

Confusion over Aboriginals

SIR—The confusion and division that reigned at the recent Canberra Annual Conference of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, was advantageous to only one body, the Federal Government.

Due to the debate as to whether FCAATSI was to remain a multi-racial organisation or become an all-black body, scant attention was paid to the vital issues that concern Aborigines — health, housing, education, land rights, legislative reform, wages and employment were disregarded during the bitter power struggle. The Federal Government escaped criticism of its administration during the past three years since the May 1967 Referendum by default. The 13-year-old Federal council that has been responsible for most of the significant changes in public attitudes and in government action, now stands effectively silenced as a united voice of the black minority and the white majority who sought to work together for Aboriginal rights and advancement.

Those whites who opposed black power domination were accused of a multitude of sins by other whites and Aborigines who claimed that FCAATSI was "white dominated."

Those who screamed loudest about "Whites controlling the destinies of the Aborigines" failed to illustrate one incident where the executive made a decision that was against the wishes of the Aborigines or in conflict with their expressed aspirations.

Differences of opinion that occurred were on administrative rather than ideological grounds and there was no evidence to suggest that people voted together as a racial bloc. One would hardly expect an executive of 25 to be unanimous on every issue that came before them. What made a mockery of the argument put forward by the black power group, was that the emphasis was placed on eliminating white voting rather than res-

structuring Federal Council so that the control of FCAATSI is not in the hands of the States with the least number of Aborigines.

At present votes are allocated to organisations rather than on the basis of Aboriginal population.

We opposed an all-black FCAATSI for the following reasons:

First a national organisation, whether it be white or black, is extremely difficult to manage. It requires the skills, abilities and knowhow of a wide range of people. Once having asked or elected a man to join a committee, you cannot then deny him the right to vote on a decision he may be forced to implement.

Second, the move would tend to alienate many white individuals and organisations who would interpret this as reverse racism, and finally because the charges had no basis in fact and were part of a plan to divide and effectively silence the Federal Council as the only unified voice capable of criticising the actions of the various State and Federal governments.

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(Mr Cohen (A.L.P.) is a member of the Federal Parliament representing Robertson, NSW.)

Disagrees

I READ recently an article in *The Australian* about the bicentenary celebrations, in which Mrs Kathleen Walker was quoted as saying that

Aboriginals should demonstrate.

As an Aboriginal I feel that this is wrong because I, for one, am proud to be an Australian and I feel that instead of demonstrating we should join in the celebrations.

We are all Australians and we should not feel any different from anyone else. Some of our ancestors were killed by Captain Cook but he only killed them to protect his men from the, then, wild natives.

Mrs Walker does not speak for me and I feel that many other Aborigines feel the same as I do.

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