

Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship

Box 2672, G.P.O., Sydney.

19th January, 1965.

Mr. J. Spigelman,
Secretary, S.A.F.A.,
170 Fitzgerald Ave.,
MAROUBRA.

Dear Mr. Spigelman,

I apologise for the delay in replying to your letter of the 24th December, but most of our active members have been on holidays.

We are most interested in the objects of your tour -- demonstrating against discrimination and carrying out a social survey. We are confident, from what we have heard about your preparations, that you will take care that your protests against discrimination will be made in such a way that they will not disadvantage the local Aboriginal population who will have to continue living in the area after the students have returned to the city. The social survey will have a continuing value, and when documented and published (as we hope it will be), can be expected to influence both Government policy and local attitudes.

As a city organisation, we have not as much direct contact with country Aborigines as we would like to have, but as you probably know, they are not prolific letter-writers. Most of the complaints we deal with come from Aborigines living on Welfare Board Stations and Reserves, and arise from the Manager-inmate relationship which we have been opposing for many years. We would like to suggest that you study carefully the Aborigines' Protection Act, and particularly the Regulations, and discuss with Aborigines the features they find objectionable. We enclose copy of some material we sent to the Civil Liberties Association on this aspect, which may be helpful.

Much of the discrimination suffered by Aborigines is covert, and it may be difficult for you to get them to discuss it with you in the short space of time at your disposal. In the enclosed schedule of Stations and Reserves, we have tried to suggest people to whom you could talk -- a lot of information can be gained from talking to Europeans about Aborigines ... many of them reveal prejudices ~~and~~ of which they are not themselves aware. I think you will find that discrimination and prejudice are greatest where there are large concentrations of Aborigines, e.g., Kempsey district, Walgett, Woodenbong, and least where there are only small groups, e.g., Yamba, Maclean, Casino.

Some specific instances which you might enquire into:

Kempsey -- Baths and Public Halls. Kinchella Boys' Home, from which many boys have absconded lately.

Fempsey (continued) -- We understand there is no longer an "Abroginalward" at the Hospital -- but are Aborigines treated in exactly the same way as Europeans, or put on verandahs, etc.?

Is Green Hills School (nominally a Public School) still used solely by Aborigines, other parents preferring to pay bus fares to send their children into town?

Moree -- We have heard that the school bus picks up Aboriginal children from the Station after it has delivered other children to school, and takes them home before school finishes, so that they lose up to an hour a day.

Moree has a very bad name for discrimination generally-- a sort of hard-core attitude, which should yield you a lot of material.

Purfleet (Taree) -- there is some story here of dissatisfaction with the school bus service, but we haven't any reliable information.

Urbenville - Some two or three years ago there was an outcry about an Aborigines Ward being built at the new Hospital-- the Minister for Health declared against segregated wards, and we understand it was not proceeded with. However, there was much local ill-feeling, and it would be interesting to know how the hospital functions, in practice.

Walgett -- no doubt you have all the material on this town. We had correspondence with the manager (Mr. White) of the Oasis Hotel-Motel, in which he admitted putting up a notice "Aborigines by invitation only", justifying this on grounds of cleanliness, bad language, etc. We pointed out that even if some Aborigines were dirty and used bad language, this did not justify a blanket prohibition on all Aborigines; that he had power to remove objectionable clients, but he was immovable (by letter). On Walgett we would like to suggest that you make a more general search for information than was apparently made by the Trade Union delegation, and Mr. David Tribe, who was a teacher there for some years, would, we think, be willing to advise you on how to go about this. There are many issues worth taking up in places like Walgett, but it is essential to pick the unassailable ones, and to check carefully the facts given.

A report it would be worthwhile reading is one by the Health Department Medical Officers' Conference (1962/63) which said that the "death rate of Aboriginal children might be twice as high" as that for other children.

In case you have not a copy, we enclose the N.S.W. Teachers' Federation "Survey of Aboriginal Children in N.S.W. Secondary Schools" which gives interesting facts, and highlights the need for sociological surveys into all aspects of Aboriginal communities, followed by ~~are~~-thinking of official "assimilation" policies.

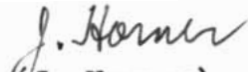
A permanent campaign of this organisation is to give Aborigines some say in their own affairs. The Welfare Board's constant complaint is that Aborigines will not accept responsibility, but they're given no training and no opportunity to assume responsibility. Stations are under the control of a Manager, who has wide powers -- "Aborigines must obey all reasonable commands" -- Aborigines on unsupervised Reserves have a lot of police surveillance. Europeans must get written permission from the Board to go on to Reserves -- Aborigines must get permission from the manager, even to visit their families, if they do not actually live on the Station. There is no provision for a committee of residents to make their own decisions -- only recently have there been moves to introduce Adult Education Classes (under Mr. Alan Duncan's guidance); ~~and~~ most adult Aborigines are barely literate, and are at a loss in coping with Social Service problems, etc. The Welfare Board has provision for one full-blood and one mixed-blood Aborigine on it, to represent all Aborigines in N.S.W. The Board is so unpopular with Aborigines, that they decline to get involved in its policies, knowing that two Aboriginal people on a Board of 11 will have little say, anyway. We have campaigned for more Aboriginal representation, on a regional basis, and for travelling expenses (at least) for the Aboriginal members, so that they can truly represent their electors. At the last Board elections, in spite of a campaign by the Fellowship and other organisations, less than 10% (probably only 7%) of eligible Aborigines voted. The procedure of applying to get on the roll, applying for a vote, having everything witnessed by a J.P., etc., would bedevil the average Australian elector -- add to this that Aborigines at Bourke don't know Jim Morgan from Coreki, and why should they vote? Although Aborigines in N.S.W. are eligible to vote in State and Federal elections, only a minority do so. Our policy is to remove the managerial system, replace it with a large staff of trained social workers, to be guides, counsellors and friends to the Aborigines, and to attempt, as a first step, community development schemes on land vested in the Aborigines, from which they can either take their place in the general community, or elect to raise themselves as a group.

We enclose booklet "Aborigines and Ourselves" which is a record of papers and discussion at our October 1961 Conference. Although there have been some changes in law -- for example Section 9 of the Protection Act was repealed, and some out-of-date and unused provisions, social and economic factors remain much the same. We also enclose a Bibliography which may be of use to you.

We have recently had cases of persons being refused permission to visit Stations and Reserves, but these were on the South Coast, and not relevant to your tour. However, we think you will find that this restriction on visitors is a point of contention between Reserve residents and Managers. The Board's view is that Aborigines are not compelled to live on Stations; if they do so they must abide by the rules, as in other institutions. This overlooks the fact that Aborigines rarely have much choice as to where they will live (financial considerations, attachment to their own birthplace etc.) and that "institutions" do not produce self-reliant, happy, well-adjusted persons.

We hope that some of this information will be of use to you, but appreciate that the object of the tour is to gather your own data, and make your own interpretations -- we are convinced that this will be very valuable, and we wish you very well indeed.

Yours faithfully,


(J. Horner)
Hon. Secretary.