

Lake Tyers Settlement

SIR, — FOR MORE than six years I have been a member of the Aborigines' Welfare Board of Victoria and I look back on this period with profound unhappiness and a sense of frustration.

This feeling has been pointed by the recent publicity which has centred about the Government's policy towards the aboriginal reserve at Lake Tyers.

As a Victorian by birth, I grew up in the belief that Lake Tyers, and certain other areas, were inviolable sanctuaries for the aborigines.

The policy of "assimilation" which is being implemented in this State and elsewhere in the Commonwealth appears to be directed at the breaking down of the communal and family life of the aborigines, and in Victoria, of dispersing them over the State.

The culmination of this policy must logically destroy the need for a reserve. As an Australian and an anthropologist, I believe that our paramount concern must be for the welfare of these people and that their dispersal throughout the State is not consistent with this objective.

I believe that Lake Tyers, as the last aboriginal reserve, should be retained as a home for these people and that they should be encouraged by the best education, technical as well as secondary, to take a normal place in the life of the community without pressure or discrimination.

Up to the present I have refrained from expressing publicly the views that I hold as a member of the Welfare Board. But I feel that I must now set out my views towards "assimilation" and especially as to the future of Lake Tyers on which subjects I find myself in conflict with the chairman of the board (Mr. E. R. Meagher, M.L.A.).

I take exception to the statement made in Parliament by Mr. Meagher (Hansard, March 26, 1963, page 2593), in which he refers to the fact that I advocate that we should retain Lake Tyers "and turn it into a co-operative society run by the aborigines," followed by the statement, "This is a policy of apartheid."

Mr. Meagher concluded with the assertion that I, Pastor Doug Nicholls and others say in effect, "There is nothing better in life for you than to stay on this segregated settlement and remain a part of it for the rest of your lives."

Mr. Meagher knows well that this is not correct as far as I am concerned, and that in a report on Lake Tyers presented to the board as long ago as 1958 I outlined a policy of development and encouragement which included a proposal for the establishment of a first-class technical school on the reserve, for white children as well as for aborigines. Furthermore, I have at no time had any part in discussions about a co-operative at Lake Tyers.

Meeting

I also challenge the statement of Mr. Meagher, in his capacity of chairman of the board, in a letter published in "The Age" on May 10, "the ultimate fate of Lake Tyers has certainly never been discussed by the board."

I was present at a meeting of the board at which certain recommendations, including a proposed date for the closing of the reserve, and withdrawal of the staff, were presented by a sub-committee, but rejected—no doubt on grounds of expediency.

The only ideas that do not appear to have been seriously considered are those of the aborigines themselves.

If anything constructive has emerged from the recent controversy it seems to be the expression, perhaps for the first time, of the desire, mentioned above, to establish some kind of co-operative and a farming enterprise on the reserve. Surely it is the duty of the board to do its utmost to foster the ideas of the people themselves and to encourage their initiative as a step towards their ultimate independence.

In conclusion, I wish to state that the only reason for my remaining on the board has been my desire to help these people.

I believe that any Government that assumes the responsibility for closing Lake Tyers as a home and a refuge for the last of the aborigines must bear the stigma in the eyes of posterity.

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