

REPORT ON CONFERENCE OF FEDERAL COUNCIL FOR ADVANCEMENT OF
ABORIGINES AND TORRES ISLANDERS

HELD AT CANBERRA DURING EASTER 1967

R. ANDERSON

Conference opened on 24th March. Approximately 300 delegates and observers present with some 50 odd Aborigine delegates.

Delegates represented a broad cross section of organisations from church to trade unions with a number of Aboriginal Advancement organisations from various States.

17 organisations with Aboriginal Advancement as their main platform.

2 church organisations

N.S.W. Teachers Federatkon

Actors & Announcers Equity, Sydney

7 trade unions

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Sydney

Victorian Teachers Union

4 Labour Councils

The National President, J. McGinness in his Presidential Report gave a comprehensive report with emphasis on Northern Territory struggle and the Queensland Government's continuing policy of economic and social discrimination. He also pointed out the growing awareness of the trade unions to the responsibility to assist in Aboriginal advancement and the need for a "crash" education and housing program to bridge the gap and create an environment to sustain this position.

Stan Davey, Federal Secretary, reported on 10 years of F.C.A.A.; detailed the early problems, the work that has been done, the achievements and the work of the future.

Mrs. Faith Bandler and Mr. Gordon Bryant, M.P. dealt with the proposed referendum pointing out the dangers of support for Aborigine proposals being lost because of the issue of the House of Representatives.

Conference was officially opened by Mr. Sinclair, M.P. Minister for Social Services who represented the Federal Government. This in itself is recognition by the Federal Government that F.C.A.A. is a representative body and accepted as such nationally.

Mr. Sinclair outlined that by the end of the year Social Services Benefits would be paid directly to Aborigines and not to pastoralists.

Guest speaker was a Maori M.P., Mr. Matu Rota, who gave a refreshing talk on Maori and white problems.

Some of his best quotes would be:

. "You cannot be equal unless opportunities are equal."

. "The world judges us on our administration of ourselves; the success of our external policies is measured by what it does internally."

He stated that the solution to the Aboriginal problems was the creating of conditions under which they could

advance their economic, social and political status to that comparable with the rest of the community.

Saturday morning, March 25th.

Committee reports were briefly delivered and discussed.

Saturday Afternoon dealt with State Secretary's reports. These reports showed good work in various States. Some extracts are:

*South Australia - Formation of an Aboriginal Women's Council early in 1967. Membership 50 (this body sent 9 Aboriginal women delegates to the Annual Conference).

Demonstration by Aborigines outside Parliament House South Australia, around the issue of mineral rights.

A Bill passed in South Australia making it an offence to discriminate against Aborigines on the basis of colour.

* Demonstration by Aborigines in Darwin outside Northern Territory Legislative Council on the issue of equal pay.

* Waterfront Aboriginal Committee, Sydney, collected \$1500 for strikers in Northern Territory.

Delegates from all States reported on good forms of activity.

It is obvious from these reports that the position in Northern Australia is where concentrated work is required by organisations supporting Aboriginal advancement. The Trade Union movement can play a vital role in this work. The number of trade union delegates attending conference would indicate a growing awareness of the fact.

COMMENTS ON CONFERENCE

Conference was conducted at a General Assembly, The all-Aboriginal section and various commissions were waived. These had been the normal procedure at prior conferences.

There was such opposition to the deletion of the Aboriginal section by Aboriginal delegates that a special section was called for Sunday morning at which it was unanimously decided they insist on this section at future conferences.

Reason for this is that there is a hesitancy on the part of some Aborigines to speak in front of white people (let alone an assembly of 300). It is a fact that they air their problems at the Aboriginal Section.

I feel that the deletion of sections or commissions did not allow for fuller discussion on matters such as wages and employment, settlements and missions, native arts and crafts, etc .

These came in the form of a half hour report from those Committees (four at a time) with a 35 minute time limit to discuss the lot. (Previous conferences devoted up to two hours to discuss ~~xx~~ each section then made recommendations to the general assembly).

Flowing from the Conference are two decisions for immediate action. Firstly, and most important:

- * The Referendum on May 27, 1967, which deals with altering the Australian Constitution so as to allow the Australian Aborigines to be included in future census taking.

It is felt that unless a vigorous campaign is developed in support of this that the vote could be negated because of the second question on the voting paper increasing the number of members to the House of Representatives. Because of the foregoing reason all States are calling meetings of a broad character which will include Church organisations, Progress Associations, trade union bodies and intellectual organisations to develop a Working Committee to ensure a "Yes" vote for the Aborigines. Tentative date for Brisbane is 21st April

Some suggestions could be:

- * Take up the matter with the Building Trades Group and the Trades & Labor Council
- * Publicity in the "Building Workers' Journal"
- * Use May Day as a means of publicity.
- * The other planned activity is by Student Action Cttee, Sydney, who are to hold a Conference in Townsville in August 1967 on Aboriginal Advancement.

Federal Council is to support this move and urges affiliated organisations to render all assistance possible. This could be done by media of the Journal (B.T.G.) and through the Trades & Labor Council of Qld. and the Townsville Trades & Labor Council.

In conclusion I can only state that the Conference has been a stimulus for all those working in the interests of Aboriginal advancement.