

The Black Resistance

An introduction to the history of
the Aborigines' struggle
against British Colonialism

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Widescope



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The official histories of the colonisation of South Australia maintain that settlement there proceeded upon humanitarian and enlightened principles. What really occurred in South Australia was simply an attempt at a different tactical approach to gain the dispossession of the Aboriginal people, an approach that drew upon the experiences in the other colonies, as South Australia was occupied last. The resistance of the Aborigines in the other colonies was proving to be a factor which positively retarded settlement. The problem for the British colonialists was how best to avoid a similar resistance by the Indigenous of South Australia. How could occupation and the dispossession of the Aborigines that it necessarily involved, be achieved with the least possible resistance.

The official attitude to the Aboriginal people in South Australia was to be marked by a superficial 'tolerance' and an effort to dispossess them by ruining their traditional sources of subsistence and thereby forcing them into dependency on the station or township. In other words, the official attitude sought to avoid the problem of Aboriginal resistance by trying to make the Aborigines of South Australia stop acting and thinking like Aborigines. The colonialists tried to coerce, bribe, and dupe the Aborigines into agreeing to their dispossession. This impossible task soon failed and colonial settlement and dispossession of the Aborigines in South Australia, like everywhere else, was fulfilled by the armed force of British colonialism.

The policy of 'protection', proclaimed by English parliamentarians to represent a new humanitarianism in the colonial process, and acclaimed today by conventional historians as a generally sincere programme for peaceful settlement, was little more than a cunning tactic employed by British colonialism in its seizure of the Aborigines' land in South Australia.

The Aborigines of South Australia, like their brothers and sisters in the other colonies, waged a splendid resistance struggle. They successfully retarded the official settlement of the colony

itself, not to mention its frontier regions after settlement and the near disbandment of the occupation of Port Lincoln.

The British colony of South Australia was officially established in 1836, the year of the arrival of the first European settlers. Prior to 1836, sailors who had deserted their ships had arrived at Kangaroo Island, off the southern coast of South Australia. There is some suggestion that these pre-colonisation 'settlers' came into some conflict, at times, with the Aborigines. Some of the sailors, for example, forcibly procured Aboriginal women as their wives. One woman is said to have swum from Kangaroo Island to the mainland in a bid for freedom.

South Australia was to be an exercise in peaceful colonisation and peaceful dispossession of the Aborigines who, it was officially stated, would soon realise the moral and physical benefits to them of settlement. The high price of South Australian land was supposed to be a source of revenue for the benefit of the Aborigines. Such was the high-minded intention of the Aborigines' Protection Societies of London, and the colonial administrators, who sought to avoid the repetition in South Australia of the bitter resistance of the Aborigines in all other occupied territories.

What they overlooked was the fact that the Aborigines were the rightful owners and occupiers of the land; that the land was their source of subsistence and that they were culturally inseparable from it. The land was not, as the Foundation Act of 1834 maintained, 'waste and unoccupied'.

The actual settlement of South Australia was postponed for two years as a result of divisions within the ruling colonial circles as to the best tactics to employ in dispossessing the Aborigines. In 1835 Lord Glenelg had sought an Act which would 'protect' Aborigines and regard them as British subjects. The Commissioner of Lands in South Australia had, at first, opposed the proposal. Thirty-five thousand pounds worth of land had already been sold to eager settlers who were becoming increasingly disgruntled at the postponement of the conquest of South Australia. The main point of contention was not whether dispossession should take place, but how it could be done, tactically, to engender only minimal resistance. Regulations concerning the protection of Aborigines were to be clearly defined so that they could not, in any possible way, conflict with the interests of settlement. Colonisation was the supreme goal, and colonisation necessarily entailed total dispossession of the Aborigines.

Following all the debate, the colony of South Australia was finally set up and the Aborigines were placed under British Law. Sheds were erected for them near settlements and food and cloth-

ing were to be offered in return for labour. What appeared to be a more humanitarian approach to the dispossession of the Aborigines turned out to be a 'sugar-coated' bullet.

The South Australian Commissioners declared that South Australia was to:

be so conducted as not only to protect the natives in the enjoyment of existing rights but ... offer them the subsistence and comforts of civilised men ... may not colonisation on these civilising and Christianizing principles be extended without limit to other savage lands?¹

The Governor of Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land) had urged the South Australian Commissioners of the need to 'come to an understanding' with South Australian Aborigines before settlement took place. He was influenced in his advice by the successes of G. A. Robinson who had led the remnant Tasmanians into their final solution, genocide. Robinson himself offered to assist the colonisation of the Norfolk or Portland Bay region, a little east of South Australia.

The settlement was definitely held up because the Commissioners could not come to terms with what to do about the Aborigines before settlement commenced in full swing.²

The Land Commissioners warned Colonel Light, who arrived at Kangaroo Island in August 1836 in his capacity of Surveyor-General, that his safety and the future security of the colony would depend largely on his treatment of the Aborigines.³ The instructions of the Commissioners to the Resident Commissioner in October 1836 advised that medical relief be offered as an inducement to Aborigines who surrendered their lands.

The first Governor of South Australia, Hindmarsh, arrived in December 1836. His proclamation dealt extensively with the Aborigines.

It is also at this time especially my duty ... to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the Native population as to the rest of His Majesty's subjects ...⁴

This recognition of the Aborigines as British subjects was a tactic employed by the colonialists to avoid the need of recognising them as an independent, indigenous, entity with prior title to the land.

Among the 'enlightened' schemes which were put into effect was the policy of exploiting the dispossessed Aborigines as labour. From the viewpoint of colonialism this was a logical step to take in the absence of convict labour, owing to the non-convict origins of the colony — or 'Province' as it was first styled.

One South Australian settler wrote favourably that he personally employed some Aborigines who would work six hours consecutively for a biscuit. Whilst this invader's account admits to his own

gross racism in the treatment of Aboriginal labour, it does not tell us that the Aborigines, in accepting the biscuits, were not consenting to those pitiful terms of exploitation, but rather had an expectation that the 'settler' would return his labour in a reciprocal type of arrangement.

In 1838 an interim Protector of Aborigines was appointed. He was Captain Bromley who had been involved with British colonialism's attempted genocide of the American Indians. It was his task to teach the Aborigines to regard the settlers as friends, and to convert the Aborigines to Christianity. Bromley learned their language and tried to win their trust by giving them regular food rations. The Aborigines rebelled against Bromley's scheme and refused to eat their porridge. They were reduced to near starvation but still they refused to eat it. They crowded, *en masse*, into the Protector's tent and abused him.⁵ That the Aborigines did not let themselves be deceived easily is revealed in the Protector's report to the Colonial Secretary which explained that he considered his life in danger as a result of the incident. Aborigines continually robbed settlers. The Protector himself was subjected to continued harassment.

A classic illustration of the double purpose behind the Protector occurred when some Aborigines had settled on some purchased land and made themselves 'troublesome'. The Protector was authorised to use force if necessary to remove them. He declined this authorisation because, he said, 'awkward consequences might follow' as the Aborigines viewed the land as their own.⁶ The course of action pursued by the Protector to solve the problem highlighted his essential function as the man who was in charge of trying to convince the Aborigines into giving up their land. Instead of using force against the Aborigines he drew them off the land by promising and supplying them with loaves of bread. The hunting grounds of those Aborigines, most probably, had been disrupted by the intrusion of settlement and so they had no tactical alternative but to accept the offer of food.

This desire by the Protector to avoid violent dispossession was not the product of a humanitarian commitment on his part. His basic aims did not conflict in any way with the overall strategy of British colonialism to dispossess the Aborigines. The Protector was not an humanitarian figure trying to do the best for the Aborigines in a generally poor situation for them. He was a part and parcel — indeed, an important aspect — of their dispossession.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the Aborigines constantly rebelled against Bromley. On one occasion, he became ill with 'intense anxiety' as he saw his 'protected' Aborigines

refusing to accept his 'protection'. He could only lure them back with offers of more food rations. Bromley was so unsuccessful that he was sacked by the Governor who refused his requests for more financial assistance.

The next interim Protector was Dr Wyatt, who was given clear instructions to follow. Wyatt's activities reveal how the Protector was not only a deceiver but a spy against the Natives. Wyatt's instructions meant that his primary task was to ascertain the strength and disposition of the tribes, especially those near the settled districts. In this respect he was crucial to the military efforts of the British against the Aborigines. Secondly he was to put an end to Bromley's habit of giving the Aborigines gifts but instead was to encourage them to work for settlers in return for medical relief. A plot of ground was to be enclosed where they could be encouraged to work for the Protector. Dr Wyatt was to learn their language and to teach them English and convert them to Christianity. The ultimate aim of all these efforts was to explain British Law, to 'prevent further aggressions' and to bring offenders to justice.⁷

Wyatt's first report in October 1837 spoke with confidence about the friendliness of the Aborigines. Initially, before they could be aware of the land-grabbing activities of settlement, the Aborigines were prepared to be on friendly terms with the invaders. His report indicates that as the Aborigines gathered in increasing numbers more and more disturbances took place. Continual complaints were made about Aboriginal occupations of the Parklands and their stripping of trees to build huts for themselves.⁸ Half-wild dogs which the Aborigines had and regular thefts of settlements continued to annoy settlers as did the noise of corrobories.

In March 1838 a dead settler was found on the banks of the Torrens, with a sharpened kangaroo bone pressed into his heart. He had been killed by members of a tribe which used half wild dogs to attack settlers' sheep and fowls.⁹

The first killing of a settler by an Aborigine occurred at Encounter Bay, some eighty kilometres from Adelaide. A young man was also killed by Aborigines near Yankalilla and Captain Barker was killed by Aborigines near the Murray mouth. In June 1837 a man in a whaling party was killed by an Aborigine named 'Elick' in a fight over one of Elick's wives. Elick was arrested and the Advocate-General ordered that he be tried before a special commission. Thus, whilst the Aborigines were theoretically British subjects in early legal practice they were, when they committed acts against settlement, viewed in effect as hostiles. Elick cleverly escaped from custody and was not recaptured.¹⁰

In 1838 the pioneer Joseph Hawdon, having arrived in Adelaide from New South Wales, reported that the Aborigines were numerous and that he considered that his party of nine should be reinforced before it could return to New South Wales.¹¹ The Aborigines were preparing for a physical resistance struggle that would last well into the 1850s.

The overlanders who came with cattle and flocks from the east along the Murray intruded on Aboriginal hunting grounds. The Aborigines of South Australia made many successful attacks upon these overlanders. In 1838 three men went to South Australia from Port Phillip along a coastal route. They reported that the Aborigines were very hostile.¹² Similarly, the exploring expeditions near Port Lincoln found the Aborigines unapproachable.¹³ Settlers had to push cautiously forward into country around Adelaide. Aborigines burnt the grass on settlements where settlers were grazing stock. They speared herds or flocks which entered their hunting grounds.

The impossible task which the colonialists had set themselves — the peaceful dispossession of the Aborigines — was exposing the policy of 'protection' to be a farce. In March 1839 the Governor informed the Grand Jury that increasing petty offences and depredations by Aborigines were provoking more and more hostility among settlers. Grass fires and attacks upon sheep and cattle were becoming more frequent. A few weeks after the Governor's observations, a shepherd was killed by Aborigines eleven kilometres north-east of Adelaide. The Government decided to withhold customary rations to the Aborigines and called on settlers neither to employ them nor give them food.

An Aborigine was arrested for the murder and placed in irons at Adelaide. This person's brother, nicknamed 'Captain Mitchell', sought revenge and threw a spear at the first white man he met.¹⁴

All the police in Adelaide were mustered, along with Government officers and magistrates, outside Government House. All the Aborigines in the vicinity were also mustered and warned, through an interpreter, that they should not abuse 'deliberate kindness of the white man' and that 'wicked blacks' would be punished.¹⁵ Only those Aborigines who helped the search party for the murderers would receive rations. Those responsible were never captured but three other Aborigines alleged to have killed a shepherd at Para River were caught. After their capture rations were resumed. Around this time it was rumoured that the fellow-tribesmen of the captives had threatened to poison the Torrens River if their comrades were punished.¹⁶

By 1839 it had been estimated in the diary of settler Watson that at least seven settlers had been killed by Aborigines and that 'no one thinks of going out into the bush without sword and pistol'. Two of the captured Aborigines were condemned to death and again the abstract question of the Aborigines as British subjects had attained practical significance. Undoubtedly, Aborigines had previously been killed by settlers outside of the law, and, definitely, they continued to be slaughtered, but the recent exercise had proven that a formal legal rationalisation for dispossession and genocide could more effectively serve colonial expansion than an open declaration of war. The recognition of the Aborigines as British subjects, answerable to British Law, for one thing did away with the need to enter into treaties with them; a course which would have had to be followed if they had been formally recognised as an hostile nation.

After the executions, public meetings held in Adelaide unanimously protested against the Government's policy of allowing Aborigines to carry their traditional weapons in Adelaide. The Governor issued a proclamation assuring settlers that the Government would provide all possible protection. He stressed that settlers must not threaten or act with hostility towards Aborigines. The aggressions and unnecessary provocations of settlers in other colonies had provoked militant Aboriginal revenge attacks. The Governor still sought to avoid these in South Australia.¹⁷

The Governor issued a new set of instructions to the Protector, stressing that he was to remove, to as great a degree as possible, any immediate causes of conflict between the Aborigines and the settlers (with the exception, of course, of returning their land). The Protector was directed to integrate, as far as practicable, the Aborigines into the station/township as workers and to encourage a uniform reward for their services in the manner of medical relief, food, and so on. Also in the instructions the plan for a 'Native Location' was detailed.¹⁸ An interpreter was stationed at the Location and the Aborigines were induced to apply to the Location for food rations twice a day.

In October 1838, Colonel Gawler was appointed the new Governor of South Australia. On his installation, Gawler addressed a large number of Aborigines who had been assembled in front of Government House. He told them:

You must love the Queen of Great Britain and all the people of Great Britain. You must behave well and quietly; you must learn to read — and read the Bible. You must fear God who made heaven and earth, and you and we then shall be happy together.¹⁹

This address summed up admirably the plans for the peaceful

dispossession of the Aborigines. But even at this early stage, the resistance of the Aborigines was an inescapable fact.

Such was the rapid escalation of the resistance in the frontier parts of settlement that the Governor conceded, in May 1839, that the police could not protect isolated individuals in the frontier regions and that shepherds on outstations should always carry arms.²⁰

Meanwhile, the efforts of Dr Wyatt and his Native Location were meeting the same sort of failure as his predecessor, Bromley, had met. The Location was moved to the north bank of the Torrens, on about 5.5 hectares and, in a further attempt to inculcate 'habits of industry' into the Aborigines, a school was established on the Location in December 1839.

The British did not formally recognise the Aboriginal title to the land. When the first selections were made in May 1838 the Protector had asked for reserves of land to be made for the Aborigines.²¹ The Foundation Act of 1834 allowed for no such reservations. In 1840 though, when a group of Aborigines applied for land to cultivate, sixteen sections comprising 466 hectares were reserved. Under the pressure of Aboriginal resistance the British were prepared to grant reserves of land to Aborigines, providing it served their overall strategy of dispossessing the Aborigines from lands which were to be settled.

The Aborigines called Milmenurras, inhabiting the land near the Coorong, launched a magnificent resistance struggle. They were the tribespeople who had seriously frightened Sturt during his journey in 1830. Captain Barker was killed by the Milmenurras after his exploring party had intruded into the mouth of the Murray. In a despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Governor Gawler had written that these Aborigines had been consistently 'hostile'.

The Milmenurras had learned about the plans of the invaders to dispossess them. They had come into contact with whites who used to sail along the southern coast and with explorers like Sturt and Barker.

The Milmenurra lands bordered on the overland route from Port Phillip to Adelaide. Thus the Milmenurras were destined to come into conflict with the settlers. At first it appears that they were prepared to be friendly with the settlers. In 1838 a ship had been wrecked on their coast and they had looked after the survivors for seven weeks. However, the overland parties were disrupting their gathering grounds and hardly an overland party went from Port Phillip to Adelaide without some boast of having slaughtered members of the Milmenurra Tribe.²² Realising that their initial

kindness was only being repaid with dispossession and violence the Milmenurras were quick to change their attitude to the invaders and they soon earned a reputation for ferocity.

Two years after they had saved the lives of the survivors of a shipwreck, they were obliged to adopt a more realistic attitude to the members of a second shipwreck. In 1840 the *Maria* was wrecked and the Milmenurras killed the passengers.²³ An investigatory party headed by the Marine Surveyor and a policeman sailed down the Coorong for five days. They discovered the mutilated bodies of the *Maria* passengers and met Aborigines who were wearing clothing identified as belonging to the deceased. The party then returned to Adelaide with its report. What happened afterwards illustrates the cautious tactical approach of British colonialism in South Australia.

A special meeting of the Executive Council was called. The Council decided that only those Aborigines who had in some degree submitted to British dominion could be considered subject to British laws. The Judge of the colony agreed that he had no right to formally try the people of a tribe who had never had social intercourse with the colonists.²⁴ This apparent concession to the Aborigines was in reality an acknowledgement of a state of war between those Aborigines who refused to be dispossessed and the colonialists. The British were faced with a tactical predicament. They were committed to the peaceful dispossession of the Aborigines but they had to suppress the Aboriginal resistance.

From the start, the British had tried to seek the ideal solution of the Aborigines voluntarily accepting their dispossession. The real situation was that the Aborigines of South Australia were just as strongly attached to their land and culture as other tribes in Australia, and this brought home, in harsh terms, the need for the violent suppression of any resistance. The immediate advancement of settlement was at stake.

Thus, on 5 September 1840, the Governor in a despatch to the Secretary of State ordered the Commissioner of Police to go with an armed party to execute 'summary justice' upon the Aborigines, that band of 'most ferocious, insidious, unprovoked, and inveterate murderers and robbers'.²⁵ The dream of peaceful dispossession was revealed as a disgusting nightmare. Aborigines in South Australia who resisted colonial settlement were outlaws to be dealt with summarily. The Governor instructed the police party to scour the country to awe the Aborigines.²⁶ A virtual reign of terror was released upon the Milmenurras. Fifteen Aboriginal men and fifty Aboriginal women and children were rounded up and harassed by police in one day. On another

occasion they captured five Aboriginal women and fired upon two Aborigines who were harmlessly swimming across a lake.

The result of the scouring of the country was the arrest of two Aboriginal patriots. One, named Moorcangua, had allegedly killed a sealer from Encounter Bay two years beforehand. The other, Mongarawatta, was arrested for alleged participation in the *Maria* killings. The death sentence was summarily proclaimed and the two Aboriginal patriots were hanged by the neck over the graves of the *Maria* passengers. The two Aborigines died as martyrs of their people's struggle. The Commissioner of Police commented on the extreme courage of the two Aborigines and claimed that Mongarawatta had the 'most ferocious and demon-like countenance' he had ever seen.

Following the execution of Moorcangua and Mongarawatta the formal procedure of receiving the Governor's sanction had to be undertaken. In a despatch to the Secretary of State, the Governor explained that at first he had been tempted to proclaim military law as a result of the *Maria* killings, but the Executive Council resolved instead to treat the Milmenrura Aborigines and any others who resisted settlement as an openly hostile tribe and a 'foreign enemy'.²⁷

The reality of violent dispossession emerged from beneath the mask of 'peaceful settlement'. At an Executive Council meeting on 15 September the Governor declared his intention of keeping aloof from 'that unhealthy sentiment by some persons miscalled philanthropy' which, he said, condoned wanton crimes.²⁸ Divisions appeared within the ruling circles as to the best way to handle the conflict with the Milmenruras. The Advocate-General had, on behalf of the Executive Council, justified the summary executions by saying that the Milmenruras were not British subjects but a hostile nation. The Governor had declared in 1839 that the Aborigines had been brought under British Law. The only way out for the Governor was to state that he had acted on martial law without proclaiming it. Newspapers in South Australia (the *Register*) and in Tasmania as well as the Aborigines' Protection Society in England condemned the Governor's action as being excessive and unnecessary. In December 1841 the Secretary of State issued a reply to the Governor's despatch (which had justified the summary executions). His report was then referred to the Law Officers of the Crown who concluded that the Milmenruras could have been brought to trial in the ordinary legal tribunals of the colony and that their summary execution was, technically, an act of murder. Of course, neither the Commissioner of Police nor the Governor were ever brought to trial. The pointed remarks of the Law Officers had served as a

reprimand to the Governor and as a warning to him to avoid at all costs such tactics which recognised the Aborigines as a hostile entity existing outside of British Law.

The Milmenruras, from then on, avoided any contact with the settlers. In October 1840, for example, the Secretary General traversed the whole of the Milmenrura territory without meeting one Aborigine. The bodies of the two hanged patriots were untouched, in accord with the instructions given to the Aborigines by the Police Commissioner, but innumerable foot-prints appeared in the immediate vicinity. According to an Aboriginal spy, the Milmenruras had met around the bodies of the hanged tribespersons and pledged revenge. They promised to kill every European who came within their reach and members of any tribe who had friendly relations with settlers.

Either other tribes or wandering Milmenruras took revenge when two hundred Aborigines attacked a survey camp about thirty kilometres north of Adelaide.²⁹ The Milmenruras would never again trust the white invader. In early 1841 the Protector of Aborigines led a party in a whale boat along the Coorong in order to estimate the strength of the Milmenruras but the Aborigines rushed to the sandhills as soon as the boat approached the shore.³⁰

Stations in the country continued to be attacked by Aborigines who scattered before they could be caught. During the hot weather they lit fires which dispersed cattle and sheep, destroyed pasture, tents, huts, and obliterated marks of the country survey. The Commissioner of Police warned of a coming war between settlers and Aborigines.³¹

A staunch resistance occurred on the overland route along the Indi River (Murray). In one conflict in October 1839 eleven Aborigines were killed and the overseer of the cattle had been beaten and speared to death.³² Then, in April, 1841, eleven men who were bringing sheep over from New South Wales were attacked by 300 to 400 Aborigines who showed a 'fierce and courage hitherto unknown'.³³ A party of ten armed volunteers later went out to the scene of the confrontation. When they arrived they were stopped by 300 or 400 Aborigines. In the ensuing battle, the punitive party was forced to retreat and was pursued for some distance by the Aborigines who showed no fear of firearms.

The Commissioner of Police and a party were then sent out after the Milmenruras but were recalled when Captain Grey replaced Colonel Gawler as Governor of South Australia. The settlers in South Australia held protest meetings which reflected their fear and anger. Grey urged them not to engage in punitive or vindictive expeditions against the Aborigines but, if they felt strongly

enough about it, to enlist as special constables in the police force.

It was Grey's intention to amend the tactical failing of Gawler who had given the Aborigines the status of a hostile nation outside of British law through his sanction of the summary execution of two Aborigines. Grey insisted that the Aborigines were British subjects and that the repression of their resistance should be conducted with a view to maintaining their status as British subjects.

The Commissioner of Police thereby had the go-ahead to organise a party of sixty-eight police and 'special constables' to go out to the Murray to capture the offending Aborigines. Sturt, the 'discoverer' of the Murray, had offered to join the party but was unable to go. He advised the party to be careful because the Aborigines of the interior were fearless and aware of how poor a weapon a gun was once discharged. He warned the Police Commissioner that a disorganised attack on the Aborigines would be a disastrous failure and would lead to full-scale war between the settlers and the Murray Aborigines.

Three hundred and eighty kilometres from Adelaide, the party met an overland expedition from the east. Two days beforehand the overlanders had been attacked by the Aborigines who had killed four of their number, wounded two others, and stolen much property. The punitive party from Adelaide then decided to search the countryside to recover sheep and capture the culprits. They recovered only the carcasses and bones of sheep and were jeered and laughed at by thirteen Aborigines, the only ones they could pursue.

The police party was beaten on two counts: firstly it was outnumbered by the Milmenurra and secondly it was easily outmanoeuvred by the Aborigines who were so familiar with the environment, the rivers, lagoons, creeks, scrubs and reeds. Thus, the police party though successful in protecting the final stage of the overlanders' journey, had failed miserably in its effort to capture any Aborigines. The Protector of Aborigines (who was a member of the police party) had failed to make contact with the Milmenurra. Following this defeat, the Governor ordered all overland parties to accept the escort of eight or ten mounted police and the command of a military officer. (The bill for which was to be footed by the proprietor of the party.)

In July 1841, a party of twenty-nine Europeans and three Aborigines set off from Adelaide for the Murray to protect a new overland party from New South Wales. Not far from Lake Bonney they met over 100 apparently friendly Aborigines, some of whom warned them not to go any further because other Aborigines were preparing their shields and spears. On hearing this, two of the

Adelaide Aborigines ran away. Two of the friendly Aborigines offered to join the police party thus replacing the two deserters. The two newcomers and the remaining Adelaide Aborigine were then directed to go off in advance and to warn the hostile Aborigines of the white-man's superior armory.

The events which followed strongly suggest that these apparently friendly Aborigines were in fact spies sent to estimate the morale and military strength of the enemy. The European party failed to protect the overlanders who were attacked by 300 Aborigines. When the three Aborigines sent by the punitive party to warn the hostile Aborigines not to resist returned, they were followed at a distance back to the camp by a small group of hostile Aborigines who in turn were followed by a force of 150 armed with 400 spears.

The colonists fired upon the Aborigines before they could throw their spears. The overlanders, on the other side of the river, also began firing. The battle lasted twenty minutes. Thirty Milmenurra were killed and four were captured. The rest had disappeared into the scrub and water.

The Protector had been placed in command of the European party until such time as an Aboriginal attack was made in which case he was to hand over command to the Sub-Inspector of Police. The Protector addressed the captured Aborigines through an interpreter and released three of them as a sign of good-will. He told them to tell the others not to attack future overlanders or settlers. The Executive Council held an inquiry into the Milmenurra Aboriginal resistance.

The captured Native told the inquiry that his people attacked the overlanders because they needed the cattle and sheep for food. The inquiry resulted in the stationing of a permanent armed party of police on the Murray to protect overlanders.

In October 1841 when Protector Edward John Eyre, who had just returned from his journey across the Australian Bight, left Adelaide for the newly formed station at Moorundi (on the Murray about 130 kilometres from Adelaide) he was accompanied by a force of twelve police under a military officer. The Moorundi region was an unconquered area far away from any other settled areas. Eyre wisely set up his station well in advance of other settlement and with substantial military protection. He no doubt utilised his considerable experience in the suppression of native peoples gained through his prior activities in the West Indies. The deceptive tactics employed by Eyre tended to thwart Aboriginal resistance in this area.

By 1841, the settlement at Port Lincoln consisted of a little

village of about two miles and a few stations in the bush.³⁴ A Reverend Schurmann had been employed by Governor Gawler to go to Port Lincoln in 1840 in order to gain the trust of the Aborigines and to prepare them for dispossession.³⁵ The Aborigines of Port Lincoln were not to be lulled by deception. They launched a staunch resistance to settlement.

In October 1840 they killed a youth at one of the stations.³⁶ The following year they began a systematic campaign of harassment. They regularly seized stock and possessions of settlers and, refusing to fall for Schurmann's tricks, they boycotted the township. The Governor was alarmed by the potentially disastrous balance of forces at Port Lincoln where the Aborigines greatly outnumbered the colonists. He ordered the Resident Magistrate to distribute three pounds of sugar every two months to all Aborigines who chose to assemble for it. Through this regular assembly he was able to convey to the Aborigines any Government instructions or messages.³⁷ By December 1841 about one hundred Aborigines were assembling in the town for the hand-outs.³⁸

Hypocritical gestures of friendship to the Aborigines did not stop their resistance struggle. All stations and several houses at Port Lincoln were attacked by Aborigines. So consistent were these attacks that the settlement of Port Lincoln was nearly abandoned.³⁹

The Aboriginal attacks were systematic. One station was raided every day. In March 1842 the Aborigines killed a station owner and his hut-keeper. A few weeks later a group of Aborigines surrounded a hut on a station and showered it with spears, killing three settlers. The station-owners on the frontier of settlement were driven back to the township.⁴⁰ The Governor sent Lieutenant Hugonin with a detachment of soldiers to Port Lincoln to capture the offending Aborigines at all costs.⁴¹

Lt Hugonin set out with a party of police and colonists. The search lasted for over one month, with a few Aborigines being killed, wounded and captured and with three soldiers, who had been left at a station, being attacked by 300 Aborigines. Hugonin reported that all the Port Lincoln Aborigines were hostile and ready to engage in concerted action to drive the settlers from their country.⁴²

The Port Lincoln Aborigines not only sought to expel the settlers from their land, they sought to punish any fellow-countrymen who had turned traitor. They also sought to eliminate colonial officials who were being effective in opposing the resistance. In the winter of 1842, for example, an Aboriginal woman named Utulta, who lived with settlers and informed against her country-

men, told a group of settlers that the tribespeople were preparing to attack again in summer and that they were going to kill her and other Aborigines who lived with the colonists as well as the Government Resident.

Tribes united in the common struggle against settlement. Colonists claimed that two tribes at Port Lincoln had combined 'for the express purpose of murdering all the white people'.⁴³ In 1843 five Port Lincoln Aborigines were brought to trial for murders. Two were executed and three imprisoned. They are martyrs in Australia's real history of struggle.

Resistance occurred almost wherever settlement expanded. At Bungaree, about 161 kilometres north of Adelaide, Aborigines continually attacked the flocks and set fire to the country all around.⁴⁴

As part of its policy of recognising the Aborigines as British subjects with no title over the land, the Government passed the Waste Lands Act of 1842 which allowed for the reservation of land for public use, including for the use of Aborigines. Fifteen per cent of gross proceeds from land sales was authorised to be spent for the 'civilisation and protection' of the Aborigines.⁴⁵ In other words, a pittance from the sale of stolen Aboriginal land was to be used to assist the further dispossession of the Aborigines.

In the isolated frontier regions, as settlement extended, it was only a matter of time before resistance would develop. Aborigines of South Australia's south-east region, which had just been opened up, killed a settler and regularly assailed flocks. As the winter of 1846 approached the Aborigines mustered in great numbers and united with tribes from the Glenelg River in the neighbouring colony. The scrubby nature of the countryside favoured the Aborigines who took sheep with impunity.

The resistance continued throughout 1847 and the Government Resident himself lost many sheep. Police patrols were rendered useless by the almost uncanny ability of the Aborigines to conceal themselves in the swamps and scrubs around the stations.

Continual resistance marked the advance of settlement into all new districts.

In the north, near Mount Remarkable, the Aborigines attacked sheep stations and in the Yorke Peninsula, the Protector of Aborigines advised the Government to form a police station in the centre of the pastoral runs. In the north-east and north-west of Port Lincoln, as settlement expanded, further resistance took place. Stations were plundered and settlers killed.⁴⁶

At the September 1849 session of the Supreme Court, the Grand

Jury drew up a petition which deplored the inadequacy of police protection at Port Lincoln and on Yorke Peninsula.⁴⁷ Four police constables had been stationed in the Port Lincoln district for three years, but in November 1848 when scattered lines of stations had extended along the north-west and north-east coasts, there was a proposal to build four police stations on the west and the east. On Yorke Peninsula the colonists were outnumbered, by eighty to 150 Aborigines. Following two killings and a general harassment campaign by the Aborigines, the Government decided to set up a permanent police station there.

The resistance of the Aborigines in the remote parts of Port Lincoln continued well into 1850. In November 1850, Aborigines near Streaky Bay, about 320 kilometres north-west of Port Lincoln, killed the settler of a sheep station. The Streaky Bay Aborigines had a history of resistance dating back to their repulsion of intruding whalers before official settlement. Two more settlers were killed there in 1851.

In these, and many other cases, the killings were motivated by the need for food. The Aborigines' hunting grounds had been rendered useless by the encroachment of settlement. Acts of resistance continued well into the late 1850s.

The office of Protector of Aborigines was abolished in 1856, a time when settlement in Adelaide had been secured and settlement on the outskirts was relatively secure. The Aborigines had, by and large, been successfully dispossessed and so there was no immediate need to continue the pretence of 'Protection'.

The Protector had been crucial to the success of dispossession. His schools, feeding-stations, and his encouragement of employment of Aborigines in the township or on the station helped to ensure the success of British colonisation of South Australia.

In the established settled areas, the tactic of making the Aborigine dependent on the market economy was meeting with success. Missionaries taught Aborigines how to speak English and they were employed as whalers' labourers, bullock drivers' labourers, and trackers. In return they were given food and clothing and thrown deeper into the den of the invader and further removed from their own culture and attachment to the land.

The resistance gradually began to subside as the numbers of Aborigines declined (as a result of the colonial policy of extermination) and the settlers increased. The Aborigines were being forced into a position of dependency on the township or station because their traditional source of subsistence had been disrupted and they could best get food by working for handouts.

The forced integration of the Aborigines into the township did

not in any way serve the interests of the Aboriginal people. The Aborigines in Adelaide caught alien, European, diseases and were forced into destitution. All the noble words about 'protection' were exposed as hog-wash. More and more Aborigines were forced into Adelaide for survival: the figure rose from 283 in 1840 to 450 in 1843. The policy of 'Protection' was a fancy word for extermination: by the years 1843 to 1845 there were twice as many Aboriginal deaths as births and nearly twice as many men as women.⁴⁸

The educational institutions (if they could be called that) and the feeding-stations for the Aborigines were tactics aimed at the dispossession of the Aboriginal people.

In 1852 the Protector had introduced daily feeding-stations whereby any Aborigines who sought food rations could receive them. Significantly, the first feeding-stations were set up 145 miles north-west of Port Lincoln and sixty kilometres north-east at the areas where settlement had expanded and where outlying Aborigines were putting up a resistance. This scheme was the Governor's answer to his dilemma as he put it: 'Are we to feed the natives and prevent work? (that is, give them food for nothing) or 'are we to drive them away and encourage plunder?''⁴⁹

It was only a matter of time before the feeding stations were to withdraw food handouts and replace them with distribution of worthless gifts, thus compelling the Aborigines further into dependency on the township or station, where he would have to work for food.

By 1860 there were twenty-three feeding-stations.⁵⁰

In 1844, Captain Grey had written that the whole of his experiences in South Australia had convinced him that the best means of 'civilising' the Aborigines was by giving useful education to the children.⁵¹ Of course, by 'useful education', Grey meant any education which assisted the dispossession of the Aborigines and the integration of the future generations.

From 1840 when the Protector had lured starving Aboriginal children into the school at Adelaide by feeding them with soup, he had been zealous in indoctrinating the children in the ways of the European. Parents who let their children attend the Aboriginal school were given extra rations of food or blankets.

In 1860 a Select Committee into the Aborigines revealed in statistical terms some of the human misery wrought upon the Aborigines by British colonialism.

The Aboriginal population in an area of 7 250 square kilometres around Adelaide had decreased from 650 in 1841 to 180 in 1856.⁵²

Of the 612 000 square kilometres of South Australia (as we know it today), only 3 900 hectares were reserved for the Aborigines and the rest was to be seized by British colonialism.

The Select Committee exposed the destitution of the Aborigines in the townships, and rather ironically, observed that the Australian Aborigines 'have lost much and gained little or nothing by their contact with Europeans'.

The Report of the Select Committee concluded that 'The race is doomed to become extinct.'

All the fancy words and promises made at the time of settlement were, by 1860, exposed as fraudulent. Recall the words expressed in the *Government Gazette* of July 1840:

The invasion of those ancient rights by surveys and land appropriations of any kind is justifiable only on the ground that we should at the same time reserve an ample sufficiency for their [the Aborigines] present and future use and comfort under the new state of things into which they are thrown — a state in which we hope they will be led to live in greater comfort on a small space than they enjoyed before it occurred on their extensive original possessions.

The official 'hope' expressed above would have had some credibility if it in fact had been even partially fulfilled. The 'new state of things' for the Aborigines was not characterised by 'greater comfort' but by degradation, malnutrition, disease, and destitution.

South Australia was in no way an example of colonisation 'with a human face'. The Protector, the missionaries and schools, and the feeding-stations were just as much a part of the process of dispossession and extermination as the punitive parties, the poisoned flour, the execution of summary justice, and the armed police and soldiers. But it is a telling testimony to the strength of Aboriginal resistance that the tricks and ploys involved in the British colonialists' strategy of deception were not capable of defeating a proud and militant people without the introduction of armed force and violence.

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