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Seats for Aborigines

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CANBERRA.—Direct representation for Aborigines in State and Federal Parliaments was advocated at the weekend by the Federal Opposition's Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Beazley).

He was speaking at the annual conference of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, which met in Canberra over the weekend.

Mr. Beazley said he was giving a personal opinion. Direct representation was not yet part of the Labor Party's platform.

He said in the Northern Territory and at least three other States with large Aboriginal populations — Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia — immediate provision should

be made for Aborigines to elect their own political representatives.

This could not be done at the Federal level without a constitutional amendment to enable Aboriginal electorates to transcend State and territory boundaries.

Mr. Beazley said he envisaged creation of separate Aboriginal voting rolls and reservation of a specific number of parliamentary seats based on the size of the adult Aboriginal population.

This had been done many years ago in New Zealand for Maoris and had led to dramatic improvement in their economic and social status.

"Here in Australia we have to stop hiding behind this defence that we can't see race.

"I believe it would make a very significant difference to the rate of Aboriginal advancement if Aborigines

were elected to Parliament by their own people," Mr. Beazley said.

"This would give them real authority to speak out on behalf of the Aboriginal cause."

Later, during an outspoken debate on Aboriginal power, Mr. Neville Bonner an Aboriginal candidate on the Queensland Liberal Party's ticket for the Senate election was accused of being a "black Judas" and "a traitor to his race" by a young fellow Aborigine.

The charge was made by Mr. Paul Coe of Cowra, NSW, who claimed the Liberal-Country Party Federal coalition was a "near fascist" Government.

He said later the basis for his attack on Mr. Bonner was his failure some years ago to support a strike by Aborigines on the Palm Island reserve off the North Coast of Queensland.

In reply, Mr. Bonner told

the conference it was not the first time he had been accused of being an "Uncle Tom" and a traitor to his race.

"These things I deny. I am an Australian Aboriginal and I came up the hard way," Mr. Bonner said.

"What I have achieved, I have done because I was able to stand on my own two black feet."

Mr. Bonner said a man's religious and political beliefs were his own concern.

"I'm going to do what I can to promote the advancement of my race. If my beliefs don't accord with yours, then that's just too bad," he added.

Mr. Bonner received a loud round of applause when he stepped down from the platform and later speakers, including some Labor Party members, supported his right to belong to the Liberal Party.

A group of Northern Territory Aborigines had asked the Federal Government for financial help to buy a 900 square mile cattle station before it is taken over by American interests, the conference was told.

The group claims the owner, Mr. Edgar Parkinson, wants to sell for health reasons and is anxious for them to have it.

The conference unanimously called on the Go-

vernment to give immediate financial support.

The property, Willowra station, 180 miles north of Alice Springs, is home to about 150 people of the Walbiri tribe who live and work there.

One of them, Mr. "Stumpy" Martin, told the conference that his people wanted to run the property on a co-operative basis — using expert advice wherever necessary.