

Blacks give in to Govt

From MICHELLE GRATTAN

CANBERRA. — The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Senator Cavanagh) yesterday won a victory over the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee in the row over its powers.

Leaders of the NACC agreed the body would stick to an advisory role — for the present.

Their backdown ensured that members of the NACC will continue to get their pay of \$6000 a year, plus allowances.

However, the compromise has set the scene for another fight between the 41-member elected Aboriginal body and the Government later this year, when the body's role will again be considered.

Senator Cavanagh agreed that the Government would consider the body's proposed new constitution, which will seek executive powers.

The former chairman of the NACC (Mr. Bruce McGuinness) last night warned: "If the Government doesn't accept the NACC's constitution, we'll go ahead without Government support."

Senator Cavanagh met six NACC leaders for an hour yesterday.

The meeting was called after Senator Cavanagh said on Friday he no longer had power to pay NACC members because they had changed their name and functions.

Last week the NACC decided to call themselves the "National Aboriginal Congress" to show they were not content with their advisory role and elected their own "council of Ministers".

They also called for control over the Government's Budget for Aboriginal affairs, and said Senator Cavanagh should immediately resign.

After yesterday's meeting, Mr. McGuinness said the congress had accepted that for the present its primary role was to advise the Government. It would go back to the name NACC.

However, the proposed constitution — which will be submitted to Senator Cavanagh soon, and is expected to be discussed at a meeting between the Minister and the NACC in April — would provide for a "dual role."

This would be partly advisory and partly executive.

Mr. McGuinness said Senator Cavanagh had told the delegation the Government did not have the power to fund an executive body called a "congress" under the terms of the original Cabinet decision.

Mr. McGuinness said: "We'll ask the Government to recognise the change in our role in the new constitution."

He said he was certain the committee would not agree to accept a merely advisory role on a permanent basis.

Mr. McGuinness said if Senator Cavanagh did not take the NACC's advice, "then he and the Government will become the brunt of the wrath of the Aboriginal people."



Senator Cavanagh greets the president of the National Aboriginal Council (Mr. McGuinness) before their talks in the Senator's office in Parliament House yesterday.

Senator Cavanagh said in a statement after the meeting that when the new constitution was finalised it would be submitted to the Government to seek approval for the alterations.

"Any questions that may arise if the Government rejects the altered constitution would be for decision of the NACC delegates," he said.

This means that Senator Cavanagh has left it up to Cabinet to determine whether the NACC should be given wider powers.

He has also indicated that if Cabinet rejects the proposals for wider powers the NACC will have to decide whether to "go it alone" without Government support.

Eleven executive members of the NACC will meet in Canberra next week to finalise last week's business and send the recommendations to Senator Cavanagh.

Yesterday's meeting was also attended by the permanent head of the Aboriginal Affairs Department (Mr. Barrie Dexter).

Before the meeting Senator Cavanagh and Mr. Dexter discussed the situation for 75 minutes.

Other NACC members who attended yesterday's meeting were Mr. E. Bennell (president chairman), Mr. Philip Hall (acting general secretary), Mr. Keith Smith (NSW), Mr. Keith Saunders (Qld.) and Mr. Tom Williams (New South Wales).