

Adult Education for Aborigines

The Department of Tutorial Classes at the University of Sydney is concerned with Adult Education for men and women in the community. In conjunction with the Workers' Educational Association, it holds classes on a wide variety of subjects of interest to adult people generally. It provides such general services as Discussion and Kit groups and also publishes the fortnightly Current Affairs Bulletin. The Department is also concerned with certain special groups in the community, one tutor for example, has been appointed to work mainly with people in Trade Unions, whilst another tutor is mainly concerned with various women's organisations. This tutor is working to encourage women to play a greater part in various community activities and, for example, take their place on local shire and municipal councils.

My own appointment is somewhat similar as I will be concerned with Adult Education for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. The types of courses which will be provided will depend to a very large extent on what the Aboriginal people themselves feel would be of most use. It is hoped, however, that the Tutorial Classes Department will be able to assist Aboriginal people to achieve full citizenship and help them to take their place as full members of the community.

I will be visiting a number of towns and settlements in country areas as well as working with the growing

number of Aborigines who have settled in Sydney. Conferences have already been held with urban dwelling Aborigines and these people have already expressed their opinions on various problems which face dark people everywhere. At one meeting the employment problem was discussed and this discussion will be the basis for a future article.

Suggested Courses

The Aboriginal people felt that the most useful courses would be those which would help people in their homes or which would assist them to take a more active part in the life of the community. Some of the suggested courses concerned with the home were Family Budgets and how to estimate household costs; Nutrition and Food; the Home Garden and Child Care and Development. It was felt that courses and discussions about the community should be on such topics as the Structure and Functions of Government. This would include a study of the Federal, State and Local Governments, voting procedure and an examination of some of the government departments such as the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare.

Similar courses suggested were public speaking and meeting procedure and community services. The course on community services would consist of a series of discussions on such places as the post office, banks, the Baby Health Centre, the school and similar institutions which are so important in the local community. There would also be talks about the C.W.A., Junior Farmers' Clubs, the trade unions, such charitable organisations as the Red Cross and also, discussions about medical benefit funds, youth groups, church groups and other local associations.

"Form filling" is a problem which faces not only Aboriginal people but all people in the community. However, it must be remembered that by filling in many of the rather complicated forms which are required from time to time, we can gain quite big benefits. For example, nearly all Aborigines have tax deductions made from their wages and many Aborigines would have most of this money refunded if they submitted an income tax return. This is especially true for people who are not employed for the whole of the year and for men with a number of dependents. There is a large allowance given for each non-working member of the family. This means that if we were able to fill in this form, most of the money we have paid would be refunded each year.

There are also a number of other forms which could bring similar advantages. The trouble is, of course, that so many of the forms are difficult to understand and ask so many complicated questions that we often wonder if it is worthwhile filling them in at all.

The courses which have been mentioned are just some of the possible topics which could be treated. I feel that Aborigines themselves are the ones to decide what sort of course they feel would be worthwhile and also, how the course should be conducted. Courses

ADULT EDUCATION

The Aborigines Welfare Board recently set up a sub-committee consisting of its Vice-Chairman, Professor Elkin, and the Assistant Director-General of Education, Mr. V. J. Truskett, to investigate the provision of adult education for Aborigines. The sub-committee co-opted Mr. J. Wilson, of the Department of Tutorial Classes of Sydney University. At the request of this sub-committee, the Director-General of Education made available the author of this article, Mr. A. T. Duncan to carry out research work. Mr. Duncan, who was previously headmaster at Woodenbong Aboriginal School and Hillston Central School, graduated from Sydney University with honours in History and has since done post-graduate work in Education and Sociology.