

## Jobs and equality

COMMONWEALTH Government attitudes towards Aborigines have become increasingly humane and enlightened during the past two years. Spurred, no doubt, by the result of the May, 1967, referendum, and by the determined Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Wentworth), the Commonwealth has appointed Aboriginal liaison officers, offered financial aid for Aboriginal land settlement and business undertakings, and promised to assist all Aboriginal students. Now the Minister for Labor and National Service (Mr. Bury) has announced a practical, three-year scheme to stimulate job opportunities for Aborigines. Given reasonable support by employers, the scheme will be of immense long-term importance in the campaign to give Aborigines genuine equality with white Australians.

Lack of job opportunities has long been one of the major factors helping to perpetuate the injustices and indignities suffered by Aborigines. This is partly because some employers simply discriminate against Aboriginal job applicants and partly because many Aborigines have had no chance to acquire skills. Mr. Bury's scheme seeks to overcome both problems by offering an incentive to employers and Aborigines. It offers to subsidise employers who give jobs and long-term work training to Aborigines with inadequate employment records; it offers a living-away-from home allowance to Aborigines under the age of 21 who have no record of regular employment and who have to live away from home to take up long-term work training.

If the scheme succeeds in placing increasing numbers of Aborigines in steady well-paid jobs, it will break down employer discrimination. Aborigines will be encouraged to acquire skills, to educate their children and to play a meaningful role as equals in our industrialised urban society. Once this complex sociological process is started, the days of charity hand-outs and riverside humpies will be numbered. In deciding to start the process artificially, Mr. Bury has acted on a Department of Labor and National Service survey which has established that there is no statistical basis for the belief that Aborigines are "occupationally unstable". The problem, as Mr. Bury said, has always been that job opportunities for Aborigines are too often either of intermittent or unskilled nature. His plan for overcoming this problem is reasonable and far-sighted.

It is to be hoped the Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal policies continue to develop along these lines. There is still much to be done. For example, the wide gap between white and Aboriginal education standards must be closed; Aboriginal housing and health also require immediate attention. As the Commonwealth acts to overcome the more obvious problems faced by the Aboriginal population, it should also undertake studies designed to expose the deeper desires and needs of Aborigines. Already there are encouraging signs that Aborigines are developing social and political viewpoints, and it would be tragically unwise for a Government to jump to conclusions about what Aborigines want and need. Condescension is no substitute for consultation.