

A matter of black and white

"IT'S HARD to be black and white on that issue," said Interior Minister Ralph Hunt when asked in a television post-mortem about the propriety of police action. But when the axe fell on the Aboriginal embassy opposite Parliament House in Canberra last week, appearances were against him.

The rationale for the timing of the affair had not become any clearer by the time the feds moved in to carry out Mr Hunt's work. The ordinance empowering police to remove campers on unleased Crown land had been gazetted just half an hour when they took action. Three tents were carefully taken down and then police bore down on the Aborigines and their white supporters circled around the embassy tent. The violence that followed was almost predictable.

The government cannot really believe that the affair ended with the removal of embassy tents. The new ordinance can be disallowed within 14 days of it being presented to federal parliament: it must be tabled and will certainly be challenged.

The government's attitude to the Aboriginal embassy has been consistently puzzling. Whenever the embassy's message has been flagging in terms of public interest, Hunt and his colleagues have provided the filip to revive it. Last week's action can only further polarise white and black. That and government inaction on the land rights issue, will very likely add fuel to the fire stoked by black extremists.



White-haired Labor MP Gordon Bryant tries to stop Aboriginal activist Bobby Sykes from intervening in one of the more violent arrests. Bryant and the ACT's Kep Enderby were the only Labor parliamentarians who kept their word and turned up for the last hours of the Aboriginal embassy



In Australia, the only piece of land they had reclaimed was snatched back, just a week after the token 24 hours of National Aborigines Day. In England, an unruffled Evonne Goolagong received her MBE from Queen Elizabeth