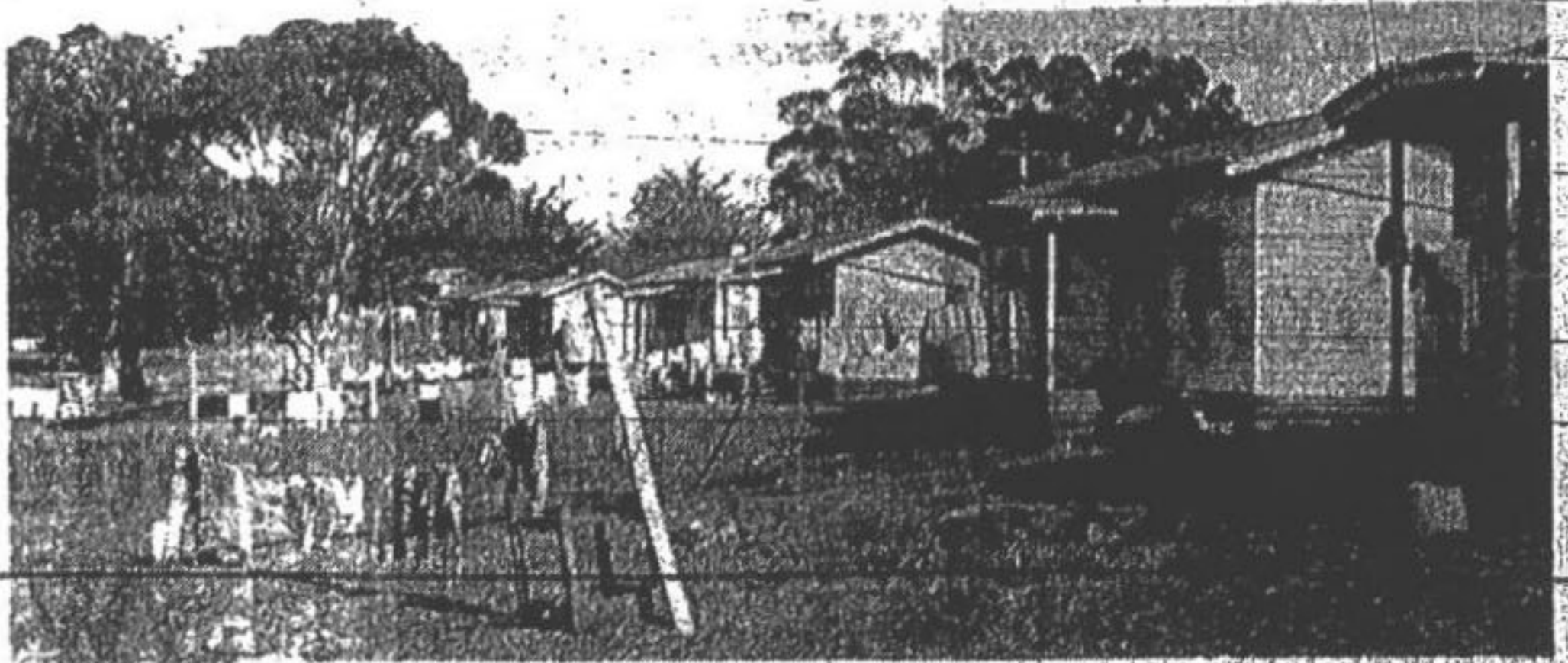


HUMAN FAILURE OF LAKE TYERS EXPERIMENT



Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station, an environment which cannot be described as desirable or humane.

ONCE again, as so often in the past, the problem and embarrassment of Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station is agitating hearts and minds in the community.

Once again, as so often in the past, sentiment, muddled thinking, good intentions and sinister intentions, a little knowledge and none at all, have so confused issues that making a rational assessment of what is, in fact, being done for the aborigine in this State becomes almost impossible.

A basically simple point is in contention in the current agitation stirred up by the recent resignation of Pastor Doug Nicholls from the Aborigines Welfare Board.

This is whether Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station should be kept open or closed.

Pastor Nicholls, who has come to be regarded by the community as spokesman for the aboriginal population of Victoria, says that this 4000-acre reserve in East Gippsland should be retained.

His argument, as put at a public meeting in Kew city hall this week, is that the aborigines "want the opportunity to give their children a chance in life in their own environment."

The State Government, through the Aborigines Welfare Board, and because of the laudable but not always reasoning or reasonable pressure of public opinion, has the same interest in giving the aboriginal children a chance. But it is determined to close Lake Tyers.

Who, then, is right?



THE Government view, based solidly on the finding of Mr. C. McLean, a former Chief Stipendiary Magistrate who carried out an official inquiry into the aboriginal question in 1956-57, is that aborigines must be assimilated, not kept apart.

This programme of assimilation, however vocifer-

BY
STUART SAYERS,
who visited Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station this week.

ously and for whatever purpose critics seek to obscure the fact, is being actively pursued and is winning an encouraging measure of success throughout the State.

But hopes for real and considerable advance must inevitably be pinned to the present and future generations of children.

The adults in the Victorian total of about 2500 people classified as aborigines do not offer, and cannot be expected to offer, such promise.

Here is the human dilemma and heartbreak, the heavy burden left on Australia's conscience by the sins and neglect of the past. Here is the reason and the need not only to atone but to find the means to eradicate the conditions and causes, social and economic, of a situation which nobody could deny is evil.

Lake Tyers is the measure of how evil, but in human, not material terms.



PERHAPS nowhere in Victoria could a more picturesque setting be found than this secluded lakeside station, 200 miles east of Melbourne, where the Church of England founded a mission for the aborigines in 1861.

On a sunny day, and from the blight eminence where the station windmill stands, the little cluster of 20 three-roomed, weatherboard cottages, in which the aborigines live, near the station's administrative buildings, has an air of contentment, peace and comfort.

Of its kind, the accommodation offered at Lake Tyers is good.

Of its kind, the life that is lived on this reserve is comfortable, envitably so in the view of anyone who has

never been subjected to the debilitating influence of the hand-out way of existence, which is all that the Lake Tyers residents of the present generation have known or, in many instances, have ever wanted to know.

This station, reached along a winding dirt road which branches unobtrusively off the Princes Highway, about 10 miles east of Lakes Entrance, cost the taxpayer in 1960-61 a net £27,774 to run.

When it is a question of "doing something for the aborigine" that may seem an insignificant enough sum.



BUT Lake Tyers' entire official population of aborigines — or, as they prefer to call themselves, "dark people," because, at the most, Victoria has only 20 full bloods — is 50 adults and 60 children.

For something approaching £1600 a head a year, Victoria is maintaining in a state of almost complete idleness and uselessness 60 adults of varying degrees of physical fitness and ability.

At this per capita cost, Victoria is perpetuating for the children and grandchildren of Lake Tyers' dwindled population an environment that by no stretch of the imagination can be described as traditional, desirable or, for that matter, humane.

Worse, because of its isolation and the ideal opportunities the surrounding bush offers for concealment, the station serves as a magnet for any friend or relative in trouble, down on his luck or hoping to share the station residents' regular twice-weekly handout of rations and tobacco and their fortnightly "dole" of nominal wages.

Despite the vigilance of the station management, Lake Tyers "supports" a constant, but shifting "underground" population of at least 20 itinerant aborigines.

It is these itinerant, often shiftless, but usually glib people, men and women both and, regrettably, adolescents already well

steeped in hopelessness, who fill the riverside camps of corrugated iron and hessian bag humpies which are too often found still near country towns throughout Victoria.

And it is these victims of bad circumstances and the neglect of the past who continue to drag down those among them who have managed to rise above their environment, haunting the towns on pay days to take, as by right of blood relationship, a share of the earnings of any of their dark fellows who have managed to gain and hold a job.

This, painted in its blackest, is the worst side of the coin.

Only a minority of the dark people are lost beyond redemption. The plight of the majority results from circumstances not choice.



FINDING the hovels and some dark-skinned derelicts who infest them, is all too easy.

And finding not only white men and women, but people of their own kind, to condemn them is as easy as recognising some at least of the socio-economic pressures which have combined to create in this prosperous State a class apart, unprivileged, uneducated, apparently without hope.

Stating the problem is simple. Finding solutions is the difficulty.

But one positive and useful measure which can be taken, and is being taken, is to close Lake Tyers, to heal the fester which has suppurated long enough in East Gippsland.

On no count is the £4830 revenue earned by the sale of livestock and produce from the Lake Tyers herd of some 300 beef cattle and 60 or so Jersey dairy cattle a satisfactory return for the nominal labor of the station's residents in 1960-61.

In fact, this only emphasises what is well recognised: that Lake Tyers is a