

4. Political Mobilisation

This beautiful world History, is, in Heraclitian terms, 'a chaotic pile of rubbish'. What is strong wins: that is the universal law. If only it were not so often precisely what is stupid and evil.

Friedrich Nietzsche

As the twentieth century unfolded in the new Australia, Aboriginal people continued to suffer in the wake of dispossession; we continued to be stripped of our land, resources, culture and children. The year 1901 witnessed the federation of the Australian colonies and the creation of a national state across the entire continent: the Commonwealth of Australia.

From an Aboriginal perspective, however, there was little joy or celebration in the federation celebrations of 1901. Aboriginal people were driven to the very margins of existence in an even more organised and articulated fashion — an existence that was at the time thought by most to encompass only a short term. We were considered and widely described as a vanishing race, a relic of the Stone Age. We were denied the right to vote in Commonwealth elections, were not counted in the census, and issues concerning Aboriginal people continued to be under the stringent, regimented control of state rather than Commonwealth legislation. As a result we were not even considered as Australians and were made to suffer and bear the full impact of that ignorance. The myths made by the popular media about a dying race were widely accepted by ordinary Australians

By 1920, Aboriginal people in New South Wales were experiencing horrifying levels of revocation of their hard-worked-for farms and were suffering under the full weight and repercussions of the systematic and sudden removal of their children from their families. The 1915

amendment to the New South Wales *Aboriginal Protection Act* of 1909 gave the Board and its array of bureaucrats the powers and provisions to remove any Aboriginal child from its parent for, in practice, little or no reason other than the fact that they were Aboriginal. The amendment as a published statement gives a very clear indication of the Board's intentions and basis for practice, especially about the perceived future of Aboriginal people.

The initial Act of 1909 had not quite delivered the Board the far-reaching and absolute control it desired. Documented archival evidence abounds of the intentions of the Board prior to 1915. In 1909 the Board argued the need for the 'power to assume full control and custody of the child of any Aborigine if such course shall be deemed by the Board to be in the full interest of such child, and the Board may thereupon remove such child to such control as the Board may care and decide upon'.¹ In 1911, with the presentation of its annual report, the Board dictated that the 'only chance these children have is to be taken away from their present environment and properly trained ... before being apprenticed out, and once having left the Aborigines reserves they should never be allowed to return to them permanently'.² Both the Board's actions and words were explicit and direct. There was to be no compromise: 'the whole object of the Board was to put things into train on lines that would eventually lead to the camps being depleted of their population, and finally the closing of the reserves and camps altogether'.³ They stated emphatically that 'it has been the policy of the Board not to allow children, many of whom are almost white, who have been removed from camp life to return thereto, but to eventually merge themselves in the white population'.⁴ The practice and directive was premeditated racial and cultural genocide. Aboriginal children were to be taken away and over time swallowed up without trace into the wider white Australian society.

The 1915 amendment did not pass through parliament without some debate and controversy. Colonial Secretary JH Cann stated that the main principle behind the amendment was 'to empower the Board to take the place of the parents'.⁵ Mr P McGarry, the sitting member for Murrumbidgee, questioned, does this not 'mean to steal the child away from its parents?' Cann replied that it is 'not a question of stealing the children, but of saving them ... from immoral Aboriginal women'.⁶ The debate intensified into a heated exchange, and McGarry was forthright in his claim that Aboriginal parents loved their children just as much as anyone else. He went on to articulate the full impact of colonisation: 'We have overrun their country and taken away their domain. We now propose further acts of cruelty upon them by separating the children from

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the parents'.⁷ But the clear-thinking McGarry was a voice crying in a wilderness of prejudice and racial superiority.

In a 1915 meeting of the New South Wales Legislative Council members discussed the intended amendment. One speaker (a MP who was, in fact, also a Board member) rose and spoke against the intended Bill:

At Darlington Point I have heard an aborigine, who was highly educated, explaining in the best of English how the aborigines were being plundered of their rations, robbed of their lands, and reduced to the position of slaves ... when you meet men who understand all these things, you cannot expect them to calmly submit to an order to take from them their girl or boy in order to place them in a Government institution.⁸

By 1920, Fred Maynard had built up his full repertoire of oratory and written skills and had enhanced and continued to hone his deep political



Fred Maynard and his sister Emma at the Rocks in Sydney, 1927.

knowledge of national and international events and key issues of minority peoples. His experience and knowledge of the deeply felt loss of his Uncle Tom Phillips's land at St Clair near Singleton, and the similar experiences suffered by the Ridgeways on the lower and mid-north coast of New South Wales, had hardened his resolve. These experiences were reinforced by Maynard's years on the wharf, his experiences with the trade union movement and his contact with African Americans. The fervour of the moment was further intensified by the experiences of the First World War in which hundreds of thousands had lost their lives and the world was changed forever.

Aboriginal men had enlisted and travelled overseas to fight for their country. Many of these men lost their lives and those who returned to Australia carried the scars and memories of their horrifying experiences on the battlefronts at Gallipoli, Belgium and France. When they returned home the impact of the perceived insignificance of their sacrifices by the wider white community was slammed home. While they had been away fighting in dreadful conditions some of these men's children had been removed from their wives by the Aboriginal Protection Board.⁹ Unlike their white comrades at arms they were not afforded full recognition or community status when they returned. The Aboriginal returned servicemen reverted to being treated as blacks with no rights. When the Soldier Settlement Scheme was introduced by the government to assist the returning heroes in acquiring property, the Aboriginal soldiers found it did not apply to them and not to bother applying.¹⁰

Dick Johnson was one of those soldiers. He and Fred Maynard became lifelong friends. Johnson, still with vivid memories of the war front, undertook another call-to-arms as he rose to stand alongside Maynard in his fight for Aboriginal political rights and social justice. These Aboriginal leaders' awareness and commitment to their task was unwavering, and with good reason. The 1920 Aborigines Protection Board *Annual Report* draws reference to its intention to eliminate the lighter-caste people from reserves and missions. The 1921 report was even more horrifying and graphic in its language and intention: 'the process of eliminating quadroons and octoroons is being quietly carried out!'¹¹ it claimed with absolute confidence.

The AAPA and its leaders drew influence and inspiration from international Black connections, but this does not devalue the fact that they had a number of white sympathisers and campaigners who stepped into this cauldron of discontent to lend support — most notably Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton and John J Moloney. These two individuals could

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clearly see and identify the inequality forced upon Aboriginal people and they rallied to assist in opposing the powers that be in the world of government.

From the earliest point of settlement onwards, many individuals came forward with ideas about what the non-Indigenous authorities could best do to ‘help’ Aboriginal people. The majority of these were put forward with no consultation with or input from Aboriginal people. The major thrust of assistance was in terms of christianising, civilising, caring for or saving a ‘doomed race’. At this time the British Empire was one ‘on which the sun never sets’, and it was considered by the British themselves that they had attained the highest point of human progress and development. Wealthy socialites, working class heroes, righteous intellectuals, or those imbued with nationalistic fervour stepped forth to aid Aboriginal people, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many were white women simply in need of an interest, or campaigning for the feminist platform. Despite many of these people having good intentions, deeply ingrained assumptions and perceptions of European superiority undermined much of their work. These ingrained assumptions were the unchallenged staple of the day, and one woman who initially carried much of the baggage of the period was Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton. However, unlike others, Hatton — through her contact with Aboriginal people — was to undergo a major shift in thinking that was decades ahead of its time. Her alliance with the AAPA in New South Wales resulted in her total opposition to the church, state and her own Christian beliefs.

Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, affectionately known [by Aboriginal people] as ‘Mrs Mac’, was a white missionary and well-known social worker. She experienced several family tragedies during her life. She lost her first husband, missionary Jim McKenzie, to a shark attack at Bundaberg.¹² He had conducted a service one hot Sunday, and was returning across the dunes with ‘a young Kanaka’, when he decided to cool off in the surf. ‘The young lad tried to talk him out of swimming on the Lord’s Day, but he dived in and was almost immediately taken by a shark. The young boy was so upset he refused to leave the spot for 10 days’.¹³

In 1908 she married again, to Tom Hatton, considered ‘to be a bit of a rebel and was very active in various groups’. Hatton was ‘a Protestant Irishman and very vocal’, and fought for the rights of everyday people — the worker’.¹⁴ (There is some suggestion that Tom Hatton may have been responsible for the couple falling out with their employers at the mission, the cane-growing Young family. He ‘was a reformer opposed against social inequality’ and he took issue with the harsh conditions under which many of the Islanders were subjected working in the local cane industry.¹⁵)

However, six days prior to her marriage to Hatton, tragedy struck again when Elizabeth's eleven-year old daughter Hope died.

In the aftermath of her first husband's death Elizabeth spent some years with the Islander community at Pialba–Hervey Bay.¹⁶ An Aboriginal missionary, Mrs Charles Aurora, worked closely with Hatton during those years. McKenzie Hatton described Aurora as a 'woman carrying a high standard of Christian character — a clever, refined, and educated woman, she has been used to help in the translation of the scriptures in the language of the Solomon Islands.'¹⁷ During this period she was in touch with Aboriginal people living within the region and about forty Aboriginal people at Tweed Heads 'had heard the gospel mainly through intermarriage with the Kanakas and McKenzie Hatton's work amongst the latter'.¹⁸

McKenzie Hatton had hoped to go to the Torres Strait originally. Writing to Retta Dixon Long, the AIM missionary, in 1910 she said:

I am deeply disappointed at not being able to go ... I would very much like to join your Mission but I am hindered at present ... I have our father to keep now. He is getting on in years & has occasional attacks of asthma.¹⁹

Further family tragedy, and government indifference, affected McKenzie Hatton's outlook in the coming years. During the First World War she took up pen and paper to assist the war effort, as Hatton's son Stewart from her first marriage to Jim McKenzie had enlisted and was wounded in France. He was flown to a hospital in England and then brought home to Australia as a quadriplegic. He died shortly after his return through infection from his wounds.²⁰

The Hatton's were operating a small toy manufacturing company in Melbourne at the time, and McKenzie Hatton requested assistance from the government for expenses incurred in the hospital treatment of her son. She had argued that 'her son was paralysed and as he was not given good attention and was not happy in the military hospital, she took him away to a private hospital and treatment incurring expenses up to about £50'. Not for the first or last time in her life McKenzie Hatton's appeal to government officialdom was to be met with a firm rebuttal and with no empathy for her loss:

This woman would have had to sign a certificate freeing the Defence Dept from all responsibility in connection with her son if she took him away from hospital.²¹

During these years McKenzie Hatton published several books and booklets on her experiences with South Sea Islanders and life as a missionary in

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Queensland. She also wrote a pamphlet, *On Eagle's Wings*, which was a message to other grieving mothers and wives who had lost loved ones during the war. In the foreword one Edward Isaac wrote that he 'knew of nothing more calculated to help the stricken parents of our brave fallen soldier lads'. The insight and understanding expressed by McKenzie Hatton came from one whose 'sensitive spirit had been wounded to the quick'. The pamphlet delivers, in McKenzie Hatton's graphic words, the shock that befalls a mother with the loss of a child:

Into our home came the sad message one day, 'Your son seriously wounded in France'. O the choking agony of that moment, 'seriously wounded'! O the stab of those words! What would the next message be? And swiftly the mind ran forward with anxious fear. How do we mothers live through such moments? With lightning flash our minds go back to that day, long ago, when the little baby was first clasped in our arms; that day of sweetest memory when with glad and grateful wonder, we called him all our own; and now he is 'seriously wounded' somewhere in France.²²

The experiences of constant wartime correspondence were to come to the fore a decade later with her prolific letter writing and petitioning on behalf of the AAPA and the Aboriginal political fight. Her efforts during the war were recognised by the Rev. W Cleugh Black who 'spoke in eulogistic terms of Mrs Hatton's splendid work with her pen during the war, when by such means she brought comfort to thousands of stricken hearts'.²³ In stark contrast to her efforts on behalf of Great War soldiers, however, her later alignment and stance alongside Aboriginal political campaigners a decade later was to meet with ridicule, opposition and open hostility.

After the war, McKenzie Hatton continued her efforts for returned soldiers and grieving families as 'the organising secretary of the Soldiers Mothers Band and is also superintendent of the Missionary Hostel at St James Park, Hawthorne'.²⁴ This work was interrupted when, after fourteen years' service in the Solomon Islands, her old friend and missionary colleague Mrs Charles Aurora returned to Queensland and was 'shocked to find, in this Christian land of ours, so little being done for her own people and the half-caste girls'.²⁵ Aurora was so distressed by the conditions that she travelled to Melbourne where she beseeched McKenzie Hatton to 'go back and help her to rescue these young and helpless girls'.²⁶ A letter that McKenzie Hatton wrote to Prime Minister Billy Hughes in 1921, as result of her friend's grim story, can be read as a prelude to what would eventuate some three years later. She asked for Commonwealth Government assistance to enable her 'from a moral standpoint' to look after Aboriginal girls.²⁷ Her communication revealed her sympathy for the horrific impact of child separation on the Aboriginal families:

One of the saddest sights ever witnessed was the sorrow of an old man wailing for the loss of his little daughter, who, with no gentle hand, was being dragged off before his eyes by the officer of the law.²⁸

In her letter she questioned the actions of the police in removing such children: 'Where do you take these girls, and what do you do with them when you remove them from the station?' The answer, McKenzie Hatton reported indignantly, was that 'we take them to the city and *lose* them'.²⁹ Her letter was full of the need to 'protect' and 'Christianise' Aboriginal girls and to have 'inculcated [in them] those high ideals, which form the basis of our civilization'. As she continued, 'no wonder some of us cry out with longing and ask to be allowed to *save* them'.³⁰ But McKenzie Hatton also praised state governments, particularly that of New South Wales, for their efforts regarding the 'educational scheme and the generous provision' made to Aboriginal people.³¹ At this point, her argument and tone were similar to those expressed by the majority of evangelical humanitarians of the time.

Despite the Commonwealth Government's negative response to her proposal, McKenzie Hatton's driving desire to establish an Aboriginal girls' home was not to be subdued. The Australian Aborigines Mission (AAM) newsletter the *Australian Aborigines Advocate* reported in April 1921:

A strong Mission Council has been formed in Melbourne — Mr Thos Graham being President, and Mrs McKenzie-Hatton Secretary. They have begun work in real earnest, and already successful results have been achieved by our Victorian Council.³²

Only months later, however, McKenzie Hatton cut her ties with the AAM, soon after visiting Sydney to initiate links with the AIM. The abruptness of this severance with the AAM in Melbourne may indicate it was not amicable. Siding with the AIM in preference to the AAM suggests that she had clashed with the AAM's national president, TE Colebrook, the result of which would surface later. Colebrook carried deep-seated resentment over the split of the New South Wales branch of the AAM thirteen years earlier, a split that resulted in the formation of the AIM:

For years the work of God amongst this people went on undisturbed by internal friction; but there came a day when the Evil One succeeded in creating discord, which led to the retirement of Miss Dixon, and the establishment of work now controlled by that lady and her husband (Mr. and Mrs. Long) under the name AIM or Australian [sic] Inland Mission. Since then the work has been carried on by two forces instead of one, whether with better or worse results time alone will reveal.³³

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At the centre of the split between the AAM and the AIM was missionary Retta Long and her husband LW Long.³⁴ Colebrook took any defection from the AAM to the AIM very badly indeed.

It was during a visit to Sydney in 1921 that McKenzie Hatton became aware of the AIM and realised that it had a similar vision to her own, that of instigating an Aboriginal girls' home. She at once offered to take up the challenge. An article in the *Melbourne Evening Herald* prematurely announced McKenzie Hatton's departure to Sydney to begin this work:

Mrs McKenzie Hatton who has been associated with various patriotic and philanthropic schemes, leaves for Sydney to resume mission work among the half-caste girls who are in need of a motherly guardian.³⁵

With a degree of perhaps unfounded optimism it was announced that 'she had been given a commission by the Aborigines Protection Board of New South Wales'.³⁶ Reference was drawn to her sixteen years' service in Bundaberg 'where she had a hostel for friendless half-caste girls'.³⁷ Her friendship to Aurora, it was revealed, was as a direct result of that hostel. Interviewed for the article, McKenzie Hatton described how she had been shocked and alarmed at the conditions young Aboriginal women faced in New South Wales: 'I find that the half-caste girl is the most neglected and degraded type I have ever encountered in my mission work'.³⁸

Even at this early stage, and probably not to her benefit, McKenzie Hatton chose to criticise the Aborigines Protection Board:

About seven years ago the Aborigines Board in New South Wales, with the idea of protecting the native girls, had an Act passed to the effect that every native girl over 14 years of age should be brought into the cities and indentured under a specially selected secretary, whose task was to find them situations in homes where they would be protected and cared for. For various reasons the scheme has not proved satisfactory.

It frequently happens that the girls, tired of having been made drudges, have run away from the foster homes, and are now adrift in the cities. It is my hope that these handicapped girls, when given a chance, will be directed into a useful path of congenial service and helped toward an all round development that will assure them independence and happiness. It seems strange that large sums of money can be raised for foreign missions, but nobody seems inclined to give to the people of our own country.³⁹

Her proposal was delayed when she was struck down by illness, and it was only at the end of 1923 that 'she was set free' and well enough to return to her work.⁴⁰ That November, McKenzie Hatton returned to Sydney with her three children and secured a house at Burlington Road, Homebush, to use as a home for girls. Unfortunately, the AIM had not yet gained

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permission from the Aborigines Protection Board to use it as such a home and, in a sign of the bitter confrontations to come, dismissed McKenzie Hatton's overture for assistance.

Unaccustomed to opposition and unaware of the Board's negativity, McKenzie Hatton remained optimistic of the Board's support and advised the AIM that she 'intended to take the place hoping that permission would be given'.⁴¹ By January 1924, however, Hatton was facing difficulties. She had leased the house in Homebush and spent a substantial sum in furnishing it, but without the Board's approval to operate as a girls' home she was forced to break the lease and find a way of disposing of her interest in the place.⁴²

Hatton soon found another home in the same street, a twelve-roomed house on large grounds. It was obvious that she fully intended to push ahead, with or without consent from the Board. The AIM endorsed the proposed use of the property and contributed £22 to assist with the first month's rent and the purchase of some furniture.⁴³ The first girl, Emily Melrose, was admitted and two fellow missionary women took rooms at the property to 'assist Mrs Hatton in various ways'.⁴⁴ At an official opening ceremony the home was named Rehoboth; the biblical significance of the name and the benevolent purpose of the property was given much significance in *Our Aim*:

And he removed from thence and digged another well; for this they strove not; and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us and we shall be a fruitful land.⁴⁵

It was initially the intention of both McKenzie Hatton and the AIM that the home would not run in opposition with other missionary or government institutions, but would provide a haven for girls the Board deemed 'incorrigible'. Once labelled as such by the Board these girls were destined for institutionalisation in mental asylums or reformatories.

The opening of Rehoboth highlighted a significant early link with the future AAPA. During the ceremony 'Mr Long then called upon Miss Cora Robertson, one of our early Singleton Home Girls, to sing and with pathos and power she exhorted us in song to "Cast thy bread upon the waters"'.⁴⁶ Cora Robertson was Fred Maynard's cousin, and would later marry Sid Ridgeway, the future AAPA secretary.

The opening of Rehoboth was a great success, but only weeks later the AIM was showing the first signs of doubt in the home's activities. AIM council minutes recorded that 'should any alteration be made in the management of the Home at any time the A.I.M would be entitled to the furniture purchased with the money voted from the Home fund for that purpose'.⁴⁷



Rehoboth Aboriginal Girls' Home, Homebush, 1924, was established by Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton. This was also the first home for the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association.

Was this an early indication of disquiet over McKenzie Hatton's contact with Aboriginal leaders and 'agitators'?

If so, she was unaware of any misgivings on the part of the AIM.

McKenzie Hatton supported her work at Rehoboth by taking the matter of Aboriginal issues and needs to the wider public forum. In this respect she was very much a forerunner of feminist activists such as Mary Bennett, Joan Kingsley Strack and Jessica Street, all of whom rose to prominence during the 1930s.

For McKenzie Hatton, developing and fostering awareness of Aboriginal issues through the wider community was a high priority. She was in this sense more aligned with Aboriginal politics of this time than with the AIM. The Grafton *Daily Examiner* of 1926 reported that the Aboriginal leaders sought to educate and pursue the conscience of the wider public, initiating an orchestrated campaign to 'enlist the sympathy and support of the public in urging the Government to repeal the Aborigines Act as it existed on the Statute Book'.⁴⁸ The stance, objectives and argument of these Aboriginal political activists radically contravened the notions of care promoted by both the Church and government at this time. McKenzie Hatton's wider public agenda situated her solidly with this Aboriginal political argument. Aboriginal leaders argued vehemently that they were well able to look after their own affairs and families, and that they were sickened by policies and actions that continued to wrongly portray them

as ‘helpless children’.⁴⁹ With Aboriginal backing and direction, and by coming to know the Aboriginal communities with an intimacy that very few white people had at that time developed, McKenzie Hatton would eventually take the message of Aboriginal disadvantage to the wider populace herself. However, the results of this awakening would cause her final separation from the AIM and everything she herself had taken as gospel.

Despite the success of Rehoboth and the praise that both the home and McKenzie Hatton received in such a short space of time, opposition from within the AIM was soon being mobilised. AIM Director LW Long became unhappy with McKenzie Hatton’s allegiance with the emerging Aboriginal political movement, and this was reinforced when the Board contacted Long to state that it was ‘dissatisfied’ with McKenzie Hatton’s work.⁵⁰

In spite of clear evidence that Rehoboth provided a caring and genuine alternative environment for Aboriginal girls, the Board demanded that one of the girls be returned to its care and be placed back into Newington Asylum! AIM’s relationship with the Board was ambiguous. While the Board’s Chief Protector stated that he was ‘very sympathetic with the work of the Mission’⁵¹, he was not so sympathetic with the AIM’s involvement with Rehoboth.

Much of the AAM, the AIM and the Board’s antipathy towards McKenzie Hatton was due to her close contact with the Aboriginal community in Sydney and beyond, and her willingness to visit the people and listen to their objections. She was informed by Retta Long of ‘letters from Mr Colebrook & Miss Barker complaining that [McKenzie Hatton] had gone to La Perouse. She had promised not to go again but had done so’.⁵² In spite of the tensions between the AIM and the AAM, the Longs chose to admonish McKenzie Hatton and side with Colebrook’s AAM and the Board. These combined forces constituted a united front against association with Aboriginal political activists. For McKenzie Hatton the painful realisation that the Church and mission groups stood opposed to Aboriginal recovery was a stinging slap to the face. The AIM was prepared to sacrifice the genuine needs of Aboriginal people for concessions and favour, bowing down and aligning itself with the Aborigines Protection Board and its policies.

Her response was to go on the offensive, undoubtedly with the backing and support of the Aboriginal political leadership. In a defiant declaration to the AIM, McKenzie Hatton stated that ‘the Homebush Home was now the centre of the “Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association”’.⁵³ The AIM’s minutes reveal the executive’s distaste that the objectives of the

AAPA 'appeared to be purely political and social'.⁵⁴ McKenzie Hatton's defiant stance prompted a disciplinary interview, the result of which was a mutual severance between the home and the AIM:

The ... mission disassociated itself entirely from Mrs Hatton's present activities. Resolved that Mrs Hatton be informed that the objects of the Home as present conducted, being altogether different from those of the Mission and that for which it was instigated. We withdraw all support and sever all connection with the Home.⁵⁵

By severing its ties with McKenzie Hatton and going on to inform the Board, the AIM let loose a pack of hounds baying for blood. The Board quickly instigated an investigation into McKenzie Hatton's background and implemented directives to make life as difficult as possible for her and the Aboriginal political activists with whom she had aligned herself. The Board secretary, AC Pettitt, requested information from Victorian counterparts regarding her activities 'amongst natives in Victoria'.⁵⁶ They called for police surveillance and a report on the activities of the girls' home, a clear attempt at intimidation.⁵⁷ For Aboriginal people during this period, such rules, regulations and restrictions were representative of a strictly enforced police state. But in a clear act of her continuing rebellion, and despite attempted intimidation, McKenzie Hatton contacted the Board seeking approval to visit the Aboriginal reserves it controlled. These requests were not approved.⁵⁸

The AIM placed a thinly disguised rebuke of McKenzie Hatton and her activities in the next issue of *Our Aim*, officially announcing its severance:

Our readers will no doubt remember that early last year an Aboriginal Girls Home was opened and named 'Rehoboth' at Burlington Road, Homebush. Mrs Hatton some months ago felt led to introduce other work into the Home which quickly changed its character, and has finally resolved itself into an Aboriginal Institute, and is the present headquarters of an 'Aboriginal Progressive Association' for both men and women, having for its object the social betterment of the people. The A.I.M. Council, who considering that the Home no longer came under the specific object of the A.I.M., viz., the evangelization of the aboriginal races of Australia, passed a resolution severing our connection.⁵⁹

The period when the Aboriginal political leaders had been somewhat hidden from public view was now over. As a white woman, McKenzie Hatton had been able to pursue their agenda with a degree of secrecy. It could be argued, perhaps, that McKenzie Hatton had to this moment been used as a public front by the imaginative and committed campaigners of

the AAPA. Quite clearly, there were things a white person — especially a white woman — could achieve on the quiet, things that were well outside the possibilities for Aboriginal people to achieve themselves.

The events at Rehoboth were part of a rising Aboriginal political movement, and the Board soon began to feel the heat of the public's gaze for virtually the first time through media scrutiny. In late 1924 and into 1925 the influential and widely read *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sun* both gave concerted coverage to the issues of Aboriginal reserves, separation of 'half-caste' children and the overall future of Aboriginal people. On 29 October 1924 the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a story that drew attention to the fact that Aboriginal girls were being denied any chance of marriage. The article drew the public's attention to the well-publicised and argued theory that Aboriginal people were a doomed and disappearing race. The journalist raised the question: if this was the unavoidable climax of white colonisation, should the actions of the Board itself accelerate this process?

The answer of course must be no. Yet, if the system introduced a few years ago ... is allowed to continue, there cannot, very few years hence, be many Aboriginal children ... This system, which aims at the segregation of the sexes, is making it difficult for many more to be born.⁶⁰

In what was probably a direct Board response to this criticism a commentator in the editorial section replied:

No problem in connection with our Aboriginal race is more difficult than that concerning the girls. It is unfair to leave them on the reserves, where it is almost impossible to keep them out of the reach of white undesirables. The Aborigines Protection Board arranges for a preliminary training in domestic work on the reserves, and then distributes them among suitable white households, where their training as useful members of the community is completed.⁶¹

The writer unknowingly and with chilling precision went on to disclose the real agenda behind such a practice: 'The teaching of anthropology indicates that in a generation or two the full-bloods in this State will have vanished and that somewhat later the half-caste will be merged into the dominant white race'.⁶² But in an article written earlier, one Annie Bowden — an Aboriginal woman from La Perouse — presented a differing viewpoint of the place of Aboriginal women:

The women were always taken care of in my case, and made much of, there was more discipline in the camps than there is in many white homes today... Boys were taught from earliest infancy to respect their

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mothers and their sisters, and no one woman had more than one husband.⁶³

Bowden's article is significant on a number of fronts, as it presents an Aboriginal viewpoint in total opposition to the so-called white authority on Aboriginal issues. She attacked an article written by Daisy Bates in the *Sydney Morning Herald* with venom. It was indeed rare that an Aboriginal voice was given the opportunity of being heard in such mass media outlets. Bowden challenged the viewpoint of Bates over Aboriginal language:

She states that all Aboriginal dialects throughout Australia have terms only for the lowest, such as lying and cheating and thieving, and no terms honesty, making the language in common with the rest as low as she possibly can. It would be laughable if it were not so serious; and we know it is not true. I am an aboriginal and understand and speak eight different languages. I am an educated woman, having been educated in the State schools of Victoria and I think I am in a better position to know than a white woman.⁶⁴

Bowden ridiculed Bates's assertion of Aboriginal cannibalism and claims of witnessing Aboriginal initiation ceremonies, and with perfect clarity articulated the obstacles that stood before Aboriginal people and hopes for political voice:

There are at the present time many aboriginal men in Australia, dark and half-caste, that would gladly do anything to better themselves and if possible get into public positions, if they were not barred by the White Australia policy. What chance has a black man got of trying to raise himself? No matter how he tried to lift himself up he would still be classed as one of the undesirables.⁶⁵

In the face of this media barrage, and the pressures caused by the now oppositional Rehoboth girls' home, the Board was at a loss for a while about what action it should take in response. In early January 1925 the issue was back on the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* when the paper drew the public's attention to the extreme cruelty to parents and relatives through the Board's child-removal policy. In Grafton a well-respected Aboriginal mother and father had their four young children — all under thirteen years of age — taken from them just prior to Christmas. A local councillor, J N Short, was indignant at the Board's action:

He said the parents had come to him about their trouble, and he went with the father to the police officer. It appeared that the officer's instructions [by the Board] were to meet the children at the ferry, and thither they went accompanied by their parents, who did not know that their little ones were to be taken away from them. The scene at the parting was heart rending, but the children were taken, despite protests

and tears, and conveyed to Kempsey. The children had been properly fed and clothed by the parents. It was a nice Christmas box to give to the parents of the children — to wrest their children from them. The parents were in a terrible state about it, and were calling at his place every day asking him when they were to have their little ones back.⁶⁶

The paper exonerated the police of any guilt in the matter, disclosing that the action taken to remove the children was as a result of a directive given by the Aborigines Protection Board. It also went on to credit the mother as one with a fine reputation as a hard-working and honest individual, and it was noted that ‘residents in the vicinity of the Grafton reserve are said to be empathetic on the point that the children were not neglected, and a petition urging the return of the children to the care of their parents is being prepared for presentation to the authorities’.⁶⁷

The Board was on the defensive through the embarrassing exposures in the press. But they were now fully alerted and were preparing to unleash the full extent of their powers upon both McKenzie Hatton and the Aboriginal leadership of the AAPA.

While McKenzie Hatton was proving to be a thorn in the Board’s side in Sydney, John Moloney’s *Voice of the North* newspaper was the focus of dissent in Newcastle and the New South Wales mid-north coast. As editor of the Newcastle newspaper, Moloney maintained a consistent campaign of editorials about Aboriginal people and issues. Having travelled widely in Europe, the Middle East, New Zealand and the Pacific, Moloney developed a broad appreciation of other cultures. In the Newcastle area he fostered contact with Aboriginal people, including those at the reserve at Karuah. The AIM newsletter *Our AIM* reported:

We were favoured with a visit from our old friend Mr Moloney, of Newcastle, who brought with him Mr David Unaipon a full-blood Aboriginal from South Australia. We gathered our people together in the church, which was again full. After some singing and playing on the lawn by the children. We listened with interest to addresses by Mr Moloney and Mr Unaipon.⁶⁸

While we memorialise David Unaipon today through his image on the Australian fifty-dollar note, most Australians remain totally unaware of his achievements as a writer, inventor and public speaker. Unaipon asserted some indirect influence over the AAPA platform, stating in 1922 that ‘every Australian Aboriginal should have his own farm or garden in fee simple, and be permitted to rear his own family in his own way. The argument is incontrovertible’.⁶⁹ Two years later this statement was taken up word for word by the AAPA in its fight for land and children.

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Fight for Liberty and Freedom

During the early 1920s Moloney attended WEA classes conducted in the Hunter Valley by the then little-known AP Elkin on the subject of Aboriginal culture and society.⁷⁰ This study added to Moloney's already fierce nationalism. He was a member of the Australian Natives Association and was the foundation secretary of the Australasian Society of Patriots (ASP), an organisation whose membership was confined to people born in 'Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania or any of the islands in the Pacific Ocean South of the Equator'.⁷¹

In 1917 the ASP proposed a fanciful 'Noah's ark' venture on Bulba Island in Lake Macquarie. The island was to be stocked with native flora and fauna 'as was observed by Captain Cook when he discovered Australia', and the ASP 'aspired to transform the island into 'a miniature Australia', and several Aboriginal families were to be encouraged to settle there.⁷²

Up to 1922 Moloney's understanding of Aboriginal people and issues was somewhat patronising, and not unlike many other humanitarians of the time. Like McKenzie Hatton, it was his meeting and association with Aboriginal leaders such as Fred Maynard, Tom Lacey and Sid Ridgeway that marked a great shift in his view and motives. His comments in the *Voice of the North* vividly presented the crimes of Australia's recent past, and he criticised the role that the construction of history played in the continued dispossession of Aboriginal people:

The treatment of the native people of Australia is a black blot on our national history ... The defamation of the aboriginals is, in a large measure, traceable to the lessons contained in the school books which were imported for use in the Australian schools more than two generations ago. If the books for use in Australian schools had been written in Australia by Australians, at the dawn of our Education System, things might have been vastly different today.⁷³

It was around this time that the tone of the coverage in the *Voice of the North* began a subtle but distinct shift from the romanticised view of saving Aboriginal people to a more politically attuned view. Moloney was quick to recognise and listen to the Aboriginal voice. He gave press coverage to a group of Hunter Valley Kooris who were drawing attention to the fact that the Aboriginal Protection Board had implemented a systematic program of stripping Aboriginal peoples of their land and children.

The year 1924 through to 1925 had witnessed some groundbreaking initiatives and developments in Aboriginal issues: the establishment of Rehoboth and the subsequent defection of Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton to the Aboriginal cause; the support of JJ Moloney and coverage in his newspaper the *Voice of the North*; and the public exposure and embarrassment suffered by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection

Board in major newspapers over its practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families. The seeds that had been sown and developed over years of hardship by Aboriginal people were now ready to flower.

Into this arena of hostility and confrontation, and into the public gaze for the first time, stepped the members of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association. Despite the Board holding all of the aces, the AAPA set about taking advantage of every way and means to embarrass and attack the stupidity of the Board's actions. As a result the AAPA was instantly front-page news in Sydney.

The AAPA's first conference was held in St David's Hall, Surry Hills. Newspaper headlines immediately trumpeted 'On Aborigines Aspirations — First Australians To Help Themselves — Self Determination' and 'Aborigines In Conference — Self Determination Is Their Aim — To Help A People'.⁷⁴ President Fred Maynard began proceedings with the call 'Brothers and sisters, we have much business to transact so let's get right down to it'.⁷⁵ Over two hundred enthusiastic Aboriginal people were in attendance and 'they heartily supported the objectives of the association'.⁷⁶ Maynard wasted no time in outlining the AAPA's directives, and his inaugural address rang with the influences of Marcus Garvey:



St Davids Church and hall in Surry Hills. The was the site of the inaugural AAPA conference in April 1925; the first Australian Aboriginal civil rights convention.

Fight for Liberty and Freedom

We aim at the spiritual, political, industrial and social. We want to work out our own destiny. Our people have not had the courage to stand together in the past, but now we are united, and are determined to work for the preservation for all of those interests which are near and dear to us.⁷⁷

The *Daily Guardian* highlighted the large cross-section of the Aboriginal community present: 'the old and young were there. The well-dressed matronly woman and the shingled girl of 19. The old man of 60 and the young man of athletic build. All are fighting for the preservation of the rights of aborigines for self-determination.'⁷⁸

Maynard declared that 'Aboriginal people were sufficiently advanced in the sciences to control their own affairs'.⁷⁹ Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton was one of the conference convenors and welcomed the Aboriginal delegates, many of whom had journeyed from various parts of the state in order to read papers on the conditions at many of the Aboriginal reserves in New South Wales. She stressed that 'aboriginal interests had suffered in the past from lack of organisation'.⁸⁰ Delegates recorded the grave state of conditions that existed on the reserves. One delegate cried that 'Conditions for Greeks and Italians are far better than those applying to our own people'.⁸¹ Reference was made to the fact that Aboriginal people were suffering due to the encroachment of 'foreigners' onto what had strictly been areas of Aboriginal labour. Aboriginal people were being pushed back and away from work now given over to others for oyster and fishing leases.⁸²

In response to a vote of thanks put forth by the AAPA and delegates for her recent enlistment drive to Kempsey, Grafton, and other locations throughout the state, McKenzie Hatton responded with a clear call to arms:

There was a definite need for an Aborigines 'Wake-Up' Movement. I came over here from another State expecting to preach to heathen people. But I found an eager, keen people who demanded a voice in their own destiny. You have come through the fires of persecution, insult and opposition. You refused to be pushed out of your own country, which is that of your fathers ... I am delighted to see in you a spirit of pride in your own country. This association is for uplift, spiritually and socially. It is progressive in policy. We feel that your best interests have not been considered. The Government has no policy for your industrial development.⁸³

Hatton's speech revealed that 'branches of the association are being formed in the country centres. We are not a rich body but we feel sure that well-meaning citizens will come to our financial assistance'.⁸⁴ It was noted

that the organisation had already obtained a membership in excess of five hundred. The conference went on to discuss matters of cooperation, migration and other actions that were calculated to benefit Aboriginal people.⁸⁵ The conference was a resounding success and the Aboriginal people in attendance went back to their communities fired with resolve. It signified blatant rebellion and a clear challenge to the Board and the authority it exerted over Aboriginal people and their lives.

The imprint of Garveyism was deeply embedded in the platform of the new movement. The logo, motto and much of the political rhetoric of the AAPA were incorporated from the doctrine of Garvey and his group, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The clarion call of Garvey's UNIA was 'One God! One Aim! One Destiny!',⁸⁶ the same as the AAPA. In his poem *Africa for the Africans* Garvey cried:

Europe Cries to Europeans. Ho!
Asiatics claim Asia, so
Australia for Australians
And Africa for Africans

'Australia for Australians' was the battle cry featured on the AAPA logo: surely no coincidence. In his manifesto Garvey wrote 'We are organised for the absolute purpose of bettering our condition, industrially, commercially, socially, religiously and politically'.⁸⁷

In its four years in the public spotlight the AAPA would make continued demands through the media. There were frequent statements by Fred Maynard that the AAPA encouraged Aboriginal self-respect through spiritual, political, industrial and social ideals. The Aboriginal political movement was now charged with enthusiasm for enforcing government change to Aboriginal affairs.