

Criticism follows 'embassy' action

The Government was strongly criticised yesterday over the removal of the Aboriginal "embassy" opposite Parliament House.

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Whitlam, said the Government had acted "forcibly and furtively" against the "embassy", and had completely disregarded its obligations to Parliament.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator Murphy, has lodged with Senate officers notice of a motion for the disallowance of the amended Trespass on Commonwealth Lands Ordinance, under which the "embassy" was removed.

He said yesterday that the ALP would also move an urgency motion "to have the whole issue of the Government's denial of Aboriginal rights debated fully".

Consider action

Members of the Aboriginal land-rights movement, including some who had been staying at the "embassy", met legal advisers last night to consider taking action against the ordinance.

Mr Whitlam congratulated the people who had manned the "embassy" since January 26 for their initiative and discipline, and said that as a result of their effort, thousands of Australians were now aware that the aspirations of a large section of the Aboriginal population could be satisfied only by recognising their right to land.

Mr Whitlam said that the Minister for the Interior, Mr Hunt, had promised "adequate public notice" of the coming into effect of the ordinance, but Parliament had been circumvented and no public notice given.

A spokesman for Mr Hunt said yesterday, "The Minister rejects any suggestion that he has not

given adequate notice and warning".

Speaking on the ABC television program "This Day Tonight" last night, Mr Hunt said that no Federal Government had been more sympathetic to the Aboriginal people's cause than the McMahon government.

"I know we have not solved anywhere the problems that you would like to see us solve", he said.

"Do give us time because we are sympathetic to the Aboriginal people".

Asked if he had any regrets about anything connected with the removal of the "embassy" Mr Hunt said he regretted that there was violence.

He put the blame "completely on the heads of those that started the violence, and they were the demonstrators".

The demonstrators had "deliberately locked their hands around that 'embassy' and tried to prevent the police from executing their duty. In such circumstances I don't think the police had any alternative but to do what they did. None of the arrests yes-

terday were in connection with the ordinance itself.

This was at the specific instruction of the Commissioner of the ACT Police, Mr R. A. Wilson.

His instruction was that people were to be allowed to stay to demonstrate or protest if they wished.

However, arrests were to be made only if people interfered with the police objective of removing the tents.

'Regret the violence'

Under the ordinance it is an offence punishable by \$50 fine to camp on unleased land in the Canberra area. Any structures involved must be removed within "a reasonable time" or, failing that, can be removed by the police.

In a statement issued last night, the chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Dr H. C. Coombs, said, "I have no comment to make on the closing of the 'embassy'. That is a Government decision and it is a matter for them.

"I regret the violence very much. The only comment I would make is that the closing of the 'embassy' has cut off one channel of protest open to Aborigines and others interested in their cause.

"But Aborigines and others have a right to protest about these matters and there remain other avenues of protest which I hope they will continue to use".

The secretary of the ACT Trades and Labour Council, Mr Ray O'Shannassy, said last night that he found it difficult to understand how the ACT Police Association could remain affiliated with the TLC after ACT Police had removed the "embassy".

The police action had been contrary to two resolutions adopted unanimously by the TLC.

The secretary of the ACT Police Association, Inspector P. D. McConaghy, said he preferred not to comment and he felt that Mr O'Shannassy should make his comments at a Trades and Labour Council meeting.

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Eight policemen hurt

Eight ACT policemen were injured as young Aborigines and their supporters violently resisted the removal of the Aboriginal "embassy" from the lawns opposite Parliament House.

One policeman had his wrist broken, another had his finger wrenched back until it broke and two were kicked in the groin. The other four sustained cuts and bruises.

Several demonstrators suffered minor injury. One was treated at Canberra Hospital after being knocked unconscious. The brother of a woman demonstrator, who declined to have her name published, said that his sister had been treated at

the ANU health service for cuts to her back, a dislocated knee and a bruise below her right eye. He said the service had also treated a male demonstrator for a bruised shoulder.

The police were acting on instructions to remove the collection of tents on the gazettal of the amended ordinance.

The police arrived opposite Parliament House at about 10.30am.

They ejected people in several tents behind the one which has been designated as the "chancery", pulling down the structures and placing them and their contents on trailers parked nearby.

Young Aborigines and students who had kept an overnight vigil on the lawns were joined by

others summoned by telephone as the police moved toward the "chancery".

At that time there were about 60 young people crowded around the tent. ACT Police Inspector W. Osborne attempted to address them over a loud hailer, informing them of the gazetting of the ordinance, and that the police were required to move the tent, but the group kept up a loud chant which drowned out his voice.

The Member for the ACT, Mr Enderby, told the youths that the police were only doing their duty, "although a pretty dirty duty it was".

Eight people were arrested and charged with hindering police in the execution of their duty and with assaulting police. Five of the arrested were Aborigines.