

Churchman wants full inquiry into Walgett crash

SYDNEY, Tuesday.—A grazier's son is to be charged by summons with negligent and dangerous driving, following the crash of a bus carrying 30 university students near Walgett last night.

The announcement today brought immediate criticism from a Sydney Methodist minister, the Rev. T. D. Noffs, who said the man should have been arrested if the police had material evidence.

Mr. Noffs said a truck made three attempts to run the bus off the road, and demanded a full police inquiry into what he called "an incident as serious as any in the United States."

The N.S.W. Premier, Mr. Renshaw, whose electorate, Castlereagh, includes Walgett, disagreed with Mr. Noffs' charges that someone tried to kill the students and that race hatred was responsible.

'Could have been killed'

The students, who are campaigning in country areas against discrimination against Aborigines, were leaving Walgett when their bus was

forced off the road. There were no untoward incidents when the students drove into Moree today.

The leader of the campaigning freedom supporters, Mr. Charles Perkins, 29, said today that if the ditch the bus ran into had been much deeper or the bus driver any less skilful some of the students could have been killed.

The students, shaken but unhurt, walked back to Walgett to report the incident to the police.

The crash climaxed a day during which the students demonstrated against racial discrimination at the Walgett R.S.L. Club and at a frock shop.

Made third attempt

Mr. Perkins, a part Aboriginal, said a truck approached from behind the bus at about 10.30.

"It tried to force the bus off a bridge just outside of town," he said.

"We missed the railings of the bridge by about an inch.

"The driver managed to pull up in time, but a few minutes later the truck again came up again and swerved towards the bus, trying to force it into a ditch.

"When this attempt failed the truck returned, hitting the bus's front end and forcing it off the road.

"If the ditch had been a foot deeper we all would have had it."

Charge 'far-fetched'

Mr. Noffs and Mr. Renshaw gave differing reports on the incident.

Mr. Noffs said after a telephone conversation with Mr. Perkins, "This incident is as serious as any that has occurred in the racial strife in the United States. Somebody tried to kill these students.

"It has revealed the seriousness of the racial problem in Australia.

"Not all the people in Walgett are like this, but there is a small, vicious group which apparently feels it should stop at nothing to achieve its ends."

Mr. Renshaw said his information about the incident came from a "prominent and respected Walgett citizen.

'Exhibitionism, not hatred'

No one denied that the bus had been run off the road, he said, but the suggestion of attempted murder was "rather far-fetched."

There had been two side-swappings, not three, as Mr. Noffs said.

He understood the side-swapping of the bus was exhibitionism, said the Premier. Walgett police were satisfied the incident was in no way anti-Aboriginal, but was "flashiness and showing-off."

There had been little danger for the students in the bus, but his informant was afraid the matter would be completely taken out of character.

The people of the district judged everyone on their behaviour, and not on the colour of their skin.

Talking of assimilation, Mr. Renshaw said, "This is not a problem to be solved in a day. It may take generations."

Mr. Renshaw said he had not seen instances of Aborigines in Walgett having to stand while eating in cafes.

He had seen both Aborigines and white people swimming together in the local pool, and knew of Aborigines winning mixed races there.

Nearby areas white and Aboriginal people mixed in the same hall for dancing, and Aboriginal girls had been debutantes in the district.

The Walgett Church of England's officials had refuse the students the right to sleep in the church hall because there were some girls in the bus party, the Premier said.

Will leave it to police

Servicemen's clubs at Moree, Lismore, Taree, and Lismore are considering putting guards on their premises "to prevent trouble" from the student group.

An R.S.L. official at Kempsey said he would let police handle the campaigners.

"There are a number of Aborigines here but no discrimination," he said. "I think the police would be very interested in the activities of these students."

A steward at the Moree Services Club forecast trouble if the students picketed the club.

"There is no discrimination in Moree," he said.

"The black fellows get a fair go. There are four in our club, black as your boots and real gentlemen. They're diggers

"We had a phone call from Walgett about these students. There could be trouble—a few punch-ups—if they get cheeky, but we don't want any bother."

The Sydney students are staying at the Moree Methodist Church, and are expected to remain in the town until Thursday before moving on to Kempsey or Warwick.

Mr. Perkins said the students would ask people in Moree their views on Aborigines.

"We are planning no demonstrations, but there could be a debate," he said.