

BLACK, WHITE IN 24-HOUR VIGIL

20/6/68
AGE



By DON SHARPE and JOHN JOST

Hundreds of demonstrators across Australia last night began a 24-hour vigil to demand Government recognition of Aboriginal land rights.

In Canberra and all State capitals, black and white Australians joined the first co-ordinated protest on the Aboriginal land issue.

In Melbourne, more than 100 demonstrators cheered demands for land rights from two Aboriginal leaders then settled in for a long, cold night.

In Canberra, speaking to a gathering of about 100 people outside Parliament House the A.L.P. "shadow" Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Gordon Bryant) said the Australian people had told the Federal Government to "do something at once for Aborigines."

They had given a 90 per cent. mandate to the Government at a referendum on the Aboriginal question.

As Mr. Bryant spoke the temperature dropped a degree to fall below the 32 deg. freezing point. He was the only member of Parliament present.

The nation-wide vigil was organised by Abschol, the Aboriginal Affairs department of the National Union of Australian University students, and supported by churches, unions and teachers.

It coincides with the launching of a massive petition by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

The demonstrators want Aborigines to own tribal land, the establishment of an Aboriginal-run Lands Trust Board and official recognition of Aboriginal laws, languages and institutions.

In MELBOURNE, biting winds swept the Spring Street Commonwealth Offices as Mr. Harry Penrith and Mr. Dexter Daniels, Aboriginal leaders, opened the city's vigil.

LAND 'STOLEN'

Mr. Penrith said: "We have had our land stolen from us. Aboriginal people have a feeling for the land — it has real meaning".

The demonstrators, mainly students but with a sprinkling of church leaders, teachers and trade unionists, lined the intersection to display their banners to passing traffic.

For the 24 hours to 7 o'clock tonight, cars ferry them to Carlton flats for brief rest shifts. Last night they sang protest songs and drank coffee to keep warm.

Mr. Penrith, from Lake Tyers settlement and now with the State Accident Insurance Company, said Aborigines wanted a Government policy of integration, not assimilation.

"We don't want to lose our identity. The Administration needs to start asking the Aboriginal people what they want — we are not dumb, we have our own mind", he said.

"The Victorian Government is so paternalistic towards Aborigines they don't know what the word consultation means.

"We shouldn't be singing Advance Australia Fair, we should be singing Awake Australia."

The vigil also coincides with a Government split over a plan by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Wentworth) to grant land to the Gurindji tribe in Northern Territory.

Mr. Wentworth has been gagged by Cabinet from making statements on the proposal and is opposed by Northern Territory grazing interests who fear the establishment of a precedent on land grants to Aborigines.

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Mr. Daniels, formerly a stockman on the Wave Hill Station, said the time had come to use strong pressure in the fight for Aboriginal land rights.

He said: "We have waited too long. Now we have got to force the Government."

In **CANBERRA**, Mr. Bryant, MP, said: "We seem to have run up against some innate parliamentary conservatism which is reluctant to acknowledge the rights of people who have occupied the land for 18,000 years.

"In the Northern Territory, the Gurindji people have asked the Government for the return of land they own by tribal right, yet the Government still hesitates."

Mr. Bryant said the Aborigine had been neglected by Australia. It was the Aborigine, not the white man, who suffered from

leprosy, from yaws, from malnutrition.

He called for the legal preservation of lands now held by Aborigines, and pointed out that even in Arnhem Land the rights of the Aborigines had been impinged upon by the mining companies.

Mr. Bryant said the Aborigine gained spiritual "replenishment" from the land, and that he had lived closer to it than white Australians.

He echoed the words of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Wentworth) that the Aborigine be allowed to help himself.

Referring to the freezing Canberra temperature, Mr. Bryant said there were many Aborigines who would spend a colder night on the banks of some river.

He congratulated "the people who gathered to show where they stood on questions relating to Aborigines."

The people who blamed Aborigines for their situation were "ridiculous, for how can you expect a man to pull up his socks, when he had no socks to pull up."

In **SYDNEY**, a 24-hour vigil was begun at 7 p.m. outside the Commonwealth Offices by students supporting Aborigines' land rights.

About 20 students aimed to continue the vigil all night before being replaced this morning by more students.

At Armidale University in New South Wales, about 45 students demonstrated in support of Aboriginal land rights.

One of their placards read: "Eight square miles is not enough for a hairy goat."

In **BRISBANE**, about 50 people kept vigil outside the Commonwealth Offices in Adelaide Street.

About 100 people are expected to take part before the vigil ends at 7 p.m. today.

The demonstrators displayed small handwritten placards and handed out pamphlets to passers-by.

A 74-year-old woman, Mrs. L. Dunford, of West End, Brisbane, a member of the Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, took part in the vigil last night.

Mrs. Dunford, who arrived at 5 p.m., two hours early, by mistake, and waited until 11 p.m., said: "I'm a Victorian originally, and I don't feel the cold."