

Our 'Native' embassy and its land rights

By PAUL
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FROM the collection of orange, green and white tents which make up the Aboriginal Embassy compound, the Commonwealth policeman standing on Parliament steps looks like a border guard in a foreign land.

His purpose is to keep an eye on the growing tent city that began as a beach umbrella on January 26 — the day Aboriginals were handed down the 1972 version of the John Batman treaty.

Tourists amble around the glaringly white Parliament building and then timidly step across the roadway which has become the frontier of black and white aspirations.

"We are aliens in our own land," say the demonstrators and the tourists give this credence by being embarrassed by the groups of black men in bare feet and pretend to make for the ugly, sandstone monument to George V.

The striped green beach umbrella still lies in the middle of the dozen or so tents like a sacred, tribal symbol and the odd sense of permanency about the encampment is reinforced by the arrival of the postman at 11 am with a letter for The Secretary, Aboriginal Embassy.

At least the PMG has officially recognised the new Government and unless the Department of the Interior has the courage to involve some forgotten ordinance, the embassy is here to stay.

It has already become an official focus for Aboriginal views, although this fact has been obscured by some of the gimmickry. Most of the 14 men who run its permanent administration enjoy high sounding titles. Mr Michael Anderson, 0, holds the post of High Commissioner and the "Cabinet" includes a Minister for the Environment, Caucasian Affairs and the Arts.

But the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Mr Whitlam, was right to take the protest seriously for the embassy is



developing into a catalyst for nationwide reaction to Aboriginal injustices.

Mrs Faith Bandler, national secretary of the Federal Council for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, was one of the visitors yesterday and will be back at the weekend when the embassy population rises to about 50.

Tribal and organisational support has been forwarded to the embassy from all over Australia and overseas and an embassy representative is to be appointed in Victoria. Unions, the Australian Council for Churches and the British Anti-Slavery Society — strong supporters of the land rights issue — are to be asked for funds to help embassy leaders to travel the country seeking support.

One of the reasons for the survival of the embassy is that its members are determined not to be declared persona non grata. A lavatory block behind the lobby restaurant has solved hygiene problems, little or no cooking is done on the camp site, the lawns are respected by moving the tents around and the policemen who make their nightly patrols are treated to nothing more than bantering propaganda.

The present occupants are slowly laying the administrative foundations for a major occupation when Parliament resumes which will test present resources that include shower relays and meal and money donations.

"We are going to stay here until we get our land rights," said Mr Anderson, who is leading the recruiting of

Aboriginals from reserves to reinforce the embassy.

"We want about one or two hundred people in permanent occupation. We are not worried about food. White men might have a bit of trouble living off the land but we'll just go up in the hills and kill a few goannas if things get tight."

So far there has been no problem. Up to \$20 a day has been put in a collection box by supporters and there has been a shuttle of meals from friendly restaurants and white supporters. Lobbying the Labor Party has ensured a fair supply of substantial luncheon invitations.

The Aboriginals in occupation are well educated and articulate but the reinforcements from reserves will not be chosen for their education. If they have never been subjected to offensive discrimination they will not have to wait long at the embassy.

"We get white people pulling up in their cars saying 'Go home nigger' and 'You've never owned this land,'" Mr Anderson said. "Goddamn it, they've only been here 184 years."

One Aboriginal who will not be invited is Mr Neville Bonner, the Queensland Liberal senator. The only Liberal to be officially invited is the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Wentworth. Especially unwelcome is Mr Peter Howson, presently responsible for Aboriginals, who recently made the remark that he could not understand why Aboriginals were demonstrating in Canberra where all the land was leasehold.