

# Bryant in row on black cash

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## Department places blame on Minister

From MICHELLE GRATTAN

**CANBERRA.** — A major row is developing between the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and its former Minister, Mr. Bryant, over who is to blame for financial mismanagement in the department.

The conflict is certain to erupt when Mr. Bryant and the department head, Mr. Barrie Dexter, give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee next month in its inquiry on the Auditor-General's report.

The Auditor-General (Mr. Steele Craik), in his report tabled this week, accused the department of serious financial irregularities, ignoring the law and failing to exercise due economy.

The department has placed much of the blame on Mr. Bryant.

The all-party Public Accounts Committee began its inquiry yesterday by calling for submission from the Aboriginal Affairs Department, the Australian National University, the Treasury and the Public Service Board.

Mr. Bryant told Federal Parliament yesterday he had followed normal procedures when ordering expenditure on Aboriginal projects.

He was replying to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Lynch), who asked if the department had ordered expenditure for projects introduced by the Minister without regular statutory checks by the Treasury or the Auditor-General.

Later, a spokesman for Mr. Bryant said Mr. Bryant had asked Mr. Dexter last July to hold an internal audit. But it appears no internal audit was set up until December.

The spokesman also said that in January last year Mr. Bryant asked the department to set up a system of financial control.

However, the department, in its reply to the Auditor-General's questions, has blamed many of its troubles on Mr. Bryant.

It is expected to argue to the Public

Accounts Committee that many irregular practices occurred because Mr. Bryant entered into commitments without consulting the department.

The first the department heard of some of these commitments was when they received the accounts, the department maintains.

The department will also say that serious administrative problems were caused by the slowness of the Public Service system in establishing the departments' own management service.

The Public Accounts Committee decided yesterday to deal first with the sections of the Auditor-General's report covering control over grants under the Aboriginal Affairs Trust Account, the Torres Strait turtle and crocodile projects, aid to the Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, and spending incurred in setting up the National Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

The chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, Senator McAuliffe (Lab., Qld) said the committee would call for further submissions next week.

The public examination of witnesses was expected to begin in early April, he said.

Although it has not yet been decided who will be called to give evidence, it seems certain Mr. Bryant will appear.

"No one will be excepted," Senator McAuliffe said.

He said former Liberal and Country Party Ministers might also be called.

The committee will meet Mr. Craik on Tuesday to discuss his report.