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AN ABORIGINAL VIEW OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORY*

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In the Australian years B.C. (before Cook) Aborigines played hosts to countries such as:- China, Japan, Portugal and Indonesia. They had never declared war on any race of people. There is no word in the Aboriginal languages for war.

Their Bora rings were their places of teaching and learning. They had no written language. Their children were taken to the Bora rings at the age of 12 years to learn the art of manhood and womanhood. Boys were taught separately from the girls.

In the Australian years A.C. (after Cook) the white invaders from England came, saw and conquered. The Aborigines saw the white invaders as the reincarnated spirits of their dead and welcomed them. The whites saw the Aborigines as pests who stood in the way of their progress. The land owners employed men to go out and poison the waterholes, to offer bags of flour heavily laced with arsenic and they offered a bounty for every Aboriginal scalp they brought in. The blood of the Aborigine flowed. It was not considered murder to kill an Aborigine.

The Australian people are guilty of genocide. They have wiped out completely the Tasmania Aborigines. In my opinion they were the original Aborigines who came before us in this country. The last of the Tasmanian Aborigines died in about 1877. Her name will live in the history of the Australian scene. Truganini was taken after death as a museum piece for the Tasmanian museum where her bones were on display for one hundred years. Her bones were finally cremated on May 8th, 1977, and her ashes scattered in the seas. This was her dying wish.

In the late Eighties, Queen Victoria sent out a directive to round up all the "indians", (this is what she called the Aborigines) and place them in reserves, and to let them die as humanely as possible. The Aborigines were placed on rations of the whiteman's food.

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* Reprinted, with permission, from G.Birch, et al. (Eds), *Languages and Cultures in the Australian Community, Proceedings of the First Queensland Multicultural Conference, Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education, Brisbane, April 16th-17th, 1977.*

The period of time was called "the soothing of the dying pillow era".

The Aboriginal population by then, because of the poisoning and scalping, had dropped from 300,000 to 80,000 in a very short period of time.

The Federal Constitution had written into it Clause 52 and Clause 127 .Because the white Australians believed Aborigines to be a dying race, they wrote in these clauses.

Clause 52 said -

The Government of Australia can make laws for the good order and peace of Australia other than the Aborigines for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.

Clause 127 states -

In counting the population of Australia, Aborigines shall not be counted.

Because the Australian Government believed the Aborigines to be a dying race, they saw no reason to make laws for their future, or to even be bothered counting them. They handed the responsibility over to the Australian State Governments. End result being, Aborigines are to this day governed by six separate and different sets of laws. Queensland has the *worst* discriminative laws written to *control* the Aborigines.

The Federal Government's hands are tied and they cannot do much for the Aborigines unless the States are prepared to allow them to accept responsibility for the Aborigines. To this date all States have refused to relinquish the Aborigines as a bargaining basis in order to be allocated more money from the Federal Government budget.

The Federal Council for the advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, set out to alter these two laws and took their plight to the Australian people in the form of a petition, calling on the Australian Federal Government to remove the discriminative laws against the Aborigines. On the 27th May, 1967, the Australian people voted in favour of the Aborigines, and the words "other than the Aborigines for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws" were deleted from Clause 52 of the Constitution. Clause 127 was struck off the Constitution.

To sum up. I sincerely hope the uniting of the Ethnic Groups will give all groups a louder voice on the Australian scene, certainly it will be a clearer one.

I congratulate those responsible for the setting up of the Multi-Cultural Conference this weekend and hope it will be a fore-runner of many more conferences in the future.

May the delegates come together to work out all needs of the various ethnic groups, especially in the field of education.

Aborigines comprise 1% of the Australian scene. I am told Italians comprise about 7½% of the Australian scene. With the uniting of the minority groups we must become a strong group which the governments of Australia cannot ignore any longer.

I disagree with those who say Australia is a Multi-Racial society. As I see it in Australia we have a Multi-Racial people; we have yet to unite ourselves into a Multi-Racial society for the peace and good order of all people. This conference is a healthy step forward to such an ideal :-

To our father's fathers, the pain, the sorrow
To our children's children, the glad tomorrow.

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