

(Identity, November, 1972)
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During one of my trips to Central Australia, I paid a visit to Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission; it is about 84 miles west of Alice Springs. It is also the real Namatjira Country in the land of the Arunta people.

The Mission was founded by Lutheran missionaries in the early 1890s. The Arunta people have been in constant contact with white Australians ever since then. They have been photographed, prodded and poked; they have been researched and categorised. Their privacy has been invaded a thousand or more times. All this because Hermannsburg settlement is the oldest in the Northern Territory. The Arunta people are a gentle, handsome people, quite used to living off the harsh land that is their natural element. During this particular visit, I had the honour of sitting with the Council of Elders; all of them are wise men and talking with them was a sheer delight, because as well as being a gentle people they are also a kind and considerate people. During our talk the points I raised were discussed by them in the Arunta language. I noticed that in their discussions there never appeared to be any argument. There was no gesticulating or raising of voices; when a decision was reached they all sat quietly and one man would rise and, in English, explain the decision to me. From his demeanour and quiet assurance I would realise it was the final decision or answer and in no way would it be changed. I knew in my heart that I could back a thousand times and ask the same questions and I would get the same answer. I would say from my observations that these men spoke for the Council and they truly represented their people. After the Council meeting was concluded I talked for some time with Edwin Parajoulja who was one of the Councillors. Edwin said to me, and I quote, "I am pleased to see that we have our people in Canberra to talk for us. If you say what you believe to be right then say it; some of us may not agree with you, because you won't always be right for all of us; I don't think you will mind if we look over your shoulder to help you," unquote. Since then I've talked to thousands of my people, and in one way or the other they have looked over my shoulder and helped me. Wise old Parajoulja with those few words has given me a lot of strength and has given me the courage to face up to my convictions in what I believe to be right for the betterment of my people. I know that all Aboriginal communities do not have the wisdom of the Arunta Council to advise them. There was a time though when this was the case. In most instances, it was a long time ago. Today the situation has changed. The whole Aboriginal social structure is changed. The management of their own affairs has been taken from them; in many cases they have been treated like wayward children. I know in my own heart that we cannot go back to the old ways, because there is no road back, only forward. This, of course, does not stop us from forming strong councils that can speak for all of us and indeed air our needs. To be able to say to the white lords and masters: to hell with your paternalism and apathy. We are a people and our needs are great. Ask them how their values are so inconsistent when an Aboriginal before acceptance has to prove something and if he has the audacity to raise his voice in protest he is condemned as a stirrer or an advocate of Black Power. Many non-Aborigines are just not aware of the great cultural difference between the Aboriginal and Island people and themselves.

Many white people claim that Australians are not racists, yet when one talks to the very same people and asks pertinent questions, one finds out that they really are. I know of white men that sleep with black women whenever the opportunity occurs, yet the same men will not invite a black man to their clubs for a game of snooker or a

friendly beer. Again, the same person will condemn a white woman if she has an affair with a black man. As I see it, the whites can have as many values as they please, whereas the blacks are criticised if they exhibit more than one.

Many young Aborigines like Dennis Walker and Paul Coe are militants, because they see what is going on. (I am not always in complete agreement with the young Black Militants. On the other hand, though, they never upset me as they do some people.) I believe that if I were 30 years younger I would be one of them.

The youngsters are striving for Aboriginal independence and freedom to control their own affairs. I for one support them in this. They don't deny that they need white Australian assistance; all they are asking is that the forthcoming assistance be genuine and sincere.

I am an Aborigine and I'm proud to be one; because I happen to be articulate and I'm not in the habit of wearing untidy clothes, most Australians take me for any dark skinned person other than Aborigine. I don't need to wear a badge on my clothes or band on my head to denote my sympathy with the Aboriginal cause and its people.

I believe that if Aboriginal culture is abandoned by the Aboriginal people, not only would we be the losers, but the whole Australian nation would be the losers. We are the real Australians and therefore possess the only true Australian culture. I believe that the needs of the Aboriginal people are great and many. All Black Australians have a need; housing, health, employment and education are common to us all. We need more than that; we need parliamentary representation; we need recognition of land rights; we need the lifting of all legislation that discriminates against us. Because our problems are different to those of other underprivileged Australians, we need special assistance in all the social service and educational fields. We need special assistance because when our ancestors were rounded up and shot or herded like cattle from their tribal and ancestral lands, they were not given the opportunity to develop with a new and foreign culture in a new and foreign environment. Instead they were put in little better than concentration camps and expected to become black white men. That's only one of the reasons why today we need a special kind of assistance. I have travelled over a lot of Australia and I can assure you our needs are urgent - if only for one fact alone: the birthrate is nearly three times that of other Australians. The infant mortality rate is also high; if we look at the figures for Alice Springs over a 31/2 year period, for example, in 1968 18 Aboriginal children under 1 year died, for the same period 5 white children - 1969 - 18 and 4; 1970 - 38 and 13; to 30.6.71 - 39 and 2.

There are still too many whites telling the Aborigines what is good for them and how to run their own affairs. This not only applies in private organisations, but also on the Government level. I believe that there is a need for more Aboriginal Liaison Officers, Welfare Officers, Social Workers and Health Officers. I think a few bold decisions by Government can give us these very important people. They, of course, must be Aboriginal or Island people, and I think they must wherever possible be local people.

There is a need for much more finance to be made available for disbursement to Aboriginal organisations and for general Aboriginal Welfare.

Aborigines all over Australia should be encouraged to take an interest in State and Federal politics and to exercise their rights and express their opinions through the polling booths. Other Australians exercise these rights automatically and compulsory voting should also apply to Aborigines. They should be enrolled on the rolls as soon as they attain voting age. Through the polling booths Aboriginal Australians can

exert some influence in some State Parliaments and most certainly in the Federal House of Representatives. The problems confronting Aborigines vary from district to district and State to State. Our needs, though, are basically the same all over Australia.

Unity therefore becomes the key and “Our voice shall be one voice” our motto.