

Indigenous Welfare in Australia

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The invasion and subsequent colonization of what was to become known as Australia, by the British in 1788 marked the meeting of two utterly different societies and the beginning of ongoing destructive disruption to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of life. How have Indigenous Australian¹ peoples fared since then? They have endured a series of welfare regimes driven by racist, eliminationist, exclusionist, assimilationist, integrationist and multiculturalist values over the last two centuries. Welfare² policies for Indigenous Australians have been, and continue to be different from, although parallel to those for other Australians, and based upon the same values of individualism, the work ethic, deservingness and Christian morality imposed by the British upper and middle classes upon the poor. Controlling the lives of the very poor has been, and still is central to welfare policies for poor non-Indigenous Australians, but its manifestation amongst Indigenous Australians has been utterly pervasive and all encompassing. From invasion to contemporary times, Indigenous Australians were seen and treated as members of a “race” in extreme need of “civilizing.” No respect was shown to Indigenous social or cultural institutions and a template of British welfareism was imposed upon all Indigenous Australians.

In contemporary Australia Indigenous Australians represent approximately 2 percent of the population. Their health, education, employment and housing status in some contexts, are so far below non-Indigenous Australians as to be described as of “third world standard.” On all social and economic indices they are the most seriously disadvantaged group, not only in Australia but also within all OECD nations (ATSIC, 2001a; Hunter, 1999). It is impossible to understand this current state without an understanding of the history of policies and practices imposed upon Indigenous Australians over the past two centuries.

In addition it is essential to understand that Aboriginal people were not just passive victims of the British Empire’s colonization. In fact they have played and continue to play a major role in changing policies and welfare provision, often in the face of extremely hostile and negative contexts. This chapter will use critical perspectives developed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal analysts in an attempt to bring to the fore the Indigenous experience of Australian welfare systems.

Pre-Invasion Society

Prior to the invasion of Indigenous Australian lands, Indigenous communities operated within a complex system of social obligations and lore that were handed down in the Dreaming³ and that were maintained as each generation passed on the stories to the next. These obligations and lores ensured that all members of the society had a role and were seen as integral to the community. Social structures took into account every aspect of life, from people, to animals, to the land; each was seen as central to life and therefore each person had a responsibility to ensure that each aspect of life was protected and sustained. Indigenous social organization and welfare was based upon cooperation and sharing within clans which moved, depending upon the season, among established camp sites to hunt and gather food, and upon these highly complex systems of personal and familial obligations.

Whilst taking care not to depict Aboriginal societies prior to colonization as perfect (which would reinforce discredited notions of the “noble savage”), family and community were central to Indigenous peoples’ way of life. For Aboriginal people this way of life had existed since the beginning of time and had continued until shortly after the invasion, when the essential connections with land, family and lore were disrupted. This way of life ensured that, despite times of hardship, risks were distributed reasonably evenly across the society and no particular person or group suffered disproportionately (Garton, 1990). It is, and was a ludicrous belief, born out of ignorance and arrogance on the part of colonial and later Australian governments, that Indigenous Australians were not capable of effectively and efficiently managing their economic and social welfare. After all, Indigenous Australians represent the oldest living societies and cultures in the world. They had lived sustainably for as long as they had occupied the continent before the arrival of Europeans. The social organization and welfare system imposed by the British was alien to this way of life.

Colonial Welfare Institutions, Values and Practices (1788 to 1900)

There may have been as many as one million Indigenous Australians in the late 18th century belonging to 350 different language groups. It is estimated that, in the early years, a majority of each Indigenous clan died of infectious diseases within a decade of first contact with the British (Girling, 1983) and tens of thousands more were killed or massacred by settlers and the military or police (Reynolds, 1987, 1998, 2001) over the next century. Not surprisingly, such appalling decimation severely damaged the welfare of families and groups. Added to this was the systematic driving of Aboriginal groups off their traditional lands as British settlers occupied more and more of what the authorities viewed as Terra Nullius.⁴ This deprived Indigenous Australians of their food sources, their spiritual (Dreaming) and physical homes and their connection to their environments.

Initial responses in the colony to Indigenous peoples’ obvious trauma and distress, as well as to what were mistakenly taken to be signs of poverty, were to try to “civilize the natives’ by teaching them British social behavior. When this proved a failure, charitable acts, such as providing them with rations, clothing and blankets were embarked upon. The removal of Indigenous children, which commenced almost immediately upon the arrival of the Europeans, has been one of the most serious disruptions to Indigenous welfare (Link-Up and Wilson, 1997). This practice of child removal continued as official government policy until the late 1960s.

The discourses and the nature of programs and methods used to address Indigenous Australians’ living conditions were and still are, linked to the 19th century British welfare policies governing paupers. The English poor law reforms of the 19th century saw a shift from a model of

outdoor relief to one of workhouses and the delivery of aid to designated “deserving poor” (Leonard, 1900; Webb, 1911, 1963). The colonial governments followed the same policy, moving Indigenous welfare provision from rations to welfare settlements based on British workhouses. This model has persisted through protection and assimilation policies to current Indigenous employment policies. Assistance to the deserving poor and working in return for assistance underpinned 18th century welfare policies in general (Wearing and Berreen, 1994; Garton, 1990) and policies affecting Aboriginal peoples in particular (Rowley, 1971).

A British House of Commons Select Committee was established in July 1835 to consider issues of justice and Christianity being provided to Indigenous people in all British Colonies. In 1837 the inquiry found that colonization had been disastrous for Indigenous peoples and argued that the British government should assume moral responsibility for Indigenous peoples’ physical and spiritual well being, in other words, for their welfare. The inquiry specifically recommended that Protectors of Aborigines be appointed to the Australian colonies. Protectors were to encourage industry within Aboriginal people and ensure that education of Indigenous children be assigned to missionaries. This linking of welfare support to work is perfectly summed up in the NSW Governor Gibbs’ statement of 1844: the Aborigines will never be induced to work, whilst the practice of giving them blankets in reward for their idleness is preserved in (Reece, 1974: 210).

The system of Protectorates and Protectors was introduced into each colony as Indigenous Australia was progressively taken over by the British. The Protectors were mostly of Christian evangelical disposition and assumed a missionary role. Their duties also included being magistrates, special custodians of Aboriginal life and property and mediators in conflicts between Aboriginal people and settlers. Protectors proved both expensive and ineffective and the colonial government soon appointed police and other public officials to their role. This set the pattern of using coercive and violent methods to deliver welfare and “civilization” to Indigenous Australians (Cunneen, 2001).

This period of time was marked by increased massacres of Aboriginal peoples and the beginning of mass removal from their lands onto missions and reserves. Despite some individual moves towards respectful negotiation on these matters, the colonial governments refused to allow any treaty or formal agreement or negotiation regarding land or co-existence. The rise of scientific racism during the 1800s encouraged the belief that Aboriginal people were subhuman and could never “progress” or be “civilized.” This led to a belief that Aboriginal people were child-like: The aborigine is, indeed, a very curious mixture, mentally, about the level of a child who has little control over his feelings and is liable to give way to violent fits of temper (Spencer, 1914: 39) and, by the end of the 19th century, to colonial governments regulating Aboriginal peoples’ lives with restrictive policies and legislation under the Protection Acts⁵ (Armitage, 1995). It was rationalized that Aboriginal peoples were “dying” out and all that was needed was “a pillow to smooth the way,” thus ending the “native problem” (Garton, 1990). By 1911 all the colonies, that were later to become states and territories of Australia (with the exception of Tasmania that denied having an Aboriginal population), had entrenched protectionist policies that allowed the state to keep Aboriginal peoples segregated from other Australians, to keep them away from their lands and to remove children from their parents (HREOC, 1997). The fact that these policies and practices were applied to all Indigenous Australians marked them racist at their very core. From an Indigenous perspective, the colonial authorities had removed almost all of the elements essential to their welfare and well being by the turn of the century (Markus, 1988; Bourke *et al.*, 1994).

Australian Federated States’ Indigenous Policies, Legislation and Welfare Practices

(1901 to 1967)

The Federation of the Australian States, creating the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 under the Australian Commonwealth Constitution, resulted in different but equally poor circumstances compared with the 19th century, for Aboriginal peoples. There were only two references in the new constitution to Aboriginal persons: section 51 that excluded Aboriginal persons from any special law making powers of the Commonwealth and Section 127 that excluded Aboriginal persons from being counted in the national census (Peterson and Sanders, 1998). These exclusions effectively continued the practice of Indigenous Australians' welfare being a state responsibility and continued their otherness. The Commonwealth went on to pass legislation excluding Aboriginal peoples from welfare and other benefits: from voting (1902), from receiving the aged pension (1908) and the maternity allowance (1912) thus relegating them to a non-citizen status. States continued with the exclusionary, restrictive and controlling policies, legislation and practices they had developed in the 19th century, in fact strengthening the Protection Acts (Peterson and Sanders, 1998). These developments set the stage for the "whiteman's" 20th-century Indigenous Australian welfare practices.

Three aspects of Aboriginal welfare policy stand out in the period from 1901 to 1970: the fundamental importance of, and exclusion from traditional lands and the development of Indigenous social action to be restored to those lands; the concerted effort by welfare authorities to starve Aboriginal societies and cultures by removing thousands of Aboriginal children from their families; and the continued and increasing use of police and the justice system to control Aboriginal individuals and communities. These had profoundly negative effects upon the health, and economic and social well-being of Indigenous Australians.

As was noted earlier, the forced movement of Aboriginal peoples from their traditional lands to missions and reserves had been pursued vigorously by the Australian colonies prior to Federation. The importance of "country" (traditional land) to Indigenous Australian clan's welfare cannot be underestimated. Their country is their welfare. They belong to it and are responsible for its preservation. It provided everything they needed—food, shelter, water and their place in the world. The removal of a majority of Indigenous Australians from their country separated them from their source of spiritual life and their source of physical sustenance (ATSIC, 2001a). Every state intensified this practice until around 1950, arguing that it was for Aboriginal peoples' welfare. The reality was that "white" Australia had first taken land for farming and sheep and cattle raising, then for building towns and cities, and then for mining and the establishments of huge cattle stations in the outback. Added to that was the convenient legal reality that first the British government, then the Australian Commonwealth had never recognized that Indigenous Australians owned or occupied the land. It was greed for land, not concern for their welfare that deprived most Indigenous Australians of their land.⁶

The removal of Aboriginal children, at its height in the first half of the 20th century, has been only latterly recognized by most authorities in Australia as a decimation of Aboriginal life and culture amounting to genocide (Wilson, 1998; Cunneen and Libesman, 2000; Read, 1998, 2000). Not surprisingly, Aboriginal peoples saw it for what it was (Wilson, 1998). Read (1998) estimates that between 1788 and 1998 not much less than 50,000 children were removed and placed in institutions or white foster homes. The intent was to train them in European ways, prepare them for menial work and break all attachment to their Aboriginal families and communities. A chief architect of Aboriginal child and land separation in NSW in 1900 stated that such practice "would solve the Aboriginal problem forever" (cited in Read, 2000). All states subscribed to these policies, particularly regarding lighter skinned children (usually from a non-Aboriginal father) who were seen as eminently redeemable. Between 1920 and 1960 virtually every mixed race child along the highway between Darwin (the far north of Australia) and

Adelaide (the South) was removed (Read, 2000). Many young Aboriginal women giving birth were bullied into giving up their baby. The official policy in the Northern Territory in the 1930s was “to breed out color by elevating female half-castes to the white standard” so that they would be suitable for “mating” with white men (cited in Read, 2000). These were all forms of assimilation in an attempt to annihilate Aboriginal cultural identity (van Krieken, 1999), a policy approach that came to full flower in the mid 1900s.

The impacts of the welfare policy of stealing children from their Aboriginal parents and communities and upon the children themselves have been almost unimaginable. White Australian authorities dressed this as a benign practice of providing an avenue into civilized, educated society. Aboriginal peoples experienced it as a gross injustice and inhuman treatment. Evidence has emerged that Aboriginal girls and boys who were placed in institutions around Australia were more often than not physically and/or sexually abused by staff members (HREOC, 1997b). They were not allowed to see or visit their families (many were told their parents were dead or didn't want them) and were sent out at 14 years of age to work as domestic servants (girls) or laborers/stockmen (boys). These young persons were underpaid (if paid at all), often physically and/or sexually exploited, and were denied access to their families and girls to any children they may have had (often due to rape by the white males of the house) (Sabbioni, 1993).

Indigenous Australians who resisted the system, who ran back to their families, who refused to work at the tasks forced upon them or who tried to return to their country, were treated as criminals. They were hunted down by the police, imprisoned and returned to the reserve or institution from which they had escaped. This continued the practice that was begun in the early colony, of delivering “welfare” via the criminal justice system (Cunneen, 2001; Haebich, 2000).

By the middle of the 20th century most Indigenous Australians had been forcibly removed, one way or another, from their “country” and had been resettled on reserves, in shanty settlements on the fringes of rural towns or in substandard settlements in major cities. These welfare policies were not accepted meekly by Indigenous Australians. In the early days, warriors fought against the invaders. Many parents did all in their power to hide their children when “the welfare” and the police came and many tried to run away from missions and reserves. Some took social and political action. The Aborigines Progressive Association, on January 26 (Australia Day) 1938, held a Day of Mourning and passed a resolution that was sent to the Australian parliament and the press. It stated, in part:

We, representing the Aborigines of Australia, this being the 150th anniversary of the whiteman's seizure of our country, hereby make protest against the callous treatment of our people by the whiteman during the past 150 years, and we appeal to the Australian nation of today to make new laws for the education and care for the Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to full citizen status and equality within the community (cited in Gray, 1998).

It went on to call for (what is now termed) Aboriginal self-determination (Horner, 1974). Although this was not the first time Aboriginal activists had demanded civil rights, it was the first time such demands had received wide coverage.

This ushered in a period of legislative changes resulting in Indigenous Australians gaining access to some welfare and other benefits. The states actively changed their protection legislation, which had embodied policies of segregation, to a variety of Acts, which embodied assimilation policies. For example in 1940 the Aborigines Protection Board in New South Wales was replaced by the Aborigines Welfare Board which focused on removing light skin colored children with the expressed aim of assimilating them into white culture and society. Other states introduced similar policies during this time. In 1965 the Commonwealth State Conference of Aboriginal Affairs Ministers endorsed assimilation policy as national policy (NSWDAA, 1998). At the

Commonwealth level there were also changes in legislation. The *Defense Act* and *Commonwealth Electoral Act* were changed to include some Indigenous people (1949); the Commonwealth Social Security Legislation in 1959 and then 1966 had all exclusionary reference to Indigenous persons deleted; and in 1962 the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* was amended to give all Indigenous Australians the right to vote in Commonwealth elections (Peterson and Saunders, 1998). In 1969 the Aborigines Welfare Board was abolished and its responsibilities handed over to the newly formed Department of Aboriginal Affairs (NSWDAA, 1998). These moves changed the value bases of the policies, but not the practices, of removing Indigenous Australians, especially children, from their families and country. Aboriginal welfare continued to be dictated by non-Indigenous Australians.

There continued a fundamental difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous views of welfare. Indigenous Australians viewed their welfare in a holistic, community based-manner as being intimately tied to their freedom to live on their land, and maintain and enjoy their culture and social structures as well as having equal access to society's benefits. Australian authorities continued to view Indigenous welfare in an individualistic narrow sense as being dependent upon being controlled and becoming like middle-class white Australians—being educated, being gainfully employed and denying Aboriginal heritage.

There is a dearth of reliable data regarding Indigenous people prior to the 1970s. A census on Aboriginal people was undertaken in 1966, however it only included people who had been determined to have 50 percent or more Aboriginal blood (Broom and Jones, 1973: 13-14). Nevertheless, all available writings and documentation from the late 1960s clearly state that Aboriginal people suffered from poor health, had low educational attainment, high unemployment, appalling housing and were in general greatly disadvantaged.⁷

Thus by the 1960s most Indigenous Australians' economic, social and cultural systems had been so disrupted by the policies and practices of the previous 150 years that they were indeed the very poorest Australians.

Assertion of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination (1967 to 1990)

Although an Australian Constitutional change in 1967 is hailed as the turning point in Indigenous civil rights, as just discussed it actually marked the end of a series of legislative, policy and attitudinal changes that had taken place over the preceding 30 years. This constitutional change, agreed to by 87 percent of the Australian population, effectively removed responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander welfare from the states and gave it to the federal government. This was an important and symbolic victory but it did little to change the situation of the majority of Indigenous peoples who lived in Australian urban areas, on the outskirts of rural towns or in rural Aboriginal settlements. Although it provided for Indigenous people to receive unemployment and other welfare benefits, this was a continuation of colonial welfare as Indigenous Australians were still treated as a race apart and there was still the expectation that Aboriginal people should be assimilated into non-Indigenous society.

By 1972 Aboriginal people were growing increasingly frustrated with the pace and direction of progress and changes to their social and economic situation. A group of Aboriginal activist took their demands to Canberra in the form a tent embassy that they set up on the lawns of the then Parliament House (now known as Old Parliament House). The purpose of the tent embassy was to protest against the government's refusal to recognize Aboriginal peoples' demands for land (Bennett, 1989: 13-14), to raise public consciousness regarding the abysmal state of Indigenous Affairs and in particular to highlight the dispossession and poor living conditions suffered by Indigenous Australians (Mum Shirl, 1995). The establishment of the tent

embassy coincided with the election of the Whitlam Labor Government, which introduced major changes to Aboriginal affairs.

The Whitlam Government announced a policy of self-determination for Indigenous people in 1973 (NSWDAA, 1998). Aboriginal people viewed self-determination as fundamental to their welfare and well-being. In line with the policy of Aboriginal self-determination legislation was passed enabling Aboriginal organizations to become incorporated and receive government funding. For the first time since invasion there a hint of respect, the recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights to exist as a people and their rights to their culture and belief systems by an Australian government.

This period was marked by a shift from assimilation to integration and multicultural policies. Between 1973 and 1985 there were two Aboriginal advisory bodies⁸ neither of which met Indigenous leaders' requirements for self-determination (Bennett, 1999; McMahon *et al.*, 2000). However, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) started to employ more Aboriginal people and Charles Perkins, the first Aboriginal person to be appointed head of any government department, was appointed to the DAA in 1984 (Tickner, 2001: 19).

The recognition, although contested and eventually abandoned by subsequent governments, that Indigenous people should determine their own welfare resulted in an explosion of Aboriginal organizations. The earliest of these were the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Medical Service both set up in 1971 in Redfern⁹ (Foley, 1991). These organizations became the prototypes for many Aboriginal organizations formed from the 1970s to the 1990s. It is estimated that, in 2000, there were over 1500 incorporated Aboriginal communities and organizations designed to provide basic services, including housing, health, legal and education services for Aboriginal people (McMahon *et al.*, 2000). This was also the period, particularly during the Labor Government of 1972 to 1975, when real progress regarding Indigenous land rights was made. The Aboriginal Land Fund Act of 1974 provided for the purchase of land and new economic and social bases for Aboriginal communities' welfare (Rowley, 1968).

Current Indigenous Australians' Welfare

Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged Australians on every social indicator. In health Aboriginal Australians:

- (1) have a life expectancy 20 years less than;
- (2) an infant mortality twice as high as;
- (3) higher levels of mental and behavioral disorders with a higher rate of self harm than;
- (4) a death rate 5 to 6 times higher than expected for almost all causes of death and every age group, than other Australians.

Overall Indigenous people experienced lower levels of access to health services than the general population. Indigenous people were nearly twice as likely as members of the general population to live outside urban centers and were more likely to live further from a range of health services and facilities. A considerable number of the Indigenous communities included in the 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey did not receive visits from a wide range of health professionals. Other factors, which were likely to influence the level at which Indigenous people used health services, were the socioeconomic status of patients, the availability of transport, the ability to speak English and cultural factors such as the availability of same sex Indigenous health worker (ABS, 2001: 3).

The health status of people is affected by their access to other resources/services such as housing. Once again Aboriginal people suffer higher rates of disadvantage. They are more likely

to be homeless, to be in rental properties and to spend a higher proportion of their income on rent than the rest of the Australian population. In addition many Aboriginal people live in overcrowded and poorly maintained houses, with inadequate water and sewerage systems (ABS, 2001: 29).

While spending a higher proportion of their income on rent, Aboriginal people also have a lower level of income and higher rates of unemployment than the general population. Aboriginal people experience extremely high levels of unemployment, 26 percent (or 40 percent if CDEP¹⁰ [work for the dole] participants are counted), compared with 8 percent in the general community. For those Aboriginal people who are in paid employment, almost 25 percent are employed on CDEP projects and Indigenous incomes are approximately two-thirds of the incomes of the rest of the Australian population (ATSIC, 2001b).

In addition to the disadvantage Aboriginal people face in their living conditions there is also a high level of coercive intervention in their lives by the state. The high numbers of children under care and protection orders and the over-representation of Aboriginal children, men and women within the criminal justice system testify to this. Whilst Aboriginal children only accounted for 2.7 percent of Australia's children in 1993, they accounted for 20 percent of all children in state care (HREOC, 1997a). The Inquiry into the Remove of Aboriginal Children from their Families found that Aboriginal children who came into contact with the child welfare system were more likely, as youth, to come into contact with the juvenile justice system (HREOC, 1997b). They are 24.7 times more likely to be in juvenile detention than non-Aboriginal youth (Cunneen, 2001: 23-24). The Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal Children from their Families also found that these removals could be linked to the entrenched disadvantage and dispossession that has been, and still is experienced by Aboriginal Australians. Furthermore Aboriginal children are much more likely to be removed on the grounds of neglect rather than abuse (HREOC, 1997b). Link-Up, an organization dedicated to bringing together Indigenous Australian families separated by the state, makes a connection between past policies of removing children under "protection" and "assimilation" and the contemporary removals for "neglect."

Aboriginal families continue to be seen as the "problem" and Aboriginal children continue to be seen as potentially "savable" if they can be separated from the "dysfunctional" or "culturally deprived" environments of their families and communities. Non-Aboriginals continue to feel that Aboriginal adults are "hopeless" and cannot be changed, but Aboriginal children "have a chance" (HREOC 1997b).

This removal of Aboriginal people continues past childhood. Aboriginal people are 27 times more likely to be in police custody and 15.8 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal people. Cunneen links this over-representation directly with the over-policing of Aboriginal people and communities (2001: 18-22). Aboriginal women are particularly over represented within the criminal justice system (Baldry, 1996; SCIPP, 2000) and accounting for 50 percent of women taken into police custody (Cunneen, 2001: 165).

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) investigated the deaths of 99 Indigenous prisoners who had died in custody over the preceding decade. The Royal Commission found that 43 of those who died in custody had also been removed from their families as children through the intervention of the state (Johnston, 1991: 7). Despite the abovementioned Inquiries, and all other research into these matters recommending that Indigenous Australians not be removed or incarcerated in such numbers, the rate of incarceration is worse in 2001 than it was a decade earlier.

Indigenous Australian leaders rightly argue for their communities to be freed from dependence on welfare benefits and services. Nevertheless, given the past dispossession, lack of

access to land and other resources, poor health, high rates of unemployment and low levels of income, Aboriginal people are in an invidious position and still need government services, programs and funding for community services to survive. After the dissolution of earlier Aboriginal advisory bodies, a statutory body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), was set up by the Federal government in 1989. It advises the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and delivers welfare and other programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (ATSIC, 2001a). The creation of ATSIC was an acknowledgement that: past attempts, however well meaning, to impose solutions upon Indigenous people had—inevitably—failed (COA, 1999: 14).

ATSIC administers a budget of approximately AU\$1.2 billion (for the 2000/2001 financial year), which represents about half of the Commonwealth's allocation for Indigenous-specific program.¹¹ There are two major programs that account for up to two thirds of ATSIC expenditure: Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), and Community Housing and Infrastructure Program.

The majority of ATSIC's funding goes to Indigenous community organizations to provide local services such as: community development and employment, housing and related infrastructure, legal aid, native title representation, maintenance of Indigenous culture and identity. Some of these community organizations have developed and are running innovative and successful programs outside the mainstream welfare system. But ATSIC's programs and funding do not remove responsibility from other government departments and organizations to provide services to Indigenous Australians. The role of ATSIC is to provide supplementary assistance or funds to ensure more accessible or culturally appropriate services. There are though a number of areas pertinent to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities for which ATSIC has no programs. These include educational assistance and primary health care (ATSIC, 2001a).

In the mid-1990s there was a change, seen by many Indigenous people as regressive, in Indigenous welfare policy. The principle of "self-determination" was abandoned in favor of "self-management." "Self-management" amounts to Aboriginal people not having full control over, but being responsible for the outcomes of the programs that they manage (Bennett, 1999). Under this policy many organizations and communities lost or had cuts to program and service funding due to changes in government's focus or for not meeting the government's desired outcomes. For example Aboriginal health funding was removed from the ATSIC budget in 1995 and given to the Department of Health and Aged Care (ATSIC, 2001). This removal of responsibility and control of Aboriginal health programs from Aboriginal people was justified on the basis of the continuing poor health status of Aboriginal people and an expectation that the Department would achieve better health outcomes. But since 1995 Aboriginal health indicators have not only not improved, they have deteriorated (SCF, 2000). The Department itself claims that a lack of funding, fragmentation of services and a lack of access to services are the major factors preventing improvements in Aboriginal health (ATSIC, 2001a).

The government provides education and health care programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through its own departments and agencies and by providing funding to other organizations. The federal government allocated three quarters of its total Indigenous expenditure to four priority areas:¹² employment, education, health, and housing.

As noted earlier, work has always been closely associated with Indigenous peoples' welfare. In 1977 the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) was commenced. It was to assist Aboriginal people gain employment in areas where there was limited or no employment opportunities and has become the largest Aboriginal program in existence today. It requires Aboriginal participants to work, often full-time, and/or participate in training in return for a minimum welfare payment (well below the poverty line). Many of the Federal

government's stated aims of CDEPs, for example formal training leading to employment and real job creation in Aboriginal communities (COA, 1999: 192), have not come to fruition, as evidenced by data over the 1990s. Aboriginal unemployment rates are at least three times higher than those of the general community, employment status in urban areas worsened between 1986 and 1991 (Taylor, 1993) and although employment improved in rural areas this was due solely to participation in CDEP not genuine paid employment. Participants tend to stay working in CDEPs for years, thus remaining on below poverty level "wages." Until 1999 CDEP participants received lower payments than those on unemployment benefits (ATSIC, 2001b).

However, one aim of the government's program is being met, that is the perception that Aboriginal unemployment is being lowered. If CDEP participants were included in unemployment figures (which they are not), the national Indigenous unemployment rate would rise from 26 percent to an alarming 40 percent (Butler, 2000). Although CDEP projects provide communities with infrastructure and services to which they have not had access previously (Butler, 2001: 8) these services are routinely available to non-Indigenous Australian communities via the public service.

The government's approach to the massive unemployment rate of Indigenous people is to increase the number of CDEPs. This does not address unemployment in rural and remote areas. As Butler points out:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have embraced CDEP as a means of assisting with the problem because there are insufficient jobs available in communities. CDEP is not a substitute for real jobs (2000).

It does though fit perfectly with the deserving poor and work ethic welfare policy, so reminiscent of the early colony that is continuing to be espoused. CDEP, one of the Federal government's key methods of delivering welfare to Indigenous communities, represents this approach, as evidenced in a Minister's statement:

Tackling unemployment today is not just a matter of creating more jobs or training-up skilled workers. It requires powerful incentives for long-term job seekers to take the jobs that are there as well as new types of work for people who can't readily find paid employment. Mutual Obligation and Work for the Dole are key factors in cutting unemployment because they make a dramatic difference to the incentive to work (Abbott, 2000).

Under the current approach to Indigenous welfare, Aboriginal people continue to be the most disadvantaged within the Australian society and government and policy makers still determine the priorities and manner in which programs and services are implemented and run within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal organizations are still dependent upon the government for funding and organizations such as ATSIC are relegated to the position of being advisory bodies. The current policy explicitly does not support Indigenous self-determination (DPMC, 2000).

Some commentators trace current problems facing Aboriginal people to the 1967 Constitutional change in which Aboriginal people gained equal access to welfare payments (Pearson, 2001). However, as we have demonstrated, so-called welfare for Aboriginal people began in 1788. Current socio-economic situations experienced by Indigenous Australians are the accumulated results of over 200 years of policies and practices with underlying themes of control and annihilation or assimilation. In contrast, middle and upper class Australians benefit greatly from welfare (provisions by the state to improve well-being) but the welfare they receive is in the form of social wage provisions (health care, education, infrastructure), tax deductions and

incentives and business welfare. Benefits accrue to those who are in paid employment, own businesses or are wealthy. Few Indigenous Australians are in these situations.

Summary and Conclusion

As with most Indigenous peoples around the world, Indigenous Australians' welfare has suffered greatly under colonial and British/European economic and social control and development (Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). We have outlined the effects, since 1788, of the consistently racist "welfare" policies. We argue that Indigenous Australians' current extremely low levels of well-being can be directly associated with this history and its contemporary manifestations. Many Indigenous Australians have seen themselves as survivors of "white" welfare and are conflicted regarding their relationship with the Australian state. They have been treated disrespectfully and patronizingly, disinherited and incarcerated but are expected to have the capacities and the wish to grasp the opportunities, offered by the state, to lift themselves out of the poverty and disadvantage into which that self-same state had forced them. They have fought back by demanding and arguing for rights to their land and self-determination. These are certainly key requirements for welfare improvements to be achieved. But they represent a deeper and more profound requirement, that of respect; respect by Australian governments and non-Indigenous people for Indigenous Australians' cultures, capacities, social wisdom and institutions, relation to land and shared humanity. The welfare imposed upon Indigenous Australians has institutionalized them, and has been antithetical to respecting their freedom to determine their ways of life and what is in the interests of their welfare.

Notes

- ¹ We use Indigenous Australian interchangeably with Aboriginal peoples to refer to all peoples who lived in Australia prior to British occupation and their descendants. These include the many different clans living on the Australian mainland, the Torres Strait Islands and Tasmania. Indigenous Australians are not, and never have been a homogenous group. Although we refer to Indigenous Australians as shorthand we do not intend to imply they have the same needs or experiences.
- ² We take Indigenous Welfare to encompass all the matters that affect individuals' and communities' well-being, including physical and mental health, education, housing, income, access to food and land and especially intangibles such as spiritual, emotional and social resilience factors.
- ³ The Dreaming is the very essence of understanding life and is expressed through the oral tradition. It encompasses the law, religion, social organization, the land, in fact the total environment in which Aboriginal peoples exist. It is more than just a collection of myths and stories.
- ⁴ Terra Nullius—land with no sovereign, unoccupied land, land owned by no one and therefore land that could be occupied and settled by colonizers.
- ⁵ The first Protection Act was the Aborigines Protection Act in Victoria, 1869, followed by similar legislation in Western Australia in 1886, Queensland's Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1901, New South Wales' Aborigines Protection Act of 1909 and South Australia's (which included the Northern Territory) Northern Territory Aborigines Act of 1910 (Armitage, 1995: 18).
- ⁶ There were a small number of Indigenous groups (particularly in the remote north of the Northern Territory) that remained on their lands.
- ⁷ For information on socio-economic indicators for Aboriginal people in the late 1960s (cf Broom and Jones, 1973; Hutchison, 1969).
- ⁸ The National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) and the National Aboriginal Congress (NAC).
- ⁹ Redfern is an inner city Sydney suburb with a high Aboriginal population.
- ¹⁰ CDEP, Community Development Employment Program, will be discussed at length later in the chapter.
- ¹¹ For full details of ATSIC's programs and funding see, http://www.atsic.gov.au/default_ns.asp.
- ¹² For expenditure details see <http://www.atsia.gov.au/budget/factsheet02.html>.

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