

TORRES STRAITS STRIKE

Terrorism Against Aborigines

A police party has been sent by the Queensland Labor Government to suppress the discontent among the Torres Strait islanders. The discontent arises from the shameful and cynical way in which the aborigines are exploited by the Government.

The conditions which have led to the discontent are as follows: "The Protector of Aborigines," i.e., the Government, sells cutters to the native under a "co-operation scheme" for some absurdly high price—about £1,000 (the Department fixes the price, of course). The aborigines man the cutters and go fishing for the valuable trochus-shell and beche-de-mer, which is taken to Thursday Island and sold.

The money goes to the Aborigines Industries Board, etc. The wages paid to the aborigine workers are nominally £3/5/- a month, but they only receive £1 per month. The rest is put to their "credit" with the Protector.

Then comes the legal trickery by which the aborigines are defrauded of

this sum. They are confronted with statements showing "invested capital," "depreciation costs," "marketing costs," "administration costs," "loss brought forward," etc., etc.

In no case has any worker ever received any of the money with which he is credited. None of the money obtained from the sale of the highly-priced trochus-shell or beche-de-mer has been received by them.

The position of these aborigines is slavery in all but the name. The huge profits obtained go to the Government or into the pockets of others. The aborigines have to pay. Their present struggle is for the actual payment of £3/5/- per month, i.e., the same rates as prevail on commercial cutters.

This state of affairs must be wiped out. Unionists throughout Australia should send in protests to the Queensland Government. Queensland workers should use all their efforts to prevent the terrorising of the Torres Strait islanders by the police party.