

Sun 27th Jan 1988

# Black power on the march

THE Aboriginal flag flew high yesterday as more than 20,000 black and white Australians joined in a protest march through the streets of Sydney.

Organisers were amazed at the size of the crowd, which made its way from Redfern Oval to Hyde Park to "support the Aboriginal struggle for peace, justice and freedom".

Traditional tribal dancers came from all over the country to take part in what many called the black alternative to the celebration of a nation.

The march was the largest seen in Sydney since the Vietnam moratoriums.

It was designed to focus attention on the black struggle on the day before the Mulholland Inquiry into Black Deaths in Custody begins in Adelaide.

None of the expected violence flared during the march as police and rally organisers kept tight control.

Aboriginal activist Gary Foley said the support from both black and white Australians had been overwhelming.

"It's been beyond all expectations," Mr Foley said.

"Let's hope Bob Hawke and his Government gets this message loud and clear from all these people here today.

"It's so magnificent to see black and white Australians together in harmony.

"It's what we always said could happen. This is what Australia could and should be like."

The marchers were given support from organisations as diverse as the PLO and the Italian Migrant Workers Families.

A number of tribal elders refused to be photographed as they led the procession.

One television news crew was told to have some respect when it tried to film some of the tribesmen performing ritual dances.

A deafening roar erupted when the protest march finally reached Hyde Park just after 2 pm.

Hundreds of both black and white families had lined the walls of the park to cheer the procession.

The Rev Charles Harris, a leading figure in the March '88 committee, said it was an historic occasion for the Aboriginal people.

He said Aborigines wanted the Australian Government and the world to know that they had been victims of gross injustice for too long.

He claimed Aborigines had been manipulated and oppressed, their children victims of racism and they were treated as foreigners in their own land.

"We are the sovereign people of this land and this celebration is a farce, it's hypocrisy."

Earlier, a procession of 2000 Aborigines made their way from Redfern to a harborside tent embassy.

Organised by radical Sydney activists, the rally attracted a rowdy crowd which included Michael Mansell and Charles Perkins.

Twice the marchers were involved in stand-offs with a contingent of 100 police who tried to block their progress, saying the march was not official.

The tense situations ended without violence when police allowed the group to proceed as individuals.

Once at the tent embassy, the group set off flares and turned away from an attempt to recreate the first white landing in Australia, dumping two participants gently, but unceremoniously, into the water.

● Former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser said it was a pity that Aborigines protested yesterday.

"It's not doing their own cause justice by this protest. Australians today can't and shouldn't feel guilty for something done by some English people 200 years ago," Mr Fraser said in Sydney.

"The great pity is they have not been able to join in the celebration. It would have advantaged the Aboriginal cause much more."