

Cavanagh has win in dispute

ABORIGINAL BODY TO BE 'ADVISORY'

CANBERRA.— The National Aboriginal Congress yesterday backed down in its dispute with the Aboriginal Affairs Minister (Senator Cavanagh).

The congress agreed to return to its advisory role on aboriginal affairs following a special meeting with Senator Cavanagh.

The agreement means that the 41 members of the body will not lose their \$6000 pay plus allowances.

A member of the aboriginal deputation which attended the talks, Mr. Bruce McGuinness, 34, of Melbourne, said last night: "We accept our responsibility to the Government."

Last Friday Senator Cavanagh said he had no authority from Cabinet to pay members of the congress after their decision to change their name from the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee to the National Aboriginal Congress. The congress also decided to change its

functions from being an adviser to demand a more direct say in aboriginal affairs.

It called for complete control over the \$117 million budget allocation to the Aboriginal Affairs Department.

Senator Cavanagh accused the body of never having fulfilled their advisory role.

Senator Cavanagh told yesterday's deputation from the congress that an urgent check with the Treasury and Attorney-General's Department had confirmed that he had no authority to pay the body if it insisted that the consultative committee did not exist.

However, despite the deputation's decision that the congress would revert to its advisory role as the consultative com-

mittee, it will continue as the congress until the new constitution is finished.

The constitution will be presented to Senator Cavanagh at a meeting in April when a final decision on the future of the congress will be made.

Mr. McGuinness, one of the nine "ministers" elected by the congress, said the deputation had admitted that the primary role of the congress was to advise.

That was until the Government either accepted or rejected the terms of the constitution.

"We will ask that they recognise the change with our role when we put in the new constitution," he said.

But if the Government rejected the constitution he was "80 per cent sure" that the congress would not accept being kept to a purely advisory role.

Made clear

However, Senator Cavanagh has made it clear that the Government will not accept the congress operating outside the role which it envisaged for it.

He appears certain to succeed in forcing this point at the April meeting.

Mr. McGuinness said the congress existed at present as a forum which would act as a negotiator

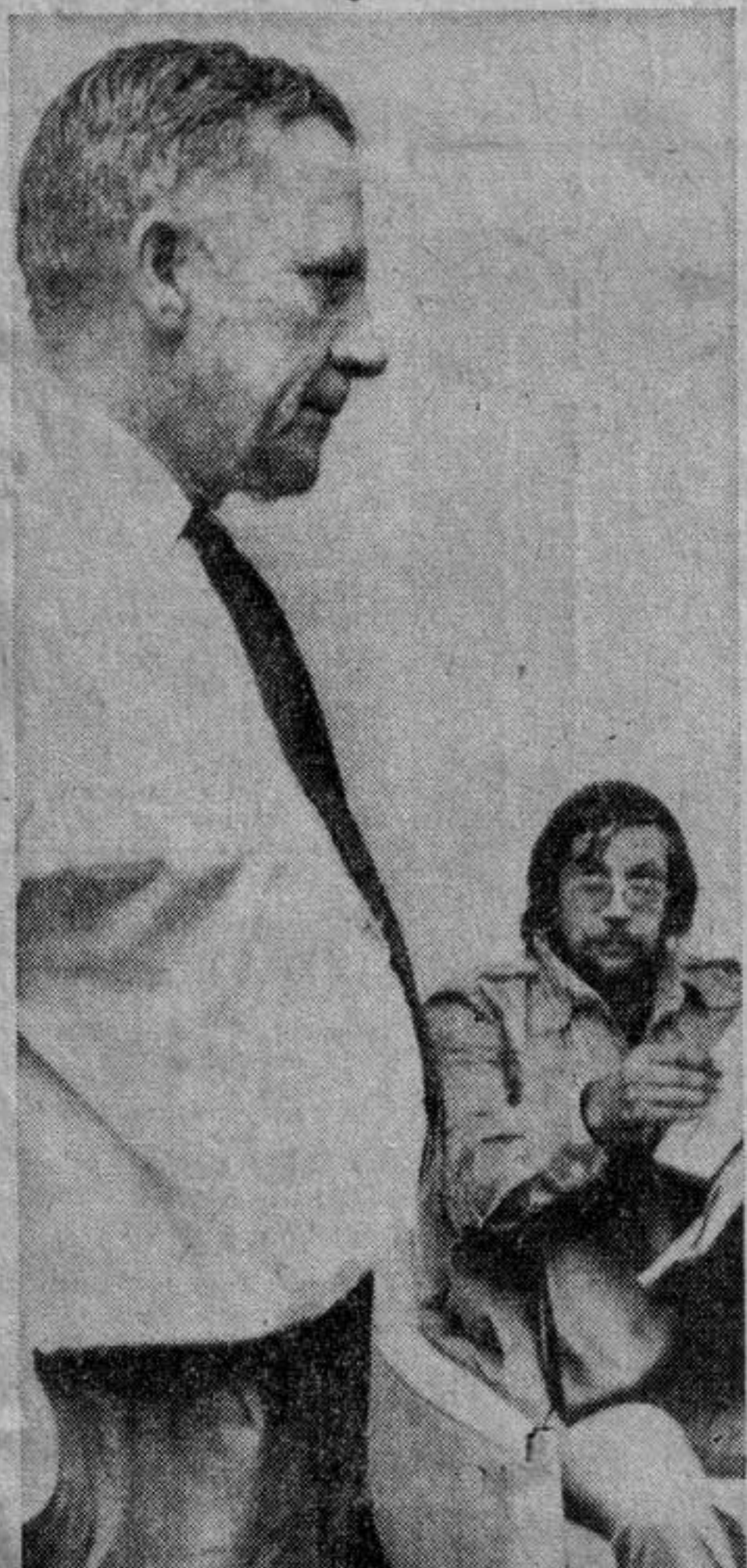
"The other purpose that we have, and the other responsibility that we have, is that we were by Cabinet and by an Act of Parliament accepted as the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee," he said.

Will remain

"We have agreed to accept this responsibility and to remain as such until such time as a proposal accompanying the constitution of the N.A.C. is forwarded to the Minister and in turn to Cabinet for their approval."

He hoped the committee would meet Senator Cavanagh frequently.

Mr. McGuinness said the deputation had made it clear that aborigines — not necessarily through the congress — wanted to become a part of the decision-making process for the expenditure of money in aboriginal affairs. (This is part of Labor's policy).



SENATOR CAVANAGH and the National Aboriginal Council president Mr. Bruce McGuinness before they began talks at