

On May 3, the Prime Minister announced the setting up of an all-Aboriginal Arts Board to stimulate and protect Aboriginal culture in Australia. Among the 15 members was Chicka Dixon — "waterside worker of Sydney and manager of Aboriginal pop groups performing in clubs." LENORE NICKLIN sought an interview.

Chicka was born with a cause

Chicka Dixon is a hard man to track down. The last time I'd seen him was at the Aboriginal "Embassy" on the lawns outside Parliament House, Canberra.

That was 12 months ago. Mr. Dixon, not a man to be trifled with, was known as the Minister for Defence.

I rang the Waterside Workers Federation. "Chicka's on special leave," I was told. They thought he was up in Alice Springs organising a land rights conference. Weren't sure.

I made another call. "Chicka's in Darwin for a few days," came the answer.

Finally a call to the World Council of Churches. "He's in Perth — attending a meeting of the National Committee for Homeless Men."

And so he was.

Five days later I pick him up at No. 10 Pyrmont wharf, Sydney, where he has just finished a day shift.

He wears a brown sweater, brown trousers and "Land Rights Now" button, and is a bit preoccupied.

"I've got to get a bloke out of Long Bay gaol this afternoon," he says. "It's not him I'm worried about — it's his four kids."

We decide to do the interview at the office.

Chicka Dixon is a former manager of The Foundation and was born in Sydney.

He is lean, tough and arti-

culate, has a sardonic sense of humor, and is highly respected by all but a few of his race.

Last October he led an Aboriginal "delegation" to China — not that that, he is quick to point out, makes him "a raging Maoist." But China impressed him very much.

"I saw no young babies in China scouring in garbage tins for a feed like I see in Sydney," he said.

"I saw no young babies jammed into a hospital suffering from malnutrition like I see in Alice Springs.

"Everyone seemed to be very healthy, happy and obsessed with developing their country. And nobody called me Jacky Jacky."

Mr. Dixon is reluctant to talk about his early days. Perhaps they can be guessed.

Before he went on the wharfs 10 years ago he was mostly a seasonal worker.

"I lived on lots of river banks and missions," he says. "You know, I'm a reformed drunk, but I've been sober for 15 years.

"I'm the only fella that can put me back in the gutter. While I'm involved in the movement I won't have time for drinking."

He reads a lot, but dictates rather than writes his numerous committee reports.

Martin Luther King and Gandhi are among his heroes. Charles Perkins was another influence, and he is full of admiration for the fact that Perkins "came out of a dirt-floor situation in Alice Springs and struggled through to get a BA."

One gets the feeling that Mr. Dixon is wistful about his own lack of education.

"But the major thing is I want to learn," he says. "I'm fortunate because I've got a good memory, and I find I learn something every day. If I'm working in a ship and there are colored people in that ship, I look them up and we have a cross-cultural exchange, if you like to call it that."

He is not a member of any political party. "I distrust all political parties, because it seems to me that the white man has had one hell of a party for the 200 years since he came here," he says.

He has been actively involved for the past 15 to 20 years fighting he says, for "black justice — don't screw the thing up; it's not black power, it's black justice."

"When you are born black you are born with a cause," he says. "A lot of white people run around looking for causes. We are born with one, and it becomes part of our daily life."

He has never advocated violence. "I've certainly been a militant person, but not an anarchist. I'm no advocate of violence, because violence never solves a problem and it alienates a lot of people.

"I'm a realistic man, and I realise we can't alter the situation our people are in without help.

"It's a challenge and I appreciate all sorts of challenge.

"Certainly I see the Arts Board breaking new ground and giving artistic Aborigines a long-awaited and



overdue opportunity to express their skills."

One of the things he would like to see would be an opportunity for tribal Aborigines to come to the city to teach their traditional dancing and music — "not only to Aboriginal kids but white kids, too."

"I'd like to see us get to the stage where the white people can fully appreciate the richness of the cultural heritage my people have," he says.

"I'd like to see Aboriginal actors playing Aborigines on television — and not painted-up white men."

Mr. Dixon is already pleased with the progress made by the National Black Theatre: "It's doing a magnificent job encouraging our youngsters in acting, dancing and singing."

He thinks the Arts Board will create more such opportunities.

He and his wharfie mates were rather amused by his "pop manager" label.

Chicka Dixon is scarcely a black Harry M. Miller, but

he has encouraged Aborigines to form their own pop groups and tried to get engagements for them.

It hasn't been easy. Mr. Dixon says the first problem is lack of finance, and the second the natural shyness of Aborigines.

"But around Sydney at the moment there are quite a number of Aboriginal groups who, if they hadn't been given a little nudge, wouldn't be in existence," he says with some satisfaction.

From June 13 to 16, Mr. Dixon will take part in the Land Rights Conference in Darwin, where the main topics to be discussed will be land rights, mineral rights, and compensation.

"ADVERTISER"

Adelaide, S.A.

26 MAY 1973