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***THE GOVERNMENT TAKEOVER OF CHRISTIAN
MISSIONS TO INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS: WHERE
ARE WE FIFTY YEARS ON?***

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THE GOVERNMENT TAKEOVER OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS TO INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS: WHERE ARE WE FIFTY YEARS ON?

A few months ago the Federal Health Minister, Tony Abbott, publicly committed himself to a revisionist view of Australian mission history:

It's fashionable to scoff at the work of missionaries but none was on a short-term contract. Service was their life, not just a business philosophy. They took solidarity with Aborigines to be their personal responsibility and many left their bones in the settlements they created. Their sense of calling did not make them perfect, but it motivated them to commit their lives to Aborigines in ways that can seldom now be matched.¹

In speaking in this way about the Christian missionary engagement with Aborigines he was giving voice to a body of opinion that has emerged over the past decade questioning some popular beliefs about Christian missionary activity. Henry Reynolds', *This whispering in our hearts*, published in 1998 gave a popular audience fresh insights into the motivations and the humanitarianism of a range of whites, significant amongst them Christian missionaries.² David McKnight's, *From hunting to drinking*, published in 2002 makes a similar point to Tony Abbott's from the perspective of the thirty year period that spans the end of the missionary era up to the present on Mornington Island in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. McKnight is particularly scathing about the people he calls "Shire careerists", the non-Mornington Islanders who manage the affairs of the present day Mornington Island Shire. He contrasted them to the Missionaries they replaced, "The Shire was staffed by careerists who, unlike the missionaries, knew very little about Aborigines and seemed to have little desire to learn."³ Moreover:

The Shire careerists are eager to claim credit for anything good that happens on Mornington island (although offhand it is difficult to recall any) but when it comes to suicide, homicide, rape, child abuse and ill health, they disclaim any responsibility and blame the Mornington Islanders for drinking too much.⁴

A similar analysis might be made of the public debate that surrounded Aboriginal Affairs in Australia earlier this year. Ideas of "sending in the Army" to combat the issues of housing shortages or community disorder, the closure of homeland centres, linking funding for Aboriginal programs to social outcomes and the loosening up of

1 Tony Abbott, "Misplaced tact stands in the way of help", Sydney Morning Herald, 21 June 2006.

2 Henry Reynolds, *This whispering in our hearts*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1998.

3 David McKnight, *From hunting to drinking*, Routledge, London, 2002, p.2.

4 McKnight, p. 184.

the land tenure system on Aboriginal lands were all part of the daily media diet for most Australians over the months of April and May, 2006. Throughout all of this discussion the responsibility and blame seemed to end up with Aboriginal people themselves, rather than with the politicians who were the main animators of the discussion.

Until about fifty years ago a large percentage of Aboriginal people in Australia lived on mission stations operated by Christian churches. From that time an increased public interest in the administration of Aboriginal affairs and the need to improve living standards for remote area Aborigines saw these Christian missions transferred to government control of some form or other. I want to look in detail at the circumstances that surrounded the transfer of the Mitchell River Mission of the Anglican Church on the western coast of Cape York Peninsula to the Queensland government about forty years ago. I think that you will see in this account a pattern for much that still happens in the public administration of Aboriginal Affairs in Australia. Greater intervention by whites and the attribution of responsibility for failure to Aborigines seems to be a common theme, in whatever era Aboriginal Affairs is examined. White administrations of all kinds appear to quickly lapse into a fantasy that there is as an administrative driven solution to the social problems encountered by Aborigines that can succeed independently of the Aboriginal people themselves. This can be seen as much in the operation and abolition of ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) in March 2005 as it can be seen in the failure of the co-operative movement of the late 1950's amongst the Australian Board of Missions (ABM) missions in north Australia.

Tony Abbott contrasted "self management" to "paternalism" in his intervention in recent debates:

Australians' sense of guilt about the past and naïve idealisation of communal life may now be the biggest obstacle to the betterment of Aborigines. Having rejected the paternalism of the past, we insist on forms of self-management that would be unworkable even in places where people are much more used to them. Because it was wrong to treat Aboriginal people like wayward children it isn't necessarily right to expect them to thrive through endless management committee meetings. ... A form of paternalism - this time based on competence rather than race - is unavoidable if these places are to be run well.⁵

In the fifty years between 1910 and 1960, Mitchell River Mission was under the leadership of four men who had each served as deputy to his predecessor before appointment to the office of Superintendent. Each man in his own way would readily have filled the job description that Tony Abbott has suggested for Aboriginal Affairs into the future. Henry Matthews, Joseph Chapman, Alick MacLeod and Wiffie Currington were the "practical men" that Gilbert White, the episcopal founder of the Mission, had prescribed. They were men capable of turning their hands to the diverse tasks that were involved in running a mission station. "The man with twenty jobs", was the way the Australian Board of Missions (ABM) journal, the *ABM Review*,

5 Abbott, SMH, 21 June 2006

depicted Currington in 1953.⁶ They were the men who had built a cattle ranching empire upon which diocesan prosperity was founded, and asked little from the Diocese of Carpentaria for themselves or their people in return. Their administration ran the Mission along the conservative and paternalistic lines that had first been forged at the beginning of the century. The mission that they had shaped, and as they knew it, was to be shaken in the mid 1950's by decisions made within the Church and within Government.

At the same time as the church supporters of ABM, the principal church funding agency for the Mission, were told that Mitchell River Mission was "a station of which the Church of England may well be proud",⁷ an increasing scrutiny of Anglican missions in North Queensland during the 1950s demonstrated that an entirely different situation existed.⁸ The 1950's were a decade of turmoil for the Anglican missionary hierarchy as it coped with the direct challenge of the Queensland Government to its administration at Yarrabah, just outside of Cairns, and as it forged ahead with its own policy initiatives, primarily at Lockhart River Mission on the north-eastern coast of Cape York Peninsula.⁹ The ripples of change from these two east-coast missions slowly but inevitably made their way west to Kowanyama. In this process, missionary perceptions of Mitchell River changed from those of pride in 1953 to shame and disgrace in 1958.¹⁰

Yarrabah provided an example of the sort of public condemnation the Church was likely to face over its management of the Aboriginal missions. In 1951, Native Affairs Director, Con O'Leary, considered that at Yarrabah: "the Church's responsibility for the future of the people whom it claims as its wards and whom it contends it caters for, falls far short of the requirements which any human being could expect".¹¹ What O'Leary called for was "a vigorous policy of administration, control and development" to be instituted by the Church.¹² This sort of criticism cut deeply into the collective psyche of a Church which had prided itself that its missions were of humanitarian benefit to the Aborigines gathered into its care. The resources needed to reverse the situation at Yarrabah were vastly beyond anything that could be found from Anglican sources and the situation lurched from one crisis to another until the Queensland state government took over full responsibility on 1 July 1960.¹³

Even though the vigorous response O'Leary demanded at Yarrabah would not be forthcoming, ABM was formulating the first change to practical missionary policy in North Queensland since the foundation of the missions themselves. In 1952 ABM adopted the co-operative model as the policy initiative to best combine economic

6 *ABM Review*, 1 February 1953, p.22.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Noel Loos, "From Church to State: the Queensland Government take-over of Anglican missions in North Queensland", *Aboriginal History*, vol.15, part 1, p.78.

9 Noel Loos and Robyn Keast, "The radical promise: The Aboriginal Christian Cooperative Movement", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.25, no.99, October 1992, pp.286-301.

10 *ABM Review*, 1 February 1953, p.24, and Clint to Coaldrake, 22 September 1958, ABM Chairman's Correspondence; Series 9, Box 3, Folder 14.

11 O'Leary to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 7 August 1951, 51:6026, OF 69.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Loos, "From Church to State", p.79.

development with Christian principles.¹⁴ ABM's decision to settle on the "co-operative way" as the means of addressing the challenge of the Aboriginal missions was a fortuitous concurrence of circumstance rather than the result of a high degree of planning. Alf Clint, the driving force in the ABM initiative, had been forced by ill-health to leave the New Guinea Mission, where he had spent four years organising co-operative activity in association with James Benson.¹⁵ A Christian Socialist by conviction and practice, Clint was radical in his aspirations, and believed that co-operatives were the means to a new ordering of society along Christian lines. Clint's High Church Anglicanism, emphasising the sovereignty of God, searched for a pattern of social organisation which would reflect this sovereignty in the whole of human life. Clint found his answer in the Co-operative Movement. The life that Clint advocated was one that required an individual response of commitment. "The Anglican Church is producing Mass priests and Mass people. The individual witness is going", he lamented to ABM Chairman, Archdeacon Robertson.¹⁶

On appointment as the Director of Co-operatives for ABM in 1952, Clint visited Aboriginal groups in northern New South Wales as well as in Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait. Undoubtedly an idealist and utopian, Clint found enthusiasm for his program amongst the white missionaries and Aborigines at Lockhart River, settling upon Lockhart as the place that the co-operative venture amongst Aborigines would be tested, based on the pearlshell and trochus industry.¹⁷ Even though the great experiment at Lockhart failed because of the introduction of plastics as a cheap substitute for shell products, Clint's legacy endured in a number of smaller and less publicised projects. The Numbahging Society on the Richmond River, the Yarrabah bakery and, most significantly, the educational establishment, Tranby College in Sydney, stood amongst the Christian co-operative movement's successes.¹⁸

Much depended on Alf Clint personally and his capacity to surround himself with loyal followers who shared his idealism. No stranger to making enemies of those who found his ideas impracticable, Clint seriously underestimated the extent to which he was dependent on powerful and entrenched interests for his experiment to proceed. He seems to have believed that the co-operatives would sweep all opposition before them, reflecting as he thought, the Divine way for human social organisation:

The Co-operative way as God's way is taking root at last... As our people understand and practice the Co-operative technique so they will understand the New Approach to Missions - a way of peace and good-will amongst all peoples.¹⁹

Clint's Christian socialism left him with no doubt that corporate ownership of the means of production by Aborigines was not just the preferable way of organising

14 Loos and Keast, "The radical promise", p.290.

15 Kylie Tennant, "Father Clint - a tradition", in *Salute to Alf Clint: commemorating the 70th anniversary of the dedication of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin at Weston in the NSW Coalfields, 11th August 1912* (monograph, 1982, originally published in *Goorialla*, Summer 1980/81, no.2), no page numbers used.

16 Clint to Robertson, 29 October 1956, Alf Clint's Personal File, ABM, Sydney.

17 Loos and Keast, "The Radical Promise".

18 *Salute to Alf Clint*, monograph, 1982 (originally published in *Goorialla*, Summer 1980/81, no.2).

19 Alf Clint, "Native Co-operative Report, June-November, 1954", ABM Chairman's Correspondence, Series 16, 16/9, ABM Sydney.

human society but was the divinely mandated way for people to live. There seems little doubt that Clint held views that Tony Abbott recently described as, “naïve idealisation of communal life”, at the core of his social and missionary philosophy. A logical extension of this philosophy, the corporate ownership of land came to be a principle that would, in its turn, receive bipartisan support when the Fraser government carried the legislative program of the Whitlam government to completion with the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. It is significant that the long standing bipartisanship on this important principle has broken down over the changes to this Act brought before the parliament earlier this month.

In a few years Clint had gone from being considered by his detractors a harmless irrelevance in 1956,²⁰ to being banned from entering any Aboriginal or Islander Mission in the dioceses of North Queensland and Carpentaria in 1962.²¹ Along with the decline in Clint’s personal credibility amongst Church officials, came the apparent failure of ABM’s last initiative to revitalise its mission to the Aborigines. The co-operative experiment had implications for Mitchell River which went beyond Clint’s attempts to establish a co-operative there.

After his initial visit with Archdeacon Robertson in 1953, Alf Clint planned to move on co-operative organisation at Mitchell River. He considered that agriculture as well as Aboriginal arts and crafts could be developed alongside the existing cattle operations.²² He met Department of Native Affairs Director, Con O’Leary on this trip, and formed the impression that O’Leary was “keen and ready to help”, and discovered that he concurred with his own opinion that the agricultural side of Mitchell River should be developed.²³ His observation that O’Leary “knows our missions and our people” and was “fond of the Bishop”, gave him initial grounds for optimism, but should have hinted at the possibility of an alliance between the two, this would become an obstacle to his plans at Mitchell River. O’Leary recognised from as early as 1956 that Clint was not going to be given the free hand that he had sought to organise the Carpentaria missions along co-operative lines:

It is a noteworthy fact that amongst the Church of England Missions in Queensland, Mitchell River stands out as an industrial unit with its cattle raising operations. Mr Clint is not devoting his energies to that Mission and the Bishop of Carpentaria informed the writer that he would not allow him to do so.²⁴

Any private reservations about the co-operative scheme or the presence of opposition was not reflected in the public stance of ABM. Archdeacon Robertson

20 O’Leary to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 25 June 1956, OF 82, DFSAIA. In declining to recommend government financial support for Clint’s activities, O’Leary thought that Clint should be advised, “that the financial position at present precludes such assistance but the Department is interested in his scheme and based on its progress will re-examine the position in twelve months time. In the interval, Mr Clint may proceed with his scheme. Even if it does not benefit the aboriginal, it can do no harm”.

21 Loos and Keast, “The Radical Promise”, p.297.

22“ Native Co-operative Report”, ABM Board meeting, 17-19 November 1953. ABM Chairman’s Correspondence; Series 16, Box 4, Folder 24, ABM Sydney.

23 Clint to Robertson, 9 October 1953. ABM Chairman’s correspondence; Series 14, Box 5, Folder 20, ABM Sydney.

24 O’Leary to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 25 June 1956, OF 82, DFSAIA.

identified Mitchell River as the next mission to receive the reforming benefits of the “co-operative way” in January 1954:

The natives are a happy people, and with the help of the white missionaries will, we hope, in the near future, by the help of co-operative enterprise, learn to become valuable citizens and church people.²⁵

Robertson so readily assumed that Aborigines at Mitchell River were in a state of perpetual tutelage that he did not consider that they might have attained both of his goals already. Nor did he specify what extra demonstration of citizenship or Christianity the people of Kowanyama needed to show. After all, their sacrificial labours on mission rations produced financial wealth for the Diocese and they were pillars of the northern cattle industry. Events had gained such a momentum, however, that ABM was convinced it had discovered the key to the future, as far as Aboriginal missions were concerned. Missionary propaganda about the co-operative at Lockhart River struggled for new superlatives to describe the success of this pilot experiment in “the co-operative way”. What had counted as “great advances” in October 1955 were described as “miracles” by July 1956.²⁶ The drive with which ABM was pushing its co-operative policy was itself a departure from the previously distant and formal relationship with the missions. It was not until 1956 that ABM formally requested the diocese to give an account of its cattle operations at Mitchell River and then only as a result of pressure from the Board’s Finance Committee.²⁷

Even though Clint had been denied the opportunity to include Mitchell River in his plans he had by no means lost interest in it. His letter to ABM Chairman Frank Coaldrake from Thursday Island in September 1958 painted a tragic situation at Mitchell River:

Fr. Sutherland of Mitchell is here, been in hospital. He tells me he has a church going staff, for the first time (except his superintendent) but an independent person told me, “that if he was an Anglican he would be filled with fear about Mitchell”. I asked Sutherland & he agreed: a flare up on the part of the people could come anytime: one thing that saves it is that most of the men are away. Sutherland says, people - children *die* for lack of food: only one answer to the whole question is for ABM to take charge of Mission Dioceses - with ABM Bishops - such as CMS in Africa. The present set up is not good enough. No policy.²⁸

Clint had little patience for the people with the effective power on the Mission, the Bishop and Superintendent, especially since they were at best, lukewarm, about his plans. The deprived circumstances, treated as normal by old hands, were undoubtedly shocking to new and idealistic missionaries. Indeed, it was to this idealism that Clint appealed in his attempt to overthrow the old missionary order. Since the election of the Bishop of Carpentaria rested solely with the Anglican

25 *ABM Review*, 1 January 1954, p.14.

26 *ABM Review*, 1 October 1955, p.150 and July 1956, p.106.

27 Robertson to Hudson, 18 September 1956. ABM Chairman’s correspondence, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 9, ML MSS 4503, Add On 1822, ABM Sydney.

28 Clint to Coaldrake, 22 September 1958, ABM Chairman’s Correspondence; Series 9, Box 3, Folder 14, ABM Sydney. Clint’s emphasis, (CMS, the Church Missionary Society was another Anglican missionary organisation.)

bishops of Queensland, his solution, direct control from ABM, was by no means possible to guarantee.

Chaplain Doug Sutherland acted at Mitchell River on behalf of Clint and the Co-operative movement. In February of 1958 he had been active in arranging for Christopher Geoffrey to undertake studies at the newly formed Tranby Co-operative Training Centre in Sydney. Even in this matter he anticipated opposition from Currington: "I am pretty certain that Wiffie will not want the boy [*sic*] to go South, but the Bishop is aware of that and will no doubt deal with the matter himself".²⁹ Despite the Bishop's assumed support for this co-operative initiative it was Hudson whom Sutherland identified as the real impediment to the inauguration of co-operative work at Mitchell River.

I am glad to say that the Bishop at last seems to agree that we should try to establish sufficient industry to give employment to our people here on the Mission, but at the moment I cannot see any chance of him agreeing to the establishment of a Co-op here. I am afraid the Diocese needs all the money it can lay its hands upon. However I am sure the day will come when there will be a Christian Community here running its own affairs. But God knows when.³⁰

The dream that Sutherland was grasping for envisaged the end of Aboriginal work on the cattle stations and its replacement by work wholly on the Mission. This was a dream that did not intersect with the realities of the dominant capitalist economy any better than the missionary order it stood to replace.

With the defeat of the Labor government at the 1957 State elections, the socialist credentials and Trade Union links which had served Clint well to that point suddenly became grounds for suspicion.³¹ Elected with the slogan, "a new deal for the Far North", the Country Party/Liberal Party government moved quickly to exploit the bauxite resources in the north-west of Cape York Peninsula.³² It had become increasingly clear that government interest in the missions, and reserves upon which they were situated, went beyond the relatively benign desire to prompt a revitalisation of Church administration. John Warby, the superintendent at Lockhart throughout the co-operative period, wrote to Coaldrake in December 1957 declaring, "the rape of the Reserves is on".³³ It had become clear that the Mapoon reserve was about to be revoked to allow bauxite mining and that the Presbyterian mission that had existed on the reserve since 1891 would be obliterated and its people dispersed.

29 Sutherland to Clint, 22 February 1958. ABM Chairman's Correspondence; series 14, box 5, folder 20, ABM Sydney.

30 Ibid.

31 Warby to Hudson, 7 October 1959. ABM Chairman's correspondence; series 14, box 5, folder 21, ABM Sydney. After a government ministerial visit to Lockhart Warby reported, "It became apparent as the day wore on that the Party came ashore with the idea that the Co-operative was Communist controlled. Their attitude was very cautious and Noble told Bunty that he expected to find a little Communist State at Lockhart! With such a state of mind it is no wonder that their attitude to our problems in the Co-op. Office was as it was".

32 Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland from 1915 to the 1980's*, St Lucia, Queensland, 1984, p.304.

33 Warby to Coaldrake, 13 December 1957. ABM Chairman's correspondence; series 9, box 3, folder 14, ABM Sydney.

Initially, at least, the interest that the Anglican sponsored co-operatives had shown in mining was valued as a “bargaining medium” in the likely negotiations between government and the mining companies. At the same time the future was made clear, “the mineral resources of the Islands and the Peninsula must be developed by big capital companies”; there would be no room for small Aboriginal controlled enterprises.³⁴ Under pressure as he was from this change, which had radically challenged the assumption of stability in which incremental change could be fostered on the mission reserves, Clint was also perplexed at the actions of Bishop Hudson as they affected the future of the mission stores. “What a man!”, Clint despaired to Coaldrake, as he related Hudson’s plan to hand over the mission stores to the Island Industries Board - the government authority which controlled trade in Torres Straits.³⁵ The takeover of the Lockhart store by the co-operative had been an important part of the whole plan for that place and Clint despaired that he might be denied the same opportunity at the other missions.

The bubble of enthusiasm over the co-operative project at Lockhart burst in 1958 with an investigation of co-operative finances by Diocesan Secretary, Joe Imms.³⁶ In so doing, an “unserviceable debt” had been disclosed, major questions about financial accountability had been raised, and the frustrated expectations of the people aired. The Lockhart co-operative was scarcely in a different financial position to the Diocese itself during periods in the 1940s and 1950s, but was expected to conform to a standard that the Diocese had often excused itself from meeting. By October 1959, Clint’s hopes for Lockhart rested with demonstrating that the whole exercise had been conducted in an accountable way: “The matter of Lockhart River returns and audit is, I believe, most important and urgent. A failure here, we leave ourselves wide open”.³⁷ With Lockhart River, the show piece of the co-operative thrust left in disarray, even Clint’s supporters realised that they were left with a hollow shell. Cyril Brown, the priest at Moa Island and secretary of the Moa Island Christian Co-operative Society, pointed out the impossibility of the situation, “It is hard to rouse enthusiasm in a cause whose sole visible sign of vitality is a Notice Board locating the registered office!”³⁸

At the time when the downturn of the co-operative movement’s efforts at Lockhart gave greatest reason for depression, Clint was given the opportunity to commence co-operative organising at Mitchell River in 1959. It may have been that Clint’s detractors considered the memory of the Lockhart debacle would be a suitably sobering curb to Clint’s enthusiasm or that the diocesan authorities assessed that the Mitchell River situation had reached such an impasse that any initiative was worth an attempt. A meeting called in the schoolroom at Mitchell River on 16

34 Clint, notes of interview with P.J. Killoran, no date but probably 1957. ABM Chairman’s correspondence; series 9, box 3, folder 14, ABM Sydney.

35 Clint to Coaldrake, 9 November 1957. ABM Chairman’s correspondence; series 11, box 3, folder 16, ABM Sydney.

36 Clint to Coaldrake, 22 September 1958. ABM Chairman’s correspondence; series 9, box 3, folder 14, ABM Sydney.

37 Clint to Coaldrake, 14 October 1959. ABM Chairman’s correspondence; series 14, box 5, folder 21, ABM Sydney.

38 Brown to Williams, 14 April 1959. ABM Chairman’s correspondence, Series 12, box 4, folder 18, ABM Sydney.

November 1959, formally established the *Mitchell River Aboriginal Co-operative Society Limited*. Clint chaired the meeting which established the Society along his standard lines before proceeding to the election of seven directors. He specifically urged the meeting not to elect any people as director who would be likely to go away droving or who would want to work away on the stations. The need was for people who could devote their efforts wholeheartedly to the business of the Co-operative.

Of the three men elected, one, Smiler Mission, was a policeman and foreman of the mission work gang, the other two were the brothers Kenny and Brodie Jimmy who had come to Kowanyama as youths from the Nassau River. Brodie's wife Valerie, the sisters Judy Brumby and Alma Luke, along with mission teacher, Leah Minyalk, made up the four women. The directors chosen were all literate and considered able to "speak up" for the rights of the people and were, in a sense, representative of the generation of mission educated Aborigines whose expectations had not been met by the mission. Their choice by the people of Kowanyama demonstrated that they well understood the sort of people the missionary administration, and whites in general, would want to deal with. They had chosen a group which was, though, unrepresentative of the traditional authority structure. The co-operative scheme was as unconcerned for this dimension of Aboriginal identity and community relations as the order it sought to replace.

At the conclusion of the meeting 48 people had signed on as members of the Co-operative. A meeting of the Board of the Co-operative, comprising Clint as Supervisor and the elected Directors, followed immediately after the General Meeting to elect a Chairman. Upon calling for nominations for Chairman, Smiler Mission was nominated and, "immediately asked to be relieved as Director, as he wanted to go on a droving trip".³⁹ This should have raised a doubt in Clint's mind as to the effectiveness of his fast flowing meeting procedure in communicating the dimensions of what he was proposing, considering he had made this point, as he thought, plainly in the General Meeting.

By the next day any misgivings Clint carried from the previous night's board meeting would have been dispelled with the knowledge that 105 people had joined the Co-operative as members, including the European missionary teacher, Sylvia Card.⁴⁰ Wiffie Currington had been appointed Deputy Supervisor to Clint thus ensuring his participation in the venture. Clint's perseverance had prevailed at least in establishing the Mitchell River Co-operative on paper.

The fragile state of diocesan finances precluded any new investment to make the Mitchell River Co-operative a reality; in fact the opposite was the case. The Mitchell River Cattle Account had realised £17, 323 from the sale of bullocks for the year ending 30 June 1959 and of this £12,738 was declared as profit, a particularly high return made possible only through the low wages paid and the minimal re-

39" Minutes of Meeting of Formation of Mitchell River Aboriginal Co-operative Society Limited held at schoolroom, Mitchell River Mission, on the 16th November, 1959, at 8 pm.", ABM Chairman's correspondence; Series 17, box 5, folder 25, ABM Sydney.

40 List of members, "Mitchell River Aboriginal Co-operative Society Limited", 17 November 1959. ABM Chairman's correspondence; series 17, box 5, folder 25, ABM Sydney.

investment into the enterprise.⁴¹ The single largest item of expenditure from these proceeds was £3,000 to purchase a boat for Lockhart River.⁴² Lockhart was also to receive a staff house and ablution blocks for seven of the village houses at a similar total cost. From these items alone, Lockhart stood to receive nearly half of the profits from the Mitchell River cattle, all because the experiment at Lockhart had become debt ridden and an increased burden on the corporate finances of the diocese of which the Cattle Account was the significant creditor.

With the passing of a year, which saw the retirement of both Hudson and Currington, there had been no action to suggest that the Mitchell River Co-operative existed in any other way than on paper and in the paid up subscriptions of its Aboriginal members. The situation had become so glaring that Dennis Hooper-Colsey, the Acting Superintendent after Currington, forbade the distribution of the *Co-operative Newsletter*, since it contained an article about the Mitchell River Co-operative and the assurance that, "Mitchell will start business later this year. Good luck to them!"⁴³ Hooper-Colsey was fearful that an unrealistic expectation was the sole result of founding the Mitchell River Co-operative. Failure would have direct consequences for field missionaries who had "to make excuses or take evasive action when schemes fail to materialize". He reflected a new understanding that the mission Aborigines were active not passive participants in their own destiny:

... we do feel that our people are impatient for results rather than mere words and that any plans concerning the future of the mission should be discussed at all levels and in the greatest detail BEFORE the people are told about it. We do a great dis-service both to ourselves and to our people when promises are made - even obliquely - that are by no means certain of being kept.⁴⁴

Apart from the obvious difference of approach that resulted from Alf Clint's personality and conviction, a fundamental difference in philosophy is revealed in Hooper-Colsey's comments. Most missionaries of this era had, in common with their predecessors, practised a benevolent paternalism that seemed to them to be the proper expression of their Christian and missionary principles. Clint's challenge to this perception was in the extent of his democratic ideal, which led him to place far more trust in the capacity of the Aboriginal population of the missions to find a solution to their problems than did the principles of missionary paternalism which saw the same people as mere beneficiaries of the missionary program. At its most radical face, Clint's program called for Aboriginal control of the means of production and distribution on the reserve communities. Con O'Leary's critique of the Clint schema makes the basis for conservative opposition to the co-operative movement very clear:

41 File memo, 8 December 1959. "Kowanyama, Breeder Bulls and Cattle generally", 17C.1, Interim Transfer R254, QSA.

42 Memorandum from Private Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 27 May 1958. OF 46, DFSAIA.

43 *Co-operative Newsletter*, vol.1, no.2, June 1960, p.2.

44 Hooper-Colsey to Coaldrake, 15 July 1960. ABM Chairman's correspondence; series 5, box 2, folder 9, ABM Sydney.

In every move for the advancement of a backward race, a close examination of the psychology of that race is imperative. There is too great an inclination amongst a section of the Australian public to imagine that the wave of a magic wand will alter the aboriginal from his present status to an advanced member of an intelligent community. Our civilisation, which has taken thousands of years to attain, cannot be reached by the aboriginal in one generation.⁴⁵

The very notion that Aborigines could be appointed as directors of co-operatives and educated to carry out such an important function was entirely alien to this thinking, "just wasting time", according to O'Leary. Yet for Clint empowerment of the Aborigines to control and develop their own communities was the very basis of the reforms he saw to be so desperately needed on the Anglican missions. I think that there is a strong resonance between Alf Clint's ideas and the aspirations that led to the formation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989. We might also conclude that the demise of the Co-operative movement on the ABM missions followed a pattern not dissimilar to the demise of ATSIC three decades later.

Even though Clint took his inspiration from the New Testament and traditions of the Church, his teachings seemed novel and threatening to his Anglican contemporaries. For the missionaries and Church dignitaries who had largely accepted the wider society's view about Aborigines and their supposed backwardness, Clint's optimism was offensive. A thorough going application of the radical egalitarianism of the co-operative movement would have been controversial enough in white Australian society of the 1950s; when it addressed the situation of Aborigines on a rigidly structured mission station, it was bound to encounter resistance. More than this, it challenged in a practical way how things were done and who exercised power. In the context of small, isolated missions, concerns about threats to mission order were the point of greater threat than any of Clint's more philosophical opinions. From racism to male dominance, Clint's critique cut a swathe through the status quo of the missions. He proudly announced that the Mitchell River Co-operative had been formed with women as directors.

Women were elected with men as Directors. This is a good move. If you have a look at the rules that are drawn up for co-operative societies you will see that women have the same rights as men. (Open membership regardless of colour, race, creed or sex!)⁴⁶

By 1960 the real situation at Lockhart had become generally known to people in diocesan and missionary circles. With Lockhart's star rapidly setting, it had changed from being a "show piece" of modern missionary philosophy to an example of what should not happen on a mission. As the gap between reality and rhetoric widened, Clint's role and especially his penchant for promotion came under closer scrutiny.

Interestingly enough, this same capacity for publicity and promotion had been noticed by Con O'Leary in 1956 and fed his suspicions of Clint's motives:

45 O'Leary to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 25 June 1956, OF 82, DFSAIA.

46 *Co-operative Newsletter*, vol.1, no.2, June 1960, p.2.

From what can be observed to date from the co-operative at Lockhart River Mission and the ones which Rev. Clint intends to establish at the Edward River Mission and at St. Paul's Mission, no particular benefit over and above that now prevailing will go to the aboriginal. They will, however, be a medium of advertising for the Church and particularly for Mr. Clint, the organiser of them.⁴⁷

Even though Clint was at his most effective as a popularist organiser he was equally confident in his persuasive powers to get powerful Church and political leaders to see things his way. The Mitchell River Co-operative foundered on Clint's confidence of his talent in the latter sphere of activism. When the popularist phase had passed after the 16 November 1959 meeting at Mitchell River, the harder task of securing control of the cattle enterprise at Mitchell River began. Clint planned to achieve this control through the Mitchell River Co-operative acquiring the legal ownership of both the Mitchell River cattle and the lease of the reserve land. This was put to Dr Noble, the Minister for Health and Home Affairs, at a meeting on 20 November 1959.⁴⁸ As simple as this solution seemed it was fraught with legal difficulties. Firstly, the reserves were legally under state control, the Church bodies simply administered the reserves as missions on behalf of the Crown. Secondly, the state authorities shared none of Clint's optimism about the desirability of Aboriginal control over affairs on the reserves. They were by then committed to seeing the missions and reserve communities as only temporary homes for Aboriginal people before their absorption into the general community.⁴⁹ In a letter of 18 February 1960, Clint's greatest ally, John Warby, gave Coaldrake the sad prognosis that there was little chance that these conditions would be agreed to.⁵⁰

Coaldrake was to find the impossibility of the situation in a meeting with O'Leary on 6 April 1960. Faced with the opinion of the Crown Solicitor that the proposal was inconsistent with both law and government policy, Coaldrake had no choice but to admit to O'Leary that ABM had not thought to consider the legalities of the proposal. Clint had once again cast his supporters adrift in deep water by letting his enthusiasm get the better of his judgement. He had not calculated on the resistance of the Queensland Government nor the fact that they held the legal authority for Aboriginal affairs in the State. Coaldrake's only consolation after the meeting with O'Leary was that an altered proposal would be considered if it was "more in keeping with the requirements of the Law and the Department's policy of protection of its wards". By 19 May 1961, Coaldrake was prepared to concede defeat and withdraw the proposal which he now considered was "evidently impracticable under present Government policy in Queensland".⁵¹

Between these setbacks and Hooper-Colsey's insistence that it was "most un-Christian, unfair and, in the long run, unco-operative to promise... any change until

47 O'Leary to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 25 June 1956, OF 82, DFSAIA.

48 O'Leary to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 8 April 1960. "Kowanyama, breeder bulls and cattle generally", 17C.1, QSA Interim Transfer R254.

49 Loos, "From Church to State", p.82.

50 Warby to Coaldrake, 18 February 1960. Personal file, John Warby, ABM Sydney.

51 Coaldrake to O'Leary, 19 May 1961. "Kowanyama, breeder bulls and cattle generally", 17C.1, QSA Interim Transfer R254.

we are absolutely sure it can be implemented and implemented successfully”,⁵² there was little to be done except allow the Mitchell River Co-operative to slide into obscurity. To use Loos’ words, the principles of “concern and contempt”⁵³ had prevailed over the “radical promise”⁵⁴ of the co-operative movement. ABM had not only failed in a major attempt to implement policy but had shown that when it came to a clash with government policies the Church was an ineffective advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people.

The reality was, that by this time ABM had itself become increasingly irrelevant to the future of the Aboriginal mission communities. There was no prospect that it could bankroll the extensive development projects required on the missions and no likelihood of Clint’s hopes for the missions to become co-operative communities eventuating. The government takeover of Yarrabah on 1 July 1960 signalled a fundamental change to the role that government was willing to take on the church-controlled reserves. It was calculated to change forever the “virtually autonomous powers” that were exercised by the Church with respect to its missions.⁵⁵ The three Aboriginal missions were the main bargaining point in the Diocesan Registrar’s July 1961 submission to O’Leary that the Diocese needed a total budget of over £120,000, if it was to run the Aboriginal missions at a standard comparable to the government settlements. The contribution of the Church was the smallest of the three funding sources available: even the receipts from Aged Pensions and Child Endowment, which the Church claimed on behalf of Aborigines, were greater than the Church amount. The government was still getting good value from the diocese. Even if the Aboriginal missions were assumed to consume two thirds of the diocesan budget, almost 1,200 Aboriginal people had been maintained across the three communities at a cost to state coffers of only £24 per person for the whole of the 1961/62 financial year; each at about the cost of a week’s wages for a white member of the public. On the case presented to him, O’Leary did not hesitate in doubling the State Government share of annual funding for the Diocese to £75,000.⁵⁶

The Yarrabah takeover had been negotiated to preserve as much dignity for the Anglican Church as was possible given its long standing failure to deal with the situation. The Anglican Church had secured the undertaking that it alone would be responsible for the spiritual needs of the Yarrabah people. Even the religious activity of government staff employed at Yarrabah was to be, “under the direction of the Chaplain”, whose stipend would be met by the government.⁵⁷ With plans advanced to build a new church it was hoped that the public would perceive the changes as a

52 Hooper-Colsey to Coaldrake, 15 July 1960. ABM Chairman’s correspondence; series 5, box 2, folder 9, ABM Sydney.

53 Noel Loos, “Concern and Contempt: Church and Missionary Attitudes towards Aborigines in North Queensland in the Nineteenth Century”, in T. Swain and D.B. Rose (eds), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies*, (Bedford Park, South Australia, 1988), pp.100-120.

54 Loos and Keast, “The radical promise.

55 Pizzey to Bjeilke-Petersen, 26 May 1966. “Administration - Mitchell River, Manager”, 17A.5, interim transfer R254, QSA.

56 Innis to O’Leary, 5 July 1961 and O’Leary to Under Secretary, Home Affairs, 20 July 1961, OF 118, DFSAIA.

57 Shevill to Noble, 28 April 1960. OF 69, DFSAIA.

new development in missionary strategy rather than for what it was, an Anglican withdrawal.

Stung by the loss of Yarrabah, the Anglican missionary initiative on the Peninsula developed a fresh urgency. Seeing John Matthews, by then the Bishop of Carpentaria travelled to England in 1961 in an attempt to recruit people to fill the missionary places that remained vacant. The new recruits were devastated to find that accommodation was still primitive and that there were few resources to equip them for their work.⁵⁸ Missionaries faced the people's disappointment that their expectations, which had been raised by Clint's scheme, would not be fulfilled, and the difficulty of coping with the new focus on material progress generally. Missionary burnout and high turnover, the two reasons for the 1959 visitation by Matthews and Coaldrake, were set to be just as bad under the new regime that was meant to address them.

Despite Matthew's success in extracting more funds from both ABM and the Queensland Government, the finances available for the ambitious goals towards material progress were still far short of what was required. The search for the finances needed to build a new missionary order led Matthews to make a submission to the United Kingdom National Committee of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. The project was linked to the plan to remove the Lockhart River inmates to Mitchell River and Edward River and proposed to develop the agricultural and pastoral sides of both missions.⁵⁹ Using the time-honoured language of dependency, it envisaged "the full use of the large areas of land available for the benefit of the Aborigines and to enable them to become self-supporting, useful members of the Australian community".⁶⁰ On account of the submission's international dimension it was brought to the attention of the Federal Government's Department of External Affairs, the Prime Minister's Department and then to Premier Frank Nicklin.⁶¹ All agreed that the submission, if successful, would be an embarrassment to Australia on the international stage. Killoran recognised that access to funding of this type could mean the indefinite continuation of Church administration, a possibility he vigorously opposed.⁶² By the end of 1963 this project was totally buried, and with it any hope of reviving the missionary order.

Field missionaries throughout the 1960s hoped that they would be able to continue in their work at Kowanyama, that it would remain a Church mission, and that increased government support would be available to assist their efforts. In hindsight it is easy to see how unrealistic these expectations were, yet the expectation amongst the field missionaries at Mitchell River in the 1960s was that the future might be expected to be marked by both increased government funding and sustained Church control. They considered that only Lockhart River was likely to be transferred from

58 Arthur Lupton, taped interview, Coolum, 18 August 1987.

59 Loos, "From Church to State", p.80.

60" Diocese of Carpentaria, Agricultural and Pastoral Projects", (no date, but 1962), OF 82, DFSAIA.

61 Lamidey to Peachey, 11 January 1963; Bunting to McAllister, 7 June 1963; Pizzey to Nicklin, 10 October 1963, OF 82, DFSAIA.

62 Killoran to Director General of Education, 17 September 1963. OF 82, DFSAIA.

church to government control.⁶³ They carried out their missionary work largely unaware of the scope of the change implicit in Pat Killoran's comment, in opposition to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign submission: "It would not be prudent for the Department to support a policy which commits the inmates of Mitchell River to mission administration indefinitely".⁶⁴

Every question about the future of the Mission was radically thrown open on 3 February 1964 when both Mitchell River and Edward River were struck by Cyclone Dora. It comes as no surprise that every opportunity was made to exploit the extent of the damage from the cyclone for fund raising purposes.

The destruction caused by Cyclone Dora provided an apparently heaven-sent opportunity to lever more financial support from the government coffers. Matthews' immediate response to the cyclone, described as "the worst ever for the northern missions", was to travel to Brisbane for urgent talks with both Church and government leaders.⁶⁵ The aftermath of Cyclone Dora witnessed an unprecedented public response to the suffering of the people of Mitchell River. Church members responded generously to an appeal for funds and clothing to replace personal items lost in the cyclone. Trade Unions and other public organisations wrote, urging the government to quick relief action. The government response was prompt, compared with anything the Church could have hoped to achieve from its own resources, and generous, considering the minimal resources that had been applied to Mitchell River hitherto. By April the Cabinet had approved the rebuilding of Mitchell and Edward River missions.⁶⁶ O'Leary's deputy, Pat Killoran, who had succeeded his former mentor as Director of Native Affairs, showed all the bureaucratic precision in his negotiation of the rebuilding project which had characterised O'Leary's earlier dealings with ABM's co-operative experiment. Aware that the Yarrabah transfer had involved a cash settlement in favour of the Diocese in consideration of the material improvements already established by the Church, Killoran was careful to establish at the outset that the government investment in the rebuilding of Mitchell River was on the condition "that equity in the buildings remains with the State".⁶⁷

With such a large stake in the rebuilding program, the government was determined to ensure that there would be no unforeseen difficulties if Mitchell River followed Yarrabah into its exclusive control. The 1965 *Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act* gave the Minister for Education a statutory power to take control of any mission schools in which the government had ever expended state funds. Even though such a provision for forced government takeover of a church school would have been controversial if applied to the wider community it seemed entirely uncontroversial where the scholars were Aborigines.⁶⁸ The Anglican Church, at least, was keen to divest itself of its missionary apparatus. Early in 1966, Matthews made representations to Education Minister, Jack Pizzey, whose portfolio included

63 Michael Martin, taped interview, Brisbane, 8 July 1988.

64 Killoran to Director General of Education, 17 September 1963. OF 82, DFSAIA.

65 *Courier Mail*, 6 February 1964.

66 Killoran to Matthews, 30 April 1964, 64:040362, OF 46, DFSAIA.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act* of 1965, section 42.

Aboriginal matters, for the State Government to assume control of its three Aboriginal missions. Cabinet approval, in principle, followed on 17 May 1966 and empowered Killoran to undertake the necessary negotiations.⁶⁹ The actual takeover occurred a year later on 1 May 1967.

The housing arrangements established after Cyclone Dora represented the most profound visible change from the palm-leaf houses of the three villages that were the standard under mission administration. In place of the palm-leaf houses, metal-clad prefabricated dwellings were constructed. Those built between 1965 and 1969 were constructed on a concrete slab, the ones after 1969 on a raised, wooden floor. Instead of the traditional pattern of three distinct villages, with houses situated at the discretion of their owners, the new town plan prescribed surveyed allotments on defined roads. Since the houses were allocated on a basis of housing need as they became available, the new township was tribally heterogeneous bearing no resemblance to the tribally based distinctions of the mission villages.⁷⁰ Frank Coaldrake visited Mitchell River and the other former missions in 1968 and commented ironically:

The Department is certainly making towns rapidly and magnificently but it is not far advanced in the making of townspeople. The chaplains are to be expected to play a big part in this. Before the transfer, the Department helped us to make towns, now we must help the Department make townspeople.⁷¹

By 1972, a full eight years after Cyclone "Dora", the rebuilding program still had not made the progress promised:

... there are still a number of families residing in sub standard tin humpies with dirt floors without adequate sanitation or electricity, while much of the unrest and fighting can be attributed to the fact that many of the new homes are grossly overcrowded and some have over twenty residents.⁷²

Even though the missionaries, at all levels, found it easier to make decisions on behalf of Aborigines rather than in consultation with them, the Kowanyama people were becoming increasingly aware of the arbitrary way they were being treated. The standard of educational facilities and school equipment particularly, was such a case that resulted in a protest from the men's meeting. At a time when slates had become obsolete in most Queensland schools, the Mission children had theirs locked away so they wouldn't be damaged and were made to write on pieces of fibro.⁷³ Archdeacon Arthur Lupton, recruited by Matthews to oversee the Aboriginal missions, came up against the agitation of the Mission Council for higher wages. Lupton was impressed by the people who confronted him. "They were completely loyal [to the Mission] since they could have been out on the cattle stations earning higher wages", but had

69 Killoran to Under-Secretary, Health Department, 20 May 1966, 66:044168. OF 40, DFSAIA.

70 John Taylor, "Housing programs at Edward River and Mitchell River Aboriginal reserves", in M. Heppell (ed.), *A black reality*, 1979, Canberra, p.218.

71 Frank Coaldrake, Chairman's Report, 29-31 October 1968, ABM Board Minutes, vol. , no. , Box, Series M4, ABM Sydney.

72 Burton to Killoran, 28 August 1972, 17A/22, Interim transfer R254, QSA. John Taylor makes a similar point in his detailed, comparative analysis of Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw. Taylor, *op.cit.*

73 Michael Martin, taped interview, Brisbane, 8 July 1988.

nothing to offer them except the information that he was only earning £7 a week himself.⁷⁴

The 1967 takeover signalled a new era for the Church and the people at Kowanyama. The transfer of the Mitchell River cattle to the government represented a big loss of income to the Diocese, leaving it incapable of even funding the whole of the chaplain's stipend on the three former Aboriginal missions. The Government provided housing and a \$2,500 annual subsidy for five years to ensure the continuation of a role for the Church.⁷⁵ Continuing beyond the five year period, the subsidy was increased to \$3,750 in 1975, before the arrangement was terminated by the Government in 1978.⁷⁶ Despite cutting off the subsidy, the Government still offered that it would give preference to the Anglican Church on the former mission communities, an effective guarantee that the power of the Department would be used to frustrate any attempt of rival sects to establish themselves. Even though ABM's involvement at Kowanyama was greatly diminished, it still struggled to fill the only "missionary" position left, that of the chaplain.⁷⁷ The Church struggled to discover its place in the new arrangement. A meeting of the chaplains in 1972 told a similar, discouraging story to the Bishop:

The picture at Edward River, Mitchell River and Lockhart River is of communities ruined by "grog" and gambling, with frequent occasions of violence.⁷⁸

Life under the government was little less regulated than it had been under the mission. The government manager acted with the same sort of over-arching authority that people had become used to from the mission superintendent. Shane O'Connor, the manager in 1969, had no hesitation in declaring the bullock paddock "out of bounds", as he considered it to be at risk of fire from Aborigines. He declared his intention of widening the access ban on hunting if the circumstances warranted it: "further restrictions may have to be introduced within the next few months".⁷⁹ By 1973, the appointment of a sergeant of the Queensland Police Force, Laurie Witham, to Kowanyama, strengthened the cause of the Aboriginal police, which by now had ten members.⁸⁰

Attempts were made by Michael Martin and David Thomson, the priests at Edward River and Lockhart River respectively, to develop a linguistic and cultural dimension to their work, but these efforts did not survive beyond the end of their tenure. ABM Chairman, John Munro, commented in 1974 after 70 years of Anglican involvement: "Some basic work remains to be done in the Diocese of Carpentaria if communication in depth is to be established by means of vernacular languages".⁸¹ Bruce and Elaine Sommer were sponsored by the Summer Institute of Linguistics to carry out preliminary language study and Bible translation work at Kowanyama but

74 Arthur Lupton, taped interview, Coolum, 18 August 1987.

75 Killoran to Lands Commissioner, 25 November 1968, 19A/41, Lockhart River, DFSAIA.

76 Killoran to Jamieson, 8 February 1978, 19A/41, Lockhart River, DFSAIA.

77 Hawkey to Munro, no date, but December 1972, Bishop's Correspondence, Thursday Island Registry.

78 Hawkey to Shearman, 13 March 1972, Bishop's Correspondence, Thursday Island Registry.

79 O'Connor to Killoran, [30] April 1969, 17A/55, Interim transfer R254, QSA.

80 Hamilton Spicer, "Report by visiting Justice", 19-20 November 1973. 17A/18, Interim transfer R254, QSA.

81 John Munro, Chairman's Report, ABM Board Minutes, 22-24 October 1974, vol. S, Box 20, Series M4, ABM Sydney.

discovered that this was not viable. As much as Bishop Eric Hawkey recognised that there was need for “a very serious re-appraisal of our missionary methods as far as Aboriginal work is concerned”, the 1970s continued to be a difficult decade for the church that had “lost its mission”.⁸²

Kenny Jimmy, the inaugural Chairman of the Council elected after the government takeover, discovered that the Government Manager was keen for the Council to do things the way he wanted and to decide matters according to his instructions, “*You were flat out getting anything done*”.⁸³ The community quickly came to rest its expectations on the Chairman, in its eagerness to get improvements in housing, wages and rights. The Government inaugurated an Aboriginal Advisory Council on a statewide basis in 1971 with reserve council chairmen, including Kenny Jimmy, as its members.⁸⁴ This experience was frustrating, “*You couldn't get a win*”. The power relations at this level of government administration were as plain as they were back at Kowanyama. “*We had the right to ask them [the Minister and the Director], but they had the right to make the decisions*”.

Any hope that the government era would lift wages at Kowanyama to award level was destroyed by the Government's assimilationist policies which required work on the community to be regarded as “training”, and that wages be kept lower than award levels as an incentive for people to leave the community to better their conditions.⁸⁵ People at Kowanyama had been thrown on to a crazy roundabout where so much seemed to change whilst their relative disadvantage remained unaltered. The introduction of award wages for work on the cattle stations in 1968, as well as the trend towards greater mechanisation and fencing of paddocks, led to a collapse in the demand for Kowanyama labour.⁸⁶ By the 1970s only a few people left Kowanyama to work on the stations, and then, only to those stations that were close by and still worked on open range principles.⁸⁷ Clint's dream for the whole of the population of Kowanyama to be involved in co-operative work on the reserve was replaced by a nightmare of unemployment, trainee jobs and deeply entrenched disadvantage.

The conferring of the federal franchise in 1962 and the state franchise in 1965 along with citizenship rights at the referendum in 1967 did not alter the realities of “living under the Act” on a Queensland reserve. Questions about rights and community politics generally were often linked to questions about the availability of alcohol. Wider exposure to the world of the cattle stations had shown that this was a key indicator of whether a person was a “protected” Aboriginal or considered to be on the same status as everyone else. Not surprisingly, Kowanyama Aborigines who chose to drink expected, as citizens and townspeople, that they should have the same

82 Hawkey to Shearman, 13 March 1972, Bishop's Correspondence, Thursday Island Registry.

83 Kenny Jimmy, taped interview, Kowanyama, 5 May 1988.

84 *Aborigines Act*, 1971. Section 33 deals with the Aboriginal Advisory Council.

85 Hewitt to Williams, 15 May 1970, OF 30, DFSAIA.

86 Dawn May, *Aboriginal labour and the Cattle Industry*, pp.167-73.

87 Butler to Killoran, 9 March 1971, 17A/55, Interim transfer R254, QSA. “The number of men available for work is in excess of work available. The extremely heavy wet appears to be affecting station employment as very little labour has been called for. Applicable benefits are being claimed for all unemployed men and one young woman”.

rights of access to alcohol as any other person. This was especially so since the 1965 *Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act* had removed the blanket prohibition on Aborigines having alcohol, even though it retained full authority to control reserves. Others, seeing the destructive effects of alcohol abuse, advocated that it be strictly limited or even prohibited. The mission administration held to a policy of prohibition, which was usually complied with or discreetly ignored for most of the year. The wet season, when station workers were back on the Mission for their "spell", was the main time when alcohol was considered to be a problem and when alcohol related brawls took place.⁸⁸ This policy was initially maintained by the government administration, with the luggage of Aboriginal passengers from Cairns searched for alcohol, which was then confiscated as a matter of routine.⁸⁹

The twenty years between the heyday of the co-operative experiment and the 1970s had witnessed many changes at Kowanyama. By the end of this period there was a mere handful of buildings left from the mission era and only the mango trees left to mark the site of the former mission villages. Disappointed expectations throughout the 1960s and 1970s contrasted with the remembrance of the mission era as a time of simplicity, sobriety and order.

Fifty years later, a very similar picture of living standards for remote area Aborigines emerges. The criticisms that Queensland government officials made of the Yarrabah Mission back in 1951 could be repeated, almost word for word, for many remote communities today. If anything, the social circumstances that have surrounded the well documented situations of alcohol and substance abuse in some remote and urban communities are more complicated and apparently more intractable than they were fifty years ago.

88 Goslett to Killoran, 18 September 1966, 17A/7, Interim transfer R254, QSA.

89 Butler to District Officer, 9 December 1969, 17A/7, Interim transfer R254, QSA.