

***Australian Intercollegian*, 1 May 1929, pp. 63–65, Shadrach James, The Wrongs of the Australian Aboriginal**

It is a tragic fact that the condition of my people still remains a problem for which all the wise heads of the Governments of this land, for a hundred years, have failed to find a satisfactory solution. The hearts of those of us who have been watching the trend of events in the history of our people, have been gladdened, from time to time, when there have come, from the voice and pen of some benevolent statesman, intimations of laudable schemes for our betterment, buoying us with the hope of a better day—which never came. So far there has never been a vigorous, resolute, decisive, and intensive effort to lift us up socially, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Whenever and wherever such an effort has been put forth, we credit the missionaries for the experiment, and my people have responded well.

The Governments of Australia have had the Aborigines for over a century in their hands and have not yet taken them out of the experimental stage. What have they done to educate them to take their places worthily in the community? The Australian whites, with justifiable joy and pride, boast of their marvellous achievements in countless phases of life amongst their own people. What have they done and what are they doing for the uplift of my people? Do they consider the weekly ration, the annual supply of blankets and clothing, an adequate compensation for the inestimable benefits they are daily deriving from this land which, by divine right, belongs to us? The white man's answer to this is that the civilisation he has introduced has brought to us many compensating advantages. We grant that, and also gratefully acknowledge the debt we owe to the whites for the knowledge of the true God and His worship. But, alas! they have brought also vice, disease, and the curse of liquor. When will the Australians wake up to their national duty, their responsibility and obligation to us? They complain of our ingratitude. We ask, when will they pay the debt of gratitude they owe to us for the untold gain that has come to them through our irremediable loss?

To quote the words of one of your statesmen, Dr Basedow, *The Aborigine has not had a dog's chance*. We wonder if we will ever, under present conditions, get a chance to lift up our heads. Although much dispirited, we have not lost heart. We still possess a residue of courage, ambition, and determination to strike out and secure a worthy place in the community if our protectors would, in the name of justice and humanity, give us an opportunity.

I would now draw your attention to some of the disabilities under which we suffer, and under the present administration there is no prospect of their being removed. There is a great deal of unemployment amongst my people, which accounts for their poverty and distress. With the exception of shearing and harvesting seasons, which absorb five months, we are practically out of employment for the rest of the year. During these months we do some fishing and trapping, which yield but a precarious living, and the consequence is nearly seventy-five per cent. are living in a semi-starved condition.

I venture to say without the least fear of refutation that twenty-five per cent. of our men are quite capable of entering many fields of labour and, standing alongside of the white Australians, work equally as hard and as well as they. We have splendid

axemen who could undertake sleeper hewing, forest thinning, road making, etc., but they are denied their licences and employment in these fields. Some of us are intellectually fit to fill some positions in the Government service—railways, tramways, forest and postal departments, etc., but we are debarred from taking these positions.

Reserves for the use of the Aborigines have been set apart in many places throughout the Commonwealth, and they are vested in the Aborigines' Protection Board, but the Aborigines are denied the right of using the land, and in some cases these reserves are leased to white men. Many of the reserves have river frontages, and could be cut up into irrigation blocks and allotted to the capable Aborigines, where they could settle permanently and make homes of their own without the fear of being disturbed.

I know of several Aborigines who were granted some 30 to 40 acres of land some years ago and were promised larger grants if they proved their capability of clearing and working this land. These men worked hard, their wives helping, on scanty supplies of ration, and fenced and cleared about 900 acres of densely timbered land, and just when they were expecting fair returns from their land the blocks were taken away from them, with no prospect of compensation for their labour.

Our girls, at the age of 14 years, are forcibly taken from their homes and sent out to service. We do not object to their being trained to work as domestic servants, but we strongly object to their being sent at that age when they need a mother's protection.

I wish to correct the general belief that our days are numbered. I say most emphatically that my people are not doomed to extinction. They may yet be saved. Let the authorities secure the needed legislation for their protection, betterment and preservation, and undertake the work of caring for them, not as heretofore, with the conviction they are a dying race, but with the confidence that the remnant can be saved. Here I wish to offer some constructive ideas and make some practical suggestions with reference to the care of my people.

I strongly advise the placing of all native aboriginals throughout the Commonwealth under the Federal Government. At present the care of the Aborigines is entrusted to an institution known as the Aborigines' Protection Board, which works through the Police Department. This Board, we understand, is a trustee to disburse to the best advantage the money appropriated by the State for our maintenance, education and general welfare. There are other responsibilities devolving upon the Board besides feeding clothing, and educating us. By the term Protection Board, we understand an institution which stands for promoting, encouraging, and, if need be, creating such influences that will make for our moral, social, intellectual development, and for intercepting those that are inimical to our advancement. In these things we must say the Board has not lived up to its responsibility. We have not made any real progress under their administration.

We desire the appointment of a Native Administrator, because he would be in sympathy with us and grasp more readily our needs, and for the same reason we ask for a native representative in the House, to voice our needs and disabilities, and a Native Protector in each State to see that our people were well cared for.

For the moral and spiritual care of my people, I advise the appointment of itinerant white and Aboriginal evangelists who shall visit the Aboriginals who are not connected with mission stations.

I am quite sure we are in the dawn of a new day for our people. I feel that the influences and prejudices that have been operating against us for a century, keeping us in a servile condition and withholding from us our natural rights, is now giving place to genuine sympathy for my people and a willingness on the part of our rulers to yield some substantial good to them.