

*Aborigines Advancement League (Vic)*  
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#### ABORIGINES TAKE THE LEAD

The Aborigines Advancement League does not exist to do things on behalf of Aboriginal people, but rather to provide opportunities for them to take more effective control of their own affairs.

That fact was made clear by the Management Committee of the League when, in December of 1968, it examined its aims and priorities in future work. In the report of its examination, the committee says:

“Our aim is to provide whatever technical assistance might be required by Aboriginal people in forming their ideas and carrying out their affairs.”

The committee sees two main methods to carry out that aim. One is to transfer more responsibility to the Aborigines' branch of the League so that decision-making, negotiating and spokespersonship will be done more and more by Aboriginal people. The other will be to employ one or more liaison officers to assist Aboriginal people to set up their own community organisations and to let the League know what help they might need to do so.

At the same time, the League will continue to remind the community generally of its responsibility, through government, in such fields as welfare and educational services, according to the wishes of the Aboriginal people.

Some new leadership responsibilities and organising initiatives which Aboriginal people are taking are reported in this newsletter.

#### NEW PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT

Bob Maza and Danny Atkinson have both accepted new roles in the League for this year.

Bob is now President, following Bruce Silverwood's resignation from this position in order to take up his duties as Director, and Danny fills the vacancy of Vice-President.

Bob, who has been in Melbourne about a year, has both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal ancestry and is now a clerk with the Commonwealth Department of Works. He says “My appointment to presidency shows that this organisation of forever aware of its obligation to the Aborigines and once again it leads the way by its practise of true democracy. We Koories must unite and it is with the help of organisation like the League that we will succeed in asserting ourselves.”

Danny has been living in Melbourne for six months and is descended from the Yoti Yoti tribe of the Murray region. He is married, with three children and works for the Country roads Board. He said his is “delighted with the opportunity to serve in the capacity of vice-president and would like to see more Aborigines taking up leadership positions.”

#### KOORIE CLUB OPENS

Since the last Newsletter in which proposals for the establishment of an all-Aboriginal club were reported, action has been fast, furious and productive. The club is now a reality with Bruce McGuinness as manager and financial support for the first six months provided by S.S.A.A.F. (Secondary Schools Aboriginal Affairs Fund).

Situated at 41 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, it provides a meeting place for Aborigines living in and visiting Melbourne and is the first centre of this kind in the Metropolitan area.

Many people have worked tirelessly to see an idea become a reality and it is now over to the ALL-ABORIGINAL COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT to develop the club in the way desired by the Koories, Members of this committee are Mar. Tucker, Eric Onus, Steward Murray, Victor Lovett, James Berg and Bob Maza.

Membership of the club is open to all Koories and the fee is \$10.00 a year which may be paid in weekly instalments. Koories are required to form table-eating teams and volunteers are asked to contact Bruce McGuinness at the club.

#### DISEASES AMONGST ABORIGINES IN THE NORTHWEST

Leprosy, Trachoma, dysentery and high infant mortality rate rampant - today - in Australia!

Evidence available shows that 10% of the Aborigines in the Kimberley division of W.A. have, or have had, active leprosy (cases amongst non-Aborigines in the area number less than three yearly except for one year when the total was six). The infection is so widespread and the contacts of the patients so difficult to trace that almost the whole Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal population must be regarded as contacts. Trachoma in this area affects about 80% of the Aborigines, dysentery is so prevalent the doctors have not time to make out reports and infant mortality figures represent about 10% of all Australian infant deaths. The commonest causes of death in the under-five year-old group are preventable pneumonia, gastro-enteritis and neonatal diseases. There are apparently tly many exotic diseases afflicting the Aborigines which specialists have not been able to identify and which obviously require further research.

Take leprosy as an example. One would think that, with such serious allegations begin made about the alarming threat of what is recognised as one of the most dreadful of diseases, Members of the Commonwealth Parliament would want to know what is happening in one of the States of the Commonwealth.

Apparently not. Questions were asked in the house about leprosy in both Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The Minister for Health's answers gave some information about Northern Territory services, but to the questions about W.A. the Minister replied "My Department does not have the particulars....in regard to Western Australia." My Department does not have the figures for Western Australia". "No knowledge is held by me Department of the procedure followed by the Western Australian Government in regard to Aborigines discharged from the Derby Leprosarium."

If the allegations of mishandling of the leprosy problem by the Western Australian Government are to be taken seriously, they require more interest and action by the Commonwealth Department of Health than those answers indicate. It is true, of course, that the Federal Health Minister has direct responsibility in the Northern Territory and that responsibility in Western Australia is with the State Health Minister. But serious allegations are made about the lapse of responsibility by the State authority. We believe that the matter should be explored more fully than is indicated in the following question and answer in the House of Representatives:

Mr. Collard asked the Minister for Health, upon notice:

1. Is he able to say whether the incidence of leprosy among Aborigines in the Kimberley Division of Western Australia is higher than anywhere else in the world?

2. If the incidence is not higher, in what countries, and in what parts of those countries, is the incidence of leprosy higher than in the Kimberley Division, and what is the percentage in each case?

Dr. Forbes - My Department does not have the information requested by the honourable member.

The League is now seeking answers to the following questions:

1. Is Leprosy a Commonwealth or State responsibility?
2. If control is a Commonwealth matter, what is the Federal Department doing to supervise and co-ordinate State programmes. If control is not a Commonwealth matter, why not, considering the seriousness of the disease and the free movement of people across State borders?
3. Why are complete records of leprosy in Western Australia not available?
4. Why is the Federal Department of Health so unconcerned over the matter?

#### OFFER OF COACHING FOR METROPOLITAN CHILDREN

ABSCHOL has offered its services to Aboriginal children living in the metropolitan area, including residents of the Northcote hostels, Its members are willing to hold tuition classes in any subject chosen and anyone interest is asked to contact Dan Atkinson at 57 Cunningham Street, Northcote, 'phone 489 1784.

#### S.O.S. ACCOMMODATION NEEDED

Young Aboriginal girls and boys coming to Melbourne from country areas urgently need somewhere to live. Often in the process of finding a job or employed at minimum wage rates, the need is for more than just a place to sleep and eat. Anyone able to provide accommodation, in a sympathetic and encouraging atmosphere is urged to contact the league office as soon as possible.

The League's hostels at Northcote can accommodate 16 young people which is but a small fraction of the number seeking somewhere to live.

#### SONGS ABOUT PRESENT-DAY ABORIGINES

Phyl Vinnecome, composer and singer of contemporary folk songs, can be heard on a record especially made for the League by W & G. It is one attempt to understand the position in which Aborigines find themselves and a limited number of records are still available from the League at \$1.65 ea. Songs include "Dark Eyed Daughter", "No More Boomerang" by Kath Walker, "Whose Hand" and "Will You Fight Will You Dare".

#### ABORIGINAL WOMENS' AUXILIARY PARTY

Over 250 children attended the Christmas party organised by the League's Aboriginal Womens' Auxiliary, and with their parents made one of the largest crowds yet catered for. Mrs Nicholls says the Recreation hall is invaluable for occasion like this and it is hoped to make more use of it in the future. The party provided one of the few opportunities for Aboriginal people living in Melbourne to get together.

#### KOORIE CLUB

Aboriginal people are free to call in for a cup of coffee and talk at the Koorie Clu, 41 Gertrude St., Fitzroy, says club manager, Bruce McGuinness. Anyone interested in the following activities is also welcome to call and, in request, the club can be opened in the day time. Activities planned include basket ball, athletics, sewing, hairdressing and make up classes for the women and girls with general trade, mechanics, carpentry and business management for the men. Sunday night will be "film night" and families are welcome.

#### CHRISTMAS CARD SALES

Gwen McNay, secretary of the Christmas Card Committee, says that over 64,000 cards were sold last year. Accounts are yet to be finalised.