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59/791^{MS} (45)
MIN. 27/6 24

61/3721

18th September, 1953

The Hon. Sir Robert Menzies,
M.P., C.M.G., M.C., M.P.,
Prime Minister,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

Dear Sir Robert,

Representations have been made to me by a member of the Legislative Council of the Northern Territory concerning Social Service payments to aboriginal Australians. I referred these representations to a Labor Party Committee on the Status and Rights of Aboriginal People, and as a result of their inquiries they consider that the remedy lies further afield than in action by the Social Services Department alone or the Department of Territories. The Committee feels the States are involved and accordingly I am writing to you.

My informant writes:

"There is another very serious matter taking place in the Northern Territory and I would say without hesitation, throughout the Commonwealth. This is the handing of the pensions of native men and women. The present form of dispensing all this money is that loose it lends itself to the greatest racket ever. Some of the station properties in this country receive as much as 12,000 a year from the Social Services Department without any attempt by the Commonwealth Government to check and see how this money is used (or abused). The attention is so serious in my mind, that I just could not sit down and write reams of correspondence to you, as it possibly would become too involved and perhaps disappointed. However, I would like the opportunity of discussing this matter with some of the senior men of the A.L.P."

Inquiries I have made seem to lead to the conclusion that this trouble is widespread, and that in western Australia an officer of the Social Services Department named Daniels is giving all his attention to it.

It seems to me to make necessary a change of approach.

The handing of Invalid pensions, Age Pensions, Widows' Pensions and Child Endowment to missions and station managers may produce a better form of expenditure in many cases than aboriginal Australians could carry out for themselves, but I think this practice should be reduced to a minimum and that more risks should be taken in paying the money to aboriginals.

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There seems to be an over concern lest old Hubarula or Ngala shares her widow's pension with all the family. Well, if she is a citizen and if the alternative is that dishonestly prevents her getting anything - why not? It is her business.

I also feel that where there is a concentration of a considerable number of aboriginal Australians on a station a welfare officer can give his time to assisting them to spend their money on protective foods of maximum benefit, and if there are not enough welfare officers then we should appoint more and assist the State to appoint more.

Frankly, I think we have just got to insist on all the implication of citizenship and then add generosity. Efficient stockmen are paid virtually nothing because they are black, and it is time that the arbitration courts were stung into extending awards to the aboriginal worker, and, in the Northern Territory, ordinances were passed to insist on their rights.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(ARTHUR A. CALWELL)

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22 # (43)

70/RW

A.55(18)/3814

The Secretary,
Prime Minister's Department,
CANBERRA. A.C.T.

Attention : Dr. R. Mandelsohn.

Subject: Letter to the Prime Minister by the
Leader of the Opposition concerning
pension payments to aboriginal
pensioners on pastoral properties.

Reference: Your memorandum 61/3721 of 20th
September, 1943.

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The Department of Social Services is not involved with the problems of aboriginal welfare as such, its concern is to see that aborigines, to whom or on whose behalf pensions are paid, receive the full benefit of the pension in accordance with Government policy.

The present position is that in the normal case the full amount of the pension is paid direct to the aboriginal. However, on a number of Church Missions, Government Settlements and Pastoral Properties, a portion of the pension is paid to the authorities of the Mission, Government Settlement or Pastoral Property for the maintenance of the pensioner and for the welfare of the pensioners generally.

Before deciding on this method of payment, officers of the Department carried out an intensive on-the-spot investigation in consultation and collaboration with the Directors of Aboriginal Welfare in all States and in the Northern Territory. The views of representative Church Missions and Pastoralist Associations as well as many individuals were also obtained. It was strongly urged upon the Department that to pay the full amount of the pension in cash to many of these aborigines would not be in their best interests and that without some guidance or supervision the pension moneys would find their way into the hands of the younger aborigines thus depriving the pensioners of any benefit of the new policy.

Over the three and a half years or so that the new policy has been in operation it has been gratifying to see that, as the aboriginal pensioners have become accustomed to handling money and managing their own affairs, certain of the Missions, Government Settlements and Pastoral Managements have recommended that the amounts of cash received direct by the pensioners be increased. In all cases the recommendations have been approved as it is the Government's policy that, in the fullness of time, all aboriginal pensioners will be sufficiently advanced as to be able to manage their own affairs and receive the full amount of their pensions in cash.

*Training
arrangements } right to
come*

*Copy to ...
comment ref A.C.*

It is in this regard that the question becomes mainly one of aboriginal welfare. The Department of Social Services would have no objections to paying all aboriginal pensioners the full amount of their pensions direct if that was the Government's wish. However, before any decision is made to do this, it is considered that the Director of Welfare in the Northern Territory and the State Departments in Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia should be consulted as the responsibility for aboriginal welfare is primarily theirs.

The position comes down to this - under the present procedures for payment there is scope for abuses on the part of certain pastoral managers although the experience of the Department of Social Services is that specific cases would be rare. Under Mr. Colwell's proposal to take risks and pay the full amount of the pension direct to the aborigines we will have the proposition that this is not in the best interest of the natives and in fact will make the task of those Departments (State and Commonwealth) entrusted with aboriginal welfare more difficult.

It should be remembered that the principle involved in paying part of the pension to the pensioner and the balance to some other person or authority on his behalf is not exclusive to aborigines. The principle has legislative authority (section 43 of the Social Services Act) and may be applied to any pensioner who is unable for any reason to handle his pension moneys himself.

Mr. Colwell's informant has made the specific allegation that some pastoral properties receive as much as £8,000 a year without any attempt being made by the Government to check how the money is used. The highest amount paid to any pastoral property in the Northern Territory for the twelve months ended 30th June, 1963, was £5,100 and the average amount paid to the ten largest properties would be just under £3,000.

Patrol Officers of the Northern Territory Welfare Branch conduct periodical inspections of pastoral properties and in doing this they bring to the notice of the Department of Social Services any aspects of the pension payments which they feel should be reported. Following a recent visit of the Director of Social Services for South Australia to Darwin arrangements are in hand for an officer of the Department to accompany officials of the Welfare Branch in a survey of selected pastoral properties.

(H. J. GOODES)

Director-General

CANBERRA, A.C.T.

1963

My dear Prime Minister,

I refer to the personal representations made by the Honourable the Leader of the Opposition on 18th September, 1963, concerning the payment of social service benefits to Aborigines.

Aborigines on pastoral properties in the Northern Territory may qualify for -

- (a) Age, invalid and widow's pensions and wife's allowances;
- (b) Maternity allowances;
- (c) Child endowment.

In all cases pastoral managements, on behalf of the Aboriginal claimants, send applications direct to the Department of Social Services. Any identification or verification of eligibility required by that department is referred to the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration.

Pensions and maternity allowances are paid direct by the Department of Social Services to the pastoralist. Child endowment is paid in the first instance to the Welfare Branch and is disbursed by that branch to the pastoralists who maintain the children concerned.

When Welfare Branch officers visit pastoral properties periodically they check, so far as possible, that the Social Service payments received by the pastoralist have been applied for the purpose for which they have been paid. The arrangement that was made by the Department of Social Services when pensions for Aborigines were commenced was that they should be applied as follows:-

- (a) Pocket money of 10/- a week paid direct to the pensioner.
- (b) For the maintenance of the pensioner at the rate of £1.14.6. a week.
- (c) The balance to be spent on amenities of benefit to pensioners (accommodation, water supply, sanitation and ablution facilities, etc.).

These arrangements, which were intended to be temporary only, were agreed to in 1960 after officers of the Department of Social Services had made investigations in all States and the Northern Territory. At that time the majority of Northern Territory Aboriginal pensioners were unaccustomed to the use of money and the payment to them of the full amount could have been to the disadvantage of the Aboriginal community. There was a serious

Pastoral Services, 1960

18.10.63

lack of accommodation and amenities for aged Aborigines on pastoral properties and it was thought that use of social service payments to provide these would assist in remedying this situation.

I understand that in appropriate cases direct payments to the pensioner have been increased by arrangement between the pastoralist and the Department of Social Services.

My own view is that emphasis must now be given to paying pensions direct to the Aborigines in as many cases as possible. Meanwhile, I certainly agree that every effort must be made to ensure that the sums retained by pastoralists are spent for the benefit of Aborigines. At the recent Native Welfare Conference it was agreed by all governments that there should be close consultation between Aboriginal Welfare officers and the Social Services Department to ensure that payments are properly applied.

Yours sincerely,



(Paul Hasluck)

The Rt.Hon. Sir Robert Menzies,
K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P.,
Prime Minister,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.



PRIME MINISTER.

Dear Mr. Calwell,

CANBERRA,
12 NOV 1963

I refer to your letter of 18th September concerning the payment of social service benefits to Aborigines.

In principle we have no difficulty in agreeing with your contentions. There is no doubt that the Aborigines should eventually receive the whole of their Social Service payments to spend as they see fit, and we are steadily working to that end.

Indeed I am informed that in many cases the full amount of the pension is paid direct to the Aborigine. However, on a number of Church Missions, government settlements and pastoral properties, a portion of the pension is paid to the authorities of the Mission, government settlement or pastoral property for the maintenance of the pensioner and for the welfare of the pensioners and other aborigines.

The principle of paying part of a pension to the pensioner and the balance to some other person or authority on his behalf is not exclusive to Aborigines. By section 43 of the Social Services Act this principle may be applied to any pensioner who is unable for any reason to handle his pension moneys himself.

Before deciding on the present method of payment, officers of the Department of Social Services carried out an intensive on-the-spot investigation in consultation and collaboration with the Directors of Aboriginal Welfare in all States and in the Northern Territory, and many knowledgeable people were consulted. It was strongly urged that to pay the full amount of the pension in cash to many of these Aborigines would not be in their best interests and that without some guidance or supervision the pension moneys would find their way into the hands of the younger Aborigines, thus depriving the pensioners of the full benefit of the new policy.

I do not think that the policy, which was always intended to be temporary, has worked badly. When Northern Territory Welfare Officers visit pastoral properties or Missions periodically, they check, so far as is possible, that the social service payments received have been applied for the purpose for which they have been paid. In this regard a certain proportion of the money is paid to the pensioner, the remainder being devoted to his maintenance or to the provision of improvement of amenities for his benefit and that of other Aborigines, such as accommodation, water supply, ablution and sanitation facilities.

.... /2

Over the three and a half years or so that the policy has been in operation I am told that, as the Aboriginal pensioners have become accustomed to handling money and managing their own affairs, certain of the Missions, settlements, etc., have recommended that the amounts of cash received direct by the pensioners be increased, and these recommendations have been approved as it is the Government's policy that, in the fullness of time, all Aboriginal pensioners will be sufficiently advanced as to be able to manage their own affairs and receive the full amount of their pensions in cash.

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT G. MENZIES

Prime Minister.

The Honourable A.A. Calwell, M.P.,
Leader of the Opposition,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. A.C.T.

copy sent to - Minister for Territories
Department of Territories
Department of the Treasury
Department of Social Services.

Attach to Social Services
to Aborigines Policy File

146

63/6480

25

23 OCT 1963

His Honour the Administrator
of the Northern Territory,
DARWIN. N.T.

SOCIAL SERVICE BENEFITS FOR ABORIGINES

In connection with the payment of Social Service benefits to Aborigines I am attaching for your information copies of:-

- (a) a letter to the Prime Minister from the Leader of the Opposition;
- (b) comments by the Department of Social Services;
- (c) the Minister's ^{reply} offer to the Prime Minister.

2. I would appreciate your views on the methods which should be adopted to conform with the Minister's thoughts in the matter:-

- (a) that emphasis must be given to paying pensions direct to the Aborigines in as many cases as possible; and
- (b) that every effort must be made to ensure that the sums retained by pastoralists are spent for the benefit of Aborigines.

Final para
folio 20.

(C. R. Lambert)
Secretary

Encl.

DEPT. OF TERRITORIES
INWARD
TELEPRINTER MESSAGE

63/6480
32 12/11
REC'D.
14 NOV 1963

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14.11.63

KJF520/D2581

TO TERRITORIES CANBERRA
FROM ADMIN DARWIN

YOUR 63/6480 OF 23RD OCTOBER SOCIAL SERVICE BENEFITS REFERS.
YOUR PARAGRAPH 2(A) PROGRESSIVELY GREATER NUMBERS OF
ABORIGINES ARE BEING PAID PENSIONS DIRECTLY AND NEARLY ALL *lawman?*
THOSE IN TOWN AREAS RECEIVE FULL PENSIONS ALTHOUGH THESE
ARE POSTED BY SOCIAL SERVICES THROUGH DISTRICT WELFARE OFFICERS
TO ENSURE IDENTIFICATION AND RECEIPT. CONSEQUENT UPON INCREASED
BENEFITS INCREASES OF FIVE SHILLINGS PER WEEK HAVE BEEN MADE
ON ALL SETTLEMENTS AND THE EFFECT ON RECOVERIES AND THEREFORE ?
ESTIMATES ARE NOW BEING STUDIED TO SEE WHETHER FURTHER INCREASE
CAN BE EFFECTED. YOUR PARAGRAPH 2 (B) PATROL OFFICERS ON
STATION INSPECTION VISITS CHECK PROVISION FOR PENSIONER
ACCOMMODATION AGAINST PASTORALISTS TRUST FUND HOLDINGS AND
PERIODICAL VISITS BY SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICERS CONFIRM THAT
See Bulletin
THEY ARE SATISFIED WITH PRESENT POSITION. A SOCIAL SERVICES
OFFICER IS SHORTLY TO ACCOMPANY A PATROL OFFICER ON A SERIES OF
VISITS TO CENTRALIAN PROPERTIES. EVERY EFFORT IS THEREFORE
BEING MADE TO ENSURE THAT THE SUMS RETAINED BY PASTORALISTS
ARE SPENT FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE ABORIGINES AND THE DEPARTMENT
OF SOCIAL SERVICES IS AWARE OF AND SATISFIED WITH THE PRESENT
POSITION. ?

ADMIN FILE 62/2240

ENDS GD

Ken Moy

*As on file
Jan 15*