

The Quarterly of
the Aboriginal
Treaty Committee:
Final Issue
P.O. Box 1242
CANBERRA CITY
A.C.T., 2601.

PHONE (062) 470648
(062) 494277

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ABORIGINAL TREATY NEWS No. 9

Dr H. C. Coombs (Chairman); Dr Diane Barwick; Dr Maria Brandl; Mrs Dymphna Clark; Mr Stewart Harris; Mrs Mildred Kirk; Mr Hugh Littlewood, Mrs Judith Wright McKinney; Mr Peter Read; Prof Charles Rowley.

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A FINAL, BUT HOPEFUL MESSAGE

Dr Coombs on the present and future

We thank those supporters who have expressed regret at the winding up of the committee. We have not made the decision without deep concern. It has been forced upon us by the pressures of increasing age and the demands of unavoidable, other commitments. We have also thought it wise to use our remaining resources in an effective effort rather than to see them dribble away in a vain attempt to maintain an administrative and educational role with decreasing success.

For the rest, we will resume our efforts as private citizens to press the Commonwealth Government to take the steps necessary to the ultimate conclusion of a binding, negotiated treaty and to encourage and support Aboriginal campaigns for immediate progress towards their material, social and spiritual independence.

As to the use of our resources, in accordance with our determination to finish with a bang and not a whimper, we have two major projects.

The first is to ensure that the Australian National University's Public Issues Conference on International Law and Aborigines (November 21/22) is the resounding success its importance demands. There is no subject affecting Aborigines in Australia more destructive to their cause than the deliberate distortion of the facts of white occupation and

of the content of international law by which it has been justified or condoned.

That conference will bring together Aborigines and leading Australian experts, and international authorities with wide and profound experience of the existing and emerging international law affecting the indigenous peoples of the world. We believe the communication which this will make possible will open courses of action to Aborigines and their friends which will significantly share the history of coming decades.

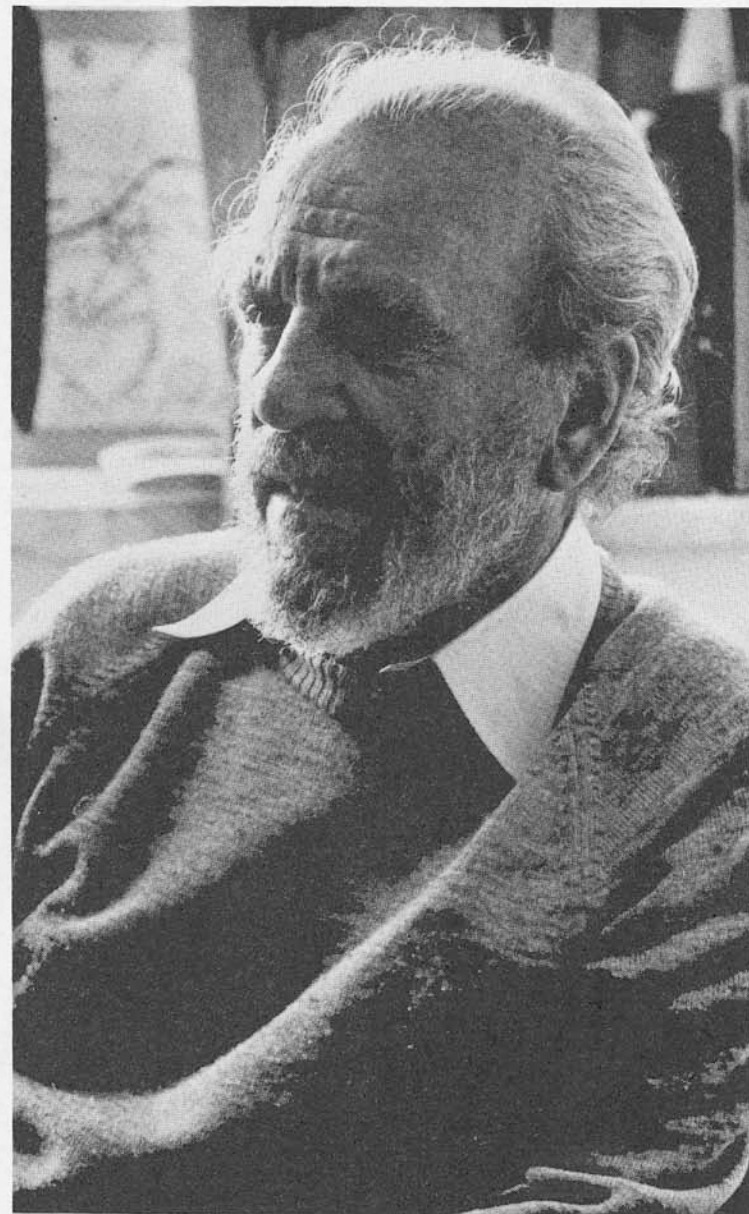
We plan therefore to give what help we can to ensure a comprehensive Aboriginal participation and to bring under review important legal, constitutional and political developments in the international context.

Secondly we plan to conclude our campaign as we began it with a book, a book which we believe will be as influential as Stewart Harris' 'It's Coming Yet' which on the committee's behalf states the case for a treaty on grounds of justice and humanity. The new book will tell the story of the committee's work, of the developing understanding of the urgency for Australians to right the wrongs of this land. We believe this story is one of success, of a slow but cumulative change in the level of consciousness in white Australian society. The book will outline a possible strategy by which that change

can be maintained until it provides the basis for decisive political and constitutional action. It will also explore the kind of provisions which emerging international covenants under active U.N. consideration would require an acceptable treaty to include.

The book is being written by Judith Wright and will, we believe, be a worthy successor to 'The Cry For The Dead' (Oxford University Press, 1981), her eloquent and deeply moving account of the destruction of Aboriginal society by the great pastoral invasions of NSW and Queensland. The committee is proud to be associated with it.

As individuals, we will be urging the Commonwealth Government to sustain the initiative which the report of the Senate Committee on the practicability of a treaty, Makarrata or compact represents and move steadily along the road to the negotiation and conclusion of a 'compact' with constitutional authority. In this respect the emphasis placed by the Senate Committee on the need for extensive educational work is of great importance. We urge the Commonwealth Government to support this work, in both the official and its voluntary aspects, among Aborigines and the community generally. We urge supporters to lend their weight to these urgencies.



Dr "Nugget" Coombs, chairman of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee, in his office at the Australian National University, Canberra.

Aboriginal Treaty Committee Papers

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"A final, but Hopeful message: Dr Coombs on the present and future", ATC News No. 9, p. 1.

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