

TUCAR NEWSLETTER

NSW TRADE UNION COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL RIGHTS
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UNIONS PLEDGE SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

Twenty trade unions, representing over half a million workers, have joined forces with the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations.

The National Committee for Trade Union and Aboriginal Co-operation sent a national delegation to Alice Springs to speak to a meeting of the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations, the first NCAO meeting since the mass march in Sydney on January 26.

At a joint press conference, the unions pledged their support and assistance towards a NCAO convened national conference of Aboriginal people, tentatively scheduled for October 1988.

"This will be an historic event — and the trade union movement's support is most welcome," spokesman for the NCAO Pat Dodson said.

The trade unions will also throw their weight behind the Aboriginal struggle for:

- ★ national land rights legislation
- ★ self determination for Aboriginal people
- ★ campaigns to raise public awareness about indigenous rights and the need for justice.

Specific undertakings have been made to:

- ☆ seek ACTU support for the national conference
- ☆ urge the ACTU to include a NCAO representative on the delegation to the International Labour Organisation's June meeting on the Convention in Indigenous Peoples
- ☆ raise funds for a NCAO appointee to work full-time with the trade union committee and liaise between the two national organisations.

The strength of the Aboriginal organisations and the growing awareness of trade unions has led to the establishment of a strong and significant link between workers and Aboriginal people in 1988.

"Both groups see common ground in our struggles and the need for all Australians to come to terms with the last 200 years of ignorance and inequity," a spokesperson for the union committee said.

"As well as holding discussions with the Coalition, the delegation visited several Aboriginal run and controlled organisations and visited outlying communities.

"From this first-hand experience we are even more convinced that Aboriginal people must have the right to economic development and self determination through the achievement of land rights and to organise as one indigenous people.

"At the moment, Australia has failed to recognise these rights — even worse, there is an appalling level of ignorance amongst politicians and the community in general.

"Australians must realise and come to terms with the fact that many Aboriginal people live in third world conditions.

"We fully support the NCAO's position that Aboriginal people themselves are the only people who can work out the solutions to these problems," the trade union committee spokesperson said, "and on behalf of our unions, we intend to help in every way we can."

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NATIONAL COALITION OF ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS MEETS IN ALICE SPRINGS

The National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations issued the following press release after its recent meeting held in Alice Springs from April 8 to 10.

The National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations is made up of Aboriginal community controlled organisations from every State and Territory in Australia.

It is the national body of the Aboriginal movement and speaks on behalf of Aboriginal people and organisations on issues of national and international concern.

At the meeting in Alice Springs, April 8-10, the Coalition discussed a range of issues including the national land rights situation, black deaths in custody and the progress of the Muirhead Royal Commission, the proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations and their proposed Declaration of Indigenous Rights, and the International Labour Organisation Convention No 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations.

The National Coalition reaffirmed that the achievement of national land rights is the major priority.

The Coalition affirmed its confidence in and support for the Muirhead Royal Commission as

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National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations representatives at the meeting were:

National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
National Federation of Land Councils
Trade Union Committee on Aboriginal Rights
Committee to Defend Black Rights
Kimberley Land Council
Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research and Action
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (NSW)
National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation
Central Land Council
Northern Land Council
Njiku Jowan Legal Service
Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council
NSW Aboriginal Land Council
Aboriginal Student Association, SAIT (SA)

the most effective means, at this stage, of establishing the truth in relation to the deaths currently under consideration; and affirmed its confidence in the staff of the Commission, in particular Special Advisor Gary Foley.

Regarding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Coalition rejected the preamble as it is currently written because it does not meet the expectations of Aboriginal people. Particular concern was expressed about clause 3 of the preamble which would extinguish Aboriginal title and rights to land.

The Coalition also disassociated itself from the much publicised "Libyan trip".

The Coalition also expressed solidarity with the Kanak people's struggle for independence and called on the Australian Government to urge France to abandon the planned elections in Kanaky and commence negotiations with the FLNKS for a peaceful transition to independence.

The Coalition endorsed the planned Aboriginal protests at the opening of Parliament House, Canberra, and the *United Indigenous Cultural Survival Gathering* planned for Musgrave Park, Brisbane, from April 27 to May 4.

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Trade unions represented on the National Committee for Trade Union and Aboriginal Co-operation delegation to Alice Springs were:

Australian Clerical Officers Association
Printing and Kindred Industries Union
Building Workers Industrial Union
Seamens Union
Independent Teachers Association
Actors Equity
Miscellaneous Workers Union
Australian Journalists Association
Australian Teachers Federation
Plumbers and Gasfitters Union

Other union members of the national committee are:

Public Service Association (NSW)
Amalgamated Metal Workers Union
Australian Railways Union
Firemen and Deckhands Union
Miners Federation
Australian Telecommunications Employees Association
Firebrigade Employees Union (NSW)
Waterside Workers Federation
Clothing Trades Union
Nsw Teachers Federation

ABORIGINES FIGHT TO SAVE NSW LAND RIGHTS LEGISLATION

The following article was prepared for trade union journals by the NSW Trade Union Committee on Aboriginal Rights and distributed on April 20th. The Supreme Court challenge by the NSW Land Council will be heard on Thursday, April 28th.

"Mr Greiner is going to take away our future," Delia Lowe, Secretary of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, told a gathering of trade union officials and activists in Sydney on April 15. "The NSW land rights legislation helped to take our people away from helplessness and despair and now the State Liberal Government wants to destroy this and take us back to dependence on welfare."

Under pressure from the National Party, Liberal Leader Nick Greiner promised that a NSW coalition government would repeal the land rights legislation and abolish the network of Aboriginal land councils. However, the Australian Democrats and Fred Nile's Call to Australia indicated support for Aboriginal land rights. With five seats, they hold the balance of power in the Legislative Council and could block moves to repeal the legislation.

Premier Greiner then announced regulations which bring the land council finances under his control. The new Office of Aboriginal Affairs in the Premier's Department, which has replaced the State Department of Aboriginal Affairs, will administer the funds. In the past, funds have been administered by the individual local and regional land councils.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council lodged an action in the Supreme Court on April 16, claiming that Greiner's action is illegal. A decision is expected in about a week's time.

Under the 1983 NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act, local and regional land councils each year receive 7.5 per cent of the land tax collected in NSW. In 1988 this is expected to be about \$25 million.

After 15 years, this funding will end and the Aboriginal people will be self-sufficient. Land Council Chairman Tiga Bayles emphasised the benefits of the land rights legislation to all the people of NSW. "We won't have to put out our hand to you any longer for our survival," he said.

The Act "phases welfare out" but repeal will mean Aborigines are once again dependents and a drain on the public purse. The regulations undermine Aboriginal self-determination.

Mr Bayles strongly criticised the Greiner Government's decision to give developers a four-year "holiday" from paying land tax.

Under the Land Rights Act, 30 business enterprises have been developed — sheep and cattle

stations, market gardens, fishing co-operatives, artefact shops, a motel, a small printing business and retail stores. All the enterprises are controlled by Aboriginal communities and have Aboriginal employees working for them.

Aboriginal unemployment in NSW is 75 per cent for men and 60 per cent for women (according to a Sydney University study published October 1987).

At least 1,000 Aborigines have been employed as result of Land Rights Act and a further 4,000 jobs will be created by 1998. All these jobs and the business enterprises themselves will be lost if the State Liberal Government gets its way.

Allegations

The NSW Land Council expects Mr Greiner to justify destroying the land rights law by alleging that there has been mismanagement in the land councils.

This has not been true for the last two years but at the beginning mistakes were made. "They gave us a bag of money and a book of rules lots of people found hard to understand, and that was it," Tiga Bayles said.

Aboriginal communities had no previous experience and few skills to deal with the situation. There were few guidelines on how funds could be used and there were insufficient funds to set up adequate administrative procedures and meet people's expectations.

In 1986, the land councils insisted that the Act be amended to make employees more accountable. The NSW Land Council set up a uniform accounting system and workshops were run to improve managerial skills.

"About 75 per cent of small businesses go down the drain in the first 12 months," Mr Bayles pointed out. "Why should we be so much better? And we didn't go down the drain."

"You have to be a lawyer, a researcher and a financial manager to handle that Act," Delia Lowe added. "We found it really hard at first."

Land claims

The only land which Aborigines may claim is Crown land that is not being used now and is not needed for any purpose in the future. "It's land that no-one else wants," Tiga Bayles said. "It's second best, but we'll live with that."

By March 1988, 3,112 land claims had been lodged covering approximately 0.01 per cent of the State, of which 569 had been granted. Aborigines hold 190 sq km of freehold land and 830 sq km of leasehold land throughout NSW.

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Battle to save NSW land rights legislation

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Premier Greiner promises he will use the land rights funds to pay for Aboriginal housing, health and other projects. However, millions of dollars have been poured into these areas over the years and the problems have not been solved.

Nevertheless, Tiga Bayles pointed out, for Aborigines forced to live in derelict cars or communities where water must be carted to homes in buckets, Greiner's offer seems attractive. "They don't always see the wider implications," Mr Bayles said, "and Mr Greiner is trying to split and divide our people."

Trade unionists at the Sydney meeting expressed their support for maintenance of the Land Rights Act until 1998 and indicated their view that the NSW situation is a trial run for an attack on Aboriginal rights and democratic rights generally at a national level.

They agreed to consider the possibility of establishing a fighting fund and making the land rights issue a central question at this year's May Day march in Sydney.

Building union representatives will take a proposal for a campaign against the land tax "holiday" for developers and in support of the land rights legislation back to their unions.

BLACK DEATHS IN CUSTODY

The National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations adopted the following statement and resolution on black deaths in custody during the Coalition meeting held in Alice Springs from April 8 to 10.

The National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations believes that the issue of black deaths in custody is one which affects all Aboriginal people in Australia. There would be very few families in this country who have not lost at least one member of their family in this manner in the past 20 years. Furthermore, given the extended family nature of Aboriginal society, any death of a member of the Aboriginal community has a profound effect on that community as a whole.

We believe that the Muirhead Royal Commission is therefore vital, not only to seek and find the truth about the deaths under investigation, but also in terms of the broader political implications involving the general socio-economic status of Black Australia.

It is obvious that the deplorable living conditions and appalling health status of Aboriginal people are possible contributing factors which should be considered by the Commission in its deliberations.

We therefore call on the Muirhead Royal Commission to also investigate the role played in the maladministration of Aboriginal Affairs monies by senior officials of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and their Ministers over the past 15 years.

RESOLUTION

The National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations therefore:

1. Affirms its confidence in, and support for,

the Muirhead Royal Commission as the most effective means, at this stage, of establishing the truth in relation to the deaths currently under investigation.

2. Affirms its confidence in the staff of the Royal Commission, in particular Special Advisor Gary Foley.

3. Affirms its support for the Committee to Defend Black Rights and those families they represent. We urge the Committee and member organisations to work more closely with each other and the Royal Commission itself, in order to ensure that their important demands of the Federal Government be met.

4. Deplores the scandalously minimal financial support so far offered to members of families of Aborigines who have died in custody. Further, we demand immediate negotiations begin between government officials and family representatives to increase financial assistance forthwith.

5. Supports in general the demands made to the government by the Committee to Defend Black Rights and the families they represent.

6. Demands that the Federal Government urgently consult with the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations and other relevant Aboriginal community organisations regarding the appointment of new Commissioners, and that the government then speed up the appointment of the new Commissioners to ensure that the grief and suffering of family members can be minimised by the expedited Commission hearings.

7. Demands an immediate meeting with the Prime Minister, in conjunction with the Committee to Defend Black Rights, to discuss issues raised in points 4, 5 and 6.

