

An embassy of their own

WHEN Canberra police forcibly removed the Aboriginal tent "embassy" last week, on orders from an embarrassed Federal Government, they removed a symbol. What they did not succeed in stamping out as well was the determination of some Aboriginal groups to be represented physically and permanently in the national capital. Already one attempt has been made to re-establish the tent embassy. Like the writ, taken out by four members of the embassy staff in an effort to have the close-down order rescinded, it was unsuccessful. Undeterred, however, the embassy staff has been talking with the Minister for the Interior (Mr. Hunt) in an effort to have their "diplomatic mission" re-established. On Sunday they and their supporters have called a further protest demonstration with the same objective. Observers fear it could prove more violent than the previous two protests.

Aborigines, as we have said many times before, have real and well-based grounds for their grievance. They have been treated,

and are still being treated, shamefully. Educationally, socially and in other ways, they are a deprived people. They have the vote, it is true; they have equality before the law; and in Mr. Howson they have a Minister to represent them in Canberra (though in fairness it should be pointed out that Aborigines are only one of Mr. Howson's 24 areas of responsibility). What Aborigines do not have is a physical centre which can serve both as a rallying point for their own people and a national base from which to carry out their fight for a better deal for themselves.

Is it too much to ask the Federal Government to provide them with such a centre, as the secretary of the tent embassy (Mrs. Eatock) has requested? We do not share her view that it should be given the recognition and status of an embassy; that is fantasy. But a modest centre, strategically located in Canberra and provided rent-free by the Government, could prove a useful contribution to the cause of Aboriginal advancement. Such a proposal, we concede, is not without its problems. For example, which of the various rival Aboriginal groups would be appointed to staff the centre? Who would have the say in their appointment? And which department would control the centre? Such problems are far from insuperable, however. Mrs. Eatock's plan is worth exploring.