

'Protected'

PROTECTED: *A film demonstrating life on the Queensland Aboriginal settlement of Palm Island. 55 mins. 16mm. color. Sydney Filmmakers Cinema, 8 pm, February 19-22, 26-29, St. Peters Lane, Darlinghurst, 31.3237. (available also for hire). The Australian Union of Students in Melbourne also has a copy.*

Alessandro Cavadini's last film **NINGLA-A'NA** concerned militant struggle around land rights - the aboriginal embassy, and so on. When he and his associates finished that film, it was suggested to them that to understand the situation of black people in Australia, they must, in effect, go back a generation, to the reserves.

The Palm Island people had a story to tell, which had been distorted in the press of the past but which offered important lessons to the future - if only somehow it could be heard. This story, of the "riots" of 1957, provides the structure for Cavadini & Co.'s latest film, **Protected**. Within the dramatic structure of the events of 1957, is presented a powerful indictment of the effects of living under the infamous "Queensland Act" even today.

Protected is most decidedly a documentary, but you will find it very different from those you are used to on TV. To begin with, it is almost all acted - or rather re-enacted - twenty years after the actual events.

In the last decade, documentary films have traded on the sense of objectivity

have traded on the sense of objectivity which is implied by seeing things as they actually occur.

But do you really think that there is such a thing as an "objective" film - or even that this is desirable?

Fortunately while an utterly realistic document on Palm Island and the Queensland Act, **Protected** is a thoroughly committed film. Everyone involved was taking a stand to expose the Act.

The white characters were played by Townsville sympathisers and the main black characters by islanders nominated by the people in exile whose roles they were playing.

The acting is magnificent - sometimes rehearsed, sometimes filmed more spontaneously - but with lines created by the participants. One of the scenes most effective in demonstrating the different

levels of racism in operation, is where the white woman supervising food distribution, sharply and pityingly says to a woman in line, "Can't you do something about that hair dear" and hands her a comb.

The bitterness of past humiliation cries out in this film.

Where there is narration, it is the complete reverse of the cultured and distant TV voice, talking platitudes and trivia. Instead we get the dynamic and highly personal account of Pastor Don Brady, describing the history and feelings of the Palm Island people.

Protected shows that in 1957, tens of

thousands of Australians were living under fascism - and I don't use that word lightly. **The Queensland Act even today, legislates fascism for blacks.**

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Although nothing is said explicitly, the film is a powerful argument in support of the Land Rights Struggle and I hope that all **Tribune** readers will find some place to arrange a screening of it.

Playing with **Protected** at the Co-op is the prize winning film **Last Grave at Dimbaza**, made underground and at great risk in South Africa.

- *Reel Red.*



Above and below: Scenes recreated of the 1957 riots for **PROTECTED**



