

Truce in row over black legal service

CANBERRA. — The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Senator Cavanagh) yesterday agreed to continue funding the NSW Aboriginal Legal Service until the end of the year.

But he will decide later this week whether the Government will meet debts of the service totalling \$43,000.

Senator Cavanagh and representatives of the service held urgent talks in Canberra yesterday to discuss the row over its failure to account for money it has received from the Government.

Senator Cavanagh had cut off funds and refused to discuss future money until "intimidatory tactics" were stopped. This included removing the tents outside Parliament House.

However, last Friday he backed down and agreed to meet representatives of the service.

Senator Cavanagh said yesterday Government funds for the service — \$11,000 a week — should not be used for any activities except legal aid.

The president of the service (Mr. Paul Coe) later accused Senator Cavanagh of acting like a "fascist".

"I got the impression he was prepared to squash the legal service because of one or two individuals associated with it — Gary Foley and myself," Mr. Coe said.

He said the service was not prepared to draw the distinction between legal and political work.

The service had been the

victim of a departmental "mix-up", Mr. Coe said.

A senior departmental officer had told the service it could start with a clean financial slate from last August.

"That information was somehow not conveyed to the Minister," he said.

However, he said the meeting had "reached a point of understanding" from which the service and the department could continue talks.

Mr. Coe said he thought the Minister had agreed to the Government paying the \$43,000 debts.

He said the service has now accounted for all but \$8000 of the funds in dispute. This would be accounted for in the next two to three weeks.

The service will have to present audited accounts for the money it gets up to December 31 before next year's grant is approved.

Mr. Coe said Senator Cavanagh had accused the legal service of organising the demonstration in Canberra a fortnight ago in which the Prime Minister (Mr. Whitlam) was jeered.

It had been organised by the Organisation for Aboriginal Unity, he said.

He said Senator Cavanagh had "more or less implied" that recent death threats he had received had been an attempt to put political pressure on him.

"I don't believe any death threats were made at all," Mr. Coe said.

Senator Cavanagh said it had been agreed there would be no extension of the legal service or appointment of more officers without his approval.

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