

Aborigines in power fight — Cavanagh

From our Canberra Bureau

CANBERRA — The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Senator Cavanagh) last night blamed a power fight among urban Aborigines for his showdown with the National Aboriginal Congress.

He accused those involved in the fight of using the body to further their own interests.

The dispute with Senator Cavanagh arose after the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee last week changed its name to the National Aboriginal Congress.

It also changed its function from that of an advisory body to one demanding a much more direct say in the handling of Aboriginal affairs.

On Friday night Senator Cavanagh said he would stop the payment of salaries to the 41-member body.

This was because he had authority from the Cabinet to pay a body known only as the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, not one known as the National Aboriginal Congress.

The members receive \$6,000 each a year plus allowances.

Senator Cavanagh said last night he believed the pay would stop from Friday last week.

However, he has ordered his

department to check today on the position with Treasury officials.

"I would say their pay stopped on Friday as a result of their now changed position," he said.

Senator Cavanagh said the urban Aborigines had used the NACC in their power fight.

It was not the body's function to tell the Minister what to do, but to advise him.

"If I can persuade them to give this away we will get on all right," he said.

"They have got a false idea that popularity comes from condemning the Minister, the department and the Government.

"But that's not the case, judging by the information I have got this week-end."

Senator Cavanagh said he had received phone calls from "several" members of the congress over the week-end supporting his stand.

He also had received calls giving support from Aboriginal organisations.

He accused the body of never having fulfilled its role of an advisory committee.

"On no occasion have they given any advice to the Minister at all," Senator Cavanagh said.

"The congress will not continue in its present role.

"If it is prepared to agree to become a consultative committee, then I have got authority to pay it."

The chairman of the congress (Mr. Bruce McGuinness) said at the week-end he wanted to arrange an early meeting with Senator Cavanagh to discuss the matter.

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