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# CLEANING UP 'DODGE CITY'

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**At 24 years-of-age Steve Gordon had been blackballed from most jobs in the Brewarrina area as a result of his continuing refusal to accept second-rate status for himself or other Aboriginal people in the district.**

But following a brief visit to Sydney just prior to Christmas he has returned to Brewarrina with a new job—that of field officer for the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. He is now employed to pursue those activities that previously cost him jobs.

Steve's particular concern is the community of 300 people at Brewarrina West, an area more commonly known as 'Dodge City'. The people who live in the twenty-nine houses in this area were originally residents of the old mission. Eight years ago they were moved into new homes built a mile out of town. Most of the men are employed by the shire council on relief work. Few have a permanent job.

One of Steve's aims is to persuade the council and police to accept more responsibility for the area. Among other things, the social and physical conditions at West Bre are believed to be having an undesirable effect on the children's schooling.

The success at school of the daughter of one family who moved from West Bre into town indicates, says Steve, that progress is possible once people get away from the 'Dodge City' atmosphere or once that atmosphere is removed.

Despite the problems that beset West Bre there are some signs for hope. Steve believes that the situation that has characterised Brewarrina for so long is beginning to ease. "At least," he says, "the white community now acknowledges there is a problem".

Like many others Steve has been waiting a long time for that breakthrough. With the exception of a 12-month stint working in Sydney he has spent all his life in Brewarrina. He attended school there, has worked in shearing sheds, and was employed by the local meatworks till three years ago when he "protested the under-award wages being paid Aborigines and was dismissed".



*Steve Gordon.*

He claims the conditions which he objected to then and which led to his blackballing still exist in some places. Most people accept the situation because they are either too frightened of losing their jobs or else just do not understand what is happening. Steve was 17 when he first started to protest and was fired.

He believes that part of the reason he has refused to accept the situation faced by Aborigines in Brewarrina and what has made him fight is that with the exception of his early childhood years spent on the river bank, he had the benefit of living in town.

He has been tempted to take his wife and four young children and leave Brewarrina. He would have no trouble finding a good job and settling down elsewhere. "The people seemed in a hopeless position", he says, "but if I'd left they would have been worse off. It's my intention to move—but only after I've got the blacks up to the level of the whites".

Steve's assessment of his own role is not inaccurate. That many in the white community regard him as a "trouble-maker" is as much a measure of his achievement as the fact that the black community views him with respect and admiration.