

We have attempted to convey our view of the various areas of problems facing the Aboriginal people in New South Wales. It is clear that these must be considered as inter-related factors. The inter-relationships between the problem areas means that each one fortifies the other. For example, the Aborigines' poor environment fortifies his difficulties in obtaining an education.

(1) We are dealing with the individual's motivation, his beliefs and hopes, his abilities and how they are developed or frustrated in his environment. Moreover we must consider the dynamics of his family life and kin-ties, his culture and how it differs from the rest of the community. This includes how his behaviour and attitudes are affected by the community's neglect of him, or its stereotyped view of all Aborigines as hopeless, shiftless or degenerate.

We are concerned with the state of his physical well-being, and how this determines his outlook and the quality of his life, his view of responsibility and rights.

These concerns, and many others, are surely what is involved if the definition of the policy of assimilation affirmed by the Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers¹ is to be taken seriously:

... the Policy aims at ensuring that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines will attain the same manner of living as other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced² by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians.

We do not wish at present to debate the value of such a policy but to point out the ramifications of it in the areas of provision for Aborigines and to assess how adequately their needs have been provided for and met, in the past.

Still begging the question of the value of the policy of assimilation, the way the policy was originated has set the tone for much of the subsequent implementation. As Professor Elkin will confirm, the "policy" was coined like an advertising slogan with no theoretical basis, when he told a State Public Servant that he believed the Aborigines should be "made

1 Darwin, July 11th and 12th, 1963.

2 Statement to House of Representatives by Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck. Wednesday, 14th August, 1963.

like us". It remains true that this, the crux of "Aboriginal Welfare" has never been subjected to the kind of exhaustive consideration of the needs and interests of the Aborigines and the community at large. **Nor how** these needs and interests would be affected by such a policy.

(2) The most fundamental criticism then, is that we in N.S.W. have never approached what is being slowly recognised as an extremely vexed social issue, with anything like the information and social analysis necessary, for making adequate and intelligent provision for the Aborigines to-day. The whole tone of official policy is one of complacent commonsense. The "methods of advancing the policy"¹ are eleven listed points and tend to be unimaginative or else in the case of (v) Vocational Training, not implemented.

(3) The Welfare Board's Statement of Expenditure illustrates the nature of provision for N.S.W. Aborigines. It is clear that by far the most important item is in the area of expenses in connection with buildings, and the cost of maintenance of stations, and the staff of the Welfare Board. The estimates for 1965-6 have a projected expenditure of less than two thousand pounds on education - child and adult. This is the only apparent expenditure which is to be directly applied to breaking the circle of poverty, apathy and ignorance, in accordance with the policy of assimilation. Though no-one would deny the need for housing, and its importance, nor deny the necessity for improvement in conditions to the quality of the individual's life, we must, however, express extreme uneasiness at the statement of the Board's objectives.

The Board can only hope that, with the implementation of its adult education policy coupled with better housing and improved living conditions, and continued welfare work, Aborigines will be fitted to compete with their fellow citizens for the employment offering in the districts in which they choose to live.²

The Board may well be able to do more than hope. Adult education in the 1965-6 Estimates succeeded in securing only one and a half thousand out of two hundred and ninety thousand, and adult education amounts only to several pilot courses in the metropolitan area and courses in motor maintenance and women's handicrafts run in conjunction with Nowra Technical College. There is no reason to believe that this tiny effort has contributed to any significant advancement of the policy of assimilation in the area of

1 Hasluck's Statement, p.7.

2 Aborigines Welfare Board, Report 1963-64, (49) p.10.

employment or any other field of community life.

(4) The "continued welfare work", the other "hope" of the policy of assimilation refers to that undertaken by the district welfare officers who visit all aboriginal Stations and Reserves within their eight, very large districts of N.S.W., at least twice a year, on which occasions "they encourage the Aborigines to improve their conditions and social standards where necessary", as well as offering advice and assistance. **Apart from the fact** that the Aborigines of the area being visited are likely to be away from home during the few hours of the infrequent visits, the value of this work is restricted from the start by the widespread suspicion and resentment of the Board, in the minds of the Aborigines. These welfare officers at present have no training for their jobs. The inservice training scheme to be introduced when "station managers" become "welfare officers" could be a very valuable step in providing the essential prerequisites to necessary welfare work, but the value of the work will depend on how rigorously the training scheme is implemented.

(5) It is important that the planning and administration of the course is not left to any single individual. Apart from the fact that no-one employed by the Board is qualified to do so, it must be remembered that Welfare Officers of the Board are in a very isolated position professionally.

One solution would be for the course to be supervised by the Social Workers Professional body, the Australian Association of Social Workers, or by a combination of the University Schools of Social Work. **If Departmental** rules would prohibit such an involvement, at least these departments must be consulted about the content of the courses and the preparation and teaching of them. At present the Revised Course of the School of Pacific Administration is being attended by South Australian Welfare Officers, and Officers from the Northern Territory.

The future of Aboriginal Welfare depends on the availability of trained professional workers, as will the implementation of the recommendations arising from this enquiry. To get professionally qualified workers to meet the urgent needs of the present, a system of cadetships could be established.

(6) The diminutiveness of the contribution at present made by Welfare Officers is very evident in the Welfare Board's listing of the principal

achievements and trends in each Welfare district. In Armidale, for example, an area in which six reserves are located, housing 461 people, the notable achievements of the year were the opening of a pre-school by the Save the Children fund, the building of a house by the Christian Youth Council, the Board contributing financially to each, the commencement of a Mothers' Club in Armidale, and the approval of three housing loans.

If this is the kind of provision that will cost the State approximately £163,800 (1965-6 estimate), in wages, transport and other administrative expenses out of only £333,000 (the total estimate of the Board), then this must surely be deemed one of the least efficient schemes imaginable; the most inadequate and the most expensive contribution towards the goal of assimilation.

And its value is judged by,

The greatest task of all facing the Board is to change the attitude of the Aborigines and their thinking towards helping themselves rather than leaving it to the Board and voluntary associations for the solution of their problems.¹

This statement is indeed very close to the greatest task facing the Board: the kind of fundamental social work that cannot be measured and carried out, without sympathetic understanding of people's initiative, opportunities and motivation.

(7) But it will not be achieved merely by increasing financial allotments, or by giving people houses, or managing their lives for them. A constructive programme oriented to stimulating the ambition and community spirit of the Aborigines at the most personal level is needed.

No-one can say specifically what such a programme would mean in terms of policy or administration, but some examples and prerequisites are quite clear.

I THE "PROBLEM".

First a view must be gained of "the problem" as a whole. This will mean that the problem is not that "We've given these people houses and they've ruined them; when will they learn to take the opportunities we open to them", but "Why do these people not live and work as we would expect them to", and "What must be done to help them to come to terms with their problems to prepare them for homes, jobs and the future without shattering their

1 Aborigines Welfare Board Report 1963-64, (48), p.10.

'cultural Differences'?"

(8) (a) The N.S.W. Aborigines Welfare Board has never achieved such an approach because it does not contain any members with a training or background in the field of sociology or sophisticated social provision. The Board is clearly constructed with a view to getting together representatives of what are considered relevant divisions of the State Public Service, (health, housing, employment and education). In this way the Board's function becomes an administrative one, rather than a policy making or policy thinking one. Since the State Government Departments already function to be approached by the public and other departments, the liaison provided by the Board is a justification of its composition.

Apart from the vital point that the members of the Board unanimously lack social policy-thinking backgrounds, the functioning and scope of any Board that is constructed of Public Servants, in an area like Aboriginal Welfare, where the actions and efficiency of the Public Service is very much at issue, must be curtailed.

South Australia has rid herself of these anomalies. The South Australian Welfare Board (which was very like our own 'executive' body), has been replaced by an advisory Board of which only one government man (an educationalist) is a member.

(b) Another explanation of the stagnation in Aboriginal Welfare is the ministerial situation. Aboriginal Welfare is not linked with Social Welfare and as one of the many responsibilities of the Chief Secretary, it becomes relatively insignificant, particularly when the Chief Secretary is also Minister for Labour and Industry, and for Tourist Activities. Again we could do well to follow South Australia's lead, in making Aboriginal Welfare an important and direct Ministerial Responsibility by linking it with Social Welfare.

(c) The clause of the Act (4.26(iv)) stating that the Board shall include one member who "shall be an expert on sociology and/or anthropology" is totally deplorable. Anthropology is omphatically not, in N.S.W., the relevant body of knowledge to help the Board ask the right questions, and know where to look for the answers.

Social policy making requires a very high degree of specialized skill and the designing and administration of social policy remains in this