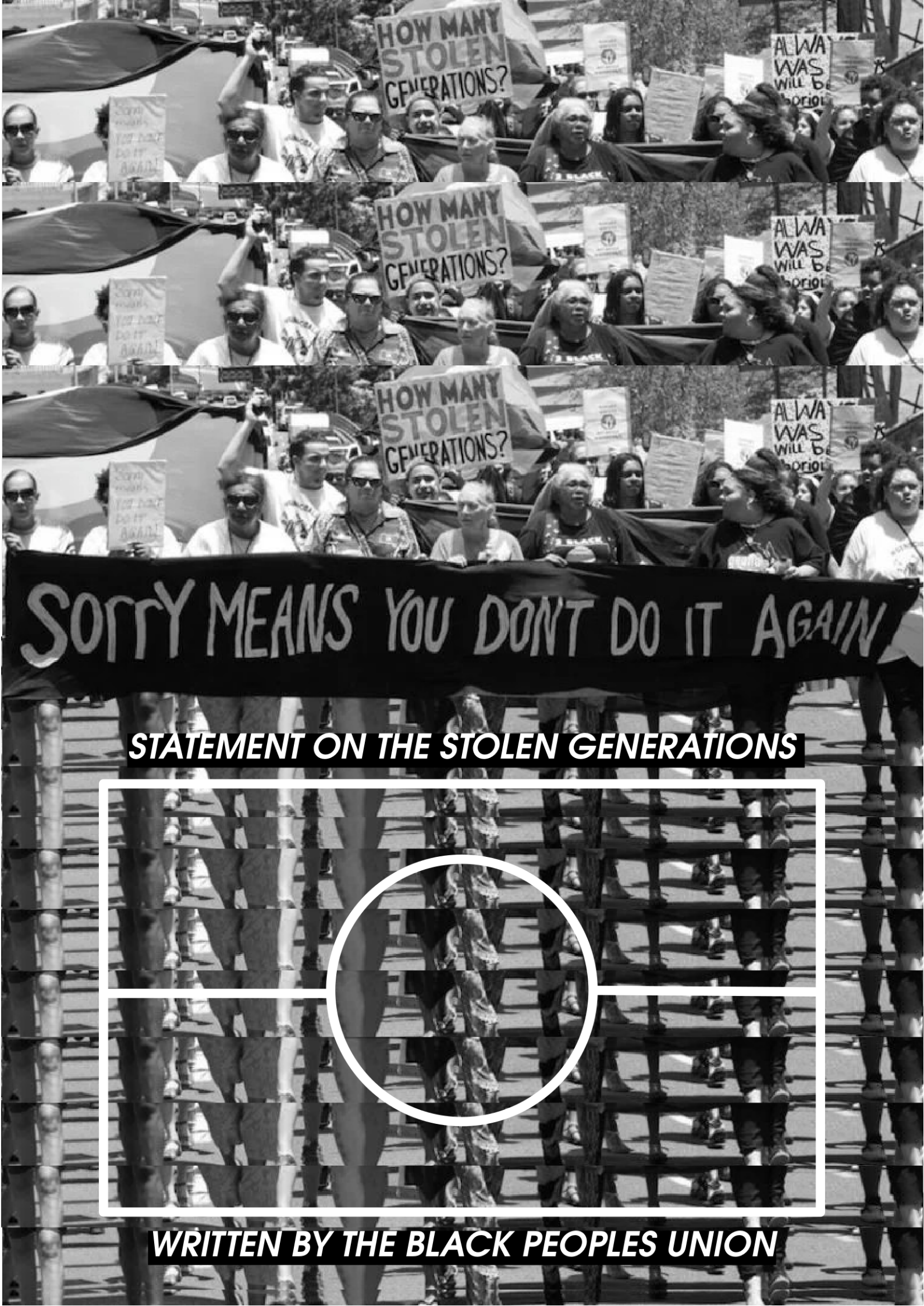




HOW MANY
STOLEN
GENERATIONS?

ALWAYS
WILL BE
SOCIAL

HOW MANY
STOLEN
GENERATIONS?

ALWAYS
WILL BE
SOCIAL

HOW MANY
STOLEN
GENERATIONS?

ALWAYS
WILL BE
SOCIAL

SORRY MEANS YOU DON'T DO IT AGAIN

STATEMENT ON THE STOLEN GENERATIONS

WRITTEN BY THE BLACK PEOPLES UNION

The Stolen Generations refers to Indigenous children that were removed by force or under duress by government agencies and church missions under parliamentary acts that were enforced between 1910 and the 1970's, acts that were designed to target Indigenous children, especially those of "mixed descent".

These acts were committed for a number of reasons; it occurred as an attempt to both assimilate and 'breed out' the Indigenous population, but it also served two fundamental roles of capitalist exploitation; slavery and oppression.

Indigenous children, some as young as three years old, were very often exploited and forced to work in various tedious jobs. Since before the onset of the Stolen Generations, Indigenous people across Australia would often be forced into slavery.

The Stolen Generations further aided this exploitation by allowing the wealthy of the area an easier means of accessing this labour, while removing the responsibilities such as housing and feeding the labourers. During the Stolen Generations policies young men and boys would be collected from the various local government and church institutions of a morning and sent out to local farms to labour in the fields for the day, performing repetitive and tedious back breaking work. The young women and girls would be sent off to the houses on wealthy estates around the area, and to various other local institutions to complete the domestic roles such as the cleaning, cooking, and ironically the baby-sitting tasks needed to be undertaken. Neither group would receive any payment or reward for their days labour, or if they did it would be no more than the bare minimum of rations needed to sustain them for the day.

The Stolen Generations policy also aided the oppression of the Indigenous population of Australia. It did this by attacking the Aboriginal society at its most basic level, the family. It did this by forcing the further displacement of Indigenous people from their lands, communities, and families. It attacked the cultural education cycles of handing down knowledge from generation to generation. And it

created a population to oppressed by individual trauma and despair to resist further exploitation.

During this time, it is estimated that between one in ten and one in three Aboriginal children were removed forcibly from their families, and that no family line hasn't been directly impacted by these atrocious acts. The removals themselves were often traumatic, with children being torn from the arms of their loved ones by police and government workers who had just stormed their house, or being kidnapped down the road from their houses as they made their way to school or the shops. These children where then often loaded into trucks and trains with dozens of other lonely crying children, to be transported hundreds of kilometres away from their families, their homes and everything they had ever known. They were fed lies about how their parents had died, or how they had been neglected by their parents who didn't want them, and parents were forbidden from having any contact with their children. These children, some of them only newborns when they were first removed, were then left to the mercy of Catholic missionaries and wealthy landowners, where they were not just exploited as unpaid house servants or field workers, but were often subjected to all manner of physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of those who had be designated to "protect" them.

On the 26th of May 1997 the Bringing Them Home Report was tabled in Federal Parliament. This report was the result of a national inquiry that investigated the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. One of the recommendations in the Bringing Them Home Report was that a National Sorry Day be celebrated each year, with May 26th of the following year observed as the first 'National Sorry Day'. The Government further tried to solidify this apologetic response with Kevin Rudd issuing a formal national apology to the Stolen Generations, delivered in an iconic speech at Parliament House on the 13th of February 2008. Unfortunately though, this token gesture of acknowledgment is about all the Government has done in regards to righting the wrongs of the past.

In fact, the Governments response to this tragedy has been so pitiful and dishonest that not only have they completely failed to address the issues of the past in any meaningful way, they have actually continued to perpetuate the disproportionate removal of Indigenous children from their families and have accelerated the rates that they are removed at.

Today Indigenous children are still far more likely to be removed from their families compared to other Australian populations. The rates at which Indigenous children are removed from their families has actually increased beyond those during the time of the official stolen generation policies and continues to rise dramatically. Since the apology in 2008 the rates of Indigenous child removal have risen by over 79.5% nationwide, with some states such as Victoria recording a 217% increase in the removal of Indigenous children between 2008 and 2017. The rates of Indigenous child removal in Victoria translate to a figure of 1 in every 10 Aboriginal children in the state being in out of home care.

This trend isn't one that's being noticed across the broader mainstream rates of child removal however, with the rates of non-Indigenous child removals actually falling during this same time period. As an example, despite Indigenous people making up less than 3% of the total Australian population, Indigenous children have gone from being one in every five children (or 20%) in out-of-home care in 1997, to one in every three children (over 33%) just over 20 years later.

Now, the rate is as high as 50% on any given day. On any given day, despite being just 3% of the population, our children make up 50% of all the kids in out of home care.

This is a direct result of a number of factors including arbitrary removal laws that unjustly target Indigenous children, intergenerational trauma, poverty that disproportionately targets Indigenous Australians, and a complete lack of empathy and action by the various federal and state government agencies. Add on to this that some Australian states still have forced and non-consensual adoption

laws in place, that continue to allow government agencies to strip Indigenous children from their families, their homelands, and their culture in an act that perpetuates the destructive and archaic assimilation policies of yesteryear. Many agencies don't have a requirement for Indigenous children to remain with extended family members, on their own country, or even with members of their own race, and those that do use this merely as a guideline or suggestion instead of a practice that should be immutable. As an example of this, during the initial outbreak of Covid-19 that we saw two Indigenous children removed from Australia completely to go and live in the UK with their new adoptive parents, an act that was strongly opposed by both the biological parents of the children as well as the broader Indigenous community to no avail.

As a result of these removal practices Indigenous children are being needlessly subjected to conditions that have an extremely detrimental impact upon their lives in the long run. Indigenous children that are raised in non-Indigenous families often report suffering mental health issues later in life that stem from personal identity issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse, depression, and PTSD all of which contributes to further intergenerational trauma.

It also causes an intergenerational pattern of child removal that continues to spiral out of control. This pattern is a direct result of historical removal. Historically, Indigenous children were removed from their families at a young age and subjected to abuse. This removal and abuse severed the intergenerational parenting and nurturing skills that humans learn at a young age from their parents and own lived experience. As a result, you had children who grew up with no positive role models on which to draw their own parenting skills or base their parenting around. This in turn lead to another generation of Indigenous children who were now being removed not just because of their Aboriginality, but also because of the neglect and poor parenting that resulted from their own parents being deprived, thus creating a perpetual and self-fulfilling justification of Indigenous child removal.

The reason given for the removal of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children vary greatly. The vast majority of non-Indigenous children are cited as being removed for emotional abuse (63.1%) with rates of neglect (11.5%), physical abuse (14.8%) and sexual abuse (10.3%) being relatively similar and combining to make just over one third of all cases. In comparison, Indigenous child removal is cited at being roughly three times higher for neglect (30.2%) compared to non-Indigenous children, with removals as a result of emotional abuse (49.9%), physical abuse (14.2%) and sexual abuse (5.4%) each being lower than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

What these statistics tell us is that on average Indigenous parents who have had their children removed aren't as likely to be inherently bad parents who go out of their way to abuse their children, but rather they are ill-equipped parents who aren't in a position to cater to the needs of their children. This lack of an ability to fulfill the needs of the child has its fundamental basis in the historical acts of colonisation and Indigenous child removal which have been amplified by the modern-day entrapments of capitalism, with structural drivers such as poverty, over-crowded housing and homelessness, geographical isolation, and a lack of culturally appropriate services all being significant contributors to cases of reported child neglect and emotional abuse.

In order to put an end to the on-going Stolen Generation a massive overhaul of the system is required immediately. This fundamental change must include:

- State and federal governments and their respective agencies need to adopt and implement all of the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home Report as a priority.
- Any protocols, procedures or legislation that allows for the non-consensual adoption of children need to be repealed. Agencies will need to apply this repeal retrospectively to children who are currently in a non-consensual adoption and revert the legal status of these specific adoptive parents to foster carer.

- A mandate be given to all agencies involved with the removal or custody of Indigenous children that the custodial placement of Indigenous children should be first and foremost with extended family members. Failing that, custody of the children should then go to members of the local Aboriginal community, then other aboriginal families, then suitable locally living non-Indigenous families progressing in that order only once preferred options have been exhausted.

- That the government fund the implementation of culturally sensitive parental education programs, which should be made freely and readily available to all Indigenous people who are parents or expecting to become parents in order to address the severed link of parenting skills.

- That in situations where a child is likely to be removed, emphasis should first and foremost be placed on addressing the underlying issues for the family that is causing or contributing to the need for removal. This should be done by providing suitable culturally sensitive services such as counselling, parental education, housing, food and health supplies, and other services or materials necessary to ensure that the child can safely remain with their family. The removal of the child should be done as an absolute last resort only when needed to protect the child from immediate or long-term harm.

- As a part of professional development, all workers who have contact with, or make decisions regarding Indigenous children will need to undergo regular cultural education courses to ensure that they can deliver their service in a manner that is sensitive to Indigenous culture and the historical and current issues Indigenous people face

- That agencies involved with the removal of Indigenous children prioritise the hiring of suitably qualified Indigenous workers by designating a percentage of positions to be filled by Indigenous workers. In the instance that suitably qualified Indigenous applicants aren't identified for a position, efforts should be made to train Indigenous people for the position by means of providing traineeships and/or funding the education and qualifications of suitable Indigenous applicants. Further to this point, people undertaking community

liaison positions such as Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers should be nominated and vetted by the local Indigenous community, with the power to hire and dismiss people in these positions remaining with the local Aboriginal community to ensure a higher level of accountability, to elect representatives that are favoured by the community, and to support Indigenous management of Indigenous specific affairs.

Implementing these measures and continuing to adapt and evolve them to the material situations of the day will only go so far however in ending the on-going Stolen Generations, as this isn't a single stand-alone issue to be easily addressed.

Although this issue, and many others Indigenous people face, may be deeply seeded in this nation's history of colonisation, they can be likened to being merely a symptom of a disease, the same disease that initially spurred colonisation. In-fact, it is the same disease that perpetuates the same callous attitudes in our government that allows homelessness rates to continue to rise in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. It is the same disease that restricts the access of satisfactory health care for all of those who can't afford to pay for it, or the liberating education needed to overcome and break free of societies issues finally allowing them to be resolved. It is the disease that sees us destroying our planet day in and day out all in the name of profit. It is the disease that is Capitalism, and it is only by treating this disease at its core as a united working class irrespective of race that we can begin to cure ourselves of the symptoms it creates for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Statement by **Black Peoples Union**

**Made into a zine by a comrade, in solidarity with the Black Peoples Union, and the struggle for land back for each of the sovereign Aboriginal nations of this continent.
From unceded Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung country.**