

CALL TO VIOLENCE

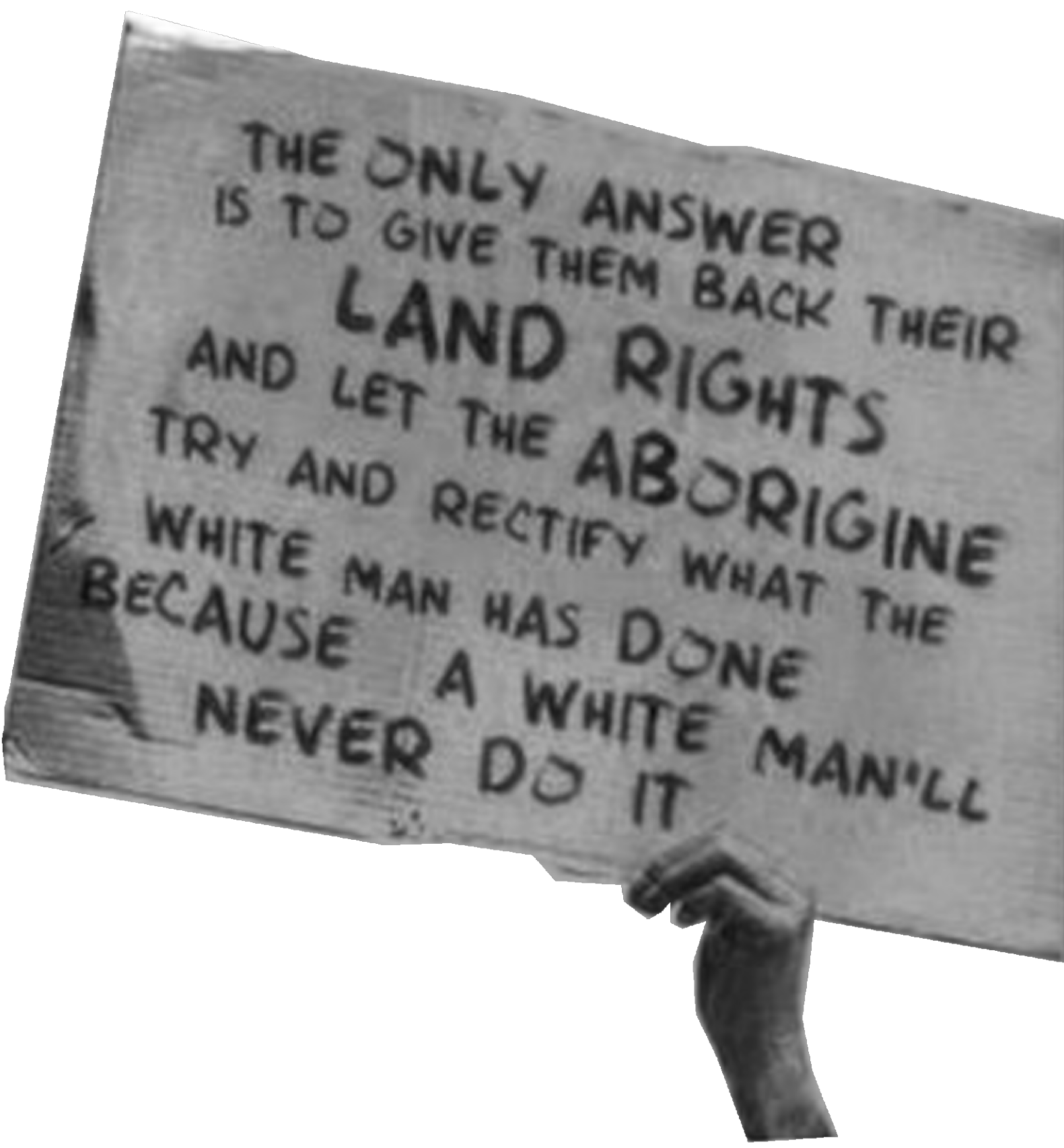


Art of Survival

Kevin Gilbert

From "Because a White Man'll Never Do It"
(1973)

Made into a zine on the stolen lands of the Wurundjeri people, in solidarity with First Nations struggle for liberation and justice everywhere in so-called australia.



7. CALL TO VIOLENCE

TONY (THE SEEDING . . .)

I remember Mumma—when the baby came along
We were livin' at the old Trelawney place
And we couldn't get a doctor he was much too far
away
And we hadn't any money so he wouldn't treat
OUR race
Daddy lived on station handouts for the bit of
work he did
And we ate off the wild rabbits that he caught
Or when we were real hungry he would go and steal
a sheep
He'd laugh and bring it in the door 'Look what I've
bought!'
But the laughter slowly faded as my mumma's
time drew near
Her body hunchin' tightly up with pain
The crinkle lines upon his face grew deep and dark
with fear
As he rode out for the doctor who would not come,
again.

I remember Mumma when the baby came along
With her hands screwed tight around the old
bedstead
Her dear, dear body twitching, screaming all that
awful night
Till silence came with morning—both were dead.
Now we live back on the mission and my daddy is
a drunk
Its not as nice as old Trelawney place
I'm gonna be a doctor when I grow up some day
Or a soldier—captain maybe and I'll fight for my
black race!

Yeah, I'll fight 'em on my own some day so no one
else gits hurt
And I'll shoot their soldiers—every bloody man
Until they know the wrong they do and why my
mumma died
Yeah, one day I'm gonna shoot right back—
I'LL MAKE them understand! !

THE FLOWERING . . .

When the white man took his bloodied boot
From the neck of the buggared black
Did you expect some gratitude
His smile 'Good on you Jack?'
When your psalmist sang
Of a suffering Christ
While you practised genocide
Did you expect his hate would fade
Out of sight with the ebbing tide?
In another time, another age
If fate had reversed the play
And a hard black boot pressed on your white
throat
When released—what would *you* say
Friends and pals forever together in a new fair
dawn
Or meet like you and I shall meet
With flames and with daggers drawn.

The 1967 Referendum gave a huge 'yes' vote for full citizenship rights for Aborigines. Many blacks thought that at last a new deal for black people was imminent. The disillusionment after 1967 hit hard. It is little wonder that younger, more literate blacks began to search for their values in the literature of the Black Panther movement of the United States. They read somewhere about how some white fat cat reckoned that Australia was a 'lucky country' and said 'Yeah, for the gub-

bahs'. Once again they are told of a case of rape of a black girl and hear the oft told tale that the coppers regard sex offences against blacks *with great tolerance*. If blacks get drunk, they get busted and cop-bullied not because they are drunk so much, but because they're *black* and drunk. I mean it—just ask yourselves whether you ever see the cops waiting to catch 'em reeling out of the RSL at night. It would be more than a cop would dare. The young blacks remember how the white kids sniggered at them in high school. (That's what made them leave—despite all the good offices of the Secondary Schools Grant.) They've probably heard the president of the Aboriginal Advancement Association back on the reserve trying to make himself and his listeners believe that, 'If we just wait a bit longer, the whites *will* help us, things *will* get better.' They've probably walked out of the meeting to go and get drunk. There's some reality in that. So they come to the city and some black shows them what Malcolm X, an American black, said:

So don't you run around trying to make friends with somebody who's depriving you of your rights. They're not your friends, no, they're your enemies. Treat them like that and fight them, and you'll get freedom; and after you get your freedom, your enemy will respect you.

They read it and it figures, it makes sense.

Or perhaps they read Frederick Douglass:

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. [And] If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

And that makes sense too.

Many country Aborigines are afraid of 'Black Power' because to them it has meant urban Aborigines descending on their town, kicking up hell about something, usually pub or

wage discrimination, and clearing out. The local blacks are left, undefended, to cop the inevitable white reprisals. Nevertheless, the idea of Black Power has enabled many Aborigines, especially the younger generation, to lift their heads towards a vision of hope and a new dignity. It has brought a subtle change to many of the most down-trodden, frightened communities and it is no accident that all blacks who knew of the Embassy and understood its aims, hailed its message—land rights for black Australia. Concurrent with this is the fact that blacks everywhere are no longer just accepting but are volubly questioning the squalor, the purposelessness, the waste of their lives and the social condition they find themselves in.

Black Power, as symbol, signifies the return to pride, to manhood, for Aborigines who have long ago lost the status of men. It will provide a new identity-image, this time positive. It will, in time, spell the end of the drunken 'give us two bob mate' cur who slinks up to you in a country town. It will provide an avenue of expression. Black Power is a very new concept in this country and, unlike its American counterpart, has produced little real violence to date. The violent scenes that were a feature when the Embassy was ripped down were, all participants and spectators agree, police initiated, with the blacks only defending themselves and their tent.

Expressed positively, Black Power means black men and black women speaking out and uniting to force the white man to acknowledge their humanity, rights, justice, dignity and right to self-determination. It is the voice of a dispossessed, victimized minority making a fair, human claim. Expressed negatively, it becomes disillusionment and frustration which is expressed not by alcoholic self-destruction as in the past, but by violence against the white persecutors. I asked Charles Perkins how things would develop if tribal and urban blacks were once again short-changed after a period of hope, as happened after 1967. Would there be violence? Said he:

Some groups probably will [turn to it]. It must be part and parcel of their development if frustration continues. Violence will be part and parcel of Aboriginal affairs in the future. It just can't be any other way. It will probably

happen anyway, regardless of what good measures are going to be implemented by the Labor government. It is going to happen in some areas, as a spontaneous thing. It has happened in the last two or three years quite dramatically on lots of missions and reserves. A can has been put on this, to keep it quiet. Nobody knows about it at all. Yet it has happened frequently. It has to be expected because the people have been suppressed for so long and they're just sick and tired of promises, programmes, pilot projects and being told what to do by the white bosses and administrators. Having things planned for them by people who don't really have their interest at heart. Being deceived and denied things. I think they are just going to hit out.

As I attended meetings and asked questions both of city and outback blacks, the idea of impending violence came through repeatedly both from the articulate blacks and from those whose depth of pain and hatred had left them almost incoherent on the subject. And over and over again they stressed that violence is necessary, not as aggression so much (although that is part of it) as for *defence*, defence against police persecution and acts of small-town and city bullying by whites. As Paul Coe put it:

I don't believe any Aboriginal will initiate violence. But I believe that, like all groups around the world who have been colonized, Aborigines will take a defensive role. They will ensure that they survive as a race. They will ensure that their kids don't keep dying from malnutrition, that they will not be used and abused as cheap labour. I think that when you take into account the institutionalized violence that most Aborigines have to live under and their psychic reactions against it, then you've got to find a way, some kind of defensive mechanism that allows the people to survive as a race and I think that one day, the outgrowth of this, of Aboriginal men and women picking up guns, will be just. To me, the idea that the Aboriginal people will one day pick up the gun, to use it perhaps, to build their own separate state or find some

other way of ensuring that the race *does* survive, is a just one. It's something that I'm not frightened of because it is something that's just got to happen. I see that there will be no alternative. . . .

Even the more conservative elements agree on this. Neville Bonner stated, after the fall of the Embassy, a peaceful black demonstration, 'I can't see how violence can be avoided now'. Pastor Frank Roberts commented,

The militants have become a creative force—creative for the betterment of the Aboriginal people in their own way. There is definitely a place for militancy. We cannot remain docile too much longer . . . we *must* assert ourselves. I think that if this government fails the Aboriginal people now, if it falls down on its promises and betrays the Aborigines it will be a bad day for the Australian people.

On the face of it, Aboriginal violence against white Australia is somewhat like a gnat challenging an elephant. Blacks in this country are historically a non-violent, peaceable people. The white race has always been keen to turn to violence, especially if it is against blacks, so they wouldn't take much provoking to turn on the big guns against a troublesome black minority. Such were the considerations of ex-army man Gerry Bostock when he said, apropos black violence:

If violence erupts, the blacks will be annihilated because they haven't got the manpower or the financial resources . . . There *will* be violence, but the blacks will lose in the end.

Perhaps there will be a new black soon. A black, who, completely alienated, will consider that to lose in the end is not too great a price to pay to re-purchase the manhood of the Aboriginal race. Figure it out. How many white men would stand by and watch their children dying from starvation and neglect? Watch them being oppressed and stigmatized? Watch them being crippled? Perhaps the cost will be some black

martyrs. And they won't come from the ranks of the fashionably dressed, TV pomaded, Afro-frizzed public blacks. It is a different black that I have in mind. You see them at black meetings. They never speak up. They never draw attention to themselves. They get a bit bored with the rhetoric of Black Power, because, essentially, they are doers, not talkers. They only perk up when someone suggests a line of action, because this has real meaning. So, when someone suggests that it's time for a demo outside Parliament House in Sydney, or perhaps we should storm Pinchgut or, let's go and camp on Waddy's lawn, it's 'Yeah, let's go'. There is no fear. They are ready for action and only need good leadership to become an effective kamikaze force. Ten years ago their type all became hopeless reserve drunks. Today they don't, for now they have been given a purpose. I believe it is these blacks who will achieve a return to manhood for Aboriginal men.

There are dreams about . . . vague plans of how blacks could form guerilla bands. Get a few with the bushmanship of a Lionel Brockman and you'd have quite an effective force provided you could get the thing financed by outside sympathizers. In the USA, whenever white society does another rotten thing to blacks, black resentment expresses itself in terms of dragging whites out of cars and giving them a hiding, or summer ghetto riots, or by firing a building full of white tenants. That, say Aborigines with whom I have discussed these things, is maybe OK if you number 22 million. But when you are as tiny a minority as blacks in this country, you have to act less on emotion and more with the intellect. Say a black girl is forced into sex with some coppers in South Australia. It's no good, obviously, complaining to the cops. And of course, the same cops have got tabs on all the local blacks. But if these blacks could alert a central group which could organize for a punitive group from another state to move in to take the justice denied to them by the white system and then move out of the region just as quickly, it would be quite a different thing. It would not be difficult to enforce secrecy amongst blacks and, were a type of 'cell' system used, working through a central group, any leaks that did occur could be quickly pin-pointed and sealed without undue fuss. Provided

adequate organization was kept, only a handful of people in each state would be needed to form a guerilla force against white violence.

Some blacks stress that there is no sense in having blind-rage reprisals against white people whose only crime is that they happen to have been born with a white skin. They stress that a guerilla system would eliminate much of the injustice to innocent by-standers, both white and black, that characterizes the Black Power uprisings of the USA. There is no profit either in hurting innocent whites to whom no personal blame for the state blacks are in can be attached and who might very well support the Aboriginal cause. Similarly, there is no profit in needlessly causing a white reaction on a scale which would turn into a race war. However there *is* profit in the concept of fast moving reprisal units that can sink out of sight into any black population after bringing a measure of justice to a pre-selected figure who has a record of racist bullying in any area.

Of course blacks realize that with conditions as they are today, there is still a large element of romance in these ideas. Probably Aborigines will have to wait at least one, if not more generations before they can fund and organize themselves to this extent. And, some blacks argue, the best action is not against the white man's person, but against his property, for property is his god. Reprisals against white injustice would, in this view, be better directed against petrol, electricity or gas installations. Against dams, bridges, railways and aerodromes. Against foreign-owned ships, to get a focus of international publicity. Or mass poisoning of the waterholes of stud stock could be thought about. Wheat fields and forests could be razed, using chemical substances that ignite after a delay.

That blacks have got to the point of dreaming such dreams is in itself an indictment of Australia's treatment of its black people. It is incredible, considering Australia's affluence, that a peaceful race of people should be forced to fight to attain justice in the land of their fathers.

It may, in time, be proven that it is necessary to do this. We should remember the words of that great patriot Mahatma Gandhi in answer to a question on the use of violence in the defence of rights (published in *The Guardian*, 16/12/38):

Where the choice is set between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. I praise and extol the serene courage of dying without killing. Yet I desire that those who have not this courage should rather cultivate the art of killing and being killed, than basely to avoid the danger. This is because he who runs away commits mental violence; he has not the courage of facing death by killing. I would a thousand times prefer violence than the emasculation of a whole race. I prefer to use arms in defence of honour rather than remain the vile witness of dishonour.

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Paul Coe, 1972

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