

[Koorier 3, December 1989, p. 14]

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

### In the Environment

OUR goal as indigenous people is to enhance and achieve freedom, justice and peace and to develop our human relationships with all other creatures of this world.

Our spirit is of one with this land. Our existence and inherent dignity provides and enhances the balance of nature. One without the other cannot survive.

The mistreatment, rejection and the lack of acknowledgement of indigenous peoples lands, territories, resources and the environment has resulted in difficult times for all living things.

Peace in this world is dependent on all human beings and their institutions treating all of creation fairly and equally. What European man has done, is placed himself on a pedestal promoting himself as superior to the environment and indigenous people.

To preserve and nurture a garden, you cannot steal or borrow the gardener's tools. You have to engage the gardener.

All things can survive if you can provide the indigenous space for it to flourish. You now know that planting foreign trees on farms or desert shrubs in coastal regions works against the cycle of nature. You should now understand that you cannot transplant indigenous people in cities or reserves and expect them to grow and flourish.

### Black Sovereignty

Prior to 1788, Aboriginal people were living in harmony with the land. We were part of the environment and shared all things in common with one another.

The common bonds were the principles of life. This included respect for all life, for each other, the land, the animals, and the total environment - a total knowledge of the land and territories which sustained us.

We were bound together by a developed kinship system, culture and law, all of which guided and protected us against overuse and abuse of the fragile environment in which we survived.

After the colonisation of this country in 1788, we were reduced to family groups or clans, we became landless with no economy and little recognition of our traditional law and cultures.

If we take a brief look at the establishment of missions and reserves a pattern becomes clear.

In 1861 areas of land were set aside throughout Victoria to protect and civilise, and give Christian guidance to Aboriginal people. Class or caste systems were imposed in December 1886 and special legislation controlled food rations, marriages and social and religious practices.

Unfortunately this caste system is still in force today somewhat like the environment issue. The broader community tends to look at things in a narrow way.

We are often judged to be Aboriginal by degrees of colour, shape, size and not the total person. The approach to our environmental problems are similar.

The single act of planting trees is not the answer to our global problems. The total picture needs attention and the balance of all things needs to be taken into account such as our attitudes towards economics and the environment, indigenous peoples themselves, their land and territories and the total well being of the planet.

### Tourism

Tourism has a disastrous effect on the environment. It is well documented by the promoters of tourism that the wealth it generates nationally and internationally has a global effect, that is, on national economies.

The tourism industry is designed to make money. It is not designed to protect the environment nor is it a benefit to the poor or oppressed. It instils power and wealth with the people of power and wealth.

If environmentalists and the indigenous people cannot control the activities of tourism in their area, then they should reject tourism altogether.

Unfortunately environmental issues have had a late start in this country. If Europeans had understood that Australia was not a part of Europe or the United Kingdom, the development of farming of cattle and sheep, the cutting down of trees and the importation of foreign flora and fauna, the gradual erosion and destruction of Australia's fragile environment and the indigenous people could have been avoided.

The solution was, and is the recognition of the wholistic approach to life by Aboriginal people.

Most laws in this country have their origins in Europe. To change the actions of a greedy capitalist society requires a revolution of the mind and a change in thinking and attitudes.

This is why the right to self determination by indigenous people at the national level must be expressed and supported.

Ratification of the ILO Convention 107 (now 169) on Indigenous Peoples must not be accepted, as it will be another obstacle in the path of justice and global morality.

Convention 107 does not recognise indigenous peoples as equals and discriminates against them.

Aboriginal sites, such as the rock-art sites in the GRAMPPIANS must be protected from exploitation by State tourism. The rock formations at BESSIEBELL must be protected against development and negotiations must occur with the appropriate groups collective involvement.

Coastal middens and sites and historical information should not be the playthings of academics/archaeologists. Common decency and respect concerning these areas should be recognised by those endeavouring to become experts on such matters.

The imposition of boundaries on communities by government legislation is a proven "divide and rule" tactic that cannot be allowed to be imposed on Koories in this State.

Governments must negotiate, not merely consult with us on the above matters.

Existing government and international corporate activities threaten the ecology of the earth and the existence of us all, particularly the indigenous peoples.

Efforts to protect and preserve the earth cannot be separated from the efforts to preserve and recognise the collective rights of self determination of indigenous people, including the right to be different, and to be considered different.

Indigenous people must be allowed to control their lives and destiny and become strong again. What use is a tree that is stunted and sick if it can offer no protection nor provide a shelter to those who seek its protection?

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NATIONAL COALITION OF

## ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS