
Stopping off at Dubbo on the track west...

The first thing I noticed as I came into her Dubbo home was a well-thumbed copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lying on the table. I smiled to myself as I wondered how many country homes would have such a thing. Or city homes, for that matter.

Then Pearl Gibbs, one-time member of the Aborigines Welfare Board, tackled me. "Come in. Sit down. How long have you got? Five minutes? Ten minutes? Five or ten minutes in which to solve the whole Aboriginal problem?" I started to protest that no, I wasn't that ambitious but that all I was trying to do was find out who had written me the letter signed "Half-Caste, Dubbo", which had appeared in the August *NEW DAWN*. To say good-day, like.

One of the locals had suggested that Mrs Pearl Gibbs, who runs the Hostel for Aborigines in Bembrose Lane, would be the person most likely to know who had written the letter. "Excuse me, excuse me," said Pearl, "but you stop talking. You just shut up and listen." Then she started to tell me some stories which fully justified her claim to the right to tell anyone to shut up—a justification, incidentally, which her age (70) background and experience all back up.

For one thing, Pearl Gibbs is right up to date with the latest developments on the Aboriginal scene, both here and in other states. Add to this a razor-sharp mind and a flawless memory and you can see why this woman has the right to take the floor. So, we listened.

Pearl Gibbs has seen it all. The speeches, the visits by important people, the projects, the plans. "Camp with me for three weeks," says Pearl. "I've got Aboriginal history in these trunks." Indeed she has. She can show you three huge trunks chock full of her people's history. Out came a scrap-book of newspaper cuttings and I leafed through them. The familiar headlines hit me in the eye:

- Aborigines get poor deal, says Alderman.
- Native Plight.
- Problems of Half-Castes.
- Natives were scared.
- Intimidation.
- Reforms for Aborigines.
- New deal for Natives.

With a shock, I realized, as I turned the pages, that the dates on these cuttings were 1938, 1939. I wasn't even born then. In the days when



Mrs Pearl Gibbs.

Aborigines kept quiet on reserves and rarely spoke up, Pearl Gibbs was already speaking at public functions about the conditions under which her people were living. As she talked, she showed, indirectly, how the frustration built up in her over the years. Yes, there was progress, she admits, but how slow, how slow.

I picked up the book of Human Rights and read out the sonorous, beautiful words, slowly:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Pearl, a quarter-caste, laughs. "You wonder what I've got that for, eh? Don't you see? I *have* to be interested in citizenship rights. I'm not quite white enough to be able to ignore them."

Pearl Gibbs is a gold-mine. The more you dig, the more there is. As she talks, the struggle and often brutal reality of her early life is uncovered. And now she says "Don't do too much for the Aborigine. Just leave him alone."

Finally our five or ten minutes were up and we had to begin the next leg of our journey west. Just before we left, unexpectedly, honestly, Pearl summed herself up. "I might get full of brandy sometimes, but I'm not full of bull." I can grant her that. She remembers a lot and knows more. Indeed, none of it is bull. As a matter of fact a remarkable lot of it made me think back to that reason and human dignity the Declaration talks about.