

# Black moral victory in Canberra

CANBERRA: "We have won a victory. The police gave us until 2 p.m. to pull down the Embassy. We are still here an hour later. The police have shown who was responsible for the events last Sunday in the police riot."

A spokesman of the Black caucus which organised the mass protest outside Parliament House last Sunday thus summed up the experience of the day.

Nearly 2000 marchers, led by 500 Aborigines, left the Australian National University (ANU) campus at 11.30 a.m. for the long march to Parliament House. Tension was high but determination and militancy was even higher in the largest — and most militant — demonstration Canberra has seen for many years.

After a series of meetings with Black organisers of the demonstration throughout the week, and the last on Saturday evening, Hunt and Howson had finally offered no room for compromise, offering only paternalist advice and showing a complete lack of sympathy or desire to act.

Events began on the Sunday morning with a Black caucus meeting at the ANU, which decided to go ahead, despite police threats, and attempt to once more erect the Embassy tent.

An all-in meeting of Blacks and white supporters was then informed of the caucus' decision. A joint Black and White strategy committee was elected and outlined plans for defence of the Embassy — rings of demonstrators circling round the tent in opposite directions, ready to hold off any police attack. Outside these protective rings, there would be four groups tightly organised to engage and break up any wedge attack from police before it could begin to penetrate the circling rings of demonstrators. The protesters were also told to actively attempt to rescue any demonstrator arrested.

Given the number present and the militant determination of the demonstrators, it would have taken many hundreds of police to break through and forcibly take down the tent. As it turned out, Hunt decided discretion was the better part of valor. The tent was hurriedly put up (after being smuggled along in the march in a protective ring) and the demonstrators began to circle it. No police appeared and after a few minutes the demonstrators sat down and began to listen to nearly three hours of speeches from Black speakers. All stressed their determination to resist any further attempt to pull the tent down and to press even further the struggle for land rights.

There were only two white speakers, Mr. Kep Enderby, MHR, for the ACT, and Mr. Bob Pringle, president of the Builders Laborers' Federation.

Enderby, who was the only ALP MHR present, was loudly hissed and booed when at the end of his speech he asked Blacks present not to blame Canberra police for the police attack.

Bob Pringle spent most of his speech replying to Enderby. The police, he said, should have followed the example of NSW builders' laborers and refused to carry out such anti-social acts. The only reason that a Labor government might do more than the Liberals, he said, was because of the mass mobilisations such as the Black Moratorium and the struggle for the Embassy.

It was the power of the people in such protests and not what happens in Parliament that is decisive — and mass mobilisations must continue no matter what party was in power.



TOP LEFT: March on its way to Parliament House. TOP RIGHT: Police dismantle Embassy tent after it was on the lawn for three hours. BIG PICTURE: The second "tent", in fact a tarpaulin, is raised by Embassy staff.

At about 3 p.m. after the police deadline of 2 p.m. had passed, the strategy committee met in the Embassy tent and decided that the demonstrators would march back to the university, leaving six manning the Embassy.

At about 3.45 p.m., two senior police officers came to the tent and informed the staff it would be taken down. A path was cleared, the Embassy staff sat down on the lawn outside the Embassy, the police pulled down the tent and took it away to the jeers of the crowd. However, as they were putting the tent away, what appeared to be another tent appeared over the heads of those around the Embassy. The police rushed back, but turned heels to the laughter of the crowd when the tent turned out to be a tarpaulin held over the heads of the

Embassy staff.

The staff then carried the tarpaulin to the main police inspector standing on the steps of Parliament House and threw it in contempt at his feet.

Sunday saw the largest congregation of Aborigines for action ever seen in Australia. Organisers promised 5000 Aborigines outside Parliament House to put up the Embassy again when the Commonwealth Prime Ministers meet later this year.

The militancy and determination of the Blacks who came from all over Australia was an inspiration to see. Although there were a few voices for retreat, the vast majority were determined that the Embassy would go up. Interstate and political misunderstandings emerged on Satur-

day among Black militants, but these eased on Sunday. Measures were taken to ensure more interchange of experiences and activists to avoid such clashes in the future.

Black organisers firmly rejected this offer, saying such an office could not relate to Blacks living in humpies and would put them away nicely in a departmental pigeon-hole. They also rejected offers by Hunt of government accommodation, preferring to sleep on cold floors at the ANU. Hunt also provided air tickets for Black organisers to travel to Canberra to see him. These tickets were used, but without the bribe having any effect on organisers.

One thing is certain: Black Australia and White Australia will never be the same after the moving and militant events of July 1972.