
The Embarrassing Commitment

Although the "Freedom from Hunger Campaign's" first steps towards involvement in relieving the plight of Aborigines in certain parts of Australia were controversial and not exactly smooth, the Australian branch of the worldwide organization is now firmly and heavily committed to projects at Alice Springs and Bourke.

The Campaign is embarrassed that it is necessary for it to operate in a country with the wealth and affluence of Australia but at the same time it is convinced that the decision was warranted and the programs worthwhile.

While the FFHC's principal concern remains with the underdeveloped countries of the world it now believes that "what seemed to some people a contradictory element in the organization's position—helping abroad but doing nothing at home—has been corrected."

The "correction" took place when it was revealed that in 1971 22 per cent of Aboriginal children in central Australia died before they reached the age of 12 months.

The campaign has made a grant of \$25,000 to the Institute for Aboriginal Development at Alice Springs, an organisation established originally by the United Church in North Australia, but now a public body run by local Aboriginal and white Australians. With the assistance of the Campaign the institute has set up a nutrition education clinic to train Aboriginal mothers in mothercraft and the basic elements of nutrition.

The approach is essentially practical. The mothers, usually accompanied by their children, cook their own meals on open fires while resident health workers try to educate the people in the methods of preparing western-style food and in various principles of health care.

The cooking utensils are those familiar to the Aboriginal mothers and the ones easily obtainable in the local environment e.g. powdered-milk cans used as billies. The 3-week course is conducted at a C-shaped building symbolizing a wiltja or humpy. Instruction is carried out in the earthen courtyard. What is learned can be immediately related to their accustomed mode of existence.

Women who undergo the course are usually those elected by the various Aboriginal communities and settlements. After completing the programme they then become teachers to their own communities.

It is not only women who have attended the courses conducted by the Institute. Rather than any belief in the equality of the sexes, it is the immediate health hazards faced by their children that has interested many men in the course. As a result what used to be known as the Mother Training and Child Care Centre has been renamed the Parents Training and Child Care Centre.



A typical Aboriginal child of the Alice Springs area. Many such children seem to suffer from chronic colds in the nose due doubtless to some dietary deficiency, possibly linked to a shortage of Vitamin C. Nevertheless he is lucky in that he has lived through the first 12 months