

Storm on natives only voting

Elegy for a lost race

CANBERRA. - An organisation for aboriginal advancement decided yesterday to deny voting rights to non-aboriginals.

And in doing so it caused a color-bar storm.

The "natives - only - vote" decision was made at the annual conference of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

But the issue still has to go before a general meeting of the council tomorrow.

Yesterday's decision was reached at an aboriginals-only meeting of the council.

The motion was moved by a non-aboriginal, Dr Barry Pittock.

He proposed that only people of aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent should be members of the council's executive.

His motion provided that the executive would be able to co-opt other people as non-voting consultants.

He also proposed that only people of aboriginal or island descent should have the right to vote at the council's annual general meeting.

The private aboriginals-only session, which is a

regular feature of the annual conference, decided to support Dr Pittock's motion.

It was reported to the non-aboriginals meeting by Pastor Frank Roberts, who said the feeling was that aboriginals must take charge of their own affairs.

He explained this did not mean non-aboriginals would be excluded from the council.

Their continued help and advice would be vital.

The first angry shot in reply came from Victorian MHR, Mr Gordon Bryant.

"This is not an aboriginal organisation," he said.

Accepted as equal

"It is a body devoted to changing the social structure of Australia so that aboriginals will be accepted as equal with other members of the community.

"This involves as many people of all sorts as you can possibly get.

"This council should not become an exclusive body of any sort of people. It should be multi-racial."

Mr Bryant said the motion faced the council with a "constitutional and psychological crisis."

• **CANBERRA.**—A request has been made to the Tasmanian Museum for the re-burial of the bones of Queen Truganini, the last queen of the Tasmanian aboriginals.

The request was made by Mr Harry Penrith, an aboriginal.

Mr Penrith said the bones were being kept for similar reasons museums might treasure the bones of a rare species of monkey.

"Here, at the invaders' talk-talk place, We, who are the strangers now, Come with sorrow in our hearts The bora ring, the corroborees, The sacred ceremonies, have gone. All gone. Turned to dust on the land that once was ours."

The words were written by aboriginal poet Kath Walker and she read them last night as the didgeridoo played a heartfelt lament outside Parliament House, Canberra.

The occasion was one of the most moving ceremonies witnessed at the Parliament.

Three hundred aboriginal and white Australians marched quietly by torchlight up to the lawns outside the white, floodlit building.

Then they moved up, five at a time, to lay on the gardens by the steps of the house placards carrying the names of scores of tribes which had been wiped out since the coming of the white man.

The ceremony was watched by about 20 police.

Apart from Senator Keeffe (Labor, Qld.) and Mr Gordon Bryant (Labor, Vic.), who are attending the annual conference on aboriginal affairs, the only representative of the Federal Parliament was one lone attendant who watched from the top of the steps.

After the names of more than 100 tribes had been laid on the bushes by the buildings, the "demonstrators" moved off as quietly as mourners.

It was the most impressive ceremony likely to be seen in this year of the 200th anniversary of Captain Cook. — LEE CATMULL.

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