

Feb. 22: Land Rights Day

By MALCOLM SALMON

"Militancy was coming across from all trends in the Black community, from arch-conservative to extreme radical. . . Black unity seemed to be coming through."

— BRUCE McGUINNESS, VICTORIA

"I was struck by the solidarity of all the movements coming together on this one issue of Land Rights, and all that it means. I was also glad it came through that we want the Northern Territory to have full State rights, with a Black government. Whites might govern the area now, but there are very few resident there."

— BOBBI SYKES, VICTORIA

"The Black movement so far hasn't achieved much because the Establishment has always succeeded in setting it off on tangents and dividing it. But today was a beautiful demonstration of just what can be achieved. It wasn't founded on any particular ideology, just basic human rights."

— SAMMY WATSON, Jr., QUEENSLAND

In these words, three young Black activists summed up the February 22 land rights demonstration at the Aboriginal Embassy outside Parliament House which marked the opening of the current session of Federal Parliament.

Despite the fact of a near-complete blackout, in the media, the demonstration was one of the most significant Aboriginal actions ever, especially on the point of the unity of various trends mentioned by the participants quoted above.

The physical and financial problems involved in staging the demonstration were considerable: four motor coaches brought nearly 100 Blacks to Canberra from points as far apart as the NSW North Coast, Sydney, Melbourne and Shepparton (Goulburn Valley, Victoria).

Other Blacks were present from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Just as the speeches were drawing to a close, two representatives of the Gurindji tribe arrived, and Peter Lingiari conveyed solidarity greetings to the crowd, and assured them the Gurindji would not be moving until they had won their demands.

After two hours of speeches, about 40 Blacks, most of them young men wearing the red headband of the modern Black freedom movement, marched determinedly from their Embassy across



the forecourt to Parliament House and fanned into both Houses of Parliament, where they observed proceedings for the rest of the afternoon.

Chairman Charles ("Chicka") Dixon, of Sydney, set the tone for the day when he opened proceedings by welcoming "my beautiful Black brothers and sisters", and inviting all and sundry into "the wide and wonderful world of color".

Confidence and militancy were the keynotes of all speeches.

Michael Anderson, High Commissioner at the Aboriginal Embassy, told the crowd: "In 1770, Captain Cook claimed the continent for England. An Aboriginal threw a spear at him. He was shot. He stood in the way of the white man claiming his land.

"Two hundred and two years later we put down a beach umbrella outside the House of Parliament, proclaimed it our Embassy, and claimed our land.

"We are not moving from here until we get it."

Michael Anderson said: "I want to announce here and now that one of our demands is for full State rights for the Northern Territory under Aboriginal ownership and control.

"Our people outnumber the whites in the Northern Territory, and if we don't get what we