

## CHAPTER 15

Despite everything, I think the Aboriginal people are getting better organized within themselves from the grass roots to the national level since the inception of the Office (now the Department) of Aboriginal Affairs. I feel I have played some part in this. Unfortunately we still have leadership problems and need realistic organization of Aboriginal communities. Individuals in urban and rural areas tend to speak out without sufficient backing from their people. Not that this is always necessarily a bad thing, but community support makes a much stronger case.

Some city Aborigines have never been in the inland of Australia. Naturally this is a tremendous disadvantage. They can be and are often shot down in flames for such ignorance of tribal or rural situations. The reverse case is true of course for Aborigines outside of main population areas. Such ignorance causes confusion as to objectives to be pursued and tends to allow for the acceptance of wrong priorities. The individuals concerned that come readily to mind will remain nameless but they are obvious.

The only way the Aborigine will ever get ahead and the Department will do what is worthwhile in terms of achieving something, is to have grass roots involvement on village, regional, district, State and national levels of Aborigines, both tribal and non-tribal. The newly established National Aboriginal Consultative Committee is part of this answer. The real effect of such a body as N.A.C.C. will be felt when it becomes statutory, with executive powers, and its members are elected by the majority in their electorates. One or two members are not representative and in realistic terms should resign, but generally it is a good thing. It is not

the answer to our dreams but goes a long way towards it. Aborigines do not wish to be all 'blacks' as in the United States, 'dark people' or 'coloured people' as was the case in Australia for some time. Aborigines are now either tribal or non-tribal, but the broad viewpoint is that all are Aborigines. Islanders are obviously included.

Aborigines—tribal or non-tribal—will listen to and need the advice of white specialists. They do not want to be told what to do. Rather, they want advice (and support) plus the money and executive powers to carry out their own decisions. Dr Coombes's advice is much sought after. The problem here, however, is the man is inaccessible generally, and he prefers association with traditionally oriented Aborigines rather than the more urban, vocal Aborigines.

Even with people like Dr Coombes and others, I cannot see the Department getting ahead if it does not employ Aborigines to make decisions in association with specialist advisers. Aboriginal people must be responsible for their own decisions. It is no good putting them there as puppets without any responsibility. Within ten years they will have learnt nothing. They must be in positions of executive responsibility or be trained to carry out these tasks, both inside and outside the Department.

It is like the American Indian situation. After all these years of white people doing things for the American Indians, you have a Wounded Knee situation: completely unnecessary, and symptomatic of the social disease where people have basically good motives but no idea of the real issues. Depressed people are depressed further by these actions. This 'poor Indian' or 'poor Aborigine' attitude is expressed in programmes within government administration and after a hundred years you turn around and see that nothing has been done. All you have bred are one or two generations more of welfare recipients, as in America. We should not let that happen here. We can avoid these experiences if we learn from other countries and take the necessary action now!

I do not think all of the people in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs are aware of this yet, however. It has to come across very slowly. It is like a big pill, about a foot across, that they cannot

swallow. It is very uncomfortable for some of those people. Some public servants, government Ministers and church groups have trouble sleeping at night, I am sure, because their security is threatened. Their image of their role is that of nineteenth century colonials handing out blankets to the lazy niggers. The Aborigine is regarded as an employment investment for the future and it is in their interest to keep that investment secure. The government, Australian society and the public service system operate to keep it that way. The public service bureaucracy where it operates in the social welfare field should programme to phase itself out of these matters. Take the Departments of Social Security and Aboriginal Affairs. They should assist these disadvantaged groups to become independent and lessen the need for people to depend on the bureaucracy. In other words, find solutions to problems which would, above all else, cut costs.

I suppose I must have wanted to resign a hundred times from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. I have frequently written out my resignation and then torn it up again. I thought, 'What's the good of resigning? It won't serve any useful purpose. I might as well stay and give Australian society, including the bureaucracy, a few more uncomfortable years. Perhaps in time we may achieve something. Perhaps I may bring about a change. I must apply constant pressure to influence decision makers.'

The Department is not moving fast enough to meet the enormous needs amongst the most sorely depressed of our people. It is too slow. To be able to meet urgent needs, for example, the people in the Department must get rid of the traditional public service way of doing things. They have to radically change their relationship with Aborigines. They must be prepared to spend money in a right and proper way but allow Aborigines to make mistakes. This could include some mishandling of funds or money seemingly wasted on special projects, but so what? It is money from the taxpayer and the Aborigines are taxpayers as well, apart from anything else. They must not be paternalistic and want to control the decision making processes among Aborigines. The well-worn myth is that Aborigines are irresponsible with money. This is propaganda to deny Aborigines the right to make their own decisions.

Tribal and non-tribal Aborigines must be in a position to make a mistake and suffer. By suffering and having struggled through something, then you know you won't do it the wrong way again. If this opportunity to succeed and/or make mistakes is given them, I believe that Aborigines will rise to the occasion and elevate themselves to meet their own needs to their own satisfaction. They will also be in a position to express themselves more articulately, strongly and constructively in Aboriginal affairs. This encourages independence and confidence.

Although there are many reactionaries in the Australian Public Service there are also great people with wide expertise and good motivation and these are the people we wish to keep with us as much as possible. People like Ted Egan, Bob Edwards, Kevin Martin, Bob Beadman, Ian Mitchell and so on.

I suppose one of the greatest disasters of recent years in Aboriginal affairs has been the slow emergence of national and local constructive Aboriginal leadership. There has been a vacuum in Australia for the last four or five years for a variety of reasons. Because of this and because of the demands made by the mass media for Aboriginal commentary on the race issue in Australia, people have often been pushed into the position of making pronouncements on Aboriginal affairs when they have had no real background for it. Frequently they lack experience on race questions and in some cases they have no sense of morality or can apply no national perspective to any of the questions they comment on. The media and the public presume that they are Aboriginal leaders because they are speaking and no one else was speaking. We have had some characters who were absolute tragedies for the Aboriginal people. Their own lives have been one hell of a tangle and they have been emotionally unstable, and subsequently erratic in their viewpoints. As a result we have had some disastrous leadership. Thank goodness this is changing and strong leadership from young and old men and women is emerging. People like Albert Barunga, 'Stumpy' Martin, Paul Coe, Daisy Wugburra, Jack Davis, Gloria Brennan, Una Walker, Gatchel Djerrwurkberk, Garry Foley, John Moriarty, Silas Roberts, Pat Turner are only some of the many people who are making a tremendous impact on the race scene here

in Australia. We are an emerging people and our leaders come from many and varied fields. Young people can sometimes be forgiven for not presenting the case for our people as well as they might; however, they will learn by experience. They are also impatient and angry. For them there is no time like the present and tomorrow may never come. They want to do something about the race issue and they have a sense of urgency motivating them to act. Sometimes they may be seen to lower the dignity of our cause, but whatever they do and whatever they say, we must stand by them and support them. We are one people—the good, the bad, the brilliant and the inarticulate. Often the mass media has encouraged the use of filthy language just for sensationalism and often they have set us up to project a bad image. But we are learning.

Some of these questions concerning leadership and our methods of operations, especially on the negative side, have proved most frustrating in our efforts to create a sense of identity for ourselves as Aboriginal people in our country. It was therefore inevitable, because of the slow pace of change and our frustrations, that some of us turned to violence and perhaps will turn even more to this method to assert ourselves and recapture some of our sense of dignity and self-respect.

Some Aborigines now feel that violence—by guns—is perhaps the only way to bring about some positive recognition of the plight of our people in Australia. This is understandable. Not everybody would agree with this, however, but can you blame some of our people for thinking of acting like this? They feel they have nothing to lose but their lives. We now totter on the brink of a bloody new era in race relations in this country. People have condemned Aborigines like Bobby McLeod for his gun-carrying activities and his hold-up of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Bobby, to me, is highly motivated with a genuine concern for his people. He is like a brother to me. His heart is good and he has soul. We want justice, whether the white man wants to give it to us or not. We will take it or deny him the opportunity to live with his conscience, or live at all.

In the past, among the older Aborigines, you would never hear violent talk but they (the old timers) were true radicals also. Going back ten or twenty years, we have had very good leadership in

Aboriginal affairs. Such people were warm-hearted and sincere and they put themselves out on a limb. The whole of Australian society was against them. They were in a social climate that at that time was very hostile towards any thinking on Aboriginal affairs. Such blokes as Bert Groves, Sir Douglas Nicholls, Jack Ferguson in New South Wales, and Jack McGuinness in Darwin, as well as many others whose names are forgotten, stood up for their rights in remote and isolated places throughout Australia. They were either shot down or sent out of their area, persecuted by the townspeople, employment was denied them. They were chased out by the police, the missionaries or the prevailing authorities.

These are the people whom I call the real radicals of Australia. Some people, Aborigines and others, pretend radicalism, but at heart and in basic activities, this is just a facade. Today in Sydney, Brisbane or Melbourne, any Aborigine can get up and say what he likes and find a job the next day. Even if they get sacked from that job they can always find a job somewhere else. To my way of thinking they are not, in some cases, as courageous as those people of the past who lived in more remote areas and were subject to pressures from a small community of white people.

By way of contrast, a lot of young people are claiming themselves as radical and presuming everybody else is an arch-conservative. Just because they are saying things that might cut the headlines at that time, they believe they have become instant revolutionaries. Such people have not always contributed towards construction of good things. These people just do not cut ice with me at all. They are interesting for a time but once you get beyond the swear words and the vague generalizations, you do not find much of a person there at all. This is why I think that we have been lacking, over the last five years, in strong Aboriginal leadership of the sincere kind. This is not to say that some natural leaders have not emerged. Senator Neville Bonner is fast becoming the man we all believed him to be. He can become a legend in his own lifetime by giving leadership to our people now when we need it most. I believe he will.

Joe McGuinness, the President of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, is a good type of person. It is not his temperament to operate in a sharp, high-

pressure way, but the good thing about Joe is that his quiet approach builds confidence in black and white alike. He has been a leader for a long time. Young radicals have contributions to make also; however, there are limits at times to their effectiveness due solely to their circumscribed knowledge on Aboriginal affairs. They are widening their horizons constantly. We need all our people, young and old, radical and conservative, to rebuild our society.

Aboriginal people are dignified people, with a basic humility that allows them to hold their dignity and to set it up as the most priceless of all values. Sometimes some of our people do not carry themselves with dignity: if this happens we must learn again. Aboriginal leaders should strengthen our values, not detract from them.

Some people like Faith Bandler also have made a contribution. She is not an Aboriginal, of course, but she was born and bred in Australia and suffered the same humiliations of living in this country with a black skin. On the basis of this she has been put into a position where she has spoken on behalf of all the depressed coloured people in this country—her own Islanders and the Aborigines.

Along with this rebirth of Aboriginal leadership, both tribal and non-tribal, I believe that Aboriginal affairs should be taken out of the political sphere in the party sense. Aborigines themselves and their groups should become more politically oriented and active. We must organize ourselves to influence the political system. No longer can we rely on incompetent or indifferent politicians or public servants. Politics is the name of the game. We must not only concentrate on welfare organizations and their activities; we must also control our communications with the mass media. The mass media under white control have generally crushed us. We must dictate terms in the future.

I suppose that one of the great difficulties in this country is that we are very limited as far as the liberal, unbiased and impartial (if you can ever get that) media is concerned. The *Courier Mail* in Queensland, the *West Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Bulletin* and so on, are typical examples of anti-Aboriginal publications. Some of their editors and feature writers are living in

the nineteenth century. They are right wing and naive on race questions. The television networks, for example, all have their particular hang-ups, political, social or religious, that allow you to go only as far as it is convenient for them. They use Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal situations for their own purposes. They will allow you to make statements within the context of their hang-ups, only where they feel they can do something with you. If you are newsworthy and if you will say something controversial that will excite all the television viewers at home and make it an interesting night for them, then you fill the bill. Aborigines' affairs can thus be prostituted at the convenience of the media. Sections of the media at times do a great disservice to Aborigines and thus the nation by their ignorance of the race question in Australia.

My greatest struggle has been that of trying to use the media as a means of genuine education. Over many years I have spoken to service organizations like Rotary, Lions, Apex throughout Australia and most of that time I have provided the 'entertainment' for the evening. I was replacing the magician who was there last week or preceding the comedian or the movie producer or striptease artist who would be there next week. You are just a break in the programme for them. 'This week it's Abos, and theatre people next week. We might have the blacks back again in about three or four months' time.' It took a while to dawn on me. I was racing around madly all over the country thinking I was educating people. I was, but not to the extent I believed at that time. I was destroying my own family life, trying to make a dent in the conscience of the Australian people with all those press, radio and television interviews and addresses to service clubs. On an average I spoke to almost 150 such groups per year. Some members would go to sleep on you if it was not for someone ringing a bell every two or three minutes, which is one of the games the grown men in some of these clubs play. I realized only after a couple of years of speaking like this that I could be merely their entertainment. I was to turn them on for the evening, and they did not even pay for this. I was only too grateful for the educational opportunities, to get a captive audience and speak on social questions that seemed vital to me and my country. I suppose we both suited each other's purpose. The arrangement worked until

I realized that we had different expectations about the function of the speech.

You wonder how much good you really do. In the end, I used to get great personal satisfaction for a while out of educating and confronting them. At times, I provoked confrontation. Not everyone agreed with what I said. Aboriginal race relations is just too close to the bone for the conservative club members. You could talk about the Negroes in America or the blacks in South Africa, but you could not talk about the Aborigines in Australia. 'Why, I have one living a few doors from me: there's one living in the next suburb. They're happy enough . . . why stir up trouble? Forget about the past and our dealings with the Aborigines.' This was the sort of thing they would say to me. 'Oh, let's not dig up the past' . . . that was their favourite phrase.

That past happens to be just about yesterday. The injustices did not happen hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Also, I always believe that the past influences and guides the future. It must be remembered. If I gave just an ordinary, dull sort of lecture on Aboriginal affairs or a sociological analysis of the Aboriginal situation, the club members would be happy, but they would probably forget my message immediately. I relished the opportunity to help Rotary Clubs and other groups to remember what I said. I said things to them that I knew would upset many members. A lot of people would not talk to me afterwards. Those who did came blustering up to me and said, 'A very stimulating speech, very stimulating'—and then disappeared immediately. I would leave the club without any of the usual pleasantries or a handshake from the president.

I did not say things that were incorrect but I said very hard factual things like: 'The infant mortality rate among Aborigines in this country is 80 per 1000. Babies are dying all over the place and you people are sitting here eating a full meal and getting your bellies bloated. You have more money than most Aborigines see in a lifetime—what are you going to do for my people?' Unfortunately this is the only way you can do it in this country, by getting right under the skin of the people. You have to disorient them, destroy their stereotyped pattern of thinking about Aborigines in one way or

another, and get them to think again. And this is one good thing the radicals do. They wake everybody up, stir their imagination and set people thinking. That was the essential purpose of the Freedom Rides, to make people think. Otherwise they go about their business and forget about the problems.

The Aboriginal Embassy on the lawns outside Parliament House in 1972 was also in this line of thinking. It was a fairly new concept although it paralleled the Civil Rights programme in the United States. The idea was not deliberately borrowed from America: it just so happens that across the world repressed groups are often forced to act along similar lines. The Aboriginal Embassy was a good thing. It fired the imagination and made a lot of people think. Tourists from all over Australia would get out of buses in front of Parliament House and make straight for the motley collection of Aboriginal tents before they climbed the steps to Parliament House. The Aborigines living in the Embassy would explain the grievances of the Aborigines of Australia.

It was a symbol of the case for Land Rights. I think the people who took the initiative on that occasion and others who carried it through, like Bobby McLeod and Allan Sharpley, should be congratulated. It did degenerate a bit towards the end but it was a significant gesture and I think it served a very useful purpose.

My attacks on white racism were most bitterly resented by church groups to whom I often spoke. The leaders became very hot under the collar about it because I dared to say that many religious people who had given half their lives to Aborigines had really wasted their time. This was a terrible thing to say to people who had devoted their life to something. What is that religious bloke going to do when he goes home at night and faces himself in the mirror? He might find it very awkward to live with himself after that. But how else could I confront the self-righteous, patronizing attitude of some church organizations? Some church groups today still think they own the Aborigines. The Catholic Church is the worst, I suppose, although even they are changing. But I believe we helped the religious groups re-direct their energies in the right direction. Up until then they were unable to see the negative social and cultural consequences of their actions. There is more to helping people than

getting them to pray or indoctrinating them with a religious dogma.

I find it very difficult to comprehend people who presume that a Christian religion that has been on earth for two thousand years can overshadow a religious philosophy—that of the Aborigines—that has been here for seventy thousand years. I went to great pains to point out the significance of Aboriginal religion. Many Christians had considered our forebears to be simply 'primitive savages'.

What I have always wanted to get across more than anything else to these people was the need for them to be educated on race relations. That was my main aim: to educate people on race relations so that when they came into a difficult race relations situation they would be able to understand it. To live in a race relations situation demands a lot of you, of your emotions, your clear thinking and your common sense. I do not think that the Australian white community is equipped at all for this. They find it relatively easy to absorb other people, say from Europe and America, but they are not willing to accept Aborigines. I believe money should be spent on a media programme aimed at educating the white community about the plight of the Aborigines and the government programmes set up to help remedy the situation. Whites get very jealous and self-centred about expenditure of what they call 'their' money on Aborigines.

Action-oriented programmes among Aborigines are starting to stimulate a 'white backlash' among the more conservative and prejudiced sections of the white community. For example, pastoralists in the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory can see that the era of exploitation is over. That Aborigines are going to turn around and start negotiating for proper wages and better conditions, demanding respect and dignity in the process. But Northern Territory whites have not been prepared for the shock of such demands from previously placid tribal people. Some of their statements are so naïve and out of date. They are twenty years behind the times. I feel really sorry for them. They do not have any remote idea of what the real issues are. They tend to get other problems mixed up with the racial question. Thank goodness we don't have such people dictating our lives any more. They are a joke, but not a very funny one.

There are some things that these prejudiced people cannot comprehend. Why does it have to happen to them? Why can't it happen twenty years from now? Why couldn't the Aborigines always remain tame and subjective? But a stronger and more vindictive backlash is coming from communities and towns throughout Australia. Some of the areas in Queensland where the Aborigine has always been treated with disdain by the rest of the community, have been especially angered by Federal Government spending on Aborigines.

To be an Aborigine in the Queensland community is a disgrace, more or less. Queenslanders will tolerate you, providing you are a good sportsman or an interesting character or you isolate yourself from the rest of the Aborigines and have nothing to do with them. They will treat you with some sort of respect then. But start speaking up for yourself or your people and they just freak out of their feeble brains.

The race problem will therefore become worse if no constructive programmes for educating white people to understand Aborigines better, and vice versa, are undertaken by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and other bodies, particularly in co-operation with the mass media.

White Australians should be encouraged to have pride in the Aboriginal culture and should be given insight into the social and cultural aims of programmes aimed at lifting the standard of living of the Aborigines. Instead of playing up some of these very difficult confrontations where Aboriginal people become involved, they should look at it in a more reasonable light on both sides. The whole community should be invited to advance creative suggestions for solving the problems. Nowadays the media acts in a particular way—either for the blacks or for the whites—and there is little or no reconciliation. At times certain of the media exploit delicate situations to suit their own ends. A good example of the partisan attitude of the media was the report of a big Aboriginal so-called 'drunken brawl' near Yalata in South Australia in 1973. The footballers were coming back from a football game and 'attacked' a service station proprietor. It was front page headlines through most of Australia. The Aborigines were condemned editorially for their

drunken behaviour, for theft and for trying to assault the wife of the proprietor. When it was fully investigated by the police, it was found that nothing like that happened. As far as stealing is concerned, the Aborigines stole five cigarettes from one packet of cigarettes. The Aborigines were gaoled, the thing was blown up out of all proportion and a smear was put on the Aboriginal people. Once again Australian society through prejudiced sections of the mass media denigrated Aborigines. It is a crime to be an Aborigine in Australia. Newspapers seldom apologize unless legally forced to. So the damage was done. This sort of thing creates racial hostility and it builds up more hostility towards Aboriginal people: 'Oh, the drunken Aborigines are on the rampage again. Something ought to be done about them.' And when the Aboriginal people read the story they develop hatred for white people who present them in that light.

This is where some of the press could play a very responsible role in race relations instead of becoming the vehicles for race hatred that some of them have been in the past. I recall an instance once in South Australia when a major paper printed a front page heading to the effect: 'Blacks Ejected from Homes'. I objected on television to the way the editor put this on the front page in headlines and, in doing so, created a very bad image of Aboriginal people. I said on television he should be ashamed of himself for putting that in big heading across his front page. Subsequently he rang me up in Canberra while I was at a conference and told me he was going to sue me. The only way I could get out of it, he said, was to write a public apology and have it printed on the front page of the next issue of his paper. I told him to stick that idea up his 'jumper'. He must have had second thoughts about legal action because I never heard from him again. There should be equal time in the media, in cases like this, to answer criticisms and counter charges. Aborigines are rarely given a chance to present their case as they would want.

If no constructive programmes to create better understanding between whites and Aborigines are undertaken, there is going to be a sharpening of race tension in Australia. Whites are going to continue to condemn the Aborigines outright as 'drunkards', 'prostitutes' and 'no-hopers'. What the white people are doing, to my way of thinking, is projecting their vices on to the Aborigines.

Alcoholism is a disease that needs to be cured in both races. To look at one group as having this disease exclusively is avoiding the issue. The white people need to turn around and look at themselves a little more clearly.

I think there could be good, constructive dialogue between the whites and blacks, if the Aborigines were given an opportunity to lay down some of the terms for such dialogue and for such involvement. What has happened to white people in Australia today is that this new mood has come too quickly; the new Government has brought in a new way of doing things with action-oriented programmes. There has probably not been enough time for race relations planning. Unfortunately, some of the programmes are ill-considered, and all are naturally white bureaucratic decisions.

Another problem Aborigines face is the do-goodism of the liberal whites. Liberal whites have done a lot for Aborigines and they should not be completely discredited. However some do not know when to stop. Their Aboriginal associates are embarrassed by their behaviour and extremism and are too kind to tell them to ease up and go to hell. But this is only a minor problem in comparison to the evil men who manipulate the lives of Aborigines within and outside the public service. These are the real social criminals who do not understand and do not care.

To my way of thinking there is no black power movement in Australia. There never has been and I do not think, while Aborigines are in it, there ever will be. Frizzy hairdos and some of the symbolism of America is borrowed by a certain minority section of the Aboriginal people. They only do that because they lack the imagination to create unique symbols of Aboriginality. There may be Aboriginal power—and there is nothing wrong with this. Aboriginal power means the power for us to do things for ourselves, to make our own decisions, and become politically aware and involved. It means, in essence, the campaign to acquire control over aspects of the political, economic and social fabric of the country for the benefit of Aborigines—but not to the disadvantage of any other group.

In the end, what will most benefit the black people comes from the Aboriginal spirit, the Aboriginal way of thinking, the Aboriginal

life and values. They can scrub all that black symbolism from America. That will never mean anything to the mass of Aboriginal people. It is just a passing fancy, something that has been developed by people over there. I don't blame them for having that. They do not have the traditions that we have. We have our traditions: we do not have to borrow anything from them. We can be in sympathy with them but let us create our own thing. Our culture goes back 70,000 years and is easily identifiable. We must build on our great strength—the spirit and dignity of our people.

I will be happy to see the day when tribal and non-tribal people speak up much more strongly on a national basis. New symbols of our own will emerge. At the present time we are only finding our feet. Some tribal groups are only now generally making their first contact with the system that operates in this country. This could have some side effects on tribal communities, but out of this will emerge more articulate people who have a knowledge of what is going on. The oncoming generation of young tribal-oriented Aborigines will bring a new wave or movement in Aboriginal affairs. They will burst upon the scene in the next few years and will force the pace.

What is going to happen then to people like myself will be that we will probably be pushed a little bit into the background, which will be a good thing in the long run. There will always be opportunities for us to come back some other time, or operate in some other way. We should be willing to stand back and let the tribal people have their say. They have a lot to say in a different way to the way we have told it. They must be given every opportunity and encouragement to do this.

I expect that in the next ten years we, the non-tribal people, are going to be disliked intensely, even more than we have ever been before, not only by the whites but by some tribal people too. It is going to take a lot of understanding and common sense to be able to negotiate the difficulties that lie ahead. We will come together again because we are one people—but there will be some heartaches before this happens. A lot of us will probably be mental cripples at the end of this time. Many are freaking out now. It is hard to imagine the strain on people like myself, seeking an identity. We are being

rejected by the whites and starting to be rejected by the tribal people. Nobody wants us. Everybody disowns us yet we belong to them both! Some unscrupulous and unethical whites delight in this interim split and exploit it. However, they are wasting their time really because the spirit binds us. We are the key to the future for tribal Aborigines and whites for their own happiness and for their relationships. We have travelled the road they must now travel. We have much to tell them about the journey.

I often think if I was ever projected into the position of Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, I would take drastic action in all fields. First, I would try to build a oneness amongst the Aboriginal people, or if you like, a nationhood amongst the Aborigines. I want us to feel that we belong to each other, tribal and non-tribal. We have a stake in each other's future. From there one could create the consciousness that we both, in turn, belong to the white people of this nation. We all belong to one country and are bound together by its soul, its history and its overall spirituality.

I think this can be done in a number of ways by public race relations programmes. Intelligent Aborigines should help by getting out into the more sensitive areas where they can get the message across to a wider number of people, and change the attitudes within the nation to one of tolerance and understanding.

Second, I think that the inner man is most important. Houses, employment and education are meaningless for an individual if they do not make a better man out of him. There is nothing worse than a highly technological society that has no morality or sense of humanity. In other words, the advance of our people will be futile if the inner qualities of true Aboriginality are lost. We must rekindle the fire within ourselves to be proud of what we are. We must build within the Aboriginal a respect for himself which will lead to respect for other people. He must carry himself with dignity and be regarded with dignity by other people. Dr Martin Luther King was always saying that 'there can be no integration without, until there is integration within'. I would agree. The Aborigine must be proud of his Aboriginality and all that it stands for spiritually and in the broad areas of society and the relationships that exist.

Once we do this we can recreate a sense of purpose amongst the Aboriginal people as to where we are going and what contribution we can make in society and not consider ourselves always as liabilities. You cannot make people love each other, but you can set the social environment so that people can work in harmony with each other, accepting differences but also accepting that they have things in common. I think society should be this way anyhow. What is needed is a new level of tolerance, not deceiving each other but realizing that people are people and we are building towards similar objectives in life in broad principles.

Third, on a more physical level, we need to undertake all programmes for housing, health and education on an integrated basis so that nothing is done in isolation from other factors. Suitable national housing programmes must be carried out with employment opportunities alongside. Health standards should be raised immediately. But health programmes have no real effect unless the Aboriginal people have decent homes to live in. Good housing makes all the difference. Sure, we get the usual criticisms from racist individuals such as those in Western Australia, that the blacks are even getting better homes than whites—what a shame! Despite such remarks we should press ahead with crash programmes in these fields to raise almost immediately, the living standards of Aborigines. If we take health, for example, we find there are 2,000 leprosy cases in Australia. There are also new cases being reported. The infant mortality rate in many areas gravitates around 80-100 deaths per thousand in comparison to approximately 8 per thousand for non-Aboriginals. This is disgraceful! Housing is almost two-thirds slum or shanty dwelling. We are also a 95 percent unskilled workforce which puts us generally in a suspect situation in terms of fluctuations in the economy of the country. We have a huge illiteracy rate. I could go on forever, but basically the point is that our situation is a disgrace and every Australian should hang his head in shame—black and white. We should all work towards overcoming all the problems. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs should be the initiator and dynamic force, giving our society the lead in bringing about the desired changes. Culturally, the problems remain with us Aborigines. We have to work this out for

ourselves, whether we be tribal or urban dwelling. But keep white racists off our backs and let us work it out.

However, if you can have a two-pronged attack, combining material progress with a cultural balance and identity, with dignity as the essence, then you can consider that most of the difficulties will be overcome. All these things should be part and parcel of the Secretary's consideration, as he seeks to elevate a particular section of society that is depressed and in the process of bewildering change.

Fourth, right through all of this programme, as Secretary, I would make sure that Aborigines were involved in every possible way, not only in implementing administrative decisions but making the policy that would set the pattern for the administration in the first place. With Aborigines being involved in decision-making right through the whole system we will quickly see a flowering of Aboriginal leadership that has been ploughed underground in the past. Often this would be regardless of whether they can read or write. We can buy white expertise in administration, accountancy and such. The criterion on which Aboriginal employees in this case would be judged would be their knowledge of the situation plus basic common sense. They would put their finger right on the pulse of things, and then direct well-motivated expert white or Aboriginal people to carry out the programmes. We can save millions of dollars this way and stop unnecessary unhappiness and expenditure.

Fifth, I would like to fight against, for the time being, the migration of certain coloured people into this country. For example, I would stop all Asians coming in for a start. Aborigines would be the first to be exploited by Asians if the population of the latter increased. When we are stronger and better educated, then Asians should be allowed in. Yet I would like to see indigenous people like Maoris, Fijians, New Guineans, Malaysians and Indonesians coming in. These people have something in common with us. They have the same sort of personality, the same feelings. We have all been suppressed people. We can work together. But we do not want nations that have a heritage of exploitation and suppression descending upon us before we have developed our consciousness and identity. A similar restraint should be placed upon prejudiced white South Africans or Americans.

And finally, I would restructure the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and make it a statutory body. There are some disadvantages in this but the advantages are far greater. We would not, for example, get hung up on public service recruitment red tape. We can bring Aborigines of competence in at high levels and be more flexible in our operations. The basic objectives of such a statutory body or commission run by Aborigines would be to find solutions to the problems of Aborigines—not a continuation of them. The next step would be to strengthen the role of the National Aboriginal Consultative Council and give it more overall representation and executive powers. Together with this would be assistance to all other Aboriginal-run groups to allow them to operate more effectively. Such a Council could be the board of commissioners to run the statutory body. In other words, give Aborigines all over the nation grass roots responsibility. I would implement a 'wagon wheel' concept of regional responsibility and operations. These regions would be virtually autonomous groups, having resources and power to carry out programmes and consult Aborigines and whites on a local basis, thus establishing priorities according to local needs and conditions. The State boundaries would be ignored. The Aborigines in these areas elect their own representatives to a council which in turn elects others to the regional council and finally to the central council in Canberra. All Canberra does is allocate money, under the direction of these councils to the regional areas, and set policy also in consultation. In this way Aborigines gradually take over responsibility for their own affairs and the eventual aim is thus to scale out the bureaucracy until the Aborigines eventually become independent. The result would be that the bureaucracy would be nothing more than a small cultural-social type operational group. I believe all bureaucracies in the social security, Aboriginal affairs, environment, arts and such should always work for their own elimination. This should be an objective.

Accepting what I have said to be propositions for solutions to the so-called Aboriginal 'problem' in Australia, I find myself today faced with a rather ludicrous situation. Here I am at the prime of my life, having completed a university degree in sociology,

anthropology, psychology and political science at one of the best universities in the world. I struggled hard to get through Sydney University with a feeling of elation on completion of the degree. I reflect also on my sporting career and my fifteen years of first division soccer. I also won an award for the 'Young Australian of the Year' in 1966 from the (then) Junior Chamber of Commerce. I travelled overseas on three occasions, two of these as a representative of the Australian Government. I have saved my money and now own my own home in a lovely suburb of Canberra. I am a Justice of the Peace, patron of many Aboriginal run organizations throughout Australia, Assistant Secretary in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Also, I recently completed an Administrative and Management Course of an intensive nature at Mt Eliza Staff College in Melbourne.

Most importantly, I am an Aboriginal. Considering everything one would presume I would now be in an ideal position to be a significant influence in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. However, the situation is such that I found myself utterly frustrated with the ineffectiveness, not only of the Department but of myself. Gradually I was becoming part of the furniture in the office and on numerous occasions had to force senior officers in the Department to consider my opinion or the opinions of other Aborigines. In other words, the system was operating to exclude me from discussions when key decisions were being made and I was more and more being utilized as a front for the Department. The Secretary, Dexter, initially wanted Aborigines to consult with the Department, but as time went by, he began to realize that we Aborigines were not content with being consulted merely at his convenience and on rather irrelevant issues. In fact, we demanded that a full consultative programme throughout Australia be established and that Aborigines, whoever they are and wherever they may be, were to be listened to and should play a part in the decisions made. I could not tolerate, therefore, any situation where I felt I was not making or not being allowed to make a contribution.

The pressures from the Aboriginal community on me were tremendous, to say the least. I had to be the 'super nigger', I had to produce the goods. And unfortunately I just could not do that,

under the circumstances. Such pressure was understandable, but what I could not tolerate was the blind ignorance, racism and lack of humanity from some of the senior officers in our own and other Departments. Some still regard Aborigines in many cases as animals and pieces of furniture. Over the last twelve months the situation became quite impossible and unacceptable. Obviously the Department was not finding any reasonable solution to many of the problems facing Aboriginal people. Many white bureaucrats, particularly at senior levels, were just not interested in the welfare of the people they were supposed to be providing a service for—they could not care less.

As long as Aborigines remain in a dependent position and recipients of the decisions they make, the greater the chances will be for such a situation to continue. There are just too many whites in Aboriginal Affairs—unfortunately the good ones leave in disgust or disillusionment or get suppressed.

I just could not, in all clear conscience, condone the behaviour of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, nor the activities of its senior officers. I had to make a stand, and naturally that led to all sorts of repercussions. It began, of course, with my suspension and several warnings prior to the suspension. I knew from that point on, that things would become much more difficult. Perhaps I should have shut my mouth and said nothing. It would have been easy to do that, but my people would have been destroyed in the process. My decision was to press on regardless and accept the consequences. I knew I was breaking public service regulations but the issues were too vital and the regulations therefore just had to go.

The peculiar thing was that I was suspended for criticizing the racist Country Party. When I criticized the Government no action was taken. It was absurd. I must have touched a raw nerve within many areas of the public service. If only the Labor Party knew how much the public service personnel in many areas deliberately undermine their policies and programmes they would not sleep at night. Public servants are not politically impartial—they play politics for keeps and are generally anti-Labor. This is so in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Part of the inspiration for my activities at this time came from

Clyde Cameron's speech on 'open government' and the public service in September 1972. He stated that open government would eventuate with the Labor Government in power, and that significant amendments would be made to the Public Service Act. I was due for a disappointment—they were only words. Everyone began to hate me for speaking out on Aboriginal affairs in such a radical and strong manner. People in the Department believed I had a greater 'responsibility' to them and the Department than I had to Aborigines. How ridiculous! Even the Public Service Unions supported me initially, but kept thunderously quiet when the crunch came. Gough Whitlam also supported me in the beginning but I have not heard from him since. I believe he has given us the 'golden handshake'. The editorials from most newspapers were vicious. They could not even comprehend events, or my motives. They are, and remain, a disgrace to our nation. I could not answer them back, as I had no newspaper and therefore could not place my case before the nation. Those hidden editors humiliated me, my family, my people and our cause. They crushed us when it was so easy to assist us. They belittled us when they could have understood us. They tried to destroy us and when they found they could not do that, they denigrated us as a people.

Consequently I found myself so isolated, not only within the department, but it seemed virtually within Australian society. Amongst all of this, I found my greatest strength and inspiration came from my own Aboriginal people and other Australians who took time out to realize what was really happening.

Within the Department, efforts were made to neutralize any influence I had. I was denied travel to areas of Aboriginal residence, my Branch of Consultations and Liaison was taken from me under the guise of 'special duties' and permission was denied me even to have any discussion with Dexter himself. It was a ludicrous situation and surely sad that things should reach such a stage. The Minister himself accepted every word Dexter said in simple ignorance.

What therefore does the future hold for a person like myself? Surely one must have reached a watershed of some sort. Where do we, the Aborigines, go from here? Can we find some justice from this

nation of people in the country of our forefathers? What more do we have to do to inform people of the justice of our cause, the needs of our people and the tragic situation that exists? Certainly, the Australian conscience on Aboriginal affairs has hardened over the years. People have become conditioned, naturally enough I suppose, to hearing the cries of despair, and the attitude of pessimism. Do we have to copy the American scene and see both black and white people die before recognition of injustices is given and realistic proposals for solutions accepted? Should Bobby McLeod and others like him produce guns to show that we mean business and are totally fed up with promises and deceit?

No more can we take part in delegations and so-called 'orderly demonstrations' to suit the values of white society. We must in all conscience take direct action, however that may be interpreted, to see that solutions are found and that the needs of the people are being met.

Gough Whitlam stated in his policy speech in November 1972: 'More than any foreign aid programme, more than any international obligation which we meet or forfeit, more than any part we may play in any treaty or agreement or alliance, Australia's treatment of her Aboriginal people will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia. Not just now, but in the greater perspective of history, and further, the Aborigines are a responsibility we cannot escape, cannot share, cannot shuffle off; the world will not let us forget that.'

Gough is great. He surely means what he says. But does his government? Do his Ministers?

Surely the only judgement that can be made on Australia at the present time is one of condemnation. Aborigines are Australia's conscience and the key to its future in two directions. Without some justice and dignity to Aborigines, white Australians cannot justify their existence as a nation before the world. Humanity cannot exist in this situation. Also, Aborigines can bring to Australian society spiritual values which, projected nationally in terms of social practices and organization of society, give real purpose to any nation of people. Such values of kindness, co-operation,

conservation and ethics form the basis of Australian Aboriginal society. Such values are priceless and make a nation unique and great. Aborigines can give this to Australia.

What then for blacks and whites in this country? Shall we have blood? Shall we seek happiness and find it? Shall we leave a legacy of hate for our children, or shall we build for them a racially harmonious society? Governments can legislate for such a society, but we the people must live it. We as individuals must play our part and be concerned and involved. Some can play a very active part while others need only understand. The opportunity is there before us and the air of optimism must be recreated! We can change things for the better together. People do not have to suffer unnecessarily, blacks or whites. Happiness can come to all people in their lifetime, regardless of their colour. Surely there must be some for my people today in our country.

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