

LAND LEASE SCANDAL

IS A.P. BOARD ENTITLED TO LEASE ABO. RESERVES?

The Aborigines Progressive Association is investigating the legal position regarding the leasing of Aboriginal Reserves in New South Wales to white men for grazing purposes.

As far as we can discover, the Aborigines Protection Board is trustee for approximately 14,000 acres of land, reserved for the use of Aborigines in New South Wales.

These Reserves are scattered throughout the State, some being only a few acres in extent, and the biggest being Cummeragunja, A Reserve of 5,000 acres in the county of Bama, on the banks of the Murray River.

With only a few exceptions, the Aboriginal reserves are poor land, of not much value to white men. Nevertheless, these reserves were granted by Parliament for the use of our people exclusively, and it was never intended that white men should have access to these Reserves for commercial money-making purposes.

There are approximately 10,000 Aborigines in New South Wales, which means that an average of less than an acre-and-a-half of land is Reserved for each Aboriginal in the land of his ancestors, which, considering the poor quality of the land reserved, is a small enough inheritance for the A.P. Board to keep as an inviolable trust for our people.

In the United States of America, as is well known, oil was struck on Indian Reservations, and, despite attempts by private speculators, the Government stood to its word and insisted that the Indians should get the financial benefit of the oil yield.

In Australia, however, there has been no oil struck. The only commercial value of the Reservations is for grass to be used for pastoral purposes.

The position here is that the A.P. Board, as trustees for 14,000 acres of land reserved for Aborigines, has in its wisdom seen fit to lease many of these reservations, wholly or in part, to white men for grazing purposes.

In their absence of proper means of testing the Board's authority to do this, we cannot express an opinion as to the legality or otherwise of this procedure, and we must assume that the Board is legally entitled to do what has been done.

At the Same time, we think it inequitable that land reserved for Aborigines should be leased to white men, and we intend to investigate the position thoroughly, bringing it before the notice of the Crown lands Department, and other authorities, who may be able to advise us whether the A.P. Board has exceeded its powers or not in thus having leased to white men land which is usually understood to be reserved for Aborigines only.

