

Man who carried gun free on bond

An Aboriginal who held four public servants hostage for about two hours at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on Thursday was released yesterday on a \$50 bond to be of good behaviour for 12 months.

Mr Robert Arthur John McLeod, 26, entertainer, of Scrivener Street, O'Connor, pleaded guilty before Mr Nicholl, SM, in Canberra Petty Sessions to carrying a pistol between the hours of 7am and 7pm while unlicensed to do so. Mr McLeod was ordered to pay \$40 to the Commonwealth within 28 days.

About 30 Aborigines, including Mr Charles Perkins and the former chairman of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, Mr Bruce McGuinness, and Aboriginal supporters, attended the court at Mr McLeod's hearing.

Sergeant Arthur Brown, of the Canberra CID, said he had spoken to Mr McLeod at about 4pm in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs building about a .22 calibre revolver that had been handed to him.

Mr McLeod had admitted it was his but said he did not have a licence for it.

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Sergeant Brown said the revolver was unloaded and there was no evidence of any ammunition. Mr McLeod had been very co-operative at all times and was not at all violent, he said.

Mr Charles Perkins said he had known Mr McLeod for about 10 years and during that time he had found him to be very co-operative and honest.

In recent times he had become increasingly committed to the Aboriginal cause for justice, he said.

He had discussed with Mr McLeod yesterday the problems facing Aborigines and they had agreed the Aboriginal situation had reached a crisis point.

More money was available to Aborigines now but nothing seemed to be getting through, he said.

"Over the years nothing's really changed", he said.

He thought Mr McLeod had made his protest to make people sit up and listen.

If he had walked in there with a boomerang and a spear, people would just have laughed at him.

Another witness to the incident on Thursday, Mr Selwyn Hausman, said he had taken the pistol from Mr McLeod and had given it to the police.

When the Press had arrived he had surrendered the pistol.

Earlier, the pistol had sometimes been on view

but was mostly in Mr McLeod's pocket.

No one had been actually threatened by the pistol.

Appearing for Mr McLeod, Mr T. J. Higgins, submitted that the incident had been over-emphasised by the Press.

Mr McLeod had intended to demonstrate that violence might break out if the problems of Aborigines continued to be ignored.

Mr Higgins said it was a serious political gesture and Mr McLeod had not thought about himself until afterward.

He submitted that none of the people had felt physically threatened and that imprisonment in this case would be tragic.

Mr Nicholl said it appeared that Mr McLeod had used the pistol for political purposes to draw attention to causes he thought valid — to improve conditions for the Aboriginal people.

However, the pistol had been carried in a very public area where some unhappy consequences might have followed even though the pistol was unloaded, he said.

Mr Pearson said that it seemed to him that the interests of the community and of justice would be best served if Mr McLeod recorded a conviction but without passing sentence and to order Mr McLeod's release upon his entering into a recognisance of \$50 on his own surety to be of good behaviour for 12 months.

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