

Aborigines declare boycott and day of mourning

SYDNEY: All 26 Aborigines present at a public meeting here last week voted to boycott the Captain Cook Bi-centenary celebrations to be held in April this year.

The Aborigines voted alone at the meeting in order to leave no doubt as to their feelings. Thirty Australians of European descent were also present at the meeting.

The Aborigines also called on all Aborigines and Islanders, wherever they live in Australia, to declare April 29 to be a "Day of Mourning" and to take part in a silent vigil, in a dignified protest at the indifference and humiliation to which the Aborigines and Islanders have been subjected and in memory of Aboriginal victims of massacre or disease following the arrival of Europeans.

The full meeting resolved to call on the State Governments to implement land reform, so that existing lands and reserves will belong to the resident tribes of Aborigines and Islanders.

It also voted to call on the Commonwealth Government to enact a Prohibition of Discrimination Act, against any discrimination, social or legislative, on racial grounds.

The meeting was called by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Aboriginal speakers at the meeting included Mr. Ken Colbourn, Mr. John Newfong, Pastor Roberts and Mr. Albert Groves.

Mortality

Pastor Roberts said that he was personally opposed to the Cook Celebrations, as he saw them as "just a window dressing for overseas consumption."

"How can we endorse them, when today the Aboriginal child mortality rate is one of the highest in the world?" he said.

"After 200 years of European settlement, the Aboriginal has been left very demoralised."

The issues of land rights, discrimination and suppression should give impetus to individual Aborigines to boycott the Captain Cook Celebrations, said Pastor Roberts.

"Each has his prerogative, but I know where I stand", he added.

"It comes down to the future of not an individual, but of tens of thousands of people."

Mr. John Newfong saw boycotting of the celebrations as "a matter of principle".

"European presence in Australia has benefited us very little in the last 200 years", he said. "What has been achieved by the Aborigines is in spite of the system and not because of it."

Unionist

The celebrations would be one occasion "when we have a tacit power of veto," he said.

Mr. Albert Groves in urging boycott action said that nothing has been achieved except by the organised activity of the Aborigines.

"A united stand could bring about the change we want," he said.

Mr. Ken Colbourn was the sole Aboriginal speaker in favour of participating in the celebrations.

He related bitter personal experiences, but said that, as from 1967 (the year of the referendum on Aborigines) "we were made Australians."

Mr. Albert Laird, of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, said that his union's attitude was that the Aborigines knew their problems and "we will back their decisions."

In backing the Aborigines' proposed boycott of the celebrations, Mr. Laird said that those most enthusiastic about the Cook celebrations were those whose ancestors gained rich land grants.

While it was justly said that Aborigines were not getting a fair go, this also was the case with workers, even though to a lesser degree, he declared.

Mr. Laird said his experience was that the average worker on the job supported his union's views on the Aborigines' problems.

Among points made by speakers from the floor of the meeting were that Aborigines are discriminated against, regardless of educational level or social status, and that the cemetery at Collarenebri (NSW), because of the high Aboriginal child mortality rate, had more children's graves than adults' graves.

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