

Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II

Historical engagements and current enterprises

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Edited by Natasha Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd
and Michael Pickering



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10. Indigenous Peoples and Stolen Wages in Victoria, 1869–1957

Andrew Gunstone

Introduction

Throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and their agencies largely controlled Indigenous people's wages, savings and social security benefits. Many Indigenous workers either received no wages or were underpaid for years and decades of employment. The savings and social security benefits of many Indigenous people were paid into trust accounts, which were regularly mismanaged, often fraudulently, and were generally inaccessible to Indigenous people. Commonwealth and State governments excluded Indigenous people from accessing many social security benefits, such as maternity allowances, child endowment and old-age pensions. These and other such acts are referred to today as the 'stolen wages' practices.

In this chapter, I analyse a number of stolen wages practices that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Victoria. These practices were the failure to pay any or adequate wages to Indigenous people, the lack of accountability and poor governance in the administration of Indigenous affairs and the enforcement of harsh employment controls on Indigenous people. I explore these practices in relation to a particular period of Indigenous affairs administration in Victoria—that of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines (BPA) (1869–1957). The BPA era was the longest and most influential period of Indigenous affairs administration in Victorian history. In particular, I analyse the Victorian Government's legislation, regulations and inquiries of this period that relate to Indigenous wages and employment. Although I focus on the BPA period in this chapter, it is important to note that practices of stolen wages occurred prior to 1869, in the early days of non-Indigenous people living in Victoria, and also after 1957, during the administrative periods of the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB: 1957–67) and the Ministry for Aboriginal Affairs (1968–75) (for more analysis on these and the BPA periods, see Broome 1995, 2005; Gunstone and Heckenberg 2009; Kidd 2007).

The Board for the Protection of the Aborigines

The *Aborigines Protection Act 1869* (Vic.) enabled governments to exert substantial control over the lives of Indigenous peoples. It allowed for regulations to be implemented across a range of areas, including employment contracts and certificates for Indigenous people, the wages of Indigenous people and the housing and education of Indigenous children (*Aborigines Protection Act 1869*, pp. 111–12). It created the BPA, which operated from 1869 to 1957 and exerted strong and discriminatory controls over most aspects of the lives of Indigenous people, including employment and wages (*Aborigines Protection Act 1869*, p. 112; Broome 1995:136). For example, in 1909, the BPA informed the Manager of Coranderrk reserve that ‘it is not desirable that they [Indigenous people] be kept in idleness, nor should the Board be required to pay the natives for every hour worked by them’ (BPA 1909–11:15). The 1869 Act also defined Indigenous people as ‘every aboriginal native of Australia and every aboriginal half-caste or child of a half-caste, such half-caste or child habitually associating and living with aboriginals’ (*Aborigines Protection Act 1869*, p. 113).

The *Regulations and Orders made under the Act 1871* (Vic.) granted substantial powers to the BPA. The BPA and employers could negotiate contracts over employing Indigenous people, looking at issues such as the nature and duration of employment, wages and rations (*Regulations and Orders made under the Act 1871*, p. 338). Interestingly, there is no mention in these regulations that the BPA or employers needed to consult with Indigenous workers regarding the contracts. The BPA could order Indigenous wages to be paid indirectly to a third party, such as a ‘local guardian’ (who was an ‘authorised agent of the Board’). The third party and the BPA could determine where the wages should be directed (*Regulations and Orders made under the Act 1871*, p. 338). The BPA had these last two powers until 1931 (Wampan Wages 2006b:2). The BPA could issue work certificates to Indigenous people (*Regulations and Orders made under the Act 1871*, p. 338). Employers and Indigenous workers could be fined or imprisoned without a valid work certificate (*Aborigines Protection Act 1869*, pp. 112–13; Kidd 2007:118). The BPA could sell goods produced by Indigenous people on reserves and ‘out of the net proceeds of the sale pay to the aboriginals who have labored on the reserves such sums as the Board may deem right’ (*Regulations and Orders made under the Act 1871*, p. 338). Finally, the BPA could remove ‘neglected’ or ‘unprotected’ children from their families (*Regulations and Orders made under the Act 1871*, p. 338). This was the first of numerous regulations that enabled governments and their agencies to exert substantial controls over Indigenous children (Haebich 2000:149).

Over the next decade, further legislation was enacted concerning the control of Indigenous children. *The Neglected and Criminal Children’s Amendment Act*

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1874 (Vic.) allowed the following for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children: children deemed 'neglected' could be detained until sixteen years of age; detained children could be 'boarded out' or apprenticed; any wages owed to children could be recovered by any person appointed by the Chief Secretary; and amounts could be deducted from a child's wages for any expenses caused by their 'ill-behaviour or misconduct' (*The Neglected and Criminal Children's Amendment Act 1874*, pp. 2–3). The *Regulations made under the Act 1880* (Vic.) enabled reserve managers to order Indigenous children on reserves to be removed from their families and to 'reside, and take their meals, and sleep' in separate buildings (*Regulations made under the Act 1880*, p. 1912).

The Royal Commission on the Aborigines was conducted in Victoria in 1877. It was to 'inquire into the present condition of the Aborigines of this colony, and to advise as to the best means of caring for and dealing with them in the future' (BPA 1877:vii). The Royal Commission advocated government control over Indigenous people. It argued Indigenous people living on reserves had better lives than those living off reserves, and governments should be able to control all Indigenous people (BPA 1877:vii–xiii). The Royal Commission also supported government control over Indigenous employment. It argued for the continuation of the practice of apprenticing out Indigenous children, and for Indigenous people living on reserves to have any wages they earned paid through the manager of the reserve by their employer (BPA 1877:xii, xiv).

During the 1870s and 1880s, reserves were built all over Victoria through the widespread employment of Indigenous people, undertaking jobs such as clearing, building, fencing and farming on the reserves (Kidd 2007:121). This employment was often a requirement for Indigenous people to receive rations (Broome 2005:141–2; Critchett 1998:93). On many reserves, however, Indigenous people often received little or no pay for this employment (Broome 2005:148). At Framlingham, Indigenous people working between 1869 and 1877, and for periods after 1877, received no wages (Barwick 1981:178–82). At Coranderrk, while Indigenous workers received wages for growing hops from 1874 as a result of their protests, they received just one-third of the non-Indigenous rate, were often paid late, the proceeds from the selling of the hops were 'appropriated [by the BPA] for general expenses', and Indigenous workers employed in other work, such as collecting firewood, received no wages (BPA 1882; Broome 2006:43.7–43.8; Kidd 2007:121). At Lake Condah, following protests, the practice of paying Indigenous workers in rations ceased in 1887 and the workers were instead paid a 'nominal wage' (Kidd 2007:121). At Ramahyuck, Lake Tyers and Ebenezer, Indigenous workers also 'forced [the payment of] wages...although not at the rate of white workers or [generally] what they might receive outside' (Broome 2005:142).

Also during this time, many Indigenous people worked for private employers off the reserves in occupations such as harvesting, shearing and stockwork. In some instances, the wages of Indigenous workers were less than (often about half) the wages of non-Indigenous workers (Broome 2005:148). In other instances, Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers received generally the same wages (Broome 2005:189). This occurred in the 1870s and 1880s at Framlingham, until the mid-1870s at Coranderrk, in the 1870s at a farm in Eastwood and in the late nineteenth century at the Snowy River (Attwood 2003:12; Barwick 1981:179; Broome 1995:137; Campbell and Vanderwal 1999:84). Indigenous people who worked off the reserves also could have some control over their wages (Broome 2005:150); however, the poor financial records of many private employers means that there is considerable uncertainty regarding the actual degree of control Indigenous workers had over their employment and wages with private employers (Kidd 2007:121). There are examples of Indigenous people not having control over private employment. For instance, Indigenous people at Lake Condah in the 1880s were not granted work certificates, which prevented them from being able to work for private employers off the reserve (Critchett 1998:151–2; Kidd 2007:121). Kidd (2007:121–2) argues that

this suggests some stations acted as employment agents and might have negotiated wage rates and perhaps partly controlled access to savings, as in other states...[and also] it is likely that part or all of the wages of adults employed under Board work certificates were controlled by the Board.

In order to minimise expenditure on Indigenous affairs, the BPA argued in 1884 that all 'half-caste' Indigenous people should be exiled from reserves and located within the wider community (BPA 1956–57:5; CAR 1965:3; PROV 2005:85). This assimilationist approach remained government policy for decades. In 1965, the Council for Aboriginal Rights (CAR), an organisation that fought for Indigenous rights, argued that 'assimilation of part-Aborigines has been the official policy of past Victorian governments since 1884' (CAR 1965:3).

The *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* (Vic.) addressed this view of the BPA. It repealed the definition of Indigenous people stated in the *Aborigines Protection Act 1869* (Vic.) and in its place defined Indigenous people as including: '(1.) Every aboriginal native of Victoria ["full-bloods"] [and] (2.) Every half-caste...habitually associating and living with an aboriginal...[and who has] completed the thirty-fourth year of his or her age' (*Aborigines Protection Act 1886*, pp. 283–4).

The redefining of Indigenous people by the *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* had a substantial impact upon Indigenous people. The Act defined most Indigenous people who were under the age of thirty-four as not Indigenous. Haebich (2000:162, 164–5) argued that this 'policy of forced assimilation or

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ethnocide' was a 'significant shift in Aboriginal policy in Victoria' and 'was the first statute to legislate for the differential treatment of "full-blood" and "half-caste"'. The *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* dictated that only 'full-bloods' and 'half-castes' under thirty-four who held a licence granted by the BPA could reside on reserves, while those who were unlicensed had to relocate into the wider community (Broome 1995:139; Haebich 2000:162, 165–7). These licences stopped being issued in 1937 due to 'the clerical work involved' (BPA 1956–57:12). The *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* resulted in 'almost half the estimated 600 residents of the state's stations and missions, representing some forty families and including 160 children', being forcibly removed from reserves (Haebich 2000:166). Further, Barwick (1981:187) stated that 'the eligible residents who "harboured" them—even if they were unemployed or ill—risked the loss of their own rations' (see also Broome 1995:190). Indigenous people forced off reserves 'could apply for rations, clothing and blankets for [up to] seven years to assist their transition into the wider society'; however, they still faced extreme hardship, including unemployment, due to racial discrimination and competition from non-Indigenous workers, the ending of rations in 1893 and the 1890s economic depression, which saw 30 per cent unemployment in the wider community and no government welfare (Broome 1995:139–40; Kidd 2007:118). Also, Indigenous people—often unemployed—'were ordered off as "trespassers"' when they tried to return to the reserves (Barwick 1981:187).

The Neglected Children's Act 1887 (Vic.) included several sections relating to the employment and wages of children. These sections included: enabling authorities to 'sue for and recover any wages or earnings' owed to wards; ensuring all monies controlled by authorities as the 'guardian' be directed to the 'State Wards' Fund'; paying an amount 'not exceeding Five pounds per cent., from the moneys paid to the credit of the State Wards' Fund' into consolidated revenue; enabling expenses incurred by authorities 'for or on account of any person of whose estate he is guardian...[to] be payable out of the moneys received on account of such estate'; acknowledging 'if any ward of the Department for Neglected Children is guilty of any misbehaviour [which is not defined in the Act], of which the Minister shall be the sole judge' then 'the Minister may order the whole or any part of any moneys to which such ward is entitled' be removed to address the 'misbehaviour'; granting the minister the discretion to withhold monies from such wards until they have been in 'good conduct' for a year; and enabling regulations to be made concerning the 'collection and investment...of any earnings of any ward of the Department for Neglected Children' (*The Neglected Children's Act 1887*, pp. 126–8, 138–40). These sections were repeated in subsequent Victorian legislation (*The Neglected Children's Act 1890*, pp. 384–6, 396–8).

The *Aborigines Act 1890* (Vic.) further imposed controls over Indigenous people regarding employment. It contained several sections—in almost identical wording to that in the *Aborigines Protection Act 1869* (Vic.)—that allowed regulations to be made in several areas concerning Indigenous people, including employment contracts and certificates, wages and the housing and employment of children (*Aborigines Act 1890*, p. 12).

The *Regulations relating to Half-Castes 1890* (Vic.) enacted several regulations concerning Indigenous wages and employment. They allowed for Indigenous children over fourteen years of age to be apprenticed out for any trade (*Regulations relating to Half-Castes 1890*, p. 1788). They also required employers to send to the BPA ‘one-half of the wages of every half-caste child licensed to service and of every apprentice’ that would be ‘paid to such child at the end of his or her service or apprenticeship’ (*Regulations relating to Half-Castes 1890*, p. 1788). Wampan Wages (2006a:5) argued, however, that there are no recorded instances of these withheld wages being paid to Indigenous children.

As with the 1871 Regulations, the *Aborigines Act 1890 Regulations, 1890* (Vic.) enabled the BPA to enter into contracts with employers concerning Indigenous workers, pay the wages of Indigenous workers to third parties, determine where the wages of Indigenous workers were directed, issue work certificates to Indigenous people and remove any Indigenous child who was ‘neglected’ or ‘unprotected’ to a reserve or an industrial or reformatory school (*Aborigines Act 1890 Regulations 1890*, pp. 3720–1; Broome 1995:139–41; Haebich 2000:165).

The *Aborigines Act 1890 Alteration of Regulations 1899* (Vic.) broadened the BPA’s long-held power to remove ‘neglected’ and ‘unprotected’ Indigenous children to include all Indigenous children (*Aborigines Act 1890 Alteration of Regulations 1899*, p. 4383). The BPA maintained this capacity to remove any Indigenous child until its dissolution in 1957, and ‘removals’ of Indigenous children ‘to institutions, and then onto white families or employers, continued until 1967’ (Broome 2005:193; CAR 1965:3).

Throughout the early to mid-twentieth century, a lack of accountability and poor governance occurred in two key areas of Indigenous affairs administration in Victoria. These issues are likely to have significantly and detrimentally impacted upon the capacity of the BPA to appropriately manage the wages and trust funds (see below) of Indigenous peoples.

First, the financial administration of the reserves was largely inadequate. In 1904, the Victorian Auditor-General notified the BPA of the lack of auditing of a number of Indigenous reserves and requested that these reserves be audited (BPA 1904–56:7 October 1904). Although the BPA allowed the Audit Office to examine the financial administration of the Lake Condah, Lake Tyers and Lake

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Wellington reserves, the Auditor-General criticised the books and accounts of these reserves and argued that ‘no audit could be made’ of these reserves (BPA 1904–56:21 December 1905). In 1905, a financial report of Lake Condah reserve stated that ‘as no bank books were produced I cannot certify to balances. It appeared to me that the Cash Books had been recently written up’ (BPA 1904–56:19 December 1905). In 1906, the Audit Office audited several reserves and made a number of critical comments to the BPA concerning these audits. Regarding Ramahyuck, the Auditor-General stated that ‘the stock book was, however, wrong’, ‘the Manager’s stock and that of the Station are mixed’, ‘I do not know whether there is any understanding between your Board and the manager as to what [Indigenous] labor he is entitled to’, ‘the duty of the Manager to your Board and his private interests clash[es]’ and ‘there is no possible check on him [the Manager]’ (BPA 1904–56:27 February 1906). Regarding Coranderk, the Auditor-General stated that ‘there was no cash book’, although its process of forwarding all cash to the Secretary ‘is preferable to the system of paying [all cash] into a bank account in the name of the manager as is done at the other Stations I have visited’ (BPA 1904–56:7 March 1906). Regarding Lake Condah, the Auditor-General stated that ‘it was impossible in consequence of the method of bookkeeping to reconcile the books with the cash on hand’, and there was a ‘faulty system of accounts’ (BPA 1904–56:24 May 1906). Many of these issues continued for decades, with several audit reports conducted in the 1930s also stating concerns with the financial administration of reserves, such as cash books, store records and trust accounts (BPA 1904–56:58–9, 65–6).

Second, there was inadequate accountability of the BPA itself to the Victorian Parliament for almost all of the BPA’s existence in the twentieth century. In 1912, the BPA ceased producing annual reports to the Parliament for several decades, with the exception of three reports in the 1920s (Broome 1995:142, 2005:206). After its 1925 report, the BPA failed to produce another report for more than 20 years (Barwick 1981:193). This lack of reports ensured that the BPA’s ‘management at Lake Tyers remained closed to Victorian eyes’ (Broome 1995:142). In addition, for many years the BPA ‘was rarely convened and executive control remained with the Under Secretary and a clerk’ (Barwick 1981:193). Broome and Manning (2006:117) argued that, ‘by the 1940s, Victoria’s Aboriginal Protection Board, then over seventy years old, was moribund. It did not meet or report to parliament; its management of Aboriginal affairs, such as it was, was handled by a few public servants’ (see also BPA 1956–57:13–14; Broome 1995:150–1). In 1947, despite the BPA being reconstituted, with new members, including an Indigenous member, it was ‘convened only once or twice a year’ until its dissolution in 1957, and ‘two officers of the Chief Secretary’s Department continued to control policy’ (Barwick 1981:202). In 1955, even the BPA itself criticised ‘the infrequency of meetings’ as ensuring that the BPA ‘has completely lost touch with administrative matters’ (BPA 1929–63:67).

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The *Aborigines Act 1910* (Vic.) extended the BPA's control to all Indigenous people, including 'half-castes' (*Aborigines Act 1910*, p. 1). This acknowledged the reality that 'the Protection Board was forced to support distressed "half-castes"' (Broome 1995:140). Haebich (2000:167), however, argued that the BPA 'insisted on helping only those families who moved to its station at Lake Tyers'.

The *Aborigines Act Regulations 1916* (Vic.) enforced strict controls over Indigenous peoples living on reserves, including over their employment and wages. The Regulations were similar to previous regulations and included: enforcing employment contracts and certificates; empowering the BPA to sell goods made on reserves and determine the wages to be paid to Indigenous workers who produced those goods; enabling the reserve manager to force Indigenous residents to 'do a reasonable amount of work' and to decide the employment and wages for Indigenous residents; controlling access to the reserve, which was critical in enabling Indigenous people to work off the reserve; and empowering the BPA to hold one-half of the wages paid to Indigenous apprentices until the end of their apprenticeship (*Aborigines Act Regulations 1916*, pp. 3547–8, 3550, 3552; Broome 2005:203; NAA and PROV 2008:3). Further, the Regulations forced all 'quadroon, octoroon, and half-caste lads' off the reserves and stipulated that they would 'not again be allowed upon a station or reserve, except for a brief visit [not exceeding 10 days] to relatives, at the discretion of Managers of stations' (*Aborigines Act Regulations 1916*, p. 3553). These regulations continued until 1957 (CAR 1965:3). Those Indigenous people who were forced off the reserves and required to 'assimilate into townships' experienced many difficulties, including rejection by the broader society, employment discrimination, ineligibility for government support and isolation from families and communities (NAA and PROV 2008:3–4, 13).

In 1917, the BPA implemented a 'Concentration Plan' (NAA and PROV 2008) that focused on closing all Victorian reserves, with the exception of the reserve at Lake Tyers, where the BPA aimed to 'concentrate all [Indigenous people] down to half-caste standard' (Barwick 1981:191; see also BPA and AWB 1918–63:26; NAA and PROV 2008:13). Consequently, only those Indigenous people living at Lake Tyers would be eligible for BPA support (Barwick 1981:191; PROV 2005:86). By 1923, the reserve at Lake Tyers was the only staffed reserve in Victoria, although some, mainly elderly, Indigenous residents remained at the reserves at Coranderrk and Framlingham (Broome 1995:142; Kidd 2007:119).

The Indigenous residents of Lake Tyers reserve experienced poor-quality rations, minimal, if any, wages, controls over all aspects of their lives and appalling levels of ill health and housing (Broome 2005:231; Haebich 2000:167; NAA and PROV 2008:4–5). Those Indigenous residents who left Lake Tyers to work off the reserve who did not first obtain a pass could be barred from receiving rations or fined (Harris 1988:8; see also *Aborigines Act 1915 Additional Regulation No.*

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34 [A] 1927; BPA 1896–1907:125A). These conditions—such as poor rations, low, if any, wages and a fining system—continued for many decades, with some of these conditions not ceasing until 1966 (BPA and AWB 1949–58:45; HREOC 1997:59).

The 1925 *Report on the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station*, commissioned by the BPA, discussed the employment of Indigenous residents at Lake Tyers. The report recommended that as ‘there are few people actually working’ because ‘the Aboriginals can make money too easy elsewhere [such as selling goods, like boomerangs, to tourists]’, ‘tourists be requested to buy nothing direct from the Aboriginals’ and instead could purchase goods from the reserve (BPA 1925:10, 15). The report also recommended that Indigenous ‘inmates of the Station be prevented from working elsewhere when required for this work [agriculture] on the Station’, be ‘paid piecework at the ruling rate for the district (less cost of rations etc)’ and ‘the crop be sold and placed to the credit of the Station’ (BPA 1925:25).

Those Indigenous people who lived in the wider Victorian community also found many aspects of their lives very difficult, including minimal, irregular and underpaid work, discrimination from non-Indigenous people, including employers, generally no welfare support, terrible standards of ill health and housing and negligible support from the BPA (Barwick 1981:194; Broome 1995:143–4; The Senate 2006:26).

The *Children’s Welfare Act 1928* (Vic.) controlled children’s wages in a similar manner to the *Neglected Children’s Act 1915* (Vic.) (*Children’s Welfare Act 1928*, pp. 381–2, 392–3). Further, the 1928 Act enabled regulations to be enacted concerning ‘the collection and investment and deposit of any earnings of any ward of the Children’s Welfare Department’ (*Children’s Welfare Act 1928*, p. 394).

The *Aborigines Act 1928* (Vic.) allowed for a range of regulations to be passed regarding Indigenous affairs, including the employment and wages of Indigenous people (*Aborigines Act 1928*, p. 2). In 1931, under the *Aborigines Act 1928 Regulations 1931* (Vic.), managers continued to be able to control Indigenous employment and wages on reserves. All ‘able-bodied’ Indigenous residents were ‘required to do a reasonable amount of work, as directed by the manager, and... be remunerated at a rate to be arranged by the manager and approved by the Board’, with those Indigenous residents who refused to work threatened with the withholding of their and their families rations and with being removed from the reserve (*Aborigines Act 1928 Regulations 1931*, p. 1558). The Regulations allowed for the creation of trust funds, in the names of Indigenous workers, which contained amounts deducted by the BPA from the wages of these workers, and stated that these trust funds would be expended under the direction of the BPA (*Aborigines Act 1928 Regulations 1931*, p. 1558). The Regulations also empowered

the BPA to sell any goods produced by Indigenous labour on reserves and place all monies received into a trust fund called the Aborigines Board Produce Fund, from which the BPA 'may from time to time from this fund pay to the aborigines who have laboured on reserves such sums as it may determine, having regard to the kind and amount of labour performed by each' (*Aborigines Act 1928 Regulations 1931*, p. 1558; for further information on the Aborigines Board Produce Fund, see BPA 1860–1956:53–5).

Over the next two decades, the Aborigines Board Produce Fund made substantial profits. These profits were £398 3s 4d (1931–35), £2208 19s 5d (1935–40), £2966 7s 1d (1940–45) and £477 13s (1945–50) (BPA 1860–1956:53). The BPA could 'carry forward any surplus from one financial year to the next' (Felton 1960:53). In 1950, the fund lost the income from leasing Lake Condah and Coranderrk reserves when these areas were granted to returned non-Indigenous soldiers (BPA 1860–1956:55). As a result, the fund incurred a loss of £4112 6s 6d between 1950 and 1955 (BPA 1860–1956:53). Despite this, the fund was £3684 5s 10d in credit at the end of 1955 (BPA 1860–1956:53, 1929–63:67; for amounts up to 1957, see BPA 1879–1957). The fund was abolished in 1957, with £3485 11s 11d in credit transferred to a newly established trust fund: the Aborigines Welfare Fund (BPA and AWB 1921–66:127–8).

The impact of World War II enabled a limited increase in employment opportunities for Indigenous people working off the reserves, including 'well paid share-farming' (Barwick 1981:200); however, these opportunities ceased at the end of the war. A 1946 BPA conference argued that 'the necessity of paying award rates' significantly restricted Indigenous employment (BPA conference, cited in Barwick 1981:202). Further, the Indigenous residents of Lake Tyers were usually the only Indigenous people in Victoria who received rations (Barwick 1981:203). This was a consequence of the continuation of the Victorian Government policy that stated that most Indigenous people of mixed descent were 'legally white, had "full civil rights" and could secure adequate aid from the resources available to ordinary citizens'—a policy that lasted until the end of the BPA era (Barwick 1981:202).

The *Child Welfare Act 1954* (Vic.) ensured that governments and their agencies would continue to control the wages of children. The Act empowered the Director of the Children's Welfare Department to compel an employer of a young employee 'under the guardianship of the Director' to pay a portion of the wage to the department and for these monies to be spent on their benefit 'as the Director thinks fit' (*Child Welfare Act 1954*, p. 160). These powers were also contained in the *Child Welfare Act 1958* (Vic.) (pp. 492–3) and the *Social Welfare Act 1960* (Vic.) (p. 211).

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The 1957 *Report upon the Operation of the Aborigines Act 1928* (also known as the *McLean Report*) analysed the administration of Indigenous people in Victoria (BPA 1956–57; Broome 2005:312–16; Manning 2002:159–76). The report has been criticised for failing to adequately consult with Indigenous people (Manning 2002:171, 173–4). The report made a number of findings and recommendations that significantly influenced Indigenous affairs administration in Victoria. It found that racial prejudice from the wider Victorian community adversely impacted upon Indigenous employment, which in turn negatively impacted upon Indigenous living conditions (BPA 1956–57:11, 15; Broome 1995:149; PROV 2005:88). It also found that at Lake Tyers reserve, in addition to rations, ‘the standard working week is of 34 hours, and the “wages” paid range from £1 10s to £3 per fortnight’ (BPA 1956–57:12). In contrast, the report found that Indigenous people who worked off Lake Tyers reserve could earn £5 or £6 per day (BPA 1956–57:13). The report recommended the Government pass legislation that broadened the definition of Aboriginality to include ‘any person having an admixture of Australian aboriginal blood’ (BPA 1956–57:20). It recommended further legislation be passed that would enable regulations to be enacted regarding ‘funds in the possession or control of the Board’ and ‘prescribing conditions of employment, other than payment, of aborigines’ (BPA 1956–57:21). The report recommended that a new administrative structure be created to replace the BPA (BPA 1956–57:16, 19–20; PROV 2005:88). The report also recommended that legislation did not need to be developed concerning the removal of Indigenous children, as the *Child Welfare Act 1954* (Vic.) addressed this issue (BPA 1956–57:19; Haebich 2000:500).

The *Aborigines Act 1957* (Vic.) addressed the majority of the report’s recommendations and created ‘a new era of bureaucratic interventionism’ (Broome 1995:150; Manning 2002:173; see also AWB 1957–59:1–31; BPA 1957:1–109). The Act created the Aborigines Welfare Board, defined an Indigenous person more broadly to include ‘not only full-blooded aboriginal natives of Australia but also any person of aboriginal descent’, defined the function of the Aborigines Welfare Board as being to ‘promote the moral intellectual and physical welfare of aborigines...with a view to their assimilation into the general community’, enabled regulations to be introduced regarding ‘conditions of employment (including housing) of aborigines in any area’, except for those conditions concerning industrial awards or determinations on employment, and dissolved the BPA (*Aborigines Act 1957*, pp. 489, 491, 493). The Act also created another Indigenous trust fund, the Aborigines Welfare Fund, closed the Aborigines Board Produce Fund and transferred all funds from the Aborigines Board Produce Fund to the new fund (*Aborigines Act 1957*, pp. 492, 494; see also Rylah 1956–57:346).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore a range of practices relating to stolen wages in Victoria during the BPA era (1869–1957). The practices discussed in the chapter involved the underpayment or non-payment of wages to Indigenous people, the employment controls imposed upon Indigenous people, the creation of Indigenous trust funds and the lack of accountability and poor governance of Indigenous affairs administration. These practices are analysed through examining government legislation, regulations and inquiries concerning Indigenous wages and employment.

These practices of stolen wages in Victoria that occurred during this period also largely happened throughout the majority of Victoria's history—from the earliest days of non-Indigenous people living in Victoria in the 1830s to the handover of Indigenous affairs administration to the Commonwealth Government in 1975.

The legacy of these stolen wages practices continues to significantly impact upon Indigenous people today, both in Victoria and throughout Australia. The abysmal historical and contemporary socioeconomic disadvantage suffered by Indigenous people in numerous areas—including health, income, housing and education—has been substantially influenced by stolen wages practices. Over the past decade, Indigenous people have been campaigning for the Commonwealth and State governments to genuinely address the impact of the stolen wages practices and provide compensation for the wages, savings and social security benefits that were never paid to so many Indigenous peoples. The appalling historical governance of Indigenous affairs agencies, however, seriously limits the capacity of activists and researchers to accurately determine the levels of compensation owed to Indigenous peoples. Further, State governments have so far generally been intransigent in genuinely providing reparative justice for those numerous Indigenous peoples affected by the stolen wages practices.

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