

Smoke Signals

► **Are people different?** While in Moree, I had an interesting talk with Mrs Nancy Tighe at Wirajarai. She was telling me how strong are the loyalties of Aboriginal people towards their own small home groups. For example, she said, the **Bear-eaters** group will always defend its members from other Aboriginal groups, even when one Bear-eater does not think that another Bear-eater necessarily has the right of it. Loyalty runs strong. The essential thing, she said, is that there is a *difference* between the two groups—and each supports his own. This fascinated me. I have for a long time been interested in how strong, deep and long-lasting the differences between people are. You see it between races, castes, tribes and classes of people. All have different attitudes to life and different values. It is stupid to pretend, as many white people do, that there are no differences. There are. The biggest nonsense is to suggest that people are all alike—or are potentially so. The point is, of course, that provided opportunities remain equal, *there is nothing wrong with these differences*. People are different and it is silly to try to be what you are not. Aborigines instinctively know this. That is why they hang on to their Aboriginality and reject the idea of *assimilation* in favour of *integration*. They know there are differences in the way they view things.

Recently, I attended a lecture given by an Indian university lecturer in psychology. He was discussing the difference between Eastern and Western attitudes to life. Not only did he stress the differences between the two, but advised that people should stick to their own customs and dress, even when in a foreign country. He did so himself. He did not wear a suit, but rather a Nehru jacket, as he would in India. His main point was that these differences are a source of *richness and variety* in our national life and are therefore to be valued. Would anyone care to comment?

► **An idea for future National Aborigines' Days** Members of the Moree National Aborigines' Day Committee had a suggestion to offer for future celebrations. They felt that if

National Aborigines' Day could be a **national public holiday** so as to form a long weekend, it would be easier for Aborigines to attend other centres. This year, Aborigines travelled from as far as Sydney to attend the Moree celebrations and many felt the lack of travelling time. Indeed, said one member, the declaration of a national public holiday in honour of the first Australians would be a fine gesture. It would put the focus squarely on Aborigines and give them a chance to show other Australians what Aborigines can do on their own National Day.

► **Team-work pays off** A combined community effort has given La Perouse a new kindergarten, called the Peter Pan Kindergarten. Officially opened on the 28th of June by the Commonwealth Minister for Social Welfare, Mr W. C. Wentworth, the kindergarten is housed in a \$32,000 building bought with money raised from the Peter Pan parades and sales of secondhand clothing. This is organized twice yearly by Mrs S. Hewlett, deputy-president of the Peter Pan Committee. The Maroubra Rotary Club provided outdoor equipment and laid out the grounds. The Aboriginal Women's Association raised \$2,000 to buy equipment for the kindergarten. A fine piece of teamwork all round.

► **Education pays** Recently one of the proudest mothers on the Bellwood Reserve, Nambucca Heads, was Mrs Jessie Williams. On the 15th May, Qantas Airways Ltd sent her a first class sleeper return ticket to Sydney. This allowed her to see the graduation of her son, Desmond Bede Williams, who received his Apprenticeship Certificate for having attained the Company's required standard of training and experience in his trade as Ground Engineer. At the graduation ceremony, special mention was made of Desmond as the first Aboriginal lad to complete his training with Qantas. All friends and well-wishers of the family are particularly pleased with Desmond's achievement and wish him well for the future.