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SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR ABORIGINES

Test Of New System To Dissolve Suspicions



THE "CITY COUNCIL" of the Cumeroounga aborigine station during a session of arranging the affairs of the settlement. This experiment in giving the aborigines some form of self-government was recently introduced by the manager of the station (Mr McQuiggan) following strike trouble in February.

By A Special Representative

Out of the "strike" of a section of the aborigines formerly living in Cumeroounga Aboriginal Station reservation, on the New South Wales side of the Murray, near Barmah, has come an interesting experiment in self-government for the blacks.

It is, in part, an attempt to clear away the misunderstandings which the management and local whites believe lie behind the "river crossings" which have been occurring at the station since February.

"COUNCIL" OF RESIDENTS

THE domestic affairs of Cumeroounga are now discussed by an advisory committee of residents, upon which the disaffected group has representation.

These are the "parties" represented, according to the "council" notice-board:

The older people.
"Those who crossed the river."
Sports.
Residents rearing young families.
"The Younger Set."

The manager (Mr A. J. McQuiggan) has the right of veto. The "town council" is still only an advisory body, but if the experiment succeeds an elective body may replace it.

"Those who crossed the river" are the men, women and children who have returned to the settlement since the first breakaway. Representation on the "council" seeks to give them a means of expressing any complaints they still may have.

A decision taken by the "council" the other day shows how far the essay in self-government has been allowed to develop. The men placed before the manager the fact that because his wife was ill one of the absentee men wished to return to the settlement house he had left.

The manager told the council that the man concerned was earning more than many white men, and asked whether they did now consider that he should make his own housing arrangements now that he had vacated the settlement and leave the house for one of his poorer compatriots, then living with relatives within the settlement. After careful consideration the "town council" decided against the manager, but accepted his amendment that the house be re-occupied only until the end of winter.

Upon lines such as these the management hopes to dissipate the cloud of suspicion which has hovered since February over Cumeroounga and its surrounding muddy river flats, where the swollen Murray divides by a few hundred yards the 220 odd inhabitants who have elected to stay at the station from the 26 men, women and children, who, to use a common settlement term today, have "crossed the river."