

Aboriginal body splits over move to bar whites

By HENRY PLOCIENNIK

The Aboriginal movement in Australia has split as a result of a move to exclude whites from the executive of the Aboriginal "parliament"—the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

The proposal was made—and defeated—at the council's annual meeting in Canberra yesterday.

Immediately afterwards, delegates to the conference who supported the proposal set up their own interim committee, and named the Aboriginal poet, Mrs Kath Walker, a Queensland delegate, as chairman.

The vote was tied 48-48, but the proposal needed a two-thirds majority for an amendment to the constitution.

The move was proposed by a Victorian delegate, Dr A. B. Pittock.

Dr Pittock's proposed amendment provided that members of the executive committee of FCAATSI would consist only of Aborigines or Islanders.

It would have permitted the executive committee to co-opt, as non-voting consultants, any persons, irrespective of racial descent.

HISSES AND SHOUTS

The interim committee, with an all-State representation, will set up a national body, in opposition to FCAATSI, with an all-Aboriginal or Islanders executive to work for the advancement and equality of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

The move, at the end of the three-day conference, followed heated debates on the motion for an all-Aboriginal or Islanders executive committee.

The senior vice-president of FCAATSI, Mr G. Bryant, MP, was hissed and shouted at when he spoke against the proposal.

Mr Bryant, in an angry outburst, said: "I am not here to be hissed at. I only want to uphold the constitution and make sure the voting on the motion is carried out in a proper fashion."

The incident occurred when delegates claimed that all "delegates to the conference" should be allowed to take part in the vote.

The Australian
30th March 1970

The constitution of FCAATSI provides that "alterations to the constitution may be made by a two-thirds vote of delegates present at the annual general meeting (provided that such alteration has the support of a majority of the Aboriginal delegates present).

Dr Pittock, speaking in support of his motion, said Aborigines had, for a long time, been living under white domination.

"I move the motion because I believe that the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders want it and I believe that they are capable, ready and willing to run this organisation," he said.

"They can do so responsibly and without alienating themselves from their white friends."

He said that some Aborigines and Islanders did not want to vote for the amendment because they believed they would lose the support of white organisations.

"This belief has no foundation. I believe there are a lot of white people who would not lessen their support to the Aboriginal movement," Dr Pittock said.

Dr Pittock, who was yesterday elected unopposed as convener of the standing committee on land and reserves, said after his motion was defeated: "I will take my position as convener of the committee as a white man, but will not vote in any executive council decisions."

Dr Pittock said despite the defeat of the motion nominations and the eventual election would result in an almost all black executive.

Mr Bryant said the proposed motion would have inhibited the work of FCAATSI.