

On Sunday, 10th of January, 1988 at the Tom Mann Theatre, 136 Chalmers St., Surry Hills the Migrant Committee for Aboriginal Rights is holding a concert in support of the struggle of Aboriginal people for their rights.

The purpose of this initiative is to provide a stimulus for a debate amongst migrant communities as a first step to achieve better communication and understanding with Aboriginal communities.

GARY FOLEY'S ADDRESS

Aboriginal people don't need to be told, in many instances of the obvious support that exists in the so called migrant communities in Australia.

I have difficulties with the word "migrant" as I did in the 1950's and 60's when I was a young kid and people called those who arrived in the post-war migration period "new Australians". White Australians used to call people like you "new Australians". I could never figure that out, because it seemed to me that the real new Australians were the Anglo-saxons who turned up here from 1788 onwards. This wasn't something I was able to have any great intellectual discussion about with white Australians. Probably to their detriment, unfortunately.

Aboriginal people are keenly concious and very aware of the fact that in many instances migrants have come from situations of extreme adversity, of great political oppression, of torture of both body and soul. We understand. We empathise. We have experienced that ourselves for two hundred years so there is a natural empathy on both sides in that respect. In some instances there are the peoples among migrants, particulatrlly the Palestinian people, who come from an identical situation to us. People who have been dispossessed and people who we obviously who we feel a great empathy with and people whose struggle we can understand from the bottom of our hearts. We know the experience of dispossession. We know the experience of oppression - It's a bond that is common to all of us.

The other thing that brings us all together, in our hearts and our minds, is the common experience at the hands of some of the more brutal white Australian racism. One of the things I learn't a long time ago in Melbourne where I lived for fifteen years and where I have talked at numerous schools : you don't have to explain to migrant kids what racism is all about, in fact, often I have had them help me explain to some of their Anglo- saxon class mates the experience of racism - of what being on the receiving end of white Australian racism is all about.

It takes me back to a long time ago when I was a kid in a small country town. I lived briefly in a place called Tenafield. When I lived there I found myself to be an

outcast when I went to school, along with two other young kids. One of them was a young greek kid in the same class as me. Another was a young Italian kid. We found ourselves naturally drawn together and hanging together for the simple reason that a lot of the white Australian kids used to give us hell. They used to call us the B.W.D.group - The Boong, the Wog and the Dago. Which is what Australia is about in many ways, especially in the 50's and still today. When I was very young I thought that Black fellas were one out when it came to that sort of experience. But through having that experience before I was even ten years old, I learnt a heU of a lot about the commonality of our experience.

In terms of the Bicentennial year, there's no doubt at this stage of the game (and I suppose it is a bit of game) that Aboriginal people are winning hands down in the public relations battle. It's veiy significant that the vast majority of the overseas news reports, from New Year's Day onwards, have featured details and particulars of the Aboriginal struggle and the Aboriginal peoples situation in Australia today. Much more so than any trivial garbage about the razmatazz birthday party. We are killing them hands down. If you think about it, the main contingent of Aboriginal people haven't arrived in Sydney yet. It's important to acknowledge that, up to this point, it's the efforts of many people that work along In the long term I hope (and I know) that from this excercise tonight a greater degree of mutual understanding and actual working together should and will develop. Because in the short term Aboriginal people are all about land rights: a means by which Aboriginal people can obtain economic independence and true self determination for the first time in two hundred years. Once we are able to achieve that, establish our own economic independence, restore - go through the process of reconstruction of our communities, reestablish our dignity and self-respect as human beings and get strong again as a community nationally. I believe that that is the beginning of the long term struggle for us, because in the long term we need a society surrounding our communities which is in some way in harmony with our communities. It seems to me that if we are to achieve that we need in the long term work very strongly towards changing Australian society as a whole. In order to do that we need to develop some real Australian culture, not the white Australian culture of football, meatpies, kangaroos and Holden cars. We need to develop a society that draws on the positive elements of the cultures present as you were able to do for the concert.

There is a great cultural diversity in this country which should not be eliminated for the sake of some sort of polyglot, homogenous society. It is important that we preserve aspects of

all of the cultures that exist in Australia in the hope that we can develop a genuinely multicultural future Australia, a genuinely egalitarian Australia where there is true equality of opportunity for all people, where every body can be proud of being Australian. In order to achieve that the first place we go to learn how to treat each other with compassion and respect as human beings rather than commodities to be exploited economically is the Aboriginal people who have the inherent wisdom of 40,000 years of accumulated knowledge in this country. Aboriginal people are more part of this

land of this continent than anybody else. It's logical that we use the building blocks of what Aboriginal people can teach and pass on as the foundations of the new Australia. Beyond that we also need to draw on the really positive aspects of all cultures that will exist. So that the Ron Caseys and the John Laws and other racists of the world will be irrelevant. They are already part of what I consider to be an outrageous vocal minority.

If we are to achieve that we need to learn more about each other. Aboriginal people need to learn more and have more direct relationships with people from migrant communities and migrants need to work a lot more closely with us which I hope this committee is going to facilitate in the near future. Ultimately it's inevitable that we will win. In closing I would like to say "El pueblo unido, jamas sara vencido"!