

'THEY HAVE MADE OUR RIGHTS WRONG'

THURSDAY IS.

BAMAGA

MAPOON MISSION

WEIPA MISSION

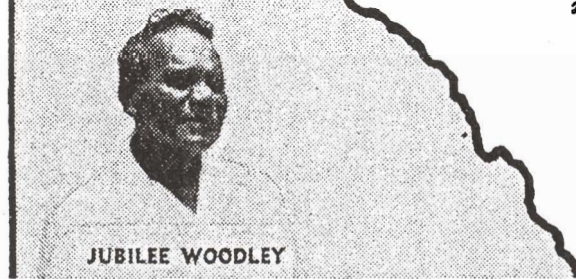
AURUKUN MISSION

★ "They have made our rights wrong. Is there any law that can force us away from Mapoon? When we asked why, we didn't get a straight answer . . ."

★ "...We all here are standing very strong. We all said we won't shift from here... Uncle, you must try and help us fight strong..."

★ "...If we could get help we are willing to back those who try and help us. Please hear this call. We want to hold this place Mapoon, the place wherein we were born into the first Gospel of Christ. This is all I ask on behalf of my people at Mapoon."

—Letters from Mapoon Mission to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Advancement League, Cairns.



JUBILEE WOODLEY

The Struggle for Mapoon

AT Mapoon, high on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, a hundred and seventy-six people are firmly resisting official efforts to make them leave their ancestral lands and go to Bamaga, farther north.

They are calling for help from all who respect human rights.

In the last two years, seventy-six Mapoon people have been removed to Bamaga or "exempted" from the Act and sent to fare for themselves in unfamiliar towns.

Bitterly regretting the change, spokesmen from among them are joining with those standing firm at Mapoon in challenging attempts by representatives of the State Government and of the Presbyterian Board of Missions to make the people leave their homes and hunting grounds.

Neither Government nor mission authorities have made any clear statement about the matter.

Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation Pty. Ltd. (COMALCO), which has been granted a lease of more than a third of the Mapoon mission area, is silent.

About Mapoon

MAPOON was established by the Presbyterian Board of Missions in 1891. At one time the mission area covered about 3345 square miles but, as the June 1959 Report of the Queensland Department of Native Affairs disclosed, 1230 square miles were excised on lease to Comalco.

The settlement is on a sandy promontory at the mouth of the Batavia River, which forms an excellent harbour. The river is navigable for many miles.

In his book *The Aborigines of Australia*, published in 1961, Mr. J. W. Bleakley, formerly Chief Protector of Natives in Queensland, says that the Rev. Nicholas Hey, Superintendent of Mapoon for 30 years, trained Aborigines, on a farm fifteen miles up the Batavia River, in production of food crops. He left a "thriving community" who maintained themselves by gardening, fishing, pig and poultry raising. But later, the self-supporting farm system was made to take second place to cattle breeding and other industries on an institutional basis "because there was thought to be more money to be made in that for mission revenue."

Threatened closure

IN 1959 the Rev. Sweet, an official of the Presbyterian Board of Missions, visited Mapoon and told the assembled Aborigines that the mission was to be closed down and they would have to shift.

Allan Parry, a spokesman of the Aboriginal Council and elder of the church, said his people wanted a reason why they should

leave Mapoon. "There is no such law to make us leave," he protested.

But no satisfactory reason has yet been given. Spokesmen for the Government have blamed the Church, and vice versa.

Despite visits from officials such as Dr. Noble, Minister for Native Affairs; Mr. P. Killoran, Deputy-Director of Native Affairs; and the Rev. J. Stuckie, President of the Australian Board of Missions, the people refuse to be persuaded.

Any correlation between closure of Mapoon and the presence of Comalco mining operations in the area has at all times been denied.

But the question remains, what does the Government intend to do with Mapoon once the people have been expelled from the area?

People bewildered

WHEN told they must leave their tribal grounds, without good reason, the Mapoon people, though bewildered, decided to stay.

At the 1959 meeting with the Rev. Sweet, Allan Parry pointed out that his people were able to live independently of the mission. They kept themselves in food from their own gardens and by hunting and fishing. For commodities requiring money, they could get income from mining, station work, crocodile shooting, etc.

"We thank the Church for the teaching of the Gospel and the schooling of our children and their three meals a day, and we thank the Government for the medical—but that is all, because with our own bare hands we do the rest."

Authorities then threatened to close the church, school and store, and to cut the ration boat from Thursday Island. And then, if the people still would not shift, "the mining people will come with their bulldozers."

Exiled

FOLLOWING his outspokenness, Allan Parry was sacked from his job, dismissed from leadership of the church and eventually exiled to Thursday Island.

In 1960 he went to Bamaga, the Government reserve on the mainland at the tip of Cape York, where he had been told he could work in the Department of Native Affairs sawmill.

He is only one of several Mapoon spokesmen who have proved an embarrassment to church and D.N.A. officials.

Alternatives to Mapoon

A GENERAL vote by Mapoon residents showed they did not want to shift. But they were told they had no choice except exemption from the Act, which meant that the Government washed its hands of them, or

staying under the Act and moving to the Bamaga district.

The hardships of a Mapoon family which chooses exemption are illustrated by the notorious Woodley case (set out in full in a leaflet published by the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement, January, 1962). This family, numbering six adults and nine children, was able to find no better accommodation in the North Queensland town of Mareeba, than a dilapidated, galvanised-iron shack, with dirt floor, measuring 12 ft. x 12 ft., with a 6 ft. lean-to, for 15/- a week rent. Here the whole family had to exist for months on the pensions of the Woodley parents, a weekly total of £10/10/-.

To remain "protected" the people are asked to live under the administration of the D.N.A. at Bamaga.

Bamaga

CAPE YORK Government Settlement, established in 1948, with an area of only 152 square miles and a population now of 837, has had a most unhappy history.

It consists of Bamaga village, and its nearby satellites, Cowal Creek and Red Island Point. They have been used by D.N.A. officials as a sort of dumping ground for unwanted or "unmanageable" people from missions and reserves farther south.

Jim Jacko, of the notorious Hopevale Mission flogging case, was, in spite of assertions to the contrary, sent to Bamaga.

Bamaga has a reputation among Aborigines and Islanders as a penal settlement. Stories are told of neglect, unemployment, hunger and bashings.

Besides being attached to "their own" country and distrusting Bamaga administration, Mapoon people have a very sound economic reason for preferring to stay at Mapoon.

Game and fish are plentiful there, and they successfully "live off the land."

Bamaga is "different country." The hunting-grounds are inferior, and the people are restricted to fishing on beaches in competition with hundreds of others.

Tinned food is available in the store, but is expensive. Jobs are hard to get.

Only about 11% (about 60 men and 16 women) of the people in the Bamaga district were employed by the D.N.A. on settlement jobs early in 1962. About 90% of the men received weekly wages of £5 or less and nearly all the women received £2 or less.

Substandard conditions

AT Bamaga village about 400 people are distributed among 41 houses, which are substandard in size and amenities, although better than many of the houses on missions

in other parts of Cape York Peninsula.

Eight houses for white staff, in a separate part of the settlement, are about three times larger, with electric light, running water, inside bathroom and toilet—all absent from the houses for Aborigines.

A new settlement, officially named Mapoon Village (sometimes called Hidden or Happy Valley) is being established between Red Island Point and Bamaga Village and at present has seven houses, also sub-standard.

Educational, medical and recreational facilities are also inadequate. For example, there is no library for the district, and the library at Thursday Island is closed to "coloureds." Poor quality, sixteen mm. films are shown occasionally in an open-air theatre. There are no regular, organised sporting facilities.

Discontent

THE recent tragic deaths of three people who tried to return to Mapoon from Bamaga by dinghy highlighted the fact that the people are virtually prisoners.

As on all missions and settlements, no one is allowed to leave without official permission.

Self-wounding and various offences are said to be committed by Aborigines who want an excuse to escape from Bamaga. Sometimes a home-sick man will go A.W.L. and try to "walk down the line," that is, the Overland Telegraph Line to Coen and beyond. Bamaga is truly at the end of the line.

The village Council is hamstrung at every turn and under the supreme dictatorship of the Superintendent, himself in turn tied up by the incredible red tape of the D.N.A.

The official story that the Council is a democratic and effective organ is a shameful joke.

Promises and reality

THE Queensland Government says it intends to develop Bamaga as a self-supporting settlement with an increasing standard of living.

If this can be done at Bamaga, why not Mapoon and other Peninsula settlements? Why should the people be compelled to leave their homelands? Have not those who broke up their old, tribal way of life the moral duty to enable them to live better without having to leave their homelands?

A critical examination shows that the so-called plans to make Bamaga a worthwhile place are hollow.

It is unreal to begin to plan agricultural development of Bamaga in its present position without providing sufficient water throughout the year.

Cape York area has a monsoonal climate and receives an average 70 inches rainfall per year, with only seven inches between May and November.

Bamaga village is situated near a spring, and there is a small makeshift dam about two miles away, but these are inadequate for irrigation for the "family farms" being opened up on nearby ridges.

Abundant water, however, is available on the Jardine River some 18 to 20 miles farther south.

So far, the only commercial crop grown with some success is cotton. Tobacco has been abandoned. A variety of crops could be grown if water, suitable fertilisers and proper management were provided. But there is no plan for the large-scale damming and irrigation fundamentally necessary.

Neither of the two alternatives offered Mapoon people—exemption or Bamaga—is economically or morally justifiable.

Secrecy harmful

THE facts presented here have been gathered with great difficulty because of the secrecy surrounding Queensland Government Aboriginal policy and administration, especially in Cape York Peninsula.

The Aborigines and Islanders who supplied the facts risked punishment, jail, chronic unemployment, or exile to a corrective settlement.

The facts show that the Government's talk about "assimilation" and "protection" of Aborigines is a smokescreen for cruel racial discrimination.

Ostensibly to protect detribalised Aborigines from undesirable contact with white Australians, the Queensland Protection Act prohibits any person entering or remaining within the limits of a reserve without the Superintendent's permission "for any purpose whatever." Permission is given readily enough to people prospecting for minerals and with other business interests, but it is very difficult for people really concerned about Aboriginal welfare to get in.

Aborigines from outside a reserve have to obtain permission, even to visit relatives or friends. This is not always granted.

Such "protection" provides a very convenient cloak for safeguarding administrative methods within missions and settlements from observation and criticism. It has also served to keep the "protected" Aborigines backward.

The Government should grant right of unrestricted entry into Mapoon, Bamaga and other settlements by interested persons, including officers of the various Aboriginal Advancement Leagues.

Such persons should be enabled to consult the Aboriginal people about their own wishes, in an atmosphere free of intimidation or deception.

What are the Government's real intentions?

WHAT does the Queensland Government really intend to do with and for Cape York Peninsula Aborigines and Islanders? Does it plan to make remote Cape York a corner into which the unwanted people from Mapoon and settlements further south can be swept out of sight?

There is no evidence that the Government is prepared to spend the considerable amount of money needed to develop Bamaga into a prosperous and enlightened region.

Moreover, a drastic change is needed in the attitude of some officials. According to the Sydney "Bulletin" of August 4, the Director of Native Affairs (Mr. C. O'Leary) thinks that, of the 5000 Aborigines on settlements, only 25% are capable of earning a living. (However, the settlements can provide jobs for only 13% of them.)

Some Administration officials speak of the people as "coons" and regard them as inherently lazy, dirty and stupid. Persons with such an outlook cannot help a people to develop their self-reliance and talents.

The Government is planning to introduce a new Native Welfare Act. But special Acts which discriminate against the Aboriginal people are not what is needed. With full human rights and intelligent, sympathetic help, these people can work out their own future.

Aborigines speak up

OF recent years, with the assistance of the trade union movement and other organisations which respect human dignity, Aborigines and Islanders have undertaken increasing activity on their own behalf. They have found their own spokesmen, who can state what their people need very capably, and in no uncertain terms.

Their demands have been shaped and expressed in a series of meetings and conferences.

At the Fifth Annual Conference on

Aboriginal Affairs held in Adelaide last April, the majority of the delegates were of Aboriginal and Island descent, 42 in all, from five States. This Conference produced a Programme of Action.

It demanded that reserves, missions and settlements be granted unconditionally to the native residents. Residence should be voluntary, restrictive regulations repealed and management placed in the hands of elected committees of residents.

Any project making a profit from existing reserves (such as Comalco, pastoral companies) should pay royalties to a fund for development of Aborigines on the particular reserve.

In these demands lies the only just answer to the problems and future of the people of Mapoon.

Until Aboriginal communities own and control the lands they live on, they will never be free of the danger of dispossession.

Significance of Mapoon

THE struggle for Mapoon is a particularly significant part of the whole struggle of Australia's oppressed Aboriginal minority.

If public outcry is strong enough to halt dispossession of Mapoon people, the Government will be forced to pause before taking similar action on other missions and settlements and before allowing further alienation of Aboriginal lands to mining and pastoral interests.

It is urgent that the demand be raised **now** for Mapoon people to be allowed to remain on their lands and for exiles to be allowed to return if they wish. The State Government should also be urged to allow a thorough investigation by competent people, free of racial prejudice, into ways and means of developing Mapoon in accordance with what the people themselves want.

We urge all who read this story to protest and campaign on behalf of the Mapoon people, whose hearts beat strong in the faith that they do not stand alone in their struggle for simple human rights.

SUPPORT the national petition for a referendum to alter the Commonwealth Constitution so as to include Aborigines in the Census, and make the Commonwealth Government responsible for them.

CONFERENCE

ON Saturday, December 1 and Sunday, December 2, the Aboriginal & Torres Islanders Advancement League will hold a Conference at the Y.A.L. Centre, Martyn Street, Cairns.

Organisations are invited to send two delegates or observers.

Interested members of the public are invited to attend.

Further information may be obtained from the Secretary, P.O. Box 435, Cairns.