

MPs in uproar on black 'siege'

CANBERRA. — The Prime Minister (Mr. Whitlam) yesterday called Mr. Sinclair (CP, NSW) a "contemptible creature" in an angry exchange over last Thursday's gun incident at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr. Sinclair, the Deputy Leader of the Country Party, had asked for an assurance that neither Mr. Whitlam nor any member of his personal staff, including his economic adviser, Dr. H. C. Coombs, was associated with a conspiracy over the incident.

In the heated crossfire at Question Time, Mr. Whitlam called the Country Party a "rabble" and said he would not shield anyone who had broken the law or contributed to perverting the course of justice.

The Attorney-General (Senator Murphy) said yesterday that A.C.T. police were expected next week to complete a new inquiry into the gun incident at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs office in Canberra.

Black activist Bobby McLeod, 26, was arrested at the office last Thursday after four senior public servants had been held at gunpoint.

In Canberra Court next day, McLeod pleaded guilty to carrying an unlicensed firearm and was

fined \$40. The court was told the gun was not loaded.

On Tuesday this week, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Senator Cavanagh) told the Senate the gun was loaded.

On Wednesday, Senator Murphy ordered a full investigation, and Mr. Whitlam said the inquiry was designed to find out whether there was a miscarriage of justice or a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

Mr. Whitlam told the House of Representatives yesterday he was completely satisfied with the way Senator Murphy and Senator Cavanagh had handled the affair.

Mr. Sinclair asked Mr. Whitlam if the reason for his satisfaction was that there was more to the incident than met the eye.

He asked for an assurance that neither Mr. Whitlam nor any member of his personal staff, including Dr. Coombs, was associated with a conspiracy.

Mr. Whitlam, on a point of order said: "I am used to the contemptible conduct of this honorable gentleman."

He said Mr. Sinclair had brought into a Question without Notice a man of honor and capacity who had served successive governments.

The speaker (Mr. Cope) ruled the question out of order. He said no person should be named

critically in a Question without Notice.

After Mr. Sinclair rephrased the question, Mr. Whitlam said Mr. Sinclair's capacity to astonish the House — and maybe the public insofar as it was aware of him — showed no sign of diminishing.

Mr. Sinclair, in the preface to his question, had mentioned the name of Dr. Coombs, who Mr. Whitlam said had given loyal and distinguished service to Australia and every postwar Prime Minister.

[Dr. Coombs was chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs under the Liberal-Country Party Government.]

"The fact that successive Country Party Ministers, particularly successive Country Party Ministers for the Interior, found his attitude on Aborigines unacceptable and unpalatable is to Dr. Coombs' credit and to the discredit of the Country Party," Mr. Whitlam said.

In the uproar which followed the Speaker warned the Leader of the Country Party (Mr. Anthony).

Mr. Whitlam was again interrupted when he said: "If the Deputy Leader of the Country Party had asked this question of any of the rabble who interjects beside him . . ."