

Spigelman: Everyone noticed that in Bowraville there seemed to be much more racial discrimination than social and class discrimination. This affected the general outlook of the Aborigines. When I asked people in other town which pubs or cafes discriminated, they would say, 'We're not allowed in this place' or 'We're not allowed in that place'. In Bowraville, the Aborigine I asked said, 'We are allowed in such and such a place.' It was a complete reversal of emphasis.

Butterworth: One thing that shocked me at Bowraville was the school. When we talked about the schools in other places, they told us that when they finally decided to integrate the school, it went ahead fairly easily. The people were apathetic, and there was a bit of opposition, but integration was accepted as a fact. But in Bowraville, they were trying to integrate the school for eighteen months and failed; every time they tried it there was such an uproar among the white parents that they couldn't go ahead.

Is this perhaps because Bowraville is poorer than any of the other communities?

Healy: This might be an influence. In Bowraville we found economic conditions so bad that all the progressive Aborigines who might have led the people had gone off to get jobs somewhere else. Unemployment was worse there than anywhere else.

Spigelman: More competition for jobs, especially at the lower level.

Dawson: But you found the same discrimination in Walgett, where there were not enough jobs to go round as in Moree, where there were too many jobs.

Butterworth: A lot of people seemed scared that the Aboriginal population would eventually outnumber the white population.

Spigelman: This came up, I think, in Walgett - it was a pressing problem because Aborigines there are about to outnumber the white population. And in Boggabilla it was the same.

Butterworth: People in Moree were scared that this would happen, though Moree has a much higher percentage of white people.

Do you think/ this is a challenge to white supremacy in this area? In the US, one of the problems was to get the poor white to accept the Negro, because he was the first to lose economically - he was the person under challenge for his particular job. Some of the strongest racials are the people facing the first economic loss. Did you find this up north?

Spigelman: I didn't particularly notice this myself, though I know that anthropologists have done work on it; a study in Walgett ~~xxxx~~ a couple of years ago did find this. We didn't have time to mix ...

Dawson: If there was any mixing, it was with the lower strata of society. If there were any bitchy women in a crowd, generally they looked quite affluent.

Healy: The Aboriginal problem is so tied up with the economic

problem in these country towns, where the only jobs are ~~xx~~ unskilled. The Aborigine isn't educated to a level where he can take skilled jobs anyway, and there is constant competition for the unskilled ones.

Spigelman: The extreme lower classes of the white population have got nobody to feel superior to except the Aborigines; they get a tendency to superiority, put on social airs...

What signs of overt discrimination did you see?

Healy: Often ~~xxxx~~ ^{legal} ones -- like councils barring Aborigines from swimming pools.

Spigelman: Though even in Moree they sometimes waive the council resolution and allow them in. But one instance does point to a colour barrier. There's a woman with four daughters, two lighter-skinned than the others; the manager allows the two lighter-skinned in, and keeps the other two out. It's purely on the manager's discretion.

Healy: Many people in the country towns didn't know that there were statutes on the books banning Aborigines. ^{or if they did know, wouldn't admit it} I pointed out to the manager of the pool at Moree that there was a council statute specifically barring Aborigines. He said, 'No, there's not'. He claimed that ^{we were confusing a Council Statute with} ~~it was just mentioned in~~ a letter from the Headmaster, ^{of the High School} who ~~had~~ ^{was} applied for permission ~~to have the few~~ ^{to send the 100 for school sports & games} Aboriginal children ~~in~~. I said, 'This ~~surely points to the~~ ^{fact that there must be a statute} ~~fact~~ that there must be a statute. ^{reducing entry of Abi} But he wouldn't have it. ^{be sought from the people}

Butterworth: One thing we did was to bring out the point that though this statute was not enforced strictly and a lot of Aborigines get into the pool, it can be put into force by someone who likes to press it.

After the 'Four Corners' interview that Charles flew down to do, I heard women commenting on the frock-shop that wouldn't let Aborigines try on dresses. They said, 'We're not interested in going to an RSL club, or going to a pub; but when we go to a frock shop we have to be able to try on a dress'; and 'If you expect people to be well-dressed, you've got to let them try on a frock'. They saw this as a significant form of discrimination. Did you find other examples of this?

Perkins: We only investigated the one frock shop. The criterion here was that some Aboriginal women carried diseases, which might be caught by a white person. The inference was that the proprietor would lose a lot of customers if she let Aboriginal women try on the dresses.

Dawson: These were the rationalisations. The aim of our social survey was to find out whether they had any basis - what was the incidence of various diseases? were they infectious? can white people justifiably discriminate on these grounds?

Spigelman: Why not let Aboriginal girls who are obviously clean try on dresses? Skin colour is the easiest criterion to use, so nobody is prepared to go to the trouble of finding out whether they're clean or dirty. This is one of the injustices you find all round.

Healy: The overt instances of racialism, mainly legal ones and coming from the top businessmen of the town, are the easiest to see. The people of the town who condone or uphold this, or do nothing about it, are also racialist - though less so.

Dawson: We were fighting apathy. Charles has called it

'criminal apathy', and I'm inclined to agree.

One of the things we hoped would come out of the tour was that as you weren't an official, or a welfare group, or the press, the Aborigines would be able to express to you their hopes and aims. What did they want for the future?

Perkins: One of the things the survey will show is that only a few of them - the older ones - want to live on reserves. Most want to live in the community, to participate in everything that goes on.

Butterworth: Higher education - the parents were adamant about that. But talking to Aboriginal pupils, when you asked them, 'Do you want to go on to higher education?' they would say, 'Why?'. They could see no point in it.

Perkins: The stumbling-block is that in many places, no matter how good they are, even if they do get a good education, they can't get jobs. In Walgett, nobody will employ them. Half the town is composed of Aboriginal people, yet not one of them is in a white collar position.

Did many feel, 'If we could get to the city we'd be OK?'

Perkins The younger people want to come to the city to make a go of it because they realise their opportunities are limited up there; but the older people often feel, 'Perhaps we might be able to make a go of it here eventually'.

Healy: Older people assume that the children have to come to the city. I'd ask the mothers how many children they had, and they'd mention those who were 'off in Sydney getting jobs'. I'd say, 'Couldn't they get anything up

here?' 'No, nothing for them up here, they have to go to Sydney'. They see the city as ...

Perkins: A ray of hope, more or less.

Spigelman: Of course this is an overall problem for country town kids. It's just accentuated in the case of the Aborigines.

Perkins: But there's a difference. Only a minority of white people feel they have to come to the city, but a majority of young Aborigines do.

Healy: It's quite a break for fifteen-year-olds to up and leave their whole family in the country and come to Sydney.

Where do you see the real need for government action?

Dawson: First, a sort of 'anti-poverty' campaign. Treat them as a socially-depressed class and try to bring their social and economic standards up to the white community's - by money, planning, surveys such as the one we've done which suggest how to go about it. Then I hope the white community will accept the Aborigines. If not, we'll have to force it.

Spigelman: Often there's a vicious circle. The Aborigines are a depressed group, and the ~~xxxxx~~ rationalisation is that 'They don't want anything better', 'They'll work only for a time and then go and drink it', 'They'll pull down their houses', and so on. Then discrimination makes the Aborigine feel that he can't better himself anyway, so why try? I think we should try to break the vicious circle by having some sort of civil rights clause in all relevant acts, like the Local Government Act.

Perkins: You must change the environment. Only the government

has the initiative, the power, the resources. They should spend fifteen times the amount they're spending now on housing and so on; there should be a crash programme of education, and once Aborigines have got the education there should be opportunities for employment. A civil rights clause should be in the Commonwealth Constitution, putting the Aboriginal question on a Commonwealth basis, under something like a Bureau for Aboriginal Affairs. Get it away from the States - they've proved their incompetence over the years.

Spigelman: The Commonwealth government has the money and the States haven't; and there's the sheer injustice of the differentiation from State to State. An Aborigine in NSW is treated to some extent as a human being; in Queensland he just isn't - he's a complete racial underdog.

Butterworth: There's another vicious circle- education. You can't educate the children properly while they're living in present conditions; and until they're educated, most people in the towns won't accept them anyway.

Perkins: The Commonwealth has fallen down as far as tribal Aborigines are concerned, but it has shown some initiative in places like Alice Springs. I've just been there, and it's a completely integrated community; Aborigines are living the same as everyone else, they've got white collar positions and all the prospects of going ahead. I think the States must give over their powers over Aborigines to the Commonwealth.

Spigelman: Though recent Commonwealth legislation has been

in response to international pressure rather than benevolence on the part of the lords in Canberra.

Butterworth: One thing I changed my ideas about while we were on the trip. When I left I believed the claim that we must 'start with the children'. But you can't; you've got to start with children and adults, and run them parallel.

Spigelman: Yes, how can you go home and study if you haven't got electricity, proper seating and that kind of thing? And it struck us that until about sixth class Aboriginal kids were doing quite well; then after that some change seems to take place - they realise they've got no future in the community, their mates start treating them differently, on the ground that 'You've got no hope anyway so you're no mate of mine' - and they get involved in the overall community attitude of resentment and suppression. This saps their initiative. 95% don't get past second year, and 98% don't get past third year.

Butterworth: You get the argument, of course, that Aborigines won't pay rent on their houses, or are years behind in their rent. But if the children are being accepted into the community, they will learn that they have to accept the same responsibilities ~~as~~^{as} white citizens

Perkins: Aborigines should be given the same facilities that are available to everyone else - electricity, water, a good house, bathrooms or showers, education - and then you'll see some progress.

Spigelman: But I disagree that they should be treated 'just the same'. There was the NewZealand Cabinet

Minister who said about the Maoris that the way ~~is~~ to get rid of the problem is to discriminate in favour of the particular race.

Perkins: Yes, I don't deny that you mustn't just abandon them; you must discriminate for them.

Spigelman: About social services, we often heard, 'You ought to go down there on Thursday when they get the social services and the pubs are full'; and, 'They bludge and don't do any work because they can get the unemployment benefit.'

Dawson: This is like the rationalisation about drinking. People generalise from this minority. But though the whites in the town are the first to tell you that some of the Aborigines are the best people you could wish to meet, they don't generalise from that minority.

Butterworth: If you're living on a reserve in the conditions they're living in, you don't have to spend much money. If a white person doesn't have to save money, he won't.

Spigelman: I don't know to what extent the concept of property is formed in their minds, but the point is that the home isn't theirs, and neither is the land. They haven't got any responsibility for them.

Butterworth: I asked one Aborigine at Walgett whether he would rather have a house given to him, or rent it. He nearly jumped down my throat. 'If they gave me a house', he said, 'I'd tear it down and burn it; I don't want to be treated like a pet. I wouldn't rent a house because I'd hate to be paying out money and never owning it. I'd like to buy a house, but I wouldn't buy it in Walgett because people won't accept me.'

What effect did the tour have on you as individuals?

Dawson: It made me commit myself. I'm far more committed to the Aboriginal problem than I was, and I think everyone on the tour is now rather evangelical about it. There are at least 30 people in SAFA who are very active and enthusiastic.

Butterworth: Yes, I feel now that I want to get out and do more - not necessarily ~~like~~ in the same way, but something to wake the people of Australia up to the fact that the Aborigines have a problem.

Healy: The sort of knowledge we gained from the two-weeks' tour just can't be ignored.

Spigelman: We've all had an insight into the sheer complexity of the problem.

When you came back SAFA had a big meeting with about 350-400 students during Orientation Week. The students listened intently to the four speakers - Rev.Noffs, Charles, Jim and I - in a way I've rarely seen in all my contact with student affairs. Do you feel you've given students in general at Sydney University a feeling of social involvement?

Spigelman: One of the main results of the tour is that the Aboriginal question is now a live political question - this is reflected in the student community.

Butterworth: I think the freshers at this meeting were a bit overcome by the impact SAFA has had. I don't know whether this will hold up when the pressure is not on.

Dawson: 'Freedom Rider' has an air of glamour. But if

SAFA maintains its momentum, it will become the main stream of social protest at the University because it has had a success. So often you get into a cause and nothing comes of it; you get battered, you come up against the Establishment and you never get anywhere. For once, we've had Professor Baxter come out in favour, we've had the Herald and the Sun with editorials in favour, we've had the police given directions from above - and the police have been marvellous. For once we've seen ~~something~~ something constructive and good happening, and this in itself is an impetus.

Spigelman: And SAFA covers a cross-section of almost every club in the University.

Dawson: So it won't get bogged down in factions.

Healy: This problem is so close to home. In things like CND, you're fighting the top men of the world. Here we're fighting the Australian government, and we know we can put pressure on it because we're citizens of this country. We can do something about this.

What reactions have you had from the government so far?

Butterworth: Mr. Renshaw came on a television debate with Jim and Charles.

The very fact that the Premier of the State would come out and debate in public - even if he was doing it just to get his face on TV before a State election ... but the fact that he felt worried enough and that the issue was big enough for him to debate in public was very

OUTLOOK FEATURE ON SAFA TOUR

ISSUE 2/65 -- early April.

Front cover -- Sketch (or photograph) with Aboriginal motif.

Interview - 5-6 page spread, with photographs.

Depending on illustration, may be necessary to cut a bit.

Introduction - will be longer, to give more background than in ms.

See Outlook - April 1965