

This year at Brisbane, about two hundred persons participated. Daily sessions attracted about eighty members. Northern Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales were well represented by delegates from organisations affiliated with the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement and there were numerous observers from southern Queensland. Mr. Jacob Oberdoo was the sole Western Australian at the Conference. The Northern Territory and Tasmania were without representation.

Thirdly—

### The Participation of Aboriginal and Other Coloured Members



At least one coloured person came from each State except the Northern Territory and Tasmania, and numbers from northern N.S.W. and Queensland were great enough to ensure that about 20 per cent. of those attending individual sessions, were non-Europeans.

On several occasions, the Chairman experienced difficulty as older part-aboriginal men, not over-conscious of the shortage of time, nor mindful of the topic under discussion, arose to speak. Other Aboriginal members made substantial contributions to the life of the Conference, both formally, and through their spirited and friendly participation in the social activity between the main sessions.

History was made, when Mr. Oberdoo, a full-blood man stood to address the Conference, although his quiet delivery and "station" English were not easily understood. (It is also interesting to observe that a Cairns part-aboriginal man, Mr. Jack McGinness, was elected to the Presidency of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement at its General Meeting.)

The enthusiasm of conferees, the new participation of part-aboriginal persons, and the general willingness of delegates to give a hearing to differing points of view leads one to suggest that these particular Conferences will develop further in significance and content.

### CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

A conference, such as that held in Brisbane, cannot be dismissed as being of little consequence, simply because it has weaknesses. Yet the subject of Resolutions should not escape scrutiny.

Thirty-three Resolutions received the assent of the Conference in general session. These ranged from a call for Federal Government control of Aboriginal welfare, to a censure of particular sections of State policies and legislation. There were some interesting innovations as well. (*e.g.*, A suggestion seeking the establishment in Australia of an independent authority to examine individual injustices after the manner of the Ombudsman of Sweden.)

The Conference was not characterised by the destructiveness suggested by Press and Radio items at the time. Unfortunately, the agents of mass publication were all too willing to highlight a few sensational statements which came from the Conference, while disregarding the many Resolutions which showed insight and good sense.

Nevertheless it is hoped that future Conferences will provide better opportunities for a more thorough consideration of important questions.

### THE QUESTION OF PARTICIPATION

The most indelible impression left by the Conference relates to participation. All possible points of view need to be represented at gatherings as significant as that held at Brisbane.

Mission bodies, governments, better-educated people of Aboriginal inheritance, local authorities, students, welfare workers, and thoughtful citizens should responsibly consider the question of representation at an annual gathering, which is becoming a focal point for a variety of people interested in the questions of Aboriginal welfare.

This particular observation is underlined by happenings at the 1961 Conference. One notes, firstly, that the Churches of Christ and the Methodist Overseas Missions, were officially represented. In addition, Mr. Paul Hasluck was represented by a senior official from the Department of Territories in the person of Mr. Swift. Mr. Swift, who had been instructed to make statements of fact as required without entering into discussions of policy, attended all sessions of the Conference. He was generously afforded an opportunity to speak immediately after Dr. Christophers had given a paper on Northern Territory Welfare Branch policies. In addition, he made realistic contributions to many of the informal conversations, which were keenly initiated in the interstices between sessions.

The positive value of this kind of participation contrasts sharply with the absence of any representative from the Queensland Government. Queensland was subjected to a somewhat hilarious censure as a consequence. Similarly, denominational Missions suffered through the absence of a spokesman for Presbyterian Missions. On the last afternoon of the Conference, a young woman, who had spent her childhood at Mapoon Mission on Cape York, was invited to address the meeting. Few would deny this person the opportunity to speak strongly of her personal experiences. However, in the absence of a tempering point of view, her bitter stories were accepted uncritically by many of those who attended.

All Australians need to be keenly concerned with the growth to self-realisation of an underprivileged Aboriginal minority. Yet it is unlikely that the best interests of all will be served either by the extremes of a conservative paternalism or by naive dogmas with their easy solutions.

