

Age 20 October 1969

Growing crisis in Aboriginal affairs

SIR, — There is a growing crisis in Aboriginal affairs in this country.

The roots of the crisis lie in the growth of three things — the Aboriginal population, Aboriginal awareness of their under-privil-

eged position, and Aboriginal impatience at such long-standing injustice.

Aborigines, and part-Aborigines, now number upwards of 140,000 and are expected to double inside 20 years. Yet Aborigines have one of the highest child mortality rates in the world, high unemployment, poor housing, poor education, and plain stark poverty.

It is time these facts were not only realised but used as a basis for a real policy of action.

Consider housing. Assuming an average of seven people per house (a far from generous assumption), about a thousand new houses must be built by or for Aborigines each year, merely in order to keep up with the growth of population.

This means that at least \$8 million per annum must be spent on Aboriginal housing, without even touching the existing shanties and slums.

Consider unemployment. In September the Minister for Labor (Mr. Bury) announced in Parliament that in six weeks the Government's new scheme to encourage the employment of Aborigines had placed 20 people in jobs. In the same six weeks the Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal population had increased by more than 800!

Clearly, despite the odd reforms and improvements here and there, the overall position of Aborigines relative to non-Aborigines is growing worse, and rapidly. It is no wonder Aborigines are becoming more outspoken!

It is time Australians and particularly Australian politicians, realised the seriousness of the situation, before it blows up in their faces.

A BARRIE PITTOCK (Legislative Reform Convener, The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, 38, Yackatooon St., Ascendale, Vic.)

