

Chapter 7

Race relations, work and education, 1964 to 1968

I returned to Australia in 1964 to find Aboriginal issues in New South Wales very different from those I left behind. In South Australia bureaucrats identified Aborigines as being persons of 'full-blood', others of Aboriginal descent were regarded as 'state wards', mainly those who were living on southern reserves. Then there were those people of Aboriginal descent who were classified as non-Aborigines because they had been given a State government exemption from the Protection legislation. Persons holding an Exemption Certificate had what was known in common practice as a 'dog tag'. And finally, there were those people of Aboriginal descent who refused to conform to government policy because they believed it would demean them as 'honorary whites' if they did so. The exemption system in New South Wales was more that of failed assimilation policies. Despite the government's parsimony, there were benefits for some individuals. Although the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW) existed, the Welfare Board was not totally blind to the idea that urban life together with social conformity needed a measure of economic resources. There were no fringe benefits for education but there was for housing in city urban areas. On the downside Aborigines were not permitted to create organisations in opposition to government policies. However, some organisations deemed illegal under the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW) did exist but were not prosecuted. The Aborigines and their friends who ran these organisations were courageous and enlightened people.

This chapter is not only about my re-education, but about race relations and how it shifted between racial politics and socialisation practice. I arrived in Sydney with Norma and our infant son Aaron late in April 1964. Norma's parents, Beatrice and Ernie, had waved us off with heavy hearts at Southampton. One of the ports of call was Naples, where we went ashore and I recall pushing Aaron around in a stroller that squeaked all through the main street of Naples much to the amusement of everyone. Finally as we walked across the street at a set of traffic lights the stroller collapsed. I took it apart as best I could and put the contraption into a large hopper down a side street. We made other port calls at Cairo, Port Said, Mumbai (then Bombay), then on to Fremantle, Adelaide, Melbourne and finally Sydney.

I could see Charlie Perkins and his wife Eileen from the top deck as we docked at Circular Quay in Sydney. They greeted us warmly and took us to the Baltimore

Hotel on the Esplanade at Bondi beach. This hotel was very basic but we were only there for a couple of nights before securing a small flat at Gladesville in north Sydney. I began looking for work in the Gladesville region, but Charlie phoned to tell me a position had become available at the Canterbury Council in Campsie. The job was an opening for an Aboriginal person and I took the opportunity to apply.

Aboriginal people in New South Wales were then campaigning for fair rents across the state and for a better employment deal. The political 'fair rent' campaign began on reserves in rural areas, however, most of the unemployment was in large regional areas and cities, like Sydney, where the campaign was well and truly under way. Aboriginal leaders campaigned for the state to be more vigilant about utilising Aborigines, including local governments, who tended to shy away from employing Aborigines. The position I applied for was open to any Aboriginal person with a fourth form certificate. It was as a clerk in the Health and Building Department of the Canterbury Council and had been vacant for over six months without any takers.

Charlie dropped me at the council chambers in Beamish Street, Campsie where I met the chief health and building inspector, a Mr Dave Watkins. He interviewed me and asked about my background. I told him that I had not been to high school and had a poor education record. I explained to him that although I did not qualify for the position I was willing to get a driver's licence and go to night school to get the necessary qualifications needed for the position. This was good enough for Dave but it had to be cleared with the Town Clerk and the Mayor because the offer was unusual and political. The Council was an inner city Labor council and had made the offer because they wanted to support Aborigines in New South Wales. Issues at the time included high rents on reserves and the concomitant drift to the fringe camps, high levels of poverty and poor health and high rates of Aboriginal unemployment.

Aborigines had been protesting since the second decade of the twentieth century. From the sheep yards of the Riverina, western wheat and cattle properties around Walgett to the Sussex Street Trades Hall in the 1930s and on into the 1960s, Aborigines had raised their voices. Aboriginal shepherds and shearing workers had protested about inequalities and poverty as early as the 1890s. They continued on into the 1920s and 1930s when, with Communist Party helpers, Bill Ferguson began lobbying the Protector of Aborigines under the guise of Christian gatherings. From 1938, apart from the war years, the Aborigines Progress Association had held annual meetings during a time when the White Australia Policy was in full force.

Following the post-war boom, housing rents increased and resulted in many Aboriginal people fleeing to the rent-free fringes of New South Wales country

towns. Welfare could be denied once Aborigines left the reserves. This caused social problems in the bush and the fall-back was casual market gardening labour or official employment at long distances from family. Reserves became crèches where women and children stayed waiting for returning partners, many of whom never returned. Housing protests intensified during the 1930s, throughout the 1950s and on into the early part of the 1960s. The rent strike became a fully-fledged protest movement in the early 1960s as wide-scale pressure on the Aborigines Protection Board mounted. While supporters attempted to shore up a flagging New South Wales Labor Party, I was returning from England to take advantage of the ferment of the time.

To begin my employment in good faith I began a correspondence course for the fourth form certificate under the Wyndham Scheme. I failed on the first try and so in February of 1965 I began classes at night. I took four subjects – history, geography, English and science – as a strategy to pass the certificate. To gain entrance I had to be assessed by the Sydney Technical College's psychologist, whose report said that it was possible for me to study for the certificate. They also remarked, however, that it was doubtful whether I could go any further and university qualifications would be, for me, 'a pipe dream'. At that stage any thought of university was a long, long way off as I persevered with the night time study and was successful at my second attempt. The Canterbury Council was happy that I had passed and almost all the staff cheered me when it happened. My confidence by this time was increasing and I succeeded in getting my driver's licence without difficulty.

The next hurdle was the clerical tasks. At the beginning of the job I was semi-illiterate with few reading skills and this flowed on to my capacity to write and spell. Both were very poor. Once I got to the front office a fellow officer George McGrath had the responsibility for teaching me all the duties of the position. George treated me exceedingly well. He was a very popular person who had begun work for the Council as a cashier and had transferred to the building clerk's job some years earlier. In early 1964 George planned to travel around Australia with a friend, meaning his job would become vacant. George had the patience to teach me how to make building applications, how to enter these into a special register that needed to be correct for legal reasons, how to assist building inspectors by posting back people's conditions of approval and, finally, how to file applications correctly. When applications were approved it could involve a few hundred dollars, or huge amounts if for works associated with complexes like the Roselands shopping center costing millions.

It goes without saying that I had to have my wits about me. There were other pitfalls in this position such as handling the public. Building forms had to be filled out by people who like me could barely read and write, so in the first few months, George basically held my hand. Ratepayers can be irate for any number

of reasons and they would be easily upset if I gave out the wrong information on the phone. Again, George helped me by showing me how it was done and I 'learned by doing'. Another duty was the filing. Filing, most people would suspect, was a simple job and in general this is so, but the Council system was complex. The first application after Council opened for the year on 2 January, took the number 1/1965 and so on. This system was an instant ready reckoner so that plans could easily be located. With care the system could be kept free of chaos but it could just as easily be thrown out of kilter, and it was not easy to locate an error. It was easy to blame others but I often made mistakes with the numbering system and corrections were embarrassing. But George taught me how to beat the system, and I did so many times.

The Council had a very popular and sophisticated library network that stretched from Punchbowl north to Earlwood, and from Burwood and Strathfield south to Revesby and Narwee. Each suburb had its own branch and three or more librarians kept the very efficient system going. Each branch had to be paid and supplied with all the things libraries needed and that was my job. A hand gun was kept in a wooden box beneath the cashier's counter and each pay day I would collect it, and the money box, and go to the central administration, where another clerk checked the pays and handed them over to me. After lunch each fortnight I would pick up the librarians' wages and off I would go to pay the library staff. I would take a different route each time, trying, as George taught me, to act and practise a kind of hide and seek from would-be bandits seeking to rob me. They never did fortunately. At this time we did not have a car and often to give Norma and Aaron a ride out I would pick them up from where we lived in nearby Clissold Parade and take them out while I did my library run. This slightly unorthodox behavior of taking the family for a ride never got out of hand and I constantly worked to improve my service to the ratepayers and council hierarchy.

Clissold Parade was literally at the back of the council chambers in Campsie and while we lived there Norma would often take Aaron to the park near the swimming pool on Cook's River. In the winter he played in the park and during the summer they would swim at the pool. Norma's mother Beatrice visited that year from England and during this time we bought an old weatherboard house in Cardigan Road, Greenacre, near Bankstown. We were overjoyed. This was a particularly memorable time for us as we had been living in rented flats often moving every three months for one reason or another; mainly because landlords did not like young children. To have our own house was very special, particularly for Aaron, who had a garden to play in for the first time. He was so excited the first morning that he couldn't eat any breakfast. All he wanted to do was play in the garden.

Not long after moving into Cardigan Road my mother rang in despair and asked if I would consider looking after my youngest brother Sam, aged 13, and put him through school in Sydney. She said he was uncontrollable and had been banned from attending school in Alice Springs. I was taken aback to begin with because at that stage there was already myself, Norma, my young son Aaron, and John, Norma's brother, living in our two bedroom small weatherboard cottage. John had arrived by boat from America earlier in the year and went on to live with us for two years while working at the University of Sydney as a lab technician – he has since maintained that this was one of the most enjoyable jobs he ever had. I suggested to my mother that Sam be told that he was coming for a holiday. I also suggested that if he was able to fit into the family we could extend his stay, put him through school and try and make the future for a 13-year-old boy a little brighter. Sam arrived shortly after, carrying a packet of Benson and Hedges cigarettes in his pocket and wearing 'winkle picker' shoes with the soles parting at the front. When we arrived back from the airport he went straight to the lounge room and stretched out on the floor almost filling the whole room. Norma, John and I looked at each other wondering if the scheme we had agreed to was foolhardy. But after a couple of weeks things settled down, and like a miracle, Sam asked if he could stay and continue his education in Sydney. I enrolled him at South Strathfield High School and with a lot of encouragement he did very well, even topping the class in a number of subjects – a far cry from the cigarette-smoking unruly lad that had arrived 12 months earlier. It was the start of a long fatherly attachment that I feel towards Sam.

In 1966 I took on fifth form part time. I would go to night-school classes at the Bankstown Technical College four times a week straight from work. The plan was to do two subjects a year: first year mathematics and geography, second year history and English. Mathematics was my weakest subject and I was tutored in this subject by Jack Kendall who had helped me pass my school certificate. Jack came twice a week and on weekends nearer to exam times. Jack was a great friend, and a graduate in chemistry from the University of Sydney. He lived near Hornsby and had a chemical equipment factory in the North Ryde area. He would come to Campsie and later to my house at Greenacre to help me with my mathematics. Jack also helped enormously at the time we were trying to buy Greenacre. We were short of \$200 and Jack arranged for his solicitor to lend us the money from a trust fund he managed. A condition of the trust fund was that I visit the hospitalised lady owner at her nursing home in Strathfield. I was very happy to do this and was forever grateful to Jack for his help. With Jack's help I passed the Bankstown leg of the fifth form certificate.

Although my focus was on getting educated, Aboriginal politics was always a part of my consciousness but it had become more social than political. Each lunch time in 1968 I would walk from the Technical College in Ultimo to the

Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs at the top end of George Street. I would take the lunch Norma cut for me and make a cup of tea and listen to the older Aboriginal men's stories about their biographies, their lives from the places they had migrated from, why they had done so and what they were now doing with their lives. Men like Doug Scott, Chicka Dixon, Roy Carol, Candy, Harry and his brother (Booma Nulla) Williams would gather around about mid-day at the Foundation, and were generally there when I came for lunch. On some days they would bring their families in and I would meet them, and on occasional weekends Norma, Aaron and I would go to concerts at the Foundation. On other occasions my family and I would go directly to Charlie's home in Glebe. Other days I would study at home and if it was hot we would all head for Coogee beach or Wattamolla to escape the stifling Sydney heat.

We all loved Coogee and Maroubra but my son Aaron especially loved it. Aaron had a special rock pool he loved to play in at Maroubra, and Norma and I would walk along the beach. The surfies would fascinate Aaron as they either carried or dragged their surfboards along the sand. Some would carry the board on their heads and pass us going the other way; Aaron would drag his make-believe-board along copying the surfers. On many occasions such as when Aboriginal visitors from interstate came to see Charlie, he would contact us and we would all go for the day to Wattamolla, a great swimming beach in the Royal National Park. I recall visits from John and Rita Moriarty, Vincent and Brenda Copley and later, my cousin Ian and Peggy Lake.

The Foundation was not only a focus for my lunchtime meetings with New South Wales Aborigines, but more importantly it was the genesis of my life in national Aboriginal politics. The Foundation began in Walgett as a reactionary movement by stalwarts like Harry Hall and the Morgan family but it took on a more liberal approach when it was established in Sydney. These families were cattle and stock-workers, many of whom had migrated to Walgett from further west during and after the Second World War. The population drifts created two factions: one made up of Kamilaroi descendents and reserve Aborigines to the south and east and the others migrating from the west in the Lake Eyre basin region.¹ In the first instance, white people dominated the positions on the Foundation board. Its political and social focus was the provision of a liberal thinking approach in which Aboriginal people could believe in a life outside of welfare.

Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel was an evangelical Methodist preacher who drew Charlie to him and introduced him to Harry Hall in the early 1960s. Ted was a 'new age' Christian who moved around rural New South Wales talking to Aboriginal groups who were looking for some kind of political connection

1 Horton 1994: 530-531.

outside the institutionalised churches. Harry and other Aborigines in Walgett found life on the periphery of the Labor government's power-base difficult to penetrate in small numbers and found Ted Noffs an ally in gaining political traction. The State Labor government had reigned for 20 odd years and it was generally difficult for Aborigines to bring to their attention problems such as high rents, unemployment, and poor education and housing in rural areas. Ted, along with Professor Bill Geddes and the Liberal Party's north-shore 'Blue Rinse Brigade', began supporting a new approach to Aboriginal affairs with an emphasis on greater freedom and liberty, reform of the legislation and liberal opportunities for Aboriginal people. A new wave of political action involving wide support was building and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was the end result. At the time these influences were difficult to detect but the ideology was unmistakable. So opaque was its message that it gathered up Aborigines from both the left and right of the political spectrum. The ideology encompassed ideas of developing an Aboriginal view-point of class in which Aboriginal entertainers, budding entrepreneurs, successful sporting identities, trades-people, boxing identities, trade unionists (both left wingers and political misfits) and white and black students, all of whom wanted change in allowing people to move up the class ladder free of racial prejudices.

This mosaic of support was diverse but at the same time the Foundation, the Federal Council for the Advancement for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and other Aboriginal bodies amassed political support of a nationalist kind. Although I had no real political connection to the Foundation I supported the organisation for its forward-looking approach to welfare. Equally, I supported its altruism and its courage to take on a moribund Labor regime bereft of compassion or new ideas, in particular, in areas of the politics of race.²

The Foundation developed in the early 1960s at a time when Aboriginal people were dissatisfied with living under the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW). They had initially migrated to fringe camps and rural towns, but were often under threat by local councils and thus many were forced to move on to Sydney for work. The Foundation picked up on this migration and initiated programs to help people settle in Sydney. Many Aboriginal women like Flo Grant, Shirley Smith, Eileen Lester, Joyce Clague and Lily Kunoth supported the Foundation on the basis of their involvement in family welfare and issues such as appearing for children in court. However, Aboriginal men like Roy Carol, Doug Scott and Herbert Simms appeared to me to support the Foundation for more commercial reasons such as supporting boxing contracts, trotting activities and running Aboriginal artefact shops.

² Perkins 1975: 99-106.

Shirley Smith or 'Mum Shirl' as everyone came to know her, was a Catholic and wanted Aborigines migrating or in strife with the law, cared for in a more personal way. She argued that too many in welfare agencies had become overly bureaucratic, asking too many questions of Aboriginal people needing help and a meal. Flo Grant was a nurse's aid and Eileen Lester was a trained nurse who came from the Warburton Ranges in Western Australia, married a white man and migrated to Sydney during the Second World War. Similarly, Lily Kunoth, like me, had been evacuated, as a refugee from the Japanese War, and was drawn to the Foundation by her traditional relationship to Charlie. Joyce Mercy was already a member of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander national political body, and had secretarial skills. All of these women, including Eileen Perkins and my wife Norma, acted as auxiliary workers on fetes and fund raising activities.

Climbing up the Australian class structure was virtually impossible for Aborigines, but some managed a small ascent. The assumption was that if you made it at sport, as a member of the military, as a poet or a writer, you were on the way up. Roy Carol, who later trained my youngest brother Sam, was a champion boxer. Roy was against the exploitation of young Aboriginal boys by other boxing promoters. He had a small gymnasium in Chippendale and a contract to provide boxing bouts at the Marrickville RSL. Doug Scott, a relation of Roy's, worked for many years on the building of the Warragamba Dam and had amassed a team of trotting horses. Doug clearly aspired to become both a famous racing owner/driver as well as the seller of Aboriginal arts and crafts in Sydney.

Chicka Dixon, a waterside worker, was a reformed alcoholic and a highly prominent political activist. Chicka came from Wallaga Lake on the south coast of New South Wales and was related to other well-known Aborigines such as Burnum Burnum (Harry Penrith), Herb Simms, Ken Brindle, Ted (the Fox) Thomas, Ross (Jirra) Moore and Bobby McLeod. Already a prominent left political activist in Aboriginal politics, Chicka was motivated by Bill Ferguson and Jack Patten and was equally inspired by Charlie Perkins and wanted reform services to deal with Aboriginal alcohol addiction. He also wanted a place where Aborigines could get off the street for even a small amount of time to clean themselves up and have a meal. The Foundation tended to meet, or aspire to meet, all these and other needs. In particular, Chicka and Roy wanted the Foundation to implement a service that met young Aboriginal people arriving from the country and then helped them find a place to stay and get work quickly.

For those who had few class aspirations, the Foundation believed it could find solutions. Daily country trains would bring in people who were new to Sydney and would subsequently get lost and fall foul of criminal violence. The Foundation also created opportunities for musicians and young sports persons

by entering teams in all kinds of sports. Rugby, of course, was a prominent sport and links to sporting bodies were assumed to be a strength. The Foundation did most of these things and also linked in with student bodies both state and national and was instrumental in supporting the statewide 'Freedom Ride' led by Charlie Perkins in 1965.

This event was also supported by the Walgett Branch of the Foundation.³ The 'Freedom Ride' embodied student radicalism and Christian socialism. The protesters wanted rural whites to be fair to Aboriginal groups and allow them to be included in the use of town services and have equal access to all public amenities – a kind of 'mutual obligation' process. The Freedom Ride put great pressure on the then New South Wales Labor government when about 30 University of Sydney students hired a bus and toured western New South Wales country towns highlighting how overtly Aborigines were being discriminated against. How, they asked was it possible for white society to do what it did, given the protections Aborigines were entitled to under international law? Ultimately they traveled 3,200 kilometres and exposed widespread problems by observing the 'conditions of life' of Aboriginal people in rural areas. The students argued that townfolk in the many communities they visited were breaking international law by basically refusing to live side-by-side with Aborigines and this conflict had become a universal culture of intolerance.

Like the Vietnam war, the Freedom Ride brought Aboriginal disadvantage and exclusion right into the lounge rooms of wealthy 'first world' whites to expose the 'third world' on their door step. It highlighted the futility of the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1909* (NSW) and the overt discrimination that Aborigines suffered in country towns – the most obvious was that Aborigines were banned from using most public facilities and services. The most prominent and newsworthy target for the Freedom Ride was discrimination at local swimming pools. Owners of these facilities and white townfolk banned Aborigines and their children. The most lasting images of this period are those of Charlie and a group of Aboriginal children enjoying themselves in the local town pool on a very hot country-town-day. I remember clearly the return of the Freedom Riders and the press's reaction to the event. I was part of the returning 'sandwich team' along with my wife Norma, Eileen, Neville Perkins (Charlie's nephew) and Gary Williams (an Aboriginal university student whom Charlie billeted). As the Freedom Ride bus pulled up outside Charlie's house in Glebe we had a large trestle prepared, full of food and drinks to serve the protesters and the press.

At the time the incumbent New South Wales Labor government appeared oblivious of the level of discrimination in country towns. The Freedom Ride bought this out into the public arena and put the issue on the political agenda.

3 Perkins 1975: 74-91.

Faith Bandler was a rabid Labor Party supporter, but of a haughty type, Ken Brindle held to definite petty bourgeois traits, while Herb Simms was more of a Christian socialist. Then there were others such as the anthropologist Bill Geddes, who tried to introduce the idea of a 'chocolate coloured world'. He clung to a harmonious view of the world in the face of angry Aborigines who wanted 'Black Power'. During the mid-1960s Charlie Perkins was seen by some Labor supporters, including Faith Bandler, as a Liberal Party stooge who was definitely en route to the upper classes. But he confounded people who tried to pigeon-hole him as a Liberal rather than a Labor supporter. In truth, he was neither, but he chose a moralistic posture, a kind of evangelical populist where his *raison d'être* was to be a spokesperson for Aborigines and although dressed like a top line Italian professional footballer, he identified as, and spoke like, a fringe-camp river-bank black. Charlie's powerful ego allowed him to be not just 'Bolshevik' but at the same time a 'Menshevik'. These traits came to the front in the Freedom Ride. This *modus operandi* stayed with him throughout his later working life as a public servant.⁴

For over half a century local governments had pushed Aboriginal camps way-out over their boundaries as a means of escaping the responsibilities to service them. Rural whites owned all the land, the rural pastoral properties; they controlled the schools and town swimming pools and ran the town councils. They therefore commanded all the wealth and prosperity of the regional areas. They controlled the primary and public health systems, the libraries, hotels and businesses. Aborigines, totally without power, possessed the poorest health, were least educated and lacked incomes and any form of wealth. So entrenched was the culture of racism that it took riots, bombings and demonstrations to awaken public awareness. The change of government from Labor to Liberal-Country Party failed to dislodge the hold of truculent rural white 'red neck' society. Not until the re-election of a more enlightened Labor regime under Neville Wran in the 1970s was it possible to say that racism in rural New South Wales had come under either some 'rule of law' or social control.

When people from the bush came to Sydney in the 1950s they went to the sand hills and bush lands around La Perouse. This was the old Aboriginal living site traditionally called 'Bunabri', and ironically located at the place where all their problems of colonialism began – off Botany Bay. Race prejudice lay at the heart of Aboriginal poverty. Monopoly of lands by whites had, for a long time, ensured and guaranteed a failure to reorganise Aboriginal economies. Political monopoly guaranteed that white society would deny Aboriginal rights to the

4 Perkins C 1975: 74-98.

franchise thereby symbolising Australian racism.⁵ Race laws made it easy for whites to oppress Aborigines across the continent that cemented in time their historic indifference.⁶

Looking back to the mid to late 1960s, a deep division emerged along a fault line with the Labor supporters on the one side and the Liberal right on the other. Charlie, with his ability to attract publicity, quickly flushed out Labor supporters trying in both state and national arenas to gain political credence. Labor in Sydney had ruled for a long time and was edging towards decay while at the national level searching for a means to escape opposition. It is hard to deny Charlie's influence, together with his alliances, to get the financial and political support needed to create a new organisation based on liberal and socialist philosophy. But the rancour continued for a long period in this era.

On the one hand, Ted Noffs was a great believer in Martin Luther King's capacity, often likening Charlie to King, to move American blacks to see their destiny in political liberation born of self-interest. Noffs supported the idea that Aborigines with resources could search around and find what was achievable to create an organisation of their own making. In the first instance the Foundation raised its own funds to build a form of symbolism that showed that Aborigines wanted change. On the other hand, the Communists in New South Wales had shown Aborigines that if they had the will to rise up against tyrannical landlords it was possible too to do other things. The 'Rent Strike' in New South Wales that progressed in the 1950s, for example, rolled onwards to a movement that exposed the poverty among Aborigines when they left the reserves to adopt a pattern of living they knew well: to head to rent-free land on the fringes of white country towns.

Although New South Wales Aboriginal people had a history of protest they lacked interstate unity of the kind liberal nationalism needs. The Aboriginal people behind the Foundation drew from their own efforts to do that and I could see them doing it. Charlie already had strong links to the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (I'll call it the Federal Council). It was through Charlie that I first met Dulcie Flowers, a Torres Strait Islander woman with strong links to the Federal Council and Queensland Aboriginal politics. Dulcie was married to a Sydney classical musician and held fund-raising nights at her home in Earlwood in Sydney. There I also met Ken Brindle, Faith Bandler and Jack Horner. Brindle was a Kinchela boy and a recently returned soldier who fought in Korea and Malaya. He was a New South Wales delegate to the Federal Council. Bandler alleges that Kinchela Boys' Home was a New South Wales government institution where children coming

5 Stevens 1971: vols 1-3.

6 Rowley 1986.

in contact with both the Aborigines Protection Board and the law courts were sent either for some trivial parental misdemeanor committed against the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW) or charges of summary offenses and/or crimes of some description.⁷ But it was more likely that most were committed as either ‘uncontrollable’ or as ‘not being under proper care and control’.

Faith Bandler was an executive member of the Federal Council, a woman of South Sea Islander descent, and of considerable political standing in the Labor Party. Jack Horner was a kindly man, who, some ten years earlier, had been transfigured and enlightened towards Aborigines by his face-to-face contact with African racism while in England with his wife Jean. Jack and Jean struck up a long and ongoing contact with the Federal Council and both were executive members.⁸ I met up with Dulcie more so than with the others, whom I only encountered at Federal Council’s Easter conferences in Canberra each year from 1965 to 1968. The Foundation was never an affiliate of the Federal Council but Ray Peckham, Harry Hall and Charlie were the three people most instrumental in raising the political poverty issue in New South Wales.

The foregoing discussion reveals the immediate national contact that individual Aborigines such as Charlie had with both the Foundation and with the Federal Council. Faith Bandler did not seek Charlie’s views when she wrote about her recollections of the Federal Council’s activity with Bobbi Sykes in 1989, which I think demonstrates the ideological schism between them.

I have already spoken about the Freedom Ride, but for me the three other issues of particular note in this period were: the 1967 Federal referendum to change the Federal Constitution regarding Aboriginal rights; the Federal Council’s growing internal and external conflicts building up to the split of 1970, and my matriculation from the Sydney Technical College to the Australian National University. The origins of the 1967 referendum lay in a series of public debates about whether parts or the whole of the political system should control Aboriginal affairs and how it ought to be done. Questions about Aborigines and Federation lay in the notion that the states should control all people (including non-citizens) within its borders. This was one political task of what is known as separate powers, where states kept their colonial right to control citizens. These rights were granted to Aborigines by Macquarie’s Proclamation in 1814, but were gradually removed and eroded as colonies created their own draconian laws to control Aborigines. Control of Aboriginal peoples remained with the states after Federation. The Commonwealth, having no constitutional power to make laws for Aborigines, kept out of the issue. I have already explained in an earlier chapter how it dealt with Aborigines in the Northern Territory, and Baldwin

7 Bandler 1989.

8 Horner 1994.

Spencer, as early as 1911, called for the Commonwealth to take over Aboriginal affairs. In the three decades to the 1930s, state and territory administrators looked to assert their control over, on the one hand, growing welfare problems among Aboriginal groups in all states, particularly the growing population numbers, caused by expanding pastoralism, while on the other hand, growing cultural breakdown among Aboriginal groups as urban poverty raged.

Following the Labor government's abortive 1944 referendum attempt to take control of Aboriginal affairs, Robert Menzies had no stomach for an additional try. People like Les Haylen, the Federal Member for Parkes, Jessie Street, Bert Groves and Faith Bandler all pushed the Menzies Liberal governments to take control of Aboriginal affairs under a petition launched on 29 April 1957.⁹ All attempts to persuade Menzies failed as he continued to espouse the view that change would result in creating Aborigines 'as a race apart'. This issue came up over a decade later in the 'Gerhardi and Brown' Federal Court case, but for different reasons than those implied by Menzies.¹⁰ This was a court case, the details of which I won't go into here, involving a New South Wales Aboriginal clergyman who went to the Pitjantjatjaraku lands in the 1980s without a permit. The South Australian government objected and charged him; a court case ensued and Brown was fined for trespassing.¹¹

The years 1961 to 1965 saw arguments put by whites in general and politicians about whether to support or not any constitutional changes, to either publish counts of Aborigines in the national census by repealing section 127 or by changing and amending section 51 (xxvi) so as to allow the Commonwealth to make laws for Aborigines. Myths flew around in abundance – including many about Aborigines getting the vote – but what it showed was the inability of Australians to move independently with the times. In 1965, eight years after the petition was launched in federal parliament, Menzies agreed to meet a Council delegation. The Liberal-Country Party government resolved to hold the Referendum but set no date; Menzies retired in 1966, leaving the implementation to the incoming Prime Minister Harold Holt. The date was set soon after for 27 May 1967. All government actions in law, politics and economics have an effect upon people's lives and I discuss the consequences of the 1967 referendum, in a concluding chapter.

Whenever governments decide to spend money in their own interest, ideas tend to follow, and that is what happened in Aboriginal affairs after 1967. Dr HC 'Nugget' Coombs was appointed the chair of the government's Council for Aboriginal Affairs (I'll call it the Coombs Council), together with the politically

⁹ Bandler 1989: 88. See also Taffe 2005: 37-38.

¹⁰ Bandler 1989: 65-66. See also Taffe 2005: 104-106.

¹¹ McCorquodale 1987: 76.

conservative anthropologist WEH Stanner and BG Dexter, Secretary of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. Their brief was to fix what was understood to be the 'half-caste problem' first, and then later deal with the 'full-bloods'. They may not have used these exact words but that is what they meant. Nevertheless, the Coombs Council made no attempt to define what they meant when they called people Aborigines.

On a personal level, my work in the Canterbury Council had broadened by 1967, and I moved from the building to the pay-master's section, where I was responsible for calculating the garbage collectors' and refuse tip operators' wages together with other council charges. Later in the year I was approached by my benefactor, the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Council and offered a scholarship through the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Foundation. The scholarship was to attend Sydney Technical College on a full time basis to complete my matriculation in one year, and with Norma's blessing I agreed. This was a bit of a windfall for me and I had no idea where this would take me. In 1968 the Canterbury Council gave me leave without pay to enrol in four subjects: English, geography, history and second-level mathematics, all under the new Wyndham Scheme. I passed the four subjects, but not at a high enough level to be accepted by the University of Sydney. Not to be defeated, I applied to other Universities and was accepted by the Australian National, the Tasmanian and New England universities. I accepted the most attractive and took the offer from the Australian National University in Canberra.

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Foundation still exists today. I was recently reminded, at Kevin Rudd's Sorry Day speech on 26 February 2008, by Trixie Davies, an Aboriginal woman from Sydney, who clearly remembers the day I was given the award. It drew tears to my eyes when reminded of the event 40 years earlier. She recalled that it was Djon Mundine, the art entrepreneur, and I who received the awards. It was an emotional night for Trixie too. From there I still had a very long road to hoe to where I wanted to go.

However, the more educated I became, the more I was steadily drawn into the circle of Aboriginal politics that I thought I had left behind in Adelaide. One of the enduring memories of this time is that I began to appreciate what New South Wales Aborigines had experienced for nearly 200 years under British and Australian governments. My Northern Territory Aboriginal family had only experienced this same destructive process for less than half that time. I recognised in myself a definite resistance and I could see it plainly now in Sydney. It was not just cultural, it was a resistance, not just about politics but also it was about economic and social non-conformism.

I moved from Sydney to Canberra in early 1969 and stayed in a college at the Australian National University while my family went to England for a well

deserved holiday. They returned in June and we set up home in Canberra. In hindsight Canberra seemed as though it was an inevitable location for the family. I went there seeking a tertiary education but we all got much more than that.

