

Blacks want political power

Says NOEL HAWKEN in the second of his articles on the aboriginal problem.



THE Black Power movement of the Australian aborigines, for all its internal differences, has one overall purpose that white Australia would be wise to try to understand.

Paul Coe, David Anderson, Dennis Walker, Bobbi Sykes and their angry colleagues — are the "combustible material awaiting a spark" that more than one white researcher has warned us of? Or just absurd?

What Black Power seeks is a footing, however small, in the effective political power of Australia. No aborigines anywhere have achieved this yet, despite the election of Neville Bonner to the Senate.

They are not a large group. They amount perhaps to a few score, with some white followers. Some are from the few who have achieved tertiary education. Others have been toughened in the urban struggle.

They feel they have little to lose. And although they hate police violence they are no longer too afraid to act, they say.

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They are the first aborigines, as a group, to become aware of the overall situation of their people and what has happened.

What drives them to action and may spill over into violence if it is badly handled or not understood is the almost total refusal of the white majority to recognise their case.

And what they claim is in fact so.

We whites did seize Australia by force, have kept it by force, and have destroyed an aboriginal culture which, in moral, human and aesthetic terms

(and in many practical achievements as well) has had astonishing qualities.

We accept that only as a platitude. They do not.

Black Power demands white recognition of a "prior right of aboriginality." And this is what white power withholds so maddeningly.

We talk of "the aboriginal problem". They talk of "the white problem." Together it adds up to a national problem.

Within their general idea, Black Power leaders voice specific demands for the aborigines.

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They want the hand of the white lifted. They want to run their own affairs. They want rights to land and to the wealth in the land, together with protection for their sacred sites.

They want political and social equality.

They are tired of the whites just making things happen to them (or not happen, as the case may be).

What may be on their side in history is harder to see than what is against them. Yet while at one time their small numbers could be ridiculed, we know today the power of small dedicated groups against majorities.

The Black Power leaders are aware of a growing aboriginal population. Despite all that they have suffered, the aborigines may number 500,000 in 20 years or so.

Support for action is growing, they believe, among younger aborigines everywhere, although many older aborigines criticise them as dangerous crackpots.

The Black Power people are aware of the United Nations, and of the impact their tent embassy and other demonstrations have made overseas, not only in communist countries.



ABORIGINAL leader Dennis Walker at a Brisbane rally.

"This is being seen by the world," they shouted into the TV cameras at the last Parliament House steps demo in Canberra.

They are aware of growing support in many quarters — the universities, some trade unions, some church leaders, some Labor politicians, federal and state, and many white Australians at large.

They are aware too, of course, of the backlash from many whites.

They categorise these as authoritarian racists . . . white exploiters . . . "poor whites" who envy any advantage given to aborigines . . . whites who fear aborigines may "move in next door" . . . politicians who see no votes in aborigines . . . missions who dislike giving up traditional au-

thority . . . officials whose careers depend on the status quo . . . police (who are inevitably labelled "pigs") . . . and others who have no confidence in them.

What we are going to do about Black Power is already a question.

We, from our more sophisticated position, can see that their demands for instant improvements are naive, and ignorant of the political realities that dominate us all.

Yet Black Power, although we may not like to admit it, has begun to put us on a spot already. It is a challenge that looks like being here to stay.

NEXT: Where Whitlam has gone wrong.