REPORT ON YIRRKALA, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AND BAUXITE DEPOSIT LEASES.
(Visit to Yirrkala by Mr. G.M. Bryant M.P., Vice President of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement, - accompanied by Mr. K.E. Beazley, M.P.)
16th July to 20th July, 1963.

YIRRKALA, N.T.

Arnhem Land. - Proclaimed a reserve on 14.4.1931.
Area of 140 square miles around Melville Bay, including Yirrkala Mission Lease excised by Proclamation 15.3.63. The reason stated being - "whereas it is desirable that part of the reservation of the said land be revoked." Commonwealth Government Gazette 28.3.63 page 1087.
Lease granted to Gove Bauxite Corporation Ltd., a subsidiary of Pechney Aluminium Co., of France, 11.3.63.

In general the lease covers the whole of the proven bauxite deposits and surrounds an area which had been leased to the British Aluminium Corporation which has been cancelled.
Note that the lease was granted to the company 11th March and the proclamation excising the area from the Arnhem Land Reserve was dated four days later.

No notice of intention was given to the Parliament, which did not meet until 26th of March.

The Minister made a statement to the House of Representatives on 9th April and after a brief debate in May (three speakers), the subject has been adjourned and it appears impossible to have it re-opened.

LOCATION.

Latitude 12 deg. 15' S. - Longitude 136 deg. 50' E., - approximately 400 miles east of Darwin "on the corner" of the Arafura Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria.

COUNTRY.

Savannah type, - inaccessible by road.

COMMUNICATIONS.

Air - a good aerodrome - R.A.A.F. base during 1939/1945 war - Bi-weekly air service M.M.A. on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Sea - Melville Bay approximately 20 miles by road from the Mission, supplies a good anchorage. It is reported that there is 20'/30' water close in shore. The Mission has built a small wharf. The Mission has an infrequent Mission shipping service. (Mission was established in 1935.) Also wireless telegraphic communication with Darwin.
THE MISSION has some 84 acres under cultivation, plus 21 acres of improved pasture, - peanuts, vegetables, sorghum, bananas, etc. Only thing to prevent the continued extension of the agricultural activities is lack of capital. Cattle have been raised successfully in N.E. Arnhem Land for approximately 80 years, but only at the end of the last century on a large scale.

For example, the Florida Station was reported as having 1,700 cattle some 70/80 years ago near Millingimbi, about 150 miles west of Yirrkala.

This Station was abandoned early this century - principally on account of the hostility of the aborigines. They regarded it as their country and reacted with vigor to the would-be 'invasion'.

The agricultural and pastoral potential of the district can be regarded as proven but completely untapped.

Population - Mission staff, 7 men, 5 women = 12
14.8.63. Aborigines - Men

Woman 130

Children under 16. 288

507

THE PEOPLE.

The people are not Stone Age, neither are they sophisticated, although they still live "close to the ground". The old tribal laws still have a great deal of influence - for instance in marriage, polygamy is still practiced, but is dying because the young people, particularly the girls who have been to school are resisting being 'promised', the practice of having their husbands selected for them while still infants. The age of marriage is slowly rising. The Mission's most effective defence against marriage is to keep the girls at school.

There is a great increase in the birthrate - last year 41 births - so that there will be a big increase in the young people at Yirrkala in the future.

Three infants died last year, making infant mortality approximately 75 per thousand births, nearly 3½ times that of the general Australian population, but under half that of the rest of the Aboriginal community of the Northern Territory.

There is likely to be a steady rise in population because the expectancy of life will rise - by Australian standards the oldest people are still relatively young, only a handful being in their 60's, - the 'elders' as it were are in their 50's and therefore the existing older people with increasing medical care will have a low death rate.
The Yirrkala district therefore, should have a population rising to perhaps 1,000 in ten years time with a primary school population of 300/400 — it will at that stage be a fair-sized country town.

**LITERACY.**

A dozen or so of the adults appeared to be able to read and write, perhaps many more can but they do not get much practice. There is little printed material coming into the community, but nearly all seemed to be able to understand English. Here again, they have little chance to practice as radios are not readily available. Their native language is the everyday medium of conversation and is also taught in the school. The staff are expected to put a good deal of time into their "home work" on this, in fact while I was there a test was being prepared for them. Perhaps a 'scholarship' or bonus for the staff at such settlements would encourage them and some effort should be made to assist the adult Aborigines to learn English.

**Note.** — The Immigration Department conducts English classes for migrants.

**LAND.**

The people on the settlement are all 'locals' although some may have been born up to 60 miles away, but they all regard the land as theirs and can define their traditional boundaries.

There would be no practical difficulties in establishing a title to the land they have occupied for so long and no one else has ever claimed it. The Mission is on a type of permissive occupancy and therefore, the right of the Aborigines to some form of collective ownership is unchallengeable. It is important to realise that none but Aborigines have ever lived in this area.

**Voting.** — Although only two Aboriginal residents were on the roll at the date of my visit, the idea of voting is becoming clear to them, and their absolute and unqualified right to act on their own behalf before the law and the Parliament should be constantly placed before them.

**POTENTIAL.**

It is generally considered that Yirrkala is the pick of the North, there is ample water, a 52" rainfall and the tropical climate is moderated by the surrounding seas. The country is lightly timbered and should be easy to clear and irrigate. Melville Bay is scenically attractive and the fishing is good and as noted earlier is a good harbour. Therefore, to take this place from its rightful owners is to dispossess a people of an inheritance of great value.
THE PEOPLE AND THEIR CULTURE.

This is the centre of Aboriginal Art in the form of bark paintings and so on, although the people are housed in corrugated iron huts with no floors, conditions which, in our eyes, are depressing - the artists in the group, some dozen or more, produce works of great artistic merit and skill of draughtsmanship with pigments made from local materials. They are sensitive to their tradition and basically a conservative people. About half the people live by hunting. As will be seen from the map, the lease granted to the Mining Company will surround the settlement and include most of their hunting ground. The advent of "sportsmen" with guns will both deplete and drive off the principal subsistence of the community.

People who hunt for their food are as much a pastoral people as those who fence them in and then slaughter them for their food.

The Government has acted with a complete insensitivity to the economics and the social structure of the community.

THE BAUXITE.

The deposits of bauxite have been known for some years and are of high quality. British Aluminium had taken a lease over the central core of the deposits but had confined their activities to surveying, and had remained some two miles from the settlement. This lease has been revoked.

Gove Bauxite have claimed or leased all the deposits by running a line around the area regardless of the Mission’s property or interests. Where the Mission had 200 square miles of occupancy on special lease before it has now been reduced to about one square mile, and in fact, has almost been compressed out of existence.

The Mining Company's headquarters are only about 2,000 yards from the Mission and the surveyed claim has taken at least two Mission paddocks and a beach area used by the Aboriginal people for recreation.

There has been a complete disregard for the people and the Mission in a way which approaches arrogance - as if already the Mission were non-existent or a wholly-owned subsidiary.

When we drove out to Melville Bay the Mission wharf was cluttered up with mining equipment which had been there for some time and the Mission wireless is used for an increasingly heavy telegraph traffic by the Company (P.M.) The survey lines were run in without even the courtesy of a consultation with the Mission staff as to their requirements.
Despite the fact that in 1957 the Government announced that
deletion of areas from reserves would only be when they were no
longer required for native purposes, the land excised is in
fact vital to the community life of the people, to their subsis-
tence and the expansion of their agricultural activities.

The survey was not done to exclude land no longer required
by the people but to include all land which could possibly be of
future use to the Company. The bias has not been ABORIGINE BUT
ALUMINIUM – NOT PEOPLES BUT Pechiney. Although the Aborigines,
(defined as words, in the lease) will have the right to walk and
hunt over the leased land, for the reasons outlined above, this
will be of little value.

The people feel doomed to destruction – for them it is a
question of survival, and they have before them so many previous
cases where the Aboriginal communities have been destroyed by
white occupancy of their country, - e.g., the Larrakya tribe of
Darwin. The Larrakya people had all but vanished by 1939.
They regard Bagot, a Government staging camp for Aborigines in
Darwin, which is over-crowded and depressing, as a symbol of
this fate.

The Yirrkala people have a horror of being "Bagotised"; -
that is concentrated in a settlement and pauperised.

The Bauxite deposits cover approximately the area leased
to the Cove Mining Corporation and are estimated to be 170
million tons. This Bauxite would produce about one ton of
alumina for two tons of bauxite by a chemical process. It is
presumed that this would be done at Melville Bay and the Aluminium
then shipped to Pechiney plants in Europe, where two tons of
Alumina would produce one ton of Aluminium, that is, four
tons of Bauxite = one ton aluminium.

The installations, though extensive, would not require a
great deal of manpower, and therefore the suggestion that these
almost tribal people have a rosy future working for the Company
appears to be a rationalisation. Also in the lease the Company
only undertakes to examine the economic feasibility of this.

The Bauxite has an overburden of perhaps a foot and is
from 12' to 18' deep, it only requires digging up and trans-
porting to the processing area. Washed Bauxite is worth
approximately £2 per ton on today's market and so the royalties
will approximate 6d. per ton.

On the estimated deposits this means royalties of £4m
spread over 43 years - the term of the lease.
It is difficult to see why the Bauxite could not be systematically mined by a Trust operated for the Aborigines (and with Aboriginal membership) as the people of Findan have struggled to do (Port Hedland, W.A.) and would have done successfully with a little help and encouragement. (Manganese)

MINING OPERATIONS SO FAR.

The Company has established a Headquarters in a substantial corrugated iron building a short distance from the Mission. It could probably accommodate 20 but is occupied currently by some six persons. Surveying, etc., is proceeding in the Point Dundas area. This is where the installation wharves, etc., will probably be and is an important fishing area. The Mission has plans in hand to establish a fishing co-operative. The Government has been more helpful to the Bauxite Company than it has been to the Aboriginal people's request for a fishing boat.

The impression is that the Company has pre-empted all the land it will need for development and all the mineral deposits on the presumption that it may use it rather than that it will.

LEGAL ACTION.

By advertisement in the Northern Territory 'News', of 20th June, the Company notified its intention to apply for Mineral Leases on Point Dundas for special purposes. These advertisements are, as usual, in a language incomprehensible to anyone but a surveyor, and of course not likely to be read by the Aboriginal people.

A member of the Executive of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement drew my attention to these advertisements and in accordance with the provisions of the Mining Ordinance, I have lodged an objection which was heard in the Darwin Miners' Court on 16th August. The adjourned for 2 months on the Company's application.

Mr. R. C. Ward, Solicitor, of Darwin, has been engaged to act in the case and the Federal Council has decided to use all the processes of law to protect the Aboriginal people's title to their land.

The grounds for objection are that this land belongs to the Aboriginal people by right of occupancy from time immemorial (some estimate 12,000 years). The Yirrkala people themselves quickly recognised the need for allies and have written to me in both their own and English language asking me to regain their land, and have sent petitions to Parliament. The issue is clear cut - Are the Aborigine people to be forever treated as trespassers on their own land?
The Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement says 'NO MORE' and in this has the comfort of knowing that it has the support of a large (but silent as yet) section of the Australian people.

The Federal Opposition has taken up the case by special motion in the House of Representatives in May, but this goes further than Parliament because even the Commonwealth Parliament has no power outside its own territory.

THE BACKGROUND.

The Minister with the concurrence of the headquarters of the Methodist Overseas Mission but without any consultation with the local people has signed away their rights to a foreign Mining Company. The legal objection lodged in Darwin is against further alienation, the lease over the Bauxite deposits has been already signed by the Minister.

The authorities who ought to protect the Aboriginal people's rights claim that this is Crown Land, i.e., in fact that it is not anybody's. This might be so in law, but is not true in fact or in common sense.

The people of Nauru and Papua had no written title to their land but it is still respected. Is Australia only to act with decency to a dependent and helpless isolated people only when it is under the international search light?

The Minister has in fact acted as an agent for a foreign Company in a way in which the Government would not think of acting with any other Australian township.

No compensation is to be paid, only royalties, which will, of course, be entirely dependent on the extent of the Company's operations. These royalties will not necessarily yield any direct benefit to the Yirrkala people but will be paid into a special Aboriginal Welfare Fund.

Far from being under close international scrutiny, the people at Yirrkala are isolated and practically defenceless. The Administration which is charged with their protection stands mute in an operation in which the Government concurs as it is an arm of the Government itself.

The Company calls to its aid all the skills of society, lawyers, public relations officers, surveyors and engineers, and when people such as the F.C.A.A. come in on the side of the ABORIGINAL people, they are dubbed as being agitators, mischief makers, and giving aid and comfort to Australia's enemies abroad.
The higher Mission authorities appear to be on the defensive and apprehensive of incurring ministerial wrath and departmental displeasure. The Mission staff at Yirrkala are exposed to reprisals by the Company if they even send a telegram over the Mission wireless, as it is apparently monitored by the Company.

I had dramatic evidence of this before witnesses when I was challenged on the contents of a private telegram to my wife by a Company official.

The mail service is bi-weekly and so rapid communication except by wireless is impossible.

It is almost impossible for an investigator to visit the area unless prepared to spend at least four days on the spot or at great expense charter a 'plane.

The Aboriginal people can only hope that someone will turn up to champion their cause, but have no hope of organising it for themselves, - therefore the community generally will have to take up the case on their behalf.

**THE FUTURE OF YIRRKALA.**

Yirrkala has to be looked at as an Australian average township with none of the community facilities enjoyed by a similar group of Australians. There is no Post Office; although there are five sizeable communities spread across Arnhem Land with a total population of 2,500 to 3,000, there has been no attempt to put a telephone line through.

The Doctor calls once a month for a few hours and the specialist medical engineering services available to other communities are lacking.

The people of Yirrkala and all other similar places should be given an opportunity to build themselves into a higher standard of living and so accustom themselves and train themselves into the acceptable Australian standard. It does not need to be forced, they can be quietly led to appreciate beds and houses and community social action. The settlement has progressive management but it is severely restricted by the meagre resources available to it. At the moment Australia is leaving almost the whole of this task to a dedicated group of missionaries.

By allowing the people to build themselves into an Australian town and employing them to do it at their own rate they would not be under the pressures to which the rest of the community is accustomed, but which tends to destroy the Aborigines self-confidence, and leaves him lost and defeated. In the process of building a town for themselves, they would become accustomed to using community services and acquire the manual skills commonplace in the Australian community.
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<tr>
<th><strong>GOVE PENINSULA - NORTHERN TERRITORY.</strong></th>
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<td><strong>(Location of Bauxite Leases)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Scale Approximately</strong></td>
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<td><strong>4 Miles to the Inch</strong></td>
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**Map Diagram:**

- Arafura Sea
- Point Dundas
- RAAP JETTY
- Drimie Head
- Melville Bay Rd.
- Turtle Rock
- Gulf of CARPENTARIA
- Wirrikala
- Latrun River
- Arnhem Land
- Excision Line
- Aboriginal Reserve
- Weipa

**Notes:**

- Arnhem Land proclaimed a Reserve 16.4.1931
- The area enclosed by the excision line was revoked from the Reserve by proclamation 15.3.1963. This area is approximately 140 square miles.
- Note the location of Wirrikala Mission and proximity of lease boundary.

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The external shaded area is the Gove Bauxite Company's lease.

The internal unshaded area around the air strip was leased to British Aluminium Corporation but this lease has been cancelled. It is presumably open for leasing now.

Shaded area around Point Dundas is area applied for for machinery leases by the company and objected to in the Darwin Court - see page 6.

Note how the Aboriginal community has been compressed into a very small area and how this will prevent the development of agricultural and pastoral work. One of the advantages claimed for the enterprise is that it will give opportunity for the Aboriginal people to gain a livelihood this way.