

“Black Power” ideas give Aborigines new faith in selves

By Our Victorian Correspondent

MELBOURNE: Evidently influenced by the concept of “Black Power”, Aborigines in Victoria have made a rapid move to re-form the Aborigines Advancement League into a body completely controlled and staffed by their own people.

The Management Committee of the League met on October 3 with a deputation from a meeting convened by the Tribal Council, a loosely knit body of Aborigines representing various regional groupings. The deputation asked that Aborigines should occupy all places on the Committee of Management and on the staff of the League.

The result is that the Management Committee will request all its members to resign, and ask the Council — the controlling body of the League — to make it possible for Aborigines to nominate for all positions. This should take place on November 28.

Sudden

The League's Director, Mr. Bruce Silverwood said last week that what was proposed was not new in principle. “It is new in that it is seeking an all-Aboriginal organisation with non-Aborigines taking a supporting role, and that not by a process of training and phasing but by a sudden act.”

He pointed out that the League has been working towards the appointment of Aboriginal people to key posts. For example, the staff has changed from four Aborigines and four non-Aborigines to eight Aborigines and two non-Aborigines.

Expressing his own personal satisfaction with the new upward turn in the desire of Aborigines to run their own affairs, Mr. Silverwood pointed out that he had originally accepted the post of Director on the understanding that he would move out when an Aborigine was available for the post.

The use of the term “Black Power” by Aborigines in Victoria has led to a variety of reactions, including consternation and condemnation.

But as an editorial in the October 1969 AAL Newsletter puts it: “To their credit, the Aboriginal people coped with the concept much better than the news media, the administrators and some white supporters of ‘Aboriginal advancement’”.

Height

The Black Power controversy reached its height after a visit to Melbourne by Mr. Roosevelt Brown from Bermuda. Victoria's Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Mr. Meagher stated categorically that Black Power was not wanted here, and his view was repeated by a Melbourne Herald editorial.

The AAL countered with its own definitions and appraisals. A statement of its annual General Meeting read:

“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.

Inferior

“Since the end of World War 2, 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 . . .”

The statement instanced as recent local examples of black power the take-over of the Easter conference of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders by the Aboriginal delegates and the formation of the Victorian Aboriginal Tribal Council and the United Council of Aboriginal Women.