

Aborigines Cast a Cloud Over Australia's Party

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SYDNEY, Australia, Jan. 25 — Thousands of aborigines from around the country met here tonight in what their organizers said could well be the largest gathering of this ancient people in its 40,000-year history.

The meeting — what the aborigines call a mob — was held in preparation for protest demonstrations Tuesday as the nation celebrates the bicentennial of the arrival of the first white settlers in Australia.

A fragmented and generally passive nomadic people, the aborigines were no match for the convict colonizers from England. The demonstrations Tuesday will be their first large-scale attempt to organize and to protest their fate.

"The aboriginal people have nothing much to celebrate," said Gerry Hand, the Government's Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, in announcing that he would boycott Tuesday's festivities in sympathy with them. "Anybody that suggests aboriginal people have a lot to celebrate this year as a result of the last 200 years hasn't taken much note of history."

The past two centuries have been a period of annihilation, dispossession and now poverty for the aborigines, who today number perhaps 160,000, only about half of their population before the advent of white settlers.

Today they are outcasts in their own land, living on reservations or in urban slums, suffering an infant mortality rate three times the national norm and earning half the average national wage of \$310 a week.

Eleven percent of aborigines have never been to school, and their unemployment rate is six times the national average of 7.3 percent.

"Neglect, injustice, inequality, carelessness," said Justice Marcus Einfeld, a human rights official, when asked the reasons for their plight.

With the approach of the bicentennial, and after the publication of new historical studies, white Australians have begun to take notice of the aborigines and to acknowledge the debt that is owed to them.

A Debt Is Acknowledged

Prime Minister Bob Hawke has offered to sign a treaty acknowledging "grave injustices" against the nation's indigenous people. His Government, in a mostly symbolic gesture, has returned some of their lands, including Ayers Rock, a giant monolith in the center of the outback that is sacred to the aborigines.

The Government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars in health plans and educational programs, but the aborigines continue to live in squalor and often they acknowledge, in drunkenness.

They have not shown the energy and enterprise of recent waves of immigrants from Greece, the Middle East and Indochina.

It is not clear, apart from an ac-

knowledge of their nationhood and dignity, what more the aborigines are seeking.

"We are a sovereign race of people and we need to be negotiated with as such," said Gary Foley, a leader of one of the feuding groups of tribesmen gathered today in Sydney.

"It is too late to say we want the white men to be kicked out," he said. "But we want to be the ones to decide what our future is in a white Australia. We do not subscribe to the melting pot idea. I don't feel like I'm Australian."

He said aborigines do not share the drive and individualism that have brought prosperity to successive waves of immigrants.

"We have a totally different value system," he said. "We are a non-materialistic, noncompetitive people."

Mr. Foley himself, who is 37 years old, may be something of an exception. He talked of his family's rise from a reservation to a slum to a better slum, on the basis of his father's prowess as a soccer player.

"I am the rare aborigine to go to a white man's school," he said. "I knew I was a lot smarter than those little white jerks that were calling me a bong and a coon."

But his outspokenness ended his

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schooling after two years of high school and contributed to his departure nine months ago from a job as director of the government's Aborigine Arts Board.

Today, "I'm nothing," he said. "I'm a bum."

As director of the arts board, he said, he became aware of another of his people's indignities, the fascination they hold for scientists, even as they are forgotten by the rest of their countrymen.

"We must be one of the most studied people on earth," he said. "There are almost as many academics measuring our heads as there are of us. But none of it does us any good. You need to be a professor just to read their index system."

"We're specimens to be examined and measured," he said. "In the British Museum you'll find aborigine heads and other body parts in pickle jars."

"When I was director of the arts board, we tried to make a move to get the return from Europe of some of our most important art and artifacts," Mr. Foley said. "They were shocked when I said we also want the bits and pieces of aboriginal people that are scattered around the world."