

'Network' directs overseas protest for blacks

By PAUL ROBINSON

The Aboriginal land rights movement, known now for the first time overseas, is being spearheaded by a key group of advisers called "The Network".

The aggressive campaign which reached Geneva and Washington last week, had its beginnings in the late 1960s when black activists began to gather a radical rights lobby.

Key figures in the "network" are the director of Sydney's Aboriginal legal service, Mr Paul Coe; the directors of Melbourne's Aboriginal health service, Mr Gary Foley and Mr Bruce McGuinness; the chairman of Victoria's Aboriginal Land Council, Mr Jim Berg; and the directors of the North Queensland Land Council, Mr Mick Miller and Mr Dennis Walker.

The chairman of the Northern Land Council, Mr Galarrwuy Yunupingu, and Noonakanbah spokesman Mr Dickie Skinner are also involved.

The director of the Aboriginal health service in Redfern, Sydney, Mrs Naomi Mayers, recalled yesterday the movement's beginnings.

She said Aborigines had been encouraged by the black power push in the United States. They established the tent embassy in Canberra and started a string of cultural, legal and medical services.

"We used to have to sing and perform in the streets in those days for money," Mrs Mayers said. "All of us were involved in community-controlled organisations, and in those days people referred to us as militants."

Volunteers

Mrs Mayers said most of the people now prominent in Aboriginal affairs worked voluntarily for the movement in the 1960s. "It's not just a job, it's a life when you work for your people."

Mr Berg said yesterday "The Network" was a term used loosely to describe contacts and communication within the Aboriginal movement.

"The Network's" latest move in Victoria is the drafting of special legislation about the Framlingham reserve near Warrnambool.

The proposed legislation would grant freehold for blacks at Framlingham and set up a programme of mutual co-operation between the State Government and the Victorian Aboriginal Land Council over land rights.

"If they beat us on Framlingham they'll beat us on land rights," Mr Berg said.

"The Network" operates in the land councils and community centres of all States. Leaders meet regularly and many groups communicate regularly by Telex with information offices in Europe.

The task of setting up international offices and financial contacts has been the work of Mr Foley, Mr McGuinness and Mr Berg.

It began after Mr Foley set up the first Aboriginal legal service in Sydney in 1971 with Mr Coe and Gary Williams.

Cannes trip

Mr Foley became involved in Sydney theatre and went to Cannes in 1978 to promote films about Aborigines.

It was there he made contacts that have provided the movement with money from a variety of sources, including "some political groups" in France, Denmark, Holland and West Germany.

Mr Foley and the spokesman for the Framlingham Aborigines, Mr Len Clarke, said the Soviet Union was aware of their cause, but the movement was not interested in the Soviet Union.

"We are not interested in dealing with the Soviet Union. We see them as just as great a threat as the United States," Mr Foley said.

In November, Mr Foley will return to Europe to set up offices in Italy and Greece, and establish links with African nations and "certain countries in the Middle East."

He will also negotiate with American Indians for joint use of the Aborigines' office in London in return for use of the Indians' office in Paris.