

**'BREAKING UP THESE CAMPS ENTIRELY':  
THE DISPERSAL POLICY IN WIRADJURI COUNTRY**

**1909-1929**

**Peter Read**

In my paper 'A rape of the soul so profound' I sketched out what seemed to me to have been the major theme of European/Aboriginal relationships in New South Wales this century: the attempts of successive governments to disperse Aborigines from their living areas and from each other, and the Aborigines' response to that policy.<sup>1</sup> I described two principal techniques of dissociation - the removal of children from their parents, and the expulsion of adults from the reserves, stations and fringe-camps. In this paper I examine the working of the second of these techniques to see what dispersal actually meant to the Aborigines subjected to it. The area of investigation is eastern Wiradjuri country in the first two decades after the passing of the Aborigines Protection Act in 1909.

The Act formally established the Aborigines Protection Board and declared the responsibility of the New South Wales government towards the relief, maintenance, custody and education of Aborigines. Aborigines were defined as people of the full descent and persons having an 'admixture of Aboriginal blood' who were in receipt of government rations or who resided on a reserve. Under other provisions, only Aborigines so defined were allowed on stations and reserves, but men, who in the opinion of the Board ought to be earning a living elsewhere, were debarred, or might be expelled.<sup>2</sup> The new Act was greeted with enthusiasm by the Board, which announced that radical changes in methods of dealing with Aborigines would now be proposed. Attention would be directed particularly to compelling the able-bodied to shift for themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Act and Regulations the government's intention, 'in a few years to come, of breaking up these camps entirely' was apparent.<sup>4</sup> For example, the definition of Aboriginality was intended to restrict the categories of people entering the reserves. In practice however it proved to be clumsy: people living on rations outside

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<sup>1</sup> See Read 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Aborigines Protection Act, No.25 of 1909, ss. 3, 8 (1), (2).

<sup>3</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, *Annual Report*, 1909, p.2.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase was Mr Flowers', speaking for the government during the debate on the Amendment to the Act which would allow the removal of children without their parents' permission; N.N.S.P.D. 2/56, 1914-15, L.A., pp.1353-4.

a reserve, for example, could apply to live on one. A temporary solution was the instruction to managers in the Regulation of 1910 to 'discourage the further introduction of half-castes'. However by 1914 the Board had begun plans to have the definition tightened.<sup>5</sup> In 1918 an Amendment narrowed it to 'any full-blooded or half-caste Aborigine who is a native of New South Wales'.<sup>6</sup> Specifically excluded were those whom the Board called 'quadroon' and 'octoroon'; such people might also now be expelled by managers. By what seemed to be a simple legal manoeuvre, the Board had absolved itself of responsibility for all non-reserve Aborigines. To both the government and the local councils of country towns it proposed to argue that it was not responsible for the fringe-dwellers of the state. Legally once a person was expelled from a reserve, he or she ceased to be Aboriginal. This arbitrary pronouncement was accepted neither by Aborigines nor the local councils, and we shall see how in 1927 the Condobolin municipal council made nonsense of the legal definitions.

Section 14 of the Act allowed for the compulsory shifting of Aborigines from near a reserve and from a township. The provisions looked rigorous enough, but concealed the fact that the principal agents acting upon the Board in framing its Act were at cross purposes. The government wished to save money and eventually close the reserves. The local councils wanted control over local Aboriginal populations, preferably by closing local reserves. The aims looked almost identical. Most officials in 1909 probably thought they were; but practice showed them to be the reverse. The Board failed in its purpose of reducing the reserve populations and revoking the reserves partly because the aims of the state and the local councils were irreconcilable. Twenty years passed before this simple fact became apparent. In that time the Wiradjuri were harried from station to reserve to fringe-camp in a futile exercise in human engineering which was doomed from the start.

A further internal difficulty facing the Board was that in 1909 it had virtually no agents to execute its policies except the station managers. These officials, with the co-operation of the police and magistracy, could be very powerful figures locally, but they were far too busy to visit the unmanaged reserves. The police, already responsible for ration distribution in these areas, could not be expected to enforce the major changes embodied in the Act. In Wiradjuri country only Warangesda on the Murrumbidgee and Brungle near Tumut had managers. In effect, despite the Board's promise of a new regime, it was possible to begin the reserve-clearances in 1909 on only a tenth of the Wiradjuri reserves.

The administrative system of 1909 was superimposed upon Wiradjuri movement patterns which had shown great resistance to change. As far as can be ascertained from the records, European settlement in the nineteenth century had greatly disrupted the lives of the surviving Aborigines, but had not succeeded in moving them very far. Numerous camp sites along the river system had lost their Aboriginal populations by 1909 to the larger centres of Warangesda and Brungle. Yet these new stations were largely within the compass of the local groups before the European invasion, most were within a few days' walking distance. Recently archaeological evidence has identified some traditional patterns of contact and movement which can be shown to have

<sup>5</sup> Regulations Under the Aborigines Protection Act, No.14 (c) issued 8 June 1910.

<sup>6</sup> Amendment No.7 of 1918, No.2 (i) (a).

survived the upheavals of the Act to the present day. For instance, McBryde has demonstrated that the most important destinations of tools made from the greenstone outcrops of the Tumut district were the upper Murrumbidgee and the south coast.<sup>7</sup> The distribution patterns coincide neatly with the missionary J.B. Gribble's estimate of the origins of the Brungle population in 1890: some from Warangesda, some from Lachlan and some from the different coastal districts.<sup>8</sup> Similarly the earliest station records of Warangesda and Brungle in the 1880s and 1890s show regular movement between what became in the twentieth century the major Wiradjuri population centres, but very little from other areas.<sup>9</sup> Therefore when the expulsions took more systematic form after 1909 the Wiradjuri continued to do as they had previously done when confronted by local settler hostility: they made their way to what were known to be safer areas within the traditional compass of marriage, movement and kinship patterns.

The results of the new legislation therefore were predictable. The expulsion of people from one reserve caused an influx of refugees to the next. The common result was that the Europeans, alarmed at the population increase, demanded action of the Board. The Board responded; the Wiradjuri moved on in groups and directions which were familiar to them, until the cycle was repeated in another town a few months or years later. After twenty years of extraordinary upheaval, some reserves were smaller, but some were larger; five or six had been revoked, but three new unofficial living areas were occupied; the self-identifying population was greater and the links between the old Wiradjuri population centres had been reinforced by the compulsory migration.

The removal of adults and children from the reserves after 1909, though apocalyptic in its effects on the people concerned, has as yet found little place in the history books. To the extent that the dispersal policy was known and understood, it seems to have found general approval.<sup>10</sup> Indeed on paper the Board's achievement looked to be impressive. One Wiradjuri reserve community had shrunk from 188 people to none at all in fourteen years. The Wiradjuri population in a single town had diminished from seventy nine people to only one in six years.<sup>11</sup> The peak year for expulsions was 1915, in which a single order contained the names of twenty adults from Warangesda and twenty three from Brungle, a seventh and a third respectively of the entire populations.<sup>12</sup> Nor do these figures include the number of people who left voluntarily to avoid having their children taken from them. This number is unknown but is likely to be almost as large as the number expelled: by 1922 the Board admitted that this was

<sup>7</sup> McBryde 1979:122 and 1984:285.

<sup>8</sup> Gribble 1890.

<sup>9</sup> The sources are 'Warangesda Mission: managers' diary, March 18, 1887-April 1897' (typescript in A.I.A.S. Library) and the Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes of Meetings, State Archives of N.S.W.

<sup>10</sup> P. Read, *op.cit.*, pp. 25, 27-28, 30.

<sup>11</sup> The town was Forbes 1909-1915; figures collated from tables in *Annual Reports*.

<sup>12</sup> Circular No.51, 7 January 1915, Aborigines Protection Board, Copies of Letters Sent, 1914-27.

the principal reason why the reserve populations were dropping so fast.<sup>13</sup> Only a year after the passing of the Act there were complaints by the residents of Darlington Point, the town nearest to Warangesda, that people from the station were gathering near the town. They were believed to have fled the reserve for fear of the implementation of Section 13A of the Act.<sup>14</sup>

It may be wondered why the Board was so concerned at the exodus of families since many of them, under other provisions of the Act, were not legally entitled to stay. The answer lies in the unresolved tension already noticed, between the Board's twin roles of reducing the reserves and placating the citizens of country towns. Over the two decades the Board had no answer, and little understanding, of the administrative tangle which it had created. In the case above, the Warangesda manager was directed to encourage the Wiradjuri to return, pointing out to them the likelihood of their children's committal for neglect should they remain.<sup>15</sup> Yet Regulation 14(c) instructed him to discourage Aborigines of several categories from returning, including those who looked more European than Aboriginal.<sup>16</sup> It was the Aborigines, not the Board, who were caught in the tangle. They could not remain on the station, they could not remain in the town; and already there were rumblings of discontent from citizens of other towns within the traditional ambit.

At Yass there had been tension in the town for several years before the Act was passed. In 1905 in an effort to placate residents the Board made a tentative attempt to persuade the Aborigines of the town reserve to move to the farming allotments at Rye Park.<sup>17</sup> These were unsuccessful, the town population remained, so that when the refugees from Warangesda and Brungle began to arrive in 1909 antagonism sharpened immediately. The *Yass Courier* of that year contained inch after column inch of accounts of confrontations between the police and the Wiradjuri.<sup>18</sup> In July a magistrate described three people before him as 'a menace and a curse to the town' and thought that the sooner the Aborigines were moved from Yass the better.<sup>19</sup> In October the town clerk announced that the Aborigines were too close to the town.<sup>20</sup> In March 1910, six men were arrested for the murder of a European man, a charge subsequently dismissed by the jury after only a twenty minute deliberation.<sup>21</sup> The shire council, probably unaware that it was official policy to reduce the reserve populations, redoubled its efforts for the Board to open a new one. In January 1910, publicly

<sup>13</sup> Circular dated 13 September 1922, Copies of Letters Sent.

<sup>14</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, 18 August 1910, Register of Letters Received. At this time s.13 allowed for the removal of children only with the parents' permission.

<sup>15</sup> Under the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act (1905) children could be declared state wards for living without visible means of support or abode.

<sup>16</sup> This rough and ready method was commonly used by officials to determine whether a person was 'quadroon', hence to be ejected from a reserve, or 'half-caste', to be allowed to remain.

<sup>17</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes of Meetings, 7 December 1905.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed discussion of events in Yass at this time see Read 1982.

<sup>19</sup> *Yass Courier*, 20 July, 23 July 1909.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 5 Oct. 1909.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 8 March, 6 May 1910.

acknowledging these demands the Board agreed to buy 275 hectares at Blakney Creek, twenty five kilometres from Yass.<sup>22</sup> The new station was to be named Edgerton and forced removal began immediately.

The new station had a brief and inglorious career. Since Edgerton was within walking distance of the town, and very few people evidently wished to go there, the result was foregone. Passive resistance to managerial rule and the continual movement of Edgerton residents back to Yass made the station uncontrollable. Alf Williams dimly remembered a mass walk-off: 'they didn't like the manager or something so they all just walked off into town.'<sup>23</sup> On Edgerton station two contradictory policies were pursued. At the height of the exodus, the manager insisted on enforcing the Sections of the Act relating to expulsions. For example, in 1911 Frank Bolger was refused permission to rejoin his family on the station, then all were ejected on the grounds that they were not Aborigines.<sup>24</sup> In 1914, thirteen men were expelled for refusing to work, then in February 1915, another thirteen.<sup>25</sup> Altogether about thirty people are noted to have been expelled from the station in three years. One can only marvel at the idiocy, as well as the cruelty, of such a policy. Edgerton was doomed. By 1916 the schoolroom was empty, the farm overrun with weeds. In 1919 the Board sold the land back to the local farmers. Meanwhile the same catch-22 already familiar at Darlington Point was invoked soon after the establishment of the station. In 1912 Yass residents began to complain of Aborigines, doubtless including some recently expelled from Edgerton, begging on the streets.<sup>26</sup>

The demise of Edgerton spelled out even more forcibly that legislation alone was insufficient to disperse a strongly self-identifying population, particularly when revocation ran counter to the wishes of the local townsfolk. The shortcomings of Section 14 were now glaringly apparent. Managers were instructed to discourage 'half-castes' from entering reserves; yet the townsfolk of Yass could not allow those same people, who by association and culture were commonly regarded as Aborigines, from entering the town. By 1919, Yass was becoming too unpleasant a place for most Wiradjuri to remain.

Only a few years after the passing of the Act, three major living areas had become virtually uninhabitable. It was apparent that what had hitherto been regarded as safe areas - the towns with an unmanaged reserve - could no longer be considered to be so. Thus at about this time the Wiradjuri began to move to two new living areas, away from major towns, isolated from Europeans. One of these was a quiet flat on the Murrumbidgee about eight kilometres from Narrandera. It became known as 'the

<sup>22</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, *Annual Report*, 1910, p.5, 1911, p.9.

<sup>23</sup> Recorded conversation Alf Williams, Swan Hill, 17 September 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, Register of letters received, 1910-1913, 24 April 1911; Minutes of Meetings, 25 May 1911.

<sup>25</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, *Annual Report*, 1914, p.9; Circular to Managers, 17 February 1915.

<sup>26</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes of Meetings, 9 May 1912.

Sandhills' and was first settled, principally by former Warangesda residents, in about 1916. By 1941, 30 dwellings were on the site.<sup>27</sup> The other new living area was outside the tiny town of Gooloogong, some thirty five kilometres from Cowra. The first official notice of an Aboriginal presence at Gooloogong was 1912.<sup>28</sup> For three years the Board attempted to drive the Wiradjuri to other towns, until in 1915 it bowed to the inevitable. A new official reserve was declared at Gooloogong in the very year that the expulsions from the managed stations reached their peak. In 1919 a visitor commented on the tidy, permanent appearance of the reserve.<sup>29</sup> Both the Sandhills and Gooloogong, which can be seen as precursors of Northern Territory out-stations of the 1970s, were successful Wiradjuri attempts at keeping the administration at bay. Largely because there were few Europeans bothering the Board, the officials seldom bothered the camps. No forced dispersals were attempted after 1915. No children are known to have been removed.

The two 'outstations' and the collapse of Edgerton were the only tangible victories of the Wiradjuri at the end of the first decade of the Act. Less than a year after the sale of Edgerton the Board began to consider ways of selling off Warangesda also. In January 1920 it resolved to make a list of its most valuable possessions with a view to leasing them to farmers. In January 1921 Inspector Donaldson was asked to find out how many Warangesda Aborigines were prepared to move to other stations. On 17 October 1924 the Board decided to close the station forthwith and to send the 'few remaining Aborigines' elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> A tradition among Darlington Point Wiradjuri, most of whom are descended from Warangesda residents, is that the last resident defended his home at gun-point until finally the roof was pulled off. Thus ended the occupation of Warangesda station after forty one years.

The former residents had now to do what other Warangesda refugees had done since 1909: they made their way into the district.<sup>31</sup> The family of Edgar Howell left Warangesda 'just before the roofs were pulled off'. They went to live for some years near Darlington Point, and by 1930 they too were living at the Narrandera Sandhills. Beckett noted the arrival of several families from Warangesda at Euabalong in the early 1920s.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the Yass community, which had spent only a few years at Edgerton, Warangesda people went to the new living-areas less through attachment to particular areas, more through economic forces, ties of kinship, and the knowledge of which local councils and police forces tolerated an Aboriginal population. Thus the combined

<sup>27</sup> Aborigines Inland Mission, *Our Aim*, XXX/4, (16 December 1941) p.9.

<sup>28</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, *Annual Report*, 1912, p.17.

<sup>29</sup> *Our Aim*, XII/9, (31 May 1919), p.5; XIII/3, 31 December 1919, p.5 refers to a population of over 100 Aborigines.

<sup>30</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, *Minutes of Meetings*, 2 January 1920, 12 January 1921, 17 October 1924.

<sup>31</sup> Hetty Charles remembered the roofs pulled off the houses. With other families, she said, her parents wandered the district for years, living in tents or tin sheds; sometimes she lived in station accommodation while her father worked as a boundary-rider.

<sup>32</sup> J. Beckett 1958: 125.

effect of the expulsions, the flight of people from Section 13A of the Act and the local councils' attempts at reserve-clearing served to increase the population, not only at the 'outstations', but at safe towns like Euabalong, Cowra, Condobolin and Hillston. The old farming reserves at Grong Grong near Narrandera and Coobang Creek near Parkes, and certain towns like Eugowra and Forbes all suffered a drastic decline. Yet the population had not, of course, diminished, nor had it been dispersed. People merely had been uprooted and now lived, less permanently, in make-shift encampments, in a greater number of areas.

It is now possible to see some of the more far-reaching consequences of the reduction of the reserves, the farming communities and the fringe-camps. One result was the reinforcing of the Warangesda-Brungle-Yass-Cowra axis. The expulsions from the south-eastern reserves in the 1920s threw the focus of the victims on to Erambie, at Cowra. Thus when the four children of Jack and Elizabeth Ingram left Warangesda in the early 1920s, three of them, James, Jack and Lachlan, went to Erambie. Lachlan married Louisa Simpson to form one of the most powerful and durable of modern Erambie families. At about the same time May Richie of Euabalong came also to Erambie, partly because there was no work at Euabalong and partly because her aunt lived at Cowra. She married James Ingram, and the first child, Ossie, was born in 1922. The first Erambie manager, appointed in 1924, declared that James was too fair to remain on the station so the whole family left. They went first to Wagga, then settled at the Narrandera Sandhills where some of James Ingram's relatives, also expelled from Warangesda, were already living. Alf Williams was another reared at Warangesda. With Archie and Alfie Bamblett he was ordered to leave there in about 1916. Williams went shearing and general labouring; then in the early 1920s someone suggested that he go to Cowra because there were some 'nice dark girls there'. He went to Erambie and married Annie Murray, a member of one of the oldest and most respected Erambie families. When fourteen years later Annie died, Williams left Erambie. After 1930 he too was living at the Sandhills.<sup>33</sup>

In this way the links between the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee, were reinforced at Cowra in the 1920s. A relationship by birth or marriage, once established, remained as long as the individual desired it. Ossie Ingram, born at Cowra, did not retain a close relationship with the reserve because he did not wish to live there permanently, but his uncle Lachlan did so and established with his wife a powerful dynasty. The dispersal policy strengthened rather than weakened, the links between the Wiradjuri population centres.

A now familiar pattern of behaviour emerged almost at once amongst Cowra residents. They began to object to the growing number of Aborigines in what had until then been regarded by the Wiradjuri as a 'safe' town. For a decade after 1914 the townspeople began to demand that a manager be appointed or the reserve closed. Early in 1924 matters came to a head. In January an Aboriginal, described as 'a beastly Queenslander' was charged with assaulting a young girl. The *Cowra Free Press* headed

<sup>33</sup> Recorded conversation Ossie Ingram, Narrandera, 19 September 1980, Euabalong, 19 October 1980; Alf Williams, tape cited.

up its account, 'The black menace'. The Board gave way. The Erambie reserve, augmented almost daily by arrivals from the south, the south west and the west, was placed under the control of a manager '[a]s a result of complaints by the townspeople . . . regarding the necessity of resident supervision'.<sup>34</sup> Cowra could no longer be considered safe. The populations of Gooloogong and the Sandhills grew steadily.

Out on the plains the town of Condobolin was already emerging as the focus of the western Wiradjuri; for this economic forces as much as Board policy were responsible. Soon after 1900 many small towns in the area declined. For instance, Euabalong was in the 1890s a stock-crossing and the centre of various mail and telegraph routes. Yet in 1888 the District Inspector of the Department of Public Instruction had estimated that the town would grow no bigger. His prediction was accurate.<sup>35</sup> In 1928 the local teacher reported that the town population was rapidly dwindling as work became available elsewhere. 'The rabbits have failed' he lugubriously told his department, 'and my school with them'.<sup>36</sup> In the south and east of Wiradjuri country work was more readily available to Aboriginal men in the 1920s. Therefore, although in the north and west of Wiradjuri country the effects of the dispersal policy were less noticeable, and there was less public pressure to drive out the fringe-dwellers, economic pressures were forcing the Wiradjuri to 'safe' towns like Condobolin as effectively as did official pressure in the east.

Yet in 1924 the reputation of Condobolin as a safe town was fast evaporating. The growing Aboriginal population was not unnoticed by other residents. So it was in the mid 1920s that the contradictions in Board policy, exacerbated by economic conditions out west, truly came home to roost.

The first reference to the large and growing population was made in the *Lachlander* in 1926, probably shortly after refugees expelled from Erambie began arriving at the town. On 19 March the municipal council formally protested to the Board over the state of the reserve. The Board replied that it would be difficult to force Aborigines to leave the reserve, especially as they had already refused an offer to move to Euabalong.<sup>37</sup> No doubt mindful of its painful experience at Edgerton, it pointed out to the council in April that it was its experience that Aborigines could not be coerced into living in a particular area. It warned that if removal of the Aborigines were insisted upon, they would leave the reserve, as they had in other places, and make unauthorised camps near the town, their last state being worse than the first. The Board seemed to have caught a glimpse of why its dispersal policy was failing. The municipal council, motivated by purely local concerns, was unmoved. The Board's offer to build another reserve was categorically refused,<sup>38</sup> and in June its offer to send Inspector Donaldson to discuss the matter was also refused. The tone of the meeting showed that Condobolin's reputation as a safe town was increasingly misplaced. An Alderman May told

<sup>34</sup> *Cowra Free Press*, 8 January 1924; Aborigines Protection Board, *Annual Report*, 1924, p.1.

<sup>35</sup> Euabalong School file, District Inspector, D.P.I., 13 September 1888.

<sup>36</sup> Teacher to District Inspector, 20 August 1928, *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes of Meetings, 19 March 1926.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; Report of the Municipal Council correspondent, *Lachlander*, 14 April 1926.



the councillors it was time they fought: 'the blacks' were 'getting thicker in the town'.<sup>39</sup> In August the Board stated that since it had failed to persuade the residents to move, it would call for tenders to rebuild the reserve. The council again rejected the proposals and sought legal opinion as to whether it possessed the power to evict the Aborigines.<sup>40</sup> In the meantime it insisted that the reserve be closed. In October 1926 the Board informed the council that when all the possibilities (such as rebuilding the reserve) were exhausted, it would then be necessary to revoke the reserve, its responsibility would then cease, and the council would then have to find its own solution.<sup>41</sup>

Back in Condobolin the feelings of townsfolk were running very high. The Board's announcements were rightly interpreted as thinly veiled threats. One alderman exclaimed that the council wanted the reserve closed on the grounds of public health, but the Board had never given the impression of sincerity in helping the council accomplish its desires. Then came 'this threat'. Some councillors thought that the Board's bluff, if it were a bluff, should be called; others warned that if the reserve were closed, Aborigines would then live in the town and its surroundings where it would be impossible to enforce clean and healthy conditions. An Alderman Condon's emotional speech carried the day. He claimed that a new reserve would be as bad as ever. The motion was carried that the council again insist on the removal of the reserve.<sup>42</sup>

It was typical of local councils throughout Wiradjuri country that the Condobolin aldermen insisted myopically on the Aborigines' removal, giving no thought to where they might go so long as it was outside the unit of administration. The Board at least by now understood what would happen if the reserve were closed. The Wiradjuri would congregate in a new town like Forbes, whereupon the same pattern of local hostility, expense and abuse of the Board would be repeated. Nevertheless its bluff had been called. The state would not be allowed to absolve itself of the responsibility it owed, in the eyes of the townspeople, through a merely technical definition of Aboriginality. The abolition of the reserve would, without absolving it of *de facto* responsibility, solve nothing. Very belatedly it reminded the council that Aborigines did have certain rights. Council would please furnish the Board with a list of requirements. In the meantime it took legal advice to see whether it could recondition the buildings regardless of the council's wishes.<sup>43</sup> The answer appeared to be in the affirmative. Legally the Condobolin council was beaten.

Caught in the crossfire were, of course, the Wiradjuri, some of whom had been on the run all their adult lives. The official reserve was unsafe, for dozens of people are recorded in the Board's Minutes to have been expelled between 1920 and 1929. There was nowhere to go. The implacable council hounded anyone Aboriginal, by its own definition, not that of the statute book, who did not live on the reserve, and the Board

<sup>39</sup> *Lachlander*, 9 June 1926.

<sup>40</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes of Meetings, 27 August 1927; *Lachlander*, 29 September 1926.

<sup>41</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes of Meetings, 15 October 1926.

<sup>42</sup> *Lachlander*, 10 November 1926, 8 December 1926.

<sup>43</sup> Aborigines Protection Board, Minutes of Meetings, 4 February 1927.

hounded most of those who did. In May 1927 the Health Inspector complained of Aboriginal camps above the trucking yards. The Aborigines Protection Board had no intention of protecting such Aborigines. The council resolved that 'necessary action' be taken to have the camps removed.<sup>44</sup> The fear of Aboriginal community continued to haunt the Europeans. And the chilling finality of the resolution indicated that, in the last resort, the popular definition of Aboriginality was the one that counted. Local councils could very well do as they pleased to the fringe-dwellers expelled by the Board from the Board's own reserves.

On the Condobolin reserve itself, conditions were so disgraceful that only the knowledge that life above the trucking yards was worse must have stayed the resolve of the people to leave. In May 1826, just as the controversy between the Board and the council erupted, the teacher at the reserve school complained to her Department that the roof leaked, the room was unlined against the frosts and there was no fire-wood. The Chief Inspector replied that the matter appeared to be the business of the Board.<sup>45</sup> In June 1927 the teacher again pointed out that all the children had had colds and earache and cried with pain in the head or face in the middle of lessons. The children 'go deaf, dull and seem too cold, too dull, half-fed, badly clothed, living in tents and falling-down houses, poor little things ended up in a cold schoolroom'. She declared that only four of the elder girls could read or write anything and they were all now in domestic service. A diagram appended showed the places where one could put a hand through holes in the floor; cold air poured down upon the children's heads and hands. Their feet were stiff with cold and on the day she wrote, a child was admitted to hospital with congestion of the lungs. In August 1929 she wrote a most emotional letter, in pencil and barely decipherable. She reported that the children had had a dreadful year. Practically every child had been in hospital, nearly all had flu. Only five were well out of a class of seventeen. The response of the Department of Public Instruction was to transfer the teacher to Gulargambone.<sup>46</sup>

So ended the Board's last attempt at the dispersal of the Wiradjuri before the Depression. Two decades of the implementation of the Act had caused the great majority of people to move from where they had been living in 1909. In terms of policy, not much had been achieved for all the brutality, expense and hostility incurred. A number of families in 1929 were living by themselves, but probably not so many more than had once lived on the now revoked and forgotten farming allotments. There were more Aborigines living at Darlington Point, Gooloogong, Cowra and Condobolin than there had been; only in a few towns like Euabalong, Eugowra, Forbes and Parkes were there significantly fewer. The Wiradjuri had been dispersed, but only to new living areas within their own country, and the vilifications of one set of town councils had been replaced by those of another. Aboriginal determination to remain

<sup>44</sup> *Lachlander*, 11 May 1927.

<sup>45</sup> Condobolin Aboriginal School file, teacher to Chief Inspector, 8 April 1926, file note annotated.

<sup>46</sup> Teacher to Chief Inspector, 22 June 1927, 25 August 1929.

united through kinship and association, and the cross-purposes of the officials, had combined to defeat the policy utterly.

Condobolin was not, however, the last Wiradjuri town to feel the sting of the Aborigines Protection Board. After the Second World War dispersal began afresh and this time there were exemption certificates and town houses to reinforce the blade of the bulldozer. By 1970 Brungle was reduced to four decrepit houses, a third reserve at Yass had come and gone, one of the two reserves at Condobolin was reduced to rubble, Gooloogong was deserted and the Sandhills bore no sign that it had ever been inhabited. Only Erambie and a new reserve at Griffith were stronger than before.

Wiradjuri community was still strong. In 1980 there were new living areas among the streets of Condobolin, Tumut, Leeton, Griffith, Cowra and Redfern. Yet the victory of the Wiradjuri was a pyrrhic victory. The smashed houses, the lost homelands, the depressed morale, the stolen children were the terrible cost of survival. And although it appeared that dispersal had failed, it was not yet quite discredited as an instrument of policy. Who could be sure that it would not come again?

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