

STUDENT ACTION FOR ABORIGINES

S U B M I S S I O N

to the

J O I N T C O M M I T T E E

of the

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL and LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

upon

ABORIGINES' WELFARE.

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INTRODUCTION.

The members of the S.A.F.A. bus tour encountered a whole spectrum of white attitudes to Aborigines. At the risk of a broad generalisation, it appears that lying behind most of the prejudices is the question "Why can't they lift themselves up?" This particular failure seems to be a manifestation of the vicious circle of poverty. Life in a depressing environment tends to produce those attitudes, e.g. hostility towards education, which keep that individual in his poverty stricken state. The apparent lack of drive and ambition of the Aborigines is the most common rationalisation of discrimination. The numerous forms of subtle discrimination and the general aura of superiority help to destroy the aborigine's ambition and sap his initiative. In combination with the depressing environment the vicious circle is complete.

President Lyndon B. Johnson in his famous "War on Poverty" speech of March 1964, gave the most eloquent outline of the vicious circle when discussing "hopelessness for the young"

"The young man or woman who grows up without a decent education, in a broken home, in a hostile or squalid environment, in ill health or in the face of racial injustice -- that young man or woman is often trapped in a life of poverty. He does not have the skills demanded by a complex society. He does not know how to acquire these skills. He faces a mounting sense of despair which drains initiative, ambition and energy."

The common opinions about Aborigines -- that they are lazy, and dirty, can all be interpreted as manifestations of this vicious circle. It is the perpetual failure of the Aborigine to lift himself up which fortifies these opinions. There is no real appreciation of the difficulties faced by the individual Aborigine. This situation has been perpetuated by the state's unwillingness to face the vicious circle squarely. It is hoped that the example of the policies adopted by the war on poverty programme in the U.S.A. will have changed this attitude.

Remedial action will be necessarily slow, and requires more attention to each individual's particular problems. Policy must not be seen in quantitative terms, i.e., how much money is spent. The most fruitful approach is a qualitative one, to discuss the TYPES of policies which are necessary.