

The Darwin Conference July 1963 listed as one of the eleven "methods of advancing the Policy" of assimilation, the following:

- (x) Positive steps to ensure awareness in the community that implementation of the policy of assimilation is possible only if Aborigines are accepted into the community and that the community plays its full part.

This seems to be a recognition of the necessity of replacing the ignorance, stereotype and prejudice of many Australians living in contact with Aborigines, by a constructive understanding. The failure to effectively implement this recognition is a very fundamental one that undermines welfare programmes.

In practice, the "positive steps" amount to a very small number of Public addresses and radio talks, all by invitation. In 1959 there were only eighteen public addresses and three radio talks in N.S.W.¹

The content of these efforts can perhaps be inferred from the other means of public education, the pamphlets published by the Welfare Board and voluntary bodies. The publications of the Australian Board of Missions, the Department of Territories, the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee, and the N.S.W. Aborigines' Welfare Board's "Dawn", come under critical examination.

The National Aborigines Day Observance Committee publications are probably the most widely distributed. The most valuable contribution of these pamphlets, for example, "The Aborigines and You", July 1963, is in the anthropological insights they offer into the Aborigines' past.

However, the representation of present policies and provision is characterised by a complacent finality and a misleading simplification. We are told of the

"common viewpoints, in legislation and in direct practical matters underlying measures for the advancement and welfare of the Aboriginal population", in each of our States.²

This statement purports to account for the South Australian Scheme with its progressive outlook, its concern for Aboriginal land rights, and its emphasis on educational and vocational training and consolidation.

1 H.J. Green, "The Policy of the Aborigines Welfare Board in N.S.W., Proceedings of the Armidale Conference on N.S.W. Aborigines 1959, p.31.

2 "The Aborigines and You", p.2. (prepared under the authority of the Minister for Territories), 1963.

The booklet expresses the popular misconception that because cultures evolve over hundreds or even thousands of years, the members of a different cultural and racial group must be exposed to change in gentle stages of transition.

"For generation after generation, cultural adjustment will take place."¹

There is no admission that the individual's characteristics which mark him out as a member of his cultural group are acquired in the early years of his life in the process of his training and education, and may be dramatically affected during this time, and that we do not have to wait for the slow march of cultural evolution for the Aborigines to learn the complexities of white Australian living. Particularly not in N.S.W., where there are no real tribal entities left, no full-blood Aborigines who know only a tribal language, and no Aborigines who haven't had fairly consistent contact with white commerce, education, law enforcement, and employment.

These booklets do not set out to give such an understanding. They are intended merely

"to describe the sort of work that is being done and to suggest means by which this work can be developed and extended."²

The important questions that one meets in reference to the Aborigines all over the State are left unanswered, or to be answered by local racial folk-lore. Are the Aborigines really "a helpless, hopeless people"? If not, why do they live the way they do, on the fringes of towns, on waste land and garbage disposal areas? Why do the children not attain average educational levels? Why are the Aborigines so widely considered a diseased depraved race, to be distrusted and avoided?

All of these questions are left unanswered, yet they are the questions which people feel are most relevant to whether assimilation is a viable policy, or not. Yet in the N.A.D.O.C. pamphlets we are told optimistically and euphemistically, that "older concepts" about the Aborigines "have tended to change with the years" and "the general population is willing to accept and encourage Aborigines."³

1 Ibid., p.3.

2 Ibid., p.9.

3 "Aborigines in the Community", published under the authority of the Minister for Territories, p.5.

Nevertheless, "Aborigines in the Community" tries to argue that Aborigines are capable of the same achievements as other Australians. No reasons are given but the case is supported by carefully selected, glossy photographs of outstanding individuals, like Kath Walker, Harold Blair and other Aboriginal success stories.

Well substantiated and authoritative answers to all of the doubts and suspicions mentioned are available. If formulated and widely distributed in Commonwealth publications for N.A.D.O.C., a great deal of understanding could be achieved which would strike at the barriers of discrimination, inferred inferiority and the suspicion that obstructs progress.

The UNESCO Statement on Race and Race Differences 1962 (May 26th) for example, has among other relevant items,

- (b) Available scientific knowledge provides no basis for believing that the groups of mankind differ in their innate capacity for intellectual and emotional development.
- (d) Vast social changes have occurred that have not been connected in any way with changes in racial type. Historical and sociological studies thus support the view that genetic differences are of little significance in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups of men.

When we have shown that differences in educational and occupational attainments and ways of life are the outcome of social and cultural differences, inequalities of real opportunity and the handicap of our past and present welfare policies in maintaining dependency and social inadequacy; then we will be able to establish the need for acceptance and community involvement of an unpatronising and genuinely helpful nature.