

Whitlam has Black Power shambles

CANBERRA.— For Prime Minister Gough Whitlam the wheel of Black Power has suddenly come full circle, and he cannot understand why.

There he was last year squatting with the aboriginal demonstrators in their then — illegal "embassy" outside Parliament House, as a most welcome Opposition Leader who was about to solve their problems.

Here he was this week, this Royal Week, confronted by the aborigines and their now — legal but embarrassing embassy, accused of being remote and arrogant and of having failed to make good his promises.

At the same time as aborigines were claiming he had not given them their promised land rights or enough money, some Labor men, particularly Senator Georges of Queensland, were claiming money was being wasted on some projects and was not being properly accounted for by the Aboriginal Affairs Department.

Militant

At the same time as he was under attack from aborigines for having removed Mr. Gordon Bryant from the Aboriginal Affairs Portfolio, former Interior Minister Ralph Hunt (C.P., N.S.W.) was attacking him in Parliament with a follow-up to Senator Georges' strong inferences that the enigmatic Dr. H. C. Coombs had influenced him in making the Bryant decision.

All of which adds up to something of a shambles.

If the three-hour protest "sit-in" by aborigi-



THIS WEEK IN CANBERRA

From Wallace Brown

nes on the front steps of Parliament House proves anything, it proves that this particular group were very upset.

It proves that their militancy is growing quickly and it proves that a patronising Senator Cavanagh has little or no rapport with them.

It also proves that Mr. Manfred Cross, of Brisbane, whom Mr. Whitlam wanted to make Aboriginal Affairs Minister originally, does have some rapport with some of them, that Mr. Bryant has more, and that Senator Georges is a great filibusterer — since he addressed them non-stop for 1½ hours so the police could not move against them while he was doing so.

Through it all Mr. Whitlam, now in the fastnesses of the Prime Minister's office, remains puzzled as to what has gone wrong.

His Budget allocates a record \$117 million for aboriginal advancement, Mr. Justice Woodward is inquiring into now (not whether) to grant land rights, and he has the Auditor-General and other experts examining such doubtful projects as Torres Strait turtle-farming.

In his corner

If the reports or casual accounting and money-wasting by the department are correct, his hope is that the pragmatic Senator Cavanagh will straighten the matter out, though the danger for the aboriginal cause is that the Minister might go too far.

In addition the administrative problem is not entirely of Mr. Whitlam's making, though his Government has seriously aggravated it, and only he has the power to remedy it.

The most valuable contribution to a short debate on this post complex of subjects has come from former Prime Minister John Gorton.

Administratively the basic problem is that Dr. Coombs, as Council for Aboriginal Affairs chairman, has direct access to the Prime Minister and can by-pass the Minister.

A corollary to this is that the department head (Mr. Dexter) has two masters, he is answerable to the Minister, but he is also a member of the Council and so is answerable to the Prime Minister through Dr. Coombs.

Mr. Gorton was correct to point out that it was Mr. Harold Holt as Prime Minister who appointed Dr. Coombs as the Council chairman and Mr. Dexter was its director. There was no separate department then and they dealt

with the Prime Minister.

Mr. Gorton as Prime Minister made Mr. Wentworth Minister in Charge of Aboriginals. Dr. Coombs and Mr. Dexter stayed on in the Council but they had to channel submissions to Prime Minister through Mr. Wentworth.

This was the correct procedure, but when Mr. McMahon became Prime Minister the two hatted system came into operation. Mr. Dexter was head of the department under Mr. Howson as Minister, yet also a member of the Council under Dr. Coombs, who again had direct access to the Prime Minister.

In Parliament Mr.

Gorton carefully picked his way through this administrative maze, making the key point as he did so that the Budget estimates give a mere one-line entry to the amount to be paid into the Aboriginal Advancement Trust account, without any indication how the money is to be spent. The amount is \$70,050,000.

As he put it: "We are spending \$1000 for every man, woman and child in the aboriginal population. For their sake we need to see that full benefit as human fallibility can give, is available for the expenditure.

"It is not the fault of the Government that the present situation obtains, but it will be the fault of the Government if it is allowed to continue," Gorton concluded.

To get back to the beginning: it is a shambles. Over to you, Mr. Whitlam.

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