

11 MAR 1974

Aboriginal affairs

Sir, — I refer to your editorial of February 7, titled, 'Aboriginal Affairs'. Permit me to make the following clarifications.

The emoluments and requirements which we members of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee seek is based on the facilities already provided for State and Federal departments of Aboriginal Affairs public servants. We seek them to serve our regions and people in them more effectively, not, as you imply, for ourselves.

The NACC will only be effective in giving our people a sense of participation, if we are listened to. We can only achieve this if our Minister, Senator Cavanagh, appreciates the stated policy objectives of his Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, who said in the national Press last April 7, "The basic objective of my Government is to restore to the Aboriginal people of Australia their lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs".

To this end the NACC is only a half-way step as there is provision for elected local representative bodies of Aboriginal people to be involved.

The reference to constitutional history is timely. The concept of the NACC by the previous Government is borne out of the unstated recognition that the Aboriginal people of Australia have unique, not special, rights rooted in international law relating to treaty rights which are peculiar to the original inhabitants and their descendants of any sovereign State.

Because history has had different impacts on the continent at differing periods, giving us urban Aboriginal populations, and because white Australia is entering the last bastions of our traditional past in Arnhem Land, if we are to survive as a consciousness, at least, we will need more than the co-operation of the total community. We will need the best of your resources, especially human ones.

Therefore, we do not want words or policies sounding of apartheid. We are one people, one world, but with different cultural socialisations in different places and time-scales. Also the NACC is not a parliament; it is an instrument for hearing, listening and exchange. It is a forum of consultation, national in scope.

Let us hope, as the former Minister, Mr Gordon Bryant, envisaged, that we will be granted seats in Federal Parliament, like the New Zealand Maoris, based on our historical constitutional position. We are not merely one group among many, such as farmers or migrants, we are the original first people, with prior occupancy rights, who seek cultural and historical preservation.

To this end much self-education has gone on in the Aboriginal civil rights movement over the past three decades, and will continue as times change.

Personally, I have learnt and

been educated by great Aboriginal men and women over an eight-year period: to name a few, Mr Jack Davis (WA), Mr John Moriarty (SA), Mr Philip Roberts, MBE, (NT), Mrs Joyce Claque (NT), Mr Joe McGuinness, (Qld), Mr Harry Williams (NSW), Mr Harry Penrith (ACT), Mr Stewart Murray (Vic), Sir Douglas Nichols, OBE, JP, and not least, Miss Margaret Valadian, Dip. Soc. Studs., MA (Qld).

We know generally what is needed, as poverty is poverty. Logically it can be solved only by those with wealth and power, and who are prepared to share it. The Prime Minister served notice on May 21, 1973, at the national seminar on Aboriginal arts that "his Government was determined that the long record of injustice, repression and neglect would be brought to an end".

In conclusion, the NACC will map out a detailed program of action for the various regions throughout Australia, if it is supported by all Australians. It will need the co-operation of the Public Service Board, the Government, and public servants, especially the resources of the Aboriginal Affairs Department, to draw up priorities locally, regionally, nationally, in which to allocate national resources for Aboriginal advancement. These are the pre-conditions to mastering our own destinies.

We seek no pot of gold but a d-and-butter Aboriginal cultural substance to come out of the Prime Minister's historic statements on Aboriginal policy and administration, since he assumed his high office.

Only then will Australia have a real future.

DAVID R. ANDERSON
Member No 3, (Mallee-Western
Region)
NACC

Clayton,
Victoria.

Sir, — In answer to Miss Brumfield's letter, (March 1) regarding Aborigines: all matters concerning Aborigines and their interaction with white society must be considered, not only from a contemporary perspective, but also in the light of the original "land theft" of Australian soil by the Crown over two hundred years ago.

All white people in Australia are living on land originally belonging to the Aborigines for which they have received no remuneration whatsoever; white people are occupying foreign soil and continue to do so only by means of superior numbers and the use of force.

With this in mind, it is only lack of thought, insensitiveness, or racial prejudice which would prompt anyone to write, as Miss Brumfield does, of Aborigines

accepting the "consequences" of white society in return for "privileges".

ROGER N. FRYER
Canberra.

Sir, — The suspension of Charles Perkins for his criticism of Liberal/Country Party Aboriginal policies was a rather frightening act. Are we coming so close to American ways that, like them, we only appoint token representatives of minority groups, and do not allow them to help their own people once they are in a position to do so within the law.

The Labor Party caucus, by replacing Mr Bryant, someone who was familiar with Aboriginal needs, and trusted and respected by them, with Senator Cavanagh, whose ideas are a trifle dated as they reflect nineteenth-century paternal attitudes towards Aborigines, is as much to blame as Mr Dexter.

Mr Dexter refuses to accept Mr Perkins' unique position as the only Aboriginal who can help his people, and is respected by them. Do both the Labor Party and Mr Dexter want to make us once more the laughing-stock of the world as we were before December, 1972: or simply confirm that, despite Mr Whitlam's statements to the contrary, Australia is a racist, reactionary country, immature enough to refuse to allow her minority groups to express themselves, and help themselves.

The only alternative is for Mr Dexter and Senator Cavanagh to stand down and allow their respective positions to be filled by people who know their jobs, such as Mr Bryant and Mr Perkins.

LINDA LEE

Vaucluse,
NSW.

Justice for Aborigines

Sir, — Any Pickering cartoon is worth a thousand words. And that on Page 1 on March 8 was my shame.

His cartoon, asking if Justice, is colour-blind, shows no sense of history, no sense of compassion, and no sense of moral relevance. For black Australians the question he asks is rhetorical: Justice is most assuredly white.

Ask those thousands of blacks who for all their lives lost their civil rights under 'protective' laws. Ask the thousands who found themselves jailed for offences that for a white man would not even rate an arrest.

Ask Nancy Young, whose infant daughter died, probably of scurvy, in July 1968 in Cunnamulla, Queensland. Four months later, Nancy was charged with manslaughter on the grounds of an alleged failure to provide her infant with adequate food or to seek medical attention.

After three months spent in jail for failure to raise bail. Nancy was found guilty by an all-white, all-male jury and sentenced to three years' hard labour. Her appeal was heard and dismissed by the full Queensland Supreme Court which, two months and a public outcry later, reversed itself on the grounds of fresh evidence, and freed Nancy one month before she was due for parole.

A well-educated and well-advised white mother in similar circumstances would have considered proceeding with a case of civil negligence against the Cunnamulla Hospital. But in our courts Aborigines are always defendants and never plaintiffs.

If white justice has at last shown that circumstances alter cases, it is an historic step forward, not backwards, for Australian society. To turn an act of foolish desperation into an unnecessary martyrdom is irresponsible. Perhaps Mr Pickering might turn the book from which I've taken the Nancy Young case into a cartoon strip. It might be more jarring than fat cats and their political bosses.

You also, on page 2, carry the report of an interview with Mr Dexter, for whom I have high regard. But I believe he is profoundly wrong in his denial of the need for an Aboriginal Affairs Commission.

Recent events, especially those of the past few days, have shown beyond doubt that Aboriginal Affairs is far too important to be left to politicians, concerned to exploit any problem, not to the advantage of the Aboriginal people, but to the advantage of a particular political party, sometimes even a particular interest group within one party.

Imagine the Australian Broadcasting Commission as a government department and its reporters as public servants. What kind of information service would we get? Nothing but self-serving propaganda. There are massive advantages to be gained by moving Aboriginal Affairs, not from the domain of public responsibility, but just one step away from the continuous glare and hurly-burly of party politics.

Surely white Australians now recognise that Aboriginal advancement to dignity and self-hood is a national goal, and not one for petty politicking and hypocritical tub-thumping.

F. L. JONES

Acton.