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By Ronald M. Berndt\*

## The "Warburton Range" Controversy

In the last decade or so, no statement on Australian Aborigines seems to have made quite such a general stir as the *Report* of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into Native Welfare conditions in the Laverton-Warburton Range area, Western Australia.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand it provoked, directly and indirectly, a series of outbursts in local and other Australian newspapers: "Warburton Natives in March of Death",<sup>2</sup> "Shock Report on Aborigines",<sup>3</sup> "Native Scandal in W.A.",<sup>4</sup> "Those Warburton Natives are in Need of Help",<sup>5</sup> "We must Stop this Misery and Suffering",<sup>6</sup> "Shock Pictures show Plight of Our Aborigines",<sup>7</sup> "Pastor Will Fly Food to Natives",<sup>8</sup> and so on. On the other it was countered by official and semi-official protests and denials.<sup>9</sup> There were demands, cautious or aggressive, for an investigation of the charges that had been made, or of the whole Aboriginal question.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, letters and statements were coming forward from members of the public who considered themselves capable of summing up the situation, condemning or commending as the case might be, and making final pronouncements on native policy. Missionaries also had something to say.<sup>11</sup> And "humanitarian" people and societies made plans for stirring up public feeling and raising money to help alleviate Aboriginal suffering in the affected region.<sup>12</sup> The differences

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<sup>1</sup> Presented by Mr. W. L. Grayden to the first Session of the 22nd W.A. Parliament, and published in Perth, 1956, by the Government Printer.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily News*, Perth, Jan. 18th, '57.

<sup>3</sup> *The News*, Adelaide, Jan. 11th, '57.

<sup>4</sup> *The Herald*, Melbourne; from the *West Australian*, Perth, Jan. 15th, '57.

<sup>5</sup> *Weekend Mail*, Perth, Jan. 19th, '57.

<sup>6</sup> *The West Australian*, Jan. 19th, '57.

<sup>7</sup> *Sunday Times*, Perth, Jan. 20th, '57.

<sup>8</sup> *Daily News*, Perth, Jan. 28th, '57.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., *The West Australian*, Jan. 15th, 19th, 22nd, 23rd, '57.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., *The West Australian*, Jan. 17th, 31st, Feb. 1st, '57; and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, in *The West Australian*, Perth, Feb. 5th, '57.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., *The West Australian*, Jan. 17th, 24th, '57.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., *Daily News*, Perth, Jan. 28th, '57; *The Kalgoorlie Miner*, Feb. 16th, '57.

of opinion, and the mass of not always relevant material put before it, seem to have left the general public confused, at a loss to know how to arrive at the "truth" of the matter.

Following the *Grayden Report* (as I shall call it here), and in all but one case because of it, three parties (or combinations of parties) visited the region between January and March of this year. The first was a group of journalists, led by Mr. Rupert Murdoch;<sup>13</sup> then came the University of Western Australia anthropological expedition to the Eastern Goldfields, Warburton Range and Jiggalong areas;<sup>14</sup> and finally a combined Ministerial and health department party: this was accompanied by journalists from *The West Australian*,<sup>15</sup> and for part of the time by Mr. Grayden himself, in conjunction with Pastor Douglas Nichols of Melbourne. All were interested in looking into the allegations made by Grayden, and in finding out what was actually happening in the area.

**Outline of the Controversy:** From time to time there are waves of Press or popular interest in the Australian Aborigines: and the items attracting the greatest attention have to do with differential treatment of these people by their fellow Australians. Minor explosions in (for instance) the daily Press have taken place in the last few years (for example, on the issue of the financial status of Tudawali, who starred in the film *Jedda*, or of citizenship rights for Albert Namatjira). These, accumulating over a period, in association with material presented through books, films, radio programmes, and (probably to a lesser extent) personal observation, provided a congenial climate for the "Warburton Range Controversy". The stage was finally set by the Anti-Slavery Society's charges concerning the treatment of the Aborigines (especially in W.A.), and suggestions that these be taken before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> I.e., the *Sunday Times*, Perth (and *The News*, Adelaide), investigators.

<sup>14</sup> This survey was planned long before the Select Committee was appointed. It consisted of three anthropologists: Dr. R. M. Berndt and his wife (Dr. Catherine H. Berndt) and Miss Ruth Fink. It was supported wholly by the University of Western Australia for the purpose of carrying out routine anthropological research, and was not designed specifically to enquire into the situation which had materialized by the time it set out for the field. However, that situation itself represented part of the material to be studied.

<sup>15</sup> Led by the Minister for Native Welfare (Mr. Brady), it included Dr. Ida Mann (Ophthalmic Consultant to the Government of W.A.), Dr. Davidson (Deputy Commissioner for Public Health), and officials of the Department of Native Welfare.

<sup>16</sup> There were several Press references to this; but see, e.g., the reported reply of the Commissioner for Native Welfare in W.A., in *The West Australian*, July 14th, '56.

This background, then, was favourable both to the genesis of the Controversy, and to the widespread and relatively persistent response which has been a feature of its development. More specifically, however, it had its origin in the political atmosphere of the appointment of a Select Committee, instigated by Mr. Grayden, who had visited the Warburton Range area and been struck by what he considered to be the general lack of interest in Aboriginal welfare in relation to it. Evidence, both particular and general, was taken from a number of persons (administrative officers, missionaries, school teachers, a member of the Police Department, and two anthropologists—the present writer and his wife). The majority of members of the Committee then visited Laverton-Cosmo Newbery and the Warburton Range. Their *Report*, tabled before the W.A. Parliament and subsequently published, was obliquely designed as a vote of no confidence in the local Department of Native Welfare. The allegations made by the Committee are too well known to reiterate here, but most of the recommendations it put forward have not received the same notice. However, I shall comment on these on the basis of investigations made by the University of Western Australia anthropological party.

In the first place, none of the members of the Select Committee possessed the specialized training so important in an investigation of this kind. Further, the majority of persons involved in the Controversy had little or no knowledge of Aboriginal traditional life, and were not aware of the implications of the changes taking place in it as a result of European contact. Their methods of examination, as well as observation, were unsystematic and emotionally weighted. Perhaps the most serious fault was the apparent difficulty they found in placing their observations in the Laverton-Warburton Range region in perspective, against the general background of conditions in Aboriginal Australia as a whole, and comparing W.A. native policy with that of other Australian States. On one occasion (after comments made by Mr. Rupert Murdoch),<sup>17</sup> there was a suggestion that parliamentary privilege would be invoked to protect the *Grayden Report*: anyone contesting the truth of the statements in that *Report*, it was said, might be charged with contempt of Parliament,<sup>18</sup> and those who had given evidence before the Commission with perjury. Although this approach was not pursued, the impression persisted that because the *Report* of the

<sup>17</sup> E.g., "Report" in the *Sunday Times*, Perth, Feb. 3rd, '57.

<sup>18</sup> *The West Australian*, Feb. 5th, '57.

Select Committee was unanimously accepted by the W.A. Parliament, this in itself was enough to set on it a seal of proof, a guarantee of empirical reality.<sup>19</sup>

The question arises here as to whose verdict on the situation is most likely to be accepted as "true". If we are unable to make first-hand observations for ourselves, whose opinions may we accept as giving not merely a sincere but also (and the first does not necessarily imply the second) a relatively accurate account of the current state of affairs? There is always, as there must be, personal involvement in such an assessment; and it is commonly understood that (even where the frame of approach is fairly tightly structured beforehand) people observing or reporting on a given situation are likely to present different versions of it—emphasizing different facets, or considering it from varying points of view. This does not mean that only one of them must be "right" and the others "wrong". Nevertheless, systematic investigation by those with the minimum of personal involvement in such a situation can reasonably be expected to offer an unprejudiced and substantially reliable account. Moreover, many of the statements contained in the *Grayden Report*, and in the Press, were specific enough to be subject to proof or disproof by qualified anthropological and medical enquiry.

The report of the expedition from the University of Western Australia<sup>20</sup> expressed broad agreement with much of what the *Grayden Report* contained, particularly in relation to recommendations, but stated that the majority of the points it raised needed elaboration, a number were over-accentuated and others inaccurate. For instance, there is no evidence of severe or consistent food shortage or general starvation in the Rawlinson-Warburton Ranges area, nor of widespread or general malnutrition or disease in excess of what is found in other marginal areas.<sup>21</sup>

There are no accurate census figures for this region:<sup>22</sup> and, as

<sup>19</sup> Cf. report of a talk by Mr. Grayden to students of the University of Western Australia, as published in the *Pelican*, University of Western Australia student newspaper, April 5th, '57.

<sup>20</sup> Excerpts were published in the Press, e.g., *The West Australian*, March 7th, March 14th, '57; and the *Sunday Times*, Perth, March 17th, '57.

<sup>21</sup> This was supported by the medical and public health officials (Drs. W. S. Davidson, Ida Mann, and others) in the Ministerial party: "Medical Report on Warburton Natives", March 27th, '57.

Suffering as a result of drought or seasonal food shortage is the exception rather than the rule as far as small semi-nomadic groups are concerned, and is becoming rare now that more and more Aborigines are remaining close to the settlements.

<sup>22</sup> During our recent survey of the Warburton Range-Laverton-Leonora-Wiluna-Mulga Queen-Mt. Margaret-Jiggalong area, we contacted personally 500



part of this picture, the incidence of infanticide as noted in the *Grayden Report* seems to have been considerably exaggerated. This is a point on which reliable information is extremely difficult to obtain in brief or spasmodic contacts. The Aborigines themselves are likely to be reticent about it, particularly in speaking to people whom they expect to disapprove of it: and missionary or police statements which do not document specific cases on a more than hearsay basis are not of much help here. From such evidence as is available, it seems clear that, although occasional cases do occur among traditionally-oriented Aborigines, these are becoming even less frequent than they were in the past.

While one could take issue with the *Grayden Report* on such points as this, others (set out in, e.g., the section on Recommendations), which were in most cases common-sense ones, were worthy of immediate attention, even though they were only partially formulated. Nevertheless, major issues of a more general and far-reaching nature received virtually no attention.

Immediately after the publication of the *Grayden Report*, certain of its more sensational features were taken up by the Press, and constructive sections of it largely sidestepped or ignored. This high-lighting of the spectacular, taking particular items out of context and accentuating them at the expense of others, led to Mr. Grayden's being credited with making some curious statements which could not be supported by empirical evidence.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Murdoch's Report, through the medium of the Press, adopted a contrary stand: but to make this more emphatic it went to the other extreme, holding that these Aborigines had never enjoyed better conditions.<sup>24</sup> The report issued by the University of Western Australia party was intended to give a clear factual statement on the basis of anthropological enquiry, as well as to deal with what it considered to be the principal issues. The Ministerial and medical party which followed it saw little in the way of bad conditions, while admitting that there was much room for improve-

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Aborigines; of these 105 were at the Warburton Range itself. According to our estimates, this would be at least a quarter of the total population in the Warburton Range-Blackstone Range-Rawlinson Range region, which is around 400 (including so-called "Bush" Aborigines).

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., an article in *Truth*, Jan. 27th, '57. There is no point in examining the contentions put forward there.

<sup>24</sup> A similar statement was made by Mr. R. Macaulay concerning the Rawlinson Range natives: the *Sunday Times*, Perth, March 3rd, '57.

ment.<sup>25</sup> But Mr. Grayden had dogged the party and made a further inspection of the Warburton-Rawlinson area, with Pastor Nichols. On their return, further public statements made it plain that Mr. Grayden had not changed his views, and in the face of contrary reports insisted (a) that the Aborigines of that area were living in deplorable conditions; (b) that they were, literally, starving; (c) that the Ministerial party had "white-washed" these conditions; (d) that the W.A. Government stood condemned of maladministration of its Aborigines; (e) that all observers (including the University of Western Australia anthropological party, but excluding members of the Select Committee) had failed to realize the significance of what they saw: that the whole problem of native welfare in the Warburton area was lost "in a desert of ignorance and prejudice and stupidity"; (f) that the medical survey was incomplete, misleading and, by inference, did not conform with the accepted standards of professional integrity.<sup>26</sup>

Before the publication of the medical report, a journalist (Mr. F. Morony) who had accompanied the Ministerial party reported that Mr. Grayden's party had misinterpreted much of what it saw and heard. He went on to discuss local conditions, summing them up as being relatively good: "the Warburton-Rawlinson people have few problems". Then, with fine journalistic disregard of the complexity of the problem, he offered his solution: either "total absorption, or controlled contacts" with Europeans. His retrogressive policy centred about: (a) virtual segregation; (b) stopping the drift into the settlements; (c) dropping of orthodox education.<sup>27</sup>

A leader in *The West Australian* (March 27th, '57) suggested that it was high time the State Government, through the Depart-

<sup>25</sup> E.g., in *The West Australian*, March 6th, '57. Up to the time of writing this article (May 4th), the Department of Native Welfare had not issued a separate report on its own part of the survey—i.e., excluding the Department of Health Report. The statements which it has made emphasize two factors, lack of money and lack of staff, but actually side-step the main issues pertaining to native welfare. The Minister of Native Welfare has been especially insistent on the first point (e.g., *The West Australian*, March 30th, '57); in fact, before any further check had been made he gave his full support to the *Grayden Report*, and accompanied two members of the Select Commission to Canberra to petition the Commonwealth Government for financial assistance, (e.g., *The West Australian*, Jan. 22nd and 25th, '57). (The request was rejected by the Commonwealth Government, which pointed out that Aboriginal welfare was a State responsibility: *The West Australian*, April 4th, '57.) After his visit to the Warburton area, the Minister apparently revised some of his ideas, but remained convinced that money was the key to the problem of Aboriginal welfare.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., *The West Australian*, March 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 26th; April 3rd, '57.

<sup>27</sup> *The West Australian*, March 20th, 21st, '57.

ment of Native Welfare, expressed its intentions in terms of policy for the region under discussion. It mentioned that "the Government had allowed itself to slip into an invidious position when, through Mr. Brady, it supported the adoption of the report of the Select Committee, which was tantamount to censure of its own native welfare administration".<sup>28</sup> To a certain extent this criticism is justified, mainly on the grounds that the Department of Native Welfare has kept relatively silent on the matter.<sup>29</sup> But two interesting points emerge. On the one hand, nearly all criticism has been levelled at the Commissioner of Native Welfare and his Department, not at the Minister in charge: the fact that the Commissioner's hands are tied is not fully realized, or appreciated. On the other hand, in initially endeavouring to make the Department of Native Welfare a scapegoat in the controversy, as responsible for the 'shocking' conditions in that region, the *Grayden Report* did not make it clear (in fact did not specifically indicate) that United Aborigines Mission stations have been established there for many years (the Warburton Range Mission for over 20 years, Mt. Margaret for over 25 years: a more recent development is the Mission station at Cosmo Newbery). Their stores are well stocked, and each has its hospital or clinic. Money comes in from well-wishers and Mission supporters (more now, I am told, than ever before); and they receive Government subsidies and support. If conditions were actually as Mr. Grayden (or some sections of the Press) would like us to believe they are, what a commentary this would be on the Missions of that area. Fortunately, the picture is not so grim: but there is no reason for being smug about this whole business, just because the *Grayden Report* represents only part of the story. There are other problems just as urgent, if less spectacular, that need facing.

It is important to remember that this controversy was not inspired simply by a humanitarian interest in the well-being of the Australian Aborigines: but even if other, more personal issues were at stake, it may be possible to turn it to their advantage. However, we must not be over-optimistic here.

**Points Relating to Local Conditions:** (a) The majority of Aborigines in this region have had a certain amount of contact with

<sup>28</sup> Much the same opinion was expressed in the *Sunday Times*, March 31st, '57, and the Leader of the State Parliamentary Country Party (in *The West Australian*, March 28th) called for a new policy on natives.

<sup>29</sup> It has, however, recently appointed a temporary welfare officer for the Warburton Range area: *The West Australian*, April 12th.



European-Australians—some more than others. There are very few semi-nomadic Aborigines in the "Bush" or desert who do not make at least occasional visits to Mission stations or settlements, and even these would have heard of Europeans. Most adult natives are clothed, in varying degrees, and an increasing number of them are speaking a little English. Traditional Aboriginal life has inevitably been affected to some extent—not only economic pursuits, but also ceremonial and ritual activity.

Agents of European contact (in the form of Missions and so on) have been stationed at strategic points in this region for more than a couple of decades, and have exerted a steady influence against traditional Aboriginal practices. On the other hand, there has been a steady drift from the "desert" area and the Central Ranges (from the Everards and Musgraves in the east, and the Warburtons and Rawlinsons in the west) for at least 20 years, if not longer<sup>30</sup>—in some cases since the establishment of mining in the Eastern Goldfields district. This drift now seems to be coming to an end, as the whole area has gradually become almost depopulated, and typically bush people are virtually non-existent. The Laverton native camp at the time of our visit, for instance, consisted largely of people who

<sup>30</sup> Tindale observed that the area north-east of Minnie Creek (about 70 miles north-east of Cosmo Newbery) had been virtually abandoned by Aborigines since 1900-1910 because of the drift of natives in towards Laverton. The Warburton natives, he said, writing in 1935, were beginning spasmodically to venture down into this area: see N. B. Tindale, "General Report on the Anthropological Expedition to the Warburton Range, Western Australia, July-Sept., 1935", *Oceania*, pp. 481-85, Vol. VI, No. 4, 1936. He commented also on the drift which had been taking place between his first visit in 1935 and a later visit in 1938-39: see "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem in S.A.", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, S.A. Branch*, 1940-41, p. 72. It should be added that there appear to be very few if any wandering groups of Aborigines in the country between the Warburtons and Minnie Creek (where a sheep station is being established). It is not just that one is unlikely to encounter them on the road, but that it is rare to see even smoke from hunting fires. Apart from the possibility of an occasional group of 'semi-sophisticates' moving between the Warburton Mission and Laverton, natives themselves have described this country as 'empty'.

A similar drift, from the Central Ranges south to the Transcontinental Railway Line, was noted during fieldwork at Ooldea, Western S.A., in 1941: see R. and C. Berndt, "A Preliminary Report of Field Work in the Ooldea Region, Western S.A.", *Oceania Bound Reprint*, Sydney, 1945.

On the eastern side, one reason for the establishment of Ernabella Mission Station, in the Musgrave Range in S.A., is said to have been the hope of checking the movement of Aborigines from the ranges into the pastoral country and such railway settlements as Oodnadatta (on the Quorn-Alice Springs Line). However, in spite of this, and occasional police patrols designed to drive them back toward the Central Reserves, the drift could not be entirely checked: see R. and C. Berndt, *From Black to White in South Australia*, Melbourne and Chicago, 1951, Chapter 5.

had originally come from the Minnie Creek-Warburton Range area, but showed no desire to return. Of the people who centre around the Warburton Mission, many belong to that general locality; but others have come in from as far afield as the Musgraves and Everards, and others again from the Rawlinsons.<sup>31</sup> Spatial mobility has always been a feature of "Desert" culture; and this was intensified when Europeans moved in. The problem in this context is, therefore, one of social and cultural change, and adjustment to a social and natural environment which is rapidly becoming something different.

(b) In such a situation the question of Aboriginal Reserves immediately comes to mind.<sup>32</sup> Although the Aborigines in the Warburton-Rawlinson area spend part of their time around such places as the Warburton Mission, this does not mean that they have given up their hereditary rights over their own territory. They exercise these on the one hand through hunting and food-collecting, and on the other through holding ceremonies at their various sacred sites. It is only when they come into centres like Laverton or Leonora, or other places outside their own traditional territory, and go back only infrequently or not at all, that they really become

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<sup>31</sup> In the same way people in the Mulga Queen camp (90-odd miles north-west of Laverton), apart from visitors from Laverton-Wiluna, gave their own or their parents' place of origin as the country further north (e.g., various sites around Lake Carnegie). The Aboriginal population at Jiggalong when we were there comprised mainly people who had come in at varying periods from the arid country to the east, towards and around the Canning Stock Route. Some of them had slight links with groups the members of which, some years ago, were drifting north-east into the pastoral country. For example, in 1944 a number of such people were living in the camps at Gordon Downs Station and Birrundudu outstation in the Northern Territory.

<sup>32</sup> It is not my intention here to consider at length how far these Reserves are inviolable. This aspect is mentioned briefly in the University of Western Australia Report. A number of people (including one of the main protagonists in the controversy) have recently entered the Warburton Reserve without official permits. Perhaps even more serious is the gradually diminishing size of these Reserves, and their prospects for the future, e.g., the Commonwealth Government took over approximately 250,000 acres in the Rawlinsons; and (according to the Select Committee) a concession of over 4,000,000 acres has been granted to a mining company in the Blackstone Range area, near the S.A. border. Similar inroads have been made on the S.A. side, on the grounds that security measures are at stake. Given the persisting pressure on these two points where the Reserves are most vulnerable (security and mining rights), there can be no guarantee that the process of alienation has reached its limits. Certainly this cannot be held responsible for the well-established drift of Aborigines into the settlements, and it may not have influenced the movements and living conditions of people in that region to the extent that Mr. Grayden suggests. Nevertheless it is hard to see how, in the long run, it can fail to affect them.

alienated from it. Even then, most of them do not seem to realize the implications of this.<sup>33</sup>

(c) The magic word "assimilation"<sup>34</sup> is highly relevant to this area today. Whether we approve or disapprove of the current trend toward Europeanization, it is certainly taking place, even apart from direct Administration help. However, this is not a smooth or straightforward process: and there is little general awareness of what it actually involves.<sup>35</sup>

There is no need to elaborate this point, but it should be borne in mind in any consideration of the Warburton controversy. In this particular region, the Aborigines are in various phases of contact with Europeans. In some cases, one might say that there is relative sophistication: but the emphasis should be on the term "relative". Certainly none in this whole region can be classified as assimilated, even in the formal sense of having equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities alongside their fellow Australians. They are becoming more and more Europeanized, but in such a narrow and restricted sense that we need to ask seriously what kind of Europeanization this is, and what are its implications for any official policy of assimilation.

A further point for consideration refers back to the matter of diversity in Aboriginal Australia, both in traditional terms and in terms of European contact and influence. In the southern part of the Continent particularly, many Aborigines (and part-Aborigines) have been brought up entirely, or almost entirely, in a European environment, cut away from traditional beliefs and practices. In

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<sup>33</sup> Just because the Aborigines traditionally do not cultivate their land, because they are not agriculturalists, there has been a tendency to think that they do not use it. But it is their source of food; and it also represents a tangible link between themselves and their ancestral past. Although it does not represent wealth or alienable property in their terms, nevertheless it is (or has been) one of their few tangible assets. It is when they lose their land, by drifting away from it into white settlements, or by having it forcibly taken over, that they are likely to become paupers (or "indigents", to use an official term).

<sup>34</sup> Various States (including W.A.) have, broadly speaking, followed the Commonwealth direction here. Mr. Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories, has recently reiterated his views on this in a Press release on "Aboriginal Welfare in the Northern Territory", Feb. 22nd, '57.

<sup>35</sup> It would be difficult to estimate, even roughly, how many part-Aborigines in Australia have achieved the specified goal and merged completely into the general community, so that the fact of their Aboriginal ancestry is not known to the people with whom they come in contact. Without unofficial information through personal contacts it is not easy to locate them—because in most cases it has been possible for them to attain their 'Australian-European' status only on an individual basis, by cutting themselves off from their Aboriginal kin and their 'Aboriginal' traditions. Just because they have been successfully

such circumstances they grow up knowing very little indeed about their own local Aboriginal background, and much less about Aboriginal life in other parts of the Continent. Physically these people may be classified as Aborigines (in the matter of blood-groupings, skin colour, and other specific characteristics); but this does not mean that they are in a position to speak with authority for Aborigines in, e.g., Central and North Australia, whose traditional culture, and experiences of Europeans, have been very different. Shared physical characteristics have never been enough in themselves to ensure social and cultural uniformity. In any case, acknowledgement of common interests and common identity in Aboriginal Australia was, and is, restricted to a relatively narrow range: outside that range were strangers, often regarded as not quite human. The horizon has widened to-day; but at the risk of stating the obvious, it should be noted that the identity inferred in the term "Australian Aborigines" is largely an identity imposed by outside observers, and not by any means part of the traditional situation. In the contact situation Europeanized Aborigines may accept this assessment, and perhaps try to consolidate awareness of such identity *vis-à-vis* ourselves, or draw on it for political or welfare purposes. They may not accept the need for special experience, or special knowledge here, relying instead on what they would categorize as the common status of 'Aborigines-in-contact-with-Europeans-and-subjected-to-political-and-social-discrimination.' In other words, there may be good publicity value in having an Australian Aboriginal from another area report on conditions in the Warburton

absorbed, they are inconspicuous. The conspicuous people, those classified legally or socially (or from both points of view) as Aborigines, or "natives", are those who have not been so absorbed. In many cases this is due to rejection or partial rejection by the Australian white community, or sections of that community. To some extent this is a matter of colour, or noticeable physical differences. A dark full-blood finds it much harder to avoid being classed as "different" than a light-skinned part-Aboriginal; and those who have passed into the general community are more likely to recognize relatives who look and behave like European-Australians. But over and above this there are other factors. Beyond a certain point there is often resistance to complete absorption, involving as it ordinarily does loss of specific identity, and loss of continuity in close social relationships. Research among people of Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal descent, especially in the southern half of the Continent, provides increasing documentation of such resistance—which appears in various forms, and is neither uniform nor co-ordinated.

As another facet of this same problem there is the question of how far we can really speak, in this context (as I have just done), of the "general Australian community". It is at this point that the notion of assimilation is most vague, and most loosely formulated. There is a tendency to ignore the diversity within Australian society, the cross-cutting of different interests and values, different social statuses, moral and ethical codes, and so on. Equality in the legal and political spheres represents only one aspect here.



zone: but when these conditions are far removed from his own experience, and he has not systematically studied them, it is clear that for competent and unbiased comment additional qualifications are necessary.

(d) Several other factors, within this particular constellation, underline the points already made. There is the question of employment<sup>36</sup> in a region where traditional economic life has been upset, and new needs and wants have been created. This is a vital and immediate issue, since the European population of the region is at present in no position to accept more than a bare minimum of untrained Aboriginal employees of either sex, and in any case is none too secure itself—especially now that the railway service between Laverton and other centres, including Perth, is to be discontinued. Complementary to this is the question of improving present educational facilities, which, although much better than they were a few years ago, are by no means adequate. Generally speaking, both Mission and town camps are sordid, depressing and lacking in confidence for the future. This is in marked contrast to what existed prior to European impact. The continual struggle for survival against a frequently harsh environment is hardly to be compared with the difficulties of adjusting to a changed or changing social and cultural pattern, which they are not in a position to reject or ignore.

**The Problems in Broader Context:** This is not the place for a detailed description of the empirical situation in the Warburton region. I have therefore tried to place that situation, and the controversy associated with it, in perspective, and to point up some of the main issues. A number of these are relevant to many other regions where Aborigines and non-Aborigines are or have been in contact—both in W.A. and in other parts of the Commonwealth.

1. The whole question of assimilation is in need of careful review, with less emphasis on rapid change and more consideration of the Aboriginal traditional background, in co-ordination with planned educational programmes. It is our contention that a sense of pride, of appreciation for their own rich heritage, should be encouraged in those Aborigines in the contact situation. Roots in the past (and this includes an Aboriginal past) are just as im-

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<sup>36</sup> This aspect will not be explored here. It has been mentioned in the University of Western Australia Report, which, for instance, supported in principle Mr. Grayden's proposal that a pastoral station be established in the Warburtons, in conjunction with Cosmo Newbery.



portant as a vision for the future. We acknowledge this for ourselves, and to be consistent we should admit that the Aboriginal way of life is of importance to them—that it is not necessarily inferior to our own, even though it is different, and even though certain features of it are not really compatible with dominant trends in our society. To say this is not to deny the inevitable—that these people we call Aborigines are becoming, culturally and socially, increasingly like some other sections of the Australian population. The point is, rather, that we should provide them with full opportunities to become active and responsible citizens of this country, contributing something to our national culture instead of just becoming darker imitations of ourselves. (Appreciating this, in some quarters of the United States there is a tendency to avoid the term "assimilation", as used in an administrative sense, in favour of "integration"—regarded as more neutral, and less obviously one-sided.)

2. One of the most important features of contact between Aborigines and Europeans in this particular region, as in so many others, is the continuing presence of Missions. The extent to which they influence native policy generally is rarely, if ever, appreciated. In some cases they are to all intents and purposes autonomous. In others, as in the area under review, they are expected to shoulder nearly all practical responsibility as far as native welfare is concerned, in their immediate neighbourhood. Yet during the controversy the Missions in the Laverton-Warburton region were referred to as if they had no such responsibility, and received virtually no share of the criticism. I do not want to discuss the reasons for this here: but since the missions represent a dominant factor in the situation, their influence on the whole question of social and cultural change and adjustment of these Aborigines should be given more attention.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> There is a widespread tendency to identify Christianity with Europeanization. Missionaries who find it hard to distinguish these seem to feel that before an Aboriginal can be viewed as a Christian he must adopt certain tangible symbols of our culture: clothing, for instance, and other material equipment. This is convenient when Missions are working in conjunction with the Administration; but we should be clear that the two are not necessarily the same thing. Some missionaries, while acknowledging that there is a distinction, nevertheless claim that they have no choice in the matter—that the practical demands of the situation call for the development not merely of Christians, but of Christians who will be living in a European-type society. At the same time, not least in the region under review, preparation for life in European-type society is carried only so far. On the assumption that early and intensive Christian training provides the best armour for adults, the local Missions have been largely responsible for giving them an extremely narrow view of Australian life. This assumption seems to have been founded on hope

The significance of education in this, or any similar situation, cannot be over-estimated.<sup>38</sup> The Aborigines' adjustment to our ways of life, "assimilation", their employment potential, all depend on the kind of education they receive. Since they have potentially the same intellectual abilities as their European contemporaries, they should not be restricted by a special "native" standard, differing from that set for European children of the same approximate age.<sup>39</sup> But because of their particular circumstances, a special orientation course would be desirable for most of them in this region. Through it children could relate what they learn at school to what they learn at home (in the camp). Otherwise there is a tendency for these two to be viewed as incompatible, because of the different and sometimes conflicting values which they present: and children who do not resolve this conflict have so much less chance of becoming well-adjusted adults. An additional factor here is that in the Warbur-

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or on wishful thinking rather than on actual experience; at least, an honest assessment must admit that the failures outnumber the successes here. It was partly for this reason that the report of the University of Western Australia expedition called for predominantly secular education in the schools, in order to give the children in them a more balanced idea of what they would be likely to encounter in later life. Since the main Aboriginal schools in this region are on Mission stations, with children living in dormitories away from their parents, there is plenty of opportunity here for extra-curricular religious teaching.

Many people appear to view Missions uncritically—to assume that, because they represent various Christian churches, they must therefore be "doing good": not only doing the right thing, but doing it in the right way. This does not necessarily follow; and a number of missionaries themselves point out the need for improvement. It is not so much interest and patience and sympathy that are lacking (as they are among some other sections of the community which have to do with Aborigines). All (again unlike some of the fellow citizens) regard the Aborigines as human beings, as "persons" in their own right. But because of deficiencies in their training, they have not been equipped to obtain more than a superficial knowledge of the beliefs, the values, the social organization, of the people they are trying to change. (It is only recently, and in the face of some opposition, that a missionary with a certain amount of linguistic training has been able to impress on his colleagues his view that it is useful to be properly acquainted with the languages spoken by such people, and that this is a skill which cannot be acquired just haphazardly.) In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the missionaries in this region have made virtually no contributions to our knowledge of the Aborigines among whom they work. In this respect they have not subscribed to the tradition of missionaries in New Guinea, Africa, and certain other parts of Australia; and without some assistance in the way of training and advice, they are not likely to do so.

<sup>38</sup> See R. Berndt, "Anthropology and Education", *Educand*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1956.

<sup>39</sup> The W.A. *Native Welfare Regulations, 1940, with subsequent amendments*, p. 7, No. 37, provides for this, with the words "as far as practicable"; it is, however, the application of this principle which receives various interpretations. (Native education in W.A. is under the direct control of the Department of Education, and not of the Missions.)

ton-Laverton-Jiggalong area most children are speaking their Aboriginal languages: this fact should be taken into account.

Out of this local controversy, the uninformed and hazy thinking which has marked so much of its content, and the emotional cloud which gathered around it, two salient points have emerged. On the one hand there is the urgent but still unresolved question of uniformity in the matter of Australian Aboriginal policy. On the other, there is the need for a more informed approach to the whole question of native welfare. Each State, while anxious to obtain Commonwealth funds for native welfare, is reluctant to relinquish its autonomous control (even though this need not affect its local administrative structure, or its executive powers within the broader framework); and the Commonwealth has not shown itself over-eager to assume responsibility. Related to this, and implicit in the second point, is the plea that the policy-makers, along with the policy-implementers, should be people specially trained for work in this particular sphere.<sup>40</sup>

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that throughout Aboriginal Australia change is taking place rapidly. It is no longer possible to find a fully self-contained indigenous community with beliefs and practices unaffected by contact with the outside world. Leaving aside the changes which took place within Aboriginal Australia itself, all have been considerably modified as a result of European impact: and there is no returning to the former state of affairs. There seems little doubt that a few decades or so will see the virtual disappearance of Aboriginal culture and social life, as phenomena to be understood in their own terms, although not of Aboriginal physical characteristics. This does not mean that these people should lose all pride in their Aboriginal heritage, although present indications suggest that they will. Its significance cannot be recaptured or honestly commemorated in designs on textiles, canvas, or pottery, figurines and souvenirs, items designed to attract the buying public or the tourist trade.

To-day, the people we call Aborigines are living under a wide range of conditions: some as members of self-conscious 'minority'

<sup>40</sup> Officers of the N.T. Native Welfare Department receive a brief course of training in elementary Anthropology, those in W.A., e.g., do not; and there is no institution comparable to the School of Pacific Administration which specializes in the training of New Guinea administrative officers.

Professional anthropologist and administrative officers rarely meet on common ground (excepting in such special cases as the School of Pacific Administration); but it is high time that they did so. See H. G. Barnett, *Anthropology in Administration*, Row, Peterson, Illinois, 1956.

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groupings in towns and cities, others in more out-of-the-way places leading an existence which may be described roughly as not entirely Aboriginal, not entirely European, but something in between: dependent partly on their natural environment, but also partly on nearby contact agencies (the Mission, Government settlement, mining camp, pastoral station, and so on). It is time we realized that these people are part and parcel of our Australian society: all the advantages and disadvantages, the responsibilities and benefits which apply to its members should be relevant to them also. If we have this view before us, we are not only in a better position to evaluate the "Warburton Range Controversy": we are also better equipped to assist these Aboriginal people in their adjustment to rapidly changing conditions.