

Mr President, Fellow Delegates —

I propose to divide my address on the Aborigine question into two portions:

- (1) The demand for full citizenship rights for part Aborigines.
- (2) The Aborigines, their right to survival as a race, their right to be treated as human beings and not as outcasts from the human family.

I will deal with the question of full citizenship rights apart from the Aborigines, because the approach and the solution to full citizenship rights is different to the full-blooded Aborigines as a whole.

We, the part-Aborigines, have an unjust ordinance imposed on us that is against the wishes of the people living in the Territory. It is against the wishes of every industrial, political, religious, cultural and sporting organisation in the Territory, and our demands were supported by every political candidate at the last Federal elections. Mr Jock Nelson assured my organisation that it had the support of the Federal Labour Caucus, and full citizenship rights would be granted to us if the Labor Party were returned to power. Unfortunately for more than us that did not happen.

My Union felt the best way in which this particular question could be presented to you for your support would be the personal attendance of a part-Aborigine, unaccompanied by any other delegate, so that you could readily see there was no justification for the withholding from us of what should be our inalienable right, the right to live as ordinary people, without segregation from the rest of the community. We are educated at the same schools, take our part in every sporting and industrial sphere on an equal footing with other peoples of the Territory, but because the pigmentation of our skin is dark, and we have original Australians as part of our ancestry, we are classed as something that is tainted and must be kept apart. What reason or justification is there for such an attitude on the part of the Government of this country?

I will be speaking about how the Aboriginal Ordinance affects me personally, but this effect applies to all others in the same category as myself. Possibly some of you know that because we are of Aboriginal extraction we are subject to, or come under, the Aboriginal Ordinance, which states “That an aboriginal or half-caste cannot remain in a town or prohibited area between the hours of 6 p.m. and 8 a.m. each day without a written permit issued by the Director of Native Affairs”. It rests with that individual whether you are entitled to a permit or not.

The Ordinance also states that no Aboriginal or half-caste Aboriginal is permitted to enter or remain on any licensed premises without a certificate of exemption; also issued by the Director of Native Affairs. This exemption also applies to people of only slight, or I may say part-Aborigine where I can prove that it is impossible to trace any colour in them whatsoever. The only thing that will disclose their part-Aboriginal blood is the records kept in the Native Affairs office where these people are classed as half-castes.

In 1936, when the Native Affairs Department enforced these laws or ordinances, the half-caste peoples formed an association and applied for a general exemption from the said ordinance. The Native Affairs Branch granted exemptions to selected members of the association and, after a period through inactivity, the association lapsed. Early this year the Aboriginal Ordinance was enforced again and the police force became very active and demanded to see a certificate of exemption from members of my association before they

I am a married man with seven daughters and two sons. Four of my daughters were born before my wife and myself were exempted. They are classed as not exempted half-castes, but the other children are classed as exempted. What a farce. Brothers and sisters having different classifications. My second daughter married a white man and had two children before the authorities discovered she was an unexempted person. Under the Aboriginal Ordinance her husband is liable to arrest and prosecution for consorting with a female half-caste Aboriginal, so to avoid that, my son-in-law has to apply to the authorities for an exemption for his wife and two children. The absurd thing about the ordinance is that the exemption covering a person can be revoked at any time. You can see, gentlemen, that we are worse than foreigners in our own country.

With your assistance and solidarity of the Trade Union Movement we hope to bring our just and lawful demands to a successful conclusion. That is the reason I was delegated to come to this Congress, to place our case before you and ask for your full support to achieve our aims, and give us the right to live as good citizens of this country and as true Australians.

Now I will go on and deal with the second part of my address — the right of the Aborigines to survival as a race, and their right to be treated as human beings and not as outcasts from the human family.

Firstly, I would like to say that all Governments in Australia, both State and Federal, have neglected to face up to the problems that must be solved so that these peoples can be brought from their present stage of outcasts and slaves. And, gentlemen, it is slavery that is imposed on these people.

They are not bound with chains to keep them in subjection, but they are prevented from receiving the education that is so necessary before they will be able to express in clear terms what is necessary for them to survive as a race. These people are classified as nomads because, in their native state they are continually on the move. It is true they constantly travel from area to area, but that is not from choice, but from sheer necessity. The native people were not kindly treated by nature when they were isolated on this continent now known as Australia. No native cereals indigenous to the country lend themselves to cultivation, no native fruits or vegetables exist that lend themselves to be produced for a stable community, and no native animals with the exception of the dingo, can be domesticated. What was left to the Aborigine from being anything else but a nomad, and in the generations that have succeeded generations it has become a part of the native way of life. It is something that cannot be eradicated overnight, but must be dealt with sympathetically over a long period of time before that inner urge to travel is eradicated.

The actions of the stations, who are in the main the largest employers of native labour, encourages this wanderlust of the native. The seasons in the Territory are divided into two — the wet and dry. In the dry all work on the stations is done and the native supply is used up for this purpose. In the wet the need for the native does not exist, so the station managers withdraw clothing that is issued to the natives during their useful working period, the natives are then told that when the wet season is over there will be work for them again, and then they will get their clothing back.

The stations are not interested in the education of the native and make no attempt to provide any. An ignorant employee is an asset, but an educated one will not put up with the conditions.

Control of Aborigines in the Territory is vested in the Director of Native Affairs. As he was the individual directly responsible for the issuing of the order that banished Fred Waters to Haast's Bluff, he has shown