WHEN IN SEPTEMBER, 1963, the Congress of the Australian Council of Trade Unions unanimously adopted its present policy statement on the Aborigines, it moved far forward from many of the earlier union and labor movement attitudes on racial purity and discrimination on the basis of color of skin and blood. The September, 1963, declaration read:

Congress declares that it is the natural right of the Aboriginal people to enjoy a social and legal equality with other Australians.

Aboriginal people while forming a part of the Australian population are at the same time distinct viable national minorities entitled to special facilities for self-improvement.

We note that legal equality and status is being denied under the Commonwealth Constitution...

Congress calls on all State Governments that have not done so to grant full rights to all Aborigines.

Congress demands that State and Federal government attitudes and actions affecting our indigenous peoples be in accordance with the UNO Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention 107 of the ILO.

John Baker is secretary of the Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists, publicity officer of the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations and a member of the executive of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.
The policy declaration then moved on to specify the requirements of such a program in land ownership, education, health, equality under industrial acts and many other fields of living and general social standards. Before analysing what precisely this declaration meant, we have to recognise the kind of evolution through which union and labor movement views had passed in the preceding 200 years to reach their advanced views of 1963-69.

The early labor movement views, particularly in Queensland, where they had a clear articulation by William Lane in The Worker and by others, were marked by phobias about Chinese and an almost complete indifference to the treatment and fate of the Outer Islanders, whom they termed Kanakas. The Aborigines, as a form of lesser slave labor, at the time, didn't attract the same virulent racist denunciations that the Chinese, Indians and black Kanakas received, but the consensus of the time included them, except where they may have been boxers, cricketers or footballers.

But even in 1904, Federal Labor Leader J. C. Watson, was asking in the House of Representatives "whether we would desire that our sisters or our brothers should be married into one of these races to which we object". How far was he from the Tasmanian magistrate, who last year denounced a young conscientious objector for not agreeing to go "up north" to fight the yellow hordes before they came down here and, as he forecast, "raped the lad's mother in her bed?" And the Labor Party platform in 1905 placed high on its charter the object "the cultivation of an Australian sentiment based on maintenance of racial purity."

*What have been the obstacles to Australians in this century achieving more humane, enlightened and internationalist attitudes to questions of race, colour and the indigenous black people of the Southern Hemisphere? Invaders, governors, soldiers, convicts and the settlers were not confronted here with the old, sophisticated and relatively advanced economic, political and cultural systems of Africa and South America during their invasions. There was no exchange of ambassadors between Western Australia and Britain or Holland, as there was between Britain and some of the West African newly "discovered" states. In Australia, the first invaders didn't meet the challenge that the Dutch-British forces met when pushing North from Cape Town and being confronted with the armies of the Zulu Nation driving South against them. The white invaders' reactions when seeing Australia and the Aborigines were too often like those of William Dampier 300 years ago when stepping on to the shores of Western Australia: "The Inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatapa, though a nasty People, yet for wealth are Gentlemen to these. . . . Setting aside their human shape, they differ but little from Brutes. . . ."

Moving forward from Dampier, the 1956 Select Committee of the Western Australian Parliament gave almost a paraphrase of Dampier to White Australians receiving it without a protest. The Report saw the Aborigines' conditions and style of life as about as miserable, fly-blown,
Between 1905 and 1965, when the ACTU Congress reaffirmed the rights of the Aboriginal people as a viable national minority distinct from other Australians, there were many debates and battles lost by unions and Labor Party members against the prevailing views on race and color and the main phobia — The White Australia Policy. But even in 1946, when at the NSW Conference of the Australian Labor Party, I opposed the vicious racist and white-supremacist declaration moved on behalf of the Executive by Australian Workers Union General Secretary Dougherty, my own union’s federal officials, noting the overwhelming vote for Delegate Dougherty’s resolution, brought charges which would have had me dismissed from the Commonwealth Public Service.

Don’t let us underestimate the racism and color bias built up over a century of organised hatred of Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Indonesians, Islanders and Aborigines by the publicists and politicians, who have made skin color and racial differences some of their main weapons. From a newspaper owner a couple of years ago calling for the shooting of so many hundred American blacks to teach all blacks a lesson, across to the Normanton father advertising

dirty, poor, under-nourished and hopeless as Dampier had. The Committee conveniently overlooked the planned and unplanned destruction of the Aborigines’ environment and organisation and ignored the overt and covert massacres. The Committee could never have read John Boyle O’Reilly’s poetic account of the thousand imprisoned, starved and weakened Aborigines on Rottnest Island killed in their losing battle with the two hundred savage dogs made hungry by the settlers’ committee and guards. And Commonwealth officials since Federation have only, in the main, echoed the consensus from the Select Committee of 1956 back to Dampier. A folk-song of 50 years after settlement commenced at the Swan River reflected the Dampier spirit —

And I’ve been out exploring in search of a run
With my packhorse and pistol, my compass and gun —
We feasted delicious, ha, ha, ha, ha,
And shot blackfellows vicious, ha, ha, ha, ha.

In other songs on the despised Aborigines, the song-writers seemed to have imbibed the full spirit of Dampier and, so they should have, for his first impressions of Australia became the standard picture presented to the Australian schoolboy:

“I . . . met a nigger family
Tramping on the way;
The meanest, poorest wretches
I have seen in W.A.”

“Black Alice, so dusky and dark,
The Warrego gin, with the straw on her chin,
And teeth like a Moreton Bay shark.”

“Your father he was black
And the gabbas called him Jack;
So remember you’re an abo.”
his preference for the shooting of his daughter to her existence in
equality with Australian blacks, and across again to the racist bias
that has been appearing in one of the Perth daily papers since the
Laverton shooting, we can still find some of the same virulent
race and color bias that the Queensland press of business, some
unions, tory party and Labor groups, showed last century and
still in some parts, practise openly today.

Australians may have passed the 1967 Referendum overwhelm­
ingly, but the national attitudes are, at best, tolerance of many
forms of discrimination, and an indifference to the needs for equality
and small interest in the rights of a viable, distinct, national minority
with all that these words mean. Nevertheless, the ACTU policies
of 1963 and 1965 represent a tremendous advance by unions and
union attitudes compared with the attitudes of the establishment —
the business, government and public service bureaucracies. Their
attitudes to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and to other
nations, races and people in and around Australia have not pro­
gressed far IF THEIR DEEDS MEAN ANYTHING. It is still
more important to play cricket and football with the South African
white racists than to adopt the almost unanimous views of the world
against the South Africans in the Olympic Federation.

Generally, it is the nature of unions and union councils
to move further, earlier and with somewhat more determination than
either the political parties or the general community. But today
the unions are being challenged by the Aborigines themselves and
by the general policies of the international trade union movement,
where black, white, brown and purple people have to sit down in
some measure of equality and unity. "Act now!" is their demand.

What then do the declarations on "The Aboriginal People of
Australia enjoy(ing) a social and legal equality" mean? They mean
certainly a complete absence of discrimination of any kind and
they mean white society and white institutions of power and
government clearing away discrimination and bias from attitudes,
practice and the culture of white Australia. The declarations say
"enjoy". That doesn't mean that Aborigines should be told to get
their rights the hard way, like unions and others have to. It means
nothing less than rights being there to be enjoyed freely like
the air of an unpolluted environment. The obligation is on white
society to ensure that Aborigines know what is available to them
and how they can acquire and enjoy those rights.

When we come to the key statement in the declarations of the
trade union movement — "Aboriginal people . . . are at the same
time distinct, viable, national minorities" what does this mean?
They are distinct and discernible and cannot be swept under the
carpet as the framers of the Commonwealth Constitution thought would be the case. Viable means in this context "practicable", in the sense that it is quite practicable to exist as a minority. Viable means "able to live in particular circumstances" and this the Aborigines have demonstrated over 20,000 years. It means capable of maintaining a separate existence. The description of Aborigines as a national minority means that they are a separate and distinct nation and that they are a national minority within the white Australia majority. The majority people which cause a national minority to die out by any one of the means of mass destruction used through history are guilty of genocide — the mass murder of a national group or nation.

We have the challenge from Lord Bertrand Russell that Australia's attitude to the Aborigines is the other side of the penny to its attitude to the killing of people in Vietnam; they are both genocide. Trade union policy is that Aborigines must be preserved and helped to persist within Australia as a distinct, discernible, viable, independent, national minority.

But what of the Aborigines where they are not a minority within a given area? What of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and the northern "half" where the Aborigines are the majority people? They should be treated as having over-riding rights to land, mineral wealth and their tribal and national laws should have precedence over those of the white majority — nothing less than that the law makers of Arnhem Land, the Pitjantjara country, Moe Island or any other such area should have the role of paramount law makers and those of Canberra and the State Parliaments should be secondary to the law makers of Yirrkala within Yirrkala, for example.

It is one thing for union congresses to lay down and reaffirm such declarations, but another thing for unions to take them up and try to enforce them. And here we come to the need for unity between organisations in which there is already black, national, independent, viable authority being exercised, and those which agree with those principles but are predominately organisations of white society. One must activise the other, one must reinforce the decisions of the other. There has to be unity of purpose and solidarity.

But the areas where struggles are generated and should be generated in order to achieve progress are not only in the organisations of Aboriginal authority and power, combined with supporting organisations where the authority may be that of unionists or churchmen and the Federal and State Governments. There is also the area between the defaulting Governments of white authority
and power, and world public opinion. The force of world opinion is being exercised continually in the area of Papua-New Guinea, Fiji, Western Samoa and other areas of Oceania. Its importance for the African States is one of the remarkable developments of the 1960's. Now it should be openly, vigorously and consistently invoked in the case of Australia and its attitudes to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

With the assistance of friendly organisations of white authority such as the unions and churches, organisations of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders should now move their fights, also, onto the world scene. Moved onto the world scene as freely as the international mining consortiums are moving across seas to penetrate the reserves, sacred grounds and tribal lands of the Aborigines.

The acceptance of the Aborigines by the trade union movement as separate, distinct, viable, national minorities places the imprimatur of more than two million unionists on the drive nationally and internationally to realise everything contained in that policy declaration. That goes much further than even the declaration on land rights, it goes to the rights of a people as a nation and as a national minority which has the right to end the discrimination against itself as a national minority. That is, as I understand it, Australian trade union policy in the 1960's.

We should work to ensure that it is implemented in the 1970's. Future meetings of the Federal Executive of FCAATSI will turn to this problem in the light of today's declarations on power. Aboriginal Power! In spite of shortcomings in the implementation of others' programmes, the Rights and Advancement Movement should feel satisfaction that the largest mass organisations of white society — the unions — have declared in favour of their main power, rights and cultural demands. Union Power and Aboriginal Power should be united to ensure that the declarations are implemented in the 1970's.
Statements on Aboriginal Autonomy

Recently Aboriginal advancement organisations have issued statements on Aboriginal autonomy. We print below statements by the Federal Council for Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), the Western Australian Aboriginal Association and the Aborigines Advancement League (Victoria).

FCAATSI

1 The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders welcomes the response by the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, in many parts of Australia, to the call for re-assertion of their rights to land, and suggests that they redouble their efforts, and at every point, seek funds from the Federal and State Governments for the necessary financial assistance to proposed pastoral, mining, fishing and industrial undertakings organised and owned by Aboriginal People.

2 The Council points out, also, that the appropriation of all Australian lands by Crown, States and the Commonwealth from its Aboriginal occupants was an act, that cannot now and for the future be justified morally or legally in the face of natural and present international law. The rights of Aboriginal people everywhere must be asserted against Governments, that are still expropriating Aboriginal occupants of lands, for their use by overseas mining and pastoral companies, and for their use and ownership by private firms and persons in Australia.

3 The most glaring example of such acts is now the continuing expropriation of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, where this proceeds under the authority of the Commonwealth.

4 We affirm that the future autonomy of the Northern Territory and other areas, and the moral and legal rights to its lands and natural resources by the Aboriginal people, within the Northern Territory, should be basic policies of FCAATSI, and the Aboriginal People in the N.T. should be moving steadily towards autonomy (self-government) and ownership of lands and resources (where Aborigines desire ownership of tribal lands), similar to that which has proceeded or is proceeding in Papua-New Guinea, Western Samoa, Nauru, Fiji, and elsewhere in the Pacific-Oceania areas.
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ASSOCIATION

The Aboriginal people seeks:

(a) Acknowledgment by the Commonwealth Government of the validity of the Aboriginal people's claim to ownership of the Australian continent.

(b) An agreement by negotiation for signature by the Commonwealth Government and State Aboriginal Representatives making Commonwealth Government's right to govern Australia conditional on the grant of an annual allocation of Commonwealth revenue adequate for speediest fulfilment of needs for advancement of Aborigines.

(c) Compensation by way of an agreement to be formulated setting down the overall period and amount of finance to be made available annually for the economic, social and political development of the Australian Aborigines.

(d) An agreement in respect of the establishment of a National Aboriginal Trust Office and its subsequent conversion after a period of twenty to twenty-five years or so, into an independent National Aboriginal Trust Organisation administered by Aborigines.

Basis:

Australia has not as yet made any money available for the exclusive use of the Aboriginal people as a form of compensation for dispossession and it is now up to the Commonwealth Government to remedy this omission.

Morally, Australia has committed robbery, violence and murder in order to confiscate and annex this island continent and she will stand charged with unlawful possession of property stolen from the original inhabitants until such time as she is prepared to sign such an agreement and to carry out the terms of that agreement satisfactorily.

This claim is submitted on behalf of Aborigines throughout Australia.

ABORIGINES ADVANCEMENT LEAGUE (VICTORIA)

TO USE THE WORDS of Jean-Paul Sartre, "Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives."

That is white power.
Since the end of World War II, many of the colored peoples who lived under white colonial rule have gained their independence and colored minorities in multi-racial nations are claiming the right to determine the course of their own affairs in contradiction to the inferior state under which they had lived.

That is black power.

Black power is not one single style of action. It does not necessarily mean violence or black supremacy, although in some expressions it has used violence and sought black supremacy. Those expressions have gained publicity because of their dramatic nature.

Black power also means what Dr. Barrie Pittock has described, as follows: “The Black Power idea in essence is that black people are more likely to achieve freedom and justice for themselves by working together as a group, pursuing their goals by the same processes of democratic action as any other common-interest pressure group such as returned servicemen, or chambers of commerce. Up to this point Black Power is hardly controversial, and the idea, whether known by that name or not, is widely accepted amongst Aborigines who are active in their own cause.”

In fact, several expressions of that kind of black power can be seen, in which Victorian Aborigines are involved. The take-over of the Easter conference of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders by the Aboriginal delegates was one. The Victorian Aboriginal Tribal Council is another. The United Council of Aboriginal Women is another.

The Aborigines Advancement League supports the principle of black power, without necessarily condoning all the ways by which it expresses itself in various parts of the world, or indeed, in Australia.

It is inevitable and healthy that there will be differences in the ways Aboriginal people understand black power and in the methods which they are prepared to use to obtain their ends. The League is able to provide a forum where all views can be discussed.

The League exists for the benefit of Aboriginal people. Its Aboriginal members are in a position to tell the League what it should be and do to best serve the interests of the Aboriginal people. Its non-Aboriginal members will stand back while those decisions are being made, and will work to put them into effect in collaboration with the Aboriginal members.