

To.
The Honorable H.
Prime Minister of Australia



Dear Mr. Holt,

Enclosed is my submission as requested. It is my sincere and honest effort. I feel sure, after having that conversation with you in New York, that you will accept this submission in the spirit given.

I do not claim to have all the answers to the Aboriginal question in Australia. However, my experiences as an Aboriginal and my following University training does give me some suitable background.

Brochures to supplement my submission will be forwarded through the High Commission in London. They are not in any definite order. Special consideration should be given to the address by the Honorable Arthur Laming.

I apologise for the paper on which the matter is outlined.

Yours Faithfully
Charles Perkins

reply f. 37

Following an interview in New York with the Prime Minister, the Hon. H.R. Holt, I hereby submit for consideration my humble recommendations. The lack of elaboration in my submission is due to two factors. One is the note of urgency with which the material was compiled. Secondly, most of my technical data has already been forwarded back to Australia. The principles and corresponding views expressed are the ones which I consider relevant to the Australian Aboriginal situation. They are my opinions alone and not a reflection of any organisation to which I belong. I do not wish to write a comprehensive critique of Aboriginal Affairs in Australia today, nevertheless, some general remarks are included to complement principles generally expressed.

When discussing Aboriginal Affairs, what must be ultimately defined is who is an "Aboriginal". Biological, social and legal factors are relevant in consideration of an adequate definition. Respective states throughout Australia have formulated their own definitions - all are unsatisfactory and unrealistic. I define an Ab-original as (a) any person of Aboriginal descent and (b) who wishes to be identified as an Aboriginal and/or can be identified as such. There are problems involved in interpretation of any definition. They can be overcome in various ways. In Canada and the U.S.A. a roll is drawn up and every Indian is registered. If an Indian is not on the roll then he or she is not considered to be an Indian legally. A corresponding situation could exist here for Aboriginals. Some would criticise this method on the basis of a division being created in Australian society. This may have some validity however, significant benefits can be gained from Aboriginal identification, pride in race and eventual full and independent participation in the community.

How
ambus?

A Federal Aboriginal Affairs Bureau, based in Canberra should be established which caters for the needs of Aboriginal people throughout Australia. The organisation should:-

1. Be the responsible agency for Aboriginal people throughout the Commonwealth of Australia.
2. Formulate national policy pertaining to Aboriginal Affairs.
3. Administer through existing State Departments the new Federal policy.
4. Have a Minister as the responsible head.
5. Be as free as is reasonably possible from the political party sphere.
6. Be staffed with trained, competent personnel with Aboriginals given preference for positions of responsibility.
7. Be allocated sufficient monies enabling fulfilment of all acceptable programmes. Finance should not be restricted. In America over 400,000,000 dollars are spent on Indian Affairs. This amount caters for the needs of only 400,000 registered Indians.

The Federal Aboriginal Affairs Bureau should be the main instrument of social change. It should be the body which stimulates change where necessary; formulates and implements programmes; co-operates with existing agents in the general community and provides the basic organisation for the rehabilitation of the Aboriginal in Australia. It has many functions and some of the more important ones are listed and analysed.

1. EMPLOYMENT

This factor is of major importance. Much of the problems associated with the assimilation or integration of Aborigines into Australian society stem from this aspect. Many Aborigines are unemployed and/or unemployable due to lack of skilled training and education - social and scholastic. It is often claimed that Aborigines do not want to work. This is of course incorrect. It is merely the lack of factors mentioned that restrict them from obtaining, or remaining in, employment once obtained. All of the adult education facilities on reserves, missions, or in the urban setting are unacceptable. Results point to this fact. They have no real direction nor are they generally aware of the inclinations or capabilities of the Aboriginal people.

Enclosed is a brochure from a pilot scheme in operation in California. Something similar with relevant adjustments can be attempted throughout Australia. The Aboriginal needs to be trained to accept employment and to live in the environment where employment is found. Thousands are ready and willing to move off reserves and missions if they are prepared for such a change. There is a population explosion on most reserves at this moment in time. The majority of residents are trained for reserve life only. They are completely unsuited for the urban setting which to them is a hostile environment.

Training Centres

I propose that training centres, both on and off Aboriginal Settlements be established in relevant areas, e.g. in major cities, where the Aboriginal and his family, if necessary, can accept skilled and social training. I emphasise skilled training at this point - education in the social and scholastic field can be examined under the education category. In these centres the adult can undergo classes in most of the trade fields e.g. welding, motor mechanics, carpentry etc. This must be under the supervision of qualified and dedicated instructors. The period of training must result in some diploma or certificate of competency being awarded. Employment must then be found in an acceptable area. Follow up work must be organised to cater for problems arising after employment.

The male aged 15 - 18 years could undergo some similar training if required. However, training should usually be in the form of apprenticeships, or perhaps a course completed in some other field in which he may be interested, for example music or sign writing. This latter group can usually find suitable accommodation under the hostels scheme proposed in the education section.

Young women over the age of 16 years can be catered for in these centres. If an apprenticeship in hairdressing, for example, is desired then this would be arranged. If the person in question is the wife of an adult undergoing training then perhaps health and home management would be more appropriate. Others may require training for factory work e.g. electronics. Personal and community health, home economics and stimulation of motivation should be the compulsory courses for women - apart from other training given.

The enclosed brochure does indicate basic principles that can be used as guide lines however there are situational and cultural differences which must be considered. Families or individuals can be brought to these training centres from reserves, missions or the urban areas.

Urban Employment Centres.

1. Welfare Agency - voluntary e.g. Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in Sydney
governmental e.g. Aboriginal Welfare Board in N.S.W.

- (a) This body can find suitable employment for individuals already living in the urban areas. This can be done through their own liason with employers.
- (b) Recommend that the individual undergo some basic training at the nearest training centre to obtain some skill enabling employment to be accepted.

2. Governmental institution - e.g. Commonwealth Employment Office.

This body can accept Aborigines as presented, or as recommended, and organise employment through the normal channels. If there is necessity for some training before employment, then they could refer the individual to the training centre.

To conclude employment, a number of points must be stressed:-

- (1) Aborigines must be trained to accept employment. Employment opportunities mean nothing if an individual is unable, through lack of skilled training to accept such positions.
- (2) Training centres be located on reserves, missions or urban areas provided that strict control is maintained on standards, qualified instructors and programmes.
- (3) Employment is a major factor to be overcome in finding some solution to the complex Aboriginal question in Australia today. Re-location seems a necessity in many cases e.g. Northern Territory.

2. EDUCATION

No one denies the value of a good education. This lack of education - in its broad sense is one of the main factors contributing to the state of the Aborigines of Australia. Education gives one the chance for independence of movement in any society, freedom of choice as to alternatives and greater possibilities of some future for your children. This has not been the case with Aborigines. Usually other people have made decisions for them. As a consequence their self confidence has never really matured. The blame for this situation is irrelevant at this point of time. This lack of education has been the motivation behind the hesitancy with which the Aboriginal has entered the mainstream of Australian society. It is not due to disinterest or biological inability but merely lack of educational background. I therefore suggest:-

1. An Aboriginal Education Foundation should provide free education and assistance to achieve the same for any person of Aboriginal descent. This education should begin at the pre-school level through to university and beyond if necessary. This Foundation should receive relevant guide lines from the already established Education Foundations e.g. the Maori Education Foundation in New Zealand. In Canada and the U.S.A. similar principles are in operation. This Foundation should sponsor any Aboriginal person, including adults, through any social, scholastic or trade courses agreed on by the Foundation and the individual concerned.
 By trade I refer to the obvious - welding, mechanics, electronics. Included also would be such courses as clerical studies, accounting etc.
 By social I refer to any course which may help Aboriginals to adapt to the general way of life in Australia. This could include home economics, health, dressmaking, public speaking and such.
 The Foundation must co-operate with existing educational facilities as much as is possible.
2. The Foundation should programme to educate the general public (including Aboriginals) on the Aboriginal question in Australia.
 All aspects of Australian society must be catered for including churches, schools, trade unions, lodges and such and programmes must be well planned. Actual situations must be revealed, analysed and explanations given. Misleading propoganda as is published at present must cease. This will enable the general public (including Aboriginals) to realise the urgency of the question and the need for change. Their conscious involvement where possible is part of the fabric for positive social change.
3. Sufficient finance should be allocated to the Foundation to enable implementation of suggested programmes. This includes support of a full-time national administrative staff and monies for scholarships.
4. Hostels should be organised in relevant centres where scholarship holders can be accommodated. These hostels should be for male or female - mostly young people. Church hostels can be assisted by a subsidy. These hostels are necessary at this point in time. As the situation begins to change for the better then there will be less need for hostels however, I repeat, they are basic at this time.
5. Training centres could be utilised by the Foundation. This is merely a question of organisation.

In conclusion on the education category, I suggest the Foundation is but only one segment of the Federal Aboriginal Affairs Bureau. Also I must add that education is not the key to any solution. It is only a very important part of the overall answer. Certainly it must never be considered apart from other social factors. A sub-standard physical environment in which Aboriginals are living can, and in many cases does, neutralise education being absorbed. Poor living conditions on many reserves, missions, fringe settlements, shanty towns and slums does not allow complete and acceptable education to come to Aboriginals, adults included.

3. HOUSING

The Federal Aboriginal Affairs Bureau should undertake to constructively programme housing of Aboriginal people. Indiscriminate or chance housing programmes must never be tolerated. Aboriginals should be consulted about any housing proposal pertaining to themselves or the group as a whole. Settlement housing, where constructed, should not be in rows or congregated in a small area. Design should be up to general community standards. The concept of "transitional housing" should be eliminated. In its place should be an accepted standard housing scheme with suitable training and selection of prospective tenants.

4. SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY

A survey should be immediately undertaken throughout Australia. This survey should comply with accepted procedure and employ only trained personnel. There should be two broad objectives of such a survey:-

- (1) Compile statistics on the Aboriginal population in Australia. This should include such matters as numbers, population concentration, occupations, education level, attitudes, housing conditions and health. No comprehensive survey has ever been completed on the Aboriginal people of Australia. There are difficulties involved, however, with the right planning and people, valuable material can be collected.
- (2) The material obtained from such a sociological survey can provide the basis for all short or long range programmes involving Aboriginals. It will be the reference point which will enable administrators or policy makers realise the extent and depth of the question with which they are dealing. At the present it is a case of "the blind leading the blind," for example, no one really knows how many Aboriginals there are or what are the conditions they are living under. Present policy on Aboriginal Affairs is generally guess work, hence the lack of progress and current social stagnation in Australia today. Present policy makers and administrators are generally untrained and uninformed of the actual situation. Frustration is the inevitable result.

5. LAND-OWNERSHIP

The matter of past ownership of land in Australia pertaining to Aboriginals is much too complex for me to deal with in several short paragraphs. I do feel however, that this matter should be investigated thoroughly and arrangements made which will benefit Aboriginal people. This benefit must be collective and not individual. There must be recognition that Aboriginals originally had ownership of land in most areas of Australia. Compensation then should be negotiated on this basis. Finance or justification for obtaining finance can be correlated with this principle.

6. LAW PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS ON THE GROUNDS OF RACE, ETHNIC OR NATIONAL GROUPING.

Some provisions should be made in the Federal Constitution which complies with the proposed suggestion. There is no doubt racial discrimination against Aboriginals has existed. Positive evidence of this is provided by the

requested. I do not imply that such a law will force a change of attitudes on the part of the strongly prejudiced, nevertheless, such a law indicates to Aborigines that the law of the nation can act on their behalf. This creates a sense of involvement in the country and its affairs. It stimulates a sense of dignity and respect for oneself, the law, and others.

They will feel they have a legal right to protest about any undue restriction of their freedom of participation in the general community. There are still many areas in Australia where racial discrimination against Aborigines is practised. This refers to some restaurants, film theatres, residentials, places of employment, swimming pools, hotels and such.

Thirdly such a law will indicate to the world that Australia ⁱⁿ tends to protect the rights in fact, of all individuals living in this society.

7. HEALTH

1. An immediate health check should be carried out on all Aborigines. Contact should be made with the more remote people. An examination should be made of every individual and medical treatment given if warranted. There are many thousands of Aborigines who have never been examined by a doctor. It would be of benefit to the National Health - apart from the Aboriginal people.
2. A check should be made on the living conditions on areas where Aborigines reside. This refers to existing reserves, missions, cattle or sheep stations or various other settlements. The conditions of many areas are disgraceful and responsible for the poor health and high infant mortality rates amongst Aborigines. No church, mission, reserve or settlement should continue which allows sub-standard living conditions. Correspondingly no Aboriginal family should be allowed to continue living in a situation which jeopardises the health of members of the family or the rest of the general community. Strict laws pertaining to standards of health and hygiene should be maintained whether the Aboriginal lives on a reserve, mission, fringe settlement or slum. The health of one family reflects on the social conscience of the nation and is a real threat to the health of others in the community.