

# W.A. Parliament's shocking Report on Aborigines

A West Australian Parliamentary Select Committee has ripped aside the screen that has veiled the cruel plight to which our Governments condemn Australian Aborigines.

FROM the committee's report emerges a shocking picture of Aborigines existing — or dying — in conditions of near starvation, desperate for water, huddling naked in bitter cold, racked with disease and ailments for which they have no remedy.

The report quotes cases of children aged about nine and seven weighing only about 1½ stone (21 lb.) and with upper arms and thighs only about an inch in diameter.

For want of medical treatment, an abscess on a child's jaw or a broken limb can cause death.

While natives are left to suffer in such conditions, huge areas of the most favorable land are being taken from their reserves and provided for mining interests, atomic and guided missile testing grounds, and other purposes.

The report, from the home State of Menzies' Territories Minister P. Hasluck, comes at a time when Government spokesmen are piously proclaiming their devotion to Aboriginal welfare and when criticisms of official treatment of Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira are being self-righteously denied.

The Select Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. W. L. Grayden MLA (a former Liberal MHR), was appointed by the West Australian Legislative Assembly in October. Its members included two Labor Party MLAs, a Country Party MLA, and another ex-Liberal MLA.

It was set up to inquire into native welfare conditions in the Laverton-Warburton Range area (central Western Australia).

Its report was presented on December 12.

The report, so damning in its content, "got an innocuous mention in the press here," says a Perth message.

## Reserve violated

The Committee says that an area adjacent to the borders of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory had been set

• "The Committee has arrived at the conclusion that the plight of the Aborigines in the Laverton-Warburton Range area is deplorable to the extreme.

"The natives lack even the most basic necessities of life.

"Malnutrition and blindness and disease, abortion and infanticide and burns and other injuries are commonplace.

"Game is extremely scarce on the reserve, water supplies for drinking precarious, and adequate medical attention far beyond the resources of the Warburton Mission.

"Employment opportunities for Mission educated children are hopelessly insufficient and in the circumstances education only serves to leave them more poorly fitted for fending for themselves when thrown back on their own resources at the completion of that education.

"Immediate food and medical aid are urgently necessary for these people and permanent provision for them a pressing obligation on the State."

—Conclusion of the WA Select Committee.

aside for tribal and semi-tribal natives but "recently there has been some violation of this reserve."

It instances:

About 250,000 acres in the Sladen Waters area has been or is about to be ceded to the Commonwealth. A Commonwealth weather station has already been built five miles from Sladen Waters.

An area in excess of 4,000,000 acres was made available to a mining company for the purpose of prospecting for nickel.

"The areas referred to involve the portions of the reserve most favorable to the natives in their constant search for food and water," says the report.

Natives who had had no previous extensive contact with whites "would leave the area, probably with acute hardship to themselves," says the report.

The Committee makes no further comment on this. But the facts brand the contrast between Government eagerness to help mining and other interests, as against the callous disregard for the Aborigines' fate.

The establishment of the Maralinga testing ground for atomic and other scientific means of slaughter has also robbed Aborigines of their land.

Says the Committee:

"The necessity for keeping the Maralinga testing ground free from

natives has interfered with the normal way of life of the natives who frequented the area east and south of the Warburton Mission, inasmuch as a large area of their tribal grounds is now denied them."

## Battle to exist

The report gives an idea of how grim is the Aborigines' battle to survive, even without being robbed of their best areas.

The report says:

"It is difficult to conceive fully the implications of the natives' constant struggle to obtain water for drinking.

"The natives usually move about the area in family groups, since the country and water available will not support large numbers.

"The natives struggle in such groups from water hole to water hole, which are frequently 20 miles or more apart.

"The natives must carry the younger children while the older ones are required to walk, in some cases carrying a younger child.

"They carry all their possessions . . . In addition, they must obtain sufficient food for themselves and their children en route.

"Since the country is either mulga scrub, sand dunes or spinifex, and the weather, particularly in summer, extremely hot (120 deg. in the shade not being uncommon), the suffering and hardships entailed will be readily imagined.

"It is stated by informed persons that a human being will survive in the country for only two days without water . . ."

The desperate struggle for water is paralleled by the battle to obtain any form of meat.

What few kangaroos can be found and speared are prized. For other meat, they use dingoes, cats, goannas, rabbits, lizards and wood grubs.

But the supply even of these is hazardous, and seeds, roots and fruits of wild plants and trees are the principal food.

The natives share what food is obtained.

## Bitter cold

Winter nights are so cold that frosts and ice on the water in the morning are not uncommon, the report says.

Illustrating the sufferings of the Aborigines in the cold, the report quotes this case:—

One night a party of whites and a group of natives were camped near each other.

The whites were sleeping with all their clothes on, plus 1-inch thick kapok flying suits and with several blankets over all this. But in the early hours they were still too cold to sleep.

The natives nearby were naked, huddling over their fires.

The report (further details of which will be published next week) must arouse the nation's conscience about our First Australians.