

'In the future there is sure to be turmoil and bitterness'

# Black Power — a call for dignity

'THOU shalt think black and act black' goes the commandment. It is a black commandment and it comes from Mrs. Kath Walker, poetess-prophet of Australia's infant Black Power movement.

Mrs. Walker is a reed of a woman, full of nervous energy, determinedly black-and-proud-of-it.

Over Easter, at the annual conference of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, Mrs. Walker wore a red head band in memory of the vanished tribes. So did a six-month-old baby girl, young men in jeans, and matronly women.

The issue of Black Power split the conference and in the future there is sure to be turmoil and bitterness.

This could have grave consequences for the advancement of Australia's 140,000 Aborigines, with white supporters of their cause confused and sometimes hurt.

The issue at the conference was simply whether Aborigines alone should have the right to vote and make key decisions or whether control of the council should remain multi-racial.

## Logical

There are logical arguments on both sides though the case for control by Aborigines, who have the advice and guidance of Europeans, seems the stronger.

But logic will be lost in emotionalism if the events of the conference are any guide.

Most of the calls for "Black Power" are no

by  
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more than calls for dignity and self-respect. In a heated situation, however, some people might interpret them as outbursts of black racism.

One incident at the conference has so far gone unnoticed. It could lead to a furor and heat the argument further, though it definitely should not.

In the dying minutes a young black man spoke. He was not an Aborigine, but a Tolai. John Kaputin

has been described as "symbolic of all that many Europeans in the territory of Papua and New Guinea despise and fear".

Mr. Kaputin, a Mataungan association sympathiser, chided the Aborigines. The Mataungans, he told them, had accomplished more in one year than the council had in 13.

He was not referring to the violence in Rabaul, but to the efforts of the association to give the Tolai people a sense of identity.

For Mr. Kaputin, the black Australians face the same problem as the Papuan and New Guineans.

He has been portrayed as bitterly anti-white. He is not.

Mr. Kaputin wants cooperation and equality between the races but says to achieve this his people must be able to make their own decisions and, most of all be given their proper role in the economic structure.

There are no simple answers to the complex problems confronting black Australians and the Papuans and New Guineans.

What will be vital in the process will be an understanding by the Federal Government of what they are saying. At times the Government has shown little willingness even to listen.

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