

Anti-apartheid round-up

Peter Hain on Aborigines

Mr. Peter Hain, chairman of the British Young Liberals and anti-apartheid activist who recently visited Australia to take part in the anti-tour campaign, has called for the formation in Britain of a "broad-based Aborigine Solidarity Action Committee to publicise the issue (of racism against Australian Aborigines) and to give practical support to Aboriginal groups in Australia."

In a report dated July 25, Mr. Hain told the Young Liberals that the treatment of the Australian Aborigines "must rank as an international scandal," and although when he went to Australia he was "vaguely aware that the Aborigines were 'badly treated' . . . the full enormity of their plight only hit me forcibly when I was in the country."

Peter Hain gave details of discrimination against Aborigines — their poor housing, educational and social status — and rejected any claim that he was interfering in Australian internal affairs. He said: "Racism is an all-pervasive international virus," and opposition to it must transcend national boundaries.

Mr. Hain also partly explained the situation of the Aborigines by his general impressions of Australia:

"I was immediately struck by the conservative apathy underlying Australia — producing an atmosphere which is claustrophobic in its strangling of any moral conscience or radicalism. The political system is very parochial and geared heavily towards materialism and an almost 19th-century form of capitalism (with no welfare state, etc.).

"The society, too, has strong racist

undertones — the white immigration policy being the most obvious example of this — with many American and other old-style/master-servant racialists now drifting into the country. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the case of the Aborigines has gone by default."

Mr. Hain sees some hope, however, particularly following the "enormous success of the anti-apartheid campaign"

Mr. Hain has also called for a campaign to the United Nations to immediately send "a special investigation team to Australia" to prepare a "detailed report on the position of the Aborigines with proposals for action" and for a crash program by the Australian government to "alleviate the misery of the Aborigines and to provide a framework for the Aboriginal people to determine their own destiny, free of cultural, economic or political oppression."

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