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Title:

Launching of Secondary Schools Aboriginal Affairs Fund Walkathon, Adelaide Town Hall

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LAUNCHING OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS FUND WALKATHON -
ADELAIDE TOWN HALL - FRIDAY, 5TH MARCH, 1971.

THERE CAN BE FEW CAUSES MORE WORTHY, OR MORE URGENT, THAN THAT OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION. FEW PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA WOULD QUESTION THE WORTHINESS OF ANY EFFORT TO BREAK THE DEPRESSING CYCLE OF NEGLECT AND POVERTY WHICH IS STILL THE LOT OF THE ABORIGINE. BUT; UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE FAR TOO FEW PEOPLE WHO APPRECIATE THE URGENCY FOR ACTION NOW. ABORIGINAL CAUSES ARE RECOGNISED AS PRE-EMINENTLY GOOD CAUSES BUT THERE IS A TENDENCY TO READILY ADMIT THE FACT, PAY LIP SERVICE TO THE NEED FOR SOLUTION AND THEN TO LOOK ON ITS ACHIEVEMENT WITH INDIFFERENCE. THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS FUND IS DOING SOMETHING AND, IN ENLISTING YOUNG WHITE AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL CHILDREN, HAS GIVEN A LEAD IN A WAY WHICH IS BOTH PRACTICAL AND IMAGINATIVE.

MANY WRONGS HAVE BEEN DONE TO THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. INITIAL CONQUEST AND DEPRIVATION OF THEIR LANDS WAS FOLLOWED BY CRUELTY AND A DEGREE OF EXPLOITATION THAT AMOUNTED TO VIRTUAL

PAGE 2.

ENSLAVEMENT. THEN CAME THE REACTION BUT FOR MANY YEARS OFFICIAL AUSTRALIA ATTEMPTED TO ASSUAGE ITS GUILT BY A HANDOUT SYSTEM OF CHARITY WHICH HAD THE EFFECT OF PRODUCING A PAUPER MENTALITY IN MANY ABORIGINES.

THE FINAL WRONG, IT SEEMS TO ME, WOULD NOW BE TO DESTROY THE RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE OF ABORIGINAL SOCIETY AND TO ATTEMPT TO TURN THE BLACK MAN OR WOMAN INTO A SHABBY IMITATION OF THE WHITE MAN. ANY WORTHWHILE POLICY OF EDUCATION IN RELATION TO ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS MUST, THEREFORE, BE CONSISTENT WITH RESTORING TO THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THEIR SELF-RESPECT. THE FUND HAS ALREADY PROVED ITS WORTH MANY TIMES OVER IN VICTORIA AND ITS ROLE THERE IS AN EXPANDING ONE. IN SETTING UP A SOUTH AUSTRALIAN OFFICE IT IS DOING THIS STATE SOME SERVICE.

THERE IS NO BETTER WAY OF ENSURING SELF-RESPECT THAN TO ENCOURAGE A SENSE OF PRIDE IN ONE'S HERITAGE. THE POST-WAR HISTORY OF AFRICA AND ASIA AND SURGE OF NATIONALIST FEELING AND PRIDE THAT HAS SWEEPED ACROSS THOSE CONTINENTS IS CLEAR PROOF OF THIS.

THIS FEELING OF COURSE, IS COMMONPLACE AMONG OUR OWN ABORIGINAL LEADERS BUT IT IS AN ATTITUDE WHICH HAS NOT YET WON GENERAL ACCEPTANCE THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA.

IN 1965 THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RECOGNISED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ABORIGINE'S SENSE OF PRIDE IN HIS PEOPLE AND CULTURE. WE TURNED OUR BACK ON THE ACCEPTED OBJECTIVE AS ASSIMILATION AND SET OURSELVES INSTEAD AN OBJECTIVE OF INTEGRATION. THIS MEANT A RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO LIVE IN OUR COMMUNITY ON FULLY EQUAL TERMS BUT RETAINING, IF THEY SO DESIRE, A SEPARATE AND IDENTIFIABLE ABORIGINAL HERITAGE AND CULTURE. SUCH A POLICY HAS MANY RAMIFICATIONS. IT LED ON THE ONE HAND TO THE PASSAGE OF THE PIONEER PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION

ACT - WHICH HAS BEEN FURTHER STRENGTHENED SINCE MY GOVERNMENT'S RETURN TO OFFICE. ON THE RESERVES IT MEANS THE END OF ANY ECONOMIC PRESSURES ON ABORIGINES TO LEAVE THE RESERVES TO WORK IN THE WHITE COMMUNITY. IT MEANS THE PROVISION OF FACILITIES TO ENABLE THE ABORIGINES ON THE RESERVES TO LIVE THEIR OWN LIVES IN A MANNER OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING. THOSE ABORIGINES WHO WISH TO REMAIN ON RESERVES IN TRIBAL SITUATIONS SHOULD BE ENABLED TO DO SO; THOSE WHO WISH TO LIVE ON RESERVES UNDER DETRIBALISED CONDITIONS SHOULD ALSO BE ENABLED TO DO SO WHILE THOSE WHO WISH MUST BE GIVEN EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN THE WHITE COMMUNITY IN JUST THE SAME WAY AS WHITE AUSTRALIANS. IN OTHER WORDS ABORIGINES MUST BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES.

IN EDUCATION THIS POLICY HAS MEANT THAT ABORIGINAL CHILDREN SHOULD WHERE POSSIBLE BE TAUGHT IN THE MOTHER TONGUE WITH ENGLISH FOLLOWING AS A FURTHER SUBJECT.

THE CHILDREN SHOULD BE GIVEN THE FULLEST OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR OWN BACKGROUND, HISTORY AND TRADITIONS, AND PARTICULAR EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE NOT EDUCATED AWAY FROM THEIR OWN PEOPLE AND HERITAGE.

NATURALLY, IT IS INEVITABLE THAT AS CHILDREN ARE EDUCATED MANY OF THEM WILL REJECT TRIBAL CONDITIONS AND PRACTICES. BUT IT IS VITAL THAT THE YOUNG ABORIGINES MUST BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY OF EDUCATION AND THE RIGHT TO MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES FOR THE FUTURE. AND ONLY BY INCREASED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES CAN THE ABORIGINES FIND FROM WITHIN THEIR OWN RANKS THE LEADERSHIP WHICH WILL BE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL AS THE COMMUNITY FACES THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES THAT MUST EMERGE DURING THIS AND THE NEXT DECADE, AND THE PRESENT FINE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP

SHOWS WHAT A RESERVOIR OF TALENT IS AVAILABLE. GOVERNMENTS CAN, IN A SENSE, ONLY AIM TO EASE THE PAIN OF THE TENSIONS WHICH WILL NECESSARILY DEVELOP. MANY OF THE SOLUTIONS WILL COME FROM WITHIN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY, AND THE ULTIMATE GOAL DEPENDS UPON THE WISHES OF THE ABORIGINES THEMSELVES.

I PERSONALLY HOPE THAT WHATEVER FORM THIS ULTIMATE DEVELOPMENT TAKES IT WILL INVOLVE A FULL INTEGRATION BASED UPON THE PRESERVATION OF THE DISTINCTIVE ABORIGINAL CULTURAL AND RACIAL TRADITIONS AND UPON RECOGNITION BY THE WHOLE COMMUNITY OF THE CONTRIBUTION WHICH THIS DISTINCTIVE TRADITION HAS TO MAKE TO AUSTRALIA.

BUT THERE IS LITTLE POINT IN TALKING OF ULTIMATE GOALS IF NOTHING IS DONE TO AMELIORATE PRESENT DISABILITIES. AND THE HARSH FACT IS THAT THE ABORIGINAL CHILD TODAY WHO WISHES TO EDUCATE HIMSELF OR HERSELF TO EVEN RELATIVELY UNREMARKABLE STANDARDS FACES SEVERE DISADVANTAGES COMPARED WITH THE WHITE AUSTRALIAN. THOSE WHO FEEL AS I DO THAT THIS IS A SHOCKING SITUATION WHICH SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO CONTINUE, HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY ON THE 27TH OF THIS MONTH, BY JOINING IN THE FUND'S LONG WALK OR BY SPONSORING ONE OF THE MARCHERS, TO MAKE A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT IMPACT UPON IT AND TO RENDER A VALUABLE COMMUNITY SERVICE.