

# \$40,000 — and Black Power fears

CANBERRA. — Wielding the cudgel against Federal Government is a favorite occupation of Victorian Ministers eager for a bit of public sympathy.

This sort of grandstanding is perhaps the most charitable explanation that can be given of some curiously inconsistent statements made by the State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Meagher) over the past week or so.

The statements revolve around a controversial decision to withhold a \$40,000 grant to the Victorian branch of the Aborigines' Advancement League.

The rumpus began when the Federal Minister in Charge of Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Wentworth) announced last week that a \$10,000 recurrent grant and a \$30,000 capital grant had been set aside for Aboriginal advancement in Victoria.

"But in view of disputes which have arisen inside Aboriginal organisations there, the actual allocation is being withheld until matters have settled down," he said.

In State Parliament the following day, Mr. Meagher was asked by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Wilkes) why the Commonwealth refused to pay the money.

The Minister replied that arrangements had been made for

## ABORIGINES

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the grants in collaboration with Mr. Wentworth in Canberra some months ago. Part of the money was to have been used on a hostel for Aborigines at Northcote and part was to go to other works for Aborigines in the State.

The apparent attempt to shuffle off responsibility for the decision temporarily to withhold the money was rectified only by a statement by Mr. Wentworth himself on Tuesday.

He said quite categorically that the grant had been withheld at the request of Victorian authorities.

In the State Parliament on Wednesday, Mr. Meagher admitted that Victoria had sought the delay pending re-organisation in the Aborigines' Advancement League.

A few weeks ago the league had told him it was about to declare all positions vacant on its management committee and have a predominately Aboriginal committee.

Out of courtesy, the Victorian department had advised the Federal Department and suggested that payment might be

withheld until the committee were reorganised. "It was thought they (the new committee) might have different ideas about expenditure of the money," Mr. Meagher said.

Why did the Victorian director of Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. R. M. Worthy) make the request for the delay?

Mr. Meagher is being a little shortsighted when he says that as far as he is concerned this has nothing to do with Black Power.

Well informed Federal Government sources had the distinct impression that the Victorian request was made because of recent disputes in the Aborigines' Advancement League over the role of whites and support of Black Power.

On November 28, the quarterly meeting of the league's council will vote to re-elect a new committee of management. At present there are seven Aborigines and nine non-Aborigines on the 17-member body.

This move is being made following discussion among Victorian Aborigines of a statement on Black Power made by the annual general meeting of the league in August.

This said in part: "The Black Power idea in essence is that black people are more likely to achieve freedom and justice for themselves by working together as a group, pursuing their goals

by the same processes of democratic action as any other common-interest pressure group, such as returned servicemen or chambers of commerce."

The statement ended by saying that the league existed for the benefit of Aboriginal people and its Aboriginal members were in a position to tell the league what it should be and do to best serve the interests of the Aboriginal people.

"Its non-Aboriginal members will stand back while those decisions are being made and will work to put them into effect in collaboration with the Aboriginal members."

Most Aborigines in Victoria would probably reject the violence and separatism that has become a feature of overseas Black Power movements. But a minority at least are actively pressing for greater control of organisations that shape their future.

The annual report of the Aboriginal Affairs Department tabled in State Parliament this week warned: "Indications are that if some trends continue, the field of Aboriginal affairs will face a major crisis in the near future."

It said the main area of conflict involved the increasing awareness by Aboriginal people of their own identity, the power of public opinion and the worldwide interest in race relations,