

MPs Give Blacks the Chop

CANBERRA society, they say, is as structured as the cake at an Italian wedding. Dinner parties according to public servant status; corridor chit-chats according to political clout.

But the ubiquitous "they" sometimes are astray, particularly when the nostrils of vigorous protesters outside Parliament House are confronted with the aroma of barbecued lamb and a just-released claret. And all of it gratis.

So it was yesterday when about 500 supporters of Aboriginal land rights temporarily gave up their abuse of collective politicians and moved off the parliamentary steps to regroup in the adjacent Treasury Gardens.

Who should they find, within a short boomerang throw, but the Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation launching new cuts of Aussie lamb, and Orlando Wines launching its 1983 Jacob's Creek claret.

Now, it is probably immaterial that the free barbecue (invitations by mail) attracted more MPs than did the Aboriginal protest, and at least the wine buffs were addressed by a Cabinet Minister, John Dawkins.

It did not perturb Aboriginal activist Gary Foley, who adapted the Muhammad line to read that if the politicians (well, Bob Hawke) would not go to the



David Humphries

Aborigines, the Aborigines should go to the politicians. While his colleagues imbibed the offerings, Mr Foley took over the microphone to applaud the generosity of Orlando, a name that "some koories are acquainted with".

And he graciously thanked the meat men for their "steaks". A stake, Mr Foley explained, was something the Aboriginal people had been trying to secure in their land for some time.

As the bells summoned the lingering politicians back to the labors of Parliament House, the barbecue caterer, Canberra restaurateur Mez O'Neill, was asked about the additional guest list and the consequent burden on supplies.

"We've got plenty of food," she said. At least lamb rights were assured.

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Aboriginal activist Gary Foley:
A stake by any other name...