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Northern Territory

Aboriginal leader drops bombshell

By DAVID NASON

AN otherwise monumentally dull mining seminar in Darwin this week was rescued when the Northern Land Council chairman, Mr Galarrwuy Yunupingu, outlined with brutal clarity the nature and direction of black power as it stands in the Northern Territory today.

In a prepared speech, Mr Yunupingu was particularly hostile to the Australian Mining Industry Council, which he accused of failing to accept the reality of the consultative process with Aboriginal people for mining on their land — an attitude which he said was working against future mining developments.

But it was in a vigorous question and answer session that Mr Yunupingu put things in cold, hard, black and white terms.

He said the time had come where the colour of mining company money would have to be expressed in terms of equity in development projects before the bulldozers could be brought in.

He spoke of "economic murder" by mining companies in the past and of Aboriginal determination not to be exploited again.

The effect was quite spell-binding. Gone was the old

emphasis on the Aboriginal holy grail — ancient land with its sacred sites and Dreamtime legends — which Aborigines sought recognition of in the early days of land-rights legislation.

This was like something straight out of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. But what Mr Yunupingu failed to say was that Aborigines wanted this equity without a cash outlay.

The implications of this in the Territory are enormous. Many of the mining developments being sought on Aboriginal land are old abandoned mines now regarded as viable only because of new technology.

But this new-found viability could in many cases be put under threat if Aborigines insisted on equity without a financial commitment.

Different mining companies will react in different ways with the value of what is in the ground obviously the decisive factor.

But none would be wise to look at Aborigines in the Territory as an easy mark.

As Mr Yunupingu told his audience: "We have learned your ways."