

# BLACK & WHITE JOIN IN DEMONSTRATION FOR GURINDJI LAND

By Alec Robertson

ALL DOWN George Street, Sydney, shoppers in their hundreds were startled first by the challenging voice, then by the sight of black and white people marching together, headed by ranks of young Aborigines.

It was the opening phase of a 2½-hour demonstration last Friday. It marked a new and higher stage in the militant direct-action campaign of solidarity with the Gurindji people's struggle for restoration by Vestey's Ltd. of 500 square miles of their original lands around Wattle Creek, NT.

The demonstration began at 3 p.m. at the Empress Hotel, Redfern, a near-city area where thousands of Aboriginal workers and their families live.

In an impromptu meeting in the public bar, Aborigines Paul Coe (Sydney) and Dexter Daniel (visiting from the Territory), and author Frank Hardy spoke briefly of the theft of Aboriginal tribal lands everywhere by companies and the Government.

They called on the Aboriginal drinkers to join in the march to support the Gurindji land occupation, as a focal point at present in the Aboriginal freedom struggle.

Outside waited more Aborigines and about 100 white demonstrators, many of them students. Dozens of police were visible, but the authorities' unusual concern first became clear in the fact that NSW Police Commissioner Allan was seen inspecting the scene.

From the moment when the march set off from the hotel until, around 5.45 p.m. and following some 45 arrests, the mass demonstration dispersed from Vestey's building, 255 George Street, three important facts became clear:—

## Dozens of Aborigines

1. The participation of several dozen Aboriginal men, women and children in unity with white demonstrators, was a major development in a campaign that had already demonstrated its militancy through raids on super-markets to promote the public boycott of Vestey's food products.

Determined young Aborigines headed the march, often with arms round each other's shoulders. Student Paul Coe and Dexter Daniel took turns in making a running speech through the portable loudspeaker, all along the 1½-mile route through the city...

"You white Australians who go home to your comfortable homes, your families, your TV sets...do you think about the thousands of Aboriginal children who sicken and die in poverty and degradation in the interior of Australia?... You have got to shake off your complacency because we black people are going to fight for the human dignity everyone should have...and at present you are sharing the guilt with the white governments and companies that oppress us..."

Alongside the march, which grew to some 150, scores of police paced in single file, violently thrusting the marchers back each time they attempted to move off the footpath.

But the general public response was obviously sympathetic.

## Police aggressiveness

2. It was clear, from the entire police operation, that the State Government had given a much higher priority to containing this demonstration than had been shown two weeks earlier at the initial sit-in and demonstration at the Vestey HQ.

Hundreds of police were in position in and around the building, where supporters soon swelled the demonstration to around 2000.

Within minutes of arrival there, the demonstration leaders lost their microphone and speaker set, ripped apart by police in a sudden, unprovoked attack. People were thrown down, a few arrests were made.

The demonstration had been publicised as a musical

and poetry-reading session outside Vestey's. When the hired truck with loudspeakers drove up, police threw the driver out and drove it away again.

The organisers regained the truck and began bringing it back through a nearby side street, summoning the demonstrators to help them. A huge crowd grew, as scores of police rushed in to arrest the driver and also Frank Hardy, who was addressing the crowd.

The band broke into "The Red Flag" before they, too, were dragged down. Then, and later again in front of Vestey's, police were given the go-ahead to wade in with fists, boots and knees.

This was clearly shown in the big TV coverage, one station reporting flatly that the police initiated the violence.

At least one of the several Aborigines arrested was booted in the ribs.

Young girls were dragged by the hair and thrown heavily to the roadway, before being arrested. At least two of them were high school students.

Those punched and then arrested included CPA national secretary Laurie Aarons, who suffered a black eye and cracked nose.

3. There was a new air of aggressive impatience among the police, two sources of which suggested themselves.

Their repeated drives to prevent prolonged occupation of the footpath outside Vestey's building suggested that the multi-million company has demanded State Government action to defend it against the campaign of exposure.

The fact that some police are not happy about being forced to defend such racist exploiters and land monopolists was revealed later at police stations by a number of individual police who admitted sympathy with the Gurindji demands.

Another significant fact was the heavy increase in bail amounts fixed, in association with fictitious charges against most of the arrested. Minimum bail was \$50 and some ranged from \$100 to \$200. One policeman admitted they were under warning of disciplinary action if they did not fix bail at the level of the maximum fine for the offence charged.

This policy change suggested the second source: the announced intention of the State Government to stiffen laws and penalties against demonstrators, "vagrants" and others, in an attempt to stifle political dissent.

The racist attitudes of some police and the rough physical treatment and the \$200 bail imposed on one Aboriginal militant, on four charges, made it clear that the traditional police method of silencing Aborigines by brutality and intimidation is being reaffirmed at this important point in the Aborigines' land struggle.

## Supermarkets

On Saturday morning, supermarket raids to extend the boycott on Vestey's products extended to Berkely, on the South Coast. Waterside workers and women were among the demonstrators who filled trolleys with canned Imperial meat, Donald Cook vegetables and other items, then loudly denounced the company while refusing to buy the goods.

In Sydney, a group of demonstrators, including one girl who had been arrested in the Friday action, did the same at Grace Bros. supermarket, Bondi Junction.

In both cases, the demonstrators fixed arrangements for new raids next Saturday.

The Save the Gurindji campaign is staging a public meeting next Friday night at the Teachers' Auditorium to launch its \$50,000 fund to help the Gurindji build their permanent settlement at Wattle Creek.