



NINGLA-A-Na (Hungry for our Land)

When this film was begun in 1972, an Aboriginal Tent Embassy had been standing on the front lawns of Parliament House in Canberra for almost six months.

Then July 14 saw the Black Moratorium on land rights in Sydney where Black marchers were joined for the first time by massive white support. Establishment reaction to this display of solidarity was the destruction of the Aboriginal Embassy.

As a result, Blacks prepared to fight for their rights on a national basis, for the first time in Australian history.

Police repression is a fact of life for most Blacks, and in a mood of fear and anger they prepared to face heavy odds at the centre of Australian political affairs. Two busloads of Brisbane blacks, led by Dennis Walker, were already on their way to Canberra, and on the Friday night another contingent left Sydney with white supporters.

The events of the weekend are clear enough on film — an overwhelming police force designed to cow and terrify the protesters — a policy of disabling or injuring Aboriginal leaders — a refusal to negotiate on any terms with what was called an 'unrepresentative group'. Also apparent was the lack of heavy-weight support for the protest — the politicians and most Australians were content to sit back at home and watch it on TV, and it was up to students and blacks to fight it alone. The resulting spectacle was enough to embarrass even the Liberal Government, as beefy cops slugged it out with blacks, students, women, and girls over

the symbolic raising of a few square yards of canvas and some tattered flags.

There were many arrests, some broken bones, but above all the Government attitude to blacks had been publicised at last — they were a nuisance, an eyesore, an embarrassment. But the effort of putting them back in their places was even more so.

As the protesters regrouped during the third week for another attempt, it was obvious that government policy was hurriedly changing. As the crew were filming less spectacular evidence of black social needs and solutions — the breakfast program — the Aboriginal Medical Service — the Minister for the Interior was trying to strike bargains with the black spokesmen.

Ignoring calls for 'patience' and moderation, black communities prepared to march again the following week, expecting even more violence. Instead, perhaps because of growing public sympathy, the situation developed a carnival atmosphere, with black theatre being performed before an audience of supporters, press, and police, and the tattered symbol of the Embassy being hurled onto the steps of Parliament House in derision.

For the first time in 200 years of white domination, Aboriginals had confronted the Government at a national level, and, in the words of Bobbi Sykes, 'scored a political victory'.

With such movements as the National Black Theatre, the Medical Service, the Legal Service, the Aboriginal Embassy, this film shows the development of a new Black consciousness that relates to urban conditions and also regenerates strong tribal and community traditions.

Director — Alessandro Cavadini; photography — Ian Stocks; editor — Ronda Macgregor. (1972)