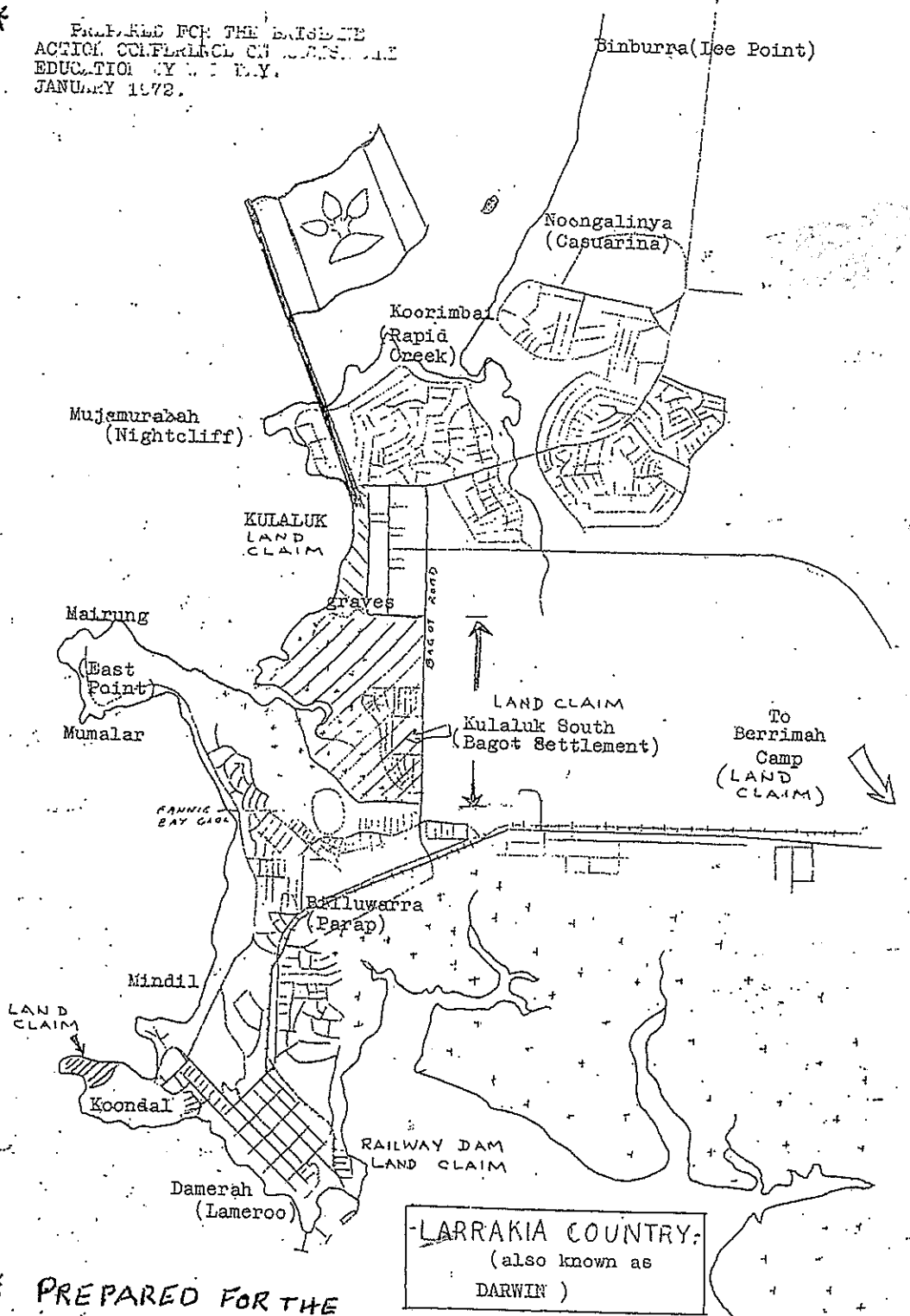


A CHALLENGE TO A CITY.

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PREPARED FOR THE BRISBANE
ACTION CONFERENCE ON RACISM AND
EDUCATION BY W. B. DAY,
JANUARY 1972.



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ACTION CONFERENCE ON RACIAL AND EDUCATIONAL

ABORIGINES AND SOCIETY

A WHITE ACTIVIST'S VIEW OF THE PREVAILING SITUATION IN DARWIN.

INTRODUCTION:

This Conference should not pass without a close look at Darwin..... named after a Scientist, Bombed by the Japanese, this multiracial city of 36,000 is still a colony of Canberra.

Pre-war Darwin, alias the human-hot-house of Fort Zodiac, was described from experience by Xavier Herbert, in his semi-factual book, "Capricornia" which was hailed in 1930 as "a challenge thrown in the face of a Nation".

The 'Challenge' was race relations in the steaming tropics so traditionally black latitudes, that whites did not bring their women and even today most travel south every second year. One third of the population, stays less than that.

Air-Conditioning and the aeroplane and a quid to be made while the boom is on, have meant that the challenge that Darwin was being forced to face in Fort Zodiac days, has never been grasped... The questions are not answered by the sounds of jack-hammers.

A journalist recently compared the Territory with Siberia; but Rhodesia is a better comparison. Like Rhodesia, we have still not solved the question of Black representation, not even discussed it, and like Rhodesia, we have an elected white Council, itching to declare Independence.

If we ask 'What do the Blacks think in Rhodesia?' Who can answer? If you ask the same question in Darwin, there are no Black Organisations to answer it.

RACIAL HARMONY:

The supposed racial harmony in Darwin, a noteworthy achievement in Australia, is not a long term answer, but an excuse for doing nothing.

It could mean that everyone knows their place, or that the dissatisfied have no leaders, or that Aborigines do not feel secure enough to speak out. Perhaps there is a fear of creating racial antagonism. Is there a problem of identity, is white power total, or is it a lack of issues?

Maybe after all, everyone is happy and Darwin has the secret the world wants to know.

Embarrassed, I admit that in this multiracial town, we do not debate these questions openly. Rather, like a Victorian brothel, where Sex is never mentioned. I, as a white, can therefore only offer this Conference, my personal, but considered, ^{be} opinions, which you may find useful. These views need not necessarily be the views held by the delegate from the Barrakia Tribe.

PART ABORIGINES

To be fair, nowhere else in Australia has, ^{so} successfully accepted part-Aborigines into integrated housing and offered such a variety of employment opportunities. This HAD to be done because, although they have never said it, the part Aboriginal Community has ' Black Power ' in numbers alone.

Part European is possibly a more appropriate phrase in Darwin, when we consider the official definition that is never disputed. It states that ' An Aborigine is a full-blood Aborigine and those persons who live with Aboriginal societies and are fully integrated into those societies.' 1953 was the year the Law decided that part - Aborigines could have equal rights while full Aborigines waited til 1964 . It has never paid to be identified with Aborigines in Darwin, and certainly not in those 11 years.

Norman Shillingsworth, in Capricornia, grew up believing himself part-Javanese until exposed as ' The Son of a Capricornian Gin !

The 'half-caste.' Homes and institutions, with missionary zeal, certainly do not encourage a pride in Black ancestry, while others blame the crushing obligation to share money with relations for the split. Whatever the reason, historical, economical, cultural, or simply the opportunism of running with the winning side, there is in Darwin, very little co-operation or even association between black and brown.

There is not even a move to help their brothers in the South who still live on reserves. However, there are no spokesmen and no issues because, having by silent approval, accepted assimilation and it's financial favours, they have also accepted an indefinite white rule.

The challenge for the Southern Black Activists is to get this silent, but large Community to identify with Aboriginal struggles throughout Australia. Darwin's famous racial harmony will suffer if they succeed and they will be abused for 'biting the hand that feeds them!' But the town melting pot needs a good stir if we are ever going to get a vital, original and balanced recipe.

BLACKS :

To be courteous, I must first mention the rightful owners of the Darwin area, the Koolamirikin or Larrakia Tribe. Some of the survivors of this once thriving salt-water tribe, are now involved in a land rights struggle and are even battling to be recognised. They deserve support.

Why the Larrakia's ?

Firstly, they have had a bad deal. Their first white contact was with a party of surveyors who got straight to work plotting out City streets. There was no compensation for the displaced tribe.

Secondly, land rights movements at Wattie Creek, Yirrkala Roper River etc are too remote to involve many Darwin residents. The Larrakia claim is right in the suburbs.

One supposes that there would also be some sympathy for an almost extinct tribe and there are more part Aboriginals in town who have Larrakia ancestry than most people realise. Hopefully, they will get involved eventually.

Thirdly, by highlighting the plight of the Larrakias who can claim the whole city but have nothing, it shows the hypocrisy of the Government which is at the moment, reassuring the other tribes, also threatened with Urban development, such as at Gove.

Lastly, the Land now held in dispute has proved to be an ideal location (in the dry) for meetings, discussions and activities. People will come if something is on. Good numbers were there to meet a visiting T.V. crew and to help make tapes for the Historical Society. It's potential for a centre where Black can meet sympathetic whites has not been fully explored.

Occasionally visiting journalists, wanting an Aboriginal story, also come to the camp, not having time to go to Wattie Creek, or refused a permit to Bagot. Two television crews and Japanese and Russian reporters have found this convenient.

Bagot Reserve

The 57 well grassed acres of Bagot reserve are home for around 400 Aborigines of up to 40 different tribes. There is an elected Council which unfortunately permitted a cutback in area from 720 acres in 1965, so that today the reserve has lost its salt water frontage and is surrounded by houses. It has recently been announced that a shopping centre and meeting rooms will be built on the reserve, open to the public but employing Aborigines. Eventually, Bagot will be for permanent residents only and another area will be for transients.

Meanwhile there is a case for greater powers to the Council, a far more active Council, and a move for the Reserve to be handed over to the people. Possible moves are a sit-in in the office, some kind of confrontation over permits to enter; (i.e, who gives the permits, the Council or Welfare ?) or meetings in the bush behind the reserve as I believe Aborigines are not permitted to hold meetings at Bagot without a Welfare Officer present. An A.B.C. television crew was refused permission to film on the Reserve, only last December.

"Squatters"

Dept
of

Apart from those Blacks on the Welfare payroll who generally follow Government thinking, there is a hardier, more independent group of fluctuating numbers who prefer to camp at various sites on vacant land in the greater city area. Without the false security of Welfare protection, these people have been the backbone of land rights demonstrations. Their strength and every Aborigines strength comes from the common language, structure and bonds of the Tribe.

Alcohol

In these self controlled bush camps in Darwin, there is usually a lot of grog drunk. Darwin is a thirsty town anyway, with drunkenness traditionally part of its cultural heritage.

Alcohol cont

Indications are that drinking habits are becoming more sophisticated in Clubs and carpeted, air-conditioned bars, where 'thongs' are not even acceptable. The trend will create greater segregation in drinking with Aborigines confined to the rougher bars -- only choosing those places because they feel uncomfortable in the new bars. They are not welcome in these bars anyway as a 1968 incident illustrates. The Manager of the Victoria Hotel publicly denied Aborigines the right to drink in the Beer garden regardless of dress. A showdown persuaded him to change his mind. Now, more subtle tactics are used.

SPENDING :

Spending

Huge sums are spent by Aborigines coming into town, often rather green, so that shops, taxis and hotels make good profit from this habit of rapid spending. One man was confused because he had spent 300 dollars in hotels in a couple of days, yet, the white bouncer threw him out.

Some car dealers specialise in selling old trade-ins with ridiculous prices and no hope of re-registration. These cars either get sold to Aborigines going down the track -- or are given to the wreckers. We need a thorough survey on black spending in Darwin to back future action. We will find that hotels and stores around which people camp, like refugees in their own country, have an interest in keeping the status quo, however horrifying this may be -- there are murders, bashings, and blacks being knocked down by speeding cars -- because an aimless, broken people will continue to blow their savings.

The white man understands money and as licencees and store-owners are often in a position of influence in the bush, there is big scope to use black spending to put pressure on these businesses for committed support and fair dealing. Boycotts, patronising black enterprises, (if any) and a black licenced club are some ideas. A boycott in some areas would require assistance to bring in supplies from other stores.

Another, less practical suggestion I have heard, to break the stranglehold on black finance by the hotels, is for the people of Arnhem Land to grow Marihuana for their town brothers. This would be a revolution in spending habits and may stop violence, which in frustration is almost always, black against black. However, the present laws make the idea impossible and also it could create new and unforeseen problems.

THE LAW .

Speaking of the law, the white police of Darwin have a more real knowledge of the true position of Aborigines than most Welfare Officers. Police and magistrates must be weary of the regular packed court on tuesday mornings. Of the usual 40 appearances, 30 will always be Black. Fines are low, but often go unpaid and the job of chasing those who don't appear must be tedious.

The Law cont

Many prosecutions are for being drunk on a reserve (Bagot). To bring this farce into the open, it would only be necessary for all Aborigines on drunk charges to plead 'not guilty'. This would bring the court system to a standstill, booked for a year ahead.

When you consider that in 1969, offences against good order in the Northern Territory were 6,897 and in Canberra with twice the population there were only 817 such offences, you have an idea of the situation.

THE MASS MEDIA

Darwin has few searching inquiries like those on current affairs T.V. and week-end newspapers in the south. The media in Darwin has to be spoon fed by spokesmen but as the Aborigines have no official spokesmen and don't make much use of letters or press statements, their viewpoint is rarely heard or requested.

The Northern Territory News has stung the Public so often with sharp editorials on Aboriginal questions that readers seem to be immune and unshockably apathetic.

The difficulty in getting a Black view into the media, and not a watered down version of it, led to the monthly printing of 'Bunji' a roneoed news sheet which is passed around the town. In line with assimilation policies, the A.B.C. does not have any programme specifically for Aborigines. An Aboriginal hour for Blacks, by Blacks at least once a week would be recognising the rights of a minority.

ASSIMILATION

"Assimilation is a policy which means promotion to a white way of life after making the grade."

It leaves the mass of unassimilated Blacks without educated leadership. It divides the generations, destroys the tribes and weakens Black unity. It is good for the churches according to one of our Christian leaders who said 'A benign Government gives generous assistance. On the side of the Aborigines, the hard core of Paganism has practically vanished. The vacuum in the Native mind which has been created by the loss of tribal organisation and tribal beliefs is waiting to be filled with the Gospel.'

WHITES

While the churches try to fill vacuums, most town whites are remarkably ignorant on Aboriginal issues. However, a newcomer to the city will be told "Leave them, they're happy as they are," "We know these people, we grew up with them." or "They'll turn on you one day." These comments only further illustrate their ignorance. Usually, thinking doesn't get far beyond "Send them back to the bush" -- So much for Assimilation. Even Integration requires some effort by whites.

Like them or not, it is the Tourist who is most likely to be most interested in things Black but there aren't many opportunities for these enthusiasts to meet Aborigines in Darwin.

WHITES cont

To see a Corroboree, they have to take a boat trip across the harbour to a resort - restaurant. These same dancers recently performed in a city park to raise money for the Townsville cyclone victims- A selfless gesture, but rather ironical.

Why aren't Black enterprises getting their share of the Tourist dollars? Because the Social Welfare is afraid of stepping on the toes of private enterprise. Meanwhile the Aboriginal image is exploited everywhere, from letterheads, to murals in hotel foyers.

An Aboriginal cultural centre for Darwin would serve two purposes. One, encourage^{ag} the Aborigines to preserve their culture and Two it would be an education for tourists and local whites.

Unions in the North get more credit than they deserve from Blacks who remember the struggle for citizenship. The truth is that the Darwin Unions have deserted the Aboriginal cause... There is no doubt that the Yirrkala Aborigines would now HAVE land title if they had, from the beginning, had wholehearted Trade Union support from workers at Gove.

EDUCATION

Kormilda College with 200 students is deservedly well known. the college is at Berrimah, 9 miles from town and teaches mainly special courses to high school levels. Unfortunately it is under the Social Welfare Department which seems to train Yes men. It is urgent that the college be given some independence if it is to educate outspoken young Black leaders.

This Conference should attempt to get Kormilda and new Colleges opening at Yirrkala and Alice Springs, removed from Welfare control. The official policies balk at Jean - Paul Sartres questions

" What then did you think when you unbound the gag that muted those Black mouths ? That they would chant your praises ? Did you think that when those heads that our fathers had forcibly bowed down, were raised again, you would find adoration in their eyes? "

This should be the challenge for Darwin -- to be prepared to face a truly liberated Black.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE STRUGGLE OF THE LARRAKIA AND
BRINKIN PEOPLE FOR JUSTICE.

The 500 strong Larrakia tribe was the undisputed owner of the Darwin area before Goyder began his survey in 1869.

At first the settlers received a friendly welcome and later clashes were resolved when 'they tamed Miranda, a powerful old man, called him King Solomon, hung a royal tin plate of false pretences around his neck and also allowed him to beg with it for tucker and tobacco so long as he kept his people out of mischief.' This tactic, of buying the leaders, is still used today.

The Larrakias suffered disease and corruption until Sir Baldwin Spencer described the remnants as 'decadent' in 1910. However, he did manage to describe some of their customs and social organisation in several pages of his book, Native Tribes of the Northern Territory.

Only about 20 people still use the language today, with as many again who can understand it. The customs have not been kept alive, but a few songs and dances are remembered, and legends are only vaguely remembered. The tribe is also scattered. However, tribesmen can still give the Larrakia name to most of Darwin's physical features e.g. Lee Point is Binburra, Old Man Rock is 'Dariba Nungalinya' and Coconut Grove is Kulaluk... I suggest that these names are remembered above all else because the ties to the disfigured land are still strong.

A request for part of Kulaluk area to be returned to the Larrakia was rejected by Mr. Ralph Hunt, Minister of the Interior, who wrote, "While the waterhole was once a ceremonial site, no ceremonies have been conducted there for many years, and the site has long since lost any special importance that may have been attached to it. The Kulaluk waterhole seems to be little different to other camping areas used by Aborigines around Darwin, and special measures to preserve the area for members of the Larrakia Tribe are not justified by known facts."

The camp at Kulaluk is in the heart of Darwin's Northern suburbs, behind the Paspalis Drive in theatre, on about 5 acres of vacant Crown Land. The area is flat and grassy, right against a narrow beach and mangrove fringed bay. In the mangroves there are plenty of shellfish, catfish and small stingrays which are caught on the tides. Sympathisers sometimes bring wallaby or geese.

Since the campaign began, the bush on the South side has been bulldozed for an encroaching sub-division, which has at least brought tap water within reasonable distance. Permanent underground water supply from shallow wells, is no longer safe to drink.

The number of residents of Kulaluk vary from 2 to 10, sheltering from the present wet season in three humpies and a marquee on loan. Bobby Secretary and his wife, Bessie have lived there for over 6 years and on weekends are usually joined by visitors.

Up to 30 people associated with the tribe discussed possible actions at the original Saturday meetings that were held at the camp in May 1971. Nine Larrakias moved in to give backing for the proposed claim. Letters were written to local organisations for support, including the three main

the three main Christian denominations and the Historical Society. No-one replied even though the Northern Territory News gave the claim a fair amount of publicity. Two letters to the National Tribal Council went unanswered. Eventually the Historical Society, admitting ignorance, sent a representative out on two Sunday mornings. He made a report which suggested the decimation of the tribe could be due to raids by the neighboring Woolnas.

No mention of introduced diseases! He went on in an extremely unbiased way, "Their (the Larrakias) position is not unique. Like many other people, the Larrakia's are victims of Darwin's growth. As the town has expanded, areas of unoccupied land have dwindled.

I can remember when many of the old time Bushmen would come to town and camp in sheds where the suburbs of Fanny Bay and Parap are today. As the city expanded, they have moved further out, but I do not see any reason why the people camped at Kulaluk should have to move until the time comes for the land to be developed."

That of course is what the struggle is all about....

The Tribe's first protest action was a march on July 9th, the full 6 miles into the city. It was a good experience, without obvious results. Then in August, Koolamurinee (Bobby Secretary) and Norman Barral flew across the Harbour to Delissaville settlement to enlist supporters. There was backing from the few Larrakias there but the Wagaits, being on the Departmental pay - roll, wouldn't be in it.

There was success at the Ten-mile on Crown land by Knuckeys Lagoon where the Brinkins camp. As they were also 'squatters' they gave a strong pledge of allegiance. These moves were published in the news sheet, 'Bunji'. The first edition received publicity on the inaugural news of the A.B.C. television channel ABD6 and in the news paper which headed the article, 'NEW BLACK POWER MOVE.' The words Black Power seem to have bad associations to most Aborigines, and this headline started Bunji on the wrong foot.

With Brinkin help, the Larrakias then held sit-downs across Bagot Road on October 4th, November 1st., and November 22nd. The first two sit-downs caught the police completely by surprise and caused lengthy traffic delays in the morning rush hour. The cover map shows the strategic importance of Bagot Road. Police were ready for the third demonstration although they could not stop some members of the tribe from sitting on the road. Once again no charges were made in an attempt not to alienate the Aborigines.

The flag raising at the court house was held on November 7th and gained more publicity than the sit-downs. Koolamurinee lead this protest as he did with the other four. The flag which was raised in a brief ceremony to claim Darwin, mocking similar ceremonies held by the British. It is now flown at Kulaluk and may help unite the people as history has shown the value of flags.

WAGAIT

On December 13th attention was drawn to the appalling conditions at the 10 Mile when fifty Brinkin were prepared to stop a goods train. It was no secret unfortunately and police were able to get the train through the families lining the track.

These families are mostly from stations for the wet/ 9

For the wet, camped out of town for the station managers convenience .He can pick up his men as he needs them . The Welfare and every traveller along the Stuart Highway knows how these landless people live . Each time the police in Darwin The latest move , on December 18th , involved nine men who signed a letter threatening to cut the Overland Telegraph Line between "Larrakia country and Jauan country". Each of these men were taken to the police station and questioned thoroughly. They were warned of the possible penalties for interfering with the lines and told that threats had been made "to shoot them"-presumably the white back-lash. The camps are now visited regularly by the C.I.B. who have been particularly interested in this conference. Despite their curiosity , police have so far been courteous and not unfriendly. A confrontation is the last thing the Government wants , as is shown by their tactics at Wattie Creek .

The Brinkins are a militant group , veterans of the struggle for citizenship , and jail sentences are no deterrent for them -- however they are becoming disillusioned with protests because of the lack of results positive results. They and the Larrakias are slowly gathering more of their people behind the flag in an underground , but still tenuous, movement of Black Liberation.

SUMMARY.

* There are many shades of black opinion in Darwin , but it is predominately conservative .

* Darwin has a young population ($\frac{2}{3}$ under 30) with a large community of uncommitted part-Aborigines.

* There is no co operation between black and brown , no organizations , few outspoken leaders .

* Assimilation is the official policy .

* The phrase Black power is not popular.

SUGGESTIONS.

* More power for the Bagot Council and ownership of the reserve. A sit -in in the office or other confrontation, perhaps over permits . These moves need popular support to succeed.

* A Peoples Centre at Kulaluk . Weekend educational activities. Possible show-down if land is required for development .

* Kormilda and other similar proposed colleges to have university-like autonomy to allow free practice of alternatives to Government imposed policies.

* Black Power or similar candidate for next Legislative Council election. At least a canvassing of candidates for their attitudes to Aborigines and the issue of an Aboriginal "How To Vote" card for all electorates.

* Organized boycotts and use of black spending as a bargaining device .

* An Aboriginal Hour on A.B.C. radio - other special programs .

* A national flag for Black Liberation and continued use of red head bands These to be used by all groups - Gurindjis , etc.

* Visit to Darwin of part-Aboriginal activist to test mood of the town.

WILLIAM B. DAY.

DARWIN JANUARY 16th 1972.