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ASPIRATIONS AND OCCUPATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ABORIGINALS*

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The twin issues of education and employment are inextricably bound together for all Australian school students. In a recent issue, Mr. Hall discussed how Aboriginal students at Port Augusta High School are dealing with the problem; and he suggested that schools should engage in a program of pre-employment training.

In this article, Mr. Lewis discusses the employment opportunities for and aspirations of Aboriginal school leavers in New South Wales. Most importantly, he tells us how his Department can assist these students to find the positions which they want.

OPPORTUNITIES

As Officer-in-Charge of the Aboriginal Employment Section of my Department, I am responsible for thirteen Vocational Officers who specialise in the field of Aboriginal employment. Five of these officers work in Sydney, and the other eight in country areas. These country Vocational Officers are based in Bega, Brewarrina, Canberra, Dubbo, Griffith, Inverell, Kempsey

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and Newcastle, and they are responsible for the whole of New South Wales country area.

Although these officers have the back-up and support of the normal offices of the Commonwealth Employment Service, they still have pretty considerable areas to cover, of course, and each of our country people would drive an average of four hundred to five hundred miles a week.

The background to the appointment of these specialist officers four years ago was the recognition by the Department that many Aborigines were not using our existing facilities. Indeed, many Aborigines live in remote areas where the normal Commonwealth Employment Service facilities are not available anyway. To put it simply, the Vocational Officers are responsible for taking the facilities that the Commonwealth Employment Service has to offer to Aborigines, not just waiting for them to come to us.

The most important part of the work of these Vocational Officers is their work with young people, particularly school leavers. To this end they visit young Aborigines in schools and in their homes to provide them with a range of career information and advice, liaise closely with schools, officers of the Vocational Guidance Bureau and the Education Officers of the Australian Department of Education; arrange career visit programs; and arrange jobs for Aboriginal school leavers.

It is not really possible to divorce aspirations from occupational opportunities, as the one is shaped by the other. What I will try to do here is to discuss the employment situation for Aborigines generally in New South Wales; then go on to discuss the changing aspirations of young Aborigines, and the role our Department is playing in helping shape and satisfy these aspirations.

Theoretically, occupational opportunities for Aborigines are the same as those for non-Aborigines, and in New South Wales there is no law or award stipulation that Aborigines cannot do particular jobs. Why is it then, that it is still true to say that the great majority of adult Aborigines in the country are engaged in rural work, seasonal work and labouring work with government organisations such as the Railways, Shire and Municipal Councils, Department of Main Roads, etc? Similarly, in the city, the great majority of Aborigines are employed in general

labouring, and unskilled factory work. And on top of this, of course, there is a high level of Aboriginal unemployment.

The only profession that I know of where Aboriginals are represented in New South Wales is teaching - there are no Aboriginal doctors, lawyers, dentists, engineers, social workers and so on. With just the occasional exception, all the Aboriginals that I know of who are self-employed have small farms or are rural contractors - fencing contractors and the like. Also, the number of Aboriginal tradesmen and technicians is extremely low.

What are the reasons for this state of affairs?

The basic reason, of course, is the history of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal contact in this State, and the illustrations I have just given are but another reflection of the Aboriginal position at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder in New South Wales.

Henry Schapper, in his important book on Aboriginal advancement writes:

"A house requires rent, rent requires income, income requires a job, a job requires health and skill, skill requires education and training, education and training require motivation, motivation requires health and a particular pattern of child rearing, the child rearing needs a home and a home and health require a house."

And you are back at the beginning. A good job is, of course, a vital element in breaking this vicious circle, but it is all bound up in a whole inter-related pattern.

This circle can only be broken by large government expenditure in all these related fields - health, housing, education and job training - and there is no magic formula.

As this seminar is particularly concerned with education, I will give one example of the poor levels of education achieved by Aboriginals compared with non-Aboriginals - although the numbers of Aboriginals getting the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate are encouragingly increasing (and I will have more to say about this later), they are still way below that of white students. In 1971 when thirteen Aboriginals sat the Higher School Certificate, the Teachers' Federation calculated

on a population basis that one hundred and eight (that is, over eight times this number) should have done so.

Although it is this general deprivation which is at the heart of the reason why Aborigines are so massively concentrated in the unskilled sector of our labour force, there are two factors that I should mention.

A. DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT

There is no doubt that discrimination against Aborigines in employment still exists, particularly in country towns. However, I would say that this issue is possible over-rated as a factor inhibiting Aboriginal economic development, and this prejudice is compensated for to some extent at least by the growing number of employers who positively discriminate in favour of Aborigines.

Also, the Australian Government recently established National and State Committees to combat discrimination in employment, and it is significant that an Aboriginal, Mr. Paul Coe, President of the Aboriginal Legal Service, New South Wales, is on this National Committee.

Where prejudice does its loathsome work here, I think, is more in the generally poor image that non-Aborigines have of Aborigines, and how Aborigines themselves invariably accept this stereotype which white society has imposed on them. One of the obvious results of this is the often poor performance at school, and, consequently, the lack of qualifications required for better jobs. Another consequence is a tendency towards lack of motivation to work, stemming from the feeling that if one is going to be inevitably branded as a second-class citizen, what is the point of striving anyway.

Again, there is no doubt that Aborigines do occasionally meet with problems of discrimination and prejudice on the job from their work mates and supervisors, and this has led to Aborigines leaving jobs which they were well-equipped for and would otherwise have remained in.

B. GEOGRAPHICAL LIMITATIONS

Australia is one of the most highly urbanized countries in the world, and its population, and job opportunities, are concentrated in its capital cities along the coast. On the other hand, about

two-thirds of New South Wales Aboriginals live in country areas, and moreover, they tend not to live in the flourishing inland cities of Orange, Albury, Tamworth and Wagga, etc., but in places like Bourke, Brewarrina, Condobolin, Coonamble, Kempsey, Weilmoringle, Wodenbong, etc. In these places, job opportunities are scarce, and the range of job opportunities is much more limited.

On the positive side, there are areas of job opportunity opening up where Aboriginals enjoy an advantage. For example, there is a supernumerary nursing aide training scheme whereby the New South Wales Hospitals receive a grant from the Australian Government enabling them to train about forty Aboriginal girls each year as nursing aides. There is a Special Works Projects Scheme whereby the Australian Government provides funds to Aboriginal Advancement Associations, local Government organizations, and the like to employ Aboriginals in work which is of particular value to the local Aboriginal community, or provides good opportunities for training for eventual permanent employment - about \$1½ million is available for this purpose in New South Wales this year.

Again, there are increasing opportunities for Aboriginals in Government Departments and voluntary organizations particularly concerned with Aboriginal matters. The Australian Government has recognized the principle that, generally speaking, the people best equipped to work with Aboriginals are the Aboriginals themselves, and there is a growing number of jobs becoming available in this area as liaison officers with the Directorate of Aboriginal Welfare and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, as Aboriginal Health workers with the New South Wales Health Commission, as field officers and office staff with the Aboriginal Legal Service, with Aboriginal Advancement Associations, and so on.

In my own Department in New South Wales, four of our thirteen Vocational Officers are Aboriginals, and plans are underway to create eight new positions to be located in our Employment Offices with a considerable number of Aboriginal applicants - these positions will be filled by Aboriginals, and they will have a particular responsibility for dealing with Aboriginal applicants; similarly, I understand that the New South Wales Education Department is considering employing a number of Aboriginal teaching aides similar to those already employed at Weilmoringle and Walhallow (Caroona).

Also, there is our Department's Employment Training Scheme for Aborigines whereby employers who take on Aborigines with an inadequate work background get subsidised by the government. This subsidy, which is worth one-third of the award wage for the job concerned (and commences at 60% for the first three months), ranges from twelve months to two years depending on the degree of skill involved in the job. Nearly one thousand Aborigines in New South Wales have been placed in employment under this Scheme since it commenced in July, 1969.

ASPIRATIONS

There can be no doubt that the general (and hence job) aspirations of young Aborigines are increasing, and this can be illustrated by the increasing number staying on longer at school, the increasing number doing School Certificate, and the increasing number going on to post-secondary studies/courses.

I think the tables below speak for themselves, and are proof enough of my general proposition that aspiration levels are definitely increasing. These aspirations are obviously going to manifest themselves in a desire for better job opportunities.

Where we come into this is in the shaping and satisfying of these job aspirations.

We make it our job to see every possible Aboriginal school leaver in New South Wales, and younger students too - to counsel them, advise them, stimulate them, provoke them; we talk to them about jobs and careers and what kinds of qualifications are needed for particular jobs; we talk to their parents and principals and Education Officers; we attend Aboriginal Advancement Association meetings to try to put the message over; we arrange Vocational Guidance tests; we try to persuade those with ability to stay on at school as long as possible; we tell them what young people in a similar situation to themselves just a couple of years ago are now doing, and how they can do it too; we show the occasional career film.

We arrange job information tours for Aborigines in their home towns - to show them what jobs involve, and what qualifications you need for these jobs. Last year we introduced for the first time career visit programs to regional centres - of North Coast and North West boys and girls to Newcastle; of South Coast,

NUMBER WHO SAT EXAMINATION - NEW SOUTH WALES		
School Certificate		Higher School Certificate
1970	Not known	6
1971	180	13
1972	225	22
1973	250	40
(Note: the above figures are approximations.)		

ABORIGINAL STUDY GRANTS SCHEME - AUSTRALIAN FIGURES*					
	1969	1970	1971	1971	1973
University	11	16	22	28	50
Other tertiary)			(14	14	17
Technical College)	16	52	(106	147	80
Teacher Training	4	4	16	30	40
Secretary/Typing	63	136	223	319	345
Matric/Leaving	13	27	29	26	60
Other	8	70	89	125	275
TOTAL	115	305	499	689	867
*Aboriginal News (Department of Aboriginal Affairs) - Vol 1, No 4, December, 1973.					

In 1973 the major items included under 'Other' were:

Pre-employment/pre-vocational	101
Child care/mothercraft/parent education	44
Sewing/dressmaking	25
Adult education	24
Heavy equipment operator	20

Central West and South West students to Canberra; Far West students to Broken Hill; Goodooga/Brewarrina boys to Sydney; and of Goodooga/Bourke/Brewarrina girls to Dubbo. About eighty students were involved in these career visit programs to regional centres last year, and we hope to considerably increase that number this year.

Similarly, we encourage Aboriginal students and their parents and schools to make use of the Vocational Guidance Camps for country students held at Narrabeen each year, and we also participate in the annual Students Camp Association for young Aboriginals at Namaroo, Lane Cove, each September.

Again, we have found that the usual career information booklets are not sufficiently relevant to young Aboriginals, so we are bringing out next month a career booklet especially compiled for Aboriginals. This booklet will show about forty young Aboriginals in various job situations. The Aboriginals and the firms they work for are identified, and there is a short description of the qualifications needed for the jobs shown, and where employment opportunities in these occupations exist. I will enumerate the jobs included in the booklet as they are a good illustration of what jobs young Aboriginals can reasonably aspire to. Bear in mind that all the photographs portray real life situations.

The jobs we have included are:

Apprentice Automotive Electrician	
Apprentice Butcher	Apprentice Bricklayer
Apprentice Carpenter/Joiner	Apprentice Cook/Chef
Apprentice Fitter & Turner	Apprentice Hairdresser

Apprentice Motor Mechanic
Apprentice Welder
Diesel Mechanic
Clerk
P.M.G. Linesman
Trainee Social Worker
Teacher
Nursing Aide
Pre-School Assistant
Student Stenographer
Trainee Brake Mechanic
Machinist (seamstress)
Shop Assistant
Typist
Driveway Attendant
Storeman

Apprentice Painter
Apprentice Panel Beater
Bank Officer
Nurse
Policeman
Soil Tester
Clerical Assistant
P.M.G. Telephonist
Station Assistant
Postal Officer
Compositor
Plant operator
Receptionist/Typist
Counter Hand
Factory Hand
Timber Mill worker.

You will have noted the emphasis here on semi-skilled and skilled jobs - apprenticeships, sales assistants, clerical work, nursing, teaching, etc. The professions, on the other hand, are conspicuous by their absence, with only social work and teaching getting a mention. The reason for this is that it seemed to us in compiling the booklet that we should have regard to what can be reasonably achieved by young people around the School Certificate level, and it is here, realistically, that we should now be getting results. When we bring out the next edition of this booklet I am sure that there will be an upgrading in the careers shown.

One of the speakers earlier this week - I think it was Mr. Watson from Brisbane - referred to the fact that there should be more general career information showing *Aboriginals* in job situations. It might be worth mentioning here therefore, that last year we were able to persuade the Australian Public Service Board to include an Aboriginal in a group photograph shown in its most recent recruitment material for Clerical Assistant positions in the Australian Public Service.

The next question is - Are young Aboriginals leaving school getting the jobs to which their improving qualifications entitle them? Again, I think I can answer a very cautious 'Yes'. The career booklet itself is some proof of this. Also, whereas over the previous two to three years we have been lucky to make double figures on the number of Aboriginal school leavers we have placed in apprenticeship positions each year, I am confident that we will

get about thirty young Aboriginals into apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship Technical College courses this year. Then there is the fact that more and more young Aboriginals are getting positions with the Australian Public Service, and if I may give a parochial example, whereas four years ago my own Department in New South Wales would have had no Aboriginals on its payroll, we now have eight, including the four Vocational Officers I referred to earlier.

One of the difficulties which I mentioned earlier that we have in placing young Aboriginals in suitable employment is the fact that so many live in remote areas where employment opportunities are poor, or even declining. All we can offer these young people is employment away from home, usually in Sydney.

To assist us in our endeavours here, our Department's Employment Training Scheme for Aboriginals provides for the payment of fares to the job, a \$45 clothing grant, first week's accommodation costs, and generous living-away-from-home allowances ranging from \$14 per week to those under sixteen to \$4 per week at twenty years of age, and return fares home twice during the first year of employment.

Also we have been involved with the New South Wales Directorate of Aboriginal Welfare in the providing of employment hostels for young Aboriginals in Sydney - there are four at the present time - one for boys and three for girls. While these hostels have enabled a number of young country Aboriginals to establish themselves in Sydney, it has to be conceded that they have only a limited success, and most of the young people who have come to Sydney under this hostel program have subsequently returned home.

The plain fact is that the majority do not like Sydney and the hustle and bustle of the big city, and, of course, this reaction is by no means confined to Aboriginals. This lesson has been emphasised to us by our experience in Canberra, where we have two employment hostels (one for boys and one for girls). Our experience there has been shorter, but I think we can already say that turnover in Canberra tends to be lower and the young people who move there adjust more easily.

Ideally, of course, we should find suitable employment opportunities locally, but more often than not, this is just not

possible. You are never going to have a wide range of employment opportunities in places like Goodooga, Enngonia, WEilmoringle, etc., unless some mineral is found there or via some other act of God.

However, we increasingly realise that we must do our best to locate suitable employment opportunities for young people from these remote areas in large country towns nearer their homes, and our next employment hostels, for example, will hopefully be in Dubbo. We hope to move from there to other suitably central country towns with good employment prospects.

I am actutely aware that these thoughts on aspirations and occupation prospects for young Aborigines have been written in terms of your relatively 'high fliers' and that little attention has been given to apparent 'slow learner' students who still make up a very high number of Aboriginal school leavers. Unfortunately, we still have little to offer them other than the usual outlets of labouring and unskilled factory work, and the only message of hope I can convey here is the proposal for work experience programs for disadvantaged students generally being jointly explored by the New South Wales Education Department and my Department.

It is intended that these work experience programs should involve students of school leaving age in part-time, or blocks of full-time work while still enrolled in school. The essential ingredient is that this work experience should be integrated with the school program and its success with individual students will rely on the goodwill and cooperation of a wide variety of agencies in the community, as well as individual employers.

To conclude then, I think there can be no doubt that the aspirations, and the consequent range of occupational opportunities, for young Aborigines are significantly increasing. And that the oft repeated story told of an Aboriginal lady claiming, "my old man works on the Council ... my son gets educated ... he works on the Council too ... so much for education", is increasingly less valid. However, we have a huge way to go before Aborigines enjoy anything like true equality with non-Aborigines as far as occupational opportunities go, and this will only be realised with the increasing injection of government funds into the various fields of education, health, vocational training and housing, which I referred to earlier.

On this question of vocational training, there is obviously a great need for compensatory programs in this area too, and I am glad to say that 1974 should see a start being made in this field, with the likely introduction of two courses by the Department of Technical Education, which, hopefully, will be extended and further developed in the years ahead.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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