

A BLACK HISTORY

From my knowledge with regard to my involvement in Aboriginal affairs within Queensland the first organized black protest put forward by the black people themselves arose out of the indignation of the Aboriginal and Islander Tribal Council, Brisbane. This organization was formed on 7th December 1969 in Brisbane. Many black people active in many Aboriginal organizations were there for that inaugural meeting to set up the Aboriginal and Islander Tribal Council, Brisbane.

Approximately one month later, on 4th January 1970, a motion was passed about the atrocious conditions existing on the Palm Island Aboriginal reserve and that the Tribal Council actively involve itself in bettering the conditions of that reserve and other reserves throughout the state of Queensland.

At this time the organization was not being funded by any government institution but did, however, begin to carry out campaigns to inform trade unions, student bodies, church groups and other Aboriginal organizations throughout Australia of the atrocities being perpetrated under the then Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Act of 1965. In July of 1970 the Federal Government funded the Aboriginal and Islanders Tribal Council, Brisbane to carry out work in specific areas such as education, health, housing, employment, financial co-ordination, social activities, sporting activities and legal aid. The members of the Council elected councillors to handle these specific areas and the monies granted from the Federal Government were used in these areas. In all of these areas we were consistently frustrated by the fact that the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Act of 1965 was the cause of many of the problems we were trying to solve. We were forced to carry out our work out of necessity.

ity, was forced to carry out political campaigns to smash that legislation. These were expressed in pamphlets, letters to many individuals and organizations throughout Australia and the world and at demonstrations. At Easter 1970 members from the Aboriginal and Islanders Tribal Council, Brisbane attended the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders annual conference to put forward the demand of self-determination in black affairs as well as to politicise the people attending that conference as to the blatant racism under the Queensland statutes and to have them campaign actively against that racism, thus broaden the struggle so that black organizations throughout Australia were receiving information and passing resolutions on the racist nature of the Queensland Act. Because the aims of self-determination were not realised by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, a split was caused in the organization and a new organization was formed called the National Tribal Council. It has basically the same specific areas and aims as the Brisbane body with additional state representatives or co-ordinators also setting up a specific area to receive monies and to carry out definite programmes and activities to smash the racist legislation in Queensland.

Because of the pressures that were brought the then Prime Minister, McMahon, granted us audience to discuss proposed changes in the Queensland legislation which he would then discuss with the Premier, Bjelke Petersen. The Federal Government had the mandate to override the states on legislation pertaining the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the 1965 referendum. The talks with McMahon proved absolutely

fruitless and the points agreed on by McMahon and Petersen were in fact meaningless. The black community, backed by the Australian Council of Churches, at the time demonstrated their disagreements with the proposed new legislation to be brought in November 1971. The emotional attitude of the black people and the white people who were aware of the atrocious situation exploded and they were refused entry into their own offices of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in George Street, Brisbane. Riot police initiated violent confrontation by pushing away people who wished to talk to the director of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Numerous running street fights broke out with police and demonstrators which resulted in the arrest of nine people.

The new legislation which was proposed in 1971 divided the Aborigines from the Torres Strait Islanders by the creation of two separate acts of Parliament. These are the political activity taken by the Brisbane Tribal Council. Federal Funds were immediately cut off. Police oppression and activity from that time on had been increased to suppress any political activity in general and especially around the racist legislation which existed in that state. Labour politicians within that state did not oppose the legislation going through their Parliament. The Labour politicians maintained it was an improvement on the 1965 legislation. We told them then that this was false and this has proven to be the case. Activity around the Act Confrontation Movement since 1971 has been very sporadic and was not revived significantly until early 1973. By this time Palm Island had elected a Chairman to their Council who refused to bow down to the racist white ad-



Denis Walker, speaking at the 1972 Brisbane conference on Racism.

ministrators and initiated moves to liberate Palm Island and to alleviate the problems brought about by the atrocities heaped on them since the late 1800's. Because of this the Act Confrontation Movement put forward a number of proposals which were agreed on by the then Chairman, Fred Clay, and his Council to obtain Federal funds to administer their own affairs and to economically develop the Island for themselves. The Brisbane Act Confrontation Committee, as well as Act Confrontation committees throughout Australia, were preparing to give very significant back up facilities and resources to achieve the aims of self-determination and the land right to the Palm Island for Palm Island people. Because of this the Petersen regime coerced their black puppets into drawing up a false petition with false names and forgeries to have that Council disbanded. The reasons behind Petersen's moves were strictly economic and racist to the extent that he wanted white business interests to control the Island and not the black indigenous people living there. He succeeded with this farcical move, mainly because of the

basic racist attitudes which exist in the State of Queensland in the student movements, in the trade union movements and backed up by the racist legislation of the State Parliament. He not only caused the black activists on Palm Island to be negated but he also negated many of the moves being made in Brisbane in the Act Confrontation Movement by having false charges of extortion laid against three activists within the movement, namely, Denis Walker, John Garcia and Lionel Lacey.

If the Act Confrontation Movement is to regain some viability then some pressures far greater than that are at the disposal of the black community must be brought to bear. It is obvious that the Federal Parliament cannot or will not over-ride the racism on the statute books of the Queensland Parliament. I would suggest that workers and working class organization immediately instigate economic embargoes on Queensland products and supplies similar to the campaign being carried out on the South African Government.

By Denis Walker, 6th February, 1975.