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A TALE OF TWO TOWNS

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Report on a New Initiative in Community Education in
Rockhampton & Kempsey by the Commissioner for
Community Relations 1980-81

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INTRODUCTION

By

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During the past six years of administering the *Racial Discrimination Act* 1975 a blend of case investigation, conciliation, and community education has been undertaken in some 250 towns throughout Australia.

Field teams engaged in this work have unstintingly devoted their time and energies to combating racial discrimination and to making the community more aware of its unacceptability in a modern nation.

The experience gained during those six years has been distilled in implementing the Two-Town Education Project in Rockhampton and Kempsey described in this Report.

The strategy developed in carrying out this project could now form the basis for a model approach to community education applicable in principle to cities, towns and suburbs throughout Australia.

In Australia there are 836 local government areas. It is apparent that community education projects need to be initiated in all of them as a matter of urgency, since racial prejudice throughout Australia appears to be deep and widespread and, for the most part, unconscious.

As a result of these projects' success planning is proceeding for similar whole-community education projects in two suburban areas, one in Sydney and one in Melbourne. Based on the experience of the past six years and, in particular, of the two whole-town projects in Rockhampton and Kempsey, a model project has been developed suitable for implementation by local government authorities, churches, and other community bodies—either singly or in concert.

The model project is attached to this Report and information on it is to be distributed to every local government Council and church denomination in Australia.

There has been international interest in the new approach which has been developed and the report is to be discussed with United Nations agencies, the World Council of Churches in Geneva and at a special US national seminar at the University of Hawaii.

A TALE OF TWO TOWNS

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT

BACKGROUND

In the Australian vernacular the phrase "Sydney or the bush" sums up the range of alternatives in a dilemma. At the same time it evokes that peculiarly Australian awareness of the diametrically opposed world of urban and rural values running through our history,

In the delicate field of race relations, with an involvement by government dating back only a few years, this factor is especially crucial: any broad consensus of public support for government intervention must be based both in Sydney and the bush. Public support of an innovative concept in public administration depends on both the urban and rural communities' understanding of what is at stake—and the stake may vary greatly between Sydney and the bush.

The passage by the Federal Parliament in 1975 of the *Racial Discrimination Act* did not of itself guarantee that wide-ranging support would be given by the community for the outlawing and combat of racial discrimination.

Therefore the Act also provides that the Federal Government carry out programs of community education concerning the principles enshrined in the Act and in the UN Convention on which it is based.

It is stipulated that such education should promote "understanding, tolerance and friendship" between all the ethnic and racial groups that compose the population,'

Any attempt to develop a positive understanding of racial and community relations issues in a given area would have to start by taking close account of the racial and ethnic composition of that area,

The proportions of the different ethnic and racial groups in the population, and their mix, vary enormously in the inner-urban, suburban and rural populations. For example, while the non-Anglo-Australian elements of the population of Redfern, in inner-urban Sydney, form the majority (and include a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal people), these elements must be virtually negligible in the population of Darling Point five kilometres away (which would doubtless lack a single Aborigine).

However the population of Wilcannia in the far west of NSW is 60% Aboriginal and 40% white, and the local school population is 75% Aboriginal. Other country towns may vary greatly in the proportion of Aboriginals in their population. For example, Townsville has 10% Aboriginal and Islander people while Wangaratta has very few indeed.

People in rural areas with a relatively high number of Aboriginals and Islanders are often unaware of the intensely cosmopolitan nature of the major Australian cities.²

By the same token most people in these cities would never have spoken to an Aborigine, nor have any appreciation of Aboriginal culture or concerns,

More significantly however, Australians, now drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, tend to overlook the richness of their fellow-Australians' cultural heritages. This can easily lead to a blinkered view of what Australia is today, and stunt the growth of a contemporary sense of Australian nationhood, The simple question "Who is an Australian?" can easily start an argument.

Thus people who are different are seen by many as a threat to the "Australian way of life".¹ This view overlooks the fact that all Australians—except Aborigines—must be linked with immigration to this land at some point in the last nine generations.

Further, such thinking can find no legitimate place for non-traditional Aborigines in its picture of modern Australia, which is after all one of the most urbanised societies on earth. Yet the surprising fact is that the majority of Aborigines are not tradition-oriented people living in remote areas but are 'resident in the country towns and capital cities.

It is in such places that they suffer from the narrow attitudes shown towards people who are culturally different, This is borne out in the constant flow of complaints of racial discrimination lodged by Aboriginal people in both urban and small-town Australia.

In the past few years between 30% and 40% of the cases of discrimination lodged with the Commissioner for Community Relations have been in respect of Aboriginal people, who comprise only 2% of the Australian population.⁴

This underlines the fact that race relations in Australia are marred by an unremitting discrimination against Aboriginal people in every facet of their lives. This imposes on them a *de facto* second class citizenship, on the whole endorsed by white opinion in the areas where they live. Wherever there is a significant presence of Aborigines, whether in "Sydney or the bush", there is racial discrimination.

Any intervention designed to seek equality of rights runs the risk of fuelling a backlash because the long-established social order is in jeopardy.

This is precisely the reason why the *Racial Discrimination Act* lays such stress on the need for community education as well as case conciliation. Moreover it is significant that reports on racial and community relations issues invariably close with a call for programs to educate local populations⁵ about the backgrounds and needs of the culturally different.

Since 1975, the Commissioner for Community Relations and his handful of officers have sought to get the message of racial and community harmony out to the Australian public wherever possible, through media presentation, and through speaking engagements at service clubs, professional gatherings, training seminars, teachers' courses, schools, universities and churches, by organising State-wide conferences, and by disseminating a growing body of documentation compiled in the Office.

There is an obvious need, however, to balance this "broadcast" or randomised approach—which reacts to initiatives from within the general community—with properly planned programs geared to the character of specific suburbs, towns and regions. This would emphasise the advantage of a preventative approach over the patchwork of case-conciliation, and would obviate the build-up of serious inter-group tensions in certain localities.

Of course community education is not just appropriate to crisis intervention. "Community relations means us all"⁶—the affluent, influential Anglo-Australians living in their near-homogeneous suburbs of the "Bible-belt" as well as the other later immigrant concentrations of inner and outer urban areas, and the townspeople of provincial centres. All must equally come within the scope of community education if it is to live up to its name, but in an era of such tight Public Service constraints and low Government priority, specific geographical areas and key occupational groups within society must command earlier attention.

The Commissioner for Community Relations has been conscious of the difficulty of allocating priorities between talking multiculturalism in the cities and combating anti-Aboriginal racism in the country. **However** in the absence of basic resources of staff and funds, it was the best compromise achievable. There is now clearly a need to integrate the educative thrust in rural and urban Australia for both Aboriginal and other subjects of discrimination.

The challenge is how to co-ordinate community education initiatives in these two fields: how to tackle problems arising in the ethnic mosaic of the metropolis which today includes an Aboriginal presence, as well as cope with the historic black/ white tension of the country town? Are there issues in common? Is there any common element: any common community mentality? Can strategies be adopted to build understanding across racial as well as cultural barriers? Or is the country town still too conscious of its relatively recent "colonial" relationship with the indigenous inhabitants? Is Sydney indeed a pole apart from the bush?

Rationale

These considerations were foremost in the decision by the Commissioner for Community Relations to focus a concerted effort in community education on two provincial centres frequently visited in conciliation work. These were Rockhampton in Central Queensland and Kempsey on the mid-north coast of New South Wales.

The choice of Rockhampton and Kempsey was made because of the presence in both towns of outstanding contributors to good community relations and of a fund of goodwill. A further factor was that conciliation teams had successfully handled a considerable number of cases there, as in so many other towns in NSW and Queensland where there were patterns of discrimination against Aboriginal people. Further, in each town there was a Consultative Committee on Community Relations which provided a framework of supportive people for the education team to draw upon.

In both towns during the past five years the Commissioner and his officers have received invaluable assistance in handling difficult and delicate situations from specialist ministries within the Anglican and Catholic Churches."

In both towns the challenge was therefore to establish whether an approach could be devised to community education that would be meaningful to the whole range of the local population- whether through the network of organisations to which people belonged or across the life of the town at large.

Aims

The aims laid down for the Rockhampton, Kempsey project were both short-term and longer-term: to seek improvement in race relations locally through an enhanced awareness of the multicultural and multiracial nature of Australia, and to explore educative approaches that might subsequently prove useful for wider application elsewhere.

In strictly educational terms, the aim was to encourage in townfolk the development of positive attitudes towards Australians of all backgrounds in order to build mutual respect, openness and trust in place of exclusiveness, racial prejudice and rejection. That is, to challenge the entrenched mythology with its damaging effects on relationships within the local community, and supply more balanced data for meaningful race relationships to be built on in the future.

2. A TALE OF TWO TOWNS: A SOCIAL PROFILE

What was the character of this local "mythology" on racial issues?

In both Rockhampton and Kempsey a remarkable similarity was noted in the attitudes expressed about Australians who differed in colour, language or origin from the speaker. The same old clichés seem to be part of an unconsciously racist script that has been circulated throughout the country areas.

Among the frequently expressed—and mostly unchallenged—prejudices, slanders and half-truths are the following, gathered at grassroots level in pubs and clubs, from "talk-back" radio, and in reported conversations:

The Aborigines round here aren't real Aborigines. They're half-caste or quarter-caste or nearly as white as we are. They only line up as Aborigines to get the hand-outs.

Aboriginals in our town don't have a culture. It was destroyed long ago. They're just like whites but their behaviour is worse. If only they'd *do* something about themselves everything would be all right. What do *you* know about our Aborigines? I grew up in this district and / know what they're like.

There were no race problems in this town before the outside stirrers came along—the radicals, trendies, communists, academics and government "experts". ,

The Aborigines are the laziest of people. They've never achieved anything.

We've got their country and we got it for nothing—you've got to admit that *that's* good business!

They breed like rabbits—can't we do something to stop them having • babies?

Myths about Aboriginal people frequently encountered include a belief in their having access to free taxis, free funerals, free housing, and free repairs and replacement for broken electrical appliances. Many variations of this type of misconception were constantly repeated, to the detriment of Aborigines.

Similar myths were stated about newcomers to Australia. Among the common anti-immigrant sentiments were the following remarks:

— They've been here for months, so why can't they speak English?

They came here with their own lingo and they still speak it in public. If they don't fit in with our way of life why don't they go back to their own country?

They work too hard. Just look at the houses they buy!

OR ELSE

They bludge on us taxpayers by living on the dole.

Such community attitudes—if generally held __ must pose massive barriers against culturally racially diverse Australians enjoying the equal rights

guaranteed them in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

Indeed, it boils down to the issue of who may legitimately claim to be an Australian. This makes a mockery both of our long-established and publicly funded programs of population-building through immigration, and also of our publicly funded programs of Aboriginal advancement.

The concept of Australian citizenship is also cheapened: if a person whose forebears have lived in Australia for tens of millennia cannot aspire to the full enjoyment of Australian citizenship, how can a newcomer of three years' residence hope to enjoy equality? Is our citizenship only for the elect? Who is to decide who the elect shall be?

It becomes simply a local power game to perpetuate the *de facto* exclusion of minority groups from the full enjoyment of citizenship rights while professing an attachment to the democratic Australian way of life and the renowned "fair go". The hypocrisy expressed by such attitudes places a serious stumbling-block in the way of outsiders ever identifying with "our" system.

Increased racial friction must inevitably result from the continuance of the white-supremacist attitudes identified above, especially in an era when minority groups of all kinds are increasingly prone to assert their rights. With the growing awareness among the Aboriginal communities of their unique cultural and social identity there comes also the determination to create their own agencies for bringing about change. In both towns there is an impressive array of Aboriginal organisations seeking this goal. Many of these bodies have been active in lodging complaints of racial discrimination with both State and Commonwealth authorities as further evidence that the old status quo of silent oppression is at an end.

In Kempsey the current NSW Supreme Court action arising from racial friction over access to goods and services bears out that Aborigines are now prepared to confront the system if need be, in order to assert their rights.

The two-town community education project represented an historic attempt to tackle attitudes to such matters across entire town populations. While it made no pretence to effect a dramatic breakthrough in re-structuring race relations, it did offer the opportunity to explore local attitudes and build up a network of people concerned to work for change in their own community. Such an approach must be essentially tentative rather than based on pre-determined strategies and the "selling" of easy solutions. Its most distinctive claim is simply that it is a "first" for Australia—and possibly further afield.

The Kempsey situation

The 1976 Census records that Kempsey has a population of 8,881 people. Of these, 5.2% are Aborigines or Islanders. This is five times higher than the average for the Australian population as a whole. Of the remaining 94.8% of the population, 14% have a connection with immigration to Australia in their own or their parents' generation. This figure is well below the national average, which is

no less than 40% of the whole population (that is, 20% born overseas and a further 20% with one or both parents born overseas).

An analysis of the 147 of the Kempsey population connected with immigration in the past two generations indicates that the majority is derived from immigration from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, while "other European", "Asian" and "Others" account for the remainder, constituting a mere 2.3% of the town's population, or 202 people.

This leads to the clear conclusion that the town of Kempsey has a significantly higher percentage of its population drawn from an Anglo-Saxon background than the nation as a whole, and also than New South Wales as a whole. The influence of this fact on the town's attitudes to the local Aboriginal population poses an interesting question.

These are among the basic facts that emerge from the Census data, but they are obviously incomplete. Other social data may be just as significant, while perhaps being less identifiable from Census material. For example, there was a report of a group of some 40 people of Lebanese background within the Catholic Church, but only eight of these appear in the Census figures as such, either because it is a development since 1976 or else because they are old-established residents of the town. The latter would be readily explicable in terms of the strong incentive in rural communities to quickly deny or forget an ethnic background other than Anglo-Saxon, in the interests of fitting into the local scene—an unfortunate pressure in a multicultural nation which has publicly rejected assimilation as a means of maintaining social harmony.

Kempsey and the Lower Macleay district form a discrete, well defined community with a distinctive history of settlement dating back to the 1830's. Both historical documentation⁸ and the corporate memory of older people record that the early days of white settlement were accompanied by considerable bloodshed arising from Aboriginal resistance to white alienation of lands. A retired clergyman put it that "the Valley was settled in a bloodbath", and that as a child he had heard reports from older people of Aboriginal heads stuck on fenceposts further up the Valley.

It must be stressed that this remark is merely repeated here without either endorsement or refutation: what is significant is that a consciousness of the turbulent settlement history is extant in the area and this must play a part even if sub-consciously __in shaping inter-racial attitudes today.

Certainly the quite surprising degree of hatred of Aborigines commonly encountered and, on the other hand, the total silence about the 40,000-year Aboriginal presence on the part of the tourist promotion industry⁹ both seem to indicate an awkwardness in the white community's relations with the dispossessed remnant of the area's Aboriginal population.

Nevertheless a great many residents who have lived in Kempsey all their lives are prone to proclaim their profound knowledge of things Aboriginal on the score of their long residence in the areal°. In itself this may not establish anything since

familiarity may breed contempt as much as knowledge. Moreover, on the basis of current white community attitudes, it is most unlikely that past knowledge of the Aboriginal people and their culture was any less superficial, ignorant or prejudiced than at present. One of the most frequent observations made during the community education project was the almost total ignorance of Aboriginal culture, opinion, attitudes and sensitivities on the part of so many people of the Valley. Whether this was any different in previous generations must be very contestable.

The Rockhampton situation

The profile of Rockhampton that emerges from the Census figures is that of a city almost devoid of people related to immigration from non-English-speaking countries in the present generation. This was confirmed by leading spokesmen such as the Mayor. Indeed, it seems likely that Rockhampton is the largest city in Australia to be practically untouched by the post-war immigration movement.

Only 5.8% of the population is overseas-born and the great majority of these were born in the UK or other English-speaking countries. The Census figures show that there are some 300 Germans related to recent immigration, about the same number of Dutch, 10 Greek families, about 50 Italians, a small number of Poles and a few others. On the other hand the largest group of residents from a distinctive cultural background are the Aborigines and Islanders who, according to figures supplied by the Anglican Ministry to Aborigines and Islanders, comprise some 8 percent of the city's population of 55,000. This is about six times the national average.

During the community education project copies of relevant tables from the Census were made available to interested people in both centres. The initial reaction was usually surprise, followed by a recognition that the figures did actually describe their experience of the local situation.

Yet in the case of Rockhampton, despite the evidence that it is still largely a city of the thirties in the background of its population, there are indications that the original white population was not monolithically Anglo-Saxon.

The size of the Catholic population and the scope of its church life indicates a strong Irish component among the townsfolk, while the number of German-origin names listed in the phone book, encountered during the program, and appearing on business premises and street names is significant. There is a local branch of the Greek lodge AHEPAI I which was founded nationally in Brisbane in the 1920's and indicates the presence of an old established Greek-origin community. A hint of the lost multicultural flavour in the town's heritage is also evidenced by a newly erected Chinese joss-house.

But this aspect of the town's history appears to be no longer in the popular consciousness, and elements other than the Anglo-Australian appear to have been virtually assimilated at least in any impact they might have made on the people's awareness that their city too is part of multicultural Australia.

It is significant that, in some occupational areas normally filled from out-of-town appointments, the cultural backgrounds more accurately reflect the situation in Australia as a whole. Thus in a group of health workers addressed, only 50% were local people, while of the remainder 40% were of English background, 35% of Irish, Scottish and Welsh, while 25% reflected a wide range of backgrounds including German, Dutch, Spanish, French, Macedonian and Polish.

Another aspect of district history that appears to have receded into limbo is the inter-racial conflict in the early days of white settlement. This period has been documented by Lorna McDonald.¹² However, on several occasions remarks were noted to the effect that older district residents retain memories of bloodshed as recent as the early decades of this century. At a service club evening one member claimed that his old uncle can remember seeing poisoned meat put out for the Aborigines.

However in contemporary times daily contact between Aborigines and white society in the town is a relatively recent development, reflecting the evolution of Governments' policies on Aboriginal affairs. As recently as 1950 centres such as Rockhampton, Townsville and Kempsey had very few urban Aboriginal residents, and in Queensland towns Aboriginal visitors from the out-of-town Reserves (then called Missions) were objects of curiosity, especially as they were often under escort by officers of the State "Aboriginal protection" agency, or police.

The intervening period has seen a dramatic change in the situation as the "protection" policy gave way to "assimilation" and later "integration". A significant townward movement developed as people left (or were expelled from) the Reserves and as urban housing began to be provided. The Aboriginal and Island population of Townsville, for instance, jumped from a few hundred to some 7,000 in 30 years.

This posed a new challenge both to black and white residents as communities emerged of people of widely different racial and cultural backgrounds sharing facilities in settled neighbourhoods, often within the same Housing Commission estate.

There is an interesting parallel between this urban resettlement movement and the contemporaneous influx of Continental immigrants into the previously monocultural towns and suburbs. In most cases the two groups of newcomers Aborigines and immigrants—went to different centres and so the existing populations did not perceive the full impact of racial, cultural and linguistic diversity. But with the passage of time and continuing mobility within our society the community relations issues posed everywhere will be the same: how to share Australia with openness, respect and harmony.

3. OPERATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Planning the project

The Two-Town Education Project was initiated in August, 1980 by a project team of two officers of the Commissioner for Community Relations, Canberra. During the next seven months the team paid several visits to each centre, working for approximately a week on each occasion,³ This enabled a general picture of life in each place to be progressively built up.

The initial visit to each town was exploratory, enabling a large number of contacts to be made. At this stage no clear commitment about forthcoming activity was given nor was every contact necessarily followed up. Initial contacts were taken up with the following key areas of community life:

- the media: newspapers, radio stations and TV channels;
- the police;
- the local government Council;
- State Government regional officers;
- Federal Government regional officers;
- educational institutions at all levels of schooling;
- health institutions;
- the churches of many denominations;
- voluntary community organizations such as service clubs.

After the initial visit to each town, the team reported back to the Office in Canberra for discussions with the Commissioner for Community Relations about possible approaches to the task.

In the light of preliminary reactions from the town communities, the need was recognised for the team to:

- (i) Establish a social profile of each town (as reported above) through Census statistics, supplemented with information gathered locally on the original ethnic backgrounds of the population. To this would be added the study of comments and attitudes commonly expressed in discussions with the team;
- (ii) Seek opportunities to promote an understanding of Australia's multicultural society, against the backdrop of the national and State Census figures, and information gathered from "family tree" projects by schoolchildren. This would highlight the contribution to the growth of the Australian nation by people of all backgrounds, including the Anglo-Saxon;
- (iii) In particular, seek opportunities to address community organisations as widely as possible, in order to provide such information and foster appreciation of the importance of cultural heritage and identity in building sound race relations;

- (iv) Work for permanent outcomes in changed attitudes in the community, while recognising that this is more likely to be achieved in areas such as the education system, the churches, and the media.

Getting to grips with the task

Perhaps the hardest task came at the outset in attempting to establish the legitimacy of the project and the credibility of the team. There was an initial handicap in being viewed as simply another arm of the bureaucracy moving into a country town, and all the resentment inherited from past out-of-town administrative initiatives was focused on the team.

On the other hand the way was made somewhat easier by the fact that previous fieldwork undertaken in the towns by conciliation teams from Canberra had initiated personal friendships and established contacts with the media and some of the churches.

Naturally no community wishes to hear that it is going to be "educated". The team was therefore not surprised to be given many warnings: the first advice received in Kempsey was "Look here, you can't just come in here and talk about our prejudice and racism. This community is sick and tired of being put under the microscope by government officials and academics".

As the circle of personal contacts widened visit after visit, courtesy calls were made on a cross-section of the institutional life of both towns. To some extent constraints of time dictated the range of contacts taken up. For instance initial contact with some bodies such as service clubs or public hospitals did not always prove productive because of difficulties in arranging mutually convenient times.

The project in action

Operations in both towns proceeded concurrently and at both intensive and extensive levels.

At the extensive level discussions were initiated with many influential figures in the life of both centres, particularly in Rockhampton, which is the regional capital for Central Queensland. These included the Mayor, the Superintendent of Police, members of the Judiciary and legal profession, hospital and health administrators, media people, regional officers of State and Commonwealth Departments, leaders in both State and Catholic education systems, some businessmen, service club leaders, academics, federal and State authorities in Aboriginal Affairs, and the Aboriginal people in many of their community organizations in the fields of health, housing, culture, and legal aid.

In discussions with such people the team sought to create an awareness of the importance to a local community of sound community relations, of the changes in the cultural composition of Australia, of the obligations and provisions of the *Racial Discrimination Act*, and of the need for the leadership in various fields to work for practical local solutions in areas of tension.

Media activity

All media outlets in both towns were used to get this message out into the public arena. Several sessions were held with local newspaper people and material was prepared for publication. The community educators were interviewed on radio and television, appeared in TV news segments, and conducted a "talkback" radio program in both towns. During his visit to Rockhampton the Commissioner for Community Relations also undertook a busy round of media engagements through television, radio, and the daily newspaper.

A clear but depressing indication of regional attitudes to community relations issues emerged from the two talk back programs.

In Rockhampton only one telephone caller---the last one__ during the entire session took the part of Aboriginal people against an ill-articulated but powerful tirade of resentment and even hate launched by all the other callers. Every perverse expression in defence of white supremacist attitudes was trotted out by the callers: anger at the Aboriginal lifestyle (paid for by the taxpayer), resentment at their non-conforming behaviour, drinking, joblessness, their threat to white property values, and their access to social services and special programs in housing, health, education. Many of these views were based on factually incorrect data but all were unmistakably invested with powerful emotion.

On the other hand, a caller living near Kempsey,' expressed amazement and horror at the revelation of white community attitudes emerging from the program. She had recently retired to the mid-north coast from Melbourne and confessed her shock at the anti-Aboriginal sentiment so uniformly expressed.

Members of the local Aboriginal community tape-recorded the program and played it back in many Aboriginal settings subsequently. Their comments were to the effect that now they knew what they were up against, but they were also encouraged to hear a white official defend their rights—a new experience for them.

In the radio dialogues there was outright rejection of such concepts as the equal rights of Aboriginal people as Australian citizens, and of the legal guarantees of non-discrimination provided in federal (and in NSW also in State) legislation, and of the injurious effects of racial prejudice and discrimination on the well-being of the community. In short, there emerged a faithful reflection of the anti-black sentiments of the US Deep South that spawned the Ku Klux Klan.

Yet even this comparison overlooks a further powerful factor in grassroots Australian racism, that we are talking about the indigenous people of this land, whose occupancy stretches back over at least 40,000 years and whose uncompensated dispossession still lies at the heart of every racial and social tension affecting them. The harsh "blame the victim" approach expressed by telephone callers showed hearts and minds closed to any possible improvement in community relations.

Relating to local institutions

The team was rapidly to learn that an informational approach is pioneering work indeed, often unacceptable to public opinion. Naturally a local citizen's

perception of the town he has lived in all his life is hardly open to modification, especially by outsiders. The fact that his State beyond the town boundaries, particularly in New South Wales, is marked by a dynamic and fast-evolving cosmopolitanism, while his nation is becoming one of the great multicultural and multiracial societies on earth, is merely academic, irrelevant to his daily experience.

It must be remembered that it was the Commissioner for Community Relations who took the initiative in launching the project in the towns; no appeal for help was made locally, although in the event a warm response was given by many people already concerned about the climate of race relations.

In other cases the team faced the task of convincing people that their organisation or agency should respond in some way. On many occasions a degree of hostility had to be negotiated, directed against (1) the Commissioner for Community Relations and his officers and their administration of the *Racial Discrimination Act* (2) against governments and the authorities in general; and (3) against Canberra in particular.

However, this hostility was expressed mostly at meetings in an institutional way rather than in the initial contacts with the persons involved. Indeed, first reactions from individuals right across the board were mostly courteous and interested.

At the same time the difficulties in inducing attitude change in the various strata of town life are not to be minimised. For instance, on the whole, businessmen seemed to be not greatly interested since for them there is little imperative to change long-established practice. For its part, Local Government often has a priority for kerbs and gutters rather than social planning. During one of the visits to Rockhampton the team was approached by the media for comment on a current proposal that certain select areas of the city be declared immune from Aboriginal housing development a clear breach of the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

Nevertheless, official recognition of the community education project was given by the Mayor of Rockhampton in providing office accommodation in the City Hall as a local base for the team and in receiving them for afternoon tea. A similar arrangement proposed in Kempsey was not taken up, although the Shire President and Shire Clerk expressed interest in the project and made arrangements for discussions to be held with the town librarian on the library's holdings of print material on Aboriginal culture.

With service clubs, difficulties often arose in arranging speaking engagements to fit in with regular meeting nights. A strong degree of antagonism and even cynicism was expressed from time to time in service club audiences addressed in both towns. However many evenings spent with service clubs also led to convivial post-mortems and produced further openings.

At one service club in Kempsey the team was challenged to produce a firm plan for community action and put it to the meeting to accept or reject. It was no

good just talking general principles and philosophies if concrete proposals were put forward the situation in the town might be better. The challenge was probably offered tongue-in-cheek for, had the team responded it would doubtless have been derided for "knowing all the answers" as mere outsiders, or "instant experts" from Canberra.

The need was recognised of establishing a nice balance between attempt to stimulate people while shunning firm prescriptions. The local community would itself need to devise practical measures to bring about improved race relations. Attempts were therefore made to place this challenge before a variety of key occupational groups. For instance, a preliminary call on regional health educators in Rockhampton opened the way to presenting a session at an in-service discussion group of health professionals. Subsequently the Commissioner for Community Relations addressed a mixed group of trainee nurses, registered sisters, and tutorial staff at the Rockhampton Base Hospital. The interest and sensitivity displayed, particularly in questions raised during discussions, was significantly greater than on similar occasions in some of the capital cities. One such question concerned ways of handling the manifest racial prejudice on the part of older patients sharing wards with Aboriginal people. Specialist materials were distributed for subsequent study.

It was learned that police training is centralised in the State capitals, leaving little prospect of supplementary training at the local level. However the senior sergeant at Kempsey was good enough to arrange for his local officers to be convened, and a film and discussion session was the result.

In addition, discussions were held with clergy of most denominations, leading to opportunities to speak in meetings in a number of parishes.

Finally, in the educational field early visits to the chief regional administrators opened the way to contacts with individual schools and staffs and with Parents & Citizens groups. Discussions were also held with academics in relevant disciplines at the Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education in Rockhampton, following a courtesy call on the Acting Principal.

In summation, at this general or extensive level of addressing meetings and providing information a great deal of useful work can be done but, while it is extremely taxing in its emotional demands on the team and creates a deal of passing interest, it is clear that the greatest value of community education programs is derived from activity geared to specific sectors of society, with matching informational resources and a specialised approach.

The intensive approach

At this specialist or intensive level the team sought to identify people already interested in community relations issues and predisposed to action - the alliance-for-progress approach. This was foreseen from the outset as the most viable strategy for institutionalising and perpetuating social change.

In both towns there are numbers of such people, playing a variety of occupational roles and for the most part involved in some way in the life of the

churches—people with an appreciation of human rights and a distaste for the racial prejudice accepted as normal in many quarters locally. Such people may need to be further stimulated by documentary resources that can open up a wider understanding, for instance of the relationship between race relations issues in rural Australia and the multicultural society in general.

At this intensive level of operations it was decided to give priority to the education systems and the Churches, as having a commitment to social responsibility as well as an educative mission.

Focus on education

The size and complexity of the education systems posed real difficulties in establishing where to begin: approaches to individual schools appeared rather hit-or-miss. The most effective and proper approach was found to be through the administrators of the education systems, although this proved somewhat laborious.

Kempsey

In the case of Kempsey this meant an initial visit to very senior officers in the NSW Department of Education's Head Office in Sydney, follow-up correspondence with the Regional Director of Education in Lismore, and then with the District Inspector of Schools in Kempsey. In addition, Aboriginal education authorities and advisors in Sydney and the Regional Consultant in Aboriginal Education were also taken into confidence.

On establishing contact in Kempsey the team found the District Inspector most cordial and responsive. He agreed to read the book *Let's End the Slander* (published by the Commissioner for Community Relations to help combat the transmission of racial prejudice through school textbooks) and to raise the theme of community relations at a forthcoming district seminar for school principals.

Subsequently he distributed copies of the book as background reading, linking this with the principals' consideration of the Department of Education's new guidelines on multicultural education. The Inspector also indicated to principals that the Community Relations team would be interested in visiting schools to speak at staff meetings on the issue of Education for a Multicultural Society.

In the event all seven schools in the town, Departmental and Catholic, responded positively and appointments were made to meet staff, and in some cases parents, during a later visit to Kempsey. At most of these meetings the film *Respecting Differences*, produced by the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission, was screened as a discussion starter. In addition a kit for teachers entitled *Education for a Multicultural Society*, assembled by the Clearing House on Migration Issues of the Ecumenical Migration Centre, Melbourne, was made available for sale to teachers.

Responsiveness in the school meetings was varied - from warm interest to a lack of receptivity and even outright hostility. Some teachers responded with

requests for information on access to further resources. Others expressed the that the Commissioner for Community Relations and his officers were actually creating discrimination in country towns where there had been none previously.

As with the other community groups encountered during the project, teachers represent a broad spectrum of local public opinion. Those who have spent

their earlier lives in the district and have later returned to teach there may speak in a quite derogatory way about Aborigines, while the VI corners (perhaps, from the State capital) have in some cases referred to the culture shock that they experienced on joining the local community and for the first time coming face to face with naked racial prejudice.

Rockhampton

In Rockhampton, the team established initial contact with the Central Queensland Regional Office of the State Department of Education and also with the Catholic Education Office. The issues were discussed with the Regional Director, the Primary and Secondary Inspectors, and the Library Consultant, as well as the Director of Catholic Education and his associate.

From another angle contacts were also taken up within the Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education, commencing with the Acting Principal, and focusing on the School of Education. Here discussions ranged over the availability of materials and resources for educating local children to live in the multicultural Australian society. It was recognised that teachers needed practically-oriented classroom materials based on life in the region and focusing on people of different cultural backgrounds. This would involve considerable development time, specialized knowledge of local communities, and access to outside funds. Some negotiations are still proceeding in the hope of facilitating production of such a kit.

Discussions initiated by the team with the Department of Education's Regional Office, the Primary Principals' Association, the Capricornia Teachers' Centre, the Regional In-Service Education Committee, and the Queensland Teachers' Union led to the organising of a seminar for School Principals on the theme "The School and Community Relations".

The Principals' Association brings together educationists from the Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Gladstone, Emerald, Blackwater and Moura areas a large section of Central Queensland.

More than 60 principals of primary, and some high schools, in this scattered area participated in the seminar. A resource kit on multicultural education had been prepared and supplied to each participant by the Community Relations team. It was designed to enable more detailed consideration to be given the issues by the Principals on returning to their own areas.

The seminar program was designed to challenge the notion common in educational circles in both towns, that schools with no Aboriginal or overseas-born children can regard themselves as exclusively Anglo-Saxon preserves bastions of a cultural homogeneity now not only unrepresentative but out of touch with the times in Australia. This inward-looking view ignores the social mobility in

our society and the fact that country school-leavers tend to move to the city for further training and, often, subsequent life."

In the initial session, the Commissioner for Community Relations spoke on "The School in Multicultural Australia". He outlined the range and intensity of cultural pluralism in Australian society today, and stressed its uneven mix and geographical distribution. In this regard Rockhampton was at the lowest end of the scale.

Many people and schools had reacted to this cultural diversity by ignoring it, refusing to adjust to it, or even resenting it. Educators were now recognising an inescapable obligation to know the totality of the Australian community and prepare children to live in it, since the school--particularly the primary school was the only place where all Australians mixed together in their lifetime.

At later stages, they might have to cope with prejudice and discrimination, especially if they were Aborigines ---the group that bore the brunt of discrimination. The textbooks that perpetuated racial slanders needed to be cleaned up and programs developed in every school to ensure that all children understood and respected the cultural heritages of all Australians. There was a need for local schools to undertake a family tree study of the cultural backgrounds of their pupils as a starting point for enhanced sensitivity to these issues both by teachers and children.

In the ensuing group discussions such issues were examined as:

Why educate the majority to cope with the minority?

Why not the reverse?

What is more suitable for Australia : the US melting pot or the Canadian cultural mosaic'?

Coping with multiculturalism in the classroom

What emphasis should be given to the cultures of our near Asian neighbours?

Stressing Australian national values and symbols

Involving parents in multicultural initiatives.

In his summation of the session, Mr Grassby highlighted the following points made by participants:

Australia can be an orchestra with many distinctive instruments weaving an appealing tapestry of sound.

As a late starter, Rockhampton can be a pacesetter for other parts of rural Australia almost unmarked by the earlier post-war immigration wave.

There is no conflict between cultural recognition and national allegiance.

There is no valid model for a "real Australian": the country belongs equally to Australians of all backgrounds and all generations. We are all "ethnic". He had deliberately introduced the word, from the Greek "ethnos" - meaning people or folk to encompass the totality of the Australian people.

Australians of all backgrounds develop a distinctive Australian "ethnicity", for example an Anglo-Australian visiting England recognises he is distinct; the same applies to Italian-Australians in Italy, Greek-Australians in Greece, or Cantonese-Australians meeting other Cantonese in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Fiji or even China itself where they all originated.

The battle for religious tolerance has been largely won. No one now insists or expects that Australians must all conform to only one religion. The battle for ethnic tolerance has yet to be won but the issue is the same. Recognising ethnic values is no more divisive than recognising religious differences within the family of the nation.

Later in the seminar Mr Eric Willmot, the first Aboriginal appointee as Director of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra spoke on "The Place of Aborigines in Multicultural Australia". He squarely tackled the reality of the "half-caste"---the heir of the two historic cultures in Australia and a unique group of humanity, "the only group able to trace its history back through recorded and unrecorded time". As early as 1938 the group was asserting its identity through a Manifesto that could now be seen as the first draft of the Makarrata.¹⁵

Aborigines formed many diverse communities but the best working division was into "traditional" (one third of the Aboriginal population) and "non-traditional" people. The latter included urban communities resembling an ethnic community in maintaining distinctive cultural patterns. Key areas that marked them off from white Australians were their economic system based on "beholdeness" not acquisitiveness, and their use of "modified English". They were now acquiring political power : perhaps they would submit the draft Makarrata at the 1988 Bi-Centenary to white Australia—"the only group that needed legitimation of their presence" (since in the case of immigrants their status is spelt out in their papers).

The primary school held the key to harmony between black and white in the next generation. Principals controlled the philosophy and climate of education and social experience in their schools. They needed to understand such Aboriginal values as the primacy of social coherence above individual achievement. Aboriginal values could contribute much to truly humanising the total society.

The subsequent discussion brought out the following issues:

In Aboriginal society, economic activity is generated by asking for what is needed, not by offering it as available.

The 100,000 year Aboriginal heritage--"the whole history of the human race" lived out in Australia—has been denied white children.

- _ "Half-castes" are special Australians like any other ethnic groups.
- _ Aborigines are prepared to live in harmony with white Australians now faced with an Asian influx and declining European influence in our part of the world.

The final speaker was Mr Ken Robertson, Chairman of the Queensland Multicultural Education Committee and Regional Director of Education, Brisbane North, who spoke on "Factors at the School Community Level for the Growth of Community Relations". He stressed that the Queensland Education Department had had a policy on education for a multicultural society since 1979, applicable in all schools. "It's no good saying, 'I've got no migrant children' you've got children."

All communities were different and schools needed to know their local community in order to meet its needs. Principals needed to tap the resources of the local community, including other cultures. Multicultural education was not a supplement to the existing program but a pervasive approach to the whole of schooling. It could only be developed in partnership with the community, by negotiating desirable policy and practice, and by co-ordinating local learning resources. In this it was essential for the principal as the status person to be authentic, not tokenistic.

The State multicultural education policy offered extra resources to all schools that sought them, but so far no submission had ever been received from Central Queensland. Grants of \$1000 per school were waiting to be tapped: "I challenge you to put up 10 or 12 submissions as a result of this seminar. Study the multicultural education policy and work out a project for your school".

The challenge of the 80's was for the school to co-ordinate the resources of the whole community for the good of the whole community, in order to confer on it more power over its circumstances and achieve greater equality of opportunity.

The enthusiasm and open-mindedness that marked the day's activity may herald the opening up of a new perspective in education in the region. With the recognition that the school can broaden its awareness of the range of cultures found locally--especially at Gladstone, in the coal-mining centres, and in old-established ethnic enclaves like the Russians of Yarwun, comes the challenge to undertake practical measures. A new sensitivity on the part of teachers and a firm leadership by principals are prerequisites to a new responsiveness in the classrooms and the community.

In a day when many young teachers are voicing their uncertainty, in handling the wide range of contentious social issues—only one of which is race relations—there is a clear need for localised in-service programs to acquaint them with the range of viewpoints and the interests of all the groups in the local community, especially if they are from a city background.

It is unlikely that young teachers from white, middle-class, urban environments will be confident in educating Aboriginal or immigrant children without having had the chance of exposure to their special values and concerns. If their initial training has covered themes such as "The School in a Multicultural Society" they will be able to subsequently relate the theory with the practice.

Unfortunately the commonest situation seems to be that older teachers have had access to multicultural issues neither in their initial training nor through appropriate in-service work.

Community education through the Churches

The community education program in both towns produced definite prospects among the Churches for an advance in personal understanding and also a heightened responsiveness to the issues in parish life and programs.

The average churchgoer may have little interest or sensitivity to multicultural or race relations matters. Even the clergy are not all specifically equipped to handle such issues—nor are they always disposed to take them up. Over and above this the team experienced the practical difficulty of establishing contact with the multiplicity of parishes, of many denominations. Beyond that again the fact is of course that not all people are churchgoers by any means.

During the project the team was involved in discussions with clergy and laity of seven different denominations : Anglican, Roman Catholic, Uniting, Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Salvation Army. Courtesy calls paid on both the Anglican and Catholic Bishops of Rockhampton resulted in an informed interest and practical support. Both churchmen had earlier taken a positive stance in regard to the case-conciliation work undertaken by teams from the Community Relations Office.

In addition one of the team members spoke to the Rockhampton Ecumenical Committee bridging many denominations, and also to the Kempsey Ministers' Fraternal. In both cases the objective was to enlist the corporate identification of Churches in the challenge of improving community relations, modifying the harsh attitudes on Aboriginal issues so often encountered locally, and disseminating information on the combat of racial discrimination prepared by the Australian Council of Churches and other Christian agencies.

The moral value of church leadership supporting the project in both towns was a great boon, given the leadership roles played in town life by the churches and by many of their members. Indeed, the most encouraging outcomes of the Two-Town Project are related to initiatives sponsored in concert with interested parties within the major churches.

These activities have achieved considerable success in both towns, since most clergy are well aware of the theological issues involved and prepared to exercise leadership in encouraging church members to become more active.

On the other hand reservations were honestly expressed by some clergy at the timing or the approach of the education project. One discussed the difficulty he experienced in relating with equal facility in the two worlds of white and Aboriginal society: "We may need to be content with slow progress. To push harder may simply frighten [white] people with the impact of change".

Another opined that community and race relations questions were just too big for the church to get involved in at the local level. Still another, a younger man, described the culture shock he had felt on first encountering prevailing community attitudes towards Aborigines. A former missionary long resident in a Third World country reflected on his children's distress at their first acquaintance with their schoolmates' sentiments in regard to Aboriginal issues.

In-service education for clergy

In order to encourage an enduring commitment to promoting attitude change and practical action, the team became involved in Rockhampton in a unique program of in-service education for the clergy, on an ecumenical basis. This project emerged from the work of a small committee interested in assisting Anglican ministers to relate better with Aborigines.

A residential seminar was held in October over two days and nights at a conference centre near Yeppoon, under the title Residential Ecumenical Conference of Clergy and Aboriginal People (RECOCAP). During the team's visit to Rockhampton in September it had become involved in the planning process and subsequently made participation in the conference the focal point of the October visit. The Commissioner for Community Relations also sponsored the involvement in the conference of Mr John Buss, of the Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education, Lismore as facilitator.

In order to tackle the difficult task of bringing about attitude change in a group of specialised professionals, the committee had decided to attempt a "search conference".¹⁶ This implied a frank sharing of beliefs, insights and prejudices, in a relaxed and non-threatening environment permitting an exploration not only of racial problems in society but of each person's own feelings. A vital part of the process was the meeting on equal terms of Aboriginal and white cultures and lifestyles.¹⁷

RECOCAP proved an extraordinary success. The Community Relations team considered the project a strategic advance in community education and in his report John Buss noted, "It showed the way to proceed in fostering understanding between different racial groups and to break down the prejudices that exist ... An important factor in the success of the conference was the commitment of the participants to the Christian religion. But the form and structure of the Conference proved to be suitable for people of differing religious groups and races to come together, not only to examine racial prejudices and solutions, but to examine their own feelings and actions in this context".

Community Relations Workshop in Rockhampton

Among the main recommendations from RECOCAP were the need to plan further study conferences for the laity and professional groups other than clergy. An enlarged ecumenical committee then set about planning a community-based search conference. It was recognised that a full-time residential conference over two days would not be realistic, so a gathering on two consecutive Tuesday evenings was decided upon, to be called "Community Relations in Rockhampton: an Action Workshop". This was planned for March, 1981.

The aim was "to seek practical plans for improving race relations in Rockhampton, and to make sure that they happened". Basically the Workshop was seen as an opportunity for "the converted" in race relations issues to consider feasible approaches to educating the community

at large. To this end invitations were issued to a wide cross-section of people known for their concern for the problems of racial prejudice and discrimination.

Again, the Community Relations team was involved in planning and mounting the Workshop, by suggesting names of suitable participants, by preparing a reading kit on racial prejudice and Aboriginal issues for distribution in advance, by providing books and materials for display and for sale. Once again Mr John Buss was sponsored as facilitator.

On each evening up to 60 people were in attendance, 38 of whom came to both sessions. They included lawyers, a member of the judiciary, health workers, schoolteachers, academics, clergy from the three principal denominations, businessmen and women, and housewives. Approximately one-third of the gathering comprised Aboriginal people.

The search techniques employed were similar to those of RECOCAP: small groups of up to eight persons looked frankly at the problems of prejudice and race relations in Rockhampton, then examined specific areas of concern and finally reported back to the whole Workshop. The themes were explored in a non-threatening atmosphere of honesty and goodwill.

Like RECOCAP the Community Relations Workshop was adjudged a historic breakthrough for the district. It had assembled a wide range of people in responsible community roles to explore ways of tackling entrenched attitudes and practices.

As one distinguished participant said, "This kind of conference would not have been possible in Rockhampton five years ago. People are now recognising that all is not well between Aboriginals and Islanders and the rest of the community, and there are enough people of goodwill around to do something about it."

A firm outcome of the Workshop was the appointment of four working parties to seek changes in the media, education, the churches, and in Aboriginal/ police relations. A further committee will take up the question of Aboriginal land rights. There is also a desire to hold follow-up conferences to widen the ranks of concerned and informed people. This is seen as a powerful strategy for effecting change in community attitudes that might ultimately lead to structural change in race relations locally.

The Workshop provided the team with a valuable opportunity to cement local relationships, supply specialised resources and information, and build up ongoing networks of people encountered during the course of the Rockhampton project: even in a provincial city, the specialised roles people play in the community militate against contacts developing across occupational, social or even denominational bounds. The Workshop provided a focus for future activity on the part of many people who had come forward at the team's other engagements.

4. CONCLUSION

It is of course too close to the event for any serious evaluation of the Two-Town Education Project to be attempted, given the time span over which attitudes and social practices evolve and are modified. Moreover, the team members are too closely identified with their labours and too involved in a network of personal relationships to be able to exercise much detachment as observers.

Nevertheless it seems appropriate for some provisional remarks to be made about the project's significance.

In an area of new social legislation such as racial discrimination law, there is a strong moral obligation on the authorities to make the entire community aware of what is now outlawed and why, as well as aware of the protection now afforded victims of discrimination. It would be improper to simply impose the *Racial Discrimination Act* on a community without giving due attention to such educative activity, because this could bring the law into disrepute by building resentment against its unexplained demands.

This is of pressing concern in country areas, where often more conservative attitudes and a more uniform social outlook can lead to suspicion about social and legislative change. Most of the fieldwork undertaken in administering the *Racial Discrimination Act* has had to be focused on country areas with a conspicuous Aboriginal presence and the higher incidence of discrimination this involves. Country towns therefore tend to see the casework and are not so aware of the full range of the Commissioner for Community Relations' work in fostering a more multicultural consciousness in Australia. Because of the focus on casework, they may even view the *Racial Discrimination Act* as mischievous because it upsets the social order. Hence the objection encountered by the team on a number of occasions that the Community Relations Office is actually creating racial discrimination where it never existed.

The team's experience in the Two-Town Project confirms the urgency of mounting programs of community education throughout Australia, if the *Racial Discrimination Act* is to become widely accepted as providing an opportunity to rethink race relations locally.

Unfortunately to this point it is largely the major cities of Australia that have benefited from the enrichment brought by the new cultural diversity. Most rural areas have only been marginally affected, so that local activity carried out in administering the *Racial Discrimination Act* tends to be viewed in a stark black-white polarity. Country people do not readily perceive that this activity is part and parcel of the task of enabling the many components of the multicultural and multiracial Australian society to live together in harmony and mutual respect.

Any future community education projects in country areas should therefore be based on promoting understanding of the character of Australian society today, and the place of each distinctive ethnic and racial group within it.

The Rockhampton Action Workshop demonstrated that wide-ranging elements in the local community are prepared to work for change. This is a new and essential stage, since outside bodies such as a Government agency, the church hierarchy, or the education system can hardly expect to bring about a genuine change of local climate by merely organisational means.

Is the ongoing Rockhampton initiative ready for adoption in other rural and urban centres? Certainly Kempsey appears ripe for it but it would have to grow out of local concern. Community-based activity is now starting to become evident in a number of centres, notably in Perth, Taree and Bundaberg. In such cases the moral and informational support of the Commissioner for Community Relations can be channelled to the group.

Some final observations may be made about the Rockhampton initiative. Firstly, it represents for the first time in Australia a Government/ community partnership in education for racial harmony. Secondly, the active involvement of major church denominations is a source of encouragement to people concerned for social justice. Finally, the success of the local efforts can represent a challenge to other towns and communities, not by way of a formula for instant success but rather an approach worth experimenting with.

At this stage in the dismal story of race relations that traverses most of our history, the prospect of many experimental projects being attempted by people of goodwill and ingenuity across the country—both "in Sydney and the bush"—would be a sign of hope for a better future for us all as Australians.

REFERENCES

1. The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, Section 20 (c) states that a function of the Commissioner for Community Relations is to develop, conduct and foster research and educational programs and other programs for the purpose of-

- (i) combating racial discrimination and prejudices that lead to racial discrimination;
- (ii) promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among racial and ethnic groups; and
- (iii) propagating the purposes and principles of the Convention.

2. The major cities have been the point of settlement for the great bulk of the 3.5m immigrants who came to Australia since World War II. These comprise, with their children, some 40% of the present population of 14.6 million. They are identified with 140 different cultural heritages, speak 90 languages, and practise 80 religions (data from a school survey conducted in 1980 by the Catholic Education Commission of NSW and from the Commonwealth Department of the Attorney-General).

In the largest Australian cities the proportion of the population represented by such people is now approaching 50%. 1978 figures give the proportion in Melbourne as 45%, Sydney 42% and Brisbane 27%.

(Tolhurst, Julian. *The Forgotten Market: an Appraisal of Migration and the Ethnic Communities*, Glebe, Tavistock Research Centre, 1978).

3. See A J Grassby, *A Multicultural Society for the Future*, Immigration Reference Paper AGPS, 1973, p.5. "Today irrespective therefore of what labels we use, the fact is that the increasing diversity of Australian society has gradually eroded and finally rendered untenable any prospects there might have been twenty years ago of fully assimilating newcomers to 'the Australian way of life' . . . We might well ask ourselves what is the Australian way of life today? The lifestyle and values of the suburban housewife in Moonee Ponds, the Italian travel agent in Carlton, the Turkish car factory worker, the Slavic Orthodox priest, or the Aboriginal at Lake Tyers?"

4. See Commissioner for Community Relations. *Annual Report 1980*, p. 1 .

5. See Chapter 1, op.cit. See also the recent report commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs on community attitudes towards Indo-Chinese refugees in the Cabramatta-Fairfield area of Sydney.

- (i) Attitudes towards Refugees and Migrants in Host Communities in Sydney and Melbourne.
- (ii) The Settlement Process of the Vietnamese, Lao, Kampuchean and Timorese in Sydney, prepared for DI EA by MSJ Keys Young Planners Pty Ltd, Dec 1980.

6. Title of paper by the Commissioner for Community Relations released in 1976.

7. In Rockhampton the Reverend Canon *John Warby*, of the Anglican Ministry to Aborigines and Islanders of Central Queensland, and Father Michael Hayes of the

Aboriginal Apostolate in the Catholic Diocese, have long been involved not only in direct ministry and practical support to Aboriginal people but also in promoting understanding of Aboriginal issues in the district as a whole.

In Kempsey the Aboriginal Apostolate of Father Steve Nolan, Sister s Patricia Carroll and Ann Maguire has had a similar commitment. The community education project was to be initiated by discussions with this group, setting directions for the subsequent activity.

8. Robinson, Fergus and York, Barry, *The Black Resistance*, Melbourne, Widescope, 1977, p. 17.

9. A booklet on Kempsey and the Macleay region, entitled *The Macleay Valley*, published by the local tourist development body, gives no hint that Aborigines have lived in the area for 40,000 years, except that a large number of the place names are Aboriginal.

10. The anthropologist Professor C D Rowley declares that this attitude has been evident in Australia since the Myall Creek massacre of 1838. See Rowley, C D, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Penguin Books, 1974, p.39.

1 I. Australian-Hellenic Educational Progressive Association.

12. McDonald, Lorna, "Central Queensland Aborigines", extracts from Rockhampton: A *History of City and District* to be published June, 1981 ch. 1 "In the Beginning"; ch. 2 "Pity him, Stranger".

13. In Appendix A are listed all the main organizations and individuals contacted by the team in each town. Also listed, in Appendix B, are the dates of the team's visits.

14. Two episodes in the Two-Town Project illustrate these claims. In Kempsey a church youth group consisting largely of senior school-leavers participated in a lively and sympathetic discussion of local Aboriginal issues at the end of 1980. When the team returned to the town to resume the program in 1981 they found that virtually the entire membership had moved off to undertake further training or studies in Sydney.

Again, a wry story was recounted by a teacher in one of the towns, which illustrates the "Sydney or the bush" syndrome: on a school excursion to Canberra a group of secondary school students was stupefied to see a diplomatic limousine conveying an Asian embassy official. The "Chauffeur-driven boatie in a Mercedes" was pronounced the highlight of the visit!

15. Word from Elcho Island, NT, signifying "resolution of a dispute", adopted by the National Aboriginal Conference to describe the treaty of friendship and commitment proposed by the Aboriginal Treaty Committee.

16. Emery, Merrelyn (ed.), *Searching : for new directions, in new ways, for new times*, Canberra, ANU Centre for Continuing Education, 1976.

17. For fuller coverage of the Conference process see Appendix C.

APPENDIX A

*ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED
ROCKHAMPTON*

"Morning Bulletin"

ABC Television

Television RTQ7

ABC Radio 4RK

Radio 4R0

Radio 4CD

Rockhampton Rotary Club

Rockhampton North Rotary Club

Rotary Club of Rockhampton West

Mt. Archer Lions Club

Lions Club of Rockhampton Host

North Rockhampton Apex Club (combined meeting with three other Apex Clubs
of the district)

Mayor of Rockhampton

Stipendiary Magistrate

Rockhampton Police

Commonwealth Department of Education, Rockhampton Area Office

Queensland Department of Education

— Regional Director Central Queensland

— Inspector of Secondary Schools

Inspector of Primary Schools

Regional Library Adviser

Capricornia Teachers Centre, Co-ordinator

— Primary Principals Association

Catholic Education Office, Director

Queensland Teachers Union, Regional Organiser

Rockhampton TAFE College

— Principal

— Co-ordinator, Access Course for Aboriginal students

Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education

— Acting Principal

— Chairman, School of Education

Senior lecturers and lecturers, School of Education

Frenchville State School

Berserker Street State School

Park Avenue State School

Gracemere State School

Woorabinda State School

Queensland Department of Health, Director of Community Health Education

Rockhampton Base Hospital
Chief Medical Superintendent
Director of Nurse Training

- Tutor sisters
- Year II student nurses
- Senior registered sisters

Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Regional Director
Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement, Regional Director

Yumbah House Ltd
Rockhampton District Aboriginal and Islander Co-operative Ltd
Aboriginal & Islanders Legal Service
Aboriginal & Islander Health Service
Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Central Queensland
Aboriginal culture group
Anglican Bishop of Rockhampton
Anglican Dean of Rockhampton
Anglican Ministry to Aborigines and Islanders of Central Queensland
Catholic Bishop of Rockhampton
Aboriginal and Islander Apostolate, Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton
Uniting Church in Australia, Rockhampton Parish
Pentecostal Church
Rockhampton Ecumenical Committee

KEMPSEY

"Macleay Argus"

ABC Radio 2K P-TR Mid-
Coast Radio 2MC Kempsey
Rotary Club West Kempsey
Rotary Club Kempsey Lions
Club

Apex Club of Kempsey
Crescent Head Lions Club
South West Rocks Lions Club
Quota Club
VIEW Club

Country Women's Association
Kempsey Shire Council

- Shire President
- Shire Clerk
- Librarian

Macleay Tourist Authority, Tourist Information Centre
Kempsey Police
Commonwealth Department of Education, Kempsey Area Office

Commonwealth Department of Education, Regional meeting of area officers for northern N.S.W.

Schools Commission, consultant on Aboriginal education

N.S.W. Department of Education

- _ Director and Assistant Director, Special Programs
- _ Director, North Coast Region
- _ Aboriginal Adviser, Special Programs
 - Consultant in Aboriginal Education, North Coast Region
- _ District Inspector of Schools, Kempsey

Kempsey High School

West Kempsey Primary School

South Kempsey Primary School

East Kempsey Primary School

Greenhills Infants School

Macleay District Catholic High School

St. Joseph's Primary School

Aboriginal Apostolate of the Catholic Church

Catholic Church, Kempsey

Anglican Church, Kempsey

Anglican Mothers Union

Anglican Youth Fellowship

Young Anglicans Fellowship

Uniting Church, Kempsey

Uniting Church, Gladstone

Baptist Church

Pentecostal Church

Aboriginal Seventh Day Adventist Church

Salvation Army Citadel

Kempsey and District Ministers Fraternal

Chief Executive Officer, Kempsey District Hospital

N.S.W. Department of Youth and Community Services, Regional Office

President, ALP Branch

President, Country Party Branch

Mirriwinni Gardens Aboriginal Academy

Durri Medical Centre

Thungeti Tribal Elders Council

Ngaku Aboriginal Housing Co-operative

Kempsey Aboriginal Youth and Culture Committee

Aboriginal Culture Education

Aboriginal Legal Service

National Aboriginal Conference, Representative for North Coast Region

APPENDIX B
TWO-TOWN EDUCATION PROJECT
ROCKHAMPTON VISITS

- ii 8-13 September 1980
- ii 19-24 October 1980
- iii 23-28 November 1980
- iv 10-20 March 1981
- 9-11 June 1981 (with Commissioner)

KEMPSEY VISITS

- 30 August - 2 September 1980
- ii 13 - 16 October 1980
- 11 - 14 November 1980
- iv 6-13 April 1981

APPENDIX C

RESIDENTIAL ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE OF CLERGY &
ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, ROCKHAMPTON

Material circulated prior to Conference

The old-time attitude of white Australians to Aboriginal Australians was based on ignorance and a belief in racial superiority; the contemporary well-wishing but somewhat patronising view may have drifted even further from the reality of space-age Aboriginal people. The white/ Aboriginal schism is without doubt the major long-term fault in Australian society, a fault which is particularly shocking because it runs counter to the comradely egalitarian values regarded as characteristic of Australians.

It is timely therefore to mount a programme in Rockhampton to remedy white ignorance and (it is believed) lead to a realisation of how much Aboriginal people are contributing and can contribute to the Australia of the future.

When one considers the state of the Aborigines in Central Queensland, one can see that the Church's role in their progress has been quite varied.

Occasionally there is a response from Aborigines and this is especially true when consideration and care are shown towards them. But, as a general rule, one looks in vain for Aborigines to come to church especially in a parish situation. Even in community situations such as at Woorabinda and Lockhart River, the attendance leaves much to be desired, although it is easier to build attendance and participation in these community situations than in the ordinary parish.

"What do we do then about Aborigines and their situation?" The same question can be asked about other minority groups in the community but this paper is addressed to the Aboriginal situation in particular.

It is a question that the Church has considered from time to time and attempts have been made to assist by such actions as:

1. The establishment of mission communities over the past 100 years, and
2. The setting aside of full-time chaplains and others to work in some urban situations, and
3. The training of Aboriginal clergy and lay readers.

But in 1980 it is important to consider the situation again for it is obvious to anyone who cares to investigate that the Church's role is very meagre, partly because of the parish pressure on clergy who have numerous other problems and demands to consider and which rate a higher priority than seeking out or even learning about Aborigines.

Many people may admit to having mental or personal blockages in relating to Aborigines and this human situation is not to be condemned so much as recognised and alleviated. One should remember that clergy as a whole are men who, after years of prayer and preparation, have consecrated their lives to the service of God and His people. Yet even the years of study, discipline and training have not served to eradicate blockages and to improve their ministry towards Aborigines. If one finds the ministry of the clergy with Aboriginal people is inadequate, it must follow that the congregation they serve is also consciously or unconsciously sharing in this inadequacy.

The importance of the involvement of the laity in ministry cannot be over-estimated, but it is important that whatever steps are taken to improve the ministry of the laity are taken with the co-operation of the clergy, despite their sometimes entrenched attitudes.

The education and participation of the Church at all levels would seem to be essential if the Church is to improve her ministry with Aboriginal people. However, there are many people in the community who are not actively involved in the Church. Many of these people are actively concerned for the social plight of Aborigines, perhaps even more so than numerous church-going Christians. Because of this the Church needs to recognise that these people can assist markedly in the education of the Church in particular and the community as a whole, so far as the Aboriginal situation is concerned. As well, there are many people in Church and community who would like to assist but do not know how to go about it. Their passive concern can be a fruitful seedbed for action and active concern.

Perhaps one could refer to a five-point plan which has been recommended to some Church people who have said they would like to help Aborigines.

First, they have been asked to pray constructively and consistently for Aborigines as people, and for their own role in learning to understand more of these sensitive people.

Second, they are asked to read and learn about Aborigines and certain reading is recommended to them.

Third, they are asked to stick up for Aborigines in the sphere in which they

move and not to generalise about them as so many people do, but build up their own knowledge and with dedication learn to maintain a position in their own peer group and to speak up for Aborigines and their needs.

Fourth, they are encouraged to speak to Aborigines wherever they can, to try and befriend them but not to be patronising or condescending, but to speak with them in brotherly love.

Fifth, it may be suggested that they join organisations if that seems to be of interest.

Format of the Conference

The first evening of the conference was devoted to a broad-ranging discussion of where Australian society was heading. Subjects discussed included the present and future place of the Church in Australia, the changes taking place in the population—both in its composition and its values—and the future of minority groups, especially the Aboriginal people. This set a broad background for the first day's interchange, which focused on the problems clergy faced in ministering to Aborigines and approaches to resolving these.

The format of the conference was to set a topic for discussion and then break up into small groups. The groups would then reassemble with their findings written up on large sheets of paper for display and discussion, leading to the facilitator teasing out the common issues.

An intimate and trusting atmosphere was thus developed early in the conference, the product as much of the openness of the participants as the skill of the facilitator. On the second evening participants attended a barbecue at the Neville Bonner Aboriginal Hostel, where the hosts were some leading people from the Aboriginal community. After this relaxing social gathering several Aborigines joined participants at Yeppoon for the discussions of the following day, which covered the same issues as had been examined the previous day by clergy alone.

White participants spoke openly of the guilt, fear, resentment, and ignorance that they all shared in regard to Aborigines. They also confessed the apprehension they had felt on entering "Aboriginal territory" as guests for the barbecue. The clergy talked openly of these feelings to the Aboriginal consultants, who showed great compassion and patience.

All participants later affirmed that their feelings towards Aboriginal people and concerns had changed markedly over the conference period. They began to discover that there were indeed ways to bring about changes in their own home settings that would express the new attitudes acquired. For the first time they had been made aware of the human implications of another point of view in racial questions and had perceived ways of relating to it. They had had a genuine encounter with another culture, and had not been alienated but rather had explored ways of communicating across the cultural gap. The confidence this engendered was felt to be the necessary basis on which their ministry among Aboriginal people might develop.

