

19 MAY 1975

EDITORIAL OPINION

been able to tell millions of Britons on television that Australia is "a racist country". He has demonstrated at Australia House and given the doorman at No. 10 Downing Street a protest leaflet. There is talk of a tent embassy outside the UN building in New York and other stunts apparently aimed at making Australia's name mud in the field of race relations. What will it be next: boomerangs off the Eiffel Tower? Mr. Perkins has done all this while he is still technically an officer of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and while on a literary grant from the Australian Council for the Arts. Hardly a sign of racism.

Mr. Perkins has a perfectly valid argument when it comes to the legacy of injustice and deprivation in Aboriginal affairs. For too long this cruel injustice has been a way of life (and death) for many Aborigines in Australia. Australians ought to feel ashamed of it and of the way it continues even today, reflected in the higher death rates of Aboriginal babies, the deprivation in living conditions, education and employment opportunities; in equality. But the point is that most Australians do care. The Government has been trying to grapple with the enormous problems in a sympathetic way, in a way which allowed Aborigines themselves

to choose and influence the pace and direction of change while conserving their culture.

Mr. Perkins has apparently chosen his way of life as perpetual protest without any record of having produced effective programmes of change himself. His greatest distinction (once again in the publicity field) seems to have been the denigration and disruption of his own department. The Australian Government has taken solid initiatives in righting the wrongs of the past — the Woodward Commission on Aboriginal land rights being typical of its new policy thrusts. Mr. Perkins has never been denied a forum in this country and the degree of latitude allowed to him in his crusade of outrage has frequently extended the normal Public Service limits. Calling Australia a racist country is not only untrue, but like many of Mr. Perkins' excesses it may well do more to provoke a backlash against Aboriginal welfare than right any wrongs of the past. His position as a public servant and recipient of a Government grant bestows on him responsibilities as well as privileges. He is not fulfilling those responsibilities if he persists with his crude propaganda in faraway places. Australians will not thank him for this overseas smear campaign — this wasted walkabout.

What a wasted walkabout

ABORIGINAL public servant (on leave) Mr. Charles Perkins has been getting publicity mileage out of his current trip abroad. He has