

PEOPLE SPEAKING OUT

Tracing a fragment of
Aboriginal resistance,
from Pearl Gibbs' radio
appearance in 1941,
broadcasting an
appeal on behalf of her
people, to the first
dismantlement of the
Aboriginal Tent
Embassy.



Kevin Gilbert, "Because a White Man'll Never Do It"

"As far as the cops were concerned, they had to get a tent off the lawns. The blacks, on the other hand, weren't just fighting for a tent -- they were fighting for the whole of australia, for the land, the dying babies, the misery."

2. PEOPLE SPEAKING OUT

LOVE? COUNTRY PARTY STYLE

Johnny boy was a nice, nice man
All soft an' bought me nice nice clothes
 Me name is 'Mary' most call me 'Gin'
But Johnny the whiteman called me 'Rose'
He owned this place—Quondong station
Had his white wife lived in town
Couldn't marry—but he loved me
How his wife would scowl and frown
When he smiled at me and winked at
With one eye and called me Rose
And I loved him yes I loved him loved him truly I
 suppose
He was in the Country Party
All the people gave their vote
On his ticket, winning ticket
'I love Johnny' what I wrote
Signed it Rose, in brackets 'Mary'
Soon my Johnny came to power
He was KING of Aborigine
And Affairs—soon come my hour
Then I bore his blue-eyed baby
'Bout the time he made new Act
That took half-castes off the blackgins
Lost me baby, that's a fact!
Come and took it like a chicken
Like a calf took it away
An' they called the new Act 'Welfare'
And they took me child away.

There's no white men, or woman, who has that feeling
we have. They can study us all they like, but we've got
them studied too. Because this is *our* country—the
country of my mother's mother, a full-blooded Aus-

tralian Aborigine. And it is *my* country. Always remember this. My Australian Aborigines did not go to England and claim it and then leave a whole lot of mixed bloods who no-one wants. It is *our* country. It belongs to us, it is precious to us. And that is something no white man will ever understand, except perhaps Bill Harney and Don McLeod. They understood a little bit of what we feel and what we are.

Pearl Gibbs, seventy-two year old Aboriginal patriot, July '72

Regrettably, given our present level of human evolution, 'human rights' tend still to be accorded to minority groups according to their capacity to demand same. Hence, for most of this century and, indeed, since colonization first began, Aboriginal people could literally rot while the major society around them was reforming and re-shaping itself in various ways. Certainly Aborigines were 'done to' according to various fashions ranging from annihilation to 'protection' (when it was thought they would die out) to 'assimilation/welfare' and so forth, but they pretty largely remained a passive group once the tribes' initial resistance had been broken. Only individuals such as Bill Ferguson, Pearl Gibbs and Bert Groves from the 'thirties in New South Wales, and similar Aboriginal identities in other states, raised their voices in protest. In 1941 Michael Sawtell, a member of the Aborigines Welfare Board, arranged for Pearl Gibbs to broadcast an appeal on behalf of her people. It was broadcast over radio 2GB by courtesy of the Theosophical Society in Sydney:

Good evening listeners,

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Theosophical Society of Sydney in granting me this privilege of being on the air this evening. It is the first time in the history of Australia that an Aboriginal woman has broadcast an appeal for her people. I am more than happy to be that woman. My grandmother was a full-blood Aborigine. Of that fact I am most proud. The admixture

of white blood makes me a quarter-caste Aborigine. I am a member of the Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship.

My people have had 153 years of the white man's and white woman's cruelty and injustice and unchristian treatment imposed upon us. My race is fast vanishing. There are only 800 full-bloods now in New South Wales due to the maladministration of previous governments. However, intelligent and educated Aborigines, with the aid of good white friends, are protesting against these conditions. I myself have been reared independently of the Aborigines Protection Board now known as the Aborigines Welfare Board. I have lived and worked amongst white people all my life. I've been in close contact with Aborigines and I have been on Aboriginal stations in New South Wales for a few weeks and months at a time. I often visit them. Therefore I claim to have a thorough knowledge of both the Aboriginal and white viewpoints. I know the difference between the status of Aborigines and white men. When I say 'white man' I mean white women also. There are different statuses for different castes. A person in whom the Aborigine blood predominates is not entitled to an old-age, invalid or returned soldier's pension. There are about thirty full-blooded returned men in this state whom I believe are not entitled to the old-age pension. A woman in whom the Aborigine blood predominates is not entitled to a baby bonus.

Our girls and boys are exploited ruthlessly. They are apprenticed out by the Aborigines Welfare Board at the shocking wage of a shilling to three and six per week pocket money and from two and six to six shillings per week is paid into a trust fund at the end of four years. This is done from fourteen years to the age of eighteen. At the end of four years a girl would, with pocket money and money from the trust, have earned £60 and a boy £90. Many girls have great difficulty in getting their trust money. Others say they have never been paid. Girls often arrive home with white babies. I do not know of one case where the Aborigines Welfare Board has taken

steps to compel the white father to support his child. The child has to grow up as an unwanted member of an apparently unwanted race. Aboriginal girls are no less human than my white sisters. The pitiful small wage encourages immorality. Women living on the stations do not handle endowment money, but the managers write out orders. The orders are made payable to one store in the nearest town—in most cases a mixed drapery and grocery store. So you will see that in most cases the mother cannot buy extra meat, fruit or vegetables. When rations and blankets are issued to the children, the value is taken from the endowment money. The men work sixteen hours per week for rations worth five and sixpence. The bad housing, poor water supply, appalling sanitary conditions and the lack of right food, together with unsympathetic managers, make life not worth living for my unfortunate people.

It has now become impossible for many reasons for a full-blood to own land in his own country. On the government settlements and in camps around the country towns, the town people often object to our children attending the school that white children attend. This is the unkindest and cruelest action I know. Many of the white people call us vile names and say that our children are not fit to associate with white children. If this is so, then the white people must also take their share of the blame. I'm very concerned about the 194 full-blooded Aboriginal children left in this State. What is going to happen to them? Are you going to give them a chance to be properly educated and grow up as good Australian citizens or just outcasts? Aborigines are roped off in some of the picture halls, churches and other places. Various papers make crude jokes about us. We are slighted in all sorts of mean and petty ways. When I say that we are Australia's untouchables you must agree with me.

You will also agree with me that Australia would not and could not have been opened up successfully without my people's help and guidance of the white explorers. Hundreds of white men, woman and children owe their

very lives to Aborigine trackers and runners—tracking lost people. Quite a few airmen owe their lives to Aborigines. I want you to remember that men of my race served in the Boer War, more so in the 1914-18 War and today hundreds of full-bloods, near full-bloods and half-castes are overseas with the AIF. More are joining each day. My own son is somewhere on the high seas serving with the Australian Navy. Many women of Aborigine blood are helping with war charities. Many are WRANS. We the Aborigines are proving to the world that we are not only helping to protect Australia but also the British Empire. New South Wales is the mother State and therefore should act as an inspiration to the rest of Australia. So we are asking for full citizenship and the status to be granted to us. We are asking that the 800 full-bloods in New South Wales be included in the claim—all those who are deprived of all federal social services to be granted, through the state, the old age pension and the maternity bonus until this injustice can be reformed by a federal law. We want an equal number of Aborigines as whites on the Welfare Board.

My friends, I'm asking for friendship. We Aborigines need help and encouragement, the same as you white people. We need to be cheered and encouraged to the ideals of citizenship. We ask help, education, encouragement from your white government. But the Aborigines Welfare gives us the stone of officialdom. Please remember, we don't want your pity, but practical help. This you can do by writing to the Hon. Chief Secretary, Mr. Baddeley, MLA Parliament House, Sydney and ask that our claims be granted as soon as possible. Also that more white men who understand my people, such as the chairman, Mr Michael Sawtell, be appointed to the Board—not merely government officials. We expect more reforms from the new government. By doing this you will help to pay off the great debt that you, the white race, owe to my Aboriginal people. I would urge, may I beg you, to hand my Aboriginal people the democracy and the Christianity that you, the white nation of Australia,

so proudly boast of. I challenge the white nation to make these boasts good. I'm asking your practical help for a new and better deal for my race. Remember we, the Aboriginal people, are the creditors. Do not let it be said of you that we have asked in vain. Will my appeal for practical humanity be in vain? I leave the answer to each and every one of you.

Measured against modern blacks' ideas of what justice for the Aboriginal race must entail, Pearl Gibbs' appeal was pretty moderate. There was no protest against the enormity of the theft of a continent. There was no compensation claim, no call for self-determination—the blacks were too down. Pearl's appeal was in terms of the preoccupations of the day—pensions, citizenship, a baby bonus, equal representation on the Board and so forth. The actual reforms asked for show the degree to which Aborigines were outcasts in their own country. They were not counted in anything. They were not considered in anything. Even small gains were monumental. One of the reasons why 'land rights' is not an issue in Pearl's talk is because many blacks in those days laboured under the illusion that 'Aboriginal Reserves' meant just that—land reserved to the blacks for ever. Another generation was to disillusion them about this, as, all over New South Wales, pieces of black reserves were sold or leased to land-hungry graziers. (Is it any wonder that the Country Party has always been such a strong political force against Aboriginal land rights? The alienation, too, has been considerably wider than many blacks realize. The recent 'land rights' concessions of the New South Wales government, announced as a pre-election stunt in 1972, listed Aboriginal land at Condobolin as seven acres. I remember when the reserve there was 300 acres. Similar situations prevail all over New South Wales.) In passing, too, notice that Pearl mentioned that there were 800 full-bloods in New South Wales in 1941. Also, says she, there were 194 full-blooded children. In 1941 she asked, 'What is going to happen to them?' Now it is possible to ask, 'What *did* happen to them?' Very rarely do you find a full-blood now, in any part of the State. At best there are only a handful left.

'Will my appeal for practical humanity be in vain?' asked Pearl Gibbs in 1941. Looking back, the answer, pretty well, was 'yes'. True, inchingly, excruciatingly, reforms were achieved. But none of them made any real dent in the ongoing situation and none of them were on a large enough scale, or bold enough to even begin to bring any healing to the people. It was not until May 1973 that Aboriginal patriot Pearl Gibbs, now seventy-two years of age and as conversant as ever with developments in Aboriginal affairs, tentatively said 'big things are happening'.

In 1941 blacks were calling for citizenship rights. The 1967 Referendum saw white Australia conferring that right. It gave the federal government power to over-ride state legislation and take direct action on behalf of Aborigines. The fact that, five years later, the federal government had still not even begun to tackle the 'Aboriginal problem' and had, indeed, spent a lot of time and energy trying to deny, ignore or white-wash the realities of it shows how strong white racist resistance to black aspirations in the Liberal-Country Party coalition was.

Of the states, Queensland was and is the worst. Despite periodic amendments of the various acts that regulate black lives in Queensland, blacks say that the spirit of white paternalism and black subjugation remains unchanged. True, as Senator Bonner has pointed out, many of the amendments made have been as recommended by the Aboriginal councillors on the reserves. But as other blacks are quick to point out, you don't get to be a councillor unless you are a good jacky who is totally under the manager's thumb in the first place. The following comments, made by Mick Miller, a school teacher living in Cairns and vice-president of FCAATSI (Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders) are strongly reminiscent of Pearl Gibbs' complaints in New South Wales over thirty years earlier. Mick was speaking in September '72:

I have in mind two missions that have been particularly badly treated, Weipa and Hopevale. At Weipa, the bauxite is mined by Comalco and there's sand mining at

Cape Flattery. Weipa and this part of Cape Flattery belong to an Aboriginal reserve. Between the Presbyterian church and the State government and Comalco they came to some sort of an arrangement whereby Comalco could go in and take out the bauxite. The people at Weipa weren't even asked for their opinion.

No mention was made of the people being given jobs, or any royalty being paid because it was their reserve. Nothing at all. They were just told to move. They had to move back from where this bauxite was located. The actual area the mission is on now is chopped right down to about 410 acres. Now it once consisted of over a million acres, that reserve at Weipa. They're pushed back, into a place called South Weipa and isolated from the rest of the community. There are a couple of thousand people in this mining town of Weipa, but the Aboriginal people have been shifted back a couple of miles. They can go into town, but they have to be out of there by a certain hour.

Jobs were an issue there at one stage. Because it is on their reserve, we feel that the people should be given jobs, be trained, and given comparable wages. They mucked about with that for a while and then brought in a clause which they call a 'slow worker's' clause. Nearly all the Aborigines working at Weipa are under it, which gives the boss there the right to pay them maybe \$30-40 a week—less than half the ordinary average wage up there. This clause lets the company out. They just nominate how many fellows they want, without testing the working capacity of any of the Aboriginal fellows up there and, I know this for a fact, they are straightaway labelled 'slow workers'. There's no great benefit from Comalco at all. Last year [1971] Comalco made a gesture of handing over so many thousands of shares to the people of Weipa. But in reality those shares are controlled by the Department of Native Affairs for Queensland. So the people can't just benefit from them like you or I could. They are controlled by the Department of Native Affairs. They say when those people take the

money out and how much is to be spent. And when.

Take 'The Act'. They amend it every so many years—the 1971 amendment is not law yet. Now this Act governs between 30,000-40,000 Aborigines in Queensland. Their lives are controlled on land set aside for their use and governed by a manager. Now he is the Almighty. He has to administer that Act. In practice he interprets it how he likes because who is there to challenge him? In a lot of cases blacks still can't travel without his permission, can't accept visitors into their homes—even relatives. The whole theme is paternalism. For example for years we've had blacks classed as 'assisted'. It doesn't mean that any assistance is given to you—it simply means that you are controlled by the Native Affairs Act. It's just a paternalistic term that they brought in which helped them to prove that the Aborigine needed helping because he is such a darn loafer, bludger, sponger that he needs someone to help him. The Department likes to give the impression that the Aborigine has to be assisted. Otherwise he'd just fall over in the gutter and that'd be the end of him. So that's how the term came in. He's being helped by the Department!

There aren't any industries on the reserves, unless you take Weipa and Hopevale. The other reserves have some timber milling, farming, dairying and market gardening, but it's only marginal. There is no industry of a scale big enough to serve another community. This has been knocked out of them years ago. They've been told that *they* 'need to be supplied'—it's an idea that has been ingrained into them ever since they were kids. They believe that they can't do these sort of things and the Department wouldn't allow it if they tried. They'd rather get supplies from the towns to supply the native community and just let the people there exist in their little jobs of boat-building or roadmaking or timber milling. The highest pay in one of those settlements would be between \$36 and \$40 a fortnight. I could show you wage sheets: 'Head stockmen' \$30 per fortnight. Three off-siders \$18 or \$20 per fortnight. Out of that they have to

pay their rent. Measuring their rent against their income, it is pretty high—they have to pay about \$5-\$8 per fortnight. That's a lot of money when you're only getting about \$20-\$36 and you've got children going to school.

Weipa is in the Gulf of Carpentaria. On the other side of the peninsula from Weipa, you're coming onto the Barrier Reef side. There is a reserve, or a settlement there called Hopevale. That is the other example I was going to give you. It's a pretty big area—there's about a quarter of a million acres there I think and it stretches right down to the sea. Where it touches the sea, there are these great big sand dunes and they've got all these minerals in the sands. One of the mining companies have been mining there for about six years or more. To begin with they did employ Hopevale Aborigines. But the latest count which I got about three weeks ago from a fellow from Lockhard, another settlement there, said that there'd be no more than seven Aborigines working on the mineral sands there now. And this would be the time they'd be expected to be taking on more workers because they've just signed a couple of contracts with Japan for something like 50,000 tons of rutile. Places like Weipa, Cape Flattery, Hopevale are always advertising for labour and yet they've got a labour pool right close at hand and they won't even use it. The Aborigines, given training, would give good work if they knew they were getting good money. There isn't any doubt about that.

The people of Hopevale do not receive one measley cent from the mining. Nothing at all, even though it's their reserve land being mined. They've had a go at protesting to the authorities. They were just told that a royalty wouldn't be paid. Because they didn't have a deed to the land, the land wasn't theirs in reality. It was just mission land, but it wasn't the Aborigines' land. The Lutheran mission controls the whole of that area. The mining companies would've had to deal with the mission. The missions, the state government and the companies—it's them all the time. The mission itself doesn't get any royalty either. But it is interesting that the church

that controls this mission is the one that Premier Bjelke-Petersen goes to. The mission authorities made no attempts to stop the mining or intervene to get the Hopevale people any sort of a deal.

Another thing we're concerned about is the legislation dealing with police handling of Aborigines. It is so easy to arrest an Aboriginal and have him charged. We're also trying to get rid of the passbook system. The passbook is their bank book. A lot of their money—they don't get their full wages, they get part of their wages and the rest is put into a trust fund—goes into government hands. We're trying to do away with that. We've brought up examples of misappropriation of funds by the 'protectors' who are supposed to be looking after these Aborigines. Cases of fellers swiping \$5000! They're caught and sent to jail, but not for a very long term. And this goes on all the time. We've taken complaints about these sorts of things—complaints about police bashings, arrest, misappropriation of funds, etc. And of course we're trying to do away with the Act. We're bringing up examples all the time of how unjust and cruel it is.

The Queensland state secretary's report at the sixteenth annual conference of FCAATSI, held in Brisbane in April '73 stated that a new Aborigines Act and a new Torres Strait Islanders Act and regulations had been proclaimed.

But in spite of all this, Aborigines and Islanders are still mostly in the same position they've always been. People still have to submit to the same old indignity of procuring a 'pass' or a permit before they can go to a mission or settlement to visit their relatives or friends. Of course the permits are granted by the Aboriginal councils. But only three councillors out of five are elected and the white manager makes sure the people who are elected are the manager's choice.

FCAATSI President Joe McGinness, at the same conference, said that the legislation was:

a serious handicap to our peoples struggle for equality. Those who exercise the authority and control through this special legislation like to argue that this is not the case. However no country in the world, other than South Africa, has similar suppressive legislation that forces its indigenous population into unnecessary hardships and because of this we should have no hesitancy in supporting the call that the federal government make use of its constitutional powers gained through the 1967 Referendum to take over the responsibility of Aboriginal affairs from all states.

Under Gorton there had been some chance of this occurring, although on July 12, 1968 in an address to the conference of Commonwealth and state ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs he said:

In fact, of course, the powers of the Commonwealth are paramount in the sense that in any conflict of law its law will prevail. But there is no such conflict at present and I have every confidence that none will arise.

Under McMahon there was no chance of federal intervention. At the conference of ministers for Aboriginal affairs at Cairns on April 23, 1971 he said:

I am happy to inform Ministers that discussions with the States, following the agreement reached at this conference a year ago to examine remaining legislation which appears to discriminate against Aborigines, have proceeded amicably and promise well for a successful outcome. Thereafter it will be our task, with, I believe, the support of the great mass of Australian people, to move towards the complete enjoyment of normal civil liberties by Aborigines generally.

The blacks had heard it all before. Nothing had changed. Nor would it, while the Liberal-Country Party coalition governed.

The degree to which the prevailing winds *had* changed by

1973 was apparent in early March when Labor Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gordon Bryant, speaking at Charters Towers said, regarding the Queensland acts:

There is no reason why these laws, with their widespread infringements of fundamental human rights, should continue in 1973. Thousands of Queensland Aborigines and Islanders under the acts have their property managed by a 'protector' of the State Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs. Often in small towns, this person, who decides how much the Aboriginal and Island people should have of their own wages, is the local policeman. How many people in the rest of the community would put up with a system where they were reduced to pleading with a policeman for a few dollars of their own money? What particularly disturbs me is that mothers are not even receiving their endowment payments without this interference. The whole principle of child endowment is that it should go to the mother. Only in Queensland have you got the government standing between the people and their just rights. It must be the most humiliating social service procedure left in Australia. I will be discussing ways of stopping the interference with wages and social services with the Minister for Labour, Mr Clyde Cameron, the Minister for Social Security, Mr Bill Hayden, and the Treasurer, Mr Frank Crean, who has the jurisdiction to prevent the Commonwealth Bank being used as an agent of the Queensland government in this area.

The failure of the Australian government and public to act, in McMahon's words, to 'end racial discrimination in our midst and to deal with Aboriginal Australians with respect, justice, humanity and compassion' led directly to the formation of the Black Panther movement in Queensland. Various Queensland blacks began exhorting the Aboriginal people to break the usurpers' chains and urged people to strike for human dignity and freedom. They also called on Aborigines to defend themselves in whatever manner necessary to stop violence against them.

But the real focus of black affairs was Redfern (Sydney) and soon, Canberra. Dr Coombs had warned in the *Australian Journal of Education* in October, 1971:

After 170 odd years of decline the Aboriginal population is now rising rapidly and a failure to solve the educational and other problems of their place in our society could mean that the fond illusion many of us hold of Australia as homogenous and free of 'race' problems could be dissipated in violence and hatred.

In Sydney, thanks to white professional help, the blacks had set up the badly needed Aboriginal Legal Service (Paul Coe said he was sick of being belted up by coppers), the Aboriginal Medical Service and later, the Aboriginal Breakfast Programme, the Moratorium for Black Rights Committee and the Black Caucus. Such organizations tackled the problems of black inequality before the law, black health, protest and so forth and were set up by black youngsters because they believed that the leadership of Aboriginal affairs had long passed from token organizations such as the New South Wales branch of FCAATSI or the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. Redfern, not city centre, was the centre of black affairs.

On Australia Day, January 26, 1972, Prime Minister McMahon brought out his land denial policy for Aborigines. Blacks were not, in principle, to be given land rights because this implicitly threatened the 'security of tenure' of white landowners. However, the government had decided to grant special purpose leases to continuing Aboriginal groups and communities. These leases would only be granted if the government felt that the blacks had demonstrated adequate 'economic or social' use for them. Of course there would still be none of that 'security of tenure' so dear to white Australians' hearts. Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, Peter Howson—who was described by columnist Phillip Adams as a 'pain in the Arts'—suggested that the new swindle represented 'an imaginative attempt to adapt Australian forms to fit in with Aboriginal ideas in relation to land'. Such was the type of sophistry with which Aborigines were once again

shielded from getting some of the nitty-gritty. Howson has since, thankfully, not only ceased to be a minister but lost his seat in the December elections.

The Australia Day statement, as it happened, came at a time when blacks had arrived at a particularly depressing point of morale. In 1967 they had hoped that with the granting of citizenship rights and federal power to over-ride state legislation, conditions would improve for Aborigines and land rights would be a possibility. Instead of this, blacks witnessed the official bullying of the Gurindji tribe, which was attempting to claim 500 square miles of country at Wattie Creek, Northern Territory. Then came the decision in the *Gove Land Rights* case which found against the Yirrkala tribe's land claim on the Gove Peninsula. The release of official figures showing that black infants were dying at between ten and seventeen times the rate for white babies in various parts of the country, was enough to depress blacks even further.

That was why the Aboriginal Embassy came into being. After it had been standing on the lawns before Parliament House, Canberra for several months, Country Party minister Ralph Hunt published a booklet entitled 'Aboriginal Land Rights and the Northern Territory'. It was a succinct outline of how the anti-black landed interests of this country think. Stated Hunt:

European Australians who have sweated to carve a nation out of a desolate continent have a legitimate stake in this country and security of title of land is paramount in an orderly society. The claim for \$6 billion compensation for dispossession of land in the past, which has been made by some groups of Aborigines inspired by radical groups, flows quite naturally from the argument that Aborigines anywhere in Australia have a moral, if not a legal right to land based on ancestral association with that land.

Aborigines, of course, do not deny that whites have carved out a stake in Australia. As one rather ruefully, tongue in cheek, stated: 'I guess we have to face the fact that the gubbah is here to stay.' All that blacks are asking is for material

recognition of the fact that *their* 30,000 years of prior occupancy counts for something too. The material recognition must be in terms of land and compensation. But in Hunt's view, the Aborigine was obviously not capable of making such a claim. Therefore it must have been 'inspired by radical groups' out to foment trouble for the government. Accordingly the booklet warned that 'unfortunately there are indications that the 144,000 Aborigines will be used as a political football this year'. It did go on to admit that 'since the European settlement, the Australian Aborigines have suffered one injustice after another, and they have gone from one disability to another'. Nevertheless it was obvious that the Embassy's call for land rights was not a true Aboriginal people's movement but was dominated by left wing or communist elements.

Here are the facts of the matter. Just before the McMahon statement, when word had already got through that it would be another land denial, I called together a number of young Aboriginal militants, Michael Anderson, Gary Williams, Tony Coorey, Billy Craigie and Gary Foley and discussed with them the need for a permanent peaceful land rights demonstration outside Parliament House in Canberra. Excluding Gary Foley, who suddenly found that he had 'other important business elsewhere' these blacks agreed to go to Canberra as soon as sufficient funds were available. As I had planned for concurrent demos outside the parliament house in each State, Gary Williams stayed in Sydney to try to organize one in New South Wales, while telegrams were sent to Jack Davis in Western Australia, Pastor Doug Brady in Queensland as well as other leaders in other States. (It is a matter of history that the idea of concurrent demonstrations did not come off.) Next problem was how to get the money for Canberra. I had not long been out of jail and had no union contacts whatsoever, so I accompanied Michael Anderson to the Waterside Workers Union offices where Mr Fitzgibbon sent out a terse message to Anderson that he was 'too busy' to see him. It was obviously time to move to the left, so next I rang Alex Robertson and Dennis Freney at the *Tribune* and told them of the need for a Canberra demo. We needed a car and funds to get the initial group to Canberra. Would they help? They agreed without

any conditions or demurral whatsoever and supplied us with a car and a cheque for \$70 which I cashed through my personal account and gave to Michael Anderson.

From its inception to its demise, the Aboriginal Embassy was a totally Aboriginal thing. Besides treating us with ordinary courtesy at its inception and providing the car and funds to kick it off, the Communists had no influence over it nor did they exercise any control. Thank Christ for Commos! They know that Aborigines don't give a damn for their dogma, any more than they do for the dogmas of the bible bashers, but they are nevertheless willing to give practical aid to blacks more often, more reliably and unconditionally than other groups. If that is 'manipulation', more power to it.

After this impetus, my connection with the Embassy ceased and it became the vehicle for young radical protest. It certainly achieved the purpose for which it was intended. Although I regret that the land claim put out by the Embassy was not a little more realistic, the way all of black Australia responded to that little tent in Canberra and the idea of land rights shows the unanimity of black thinking as to ultimate ends. I could never, myself, go to Canberra at any time while the Embassy was standing. Parole regulations keep me confined to the anachronistic Eastern Lands Division of New South Wales. Each movement outside this area must be sanctioned by the State governor and applied for a fortnight in advance. If I step outside this area without official permission, I am liable to be returned to a life sentence. This fact I never could get into the heads of the young radicals who felt that I did not have the guts to follow up the chain of events that I had started. Of course, for me to go to Canberra without permission would have been a fruitless exercise in defiance. I did, at the time, make the required formal application to go to Canberra but permission was refused by the New South Wales parole authorities. Of course there was 'legitimate' reason for needing to go to Canberra as well—a fact that Mr Barry Dexter, Director of the then Office of Aboriginal Affairs confirmed. But the New South Wales authorities would not let me anywhere near Canberra at any time that the Embassy was standing.

The Embassy started off as a land rights demonstration. But as Paul Coe has said since:

Tony Coorey got the idea of calling the tent the 'Aboriginal Embassy'. It started off as a joke, but turned out to be perhaps one of the most brilliant symbolic forms of protest that this country had ever seen. The reason why the Embassy became such a powerful thing was because in many ways it typified the history of this country: the invasion, colonization, the arrogance of the white man, imposing his values and his culture on other people.

And Bobbi Sykes:

The Embassy symbolized that blacks had been pushed as far back as blacks are going to be pushed. That from now on, they are going forward again. Despite people fighting and struggling right across the country, spasmodically, individually, in isolation, the first *national* announcement that the pushing back was going to stop was the Embassy. Despite FCAATSI and that stuff. The Embassy was a *black* affair; it wasn't blacks being guided by whites. And I was determined to keep it so. First and foremost it symbolized the land rights struggle. But beyond that it said to white Australia, 'You've kicked us down for the last time.' In all areas. In education, in health, in police victimization, in locking people up en masse—in all these things. It said that blacks were now going to get up and fight back on any or all these issues.

The details about the removal of the Embassy, the police violence and its aftermath are all reasonably familiar to Australians. As far as the cops were concerned, they had to get a tent off the lawns. The blacks, on the other hand, weren't just fighting for a tent—they were fighting for the whole of Australia, for the land, the dying babies, the misery.

Of course that 'ragged little symbol of hope' as Bobbi called it, had become too much of an embarrassment for the government to tolerate any longer. Said Coe:

It got to the stage where they couldn't tolerate it any longer because we were getting international publicity. We were getting a big exposé of the situation of Aboriginal people in Australia and the federal government was being criticized in the world press—*The New York Times*, the *London Times*, Japanese newspapers, TASS Soviet newsagency and even *The Peking Daily* ran stories. When it got to this level they decided they'd had enough of this. They might've thought that if it was allowed to go on, it might get to the stage where some of their exports could've been jeopardized by embargoes being placed against Australia. I personally believe this. I think they saw all sorts of situations where Australia would be treated like Rhodesia—with economic blockades, United Nations imposed. That would've been the outcome of the Embassy if it had stayed there much longer.