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THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

REPORT

ON THE

ADMINISTRATION

OF

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

FOR

YEAR 1944-45.

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As Sir Harold Clapp has honoured me by quoting my views at some length (pages 21-22 of his report) I think I should explain why I am not impressed by the extension of the Alice Springs line to Daly Waters-Birdum as a developing factor in the Northern Territory.

In my report for the year ending 30th June, 1944, I stated (page 5) that I considered the pastoral area of land in the Alice Springs district was contained in a radius of 225 miles with Alice Springs as the centre.

North of Alice Springs the good pastoral lands have run out before Barrow Creek, 180 miles from Alice Springs, is reached. The mineralized and spinifex country then comes in and continues through Tennant Creek as far as Newcastle Waters, a distance of over 300 miles. There are exceptions as where the Barkly Tableland country throws out a promontory which contains Banka Banka and Helen Springs on the eastern side of the Stuart Highway. This is, however, a rare instance and there are very few others.

North from Newcastle Waters the country is within the rapidly increasing high rainfall area and is deteriorating as a pastoral proposition.

On the other hand the line through the Barkly Tablelands would run through good country the whole way from Camooweal to Newcastle Waters, a distance of over 400 miles.

It is my considered opinion that with this railway linking up the Barkly Tableland with Queensland, with facilities for settlers to move and sell their stock, with little townships springing up, it would be possible to plan successful settlement in blocks from 100 to 200 square miles in area. Thus a present area upon the Barkly Tableland of 10,000 square miles, at present with a manager and a few white stockmen, could be transformed into a settlement area with, possibly, 100 families which would support at least one township, if not two.

I do not think this is in the least degree fanciful but is within the scope of practical planning. Mr. Nelson T. Johnson, who was at that time the United States Minister to Australia, went through the Northern Territory in 1944. His observations were thorough as he camped out on the stock routes for over a fortnight. When he returned he wrote an article in the *South West Pacific* of which one of the concluding sentences was—

“This is Australia’s land of opportunity.”

Mr. Johnson was a trained and shrewd observer and I propose to quote him again.

MINING.

Mining activities in the Northern Territory have remained quiet during the year and the total production was valued at £160,510. Although this is small compared to pre-war output it is, nevertheless, an increase of £50,000 on the previous year, and I am quite satisfied that once the war years are past mining will revive very materially. One mine in the Warramunga Gold-field (Tennant Creek) has been able to keep going upon a reduced scale and carry out certain exploratory work. The Director of Mines reports that high-grade ore was cut in a winze below the 200-ft. level and that drives and cross-cuts from this point exposed ore ranging in values up to 60 fine oz. per ton with an average grade of 12 oz. per ton.

Plans are in hand to improve the township of Tennant Creek. It has already been lighted with electricity and the output will be increased. Investigations are being made in regard to an adequate water supply.

It is also probable that developments will take place upon other fields, including The Granites.

There was a small production of wolfram (101 tons) and both the production of mica and tin have risen from the figures of the previous year.

ROAD AND RAIL TRANSPORT SERVICE.

This service has been maintained throughout the war years and for the period from 1st January, 1940, to 30th June, 1945, the vehicles travelled 579,000 miles and delivered station supplies amounting to 8,474 tons.

The ever-rising cost of maintenance of old vehicles over this period has resulted in a slight loss but this is more than counter-balanced by the service which has been given to outlying stations.

An interesting point is that the oldest vehicle the service possesses, the famous transport unit, consisting of an engine unit and three trailers, has proved to be the most profitable. This unit carried 1,149 tons over the period and made a profit of £3,102.

THE NATIVE OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.

The war has had the effect of lifting many of the natives out of the comparative serenity of their lives and using them steadily and continuously in connexion with the Army. I referred to this in my Annual Report for the year ending 30th June, 1943, and the various works that natives were engaged upon. Altogether over 1,000 were employed by the Army and the reports of the work done are good.

The natives will be, to some extent, a demobilization problem, but I am quite sure that this will be handled well and efficiently by the Native Affairs Branch. This branch has suffered during the war years from shortage of staff and difficulties in regard to replacements.

It is evident that serious consideration will have to be given to the native question in the immediate future and that the establishment of depots and settlements in various parts of the Territory, together with a system of patrol districts and patrol officers, must be inaugurated.

In the years during which I have been Administrator of the Northern Territory, I have seen a great deal of the Australian native. He is a very likeable person, kindly natured, pleasant tempered and peaceable.

I can only recall one case of attempted assault upon a white women in the Territory in the last eight years and, on the other hand, I can recall only one case of cruelty by a white man against a native in the same period.

I believe that upon the whole, the treatment of natives by their white employers varies from fair to very good. In the majority of the fair cases the employers are small leaseholders and, very often, adverse conditions are a factor.

In order that there should be clear and recent information upon this matter, I arranged during the year with the Director of Native Affairs for a complete inspection of all station areas in the Territory where natives are employed. This has been done and the data obtained is being carefully compiled, but is not available for this Report. It does show, however, that treatment, upon the whole, is good.

A policy in regard to natives was prepared by the Director of Native Affairs in 1941, and accepted by the Minister, but the war stopped this from being implemented. It is clear that any policy for the future will involve considerable expenditure, but it would appear that the Australian taxpayer would not have any objection to this.

In a book published by Professor Elkin, a well-known Australian ethnologist, entitled *Citizenship of the Aborigines* it is shown that the expenditure by the Commonwealth in the Northern Territory is not as heavy *per capita* of natives as in States of the Commonwealth. I do not think comparisons of this kind are of much value, but I would point out that the expenditure in the Northern Territory upon the care of natives has risen steadily in the past few years and for 1945-46 is £25,400, apart from salaries.

The last figures of native population were collected in 1941, and can be taken as being fairly accurate. They are republished in the *Year-Book* for 1942-43 (page 315). Taking the States and the Northern Territory, the figures show that there are—

—	Nomadic.	In Employment.	In Supervised Camps.	Other.	Total.
New South Wales	40	112	314	123	594
Victoria .. .. .	..	17	16	55	88
Queensland	1,651	3,238	3,146	942	8,977
South Australia	1,540	445	472	341	2,798
Western Australia	15,159	3,653	2,043	854	21,709
Tasmania .. .. .	..	..	..	1	1
Northern Territory	6,420	2,705	4,218	108	13,451
Australian Capital Territory .. .. .	..	..	2	..	2
Australia	24,810	10,170	10,211	2,429	47,620

Hereunder are figures for half-castes for all States and the Northern Territory as shown in the *Year-Book* for 1942-43 (page 315) :—

—	Nomadic.	In Employment.	In Supervised Camps.	Other.	Total.
New South Wales	505	2,057	3,403	4,057	10,022
Victoria	32	170	224	261	687
Queensland	36	1,792	1,853	2,770	6,451
South Australia	631	465	878	246	2,220
Western Australia	402	1,300	1,668	1,037	4,407
Tasmania .. .. .	..	10	184	90	284
Northern Territory	16	445	438	138	1,037
Australian Capital Territory .. .. .	..	20	63	..	83
Australia	1,622	6,259	8,711	8,599	25,191

The figures for half-castes show a most interesting position. The first point which impresses is the high proportion of half-castes in the States which have the least native full-blood population. . Thus—

New South Wales with 594 full-bloods has 10,022 half-castes.

Victoria with 88 full-bloods has 687 half-castes.

South Australia with 2,798 full-bloods has 2,220 half-castes.

Of the States carrying the larger full-blood population, Queensland with 8,977 full-bloods has 6,451 half-castes, and Western Australia has 21,709 full-bloods and 4,407 half-castes.

The Northern Territory with 13,451 full-bloods has an estimated number of 1,037 half-castes which includes half-castes out of the Northern Territory and who are possibly included in the figures for the States.

An interesting point appears to me to be that in the areas which include the largest proportion of natives in their wild and primitive state, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the proportion of half-castes is the lowest per head of native population, the lowest proportion being in the Northern Territory.

This appears to me to indicate two factors. The first is that the full-blood native in the eastern and more populated States is being steadily absorbed into the white population, and eventually will be completely absorbed. As an indication of this the *Year-Book* figures quoted show that there is one full-blood in Tasmania and two in the Australian Capital Territory, but there are 285 half-castes in Tasmania and 83 in the Australian Capital Territory. It should be remembered that half-castes include persons who are not full-bloods or full white, but who have a degree of coloured native blood. Thus half-castes include quadroons and octoroons.

The second factor is also interesting. This shows that in the areas where there are most full-bloods (Western Australia and the Northern Territory) the proportion of half-castes is lowest. So far as the Northern Territory is concerned this appears to me to show the wisdom of maintaining inviolate reserves when the natives are entirely free and unmolested. I cannot speak for Western Australia, but I should imagine the same reason prevails there.

The Northern Territory has the enormous Arnhem Land Reserve where the strictest supervision regarding the unauthorized entry of whites has and will be maintained, and there is also the South-Western Reserve in Central Australia.

It is interesting to study the distribution of the full-blood natives in the Northern Territory.

Taking the figures in round numbers to be 13,000 (the *Year-Book* gives 13,451), experienced officers of the Native Affairs Branch who have been through the areas many times estimate that the distribution can be set out in the following manner :—

Primitive and practically inviolate natives in Arnhem Land Reserve ..	4,000
Primitive and practically inviolate natives in Central Australia ..	800
Natives in and around mission stations	3,000
Aged and infirm natives maintained by the Government at various ration depots	1,250
Natives in employment (stations, Army, &c.)	3,000
Total	12,050

This leaves under 1,000 natives who are not included in the foregoing distribution but who may be classed as nomadic.

It is impossible to get a closer estimate, but it is hoped that this will be done in the near future when it may well be that the figure is considerably less. For instance, there may be more than 4,000 natives in Arnhem Land.

In regard to missions, the Roman Catholic Missions are on Bathurst Island, at Port Keats and at Arltunga in Central Australia. The Methodist Missions have their head-quarters at Millingimbi with stations at Yirkalla and Croker Island, which are all on the Arnhem Land coast. The Church of England maintains missions on Groote Eylandt, at Oenpelli and on the Roper River. The Lutheran Church has a mission station at Hermannsburg in Central Australia.

It will, therefore, be seen that there are ten mission stations throughout the Northern Territory and it is estimated that their sphere of influence extends over 3,000 natives.

In regard to the native himself, it appears to me, at the present time, that there are three sections concerned with him. One is the ethnologist who desires to record his languages, his primitive songs and dances, his music and his carvings, and also to study his religious and social organization.

The second is the missionary who desires to christianize him and wean him from some of his ancient but horrible practices.

The third is the Government who is charged with the responsibilities that the native is well treated by his various employers, that he has proper medical attention and supervision, and above all, that he and his lubras and children do not go hungry.

In studying the list of the responsibilities of the Government I think that these have been met in practically all aspects. The Native Affairs Branch either maintains or supervises ration depots all through the Territory. It inspects, as I have already written, natives employed on stations, their conditions and their food.

With the prospect in the near future of obtaining further skilled staff the system of maintaining full supervision of all natives through patrol officers who will have set districts to patrol can be effected. Recommendations in regard to this policy are before you at the present time.

Although the natives in Central Australia are far fewer in number than in the northern area, they present a much more difficult problem. In the north there are plenty of fish, fruit and yams and animals. In Central Australia there are vast areas of waterless spinifex deserts, devoid of shade, of animals, and, nearly always, of sustenance. Rockholes give out and water-holes dry up.

In order that this problem may be countered a programme of drilling for water has been instituted with a degree of success. Sub-artesian bores with a flow of over 1,000 gallons per hour of potable water have been put down and it is intended that small settlements will be established at these points where the aged and infirm natives will be looked after and where rations will be held. With water it will be possible to grow vegetables and certain fruits. These bores are to be for the exclusive use of the natives and they will not be disturbed.

As a matter of fact the average native wants very little. He gives his services to the best of his ability and in the case of stockmen that ability is of a high order. The pastoral lessees fully admit that they are dependent upon the native to handle their stock.

It does not appear to me that there is a very difficult problem here. The Government has invariably shown itself to be interested in, and sympathetic to, the native. In its work it has the good will and co-operation of the various missions and also of the societies who have the welfare of the natives as their objective.

The native deserves well of us, particularly because the position must be faced that he is a dwindling race. Slowly, but inexorably, his numbers are going down. Previously in this Report, I have quoted Mr. Nelson T. Johnson, the former United States Minister to Australia. Mr. Johnson was a very travelled diplomat who had studied natives in many countries. Of the Australian native he wrote (*South West Pacific*, New Series Issue, Number Five, page 36)—

Without the Australian aboriginal these great cattle stations could not function at present, for the aboriginal ("abo" as more familiarly known) is the stockrider of the country, who assists the stockmen in rounding up, or "mustering" the herds that are to be branded, inoculated and sent to market. With an unerring knowledge of the country and an uncanny ability to follow the trail of anything that moves, he can find wandering stock or horses and survive in a waterless, foodless area where the white men would perish. He is a good rider, and a good man with stock, and his womenfolk help about the place and in the homes that the white man has built.

This Australian native is the most interesting of all of the primitive peoples. It has been said that he possesses the physical characteristics which would entitle him to be the common ancestor of most of us. He is distinctly a member of the white race, having our blood and our hair, although his skin is black. He is intelligent and highly efficient in his own environment, but the only animal he has domesticated is the dog, which is his constant companion.

His is a vanishing race. It is said that he is passing into the white race very rapidly. When he came to Australia he brought with him no cereal, and he found no cereal grains native to the land. Wherever his ancestors lived before they came to Australia, he has never learned to build a house, nor does he seem to care for one. He seems to suffer from a form of claustrophobia, for in spite of the fact that cattle station managers and missionaries have tried to build houses for him, or to teach him to build houses with materials easily available, the native still prefers to sleep on the ground behind a low shelter against the wind. He wears clothing as a concession to the prejudices and habits of the white man with whom he works, but he discards it as soon as he leaves the white man's company.

I came away from my contact with these interesting people a little shaken in my confidence in the blessings of the civilization in which I had been reared, when I realized that nothing in our civilization has seemed to the Australian aboriginal worth adopting. He comes to us, lives near us and works with us, only for our food, but he doesn't seem to have taken kindly to that, as far as attempting to grow it for himself and on his own, for he gives up his free and independent life in order to obtain it.

It is the looker-on who sees most of the game and these comments by Mr. Johnson epitomize a good deal of fact and thought.

HALF-CASTES.

In regard to this subject, the Government approved of a building programme for half-castes and others at Alice Springs and a certain number of cottages have been erected. It is too early to comment upon the results and reaction to this, but it is a commencement and doubtless further building plans and schemes of this nature will be incorporated in the Town Plan for Darwin.

There has been a great deal of loose criticism of the Northern Territory half-caste. In point of fact the great majority of adult half-castes have full citizen rights and the Native Affairs Branch does not control them in any way. These half-castes have a vote and receive the basic wage. In many instances they have married half-castes and are good, decent, citizens.

Arrangements were made some years ago with the various missions in the Territory to look after young half-caste children of their particular denomination. This was interrupted during the war years when the children were evacuated to various States, but the missions continued to look after them. Arrangements have been made for their return and this should be completed in the next few months.

GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.

In my previous report for 1943-44, I advocated the institution of a Legislative Council for the Northern Territory. I would like to make it clear that this was, by no means, the first suggestion in this regard. The establishment of a Legislative Council has been under the consideration of various Governments for many years. I do recommend, however, that the Government considers taking action in this regard. Writing with a great deal of experience, I think it is only fair to the Administrator of the Northern Territory that he should have, to a certain extent, the assistance that a Legislative Council would give him. As it is, the Administrator is very often the target for faction fights and for criticism which is very often unfair because it is based upon a lack of knowledge of the actual facts. Debate upon these matters would serve to clear the air.

The very foundation of democracy is self-government and it would appear to me that the Northern Territory is one of the very few portions of the British Empire without a degree of self-government.

The fact that, with the Commonwealth, the Governments of Queensland and Western Australia are considering a scheme of development for the northern portion of Australia, is an indication to me that eventually a seventh state of Australia must be formed with the Northern Territory as the central portion.

As I pointed out in my previous report, this is not a recent idea, but has been advocated at various times, and twenty years ago most vigorously by the then Premier of Queensland, the Honorable E. G. Theodore.

DARWIN.

During the year a very considerable amount of thought has been given to the future planning of Darwin and the Government set up an Inter-Departmental Committee with the Secretary of your Department as its chairman to deal with some of the problems. A very considerable amount of work has been carried out by this Committee and it seems certain that Darwin will be replanned and rebuilt as a modern tropical town.

I cannot subscribe to some of the glowing estimates I have seen regarding the immediate future population of Darwin. In this I have been influenced by the growth of Canberra which Darwin resembles in that there is very little chance of secondary industries being established.

On 30th June, 1933, Canberra had a population of 7,325. In 1938 this had increased to 11,562, and in 1943, the entire population of the Australian Capital Territory was estimated to be 14,115.

It can, I think be said, that Canberra started as a town in 1922 and therefore its growth over 21 years has not been rapid although such growth has been stimulated by the transfer of various Commonwealth Departments to Canberra.

Darwin must be regarded as being somewhat akin to this. However, provided the planning and the rebuilding proceeds in sections based upon meeting present population requirements, the future position should be met.

It has been my practice in recent Annual Reports to frame them rather as a review of events in the Northern Territory, which sometimes have covered a period or an event farther back than the year upon which the report actually is based. With the anticipation that this present Report is the last one which will deal with the war years, it is intended that future reports will deal with actual progress and development strictly within the year concerned. This has not been possible for many reasons.

With this explanation I now propose to comment upon an episode which occurred some years ago, but of which authentic details have only reached me recently.

I refer to the bravery of Mrs. Ruth Heathcock, the widow of Constable Heathcock, who had a long service with the Northern Territory Police Force and who died in 1943. The action took place whilst Constable Heathcock was stationed at Borroloola, but was away upon patrol.