who successfully defied Smithers were all middle-aged people, able to work in the pastoral employment which remained in the short term, but safe from the threat of removal of their children. Henry's own parents, his parents-in-law, his older sister and others of that older age group made up the half-dozen families who were able to resist the move.⁴

For 110 Angledool Maris, however, there appeared to be no choice on May 26 when Smithers, the Brewarrina manager and three Brewarrina Maris, Jimmie Barker, Dudley Dennis and Billy Moore, arrived to load them onto two semi-trailers and a Bedford truck. The iron from all of the huts was stripped and loaded onto one semi-trailer; the other two trucks were so crowded with people that there was little room for

1 Interview T6. Henry uses older form of "Collarenebri".
2 Interview T50.
3 Interview T6.
4 Interviews T6, T20, T48.
belongings other than a few clothes and blankets. After the trucks had gone, those Maris who had refused to leave simply moved closer to the town and began building their own houses again.

For those travelling to Brewarrina, the trip took hours, with only one stop along the road to make tea and stretch cramped limbs. The trucks arrived at Brewarrina at 2- or 3-o'clock in the morning and everyone who was present has remembered that it was very cold. Jack Barker has recalled the scene as the trucks pulled up, with people climbing down, wrapped in thin, Board-issue "Gubby" blankets, searching for wood to light fire buckets against the cold. The priority, however, was not to get warm but to find a house. Henry Hardy and a mate jumped off the truck as soon as it stopped, leaving their families to help themselves down, while they rushed over to the row of tiny, half completed houses to select ones next to each other and at the end of the row for quietness. Jack Barker has described the houses in similar terms to Henry:

They had two-roomed tin shacks half built for 'em. They was about 10 feet by 29. No doors and no windows and it was a cold night.

Frieda Hardy, one of Henry's six children, has remembered the family's first night in their new house:

It was cold. Open fires was all we had, there was no stoves. There was only two little rooms with cement floors, no windows, just the squares [holes]. We slept inside on the floor, we'd made sure of our blankets. There was no mattresses, just laying on cement floors. I don't remember if we had a fire bucket inside — there wasn't any room for us, let alone a fire bucket.

These were the "fine houses" promised the Angledool Maris. The next day, the families set about digging their own pit toilets and

1 Description drawn from Interviews T5, T6, T50, T17, T18, T20, and SC on APB, ME, p37.
3 Interviews T5, T6, T20.
4 Interview T18.
5 Interview T6.
6 Interview T18.
7 Interview T20.
were issued with hinged, woven-iron beds and palliasses which they had to stuff with straw for mattresses.\(^1\) Eventually, tin flaps were placed over the holes in the wall for "windows" and doors were added, but this was not achieved for a long time. Through the winter months little was done and visiting Board members reported in August: "much work remaining to be done on huts for Angledool people".\(^2\)

Those who had protested against the move but who had been forced to come anyway were not forgotten. The Maris who had drafted the letter of protest were called up to the Manager's office, where the manager and Smithers abused them and threatened them with expulsion from the station (without their families) should they continue such activities.\(^3\)

Angledool Maris' fears about employment proved justified. Little work was offered around Brewarrina and Henry Hardy, with other Angledool men, was forced to travel back to the stations around Angledool for employment, necessitating longer absences from family." At Brewarrina they found the same unstable and violent manager, R.R. Brain, who had served at Angledool until 1935 and who was widely believed to be manipulating Endowment and other monies sent to the station, for his own benefit.\(^5\) The Board, too, believed this charge, giving it as one of the reasons for Brain's dismissal in October 1936.\(^6\)

For those Angledool Maris who could not find work, there was only work-for-rations on the station.

In terms of relationships with Maris at Brewarrina, however, Angledool fears had not been fulfilled. Although there was some friction, there were enough traditional cultural similarities and enough shared experiences from the recent past to form the basis of relationships between Brewarrina and Angledool Maris. After a relatively short time, political alliances developed and individuals

1 Interviews T18, T50.
2 Extract from Report by Board members EB Harkness and GA Mitchell, Inspection of Brewarrina station, August 9-14, 1936 in SC on APB, ME, p34.
3 Interview T18.
5 Matthews (ed), Jimmie Barker, pp157-159. Interview T5.
6 SC on APB, ME, p 34. APBM, 7/10/1936.
from both communities were involved in confrontations with the manager over issues like the poor water supply and the work-for-rations system on the station.¹

Yet even if they were happier at Brewarrina than they had expected to be, things had changed for Angledool Maris. There had always been more singing (in the language) and "corroboreeing" on the pastoral camps than on Angledool, but even the degree of Yualliai cultural expression which had taken place on that station ended when the people were moved to Brewarrina. The old people did not do so much singing and the dead were no longer buried with the ritual and the smoke which had been carried out at Angledool.²

Some of the older people died at Brewarrina. As time passed the Angledool Maris moved off the station, family by family, as their children grew a little older and so less vulnerable, as employment conditions improved. When they left, most of them headed home. As Billy Moore observed:

They were contented for a while, but not living on your own place makes you different, see.³

Some were back in Angledool itself before June 1938.⁴ Others went to Collarenebri, Walgett and Lightening Ridge where they are today.⁵ Some Angledool families stayed on Brewarrina station while their children were young, but as soon as possible moved off the station into camps near the town⁶, away from the direct control of the Board and precisely as town whites had feared. For these families, links had been formed with Brewarrina Maris in struggles against the Protection Board and later through marriages and so for them Brewarrina as well as Angledool came to be seen as home.

Although few Angledool people appear to have left Brewarrina station before the end of 1937, whites in Brewarrina had intensified their campaign for removal of the town Maris with the first rumours of the alleged gonococcal ophthalmia outbreak at Angledool and then

¹ Interviews T5, T5, T6, T17, T18, T50.
² Interview T6.
³ Interview T17. The gradual movement of Angledool Maris off the station was confirmed by all Maris interviewed.
⁴ Annual Aboriginal Census, Police Patrol return, New Angledool, 1938, "Comments".
⁵ Including many members of the Fernando, Dixon, Trapman, Thurston, Rose and Walford families.
⁶ Including the Winters and Hardy families.
with news that that station was to be moved.\footnote{BMC Minutes, 9/3/1936.} As in other towns where an appeal to the Protection Board had failed to produce the desired result, the Brewarrina Council sought to draw in other State authorities and, using the gonococcal ophthalmia scare, called for the exclusion of the 32 Aboriginal children attending the public school.\footnote{Ibid, 20/4/1936. DH Drummond, Minister for Education, to Department of Education, 30/4/1936, after personal representations had been made to him by aldermen and other citizens of Brewarrina. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.}

The Council found an enthusiastic ally in the regional Inspector of Schools, J.N. Harrison, who explained the elements of the town plan in a series of reports. Once the Aboriginal children were excluded, they would, it was hoped, be either removed to the station dormitory or bussed daily to the station school. It was then assumed that "it would not be long before the parents permanently settled themselves at the station" and this would "clear the Blacks from Brewarrina".\footnote{Inspector JN Harrison to Chief Inspector, 29/5/1936; 5/9/1936. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.} That the aim of the exercise was removal of the town Maris rather than segregation of the school was made even more obvious when a separate "special" school near the town was proposed. The town reaction, as conveyed by Harrison, was total opposition: a special school would "aggravate the problem" by attracting more people from the station into town.\footnote{Ibid, 5/9/1936.}

The Protection Board was already finding itself in difficulties providing adequate facilities for the Angledool population and could not have hoped to provide accommodation at the station for the town population which was approaching 200 people. It prevaricated by explaining to the town Council that it did not yet have the legal power to confine Aborigines (although this was not stopping the plans to move the Angledool population) and repeated that its aim remained the eventual "mergence" of Aborigines into the general community.\footnote{Ibid, 27/8/1936. BC Harkness (commenting as member of APB) to Minister for Education, 4/1/1937. All in Brewarrina public school files, DEIL. APBM, 17/7/1936.} The Board had few arguments to offer when the town raised the Board's
own exaggerated information about gonococcal ophthalmia, but neither could it provide facilities on the station to satisfy town demands, so nothing at all was done.

In August 1936, the Council broadened its line of attack, calling officially for support from the Parents' and Citizens' Association and the Hospital Board for total segregation of both school and hospital. The intention remained the removal of town Maris, as was stated bluntly in the Council-initiated petition:

That a separate hospital and school should be in operation for Aborigines. These should be established at the Mission.¹

Tension between whites and Maris was running extremely high over this period as the town's authorities attempted the closure of essential facilities to Maris. It was at this time that the large street fight, described in Chapter IV, took place.² There was, as well, a deputation of Mari parents to the public school, where they insisted that their children's right to education be maintained³ but this demand was not passed on by the Education Department staff.⁴

The Board conceded to the calls for hospital segregation in relation to the station population, issuing instructions that all but the most urgent cases of illness were to be treated by the matron-nurse at the station's clinic rather than by the doctor in town. It also agreed to admit any of the town Mari children to the station school if their parents agreed. Beyond this, however, it would not go, being still in extreme difficulties over both housing and staff on the station.⁵ The Education Department was in considerable confusion over the state of its own policy at this stage and by early 1937 was leaning towards the idea of a separate school in the town but delayed any actual segregation.⁶

---

1 M Davidson, MLA, to Acting Minister for Education, 11/8/1936, passing on petition. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
2 Interviews T18, T24.
3 Interviews T7, T19.
4 No mention was made of this deputation in Brewarrina public school files but considering the extreme antagonism to Aborigines displayed in Inspector Harrison's letters this is not surprising.
5 APBM, 17/7/1936. Secretary, AB, to Director of Education, 27/8/1936, Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
6 DH Drummond, annotation on BC Harkness' letter, 4/1/1937, Brewarrina public school files, DEIL. For a detailed discussion of the Education Department's confusion
The town camp population continued to increase and with it Aboriginal enrolments at the public school. In mid-1937, 45 children, half the school attendance, were Aboriginal. The white townspeople pressed their argument for segregation and removal through Inspector Harrison but without apparent success.¹ As an internal measure, however, the Council, at the instigation of the aldermen who were also the town's JPs, again instructed the police to enforce the curfew strictly and ensure "that aboriginals not be allowed to congregate in the streets".²

There were, therefore, many angry Maris in and around Brewarrina when Bill Ferguson came there in the early part of 1937. Some Quambone and most Angledool people were still on the station so there were two groups of people who didn't want to be there at all. For the disadvantages of loss of employment or greater travel for work, Angledool conditions only marginally better at Brewarrina: they were still living in two-roomed tin huts, the difference being that the new ones had concrete rather than earth walls, while the "running water" at Brewarrina in 1937 consisted of 4 taps for the use of 310 people.³ No-one at the station was much happier with the new manager, E. Dalley, than with Brain: Dalley was in the habit of firing his gun at any movement after dark and there were persistent rumours about sexual abuse of the girls in the dormitory.⁴ Maris in town were under intensifying pressure as the Council attempted to close the school, the hospital and the streets to them to force them out to the station. Maris from both the town and the station talked with Ferguson and the issues they stressed were those of Board interference in their choice of where they lived, the intolerable managerial control, the poor food and conditions and the dormitory system at the station and the

over the 1935-1939 period, as it moved slowly towards at least a nominal reversal of its policy of segregation on demand by white parents, see JJ Fletcher, "Aboriginal Education".

¹ JN Harrison to Chief Inspector, 27/1/1937, Brewarrina public school files, DIEIL.
³ SC on APB, ME, p23.
⁴ Matthews (ed), Jimmie Barker, p159.
SC on APB, ME, pp54, 57, 121.
Dubbo Despatch, 28/6/1937.
Interview T18.
denial of access to the services of the town.¹

In September 1937, the Council renewed its call for segregation of the school.² When it gained little response from either the Protection Board or the Education Department the Council appealed to yet another State Department, this time that of Health, insisting that an inspector be sent to investigate the housing of Aborigines "on the outskirts of the town".³ The Council apparently received little response to this appeal either, but by the end of the year the Minister for Education, D.H. Drummond, had become alarmed at recent medical reports which indicated a high incidence of trachoma among children in special Aboriginal schools. With dubious logic, the Minister insisted that this report supported the arguments for exclusion of Aborigines from public schools.⁴ (The result, presumably being to send Aborigines to the overcrowded special schools where they would suffer greater risk of trachoma). An Education Department doctor was sent to Brewarrina to ascertain the "caste" of the Aboriginal children, as a preliminary to the exclusion of all children of "predominantly Aboriginal blood".⁵ In his report, Dr Donnellan concluded that the Aboriginal children in town suffered a relatively low rate of trachoma and that there was "very little risk" to white children from infection. He did, however, note the continued hostility of the town whites to Aborigines and the violence endemic in the white children's actions towards Aboriginal children.⁶ The Department then decided that physical segregation within the classroom was the most sensible solution and so refused to exclude the Brewarrina Aboriginal children.⁷ This was not, of course, a solution in the terms of white townspeople's aim of removing Aborigines altogether from the town and through the early months of 1938 the Council continued to protest the Board's lack of

1 Interviews T3, T6, T24, T50.
2 BMC Minutes, 13/9/1937.
3 Ibid, 25/10/1937.
4 DH Drummond, 7/1/1938, annotation to memo by Director of Education. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
5 Departmental recommendation, 14/2/1938. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
6 Dr Donnellan to Chief Medical Officer, 30/3/1938, Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
7 E Williams, Undersecretary for Education, Departmental memo, 23/5/1938. Brewarrina public school files, DEIL.
compliance with this aim.¹

Maris on the station had been protesting at their conditions over this period as well. Jimmie Barker, among others, had maintained contact with Bill Ferguson and had sent him information which Ferguson was using in the current hearings of the Select Committee into the administration of the Board.² Over Christmas 1937, Pearl Gibbs returned to Brewarrina, where she had grown up, to stay on the station with her relations. She brought with her the clippings from the Aboriginal movement’s successful press campaign in October and the newspapers were secretly passed so eagerly from person to person on the station that they disintegrated from handling while Pearl was there.³ Intending to gain further evidence for the Select Committee, Pearl spoke mainly with the women on the station, who talked of the poor food, the sexual abuse of the dormitory girls and the insanitary conditions of the treatment room.⁴ It was while Pearl was at the station that the men working for rations refused to continue, telling the manager that they would work for wages but not for rations. The strike was short-lived: the manager simply denied food not only to the men but also to their families and they were forced to return to work. Pearl took all of this information back to Sydney, where Bill Ferguson was able to use some of it at the Select Committee hearings and Pearl exposed it in the press.⁵

Despite such high levels of dissatisfaction among Maris on the station and among whites of the town, the Protection Board early in 1938 was organizing the "concentration" of yet another group of people. The Wangkumara at Tibooburra were about to be moved to Brewarrina.

The Wangkumara had been camping near Tibooburra in increasing numbers since the onset of the Depression, with the camp population

¹ BMC Minutes, 24/1/1938.
² SC on APB, ME, pp53-57 for Ferguson’s statement and throughout for his questions to Board officers in relation to Brewarrina town and station.
³ Interviews TS4, TS5.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Interview T25.

SC on APB, ME, p121 and Ferguson’s whole questioning of manager E Baile.
SMH, 12/2/1938; DT, 12/2/1938.
Woman Today, April 1938; May 1938.
rising from around 30 in 1928 to 148 in 1937.\(^1\) The only relationship the Wangkumara had with the Protection Board was that when they applied for unemployment relief they were given Board rations.\(^2\) Even when unemployed, however, the Wangkumara were able to add to their income by "speckling" for gold in the hills around the station. Employment had improved by 1937 apparently, and a number of the Wangkumara were working on surrounding pastoral properties again, leaving their families in Tibooburra so that the children could go to school.\(^3\)

Conflict with town whites over access to the school had, as described earlier, reached the point of actual segregation in 1935, only to fail in the confusion over who was "white" and who "black". The Wangkumara had assumed this to be the end of the affair, but some white townspeople pursued the matter. By late 1937 the demand for segregation had been renewed on the altered grounds that the Aboriginal children were carriers of trachoma.\(^4\)

The teacher at the school agreed that "some" Aboriginal children suffered from trachoma, but pointed out that all of them had the disease in its chronic stage, in which there was no discharge from the eyes, and which Education Department medical guidelines specified as \textit{not excludable}, as it was not usually infectious.\(^5\) Moreover, the teacher stated that he also had many white pupils who suffered from this stage of trachoma. He had had difficulty in gaining permission for medical treatment from both white and Aboriginal parents and in his view the solution to the "problem" lay in compulsory medical

---

3 Ibid.
5 The interviews of Matthews with Lorna Dixon and mine with Eddie Edwards, are consistent in details of the actual move and of conditions at Brewarrina station. As far as these subjects are touched on, these interviews are also consistent with George Dutton's account of that period of his life, described by J Beckett in "George Dutton's Country",\(^5\) Aboriginal History, 1978, 2:1.
6 JL Rowett, for residents of Tibooburra, to Minister for Education, 15/12/1937.
7 C\textsuperscript{5} Sankey, teacher, Tibooburra. to RB Wilson, Inspector, Child Welfare Department, 10/12/1937. Tibooburra public school files, DEIL.
examination and treatment for all his pupils.¹

This would appear to have been a clear-cut case for the Board to use its powers under the .86 amendments to enforce just such treatment but this was not done... The townspeople had enlisted the support of the regional Child Welfare Department Inspector, to achieve their stated aims of a separate, segregated school or removal of the whole Aboriginal population to Menindee station.² This Inspector proved cooperative, as he had been in 1935, and in his report to the Child Welfare Department in January 1938, he transformed the Wangkumara children into ones "living under conditions of intolerable neglect" and "practically all infected with, and spreaders of, trachoma".³

This convinced the Secretary of the Department, who transformed the children still further into "diseased, dirty and verminous children undoubtedly carrying infection".⁴ In turn, this argument convinced Protection Board member B.C. Harkness and in March 1938 the Board decided to remove the whole Wangkumara population in Tibooburra to Menindee.⁵ This brought an urgent protest from white residents of Menindee, who probably knew of the prevalence of tuberculosis on the station there, but who had also heard rumours, spread by the police, that the Wangkumara were all suffering from (of course) gonococcal ophthalmia.⁶ The destination of the Wangkumara thus became Brewarrina, 350 miles to the south east.

By 1938 the Board was well aware of the difficulties it faced when trying to force Aborigines to move and the Tibooburra move was

1 CH Sankey to Inspector of Schools, JJ Pollock, 25/1/1938. Tibooburra public school files, DEIL.
2 JL Rowett, for residents of Tibooburra, to RB Wilson, 9/12/1937. Tibooburra public school files, DEIL.
4 C Wood, Secretary, Child Welfare Department to Undersecretary, Education Department, 19/1/1938. Tibooburra public school files, DEIL.
5 Ibid.
6 Menindee Parents' and Citizens' Association to Chief Inspector of Schools, telegram, 19/3/1938.
   RT Thomas, Headmaster, Menindee public school, to Chief Inspector, 30/3/1938.
   Both in Tibooburra public school files, DEIL.
the largest the Board had yet attempted with an independent community. With pastoral camps still in existence in the area, there were places to which the Wangkumara could go and so the police were careful not to alert them to the planned move. There were no "consultations" as there had been with Angledool Maris.

It was therefore a total surprise when, in late April 1938, Inspector Smithers arrived in Tibooburra, with three Brewarrina Maris driving the trucks which the Wangkumara were told were going to take them to Brewarrina.1 Jimmie Barker and Dudley Dennis were still employees of the Board and could not avoid assisting with the move, but Billy Moore had refused to be used again:

I'd seen enough at Angledool. I didn't like the way people were being shifted about from their homes. It wasn't a fair deal for any of the people ... young or old, they all wanted to go back to their own original homes. 2

This was no longer a consideration for the Protection Board, however, and Smithers, again wearing his gun prominently, and with the police beside him, strode from camp to camp at Tibooburra, giving the bewildered Wangkumara 3 or 4 hours to gather their belongings. 3

The situation was chaotic and if there was individual resistance it was futile. A few people had time to contact relations working on properties nearby, but many did not. Families were not able to take many possessions and all were forced to leave the camels, horses and plant which were the hard-earned means of their livelihood. 4 Both Lorna Dixon, who was 16, and Eadie Edwards, who was 14 at the time, have recalled the intense distress of the move, with many people crying as they packed under police surveillance and then were forced onto the trucks, some of the old people clutching dogs which they refused to leave behind. "It was compulsory", Eadie said, "We just had to go. But we didn't like leavin' our home, see". 5

---

1 Interview T28.
2 F.T.194.
3 Beckett, "George Dutton's Country", pp.20-21. Beckett explains the school exclusion but this was not information received from George Dutton, who was unable to offer Beckett any reason for the move.
4 Ibid (both interviews).
5 Interview T28.
The group of 130 Wangkumara who made the two-day journey were given nothing to look forward to at Brewarrina. Smithers is remembered to have warned them not to "play up" at the mission or they could be "shot like a dog". When they did finally arrive, they were greeted with an elaborate welcome, perhaps reflecting an attempt by Angledool Maris to make the Wangkumara feel a little more secure than they themselves had done. Eadie was one who was touched by the effort involved, but it did not comfort her against her overwhelming first impression: "It was just like a gaol!".

Lorna Dixon also remembered Brewarrina as a prison. The houses for the Wangkumara were better than those for the Yuwalla but were still tiny and too few in number to accommodate all of the families, many of whom spent some weeks sleeping in the school house. The Wangkumara had had enough to eat at Tibooburra and, despite some trachoma, they had felt that they were healthy. This opinion was confirmed by the Brewarrina doctor, who found the new arrivals "well-nourished" and in "good general condition". At Brewarrina, their health deteriorated: not only did their eye disease become worse but the children developed sores on their arms and legs which had not occurred at Tibooburra. The Wangkumara attributed this in part to the scarcity of food on the station: there was never enough meat and at times they boiled flour and water with sugar in it for their main meal to stretch their food until the next ration issue. In part also they felt their deteriorating health resulted from the lack of the right traditional remedies: the herbs they needed did not grow in the country round Brewarrina and, as Eadie recalled, the medicine there "was all that whitefellas' turnout".

1 F.T.198.
2 Interview T28.
3 F.T.194.
5 Dr WJ Ferguson to Director General of Public Health, 29/4/1938. Tibooburra public school files, DEIL.
7 F.T.194.
Time and again in their accounts of life on the station Eadie
and Lorna returned to their sense of the oppressive confinement they
felt there. They were not permitted to go into the town unless under
the manager's supervision and, unfamiliar with the country, they
found "no trespassing" signs confronting them whenever they tried to
find game. Their only source of food supplementation was fishing but
they were told that this was permitted in only one area of the river,
in a spot visible to the manager so that he could "keep an eye on
them".¹

The Wangkumara, experiencing managerial control for the first
time, would probably have felt confined at any period of the station's
history. Their arrival, however, had increased the restrictions
placed on all the station residents. Brewarrina townspeople had
panicked at yet another increase in the station population. Within
days of the Wangkumara arrival, another petition was circulating
among whites demanding that the Board remove all the town Aboriginal
population to the station and that station residents not be allowed
free entry into the town.²

The Board made no reference this time to its aim of "mergence"
and appeared just as anxious as white townspeople at the increase in
the town camp population, which was approaching 300.³ By May 1938
the Board had stretched the resources of the station beyond its
limits: there were over 400 people there, still with only 4 taps, housingschooling accommodation were acutely overcrowded and all
of this was compounded by what the Board now recognized as gross
managerial unsuitability.⁴ While it could not comply with the demand
to remove the town camp, the Board could restrict the movements of
station residents and it directed that no Aborigine was to be
permitted to go from the station into town "except for very special
reasons".⁵

The Wangkumara felt isolated at Brewarrina. Not only was the
country different but they had only the fact of dislocation in

1 _Ibid_ (both interviews).
3 _APBM_, 6/7/1938.
   Annual Aboriginal Census, Police Patrol returns, Brewarrina,
   1937, 1938.
5 _Ibid_, 6/7/1938.
common with the Quambone and Angledool people. The Wangkumara shared little in traditional terms with the people to the east of the Paroo river: their ritual and ceremonial links were, like those of their language, with the people to the north and west of Tibooburra. Their colonial experiences had more in common with people in the desert cattle country of Queensland and South Australia than with those of the north western NSW sheep country.¹ On an intolerably crowded station, Eadie Edwards remembered, "we kept away to ourselves as much as we could 'cause we weren't used to too many people".²

There was little work for the Wangkumara men. No major droving routes passed through Brewarrina to allow them to pick up work in their usual occupations and the surrounding pastoralists preferred men they knew to the strangers.³ The Board had no plans in this regard and made inquiries as to "the prospective employment and future disposal" of the Tibooburra people only after it had dumped them at Brewarrina." Maris there remember the Wangkumara as "dejected", "unhappy", "homesick" and increasingly anxious as the death toll mounted among members of their community despite (or because of) "all that whitefellas' turnout" at the clinic and hospital.⁵

The man who made most impression on Maris at Brewarrina was Fred Johnson, who had followed his people across from Tibooburra bringing his donkey team with him. He thus had a means of support independent of the Board and made his living at Brewarrina carting wood. Those who were children at the station while he was there remember riding

2 Interview T28.
4 APwM, 4/5/1938.
5 These adjectives are applied almost universally by all residents of brewarrina station in relation to the Wangkumara and all mention the number of deaths among the Wangkumara as a factor in their eventual decision to leave. Lorna Dixon and Eadie Edwards both give "homesickness" and the death toll as their families' reasons for leaving the station. The deaths at Brewarrina recalled by Eadie and Lorna (Eadie's aunt) were of Lorna's grandmother and step-grandfather, one of Lorna's uncles and another middle-aged man and of Lorna's 24-year old sister, who died after giving birth to an infant which also died.
the donkeys when the team wasn't working¹, but Fred Johnson made a greater impact.

As a senior man, addressed by most people as "Grandfather", Johnson expressed his people's anger by taking an active role in the western political movement, which was developing in late 1938. With both Brewarrina and Angledool Maris he was involved in organizing meetings between Bill Ferguson and the station residents, although these meetings had to be held outside the station fence as Ferguson had been denied entry to any reserve.² Early in 1939, Johnson officially took on the job of organizer for the movement. In February and March he travelled with Ferguson and Jack Kinchela, who had been organizing at Burra Bee Dee and Pilliga stations, to Goodooga and the large pastoral camp at Weilmoringle. They went on to Collarenebri and Walgett, both towns where Maris were under threat of Board enforced movement, and then to Moree, where Maris were still facing intense town pressure and where Johnson took the dominant speaking role at a large meeting attended only by Maris.³

The practice of the Dog Act had had devastating effects for Aborigines in the whole of the western and north western regions. In relation to Brewarrina alone, three communities had been uprooted and "centralized" on the station where all the residents then had to share the continued poor conditions and increased restrictions on their movements. Managers who were unsuitable provided no "training" but plenty of "disciplinary supervision". At the same time pressure on town Maris had intensified. The moves not only exacerbated the insecurity of the town's whites but had given them examples of the way the Board was prepared to deal with Aborigines from other areas. In doing so, the Board had in fact generated calls for the removal and confinement of even more people. In their response to white pressure and to the Board's moves and threats, however, Aborigines in the west had formed inter-community political links which spanned half the State.

¹ Interviews T6, T18, T20, T25.
² Interviews T3, T6, T18, T24, T50.
³ Dubbo Despatch, 24/2/1939; 12/4/1939.
DT, 30/1/1939.
Interviews T3, T18, T24, T50.
Burnt Bridge: 1936 - 1940

The struggle for Burnt Bridge played a significant role in the developments of 1937, when the Aboriginal political movement emerged dramatically into (white) public view. The nature of this particular dispute also suggests, however, the source of some dissimilarities between western and coastal Aboriginal orders, of priorities within their political aims, and indicates the differences in the white groups to whom each regional movement looked for support.

Most of the high quality alluvial land reserved for Aborigines on the north coast had been lost by 1927, so with the mid-1930s revival in the capitalist economy, there was not such intense white interest in reserve land for economic use. The pressure caused by town expansion was, however, renewed. As one example, townspersons at Karuah had attempted to have what remained of the reserve there revoked in 1929, in favour of subdivision for white residential use.\(^1\) Such plans had been laid aside during the Depression but by 1936 the campaign for revocation had begun again. White intentions were made very clear to the Karuah Guris, who included the Ridgeway family, prominent in the AAPA in the 1920s. The political link between north coast Guris and white nationalists was reactivated with this renewal of pressure on reserve land and the resulting submissions to the Premier from old supporters like J.J. Moloney, alongside some local publicity, were able to stave off revocation. They failed, however, to prevent the leasing of most of the reserve.\(^2\)

To the general pressure from local whites on reserve land was now added the new pressure of the Protection Board's concentration and confinement policy. In August 1936, the Board decided to establish a station at Burnt Bridge, adding a new area of reserve land adjacent to the two original reserves there.\(^3\) This station was intended to "absorb" the population of Urunga (relocated already from the island to the mainland at Yellow Rock in 1921), the Guris of the Greenhills camp who had given the Board so much trouble in the 1920s, the residents of the old Burnt Bridge reserves and, eventually, all

\(^1\) SMH, 14/6/1929.
\(^2\) JJ Moloney to BS Stevens, Premier, 10/6/1937;
   GC Golan for Premier to JJ Moloney, ASP, 28/9/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
\(^3\) APBM, 5/8/1936.
those on the station at Bellbrook further upstream on the Macleay. The first step for the Board was the leasing of a portion of one of the old reserves which it did not feel was necessary for the new station, thus taking financial advantage of revived white interest in land.

The land to be leased was that portion on which the Davis' had settled in 1893 and which was notified as reserve in 1894. It was Chris Davis, therefore, who made the first protest, writing directly to the Prime Minister, J.A. Lyons, in January 1937 and asking for intervention to stop the leasing. Davis explained that his family had been told in 1893 that if they cleared, cultivated and continued to reside on the land it would remain in their possession. The family had fulfilled these conditions, he argued, and so their rights to the land must be acknowledged. This letter set off a flurry of correspondence between the Prime Minister, the NSW Premier and the Protection Board, resulting in the proposed leasing being delayed.

The Board went ahead meanwhile with its plans for the station.

John Mosely was still living on the second of the old reserves, notified for him in 1898. He was by this time, an elderly man and during the Depression his son Percy had come back up to Burnt Bridge to manage his father's affairs. In 1937 the extended family group was farming corn on the reserve. As the preparations for the station were made, Percy Mosely was faced, for the third time in 23 years, with impending dispossession of land which he, his family or Guris with whom he was closely connected, had cleared, worked and been assured was theirs in perpetuity. Utilizing the networks of the

---

   Abo Call, III, June 1938, p2.
2 Chris Davis to JA Lyons, Prime Minister, 21/1/1937;
   JJ Moloney to BS Stevens, 1/7/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
3 Davis to Lyons, 21/1/1937.
4 JA Lyons to BS Stevens, Premier, 27/1/1937; Premier's Department to Chief Secretary's Department, 2/2/1937, 18/3/1937; Chief Secretary's Department to Premier's Department, 19/2/1937, 18/5/1937; Chief Secretary's Department to APB, for "urgent advice", 24/3/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
5 Percy Mosely to JJ Moloney, 1/7/1937; LJ Rose, Private Secretary to Premier, BS Stevens, 26/8/1937, notes on meeting between Rose and Mosely. PDCF, A37/193.
1920s movement, Percy Mosely had already contacted Moloney for support before the station was officially established.¹

Early in June 1937, the Urunga community, some Guris from Greenhills and Bellbrook and some who had already been moved from Armidale and Walcha to Bellbrook, were forced onto the new Burnt Bridge station site. There they found a few rough huts, a water supply that was totally inadequate and no sanitation at all.² These people faced similar problems to those of the dislocated communities at Brewarrina, the major one being that there was no work to be had in the area. Guris at Urunga had been among the few in the State to be admitted to Work Relief but they found themselves excluded from the Kempsey system. Their only alternative was work-for-rations on the new station, which they bitterly resented.³

The Moselys, however, refused to move down to the central station complex, insisting that the land was theirs and denying that the manager, J. Jacobs, had authority over them. On June 30, without prior notice, Jacobs arrived at the group of cottages and other buildings that the Mosely family had constructed over the years. Acting undoubtedly to intimidate the residents into moving to the main station and on the basis that all structures erected on reserve land were legally the property of the Board, Jacobs began to demolish and remove the buildings. The following day, Percy Mosely wrote to Moloney:

We have again been interfered with. The Manager of the A.P. Board came out on 30th June and took possession of the place and took away the W.C. from the school. Father protested and asked him who had given him permission to remove the buildings and he said we had no right to question him. When he had gone with one load, we nailed up the fence and stopped him from coming in the second time, so he went in and brought the whole of the police force out to help him break the fence.

¹ Previous communication is obvious from Mosely to Moloney, 1/7/1937.
² Kelly, "Anthropological Survey at Burnt Bridge" for description of conditions at station.
³ Kelly, "Anthropological Survey at Burnt Bridge". Kelly also raised this issue during questioning of APB officials during Select Committee hearings.

APBM, 3/3/1937, 7/4/1937, for Board's awareness of problems with water supply and necessity for connection to town supply.
Abo Call, IV, July 1938, p.2. Connection with town supply had not occurred by this date.
After they had broken down the fence and taken away the second load, the police headed by the Inspector came down to the house and gave the Manager permission to take the tank off the place. Then I asked the Inspector what his duty was here, to which he replied, 'Give less cheek or I'll lock you up'.

Moloney sent an urgent telegram to the Premier, followed by a series of letters, and the issue received some sympathetic coverage in the local white press, leading to a hasty denial by the Board that it intended to evict the Moselys and other families. Percy Mosely read this denial but when Jacobs came back later in that same week to take away the church building, Mosely wrote again to Moloney, saying:

I have read in the paper that no evictions will take place ... but I want to know if it is not evicting to take away our tank and houses and church. I call it plain robbery.

The demolitions continued, however, with Jacobs taking whatever he wanted from the old settlement to try to make the new one habitable. The labour needed was reluctantly supplied by Gurus from the central station, forced to carry out the work for rations for themselves and their families. When they began to build a fence across Mosely land, Percy Mosely had had enough. He followed the workers with a razor sharp axe and as they erected each fence post he chopped it to pieces behind them. Losing patience even with this tactic, he went back to his house and returned riding his blue pony and firing his shotgun over the heads of the Guri workers. The men scattered but work was stopped only for as long as it took Jacobs to fetch the police to arrest Mosely. This man's grim battle for his family's land was not wasted. It left a life-long impression on many of the younger men at the station who recognized from it, some for the first time, the serious nature of the issue at stake.

The repercussions of the Board's actions continued into August, as more white support was mobilized. In this process, the issues

1 Percy Mosely to JJ Moloney, 1/7/1937.
3 Percy Mosely to JJ Moloney, cited in Moloney to BS Stevens, 6/7/1937, PDCF, A37/193.
4 Interview C61.
were broadened from the specific one of the seizure of the Burnt Bridge reserve to a platform of demands based on the AAPA program of the 1920s for land and full citizens rights, with the Depression-stimulated addition of a call for a guaranteed basic wage or full Food Relief for all Aborigines.\(^1\) After consultations with Mosely and other Guris, Moloney put these demands to the Premier early in August on behalf of the ASP. Other letters from white north coast supporters of the same platform followed, making reference to the publicity being given by the local press to Aboriginal issues.\(^2\)

It was not only on the north coast, however, that Burnt Bridge became a focal point for organization. North coast Guris were in touch with those in Sydney and Moloney maintained his contact with Sydney nationalist groups and associated individuals like Michael Sawtell, who had once been a member of the International Workers of the World but had left this ideology behind him by the 1930s. Sawtell by then regarded himself as a nationalist as much as a socialist, his interests were eclectic and ensured that his connections ranged from the far left to the far right of Sydney politics.\(^3\) Having had contact with Aborigines in the Western Australian pastoral industry, he developed this interest also in Sydney, joining the APNR, but as this organization had little direct contact with Aborigines, Sawtell established his own links with the growing Sydney-based Aboriginal movement.\(^4\) Sawtell was alerted to the Burnt Bridge issue by Moloney, the nationalist connection and probably by Sydney Guris.\(^5\)

1. JJ Moloney to BS Stevens, 13/8/1937, PDCF, A37/193.

References to Macleay Chronicle, 23/7/1937 and Wingham Chronicle, also 23/7/1937.

3. Sawtell was a member of the AWU and ALP; knew individuals in or associated with the CPA; was active in the Theosophical Society; and was associated with moderate nationalists such as those in the ANA and also with the ultra-nationalist Australia First group. Horner, \textit{Vote Ferguson}, pp105-6.

4. For APNR lack of contact with Aborigines, see the account given by its secretary, Rev W Morley, SC on APB, p70. For Sawtell's association with Patten, see Horner, \textit{Vote Ferguson}, p39, for details supplied by Patten's widow, the late Mrs Selina Patten.

5. Sawtell's correspondence with the Premier from August 1937, revealed close links with Moloney, with Sawtell often quoting letters sent from the Premier's Department to Moloney but not sent to Sawtell. He was not, as Horner believed, acting on behalf of the APNR, which never took up the land issue at Burnt Brid'.
From the considerable number of Guris involved in community level politics in Sydney by the mid-1930s, the individual who emerged as the most impressive public speaker and the most effective organizer was Jack Patten (Jnr). He had grown up in the Cumeragunja situation and had been further schooled in politics by the Salt Pan Creek community, with its north and south coast connections and by his travels in search of work in the north coast country of his wife's family. In the mid-1930s the Pattens were living in the inner city and Jack Patten was developing his links with Guris at La Perouse as well as those at Salt Pan. Earlier in the year, Patten had made another trip to the north coast, travelling as far as Tabulum and so he was well acquainted with the concerns of north coast Guris.¹

Sawtell had been accompanying Patten to the Domain on Sundays for some time before this, speaking with him in support of Aboriginal demands.² Sawtell had introduced Patten to the range of nationalist groups in Sydney and a link had been established between Patten and a friend of Sawtell's, P.R. Stephenson, a central figure in the Australia First group and "literary assistant" to W.J. Miles, editor and financier of the Australia First newspaper, The Publicist.³ Patten had accepted Stephenson's offer of free office space in the Publicist building and the working relationship between the two had been cemented probably by August and certainly before October 1937.⁴

The Australia First involvement in the Aboriginal movement was curious in that this ultra-nationalist group was undoubtedly racist and a consistent advocate of a "White Australia".⁵ It was, however, constrained by its Anglonationalism from choosing biological race as the defining characteristic of its concept of nationhood. Instead, the most common Australia First slogan was that it was "Place not Race" which defined a nation.⁶ For the Australia First movement, then, as

1 Interview CS6.
2 Horner, Vote Ferguson, p39.
3 Ibid.
4 The Publicist, 1/9/1937.
5 The Publicist, any issue.
for the more moderate nationalists, Aborigines could provide a useful symbol of national identity and this seems to have been the basis of the group's interest and certainly of Stephenson's involvement.¹

Neither Stephenson nor the Australia First group ever developed a coherent theoretical position on the Aboriginal issue (nor on any other for that matter). In practice the lock of clarity in Australia First ideas as to what Aborigines should be doing meant that the Aboriginal movement was able to use effectively the substantial assistance offered by the group at the cost of surprisingly little manipulation.

Sawtell, however, played the pivotal role in mobilizing white support in Sydney because of the diversity of his connections. Early in August he wrote the first of a series of letters to the Premier on the Burnt Bridge issue, protesting the prohibition on Aboriginal ownership of reserves (and, so Sawtell believed, on any other land) and calling for full citizens rights for all Aborigines.² He effectively communicated the north coast information to his broad range of contacts, eliciting support for Burnt Bridge Gurus not only from Australia First and the Theosophical Society (of which Sawtell was an active member) but also from J.B. Steele, a left wing activist associated with the International Labour Defence organization.³

When, late in August 1937, Percy Mosely yet again made the journey to Sydney to argue for independent Guri control over reserve land, it was Sawtell whom Moloney had organized to help Mosely gain

¹ Ibid, 1/4/1937; 1/11/1937
² Significantly, the advertisement for Stephenson's The Foundations of Culture in Australia included a graphic with a stylized Aboriginal figure, with spear and Mercury-like winged heels, superimposed on a map of Australia, while the newspaper Stephenson edited and published before 1936 was titled "The Australian Mercury".


These letters incidentally reveal Sawtell's basic paternalism towards Aborigines, perhaps providing a clue to the reasons for his eventual, and bitterly-resented, defection to the side of the Government, after gaining a position on the Welfare Board. His subsequent vicious denunciations and ridicule of Aboriginal claims for full citizens rights were exemplified in the exchange between Sawtell and a member of the Aboriginal political movement in Dubbo Despatch, 3/4/1953, 20/4/1953.

³ JB Steele to BS Stevens, 2/8/1937; and Notice for Theosophical Society meeting, 2/10/1937, at which Sawtell was scheduled to speak on this topic. PDCF, A37/193.
interviews with the Board and the Premier. Mosely met only the Board’s secretary and the Premier’s secretary and received no more from the interviews than yet another denial that an "eviction" was being carried out. The Board, of course, did not wish the Moselys to leave Burnt Bridge, but it wanted them to relinquish their claims to the land and remain there as subjects of managerial control. The Board pushed ahead with its station, formally absorbing the old reserve lands into the station boundaries and forcing the previously independent Guri families into the situation of subservience to its manager.

It was on Burnt Bridge that the Board asked Caroline Kelly to undertake investigations in August and September 1937, to lay the basis for the practical incorporation of anthropological expertise into administration. Kelly must have witnessed much of this battle over the old reserve lands, but in her report she merely observed that the Aborigines there suffered "a sense of insecurity" about land tenure." In a later interview with the Premier's secretary she made no mention of the land issue at Burnt Bridge at all, concentrating instead on the problems more obvious to her: poor housing and water supply and lack of employment. Kelly had failed to communicate her concern over even these issues to Burnt Bridge Gurus, however, who regarded her work with "much amusement", Jack Patten reported, because "our people live in the Tin Hut Age, not the Stone Age".

In her recommendations to the Board, which were endorsed by Elkin, Kelly proposed a "training" scheme, to overcome the land "insecurity", by which Aborigines would be allowed "leases" over small areas of land on stations. These "leases" were to be conditional on the approval of the manager and would be surrendered for any

1 Sawtell to BS Stevens, 25/8/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
2 LJ Rose, Private Secretary to Premier, to BS Stevens, 26/8/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
3 Undersecretary, Chief Secretary's Department, for APB to Premier's Department, 20/9/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
4 C Kelly, "Anthropological Survey at Burnt Bridge".
5 LJ Rose to BS Stevens, 22/10/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
6 Abo Call, IV, July 1938, p2.
7 AP Elkin to APB, 5/10/1937; Elkin to BS Stevens, 20/10/1937. PDCF, A37/193.
misdemeanour, as defined by the manager.\(^1\) Percy Mosely and Caroline Kelly were not talking about the same things.

Unaided, then, by the anthropologists or their associates in the APNR, but rather by an expansion of the old nationalist networks of support, the Guris of the original Burnt Bridge reserves continued their campaign for restoration of independent control over their land.

In one reflection of this continuing struggle, a member of the Davis family wrote to the newly-convened Select Committee in November 1937, protesting the seizure and now-completed leasing of the family's reserve by the Board.\(^2\)

A partial victory was eventually won in mid-1939, when Percy Mosely and two members of the Richie family were each allowed permissive occupancies over small portions of the original reserves.\(^3\)

Even this victory was flawed. The Board had eagerly adopted the advice offered by Kelly and Elkin and had set up only the illusion of land ownership as proposed in Kelly's scheme for "leases". The families' occupancies of the reserve land were strictly conditional on the continued approval of the station's manager. In 1940, Percy Mosely's persistent refusal to submit to managerial authority led to his expulsion from Burnt Bridge altogether, "in the interests", so the Board claimed, "of the peace and good order of the station".\(^4\)

The battle for Burnt Bridge went on, then, long after 1937, and continues today\(^5\), but by September 1937, Burnt Bridge with its context of similar if less dramatic threats to the remaining north coast reserve land had led to a repetition of the 1920s situation. The attempt to defend independent Guri control of reserve land had again provided a focus for an emerging political organization and had contributed to a developing alliance between Guris and white groups,

---

1 C Kelly to AC Pettit, Secretary, APB, 6/10/1936; and "Anthropological Survey at Burnt Bridge". Both in PDCC, A37/193.

2 SC on APB, ME, p45. This letter is referred to as relating to Euroka Creek, on which the two original Burnt Bridge reserves were sited.

3 APBM, 14/6/1939.

4 ANBM, 10/4/1940; 26/6/1940.

5 The Mosely family is today still living on the area reserved for John Mosely in 1898. The "reserve for the use of Aborigines" has, however, been revoked over this particular site and the family are conducting a political campaign, involving a land claim, for restoration of control and granting of title over the land.
more diverse than in the 1920s but among which white nationalists were still prominent.

Unlike the AAPA, however, the as-yet unnamed Sydney-coastal Guri movement in the 1930s was developing in a situation where Aboriginal political support existed in other areas. It is probable that Patten was aware of the Melbourne organization of Cooper and the other Cumeragunja people, and there was definitely contact between the Sydney group and Maris in the west, where the Dubbo group had formalized their organization under the name of the Aborigines' Progressive Association in June 1937.