

KULINMA

Listening to Aboriginal Australians



H.C. COOMBS

Kulinma means 'keep listening' and that is what this book urges Australians to do if their attitudes towards, and policies for, Aboriginal Australians are to command respect. Dr Coombs's understanding of Aborigines' problems and aspirations has developed over the years when he was Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, because he and his colleagues listened patiently and with open minds to what Aborigines have said not only to them and other whites, but to one another. The book is intended as a record of that developing understanding and as an expression of gratitude for the many lessons the author and other members of the council learned in the course of their work among Aborigines.

All who are interested in the attempts that have been made in recent years to end the cruelty and indifference that have characterised the attitudes of most white Australians towards Aborigines and to find a basis for mutual respect in the future will find both disappointment and consolation in these pages. Those who know little of the original Australians will learn much.

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Introduction

Most of the papers in this collection were written between 1968 and 1976, while I was Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs. However, four were written during 1977, one about the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, one concerning the developments since the 1967 referendum for an international organisation and two especially for this book, a background paper on the establishment and development of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, and an account of its involvement in the land rights issue. The last was written to fill an obvious gap in the content of the book if it is to contribute adequately to an understanding of Aboriginal affairs during the last decade. The council was deeply involved in the land rights issue but most of the time was fighting a hidden and apparently hopeless battle. Subsequent changes make it possible now to trace the course of that battle and its impact on official policies.

The papers do not pretend to provide a comprehensive picture of the development of Aboriginal affairs over the period. Rather they illustrate the ways in which the council's thinking developed on some major policy issues and the ways by which it sought to bring about significant reorientations in government and administrative attitudes. Many of them are concerned to explore issues of general significance underlying policy judgments which had to be made: thus the paper 'Decisions by Aborigines' was concerned to scrutinise widely expressed assertions that Aboriginal society was by its own constitution and social relationships incapable of making decisions, without which any measure of self-government or autonomy in contemporary matters would be ineffective. Others, like the papers on Aboriginal health and education, were concerned to assess the scale of the problems to be faced and to provoke or stimulate professional concern among those best qualified to deal with them.

In particular this selection of papers focuses on people who live in communities that are predominantly Aboriginal, with varying degrees of contact with white Australian society. It does not deal at any length with the special problems of urban or fringe-dwelling Aborigines and for that reason brief sections of some papers which merely touched on these problems have been omitted. It seemed better not to raise such profound and complex issues even tentatively than to deal inadequately with them. The exception to this

general principle is the George Judah Cohen Memorial Lecture for 1972, 'The future of the Aboriginal Australian', in which I spoke of four groups of Aboriginal people living in widely different social environments, including the Aboriginal communities of Redfern in Sydney and of Bourke, in New South Wales. Because it was part of the intention of this paper to illustrate the different social backgrounds against which Aborigines live in Australia, and the different sorts of problems they encounter, and also because the paper was given at a crucial period in the evolution of federal government policy towards Aborigines, in which I was closely involved, I have included it in full.

The Council for Aboriginal Affairs

Establishment, issues and relationships

The story of my official involvement with Aboriginal affairs begins on 27 May 1967, when more than five million Australians voted 'Yes' to a referendum proposal making two important changes to the Constitution in respect of Aborigines. The first was the repeal of Section 127, which excluded Aborigines from the census to record 'the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth'. The second was to amend Section 51 by the removal of the words 'other than the Aboriginal race' from the provision that 'the Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have the power to make laws for the people of any race, other than the Aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws'.

The campaign for the referendum proposals had not been a controversial one. In fact no official 'No' case was put forward and the 'Yes' case was jointly supported by the Liberal-Country Party Government and the Labor Opposition, with Gordon Bryant — later to become first Labor Minister for Aboriginal Affairs¹ — acting as joint campaign director. In the event only a little more than 500,000 'No' votes were registered, with 91 per cent of voters voting 'Yes', making this the most overwhelming acceptance of a referendum proposal in the history of federation.

The outcome provided an opportunity for the Federal Government to act decisively in the neglected area of Aboriginal affairs, and the press was firm in its encouragement of the government to take up the challenge. Not everyone in the government, however, was eager to act. In early June the Country Party Minister for Social Services, Ian Sinclair, set out his attitude to federal action in this area by saying that he believed that Aborigines were best served by the State Welfare Boards and that 'for this reason I can't see that, in the immediate future at any event, the Commonwealth is likely in any way to replace the Boards'.

The Prime Minister, Harold Holt, although surprised by the overwhelming numbers voting in favour of the referendum, saw it

1. Strictly speaking, of course, the first Labor minister was not Bryant, but E.G. Whitlam from 5 to 19 December 1972.

as a direction to the government to respond promptly and vigorously, and he at once sought to inform himself about possible courses of action.

He and the head of his department, John Bunting, approached me for advice at this time, not because of any special knowledge I might have had of Aboriginal matters, but because of my wide experience of administration allied with a background interest in and sympathy for Aborigines, and because John saw elements in common between the task before the government and those with which I, as Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction, had been involved in the war and post-war years. The advice sought from me at that stage was concerned with organisational matters rather than with the substance of policies to be adopted. Like John Bunting I saw similarities to the situation which had confronted the Curtin government in 1942 in relation to plans for post-war reconstruction. Before action could be planned it was necessary to identify the major problems, to explore community attitudes towards them, to conduct research into the bases of policy and to consult with executive and administrative agencies likely to be affected or involved. I recommended therefore that as a first step the government should appoint a small Council for Aboriginal Affairs supported by an office with a strong research basis to study the problems and to advise the government in relation to policies to be adopted and the administrative and executive means by which they were to be carried out. These recommendations were based upon a belief that policy in relation to Aborigines would involve almost all government departments and agencies, and that it was undesirable that administrative responsibility should be taken from them and entrusted to a single agency providing for all aspects of the needs of one group of Australians. To establish such an agency would, it seemed to me, ensure that Aborigines would continue to be treated as separate, and moreover as second class citizens in respect of the services and facilities provided to the community generally and that those involved in the agency would develop a dangerously dominant and paternalistic relationship with them. These fears were strengthened by my early contact with the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory and Queensland in both of which the tendency for separatism and paternalistic dominance seemed strong. Above all it seemed to me that unless the council and office were free of executive responsibility they could not avoid being identified with the *status quo* and therefore would be inhibited in advocacy of change.

The recommendations therefore envisaged the council and the

office as small, but powerful, seeking to influence policy and administration widely by the quality of their research, their links with the Aborigines, and their persuasiveness — which I hoped would be given added strength by a close association with the Prime Minister and his department.

This approach commended itself to Holt and in September 1967 he announced that an Office of Aboriginal Affairs would be set up in association with his own department to co-ordinate policy in Aboriginal matters and to provide the necessary machinery for state-federal consultations and relationships and for consultation with Aborigines themselves.

In the meantime Holt had invited me to become chairman of the council I had recommended. The invitation was a surprise and my initial reaction was to reply that this was a task for a much younger man with more direct experience of Aborigines.

I had had no previous professional or administrative experience with Aborigines. As a trainee teacher in Western Australia, I had encountered two or three part-Aboriginal children in my first class and a little later lived and taught in a country town which exemplified with brutal exactness how prejudice and fear can drive otherwise kindly people to behave towards their more unfortunate compatriots with cruelty and derision. I can recall being surprised, rather than outraged, by this, but it gave me an added interest in the dark children who suffered from it. I was struck then by a prevailing gentleness in their voices and a responsiveness to the tone and mood of the spoken word. These helped to interest me in the difficulties they were encountering in their learning processes. But other issues soon submerged this embryonic concern. Also I think that, like most Australians of my generation, I accepted the prevailing dogma that Aborigines were doomed to become extinct and believed that, apart from behaving towards those we encountered with common humanity, there was nothing that we could usefully do.

However, encouraged by John Bunting's advocacy, Holt persisted with his invitation and finally I agreed. Several considerations influenced that decision. First, I had by then been Governor of the Commonwealth Bank and then the Reserve Bank for more than nineteen years and was approaching the end of my third seven-year term. William McMahon, who was then Treasurer, had indicated a desire to extend my appointment further, but while I had enjoyed my work in the central banking field I had grave doubts about the wisdom of continuing so long. Nevertheless I was some years short of the normal age for retirement and was anxious to be still active.

Second, I had always been motivated by a desire to be involved in social reform. I had studied economics and central banking under the stimulus of the great depression and always saw my involvement in financial policy as a contribution to such reform. My activities in post-war reconstruction were more obviously a direct expression of this motivation and, with the winding up of that work, it seemed logical to move again to central banking where I believed more humane principles of financial management could be applied.

To turn therefore to a field like Aboriginal affairs, where the need and opportunity for reform were abundantly clear, was attractive, especially as the field offered scope for relations with those on whose behalf I was to work more personal and more intimate than the rather remote links between a central banker and those whose lives were affected by his activities.

Accordingly, on 2 November, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, of which I was to be chairman. The council was to advise on policy, consult with departments involved in any way with Aboriginal matters, and to be an agency for co-operation at both state and federal level. It was to be serviced by the recently announced office.

A few weeks later the names of my colleagues on the council were released. They were W. E. H. Stanner, Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at The Australian National University, and Barrie Dexter, then Australian Ambassador to Laos, who was also to be director of the office.

I have said that I came to the work of the council with no background of knowledge other than that here in our own society was an oppressed and depressed minority. My colleagues were better equipped. Barrie Dexter had had experience of non-European peoples in Asia, Africa and the United States of America and could see the Aborigines' plight in the context of wider ethnic concerns. But it will be apparent how fortunate we both were to have Bill Stanner as our colleague and how heavily we depended on him. No Australian anthropologist had a more profound and sympathetic knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal peoples than Bill. Few had lived so long or so intimately among them or had such an intuitive sympathy with the spiritual elements which suffused their life-style.

But anthropological knowledge, sympathy and an understanding of Aboriginal society were only the beginnings of Bill's contribution to our work. His training as a scholar, his extensive work in various state and federal administrations, and his own integrity

gave him high standards in the search for and the assessment of evidence, and a ruthless contempt for careless and unsound reasoning and for sloppy expression.

Of course we were concerned with problems which lay less within Aboriginal society itself than in the interface between it and our own, or wholly within our own, in the fears and prejudices which often determined white attitudes towards Aborigines and in the rigidities of bureaucratic and governmental processes. In these, despite our long and varied experience in a wide range of official tasks, we were all learners.

The office was set up almost immediately by the borrowing of its first officer, F. H. Moy, from the Department of Territories, but did not begin to function fully until Barrie Dexter's return from Laos in February 1968. The full operation of the council was also delayed because it was not until July 1968 that I retired from my position as Governor of the Reserve Bank. Notwithstanding these delays, the council had its first meeting of all three members in November 1967 during a visit by Barrie Dexter to Australia, continued to meet thereafter when he returned to Laos, keeping in touch with him by correspondence, and met regularly and fairly frequently until my own retirement from the Reserve Bank. It was indeed a period of intense and, for all three of us, double activity.

But before the council and office had begun to function the whole political and administrative context in which it had expected to work was transformed. The tragic death of Harold Holt in December 1967 was followed by the election of John Gorton as his successor, the appointment of William Wentworth as Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs and the replacement of John Bunting as head of the Prime Minister's Department by Lenox Hewitt.

Neither Gorton nor Wentworth was sympathetic towards the concepts underlying the establishment of the council and the office. Gorton's genuine interest in social reform did not extend to Aborigines. Indeed it could be said that he was frankly not interested and could see no good reason for special privileges for Aborigines or for programs directed specifically at their needs. He reluctantly accepted my argument that the council and office should continue to be attached to the Prime Minister's Department — but this was, I think, because it would lend authority to dealings with the states rather than because it might stimulate commonwealth departments and agencies to develop programs for Aborigines. He quickly made it clear that he did not, even when Wentworth wished it, want to deal with the council. It would not be a great exaggeration to say that having agreed to Wentworth's

request for a \$10m budget allocation he believed he had done all that was necessary.

William Wentworth had long been interested in Aborigines. At the political level it was his persistent and energetic advocacy which made possible the Institute of Aboriginal Studies,² and he was ambitious to leave his mark on policies for Aborigines. His interest was primarily in the traditional communities and his relations with urban Aborigines — particularly those who were politically active — were rarely sympathetic. More importantly he disliked the organisational structure of the council and office and the principle of action through other agencies which it implied. He would rather have had from the outset a normal government department with direct executive functions. Indeed he earlier told Barrie Dexter that he would press for its establishment with Barrie as its titular head. When Barrie asked what role, if any, he saw for the council, he replied, 'Nugget can run the Capital Fund [a small fund established to support Aboriginal enterprises] and Bill Stanner can write a book'. Furthermore Wentworth took a very literal view of ministerial responsibility: in effect he wished to be his own departmental head and saw Barrie's role as rather in the nature of a personal assistant.

The departure of John Bunting to the Cabinet Office was to me especially disappointing. It had been his advocacy with Holt which had led to the establishment of the council and office and to my involvement. He and I had worked together in the post-war reconstruction era and there was a deep sense of mutual trust and confidence between us. His successor, Lenox Hewitt, had also worked with me as a member of delegations at post-war trade conferences and I had a respect for his intelligence and administrative competence in that context. He did not seek to limit the autonomy of the council and gave Barrie at the office substantial freedom of movement in detailed administration at a fairly low level. But he shared and perhaps encouraged the limited concern which his Prime Minister showed towards Aboriginal matters and did little to support the policy initiatives which the council wished to take or to ensure that the office obtained the staff and other resources it found increasingly necessary.

Thus instead of working closely with a Prime Minister and head of department firmly resolved to bring about radical change in the

2. There is a story that R.G. Menzies yielded to his pressures in the hope that it would 'shut him up' and provide relief from his persistent and embarrassing criticism of defence and economic policy, but was sadly disillusioned by the result.

status of Aborigines, the council found itself as a rather unwelcome appendage to the Prime Minister and his department, working more closely with a minister-in-charge who would have preferred another structure and whose approach to many problems facing Aborigines differed significantly from ours. Above all we faced a government and a bureaucracy largely indifferent to Aborigines and disinclined to reconsider established policies and administrative structures. These difficulties were intensified as profound philosophical differences emerged about the principles which should underlie policies in relation to Aborigines.

These differences centred around the established doctrine of assimilation and the degree to which the commonwealth should continue to work through the state and territory administrations. The issues involved in the doctrinal struggle over assimilation are described more fully in the paper 'A Decade of Progress' (see pp. 215-43)³, but fundamentally the difference was between the points of view that policies should be directed to incorporating Aborigines into white society to produce one homogeneous social structure (the 'assimilationist' view) and that Aborigines should be enabled, to the extent that they wished, to build on the remnants of their own culture and traditions and to maintain a separate and distinctive social and racial identity within the Australian community (the 'integrationist' view). It is interesting to note that although the term 'assimilation' was taken from the work of Elkin, a profound student and genuine friend of the Aboriginal people, his concept was in fact closer to the 'integrationist' view. The assimilationist approach was firmly built into the policies current in the Northern Territory administration and was firmly held in the Department of Territories and the Department of the Interior, which in 1970 took over responsibility for policy issues in the Northern Territory. Although I was initially inclined to accept the prevailing assimilationist approach, the council took seriously its responsibility to listen to the views of Aborigines in all locations and circumstances and to act as a channel of expression for them. Urban and rural, as well as traditional contacts convinced the council that many Aborigines were far from eager to be assimilated into white society and firmly believed that the option of a distinctive Aboriginal identity within a pluralist Australian society should be open to them.

To some extent, then, the history of the council between the

3. See also W.E.H. Stanner, 'Fictions, nettles and freedoms', Presidential Address to the Anthropology Section of ANZAAS 1972, *Search*, 4, 4 (April 1973), pp. 104-11.

referendum and the end of 1972 might be seen as a record of its growing rejection of assimilation as the basis for Aboriginal policies and of its struggle to persuade successive governments to accept the right of Aborigines to choose the nature and extent of their involvement in Australian society and, having accepted that right, to act in a way which made that choice a reality. It was no easy task.

The division of opinion about the respective roles of the commonwealth and states ran parallel with that between the assimilationist and integrationist views. Established authority wished to confine the commonwealth largely to providing additional funds to enable states and its own territory to devote greater resources to existing policies. The council was convinced firstly, that those policies needed to be re-examined and in some cases modified to justify commonwealth funding, as well as being supplemented by programs which derived from exclusive or concurrent commonwealth powers under the Constitution and were administered by commonwealth departments and agencies; and secondly, that support should be provided for initiatives deriving from Aborigines themselves managed and administered by organisations developed within their own communities.

In holding both these views the council was conscious that social attitudes among the general white community differed sharply from those among groups who felt threatened by larger numbers of Aborigines (such as in country towns in western New South Wales) and by communities (like those in the Northern Territory and northern Queensland) who were conscious that Aboriginal claims and aspirations, for example in respect of land, could threaten their established property rights. The council was therefore anxious to focus basic policy decisions in Canberra where the impact of the broadest and most disinterested social opinion could carry its greatest weight. These differences made it certain that the council would find itself in opposition to and distrusted by long established government sources of advice.

Thus the council, while urging greater subventions to the states and Northern Territory in respect of Aboriginal education, housing, health and similar programs, also argued for a recasting of the statements of general objectives to place greater emphasis on the right of Aboriginal choice and for independent commonwealth initiatives, for instance through study grants for Aboriginal access to secondary and tertiary education, improved training and access to employment, subventions for Aboriginal enterprises, support for Aboriginal arts, and programs to educate white Australians

about Aboriginal society. There was little or nothing in the concrete components of these proposals which called in question the fundamentals of established policies or attitudes, but they produced an increasing tension between the council and other advisers to the government and its administrators. We earned more frequently the label of 'stirrers' and we began to feel that we were regarded as a kind of 'fifth column' pressing unwelcome views on behalf of Aborigines from within government administration. It was without doubt a period of frustration and disappointment.

Nevertheless there were some minor achievements and some events casting predictive shadows into the future. By the first legislation recommended by the council, John Gorton established the Capital Fund for Aboriginal Enterprises (though the council's original proposals suffered in the process of legislating), with an initial sum of \$4.65m to sponsor and assist potentially self-supporting economic ventures by Aborigines rather in the manner of a development bank. This decision was significant, less for its financial and economic impact, than for the fact that it opened the way for support for Aboriginal organisations of various kinds, thus stimulating the search by Aborigines within and outside their own traditions for instruments for collective action.

Peter Nixon, the then Minister for the Interior, announced in 1970 a committee of inquiry into the status of Aborigines on cattle properties to be presided over by Professor Gibb, the Professor of Psychology at The Australian National University, and including in its membership a senior officer from the Northern Territory administration, an anthropologist from Queensland, and the chief executive of the Northern Territory Pastoralists' Association. This announcement provoked Wentworth into unaccustomed anger. His primacy on Aboriginal matters had not been acknowledged or deferred to. He demanded the right to nominate half the members of the committee and Gorton in principle supported him. In the upshot it was agreed that I should become a member of the committee and that the late Clancy Roberts, an Aboriginal with some personal experience of employment in the pastoral industry, should also be added.

It was widely believed among Aborigines and their friends that this committee had been conceived as a 'whitewash job' and as a means to modify the impact on pastoralists of the 'equal pay for Aboriginal pastoral workers' which had been awarded by the Arbitration Commission some years earlier. The committee was sharply divided on basic attitudes towards Aborigines and towards their relative importance compared with the financial and economic

viability of the pastoral industry. For me, membership of the committee was especially valuable in that it provided me with a more comprehensive view of the Aboriginal condition outside reserves and settlements than I had experienced before and because it enabled me to experience at first hand the intensity of the relationship between Aborigines and the land with which they were identified.

As a result of the work of the committee I reached, surprisingly for me, some conclusions more favourable to pastoralists than I had expected. While the record of the white-black relationship in the cattle industry was rich in examples of exploitation, brutality and crime, of which Aborigines were overwhelmingly the victims, there was also evidence that at its best the pastoralist-Aboriginal relationship came close to being one of mutually understood obligations and interdependence. It was therefore comprehensible and often acceptable to many Aboriginal groups involved in it. Furthermore its claims on those groups were intermittent and flexible, allowing generally the continuance of much of the content of their traditional life. The 'equal wage' decision had had the effect therefore of replacing an ill defined (but usually understood) obligation on the pastoralist to provide modest support for a whole Aboriginal group in return for the labour of a few, with a precise and larger, but limited, obligation towards the individuals actually employed.

Generally speaking the effect for Aboriginal communities as a whole was adverse. Pastoralists reduced their use of Aboriginal labour by increased capital expenditures on fences, vehicles etc. and resisted the exercise by Aborigines of their rights of access to the land and its natural resources.⁴

It seemed to me that the main issue emerging before the committee was therefore how Aborigines, being denied employment opportunities, could obtain access to resources and retain some links with their traditional homelands. The membership of the committee precluded any radical approach to these problems and even the very moderate recommendations to excise small areas of land from leases to provide Aborigines with a residential base were coldly received by the pastoral industry. For me, the committee's work was an important step in my growing conviction that for traditional Aborigines land was the essence of their problem and a *sine qua non* of its resolution.

4. Pastoral leases were granted on conditions which included reference to the right of Aborigines to move and hunt over the land and to use its surface waters.

The land issue had already been specifically raised in a way which involved the council. An industrial dispute on Wave Hill Station had led in August 1966 to a 'walk-off' of Aboriginal labour by men from the Gurindji people. Some months later they camped at Wattie Creek, close to sites ceremonially important to them, and made a claim for land on which to live and conduct their own cattle and mining enterprises. The story of the council's growing involvement in the land rights issue is told in a later chapter, but it is sufficient to say here that the advice it then offered to the government on the Wattie Creek claim was not accepted and that its rejection intensified the council's sense of isolation in a political environment hostile to what it was convinced were Aboriginal needs and aspirations.

One small consolation was the decision by the Prime Minister to include in his policy speech for the 1969 election an undertaking to end all discriminatory provisions in Australian legislation. After the election the commonwealth pursued work that was already in progress to identify and repeal discriminatory components in a number of statutes and invited the states to do the same. Action was taken in Western Australia but Queensland refused to cooperate.

Thus towards the end of John Gorton's period as Prime Minister the council was seriously considering resignation. The gap between its general approach to the policy issues affecting Aborigines and that of the main focal points of power in the government itself and in the bureaucracy was so wide that we despaired of it ever being narrowed sufficiently to lend relevance and potential to our work. The gross overwork to which the three of us were subjecting ourselves — and how could we do otherwise when in daily touch with the plight of the Aboriginal people — could not overcome the disadvantageous position in which we found ourselves within the administration.

In March 1971 came the replacement of John Gorton by William McMahon — a change which, at first sight, appeared to promise a more favourable political climate. I had worked closely with McMahon as Treasurer and had found him hard working, conscientious and receptive of ideas. He was anxious to renew our association in a form which would involve me as an adviser on economic and social issues. This I was reluctant to do, both because I was already very fully occupied in Aboriginal affairs and because I did not wish to encroach upon the functions of his official advisers. In conversations shortly after his election I had urged on him that to establish an acceptable Prime Ministerial 'persona' he

needed to amplify his reputation as a competent financial administrator with evidence of wider human sympathies and a more imaginative vision of the future of Australian society. I expressed the view that his personal involvement in Aboriginal affairs would serve these personal ends and help resolve difficult policy and administrative issues. In a letter to him dated 25 March 1971, I told him of the council's frustration and disillusion and urged the importance of clarifying its role and functions as well as of establishing a unified ministerial responsibility for policies in Aboriginal affairs wherever they were to be applied, geographically or within whatever ministerial portfolio.

McMahon said he could not accept ministerial responsibility for Aboriginal affairs himself and indeed that he contemplated breaking the link between the Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs and the Prime Minister by placing Aboriginal affairs within a more comprehensive portfolio under a minister with full ministerial rank. However, he expressed willingness to maintain and develop a Prime Ministerial role in Aboriginal affairs, to preserve the council's direct line of responsibility to him and generally to support a more active and generous approach to Aboriginal matters especially in relation to land. To this end he undertook to make a significant statement of policy at the forthcoming meeting of state and commonwealth ministers concerned with Aborigines which was to be held in Cairns towards the end of April 1971. He also agreed to provide the council with a charter and to strengthen the machinery for co-ordination of policies.

With these assurances I agreed that, provided the head of his own department (by now John Bunting again), the Secretary to the Treasury and the Governor of the Reserve Bank concurred, I would act as an adviser to him. It was, however, agreed that this should not require me to join his staff, that my advice would be expected only on issues agreed between us, and the arrangement would be personal and informal. I was encouraged to accept this commitment because of my confidence that John Bunting and I could make it effective and because I hoped it would lend strength to the Aboriginal cause. In the event neither hope was realised.

The Prime Minister lived up to his undertaking about the Cairns statement. A forthright statement was drafted which committed the government to acknowledging an Aboriginal right to choose the pattern and determine the pace of their future development and promised more active federal action in a variety of fields to give reality to the choice. It also outlined administrative arrangements for the co-ordination of policies and the resolution of conflicts. In

significant respects it was a courageous, and could have been an historic, declaration. However, the gap between the Prime Minister and some of his ministers in these matters was immediately demonstrated by the issue in Cairns of a separate statement by Ralph Hunt, the Minister for the Interior, which reasserted his adherence to the traditional lines of policy.

In the circumstances it is not surprising that the Prime Minister's statement made little public impact. Only the *Melbourne Age* recognised its potential significance and gave it front-page attention. Television programs ignored it. Internally it was an early instance of the Prime Minister's unwillingness or inability to establish his ascendancy over the more reactionary elements in his cabinet and the coalition parties. It also stimulated the already mounting opposition within these parties and within the bureaucracy to the role of the council and to its access to the Prime Ministerial ear.

Despite continued efforts by the council its role had never been defined. It had, we believed, been Holt's intention to give the council a statutory basis with rights to information and with an autonomous capacity to offer comment or advice. There had not been time for any such statute to be drafted and in any case the council believed, after some early work towards drafting a statute before Holt's death, that a period of experimental activity was necessary before its charter could properly be defined. The council was not committed to a statutory basis — indeed it was inclined to think that a charter expressed in a Prime Ministerial letter would probably have provided adequate security and greater flexibility. In the event Holt died without giving greater precision to the council's role than the rather vague words to parliament in announcing its establishment.

Suggestions to Lenox Hewitt, to Wentworth and to Gorton that a charter should be prepared had fallen on deaf ears. It is probable that the new McMahon government, like them, was unwilling to confront the dilemma of, on the one hand confining the council in ways which would lay the government open to the criticism of emasculating it, or on the other of conferring on it powers which gave it undue authority and capacity to embarrass the government.

When McMahon came to the prime ministership the council had again urged that a delineation of its functions should be undertaken. After the Cairns meeting the Prime Minister established a committee of permanent heads of departments to undertake this task, directing that he did not favour a statutory basis but that the council should be given a substantial degree of autonomy. While

this committee was at work, the Prime Minister established the new Department of the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts under Peter Howson, and one of the members of the committee of permanent heads, Lenox Hewitt, was appointed as its permanent head. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs was to be incorporated into this department making even more urgent the clarification of the council's functions.

However, nothing was finalised. Howson was personally closer in sympathy with the views held by Country Party ministers and by pastoralists and mining companies in northern Australia than with the principles embodied in the Prime Minister's Cairns statement. It is likely therefore that the dilemma referred to above was especially acute for him. Certainly the period of the council's association with him was one of increasing difficulty and developing tension.

It could be that the council, not subject to the normal disciplines of the bureaucracy and without commitment to the government or to an established set of policies — indeed seeing itself rather as the advocate within the administration for Aborigines and an instrument of change in relation to policies affecting them — was incompatible with the processes of ministerial government. On the other hand it may have been that the council was urging policies which were philosophically too greatly at odds with the political principles of the government parties. At the time we were becoming convinced that this was so and feared that the anxiety shown by Harold Holt to achieve a significant change in the status of Aborigines was not shared by his party colleagues and had died with him. There must have been some basis for this fear but it is certain that the council would have settled happily for principles and policies of the kind embodied in the coalition statement on Aboriginal affairs in the 1975 election — itself not significantly different from the Labor statement for the 1972 election. At the worst therefore we were less than a decade ahead of an established political consensus.

The Prime Minister, on the advice of the council, had established a Ministerial Committee on Aboriginal Affairs to provide a context within which policy could be shaped and difficulties resolved. Parallel with this there was an interdepartmental committee which became the focus of intense conflict over issues such as land rights and mining on Aboriginal reserves. The protagonists in these conflicts were the Department of the Interior on the one hand and the Council and Office of Aboriginal Affairs on the other. Most other departments tended to abstain from a definite view except on mat-

ters of immediate concern to their departmental interests and in consequence the critical issues had finally to be referred without recommendation to the ministerial committee for resolution. The council was given the opportunity to present a considered set of recommendations to the ministers. This it did in forms which it believed were within the limits set by general statements of government policy on Aboriginal matters, by the decision of April 1971 of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory on Aboriginal claims to title over land, and by a government decision in principle that mining should be permitted within Aboriginal reserves. The recommendations represented therefore not what the council thought right and practicable but the furthest which it believed the government would go within the limits of its own philosophy and previous policy statements.

Despite these constraints which the council placed on its recommendations, the committee's decisions were on all matters of substance a reiteration of long established practice and a rejection of the council's recommendations. The council, in a memo to Peter Howson, stated that 'in certain fundamental respects those decisions were taken against the advice of the Council and the resulting policy differs from that proposed by it in content, principle, and basic philosophy. Accordingly the Council cannot subscribe to it'. It added: 'The Committee's decisions confirm the policies and practices which have brought Aboriginal people into confrontation with the government and which have aroused the resentment and disillusionment of many white Australians. We see no prospect of their ending that confrontation or of laying the foundation for "one Australian society" in which Aboriginal Australians will hold effective and respected places.'⁵

It is perhaps not surprising that by this time tension between the council and Peter Howson had become acute. While he had allowed the council's submissions to go forward to the committee, we believed that he had joined with the Minister for the Interior in urging rejection of them. This tension was rendered more acute because, in respect of the committee's recommendations relating to the granting of leasehold tenure to Aborigines of land within Aboriginal reserves, the council decided that it must continue the fight, and it successfully persuaded the Prime Minister to invite the ministerial committee to amend its recommendations. This story is set out more fully in the later paper 'Aboriginal land rights'.

But further and more acute difficulties were to emerge. The

5. This quotation is a reference to a stated objective of the coalition's policy.

government's decisions were badly received in Australia and abroad. The London *Times*, when the policy was announced on 26 January 1972, carried the headline 'Australia's new rejection of the Aborigines'. The policy was an additional factor contributing to the mounting frustration of Aborigines which led some of them to establish the notorious 'embassy' on the lawns of Parliament House on the day the policy was announced, their action being a symbol of their feeling that they were aliens in their own country. This embassy was tolerated, though with increasing reluctance, for some six months, when an ordinance was gazetted which prohibited camping on public lands in the Australian Capital Territory and the police were instructed to remove the Aborigines' tents. Events arising from this action brought the council's relations with Howson to an all-time low. When the police moved in on 20 July there were clashes with the Aboriginal protestors and some arrests. Aborigines claimed that police had behaved with unnecessary violence and brutality towards what was a peaceful demonstration — a claim which was given credibility by films of the encounter. An attempt to re-establish the embassy a few days later led to further clashes.

In the following week the council was in Darwin with the minister attending a meeting with state and commonwealth ministers concerned with Aboriginal matters. Towards the end of this conference I received an urgent telephone call from Canberra. I was at that time Chancellor of The Australian National University and had come to know reasonably well the President of the Students' Council and one of the student representatives on the University Council, Richard Refshauge. Richard was a politically active student but responsible and motivated by genuine social concern. Certainly he had performed admirably as a member of the University Council. The call was from Richard. The student body had decided to support the Aboriginal protesters and were organising food, blankets etc. for those occupying the 'embassy'. He had with him some of the leaders of the protesting Aborigines.

Briefly they told me of the violence which had occurred and of their certainty that on the following weekend the police would renew their attacks if the Aborigines returned. There was a firm determination not to give way and even larger numbers of protesters were expected and fears for serious injuries among them were widespread. While every effort was being made to prevent Aborigines arming themselves they feared that some might in fact do so secretly. In other words they were not going to withdraw, they expected police violence and they feared that there would be bloodshed.

They asked whether there was anything which I could do to persuade the government to meet a representative group of the protesters and to ensure that police behaviour was non-violent.

I discussed this with my two colleagues as the Darwin meeting went on about us. We were agreed that the Aboriginal fears were genuine and well founded; that there was a real risk of extreme violence and bloodshed; and that we had an obligation to do what we could to avert this outcome. Accordingly we prepared a submission to the minister outlining a course of action which we believed would defuse the situation. I also sent a message to the Prime Minister expressing my conviction that unless special action was taken there could be bloodshed. The minister bluntly dismissed the council's proposals. To him the issue was simple. The protesters were trespassing: any action the police found necessary to move them would have his support.

In the meantime we had been informed that ministers would be meeting in Canberra on the following day to discuss the 'embassy' issue. We believed it urgent that ministers should be informed of the council's views. Furthermore I had been advised through the Cabinet Office that I should be available to be called on for that meeting if required. There was a strike in progress and I could not have got to Canberra in time so I asked Howson to allow me to return with him on a spare seat in his VIP aircraft. This he refused to do. Fortunately I was able to arrange a seat on an overseas flight passing through Darwin that afternoon.

Because of the confusion over transport and my involvement in drafting work for the Darwin Conference there was not an opportunity before my own and the minister's departure to clear with him the council document for cabinet which had been drafted by Professor Stanner on the basis of that previously given to the minister. It was, however, telephoned to Canberra for submission to the Cabinet Office so that it could be available to ministers on the following day.

On my return to Canberra I met a group of about fifteen of the Aboriginal protesters in a rather emotional and incoherent session during which I endeavoured to get them to list specific proposals which I could report to cabinet. This was difficult. The original issues of land rights, greater expenditure on education, housing, etc. had become overwhelmed by concern over police action, the right to meet ministers, and a desire for a continuing Aboriginal presence in Canberra. I prepared a brief summary of these issues and made it available to the Cabinet Office.

In the meantime I tried to contact Peter Howson but was not able to do so. It is probable that after an initial attempt I did not pursue

the contact with great vigour. I was conscious that I was acting in a way contrary to the minister's wishes and feared that he might well attempt to have the council document withdrawn — despite an assurance which he had earlier given that the council could always present its views to cabinet.

In the event our efforts were partially successful. Cabinet discussed the document; arrangements were made for a committee of ministers including Peter Howson, Ralph Hunt, Minister for the Interior, and Malcolm Fraser, Minister for Education, to meet a group of the Aboriginal protesters; and apparently police were instructed to avoid all show of force in dealing with the next gathering of protesters, which took place in a much more peaceful atmosphere.

The ministerial meeting with the protesters, at which I was present, was a strange episode. The ministers' attitude was that the protesters had no mandate to represent Aboriginal opinion and that a forthcoming meeting of advisory groups from the various states and territories provided an adequate channel for Aboriginal views which the protesters should use. They undertook to consider any proposals submitted in this way.⁶ After stating this position they sat silent and impassive while Aboriginal after Aboriginal spoke of their grievances, their frustrations and their fears. A passionate earnestness gave eloquence to their pleas and made the occasion, for me at least, a moving experience. It apparently affected Ralph Hunt the same way. As we walked away from the meeting he remarked that it was a sad commentary on two hundred years of white occupation that it should have occasioned such hatred, bitterness and distrust. His colleagues made no response.

It was after this meeting that Peter Howson in tense conversation in his office accused me of dishonest and improper behaviour, claiming that I had sought throughout our working relationship to deceive him. I replied that there was nothing in what I had said to the Prime Minister or in the document for cabinet which I had not already said to him and that he had been aware of my intention to inform the Prime Minister. The preparation of the document for cabinet had arisen from a request from the Cabinet Office which was anxious that ministers should be fully informed. I agreed that he should have seen it and that perhaps I should have persisted longer in my efforts to contact him that morning and apologised for this failure. I thought, however, that my action was justified by

6. When this meeting of the advisory groups occurred they pointed out that they had no more authority than the protesters to speak for Aborigines generally and supported the embassy.

the need for cabinet to be fully informed and to avoid a conflict as damaging to the government as to the Aborigines. Furthermore I and my colleagues believed that as members of the council we had an overriding obligation to ensure that significant Aboriginal voices were heard.

This episode emphasised two anomalies in the council's role. The failure (for which Howson had for many months been personally responsible) to provide the council with terms of reference and a charter for its activities left much room for conflicts about what degree of autonomy the council possessed. The council did not see itself as part of the minister's department nor as part of his personal staff but as an independent agent with a right to study, to analyse and to make its conclusions known to the government as a whole and in some circumstances to the public. This right, we believed, was demonstrated by the council's link with the Prime Minister and by the understandings with Harold Holt at the time of our initial appointment.

We were, however, now more than ever certain that the concepts of the council's role and methods of work with which we had begun and which had guided us did not fit comfortably into the existing structure of Australian government. Relations with Peter Howson remained strained and after some weeks of delay he wrote to us saying that he considered that the council had a right to submit material to cabinet only with his consent and through him. We replied that such a position was unacceptable to the council and we sent a copy of our reply to the Prime Minister. However, before this confrontation could be resolved preparations for the 1972 elections had pushed it into the background.

As early as May 1970, Barrie Dexter had, with the concurrence of the then Minister-in-Charge (W. C. Wentworth) met the Parliamentary Labor Party's Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and had discussed the work of the council and the office, the policies the council believed necessary and the problems of policy and administration being encountered.

This and subsequent contacts clearly influenced ALP thinking on these issues and the Federal ALP Conference at Launceston in 1971 adopted a much more forthright and vigorous policy for incorporation in the party platform. Communication with the ALP caucus committee was maintained and in March 1972 the council prepared for that committee a document which reviewed events since the referendum, examined difficulties in the existing role chosen by the commonwealth and proposed modifications to it. In this document attention was drawn to the problems inherent in the

council's own position and suggested possible limitations and modifications of its functions. A meeting with the caucus committee was held in September 1972 in which month I also had an informal discussion of the issues covered in the council's document with E.G. Whitlam — then Leader of the Opposition.

Parallel with these and other consultations between various departments and agencies and opposition committees and 'shadow ministers', discussions were being held between departments and the Public Service Board about structural changes which might be necessary if there were a change of government. Extensive talks were held between Barrie Dexter and board officers about how the ALP plan to establish a Department of Aboriginal Affairs could best be implemented.

Partly as a result of these consultations the Labor Party came to office in December 1972 committed to policies much more vigorous than those which had been followed by their predecessors and with a content which reflected much of the thinking and the experience which the council and the office had developed over the previous years. The council's role in particular could now be different. The establishment of a full department and the promise of a fully elected representative body to express Aboriginal opinion both meant that functions previously exercised by the council could be effectively performed within a more traditional structure. More importantly there was a sense of commitment wholly new in the Canberra scene. Not long after he took office Whitlam stated: 'If there is one achievement for which I hope we will be remembered it is . . . that the Government I lead removed a stain from our national honour and gave justice and equality to the Aboriginal people'. In Gordon Bryant, a minister was appointed who had a long and honourable record as a friend of Aborigines, as an active participant in the work of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and as a man who brought humanity, warmth and affection to his relationships with individual Aborigines, among whom he had many friends.

The decision to establish a full Ministerial Department of Aboriginal Affairs ran counter to the council's belief that the primary agency concerned with Aboriginal affairs should not have major executive and administrative functions but should study the condition of Aborigines, propose policies and programs to be administered by other agencies and maintain a continuing survey of their effectiveness — that is, it should generally act within the agencies of government as a source of stimulus and of ideas, as an advocate and as a critic on behalf of Aborigines. This conception

required that the agency should be substantially free of executive responsibility, not identified with the *status quo*, nor seen as a rival or competitor for power within the bureaucracy by those to whom policies and programs were entrusted for performance.

We had to admit that our attempts to establish such an agency had not been successful. To have done so would have required the general commitment to changing the status of Aborigines which Harold Holt had promised and a political 'clout' which had been lacking in the council and the ministers with whom it had been associated. Furthermore the concept was unfamiliar to those involved in the Australian bureaucracy, even to the staff of the office itself. The council somewhat reluctantly had come to believe that a more 'normal' organisational structure might do better.

An additional consideration was the commitment of the Whitlam government to the development of Aboriginal organisations. The proposed National Aboriginal Consultative Council obviously could develop effectively as the channel for conveying Aboriginal views and aspirations to the government — a task which the council had sought to perform. It was possible to envisage it developing a role also in policy formation in the establishment of priorities for expenditure. Similarly the government was sympathetic towards the Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service, to Aboriginal enterprises and to incorporated Aboriginal communities and their developing institutions. We hoped therefore that the new department might see itself as a foster parent to these emerging Aboriginal initiatives entrusting increasing authority and executive power to them.

Shortly after his appointment the council met with the new minister and discussed its future, offering to step down. Bryant said that he did not wish to wind up the council, that there was room for it as well as for the other sources of advice he would draw on. He agreed, however, that it would be useful to clarify its charter and said that he would think about this and about the possibility of adding new members to the council. We agreed to continue and to seek for a clearer conception of our role. For the present we concentrated on assisting Barrie Dexter in the development of his department and its organisational structure.

The relationship was not successful. Bryant continued to be reluctant to identify our role and difficulties began to occur. He relied heavily on the advice of his personal staff and individual Aboriginal advisers with whom he had long associations. Effective relationships between these advisers and the department were not established and communication often broke down. Gordon Bryant,

like W. C. Wentworth before him, saw ministerial responsibility as justifying direct executive action by him sometimes in circumstances which caused embarrassing difficulties for the department and its permanent head. The council, which worked closely with the department, could not escape from the effect of these embarrassments. Our position was made more difficult because a good deal of my time was now taken up with work for the Prime Minister himself. Bryant and some other members of the Labor Party's caucus committee felt that this role as adviser to the Prime Minister was not compatible with the relationship with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs which my chairmanship of the council required.

Accordingly, in October 1973, I informed the Prime Minister that I thought the council should be wound up, offering — if the government wished — that Professor Stanner and I would stand ready to undertake work on Aboriginal matters on a part-time consultancy basis. Indeed Professor Stanner was already acting in this way for the Parliamentary Committee on Aboriginal Affairs.

Consideration of this request was prevented by a change of ministers but when Senator James Cavanagh was appointed we waited on him and repeated our advice. He was unwilling to accept it, asked that we continue, but agreed to provide us with a charter. He was as good as his word. The charter, when completed, established that we were to act as consultants, primarily to the minister himself and the secretary of his department, but, with the minister's concurrence, to other ministers, to the NACC and to Aboriginal communities and their councils. It was agreed that for the immediate future we should concentrate on developing and recommending measures to strengthen the power and capacity of Aboriginal communities to conduct their own affairs.

It was not long after this that I accepted an invitation from the Prime Minister to preside over the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration. This proved to be a substantially full-time task although I had made it a condition of my acceptance that I would take occasional opportunities to continue my association with Aboriginal communities. During this time Professor Stanner and I were able to conduct, at the minister's request, some fairly comprehensive studies of a number of Aboriginal communities and to make recommendations for action relating to them. These studies are embodied in reports (the first on Hooker Creek and Yuendumu and the second on Eastern Arnhem Land) which were presented to parliament by the minister and

published with his authority.⁷ In addition, Professor Stanner continued his work with the parliamentary committee and acted as a consultant to the department on anthropological and related issues.

It was a relief for the council to have established with a minister working relationships which were wholly satisfactory. This was due in part to the fact that the charter agreed to by Senator Cavanagh made clear what our role should be while maintaining the council's independence which we regarded as critical to our performance. It was due also to the energy and dedication which the minister showed and to the increasing respect we acquired for him.

Meanwhile the Woodward Report on Aboriginal land rights had been presented and adopted by the government and legislation to give effect to its recommendations was being drafted. It was especially satisfying that the coalition parties also accepted it and the relevant legislation prepared by the Whitlam government, although lost with the dissolution of parliament in November 1975, was reintroduced in substantially the same form by the new government. This was the first significant evidence of the emergence of a substantial inter-party consensus on major Aboriginal policy objectives in the federal parliament.

When the campaign for the 1975 elections started this evidence was strengthened by the statement of the coalition parties on policies for Aborigines which began by declaring: 'We recognise the fundamental right of Aborigines to retain their racial identity and traditional life-style or where desired to adopt a partially or wholly European life-style.'

It went on to outline a policy based upon Aboriginal self-management, Aboriginal land rights, Aboriginal self-sufficiency backed by increased funds and Aboriginal involvement in the related programs. The dramatic contrast between this forward looking policy statement and the grudging reluctance of that announced in 1974 indicated some extensive heart-searching in the interim. To this heart-searching the Woodward Report contributed as did the consultations with academics and other sources of intellectual stimulus arranged by the Liberal Party in the revision of the party platform. That substantial rethinking was taking place was illustrated by a comment made to me at about this time by Ralph Hunt who on a social occasion remarked, 'I realise now that in relation to land and other Aboriginal matters, the Council was

7. Council for Aboriginal Affairs, *Report on visit to Yuendumu and Hooker Creek*, AGPS, Canberra, 1974 and *Report on Arnhem Land*, 1976.

right in the advice it offered us back in 1970 and 1971. I wish now that I had listened to it.'

A major contribution came also from R.J. Ellicott who over this period was 'shadow minister' for Aboriginal Affairs on the coalition front bench team. From the time of his involvement as Solicitor-General in the Gove land rights case⁸ he had taken a sympathetic attitude on Aboriginal issues.

This reformulation meant that to a substantial degree there now existed a bipartisan consensus in the Federal Parliament on Aboriginal affairs. It was not possible for the council to judge how far its work had contributed to the development of this consensus but it saw it as some compensation for past difficulties.

In the event, the impact of the changes on objectives and promised programs has been sharply restricted by the financial restraints imposed by the coalition government. These have damaged valuable components of existing programs as well as requiring reassessment of others less successful. Reassessment has also been a consequence of a change in the departmental head, a process justified after a period of intense and rapid growth. For the present, however, there can be little doubt that effectiveness reviews and financial stringency have impaired both Aboriginal progress and their confidence in governmental assurances.

With the change of government in 1975 I decided that the time had come for me to withdraw from the scene. The Australian National University, when the end of my term as Chancellor was approaching, invited me to become a Visiting Fellow — a post which would give me the opportunity to continue to work for and among Aborigines but also to pursue other interests especially in environmental matters. Accordingly, when R.I. Viner was appointed as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the council waited on him and tendered the same advice that it had to Bryant, Whitlam and Cavanagh in 1973 — that it should be wound up. He expressed regret that the council would come to an end and asked whether Professor Stanner and I would continue to be available as consultants. Professor Stanner was able to agree on a fairly continuous part-time basis, and I said that I would be willing to carry out particular tasks agreed between us within clear limits of time. However, when the minister discussed this plan with the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister asked that the council continue until the decision about the future of the NACC resulting from the Hiatt

8. This was the famous case in which the Yirrkala people brought an action against Nabalco Pty Ltd, a mining company, and the commonwealth. See further on this case and Ellicott's involvement 'Aboriginal land rights', pp. 159-83.

Report had been made and announced.⁹ Although we accepted this, my own involvement thereafter was limited to preparing some comments on the Torres Strait border issue and to the preparation of a study of the Pitjantjatjara people and their future. That study provided material for a later paper in this volume.

With the presentation of the Hiatt Report and the government's announced policy for the NACC's future, the way became clear for the council to be wound up. This was done in December 1976, when Viner informed Parliament accordingly. The period of our association with Viner had been fruitful. Despite the financial problems the changed basis for the coalition's policies combined with the competence, deep concern for Aborigines and an untiring capacity for work which Viner had shown made possible a cordial working and personal relationship. It was doubly pleasing to us that the council was able to end its life, which in its political and administrative context had frequently been stormy, in so harmonious a manner and in the knowledge that a substantial degree of national consensus had been reached, at least on the political level.

Frequently the council had felt that its involvement in Aboriginal affairs had meant a constant stream of disappointments and frustrations interrupted only occasionally by minor achievements. Yet to look back over the period, as the final paper in this book attempts to do, is, I believe, to be convinced that real progress has been made. We may not have advanced far along the road towards a society in which Aboriginal Australians will receive the justice and respect to which they are entitled but the way ahead is clearer and the instruments of change gradually become more effective.

Despite the disappointments and frustrations, 1967 to 1977 were for me and my colleagues a rewarding period. We have had the reward of knowing that when we won particular fights, this was a benefit to the Aboriginal people. Our work gave us friends among Aboriginal communities, traditional, rural and urban, who by their character and affection greatly enriched our personal lives. It brought us into increasing contact with a culture and a way of life of profound interest and for which increasing knowledge brought increasing respect. I see the work of the council and this book as a small acknowledgment of what we have gained personally from our association with Aboriginal Australians and an expression of gratitude for it.

9. Before the election of December 1975 the coalition parties had declared their policy to hold an inquiry into the role and structure of the NACC. A Committee of Inquiry was appointed on 8 April 1976 under the chairmanship of Dr L. R. Hiatt, Reader in Anthropology at the University of Sydney and President of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. A report was presented to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on 4 November 1976.

Understanding Aborigines

Man and his environment — can we learn from the Aborigines?

When the Europeans first came to Australia they found a land where a balance existed between man and nature. The Aborigines saw themselves as a part of nature rather than its antagonists, co-operating with their environment rather than attempting to subdue it. This attitude was in part at least forced on them by the inadequacy of their technology. They cultivated no grains and domesticated no animals other than the dog, and consequently it was probably beyond their power to cause such changes as have been brought about by the European with his sheep, wheat and metal tools. The Aboriginal had only fire and the dingo with which to impose his will upon his world. No new factor is without its effect on the ecosystems; it seems likely that the Aboriginal's fire wiped out a few of the less fire-resistant plants and trees, while the dingo may have obliterated the last remnants of the Pleistocene fauna.¹ Despite these changes the balance had certainly stabilised thousands of years before Phillip.

The Aboriginal was conservative and a conservationist. He could not afford to damage the country that fed him. With a few negligible exceptions he had no reserves of food, and had to rely on a fresh supply always being available. If the productive capacity of the land was damaged by careless exploitation the tribe would suffer. He found that it was best to leave some yams for the next season's crop, and not to kill stingray during the breeding season.² Conservation techniques had been built into the tribal traditions by 500 generations of experience: the Ancestral Beings — god-like ancestors — had created the land and its gifts and had 'demonstrated how, by rational seasonal exploitation of foods and waters, it was possible to have and continue to enjoy their resources'.³ Berndt quotes an Arnhem Land woman as saying to a missionary: 'You

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1. N.B. Tindale, 'Ecology of primitive man in Australia', in A. Keast *et al.* (eds.), *Biogeography and ecology in Australia*, W. Junk, Den Haag, 1959, p. 43.
2. R.M. and C.H. Berndt, *The world of the first Australians*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1964, p. 93.
3. Tindale, p. 40.

people go to all that trouble, working and planting seeds, but we don't have to do that. All these things are here for us, the Ancestral Beings left them for us. In the end you depend on the sun and the rain just the same as we do, but the difference is that we just have to go and collect the food when it is ripe. We don't have all this other trouble'.⁴ In the field of human behaviour the Beings had arranged 'protection from over-exploitation of resources by developing systems of taboo, enforcing restrictions of diet on certain social groups and on certain age grades, thus enabling a continuous living to be wrested from a given territory'.⁵

The Ancestral Beings were god-like, but they were also animal-like and human. The Aborigines did not draw a sharp line between man and the natural world: the system of totemism similarly linked man and animal — a man of the emu totem would have a blood relationship with the emu, and would not kill or eat it.⁶ They did not regard man as 'differing in quality from other natural species, but sharing with them the same life essence'.⁷ The rites for increase of rain, for example, were performed when rain was likely to come: not as an attempt to control nature by magical means, but as a way of co-operating with nature to help maintain the natural order.⁸ The Aboriginal was not divided from the world about him by physical barriers: he wore virtually no clothes and built no real houses. To keep warm he adapted himself to the conditions he found, and by active control of blood circulation and bodily metabolism could maintain his body warmth from the smallest of fires.⁹

The Aboriginal builds a small fire and sits close to it, the European a large fire and sits further away. With the loss of any sense of relationship between man and nature has come a growing insensitivity to upsets in the natural order. Western man has expended his energy in erecting material buffers against nature, designed to wipe out the natural differences in seasons and climates, times and places. These buffers, built at increasing cost, enable him to postpone the retribution awaiting those who destroy

4. Berndt and Berndt, p. 93.

5. Tindale, p. 40.

6. A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1968, p. 173.

7. Berndt and Berndt, p. 189.

8. Elkin, p. 228.

9. J.B. Cleland, 'Some aspects of the ecology of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Tasmania and Southern Australia', *Royal Society of Tasmania Papers and Proceedings*, 1939, p. 12, quoting other authorities. See also J.B. Cleland, 'Our natives and the vegetation of southern Australia', *Mankind*, 5, 4 (1957).

their resources. More and more interference is needed to keep things hanging together, or going at all, but with ingenuity and technology (but at increasing cost) it can be done; mistakes can for the present be retrieved or concealed. The Aborigines' ability to achieve such a postponement was limited indeed and practically disappeared with European settlement. The introduction of the cat and the rabbit alone, mere camp followers of the march of civilisation, was sufficient to destroy the economy of the desert people without a shot being fired, even if they had never met a European: the cat killed off the smaller animals and the rabbit stripped away much of the vegetation.¹⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that both the cat and the rabbit are now important components of the diet of desert Aborigines.

The European settlers brought flocks and herds that were to transform the face of Australia, creating grazing land where there had been forest, and vast areas of drifting sand where there had been grazing land. The ecosystems of the country had to be utterly changed, simply because the pre-existing environment could not support a civilisation of the kind we demanded of it. We did this boldly and deliberately, confident that our technology would provide the buffer behind which people could multiply, at a rate impossible to those dependent on the unimproved production of the land. There could be no question of serious over-population in Aboriginal society, as any surplus would be trimmed off by the first drought. Developed societies can at any one time avoid this discipline, but in doing so make their way on to new problems. A growth in human population causes more severe ecological imbalance than any other factor, since it presses us on to technological change at an exponentially increasing rate, in forms the ecological consequences of which we cannot hope to foresee. Malthus saw famine, pestilence and war as the inevitable restraints on population growth. In part, for reasons of humanity, we reject these restraints as unacceptable. But unless we find others as effective the prospects of ecological balance are remote indeed.

In brief then the Aborigines before Phillip had established a way of life in harmony with their environment. This harmony was not inevitable and indeed their first impact, through fire and the dingo, was probably destructive. But they were compelled by reality to come to terms with their environment, and by a complex of social and economic means they successfully established a balance on which the harmony depended. We, facing the same problem, have

10. Tindale, p. 46.

sought to push further into the future the time when we too must come to terms with our environment but the sands are almost certainly running out for us.

Here, as indeed in other ways, we can learn from the first Australians.

Approaching Aborigines

It may be helpful if I say a little about the attitude of mind with which I think the Aboriginal people should be approached.

Firstly they are entitled to respect as persons and as a people in their own right. When you have heard more about the traditional way of the Aborigines you will realise that it is a respect which is fully warranted.

The Aborigines have occupied this continent for more than thirty thousand years and evolved a way of life in harmony with the environment which gave them security, stimulus and a distinctive identity.

We, who are inclined to think of Australian history beginning with the arrival of Governor Phillip, imagine the continent before then as empty save for a few wandering savages and largely untouched by the influence of human life. Yet I have seen maps of Australia relating to that prehistoric time which show the areas occupied by the various tribal groups, the distribution of the related chains of languages and the trade routes along which flowed the commodities and cultural influences which passed between these many groups. The interesting thing about these maps is that they comprehend the whole continent — no part of which lay outside the humanising influence of Aboriginal society.

We who measure economic success by the complexity of our technology and by the quantity and diversity of material goods it creates cannot understand the genius which solved the problem of economic scarcity by the simplification of human needs and the means whereby they are met.

The Aboriginal saw possessions beyond the barest essentials as a burden, limiting his freedom of action and movement. He, with his fellows, found food, shelter and warmth readily from an environment which in many places looks harsh and inhospitable to us

Extracts from the opening address to the ABSCHOL Symposium on Aborigines, Australian National University, Canberra, 8 April 1972.

and shared these things in accordance with time-honoured tribal principles. They spent much time on games, story telling and the singing of songs and other music making, in painting, carving and the making of artefacts designed only to give them pleasure. They had a tradition of dramatic performance which ranged from improvised camp-fire presentation of traditional tales and social commentary to deeply significant and emotionally charged ceremonies around which their religious life revolved.

We, who tend to identify culture with what is written or in some way recorded, cannot comprehend the potential richness of the oral tradition. Justice Blackburn in his judgment on the Aboriginal Land Case¹¹ expressed his conviction that the Aborigines possessed and lived by a whole system of laws — complex but adapted to their ways of life — which in his view were capable of cognisance by our legal system if we were prepared to acknowledge its validity for the Aboriginal people. Recently Ginsberg, the American poet, reminded us that the Aboriginal song cycles celebrating episodes in the lives of their totemic ancestors and embodying the myths by which they come to terms with the universe are the last living survival of the epic tradition of poetry which we are inclined to identify only with the heroic days of Greece.

A people of whom these things can be said are entitled to respect. They may well be capable of bringing to our society qualities which may enrich it and of which, in the generations ahead, we may have a great need.

Secondly do not romanticise the Aboriginal. This is a real danger to those who are caught up in the strangeness, the complexity and the richness of Aboriginal culture. My friend, Professor Stanner, says it is a tendency in the attitude of dominant races towards primitive peoples which has recurred in history from time to time and has, he says, almost always been followed by the corruption and destruction of the primitives. You will perhaps recall that the idea of 'the noble savage' cultivated in the eighteenth century by Rousseau and others preceded and in part influenced the destructive impact of European civilisation through its explorers, traders, missionaries and blackbirders which followed the entry of Captain Cook into the Pacific.

As you will realise, surviving Aborigines now rarely if ever live wholly in accordance with their traditional way although its influence remains powerful and often unsuspected. On pastoral

11. This was the famous 'Gove Land Rights Case' brought by the Yirrkala people against the mining company, Nabalco Pty Ltd, and the commonwealth (*Milirrpum v. Nabalco Pty Ltd* (1971) 17 FLR 141).

properties, on missions and settlements, on the fringes of country towns and in the ghettos of the cities, Aborigines live in a widely differing range of circumstances — each with its own characteristic problems. Most of these problems derive from the fatal impact of our ways on them and in many cases it has destroyed their identity, undermined their faith and hindered them with the social handicaps of ignorance, poverty and prejudice. It is not an easy task to restore that faith and to narrow these handicaps. Those who involve themselves in these tasks, whether Aboriginal or white, must be prepared for failure, for disappointment and for frustration — but the rewards can be great.

Arts and Aboriginal life

In the Boyer Lectures entitled *After the dreaming*, my friend and teacher, Professor Stanner, tells the sad story of an elderly Aboriginal whose tribe had been scattered, who saw the links which bound him to the land being broken, who felt himself to be cut off from the sources of his own life and from the continuities of his people. He was aware that everything he had loved and everything with which he was familiar was in ruins around him and that he must come to terms with the alien white man's civilisation. When he was about to leave his own country to seek a place within that white man's civilisation, Stanner found him burning something in a fire and asked him what it was he was doing. And the old man replied, quietly and unemotionally: 'I am burning my dreaming'.

Stanner tells that story as an example of the Aboriginal's capacity to survive, to seek an answer to the insoluble, to face clear-eyed the need for a severance which was to him indeed almost a personal suicide. Aborigines throughout our history have been faced by that desperate option. We have steadily, sometimes in ignorance, sometimes in anger, but frequently in wanton and arrogant destructiveness, brought their world into ruins around them. There are many today, including some who claim to be guided by a concern for their welfare and some who have responsibility for that welfare, who consciously seek to shatter and destroy what remains of their civilisation.

An address given at the opening of an exhibition of work by the Pitjantjatjara people from Amata and Ernabella at the Argyle Arts Centre, Sydney, 7 December 1971.

A year or two ago, reports of discoveries of nickel at Wingelina in the Western Australian desert were accompanied by stories of the destruction and despoliation of sacred sites of the Aborigines by those who sought the nickel. My then minister, W.C. Wentworth, asked me to go out to Wingelina and to see how far these reports were true. I went first to Amata to meet the men who were to escort me. They seemed to me, when I met them first, a rather broken and derelict group. We set out in an old truck, shot a few kangaroos for food and went to Wingelina. There they took me to show me the sites — sacred to them and to their ancestors — and to see the damage that had been caused.

It was at this stage I became conscious of a change. Whereas earlier I was being led by a white anthropologist and the Aborigines were just coming along, now *they* were taking *us*. They were in charge and we were the guests. They talked to me about the significance of the sites and the stories of their totemic ancestors, and what it meant to them for these places to be destroyed. As the day progressed, these men grew in stature and authority. Increasingly I became conscious of being a learner — someone being instructed in a mystery of infinite complexity. When we had finished the day they said: 'We do not come here very often, and it is an important occasion. Tonight we would like to sing one of the song cycles about our ancestors who created this country for us. Would you like to come?' And I said: 'I certainly would'.

We went out that night and sat in a circle in the sand with two or three fires between us as they sang. The night was moonless and the only light was from the stars and the fires. The songs were sung in a kind of Gregorian chant-style melody while the rhythm of the song was beaten into the sand with a stick. I sat amongst them, putting my hand on that of the man next to me, trying by moving with him to feel the complex rhythm. In that circle I realised that these men whom I had presumed to pity had dignity and authority backed by a tradition infinitely older than our own. It was a moving experience which has left its mark on my mind and spirit.

At Ernabella and Amata the women have taken the crafts which their ancestors taught them; they have built on them; and have created not merely something which is continuous with the past but which expresses the present and is a claim on the future.

The women of Amata and Ernabella have not burnt their dreaming. They are, in the maintenance and development of their traditional arts, transposing their vision of life into art forms ancient in origin, continuous in development, and responsive to the influence of the present — into objects which satisfy them and can

delight us. Aboriginal tradition, despite what many have said about it, has never been static or frozen into unchangeable form. When Captain Cook came here, their life was vigorous with religious, dramatic and artistic impulses. In my experience at Wingelina and in this exhibition there is a proof that those impulses are still alive and still fertile. The 'dreaming' which the Aboriginal arts express is changing under the pressure of events, but it still links these people with their past and gives purpose and reality to their present. More importantly, let us remember that it is their inalienable right to preserve that 'dreaming' and that it is our responsibility to make it possible. If we do so the works which flow from it will be a source of inestimable gain to our own culture and to our own sense of humanity.

Aboriginal law

Too little work has been done on the nature and content of Aboriginal law. We should not conclude that, because it is unwritten, it does not exist or that it is ephemeral. Anthropologists who have lived among Aborigines have remarked on the force of the law in their society and that to them the concept of 'the law' is something of deep significance. They have been impressed by the degree to which Aboriginal society is conducted in accordance with their law.

In some circumstances this system of law can sanction and indeed require of those who honour it action in conflict with the laws of white Australian society — sometimes action which is in conflict with almost universally accepted conventions. In Aboriginal society a young girl can be promised in marriage to an older man, a practice clearly conflicting with the United Nations Convention on Human Rights. Similarly, punishments for breaches of ceremonial laws can conflict with the laws of our society although to an Aboriginal they are obligatory and his failure to perform them would involve him in a breach of his own law. Different too are the means of trial and judgment established under Aboriginal law. White Australian law bases the means of trial and judgment upon the rights of the individual, the rights to trial by independent and impartial tribunal. Aboriginal law, on the contrary, presumes the

From 'Australian lawyers and social change', an address given at an Australian National University Seminar, 23 August 1974.

subordination of the individual to the rights and needs of the community. In understanding the implications of this subordination, it is important to remember that an Aboriginal community traditionally was often not much larger than an extended family. Accordingly, in Aboriginal society an accused person will have his alleged offence investigated, his guilt determined, and his punishment assessed by the same group of people — those who know him well, who form part of his own society, and who therefore are those best entitled to express its conventional wisdom.

This subordination of the individual, while alien to our present practices, is not wholly foreign to the tradition from which they derive. It has much in common with the practices of European law in the middle ages — much more so than it has with those which have developed in the last two hundred years under the influence of the liberal philosophers of the eighteenth century.

Similarly, Aboriginal society will deal differently with an alleged offence against another member of the group. In such a case, if the offence is judged to have been proven, the punishment may be one in which the offended person, sometimes with the consent of the offender, sometimes by the authority of the community, is authorised to inflict personal injury on the guilty party. The offender may himself offer to receive, or he may be required to accept, the thrust of a spear in his thigh. Such a conclusion to an inter-personal dispute involves, of course, a breach of white Australian law. That breach could and does become particularly serious when, by accident or in some cases by deliberate decision, the injury is mortal.

An Aboriginal Australian therefore lives simultaneously under two law systems. It is interesting to note that at least in some communities he has developed ingenious means of accommodating to this in ways which imply a consensus relating to jurisdiction. In these communities, Aborigines appear to have a clear conception of when an offence or situation justifies the intervention of white law-enforcing authorities and to be equally certain when, in their view, there is no call for white intervention. They appear to assume that we have considered this problem and reached a parallel if not wholly identical judgment about relative jurisdictions. In fact, however, to the best of my knowledge, no significant attempt has been made in our society by law authorities or academics to examine this problem or to explore it with Aboriginal leaders.¹²

12. The recent reference (1977) by the government to the Law Reform Commission has now brought this question under active review.

Yet these are essentially practical problems. In northern and central Australia judges, magistrates, officials, policemen encounter them as a normal part of their duty from day to day. These men deal with them, sometimes with understanding, often, but not always, with humanity, but never with the benefit of guidance from those whose profession it is to study the law — those people who in our society are really the keepers of the law in its widest sense.

If only to offer guidance to those who must, in the conduct of their day to day duty, deal with these matters, study is necessary — study involving a profound comprehension of the nature and sources of law, its relationship with society and the means whereby within that society the law can be developed and changed.

It could be also that in the process such studies of Aboriginal law and society could provide clues to the solution of fundamental problems relating to the role and nature of law in our own and other societies.

Aboriginal decision-making

The following two papers deal with a central aspect of the work of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs — that of ensuring that Aboriginal people in Australia have an increasing control over and sense of responsibility for the management of their own lives.

In order for the council to work effectively towards this goal it was necessary for it to develop an understanding of the social organisations of Aborigines and their decision-making process.

These two papers both represent important steps in our process of learning about these matters. The first is a report prepared after a visit to the Hermannsburg Mission in October 1974, when I observed the results of an experiment they had conducted and of a study of the social structures of the local Aboriginal population which had arisen from that experiment. The second is an earlier paper given to the Anthropological Society of Western Australia in Perth on 5 April 1971 in which I describe some of the factors in Aboriginal society of which the council was becoming increasingly aware and some of the conclusions we were beginning to form.

A report prepared in October 1974.

The Hermannsburg study

As a result of changes in Australian government policy and their own experience, the Hermannsburg mission decided about two years ago to proceed with the transfer of authority to the Aboriginal community resident on the mission. Accordingly, they set up a number of councils — a council for the management of the school, a village council largely responsible for law and order, which had in fact been in existence in collaboration with the mission for a number of years, and finally a town council which they saw as the essential management body of the secular affairs on the mission. These councils were wholly elected bodies and the mission authorities saw their establishment as a precursor to the transfer of ownership of the land and of complete responsibility to the Aborigines themselves. It is my belief, based upon discussions which I had with the mission authorities some time ago when the transfer was in its early stages, that they had considerable hopes for the future of the councils.

The mission authorities report that the experiment has been a complete failure. For the school, the results have been devastating. Attendance has almost completely ceased, the building itself has been seriously damaged by vandalism, and parents have increasingly refused to allow their children to attend. So far as the town council's responsibilities are concerned, there has been a progressive deterioration in the physical condition of the mission and in the conduct of its affairs. There has been a serious increase in the incidence of drink and of the violence and misbehaviour associated with it. Funds provided to the council for the conduct of community affairs and for the financing of particular ventures had, according to the mission, progressively been diverted to other purposes, particularly to the personal and family benefit of the members of the council. There seemed to be generally a steady withdrawal from the activities of the council, and indeed from the life of the community itself, by the more responsible Aboriginal families. For instance, more and more children were forbidden to attend the picture shows put on by the mission authorities because they were increasingly interrupted by drunken Aborigines who frequently threw stones at the screen and generally made the continuance of the show impossible.

Some months ago the idea was put forward by one of the mission staff, who had recently spent a year studying anthropology at the University of Queensland, that the failure of the council system could perhaps be due to the fact that it was not linked in any

significant way with the traditional structure of Aboriginal society nor with its system of authority. The key members of the staff therefore decided that they should undertake a study of the social structure of the Hermannsburg community so as to be aware of the way in which the Aborigines composing the community conducted their internal affairs and so that they could identify the persons in whom authority lay.

This study is based on a detailed examination of the genealogies of all the members of the community, to establish the nature and interaction of family groups. Some very interesting conclusions have emerged which could have profound relevance in considering the council failures. It is clear that the assumption that the people living on the Hermannsburg Mission, after decades of association, would by this time have become a community in the true sense, is almost certainly mistaken. Rather the community consists of a number, at least five, of major common descent groups. These groups comprise the patrilineal descendants (together with their wives) of ancestors who can be traced back about three generations from the present elders of the groups. The groups vary in size from about seventy individuals, including children, up to perhaps two hundred. The task of compiling the genealogies has brought out many significant aspects of the relationships between different members of the family groups. It is clear, for instance, that the Aborigines see the groups in strongly hierarchical form and that the head of this hierarchy has very considerable authority in relation to almost all aspects of the family group's affairs. The headship of the hierarchy is inherited from generation to generation in accordance with a strict patrilineal rule. In effect this position passes, on the death of the holder, to the eldest surviving son of the oldest male descendant of the original ancestor. Thus, if the person holding the position died, he would be succeeded by his brothers in strict order of seniority. On the death of the youngest surviving brother, the position would revert to the eldest son of the eldest of the brothers who may have held the position in succession.

As a result of this study, it is now possible for the mission authorities to identify the head of the hierarchy in each family group, to consider his relationship with other members of the group and to assess the nature and strength of his authority. They believe that in the groups which they studied, the authority of the head of the hierarchy is powerful and is acknowledged by all members of the group, even by those younger men who, in other contexts, appear to be resentful of authority and anxious to assert their own importance.

The study demonstrated that none of the traditional leaders of the various family groups had in fact been members of the councils. When the mission authorities asked these leaders why they had not been nominated for membership of the councils, they pointed out that it was traditional that the various family groups kept their affairs completely separate and that it was considered not merely inappropriate but shameful to discuss the affairs of one's own family group when members of other family groups were present. The only occasions on which common action seems to have been taken or considered were when issues arose in which the interests of several groups clearly demanded it. Most of the issues with which the council was concerned were seen as matters which were properly the concern of one group or in which the interests of the various groups were competitive or conflicting. Thus if there were an inter-family dispute which threatened to cause difficulties for two family groups, it would be normal for the heads of the groups to meet and confer on the means by which the dispute could be resolved. Apart from such matters, co-operation between family groups was rare, and indeed was felt to be improper.

Consequently, the people who were nominated for the various councils were invariably people without authority within the individual family group. Indeed they frequently were men who were not identified with the major family groups at all except in some cases by marriage — that is Aborigines from other communities who had married women of one of the Hermannsburg groups and had come to live there were seen, in the first instance, as appropriate members of councils. Action by them in dealing with members of other family groups was not at first seen as affecting the authority of the heads of the family groups. However, the people who had in fact been nominated to membership of the council saw their resulting obligations as not to the community as a whole but to themselves personally, to members of their immediate family or to the persons to whom they were related. They tended to look at every issue which came before the council strictly in the light of its impact on their own position or on that of the people to whom they had obligations. Thus if a member of the council was by virtue of his membership able to influence the choice of the persons employed by the mission he tended to appoint, or to replace those already employed, by members of his own family. Similarly, money provided for projects or for work within the community tended to be diverted to the personal aggrandisement and to the personal benefit of the members of the council and their families. Trucks, for instance, purchased with grants from the government,

tended to be taken over by members of the council or their immediate families and used as their personal property. They were frequently used for bringing drink to the mission enabling profits to be made from its sale. Dissatisfaction with this developing state of affairs among the senior members of the family groups did not lead to action designed to bring council members under control but rather an even more complete withdrawal from the activities which were in common for the community as a whole. In many cases this tendency lent even greater force to their anxiety to withdraw from Hermannsburg itself and to set up small independent settlements some distance from the main mission station.

As a result of their becoming aware of these aspects of Aboriginal life the mission decided to deal in all matters where this was possible with the heads of the individual family hierarchies. Not merely was this welcomed by the families but decisions made by the heads of the family groups after internal family consultation tended to be widely, indeed almost universally, accepted, within the group. Consequently, instead of having council meetings, mission workers now discuss any issue requiring resolution with the heads of the various family groups one by one. In this way they have found that it is usually possible to get a common view, where previously they encountered unwillingness to take part in any common decision-making process.

This mission reports that as they began to work in this way, the councils went into voluntary liquidation. They were not formally wound up but ceased to meet and Aborigines previously involved in them ceased to exercise authority. It was, the mission people believed, clear that they too acknowledged the primacy of the authority of the heads of the various families where it was exercised in accordance with traditional practice.

The mission reports marked improvement in the general morale of the community. They say that the population is better behaved, that drink has become much less common, and abuse of the community facilities less damaging. The main family groups are now interested in moving away from the main administrative mission centre and several have already taken up residence on land further away from the settlement at distances which vary from a few miles up to thirty or forty.

I visited two of these outstations and was impressed both by the cheerful atmosphere and by the work that is being done without white supervision. The mission believes that the basic government objective of entrusting decision-making to Aboriginal communities is likely to be effective to the extent that decisions can be entrusted

to the leaders of the family groups. The problems of Hermannsburg are, they believe, intensified because it is a multi-group community, some Arunta speaking and others Pitjantjatjara, but even in communities which are substantially of common tribal origin they think that effective decision-making may be possible only if linked with the traditional authority structure.

Nevertheless, acceptance of the mission's conclusions may present many problems. An authority structure based upon the headship of large family groups may prove unduly conservative. The capacity of a traditional leader to comprehend the problems raised by the impact on his people of white communities, white standards and white opportunities may well be limited. However, it does not follow from what the mission has observed that his alone will be the ideas taken into account. He will be exposed to the influence of the members of his family group in ways which conform to traditional Aboriginal patterns. Thus, for instance, it was clear in one of the smaller decentralised communities we visited that the head of the family group was very much influenced and guided by the views of his son who had been trained as a teacher's assistant and was well educated in English and in many aspects of white Australian life. But equally it was clear the son acknowledged and accepted fully that decisions in the end were for his father. In another instance, a young Aboriginal activist, high in the line of succession to family authority has, since the recent changes, been working closely with his family head and exercising through him increasing influence.

Government reliance on the traditional authority structure would be viewed with distrust by part-Aborigines and others who have become alienated from their traditional family groups. Thus if, as the mission argues, collaboration between family groups is possible only through the medium of outsiders, these would in most settlements tend to be white missionaries or white officials although occasionally they would be Aborigines who would have no direct family affiliation with the groups. However, the Hermannsburg experience suggests that other Aborigines from outside their own family groups would use their power, authority or influence primarily for their own benefit or for the benefit of their immediate families and others to whom they had obligations.

Consequently, government acceptance of traditional Aboriginal authority through the family head could be interpreted simply as a device for preserving the power and influence of the white administrators or white missionaries as a divide-and-rule technique exercised by whites.

Furthermore, the Hermannsburg approach seems unlikely to encourage co-operation between the various groups. It might be worth experimenting with procedures by which separate discussions with group leaders are followed by formal meetings at which decisions reached in the separate discussions were formally confirmed. This might provide the basis for the emergence, on some issues at least, of a recognition of common concern and the need for common action.

The mission authorities insist that their attempts to do this have failed because it is regarded as a matter of shame to discuss matters of concern to their respective families in the presence of others. In other words, they argue that in Aboriginal society there is not and cannot be community above the level of the extended family group or the clan. They see the tendency to believe that groups which live in settlement conditions under white guidance constitute a community as simply mistaken. This may be an unduly pessimistic conclusion. There are I believe examples of co-operation within multi-clan groups even if for limited purposes. It may be possible to build on the elements in Aboriginal society which make this possible. But the Hermannsburg experience suggests that if it is to be done it will require a profound understanding of the structure of the groups concerned and their relationships to one another.¹³

Decisions by Aborigines

I believe the most important aspect of the problem of the advancement of the Aboriginal people is that of effectively involving them in the solutions to their problems. It is no exaggeration to say that I know of no Aboriginal community in which this is at present

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13. In the recommendations which Professor Stanner and I made after our visit to Hooker Creek and Yuendumu (Council for Aboriginal Affairs, *Report on visit to Yuendumu and Hooker Creek*) we urged that every community should build up an internal reference book available to new arrivals which reviewed all relevant aspects of the community itself. We suggested that this book should contain information about the anthropology of the community and about its language, social structure and leadership. I think the urgency of preparing such information is emphasised by the Hermannsburg experience.

It is important that officials should know whether the community which they are assisting is composed of a homogeneous clan group or groups basically suspicious or antagonistic to one another. They should be able to identify the current leaders and the means by which authority is likely to be inherited. The preparation of such background books appears to me even more essential to the sensible development of policy and administration in Aboriginal communities in the light of the Hermannsburg discussions.

effectively done. The blame for this is frequently placed by Europeans and to some extent by the Aborigines themselves on their supposed traditional incapacity to make social decisions of the kind required by their new conditions of life. It is therefore important that we should understand as fully as possible the decision-making processes involved in Aboriginal life, to see whether they afford a basis for more effective organisation of Aboriginal groups in new circumstances.

We must bear in mind that issues involving more than one person can arise within the traditional life of Aborigines themselves and also from situations deriving from their contact with the alien western culture, religion and economic system. The adequacy of their decision-making process may be markedly different in the two situations.

Some anthropologists represent traditional Aboriginal society as profoundly conservative and conformist. Deviants and innovators, so it has been said, were regarded as a threat to the unity and strength of the group and tended to be punished or even eliminated by the community acting with the authority of the traditional code. Thus, in speaking of the Aranda, Strehlow wrote:

The thoroughness of their forefathers has left to them not a single unoccupied scene which they could fill with the creatures of their own imagination. Tradition and the tyranny of the old men in the religious and cultural spheres have effectively stifled all creative impulse . . . myths had ceased to be invented many centuries ago . . . chants, the legends, and the ceremonies . . . mark the consummation of the creative effort of a distant, long-past age . . . They are, in many ways, not so much a primitive as a decadent race.¹⁴

According to this interpretation, which has been questioned by Stanner,¹⁵ among others, the individual Aboriginal was con-

14. T.G.H. Strehlow, *Aranda traditions*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1947. It should be noted that Professor Strehlow made this observation some time before this paper was written and might no longer have supported it in this form.

15. W.E.H. Stanner, 'On Aboriginal religion', *Oceania*, XXXI, 4 (1961), p. 237 and Note 5: 'My own experiences suggest the opposite of each statement. Mythopoeic thought is probably a *continuous* function of Aboriginal mentality, especially of the more gifted and imaginative minds, which are not few. The notion of a time when myths were, or ceased to be, invented is probably a schematic figment: one could as legitimately postulate the "invention" of the family, the forms of social organisation or any institution. Such a vocabulary of thought is wrongly applied to organic growths. In the north, there is every evidence of painstaking adherence to traditions; but the traditions themselves

ditioned from infancy to accept without question the validity of ritual and sanctions to support it. Meaning and purpose were revealed to those who had reached the appropriate age and degree of initiation, and to ask 'Why?' not merely brought no answer but invited punishment. It has been said that within this system there was no room for consultation, discussion or the clash of opinion. The only time an individual Aboriginal would be called upon to expound views would be when it was his responsibility to convey instruction to another, and then he spoke as the representative of the unchanging traditions of his community. Yet there is abundant evidence that particular traditions did in fact change.

However, while these traditional matters were the essence and fulfilment of life, experienced progressively through age-grading rituals demanding custodianship of and authority in ceremonial, there remained much that lay outside its scope and which could be regarded as being wholly within a public or a private domain of legitimate individuality.

At the extreme of the area of privacy was the individual's personal Aboriginal name, which was frequently thought of as so exclusively his own that two persons found to have an identical name had to be freed by ritual in order to speak to each other; and, of course, after a man's death, others should not even speak his name for a long time. Between this extreme and that provided for absolutely by tradition, there existed not merely the region of the inner self — the spirit — which could not properly be encroached upon by another, but a whole area where a man's thoughts and views, to the extent that they did not touch upon or breach the tribal code, were entirely a matter for himself, where he was not called upon to account for them, to modify them to conform, or to adjust them to make them workable in his dealings with others. Any attempt by another member of the group to interfere or to impose authority within this area of the private domain would be strongly resented, leading to an accusation that the interferer was trying to act 'like a white man', an accusation regarded as extremely offensive. It was because such an area of self-expression

are a continuous inspiration; and adherence is not necessarily dispassion, disinterest, or dullness. The presence of a religious cult, in all probability as one of a succession, does not suggest men who simply live on the spiritual capital of olden times . . . Against, then, Strehlow's view . . . I can but record my own experience of having heard brilliant improvisation, and my belief that this is part of the process by which mythopaeic thought nurtures and is nurtured . . . And, again 'free imagination and human insight, while still obeying the canons of situation, may greatly change the emphasis and tone of a myth, and may even change its content'.

existed that great Aboriginal men could find a mode and a field of prowess. Such a man as Yagan in the early days of Western Australia, a 'natural' leader if ever there was one, whom the settlers feared and shot, could not have attained such power if Aboriginal society had been as all-constricting as we have been told.

In other words, the division between the domains of 'absolute tradition' and 'private concern' were by no means watertight in comprehending the whole of experience. There remained within the Aboriginal way of life matters not clearly provided for by tradition and equally not wholly within the private domain. It seems likely that these would have been regarded as being covered by then traditional patterns of belief, although the precise application of that pattern to the situation would need exploration. This position is not dissimilar from the convention regarding common law — that it is the function of the judge to elucidate its relevance to the immediate situation. One would expect, therefore, Aboriginal society to have techniques of decision-making effective for this part of human and social experience.

The response of individual persons to situations arising from their contacts with 'white men's business' was not provided for by the rigidly coded tradition of the past, nor was any machinery for decision-making in their own society obviously suited to deal with it — apart from the fact that to Europeans the nature or even the existence of such machinery was unknown, or disputed. The lack of suitable machinery for this purpose has obviously been a source of great weakness in Aborigines' capacity to deal with the threat to its existence represented by the intrusion of alien affairs. It has also greatly handicapped those representatives of missions, governments, welfare organisations and others who have sought by consultation to discover or work out a community view, to obtain agreement or concurrence in action proposed, to organise effective Aboriginal resistance to actions or developments detrimental to their welfare, and, above all, to find a person or group of persons with whom negotiations or dealings could be conducted in a way which would make them effective for the Aboriginal group as a whole.

Attempts to set up councils or other representative bodies within Aboriginal communities with which mission officials, administration officers and others could deal, have usually been established by analogy with the social decision-making processes of our own society and have invariably encountered very great problems.

Experience has shown that individual Aborigines, even when they are members of a nominally representative body, feel in no

way committed to any decisions it may reach or views it may express. Aboriginal communities on mission stations and settlements frequently include members of separate clans or tribal groups, and members of these groups are often active in political manoeuvring and intrigue to achieve status and power within a representative council. Nevertheless, even within the clan, representatives may have no effective authority to speak for their group. Indeed, communications between 'representatives' and those they represent is frequently inadequate or non-existent. The apparently firm expression by a member of a council cannot be taken as an indication that he has effectively conferred with, or even informed, those on whose behalf he purports to speak. It may be that he regards himself, in expressing his views, as simply exercising his rights within the private domain but would not usually recognise or accept any obligation to inform or persuade his fellows to support the view which he has expressed.

As a result of these attitudes, government officers and mission representatives frequently complain of the ineffectiveness of representative organisations, and the futility of attempts at consultation. They despair of Aborigines ever being able to establish social organisations capable of managing the simplest of corporate affairs. This conviction, going along as it does very frequently with a natural desire to achieve effective action, and with a certainty of what is good for the Aborigines, leads to policies which are paternalistic and basically authoritarian, even though these policies are generously motivated and imply an acceptance of genuine trusteeship for the Aborigines' welfare.

I believe that a continuance of policies based on these attitudes offers no significant hope for the future of Aborigines. It will ensure the continued disintegration of Aboriginal society which has marked our association with it for the last two hundred years. If Aborigines as individuals and as communities are to become an effective and integral part of Australian society, we must permit them to organise themselves for effective social action in their own way, making use of their traditional sources of authority, and do our best to make their organisation effective.

I myself do not wholly accept the pessimism which underlies the description of the present state of Aboriginal society which I have outlined. As I have indicated, there are competent authorities who doubt some at least of the judgments on which it is based. Furthermore there are, I believe, hopeful factors in the present situation.

Perhaps the most interesting and potentially significant is the emergence, so far on a very small scale, of what might be described

as an Aboriginal intelligentsia. These are Aborigines who have acquired sufficient European-type education and experience to be able to live effectively within the wider Australian society but who, nonetheless, remain and wish to remain Aborigines, accepting and participating in the traditional ceremonies of their people, knowing and understanding their myths and history, and respecting the structure of authority implied by it. These include men like Phillip Roberts of the Roper River, for long a member of the Northern Territory Health Services and now a liaison officer with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs but rising in status and authority among the Roper River people themselves. Among the younger ones, men like James Gallarrwuy, trained and qualified as a mission worker, but advancing to a position of greater influence within the Yirrkala community and in the long run a potential leader, may be even more significant. These people may be more important in the next few years than the occasional university graduate who often will have absorbed, to a degree of which he may be unconscious, the values and prejudices of the European middle-class intelligentsia in whose company he will have acquired his special qualifications.

The picture of an inflexibly rigid system of Aboriginal traditional and ceremonial life is over-simplified. There have always been breaches of these traditions, and the stability of Aboriginal society required that ways of accommodating such breaches in particular cases should be found. There is no section of Aboriginal law so apparently absolute as that which deals with marriage. Aboriginal custom lays down the kinship categories within which a person may marry and even, as an ideal, specifies the particular person; and, generally, betrothal 'promises' are made by parents and/or guardian relatives for children a long time before they are aware of the possibility of choice.

Aboriginal myths and stories — and actual social life itself — record many incidents in breach of these arrangements and such breaches continue. I have talked with Aborigines and anthropologists about the way Aboriginal society deals with these situations. My impression is that, if a boy or a girl approaching marriageable age did not wish to go through with the promises entered into on his or her behalf, he or she would make this clear, perhaps by running away — either alone or with the more desired marriage partner. If this happened, the offender was likely to be caught and brought back and subjected to punishment. If he or she was really determined there would be another escape, another recapture and another punishment. But in due course, if the young people had demonstrated beyond any possibility of uncertainty

their extreme unwillingness to conform with the wishes of their elders, there would follow discussions between the heads of the families, with no doubt much shaking of heads about the recalcitrance of the rising generation, out of which would be likely to emerge an acceptance of the young people's determination, some notional or real compensation to save the face of the rejected husband or wife, after which the non-conformist pair would be readmitted to normal membership of the society. In other words, in Aboriginal society breaches with tradition are not unknown and techniques exist for dealing with them — techniques designed to test the firmness and determination of the non-conformist parties, but thereafter to ensure that within fairly wide limits their behaviour is given social sanction.

I have spoken with several young people in the Yirrkala community on Gove Peninsula, who, short of the extremity of running away, have made clear to their elders their unwillingness to honour promises entered into on their behalf by their elders. The procedure has been much the same in principle — the young people have been required to wait, to demonstrate unequivocally their determination not to honour the promises but go through with alternative arrangements; and when these have been effectively tested, the elders have conferred an unwilling but real social blessing on the new arrangements between the young people.

It is clear that attitudes toward marriage promises are going through substantial change under the influence of European attitudes. Provided that the marriages sought in replacement of those promised do not conflict with basic Aboriginal law, that they are 'straight' in their terms, Aboriginal social arrangements are sufficiently flexible to allow for them.

I heard these marriage matters discussed at great length at a conference on Goulburn Island called at the request of the elders of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal communities. The discussions indicated that the elders were prepared to change their attitude toward promises, but not toward the categories within which marital partners should be sought. Their attitude was that existing promises should be honoured but that no future promises should be made; that young people should be permitted within the limits of the law a greater freedom of choice; and even their insistence that existing promises should be honoured was clearly subject to reservation.

This Goulburn Island conference was particularly interesting because of the relationship which seemed to me to be implied between the spokesmen taking ostensible parts in its discussions, and the genuine elders, many of them inarticulate in English, who

sat in the background. My impression was that the spokesmen were drawn more or less from the intelligentsia I have described — from those young and middle-aged Aborigines who were articulate in English but who were, nonetheless, accepted and respected at their appropriate level in their own society. Clearly these spokesmen were conscious of important limitations on their freedom in discussions. I was reminded somewhat of the kind of relationship which perhaps exists between men who constitute the government of a social democratic party in Italy and the hierarchy of the Church, or between ambassadors abroad and the government at home. One was conscious that discussions were never pushed at any session beyond the point where the spokesmen could, in the interval before some succeeding session, seek guidance from their elders. Some people see this limitation on the power and authority of the emerging intelligentsia as a threat to progress. On the contrary, I feel that it is an essential step, guaranteeing continuity with the past while providing the means to gradual adaptation of conservative tradition.

Apart from the traditional rigidities of Aboriginal society, and distinct from the areas reserved to the personal 'private domain', there appears to be a conception among Aborigines of corporate action of an informal kind. I am told that in many Aboriginal communities there is a conception of 'going company' in relation to a particular project or enterprise. This phrase appears to mean that the parties tacitly agree to work together for the achievement of a common purpose, on a basis in which obligations and rewards are shared and there is no employer-employee or master-servant relationship. The relevant Aboriginal words have been translated as meaning 'together and equal', and are used to refer to the status for certain purposes of members of the same clan. Whatever the origins of this attitude in Aboriginal society, it may be the basis on which effective corporate action can be built.

In at least some parts of Australia there is, in Aboriginal attitudes toward ceremonies, myths and the like, an interesting separation of responsibility between 'ownership' or 'being the boss', and 'management' or being an activator or worker. The English words, which the Aborigines may use, do not, of course, express the Aboriginal concepts at all well. If I understand the position correctly, a ceremony and the myth or story connected with it may belong to some body of persons by right of tribal tradition. This ownership gives rights but also, more importantly, imposes obligations. These rights cannot be exercised in isolation; there is always somebody else whose interest is affected, somebody who

may, for example, be responsible for the management or presentational aspects of the ceremony, the myth or the story and without whose consultation and collaboration nothing can be done with it. There is much in this dichotomy which I do not pretend to understand, but it clearly implies some complementarity of rights and duties and establishes sets of checks and balances. I wonder whether the existence of this arrangement as an element in Aboriginal society may make easier the establishment of corporate bodies with proprietorship of economic enterprises which are prepared to entrust to others the decisions involved in management. At the least, it may make the distinction between the separate roles more comprehensible.¹⁶

I do not think it has ever been true that ceremony and myth-making at some time came to a complete stop. I myself have seen performances — mundane perhaps rather than sacred — regarding events contemporary rather than traditional. I have seen the air-raid on Darwin mimed with wonderful dramatic effect, and my colleague Professor Stanner has told me of various hilarious presentations portraying the behaviour of certain physical anthropologists in pursuit of information.

This capacity to build the present into the traditional (and vice versa) may be of great significance. Recently the Office of Aboriginal Affairs financed the establishment of a brickmaking enterprise at Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula. This is an enterprise which is or will be wholly or predominantly owned by the Aboriginal community itself, and which was established as a result of pressure they themselves exercised to counter the domination of

16. The following note was supplied by Professor W.E.H. Stanner: 'This is a tender matter which no one has yet made very clear. I consider that at the root of it is the fact that no Aboriginal group lives *to* itself but always by, with and for (and from) others as a condition of life. One could say, aphoristically, that theirs is a society in the ablative case, whereas ours is much more in the possessive.

No man disciplines his son: it is usually the mother's brother. No man initiates his son: the men who do so are from another clan. One does not paint one's body on ritual occasions: another person does so. My clan indisputably owns and alone performs a ceremony but in order to perform it properly men of other clans must help: there is a right, not just a duty, to help. It is not really a dichotomy though it may look so in a nearer perspective. It is a case of left hand and right hand in a life that needs two hands. The phrase I have used is 'complementary opposition' or 'unity of opposites'.

It's very hard to get the words for all this right. But I think that whereas we have secularised and emphasised the separate parts of a joint function (e.g. priest-laity, buyer-seller) they have sacralised or at least canonised the jointness while not allowing this to obliterate the separateness.'

the bauxite mining project. Their response to its establishment was interesting. When the building was complete and the plant installed and operating, they, without reference to the mission, the administration, or to the office which financed it, conducted a naming ceremony the purpose of which apparently was to incorporate physical aspects of this enterprise into their past, the building itself receiving a name which meant in effect 'secret cave', and every piece of equipment being named similarly with words which linked them with Aboriginal traditions and with metaphorical symbolism, the full significance of which was not reported.

My own conclusion from consideration of these 'hopeful' elements in contemporary Aboriginal attitudes is that we do not need to despair of the capacity of Aboriginal society to adapt its techniques of decision to contemporary problems. They will no doubt take time to learn, and will make many mistakes, but I do not believe that a society which has survived some twenty or thirty thousand years in widely varying climatic and environmental conditions can really be incapable of adaptation.

Nevertheless, it will not be easy to build what hopeful elements there may be into an effective system of collective or corporate action. Outside the fields covered by firm tradition there are and will be many obstacles. The concept of representative government and decision is unfamiliar to Aboriginal communities, and it will be long before communities are content to leave decisions on non-traditional matters to chosen representatives, however highly they may regard them. I believe we must look first for a system of decision by consensus, being prepared to allow time in which a consensus can emerge. In this process, representatives will serve not as persons who can speak with authority on behalf of those they represent but as those whose task it is first to identify the issues and to clarify the problems and, having clarified them, to explain to those they represent, and then patiently to promote the development of the consensus. In such a system, the representative perhaps could function rather like the Moderator in a Quaker meeting; he could be the person whose task it is to seek out 'the sense of the meeting'.

All of this suggests procedures of consultation and decision-making which allow ample time for the pattern of consensus to emerge. Issues will first be exposed and thrashed out in the representative organisations without being pushed to finality. This will be followed by prolonged consideration within the clans or other groups represented. Time will lapse, during which the action

proposed can be tested by reference to long-established traditions, and which will provide opportunity for negotiation, face-saving and compensation between family and clan and between other competitive units within the society. The final act of formal decision by the representative body will not be the imposition of the will of the majority, but giving the sanction of collective authority to a consensus patiently and tolerantly developed. Self-denying ordinances by potential majorities will for long remain an essential element of effective corporate action. Such ordinances are by no means absent from our own institutional arrangements. We have come to take them so much for granted as to be unaware of them.

Somewhat similar problems arise from the choice of representatives. The procedures of election are unfamiliar and probably inappropriate. The council of the Yirrkala community consists of at least two members of each clan (or each dialect unit) — chosen in ways of which non-anthropologists remain ignorant but which are not questioned by other members of the community. It is not easy to write such procedures into the Articles of Association of a society or company. A compromise might be for the representatives in fact to be chosen privately, names to be announced at the appropriate meeting and their appointment confirmed by a vote which would be more like a plebiscite than an election. I have been interested to read of some land legislation in Kenya which follows this practice in choosing local land boards with statutory authority.

Some studies have been made of decision-making processes among contemporary Aboriginal communities. Some very interesting work was done from the University of Western Australia on the Nomads Group under the patriarchal leadership of Don McLeod.¹⁷ The break-away Mugarinya Group, too, has been studied and offers now some interesting prospects for the future. The Council and Office of Aboriginal Affairs are devoting a great deal of thought to establishing Aboriginal groups and communities as legally incorporated societies having authority to own property, to employ persons including professional experts, with the right to borrow, to raise money from their members, to spend, and to enter into contracts.

The office recently assisted a community on Moa Island in the Torres Strait to set up a co-operative investment company which is the dominant shareholder in a mining enterprise which successfully

17. J. Wilson, Authority and leadership in a 'new style' Australian Aboriginal community, Pinden, Western Australia (unpublished MA thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Western Australia, 1962).

tendered for the testing and development of the wolfram deposits in that area. This project will be an interesting test of an Aboriginal community's capacity to differentiate between the functions of ownership and management. The testing and mining of wolfram deposits on this island can be carried out only by persons with comprehensive professional understanding of the geology and engineering of this form of mining and, however much islanders may be involved in the project, they do not yet have the necessary competence, knowledge and experience. The islanders seem to understand that, while they demand the proprietary rights in the resources of the island and the enterprise which develops them, they will continue to be dependent upon hired knowledge and skills for the conduct of the enterprise.

Similarly the Aboriginal community at Yirrkala on Gove Peninsula is considering a two-tiered system for their economic and social organisation. It envisages, first, an incorporated non-profit society to which all members of the community will belong — a society whose functions will be to work for the greater welfare of its members, individually and collectively, to own and administer property, to hold shares in economic enterprises, including the Yirrkala Brickworks and others contemplated. Under this society there are envisaged several business enterprises, some wholly owned, others partly owned, by the society itself but each managed independently. The board of management of the society would be wholly Aboriginal, and would at the outset be identical with the council composed of clan (dialect group) representatives which has emerged there as a result of the attempts of the various clans to live together and to deal with the mission, the administration and the mining company. We hope the society and its subordinate companies will continue to realise that, in dealings with persons and organisations of the wider society, they will need the help of professional advisers — lawyers, accountants, business consultants, and others — and that their skills are as continuously available to them as to those with whom they deal.

Clearly, a long period of education and of trial and error will be necessary before these and other experiments show conclusive results. However, until the Aborigines are forced by circumstances to face issues, to make mistakes, to resolve their internal problems, to confront our society, and have unquestioned authority to do so without veto by any agency outside their own community, they will continue in a state of economic and social dependence.

I am satisfied that, in the end, only Aborigines can resolve the problems of Aborigines in our society, and that to do this they need

to evolve institutions for social decision-making which are based on and grow out of their own traditional systems of authority but which increasingly draw on the professional resources which the wider society can offer them. It is to anthropologists that policy makers must look for an understanding of the systems of authority and decision-making of Aboriginal society, and for guidance as to the ways in which Aborigines can be helped to adapt them to the legal structure of our own society.

I present these comments, therefore, tentatively in the hope that they will stimulate further research on this question among Aborigines.

Some Aboriginal Australians

In its original form this address was given to a group of medical scientists as the fifth Walter and Eliza Hall Institute lecture in Melbourne on 3 June 1974. Its purpose was to counter the tendency among white Australians to speak of 'the Aborigines' as if they were an undifferentiated mass recognisable primarily as the source of problems which plagued white Australian society. I sought therefore, while placing the individuals chosen firmly within their social context, to emphasise their individuality and personal characteristics. This approach appeared to produce a warm and human response from the audience and I have therefore from time to time in similar situations talked of other Aborigines who for one reason or another commanded my respect and affection. This text incorporates some of the later material.

Kate Wigan is now an old woman; I do not know quite how old. She is frail, grey and almost completely blind. But she stands straight; she does not despair; and she has the gift of laughter. She has the soft and gentle Aboriginal voice which in her case is linked with the precise English of some now forgotten mission teacher. Frail, old and blind, she is yet very much a woman and in her own way beautiful.

Her life story is integrated with the recent history of her people — the Bardi of the Western Kimberleys. The Bardi have a long and proud history. Traditionally their ancestors have lived on the coast: they have always been fishermen, canoe makers, divers and sailors, capable of braving the wild storms of the north.

Towards the end of the last century a mission was established on Sunday Island, north of Derby in the Western Kimberleys, which attracted to it many of the Bardi people even from the mainland. Here they lived a traditional life much influenced by their sea environment. They hunted for the dugong, they fished, they rode the turtles and dived for shell. There were amongst them men of courage and distinction. Outstanding amongst these were two brothers who went by the name of 'Big Wigan' and 'Little Wigan'. They were characteristic of their kind — tall, stalwart, solid and competent men of the sea.

The Fifth Walter and Eliza Hall Institute Lecture, Melbourne, 3 June 1974.

Unhappily the mission on Sunday Island came under severe financial and other pressures and finally was closed down. The missionaries left, leaving the Aborigines without the resources on which they had come to rely. The state government, in its wisdom, decided that it was inappropriate for the Bardi to remain on the island. After some resistance they were persuaded, if that is the right word, to go to an Aboriginal camp on the outskirts of the town of Derby. This move confronted them with acute problems. — There they were, lumped together with Aborigines from the desert, from the mountains or 'stone country' — people they felt to be alien to them. The skills of seamanship built up through their long association with the sea were no longer valuable. Work available demanded qualities for which they had little aptitude and less interest. The impact on the Bardi was devastating. They suspected the Aborigines among whom they found themselves of witchcraft and sorcery, and soon were in conflict with the white man and with a law which they did not understand. Also they found themselves incapable of managing alcohol.

So the Bardi people, from being a resilient self-reliant group, deteriorated step by step into a degraded rabble — a source of problems for which the bedevilled bureaucrats had no answer.

It was then that Kate's influence began to emerge. She had been married to Little Wigan, in accordance with Aboriginal custom, while she was little more than a child. She was a woman — a handicap in most societies but particularly in Aboriginal society. She was not even wholly Aboriginal. Her unknown father had been white. But she had been fully accepted into her group and had acquired instruction and wisdom from her elders. Kate looked with sorrow upon the deterioration of her people and knew that their one hope was to leave this place and its people. Quietly she set to work to persuade the elders that they must return, at whatever cost, to Sunday Island. Patiently she worked on this theme until finally an experimental foray was made in the hope that they might be able to re-establish themselves.

The experiment failed. They had become too dependent. The natural environment on which they had lived in the past would no longer sustain them. They could no longer do without access to the flour, sugar and tea, tobacco and services which could be delivered only by vessels they did not have and which others were unwilling to provide.

But Kate did not give up. Finally it was agreed that they should move to One Arm Point on the mainland, a site closer to where the original Bardi people had lived. There it would be possible for them

to live a life based primarily upon the sea, with reasonable access to stores and essential medical and other services but far enough from white communities. There they could escape alien Aborigines and the dominant white administrators. Today at One Arm Point a new community is growing — seeking to build its future on its own resources, on its own experience, drawing on the wisdom of the Aboriginal way.

Kate's influence persists. She sits on the periphery of the Aboriginal decision-making structure but is not idle. When they returned to One Arm Point she recalled her son Roy, a strapping Aboriginal in the mould of his father and of his uncle, who had found the adaptation to white society on the whole relatively easy. He was intelligent, strong and moderately literate. He could live in the white man's world, and had found a place for himself within it. He drove trucks, drafted cattle, worked on the wharves. But when Kate told him that the Bardi people were going back to One Arm Point he too returned and daily grew in standing and authority among them.

At this time there occurred an event in Roy's life which reflects much of the Aboriginal attitude to the world.

The seas off the West Kimberley coast are very dangerous. They lie within the zone of the cyclones. The tides rise and fall thirty to forty feet each day. Roy and some others had been fishing in a frail canoe and they were struck by a storm. Roy's companions were drowned. Roy realised that he had no chance of surviving if he struggled with the waters. He therefore relaxed and let the waters take him where they would. He was tossed and driven for fourteen hours before making land and thereafter had to swim from island to island, only reaching the mainland after great struggle and privation.

In telling of his survival he told how he had realised that he must summon up the spirit of his dead father to help him through this ordeal. He told how his father had come to him and urged him to entrust himself to the waters. 'But', he said, 'while you do we will sing the song which you will teach our people when you return.'

Aboriginal history as well as their myths of the origins of the world and its creatures are preserved in song. These songs form one of the few living oral epic traditions. Generally Aborigines believe that these song cycles have been handed down unchanged from generation to generation. Very occasionally new songs are added but they are explained as originating in a dream of the maker and so are derived also from the continuing Dreamtime. Roy's conviction that he had been instructed by the spirit of his father fitted

in with this pattern of belief. When he told the old men his story and they listened to the song they accepted it as an authentic part of the traditional cycle.

At the end of my visit to One Arm Point the old men were performing the dance linked with this song cycle while the song was sung to a rhythmic beat of sticks. Behind the old men, completely white with pipe-clay, was a small boy, perhaps 10 years old, studiously and seriously following the old men, while others joined in the song. The boys were to be the instrument by which this episode would pass into the oral history of the Bardi. Close by but just beyond the light of the fires was Kate, encouraging the boys, guiding and teaching patiently and unobtrusively. She had not been merely the means by which her people had survived but she had been also, in the time of stress, a keeper of the law, a source of courage, endurance and inspiration.

Some anthropologists in the past have argued that Aboriginal society is inflexible and unchanging. This story illustrates also that in Aboriginal society, as in all others, there is perpetual change. Perhaps Aborigines feel greater need than we to fit that change into the pattern of continuity.

Let me turn now to a man who, among Aboriginal associates, appears to be recognised more fully than any other I know of as a leader in the sense in which we would use the word.

Vincent Lingiari is a man now in his sixties, slight, grey, a little stooped, his eyes clouded by cataracts, his voice quiet and his manner withdrawn, contemplative. He, for an Aboriginal, has unusual claim to be considered a leader. As a background to this claim it is necessary to recall that Aboriginal society in its traditional form appears suspicious of claims to generalised or widespread authority. The traditional groups are small. Within such groups, men, according to age and status, have responsibilities which are broadly known. Within the field of those responsibilities a man's authority will be accepted. In some communities two people are often involved in major ceremony. One is the person who by tradition owns the ceremony. But there is another who decides when the ceremony will be performed and is responsible for its arrangement. Thus in traditional Aboriginal society responsibility is generally divided and subject to understood checks on individual dominance.

This lack of generalised authority focused on one person is frequently a worry to white people who have to deal with Aborigines. Outside those matters which are prescribed by tradition it appears difficult for an Aboriginal group to reach decisions. In fact in their

small groups it was rarely difficult to reach a consensus. But when small groups are brought together they come into conflict not merely with one another but with white society and there emerge problems to which tradition provides no answer and where the task of reaching consensus faces almost insuperable difficulties.

From such a background came Vincent Lingiari, a member of the Gurindji tribe, a cattle man on the Wave Hill Station. The history of the relationship of Aborigines to pastoralists is conflicting. Many things done by pastoralists were indefensible, but there is evidence of some happy human relationships between pastoralists and Aborigines. Aborigines are not greatly concerned about material rewards. Although they did not doubt that the land was theirs, the Aboriginal conception of ownership is much less exclusive than our own.

If a nearby community was faced with hardship and wished to forage on your land, why should you resist if the courtesies were observed? Maybe next year you might want to forage on theirs. Consequently when the pastoralist came he was, at first, often not resisted and the Aborigines sought to establish some kind of working relationship with him which was within their comprehension.

Aboriginal society is based upon understood and recognised mutual obligations. Accordingly they appear to have sought to interpret their relationship with the pastoralist in these terms. They knew he wanted work from them. But they knew he would give food and valuable supplies. This mutual dependence possibly offered the basis of a comprehensible relationship.

Such a relationship may have existed on the Wave Hill Station. But gradually the presence of exotic animals made the environment progressively less capable of supporting the Aborigines. The fact that they were provided with food, clothing and other stores itself made them more dependent. For a long time this dependence was in real rather than financial terms. But gradually it became necessary, or more common, for the pastoralist to pay money to the Aborigines so that they could buy the goods on which they had become dependent and after which they had come to lust. So, even where in the first instance there was a comprehensible human relationship based on mutual dependence, there gradually developed one simply of commercial contract — a concept alien to Aboriginal ways of thought. And so from 1953 to 1966 there developed increasing dissatisfaction, increasing antagonism, increasing resentment, until the impossible happened.

Vincent Lingiari led his Aboriginal fellows and the families

dependent on them off the station and left it without labour. They went off to Wattie Creek close to a traditional ceremonial meeting place of Aborigines.

The creek flows out of a deep gorge, with perennial water, in which there are many sites sacred to Aborigines. The stream runs through an open plain into a shallow wooded and grassy valley. The stream dries up to water holes for part of the year but, except in severe drought, is a pleasant spot. Beside the creek the Gurindji camped and there they have remained.

This historic move began simply as an industrial dispute — a dispute about what it was fair to pay or to be paid. But it developed far beyond its original significance as a result of more conscious emphasis on Aboriginal identification with the land and the wider campaign for Aboriginal land rights.

Through this development Vincent Lingiari was the guiding spirit. It was he who had struggled through the long negotiations, to be met with failure. It was he who said: 'Here we are and here we sit.' And it was he who developed the practice of passive defiance. Vincent sounds, in this account, strong, powerful and perhaps unyielding. To meet personally he is quiet and unassertive although his demeanour is one of unaffected dignity. Unlike Kate, his English is halting. But in what he says there is the eloquence of honesty and directness.

A friend with whom I talked of Vincent said: 'He is the most civilised man I have ever known.' I was struck by this claim. From what I knew or had heard there were many things that could have been said about him but it was not easy to understand how he could be described as the most civilised man a sophisticated person had met. So I asked why. Mention was made of the qualities of simplicity, dignity, quiet — but finally he said:

In the middle of the dispute, when Vincent had been the leader in denying labour to the pastoral management, there came a message that the Wave Hill Station, seriously stricken with drought, was mustering cattle which, if not moved, would die. Vincent was told that the station just did not have the labour to achieve this. Without hesitation he said: 'We cannot let the cattle die'. And he sent the young men back to the station out of which they had walked so that the roundup could be completed.

If this story is true it may help explain why Vincent Lingiari possesses, among the Gurindji, such unusual stature. Perhaps conflict of the kind in which the Gurindji have been involved tends to

strengthen the influence of the individual who possesses the elusive quality of authority. Perhaps that quality was best expressed in the final episode of the Wattie Creek story when in the presence of many white dignitaries, representatives of the press, and other media, Gough Whitlam handed to him the title deeds to the land they had claimed. When asked to respond he chose to speak in his own tongue to his own people and to remind them of their obligations to the land and the responsibilities which they carried with them.

Another phase of the land rights struggle began in Yirrkala, a mission village on the Gove Peninsula, the centre of a bauxite mining and processing project. In this community of Yirrkala lived young James (as Europeans call him) Galarrwuy (to give him his Aboriginal name). Galarrwuy was the son of Mungurrawuy, who was himself the grandson of Yunupingu. In Arnhem Land the name of Yunupingu is a name to be conjured with. In the early thirties of this century Yunupingu was important among the clans who lived on the Gove Peninsula. At that time, groups of Europeans and Japanese fished for trochus and other marine creatures off the coast. Their behaviour often led to conflicts between them and the Aborigines. In such a conflict Yunupingu and his tribesmen believed the European and Japanese intruders had breached clear understandings and had abused their women. In the violence which followed, a number of Japanese and some Europeans were killed. Mungurrawuy, the grandson of Yunupingu, was there as a young boy and was wounded by the bullet from a policeman's rifle. He lived, however, to take a place of influence in his community. It is interesting to hear the account the Aborigines give of the conflict.

The Aboriginal system of justice in some communities seems to resemble mediaeval practices of our own society. If a man offends against another member of his community he is accused and challenged to defend himself in trial by combat. In such a trial the accused stood and allowed his accusers to throw spears or boomerangs while he warded these off with a shield. Aboriginal tradition provided a way in which this trial by combat could be honourably resolved. The accused, if guilty, after having demonstrated his willingness to conduct this combat with courage and skill, offered his thigh for ritual punishment. He received a spear thrust and this resolved the conflict with honour on both sides. According to Mungurrawuy, the Japanese and European intruders, having given offence, were challenged to such trial by combat. But,

perhaps not knowing the rules, they fled — with, for them, fatal results.

Mungurrawuy is an impressive figure — tall, massive, bearded, powerful. He has seven wives and thirty children. These, no doubt, are measures of his status in his community.

He was a young man in Yirrkala when the Methodist mission came. It called the fourteen or fifteen clans from the surrounding countryside to help establish the mission. Like most Aborigines, they respected the missionaries, recognising in them an integrity. These missionaries, too, were wise enough, humane enough, not to seek to interfere with traditional Aboriginal law. They established a working relationship of mutual respect and affection which still persists.

Mungurrawuy, in addition to being physically impressive, has a remarkable charm of manner. He is gentle and quiet unless he is roused. His seven wives and thirty children, and most of the community, seem to anticipate his wishes and keep him cheerful and happy. And so it seems did the mission. Generally a happy relationship existed between them which was not broken even by the first impact of the mining company.

When the mining company came they wished, amongst other things, to take over the tip of the Peninsula to establish wharves and stores. Mungurrawuy pointed out that the area included the little cove important in his dreaming and he said that its loss was unacceptable. It was interesting to find the Northern Territory administration and the local managers of the mining company seeking to find a way of solving their technical problems while leaving Mungurrawuy's dreaming untouched.

He and his fellows did not realise immediately the threat which the mining development carried for the relationship between them and the land. Gradually it emerged, in the physical processes of development and through statements of those in authority, that the right of the Aboriginal people to the land was being questioned. The gentle, kindly Mungurrawuy really hit the roof in anger. For the identification between his people and the land to be disputed was intolerable. He was deeply involved in the revolt of the fifteen clans of Yirrkala against the occupation of their land and against the conduct of mining within it, but above all against those who questioned the sacred relationship between the Aboriginal and the land which bore him.

I met Mungurrawuy in the early stages of their campaign when I went to Yirrkala to study the impact of the mining project on the people there. I met the council and heard Mungurrawuy deliver a

speech in a language unknown to me but in which his passionate eloquence was clear. This speech was interpreted by his son, Galarrwuy — at that time a young man of about eighteen, slightly shorter than his father, a slender, handsome young man, with the dark, liquid eyes of the Aboriginal and the smile which lights up his face. He was an athlete, a hunter, a dancer, a singer. He had inherited his father's charm. I could tell, as he interpreted for me, that he was watering down his father's words so that they should not offend.

At this point the council decided that I should listen to the resolutions which had been carried in their meetings during recent months. Galarrwuy read them quietly and I listened until he came to one which read: 'This council resolves that it will not in future receive any representative of the Government except in the presence of a legal adviser.' When he said this I laughed because there was I, an emissary of the government, being received by the council in friendly fashion with no sign of any legal practitioner. Galarrwuy stopped, noticing that I was laughing, and looked at me in surprise. I said: 'Does that mean me?' He looked puzzled for a moment and then a smile broke over his face and he said, 'Oh no we know you are our friend'. He certainly had inherited the family charm and I was already under its spell.

Galarrwuy had grown up in the mission community receiving in parallel the instruction about the traditions and culture of his people, about the obligations which they bear to one another, and at the same time being instructed by the Methodist mission in the faith of Christianity. He was apparently influenced by the teachings of the missionaries and they believed that he was or would become a Christian. They invited him to go south to be trained for work in the Church. He spent two years at a Brisbane Bible College. He was, like most Aborigines, deeply unhappy away from his own people and from his own country. He did not alienate himself from his own people and shared in the traditional ceremonies as occasion called for him to do so.

In him, however, there were evidences of changing values. It is normal for an Aboriginal girl to be promised in marriage, often to a much older man, before she is more than a few years old. This system of arranged marriages offends against much that our society values, although the practices by which marriages are arranged in different cultures are diverse. Galarrwuy had had a girl promised to him. When he came back from his training he decided that he did not want to marry her. He told his family and his potential bride's family of this. His decision was badly received. However, with the



Plate I (right) Galarrwuy Yunapingu.

Plate II (below) Children dance to a didgeridoo at Moremega Homeland Centre.





Plate III (left) Daymbalipu, Chairman of the Yirrkala Clan Council.

Plate IV (below) A humpy at Yuendumu.

Plate V (right) Bark painting at Yuendumu.



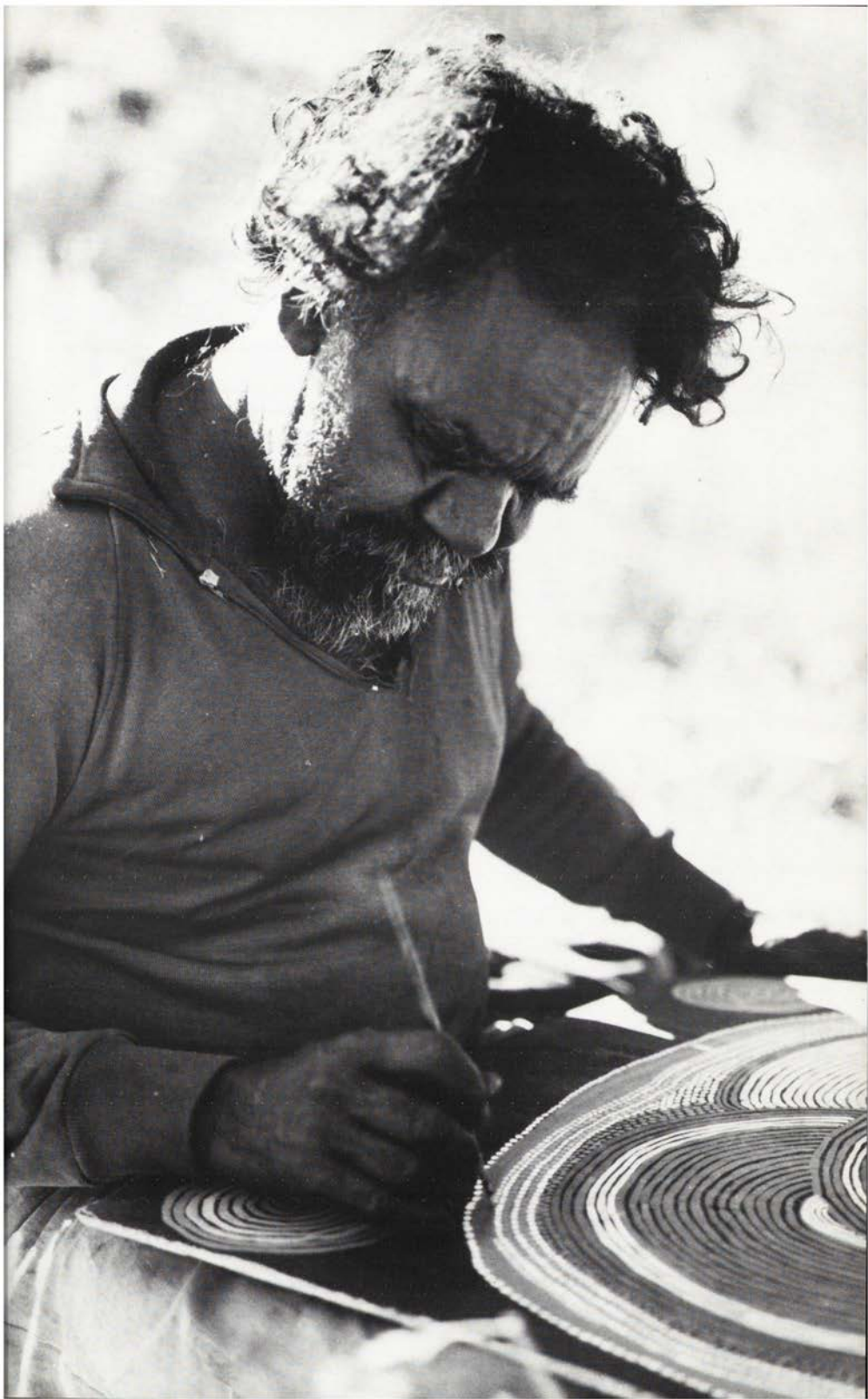




Plate VI (above) Smiler Gordon, Joseph Green and Brian Hargraves operate a brick making machine at Hooker Creek.

Plate VII (below) Pre-school class at Hooker Creek.



charm and skill of his family, he managed to break down the resistance. There were the customary consultations between the family, offers of compensation, until in the end he got his way. This was not simply the power of a young man's fancy but evidence of the winds of change more generally.

Not long after this episode, the elders of the various communities in Arnhem Land called a conference on Goulburn Island. This was, I believe, the first such conference ever arranged by the Aboriginal communities themselves. They had proposed them but, having few resources and the government being unwilling to provide them, they had not happened. The minister, W.C. Wentworth's, more imaginative mind saw merit in the idea and he provided the funds for the elders to meet. I attended as an observer and listened while they talked of the problems of their relationships with the white community, of what was happening to the traditions of their fathers and about the promise system and its future. I saw young Galarrwuy stand and defend the right of the young to choose. The form of his proposal was interesting. He did not seek to break the fundamental rules of the categories within which an Aboriginal may and may not marry. He was asserting rather that, within those rules, the young should be free to choose. The rights or wrongs of this issue are perhaps unimportant in this story. What was interesting was that, despite feeling among elders that Galarrwuy was claiming a role he was not yet entitled to, the conference, by consensus, decided that the promise system should be ended; that all existing promises should be fulfilled but no more should be made. While it may be doubted whether the decision was intended or expected to be generally applied, it was an interesting example of the capacity of Aboriginal society to adapt itself to change from within, even in matters of long-established tradition.

Galarrwuy seems to me to be a symbol. He is a man of two worlds. He is literate, articulate in our language as well as in his own; he can earn a living with distinction in our society. On the other hand, he can hold his place and command respect in his own. He could, without difficulty, take a place in our society but, as he said to Professor Stanner: 'If I have to choose I will be an Aboriginal'. There will, I believe, be many more such young men of two worlds.

Galarrwuy has recently been elected as Chairman of the Northern Land Council, a body of representatives of Aboriginal communities in the top end of Northern Territory which is by statute entrusted with the task of negotiating on behalf of traditional Aboriginal land-owners with the land commissioner, with the

government, and with mining companies. In this capacity he was invited, in November 1977, to address the National Press Club in Canberra and his speech on that occasion was broadcast live on radio. It was a dignified and moving address and must have made a great impression on all who heard it. In conclusion Galarrwuy said, 'These are difficult days for all of us, Aboriginal Australians and European Australians, as we learn to live together in a new way, with real equality at last. We Aborigines want to share this land with you and we will ask you to share it with us, openly, and without fear or secret dealings. We ask you to be as responsible as we have been for 40,000 years in preserving our heritage and environment'. Galarrwuy's election to the position of Chairman at his very early age by communities among whom wisdom tends to be identified with age is a remarkable tribute to his standing among his own people and the conscious need for persons of their own society who possess also the skills necessary to deal with our own. It will be a severe test for him.

The way of the young who wish to rebel against the matrimonial practices of Aboriginal society is not always as easy as Galarrwuy's. Some years ago the press made much of the story of a teenage girl of one community promised to an older man but unwilling to marry him. She sought the protection of a missionary and his wife, who took her into their home. The 'promised husband', backed by the elders of her clan and by the Aboriginal council, demanded that she be returned to the care of her parents and when the missionary refused, feelings ran high. The missionary's reaction was to call in the police — which intensified Aboriginal hostility as it was seen as an organised interference by white society in a matter which was the exclusive concern of the Aboriginal people. There was a violent clash between the police and several clan leaders, some of whom were gaoled. The girl was flown out by the Aboriginal welfare agency to a city where she was enrolled in a school. Great publicity was given to this story by the press at that time and most white people thought the missionary had acted wisely and chivalrously. Little publicity has been given to the subsequent events.

The gaoled leaders were soon released but the issue long continued to embitter relationships between Aborigines, mission, police and administration. The girl was lonely in the city; she did not wish to reject the Aboriginal way of life, and had never intended to leave her own family and community permanently.

Within a year she returned at her own wish to her community and to the man to whom she had been promised. She is a secure and

happy woman now in a position of influence. Protest against the social practices of any society is best expressed within the society itself and justice or reform is rarely achieved by an appeal to external and alien authority.

It is perhaps important to ask whether means of redress existed within Aboriginal society itself. Although most Aboriginal women appear to accept without great question the matrimonial procedures of their people it would be surprising if instances of rebellion did not occur from time to time. Certain Aboriginal myths and stories contain many references to breaches of traditional law and practice in these matters, and Aborigines will readily point to individuals among them who have erred also. I have asked many of them how these cases are dealt with. In simplified form what I learned was something like this.

A girl who did not want to marry the man chosen for her would run away — usually with a preferred lover. They would be pursued and brought back and she would probably be beaten. However, if she was serious in her resistance she would run away again and the pursuit and punishment would be repeated. If, after this, she persisted in fleeing again the elders of the families would confer, some compensation would be devised for the hurt dignity of the rejected spouse and then the errant pair would be forgiven, their union regularised and their place in the community restored. It is after all presumptuous to imagine that we alone have the means to resolve such problems. The more so since it is hard to claim much in sexual and matrimonial matters for the wisdom, humanity or success of our own practices.

Some Aborigines have responded to the complexities of the black-white interaction by withdrawal as complete as can be achieved. One such was Mandargg, a great contemporary bark painter who presides over a small family-based community some seventy miles from Maningrida — a government settlement in eastern Arnhem Land. Mandargg is known to be a difficult man to meet, but I had been told that it was possible he would receive me and that in any case I would be welcome. Arriving just about dusk, we could see through the trees in the shadows the light of the small fires which mark an Aboriginal camp, and the shapes of bush huts and platforms. Just as we were approaching the camp, my companion said: 'Do you know about the son?' And I said: 'No'. 'After we leave I will tell you,' he said.

We were met by a young man of about twenty-five, very gentle, softly-spoken, and friendly, who explained that his father was tired

and had gone to bed, but would perhaps see us in the morning. He made us welcome and showed us where we could set up our camp.

During the night we were disturbed by a strange wailing, keening noise from one of the bush huts. It went on, it seemed, interminably, seeming to express the most unutterable sorrows. However, in due course we slept and woke in a camp on the edge of the sandstone escarpment where it drops down from the rock country of Arnhem Land to the coastal plain. There were ledges, galleries, caves, among trees and scrub through which the morning light came slanting. The camp was arranged in traditional Aboriginal style and was of bush materials but some of the structures clearly had been influenced by knowledge of European building techniques. It was a scene that gave a strong sense of order.

The young man explained that his father had gone but would perhaps meet us later in the day. He took us round and told us of their way of life. It was one of extreme simplicity. They relied almost entirely upon what they could hunt or gather. But since they, like other Aborigines, had become to some degree dependent on what could be bought in the stores, they had an arrangement with the superintendent at Maningrida that he would visit them from time to time, bringing stores and pension cheques for the old people. On his visit he would pick up the barks which the old man had painted and the artefacts which his son and others in the camp had made. Values would be placed upon them and a balance would be struck, often in the absence of the painter, who sought to avoid contact even with members of white society whom he trusted.

The young man took us to see the paintings and drawings under the overhanging slabs of sandstone. Most were very ancient, but some were new. It was clear that his father painted there as well as on the barks. He told us that these ledges were the home of the *Mimi* spirits — spirits perhaps of dead ancestors — sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. He explained with great simplicity that his father knew these spirits and talked with them. When I asked him: 'Can you hear them?' He said quite simply: 'No, I cannot but my father can'. I said: 'What do they talk about?' He said: 'Sometimes they remind him of the stories of our ancestors, of the way in which the men and animals came to these places. But sometimes they talk about very ordinary things'. I said: 'What sort of things do you mean?' He said: 'The other night they were telling my father that they would like to see one of these new motor bicycles'. All of this was said with a simplicity which, with the impact of the land, the trees, the sunlight, the paintings, as well as the boy himself, conveyed a strange mystical quality.

The father returned but did not want to talk with us. When it was time for us to go we sought him to thank him. He remained distant and aloof accepting our thanks courteously, but clearly not wishing to communicate further.

As we were moving off I said to my friend: 'What was it you wanted to tell me about the boy?' He said: 'He has just come out of gaol where he has been for some years for murder'. He went on: 'Some years ago there was an Aboriginal girl murdered and the boy went to the police and told them that he had killed her. He said: "I had a dream and I knew that when I woke I should go to a place on the road where I would meet the girl whom I knew had offended against the tribe and that I would kill her. And so I did."' They asked him whether he had known the girl and he said that he had never seen her before'.

He told this story to the courts. Anthropologists confirmed that when a person is to be punished for an offence against tribal law the one chosen to carry out the sentence may have been wholly unconnected with the offence or with the person who had committed it. They said also that Aborigines believed that the instructions to carry out such ritual punishment could be conveyed in a dream. Whatever the truth, the court was apparently impressed with the young man's frankness and simplicity, giving him a lenient sentence.

I find it hard still to envisage this gentle mystic as the instrument of tribal vengeance. In all, my visit to this camp was an experience beyond my power fully to comprehend. It was perhaps because the camp and its residents were the embodiment of the Aboriginal 'way' in as pristine a form as is today possible and then only because of the physical and psychic distance from us which they have established as a barrier to the contact whose damage they fear.

Elkin in his accounts of Aboriginal society refers to those having significant magical powers as 'Men of High Degree'. His application of the term seems unduly limited. It could well be applied to those possessing authority in spiritual ceremonies and secular matters and especially to Daymbalipu Mununggurr, a leader by right of descent backed by physical and intellectual dominance among the Djapu clan, one of the sixteen clans grouped in and around the mission settlement of Yirrkala on Gove Peninsula. Aristocrats of any society tend to be characterised by an apparently conscious sense of superiority, a high degree of responsibility in the affairs of their society and standards of virtuous behaviour derived from the code of 'noblesse oblige'. Such a man is Daymbalipu: the

grandson of Wonggu, handsome and impressive in bearing, confident and assured, learned in the cultural traditions of his people, eloquent and persuasive in speech, quick to assert and defend the rights of his own clan but ready to act with others in matters of common concern.

The Yirrkala mission had brought together the various clans whose traditional territory was spread through the Gove Peninsula and related parts of Eastern Arnhem Land. Most of the Djapu land lay to the south close to the waters of Caledon Bay. The mission land itself was mainly Rirratjingu and Gomaitj territory. The Djapu clan had a reciprocal relationship with the Rirratjingu which gave them responsibilities for the care of each other and which made their presence generally welcome. Nevertheless, living within another clan's territory for prolonged periods imposes strain on the visitor but also on members of the host clan. Tension can easily develop and tempers fray when one group feels that its rights are being infringed beyond the limits of the implied mutual obligations which underlie most Aboriginal relationships, and when there is probably some sense of guilt and embarrassment on the other at being so long within another's territory. As a leader Daymbalipu bears responsibility for ensuring that such tension is kept within limits. There have been problems at times but today he is the chosen chairman of the combined clan Council which guides the affairs of the whole community and its relations with the homeland settlements of the individual clans.

It was Daymbalipu who first made me aware of the interest of Aborigines in returning to their traditional homelands. On one of my first visits to Yirrkala he asked me why the government would not let his clan re-establish themselves near Caledon Bay. His view of the situation was that the clans had come to Yirrkala to help the mission establish itself and that it was time that they were now helped to return to their own territories and there to develop facilities comparable with those that the mission had, with their help, established. This expectation of reciprocal action accords with Aboriginal values which are frequently based on the well understood principle of mutual obligation.

On my next visit to Darwin I discussed the question with H.C. Giese, then Director of Welfare in the Northern Territory administration, and was surprised at the vehemence of his antagonism. Briefly he saw such moves as inconsistent with the assimilationist objectives of the then accepted policy, as encouraging Aborigines to maintain their traditional ways, weakening mission and administration control and as impairing the education of the children

in the ways of white society. These views were generally, although less vehemently, shared by the missionaries.

When I returned to Yirrkala the issue was raised again and I was able to assess the strength of Aboriginal feeling about it. Other clans expressed the same aspiration — to be once more within their own territory but to maintain effective links with Yirrkala itself. I realised, however, that, in the light of prevailing attitudes within the government and administration, it was unlikely that the moves could be made with official blessing. This I made clear to Daymbalipu — adding, however, that if they felt strongly enough about it they could simply go without help or blessing from officials. I said that the government could not stop them and that I thought it probable that once the move had been undertaken officials would accept and adapt to it.

Today there are more than twenty homeland centres around Yirrkala — more independent and self-sufficient than perhaps any others — working out an acceptable pattern of life, incorporating chosen components from white society, but still characteristically Aboriginal. Their links with Yirrkala which they see as an administrative, service, commercial and educational centre, are effective. Altogether the homeland movement in this region is more mature, more coherently motivated, more consciously independent and self-managing than anywhere. It may well prove a model from which others will learn. Much of this effectiveness reflects the capacity and wisdom of Daymbalipu. He has an especial interest in the development of education for the homeland children — an education which by content and pedagogy is designed to develop them as Aboriginal Australians equipped for their own clan life but capable also of dealing with white Australian society.

He is, however, not only a political and administrative leader. He is also a scholar. As a member of the Council of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies he is active and articulate in its policy formation but also undertakes, in a research program supported by it, the recording of the traditional law of his people. The small communities of Aboriginal society, like the city states of ancient Greece or Renaissance Italy, seem to provide a context from which such 'universal' men can emerge — men who are at once warriors, hunters, artists, scholars and statesmen.

James Lester spent his early childhood years among the Yunkuntjatjara people of the Mimili community in the north of South Australia, learning the ancient lore of the land with his fellows. His home base was Walatinna, now an outstation of Granite Downs.

At about fifteen years of age he began to go blind and he was taken to Oodnadatta hospital where the Sister arranged for him to go to Adelaide for treatment. That was in 1956. In 1957 Jim returned to Granite Downs where, after a short time, he became completely blind. He was sent to Oodnadatta again, and from there to Adelaide. The late Reverend L.J. Samuels, himself blind, met Jim in hospital and became a valuable friend and helper. He had Jim admitted to the Calbrooke Home for the Blind from which he attended the Royal Institute for the Blind and learned to make brooms and brushes. Jim then asked to learn Braille and was taught for half an hour a day by the late Pat McCulloch, himself a blind man, the Public Relations Officer of the Institute. He also taught Jim English. Jim was an apt pupil becoming articulate in English while maintaining his command over his own and the related languages of Central Australian Aborigines. This aptitude enabled him to find employment from time to time as an interpreter in court proceedings and similar situations where his usefulness was increased because he had not lost touch nor sympathy with the ways of his fellow Aborigines. This understanding and sympathy was well expressed in a paper which he presented to a conference organised in 1973 by the International Commission of Jurists, in which he drew upon his personal experience as an interpreter, to emphasise the handicaps which Aborigines suffer in our system of justice, and the conflict which can exist between our own and Aboriginal systems of law.

In due course he returned to work with the Reverend Jim Downing in the United Church, and later in the Institute of Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs where he served as an interpreter, assisted in the teaching of Pitjantjatjara and progressively became a friend and adviser to many communities. In the meantime he had married an Aboriginal girl, Lucy Turner, from Tyon and Ernabella, who also had spent some years in Adelaide and who had become articulate and literate in English and familiar with much in white society. They have three children. Although Jim was happy with his work he was conscious that to a degree he had not effectively re-established the full confidence of other Aborigines who were aware of the barrier between him and them, created by his years in white society. Furthermore he was conscious that he lacked the knowledge and involvement in the Aboriginal way which the continuing instruction in its teachings would have given him had he remained with his own people. He was sure that he should seek full readmission to Aboriginal society, but uncertain how this could best be done. He hesitated — his

doubts increased by the influence of European ways and ideas absorbed consciously and unconsciously during his years in white society. This phase of uncertainty left its mark on his confidence and capacity: he was at that time obviously a man divided within himself.

Finally, however, he became a full tribal man. There was a new assurance and confidence in his demeanour and in his relations with black and white. Traditional communities, particularly his own people at Mimili, turned to him with greater frequency and certainty. He had indeed come home with new skills and capacity but with a strengthened Aboriginal identity.

Today James Lester, despite his blindness, manages the Aboriginal cattle enterprise at Mimili where his wife Lucy acts as his 'eyes' and he carries the working model of the enterprise clearly in his mind. The community is increasingly developing a pattern of life which places the cattle project firmly within its chosen priorities but does not subordinate them wholly to it. After the initial problems which they faced with white managers and unfamiliar objectives and concepts, there is a new sense of competence among them. Much of the credit for this is due to James and Lucy Lester.

Kath Walker is perhaps the best known Aboriginal writer and poet working in the English language. Her work commands respect in its own right rather than simply as proof that it is possible for an Aboriginal to be successful in our society despite the odds.

Kath was born on Stradbroke Island to which she has returned in recent years. Her family were members of the Noonuccal tribe and retained much of the traditional Aboriginal law. Kath, belonging to the carpet snake totem, retained her sense of identity with the rest of nature, depended much upon hunting and gathering for food and learnt early not to harvest more than was necessary for sustenance. She heard, too, many of the stories and myths of her people, echoes of which recur in her writings.

Stradbroke Island, however, had a significant white population and Kath's childhood was spent partly among them. She was educated in the state school and was fortunate to find a teacher who was as interested in his Aboriginal as in his white pupils. Despite her good school performance she encountered barriers when she sought training and employment in work which appealed to her.

The war brought her more opportunities. She enlisted for service and her intelligence and adaptability were recognised. Furthermore, photographs of the time show her to have been beautiful, as well as

gay and charming. In a predominantly male world she must have been much sought after. Her service also later entitled her to training opportunities and she took advantage of this to equip herself as a stenographer.

By this time she had begun to write. James Devaney, a Queensland poet, encouraged and praised her work. Her first book, *We are Going*, was read before publication by Judith Wright who urged the potential publishers that here was a genuine poetic talent, not simply a literary curiosity. Not surprisingly her work concentrates much, but not exclusively, on the sorrows and injustices of Aboriginal Australians and their need for a shared identity and unity among themselves. But her poems are never merely propaganda.

She became increasingly involved in the struggle for the rights of Aborigines and quickly established a reputation as an eloquent and persuasive speaker. Consequently when the referendum to involve the federal parliament and government in Aboriginal affairs was being presented in 1967, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders chose her to tour Australia, urging support for the 'Yes' vote.

As the campaign neared its end Kath was somewhere in far western Queensland and the money had run out. An appeal to the Queensland government for help met indifferent silence, but her friends rallied enough to enable her to complete her journey, one of them, Ingrid Palmer (then a lecturer at Queensland University) placing her holiday pay at Kath's disposal. Kath has continued her work for the cause in a great variety of ways and enjoys any opportunities to 'put one over' the enemy. At one time she was working for some weeks in the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. I had recently presented to the College of Physicians the review of Aboriginal health which appears in this volume. Because, at that stage, I hoped that the college would be stimulated to take some professional initiative in the matter, I had labelled it 'confidential'. There were copies around the office and one came into Kath's hands. She rightly judged that such information should properly be public — so she appropriated two copies of the address and I was surprised to see extracts from it appearing in a great variety of Aboriginal publications. Kath frequently gets pleasure from reminding me of her little exercise in espionage.

In recent years Kath has established and run almost single-handed 'Moongalba', a camp on Stradbroke Island, to which come Aborigines (and non-Aborigines too), from many parts of Australia, especially children, to renew their contacts with the

natural uncorrupted face of their own land and to be reminded of the culture of their ancestors. It is a project for which she has long sought government support but the bureaucratic mind can see little virtue in a project so individual, so practical and so idealistic — especially of course when it is put forward by a woman.

Kath is a fiery and eloquent speaker on behalf of her people. It is said that somewhere in her ancestry there is a wild Spanish sailor, and certainly her fierce intensity and flashing eyes when her oratory is in full flight have all the fire of a passionate people.

A white girl who listened to one of Kath's speeches wrote:

Black Mother
 You stand there on the stage, the spotlight white
 Black eyes flashing — hands on hips —
 Condemning me
 Your anger flows and sparks in vicious words
 Your rage strikes sparks of anguish from your black friends
 They howl your anger back at you
 In words of black righteousness
 While I the only white one here
 Howl also
 But not in anger
 I howl in fear and sorrow
 Black woman
 Do not hate me
 Because I am white
 And free
 And guilty.¹

But despite her fire Kath is a gentle soul at heart. In her poem to her son, she writes:

I could tell you of heartbreak, hatred blind
 I could tell you of crimes that shame mankind
 Of brutal wrong and deeds malign
 Of rape and murder, son of mine

 But I'll tell instead of brave and fine
 When lives of black and white entwine
 And men in brotherhood combine
 This I would tell you — son of mine.

When white society can respond with comparable justice and compassion we shall have made progress.

1. 'To Kath' by Elizabeth Smith, first published in *Aboriginal and Islander identity*, 2, 10 (October 1976), p. 24.

Aboriginal handicaps

This group of papers illustrates the early concern of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs to take steps to break the cycle of poverty by which many Australian Aborigines were trapped. The council was anxious to encourage concerted efforts to attack the handicaps that faced Aboriginal people in three key areas: health, education and employment. The papers that follow represent attempts to interest and activate professionals in these fields.

The paper on Aboriginal health was given in 1969. Until 1967 Aboriginal health had been the sole responsibility of state governments and the Northern Territory Administration. Early efforts in this area by the council in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Health tended to meet objections from the states that there was no special problem. To obtain a clearer picture and establish the need for action, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs accepted responsibility for financing a number of research projects recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council, which showed up the seriousness of the health problem among Aborigines.

The first allocation of commonwealth funds to the states for Aboriginal health projects was in 1968. Initially the response of the states was to seek grants for large capital projects. Some of these were financed by the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, but in general, the council considered it preferable to try to persuade the states to give greater emphasis to extending medical services into remote areas and to the training of Aborigines as nursing aides and assistants to work in their own communities. These efforts met with some success, although in spite of a moderate increase in commonwealth grants to the states year by year from 1968, until the change of government in 1972, funds were not made available on a scale which would allow the sort of intensive activity envisaged by the council.

In education there were two major aspects of the problem. The first was simply to increase the educational opportunities available to Aborigines, and the second was concerned with the type of education that was available. The first aspect was tackled by the council on three fronts: pre-school education, secondary and tertiary education, and adult education. Some considerable progress had been made in all three areas by the time the paper 'Human values in education' was given in 1970. In 1969 a system of study grants for Aboriginal students at post-secondary and tertiary levels

had been introduced, followed in 1970 by a secondary grants scheme to assist those who wished to continue at school beyond the statutory leaving age.

At the same time a more fundamental attack was made on the educational deprivation characteristic of Aborigines, by the institution of an ultimately very successful program of comprehensive pre-school education in Aboriginal communities, and in 1969 a program of commonwealth aid to the states was introduced for adult education projects.

The other aspect of the problem — the nature of education available to Aborigines — was more difficult to grapple with and the paper reproduced here was, in part, an attempt to inform professionals in this field of some of the difficulties and possibilities as seen by the council.

The paper 'The employment status of Aborigines' is rather later than the other two (March 1972) and reflects the council's special concern with encouraging avenues for Aboriginal employment that would give them increased independence and self-respect. The paper was given at a time when prospects for the sorts of Aboriginal enterprises it concludes by describing were less good than we might have hoped. The Prime Minister's statement in January 1972 of government policy in relation to Aboriginal ownership of land and support for Aboriginal enterprises (see the paper 'Aboriginal lands rights', pp. 159-83 had been very conservative, and those initiatives that had been announced were not being followed up with any enthusiasm in most quarters. It was at this time that a group of Aborigines was occupying a 'tent embassy' outside Parliament House, seeking some recognition of their claims from their white compatriots.

Health

Information about Aboriginal health is fragmentary. Since Aborigines are not recorded separately it is impossible to make comprehensive comparisons of their health experience with that of the community generally. We can rely therefore only on the results of surveys and studies of particular localities and communities and comparisons between areas with known predominantly Aboriginal population and others.

From 'Aboriginal health' an address to the Australasian College of Physicians, Sydney, 5 June 1969.

There are probably about 140,000 persons who identify themselves as Aborigines of whom 46,000 are believed to be of full Aboriginal descent. The age structure of this population is remarkable. Most communities which have been studied show 50 per cent under the age of fifteen and 20-25 per cent under five. Such a population is doubling itself in little more than a decade. The number of Aborigines in the child-bearing age groups represents less than 1 per cent of all Australians in this group — but Aboriginal births comprise 2 per cent of all registered births.¹ Over the next few years there will be a sharp rise in the numbers in the child-bearing ages, reflecting itself in an even more dramatic rate of increase in relation to total population.

Infant mortality

Let us look first at infant and child mortality. Dr P.M. Moodie² of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Sydney University, reports that compared with births, which represent 2 per cent of the total, Aboriginal deaths in the appropriate category represent:

- (a) 10 per cent of *all* infant deaths;
- (b) 28 per cent of all deaths in the one to two year group;
- (c) 9 per cent of all deaths in the two to four year group.

The rate of 28 per cent for the second year of life is twenty times the Australian average and is, Moodie reports, *not declining*. The infant mortality is three and a half times that for other Australian babies and in the Northern Territory and Queensland in the three years from 1965 to 1967, between 12 and 22 per cent of all Aboriginal babies born died before the age of two.

It would be a mistake to think of these conditions being restricted to the 'outback' or far north. A joint committee of the New South Wales Parliament in 1967 reported that in Walgett and other western towns surveyed:

- (a) the standard of health of Aboriginal children in the first year is markedly lower than that of other children;
- (b) the chances of an Aboriginal child under the age of one dying are three to four times as great as those for other children.

Medical officers in this general area indicated that deaths in the

1. Department of Territories, *Australian Aborigines*, Canberra, 1970.
 2. P.M. Moodie, 'Mortality and morbidity in Australian Aboriginal children', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 1 (1969), pp. 180-5.

first month of life were 7.4 per cent for Aboriginal babies and 2.8 per cent for others.³ In one south coast town surveyed it was reported that 66 per cent of Aboriginal children registered died before they were four years old.

Nutrition and general health

Professor G.M. Maxwell's researches⁴ throw some interesting light on factors affecting child health generally. He concludes that:

- (a) Aboriginal children in all areas studied are malnourished by general Australian standards;
- (b) the growth pattern in the first six months is not seriously abnormal but 'post-weaning' malnutrition appears widespread, with older groups showing little capacity to improve their condition in this respect;
- (c) this 'post-weaning' malnutrition shows itself, among other ways, in subnormal bone development reflected in chest circumference and head size. There is some reason to believe that the imperfect head development is sufficient to represent a continuing handicap to mental development.

An interesting commentary on these conclusions is provided by the work of Dr J.J. Elphinstone⁵ who surveyed the condition and dietary habits in 1957 and 1958 of an Aboriginal community in Western Australia which had little or no contact with Europeans. He found no evidence of malnutrition in infants or young children. Only in drought did evidence of malnutrition emerge and that swiftly disappeared as food became available. In other words the malnutrition may be a result of 'contact' where the balance of the diet has been upset by external influences, for example in European settlements, missions and pastoral stations.

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3. Report from the Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines' Welfare, Minutes of Evidence, 13 September 1967.
 4. Information attributed to Professor G.M. Maxwell and Dr R.B. Elliott is taken from 'Nutritional state of Australian Aboriginal children', *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 22, 6 (1969), pp. 716-24; 'Respiratory infections in Australian Aboriginal children' (with W.T. McCoy and W.A. Langford), *Medical Journal of Australia*, 2 (1968), pp. 990-3, and a number of unpublished papers on child health provided by them.
 5. J.J. Elphinstone, *Report on health and nutrition of natives from Rawlinson Range to Lake Macdonald*, Report of the Commissioner for Public Health, Western Australia, 1958.

Resistance to disease

With this background of malnutrition it would be surprising if general health and resistance to disease were not poor. Professor Maxwell's study of children in the Papunya and Maningrida communities in the Northern Territory⁶ which covered some 95 per cent of the Aboriginal population under fifteen, in the years 1965 and 1967, indicated that high proportions of the children had a history of repeated ear, nose and throat problems, gastro-enteritis and respiratory infections.

Similar conclusions have been reached from surveys by Professor W.B. MacDonald of Western Australia;⁷ he added, however, that in remote areas the mortality rates are higher than in communities close to towns and the diseases more varied. He refers in particular to a high prevalence of worm infestation, trachoma, and skin diseases.

Again, however, there is no reason to believe these evidences of substandard health and resistance to disease are confined to the remote areas. Reports of medical officers to the government of New South Wales of conditions in western and coastal towns indicate for example that:

- (a) the haemoglobin content was substandard in 68.5 per cent of Aboriginal children;
- (b) ear, nose and throat infections and chest complaints were 'very prevalent';
- (c) there was a heavy incidence of 'sticky' eyes — more than the usual conjunctivitis possibly indicating gonococcal or meningococcal origin.

Eye infections are widespread. A report in 1966 on trachoma among children in a community around Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia⁸ showed 100 per cent positive results. After treatment over a five-month period this had fallen to 50 per cent. Further treatment over five months in 1967 brought the percentage down to 24 per cent but by the beginning of 1968 it had risen again to 40 per cent probably because of reinfection.

6. See note 4.

7. W.B. Macdonald, 'Nutritional status of Aboriginal infants and pre-school children', unpublished paper.

8. Unpublished reports from Sister Pat McPherson of the AIM Nursing Service, to the Commissioner for Native Welfare in Western Australia.

Adults

And what of the adults? With the exception of limited fields of study little recorded evidence exists.

Generally there is a prevailing impression of lethargy and lack of interest in life among many. Widespread reports of lack of interest in employment or sustained activity, and lack of response to normal social incentives could reflect genetic factors, rejection of European value judgments, or simply the effects of malnutrition, weakened vitality and a general conviction of hopelessness.

What can be said is:

- (a) that Aboriginal Australians suffer more from leprosy than almost any community for whom information is available (of 140,000 Aboriginal Australians, 2000 are *known* to suffer from leprosy);⁹
- (b) venereal disease is a serious and growing problem among them;
- (c) the evidence of psychological disorders prevalent among teenagers living within the European communities appears to be repeated where any facts have been assembled about adults living in similar circumstances.¹⁰

Conclusions

I have tried to present the available data as objectively as I can, refraining from comment or attempts to lay blame. Perhaps one could summarise the picture somewhat along these lines:

If an Aboriginal baby is born today:

- (a) it has a much better than average chance of being dead within two years;
- (b) if it does survive it has a much better than average chance of suffering from substandard nutrition to a degree likely to handicap it permanently —
 - (i) in its physical and mental potential;
 - (ii) in its resistance to disease.

9. Statistics issued by the Commonwealth Department of Health, Canberra 1968.

10. For examples, see the results of surveys carried out in Victoria by Drs Gault, Krapinski and Stoller in 1967 and 1968 (Krapinski *et al.* 'A community health survey of Hayfield, Victoria', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 1 (1967), p. 1204; E.I. Gault, 'Psychiatric and behavioural disturbances in adolescent Aborigines in Victoria', *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 2 (1968) pp. 128-33) and by Drs Kidson and Jones in Western Desert areas (M.A. Kidson and I.H. Jones 'Psychiatric disorders among Aborigines of the Australian Western Desert', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 19 (1968), pp. 413-17).

- (c) it is likely in its childhood years to suffer from a wide range of diseases but particularly ear, nose and throat and respiratory infections, from gastro-enteritis, from trachoma and other eye infections;
- (d) if it reaches the teenages it is likely to be ignorant of and lacking in sound hygienic habits, without vocational training, unemployed, maladjusted, and hostile to society;
- (e) if it reaches adult ages it is likely to be lethargic, irresponsible and, above all, poverty-stricken — unable to break out of the iron cycle of poverty, ignorance, malnutrition: if it lives in the north it has a good chance of being maimed by leprosy and, wherever, its search for affection and companionship may well end only in the misery of VD;
- (f) if it happens to be a girl she is likely to conceive a baby at an age when her white contemporary is screaming innocent adulation at some 'pop' star and she will continue to bear babies every twelve or eighteen months until she reaches double figures or dies of exhaustion;
- (g) and so the wheel will turn.

Let us be clear: the health problems of the Aboriginal Australians are not peculiar; they are the universal health pattern of depressed minorities the world over — a pattern set in a context of poverty, ignorance, unemployment, loss of identity, lethargy, and poverty again.

There is nothing insoluble about them. Existing knowledge, determination and resources could transform this scene in a decade and eliminate the problem within a generation.

You may ask what is being done about this. Until 1967 Aboriginal welfare was the responsibility solely of the states and the Administration of the Northern Territory. Handicapped by lack of knowledge and of human and financial resources, those responsible faced an impossible task. In 1968 for the first time commonwealth funds were made available in modest proportions. Some \$500,000 was provided to the states to reinforce their efforts in the field of health. Most of this was used to support capital expenditure on hospitals, hostels for patients etc. although in Queensland a part was devoted to provision of meals at school, and the Northern Territory Administration has begun an interesting development of a 'grass-roots' health service among Aboriginal communities in which Aborigines are trained and employed at sub-professional levels working under professional guidance to help

raise the standard of nutrition, maternal and infant care, sanitation and other aspects of public health.

In recent discussions with state welfare and health representatives the Australian Council for Aboriginal Affairs has been urging that greater emphasis should be given to maternal and infant care — to the training of Aboriginal health workers to carry through health education programs among their own people. These are valuable beginnings but one cannot but fear that unless greatly reinforced they will be overwhelmed in the rising flood of numbers.

In the meantime we are seeking more information. The council is financing research studies of the aetiology of malnutrition in Aboriginal children, field and hospital studies of the health of Aboriginal children in Queensland, and into the effects of cultural deprivation and possible techniques of cultural enrichment in 'fringe' communities in New South Wales. The initiative for these studies has come from the individual workers themselves. We lack a coherent plan for the collection and analysis of data and for programmed research to help determine priorities for action.

Governments can and are giving a lead but they can rarely do more than their society expects of them and our society has shown little desire to demand or to render significant aid for these our compatriots. This is a responsibility which we all share but would you think it an impertinence on my part to wonder whether an especial responsibility in this matter does not lie with the medical profession? What an effect it could have if their representative organs would resolve:

- (a) soberly to check on the health status of our Aboriginal people in all parts of Australia and to make known their findings;
- (b) to lay down for the consideration of governments a health program, graduated in its stages of urgency, designed to break this so far unending cycle of misery;
- (c) to check progress, revise plans and check again until our Aboriginal citizens stand upright among us with the same health and dignity as they did in this land before our forebears descended upon them.

Do not misunderstand me. Your part can be no more than a part. The program must assault this problem from every aspect — housing, education, vocational training, employment, social recognition, the restoration of personal and ethnic identity — all are in my view essential to a solution of the health problem, and others must accept prime responsibility for these other aspects of policy; but equally none of them can be wholly effective unless an

equally effective health program forms part of the whole.

May I ask that you give it thought?

Education

I am interpreting the title of this paper 'Human values in education' as posing a question as to the degree to which an education system or process recognises or is based on the belief that it is people that matter and asserting that this question can best be answered by inquiring:

- (a) what the process or system makes possible for the human beings for whom it is organised; and
- (b) how far, by its content and its pedagogy, it establishes the value of human beings.

I wish to apply these tests, superficially and inadequately it is true, to our own education system so far as it concerns and is concerned with Aboriginal Australians. I think it important to do this:

- (a) because, since the education of Aboriginal Australians presents some special problems and difficulties, it is likely to test our values under 'stress conditions' and therefore to expose more effectively the validity and integrity with which they are held and applied;
- (b) because, for reasons of history, and Aborigines being of our community, we have a special responsibility for them;
- (c) because after 170-odd years of decline the Aboriginal population is now rising rapidly¹¹ and a failure to solve

'Human values in education', the Buntine Oration, Eleventh Annual Conference of the Australian College of Education, Canberra, 13 May 1970. A version of the paper was first published as 'Human Values in Education: The Educational Status of Aboriginal Australians' in the Australian Journal of Education, 14 (1970), pp.241-252.

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11. Most authorities estimate that in 1788 there were some three hundred thousand Aboriginal inhabitants of the continent. The impact of Europeans was devastating and by the early part of this century there were probably no more than forty to fifty thousand. But for reasons about which it is possible only to speculate, the tide appears to have turned in the 1930s or 1940s and by 1970 the total of persons who would classify themselves as of some Aboriginal descent would probably have been between one hundred and twenty and one hundred and fifty thousand. More important is the changing age structure. Most Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal communities for which information has been gathered show about 50 per cent of their numbers under the age of fifteen and of those close to half will in many communities be under the age of five; and this despite infant mortality rates frequently many times those normal for our

the educational and other problems of their place in our society could mean that the fond illusion many of us hold of Australia as homogeneous and free of 'race' problems could be dissipated in violence and in hatred.

Such an analysis necessarily involves deeply the problems of human values in whatever terms you define them.

However, it will perhaps make clearer why I believe this if I outline very summarily the values which I hope would tend to be established during the process of education. I express this somewhat circuitously because I doubt whether values can or should be 'taught'. What one values or thinks good is a matter of fact; one is not always wholly conscious of it nor of the reasons for it; and conclusions about it can often better be derived from behaviour than from oral or written statements of principles. Furthermore, these values are derived from one's whole experience and only partly interpreted or organised by rational thought. Furthermore, the educational process in the pedagogic sense is only a small, if significant, part of experience even in the years of school and higher education. Nevertheless what is implied or demonstrated about values in the content of an education and in the attitude and behaviour of teachers obviously is an important source from which the young will choose their values. Personally I would wish that during their years of education and youthful experience the young would:

- (a) come to value intellectual activity both as useful and as pleasurable and exciting (in other words, I would like them to become able to think rationally and systematically; to trace the probable consequences of a course of action, to formulate and test a hypothesis designed to connect or explain a series of events, and to find enjoyment in these and related activities);
- (b) enjoy a range of experience in the 'liberal arts' which would give them the freedom of the delight of human creativeness in these arts;
- (c) come to want to behave in accordance with principles which rate kindness, tolerance and compassion highly and which reject hatred, cruelty and indifference to human misery;

society. These figures are consistent with those of the 'Population explosion' in the countries of Asia and Africa and of underprivileged communities in the United States of America. It is probable that before the end of the century the Aboriginal numbers will have been restored to those at the beginning of white settlement.

- (d) feel themselves to be members of a community which, potentially at least, comprehends the human race and which welcomes diversity within it as something to be enjoyed and protected.

You will see that these values derive broadly from a conviction about the value of human beings as persons — as individuals, and as members of families or of the communities of which they feel themselves to be an organic part; in other words, a conviction that it is people that matter.

Educational status of Aborigines

In 1966 the first comprehensive attempt was made to include Aborigines in the census. While census authorities are not wholly happy about the statistical reliability of the results, particularly in respect of persons of some, but less than 50 per cent, Aboriginal descent, it now becomes possible to obtain for Aborigines certain data similar to those for other Australians. For instance it is now possible to assess the educational status of Aborigines — at least for those who recorded themselves as of 'more than 50 per cent Aboriginal descent'. The year 1966 will therefore represent a base year for future comparisons, and in the meantime some important, if provisional, conclusions can be drawn.¹²

First, the educational system up to 1966 had had a relatively limited impact on the Aboriginal population, at least on that part of it of more than 50 per cent Aboriginal descent. Thus:

- (a) although education is by law compulsory throughout Australia, significant numbers of Aboriginal children did not attend school. (In the states and territories with substantial Aboriginal populations the percentages of children from five to fourteen years up not attending in 1966 ranged from 6 per cent in New South Wales to 18 per cent in the Northern Territory and averaged 11 per cent for the whole of Australia. By contrast the non-Aboriginal population would in effect be wholly attending. The variation between the states reflects both the difficulties of educating a scattered population and apparently a differential effort of authorities to incorporate young Aborigines into the school system. It is notable that the Queensland ratio is 8 per cent compared with 11 per cent, 14 per cent and 18 per cent in Western

12. Leonard Broom, 'Educational status of Aborigines', unpublished paper.

- (b) Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.) Older age groups have had little contact with the educational system. (More than half the men over forty-five report no education at all and a majority of those over twenty have no education or only primary. In many of the latter cases primary education would have been confined to very low levels; thus for instance Aboriginal settlement schools in New South Wales taught only to Grade 3 until 1938 when it was raised to Grade 5; and in Queensland the limit was raised from Grade 4 to Grade 7 only in 1953. The staff of the schools were frequently untrained.)
- (c) Aboriginal children start their education later than white children (apart from the ones who do not get to school at all). (Of Aboriginal children aged five to nine, 15 per cent had no education, compared with 3.5 per cent of non-Aborigines, and the ratio was still as high as 5 per cent for the ten to fourteen age group compared with 0.3 per cent for non-Aborigines.)
- (d) Aboriginal children leave school earlier than others — mostly at the minimum legal age of fifteen and often in practice earlier. (Thus more than half the Aboriginal children in secondary grades in New South Wales schools in 1966 were in Form I; few stayed beyond Form II, and only two out of 1019 were in Form V. In Victoria, in 1967, 42 per cent of Aboriginal children in secondary schools were in Form I and only six out of 243 were in Forms V and VI.)

Second, it is clear that at every age Aboriginal performance lags behind that of their white age peers: they are disproportionately represented — being few among the high achievers and many among the low achievers. Thus:

- (a) many who go on to secondary school do so by age qualification only — because they are too old to keep in primary school — and few of them complete secondary education;
- (b) a survey by the New South Wales Teachers' Federation in 1965 showed that teachers rated 58 per cent of Aboriginal secondary pupils as 'slow learners' and only 4 per cent as at 'advanced' levels;
- (c) there is a dearth of Aborigines with high qualifications: they were in 1966 practically totally absent from those possessing tertiary qualifications; less than 1 per cent

achieved the Leaving Certificate and at the Intermediate they lagged far behind white students; at ages twenty to twenty-four, 5 per cent had Intermediate or better compared with 50 per cent for their white counterparts.

Third, although there are some signs of increasing progress into, if not through, secondary school, the dead weight of educational failure will continue to bear heavily on Australian society and younger Aborigines for decades to come.

In general it must be concluded that up to 1966 the Australian education system had failed the Aborigines. It had, as Professor Broom points out, left them utterly unequipped to deal with the paper and materials needed for an industrial democratic society; it had frozen them into the sector providing the limited kinds of unskilled labour capable of being performed by the illiterate and the near illiterate; as workers, as consumers, as industrial bargainers, as claimants for social welfare benefits, as citizens seeking the protection of the law or the enjoyment of civil liberties or redress through political action it had left them hamstrung.

With failure so nearly absolute at this basic level, what can our education system have given the Aborigines of the human values we look to it to help provide for our own young? How many Aborigines will have learnt in our schools to value intellectual activity for its own sake — to think systematically and rationally, to speculate, to form and test hypotheses and to find these processes not merely useful but enjoyable?

In what respect has our education been 'liberal' for them? How many have been made free of any significant part of the literary, artistic and cultural heritage of our civilisation?

What opportunities will they have had to see in action moral standards which we believe underlie our actions and attitudes? Will they have learnt from our behaviour to them that (to quote Professor S. Stebbing) 'we know that hatred, cruelty, intolerance and indifference to human misery are evil; that love, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness and truth are good'?¹³

Can they see in their education evidence that with them we are one community — that we are 'members of one another'; that we see their differences from us simply as variety that adds spice to the enjoyment of living?

To ask these questions is to answer them sadly in the negative.

It is essential if we are to think rationally about these matters that

13. Professor S. Stebbing, cited in A.L. Rowse, *The use of history*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1946, p. 155.

we should ask why our educational system has failed: what are the reasons for Aborigines' poor academic attainments?

But before I turn to these questions I should, in justice, draw your attention to some measures which have been taken since 1966 for, in at least one respect, they do represent a major step forward.

Primarily these measures, flowing from the referendum of 1967 which entrusted to the commonwealth government concurrent responsibility with the states for Aboriginal affairs, amount to a greater allocation of financial and therefore physical and human resources to Aboriginal education among other aspects of their advancement. This increased allocation (amounting in 1968-69 and 1969-70 to between \$800,000 and \$900,000) enabled states to expand their own programs primarily by building schools and hostels and providing grants-in-aid to Aboriginal families. A modest beginning in an experimental way has been made with pre-school work — a matter to which I will return.

The commonwealth, through its Department of Education and Science, has established in its Study Grants a system of direct aid to Aboriginal children at post-secondary levels. These grants began in 1969 to assist Aborigines to go on to acquire vocational and higher education. During that year it became clear that many Aboriginal children left school at fifteen without having acquired the basic education standards required for such training and it was decided to extend the scheme downwards by way of a Secondary Grants Scheme to cover Aboriginal children over the minimum leaving age whose teachers believed them capable of profiting from an extension of their education. These grants are not extravagant but are adequate to ensure that economic handicaps need no longer terminate an Aboriginal child's education.

This is a tremendous step forward. It has, too, provided the occasion for an error in financial planning which has gladdened all our hearts. In estimating the funds necessary in 1970 to finance these grants for those between the school leaving age and tertiary or vocational entry standards, we were guided by the best advice we could get which was that, at this stage, few Aboriginal children and their families would be interested. We could not have been more wrong — the numbers applying proved to be *nine* times the forecast! This would indicate an awareness of educational needs, the impact of which could begin to transform the dismal picture of 1966.

These measures do not direct themselves to the *causes* of relatively poor Aboriginal performance but are designed to make more readily and completely available to Aborigines able to profit

from them the resources of our existing educational system. Valuable though they are, they need to be supplemented by measures specific to the causes of poor performance. For such measures to be designed, we need to identify and understand the causes more completely, especially in their pedagogic implications. There is an urgent need for research in this field — research which can most properly be carried out from within the teaching profession. Only such research and the concern of the profession with it can provide governments with the knowledge and the incentives on which their policies must be founded.

However, let me mention briefly some hypotheses based largely on social and educational research and experience in other countries, and on the work of medical and sociological workers in this country, on which we are basing our own present thoughts as to the future. First, let me make it clear that there is no reason to doubt that, other things being equal, Aborigines can be expected to perform equally with other ethnic groups — but things are anything but equal as I think the following comments will show.

We believe that poor Aboriginal performance derives from the following main causes:

(a) *Poor health*

It is certain that the health of Aboriginal children falls far short of acceptable standards and of that of white Australian children. Research in Aboriginal communities of the Centre and North, among the fringe-dwellers of country towns, and among the part-Aborigines of the cities reveals widespread malnutrition, beginning often in the immediate post-weaning period and in many cases imposing a permanent handicap on physical and mental development.

(b) *Language difficulties*

In the North and Centre especially, education entails learning a second language as a basis for all other instruction. The language spoken at home expresses and is part of a culture alien to the culture and language Aborigines learn and work in at school. Very few teachers know anything of the tribal language of their scholars and the task of teaching English to Aborigines — recognising that it is a second language requiring appropriate pedagogy — is often ignored. It is a task for which their teachers are not trained. Where the tribal language has been lost, it is often replaced in the home by an English so maimed and defective that it provides little basis for communication.

(c) *Poverty of environment*

Generally Aboriginal children come from a background of poverty. The material consequences of this are serious enough, but the lack of intellectual stimulus may be educationally even more damaging. There is good reason to believe that, in the development of language and of intellectual concepts upon which future attainment will be built, the pre-school years are critical; that, in respect of these elements, learning capacity is fixed in time and that the stunting of the learning process during that time is irretrievable and cannot be compensated for by later attempts at enrichment. Work by Dr B. Nurcombe¹⁴ in Bourke, New South Wales, has shown that by the time Aboriginal children get to school, they are, in terms of intellectual stimulation, already eighteen months to two years behind standard white performance. It is probable that the gap will widen rather than narrow.

(d) *Inadequate motivation*

The relationship between performance and motivation is complex. It is almost certainly true that a child who performs well is *thereby* motivated to continue to do well or better. It is almost certainly true also that motivation among children is derived. Children want to perform well because they are expected to do so, and Aborigines perform badly because they know that it is presumed that they will fail. I have seen one or two dramatic examples of the effect on Aboriginal performance of a teacher who believes in their capacity and whose faith is made clear in action. I recall, too, a teacher who, seeking to learn something of the language and culture of the group among whom she worked, sought information and help from her scholars. The response in their performance to this evidence of interest and respect was equally significant.

This interrelationship does not invalidate the fact that, especially at certain stages, personal hopes and ambitions can be significant in motivation. At such stages the existence of models to be emulated and the sense of reality which can be attached to the hopes and am-

14. Barry Nurcombe, 'Deprivation: An Essay in definition with special consideration of the Australian Aboriginal', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 2 (1970), p. 87. Other unpublished work by Dr Nurcombe was also taken into account in writing this paper.

bitions can be critical. Where in our society are there Aboriginal models likely to excite intellectual and scholastic emulation; and with what degree of conviction can an Aboriginal child sustain a desire to be, not to put it too highly, say an aeroplane pilot, a nurse, or a motor mechanic? It is only within the last few years that Charles Perkins and Margaret Valadian have appeared and they remain isolated instances; and it is predominantly still only in sport — boxing, in tennis and in football — that Aboriginal children can see their elders successful, accepted and admired.

Foremost in our thoughts for the future therefore ranks the greater development of pre-school stimulation among Aborigines. The work of the 'Headstart' projects in the United States of America; of community development through play centres and pre-schools in New Zealand; the work of Dr B. Nurcombe in Bourke and of the Van Leer Foundation¹⁵ more generally support the hope that specially designed programs of language and conceptual enrichment can do much to fill the gap left by the 'uneducogenic' environment if undertaken at the right time. Similarly we hope to develop better techniques for the teaching of English to Aboriginal children and to explore the possibilities of the use of tribal languages where they are still spoken as a basis for literacy programs. The work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Vietnam and the Philippines suggests that the most effective programs begin with literacy in the mother tongue and that literacy in the second language comes the more easily after such beginnings.

There is, however, desperate need for educational research in the Australian context into all these problems. I believe the educational profession itself can be expected to demonstrate effective concern with them, increasing our understanding of them and advising on means of their solution.

What is taught about Aborigines?

Let me turn now to the other aspect of this question — of how far our concern for human values is embodied in what we teach about Aborigines, a group of human beings of great concern to us. I do

15. The Bernard van Leer Foundation was established in 1959 and derives its funds from shares in the Van Leer Group of Companies. It supports projects which help to counteract unfavourable environmental factors in children's development and intellectual progress. Particular emphasis is given to experimental work. Studies by Dr Barry Nurcombe in the Bourke area were funded by the Foundation.

not think it is an exaggeration to say that a great many Australians know little or nothing about the Aborigines and indeed that *what they think they know* is often a collection of hackneyed and hoary stereotypes picked up at second hand whose main function is to excuse or justify injustice or indifference. Who has not heard them? 'They are unreliable — they have an irresistible urge to go walkabout.' 'They are stupid — the only thing they understand is a kick in the slats.' 'They are made differently from us — they do not feel the cold.'

That this ignorance and misinformation is due in part to the failure of our educational system to provide a basic foundation of knowledge cannot be doubted. By contrast it is rare to meet a New Zealander who does not know something of Maori history and culture, who will not speak of the Maori people with respect, taking pride in their achievements. All New Zealand children learn something of these things in their schools as part of the process of coming to understand the physical and human environment in which they will live.

It is my impression that, generally speaking, the Aboriginal enters the content of Australian education largely incidentally. We meet them in the stories of discovery as 'the natives who were friendly, unfriendly or not to be trusted'. Some material about their traditional life and customs comes into stories, particularly for younger age groups, in sentimentalised form and often in a tone of patronage. Later the Aborigines creep into the Social Studies course as a problem not so much to be understood as to be explained away.

Let me quote three extracts from books still I believe in common use in Australian schools which fairly illustrate the attitudes towards different ethnic groups which unconsciously we express and which we inculcate in the young.¹⁶

As a rule the natives were timid and kept out of sight, but here, perhaps because they wanted to get water from the spring, they suddenly attacked. It was lucky that the explorers [John Forrest in this case] were on the alert, and a quick volley from their rifles sent the natives scurrying into the bush.

In the afternoon Papa was pierced in the arm by a spear. His

16. Extracts are from the following school text books: Williams, *History through activities*, p. 5; Schonell and Flowerden, *Wide range reader* (Blue book 6), p. 31; Golding, *Stairways to social studies*, p. 74.

gun fell with a clatter beneath the wagon, and he was forced to rest. Anxiously Mama bathed his wound and bound it up tightly. Meanwhile there was no-one to take Papa's gun. But yes! As the mother looked she saw [little] Piet run forward and slip into place between the wagons, with the gun in his hand. Sitting on a stone nearby, in her long print frock and pretty bonnet, was little Anne Marie, rocking someone's baby to sleep. Mama smiled at Papa. 'Our children are growing up,' she said.

By evening the natives were driven back, and the Voortrekkers were once more at peace.

Both the Dutch and the Australians have been making great efforts to prepare the natives to govern themselves. This has proved difficult, for they were very backward when the white man first moved in, less than a hundred years ago. However, many have been educated and are working alongside Europeans but a great number are still savages.

The view is well described in Ivan Southall's *Indonesian journey* . . .

That was the way it was when I was a boy. The brown man was always spoken of as being a native, in a tone of voice that meant that a 'native' was something other than a proper human being. The brown man was written about in adventure stories as though savage or treacherous or stupid or dirty, and usually the brave white hero had to shoot a few to teach the brown devils that the white man's way was best. If ever we saw a brown man, which wasn't often, we were very cautious because brown men ate people and he might eat us. In study groups when we were a little older we were told that all men were equal in the sight of God, but the brown people were our special care, nevertheless, because they were simple or heathen. They were evil because their ways were not the same as our ways. We put pennies in boxes for the brown children and felt sorry for them, not so much because they were poor and hungry and ragged and perhaps naked, but because they were brown, because they were not as clever as white children.¹⁷

Aborigines will fare better when members of our community have learned to question such folk myths; when the combination of chance and intention which has moulded our own and other

17. Ivan Southall, *Indonesian journey*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1965.

societies can be viewed objectively; and when we can cease from the self-flattery of judging other ethnic groups by standards relevant to our own provincial context — or, as my friend Professor Stanner would say, of ‘smelling the flowers which fortuitously grow in our own momentary dunghill’.¹⁸

And there is widespread and, among some, intense interest and concern which establishes a demand for a new approach. The astonishing vote in the 1967 referendum can be interpreted only as an expression of anxiety and perhaps of guilt. The gratification that most Australians find in the success of Lionel Rose, of Eric Simms, of Darby McCarthy, of Evonne Goolagong; the genuine commitment to Aboriginal advancement that underlies the ritual of student demonstrations about land rights or what have you; the intense and genuine interest in Aboriginal paintings and sculpture and the puzzled realisation by critics that in Aboriginal theatre there is an art form of quality and serious import — all these are expressions of a generous impulse to recognise and respect. There can be no doubt that among the young particularly there is deepening interest and involvement.

There is, let us be clear, much to be said and learned about these people who have lived in this land for some thirty thousand years which will excite and stimulate the curious mind of youth. Who and whence were these people who used the Nullarbor caves ten millennia before the sea rose to change the shape of Australia and isolate it from the lands to the north. A glance at Mulvaney’s book on Australian prehistory would suggest a hundred such new paths of thought.¹⁹

Should it not be possible for our youth to learn that when Cook came to this country it was a wilderness only to the sealed eye of the European and had in fact been humanised from end to end? It was a continent criss-crossed by established trade routes along which flowed things precious to Aborigines — not merely the ochres and the shells, the material for their tools and weapons but the songs and dances of tribal groups perhaps from thousands of miles away. It is a sobering thought that, if my Minister, W.C. Wentworth’s, illustrious ancestor had thought to ask a nearby Aboriginal, he and his colleague might have strolled with ease across the Blue Mountains by pathways plain and accustomed to Aboriginal eyes.

These trade routes linked tribal groups which themselves were

18. A personal observation by Professor W.E.H. Stanner.

19. D.J. Mulvaney, *The prehistory of Australia*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1969.

linked in chains of ritual relationships and chains of languages. Some knowledge of these human patterns would enrich young Australians' understanding of their own land as well as of their predecessors in it.

We are suddenly torn by the realisation that we are at war with that land and the environment to which it sets the ultimate limit. We are becoming conscious that every technological triumph which permits us to change its face still further only defers the day when we must face the dilemma of the man who has dissipated his capital. It is at least possible that we might learn from a people who had come to terms with their environment, who lived with and understood it as something of which they were themselves a part, who used it for their purposes creatively but undestructively, who wrapped themselves and it in a fabric of custom and of ritual of great dignity and beauty.

Let me bring these thoughts together.

1. We are a people ill equipped by experience to deal with cultural and ethnic diversity.
2. It is vital, therefore, that we should learn to replace prejudice and ignorance by knowledge and tolerance — and the school is a good place to begin.
3. This is the more true for our relations with Aboriginal Australians for whom we have by history and social obligation a special concern.
4. What is needed is accurate information presented objectively and un sentimentally as a means to a more humane view of cultural diversity and ethnic variation.
5. Our willingness and capacity to carry out this task is a valid test of the integrity with which we hold human values as significant and with which we believe that it is people that matter.

It was not alone of the children of Jerusalem that Christ said: 'Whatsoever ye do unto the least of these ye do also unto Me.'

Employment

When I chose as the title of this talk 'The employment status of Aborigines' I was using a kind of shorthand for the means whereby

From 'The employment status of Aborigines' an address to the South Australian Branch of the Economic Society of Australia and New Zealand, Adelaide, 6 March 1972. First published in Australian Economic Papers, 11 (June 1972), pp.8-18.

they do or could earn a living or acquire the means to the fulfilment of their wishes.

The Aboriginal population — general employment profile

There are probably somewhere near 140,000 Australians who are wholly or partly of Aboriginal descent of whom perhaps about 46,000 are wholly of Aboriginal origin. The numbers, after a long decline from the arrival of Governor Phillip to some time in the late twenties, are now rising rapidly. The population seems certain to be at least 300,000 by the end of the century, but could be well over four hundred thousand. In other words the problem with which we are dealing at the moment is in numerical terms relatively a small one. This is the time to do something about it because in thirty years it will be of a different order.

If employment of Aborigines in the aggregate is compared with that of the population in general the picture is a distressing one. Professor Broom, an American sociologist working on the results of the 1966 census, concluded:

- (a) that 71 per cent of adult male Aborigines participated in the work-force compared with 84 per cent of the community generally;
- (b) that 7 per cent of all Aborigines in the work-force were unemployed, compared with 1 per cent for the rest of the work-force, and that ignored very large numbers of Aborigines whose conditions could only be described as underemployment;
- (c) that only 2 per cent of Aboriginal workers entered the occupational categories above the lowest levels of skill compared with 35 per cent of the work-force generally — 2 per cent against 35 per cent;
- (d) that 67 per cent were engaged in manual labour compared with about 16 per cent for the community generally;
- (e) that, even among those few Aborigines who had reached matriculation levels of education, and they were distressingly few, over 80 per cent were engaged in manual occupations.

However, Aborigines live in diverse situations, many of them fundamentally different from those of the white population generally. Comparisons of the kind Professor Broom has made serve primarily to assert the existence and to emphasise the magnitude of a social and economic problem. They do not throw much light on its

character or suggest possible courses of action for its solution. Above all, there is implicit in such comparisons a presumption that all would be well if the relevant ratios for Aborigines were identical with those for the community generally and that it is to the development of such uniformity of ratios that we should direct our efforts.

I would like to look at the circumstances of Aborigines in characteristic situations and consider the problems they face in gaining a livelihood whether by employment or by other means. These situations differ widely but there are some which can be regarded as 'representative' because significant numbers live in comparable conditions. Thus:

- (a) about 50,000 Aborigines live on missions and settlements mainly in the northern and central parts of the continent;
- (b) a few thousand live in communities which reject government or mission tutelage and seek to conduct their own affairs independently; these too, few though they are, also are in the north;
- (c) between 10,000 and 15,000 live on pastoral properties in Western Australia, Queensland and in the Northern Territory, both at the top end and in the centre;
- (d) some tens of thousands live mainly on the fringes but to some extent within the communities of country towns;
- (e) some tens of thousands live in the metropolitan areas of our major cities.

Before looking at particular illustrations I shall say briefly something of the traditional way of life of Aborigines because it remains to a varying but nonetheless significant degree a factor which influences the ways of Aborigines, even those who appear to have been fully integrated into our own society.²⁰

Aborigines were hunters and foragers living on the natural produce of the land and moving in a seasonal pattern from place to place within the narrow ambit of their 'own' lands. Characteristically they moved in small groups rarely exceeding forty or fifty and shared the tasks of winning a livelihood from an environment which to us looks inhospitable, as they shared, in accordance with firm traditional practice, the food and other products won. It was not a bad life. They managed with a minimum of weapons, tools and domestic equipment — finding warmth and shelter from the environment as simply as they did food. Judged by

20. Henry Schapper, *Aboriginal advancement to integration: Conditions and plans for Western Australia*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1970.

the proportion of their time devoted to leisure-time pursuits (which is a test sometimes used by economists) compared with that spent in 'earning a living' they were an affluent people.

They devoted much time to games, to story telling, to music making, to dancing and to ceremony and ritual — coming together occasionally in larger tribal groups for important ceremonies. All of these things were integrated into their pattern of life, a pattern which gave them stimulus and excitement as well as security.

It was, of course, not an easy life, and deprivation, danger and early and unexpected death were accepted parts of it. It had qualities and established values, however, which have handicapped those Aborigines who have sought to adapt to our own European pattern of life.

- (a) It did not, for instance, depend on, or value highly, material possessions. Indeed they were, with rare exceptions, thought of as burdens to be avoided or discarded. Captain Cook remarked on this lack of interest in possessions before he left the east coast of Australia. Just as he was leaving the Queensland coast he wrote in his journal how he had found again and again that the gifts which he had given the Aborigines and which he expected to be highly prized, although received with courtesy and apparent gratitude, were thrown away on the beach or among the trees before the following day.
- (b) It was dependent upon an intimate and emotionally charged relationship with a known area of land whose qualities, features and resources were familiar and, except with the seasons, unchanging.
- (c) It involved a pattern of mutual dependence and corresponding obligations within the tribal family whose demands could not be questioned.
- (d) While it called, on occasion, for the exercise of great effort and endurance, it rarely demanded the sustained and unchanging boring routine characteristic of much of the work offered in our economy.
- (e) It was a pattern of life of which diversity of scene and of activity were natural components.
- (f) Perhaps most important, compared with ours, it offered no incentive or gain from planning or saving for the future; tomorrow would be like today or yesterday and its resources could confidently be expected to be sufficient unto its needs.

It is hard to imagine another society whose values were as inap-

propriate to the demands of an industrialised economy. This does not mean that Aboriginal values were wrong or irrational. Values of this kind are not absolute. They belong to particular environments and to particular social and economic circumstances. We must remember that we have no right to dictate how other men should live.

Aborigines on pastoral properties

In many ways the early position of Aborigines in relation to the pastoral industry had attractive features. The Aborigines were often there in their traditional country before the industry was established. They did not necessarily see its coming as a threat to their way of life and indeed in some cases an acceptable *modus vivendi* was worked out between them and the pastoralists. The newcomers offered desired goods — meat, flour, tea, sugar, tobacco — and some social care in return for work. Such work required aptitudes valued in their own hunting and brought access to horses and other symbols of status. The relationship between Aboriginal and pastoralist could be, and often was, one of mutual dependence and mutual respect. They each had a genuine economic function. Above all the pattern of the pastoral industry in Australia, with its long stand-down period in the Wet, left ample opportunity to maintain traditional skills, to educate the young and to gather for social and ceremonial occasions. Consequently in the early stages this change did not threaten the Aborigines' basic independence.

There was probably a good deal of mutual misunderstanding about the relationship between the rewards offered and the work sought. Contractual arrangements of this kind would have been unfamiliar to Aborigines among whom the allocation of functions and the distribution of the product was based wholly on other principles. The situation was accepted by Aborigines partly because of the satisfaction and prestige of the work itself but also because it was seen to establish a 'credit' in a relationship of mutual obligations between pastoralist and Aboriginal.

Increasingly, however, the symbiotic 'family' type of set-up gave way to arrangements in which money payments were more important — a change recently expedited but not created by the Arbitration judgment requiring award wages for Aboriginal employees. Today, called on to pay award rates, the pastoralist is no longer willing to employ more men than he needs, to find 'hose-holding' type work for older men and those past stock work; nor is he or his wife willing to carry the often onerous role of unpaid wel-

fare worker providing first aid, help with social service bureaucracy, and looking after the hygiene and cleanliness of the camps.

These changes are coming unfortunately at a time when changing technology, and the availability of larger amounts of capital, are shifting the structure of the pastoral industry away from labour-intensive to capital-intensive processes, particularly in the north. In no area is there evidence of increasing demand in the pastoral industry for Aboriginal labour and in some the employment now available has fallen 30 per cent or more in the last four years.

There is a drift of Aborigines, sometimes encouraged by pastoralists, towards missions and settlements away from cattle properties. Some pastoralists complain of this as 'feather-bedding' and reducing Aborigines' willingness to accept work when available. In other cases it is clear pastoralists see it as the means of escape from responsibility and tend to welcome a situation where, when they need it, they will seek labour, white or Aboriginal, according to their needs, without needing to consider any obligations that they may have or could have towards the Aborigines whose traditional land they are now occupying.

The outcome seems inevitable. The drift from the cattle properties to the missions and settlements and to the towns and cities is likely to continue. Fewer will find employment in the pastoral industry and the small communities are likely to wither away. Unless effective action is taken to enable Aborigines to become partners and, in some cases, proprietors in the pastoral industry their relationship with it will soon be much like their relationship with other Australian industries.

Missions and settlements

Missions and settlements are important — because more than a third of Aborigines live on them, because within them the influence of traditional ways of life persists most strongly, and because they express in concrete form the purposes of official policies. In the main Aborigines have been attracted to them voluntarily — although there are some records of enforcement. They have been attracted by the food, the services that they provide and more recently by the money incomes, the housing, the schooling for their children and so on.

But within them Aborigines are in a position of tutelage. The programs of the missions and settlements are directed to teaching Aborigines to live by white Australian standards, to acquire education in European forms, to work regularly, to manage a

money income, and to desire, accept and live by white Australian standards of housing, dress, hygiene and social behaviour generally.

Economically they have an air of artificiality. Aborigines on them do not make any significant contribution to their own economic independence although missions are frequently better in this respect than government settlements. Aborigines generally receive money incomes for the performance of tasks of varying degrees of genuine economic purpose. In the Northern Territory these money incomes are referred to as training allowances — elsewhere they are accepted as low-level wage payments within the capacity of the missions or departments concerned. The work undertaken by the Aborigines derives partly from the conduct of the mission's affairs — they keep it tidy, repair and sometimes construct buildings, and often engage in some gardening, cattle and other animal husbandry or similar rural projects directed primarily at the support of the mission. Little is produced for export outside the mission other than Aboriginal paintings and artefacts which are occasionally important, and in a few places some fish, crocodiles and buffalo hunted generally by independent groups of Aborigines on their own initiative. On some missions and settlements men are encouraged to seek employment on outside cattle stations, mining projects and the like.

The income structure of these communities illustrates their unreality. On one mission for which information was made available (a well-run community with considerable economic potential) about 90 per cent of the money income of the Aborigines was derived from government in the form of training allowances, pensions and child endowment. The bulk of the remaining 10 per cent was the income of one independent group of Aboriginal hunters. The income of the mission itself was derived largely from government subsidy and from the sale of goods and services to Aborigines who paid for them out of training allowances paid by the government. Less than 10 per cent represented the price of goods and services produced for external sale.

I believe there is an urgent need for a reconsideration of the role of these missions and settlements and their reconstruction on different principles. It is hopeless to contemplate the continuance of rapidly-growing communities in a state of tutelage involving a destruction of the independence and dignity of these people but also a yearly mounting burden on the public purse.

Before I ask what these different principles might be, let me describe briefly what I believe is in the minds of two representative

Aboriginal groups who themselves are seeking to bring about changes.

There is in the Pilbara area of Western Australia a group of Aborigines of mixed tribal origin who have formed themselves into a limited liability company and who have persuaded the state government to allow them to occupy an abandoned cattle property which has been converted to an Aboriginal reserve. This group does not in the main live on the property although all return to it from time to time. Those remaining on the property are a few pensioners and a small number of others engaged in essential maintenance and the hunting of such cattle as remain. The others work elsewhere, some on surrounding cattle stations, some on the Port Hedland wharves, while others gouge and yandy (as they call the process of sifting pulverised ore) for tin and tantalite which exist in alluvial form in the area. Apart from the acceptance of pensions, the members of this group resist the tutelage of officials and missionaries. All contribute from their wages or from their pensions to the support of those who stay on the property, to meet rental payments on it and other costs associated with it. The chairman and the officials of their company are all Aborigines and, apart from the part-time help of a friendly pastoralist and the paid services of a firm of accountants, they manage their own affairs — with some degree of competence.

They seek a lease of the land and capital for its development. They contemplate on it a community which would re-establish much of the traditional ways of their people but which would live in compromise with our economic system. More of them would be engaged in the cattle enterprise and in other projects directed at their self-sufficiency. Traditional crafts would be revived and others learned. Many, perhaps the majority, would still go out to work in Port Hedland and on other properties or on the alluvial mining. Although poor by our standards they are themselves, as an Aboriginal community, already beginning to manage their own affairs and are achieving a standard of living adequate to their needs but compatible with their own independence.

Another multi-clan community in Arnhem Land, which has for many decades lived under the guidance of a friendly mission, now finds its traditional lands and its way of life threatened by a major mining and industrial enterprise nearby. They see with dismay the decay of their social structure, the insidious influences of alcohol and easy access to the material goods of our society. They have decided to return to the smaller communities of their ancestors and to reoccupy their ancestral lands — maintaining contact with their

present mission township as an administrative, and to some degree an industrial and commercial centre for their various decentralised groups and as a focal point for the education of their children.

In these smaller groups they expect the vitality of their traditional ways to revive and the discipline and strength of their social structure to return. Their coastal groups will fish, gather oysters and trepang, maintain gardens and livestock, perhaps breed turtles and crocodiles — partly for their own use but partly as a source of money income. Their traditional crafts of bark painting and sculpture will be extended into newly acquired crafts and by the use of new media. Their inland groups will do many of these things also but will run cattle and other livestock, maintain gardens, perhaps cut timber as well as hunt and gather. Both may develop interests in tourist accommodation and services. They do not doubt that, from the security of such a base, they can deal, as equals, with the white community.

These experiments and others of the same kind are in early stages and it would be reckless to predict their outcome but they express profound and important changes in the minds of Aborigines which indicate a desire to return to the land, to a pattern of life which basically is traditional, but at the same time to adapt this way of life so that it can co-exist in some kind of harmony with the general Australian system into which they will only partly be incorporated.

This concept of independent Aboriginal communities preserving the fundamentals of their traditional ways and the authority of their own social system but coming to terms with our own economic and legal system by their dealings with us through economic transactions, is an original and, to me, an exciting one. It is, I believe, the outcome of their own response to the destructive impact which contact with us has had in a most intense form. Its principles derive essentially from their own traditions and ways of thought rather than from ours.

I believe that this concept fully justifies a thorough test of its practicality. The concept is relevant, of course, only to those parts of Australia where Aboriginal society still exists to some degree in its original form. For such a test Aborigines must have land under their own control for use in their own way; they must be helped with financial support so that their economic efforts can be given the aid which modern technology can provide for them without seeking to impose the requirements of our economic and social system on them; and above all they must be permitted and, if they wish it, helped to evolve social and institutional forms which, while consistent with our legal structure, are capable of giving effect to

their purposes, and fitting within their own structures of social cohesion and discipline.

In other words I believe missions and settlements, in the north at least, must give way, at speeds dictated by the Aborigines themselves, to communities under the Aborigines' own control. They must be given the opportunity, persuaded — even coerced a little — into accepting responsibility for their own affairs. The role of the white man among them must cease to be that of the supervisor and become that of the employee or consultant, standing by willing to offer knowledge, experience and advice. He must beware of believing that the right answer is more important than the process by which it is reached — or that the measure of rightness is the degree of material affluence which the answer will produce.

What do Aborigines want?

The papers which follow cover a period of dramatic changes in government policy on Aboriginal affairs which accompanied the election of the Labor Government in December 1972. It was a period during which the question 'What do Aborigines want?' began to be considered seriously, perhaps for the first time in Australian history, and in which Aboriginal aspirations, possibly under the stimulus of increased government interest, seemed to take on a new spirit of independence and purpose.

The first paper, the George Judah Cohen Memorial Lecture for 1972, given just before the change of government, examines the life-styles and future prospects of four different Aboriginal communities, picking up the themes of self-sufficiency and independence which were sounded in the earlier paper 'The employment status of Aborigines'.

The second is an extract from a talk given early in 1973, with the new government now committed to granting Aboriginal land rights. It explores some of the potential problems that the council felt must be faced in following through the new policy, and develops some thoughts about the community at Mimili which were foreshadowed in the George Judah Cohen Lecture.

The final paper of this group 'Decentralisation trends among Aboriginal communities' brings together an address given in 1973, when this trend was just beginning to take on a new impetus, with a later report on particular decentralised communities in Arnhem Land.

The future of the Aboriginal Australian

that we betray all truths that we possess — Judith Wright

There has been evidence in recent years of increasing consciousness of the right of Aboriginal Australians to a choice about the nature

The George Judah Cohen Memorial Lecture at the University of Sydney, 18 October 1972.

of the future that government policy is designing for them. The first reference to this right was indeed tentative and equivocal. Commonwealth and state ministers in 1965 stated that:

The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community — enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians.

Change from this assumption that our society was entitled to expect of Aborigines the supreme flattery of imitation was slow. However, not long after the referendum which brought the commonwealth into this field of policy, the then Prime Minister, John Gorton, expressed the following views which acknowledged that Aboriginal Australians might have different views about the pace at which assimilation was to take place, but the objective remained unchanged and the conviction that Aborigines would in due course desire it was re-emphasised:

without destroying Aboriginal culture, we want to help our Aborigines to become an integral part of the rest of the Australian people, and we want the Aborigines themselves to have a voice in the pace at which this process occurs . . . We believe that if Aboriginal Australians can be helped, and encouraged to help themselves, to develop their aptitudes more fully, to accept further responsibility for their own individual activities, to become self-supporting and thus reacquire their dignity of life — that then they will be readily attracted to and welcomed to the assimilation we aim for.

In his personal statement to a conference of commonwealth and state ministers in April 1971, Gorton's successor, William McMahon, said:

We believe that Aboriginal Australians should be assisted as individuals and, if they wish, as groups to hold effective and respected places within one Australian society with equal access to the rights and opportunities it provides and accepting responsibilities towards it. At the same time they should be encouraged and assisted to preserve and develop their culture — their languages, traditions and arts — so that these can become living elements in the diverse culture of the Australian society.

and he went on to say,

We believe that Aborigines must be helped to take an increasing part in the management of their own affairs.

Finally, in the official statement of commonwealth policy on 26 January 1972, McMahon said:

The Government recognises the rights of individual Aborigines to effective choice about the degree to which and the pace at which they come to identify themselves with that [Australian] society.

and

We believe that programmes to give effect to such a policy . . . must take into account the expressed wishes of Aboriginal Australians themselves.

and

The role of governments should increasingly be to enable them [Aborigines] to achieve their goals by their own efforts.

These are important changes in the stated philosophy and objectives of policy. Much remains to be done before the spirit expressed in the words pervades the policy itself and effectively determines the pattern of programs undertaken. Nevertheless the changes are already stimulating determination on the part of Aborigines to express their own views, a new interest in the content of those views, and a more critical assessment of policies and of the means by which they are given effect.

A study of our own efforts and those of welfare programs abroad like the 'War on Poverty' and programs for American Indians in the United States shows that apparently well conceived programs designed by social scientists and administrators have failed because their clients, the Aborigines, the Indians or the poor, have been involved only as passive recipients — at most invited to endorse programs already approved. Our failures will continue until the goals the Aborigines are assisted to achieve are those they freely choose themselves and until they themselves plan and largely administer the means by which they are to be helped.

This thought is not exclusive to us. In July 1970 the President of the United States of America, in a message to Congress, said:

It is long past time that the Indian policies of the Federal Government began to recognise and build upon the capacities and insights of the Indian people. Both as a matter of justice

and as a matter of enlightened social policy, we must begin to act on the basis of what the Indians themselves have long been telling us. The time has come to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions.

It is, therefore, useful to study and to speculate about the hopes and ambitions of Aboriginal Australians — about what they want for themselves and their communities — so that we can help them make real the choice which official policy now purports to offer them and so that we can anticipate the influences their pursuit and possible achievement will have on our own society. My colleagues on the Council for Aboriginal Affairs and I for the past four years have been listening to the views which Aborigines have expressed to us and to other agents of government as well as to the comments and criticisms they have spoken privately among themselves. From these a variety of patterns has emerged which may enable us to form some judgment about the way of life which various Aboriginal groups seek and the relationships with our own society which they would like to build.

I intend therefore to speak briefly about each of four Aboriginal communities chosen partly because they are, in some ways, representative of others in similar circumstances, because for one reason or another they have been more articulate or more adequately reported, and because some of the individuals and communities are known to us personally. The four communities about which I would like to speak are:

- (a) The community in South Australia for whom the Everard Park cattle property has recently been acquired.
- (b) The community at Yirrkala in Arnhem Land who conducted the case against the government and the Nabalco mining company for land rights to the territories of the clans composing the community.
- (c) The fringe-dwelling community at Bourke in New South Wales.
- (d) The Aboriginal population of Redfern — an inner suburb of Sydney.

The four taken together cover a wide range of Aboriginal circumstances, from those whose way of life remains traditionally oriented and materially close to that of their tribal ancestors, to

those at the other extreme, who have apparently lost almost all contact with Aboriginal tradition and culture and are most nearly 'assimilated' into the general Australian community.

Everard Park

Clean lean hungry country — Judith Wright

Everard Park is a cattle property in the arid north-west of South Australia which the Aboriginal residents have decided will for the future be known as Mimili, the ancient Aboriginal name of its homestead area. The community associated with Mimili is perhaps the least 'Europeanised' of any community in Australia I personally have encountered. Continuous contact with white people is relatively recent. The station was taken up only in 1942 and before that only itinerant 'doggers' and occasional squatters were in the area. The station management called on the Aborigines only for seasonal pastoral work and left them free to follow their traditional ways provided they refrained from drink and camped away from the homestead. There was no school, no store, no hotel, no housing, no hospital, and the community (except for the receipt of social services benefits) lived largely independently of the watchful eye of departmental welfare services.

The population is highly mobile within a large but clearly defined area and at any one time many could be away from the station visiting friends at not too distant missions or settlements, arranging or conducting ceremonies, hunting and food gathering, or engaged in seasonal work elsewhere. If all were brought together there would be a total of between one hundred and one hundred and fifty people, of whom (and this ratio is significant) nearly 40 per cent would be under ten years of age.

Hunting is still the most important source of protein food for these people. Kangaroos, euros, rabbits, lizards, goannas and feral cats are all caught. Apart from wild figs, the traditional vegetable seeds and other foods have been eliminated by the cattle, and white flour is now explicitly seen as a substitute. It has been estimated that for this community game provided food to an approximate value of between \$4000 and \$5000 per year. Cash income is derived from wages (relatively small — between \$3000 and \$5000), pensions (more important — about \$13,000), child endowment (about \$2000), and unemployment benefit (a new benefit — from \$5000 to \$10,000). This gives a family income in cash and kind of between \$1000 and \$2000, or an income per head of between \$330 and \$460 per year.

It is interesting that surprisingly little of the cash income is spent on food, clothing and other small 'European' goods. The main cash disbursements are for:

- (a) motor vehicles bought on very bad terms and used up extravagantly to facilitate and extend traditional hunting, social and ritual activities;
- (b) gifts to relatives strictly in accordance with traditional obligations.

Both (despite the use of the motor car technology) are essentially for Aboriginal purposes. Indeed life for the Mimili people still centres around their traditional social and ceremonial life. The people have links with communities to the north and west and, for men's and women's rituals, small groups travel between these centres planning, co-ordinating and carrying out ceremonies. From time to time major ceremonies known as *inma* involving a number of communities, designed especially for the education of the young, make it necessary to move entire communities sometimes for several weeks. The advent of the motor vehicle has made all ceremonies easier to arrange and they have become more frequent in recent years. Perhaps this change has been encouraged by the fact that the old men who are the bearers of important ritual responsibilities also possess in their pensions the financial means of access to vehicles. While this pattern of expenditure, and the relative values it reflects, persist, they probably will continue to be a relatively affluent community.

The purchase of the property by the commonwealth on their behalf is for these people an event of highly-charged emotional import. A small group of the oldest men with whom I discussed this had tears running down their faces when they talked of it. A meeting of most of the potential residents held at a nearby government settlement was excited — they were laughing, talking all at once, with an almost hysterical elation. An *inma* which was planned for later this month — originally at another location — has been transferred to Mimili and looks like becoming a grand celebration of the return of the land to the care of the Aboriginal people. The area, one of great beauty with soft red earth scattered with stunted shrubs surrounding the ranges of low hills, shaped and coloured like miniature Ayers Rocks, is rich in sites of traditional significance. To the Aborigines there, its return to their care may well seem like the beginning of a reversal of history.

They welcome the idea of the cattle enterprise being continued and of its being developed by and for them and they agree that at the outset at least they will need a skilled white manager capable of directing its activities. They have already demanded, however, the right 'to look him over' and to satisfy themselves that he is compatible. Arrangements have, therefore, been made for a 'transitional' appointment which will be reviewed when both parties have come to know one another better.

It would, however, probably be a mistake to imagine that the cattle project will be a dominant consideration in their minds or that they understand all the organisational and economic concepts involved in it. We have seen that the traditional elements of Aboriginal life remain for them of the greatest importance, that they choose from the goods and technology our society offers those things which enhance and contribute to those elements, that they subordinate income-earning activities to 'Aboriginal business' and devote income gained from employment and social service benefits primarily to purposes arising from and consistent with their own way of life.

It seems likely, therefore, that at first they will not wish to become very much more completely involved in the cattle enterprise than they have been in the past. The relatively small number of stockmen who can be employed continuously on such a property, the labour required for essential capital improvements and for supplementary activities designed to increase real incomes and to protect and restore the natural environment may well strain their willingness and capacity to take time away from their traditional pursuits.

Additional income in money form, by encouraging even greater mobility on 'Aboriginal business', might be counter-productive from a European economic point of view. It will be interesting to watch whether an interest in white-style food, clothing, accommodation etc. will develop to match increasing incomes. Additions to real income from 'self-sufficiency' activities in gardening or small livestock production might, if compatible with their way of life, contribute more to material welfare and to their sense of being affluent than additional cash income. Additions to the incomes of women may also be important. The responsibility of the father as bread-winner, characteristic of the European-style family, is not as clear among Aborigines, where women in the past have been responsible at least equally for food gathering and especially for those foods suitable for young children.

A peculiarly difficult problem will emerge from the necessity to establish the cattle enterprise in a coherent, manageable form. This is likely to involve legal incorporation of the community, a pattern of equity investment and borrowing — activities involving concepts and magnitudes almost certainly beyond the understanding of the present generation, many of whom cannot count beyond five, who will nonetheless be expected to accept real responsibilities and obligations arising from these arrangements.

An interesting dilemma is already emerging in relation to education. There is not and never has been a European-style school. The Aborigines realise that education is probably necessary for their children to deal with our society but fear the alienation from their ways which they have seen flow from education in communities they have visited. They have, they say, suspended judgment for the present about whether they want a school and they appear to be groping towards a concept of education 'under the trees' based on the teaching of the elders — literacy will come first in their own tongue and acquisition of 'white-style' knowledge specifically in relation to their own environment, their own community, their own enterprise. It is an interesting concept. The suspension of judgment may, of course, reflect a determination to oppose the idea of a school, but a recognition that to state this opposition bluntly at this stage may be unwelcome to white Australians with whom they have to deal.

It is presumptuous to forecast what will emerge from this context. The one thing about which I personally feel certain is the strength and resilience of the Aboriginal way. It is the practice of these people to seek to involve white residents and long-term visitors in their own communal structure, to seek to establish relationships with them which reflect and are compatible with the pattern of mutual obligations which underlie that structure. Acceptance of this involvement, at least to a significant degree, seems the first requirement of successful relationships with them. But the involvement is not just a courtesy — not a kind of 'honorary membership'. To them it is genuine. They are inclined to press its implications and in many ways to demand increasing acceptance of and identification with their own ways of life.

Already there are examples where white men have come to dwell among them and among related communities when it has been the white men and their faith which have wilted under the pressure of this demand for participation in the Aboriginal way. There is no doubt that this cultural pressure will present problems for any white Australians becoming involved in their future.

For the Mimili Aborigines, however, there seems to me for the present little uncertainty about their vision of the future desired and expected. It is essentially Aboriginal and traditional — a grander and more vigorous version of their immediate past — a life dedicated to the traditions and ceremonies of their totemic ancestors — taking from white technology and white society, ruthlessly and without question, only those things which serve its purposes, honouring the obligations its traditions impose but recognising none that are incompatible with it.

If there are to be changes in their dedication to this future the changes must come from within their own society. The questions are: Will increasing affluence and increasing access to the material comforts and opportunities of European consumption goods undermine their devotion to the unchanging land and its spirit? Will involvement in the cattle enterprise (about which some of them at least feel strongly) in ways which demand their personal identification with its success and require increasing understanding of its technological and commercial processes, change the order of priorities in which their work for it now stands?

Yirrkala

*But in front of the night the rainbow stood on the mountain
Just as his heart foretold — Judith Wright*

Yirrkala is a mission community of some seven to eight hundred Aborigines, again with approximately 40 per cent under the age of ten (this is a population which is doubling in much less than twenty years). It comprises members of thirteen clans each of which has close economic and religious affiliations with various tracts of land in Gove Peninsula and related parts of eastern Arnhem Land.

The surrounding area is comparatively rich. Game of all sorts, crocodiles, buffalo, fish, shell-fish, lily roots, have in the past been abundant. While, until recently, generally protected from excessive change, the people of this area have a long tradition of external contact. Trepang gatherers from Macassar have probably visited for centuries until a few decades ago. Over many years occasional crocodile and buffalo hunters were seen. During the last war a nearby military camp brought contact with the armed forces. The

mission, however, until recently the only source of continuous contact, was established in 1934.

The story of their resistance to the bauxite mining, to the establishment of the white town of Nhulunbuy, to the grant of a licence for a hotel, of their appeal to Australian law for acknowledgment of their rights in the land, has been told many times.¹ Sufficient to say here that these struggles have brought a degree of at least superficial unity to the normally conflicting clans and have forged their joint council into a relatively effective instrument of political action.

In many ways the Yirrkala community is as strongly traditional as that at Everard Park — indeed in some ways more so. Thus, for instance, polygny is still practised in Yirrkala and the ‘promising’ of young girls in marriage to the men of the clans (often to the old men), is only slowly being modified. Religious ceremonial continues to be of the essence of life for these people and they are equally mobile in the fulfilment of its obligations. More than at Everard Park, the arts of painting, sculpture, music and dance associated with the ceremonies are active and splendidly creative.

It was of these people that Judge Blackburn, in his now famous judgment on the land case, said:

I am very clearly of the opinion . . . that the social rules and customs of the plaintiffs cannot possibly be dismissed as lying on the other side of an unbridgeable gulf. The evidence shows a subtle and elaborate system highly adapted to the country in which the people led their lives, which provided a stable order of society, and was remarkably free from the vagaries of personal whim or influence. If ever a system could be called ‘a government of laws and not of men’ it is that shown in the evidence before me.

It was of the culture of these people, as well as other Aborigines, that Professor W.E.H. Stanner spoke when he said:

The ‘oral tradition’ was intrinsically an educational process and the education lay in daily demonstrations of adaptive skills of all kinds, provenly successful, and in the periodic display of the expressive culture as a reward of life which young people grew up desiring nothing more greatly than to share after a long discipline of preparation.

1. See ‘Aboriginal land rights’, pp. 159-83.

I have been deeply impressed by the enthusiasm which this expressive culture roused among Aboriginal people and by the brilliance with which the lessons of the great ceremonies were taught in a setting into which all the perfected arts of music, mime, dancing, theatre and ceremonious form were drawn for days and weeks at a time.

There is no doubt of the quality and stature of these people. They are deeply conscious of the threat to their way of life from the mining venture, from the 5-10,000-strong alien community of white Australians on their doorstep, from the seductive influence of material affluence, and from the contempt for the Aboriginal way and its social disciplines which daily corrupts their young in and out of school.

The plan which they have submitted in their application for a lease over their 'tribal lands' draws on the strength of their links with the past but also on their experience of working with white Australians economically and technologically more sophisticated than they. They plan a return of many of the clan members to their traditional lands to resume a way of life more closely geared to the pattern of the past. At the same time they see the traditional economic practices of hunting and gathering being supplemented by European-style production both for their own use and for sale. On the coast they hope to combine fishing and oyster gathering possibly with the farming of crocodiles and turtles, with the revival of trepang gathering as well as with the continued production of artefacts and paintings. Away from the coast, some of these will be supplemented by cattle and buffalo hunting and farming, timber cutting and gardening. All these would contribute to the same purpose.

Money incomes (including pensions and other social service payments) as well as the community's share of royalties are seen essentially as subsidiary to self-sufficiency activities, traditional and derived from white technology. Nevertheless they aim to produce for and sell to not merely the white market at Nhulunbuy alongside the mining venture, but, to some degree, the 'export' market of more distant places.

They envisage a number of 'decentralised' villages surrounding and linked with the mission centre at Yirrkala which would serve the villages as an administrative, educational, commercial and, to a modest degree, industrial centre for the whole complex. It is a conception which derives in part from their desire to be 'at arms length' from the mining company and from the white town at

Nhulunbuy, and in part from their experience of the services provided by a small aeroplane for smaller and isolated settlements by the Methodist mission at Elcho Island in the past. The presence of the villages would, they believe, be a defence of their rights to the clan territory, a refuge for the aged and for those unable to cope, a source of education and traditional experience for the young and a haven of traditional life for those in part caught up in the white man's world.

Unlike the people of Mimili, those at Yirrkala have become accustomed to the services — the schools, the hospitals, the stores — provided by the government and the mission. They look to these authorities to provide similar if less sophisticated services in their decentralised villages. Whether they will show the determination and capacity to go ahead with their plans if these authorities prove unwilling to provide the services remains to be seen. Clearly to some extent they must choose.

This picture that I have outlined perhaps exaggerates the unanimity of conviction with which this concept of decentralisation is held at Yirrkala. Apart from a few young delinquents — the idlers and the petrol sniffers who have already become alienated from the standards of their own society without accepting the disciplines of our own — there are some, especially among the young, who see opportunity in the life the new society offers and are more confident of their capacity to compete within it. Some will no doubt venture into the white man's world with varying degrees of success. I believe, however, that even those most anxious to do so will desire that the haven of the traditionally oriented 'village' should be developed also — even if only as a place of refuge and recreation for the old and those who do not wish to cope with the pressures of white society — a place where the young can learn the ways and traditions of the ancestors, and a place to which they too may wish to return.

Again as at Mimili, the outcome is unclear, but the vision is relatively precise, coherent and practicable. Much will depend upon the capacity of the leaders to recognise and choose between the alternatives which are critical to the outcome.

Bourke

I wait for the rising of a star — Judith Wright

Bourke is a town of some 3500 people at the end of a railway line in the semi-arid lands of western New South Wales through which flows the Darling River. It has an Aboriginal community of some

eight hundred, of whom some three hundred normally live in shanty conditions in the depressing reserve downstream from the town. About the same number live in grossly overcrowded 'transitional' houses in one part of the town, with the remainder — perhaps equally crowded — in more scattered privately-owned houses and Housing Commission-style homes erected mainly within the last few years.

The Aboriginal population is almost wholly of mixed Aboriginal and white descent although most families trace their ancestry through a number of generations of 'dark people'. These are the characteristic fringe-dwellers who provide for most white Australians the stereotype of 'the Aboriginal'. Like most Aboriginal communities they are increasing fast — indeed research workers from the University of New South Wales recorded birth rates in excess of 6 per cent — one of the highest ever recorded.

Superficially there is little evidence of survival of Aboriginal tradition. Indeed, as Rowley points out in his *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*,² their way of life is a kind of parody of that of the itinerant rural worker of the last century. The shacks they build, the games they play, their addiction to bursts of drunkenness, even the songs they sing, reflect this 'poor white' influence. Theirs is essentially a 'culture of poverty' as described by Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist, in his writings on Mexican and Puerto Rican families. Nevertheless, the influence of 'Aboriginality' is still significant. Knowledge of at least some words of the old language, of where one's traditional 'country' was, of the complex ramifications of 'relations' and of the mutual obligations which relationship implies continue even in the young, sometimes subconsciously.

There is a high level of unemployment and dependence on social service payments and a relatively high frequency of drunkenness and minor delinquencies (although how far this reflects a different attitude of police to Aborigines from that to their white compatriots is hard to determine). There has until recently been little evidence of social organisation, cohesion or leadership. The reserve alone — despite its unprepossessing character — serves as a unifying influence. Even those who have left it to live in newly built houses in the town return to it, often daily, for gossip, for bingo, and for card games, barbecues and other social gatherings. It is in a way a symbol of security and of the unquestioning acceptance

2. C.D. Rowley, *The destruction of Aboriginal society*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1970.

which this Aboriginal culture of poverty holds out to all the 'dark people', whatever their failures or inadequacies.

Economically the Aborigines depend upon irregular employment or on social service payments. There is a meat works in the town which, though subject to periodic closures, employs between seventy and one hundred Aborigines when operating at capacity. The Shire Council employs a number as labourers — more when drought relief funds are available. Seasonal employment in cotton fields on the Namoi River and more distant fruit orchards supplements local employment. The numbers seeking employment increasingly exceed the absorptive capacity of the local labour market but movement (other than temporary) to other centres of employment opportunity is rare. This is due in part to a genuine attachment to the area but probably mainly to a felt incapacity to make the transition. A recent attempt to stimulate a conscious 'relocation' proved unsuccessful.

Bourke has in recent years become the centre for a variety of research and 'action research' programs concerned with Aborigines and their welfare. The University of New South Wales, with support from the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, has been conducting a research and community development program concerned with health, mental health and family planning and has stimulated the development of an Aboriginal Advancement Association formed by the Aborigines themselves.

Interesting work has been conducted at a special pre-school to assess the reasons for the poor response to educational opportunity among Aboriginal and 'poor white' children and the effect of special conceptual and experience enrichment programs on that performance.

The state government has built a number of houses in the town and more recently an Aboriginal housing society has been formed under the leadership of the local Aboriginal Advancement Association. This society is carrying out an interesting design and construction experiment. An interested architect has designed a house — unfamiliar in style but essentially orthodox — which is capable of being constructed by unskilled labour with minimum guidance and supervision. Members of the society, with some help from some university volunteers, are building the house as a 'self-help' project and as a means of acquiring skills. If the construction is successful (which seems likely) and the Shire approves the result, a continuing program will be carried out. It is hoped that in due course the society will become financially self-sufficient.

Perhaps the most important development has been the establish-

ment of the Association. Active discussion of their problems, of their hopes and plans for the future occur regularly. With the financial support of the Freedom from Hunger Organisation, full-time paid Aboriginal officers of the Association have been elected and this gives vitality and significance to its work and stimulates more widely spread participation.

There is a danger that lack of day-to-day functions and the failure of effective outcome of their discussion and planning will cause the Association to wither away — particularly if the financial support of the Freedom from Hunger group were to come to an end and the stimulus and sympathy of a guiding medico resident in the town were to be lost. However, for the present it is active and the leaders seem confident. Out of all this emerges an impression of the changes Bourke Aborigines would seek in the life-style available to them. This life-style is probably closer to that sought by 'assimilationist' policies than those in any of the other communities reviewed in this paper.

Economically they look simply to more regular employment opportunities — in the meat works, for the Shire Council, they hope in new decentralised industries, and to occasional opportunities for more adventurous spirits to enter small-scale business enterprises perhaps arising particularly from the growing tourist industry.

In housing, the majority seek the opportunity to live in the town — preferably in groups of houses occupied also by other Aborigines but not in exclusively Aboriginal areas. However, almost all wish the reserve (such as it is) to continue as a place for dwellings — at least for others not capable of accepting the financial and social burdens of town houses and the pattern of life that such houses would impose on them.

Socially they desire acceptance in the general community but the right and the opportunity to meet and work as a group within it conducting for themselves those affairs which they see as peculiarly their own. In this, especially in the absence of an Aboriginal community centre or club, the reserve continues to be central. It is in essence an open-air community centre as well as a camp and could, with advantage, be designed and developed as such as a focus for Aboriginal social life under the control of their own Association.

The Aborigines see themselves becoming increasingly involved, through their Association, in the administration of special programs of health, education and community development insofar as they are concerned with the local Aboriginal community and believe that the housing society will prove of increasing importance both in the provision of accommodation and in the

development of administrative and executive capacity.

It is indeed a pattern of modest expectations.

Redfern

Yet it is time that holds somewhere altho' not now the peal of trumpets — Judith Wright

There has, since the end of the war, been a significant drift of Aborigines to the cities and the development of characteristically Aboriginal communities within them. The Aboriginal population recorded in Sydney in the 1966 census was more than twice the figure shown in 1961 and it has been variously estimated that there may be between ten and twenty thousand persons of Aboriginal descent in the Sydney metropolitan area — many of them resident in Redfern and nearby inner suburbs. The pattern has been for them to drift to such areas partly because they are cheaper and partly because 'relatives' are already there and will offer help and companionship. They frequently occupy substandard accommodation, and, because of poverty and difficulty of finding accommodation, frequently grossly overcrowd it. Faced with growing hostility from surrounding white residents and unsympathetic police attitudes they generally withdraw even more into association largely among themselves. These are the characteristic 'ghetto' conditions found in American cities where enclaves of ethnic minorities exist.

Although unemployment is high, over the years a growing absorption into the work-force has occurred, generally at the lowest levels of skill, and this has led to some dispersal through other suburbs but a solid core remains in the South Sydney area, reinforced by those being 'staged' as they continue to drift into the city and as their own numbers grow.

These urban Aborigines have become an important and interesting component in the total Australian population, exercising a political influence beyond expectations based on their numbers. First, many are, despite their substantial and increasing isolation from tribal affiliations, self-consciously and aggressively Aboriginal — asserting their identity as such vigorously and demonstratively. From their numbers have been drawn the bulk of the Aboriginal protesters, for instance the members and supporters of the group which established and manned the Canberra 'embassy'. Similar groups are emerging in Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. They have espoused all Aboriginal causes, including particularly land rights for Aboriginal communities because they link

land rights with the assertion of an Aboriginal identity and therefore with their survival as an independent and distinctive component in Australian society.

An Aboriginal woman involved in pre-school work among Redfern Aboriginal mothers and children commented: 'We get exasperated by white people telling us we should be proud of being Aborigines. Here we are all Aborigines. Our kids now don't have to be told — they recognise each other and themselves for Aborigines. I am a Koori — I know I am.'

For them Aboriginality is a fact primarily of being racially different from the white community — rather than deriving from cultural and historical tradition. By contrast, a tribal Aboriginal sees the essence of his Aboriginal identity in his 'initiation' and participation in the religious and ceremonial life of his local people and in its identification with his territory. Some of these tribal Aborigines, many of them of purely Aboriginal descent, would question the right of urban Aborigines to call themselves 'Aboriginal' — not because they are often part white (which they would regard as irrelevant), but because they are not 'initiated men' and do not share either the identification with clan territory or the ceremonial and other knowledge that goes with it. There is, however, among urban Aborigines an intense longing and curiosity for knowledge about the traditional life and culture of tribal Aborigines and they know it to be of inestimable value. There is correspondingly a bitterness that the white man, in his greed and ignorance, has stolen from them this heritage along with that of the land itself, leaving many of them in a cultural void.

Activity is not confined to political protest. The same people are frequently involved in social welfare and cultural activities among and for their fellow urban Aborigines. Some are involved in Sydney for instance in the administration of the Aboriginal Foundation, a meeting place and social centre for Aborigines in the city which provides a variety of services especially for newly arrived Aborigines from the country.

The political activists have also been very much involved in the establishment and management of two important new institutions in Sydney — the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Medical Service. These two organisations have been developed essentially in an interesting collaboration between representatives of the Aboriginal community and the legal and medical professions respectively, particularly with the Law Faculty and the Medical Faculty of the University of New South Wales. These services aim to bring professional help to Aborigines under the guidance of, and

in an environment identified with, Aborigines themselves. The Legal Service has worked hard to bring to urban Aborigines protection from injustice under the law and access to legal representation, and has sought strenuously to improve relationships with law enforcement authorities.

The Aboriginal Health Service has operated similarly in the health field — bringing facilities for consultation and treatment into the Aboriginal community itself — the service being provided in part and increasingly by Aboriginal personnel themselves. It has already done much to improve standards of infant care and maternal health and to bring to these people knowledge of the possibilities of family planning. Under its guidance, Aborigines themselves have organised a 'breakfast service' at a centre in Chippendale, ensuring to young children the basic components of a sound diet and raising the level of knowledge among the parents, and also an itinerant 'food round' bringing gifts of food to those in need through poverty or ignorance.

This development of independent and Aboriginal controlled organisations is occurring also in the cultural field where a veritable explosion of activity is taking place. A National Black Theatre has been established — conducting classes, writing, reading and producing plays by Aboriginal writers, providing an agency for Aboriginal performers, and collaborating with white theatre organisations. Creative writing classes, pottery and other craft groups are enthusiastically being formed — all within the ambit and bearing the mark of the Aboriginal community itself.

The content of these cultural developments bears little relationship to the ceremonially based culture of the tribal Aboriginal. It is nonetheless characteristically Aboriginal — in its language, in its imagery, and especially in its humour. It is, like similar ethnic art developments in other countries, partly a response to, and protest about, contemporary Aboriginal social problems, but it is also an expression of the newly emerging Aboriginal self-consciousness of the country and urban Aborigines, and as such is a culture with its own authenticity. Its development may well prove vital to the future of the communities concerned.

This effervescence of Aboriginal self-consciousness and vitality is, of course, greatly handicapped by lack of facilities and finance. The buildings associated with the various services and activities are used also as meeting places for general social purposes. There are, understandably, widely and forcefully expressed demands for buildings, for materials, for the right teachers, for finance. It may not be wholly bad that they have to some degree to struggle since

struggle is of the essence of their purpose and their message, but greater resources could add greatly to their effectiveness.

Economically the Redfern community is differentiated from the total Sydney economy only by its poverty. From that economy Aborigines find employment generally at low levels alongside white employees in white-owned enterprises. They are not merely predominantly in the least skilled and worst paid employment, but are unemployed more frequently and for longer periods. These facts have led some of them to consider whether economic dependence could be lessened if there were Aboriginal-owned enterprises serving those areas where their own people were more nearly predominant. Of course, they lack financial resources for such ventures and it is difficult for them to find economic activities within which they would have comparative advantage or where partnership with them might prove attractive to white entrepreneurs. But the ideas may yet emerge.

These community developments are deeply involved in the political struggle to assert Aboriginal identity and to seek social justice for Aborigines. In form and content this struggle has derived some of its inspiration from minority political movements abroad but its energy, and much of its methods, bear the stamp of Aboriginal imagination. It reflects the emergence of an Aboriginal intelligentsia — articulate, ambitious for themselves and for their people and conscious of the possibilities of social and political action. So far in Sydney the struggle has taken the form of creative action and non-violent protest on the whole rather than extremism and violence. Whether this remains true will depend upon the response of white Australians to their protests. One cannot be surprised that Aboriginal Australians begin to doubt whether 'non-violent' protest is ever really listened to.

Conclusions

Let me be most clear and most tender — Judith Wright

Consideration of these examples leads, I think, to the conclusion that the life-style sought in each of them is practicable and modest. An Australian community committed to making it a reality for them and for comparable communities would be assuming no impossible or overwhelming burden. There is, however, one aspect of the aspirations of all these groups which I believe will surprise most Australians: that is the emphasis in all of them on 'separateness' and 'distinctiveness'; on a future in which their Aboriginal identity

would be apparent and acknowledged. There is no evidence to my eyes of any of the Aboriginal groups having chosen or being prepared to choose, as official assimilationist policy in the past assumed they would, to live by the same standards and to pursue the same purposes as white Australians.

To some extent this 'separateness' is merely a reflection of our own attitudes towards them — an aspect of the social isolation we have forced upon them — but the forces behind it are more complex and more deeply Aboriginal than that alone. I remember in the bigoted country town in which I spent part of my childhood it was normal to regard Catholics as strange — indeed alien and hostile creatures. They were jeered at, derogatory songs were sung of them, and they were left out of the most important social activities. Not surprisingly they withdrew into themselves — their children playing with one another, going to their own schools, seeking jobs with employers known to be Catholics also, marrying one another, and supporting a variety of protest activities against the Protestant establishment. And then of course we pointed triumphantly to their clannishness as proof of their essential 'un-Australianism'. We should not, therefore, be surprised if Aborigines react similarly to our alienation of them.

But there is more to it than that. Ethologists believe that behaviour of all living creatures, and certainly social animals like man, can be interpreted as attempts to satisfy their needs for identity, for security and for stimulus or challenge. A way of life can therefore be judged at least in part by the degree to which it meets these basic demands. Of these, identity is the most fundamental. A child's first exploration of the universe is for the purpose of separating in his own consciousness himself from the surrounding environment. Progressively he develops the knowledge and awareness of his personal identity by a series of recognitions of 'belonging to' and at the same time being 'different from' other things, other persons, and other activities experienced. Security is found in recognition and enjoyment of the sense of 'belonging' while stimulus and challenge are frequently provided by the exploration, by the testing and by the enjoyment of being different.

A healthy and balanced personality accepted within the general society of which he is a part, confident that his 'belongings' and his 'differences' will be acknowledged and respected, can, in his continuing exploration of his universe, come to see himself as belonging to a great variety of groups. His family, his schoolfellows, his workmates, his church, his sporting associates, his fellow club members, persons of common political or cultural interests, all

provide contexts within which he can find various kinds of identification and security and from which he can venture forth to issue and to encounter an infinity of challenges. It is characteristic of members of repressed minorities — racial, religious, political and sexual — that, because of their repression, they can come to attach overwhelming importance to their sense of belonging to the group being repressed. This attachment can become obsessive, impairing their capacity to develop the diversity of group affiliations open to them. One has only to think of the attitudes of some Arabs, some homosexuals, some communists, to be aware of the potential intensity of this obsession. They have not merely come to see their membership of the particular minority as the most important part of their personal identity, but can find security only within it and can be concerned only with those challenges which arise from asserting or defending its virtues in the face of the unjust and discriminatory world around them.

A perceptive and intelligent response, therefore, to the more extravagant assertions of Aboriginal identity, to 'Black Power', and to similar political and racial extremism among Aborigines, may well be in a change of Australian attitudes towards racial and cultural diversity. We are, on the whole, an easy-going, tolerant people and, when our economic and personal security has not been seriously threatened, we have avoided the more blatant forms of racial discrimination which mar societies like those of South Africa, Rhodesia and some parts of the USA. But there can be no doubt that we fear and distrust differences within our society and place a wholly unwarranted value on conformity with the ways and standards of 'the Australian way of life'.

It is strange that we should do this at a time when many are coming increasingly to question its virtues for themselves. It is scarcely possible to listen to a casual conversation, to read a newspaper, or view an evening's television programs without being reminded of the destruction we are wreaking on our natural environment, of the throttling and pollution of our cities, of the mockery of worthwhile values which is embodied in the frantic pursuit of material affluence and of economic growth. Contemporary Australian novels, plays and poetry all express savage or caustic denunciations of the emptiness and moral futility of much of our social life. Is it not strange then that still we should be seeking to force this pattern on to the Aboriginal people?

Even if Aboriginal life were so uncivilised, as 'poor, nasty, brutish and short' as many of us have liked to believe, there would

be a strong case for allowing and assisting those who wished to continue within it, and were so placed that they could do so, the effective opportunity to do so. But the essential differences between Aboriginal society and our own are not the differences in the degree of 'civilisation' of the respective material qualities — the differences in food, clothing, housing and the like; in the productivity of the respective economic systems; or in the differences between an oral and a recorded culture (although this last is more fundamental than the others).

The essential difference, I believe, lies in the attitudes of the Aboriginal to what we call 'land' and 'nature' to which we give meanings that he thinks barbarously insensitive; in the relatively low values that he puts on things that are not charged with what we dismiss lightly as 'symbolic' or 'spiritual' values, and in his ideas about social obligations between persons.

In his own world the Aboriginal did not see 'man' as one thing and 'nature' as another. He was *of* nature. He saw the earth itself, plants, animals and men, the clouds and the stars — indeed all natural phenomena — as a living system of social life. It was not just a scientific or philosophical system but one with which and by which man must live consciously and reverently. Long before Terence said 'nothing concerning man can be alien to me' the Aboriginal was asserting and living by the faith that 'nothing in all nature can be alien to me'. It is true but inadequate to say of Aboriginal life that it was 'in harmony with nature'. The harmony came from man being in thought, word and deed of nature itself. Over at least 30,000 years Aboriginal society was instinct with the understanding that its highest, most religious purpose was to help nature be itself, to be unchanging, to replenish itself. From this replenishment man himself was nurtured and his kind perpetuated and successive generations inherited an environment as rich, as beautiful and as spiritually alive as that of their ancestors. To this purpose were dedicated the great ceremonies in all their richness.

Their life, it is true, by our material standards may seem to have been excessively simple and in some respects poor, but it was not unduly arduous and there was time for the less immediate but more fundamental purposes of human existence. Occasional feats of great skill, strength and endurance were called for but generally the material needs of the group could be satisfied well before the day was over, leaving time to devote to rest, to family affairs and social fellowship, to games, to story, song and music, to dance and drama, and to the great ceremonies sacred and profane. Almost

every day was one of journeying, sometimes only for hunting and food gathering, sometimes to visit a neighbouring group to share good things, sometimes to come together with other related groups to share the experience of ceremonial life. Indeed it was in these shared experiences that much of the purpose, justification and fulfilment of life itself were found.

There was within the social groups a complex pattern of relationships which was both a source of support and of mutual obligation. The outcome of the hunt and the food gathered was shared in accordance with firm tradition. No person was uncared for or unsupported when care or support was needed and no one was without obligations to others. This pattern of complex mutual relationships, with a strong sense of personal as well as social obligation, gave to their care for children and for the aged a warmth by comparison with which the impersonal social service benefits of our society seem poor indeed.

It is easy, of course, to romanticise Aboriginal life and I am perhaps inclined to do so. My friend Professor Stanner reminds me that this tendency to romanticise primitive man — to see in him the 'noble savage' — has usually preceded effective action leading to his utter destruction.

Aboriginal life has its seamy side, its unfairness, its deprivations and its failures but there is no doubt that in the Aboriginal way there are values markedly different from our own: values of which our society may well stand in need as we seek to modify our pattern of life to make it less destructive — to make it compatible with the continuance of human life on the earth.

It is true that already we can see Aboriginal man being led away from his traditional ways — indeed, as I have said, in country towns and in cities it may be hard to recognise much of their substance. But I believe that to some degree the basic Aboriginal values and the sense of mutual obligation remain and they can be discerned in the future life-styles which the four groups of which I have spoken see for themselves.

Only the Aborigines will determine the pattern of that life-style and the degree to which it will be achieved. Whether it is won from us in bitterness and in conflict or whether it develops as an honoured and welcome diversity in the fabric of our national life can, however, be for us to decide. If *our* vision of Australia is generous enough for us to see and enjoy the differences of this so different civilisation *we* may learn much from it, and *their* dreams may be realised in friendship and respect. If they are it is my belief that *our* lives will be the richer.

After land rights — what?

I would like to discuss some changes which seem likely to occur as a result of the transfer of title in land to Aboriginal tribal groups which could present both opportunities and some special problems. Some of these changes will flow from attempts to satisfy Aboriginal wishes and some from the social objectives underlying the government's policies. Often of course, but not necessarily, these will work in the same direction. However, one obvious change sought by both Aborigines and the government is that they hope that the transfer will lead to a greater independence economically and to improved real incomes for the Aboriginal people concerned.

At Mimili the intention of both the community and the government is that the land will be run and developed as an Aboriginal-owned cattle enterprise, and funds are being made available by grant and loan to enable this. A white manager has been appointed, in consultation with the Aborigines, and an Aboriginal company will be incorporated as the legal proprietor of the enterprise. It seems likely that the enterprise will lead fairly quickly to increased incomes within the community. Award wages are now paid to men employed in stock work. Some paid employment is available also for others on fencing and other developmental work and possibly for work which is designed to protect the environment from the damage inflicted on it by past habitation.

It is hoped that these benefits will encourage a sense of proprietorship in the enterprise and persuade the residents to identify the enterprise with themselves and their community. The benefits may be inadequate or of the wrong kind to serve this purpose in the face of other difficulties that exist. The formal corporate arrangements necessary for the conduct of an enterprise which will be worth half a million dollars are likely for some time to be beyond the comprehension of the community. They have no means of understanding the magnitude of the sums of money involved or the obligations which it is assumed they will and should accept. Conceptually the formation of the company and the arrangements for the conduct of the enterprise abstract the enterprise from the general life of the community. To the Aborigines such abstraction is impossible for they cannot be separate and it may well prove that the relationships between manager and com-

munity, cattle and people, work and reward, are alien and hard to reconcile with the unity, the diffuseness and the equality characteristic of Aboriginal life. It may in fact turn out that to the Aborigines the enterprise looks and feels very much like it did when it was owned and run by the white pastoralists.

It is not easy to see how it can be shown satisfactorily to them that, despite certain formal similarities, the position is different from before — that the manager works for them; that the fences, the wells and the windmills are theirs; and that as time goes on they will own more and more cattle. If we fail to establish with the Aborigines the reality of these differences then it is not impossible that the community will come to by-pass the whole exercise as in the past they by-passed the presence and activities of the white pastoralist. And then all that we would have achieved would be a white man's cattle enterprise imposed upon an Aboriginal-owned tract of land. That would be failure, however efficient the cattle enterprise or however much income it fed directly or indirectly into Aboriginal pockets.

Increased money income cannot be assumed to add to material welfare in a traditionally oriented society like that at Mimili. The protection and increase of 'bush tucker' and the development of self-subsistence activities, if these were possible, might produce a greater return in improved nutrition and general health and vigour.

Enterprise in the north based upon the natural resources of sea and coast may be better from this point of view since such enterprises grow more naturally out of the hunting and gathering economy of the people themselves. It is, however, one thing to recognise that subsidiary enterprises growing out of their traditional hunting and gathering, or made possible by white technology, are practicable and likely to be beneficial, and it is another to create among Aborigines the desire for them and an urge to undertake them. Unless such goals are freely chosen by them they are unlikely to inspire the effort required to give them reality.

Closely related to the problem of establishing and maintaining a sense of proprietorship in and identity with economic enterprises is the disparity between the decision-making processes of their and our social systems. We have in our society developed, for many political and commercial purposes, procedures involving the acceptance of majority decisions. These procedures are expeditious and we feel them to be efficient. Sometimes I think we delude ourselves about them, as they are not always as efficient as we imagine and also of course, often a majority decision comes after a quite considerable amount of hard bargaining by which a consensus is

obtained. Such decision by majority differs from the processes of Aboriginal society, where apparently endless time will patiently be devoted to controversy and argument at all levels in the community until finally it is hoped a consensus will emerge; and where unless such a common decision is made, action can be inhibited.

It would be easy to alienate Aboriginal participation if, in the certainty of our knowledge of what an enterprise requires for its efficient operation, decisions were 'bulldozed' through in the face of uncertainty, hesitation or division among the Aborigines. It is important that procedures for management should be worked out which allow time for the more leisurely processes to which they are accustomed. It is unlikely that Aborigines will attach the same importance to efficiency and profit as we do. They will judge the enterprise much more by the contribution it makes to the total way of life which is possible for them and their fellows and to its compatibility with their traditional ways, and these bear little relation to our concepts of efficiency or profit.

This need to adapt our techniques and our economic objectives to the present state of Aboriginal culture has a profound bearing also upon the provision of many of the services needed by Aborigines equally with other sections of the community, where in many cases the need to adapt them to the Aboriginal cultural attitudes has in the past been ignored. For instance, much of the failure to achieve significant improvement in the health of traditionally oriented Aborigines, to reduce infant mortality, to improve nutritional standards, to check the damage done by respiratory infections, trachoma and so on, derives from our insistence on introducing among them the whole western institutional pattern of medical care without reference to the cultural context into which it is going. There has been a failure of Aborigines to respond to that care because the treatment that they receive, the advice and instruction they are given, which frequently conflict with their patterns of belief, expose them in their eyes to dangers of which the medical practitioners are unaware, isolate them from the support of family and community, and ignore their own traditional health practices and their own tribal practitioners. There is need for drastic change here and for medical and health workers among Aborigines who are willing to approach their task acknowledging that they too are learners.

In no field will these problems of adjustment be so acute as in education. The government has already made it clear that it wishes that, in communities where an Aboriginal language continues to be the means of communication, instruction will be at the outset in the

local language and that the objective will be to enable Aborigines to become literate in both their own language and in English. It has also decided that the education system must be adapted so that it does not tend to weaken the child's link with his family and with his community, or with their history and traditions. At the same time it is intended that the school will equip the Aboriginal child so that, if in due course he chooses to do so, he is ready to find an effective place and earn a living in those parts of Australian society where most people are white. It must be expected that many Aboriginal children will wish to do this, including many who will still want to maintain a close link with the communities of their origin and remain by conviction as well as inheritance 'traditionally oriented'.

It will, therefore, in areas of predominantly Aboriginal population, be necessary to set up a system of education which will work in parallel with the traditional pedagogy of the Aborigines themselves and which will need to some degree to interlock with it. The task of working out the character and content of such a system and ensuring its acceptance by Aborigines will present great challenges. Aborigines in many parts of Australia have seen the school used as a means to belittle and destroy their culture, to isolate their children from their families and communities. The damage which has been done by such schools in producing an alienated and rootless generation can, I believe, scarcely be exaggerated. It is not surprising therefore that many Aborigines look at the education which has so far been offered their children with distrust and that, where they cannot avoid it, they plan to by-pass it and to pursue their own ways of involving the young in their traditional culture separately and independently of the school.

Here too the problem is to identify the Aborigines with the educational process. This may call for radical rethinking of our procedures as well as for reconsideration of the content and techniques of teaching. Education may well have to involve the whole family rather than the children alone; it may need to move out of the schoolroom and become integrated more with the daily round of Aboriginal life; it may need to merge itself to a significant degree with the teaching techniques by which the Aborigines involve their young in the traditional laws and culture of their own society.

The instances I have cited of issues which recent changes in policy towards Aborigines will evoke are illustrations only. The decision to restore title to the land, at least in reserves and selected areas outside, is only the first expression of an attitude towards which, I believe, we must move willingly or reluctantly — that is to

place Aborigines in a position where they can effectively choose their own social and personal goals and to enable them to work for and achieve those goals by their own efforts. Goals so freely chosen are likely to be different from our own (and we must come to recognise this and accept it) and different from those which missionaries, social scientists and bureaucrats, however sympathetic, would have chosen for Aborigines. If there are standards by which these things can be judged, it is possible that the Aborigines' choice may be inferior, but that seems to me to be irrelevant. Our own experience and that of welfare programs the world over have demonstrated that, however wisely planned, however humanely and skilfully administered, such programs are doomed to failure unless they originate from the hopes and aspirations of those whose lives they are to influence and unless they are achieved by their own personal and collective effort.

Decentralisation trends among Aboriginal communities

There has been an increasing number of instances of small groups of Aborigines breaking away from missions and settlements and adopting a more remote satellite role. This tendency to form smaller and more homogeneous communities can be understood as one response to the complex problems created by contact with our society — a move towards a more traditional type of relationship between societies, based upon agreed mutual obligations without mutual interference.

It seems agreed that, before white settlement, the basic hunting and foraging groups of Aborigines moved on a generally seasonally-determined pattern, largely within the land of the clans to which their members belonged and of those with whom they had close language, marital, totemic or other family or ceremonial relationships. At the same time, more extensive movement must have been common. Many parts of the country were, even for Aborigines, at times inhospitable; droughts and floods, then as now, were part of the normal expectations and these would from time to time have created the need to seek resources outside their

A paper under this title, given as the Presidential Address to the Anthropology Section, 45th ANZAAS Congress, Perth, on 14 August 1973, and later published in Search, 5 (April 1974), pp.135-43, is here supplemented by material from the Council for Aboriginal Affairs Report on Arnhem Land of 1976.

own territory. The Aboriginal system of land 'ownership' is remarkably non-exclusive in relation to usage, and the pattern of mutual obligations established by the use of resources of land identified with other clans has always been well understood. The obligation to care for one's own clan land did not call for continuous residence but could be met by occasional visits or even by ceremonial observances at a distance. It seems highly likely that in Aboriginal society before white settlement there would have been goings and comings, migrations out of and back into tribal lands. The motivation would normally have been economic — the pursuit of more plentiful food supplies, water, materials for weapons, tools and works of art — but also to attend larger convocations of clans for major ceremonial events.

It is not surprising, therefore, that after the entry of whites into their environment Aborigines tended to be attracted to sources of food supply — the white man's flour, sugar and tea — and of course, the even more important tobacco. Professor Stanner, in his ANZAAS address of 1958, has described some remarkably long and comprehensive migrations in pursuit of this latter item. These attractions were quickly reinforced by the changes in the natural environment brought about by the white man's stock as well as by the white man himself, which reduced the Aborigines' capacity to live off the land.

Where contact was primarily with pastoralists grazing cattle there was no dramatic break with the past. Access to rations could be seen by Aborigines as part of a pattern of mutual obligations involving, for Aborigines, other forms of care and, for whites, access to the labour of young men and often other privileges. This pattern, although it had many aspects puzzling to Aborigines, was not wholly unfamiliar. The seasonal character of pastoral work, and the fact that only a changing few adults were extensively involved in cattle work, meant that interruption of, or fundamental change in, the traditional pattern of life was rarely involved.

With the coming of missions, and even more with the establishment of government settlements, the position changed. Access to the same basic rations was offered — indeed the range and quality of goods and services offered was greatly extended: medical care and attention, education, improved housing and, in due course, money in the form progressively of pocket money in subvention of rations, pensions, training allowances, wages etc. But the obligations for which these multiple benefits were in effect being traded were markedly more comprehensive than in the past. While the basic objective of the missionaries was the spiritual conversion

of Aborigines, they sought too, consciously and unconsciously, to change the basic pattern of life and the values which motivated Aboriginal society, to something much more closely resembling their own. Government settlements, guided by official policies first of 'protection' and then of 'assimilation', served as instruments of these policies, and the benefits they offered Aborigines aimed to produce the social changes by which these policies were to be made effective. Thus the Gibb Committee³ reporting in 1972 wrote:

Programs on missions and settlements seem to be directed to helping Aborigines to learn to live by white Australian standards; to acquire education in European forms, to work regularly (if not always efficiently), to manage a money income, and to desire, accept, and live by white Australian standards of housing, dress, hygiene and social behaviour.

Both with the intention of imposing these social changes on as large a number of people as possible and in order to achieve them as economically as possible, missions and settlements tended to bring together multi-clan and often multi-language-group communities. Such communities were, if maintained beyond the time appropriate to some special and short-term purposes, alien to the Aboriginal way, and created significant stresses among the groups forming them. It may have been that such mixed communities were consciously seen as a means of breaking down the traditional structure of Aboriginal society, as indeed they tended to do. However, it is likely that the main motives were simply those of economy and the administrative and personal convenience of the administrators.

It is not surprising therefore that group withdrawals from mission and settlement communities, and more frequently talk of such withdrawals, have been commonplace. Talk has been more common than effective action. Dependence on the goods and services of the white settlement was real and has increased over the years. Bureaucratic resistance to withdrawal, while usually passive, was real, and the fear of effective isolation from services to which the Aborigines had become accustomed was usually enough to ensure that efforts to withdraw were abortive or, if made, were readily abandoned. This inability to act upon long considered hopes often intensified previously evident passivity and inertia among the Aborigines concerned.

3. This committee, under the chairmanship of Professor C.A. Gibb, was set up on 23 October 1970 by the then Minister for the Interior, Peter Nixon, to review the 'situation of Aborigines on pastoral properties in the Northern Territory'. Its report was tabled in parliament on 25 May 1972.

The breakaway movements

Within recent years there has been increasing evidence of more urgent and effective desire and intention to withdraw. This may have been stimulated by 'land rights' campaigning and the related desire to demonstrate by an Aboriginal presence the reality of those rights, or perhaps by increasingly frequent reports of damage to or desecration of sacred sites by prospectors, tourists and mining companies. The desire to withdraw may have been influenced by the growing access to sources of income, such as pensions and child endowment, independent of immediate missionaries or administrators. It is possible that the changing philosophy of government and of the white community towards the right of Aborigines to choose their own life-style was inducing Aborigines to assert their separate group identities, and their bureaucratic mentors to tolerate greater diversity: certainly in some instances the sympathetic support of individual missionaries and administrators, often in the face of opposition and criticism from their superiors, has encouraged some Aboriginal groups to persist.

Whatever the causes, there has been an increasing number of instances of small groups, usually from single clans or language groups, breaking away from larger aggregate communities to set themselves up as satellite communities on outstations. The number and similarity of these instances call for some examination to assess how far the causes of movement were similar, what were their respective purposes, what effect the establishment of such sub-communities might have on the future of Aborigines, and, it was hoped, to provide some guidance for official policy towards them.

This paper is an attempt to comment on a few such movements and to invite the interests of those — especially anthropologists — better able to assess their significance than I.

I intend to review briefly some developments in places which I have recently visited:

- (a) the Pitjantjatjara country, primarily in the North-West Reserve of South Australia but spilling over into Western Australia around Wingelina, with links on to Warburton;
- (b) Yayayi near Papunya in the Northern Territory, involving the Pintubi people;
- (c) One Arm Point, outside Derby, Western Australia, where the Bardi people have taken some interesting initiatives;
- (d) around Maningrida in the Northern Territory, where

the concept of Aboriginal-controlled outstations is perhaps best exemplified.

I intend then to consider whether any general conclusions can be drawn about the reasons offered and the motivations for these developments; and to examine the implications both for policy development and for the future of Aboriginal Australians.

Pitjantjatjara country

The road which passes through the North-West Reserve of South Australia touches the Presbyterian mission of Ernabella, the government settlement at Amata and, after crossing the Western Australian border, the presently abandoned mining centre of Wingelina. It then divides eastward to the Docker River settlement in the Northern Territory and west towards Warburton.

The country through which the road passes is of great religious significance to Aborigines. Through it their totemic ancestors travelled, and the landscape is rich in sites bearing physical evidence of episodes in their journeying, and marking their living presence to this day. Aborigines fear greatly the desecration which white Australian presence can bring to these sites. They recall the damage to sites in the Wingelina district by prospectors and mining companies, and there and elsewhere by vandals, and in some instances by uninitiated or alien Aborigines. They see the road, which passes uncomfortably close to sites of special significance, as a source of continuing danger of such intrusion.

Toward the end of 1971 a group of Aborigines from Amata set up a permanent camp 120 miles to the west at Puta Puta. The residents wished to care for rock arrangements, for an important centre for ceremonies, and for other sites linked with events on the ancestral journeys.

The move appears to involve some sacrifices by the Aborigines concerned. The camp is on a bare open plain giving an extended view of the road. It consists of traditional-style *wiltjas*, sometimes reinforced with tarpaulins or galvanised iron. Water is carried from a hand pump located by the road a quarter of a mile away, and firewood for more than half a mile. A truck visits the camp from Amata on pension day bringing pension cheques, stores and a nursing sister. Hunting and gathering are probably important sources of protein food. The group income averages \$10 per week per head and there is a cash-flow back to the Amata community in fulfilment of family obligations, particularly to children and grandchildren.

Most of the residents are elderly and include the owners of myths and ceremonies associated with the surrounding country. Official policy discourages taking children to the camp because of its emphasis on schooling, but children are often there nonetheless. Discussion with the members of the Amata community made it clear that many younger people would be involved if this were practicable without serious loss of other benefits.

Since the establishment of the Puta Puta camp, an additional camp has been set up, at another strategic point on the road where in the past a bore had inadvertently been sunk through a ceremonially important hillock. In addition, the communities involved have sought official help to enable them to establish a series of such camps on the Puta Puta model. Their wants are modest. They need a reliable supply of water but would expect to live in camp conditions, although they would welcome small simple structures within which they could take refuge in extreme weather conditions. In addition they have sought materials with which to build repositories for sacred objects — lockable containers built into the hillsides close to but not actually within the sites to which they relate.

Primarily these moves seem to be designed to establish an 'Aboriginal presence' at key points along the road as protection against intrusion and damage. Other reasons, to which greater emphasis was given in other communities and on which I will comment later, were referred to in passing. But in discussion, and in the program arranged by the Aborigines for us, overwhelming emphasis was placed on this protective aspect of their motivation. This may have been because it was firmly supported by members of the South Australian administration at Amata and by anthropologists working in the area.

The community at Warburton — until recently a mission settlement — has links with the Pitjantjatjara communities of which I have been speaking, but is more mixed tribally and includes groups whose affiliations are more strongly with Papunya and other Northern Territory settlements. So far no continuing decentralisation has occurred, although temporary journeys to other areas are frequent. Nevertheless there is evidence of increasing interest in the idea of and desire for official approval and some support. Representatives of some clans and language groups would like to establish themselves in smaller communities in areas with which they have traditionally been involved. There were also reports of related groups at Docker River, Amata and Giles who would join in returns to areas in the Blackstone and Cavanagh Ranges. In addition to concern about important sites (less urgently expressed

than at Amata) emphasis was placed upon the problems of living in a community composed of differing clan and language groups, and on the simple desire to return to their 'own country'. Although not emphasised by Aborigines in discussion with us, there was evidence of stresses in their relationship with members of the white community and with one another. In correspondence and at other meetings Warburton groups have also complained about the lack of employment at Warburton — 'There is no work here and nothing to stay for, we want to go back to the bush'.

The Pintubi at Papunya

The people now referred to as Pintubi at Papunya originally occupied a great sweep of the Central Desert west of the Western Australian border. The country is harsh and unyielding, and survival necessitated small mobile groups. From about 1963 more of these people began moving east to the Papunya settlement and by 1966 some 120 'new Pintubi' had arrived.

At Papunya these Pintubi were strangers in a strange land. Confrontation with a sedentary community of about one thousand people was traumatic for them. They were unable to adjust to the new way of life and suffered many social disturbances. Alcohol became a major problem for them. Having little resistance to disease and no understanding of the basic hygiene necessary for sedentary living, they were plagued by ill health and an alarming proportion of the newly arrived adults died. Deaths and illness they often attributed to 'ill will' or sorcery on the part of the other groups with whom they were thrust into contact, increasing their own unease and tensions.

In 1968 a number of Pintubi went on holiday to Waruwiya, a newly equipped pastoral bore about thirty-five miles west of Papunya. They decided to stay there. Their numbers grew to about two hundred but after about nine months it was discovered that the water had an unsafe nitrate content, so that plans to establish a satellite settlement there were abandoned. The Pintubi returned to Papunya but later they moved out to Alumbara bore (Tjipula), some twenty miles west of Papunya. Here they started a small garden, built some yards, and acquired a goat herd. Being within easy distance of Papunya, Alumbara attracted many people from the settlement and the population reached some three hundred. Papunya staff, finding it impossible to cope with what amounted to a satellite settlement, closed Alumbara down in September 1970. Neither Waruwiya nor Alumbara are in traditional Pintubi territory.

Although the Papunya staff are reported to have felt unable to provide adequate oversight of health, nutrition, employment and general conduct during both these abortive moves, the Pintubi recall these periods as satisfying experiences.

Since their return to Papunya, the Pintubi have continued to press for relocation. Possible sites were examined and discussed by them and with administrators over a period of months, and plans were made to establish a satellite community at Wangati, some one hundred miles to the south-west. A water investigation program was planned and trial holes were sunk in one area in an effort to find a site, but the group became increasingly impatient and in May 1973 decided that they wanted to move to Yayayi, a new bore some twenty-eight miles west of Papunya and a few miles down the same creek from Alumbara bore.

Yayayi is not Pintubi country but the Pintubi leaders are satisfied that they have negotiated use of the area with the true owners, the Kukatja or Loritja people. (These groups are close linguistically and in terms of ceremony and beliefs to the Pintubi.)

On 4 June 1973 the Papunya administration transported the group to Yayayi, and some ten days later the government provided a grant of \$30,000 for proper water storage and reticulation, means of providing shelter, store facilities, transport and hand tools.

The camp is in an idyllic setting — a sandy creek bed among shady river gums against a backdrop of blue ranges. At the time of my visit a few days after its establishment, the residents of the camp were living in a state of chaotic euphoria, like an endless carnival. There were people joy-riding around in the vehicles, children trotting about on ponies, much laughter and talking, open crates of tools and blankets and tents strewn about as if a dreamed-of cargo had finally arrived.

The predominant motive for this move among the Pintubi was clearly to escape the social frictions of having to live with other groups whom they felt to be alien and hostile. They had not fitted into the settlement community, could not cope with large numbers of strange people, feared sorcery, and so on.

Unlike the Central Desert people at Warburton and Amata, the Pintubi say they do not want to go back to their own country — because there is 'no flour, no tea, no buildings and no water out there, and too far'. The Pintubi are adamant that they wish to live permanently at Yayayi. They know that there are no facilities in their own country now and they do not expect any in the foreseeable future. They were obviously desperate to move away from Papunya. They probably recall that on the two previous oc-

casions they were eventually moved back to Papunya and therefore wish to appear single-minded in respect of Yayayi. However, Pintubi people at Warburton and Docker River are already pressing for bores in their traditional country. It is hard to believe that, if adequate facilities were available there, some of the Yayayi group would not move also.

Despite the scale of government support and the fanfares which have accompanied this move, I do not feel optimistic about the longer-term future of Yayayi. The size of the group (250) almost certainly means that some of the social stresses evident at Papunya will persist despite the absence of other groups. It also means that hunting and foraging can be only a very limited source of food supply. Already destruction of trees and other vegetation is under way. Possible sources of earned income so far considered include only herding of goats and perhaps a small number of cattle which might supply Papunya. Neither prospect at this stage looks promising. The Aborigines themselves apparently count on the continuance of employment on the so-called 'training allowances' which are at present being paid for work on the camp's establishment. When this work has been completed it will not be easy to find socially purposeful tasks for them unless more imaginative ventures can be devised.

Any pessimism, however, is not shared by the Pintubi. The community has recently been encouraged to set up its own council whose authority appears to be supported by the members and is acknowledged by the administration. This council has been responsible for the management of the move so far and the community asserts that its existence and effectiveness are sufficient guarantee that earlier failures will not be repeated. Certainly in discussion they show determination and a capacity to grasp the issues involved.

The Bardi at One Arm Point

A more encouraging venture has developed, after similar frustration and disappointment, among the Bardi people at One Arm Point, north of Derby in the Kimberleys.

The community there identifies itself as the Sunday Island Bardi. The community originated on Sunday Island, where a mission was established in 1899. Bardi people, attracted by the mission, migrated from the mainland to the island, intermarried with the Djawi (the original residents) and gradually became numerically and culturally dominant.

The mission was continually beset by financial problems, and in 1962 withdrew its staff from Sunday Island. Most of the Aborigines refused to leave, and fortnightly visits were promised to deliver supplies to them. The authorities, however, removed all the children to school in Derby, and the community began to disintegrate as parents followed. A group of pensioners refused to leave until delivery of stores was finally stopped in 1964.

In Derby the Sunday Island Bardi were like fish out of water. They are a salt-water people whose diet, technology, life-style, beliefs and ceremonies differ radically from those of the inland Aboriginal groups among whom they were thrust in the Derby Aboriginal Reserve, but with whom they refused to mix. Being accustomed to maritime employment, they were unable or unwilling to compete for most employment available around Derby, and resented the reserve living conditions. They quickly became a cohesive, introverted group, at odds with the authorities and other Aborigines. Alcohol, combined with their unhappiness and frustrations, had a disastrous effect.

For eight years the group, spurred on by a few leaders, made ineffective efforts to return to Sunday Island. They pressured the authorities for assistance and attempted to enlist various whites who might further their cause. In 1970, apparently despairing of outside assistance, a small group established residence on the island. By mid-1970 some forty-nine Bardi had returned to the island and had been joined by a sympathetic white couple. The group continued to grow, but lack of employment and the difficulty and expense of transport and communication occasioned hardship. The group received only token government assistance — a grant of \$1000 from the Australian government to establish a small stock of stores. Late in 1971 the Sunday Island Bardi moved to One Arm Point on the adjacent mainland.

There are now approximately one hundred and sixty Bardi at One Arm Point. They are a young population, 42.5 per cent being under sixteen years. The group is fairly stable, the only major fluctuation being regular visits to Lombadina during school holidays for ceremonies. Some families and members of the Sunday Island Bardi group who are reported to be anxious to join the One Arm Point community are still living in Derby or elsewhere for educational or employment reasons. It has been estimated that with those people present the total group might number about two hundred.

At present most of the people are living along the back of the beach, with two small groups each about three-quarters of a mile away from the main area. Dwellings range from semi-traditional

shelters reinforced with tarpaulins and corrugated iron, through tents, to huts of paperbark or iron. The last are constructed on rectangular 'European' lines. Some people have built outdoor toilets and washhouses. There are several metal sheds with concrete bases serving as the community store and equipment sheds.

A nursing sister visits once a fortnight from Broome. There is no school, but a member of the group is attempting to give lessons to some of the sixty-nine children under sixteen.

Until recently the Bardi suffered severely from lack of employment and consequently of income. They worked without wages digging wells, making roads, clearing the airstrip, erecting buildings and generally establishing the community. The group survived during this period largely on social service payments, seafoods (which are abundant) and the assistance of sympathetic persons and organisations. The Australian government is now paying wages to three turtle farmers in an attempt to establish an industry, and providing some funds for employment on road-making and similar projects associated with the establishment of the settlement. Apart from the turtles, there are reasonable prospects for income from fishing and possibly crocodile farming. In July 1973, fortnightly income was estimated at:

	\$
child endowment and widows' pensions	160
other pensions	824
wages (storeman and turtle farmers)	171
unemployment benefit	714
	\$1869

that is, approximately \$11.50 per person per fortnight.

Unlike the people of the Central Desert, the Sunday Island Bardi did not refer to any need to protect sacred sites or to establish an Aboriginal presence as evidence of ownership or occupancy of their land, although the people retain much of their traditional ceremonial life. Sunday Island was not in fact traditional Bardi territory and has only come to be regarded by the group as home since the establishment of the mission. The return to Sunday Island and subsequent relocation at One Arm Point can most simply be seen as a response to their desire to re-establish themselves in their natural maritime environment, away from the controls and frustrations of mission and government authorities, and at a safe distance from disrupting influences such as alcohol and alien Aboriginal groups. It is not clear what part technology and town-living will play in their future. The Bardi show evidence of enterprise and, if adequate opportunities and employment emerge,

may seek a 'European' style of living of a reasonably high standard — with conventional housing, amenities such as pictures, vehicles and so on. It is clear, however, that they want these things on their own terms.

The Bardi have weathered the initial period of hardship and uncertainty as to whether they could establish a community at all. They may now be entering a new phase with more subtle dangers. Their desire for at least some aspects of the European life-style may prove practicable if the turtle farming, fishing and other economic prospects develop favourably. But the changes involved in such developments and in the adoption of any aspects of an alien life-style may be hard to reconcile with their demand for independence and autonomy. Would this not necessarily involve the obtrusive presence of white technicians and administrators which the Bardi resented and sought to escape from in Derby?

Maningrida

Maningrida is a relatively young community, established in 1957 as a government administration centre to reduce pressure on Darwin. It has attracted and encouraged Aborigines to move to it from surrounding regions — Darwin, Mainoru, Bamyili and from missions. Some Aborigines have remained in their own bush country around the settlement, and movement between the settlement and the bush continues to be common.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there are around Maningrida at varying distances up to fifty to sixty miles a number of decentralised communities. In some instances these groups have at all times maintained substantial independence of the settlement and have preserved a way of life close to the traditional. In others they have been formed by groups who have reacted against the restraints and pressures of the settlement life. The interest in the possibility of such a return to the bush has always been present through the history of Maningrida, but the growing dependence on white man's food, tobacco, blankets and other stores often inhibited effective action. It is the inception of 'training allowances' and the possibilities of wage-income from road construction and forestry which have tipped the scale. These sources of income, together with social service payments, made it possible to supplement the natural resources of the bush with the settlement goods upon which the people had become dependent, while preserving a life-style of desired simplicity and continuity with tradition. In recent years growing concern about land rights has probably intensified the interest in return which was already evident.

The decentralised communities are provided with minimum facilities by visits from the settlement superintendent. He delivers and cashes social service cheques, sells basic food, tobacco, beer and other stores, and picks up artefacts for sale at the settlement. The communities differ in their degree of communication with Maningrida, in their reliance on the resources of the bush, in the extent of European-style economic activity, and in the sophistication of services in fields such as education and health which they receive.

At one extreme there is Ngarraitj, the home of a small group of about thirty people. This group has suffered tragically during earlier periods of residence at Oenpelli and Maningrida and has almost completely withdrawn from contact with all but a few trusted persons.

Their way of life is essentially traditional, self-contained and independent. Paintings and artefacts are exchanged (often without personal contact) for essential and limited stores, but the group ranges widely and traditional hunting and gathering provides much of the food supply, especially in the Wet. It is unlikely that the group would accept services which involved the continued presence of white Australians; there is no school or resident medical personnel.

The camp is beautifully kept, consisting of a number of huts mainly of bush materials modified slightly in design and structure by white influences. It is set among trees at the foot of a sandstone escarpment, among which are ledges and overhangs which have for generations been used to record paintings, many of them of the *Mimi* spirits which the group believes inhabit this rock country. Even passing contact with this group has a powerful impact. There is no doubt of the richness of the life this environment provides for these people, nor of the absoluteness with which they reject the values which motivate our own existence. There is a gentle and mystic quality in them which makes them seem at the one time infinitely vulnerable and yet spiritually indestructible.

A more economically complex community exists at Kupangur, a beach settlement near the mouth of the Blyth River. Here about fifty people live in camp structures among the sand hills along the beach. Kupangur is one of several camps in the area which this group inhabits seasonally. These are sea-going people, and fish and shellfish abound as well as wallabies, geese, turtles and a variety of fruits, berries, roots etc. They are traditional makers of dug-out sailing canoes, and the craft of making them is maintained both for their own use and to meet an increasing demand from museums and similar institutions.

So far, economic activity is largely directed at internal needs except for the export of craft products of high quality produced by men and women. At times fish, crabs etc. have been supplied to Maningrida and, given cold-storage facilities and improved transport, there would be scope for this to be expanded, certainly to a degree which would amply cover their present needs of bought stores. There is no lack, here, of economic potential. Turtle and crocodile farming appear highly suitable. The problem for the community may well be to hold the balance between increasing affluence and the desire for independence and simplicity.

This community is more 'services-conscious' than that at Ngarraitj and some interesting experiments are being tried. A young man — educated but not trained as a teacher — is attempting bilingual teaching after a few weeks' training in Darwin, aided by occasional visits from a Maningrida teacher. This development is in response to requests from the community that their children should be enabled to continue their education but that it should be within their own community and more consistent with their own Aboriginal way. Similarly, a young woman who has worked in a settlement hospital dispenses simple 'first aid', with guidance from a nurse on periodical visits from Maningrida.

There is scope for further experimentation of this kind. Indeed the future of these communities may well depend upon success in evolving ways of providing such services in forms compatible with the life-style the Aborigines seek.

There has in the past been movement between Kopangur and Maningrida, with children generally being sent to the settlement for schooling. The return on a permanent basis followed long discussion by the group, reflecting dissatisfaction with settlement life, problems of social control, and the desire to return to their own country. The group is strongly motivated and displays energy and enthusiasm. Although a relaxed and leisurely atmosphere pervades the camp, it is significant that almost everybody is actively and purposefully occupied.

These people give the impression of great awareness of the choices inherent in their preference for life in their own area rather than at Maningrida. Their gropings for Aboriginal-style services rather than those involving the presence and influence of white authorities suggest that they realise how easy it is for the quality of the life they have chosen to be impaired — even by components which in themselves seem beneficial.

Conclusions

The examples of decentralised communities I have commented on are illustrative only. They are designed to demonstrate my conviction that the decentralisation trend is an Aboriginal response to the problems which contact with white society has created for them: an attempt to evolve a life-style which combines what they wish to retain of the Aboriginal way with those goods and services of the white man which they desire: an attempt to build their relationships with us into patterns comprehensible to them in terms of the mutual obligations which underlie their own social relationships.

The reasons offered by Aborigines for their desire to move may not always be significant. It is, even for people like ourselves for whom the habit of self-analysis has become almost pathological, difficult to be aware of the motivations which impel us to action — especially where such action is a response to complex total situations. Furthermore, Aborigines know how important it is that what they propose should appear reasonable to white administrators, and their justification is often framed to conform to what, in their judgment, will receive white approval.

Nevertheless, there are persistent and recurring themes in Aboriginal comment which are almost certainly relevant. The first group of such themes relates to Aboriginal relationship with the land. There has been an increasing desire to establish an Aboriginal presence as evidence of proprietorship and as protection against intrusion. Knowing that white authority regards productive activity as the prime purpose of land-holding, there has been an increased tendency to emphasise the Aboriginal presence by activity of the kind urged upon them by white administrators, or at least to put up fences, yards, etc., which they hope white men will identify with effective land use.

Although Aboriginal obligations to care for their own land are not incompatible with prolonged absence from it, there remains a deep attachment to it and to the pattern of life it provides. From time to time nostalgia for this life is strong enough to overwhelm the attractions of the white man's goods. If resources are available which make goods accessible within the context of one's own country, this nostalgia can be the more readily acted upon — particularly perhaps by older people in whom the spiritual need to live and die within their own country is strongest.

The second group of explanatory themes is concerned with the

limitations of Aboriginal society's capacity for social control. Aboriginal communities traditionally are small and often not much more than extended families. Within such communities social discipline is readily maintained, without formal institutions, by the strength of tradition and the power of personal loyalties and affection. For larger communities, particularly those composed of different and possibly hostile and mutually suspicious groups, these controls are inadequate. Such hostility and mutual suspicions are often intensified when various language groups are brought together in the territory traditionally belonging to one of them. Occupancy long sustained threatens the validity of the mutual obligation principle and probably tends to produce resentment on the one side and some sense of guilt on the other. It also makes necessary social institutions for which tradition provides no basis and to which there is no loyalty, especially when the institutions are imposed by an alien group. The desire to re-establish discipline over the young, to avoid conflict with other Aboriginal groups, and generally to escape the tensions which the threat and fear of these troubles carry, are common elements in explanations offered.

The third group of themes concerns problems of black-white contact. The problem of social control is peculiarly difficult in contact with white society. There are problems and offences for which Aboriginal values and law have no relevance. Conceptions of property, of contractual commitment, indeed of most of the things with which white law is concerned, must be mysteries to Aborigines. Consequently, although not frequently stated, the desire to escape the problems of living within two different systems of law and social obligation, as well as to get beyond the power of administrators and the restraints and frustrations associated with them, are reflected in the desire to minimise white presence in decentralised communities. Linked with this desire to escape are the problems of alcohol and the troubles with white law-enforcement authorities arising from it. Above all, the desire to live within a familiar and comprehensible environment, to enjoy privacy from the arrogant and uncomprehending, can almost certainly be presumed to be significant.

The desire to decentralise into smaller and more homogeneous communities seems to be a genuine Aboriginal response to the complex problems created for them by contact with our society. I believe therefore, that where it emerges with sufficient clarity and determination it should be supported by governments. It is, however, important that evidence of the clarity of the desire and of the determination to make it effective should be expected.

The Aboriginal way and the European-style social and economic system are coherent systems exercising profound and pervasive influence on the values and patterns of behaviour of those who live within them. It would be self-delusion to imagine that Aboriginal communities could become integrated within the general Australian economic system and retain their distinctive traditional Aboriginal character. One does not have to be a Marxist to acknowledge the power of economic systems of production and distribution in moulding social institutions and behaviour. If Aborigines were to organise themselves for economic purposes on European lines they would inevitably come to think and behave as we do — individually, competitively, acquisitively and aggressively. It seems to me basically because they do not share the values which justify this behaviour that many are seeking to escape into smaller communities.

And yet it is clear that some access to the goods and services which our system produces has been a prerequisite of the establishment or maintenance of many of these communities. There is a dilemma here — for the Aborigines and for those who wish to help them. Some outright support (such as that from social services) is the right of all eligible Australians. There are some forms of production which may be compatible with the Aboriginal ways, and it would be wise to help Aborigines to pursue them. But there are many forms of activity of which this cannot be true. There may even be a level of income beyond which its management in accordance with Aboriginal tradition becomes unlikely. Beyond a certain point Aborigines will need to choose between the values and opportunities of their own way and the different values and opportunities of our society. It is important that Aborigines should be aware of this choice and make it freely and consciously. It would be unwise to encourage expectations that not merely the best but *all* of *both* worlds is available for the asking.

There are other reasons why governments should approach decentralisation sympathetically. At least in Central Australia the ecological impact of large communities is destructive. The ecosystems of arid regions are notoriously fragile, while at the same time of great scientific and aesthetic interest. The relatively small hunting and foraging band of the traditional desert Aborigines, rarely exceeding thirty people, was probably as much as the country could bear. Even then the mobility of the group was an essential element in its ecological relationship with the land. Western technology may have modified this relationship but it certainly has not changed it fundamentally. It may well be wise, therefore, to go

slowly with social and economic changes which impose a sedentary way of life on desert Aboriginal people. To the extent that such sedentary ways are inevitable, the social and monetary costs of ecological protection should be accepted. Probably every desert community should have its tree nursery and planting program. Throughout Australia the ecological impact of every economic venture should be considered before it is established.

Decision-making processes within Aboriginal society are ill adapted to large and socially complex communities. In such communities this deficiency often faces administrators with the apparent dilemma of either allowing Aborigines to fail to cope with the problems about which decisions are called for, or of making paternalistic decisions for them. It is understandable that Aborigines should be given time to adapt their processes to new tasks, but unwillingness to risk Aboriginal failure or ineffectiveness has generally resulted in the alienation of the Aborigines concerned from decisions taken on their behalf, and in a further weakening of their capacity. One of the encouraging aspects of many of the decentralised communities I have seen is the apparent decisiveness of what might be called their 'house-keeping'. The tidiness, the air of purpose, contrast sharply with the lethargy which characterises most reserve settlements. Within smaller communities Aborigines will have, without encroaching upon their autonomy and self-determination, the opportunity to adapt their social machinery to new and more complex tasks.

Perhaps most important from the point of view of government is the effect of such communities on the role of the central settlements which service them. The staffs of these settlements, at least in relation to the decentralised communities, will lose their supervisory function — their role as the instrument of white policy or doctrine. They will become instead reservoirs of skills and other resources upon which the communities can call as they feel the need. It is to be hoped that this will make possible a professional client-specialist relationship between them and Aborigines which would meet more adequately the Aborigines' need, and be less derogatory to the dignity of both parties than the relationship now prevalent.

The most difficult problems facing government are those of reconciling self-determination for the Aborigines with help to enable them to obtain access to essential stores and services without imposing on them excessive economic dependence. It would serve little long-term purpose if we free Aborigines from the bonds of bureaucratic paternalism and at the same time make them wholly

dependent upon financial subvention from the community. Apart from the ever-present risk of white 'backlash', dependence is insidious, in the long run impossible to disguise, and in due course destructive. As we are now trying to do in social affairs, the objective must be to make the economic condition of Aborigines reflect their own aspirations, efforts and capacities.

In my view a healthy decentralised Aboriginal community will be one which:

- has been formed or maintained by the freely reached decision of those who compose it;
- is small enough to allow ecological compatibility with its physical environment;
- has a location relatively isolated from large communities but with good water supply and some possibility for living off the land;
- has access to basic supplies of bought stores and to basic medical services;
- shows a preference for a simple life-style;
- has productive activities (including hunting and gathering) which are compatible with the basic simplicity of its chosen way, with freedom from day-to-day white supervision, and with the ecological needs of the environment;
- produces sufficient goods and services for sale outside its own community to contribute reasonably to the cost of the goods and services it obtains therefrom;
- can manage its own internal affairs, and provide its community services basically from among its own members, with access only to periodical visits from, and occasional resort to, specialists from resource centres in major settlements and elsewhere.

Such a community will in money income probably be poor by general Australian standards. It may, however, be healthier, more resilient, and more confident than those which we have in the past helped create. Most importantly it could come closer to the type of life which many Aborigines in the Centre and the North seem to wish for themselves and their children.

The decentralisation movement in 1975

The tendency towards decentralisation of Aboriginal communities described in the previous paper continued to grow in the following

years. The extract below from a Council for Aboriginal Affairs Report on Arnhem Land illustrates some of the developments.

On earlier visits to Arnhem Land and other parts of Aboriginal Australia, members of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs had been deeply impressed by the strength and frequency of the signs that an idea of great organising power appeared to be taking increasing hold of the Aboriginal imagination and showing a high potential to transform their life-style.

On its visits in 1975, the council formed the impression that something close to a social movement animated by a coherent ideology was developing and might have taken a somewhat stronger hold in parts of north-east Arnhem Land than elsewhere. Indeed, only at Ngukurr, where special conditions appear to apply, was there no spontaneous reference by Aborigines to their plans or their desire to work out a new life in their traditional countries.

In north-east Arnhem Land alone more than three dozen decentralised communities have already been established and many more are said to be in active contemplation. The numbers of people now living in individual communities, though fluctuating considerably, range from perhaps a dozen to more than two hundred.

The descriptive term 'outstation' is increasingly used for such settlements, reflecting probably the use of this term for settlements around Elcho Island which for many years had been serviced by Harold Sheppardson. However, the term somewhat misrepresents the Aboriginal conception of them, for each clan appears to consider its settlement as existing in its own right and not as an offshoot from a larger unit, although some sense of affiliation with the central unit continues. The Yirrkala community now refers to these settlements in English language contexts as 'homeland centres'. This phrase probably reflects more accurately the Aboriginal conception.

There are in these movements both a challenge to and an opportunity for an imaginative development of policy and administration. The general situation seems clear. The movements, whether diffuse or definite and organised, are voluntary. They are taking place under traditional leadership. The tasks and burdens involved in the decisions to move are, though onerous, being assumed cheerfully and are regarded as rational and attainable. The controlling aim seems to be to re-establish an authentically Aboriginal society which will assimilate chosen European elements but will not necessitate a continuous white presence or the maintenance of a 'worker-boss' relationship between black and white. It

seems certain that to some degree being 'in one's own country' is a material and psychological prerequisite of independence and a distinctively Aboriginal life-style.

The Council for Aboriginal Affairs made a point of discussing with each interested group the activities it proposed in its new location and the relationship it hoped to maintain with centres such as Yirrkala, Elcho, Milingimbi, Maningrida and Angurugu with which it could be linked. The activities most quoted include gardening, artefact making, fishing, hunting and timber getting, and the main relationship envisaged is that the old place of residence will be a resource and service centre, an outlet for marketable products and a focus for inter-clan discussion and joint action.

The council was made aware of enthusiasm among Aborigines and of a significant change of attitude amongst government officials and mission staffs to the concept. Among the latter, from scepticism and some cases of opposition, there is now often positive support. Many experienced people claimed highly beneficial physical, psychological and social effects, including a greater incentive to personal and group effort. On the other hand, some departmental officials feel that the movement is in danger of getting out of hand; that new decentralised groups are being established with little or no prospect of survival; that they will generate extravagant demands for and expectations of government support which the government will be unable or unjustified in attempting to satisfy. These anxieties may be in some instances well founded and should not be ignored. The very intensity of Aboriginal enthusiasm and the speed with which the movement is growing warrant care in the allocation and extent of government support for it. At the same time due weight should be given to the fact that there is no precedent on record for such spontaneous and widespread Aboriginal interest in plans for their future.

The survival prospects of 'homeland centres' cannot confidently be prejudged. This will depend upon whether they can develop along lines which enable them to meet the economic, social and psychological needs and expectations of those who establish and live in them.

Perhaps the most basic long-term threat to their future is environmental. Arnhem Land (and even more Central Australia) is ill adapted to sustain sedentary groups of more than extended family size without threat to its fragile environment. This threat will be intensified as the groups become more dependent on motor vehicles, European-style stores, fire-arms and other gadgetry, as their exploitation of the indigenous physical and biological resources

becomes more intense, and as their numbers grow as a result of their extraordinarily high net reproduction ratio. It is difficult indeed to plan to provide for these risks. However, environmental considerations suggest caution in support for white-styled housing which assumes a sedentary community. For the present it may be wise to keep open the option of periodic movement of the camp.

Economically much will depend upon the life-style sought as well as upon the resources and income available. Thus the extended family of Mandaarg, the painter, and his brother at Mongolod (a total of about thirty to thirty-five people) live in a pleasantly constructed bush camp (which had been moved a few months before the council's visit). Pensions and child endowment provide some money income, sales of bark paintings and artefacts rather more, while the bush and river provide apparently abundant 'bush tucker'. The group has been able, therefore, to purchase supplementary foods, household stores, blankets and even radios and recorders while building a significant accumulation in the savings bank. Other groups would clearly be much less self-sufficient and in many there is a demand for wage-employment to maintain minimum real income. There is a need to study the potential sources of income available to different types of communities in different locations and at different stages of development. In the meantime care should be exercised in providing funds for wage-employment in development and establishment works which will provide the basis for income expectations and patterns of expenditure which cannot be sustained when grants for these purposes can no longer be counted upon.

While the social motivations of this movement must remain, in large part, a matter for speculation, it seems certain that they include a desire for a slower rate of overall change and for a return to a situation within which the traditional social disciplines of Aboriginal society can again become effective. In larger multi-clan and language concentrations dominated by or in close proximity to a largely non-Aboriginal administrative group, these disciplines have been eroded and in particular are proving ineffective in dealing with a number of problems. Among them are abuse of drink, inter-clan suspicion and hostility, black-white tension and antagonism, and alienation of the young from Aboriginal tradition accompanied by increased delinquency.

While it cannot be certain that the 'homeland centres' will eliminate these factors, destructive of contemporary Aboriginal life, experience so far suggests that in 'homeland centres' Aboriginal leaders show more confidence and resolution in dealing with such

problems. At the very least, serious evidence in a large settlement that these problems are damaging Aboriginal social life should be seen as good reason to support and encourage any desire shown by groups within it to move to their own homeland locations.

The Council for Aboriginal Affairs believes that decentralisation, if it is to meet the psychological needs of Aborigines, should remain essentially an Aboriginal initiative, with expressed preferences regarding chosen combinations of traditional life-style and white goods and technology, and demonstrating by its success Aboriginal capacity to develop the necessary managerial and technical capacities. These requirements face white administrators with difficult problems. It is perhaps simple enough to allow the desire to move to emerge without stimulus but it may also be necessary to expect those concerned to demonstrate the inner strength of this desire by their willingness to contribute enthusiasm, effort and finance before major material help is given.

It will be more difficult to decide what influences to bring to bear on the 'white' component which the group seeks in its chosen life-style. Here the Council for Aboriginal Affairs believes there are good reasons to discourage the more extravagant expectations. Firstly, as the council has seen, the money income of these groups, if it is to be genuinely earned, will be modest and is unlikely to provide more than an important supplement to a substantially self-sufficient way of life. Secondly, the more complex and expensive elements in white technology and services usually involve supply, service and management components which, at the present stage of Aboriginal experience, will require the presence of white technicians, managers and the like.

The problem of administrators and advisers is made more difficult because it will often not be easy for Aborigines to follow through the implications of incorporating any given white component into their life-style and attempts to draw their attention to them can easily be interpreted as lack of sympathy with their purposes. Nevertheless there is a strong case for government assistance being limited, especially in the early stages of a new decentralised community, to ensuring access to essential supplies and services and to those components of white technology which will not require more than periodical visits from white technicians and managerial and other experts.

In this connection, the council would like to draw attention to several developments which it considers of special interest.

Firstly, there is the proposal from the representatives of the decentralised communities around Maningrida to establish a

resource centre in Maningrida itself. The intention is that this centre would be responsible for:

- (a) a regular delivery of supplies to all decentralised communities;
- (b) the regular collection of and payment for all artefacts and other produce;
- (c) the marketing of these products;
- (d) maintaining a pool of tools, equipment and replacement parts to supply and maintain these items in the decentralised communities;
- (e) providing a communication network between the decentralised communities and Maningrida — preferably by radio.

The centre would be staffed by Aborigines but at the outset would be headed by a non-Aboriginal who has for some time been engaged in servicing the decentralised communities.

This plan will make the most economical use of scarce managerial and technical skills, will make the work at decentralised communities more effective and will make servicing possible without introducing into the homeland communities persons who are not members of them.

This plan provides for a light aircraft service from Maningrida on the lines which have been followed by the Methodist mission at Elcho Island for many years. This is regarded as essential so as to maintain communication during the wet season when most of these communities are isolated. To achieve this, landing strips would be necessary at or near all decentralised communities but it would be within the capacity of the groups concerned to clear and level these to the necessary specifications. It would be desirable to provide access to essential tools and equipment and to make a contribution to the labour costs of completing these strips. It is suggested that the control of the equipment and the funds be vested in the resource centre which would pay out money for labour costs progressively against work done. It would, in the opinion of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, be important that the decentralised group should make a contribution to construction of the strip by providing some free labour.

At the outset there would, the council believes, be advantages in contracting with an air charter company for periodical visits by Darwin departmental officers scheduled perhaps to coincide with routine visits to Maningrida thus exercising maximum economy. A study of such operations and of those of the Elcho Island Mission would provide a basis for decision about the future of this service.

This plan for a central resource centre could be linked with a plan being developed at Elcho Island for a mobile task force of tradesmen, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, motor mechanics and others (if possible all Aborigines) which would visit decentralised communities in rotation, staying for days or weeks if necessary to carry out essential maintenance and repairs and to train the residents in the use and care of equipment. It would be desirable if such a task force included a person experienced in studying the environmental impact of communities on the surrounding country. Such a person could concern himself with the layout of the community, its drainage and waste disposal, the protection and restoration of trees and other vegetation, and the conservation of sources of indigenous foods. Aborigines have not in their traditional past had to deal with the impact which even the smallest of their new decentralised communities will create under the new circumstances. It would be valuable if the experience of such experts could, through the schools, be communicated to young Aborigines.

The concept of a network of radio communications based on the main centre (in this instance Maningrida) is also attractive and clearly given high priority by Aborigines.

The inter-relationship between the proposed resource centre and the related decentralised communities will require appropriate institutions for administration and it would be helpful to study examples of emerging and successful institutions. Thus the Council for Aboriginal Affairs noted at Yirrkala that, in addition to the Town Council, an Aboriginal Leadership Council (apparently comparable in composition to the former Village Council) includes the senior men from the various clans responsible for one or more of the decentralised communities. This Aboriginal Leadership Council is capable of joint action in matters affecting several or all of the decentralised communities. Care in dealing with clan leaders will be necessary to ensure the involvement also of younger men, including those employed in a 'community adviser' capacity. In this Yirrkala pattern there is a functioning body performing some of these inter-clan administrative and political functions. It warrants careful study to see whether it provides a model to be followed by others. The Council for Aboriginal Affairs discussed with some of the Aboriginal leaders at Elcho Island the possibility of their establishing a similarly constituted council of leaders which could help co-ordinate the development and servicing of the decentralised communities where this will require action at Elcho Island as well as at those communities themselves. At Maningrida it seems that an

inter-clan council exists or is in process of developing along lines similar to those in Yirrkala.

Generally, the Council for Aboriginal Affairs believes that, despite problems, the possibilities and promise of the decentralisation movement justify relatively generous support for some years to come. This belief is strengthened by the knowledge that many Aborigines see the changed official attitude in the last two years as evidence that what they are doing is 'what the government wants'. The government's good faith is therefore involved. Apart from this commitment, the council is convinced that the development of Aboriginal lands will be most positive and coherent if Aboriginal loyalties are mobilised behind projects requiring the minimum of guidance, co-ordination and support, and that concentration on such projects will guard against wasteful absorption of capital and maintenance funds.

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Some policy issues

Aboriginal land rights

The fight for Aboriginal land rights is essentially political. The success which has been achieved in the first campaign relating to the Northern Territory reflects the persistence, energy and determination of the Aborigines who have waged it in the legal and political arenas. Nevertheless there have been, parallel with that campaign, events within the machinery of government which had some bearing upon the outcome. This chapter attempts to trace those developments.

Without doubt the issues which involved the Council for Aboriginal Affairs most deeply and which brought it into the most open conflict with ministers and with their departmental advisers were those identified with 'Aboriginal land rights'. From the council's inception we could not but be aware that these issues were central to the work on which we were engaged, and one of our earliest initiatives was the establishment of a committee under Charles Rowley to advise on certain aspects of the Northern Territory Crown Lands Ordinance (No. 2) of 1967. This was in response to the concern being expressed by interested people and organisations about the provisions of this Bill which was then before the Legislative Council of the Northern Territory, and which, in our view, would have undermined the economic and social protection afforded Aborigines by the reserve lands. The committee recommended extensive amendments to the Bill and concluded that even with such amendments it provided no more than a basic legislative framework and would need to be supplemented by an extensive administrative and legislative program if any real contribution was to be made to the social and economic development of the Aboriginal people. In the event the Bill was withdrawn.

While we took a keen interest in all matters pertaining to land rights, the first formal reference to the council by the Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs of a question where the land rights issues was central was in March 1968 shortly after the council's establishment when the problem of the Gurindji Aborigines was referred to us for advice. By this time the issue was already more than eighteen months old.

Wave Hill Station, one of the largest cattle leases in the Northern Territory, had resident on it an Aboriginal community composed

predominantly of members of the Gurindji people. For many years this community had provided labour for the station management in return for stores (the traditional sugar, flour, tea and tobacco) for the group. About 1952 an agreement was reached with the management that in future wages would be paid. In the years which followed the community became increasingly dissatisfied with both the wages paid and the conditions provided for the group. In August 1966 the Aborigines on the station — about one hundred and seventy in all — walked off and set up camp a few miles from the station homestead near a Northern Territory administration welfare centre. Such industrial action by Aborigines was practically unheard of among white administrators, pastoralists and the community generally.

At this stage the dispute was seen as essentially industrial and no hint had emerged of the 'land rights' basis which it was soon to assume. It was probably because of this that the Northern Territory administration responded initially quite sympathetically to the Gurindji. They made no attempt to persuade the Aborigines to return — indeed they commented to ministers that the walk-off was justified because wages and industrial conditions on Wave Hill did not comply with statutory requirements. Accordingly they urged a positive government response to the Gurindji grievances.

Already, however, the content of the dispute had begun to change. In March 1967 the group moved from near the Wave Hill Welfare Centre a few miles to Wattie Creek — a more attractive camp site with semi-permanent water. More importantly it was close to Seale Gorge — an area rich in tribal and ceremonial significance for the Gurindji people. Here the aspirations of the group began to be expressed in different forms. In April 1967 a petition to the Governor-General was composed seeking a lease over an area of some 600-700 square miles most of which formed part of the existing Wave Hill lease and the remainder of Victoria River Downs. This area was claimed as being the traditional country of the Gurindji but the claim was justified also on the grounds that the Aborigines would develop their own pastoral and mining enterprises. Indeed they offered to pay for the lease and to surrender it if the ventures failed.

While there can be little doubt that the shift of emphasis in the Aborigines' demands was stimulated and given coherent expression for English-speaking audiences by the help and ideas of Frank Hardy, a radical Australian writer, and other white advisers, it seems likely that the idea of basing the claim on 'traditional rights' emerged naturally from discussions with the group themselves who

certainly would have made clear to their advisers what territory they considered to be 'theirs'. Knowledge of such claims to 'ownership' was common among officials and missionaries familiar with Aboriginal communities and was consistently taken into account in dealing with the groups concerned. Nevertheless at this stage the government and public response was still based upon the industrial and economic components of the claim.

Thus the Northern Territory administration continued to argue for a positive response to the Gurindji initiative and independence. It sought authority to negotiate with the petitioners on the basis that the large area sought would not be granted but that a smaller area — enough for a home base and some self-sufficiency activities — would be considered.

However, the Department of Territories was more conscious of the explosive potential of the petitioners' claims. It was at this stage (March 1968) that the council's advice was sought with results which were probably unexpected and certainly unwelcome. Members of the council were unfamiliar with the industrial aspects of the dispute and (although Professor Stanner had many years earlier worked as an anthropologist in a closely related area) none of us had had recent contact with the Gurindji or their advisers. The notes of our discussions and material prepared for the minister reveal that from the outset the council was sympathetic to the idea that a claim could be made on the basis of 'traditional' tribal rights and affiliations — although Professor Stanner was not convinced that the Wattie Creek group could in fact sustain a claim to the area involved on these grounds. We were concerned therefore to recommend that no hasty decision should be made but that a procedure should be established which would ensure that this and other claims could be soberly examined by a judicial or quasi-judicial authority and, if sustained, that a negotiated settlement would be reached. Underlying the council's approach therefore was a conviction that the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia had a legitimate claim to territory with which they had long been associated, that despite progressive dispossession of that territory, that right remained, and that they therefore had, in natural justice, a good claim for the territory to be restored to them at least to the extent that their claim to it could be validated and met without undue injustice to those who had since acquired legal rights to it.

The dispossession of the Australian Aborigines, while far from unique in colonial history, had been perhaps more ruthless and absolute than in other acquired territories in British possessions. The issue had exercised the minds of British Parliamentarians in the

first half of the nineteenth century. A Select Committee of the House of Commons set up in the 1830s heard extensive evidence on the land question in the course of its inquiries into 'What measures ought to be adopted with respect to the Native Inhabitants of Countries where British Settlements are made, and to the Neighbouring Tribes, in order to secure to them the due observance of Justice and the protection of their Rights, to promote the spread of Civilization among them and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion'.

In its second report of 1837 the committee recognised that contact with Europeans had been a 'source of many calamities' to the native inhabitants of the colonies, and had much to say about the rights of those inhabitants to the lands. 'It might be presumed that the native inhabitants of any land have an incontrovertible right to their own soil: a plain and sacred right, however, which seems not to have been understood.' With particular reference to Australia the committee reported that the effects of colonisation had been 'dreadful beyond example, both in the diminution of their numbers and in their demoralization'.

In its general conclusions the report stated that 'no national interest, even in its narrowest sense, is subserved by encroachments on the territory or disregard to the rights of the Aboriginal inhabitants of barbarous countries', and recommended that the acquisition of Aboriginal lands by British subjects should be declared illegal. In the case of the Australian colonies, where 'the land has been taken from them without the assertion of any other title than that of superior force', the committee concluded that the encroachment had been too far proceeded with to be reversed and that the consequent inclusion of the Aboriginal people as subjects of the Crown gave them certain advantages and protections. It did, however, clearly recognise that the Aborigines had been deprived of lands that were undeniably their own and that as a result they were entitled to certain compensations and special considerations from the Europeans.

The committee's report produced no results in Australia favourable to Aborigines although it may have stimulated an even more ruthless pattern of behaviour towards them. Certainly suggestions that Aborigines could have legal or moral rights to land were regarded as unworthy of serious attention among Australians until the Wattie Creek situation forced some reconsideration of the issues involved.

When the Council for Aboriginal Affairs encountered the land rights problem over a hundred years later it quickly came to un-

derstand that Aborigines who demanded land rights were fundamentally asking that Europeans restore to them land that was rightly theirs according to Aboriginal law and tradition. Of course few Aborigines were unaware of the historical changes which had occurred since 1788 and of the impossibility of restoring the *status quo ante*. Nevertheless, even where white intrusion had impaired the Aboriginal traditional 'way' and weakened the old religious relationship between Aboriginal and his land much was retained so long as he was not physically excluded from it. Increasingly such exclusion became more widespread. Demands for land rights became therefore not merely claims to the acknowledgment of title where that was still clearly practicable but also a symbolic claim — a claim for acknowledgment of dispossession and past wrong, a claim for compensation for that wrong, a claim for the right to a distinctive Aboriginal identity and a valid choice between possible life-styles and patterns of social development. But in the early stages of the Wattie Creek dispute these strands in the claim were little more than embryonic and the claim of the Gurindji to own and manage a small part of the cattle property on which they had worked for generations commanded greater public attention.

The council's proposal that procedures should be instituted for the examination of claims based upon 'traditional' rights was therefore especially unwelcome to the authorities. Any concession, even one designed merely to give the Gurindji rebels the opportunity to prove their capacity for economic independence, was strongly opposed by pastoralists of the Northern Territory whose case was presented to cabinet by the Minister for the Interior. Cabinet feared that to provide land from an area already under lease would lead to a succession of similar claims which would be the more embarrassing if any acknowledgment of traditional rights were implied. The Governor-General's reply to the petition consequently rejected the Gurindji claim and conceded no more than to indicate that an application for land on an Aboriginal Reserve or vacant Crown land would be considered, that is land which in Aboriginal understanding would belong to other Aboriginal groups. It concluded by warning the Gurindji against behaving in breach of Australian law, presumably by continuing to occupy and use land which was part of that covered by the Wave Hill pastoral lease.

This rejection, so far from ending the matter, provoked a hostile public reaction both to the government and to the Vestey group of companies which held the lease to Wave Hill Station, and brought the 'traditional rights' basis for the claim more forcefully under at-

tion. It was at this point that Professor Stanner wrote for the file a note predicting that 'the affair would become a "cause celebre" echoing long into the future'. In this note he drew attention to the council's advice and the government's rejection of it, forecasting that the decision would become 'a rod for the back of Commonwealth policy'.

It quickly became evident that the issue was not going to die. The adverse publicity stimulated the Minister-in-Charge, W.C. Wentworth, to intervene in a personal attempt to resolve the issue. In this he ignored the advice which the council gave him, that is, to persuade the government to agree to have the Gurindji claim examined by an independent authority; to assist the Wattie Creek community to incorporate and to provide them with legal aid to try to establish their claim; and to negotiate a settlement in the light of the decision of the independent authority on the validity of the Gurindji claim.

On 8 April 1968 Wentworth visited Wattie Creek personally and was reinforced in his belief that the Aborigines wanted no more than a token area, for residential purposes, as a base for employment on surrounding cattle properties and to develop self-sufficiency economic projects. For these purposes, he announced to the press, the Aborigines wanted only an area of 'some eight square miles' rather than the 600 previously claimed.

He was, however, unable to persuade his colleagues to allow him to negotiate on this modest basis. In July 1968 the government rejected Aboriginal claims to ownership of any land in the Wattie Creek area. It decided, instead, to develop the land near the welfare centre, which had previously been excluded from the Wave Hill lease as a 'pound'. It planned a substantial township with well equipped houses and assistance for Aborigines to establish gardens, orchards etc. and to develop contract teams to carry out mustering, fencing and other work for pastoralists in the area. It was tacitly accepted that pending the move of the Aborigines to the township their occupancy of the Wattie Creek site would not be questioned.

This decision had derived from the government's determination not to authorise any excisions, on Aboriginal behalf, from existing leasehold properties. Ironically it emerged after the decision had been made and publicised that the 'pound' which it had been believed was not part of the Wave Hill lease, had in fact been inadvertently incorporated into it when the lease was renewed in the 1950s. It was necessary therefore, in order to give effect to its decision, for the government to breach its own principle and seek concurrence of the Vestey Companies in excising the pound from

the leased area. Negotiations for this release were carried out amid great embarrassment and with a careful avoidance of publicity.

The fact that they had no difficulty in obtaining this excision was the first evidence of another ironic element in the situation. The top management of the Vestey Companies in London was reluctant to be involved in the dispute with the Gurindji. They were willing to collaborate in any government policy directed to meeting Aboriginal demands for land, even if this meant surrendering substantial areas from their Wave Hill lease. They were, however, reluctant to take the initiative in an area which they saw as properly a matter for the Australian government. They had made their attitude known, we believed, to the government, privately to Professor Stanner during a visit by him to London, to other concerned Australians who were personally known to them and later to me, in a conversation I had with Lord Vestey in London in May 1972.

The government went ahead therefore with the establishment of the Wave Hill township which proved to be a slow and very expensive exercise producing houses quite unsuitable for the area. Above all, despite its material comforts, it did not in fact provide a counter to the Wattie Creek development. Vestey's readily agreed not to disturb the Aborigines who proceeded, with aid from churches, student bodies, trade unions and other sympathisers, to fence the Wattie Creek area, build some rough dwellings, acquire livestock and begin to establish gardens. It could not be claimed that the settlement flourished, but it survived, its young men began to establish working relations on acceptable terms with some of the nearby cattle properties and it remained a continuing symbol of Aboriginal claims to land and an as yet unresolved conflict between Aborigines and the government. By this time, however, the focus of the land rights issue had shifted elsewhere and for some years the Wattie Creek issue continued in a state of half suspended animation.

Early in the following year (1969) the council became involved in a second famous land rights case — that of the Aboriginal clans resident at Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula. Land in this area had been declared an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931 and the only white habitation or use had been by the mission station set up at Yirrkala shortly afterwards and by the RAAF during the Second World War. The airfield which was then established continued to be used for civil purposes.

The whole area had been found to contain large quantities of bauxite and in 1953 an ordinance had been passed — the *Minerals (Acquisition) Ordinance* — which purported to vest the bauxite in

the Crown if it was not already Crown property. A number of leases were let after this and there was exploratory and construction activity preparatory to mining. In early 1968 Nabalco Pty Ltd acquired a Special Mineral Lease from the commonwealth to mine the bauxite, and was promised other special purpose leases for ancillary activities. The agreement was embodied in the *Mining (Gove Peninsula Nabalco Agreement) Ordinance* of the Northern Territory of 1968 which came into effect in May of that year.

In December 1968 an action was brought by the Aborigines in the area against Nabalco and the commonwealth alleging that their rights to the land had been violated. This action faced the council with difficult problems in deciding how best to advise the government. The government's attitude on the Wattie Creek instance had made it clear that if the case came to hearing it would assert that Aborigines had no rights in land whatsoever. We were conscious that if it were so to argue it would be publicly asserting a point of view inconsistent with that taken in many British territories, with its own practice in Papua New Guinea where the land rights of the indigenes had been given legal status, and with a recently adopted ILO convention commanding wide international support. Whatever the government argued, its own standing, domestic and international, would, we believed, be impaired.

Equally we believed that whether the case was won or lost it would be detrimental to the government. If the government's case was upheld the decision could not be accepted by the Aborigines who would have an intensified grievance in which they would have widespread public support — a situation which might lead to overt resistance to mining. If the government's case was lost, as we believed eminently possible, it would be involved in substantial costs, in either compensation to the mining company or just terms for compulsory acquisition of the land from the Aborigines — apart from the fact that it would establish an overwhelming justification for other claims of unpredictable magnitude.

Furthermore there was some evidence that opinion among the Aborigines at Yirrkala was divided and that, subject to reasonable terms and the protection of important Aboriginal interests and concerns, Aboriginal consent to the development might in fact be forthcoming.

Accordingly we concluded that the government should seek a settlement out of court, and recommended that the possibility of a negotiated settlement should be explored in which:

- (a) a quasi-judicial body would examine the traditional claims of the Yirrkala clans to the disputed lands;

and (assuming that it found traditional association established)

- (b) terms and conditions for Aboriginal consent to mining would be determined by agreement.

The government rejected this advice. John Gorton, the Prime Minister, in a discussion with the council arranged by Wentworth, insisted that the issue be determined by the courts. If, he declared, the law was against the commonwealth, then the commonwealth would change the law. A handful of people could not be permitted to obstruct development.

It can reasonably be asked why, if the council considered, as it did, that the Aboriginal case had reasonable prospects of success, we advised against allowing it to go to hearing. We had been ourselves far from certain what advice to offer. Bill Stanner, in particular, thought the case would go on appeal to the Privy Council and there be decided in favour of the Aborigines. In any case he wanted to have the legal situation settled one way or the other and consequently he thought it in their interests that the case should proceed. However, we as a council were influenced by two considerations. Firstly we were sure that whatever the legal outcome the government would ensure that Nabalco was enabled to proceed. We had heard Gorton's assertion that if necessary he would change the law for this purpose and we were aware of preparatory moves to acquire compulsorily the land which the government had agreed to lease to Nabalco. We feared therefore a confrontation from which the Aborigines must suffer. Furthermore advice from the local officials and missionaries led us to believe that there was probably majority support among the clans for the mining to proceed and that therefore a negotiated settlement would be practicable and, if under suitable safeguards, materially greatly to the Aborigines' advantage. Subsequently we came to doubt the accuracy of this advice.

In any event, the government rejected our advice and the case proceeded with the government undertaking to pay the costs of the Aborigines. With the minister's agreement Bill Stanner, as an expert witness, presented an affidavit and gave evidence to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory in which he outlined the nature of Aboriginal ideas about land. He pointed out that they held a conception of a right of ownership under title, a corollary right of possession and connected rights of occupation and use and that customary rules existed to determine with whom these rights lay and by whom they could be exercised. He emphasised the ritual nature of the relationship between the land and the land-owning

clan which made its alienation inconceivable. This affidavit provided an intellectual context for the court within which the evidence of the Aborigines concerned became obviously relevant and significant. It almost certainly made possible the understanding of and sympathy with Aboriginal traditional practice which was evidence in the court's judgment despite the adverse decision itself.

Judgment in the Gove Land Rights Case was not delivered until April 1971. In the meantime the council was involved in other aspects of land policy. During 1969 we made comprehensive studies of the Yirrkala situation seeking to develop a pattern for policy which, irrespective of the outcome of the land case itself, might provide a more humane and acceptable basis for Aboriginal involvement in mining and similar developments. Thus in September 1969, after widespread discussions, including many with the Aboriginal council of the clans resident at Yirrkala, we submitted as a basis for negotiation a program for Yirrkala in which we urged that the community should be assisted to incorporate so that as a legal person it could negotiate with the government and with Nabalco, and could act effectively on behalf of its members. It was proposed that a program of economic, social and cultural development should be negotiated with the community to be carried out under the authority of the community and its chosen agents and financed by an allocation to the community of a substantial share of the royalties payable by the mining company. While this program was never formally adopted it provided a framework for much that followed and served as a starting point for negotiations with other communities in other contexts. It also provided the basis for a draft statement of government policy in relation to land prepared at the Prime Minister's request for W.C. Wentworth. The statement concentrated on the protection of sacred sites, the effective reservation for Aborigines of reserved lands, the establishment of a fund to purchase land for Aboriginal communities outside reserves and the extension, in association with the states, of arrangements already operating through the Aborigines Benefits Trust Fund for the payment of royalties for mining, forestry, etc. to provide capital assets and community facilities for Aborigines.- In presenting the draft the council emphasised that it was prepared within limits dictated by existing government policies and so 'falls far short of what the Council itself would propose'. Despite its moderation the statement was not used.

Another body with the potential to make some impact on the land rights issue was the Gibb Committee appointed by the Minister for the Interior in October 1970 to study the situation of

Aborigines on pastoral properties in the Northern Territory. This committee was invited by the minister to consider *inter alia* 'the special needs [of such Aborigines] including the relationship of individual communities to particular land areas'. On the face of it this could have opened the way to a comprehensive review of policies bearing upon traditional Aboriginal interest in land. However, the committee was promptly informed that it was to work 'within existing policies of social, economic and educational advancement' and the presence on the committee of a senior member of the Northern Territory administration and the Secretary of the Northern Territory Cattle Producers' Council rendered any radical reforms improbable. In the event the committee sought to encourage the continuance of Aboriginal communities associated with cattle properties and recommended that land be obtained for them by excision or by sub-lease for village, economic, traditional, cultural and recreational purposes and that such land should be suitable for small-scale largely self-sufficient types of productive activity. Attempts to persuade the committee to support the purchase of pastoral properties for Aboriginal communities resident on them and to promote 'share-farming' arrangements between the pastoralist and the resident Aborigines were strongly and effectively resisted. Sparing use has subsequently been made of the excision of land for residential and related purposes but in some instances it has been achieved by negotiation.

By the time the decision of the Northern Territory Supreme Court in the Gove case was handed down (April 1971) John Gorton and W.C. Wentworth had been replaced by William McMahon supported in Aboriginal matters first by Alan Hulme as Vice President of the Executive Council with W.C. Wentworth still as Minister-in-Charge and subsequently by Peter Howson as Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, and the council had been encouraged to expect a more sympathetic approach to Aboriginal problems at least by the new Prime Minister himself.

The decision was wholly favourable to the government's case — the Aboriginal plaintiffs' action was dismissed. The court held that the relationship between clan and land did not amount to proprietorship as it is understood in our law; that the Aborigines could not sustain the burden of proof of association with the same land since the occupation of 1788; and that no doctrine of common law required the recognition of land rights under Aboriginal law which might have existed before 1788. The public response to this decision was almost universally one of shocked protest — fully justifying the council's earlier advice to the government that it

could not benefit even from a favourable court decision.

The press quite generally were clamouring for a change in the law and powerful trade unions were threatening to block the Gove development projects until Aboriginal claims were justly met. Among the government and its supporters there was evidence of dismay — almost of panic — they clearly had misjudged the political climate on this issue. However, the Prime Minister's first reaction showed promise of bringing the situation under control. In response to a question in the House he drew attention to the difference between the purely factual question of what was the legal status of Aboriginal claims to land and the moral problems associated with justice and reasonable treatment of those claims. He drew attention to an undertaking in his statement to the recent meeting in Cairns of federal and state ministers with responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs that, whatever the decision of the court, the commonwealth would act to protect the ceremonial and recreational rights of Aborigines to land and to ensure them adequate opportunities for enterprises. He undertook to initiate discussions with his colleagues which would lead to policies designed to achieve a sensible resolution of the problem.

At the Prime Minister's request the council prepared a draft cabinet submission recommending reference to the Aboriginal land rights issue to a ministerial committee but directing it to consider policies designed to give Aborigines legislative protection for the use and benefit of reserve lands for ceremonial, religious and recreational and productive purposes; to establish an Aboriginal Land Fund to acquire, over a period of years, land for Aboriginal groups outside reserves; to enable Aborigines to participate in mining development and to be compensated for disturbance to their traditional way of life; and to provide grants-in-aid for commercial ventures by Aboriginal communities. This draft was endorsed by W.C. Wentworth, the Minister-in-Charge, Alan Hulme, Vice President of the Executive Council, and by Ralph Hunt, the Minister for the Interior, but before it reached cabinet, Hunt, after consultation with his department, had withdrawn his endorsement.

In presenting the draft submission to the Prime Minister, we emphasised that it was designed to provide Aborigines with title to land in accordance with Australian law and practice. We pointed out that this could be done either by establishing a new form of Aboriginal land tenure or by granting Aborigines one of the existing forms of tenure. The Prime Minister expressed a preference for the former.

The reference to the ministerial committee was made. By this

time Peter Howson had been appointed Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts. He submitted to the council a series of questions which he proposed the committee should discuss before referring the issue to an interdepartmental committee for advice.

The questions went through some of the basic issues, such as the proposed status of lands reserved for Aborigines (i.e., should they remain Crown land?) and the form of title to those lands that might be granted to Aboriginal communities. They also raised the problems of mining on Aboriginal lands and of establishing a land fund to provide grants for the purchase of land for Aboriginal communities. The council provided answers to these questions which were framed within the constraints imposed by previous statements of government policy and by the outcome of the Gove Case. Thus, for example, we recommended that reserve lands should be Crown land and that ninety-nine-year general purpose leases should be granted to Aboriginal communities. Our answers were not always those we would have given had we not felt bound to keep our advice within the limits of the government's stated position, and we thought this was clear to the minister. Evidently we were mistaken, because in late 1972, when our relationship with Howson had considerably deteriorated, he criticised the council severely for its increasing opposition to the direction of the government's land policy, saying that he had felt entitled to rely on our answers to his questions in 1971 as an accurate expression of our views, and that we were shifting our position. Our efforts to reach a clear understanding with the minister on this question were eventually interrupted by the election of December 1972.

As the committee began its work, the widespread interest provoked by the Blackburn Judgment in the Gove Land Case was sustained. The Prime Minister received a delegation of Aborigines involved in that case who stated that they were deeply shocked by the decision, which they described as 'morally wrong', and could not be satisfied with anything less than ownership of the land. Proposals and counterproposals were put forward from a variety of sources. In a private paper given restricted circulation Mr Justice Blackburn gave as his personal opinion that 'it is desirable to establish a system of Aboriginal title, integrated within the framework of Australian law in order to give some groups of Aborigines who want it, a sense of responsibility for their own future and to satisfy the aspirations of Aboriginal people generally'. He went on to consider possible means by which this might be achieved.

In another paper circulated to the members of the ministerial and

interdepartmental committees, R.J. Ellicott, QC, the Solicitor-General, expressed the view that the relationship between Aborigines in the Gove area and the land around them was such that in order to enable them to maintain their own culture and way of life, and therefore retain self-respect and dignity, some way should be found of preserving and recognising that relationship. He went on to search for a method by which such recognition could be achieved and concluded the 'while legal recognition of title to land will not provide the complete answer to the Aboriginal problem — it is one of the bases on which future Aboriginal policy should be structured'.

It is difficult to imagine more powerful evidence of the emotional impact which the Yirrkala land rights issue had exerted on the conscience of thoughtful Australians. And the terms of the cabinet's reference to the ministerial committee constituted a virtual direction to achieve a positive response to Aboriginal claims. But the kind of resistance illustrated by Ralph Hunt's withdrawal of his endorsement of the council's cabinet submission proved of more relevance.

The Department of the Interior sent its representative to the supporting interdepartmental committee of officials in effect with instructions to resist any changes in the *status quo*. He saw his task there not as contributing to a consensus giving effect to the cabinet's directive but as a defending counsel determined to resist change by all means. The committee's meetings therefore became a series of confrontations between Interior and the council on every aspect of the land rights and mining issues. These confrontations were bitter and acrimonious. Other departmental representatives — even those sympathetic with the Aboriginal claims — drew back from this conflict, confining their participation to ensuring that the interests of their own departments were not impaired. The tactics of the Interior representative were successful. The committee failed to reach any consensus and simply referred the issues without advice to the ministerial committee for decision. The council's proposals went forward to that committee without sponsorship or its support.

While the committee processes had been grinding on, public interest had wavered and opposition from interests likely to be adversely affected — particularly in the mining and pastoral industries — mounted. Peter Howson's sympathies lay more with these than with Aborigines for whom he had ministerial responsibility. In the event the ministerial committee decided that even within reserves Aborigines could obtain title to land only on

leasehold and that traditional association with a particular area should not be used as a criterion in the granting of a lease to an Aboriginal community. It rejected the proposal to establish an Aboriginal Land Fund, but agreed to appropriate funds for the acquisition of properties off reserves for Aboriginal communities. It rejected also the council proposal that the interests of Aboriginal communities likely to be affected should be the dominant consideration in decisions relating to mining within reserves but agreed that Aborigines should receive a degree of preference in applications for prospecting rights provided they could demonstrate their capacity to carry out an exploration program by an arrangement to obtain professional assistance.

These decisions were a reassertion of the *status quo*. They made impracticable the hope of the Yirrkala clans that they would obtain a general title to the whole of the area involved in the 'land rights' case which would enable them to deal with this land in accordance with their traditional practices; they meant that the predominant justification for leases would be for individual and group enterprises of small size and to provide land for community and government services, which would tend to 'pepper' tribal country with small leases undermining the community's identification with the areas concerned; they meant that Aborigines could not hope to exercise significant influence on decisions about mining with the almost certain outcome that the destructive impact of past mining ventures would be repeated in the future.

On 18 October 1971, therefore, the council wrote to Peter Howson stating that the ministerial committee's decisions confirmed the policies and practices which had brought Aboriginal people into confrontation with the government and had aroused the resentment and disillusion of many white Australians. In fundamental respects they were taken against the advice of the council which could not therefore subscribe to them. Particularly in relation to the proposals to lease land within reserves only for limited and specific purposes and to reject traditional association as a basis for such claims, the council felt that it could not let the matter rest there. It was therefore faced with the alternatives of seeking a review of the ministerial committee's decisions or resigning. We decided to take the issue to the Prime Minister and wrote to him that we were 'shocked and disappointed'; that the decisions were incompatible with assurances given in his Cairns statement; that they would be seen as 'another expression of outmoded prejudice and discrimination'; and 'we believed a tragic mistake had been made' and accordingly 'urged that the decisions be reconsidered'.

After some discussions with the council the Prime Minister wrote to Howson saying that, if the decision that leases should not be granted on the basis of traditional association with the land sought was applied strictly, it would serve as a flat rejection of the request of the Yirrkala clans for ownership of their lands and such flat rejection would be both unjust and politically unwise. He proposed therefore the addition of a paragraph which would at least leave open the way for Aboriginal communities to lease 'for general purposes' areas large enough to comprehend their tribal lands. The suggested paragraph read:

However, Aboriginal communities on reserves should be informed that, if they wished to apply for leases of consolidated areas of land with which their members have long association and if —

- (a) examination indicates that this would not encroach upon the interests of other Aborigines; and
- (b) they can indicate an ability and intention to make reasonable economic use of the area;

the government would support their application to the Land Board set up under the Northern Territory Crown Lands Ordinance.

Peter Howson was not happy with this proposal especially as he saw the phrase 'long association' (correctly if it is taken in association with the proviso under (a)) as a paraphrase of 'traditional association'.

The issue was not resolved when the Prime Minister was due to leave for a visit to the USA in late October 1971. He had invited me to accompany him but I was especially reluctant to leave Australia while the issue was undecided. I feared that a definitive statement might be issued in his absence and that the granting of small special purpose leases in tribal areas by the Land Board might pre-empt the possibility of the larger 'general purpose leases'. However, the Prime Minister directed that no decision on the proposal contained in his letter to Howson should be made until his return. Accordingly I, still reluctantly, agreed to go with him.

On his return, agreement was reached with Howson about an amendment to the Prime Minister's suggested addition which retained but gave less prominence to 'long association' with land to be applied for, and a statement was finally agreed by the ministerial committee and was issued by the Prime Minister on Australia Day, 26 January 1972: in the circumstances not the happiest of choices as to timing, and one which the council and office had advised

against. To Aborigines, their friends and to the press, it was a mouse-like issue out of the mountainous labours of the ministerial committee. It gave no acknowledgment to the reality of Aboriginal association with the land; it neither admitted nor accepted guilt for their continuing dispossession; it was parsimonious and grudging. In theory the statement made it possible for Aboriginal communities to acquire on fifty-year lease areas of land which would incorporate their clan territories. In practice the way to this objective was barred with bureaucratic procedures to be administered by ministers and officials who had stubbornly resisted every concession contained in the statement. It was this latter aspect which led me, in response to a press question, to say that whether Aborigines would benefit significantly from the decisions would depend on 'the integrity with which the policies were administered', a form of words I had agreed in advance with my council colleagues. I anticipated that the passive resistance to Aboriginal land claims which had been demonstrated by some ministers and politicians, officials in the Department of the Interior, the Northern Territory administration and the Northern Territory Land Board would effectively block significant action. This remark was strongly resented but I believe the fears it expressed were justified. When the Labor Party came to office in December 1972 almost a year later, not a single 'general purpose' lease had been approved. Later sections of this story will demonstrate the same negative response to other aspects of the land policy embodied in the statement — limited and grudging as it was.

As soon as the statement had been issued Aboriginal disillusion and anger were expressed by the setting up of the tent 'embassy' on the lawns of Parliament House.

The Australia Day statement had one unexpected outcome. The Prime Minister received a cable from Lord Vestey, who may have been misled by the terms of the statement into thinking it a genuine approach to the lands issue, offering to release a suitable area of land from the Wave Hill lease as a free gift to further the cause of Aboriginal advancement. The cable was followed by a letter confirming the offer and extending its scope with an assurance that Vestey's would co-operate with the government in any way which would help Aborigines. The council considered this a golden opportunity for the government to take action, especially in relation to the Gurindji at Wattie Creek, which together with other action being planned by the council could perhaps have begun to demonstrate that the government's 26 January statement was more than mere hollow words.

The council urged that the Vestey offer should be accepted and that an area of suitable size to support a viable cattle enterprise should be excised, but that the company should be compensated at least for improvements and that the transaction should be negotiated by the council in accordance with the procedure decided by Cabinet in October 1971 in respect of the acquisition of properties off reserves. Action was opposed, however, by the Minister for the Interior (Ralph Hunt) and his department on the grounds that the government needed to take account of the effect of such action on the position of pastoral properties generally in the Northern Territory, and that the acquisition of land was a function of the Department of the Interior. They foreshadowed that they proposed to submit a plan to deal with the Wattie Creek situation in terms arising from the Gibb Committee Report which had proposed the excision from pastoral leases of limited areas for residential and small-scale subsistence-style activities.

I took the opportunity afforded by being in London at this time to discuss Lord Vestey's offer with him. It seemed to me that he had come increasingly to resent the unfavourable image his company had acquired despite its willingness to collaborate at substantial cost in action to assist Aborigines. His resentment was not reduced by the failure of the Australian government to respond to or to publicise his offer.

On my return in July 1972, I was met with the news that cabinet had authorised Peter Howson to negotiate with Vesteys for the release of 1500 square miles of the Wave Hill lease, in accordance with the view of the council that an area of this size was necessary to support a viable cattle enterprise — a view backed by the Gibb Report. Even so, Interior continued its separate course, announcing that 25 square miles around Wattie Creek would be resumed as Crown Land and be available for leasing to the Gurindji — a proposal that was dismissed by Aboriginal spokesmen as no more than a 'token'. In the event no effective action to commence negotiations with Vesteys was taken as the minister, Peter Howson, was not prepared to use the council or the office in this task. Again therefore passive resistance prevailed. Again the Prime Minister, although well disposed personally towards more positive action, lacked the political authority to assert his will with his colleagues. The Wattie Creek issue drifted once more into the doldrums, where it languished until the change of government in December 1972.

The same elements of a cabinet divided in its fundamental approach to Aboriginal issues, of strong external resistance from powerful interests, and passive resistance within the bureaucracy

marked the outcome of the council's attempts to help Aborigines outside reserves acquire land.

The purchase and resumption of land outside reserves which was already leased had been a component in the council's approach to this issue from the outset. In its first encounter with the land problem it had contemplated land, when demonstrated to be traditionally identified with the Gurindji at Wattie Creek, being resumed or purchased on their behalf. It realised that as claims to reserve lands began to emerge, any recognition of such claims would need to be balanced by action to enable Aborigines off reserves to acquire land also and that those who (like urban Aborigines) had lost all association with their traditional origins should be assisted to acquire in other ways the benefits their ancestors had derived from the land.

Thus in the draft prepared in September 1969 for the Minister-in-Charge outlining a possible policy (within limits set by principles underlying government measures already adopted) the council included proposals that the government should provide funds progressively to acquire land in areas of significant Aboriginal population; and extend special royalty arrangements for mining and forestry to all areas (in states as well as territories) of predominantly Aboriginal population — the proceeds to be paid to trust funds for use in acquiring capital assets and community facilities for Aborigines. This draft was not used by the Minister-in-Charge.

It was not until April 1971 in the flurry following the Blackburn Judgment that the idea of a Land Purchase Fund received any ministerial blessing. The cabinet paper referring the land rights issue to the ministerial committee directed it to prepare urgently (*inter alia*) 'policies designed to set up an Aboriginal Land Fund which would receive funds over a period of years to acquire land which could be made available to Aboriginal groups'. The ministerial committee rejected the idea of a special fund but agreed that the government should appropriate \$5m in the first year to acquire properties off reserves for Aboriginal communities and that the government would contemplate a further \$2m in each year for the next four years. The announcement of government policy following the committee's report in January 1972 appeared, at least in this aspect of policy, to open the way for effective action and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs immediately sought \$5m in the Supplementary Estimates to enable it to achieve such action. In doing so it informed the minister that it was confident that at least three properties valued in total at about \$600,000 could be acquired

within the next few months. The subsequent events again exposed the hollowness of these expectations.

The confidence expressed by the office was derived from a series of approaches from Aboriginal communities since the council and office were first established and from studies and negotiations conducted in relation to them.

As early as December 1968 approaches were made to the council from Aborigines at Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia seeking help to acquire 'a place of our own' and suggesting a property which, however, was not on the market. Once the Capital Fund for Aboriginal Enterprises was established in 1968, applications for loans to purchase properties recurred from time to time from Aboriginal groups in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia, but invariably it emerged that these projects, requiring as they did 100 per cent borrowing, could not be regarded as complying with the legislative requirements of the Act under which the fund operated that they be potentially economically successful. Nevertheless we believed that the Capital Fund Advisory Committee had an obligation to consider such requests and to test their practicability. Furthermore we had come to believe as a result of studies of them that some of them were capable of yielding significant social benefits in terms of the cohesion, motivation and independence of the Aboriginal community concerned, even if they were not viable in the sense of being able to service and repay the capital sum which would be involved in their establishment. We hoped that in due course it would become possible to provide funds for the purchase of such properties by grants rather than wholly by loan. Accordingly detailed analyses were sometimes conducted with the professional aid of the Commonwealth Development Bank and commercial consultants.

This practice brought us again into sharp confrontation with the Department of the Interior and the Northern Territory administration. The story of Willowra illustrates the issues and the attitude of different authorities to them.

In mid-1968 Edgar Parkinson, the owner of the Willowra leasehold cattle property, suggested to H. Giese, then Director of Social Welfare in the Northern Territory administration, that the government might buy the Willowra lease for the resident Aboriginal community. Parkinson wished to sell because of age and health considerations and was anxious to protect the interests of the Aboriginal community whose help and support he believed had made it possible for him to establish and develop the property. We expressed interest to the Department of the Interior and sought

information about the income and the probable valuation of the property as a means of learning more about the potential of Aboriginal ownership of and involvement in cattle enterprises. Despite repeated requests there was no response until November 1969 — more than a year later.

In the meantime the council had met the owner and some of the Aborigines interested but there seemed little prospect of any developments. Early in 1970, however, the possibility of such projects being supported by the capital fund was considered by the Capital Fund Advisory Committee and a report was made to the minister-in-charge. Shortly after this the idea took more concrete form. At the suggestion of the council, Parkinson made a firm offer to sell and a Willowra Aboriginal, Stumpy Martin, wrote on behalf of the Aboriginal residents requesting a loan to purchase the property.

It was our practice at this time to hold fortnightly meetings with the Department of the Interior on Aboriginal matters in an attempt to keep each other informed, and to avoid misunderstandings and duplication. (These meetings continued until they were unilaterally terminated by Interior.) At a number of these meetings from August 1969 onwards, the project was discussed. We told Interior of the Willowra approach and that in accordance with our normal practice we proposed to commission a feasibility study to determine whether capital fund support would be warranted. The Department of the Interior representatives raised strong objections. It was, they pointed out, the function of the Northern Territory administration to approve the transfer of pastoral leases and the minister and Department of the Interior to determine policy in such matters. They saw any action by the council or office as an intrusion on their preserves and any proposal to transfer a pastoral lease to an Aboriginal community as contrary to policy.

We replied that the legislation establishing the capital fund gave any Aboriginal or group of Aborigines anywhere in Australia the legal right to apply for financial aid to establish or develop an enterprise and the fund had a legal obligation to examine any such application and to make a recommendation to the Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs, in relation to it, and that he alone could decide whether it should be granted. We pointed out that even if the minister approved financial aid it would still be within the power of Interior to reject the transfer of title to the Aborigines if they so wished and were prepared to do so.

This argument continued over some months, at times with heat and bitterness, but finally in September 1970 Interior said that they

would not stand in the way of the feasibility study being conducted. This was carried out by Hugh Robinson and Co., a firm of commercial consultants, who reported that 'the project could become feasible'. The advisory committee decided that it could not be supported unless part of the purchase price could be provided as a grant rather than a loan. As the ministerial committee had before it at that time the proposal to establish a Land Fund it was recommended that an option fee be paid to hold the property until a decision about the fund was made. This the minister, Peter Howson, declined to authorise. As the time taken by the ministerial committee lengthened and with the arguments over the content of the government's Australia Day announcement the project languished, but the willingness of the owner to hang on and the continued interest of Stumpy Martin and his people prevented it from dying absolutely.

When the 26 January statement announced the decisions to appropriate \$5m for the purchase of properties and to allocate funds to the Aboriginal Advancement Trust Account for grants to Aboriginal enterprises the way seemed open for the Willowra story to be brought to a satisfactory ending. However, it was soon discovered that the request for \$5m in the Supplementary Estimates to finance purchases had been deleted by our parent department, the Department of the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, before treasury or cabinet consideration. It was in due course restored but time was lost. Furthermore it quickly became apparent that the minister, Peter Howson, was not disposed to support proposals for purchases despite the firmness of the commitment in the Prime Minister's statement. Willowra and other properties under review drifted quickly back into the limbo from which they had momentarily emerged. The position was further complicated because of a dispute between the council and the Department of the Interior over the precise intentions of the government in respect of properties off reserves. We had understood the decision of the ministerial committee to be that funds would be provided to assist Aboriginal communities to acquire such properties, and that this would be done through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. Interior insisted that the intention had been that properties would be acquired for the commonwealth under the Lands Acquisition Act, administered by Ralph Hunt as Minister for the Interior, and at some later date transferred to Aboriginal groups. The acquisition of properties in this way would have involved complex and time-consuming procedures and would have raised substantial difficulties as to the status of the land once acquired by the com-

monwealth and the exact arrangements for its 'interim' administration.

Ralph Hunt on 23 February 1972, hard on the heels of the Prime Minister, had made a statement which outlined for the Northern Territory, policies with essentially different objectives from those outlined by the Prime Minister, but describing the Australia Day statement as 'the most advanced and comprehensive made by an Australian Prime Minister'. Because of the difficulties raised by his department we were able to acquire only two properties, Everard Park in South Australia and Panter Downs in Western Australia, in the remaining eleven months of the government's life. In the Northern Territory on all significant new components of policy in relation to land outlined in the Australia Day statement there had been literally no visible signs of action. There was nothing in this record to make me regret my statement that the impact of the Australia Day policies would depend on the integrity with which they were applied. Once again the genuine concern of the Prime Minister to deal justly and humanely with the clans of Yirrkala and other Aboriginal groups was frustrated by party and ministerial division and by bureaucratic resistance.

At this point the election of December 1972 intervened. The communication through parliamentary and caucus committees which had been established by the office and the council together with the influence of the 'embassy' protesters, periodical visits to Canberra by Aboriginal groups interested in the land rights issue and the contacts which Manfred Cross, Gordon Bryant and Senator Jim Keeffe had with Aboriginal organisations ensured that the Labor Party policy statement on land was forthright and unequivocal. Gough Whitlam stated:

We will legislate to give Aborigines Land Rights — not just because their case is beyond argument but because all of us as Australians are diminished while Aborigines are denied their rightful place in this nation.

Even before the full ministry had been appointed on 19 December the new government brought the frustrations of the past five years to an end and set policies and administration on a new and more hopeful road. The Northern Territory Land Board was instructed to grant no more development leases on reserves which might impair Aboriginal rights, the approval of mining exploration licences was frozen pending determination of the land rights issue, the purchase of Willowra station was approved and negotiations put in train to take up Lord Vestey's offer to release land from

Wave Hill station. Above all Mr Justice Woodward was appointed as a Royal Commissioner to advise on the legal establishment of Aboriginal land rights. The Prime Minister stated:

Mr Justice Woodward's commission is not concerned with whether rights on land should be granted since the Government has already decided that they shall. His task is simply to advise on how they shall be granted.

'Simply' may not have been the most apt choice of a word to apply to so complex a task but the sentiment was unexceptionable and sounded warmly in the ears of the council as well as of Aborigines.

The commission's recommendations were developed out of perhaps the most patient and effective exercise in communication with Aborigines in Australian history. The commission established two Aboriginal Land Councils in the Northern Territory to collaborate with and advise the commission on the nature of Aboriginal traditional rights to land and on the identity of traditional owners, and on Mr Justice Woodward's recommendation these councils later became statutory bodies.

The commission's main recommendations were designed to ensure:

- (a) that title to Aboriginal reserves and certain other land in the Northern Territory should be held by the Aborigines, either through incorporated land trusts acting for the traditional owners, or, where traditional owners no longer existed or were unable to operate trusts, by the land councils;
- (b) that while minerals should be the property of the Crown the Aboriginal owners of land which it was proposed to mine would (subject to the right of the government to override it in the national interest) have a right to veto such mining;
- (c) that an Aboriginal Land Commission would have the power to investigate traditional claims to Crown lands and to pastoral leases; and
- (d) that an Aboriginal Land Fund financed by the government should be able to purchase land for Aboriginal groups both where a traditional claim had been established and where it was judged necessary to provide for the social and economic future of Aborigines concerned.

The commission's recommendations were accepted by all three major parties and legislation to give effect to them was introduced

by the Whitlam government, but the events of November 1975 led to an election while it was still unpassed. However, the incoming government, already committed to the recommendations, introduced substantially similar legislation in which the main thrust of the Woodward Report was preserved.

With the Whitlam government a Department of Aboriginal Affairs was established. This and my own involvement in other aspects of government made changes in the role of the council inevitable. While our advice to successive Labor ministers to wind up the council was not accepted we acted more as consultants to the minister and the secretary of the department on issues chosen by them or suggested by us. Our involvement in land issues was thereafter generally limited to discussions from time to time with Mr Justice Woodward.

However, we had the pleasure of participating in the handing over of a lease of 1250 square miles from Wave Hill to the Gurindji people. I flew to the ceremony with the Prime Minister and on the way he asked me to comment on the draft speech which had been prepared for him. It was a good but fairly standard political speech concentrating on what the government had done for Aborigines. It was also rather long for an Aboriginal audience. I told the Prime Minister that I thought he should see the occasion as a ceremony rather than a meeting and that what he said should be short and expressed in ritualistic style. I recalled that Bill Stanner had told me that when Batman had in 1835 concluded his 'treaty' for the use of Aboriginal land in Victoria, the Aboriginal leader had gathered a handful of soil and poured it into Batman's hands in acknowledgment of the agreement. It occurred to me that this action might be repeated in reverse as a symbol of the restitution which had been begun. Whitlam liked the idea, saying, 'It will make a kind of sacrament of it'. Accordingly I prepared a draft which the Prime Minister used, short, formal and ceremonial in style, concluding:

Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof in Australian law that these lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your hands this piece of the earth itself as a sign that we restore them to you and your children forever.

Characteristically Vincent Lingiari, the Gurindji leader, when asked to reply would say in English only, 'We are all mates now', but turned to his own people and in their own tongue spoke of their

obligations to the land and the responsibilities which those obligations placed on them all.

It was an emotional but fitting end to the council's official involvement in the Aboriginal land rights issue.

The Pitjantjatjara Aborigines: A strategy for survival

Introduction

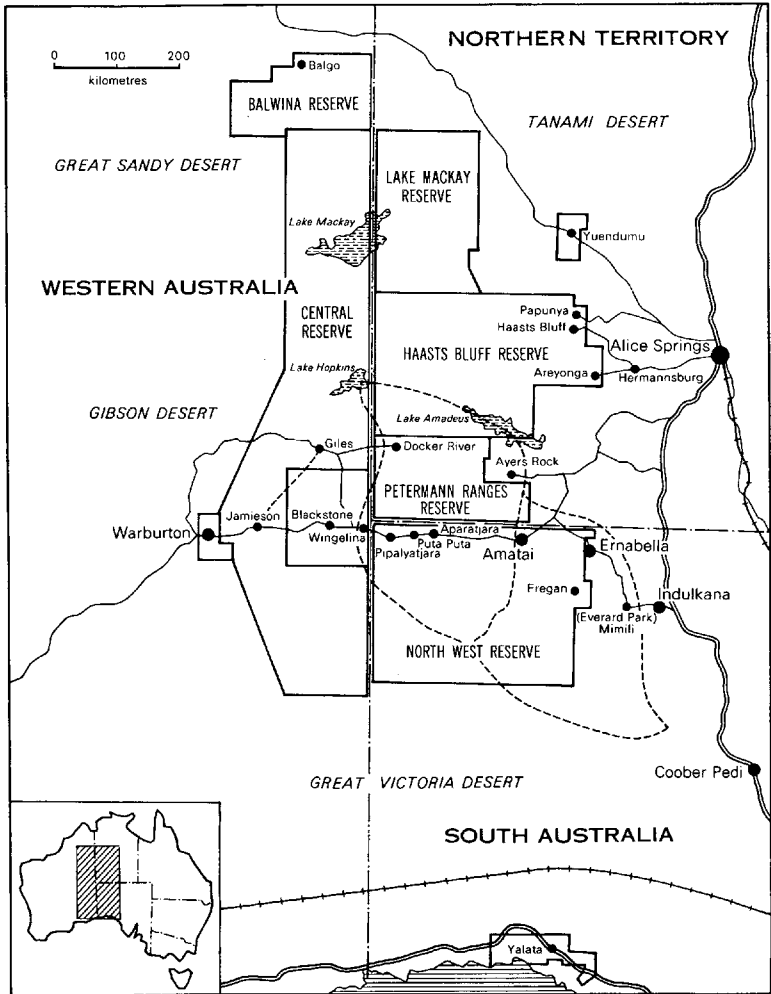
This paper is concerned with the Aboriginal communities of Central Australia who speak Pitjantjatjara and closely related languages — mainly Yankuntjatjara and Nganatjara. These include Indulkana, Mimili (Everard Park), Aparatjara, Fregon, Coffin Hill, Amata, Cave Hill, Puta Puta, Pipilitjara (Mt Davies) in South Australia; Wingelina, Blackstone, Jamieson, Warburton, Giles in Western Australia; Docker River, as well as some decentralised communities not visited in the Northern Territory. (See Figure 1.) These communities share closely related languages and a common religious and ceremonial tradition. Movement between them is frequent. They have recently established a political body referred to as the Pitjantjatjara Council for mutual consultation and for common action especially in relation to land rights.

Of the communities referred to, Indulkana, Ernabella, Amata, Warburton and Docker River are characteristic mission or government settlements while the remainder have emerged in recent years as the outcome of the establishment of Aboriginal-owned cattle stations and of decentralised homeland places by Aborigines returning to their traditional territory.

There is considerable movement between the communities and the populations fluctuate widely. The average populations have been estimated as in Table 1.

The figures in Table 1 indicate the characteristic age profile of contemporary Aboriginal communities with a heavy weighting in the school and pre-school ages reflecting high reproduction ratios. It is a population likely to double in less than twenty-five years. Other data relating to youths indicate an almost complete absence of employment for members of this group.

Before the establishment of white influences, the forebears of



Area inhabited by the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines From Peter Brokengla, *The Pitjantjatjara and their crafts*, Aboriginal Arts Board, 1975.

	Age pensioners		Other adults		Youths		School children		Pre-school children		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Centres												
Indukana	22	23	18	60	30	10	50	48	10	10	130	158
Ernabella	10	10	52	65	15	5	60	70	20	30	157	197
Amata	30	30	80	82			70	70	20	20	200	202
Docker River	10	15	53	27	10	8	100		30		253	
Homeland places, cattle stations etc.												
Fregon		12	60	50	15	20	30	40		45	270	
Mimili	7	7	15	16			15	15	9	9	100	
Pipalyatjara	25	25	20	31	20	5	20	15	10	10	181	
Wingelina	1	11	34	29	4	2	13	18	8	8	132	
ijamieson		7	36		6			64		20	153	
Giles		12					35			12	150	

Table 1 Average populations

these Aborigines lived a characteristic hunter-gatherer style of life moving in small groups from place to place within country with which they were tribally associated; usually dependent on sheltered rock-holes, creek bed soaks and native wells for water; on large and small game, mammals, lizards and insects for animal protein; and on natural grains, berries, tubers and fruits for vegetable foods. They wore no clothing and shelter was provided by hastily erected *wiltjas* of bush materials. Warmth in the bitterly cold nights of winter was provided by the proximity of dogs and by small fires. It seems a hard life but in most circumstances it was not unduly arduous and was a life which provided a basic security and diversity of activity as well as stimulus and challenge.

As white mission and government settlements were established Aborigines were attracted or persuaded to them by rations of flour, sugar, tea and tobacco and by the availability of some medical services and in due course schools and other facilities. These settlements tended to have a characteristic physical pattern with central administrative buildings, European-style houses for resident white staff and on the periphery Aboriginal camps — often several where different groups of Aborigines were brought together. These camps were similar to those which Aborigines had made in their nomadic life but used European cast-off materials — galvanised iron, pieces of derelict motor cars, tarpaulins — to supplement the bush materials. Partly because of these materials, but also because Aborigines were unaccustomed to a sedentary life, the camps appeared squalid and quickly became unhygienic.

The settlements also offered some opportunities for paid employment — generally in the provision of community services, but sometimes in cattle work, gardening and domestic chores for white residents.

The material advantages of ready access to basic stores and services tended to be offset by social tensions — between Aboriginal groups of different backgrounds unaccustomed to living in association for long periods and without specific purpose (such as the performance of joint ceremonies) and, of course, between black and white residents with the master and servant content of that relationship. These disadvantages were to some extent minimised by the continuance for a substantial part of their time of their hunter-gatherer activities. These tended to be concentrated at first in proximity to the settlement and this, with the use of timber for fires and artefacts, quickly depleted the immediate surrounds with damaging consequences to the environment. More recently, motor vehicles have widened the range of these activities and some

Aborigines appear to have become more concerned about environmental damage from this new pattern of life.

During the last decade, the always existing desire for a return to their own territory and its simpler life-style has become more effective. With the greater willingness of the government to make available basic stores and services in a more decentralised way, a number of 'homeland' places have developed to which Aboriginal groups have returned. These homeland places characteristically are located within territory with which the group identifies, often sufficiently close to sacred and important sites for these to be tended and protected from intrusion. The homeland camps usually are provided with a basic water supply — a bore or well with hand pump or windmill and storage tank. Some camps maintain a small store while others are serviced periodically by a store truck which often delivers pension and child endowment cheques also. Frequently, there is a primitive air strip. Most communities are assisted by a white community adviser or community services officer who is employed by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs or by the community with funds provided by the department.

These changes have affected profoundly the lives and aspirations of the Aborigines concerned. They remain, to a significant degree, hunter-gatherers, in their activities, in social attitudes and in personal preferences. But their capacity to live as hunter-gatherers has been impaired by the intrusion of white Australians and their animals and all other consequences of their presence. Furthermore, their priorities have been modified by the attractions of white goods and services and by an increased dependence on them. The need for money income to finance these goods and services has been met largely by pensions, child endowment and other social service payments — including in the last year or so unemployment benefit — and to a lesser extent from wages and from the sale of artefacts. Some community income is derived from the profits of the store, from cattle enterprises, small-scale mining and other ventures and in one or two instances from contract work either associated with the establishment of the settlement or road maintenance.

Information suggests that money income (predominantly from social service payments) averages \$30-40 per head per fortnight. Where a relatively simple life-style is followed (i.e., where Aborigines live in camps) this appears to meet their regular expenditure patterns and to leave a surplus for occasional purchases of motor vehicles and petrol, rifles, transistor radios and cassette players, and musical instruments — generally guitars.

The Pitjantjatjara Aborigines thus appear to be evolving a life-style which is an amalgam of that of the hunter-gatherer with selected aspects (especially goods and services) from the white economy and its associated life-style. It can, of course, be questioned whether this is not simply a stage on a pathway which will lead, by steadily increasing desire for and dependence on white goods and services, to increasing involvement in the white economy and ultimate acceptance of its values and priorities. This expectation derives some support from the apparently greater interest of children in the attractions of white life-style. On the other hand most young men are initiated and seem to be deeply involved in their religious activities. Also hunting continues to be a primary interest.

It can also be argued that the amalgam which is emerging is too dependent on white willingness to provide cash income without requiring corresponding contribution in work or other service to the economic system. There are two types of risk involved in that dependence: firstly that support may be withdrawn or reduced as a result of 'economies' or changes in policy; secondly, that dependence may prove psychologically damaging to and ultimately destructive of the Aboriginal societies themselves. The latter risk is perhaps especially strong in the ready access to unemployment benefit, rather than to the opportunity to work for wages.

Other criticisms of the emerging amalgam could be that it appears to provide little opportunity for teenagers to develop skills and capacity whether in the hunter-gatherer or 'white' aspects of their lives and that it makes inadequate use of the capacity of women.

Finally, attention can be drawn to the growing damage to the physical environment of the desert from the effects of a growing population living in more sedentary style, and from the effects of various forms of white productive enterprises (e.g. cattle grazing). The question must be asked whether the amalgam is compatible with reasonable stability of what is a peculiarly fragile set of ecosystems.

The amalgam will develop, however, not only in the physical environment. It will be shaped by and shape the social environment also. Especially important is its compatibility with the spiritual environment which comprehends in a special way the relationship of Aborigines with the land and its creatures.

The purpose of this study is to examine Aboriginal priorities within these environmental contexts and to explore their compatibility with them; to examine the economic basis of the amalgam

they appear to be seeking, and its continued acceptability to Aborigines and white Australians and to attempt to develop a strategy for government policy which will promote the achievement of Aboriginal priorities in ways which are environmentally compatible and which contain Aboriginal demands on Australian society within acceptable limits.

The physical environment

The climate of the area is arid (even more arid than Alice Springs) with low and unreliable rainfall and high evaporation rates. Effective rainfall (i.e. available to plants) gives a growing period as low as four weeks about one year in four.¹ Temperatures range from extremely high on summer days to below frost level, at night, from May to August. (See Table 2 and Figure 2.)

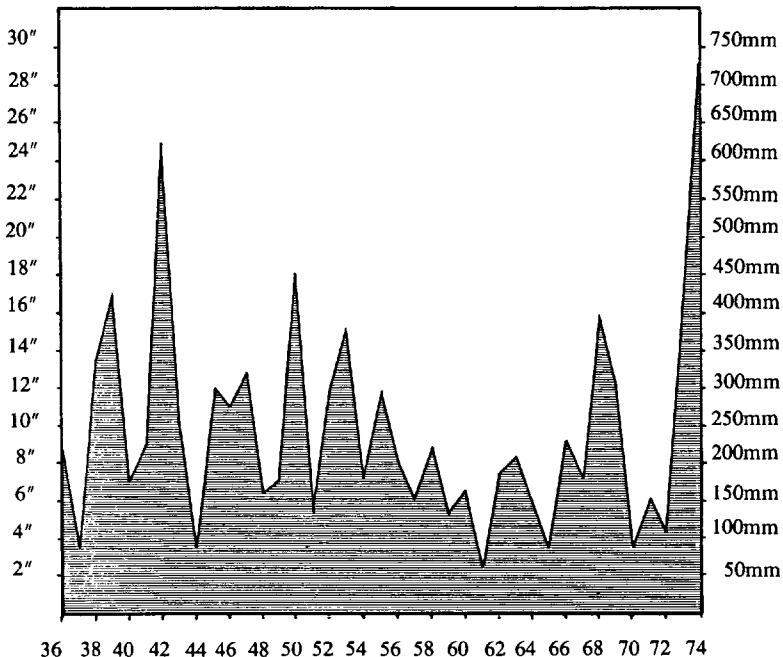


FIGURE 2: Annual rainfall recorded at Ernabella 1936-74. From Peter Broken-sha, *The Pitjantjatjara and their crafts*.

1. R.A. Perry, 'The Central Australian environment — climate, soils, land forms and water', Paper prepared for CSIRO Workshop, October 1976.

	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	Total
Rainfall (mm)	7	8	7	18	29	39	44	34	28	10	15	13	252
Mean maximum temperature °C	19.4	22.8	26.7	30.6	32.8	34.4	35.0	34.4	32.2	27.2	22.8	18.9	
Mean minimum temperature °C	2.8	6.1	9.4	14.4	17.8	20.0	21.1	20.0	17.2	12.2	8.3	5.6	
3 p.m. relative humidity (%)	31	28	25	24	25	25	26	26	27	28	33	38	
Evaporation (mm)	95*	130	183	240	268	293	305	267	244	183	126	88	2422

* Note that evaporation from the Class A pan currently situated at the Bureau of Meteorology's site at the Alice Springs Airport is approximately 35% higher than the evaporation figures given in this table.

TABLE 2: Mean monthly rainfall, maximum and minimum temperatures, 3 p.m. relative humidity and evaporation from a standard tank evaporimeter for Alice Springs (from R. O. Slatyer (ed.) *Arid lands of Australia*, ANU Press, Canberra 1969)

The region consists of a number of broad flat range and basin structures with a characteristic pattern of correlated soils and vegetation. (See Figure 3.) These structures are composed of:

- (1) hills — rocky slopes with narrow valleys providing high run-off which contributes most water to water courses and to temporary or permanent water holes at the base of the hills.
- (2) alluvial and colluvial fans and flood plains, of water courses fringing the hills. Soils vary from clays to gritty sands which are reasonably fertile and sustain open woodland or grassland vegetation. These plains extend towards the centre of the basins.
- (3) laterite plains of infertile red clayey soils — immediately below the alluvial fans with little or no surface water supporting mulga-type vegetation.
- (4) spinifex sand plains and dunes with infertile soils and no surface water.
- (5) salt lakes at the bottom of the basins — which are dry except after heavy rains.

The surface water of rock-holes can be supplemented by ground water which flows from the run-off of the hills into creek beds and alluvial fans — ultimately being evaporated in the salt beds. Near the hills, ground water is shallow and of good quality, but of limited storage. It is deeper further from the hills, but shallow near salt lakes. Quality declines with distance from the hills. (See Fig. 4.)

Aborigines before white settlement harvested the natural animal and vegetable products of this area, generally relying for water on

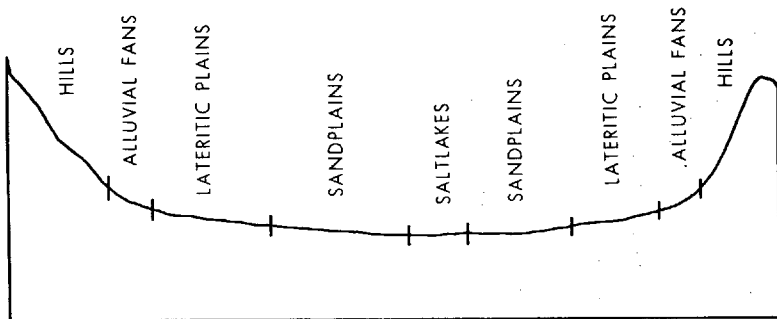


FIGURE 3: Typical land structures of the area. From R.A. Pey, *The Central Australian environment — Climate, soils, land forms and water* (Paper

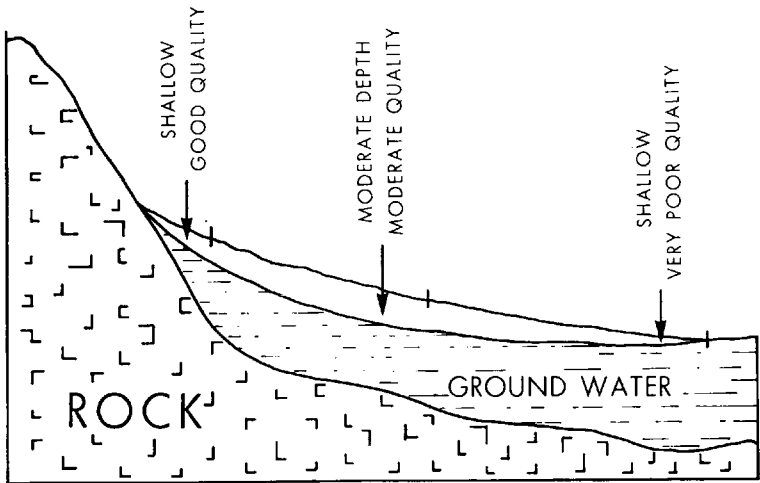


FIGURE 4: Distribution of water. From R.A. Perry, *The Central Australian environment*.

rock-holes, seepages in water courses and native wells.

With the use of ground water, small settlements can be sustained in the foothills and alluvial fans. These are the locations of most of the decentralised settlements.

Most settlements have attempted to establish market gardens sometimes with organised irrigation. Few have continued to produce successfully — even to contribute substantially to the settlement's needs of fresh vegetables and fruits.

Sometimes these failures have derived from technical problems — choice of unsuitable species and varieties, the development of salinity in the soils, pests etc. Often the ventures have failed because of staff changes: an interested officer may be transferred before Aboriginal interests and skill have been effectively established. Sometimes it has not been possible to establish such interest or skill because the venture called for work and attention incompatible with more important Aboriginal priorities. The experimental work at Ernabella is perhaps the most encouraging experience in a Pitjantjatjara context. There appears to be a decline in its quality with the substantial withdrawal of Michael Last, a mission employee who was organising the work, from continuous involvement. This does not necessarily denote failure.

The region sustains a varied wild life which is important to Aborigines not merely as a source of food, but also for cultural and spiritual reasons. Totemic identification with elements in the wild

life is a feature of Aboriginal religion and animals and plants figure prominently in the myths and oral literature of the people.

Important changes have taken place in the composition of the wild life and vegetation, as a result of white settlement and the establishment of Aborigines in a more sedentary way of life. The country is infested with feral grazing stock which are having seriously deleterious effects on the natural plant foods of the Aborigines and on the land itself. Wild foxes and cats have practically eliminated the small marsupials of the region and probably many of the reptiles. On the other hand, kangaroos and, in some areas, euros appear to have increased in numbers despite more efficient hunting by Aborigines. Emus, however, are greatly depleted although some experience suggests that their numbers can recover if conditions become very suitable.

Insects (particularly, in this area, sugar ants and witcheties) have always been important to Aboriginal diet but little is known about their availability compared with the past. They generally are closely interrelated with particular species of plants and it seems probable that their supply has been reduced. They remain, however, important and highly valued.

The effect of these changes on Aboriginal food and nutrition has been important. Rabbits and cats have largely replaced the smaller mammals and reptiles as a source of meat, emu is a luxury, but kangaroo remains important and highly valued. The ready availability of flour, bread, biscuits, and the like has largely replaced the natural grains and seeds which were important in Aboriginal diet to the detriment of its protein content. The combined effect is to increase Aboriginal dependence on foods available from the store and particularly on the traditional white flour, sugar and tea.

Around all the settlements can be seen a widening circle of devastation as trees are destroyed for firewood and for material for artefacts and smaller vegetation is eaten or trampled out of existence by grazing stock. Serious damage has been done to the environment and the continued life of the settlements is dependent upon a consciously planned program of planting and protection of vegetation and active measures to reduce the incidence of feral animals. It is clear also that environmental factors place severe constraints on productive activities. The environment is best suited to the kind of use made of it by Aborigines — the harvesting for consumption by a small numerically stable nomadic human population of the natural yield of the animal and vegetable components of the environment. The impact of increasing numbers, a more sedentary life-style, introduced species and productive processes directed at

the market on the ecosystems of the region is imperfectly understood but certainly damaging. A cautious approach to development, extensive research, and active measures to counter this impact will be necessary if the environmental constraints are to be accommodated.

The spiritual environment

The Western Desert is crossed by the 'lines' followed by the mythical totemic ancestors of the Aboriginal people. These ancestors at once men, animals and spirits made these journeys, in the Dreamtime, creating the physical features of the countryside, embodying themselves in them in forms recognisable to those familiar with their stories and the events recorded in them. During these journeys, they created also all the living creatures of the desert, including the Aborigines themselves, instructing them in the ceremonies and practices necessary to the maintenance of the whole web of life, as well as those required to keep fresh and effective the link between the Aborigines and their spirit ancestors. Important in these ceremonies and practices were those concerned with the care and protection of the sites important in episodes of those journeys and with the performance of the rituals and song cycles which recorded them. Furthermore, the ancestors, during these prehistoric journeys, created and stored in appropriate places (particularly water holes), spirits to be embodied in the Aboriginal children of subsequent generations. These spirits entered young women of child-bearing age, and were born to live out their human life. Some Aboriginal communities believe that on the death of the body in which they were incarnated, the spirits, by appropriate ceremony, are enabled to return to their original source in the land. The Pitjantjatjara people, however, believe that the spirit of a deceased person is entrusted to and becomes identified with a chosen member of the family.

This pattern of beliefs implies a relationship between the Aboriginal and his 'country', so rich and complex that it is impossible for a person of a different culture fully to comprehend it. The land is at once the source, the means, the justification and purpose, and above all the joy of life. An Aboriginal's relationship with it is at once practical and spiritual, loving and reverential, respectful and intensely intimate. He can live away from his territory for long periods — perhaps for years — but his identification with it does not weaken and his need to return to it grows steadily more urgent and in his older years the obligation to enable his spirit to return to

be cared for by his family and tribal associates can overwhelm all other motivations for action.

It is logical, therefore, that the obligations which this relationship imposes upon him — essential as they are, both to the continuance of the livelihood his country provides for him and his family and to their psychic and spiritual well being and that of their spirit ancestors — should rank highest among the Aboriginal's priorities. He may be flexible in the timing of their performance, but when the time is ripe he will abandon and sacrifice any or all other claims and benefits to them.

Some of these obligations are personal to him as an individual: those concerned with sites with which by descent, or by place of birth, he is personally linked. Others he shares with those associated with sites related to his own by being on the same journey line or linked in other ways. He will therefore, from time to time, need to join with these associates in the performance of his religious duties.

Occasionally even larger groups — sometimes two or three hundred men, and occasionally as many as five hundred, who share substantial mythic inheritances, will gather for the performance of major rites. There are too the Red Ochre ceremonies which extend over many weeks involving men from a wide range of communities. These have tended to be resented by white missionaries, administrators and managers of enterprises, because of the absoluteness of the claims they make on Aborigines and the disruption they can cause in matters of greater moment by white priorities.

The strength and validity of these claims on Aborigines deriving from their spiritual relationship with the land must be acknowledged. That acknowledgment will, I believe, impose important constraints upon plans for the future development — economic and social — of the desert people. Economic activities which cannot accommodate the occasional absences, sometimes extended, must be expected to fail. Plans for land ownership which are not based on the personal identification of the local Aborigines concerned will fail to satisfy, and indeed may provoke more intense hostility than the present situation where Aborigines *know*, with all their being, that the land is theirs, and where their rights are challenged only rarely and in limited ways. Educational procedures must accommodate Aboriginal insistence that the Aboriginal child must not only learn the skills of the hunter-gatherer but also must become intimately familiar with his own territory and with the spiritual and ceremonial obligations he has towards it.

The spiritual environment, however, is not wholly benign. Thus the spirit of a dead person is feared in the period immediately after

death. In its restlessness it can harass those associated with the person in whom it had been incarnated and do serious damage to them. Accordingly, dwellings must be vacated and elaborate ceremonies conducted to protect the living and to placate the still wandering spirit.

Similarly there exist everywhere other spirits — many malevolent towards man. 'The World is not Empty' was the title of a dramatic performance created by an Aboriginal to explain the Aboriginal world view to a white audience. Thus illness and death, except of infants and the very old, or in accident or battle are 'not natural' and can be the result of the activities of malevolent spirits. Those endowed with special powers can sometimes direct these forces against an enemy and fears and accusations of such 'sorcery' are frequent when illness appears — especially when the community includes groups of Aborigines of different cultural backgrounds or who may, in the past, have been traditional rivals or enemies.

There are those who find it hard to treat these patterns of belief in the spiritual environment seriously and who expect confidently that they will quickly be replaced by alternative patterns more in accord with our own or that they will, as irrational superstitions, fade in the light of increasing education and European enlightenment.

There is little historical justification for that expectation. Generations of missionaries have toiled with negligible response to inculcate Christian beliefs. Their few successes came in instances where the Aborigines see no incompatibility between their own spiritual world and that advanced by the missionaries and cheerfully continue to meet the demands of their own. Sadly it is true that, when the Aboriginal pattern of belief has been destroyed, it tends to be replaced, not by another of equal authority, but by a kind of 'anomie' of which a sense of futility and spiritual despair are characteristic.

Indeed, the evidence suggests that only where religious belief and its associated ceremonial life remain strong and active have Aboriginal communities retained the coherence and inner strength to survive the cultural shock of association with white society. Accordingly, it would seem at least prudent that policy should, within the knowledge and capacity of those concerned to comprehend, avoid action which may weaken or conflict with the Aborigines' understanding of their spiritual environment. It should be seen as the source of the continuity without which change becomes anarchic and adaptation purposeless.

The social environment

Aboriginal society in the Western Desert is organised geographically at three levels which can be envisaged diagrammatically as a township centre with two concentric circles; the first of smaller settlements relatively stable and the second of camps for occasional visits or holidays.

The central settlement

The central township is the location of the mission or government authority established in the past for the administration of official policies in relation to the Aborigines concerned. Characteristically, it will have a central group of buildings surrounding a church or central office which includes the store, the school, the workshop and the hospital. Close by will be houses of standard white Australian pattern for the resident white staff and increasingly, some dwellings of similar style, but usually of poorer quality, for Aborigines regularly employed. These are provided at nominal rental and service charges.

The majority of Aborigines, however, live in one of the several camps which usually are located on the outskirts of the township. These camps usually, but not always, are provided with water reticulated from central bores and storage tanks to several water taps within the camp area. Water is carried from these taps, by the women, each day to individual *wiltjas*. These dwellings are usually traditional bush shelters which incorporate discarded building materials from European buildings — galvanised iron, tarpaulin and canvas etc. Sometimes tents were used and at Fregon some of the Goorawin shelters designed by the Aboriginal housing panel had been erected. They had, contrary to Aboriginal expectation, survived a violent wind storm, but opinion remained divided about their merits.

Sometimes other more elaborate structures employing elements of European building techniques are put up and usually axes, pots and pans, various storage containers and occasionally iron bedsteads, are in evidence.

Aborigines sometimes express a desire for European-style housing, but the matter was not raised often, and those who mentioned it did not appear to place it high in the order of priority. The largest sum which any Aboriginal questioned said he or she was willing to pay for a house was \$10 per fortnight. Some families who had moved into contemporary dwellings had found them too demanding and had returned to the more easy-going context of the

camp. The most influential woman I encountered, Nganyintja, a councillor at Amata, was one such, and was insistent that a house imposed more burdens than it gave benefits. Another Aboriginal man who paid \$6 per week for his house said that he could not afford it because he must first buy food, ammunition, and share the cost of petrol, and that he had too little over to pay the rent of his house. He also complained that he had to pay the rent even when he was away in the bush — perhaps for long periods. It is my belief that, judged by their actions and by the patterns of their expenditure, Aborigines in these communities rank housing low in their order of priorities — except for those, like some Aboriginal school teachers etc. who are in regular employment and living generally in a more 'white' style. For these, what is required is a standard white-style house with the normal facilities. It seems, however, important that rental payments representing a proportion of their income comparable with that required of white residents should be expected.

The individual *wiltjas* in the camps are occupied by nuclear family groups and are arranged in accordance with traditional behavioural relationships towards other persons and families. Separate dwellings exist for the widows and unmarried women and for younger unmarried men.

The camps are usually almost or wholly bare of vegetation and vary in untidiness and squalor. It is, however, noticeable that some Aborigines are increasingly concerned about preserving and planting trees. The Ernabella experiments in afforestation appear to have influenced them and houses occupied by Aborigines in that settlement frequently had well cared for trees growing — which unlike some planted for the township were not damaged by children. An interesting experiment in one of the Ernabella camps was the use of quickly regenerating saltbush to provide some protection from wind and dust, to provide greater privacy and to improve the appearance of the camp generally.

The segregated boys' camp

Teenage boys (*Nyiinkas*) are required to be segregated for periods up to some years, varying from community to community. The boys' camp is outside the town and they are expected to avoid all contact with women and children. In the past they were expected largely to support themselves by hunting but today families are supposed to supply them with food — although it seems that, occasionally at least, this arrangement breaks down and the boys go hungry.

The period of segregation traditionally was used for pre-initiation training. Young men recently initiated taught the boys elements of the cultural and ceremonial knowledge and they were introduced to limited participation in more important ceremonies which occur during this time leading up to the 'man-making' rites of initiation themselves. Boys were reported in the past to participate eagerly and to look forward to their full participation in the ritual life they were to lead.

Today there is deep concern among the Aboriginal people about the deterioration of the behaviour of these *Nyiinkas*. Some see it as a consequence of failure by their elders to perform the traditional ceremonies or more directly as the result of the destructive impact of white school education and contact with white materialist values generally on the respect of the young for traditional Aboriginal law. Others see it less pessimistically as reflecting the difficulties which arise from larger numbers which reduce the effectiveness of traditional teaching methods and fail to occupy or interest the boys sufficiently to prevent boredom. Frequently, therefore, the boys, especially in the larger centres, become idle and destructive, involved in petrol sniffing, breaking and entering and general vandalism.

It is also argued by white administrators and advisers that the period of segregation is not integrated with 'white' educational processes, provides no vocational training, and effectively precludes most forms of employment. In fact almost none of the youths in the communities visited is employed for wages.

Sometimes the older men respond to this delinquency by delaying initiation on the grounds that the boys are not fit to receive the knowledge and privileges of being made a man. This response often intensifies the delinquency.

It is noticeable that this problem is much less severe in decentralised communities where the numbers of segregated boys are smaller. The authority of the older men is more effective and generally the total context closer to the traditional pattern. This suggests perhaps that the problem does not arise wholly from a breakdown among the young of respect for traditional law and may therefore respond to changes in pedagogic methods and organisation more appropriate to larger numbers and taking more account of interests and contemporary aspects of their lives.

It was suggested to me that if Aborigines were prepared to consider such changes it might be possible to use the period of segregation, without interference with its traditional purposes, also to provide training of interest and value to the youths in matters such

as the care and use of rifles; the care and use of motor vehicles; camp design and hygiene; non-Aboriginal music and musical instruments etc.

There is no doubt that a serious problem exists here but unless any attempted solution is based upon action to strengthen the traditional content of the segregation period and commands the support of the community it can result only in speeding up the alienation of the young from their communities and the disintegration of their societies. It is essential therefore that any initiative should come from the Aborigines themselves. It is possible that the recently established Pitjantjatjara Council would be an appropriate place for this issue to be discussed among them.

Decentralised communities

The camps at the decentralised settlements are similar in general appearance although they are generally cleaner and their locations have a more natural and aesthetically pleasing quality. These smaller settlements are arranged in relation to the central store (if it has been erected) and the residence (usually a caravan) of the community adviser or community service officer. There is in some instances a tendency for the community officer (and his wife) to allow themselves to be continuously 'on demand', so that they get little leisure or privacy and their role in developing Aboriginal capacity to manage their own affairs suffers accordingly. Aborigines, if encouraged to do so, will exploit white paternalism quite ruthlessly, but will usually accept and respect reasonable arrangements to limit their access to resident whites.

The quality of the community advisers or officers varies greatly and it is important to clarify their role and responsibilities. In particular, the temporary nature of their presence should be emphasised and it should be made clear to them and to the community that their task is to train the members of the community to do without them. As far as possible their functions should be performed by officers centrally based who visit the community from time to time. Where an initial period of residence appears necessary it should be clearly understood that it will be limited — a period of three years should rarely be exceeded. Accordingly, accommodation should be in a caravan. Thereafter, there should be only periodical visits by an adviser involved equally with a number of communities. During the period of continuous residence the white community worker should have several full-time Aboriginal assistants chosen by the community in association with the department and outside consultants. It would be necessary to train

Aboriginal teachers' assistants, male and female health workers, store operators, and clerical workers capable of conducting the routine radio communication, recording community decisions, preparing correspondence etc.

It would, I believe, be helpful if a description of the community workers' tasks, and their objectives, could be prepared to assist them and to provide a yardstick against which performance could be measured. While it should be clear that their immediate responsibility is to act as the mouthpiece and executive of the community and their right to express criticism of departmental policies and actions on its behalf should be clear, they must be open to criticism from the department where they fail to perform their primary functions or seek to impose their own priorities upon the community, or to take advantage of it in any way. They should be precluded also from engaging in any financial or commercial dealings with members of the community. To this end, I believe the contract under which they are employed should empower the department to suspend or to terminate their employment subject to a right to appeal to a body (perhaps chosen by the Pitjantjatjara Council) composed predominantly of Aborigines.

Decentralised settlements naturally differ in the stage of establishment and development which they have reached but apart from such differences there exists some uncertainty about what support they can expect in the provision of facilities. It would, I believe, be helpful if a statement of policy could be made to all communities and their advisers which indicated the basic facilities which they can expect in due course as funds are available. This statement should be based upon the settlements being seen as providing a simple camp context for a life-style with a substantial hunter-gatherer component and which can be managed by the community itself with no more than periodical visits from white advisers, technicians, experts and administrators. It should also emphasise that help will be dependent upon clear willingness and capacity of the community to contribute itself in cash or in kind in its establishment and development. In this region, however, a secure water supply will generally be required before a group can begin to establish itself.

Such a statement of policy will require decisions particularly relating to employment for wages, eligibility for unemployment benefit, support for special work projects and in relation to the conduct of the community store.

These smaller communities can meet most of their basic needs from their hunter-gatherer activities supplemented by the pensions

and child endowment payments received which are usually shared in accordance with Aboriginal traditional practice although this does not necessarily ensure that all are provided for. Some observers are concerned that the receipt of a substantial proportion of the cash flow by the women is disruptive of traditional authority patterns, but most appear satisfied that male priorities dominate in its use — probably excessively. However, most men seek the opportunity to earn money despite their preference for substantial leisure for their traditional pursuits. They have acquired new needs and desires and have been encouraged to expect employment because during the establishment period of the decentralised homeland places, work for wages has been offered for the making of airstrips, the building of stores, clearing and fencing garden areas, the reticulation of water and other similar projects. Before this, work for 'training allowances' was generally available in the Northern Territory settlements and to a lesser degree similar opportunities existed in South Australia and Western Australia.

When in the current year funds for such work dried up, community advisers became active in some communities in assisting Aborigines to apply for unemployment benefit. Although delays are frequent these benefits are, in due course, usually received. It was clear in most communities that Aborigines preferred to see their projects continued and to work part-time for wages. Indeed in some instances, they continued to work on the projects where the necessary materials were available. However, generally Aborigines have been content to accept the 'sit-down' money without working.

This is a critical question and policy in relation to it should be resolved promptly. There is little scope for private employment of Pitjantjatjara Aborigines in present circumstances within their own or nearby areas. It would be seriously damaging to them, their families and their communities if men capable of joining the workforce were obliged to move to areas where work might be available — and in present economic circumstances their prospects of employment anywhere are negligible. While there does not appear to have been any general policy decision, the practice appears to be growing of endorsing applications for unemployment benefit from Aborigines in these areas. The following aspects of the situation are relevant:

1. Unemployment benefit probably provides as much, if not more, income than Aborigines would earn from wages if work was freely available and they were able to choose freely between such work and unpaid leisure for their own pursuits.

2. Although work for wages is not now generally available
 - (a) there are socially important tasks to be undertaken of the special work projects type;
 - (b) Aborigines could be trained to reduce the need for scarce and more expensive white employees.
3. Until recently unemployment benefit was not expected in most Pitjantjatjara communities.
4. It seems irrational to pay men to be idle when socially valuable works are being terminated.

I believe it would be rational and practical to resolve this policy issue in the following way:

- (a) periodically (quarterly) officers of the Department of Employment should visit Aboriginal communities in remote areas and assess, in consultation with the community and Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the employment prospects and the probable number of eligible unemployed;
- (b) a grant should be made, through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, to the community on a quarterly basis equivalent to the unemployment benefit which would have been received by those assessed as likely to be unemployed;
- (c) the community should be authorised to use this grant to employ its members on approved work projects — on a basis which would provide them with an average of three or four days' work a week;
- (d) Aborigines from these communities should then be regarded as ineligible for unemployment benefit on the grounds that paid work is available to them within their own community;
- (e) the Department of Aboriginal Affairs should supplement these employment grants to cover material and equipment costs for approved projects provided that a reasonable contribution was made by the community to these costs.

This raises, of course, the question of how an Aboriginal community can contribute in money terms. The example of the Jamieson community is relevant and important. The community adviser at Jamieson has persuaded the community to fix prices for other than basic foodstuffs at higher levels than necessary to break even — with a heavier weighting on petrol and luxury goods like transistors. This provides the community with a surplus which it

can use to help finance projects of social importance. Other communities use income from film showings for similar purposes. Greater government aid could well be made conditional on communities being willing to tax themselves in this way. For this purpose control and efficient management of the store is essential.

Other camp locations

The third level of community organisation is represented by a series of camp sites within relatively easy access from the decentralised homeland places. They will be places visited from time to time for the care and protection of sacred and other important sites, for the conduct of ceremonies and similar traditional activities, as a base for hunting and food gathering, for the education of the young and simply for enjoyment. Several communities look forward to these locations being equipped with a reliable source of water and other facilities to make camping easier, but they do not contemplate them being other than holiday camps except where they are closely associated with important sites when old men and their immediate families may choose to 'sit-down' there for longer spells or even permanently. It is possible, of course, to envisage such camps becoming the focus for a further decentralisation as the population of the present homeland places grows and imposes strain on their environment.

This hierarchy of settlements from the central mission or government administrative centres through the homeland places to the occasional camps provide the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines with a range of social environments which offer a choice among degrees of complexity, social contacts and involvement in the white way of life. It is a diversity already much used, as mobility between the various levels and indeed between one group of related settlements and another is frequent. Such movement enables Aborigines (within certain limits) to achieve the particular amalgam of 'hunter-gatherer' and 'white' employment-oriented life-style they may desire; it enables them to experiment without final commitment; it provides an escape from the tension, from hostility and from fear of the unknown, inherent in the mixed racial and ethnic cultural situation.

Opinions differ as to whether Aborigines from different contexts can weld themselves into real communities. Tonkinson² reports that a substantially common religious and ceremonial life has enabled

2. R. Tonkinson, *The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal victors of the desert crusade*, Cummings, California, 1974.

Aborigines of different tribal origins to develop into an integrated society at Jigalong and something similar appears to have emerged among the nomads of McLeod's mob in the Pilbara.

I have no personal contact with the 'Jigalong mob' but Tonkinson's account suggests that the cohesion reflects the need to combine in opposition to the domination of an aggressive missionary control. In the case of McLeod's mob the continuing hostility towards white pastoralists, missionaries, and bureaucrats provided a similar aid to cohesion. Nevertheless, these instances are interesting in that those familiar with them in both cases give common dedication to the Aboriginal 'law' as the mainspring of the cohesion.

More frequently, however, evidence (e.g. from Hermannsburg) suggests that inter-group tensions persist and prevent the emergence of a sense of community between Aboriginal groups; certainly when white authority acts as an intermediary making direct resolution of conflict by negotiation, political action, or by force, unnecessary.

Aboriginal groups, in the past, frequently came together temporarily for special ceremonial and social purposes and these meetings were traditionally the occasions for the resolution of past conflicts at least for the period they were together. There are in their culture, therefore, elements of political machinery for common action which possibly they can build on. Thus at Yirrkala, in Arnhem Land, a complex of clans (more than sixteen) have with difficulty and continued rivalry evolved means to common action — first in the fight for land rights and in opposition to mining and thereafter for more domestic purposes. In that instance, the stimulus of the land rights campaign was clearly critical.

It is therefore of interest and importance that the Pitjantjatjara communities have formed a Pitjantjatjara Council which includes also some other closely related communities, essentially to work for an appropriate form of land title. As the situation now stands, it seems probable that title to the land of the Pitjantjatjara families and communities will be held by three separate authorities — the South Australian Aboriginal Lands Trust (composed predominantly of urban Aborigines and located in Adelaide), the Western Australia Aboriginal Lands Trust (similarly constituted and located in Perth), and one or more regional lands trusts for the portion of their land which is in the Northern Territory. It has been suggested, however, that the South Australian government is willing to vest land in the North West Reserve in the Pitjantjatjara Council.

It was forcefully explained to me that state boundaries have no

relevance to Aborigines. They seek to ensure that all Pitjantjatjara land is held by one or more appropriate local bodies in trust for the traditional owners. This body or bodies should be composed of their own chosen leaders and should be resident in Pitjantjatjara territory where also the instrument recording and symbolising Aboriginal title should be held. The nature and extent of the interest of particular Aboriginal families and groups in different areas of land will be difficult to define. Traditionally a man inherited 'his country' through his father although he had some lesser interest in his mother's country also. The position has now become more complex since an Aboriginal has rights and obligations also in relation to country within which he is born. Today, with the movement of Aboriginal groups away from their traditional country and towards sedentary settlements, it is less common for a child to be born within his father's country. These complexities do not prevent agreement being reached about rights to land among Aborigines but time and discussion is sometimes necessary and it would be exceedingly difficult for any external authority to determine the issues which may arise. It is essential therefore that the holders of title act as Trustees for the traditional owners and that uncertainties can be resolved by consensus among Aborigines concerned.

The need to work jointly for a satisfactory form of land title and its acceptable administration may, as in Yirrkala, provide the stimulus to the development of common political institutions among the Pitjantjatjara people which, in due course, may enable the various groups to act in common and so weaken the inter-group fears and hostilities. This, however, is a process which will take time and will meet many setbacks. In the meantime, too much should not be expected of it, but Aboriginal initiatives for consultation and common action such as the establishment of the Pitjantjatjara Council should be encouraged and wherever possible met by a positive response.

A possible strategy for survival

The Pitjantjatjara Aborigines are an interesting and distinctive set of communities standing culturally between a hunter-gatherer pattern of life and involvement in our own production-based society. They are communities whose oral culture is impressive and which have an identity with a part of Australia which is environmentally unique, of great scientific interest and profoundly beautiful. The communities seem deeply committed to their way of life and to

have the initiative and resilience to protect it and to adapt it to the needs of its survival and continued vitality. There seems a powerful case therefore for policies to be directed to assisting these communities to maintain that vitality.

A strategy designed for this purpose must, I believe:

- (a) respect Aboriginal priorities, initiative and independence;
- (b) respect and act to preserve the unique physical environment of the desert and the cultural heritage of the Aboriginal people linked with it;
- (c) reduce the degree of dependence of the Aboriginal communities on the rest of the community.

The foregoing sections of this report seek to make Aboriginal priorities clear. For the Pitjantjatjara people, the components of the 'good life' are relatively simple. First and most essential is the acknowledgment of the special intimate relationship between them and the land.

In recent years their own experience and political campaigns have made them aware of the tenuous nature of that relationship once the land becomes of interest to prospector, pastoralist or tourist agency. They seek therefore a clear title in Australian law to the land with which they have been identified — a title which will leave to their management the determination of the precise limits to the rights of individual communities, groups and families. Such a title should, they believe, be inalienable and should give to them the power to veto mining and to protect from intrusion the sites and areas of special importance to them. These rights are substantially assured by the recent commonwealth legislation establishing Aboriginal land rights and the state legislation in South Australia and Western Australia goes some way to the same ends.

However, there is deep concern and uncertainty about the means for the administration of these rights. State boundaries divide the territory of the Pitjantjatjara peoples. The state land rights legislation appears to entrust control to agencies outside their territory and composed of people unknown if not largely alien to them.

Secondly, these Aborigines seek a pattern of life which is flexible enough to allow time and opportunity for them to participate fully in the ceremonial aspects of their religious life. Closely linked with this is the desire for mobility which both widens the range of opportunity and reduces the degree to which these observances encroach upon other aspects of their lives. It could be, however, that this desire for mobility, linked as it is with the desire for motor vehicles, will be a major influence in breaking down their desire

and capacity to remain substantially independent of the white economic system.

Thirdly, they seek a pattern of life which has a substantial component of hunter-gatherer activities and material content. These are important aesthetically and emotionally, as well as materially.

Finally, they seek access to sufficient money income to provide adequate access to 'white' goods and services including vehicles to provide mobility.

It would perhaps be pleasing to add that the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines were anxious to reduce their dependence on government subvention of one sort or another, but it is hard to do so. So long as that subvention appears impersonally, as do pensions and child endowment, it tends to be accepted unemotionally. This may be evidence of the 'intelligent parasitism' of which Elkin wrote,³ but with few exceptions white citizens accept similar support without concern. The only suggestion of anxiety expressed by Aborigines in my recent journey related to unemployment benefit, and that could have originated in a desire to please the white visitor or simply from disappointment about the withdrawal of support for favoured projects. Thus there is little reason to believe that dependence on unemployment benefits is an important cause of concern to Aborigines or that where concern exists it is likely to persist.

Action to protect the physical environment and the material, social, and oral evidences of the Aboriginal heritage can justifiably be seen as benefiting not merely Aborigines but the Australian community at large and indeed the world as a whole. These are unique and of intense cultural and scientific interest. Furthermore, the consequence of damage to the physical environment of the Central Desert may well have seriously deleterious effects on the climate and amenity of the rest of the Australian continent. The employment of Aborigines in action to protect the environment and the Aboriginal cultural heritage can be seen, therefore, as a contribution by them to the total Australian welfare and a significant factor in the balance of exchange between Aboriginal communities and the rest of Australian society.

Such employment will therefore help reduce their dependence. Even though Aborigines are not greatly concerned about this dependence, it is a factor intensifying, and appearing to justify, the hostility of sections of the white community towards Aborigines.

3. See A.P. Elkin, 'Reaction and interaction: A food gathering people and European settlement in Australia', *American Anthropologist*, 53, (1951), pp. 164-88.

Furthermore, it is important to Aborigines that, as they become more involved in political action, they should have an effective answer to the charge of parasitism.

At present, the emphasis on the protection of the Aboriginal heritage is essentially based on a 'museum' approach — to record and preserve it as the surviving relics of past civilisations are preserved. This approach is important and the only way open to preserve relics of the Aboriginal heritage in areas where Aboriginal society has been destroyed. It has its place too, where Aboriginal tradition is still alive and vigorous. The museum at Yuendumu⁴ has been important in the education of young Aborigines in their own culture, but it serves also to help preserve the culture and to inform members of other societies. Interest was expressed in Docker River in the establishment of a similar museum and the idea is capable of extension to provide a 'chain' of museums embodying evidence of the cultures of all major Aboriginal tribal groups.

The establishment of such museums could be linked with the development of 'cultural' tourism. With the establishment of Aboriginal title to the land it would be possible to confine entry to 'conducted' parties under Aboriginal guidance and supervision. It is possible to conceive tours of great cultural, anthropological, as well as scenic interest which could be a useful source of income to Aborigines, as well as perhaps increasing the understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture. There is, of course, a serious risk that such tourist activities would vulgarise and depreciate the culture they were designed to display. Many friends of the Aboriginal 'way' oppose any such activities strongly. It is of course a matter for Aborigines to resolve, although it is difficult for them to foresee the effects of organised tourism. While careful experiment may be justified it would probably be best for the government not to encourage such developments.

However, the most effective protection of the Aboriginal heritage among the Pitjantjatjara people is to lend support to the practice of the living culture and to the social authority which derives from it. The case for this support is strengthened by the accumulated evidence that the religious sanction of this heritage alone gives Aboriginal communities the capacity to resist the damage which the impact of our way of life has elsewhere imposed upon

4. This museum, a stone building constructed by the older men of the community, houses sacred objects and in it 'ground paintings' of great beauty are still created and used for the instruction of young men. See the Council for Aboriginal Affairs *Report on visit to Yuendumu and Hooker Creek*, AGPS, Canberra, 1974.

them. It may be of special importance to support the Aboriginal education of the young.

The experimental work being carried out by CSIRO, the Department of the Northern Territory Forestry Branch, by the Aboriginal community at Ernabella, all demonstrate both the need for and the practicability of protecting the environment of Aboriginal and other communities in Central Australia. It is possible to envisage central communities such as Ernabella, Amata, Warburton and Docker River becoming centres for experiment and demonstration, for the development of nurseries, for the provision of training for the Aborigines from decentralised communities to enable them to conduct planting programs in and around their camps and settlements. These programs in some areas could be based upon arid zone irrigation techniques using run-off catchments of storm water.

The development of such planting programs could be projects for which communities could be authorised to use employment funds provided in lieu of eligibility for unemployment benefit. The programs should be designed and supervised by occasional visits from those involved in the experimental and training work at the central communities. In these communities training could be provided by offering periods of employment to Aborigines from related decentralised communities. This employment should be financed by an appropriate department or departments concerned with environmental protection or by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

It seems possible also that Aborigines could be involved in programs for the protection of the indigenous wild life. Bounties have long been paid for the destruction of eagles, dingoes and other indigenous birds and animals judged to be destructive. There seems no reason why they should not be paid for the destruction of feral foxes, cats, pigs, and feral grazing stock generally. It may be possible to devise programs artificially to improve and protect selected environments for endangered and important species so as to build up their numbers. Work involved in such programs would appear, like the environmental programs referred to above, to provide the time elasticity necessary to the Aboriginal life-style.

Apart from providing environmental and cultural services for the community generally, Aboriginal dependence could be reduced by enabling them to produce a larger proportion of the food and other commodities to replace those at present purchased through the store and by the development of production for sale outside their own community. Great care would be necessary in the development

of market-oriented projects since they are likely to impose serious environmental hazards and produce structural changes in Aboriginal society likely to impair its social viability. Experiment should therefore, at the outset, be concentrated on projects likely to diversify and improve domestic sources of food and other essentials, reducing dependence on imported stores.

Nutritional status would be greatly improved if greater reliance on 'bush tucker' were possible. The wild life protected environments suggested above would therefore be a valuable beginning. There appear, superficially, to be indigenous sources of food other than meat which should be capable of being farmed on a small, if not commercial, scale. Insects, honey ants, and witchetties, have traditionally provided a valuable and valued part of Aboriginal diet. Each exists presumably within an ecosystem of which known plants are part. There seems room for research into the nature of these ecosystems and into the possibility of developing them artificially as a basis for increased production. Some work was done by Applied Ecology Ltd on prospects for farming of witchetties. Witchetties also might well develop potential as a 'luxury' export. The possibility of domestic supplies of honey from native bees may be worth exploration.

Similarly experiment may justify the farming of reptiles which have always formed an important part of Aboriginal diet. There could also be an export market for these and for certain species of birds which it may be possible to farm.

While problems have been encountered in market gardening because of the constancy of attention required, some success has been achieved with melons and other short period crops, both for domestic consumption and external use. The experience of Desert Farms (now an Aboriginal enterprise) in Western Australia could well be studied.

Better prospects may exist for horticulture. CSIRO and Ernabella experiments indicate a wide range of possible crops including grapes, dates, olives, nuts and citrus of various kinds. These could be planted both in 'run-off' locations and where irrigation water is available. They call for intermittent rather than continuous care and could fit reasonably into Aboriginal time patterns.

One aspect of this experimental work which calls for study is the effect on it of the male-female division of labour within Aboriginal society. Many of the tasks involved appear to have more in common with the traditional roles of Aboriginal women than of men and indeed when similar projects have been tried it has usually been

the women who have performed continuing work in relation to them. While male attitudes seem to require that handling equipment is their preserve there could be advantages in planning agricultural and horticultural projects consciously as women's work.

In view of the importance attached by Aborigines to mobility and the impact therefore of motor vehicles on their way of life, it is necessary to consider whether a more considered policy may not be possible in relation to them. In some communities government grants have been received for the purchase of vehicles to facilitate ceremonial activities and to encourage the production of artefacts and works of art. Frequently these vehicles have been the cause of internal dissension; invariably they have been ill cared for and their life span has been short. More generally groups of Aborigines purchase aged and potentially derelict vehicles often at prices unjustified by their condition. Despite a remarkable capacity to get and keep such vehicles moving, Aborigines generally lack the knowledge and facilities to care for vehicles even when they are in reasonable condition.

Aborigines in this region appear to need:

- (a) group access to efficient vehicles from time to time for limited periods;
- (b) access to adequate service and repair facilities;
- (c) protection against fraudulent sellers.

There is at Ernabella a workshop building designed to serve as a training and service centre for Aboriginal communities in that area. It would seem reasonable to set up a commercially-oriented service at this location and to duplicate it in due course at other central settlements in the area. This service could aim to provide:

- (a) trucks and four-wheel drive vehicles under the control of trained drivers for hire to Aboriginal communities for a commercial hiring fee;
- (b) a repair and service workshop available to Aboriginal vehicle owners on a supervised 'do it yourself' basis and selling spare parts;
- (c) a range of training facilities of varying sophistication from driving and basic maintenance through to apprentice-type training for mechanics;
- (d) an inspection and valuation service to Aborigines purchasing vehicles. This service could well be supplemented by legislation to provide that a vehicle cannot be sold to an Aboriginal unless the purchaser is given a report and valuation from this service, the NRMA or equivalent body.

All of these are matters for experiment and the failure rate may well be high, but there is no reason to doubt that some successes could be scored. What is important is to conduct the experiments, field trials etc., in the context of the Aboriginal communities and within the environmental constraints described above — employing Aborigines as far as possible, both as a way of increasing their skills and incomes, and also of improving the quality of life open to them.

A recent CSIRO seminar on Aboriginal Nutrition and the Ecosystems of the Centre was a valuable beginning and a second seminar to be held in the Central Desert region is planned for 1977.⁵ It would be desirable for this seminar to be designed in the context of a group of Aboriginal communities, so as to set up a program of research and field trials realistically in the context of their various environments and with awareness of the constraints they impose. Studies of the nutritional, social, and economic status of the groups concerned, as well as of the environment itself, could be undertaken in advance, and so lend greater concreteness to the work of the seminar.

Possibilities will exist outside the food component. A study of the goods sold through Aboriginal stores would reveal products which could be replaced by locally made goods. Children's clothing, for instance, is manufactured by a women's home management training centre in Yuendumu and at Santa Theresa Mission. Communities could perhaps specialise in the production of selected goods for disposal through all stores in the region. Some central planning of design, supervision and distribution would be necessary. It would appear justified to subsidise such ventures, at least for some years so as to reduce Aboriginal dependence and to bring idle resources into use.

5. The first of these workshops organised by the CSIRO, 'The nutrition of Aborigines in relation to the ecosystems of Central Australia' took place in Canberra on 26-29 October 1976. The second was held at Alice Springs on 24-27 October 1977.

While none of these has responsibility for the use I have made of it, I am indebted to many for help in the preparation of this report.

The Institute of Aboriginal Studies provided me with comprehensive bibliographical and other background material relating to the Pitjantjatjara people. In addition I received personal help and advice from Professor Nicolas Peterson and from Noel and Phyllis Wallace. I drew heavily upon the papers prepared for the CSIRO symposium on Aboriginal nutrition and the ecosystems of Central Australia and am indebted to Dr Hetzel and research

workers in CSIRO in Alice Springs for valuable comment. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and its officers in Canberra, Adelaide, and Alice Springs, made possible the journey among the communities visited and were generous with information and advice. Mr Vandenburg of the Department staff in Western Australia was a congenial and helpful companion on the Western Australian part of the journey. My colleagues on the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Barrie G. Dexter and Professor W.E.H. Stanner, read the draft of the paper and gave me valuable comment.

Above all, I am indebted to the Pitjantjatjara communities themselves and to their advisers for the courtesy and help they extended to me.

A decade of progress?

The following paper, which attempts to summarise the developments and achievements in Aboriginal affairs since the referendum of 1967, draws together many themes from the work of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs and thus from the preceding papers in this collection.

Aboriginal Australians 1967-77

In 1967 the Australian electorate voted with astonishing unanimity to confer on the commonwealth parliament the powers to legislate in respect of Aborigines for effect throughout Australia. Although this power was not exclusive in that the states retained concurrent powers, this was the first time in Australian federal history that an Australia-wide approach to relations with the Aboriginal people had become possible and when the financial resources of the commonwealth government could be drawn upon for these purposes. After ten years it is perhaps an appropriate time to review developments over the decade and to assess what has been achieved and what remains to be done.

Such an assessment, however, is far from easy. It is difficult to speak of Aborigines as a whole in relation to any aspect of their affairs. There are probably between 120,000 and 150,000 persons who would identify themselves as Aboriginal Australians. The majority of these live in the northern and central parts of the continent although there are concentrations in the inner city areas of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, of Aborigines who have moved to the cities in search of work and stimulus or to achieve greater anonymity in the face of the hostility and prejudice which too often have been characteristic of white attitudes towards them. Among those who still live in a rural context about a third live in and on fringes of country towns, often in camps of varying degrees of poverty and squalor. These fringe-dwellers have largely lost contact with the traditional religion and culture of their ancestors although fragments of that heritage linger in a strong sense of identity with the land and the maintenance of close family relationships. Sometimes these fragments are still expressed in broken remnants of traditional languages and in half-remembered

A report for the British organisation, The Minority Rights Group, July 1977 which draws upon an earlier statement in the Murdoch Memorial Lecture.

stories. This fringe-dwelling pattern of life emphasises mutual dependence and acceptance of one another amongst Aborigines and reinforces their alienation from white society.

Those in the cities usually live in the poorest and most depressed areas, tending to cling together in the face of ostracism from white society. The resulting isolation has encouraged them to identify themselves with other deprived minorities abroad and to pick up from them political ideas and patterns of behaviour which give added strength to their alienation and justification to their bitterness but provide also models of political action and enable them to place their cause in a more universal context. Away from the cities and towns Aborigines have continued to live in ways much closer to the pattern of life of their ancestors. Most have been concentrated in mission communities and in government administered settlements as their land has been encroached upon and rendered unable to sustain their traditional life-style as hunter-gatherers. However, some remained on land with which their ancestors had been identified but which had been taken up on leasehold by white pastoralists. In the past these Aboriginal groups have frequently provided labour for the cattle industry and sometimes a degree of mutual dependence was established. However, during the past decade it has become compulsory for Aboriginal stockmen to be paid full award wages and this has been followed by progressive reductions in the employment offered to them. This reduction sometimes reflected a quite irrational judgment about the relative merits of white and black stockmen or even more basic racial prejudice, but sometimes flowed from the inability to combine in mutually acceptable form the responsibility (limited and undefined though it was) which the pastoralist previously had for the *whole* Aboriginal community from which he derived the labour he needed, with the new requirement for a more expensive responsibility only to the individuals actually employed. The reduction was usually achieved by increasing capital expenditure on fences and motor vehicles which reduced the need for the skills which Aborigines in fact possessed.

This diversity of circumstances and life-styles among Aborigines themselves and of relationships with the white communities with which they are associated makes generalisations exceedingly difficult. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that the federal government has not sought, as it now has power to do, to take over completely the administration of Aboriginal affairs nor to impose uniformity of policy and administration on the various states and territories. The attitudes and policies towards Aborigines

differ markedly from state to state and from community to community. Reference to these differences will be made at various points in this review.

Perhaps the most interesting political development since the referendum has been the emergence of a substantial consensus between major political parties in the federal parliament towards the objectives which should be sought in policies concerned with Aborigines. Following the referendum the then Prime Minister, Harold Holt, established the Council and Office of Aboriginal Affairs to identify for the government the essential problems facing Aborigines; to establish communication with Aborigines so as to ensure that their views were heard and understood; and to advise the government on policies to deal with these problems and on administrative machinery to give effect to such policies. Between the establishment of the council and the change of government at the end of 1972, it could reasonably be said that an internal doctrinal struggle occurred within the administration to determine the general philosophy which should underlie federal policies towards Aborigines. The official attitudes of Australian governments towards Aborigines have historically undergone many changes. The rather patronising kindness of Governor Phillip's Instructions and early behaviour after the first settlement quickly gave way to a mixture of contempt and fear which no doubt helped excuse the more or less conscious destruction of Aborigines and Aboriginal society which became the prevailing pattern. However, when that destruction was substantially complete, white Australians settled down with the comforting belief that Aborigines were doomed to extinction, victims of the divinely ordained 'survival of the fittest'. Official policy then became expressed as 'protection', the sentimental 'smoothing the pillow of a dying race'. As it became clear that the extinction was to be long deferred and perhaps would never occur the rationale of policy became 'assimilation' — to incorporate the survivors into our own society.

Essentially the struggle in the early years after the referendum was about the appropriateness of this established doctrine of 'assimilation'. The Council for Aboriginal Affairs became convinced from its contacts with Aborigines that they did not wish to be assimilated, indeed that one of the few things Aborigines held in common was a determination to maintain a distinctive racial and social existence within the Australian community; salvaging what was left of ancient traditions and building on their foundation a culture which would preserve for them a separate identity as Aboriginal Australians. Gradually changes emerged in official

statements of policy indicating a shift away from assimilation as a basic objective. These shifts were strongly opposed by conservative 'white' interests particularly in areas where Aborigines were numerous and in those sections of the government and mission bureaucracies which had been identified with the assimilationist approach. The major breakthrough came with the election of a Labor government under Gough Whitlam in December 1972. Its policy speech, although sparing of statements of a philosophical kind, contained specific commitments to grant land rights over Aboriginal reserves, to establish a land fund to purchase back alienated lands, to outlaw discrimination, to provide legal aid for Aborigines, and to establish a statutory basis for Aboriginal communities and their political and administrative organisations. These commitments in effect promised the right to independent and distinctively Aboriginal development.

The breakthrough was confirmed in 1975 when the Liberal Country Party Coalition formally abandoned assimilation as an objective and acknowledged the fundamental rights of Aborigines to retain their racial identity and their traditional life-style where they wished to do so, and indeed took over most of the major commitments made by their Labor predecessors.

Various terms have been used to describe this new approach: the Labor Party tended to refer to it as 'self-determination' while the coalition opted more cautiously for 'self-management'. This important change in objectives at the federal level has not been universally accepted nor has it been uniformly applied in the policy of the federal government itself. The attitude of the Queensland government and to a lesser extent the government of Western Australia retains much of the paternalist and assimilationist content which prevailed before the referendum. They are opposed to the granting of any privileges which accrue to Aborigines alone and to measures which involve any encroachment on the rights of white property holders. Furthermore many programs, including those of the federal government, continue consciously or unconsciously to be directed to assimilationist purposes or at least to put pressure on Aborigines to seek to be assimilated. This tendency is strengthened by the continued presence in the federal administration, particularly in the Northern Territory, of officials closely identified with earlier policies.

An added factor contributing to the persistence of older attitudes has been the inability of Aborigines directly to influence decisions of the major political parties. It has been estimated that there are six or eight seats out of a total of 127 in the House of Represen-

tatives, the outcome of which could be determined by an organised Aboriginal vote. However, few Aborigines have seen political action through these parties as likely to benefit them or their people. No member of the House of Representatives and only a single senator is of Aboriginal origin and in the main the advocates for Aboriginal causes in all political parties have been white, no doubt interpreting those causes in the light of their own preconceptions.

There are, however, signs of increasing political activity among Aborigines. For instance there appears to be a tendency in the Northern Territory for the Labor Party to establish closer relations with Aborigines and to choose Aboriginal candidates for electorates where there is a majority of Aborigines in the resident population. This development is interesting since in the past trade unions in the Territory have tended to see Aborigines as a threat to their employment privileges — as a potential source of cheap labour. The effect of this association may become apparent in elections for the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly due later this year.¹ Elsewhere, however, it seems that Aboriginal influence on political events will for some time continue to be exercised indirectly through pressure exerted by their own organisations and through agencies in which they collaborate with interested and sympathetic white friends. We shall return to this question of Aboriginal capacity to influence political events later in this paper.

Demographic factors

Reference was made earlier to estimates of 120,000 to 150,000 Australians who would identify themselves as Aborigines. There is a considerable element of uncertainty about these estimates partly because they can be based only on 'self-identification' but partly because of serious difficulties in obtaining effective census coverage of mobile, inarticulate, people suspicious of white authority. Some academic estimates put this figure at about 180,000.

Whatever the base from which forecasting begins, it seems certain that most Aboriginal communities are increasing at rates greatly in excess of the national average. For some of the same reasons the age profiles of these communities are difficult to construct but many Aboriginal communities in traditional and rural contexts show more than half their total populations under the school leaving age (generally fifteen or sixteen) with frequently as

1. In the event the Labor Party secured six of the nineteen seats in the Legislative Assembly, having held none before. Only one Aboriginal candidate, Neville Perkins, was returned.

many in the pre-school as in the school-going years. Such profiles are characteristic of rapidly expanding populations.

It may be wondered how these data can be reconciled with the high infant and child morbidity and mortality, which are known to characterise many of the communities. Before white occupation Aborigines were believed to have maintained a remarkably stable population over long periods, perhaps millennia, and to have established an equilibrium with the capacity of the environment to support them. There is no doubt that Aboriginal society made use of a variety of practices physical, medical and social, which constrained the reproduction ratios. They served broadly as selective processes as well as direct constraints and survivors probably tended to be healthier and better adapted. Most of these practices are proscribed or made difficult by the conventions of our own society.

Some people would link the current population growth with the effect of child endowment payments which have been a significant component in the cash income of many Aboriginal families and communities. It is possible that it has had some influence.

Whatever the causes of these population trends it seems certain that the Aboriginal population will by the end of the century exceed three hundred thousand. While this will still be a small proportion of the total population it will, assuming reasonably similar distribution to that now current, change the racial composition of some areas outside the major urban concentrations in interesting ways. Already in central and northern Australia Aborigines predominate outside the major cities and towns. This predominance will be more marked and Aborigines will become increasingly important politically even in the towns and cities as they become more conscious of their potential political strength. In the arid areas of the centre increasing numbers, a more sedentary life-style combined with the damaging effects of white Australian productive activities and of animals introduced by them could threaten an already fragile environment. In many country towns Aborigines already form a substantial proportion of the population and frequently white attitudes towards them can only be described as racist. With increasing numbers and growing political awareness among Aborigines increased tension may become apparent throughout these regions unless white Australian attitudes are substantially modified.

From the Aboriginal point of view the major issue which has emerged since the referendum and which has become the essence of self-determination and the test by which government attitudes, policies and programs will be judged, is the issue of Aboriginal

rights to land. It is not usually understood outside Australia that white settlement had meant that the Aboriginal people were absolutely dispossessed of their lands — dispossessed without negotiation, compensation or acknowledgment of lands which a United Kingdom Parliamentary Committee in 1837 considered were theirs by 'plain and sacred' right.

It is difficult for a person reared in a western European-based culture to comprehend the full significance of the land to an Aboriginal. Traditionally Aboriginal societies were composed of small mobile groups that moved from place to place within areas of land with which they and their ancestors had been identified from time immemorial, and which for them had deep religious significance. Many Aboriginal groups believed that through their land passed the pathways followed by totemic and spirit ancestors in the Dreamtime. These ancestors had moved through the land creating its physical features and the creatures, including man, who lived within it. They laid down for all time the pattern of life for these creatures, their relationships with one another and with the land itself, expressing these relationships in rituals to be performed. The purpose of these rituals was to protect the land, to ensure the renewal of its resources and to acknowledge and honour the presence within it of the spirit ancestors themselves. The performance of these rituals was therefore both the justification and purpose of life and the claims of the ceremonial life built around them took precedence over all other claims. A sense of identity with his ancestral land was therefore the core of Aboriginal life. To quote from my colleague Professor Stanner's *After the Dreaming*.²

No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word home, warm and suggestive as it is does not match the Aboriginal word which may mean camp, hearth, country, everlasting home, totem place, life source, spirit centre and much else all in one. Our word land is too spare and meagre. We can now scarcely use it except with economic overtones unless we happen to be poets . . . To put our words 'home' and 'land' together into homeland is a little better but not much. A different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance. When we took what we call 'land' we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and focus of life and everlastingness of spirit.

2. W.E.H. Stanner, *After the dreaming*, the Boyer Lectures, ABC, Sydney, 1968.

Thus the Whitlam government was focusing on the foundation of Aboriginal society and on the essence of self-determination when, following its election in December 1972, it announced that Aboriginal rights to land were to be restored and appointed Mr Justice Woodward to prepare plans to give effect to that restoration. The Woodward Report represents a landmark in Aboriginal affairs. It recognises not merely that for Aborigines land was 'the first essential for a people who are economically depressed' but also that its restoration alone could make possible the 'preservation of a spiritual link with his own land which gives each Aboriginal his sense of identity and lies at the heart of his spiritual beliefs'.

The report was concerned primarily with land in the Northern Territory although it was hoped both by the commission and by the government that its principles would be applied also in the various states. It contemplated Aborigines receiving title to land in two different ways. First Aborigines were invited to demonstrate to a commissioner appointed for this purpose the existence of traditional ownership rights to land within Aboriginal reserves and within other unalienated Crown land. Where such rights were demonstrated provision was made for granting unalienable freehold title to trustees chosen by the Aborigines themselves who would hold that title for, and on behalf of, the traditional owners who would progressively be identified and listed. In respect of alienated land, for example land granted to white landholders under leasehold for economic purposes such as cattle raising and within urban limits for residential and commercial purposes, provision was made for an Aboriginal Land Commission to purchase land for Aboriginal groups and communities either because they had been able to demonstrate traditional rights to it or simply because their circumstances established their need for it as a basis for their re-establishment socially and economically. While it seems possible that the intentions of the Woodward Report in respect of alienated land are being, and will be, limited and whittled away because of the opposition of leaseholders' representatives in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly there can be no doubt that the rights granted following the Woodward Report represent the biggest major advance in the status of Aborigines in Australian history since white colonisation.

The hope that similar principles would quickly be adopted in the states has so far had a variable outcome. South Australia had some years earlier established an Aboriginal Lands Trust and had provided for the granting of title to lands previously listed as Aboriginal reserves. While the work of the Woodward Commission and

the views now being expressed in forthright style by Aboriginal communities in South Australia are likely to bring about modifications of existing Land Trust legislation in that state, the position of Aborigines in relation to land within Aboriginal reserves in that state is at least as good as in the Northern Territory.

In New South Wales and Victoria the Aboriginal population is more dispersed, and Aboriginal reserves where they exist have for many years been small and not of great economic or social value. Such as they were, however, they have, since the presentation of the Woodward Report, been transferred to Aboriginal ownership. Apart from these limited reserves, land can be found for Aboriginal communities only to the extent that the Federal Land Fund Commission within the limits of its resources is able to acquire for them land coming on the market. This has occurred to a modest extent.

In Tasmania the number of Aborigines is small (perhaps between four and five thousand) and Aboriginal reserves, except for a couple of small islands in Bass Strait, do not exist. A major problem exists, however, in Queensland. The Queensland government has refused to legislate to grant title to land within Aboriginal reserves (which in that state are extensive) and has refused to allow the transfer to Aborigines of land purchased for them by the Federal Aboriginal Land Commission. Aboriginal reserves in Queensland remain the property of the Crown and are administered either by missions or by government officials.

In Western Australia an Aboriginal Lands Trust has been established which formally holds title to Aboriginal reserve lands. This trust is composed of urban Aborigines who are felt by many Aborigines in the North and Central regions among whom the traditional Aboriginal 'way' remains strong to have little knowledge of or contact with their concerns. There is pressure on the Western Australian government to establish regional lands trusts with membership chosen by the local Aborigines who are personally familiar with the traditional owners.

An interesting development from this desire for land rights to be expressed in local institutional form has occurred among the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines. These Central Australian communities speak a common language (or closely related dialects) and share a substantially similar religious and ceremonial tradition. They occupy sparsely a substantial area of the arid lands of the Centre which spread through the northern parts of South Australia, the eastern zone of Western Australia and the southern region of the Northern Territory. They are a remarkably mobile people and

move freely through this territory. To them it seems ludicrous that land which they consider theirs should by the accident of white political history be vested in three separate lands trusts established by three separate parliaments. The communities have combined to establish a Pitjantjatjara Council to press the governments concerned to establish a single lands trust for the whole area, to appoint to it traditional leaders chosen by the council and to vest the whole area in that trust with an instrument of title which would be held within Pitjantjatjara territory. This council since its informal establishment has developed in an interesting fashion. It acts as a means of consultation between its constituent communities and is pressing for administrative and executive powers in the area. Already other tribal and language groups are considering the establishment of councils on the same model. This initiative among people who in the past have shown little capacity for political organisation and action is indicative of the strength of concern about matters related to land.

This concern probably underlies the success of the two regional land councils composed of delegates from various Aboriginal communities established initially to assist the Woodward Royal Commission to understand the nature of traditional rights and obligations in respect of land. They have been given statutory powers under the land rights legislation and will assist Aborigines to establish traditional claims to land and to help identify traditional owners. The land councils have been given limited resources which enable them to employ their own professional and administrative staff. They have proved to be effective instruments for the expression of Aboriginal views relating to land and have demonstrated the capacity of Aboriginal communities to reach agreement about the nature and extent of the rights of different groups to different areas of land. The councils appear likely to develop as an important instrument for the expression of Aboriginal opinion not merely in relation to land but also about other issues of importance to Aborigines including the exploitation of mineral resources within Aboriginal land.

Mining

The Woodward Report did not accept Aboriginal claims to ownership of minerals found within their land since this would have conflicted with normal Australian law which vests all minerals in the Crown. Instead it proposed that Aborigines be given special privileges in relation to the exploitation of such resources: that mineral exploration and mining development should not occur on

Aboriginal land except with the consent of the Aboriginal owners and then on terms to be negotiated with the local community and with the relevant land council. It recommended, however, that the government (subject to certain parliamentary controls) could override this Aboriginal right to veto in circumstances where 'the national interest' required that the development should occur. This provision was apparently envisaged by Mr Justice Woodward as applicable in what might more accurately have been described as 'national emergencies'. It seems likely, however, that the present government will interpret it as identifying 'the national interest' with 'important economic benefits'.

Certainly Aborigines seem to have developed a cynical conviction that where substantial mineral resources are found within their land they will, despite their unwillingness, one way or another be compelled to accept its development. An additional complication is that the first instance which has arisen since the Woodward Report was presented involves the prospective mining of uranium within land which almost certainly will be acknowledged as Aboriginal-owned. The intense concern about whether uranium should be mined in any circumstances which is being expressed by many Australians following the studies by the Fox Royal Commission is tending to obscure the importance of this issue to the way in which the land rights legislation is to be interpreted. The land-owning Aboriginal groups and the Northern Land Council have continued to express their opposition to the mining despite the considerable financial rewards it would bring. It seems, however, widely accepted that their opposition will be overruled. If this is so the provisions for an Aboriginal right of veto may be important primarily in ensuring that Aboriginal communities share significantly in the financial benefits from mineral development and in making more likely its planning in ways intended to minimise the potential social damage to those communities.

As with land, the rights of Aborigines in relation to mining differ from state to state, according to local legislation and government attitudes. In South Australia Aboriginal communities have the right to reject mining development and this right, at least with the present government, appears to be more effective than in the Northern Territory, although it has not been tested by an important discovery. In Western Australia and Queensland the state governments retain complete discretion to approve development and to determine the conditions on which it occurs. Recent examples in Queensland suggest that Aborigines have little to hope for and much to fear from mining development within their territories ex-

cept to the extent that social pressure from other parts of Australia can be exerted on the mining interests involved. Some years ago the discovery of nickel deposits in Western Australia led to the relevant areas being withdrawn from Aboriginal reserves. When the deposits were not developed the land was restored to reserves but similar action could be taken again.

Experience in existing centres of mining activity in areas of predominantly Aboriginal population is far from encouraging from their point of view. Despite, in some instances, genuine efforts by the mining interests involved, the benefits to Aborigines in employment and increased opportunity have not been realised to any significant extent. On the other hand the disintegration of their own traditional society with the social and physical deterioration associated with it is almost invariably evident. The simple fact of major white populations in the area appears sufficient to ensure this disintegration.

A recent background report relating to health risks prepared for the Fox Royal Commission on Uranium Mining draws attention to other potential problems. Apart from possible dangers of carcinoma and leukemia derived from exposure to increased radiation (which are obviously greater for those, like the Aborigines, who can be expected to continue to live in the region), it is clear that increased numbers of new arrivals from diverse places of origin will greatly add to risks of disease. This risk is especially great for parasitic and vector borne diseases — particularly malaria since the relevant vectors are plentiful and the introduction of persons bearing the parasite is practically inevitable and quarantine measures are difficult to enforce.

Decentralisation among Aborigines

Apart from action to acknowledge Aboriginal land rights and interests in mining development perhaps the most significant development since the referendum is the emergence of what has been described as a decentralisation trend among Aboriginal communities. I have described some of the origins of this trend and some particular examples in the papers 'Decentralisation trends among Aboriginal communities', and 'The Pitjantjatjara Aborigines'. With some exceptions administrators were at first reluctant to provide services for Aborigines on a more decentralised basis. Consequently the frequently expressed desire to return to homeland territories was rarely put into effect although occasional and usually abortive attempts were made to do so. However, after

December 1972 the Labor government expressed itself as willing to assist communities who wished to re-establish themselves within their homeland territories. Indeed in some early instances generous aid was given and extravagant promises raised equally extravagant expectations. Subsequently this aid has been much more closely constrained and limited. Nevertheless Aborigines have continued to leave the larger settlements and to set themselves up in smaller groups — tribally and socially more homogeneous — within territory with which they identified. This trend has been evident in all parts of Australia where there are significant Aboriginal communities except in Queensland where the opposition of the state government to the movement continues to be strong. Although the pattern of these smaller homeland communities has not yet become clearly stabilised it seems likely that, away from major centres of white population, Aboriginal society will again be composed of smaller groups within territory with which they have traditional links. It is clear, however, that they will need to maintain lines of communication with larger centres from which stores and essential services can be derived.

White opinion about appropriateness of this decentralisation trend continues to be divided. Some see it as a reactionary move, a kind of return to savagery. Others see it as an appropriate expression of and response to the government's policy of self-determination or self-management. It seems certain that it is a truly Aboriginal response to problems which they encountered during the period when they were concentrated around cattle homesteads, missions and government settlements. It is unlikely therefore that Aborigines will readily abandon the new pattern of smaller settlements. Nevertheless their capacity to carry the policy further as many would wish, and their capacity to establish a satisfactory lifestyle within the smaller communities, will significantly depend upon the resources which the government is prepared to make available to them and their capacity to develop their own productive and administrative skills. The financial restrictions imposed last year upon expenditure on programs for Aborigines (as well as on most other categories of government spending) bore heavily upon decentralised communities — especially those which had only recently moved or were still preparing to do so. Minimum requirements for a new community were a reliable water supply — which in Central Australia meant a bore giving access to underground water with pump and windmill and a reasonably sized storage tank. Apart from these, a store and a vehicle to provide essential mobility and radio communication with larger centres

were almost as important.

It had been the policy of the Whitlam government to encourage communities to establish these facilities by their own physical effort, providing grants to enable minimum wages to be paid and materials to be purchased. Some of the work done would appear amateurish to trained tradesmen but the communities valued its results as evidence of their own initiative. The grants which made it possible were among the first victims of the financial 'squeeze'. In many communities much of the work continued by voluntary unpaid effort but when materials could not be purchased this became impossible also.

Furthermore the minimum personal income which the wages for this work (usually on a part-time basis) made possible was quickly cut off. Some communities found that their only cash income was that derived from old-age pensions and child endowment. Where the environment continued to provide generous supplies of 'bush tucker' this was sometimes enough to provide bare subsistence but dependence on store foods and other goods had grown and hardship increased. The outcome has been interesting. Largely because of the influence of sympathetic white advisers and administrators increasing numbers of Aborigines previously employed on these community projects applied for unemployment benefit and their claims were usually admitted often after long delays. Thus paradoxically Aborigines found that they would receive in unemployment benefit ('sitting-down money' it was called in some communities) more than it had been possible for them previously to earn for work on their community projects. Again in some communities work on the projects continued while materials were available but increasingly Aborigines became content to 'sit-down'. The more responsible elders were bitterly critical that they were no longer able to proceed with their chosen projects and concerned at the debilitating effect, especially on their younger members, of paid idleness in the face of tasks waiting to be undertaken.³

The government is now experimenting with a plan known as the Community Development Employment Plan (CDEP). Under this plan communities who choose so to do can receive wages grants equivalent to the unemployment benefits their members would otherwise qualify for, supplemented by a percentage added for materials and equipment, and hired expertise. With this they can provide employment in developing community facilities, estab-

3. For a fuller account of these developments, see the previous paper 'The Pitjantjatjara Aborigines: A strategy for survival'.

lishing potentially income-earning or self-sufficiency enterprises, and in providing community services. In return their members accept that they will no longer be eligible for unemployment benefit. Each community offered the chance to participate in this experiment has accepted. They will face problems deriving from their lack of appropriate skills and experience but the initial responses show enthusiasm and some capacity to improvise. It will be a good test of the 'self-management' concept.

One of the motives behind the 'decentralisation' trend has obviously been to escape the persistent and apparently universal presence of white managers, technicians, and officials, from the 'two level' society which it creates within their communities, and from the stultifying influence which it has upon Aboriginal confidence and initiative. However, Aborigines would like to take with them to their smaller and simpler decentralised communities selected components of the white man's technology and the goods and services in which it is embodied. Thus they value the periodical visits of small aircraft bringing stores and medical services; they see the benefits of radio communication both day by day and especially in emergencies; they dislike some aspects of the education provided for their children but they wish them to go to school; they realise their dependence on water from the bore, and look forward to it being piped closer to their dwellings; especially they cherish the mobility — the increased range for hunting, the contact with related groups, the opportunity to join in ceremonies — which motor vehicles provide.

It is difficult for them, however, to realise the degree to which these facilities depend upon men and women possessing the knowledge, the skills and the training to provide them — men and women who in the present lack of opportunities for training Aborigines will almost invariably be white, or, if Aboriginal, drawn from a different community background. Decentralised communities therefore face a dilemma: how can they combine a community receiving even those facilities, minimal by our standards, without having to accept at the same time the obtrusive dominance of white officials and experts. Some have already realised that they have escaped from the major settlement only to recreate in miniature the very conditions they had sought to leave behind.

The elements of a solution, pending the training of Aborigines to these tasks, seems to be emerging. This solution is based upon expertise being provided by visiting experts who will train Aboriginal assistants to carry on maintenance and routine tasks in their ab-

sence. This, supplemented by the access which radio can give to centralised sources of special skills, may enable Aborigines increasingly to be in control, at least of their day by day activities.

The final outcome of the decentralisation movement cannot be predicted but at least it is providing a context in which the outcome can be determined by Aboriginal decision in the light of Aboriginal priorities.

Discrimination

One of the more general objectives to which the Whitlam government was committed by its policy speech in 1972 was to outlaw racial discrimination. Before 1972 an anti-discrimination law had been in operation in South Australia and while the number of convictions under this law had been negligible, it was widely believed in South Australia to have had valuable effects: to have restrained those who wished to discriminate and to have encouraged those who sought to resist discrimination. An interesting benefit claimed for it was that perhaps for the first time in Australian history it put the law enforcement authorities, including the police, observably sometimes, on the side of the Aborigines. The fact that police were seen to warn hotel keepers and traders who were known to discriminate against Aborigines that they were risking legal charges and conviction was believed to be breaking down the almost traditional antagonism between the police and Aborigines. Some doubts must be felt about the validity of this last claim but most objective observers believed that the law had not the adverse social effects predicted and that it had been at least marginally helpful to Aborigines.

The Whitlam government turned its attention first to the question of whether it could ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. This action required a review of federal and state legislation to identify provisions which were inconsistent with the terms of the convention and made necessary negotiations with states so that legislative action could be taken to amend or repeal offending provisions. Major problems were found with provisions of the Queensland legislation relating to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Subsequently in 1975 the Whitlam government introduced the *Racial Discrimination Act* which made discrimination on racial grounds illegal and established a Commission for Community Relations. The commissioner was empowered to investigate complaints of discrimination; to conciliate between the parties; and, in the event of conciliation

being ineffective, to issue the complainant with a certificate which entitled him to take civil action for relief or for damages. The commissioner was also empowered to develop educational and other programs designed to reduce or eliminate the causes of discrimination.

The legislation, incidentally, rendered invalid some provisions of Queensland legislation affecting Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Some amendments to those provisions have since been effected but Aboriginal organisations continue to criticise them as still discriminatory in practice.

The commission has shown energy in the formulation of educational programs, in mobilising public concern and in exposing to police attention evidences of discrimination. Thus an early report by the Commissioner on the existence of racial discrimination in northern New South Wales and North Queensland states bluntly, 'Racial discrimination exists in the centres visited on a scale which is described as wholly discriminatory against Aborigines and as affecting practically every aspect of their lives' and 'The Aboriginal community is an oppressed community and does not have the facilities necessary to enable it to attain the full exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights'.

The Aboriginal Legal Service to which reference is made below has, in New South Wales and subsequently in other states, acted to combat discrimination against Aborigines by police and other law enforcement agencies. It has supplemented its representational work by educational campaigns designed to improve understanding of Aboriginal people among the police and to improve relationships with them. The Commission for Community Relations, Amnesty International, church organisations and others continue their efforts but these have brought little change in the attitudes from which discrimination derives nor have they stimulated to greater activity those whose influence could limit its effects. In some states — especially Queensland — discrimination continues to be severe and frequently blatant. The decision by the Queensland Minister for Lands to refuse approval for the transfer of a pastoral lease acquired on behalf of an Aboriginal community by the Federal Aboriginal Lands Commission is a case in point. It was reported that a legal opinion was given that neither the decision nor the law under which it was made could be challenged as discriminatory because the law did not require the minister to state the reasons for his decision!

Discrimination remains a fact of life for Aborigines and so far community attitudes do little effectively to discourage or counter it.

In comparable situations unemployment among Aborigines is many times that of white workers. Infant mortality, child and adult morbidity, life expectancy — indeed all measures and indicators of health — demonstrate that the position of Aborigines is markedly inferior. Proportionately to their numbers Aborigines are exposed to arrest and imprisonment on a wholly different scale. The numbers of Aborigines in the higher levels of education, in the professions, in the bureaucracy, in all positions of power and influence are negligible. Despite the proscribing of racial discrimination Aborigines live with such evidences of it day by day.

Social welfare programs

Policy in relation to Aborigines is expressed not merely in laws and decisions dealing with Aborigines as such but in the whole range of services and programs for which the various levels of government are responsible. Thus there can be no doubt that government departments and agencies responsible for programs in health, housing and law and order etc., will be of critical importance in the development of Aboriginal welfare.

Education

While assimilation was the avowed object of Aboriginal policy it could be argued that the task of particular departments and agencies was to ensure that the services and facilities provided for the community generally were equally available to Aborigines. Thus in education the objective generally could be seen to be to ensure that compulsory education applied to Aboriginal children, that they were exposed to the same instruction, in the same curriculum, in schools possessing the same resources as those provided for the children of the community generally. The test of success for educational authorities would be the production of Aboriginal school leavers competent to take their place along with others of their age in a predominantly white society, accepting its values and fitting into the pattern of life it provided.

However, if the assimilationist objective is superseded a different approach will be necessary. Thus an education designed to enable Aboriginal children to live effectively in their own society would clearly call for a different educational content, a different pedagogy, different schools, and would have different measures of success. Even more, an education designed not merely to enable them to live effectively in their own society but also to deal effectively with those aspects of white society which they must encounter and to give them genuinely effective choice whether or not to become part of white society in preference to their own, would obviously

present even greater problems in educational policy, content and organisation. These presumably should be the objectives of education in a society committed to self-determination and self-management.

The education provided for Aborigines when assimilation was the avowed objective met the test of success in so few instances that they could be ignored. As an instrument of assimilation educational practice was a failure. It tended to alienate the Aboriginal child from his or her family and community, to cause him to question and frequently to reject its values and its traditions; to destroy his Aboriginal identity and to leave him restless and alienated from his own society without giving the opportunity or the competence to join white society.

Despite these evidences of failure the prevailing patterns of education of Aborigines continue along substantially unchanged lines and a fundamental review of the implications for educational theory and practice of the changed objectives of policy for Aborigines has yet to be undertaken.

Perhaps the most significant development so far has been the establishment of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme and the Aboriginal Study Grants. These two schemes were designed to increase Aboriginal access to secondary and to tertiary and technical education respectively. They are therefore potentially important in increasing Aboriginal capacity to take a place in Australian society generally. They have been effective in increasing the numbers of Aboriginal children who proceed to higher levels although these remain at ratios markedly below the proportion of the white community generally even where circumstances are similar. There is continued evidence that Aboriginal performance is comparatively poor although a recent report indicates that about 8 per cent of Aboriginal secondary students are doing extremely well and a substantial proportion adequately. The link between performance and the general socio-economic status of the family and the relevance to Aboriginal priorities of the educational content cannot reasonably be doubted.

The picture, however, is not wholly dark. Education departments in all states and the Northern Territory now have senior administrators with particular responsibility for Aboriginal pupils. The rate of training of Aboriginal teachers and teachers' aides has been greatly stepped up although it is still far from adequate to the needs of the situation and the number of special training courses and other opportunities for them to improve their professional status has been greatly increased. Greater significance is now accorded to research into the problems of Aboriginal education.

Attention to these issues at the higher administrative and academic levels seems nevertheless to be confined within the limits of the present educational structure, accepting its basically assimilationist purposes. There are, however, signs that at the grass roots levels where teachers confront a basically Aboriginal society they are more conscious of the need for change and there are interesting evidences of innovation.

This innovation has been sparked by two main factors: firstly the decision by the Whitlam government that wherever appropriate Aboriginal education should begin in the indigenous language of the children; and secondly the desire of decentralised communities to have their children taught by teachers drawn from their own members. The first of these factors has led to a vigorous response by linguists and teachers from which important developments in language pedagogy and the formation of concepts are flowing. In these, Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants have contributed significantly.

From the need to rely largely on members of decentralised communities with low levels of professional training has emerged the technique of the visiting teacher. Thus a fully trained (usually white) teacher will visit a community for two or three days, perhaps every two or three weeks. The visit is designed to assist the resident teaching assistant to plan and prepare for the work of the next fortnight — designing the lessons, preparing the necessary teaching aids, work books, and looking over the results of the previous period.

The technique offers promise and could be used to build a local community-based content to the education in decentralised schools, thus increasing its relevance and value to the community. So far this promise is largely unrealised. The system lacks a coherent educational philosophy, it lacks a considered and practicable locally based curriculum, it lacks the support of research and educational planning, and above all, it lacks resources. When for instance it is compared with the well planned ingenious and resources-backed program for the education of isolated white children through the School of the Air, its deficiencies are abundantly evident.

Despite these deficiencies a fundamental reconsideration of educational policy and practice in relation to Aborigines has begun. It will be many years before its effects are widely felt but the leaven has begun to work.

Health

A somewhat similar intellectual revolution has begun in the field of health. Before 1973 health policy was concerned primarily with the establishment of professional therapeutic services and well equipped hospitals, concentrating on the treatment of disease. Evidence now suggests that poor Aboriginal health measured by infant mortality, malnutrition and widespread morbidity in children and adults is primarily a reflection of the adverse conditions in which the Aborigines live on the fringes of white communities and in settlements, and the failure to develop a pattern of life suitable for communities more sedentary than those of their past. Nevertheless, the therapeutic emphasis continues. There can be little doubt that this approach has been the cause of expensive failure. There are monuments to it in various parts of northern and central Australia in the form of impressive hospital buildings frequently unstaffed and empty of patients — their aseptic ambience is singularly unwelcome to Aborigines. These buildings contrast sharply with the poverty and squalor of the camps and are frequently the target for vandals. Their results on the health of Aborigines are profoundly discouraging. Thus for example a recent report by a visiting medical officer through a number of Central Australian communities indicated high levels of otitis media, rhinorrhoea, conjunctivitis, bronchitis and diarrhoea among pre-school children with forty-two out of 282 children showing evidence of all these conditions. Trachoma continues to be widespread and scabies is a common outcome of unsanitary camp conditions.

In other words existing health care measures are ineffective. The emphasis on therapeutic rather than preventive medicine has compounded the problems arising from socio-economic causes and from the cultural gap between Aborigines and health officers. However, there are encouraging signs of change.

It is now officially recognised by most government health authorities that Aboriginal health programs must be focused on the community and that their effectiveness in improving nutrition and hygiene will depend largely upon how far the community itself is involved in the design and conduct of the programs. The official health worker must now see his task as essentially educational and must build up and rely increasingly upon resources which can be found within the communities themselves. For this local Aboriginal health workers will be essential and official policy is increasingly being directed to their training and to the development of more effective communication between them and professional medical and health workers placed at centres within the region. Increasingly, of-

ficial health policies acknowledge also the importance of traditional healers who exist in most communities and who have access to a fund of traditional health-related lore. Collaboration with them can help bridge the cultural gap and render preventive medicine the more effective. This transition to a preventive, community-based, health program is in its early stages and encounters resistance from some practitioners who see it as undermining professional standards and privileges. But here as in education, the social and intellectual ferment is at work and its influence grows.

Reference should be made here to the emergence over the last few years of the Aboriginal Medical Service. This organisation originated in Sydney, New South Wales, where a group of politically active Aborigines persuaded some concerned practitioners, some associated with the medical schools at the Universities of New South Wales and Sydney, to help them develop preventive and treatment programs for Aborigines in the central areas of Sydney where health problems were acute. The management of the service was retained by Aborigines and the white practitioners accepted the role of employees. To the largest extent possible the programs are concerned with improving the nutritional status and general hygiene of the Aborigines and are carried out by Aborigines themselves. From a health point of view the organisation seems to be increasingly effective and can be seen as an impressive example of Aboriginal initiative.

Like most Aboriginal organisations it is also politically oriented, working as a pressure group for the Aboriginal cause generally. This, together with the fact that the magnitude of its tasks frequently exceeds the limited resources available to it (primarily from federal government sources) probably accounts for the criticism sometimes directed at it from Canberra. Recently federal government financial support was withdrawn from the Sydney service. Widespread protests have been mounted and it is hoped that it will be made possible for the service to continue and develop its work.

The Sydney model has been copied in some other large cities and country towns and despite administrative problems the services have achieved valuable results. At Alice Springs in central Australia a substantial organisation provides support for a wide range of communities throughout the centre and has developed valuable training facilities for Aboriginal community health workers.

This central Australian service recently brought together the professional skills of leading ophthalmologists, the logistic resources of the army and their own contacts with Aboriginal communities to mount a program to identify, treat and, where

necessary, to operate on sufferers from trachoma, a disease eminently treatable but from which almost all Aborigines in central Australia suffer — many to the point of blindness. This program was a masterly exercise especially in its human aspects. Great care was taken to communicate to Aborigines the purposes and possible benefits from it. Although participation was wholly voluntary and the ideas to be conveyed were unfamiliar and to a degree frightening to the uninformed, the response was remarkably high and the results encouraging. It is a praiseworthy example of the possibility of Aborigines directing professional skills to socially valuable purposes and of making use for them of the social organisation of the Aboriginal communities themselves.

Law and order

A similar intellectual revolution in relation to law and order has scarcely yet begun. Reference has already been made to the grossly unequal burden which Australian law enforcement authorities throw on to Aboriginal citizens. Persistent requests from Aboriginal communities for their own organised system of law to be acknowledged, respected and given the support of official law enforcement authorities have been largely ignored except where individual magistrates and judges, in dealing with individual cases where traditional law was involved, have shown understanding and humanity ahead of prevailing social attitudes. It is only within the last year that the Australian governments have formally sought a study by law reform agencies of the content of Aboriginal law and have sought advice on how far it should be supported by law enforcement agencies and how far Aborigines and agencies established by them should be involved for their own communities in the enforcement of Australian law itself. These matters are at long last the subject of a reference to the Law Reform Commission.

There can be little doubt that for the vast majority of Aborigines, Australian law and its agencies act as instruments of coercion in the interests of the all powerful white majority. Above all the police are seen as an ever present symbol of the dominance of that majority. In a recent book, *Fear, favour or affection*, the late Elizabeth Eggleston⁴ mounted staggering evidence of the inequities in law enforcement from which Aborigines have suffered and continue to suffer and their powerlessness to derive justice from institutions and agencies of the law in their dealings with white society.

4. Elizabeth Eggleston, *Fear, favour or affection*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1976.

Alcohol

Deeply involved in both the issues of health and law enforcement is the issue of alcohol abuse by Aborigines. There is at the present time almost a mounting hysteria amongst the white community about this abuse. It is ironic to hear from leaders in that community expressions of fear that drunkenness will destroy all that is left of traditional Aboriginal society as if our own insensitivity, selfishness and brutality had not been the prime causes of that destruction. Drunkenness amongst Aborigines is much more visible than corresponding abuse by white people. We recognise it promptly because it confirms our expectations and the conventional wisdom about Aborigines. It has always been 'known' that an Aboriginal cannot 'hold his grog like a white man'. Furthermore this abuse is a convenient peg on which to hang expression of resentment against benefits being granted to Aborigines and against policies directed towards greater autonomy for them in the conduct of their affairs. Expression of such concern and resentment is frequently a prelude to a demand for the return to the institutional pattern of white controlled missions and settlements.

It is not to be denied that alcohol excesses are a threat to Aboriginal health and welfare. How much worse it is than the corresponding threat within the white society is difficult to determine. What is clear is that Aborigines themselves are concerned about this problem and that many Aboriginal communities have shown concern and some desire and capacity to deal with it. A variety of experiments in social control can be seen at work in these communities. Thus some communities have established and managed canteens with limits on the kind and quantity of liquor sold; some issue permits for the purchase of liquor for consumption only in the home; one community has purchased the local hotel where the Aboriginal council runs a 'quiet house' to the general satisfaction of Aborigines and other residents. Some of the more experienced local Aboriginal councils have sought backing from government law enforcement agencies for their own measures to impose social discipline in this matter. Regrettably authority and support for their efforts has not as yet been granted. When an Aboriginal council deriving its authority in part from the Australian government, but in part from traditional sources in Aboriginal society itself, shows itself willing to accept this responsibility, we are unwise to deny it the opportunity and our full support. The only alternatives to local Aboriginal self-discipline will inevitably involve discrimination, and resistance can be expected to them as renewed assertions of alien power.

Housing

There is no element in social policy for Aborigines the results of which have been so disappointing and so confusing as that related to housing. The social attitudes of most Australian people are expressed more effectively in their attitude towards housing than almost any other single issue. Much of the distress felt by many sympathetic Australians at the conditions in which Aborigines live has centred upon the poverty of the dwellings which they frequently occupy. The Whitlam government came to office with an avowed intention of housing the Aboriginal population at levels reasonably comparable with the rest of Australian society within ten years. Efforts to achieve this have resulted in frequent failures and disappointment, despite a substantial number of successfully housed Aboriginal families, especially in urban and country town contexts. These disappointments are most common in central and northern regions. In their anxiety for speed the government seized upon an institutional arrangement which had been established by their predecessors, the right of an Aboriginal community to establish its own housing society, a kind of co-operative housing agency. These associations were offered generous financial support and, because of the inability of government agencies to provide them with technical and professional aid sufficiently rapidly, were authorised to enter into contractual arrangements with private consultants and architects. So far from speeding the construction of dwellings, and bringing to bear on housing problems fresh and innovative ideas, these arrangements frequently led to gross waste, incompetence and abuse of the trust of the local community. Most consultants found effective consultation with their clients too difficult or were too impatient to achieve it. Consequently preconceived notions and designs were imposed on communities which did not understand them and the consultants were unable or too prejudiced to explain them.

The basic cause of these failures was a refusal to recognise that housing occupies very different places in the priorities of traditional Aborigines and in those of people in our society; that many components in traditional and contemporary Aboriginal life-styles depend upon mobility and are incompatible with the sedentary condition implied by the European-style housing. Most of all the failures reflected an inability or unwillingness to establish communication with Aborigines and to give an appropriate weight to those elements in their social attitudes which were unfamiliar or incompatible with our own.

Thus policy relating to housing and the physical settings of social

life in predominantly Aboriginal contexts remains an area where the kind of intellectual and emotional revolution already at work in education and health policy has made little progress. Particularly because of our own attitudes to those aspects of life, Aborigines have come to see 'white-style housing' as a kind of status symbol, the rejection of which they know will be interpreted by us as evidence of their inferiority. At the same time neither government agencies working in this area, architects and planners, nor Aborigines themselves have followed through adequately the implications for other aspects of Aboriginal social and economic life of a sedentary life-style set in European housing with all the complex social implications involved in such a life-style. The issues are very difficult to grasp, calling for familiarity with technological, economic and social variables of a kind beyond the experience of almost all Aborigines. It is not surprising that some who have demanded Australian suburban-style dwellings 'for show' have continued substantially to live outside them in ways with which they are familiar.

Aboriginal organisation

Aboriginal society traditionally was composed of small groups whose relationships with one another were frequently suspicious and hostile. From time to time groups who shared a common language or religious and ceremonial tradition came together for limited periods, for common purposes. There was, however, little sense of a common identity between the various groups where ceremonial or language affiliation did not exist. It has only been since white occupation and the emergency need for groups, however separate and mutually suspicious, to work together to resist a common danger, that some sense of identity between Aborigines of different kinds has begun to emerge. This sense of identity is still largely embryonic and lacks effective institutions through which it can be expressed.

Before the referendum the only effective instrument for action in the Aboriginal cause was the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, a federation of a number of separate organisations some of Aborigines, some of white sympathisers, some of interested trade unions and political organisations. The federal council met in annual conference to urge the various governments to more sympathetic and effective action in relation to Aboriginal affairs and achieved some reforms as well as stimulating concern among socially aware members of the com-

munity and giving Aborigines their first experience in political action.

The federal council tended to go into decline following the change of government in December 1972, when increasing demands among Aborigines for such organisations to be controlled and administered by Aborigines tended to reduce the participation of white sympathisers. This decline was intensified by the establishment by the Whitlam government of a National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) composed of elected representatives of Aborigines from all parts of Australia. This consultative committee proved something of a disappointment both to the government which established it and to Aborigines, urban, rural and traditional. In operation it seemed both isolated from the local influences of those whom its members were supposed to represent and ineffective and powerless in its dealings with government. There were, not surprisingly, weaknesses in the structure and composition of the NACC, but the fundamental deficiency was the failure of the government to entrust it with real authority or to provide it with resources which would have enabled it to develop its own capacities. Recent changes in the composition and functions of the NACC have yet to be tested⁵ but on the face of it they do not seem likely to overcome the difficulties which led to disappointment with its predecessor. There is no indication as yet of willingness to entrust it with either authority or significant resources. Recently there has been something of a revival in the role of the federal council as an Aboriginal dominated political instrument with which sympathetic white organisations also can identify. As a source of political pressure it has the advantage compared with the NACC of not having to accommodate itself to dealings with the government and its officials.

More important to most Aborigines in predominantly Aboriginal communities are the councils established under federal and state law by them for the conduct of their affairs. The performance of these councils is uneven but in some instances, for instance in the case of the Yirrkala communities, they have developed into effective political and administrative agencies. The Yirrkala Council presides over the affairs of a large multi-clan community and despite many internal difficulties and power conflicts, has demonstrated effective capacity in opposition to the local mining com-

5. The Committee of Inquiry into the Role of the NACC, under the chairmanship of Dr L.R. Hiatt, was appointed on 8 April 1976 and reported to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on 4 November 1976.

pany and in the development of the campaign for Aboriginal land rights.

I have already mentioned the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Medical Service established initially in New South Wales as a result of action by urban Aboriginal activists mobilising socially conscious professional men and women. The success of these organisations has shown that white professional practitioners who are willing to put their skills at the disposal of Aboriginal controlled organisations can establish a relationship of trust with Aborigines. These New South Wales organisations have been duplicated in other states and have in effect been accepted by the government (with reservations and doubts) as an independent Aboriginal controlled element in the administration of government programs.

A particularly interesting recent development is the emergence among the Pitjantjatjara speaking peoples of Central Australia of a council, representative of communities spread over more than a thousand miles of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. It may well provide a model for other regionally based groups of communities with a common language.

Against these successes among emerging Aboriginal institutions must be set others which have faltered or failed, but there is good reason to believe that increasingly the successes are becoming more frequent and more impressive and that models are emerging which can be copied wherever it is necessary to take united action to express Aboriginal priorities and to act to achieve them.

Closely associated with the emergence of these political and administrative institutions is the growth at national, state, regional, and local level of what might be called an Aboriginal intelligentsia: a growing body of men and women deeply committed to the Aboriginal cause and with sufficient understanding of the English language and of Australian society to be able to deal with it effectively in the interests of their own people. An increasing proportion of this intelligentsia is tradition-oriented, including men fully initiated and involved in the religious and ceremonial life and in the preservation of the essence of the Aboriginal law. Parallel with this political and administrative intelligentsia there is a growing community of Aboriginal artists: practitioners in the traditional Aboriginal arts of music and painting, theatre and, less traditionally, poets, and writers in English, as well as in their own languages. No one has yet done for Aboriginal Australians what Nyerere in his *Ujamaa* did for Africans in the formulation of an ideology derived from their own traditions but relevant and applicable to contemporary life. Nevertheless there is in this emerging intelligentsia

of politicians, administrators, writers and artists, a source from which such an ideology may before long emerge to unite and give common purpose to Aboriginal aspirations and political action.

There is little in the history of the decade since the referendum about which white Australians can feel complacent, but the way ahead is clearer and the ferment of ideas necessary to open that way has begun. Above all, Aborigines are developing the sense of a common identity, the institutions of political action and the intellectual and spiritual leadership which will give increasing authority to their claim to move along this way by their own efforts and at their own pace. Hope for the future lies essentially in their growing capacity to maintain these trends. That capacity would of course be more effective if it were matched by an increasing desire and determination among white Australians generally to welcome and support Aboriginal initiatives. I wish the evidence justified more optimistic expectations about such changes in white attitudes.

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