

# Aurukun blacks hold fast

**BRISBANE: Aurukun Aborigines are holding fast to their decision not to allow any mining on their land.**

The ABC's Queensland news last Wednesday quoted Mr F. Purcell, the Aborigines solicitor, as saying that no new "decisions had been made following almost two days of negotiations with the consortium, Aurukun Associates."

Mr Purcell also said that the Companies' attitude showed that its representatives had come to the Aurukun Mission "ill-prepared" for the negotiating talks. He said the 800 Aborigines wanted to know exactly how much they would benefit from this multi-million dollar bauxite mining project at Aurukun.

The Aborigines have already experienced the hollowness of promises by both the state and the companies, and they have seen the devastation to the environments of Weipa and Yirrkala (Gove) where an alumina refinery was poisoning all the fish and poisoning those who ate the fish.

They have experienced the crookedness of government and companies which employed their people to clear the land for five years past, paying them the miserable wage of \$35 for a seven-day working week.

Despite Minister Wharton and Premier Bjelke Petersen's claims that all the senior people at Aurukun had agreed to the mining, the community has twice sent

had agreed to the mining, the community has twice sent telegrams to the government denying this.

"We the people of Aurukun say no mining at Aurukun. We the people say no" read one telegram signed, "the people of Aurukun."

Another telegram to Wharton read, "Please stop mining companies from starting any

mining. We ask you to remember the Council and Community meeting on Monday, December 1. The decision was for no mining at all. We ask you to meet us at Aurukun with our solicitor to talk to us about the details of the Bill your government has now before parliament. Please reply today. We don't want any trouble to happen at Aurukun. It is urgent. Chairman."

Pressure by the public, the Presbyterian Church, and Senator Bonner resulted in a visit to Aurukun by the state Ombudsman who also decided further consultation should take place. But no one, except the Aurukun people will back the demand for no mining at all. Senator Bonner, Mr. Purcell and the Church all demand only "further negotiations".

It seems obvious the Aborigines are being pressured heavily to accept a few "concessions" in place of a ban on all mining.

The Aurukun Associates Agreement Act 1975 (the Aborigines are also against the theft of their name) is made between the state and the companies, with approval of the Director of Queensland's Aboriginal Affairs, **not** with the Aboriginal Council of Aurukun.

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This Act is not only prejudicial to the Aborigines, but to other (white) land owners in surrounding areas. Its provisions practically ensure the despoliation of both the land, the food-rich swamps and the rivers and streams.

"Waste water and effluent" are allowed to be discharged into the sea, rivers and streams, and the Act **has precedence, in some cases of conflict, over the Water Act.**

The Aborigines have no rights to decide on "the exclusive use" by the companies of **any** area; the introduction of alcoholic liquor; the

ingress, egress and regress of people on to their reserve, the sites or plans for town and harbour and the limits of these; on wells, bores, reservoirs, weirs, dams etc. and "areas to be inundated" and so on.

Should they wish to complain about any matter to "the Tribunal" (a Supreme Court Judge and a barrister of seven years standing, both appointed by the Governor-in-Council), they have to pay their own costs.

The companies will "employ employable Aborigines" and pay "award wages" or if no award, "the minimum wage", and after the third year of operation, pay 3 per cent of net profits (if any) to the Director on behalf of Aborigines.

The Aurukun people have only Bjelke Petersen's verbal assurance (*Courier-Mail*, May 12, 1976) that "the Government had always intended that the Aurukun people should get the bulk of the Aborigines' share of the venture."

However, when money is paid to the Director it goes into the Aboriginal Welfare Fund which is used to finance the mainly white-occupied Department of Aboriginal and Island 'Advancement'. □





