

The eyes of Asia are on developments in Moree

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



RAISING THE ISSUE: Charles Perkins, Freedom Ride leader, queues with Aboriginal children at the Moree Baths.

SIR — It will be argued that the recent Freedom Ride in NSW has caused trouble where none existed, and has raised issues which were best left untouched. Yet the stirring of public conscience in country areas on the color issue, or indeed on any important issue, is an achievement in itself.

Until now only a half-hearted assimilation policy has been followed in NSW and it has failed owing to the apathy of local white citizens. No new houses nor more liberal policies will succeed until the local population accepts Aborigines as equal members of the community.

If half-caste Aborigines are accused of alcoholism, and lack of hygiene, these attributes have been forced on them by the failure of local people to give them self respect. It will be a long hard road to real assimilation, and the students have at least forced the community to examine its conscience.

Future developments in Moree and other towns will be regarded with exaggerated interest overseas, especially in Africa and South-East Asia, and it is hoped that Australians realise the importance of these issues abroad.—B. C. STEVENS, Kent Court, Toorak, Victoria.

Poverty maintains a vicious circle

THE SO-CALLED Aboriginal problem in Australia is beginning to come to the boil after a century and a half of stupid indifference and neglect. The steam and heat at Walgett and Moree, however, obscured a small item of news from Nowra, another town in NSW. It was a news item of special significance. It illustrated clearly how the Aboriginal "problem" starts and is perpetuated.

At Nowra about 15 Aboriginal children frequently are being excluded from the infants classes at the Public School because they arrive infested with lice. The Headmistress, Miss Bingham, has the unenviable daily task of inspecting the children, and rejecting those whose condition would affect others.

So yet another generation of Australians is starting innocently at the age of four or five along a road with humiliations on one side and contempt on the other, and leading inevitably to racial intolerance, hatreds, and ultimately to violence.

Reasoning people who do not allow emotion, prejudices, or bitter memories to run away with them should think about this situation at Nowra. The parents of the 15 children are ignorant people whose employment opportunities are few because of their ignorance. They live in two awful shanty settlements not three miles from the centre of Nowra. They cannot afford better housing because of their low earnings because of their ignorance. Universally it is true that ignorance and poverty and squalor and dirt go hand in hand, and the companions and symbol of this are body lice. Because of ignorance, squalor, and lice, 15 children at Nowra are beginning to miss school, and will begin to dodge going to school, and are likely to be no better off than their parents.

This fact must be faced without further evasion—Nowra is a typical Australian country town with its underprivileged racial minority existing around its outskirts in filth and destitution.

Last December my book, *The Illegitimates*, upset some of the politicians in the NSW Parlia-

ment because it describes scenes similar to the head-searching at Nowra school, and worse but equally true. A Minister was asked in the House to give an assurance that more would be done for Aborigines, but he hedged. He said that the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board was responsible only for Aboriginal people living on Government stations. The others who are more numerous do not belong to anyone.

Obviously Governments in Australia must take urgent and strong action to extend their range of aid, and break the vicious cycle which has been carrying old mistakes and miseries into new generations.

While ever the majority of Aboriginal people continue to live in squalor like those near Nowra their social rating in the Australian community will remain at zero level, and people like the residents of Moree will refuse to share crowded swimming pools with them, and will shun them in other ways.

Internationally we cannot afford any longer to ignore or to deal half heartedly with the "Aboriginal problem". Australia's own rating as a nation is being judged throughout the world on what we do about the Aboriginal people. Our international rating must not be zero level. — RAYMOND ATCHISON, Ramah Avenue, Mt Pleasant, NSW.

Protestants defended

I WOULD LIKE to contradict the opinions of your correspondent R. D. Symons, (February 15) who attempted to indicate an "apparent relationship between Protestantism and racial tension."

In his letter the implication was made that one of the results of the Reformation has been an assumed sense of superiority by white people resulting in racial tensions where none existed before.

In reply I would ask if it is not thought strange that the majority of negroes in the United States of America are active members of this Protestant faith and that he who is regarded as their leader is a Protestant minister, as his name so amply testifies.

Your correspondent proceeds to indict Calvin in particular. I am surprised he does not find it inconsistent that there is as high a proportion of Calvin's modern day followers who are colored as there would be colored members of any major Christian group. In so far as "Calvinists" could be found in any body they would be in the Presbyterian or Reformed Churches throughout the world. It is interesting that the largest

of these, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States, has at the moment a negro as its Moderator. Again, one of this Church's best known executive officers, its Stated Clerk, the Rev Dr Eugene Carson Blake, has been flung into prison for his support of the negro cause. I doubt that that elder of the Church of Scotland and leader in Malawi, Dr Hastings Banda, would agree with your correspondent's views either.

Racial tension cannot be traced to any particular section of Christian society when considered in its broad aspect; it is not absent in the non-reformed churches. Other causative factors should be sought, since those suggested by your correspondent do not survive rational scrutiny. — DR PETER WILLIAMSON, Killara, NSW.

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