

Jeune Pritchard describes the making of *Queensland Dossier*

We began covering street marches, having our equipment bashed by Special Branch, which put us out of action for the remainder of that day. From here we moved into talking with organisers for the Seamen's Union, the history of the dispute with Utah, covering the picket lines outside the Utah Building, and talking with Australian seamen when they docked at the Brisbane wharves.

Within the tape (documentary) we have attempted to cover the following areas of repression under the National Party in Queensland. These include the areas of unions, education, women and health, Aboriginal land rights in Aurukun and Mornington Island, and the development of civil liberties groups in smaller townships (the town we chose was Mt Isa. The choice of Mt Isa also enabled us to refer back to the industrial unrest of 1964-65 when Bjelke Petersen was then Police Minister).

The areas of information had grown so broad during the course of the shoot that we did consider making several separate tapes; but have decided to stick to the original decision of presenting a broad picture of the current political nature of Queensland and attempting to relate this to the rest of Australia.

What did come through quite strongly in the course of this tape was the disunity of the left, the divisions between the Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party, the various Trades and Labour Councils, splits between unions, women and Aboriginal groups. The Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Council has been unable to achieve a unity between parties opposed to National Party policies. The tape only begins to explore these splits, the divisions are articulated but not really analysed.

More time proportionally has been spent on the Aurukun/Mornington Island segment of the tape. The Aurukun segment is shot several days prior to the threatened takeover of the reserve (22 May 1978), when politicians flew in hourly promising to stand by the people, not to allow the takeover. The rest is media history. The Federal Government backed down in the face of National Party pressure and the two reserves are now under the jurisdiction of Mr Russell Hinze, Minister for Local Government in Queensland. The future of the two reserves, now designated shires, is anything but secure.

In the tape we've tried to explore the motivations of both the federal body, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and the State Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DAIA).

This is countered with extensive interviews with the Tribal Council and local tribal people. It seems as though it may be possible to release the Aurukun/Mornington Island segments as a separate tape with the material that has already been shot.

The following extract from *Queensland Dossier* indicates the treatment of Aboriginal people in the state.

When justifying the over-crowding of state accommodation for Aboriginals last year, Mr Bjelke-Petersen stated that blacks from all over Australia were migrating to Queensland because they envied the conditions Queensland Aboriginal population lived under.

Blacks do get special treatment in Queensland. They are the subject of special legislation, the notorious Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Acts. The Acts provide for the aboriginal reserves dotted throughout Queensland - reserves invariably managed by state appointed white staff. Although the Government makes much of Aboriginal Councils elected by the reserve communities, one has only to examine the power of the state-appointed managers to see the reality of Council decision making.

Blacks can only remain on reserves at the discretion of the manager, even if their family has lived there for generations. To stay there, they need a permit issued by the manager - a permit which can be revoked without appeal. Under the legislation, white officials can control the reserve aboriginals' finances so that they can't get any money from bank accounts or wages without permission. And, thanks again to the Acts, the wages paid are set by the State Government outside and far below Australian Arbitration Commission rulings. As a result, on the Yarrabah reserve in 1973 cooks got \$10 a week, tractor drivers \$10, office assistants \$8, and truck drivers \$18.

As well, the manager was empowered to select occupations: "*All able-bodied persons over the age of fifteen years residing within the community reserve shall, unless otherwise determined by the manager, perform such work as directed by the manager or person authorised by him.*"

If they didn't do as they were directed, there was always the Aboriginal police - appointed and subject to dismissal by the manager.

The police are backed by special courts for Aboriginals, which are established on the reserves and which have similar powers to the magistrates courts. The powers might be the same, but the procedures are different. Under the legislation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advancement Department District Officers can represent blacks in court - whether the blacks agree or not. In places like Normanton, Cloncurry or Croydon, the local District Officer is also the local policeman. It follows that an Aboriginal defendant can find that both the defence and the prosecution are police. Not many get off.

Jeune Pritchard

The tape makers, Luce Pelissier and Jeune Pritchard secured a grant from the Australian Film Commission of \$5,300 to cover air fares, colour portapak hire, stock and edit costs.