

Editorial

As I write this my last Editorial, the Year of the Child is drawing to a close. Who could have foreseen that 1979 was going to be one of the worst years for children in a decade not short of horrors perpetrated by Man or natural disasters perpetrated by somebody else? What started out as a good idea became quickly bogged down in conferences, dinners, interminable accounts of what innumerable experts had to say. As the year wore on reports from all over the world underscored the febleness of our efforts.

A recent report from Britain estimates that between 100 and 200 million children throughout the world are engaged in work activities that often put their health and safety in jeopardy. The problem is particularly intractable in Latin America, where children work in the fields from an early age, are sold as servants to rich families or are forced into prostitution. In the United States there has been an upsurge of child labour among the grape pickers of California — predominantly migrant workers from Mexico. In Morocco they, work in the textile factories, while the continued existence of sweat

shops in the East End of London must make Shaftesbury turn in his grave. Sadly few governments have signed the Convention of the International Labour Organisation which aims to outlaw child labour.

A LONG WAY TO GO

All this pales into insignificance alongside the disaster of Kampuchea where a whole child population is being destroyed by starvation, disease and neglect.

The main thrust of this issue is the rights of children and although the arguments are important for Australian children, when set against the situations already mentioned, they leave a feeling of extreme discomfort. When life itself is in total jeopardy, higher order rights

like legal representation seem incomprehensible. Yet we have to continue to advance the rights of children wherever they are — they did not ask to be born in Australia any more than those pitiful children staring at us from our newspapers asked to be born in Kampuchea. Their eyes haunt me however, when I think about the waste of resources in this country in this fast disappearing Year of the Child. Was it really necessary for the Governor-General to have a barbecue in Canberra for all those children and adults, and fly those entertainers in from all over the country. Could not the collective wisdom and humanity of all those IYC advisers find a more imaginative way to spend scarce money. Had none of them heard about the urgent health care needs of aboriginal children or of the parlous financial state of some child care organisations? But I forgot, those are matters for the States.

The message for next year and for many years to come seems to be — there is a long way to go before the world's children can look forward to enjoying the childhood they should be entitled to.

Cliff Picton