

“Speaker’s Corner” Address at National Archives of Australia on Sunday, May 29th, 2011 at 2pm.

I am greatly honoured to be asked to say a few words about the petition that has been so well preserved by the National Archives of Australia. By displaying this petition the Archives has honoured all those whose names are written on it. By your presence here today you are also giving honour to the memory of those whose names are before us. It is a big responsibility for Daniel and I to do justice to their sacrifice. We both thank the National Archives of Australia for the invitation to speak today.

This is the first time I have seen the petition since I mailed it to Buckingham Palace in October 1972. Many of those named on it were my friends. Sadly, the majority have passed away since the petition was gathered. I feel that their spirits are with us today. Their signatures on this historic document act as a cry for Aboriginal rights - one that has echoed down through the generations.

Those who signed the appeal to the Queen would be proud to know that the National Archives of Australia has described this petition as an important document in the Aboriginal rights movement and in Australian history as well. Daniel was going to smoke the petition displayed here but he feared the ceremony might set off the fire alarm and sprinkler system. However, today we visited the Aboriginal Embassy and were smoked in the sacred fire burning there.

Could we please start proceedings with a moment’s silence to acknowledge those who have passed away..... Thank you.

In my brief talk I will firstly place the petition in the context of the Aboriginal Struggle. I shall then attempt to give the petition a human face by describing some of the people who contributed to it. In Darwin I often get requests for these same photographs, so there is no objection to showing their image after so many years. Also because they made such an important contribution to Aboriginal history, I believe the signatories should be acknowledged as the heroes and martyrs of the struggle that they were. Hopefully today’s Speakers Corner will place the petitioners firmly in their rightful place in history. I shall then briefly mention my contribution, before describing the history of the petition in a bit more detail.

For the last four decades to my knowledge, the Larrakia petition has been almost entirely overlooked. The petition is seldom mentioned in history books, essays and documentaries. One exception is Judith Wright’s 1985 book, ‘We Call for a Treaty’. Her book is available in PDF format on the internet.

Perhaps it was Judith Wright who first labelled this as the ‘Larrakia Petition’. This would be understandable because ‘Gwalwa Daraniki’ in the Larrakia language means ‘Our Land’. In fact the petition was intended as a **National** effort, on behalf of **all** Aborigines, not just the Larrakia people, the traditional owners of the Darwin area.

There **were** earlier Larrakia petitions. In 1971 the Larrakia had prepared a statement signed by 15 people vowing not to lose ‘one more acre of land’. Then a letter signed by eight men was delivered on 18th December 1971, threatening to cut the overland telegraph line between Darwin and Katherine. All the men who signed the letter were taken to the police station to give statements. These police statements are available in digital format in my ASIO files preserved by the National Archives of Australia.¹ The Special Branch and ASIO kept better minutes of our meetings than we did. Their archival records remain a useful resource to me.

The police response to Aboriginal protest in Darwin did not deter the Larrakia and their supporters. Judith Wright records that in March, 1972 a petition signed by Gwalwa Daraniki members was sent to the Prime Minister, William McMahon. As you see in the handouts, this petition called for a ‘Commission to go around to every tribe and work out a treaty to suit each tribe’. The petition concluded, ‘These are the demands of the Gwalwa Daraniki and we shall not stop until the treaties are signed.’

Prime Minister McMahon replied in June 1972, saying that it was not appropriate to negotiate with British subjects as though they were foreign powers. However, the Larrakia did not give up, and the national petition we honour today was the result. A year later the Larrakia were to present their own treaty to Judge Woodward, the Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner. This document is also preserved in the Archives.

To put the Larrakia petition in perspective, it is one of many similar demands that Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus record in the book, ‘The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history.’ Typically, the book does not mention the Larrakia petition. The list is too long to recite here but one more famous document was the Yirrkala bark petition to the House of Representatives. Amongst the points made on the bark petition was a fear of sharing ‘the fate of the Larrakeah people’.

¹ Series A6119 Control 3853 Item: Day, William Bartlett [ASIO File] Volume 2, 1973-1975.
Series A6119 Control 3854 Item: Day, William Bartlett [ASIO File] Volume 1, 1971-1973.

THE LARRAKIA TREATY.

WHAT WE WANT:-

SPECIAL AREAS: KULALUK, BAGOT, GOONDAL, DARIBAH NOONGALINYA, MANABUR, Balyun, MATLAMANNING.

THE 14 SQUARE MILE LARRAKEYAH RESERVE.

\$15,000,000 FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF DESTRUCTION.

SIX HUNDRED AND SIXTY ACRES IN TOWN TO REPLACE LAND TAKEN FROM BAGOT IN 1965.

A MONUMENT TO THE TRIBE AND A MUSEUM TO THE LAND RIGHTS WAR.

AREAS SET ASIDE FOR ABORIGINES TO CAMP e.g. BERRIMAH AND RAILWAY DAM.

PROPER RECOGNITION OF LARRAKIA LANGUAGE AND ADVICE SOUGHT FOR PLACE NAMES e.g. MANABUR NOT VERNON IS, Balyun NOT DELISSAVILLE, KOORIMBYE NOT RAPID CREEK.

BAGOT RESERVE TO BE KEPT FOR OUR PEOPLE FOR ALL TIME.

BOMBING OF QUAIL ISLAND MUST STOP AND ABORIGINES TO BE CONSULTED BEFORE ANY LAND USAGE ANYWHERE.

Jackson de Mello Secretary
BIGHOP MOM

The Larrakia Tribal country as described by Baldwin Spencer 1901. From Finniss River, N.E. to mouth of Adelaide River, inland to a point ten miles north of Rum Jungle - including part Darwin and South part.

THE GWALWA DARANIKI ASKS THE LAND RIGHTS COMMISSION TO WORK OUT A TREATY WITH EVERY TRIBE.

FIRST, EVERY TRIBE MUST MAKE A ROLL - WITH THE NAMES APPROVED BY THE ELDERS.

ALL THE TRIBE MUST AGREE TO THE TERMS OF THE TREATY BEFORE THEY SIGN THE TREATY.

THE PRIME MINISTER AND GOVERNOR-GENERAL MUST ALSO SIGN EACH TREATY.

IF THE PEOPLE OF A TRIBE DO NOT AGREE WITH THE TERMS OF THE TREATY, THAT TRIBE WILL GO ON FIGHTING FOR THE LAND AS WE HAVE DONE FOR 203 YEARS.

IF THE TREATY IS SIGNED, THEN AT LAST JUSTICE WILL BE DONE.

signed + Mary Kunyee Secretary

Jackson de Mello Secretary

Roy Mutchford
FRED

X Violet Nungarrayi

Kulaluk.
2nd June 1973.

Above: The Larrakia Treaty presented to Judge Woodward at Kulaluk on June 2nd, 1973, 8 months after the petition to the Queen signed by 1000 people.

The Murdoch press continues to champion the clans of North East Arnhem Land as responsible for the Land Rights Act passing into legislation. In fact last Friday's *Australian* illustrated a story on a mining deal in North East Arnhem Land with a photograph of Galurrwuy Yunupingu holding the bark petition. The article repeats the claim that the Yirrkala clans were responsible for the Land Rights Act in 1976, thus ignoring six years of history - the crucial years between the 1971 Gove decision and 1976. The thesis that I suggest today is that it was a ragged coalition of fringe dwellers in Darwin and later Alice Springs who kept the pressure on the Federal and Northern Territory governments when land rights were under threat between 1971 and 1976.

Certainly most of those who signed the petition addressed to the Queen were not the movers and shakers of the Aboriginal struggle as it is recorded in the history books and southern mass media. In a brief slide show I would like to put faces to some of the names of those who signed. Some are well known, like Phillip Roberts and Denis Walker, whose signatures are there, but the majority are from the grass roots, if not the 'long grass', as they say in Darwin. They express the cry for recognition of a people whose rights had been crushed. They seized the banner from their predecessors at a crucial time in history and carried it forward.

There is Bobby Secretary, Topsy Secretary and her cousin, Prince of Wales, Larrakia elders Dolly Batcho, and Garamanak, Kim Ross, Norman Horace, Johnny Maler and Cheryl Buchanan, Roy Mudpul, Richard Rankin, Norman Harris and Billy Manji and a Queensland man who helped collect the names and became synonymous with the Larrakia struggle, Fred Fogarty.

In this recent photograph the people at Knuckeys Lagoon remember their brave parents and extended family members who are signatories on the petition and are buried on land they won in Darwin in 1979. Their little community has been immortalised in Basil Sansom's book, 'The Camp at Wallaby Cross' and also in this surveillance photo by the Special Branch in 1972 (also taken from my ASIO files). Most of those pictured would have signed. Note their meagre but self-built accommodation in the background. Their struggle for the gains won in the 1970s continues.

I believe it is appropriate that this petition calls for a treaty, because from the Aboriginal viewpoint there has been a protracted and ongoing war occurring in this country in which Aboriginal people have never surrendered their claim to land rights. Speaking personally, I have known many leaders, heroes, martyrs and quiet achievers amongst Aboriginal people whose efforts and sacrifice has gone unrecognised. As Bobby Secretary said, 'When I die others will carry on.'

To my knowledge there is no national memorial to the heroism of the Aboriginal people who fell in many ways defending their land. There is some belated recognition of the Aboriginal people who served defending Australia in overseas wars, but what is needed is a monument on a grand scale in Canberra commemorating the Aboriginal struggle that has been so fleetingly recorded. That struggle continues within this country we now share. I envisage a massive realistic monument capturing the horror, the tragedy, the stoicism, the courage and even the loyal service of the Aboriginal resistance.

John Pilger captured some of the emotion behind this struggle in the opening of his Bicentennial television documentary 'A Secret Country', now on DVD. Staring into the camera, with great intensity Pilger recited a poem which first appeared in the newsletter Bunji in 1971:

At the whiteman's school what are our children taught
Are they told of the battles our people fought
Are they told why the women cried
Are they told how our people died
Australia's true history is never read
But the black man keeps it in his head.

The first edition of the book, 'A Secret Country', reprints the poem on page 21 with an acknowledgement to 'an anonymous Aboriginal poet' as the author. When I noticed this, I wrote to Pilger in UK pointing out that the poem was first published in the newsletter Bunji and that it was my composition. Pilger then arranged for the "Fully Updated Edition" of *A Secret Country* to acknowledge the author of the poem as "Bill Day, from Bunji, December 1971."

Perhaps I should at this point say something about my role. Listeners may find it strange that a non-Aboriginal man published an Aboriginal newsletter like Bunji for 13 years and wrote poems and articles like the one I have just read. My role may be an irritant for some Aboriginal militants, even amongst the 1,600 potential members of Larrakia Nation today. But it was not a problem amongst the Aboriginal people I knew in Darwin in the 1970s. From my experience, our activities certainly were a problem for the white racists and the Special Branch.

I hitchhiked up the coast from Perth in 1969 and found work on the wharf in Darwin. On the wharf I heard stories about the Communist led Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights and their fight for citizenship in the 1960s. Peter Australia is one veteran of that campaign whose name is on the petition. The year before, I had worked in Port Hedland as a taxi driver and met an Aboriginal leader named Clancy McKenna who told me about Don McLeod and the Pilbara strikes. In both these struggles, non-Aborigines played an important role, as they did in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa where white and black fought side by side against racism. After 1971, Aboriginal opposition in Australia took a more separatist direction, probably as a reaction to assimilation.

Larrakia activism had its origins at a time when the Gurindjis at Wattie Creek had refocused the Aboriginal struggle from citizenship and equal wages to land rights. Gwalwa Daraniki was the name given to a land rights movement based in the camps of homeless Aboriginal people in Darwin. 'Homeless', in the sense that the Aboriginal campers had no rights to the land on which they had constructed rough shelters of tarpaulins and old corrugated iron. Their voice was to be a roneoed newsletter called Bunji which I published in 64 editions between 1971 and 1985.

At one camp called Kulaluk situated behind the Darwin drive-in cinema I was introduced to Larrakia elders, most notably Mr Bobby Secretary. Others lived in the Bagot Aboriginal Reserve, as it was then known, controlled by the Department of Welfare under the Director, Harry Giese. Twenty-five years later, under different circumstances I was to do my PhD field work in similar

camps in Darwin. My thesis was titled, 'Fringe dwellers in Darwin: cultural persistence or a culture of resistance?' My thesis was passed in 2001.

In the Gove Case in 1970, Judge Blackburn ruled that Aboriginal people had no land rights. Following this decision, in November 1971, five men from the camps had raised their flag on the flag pole in front of the Darwin Supreme Court and claimed back Darwin for the Larrakia. As far as they knew that was the first Aboriginal flag. On three separate occasions in late 1971, the Gwalwa Daraniki members had also sat across the arterial road into Darwin during peak hour. There were also big turnouts of Aboriginal people in the streets of Darwin in the May Day and National Aborigines Day marches.

After many similar actions throughout 1972, the next step was to mail out and circulate petition forms with a covering letter asking Aboriginal people to sign or put their thumb print on the forms and return them before the visit to Darwin by Princess Margaret in late October. I collected quite a few of the signatures myself. That is my printing beside many of the thumb prints and crosses. In this photograph the completed petition being held by Tessa Ferguson and Edwin Jangalaros outside Government House.

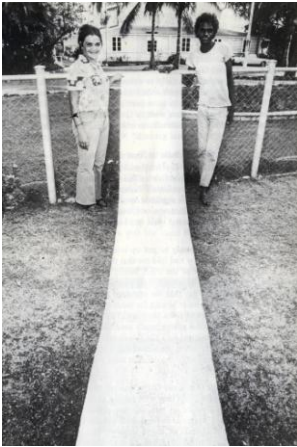
There had been quite a lot of concern in the media about the planned protest, and the police had conducted a blitz on homeless Aboriginal people in the preceding days. Statistics published in the Bunji newsletter show that the number of Aboriginal people hauled before the Darwin magistrates' court on the week prior and after the royal visit doubled. One leading Darwin Aboriginal activist, and leader of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement, Fred Fogarty, was taken from his bed in the Larrakia camp at Kulaluk and locked up for the duration of the protest. Fred pleaded not guilty to his charge and managed to get a sympathetic lawyer named John Waters to defend him. This was before the advent of Legal Aid, so we had to rely on the lawyer's goodwill.

Excuse me if I read the description of events from my book *Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement* published in 1994 by Aboriginal studies Press here in Canberra:

Read from page 37.

The council at the Bagot Reserve sent me a letter warning me that I would be prosecuted if I was seen on the reserve without permission. In those days so-called 'radicals' were rarely given a permit to enter Aboriginal land and the Aboriginal councils were usually very conservative.

People were asked to bring their swags, didgeridoos and guitars to camp out all night outside Government House. As petition forms were returned, they were pasted in one long scroll, which was photographed for the Northern Territory News.



Left: The petition to the Queen. Right: Campers outside Government House waiting to deliver the petition on the night of October 16th, 1972.

The plan was to set up an alternative ‘Aboriginal Government House on the lawns outside the entrance to Government House for the duration of the October visit to Darwin of Princess Margaret and Anthony Armstrong Jones.

One man described his experience in Bunji. “I was just going home. Police pull up. I was just wobbling, probably reckon I was drunk. They took me to the lock up, lock me up to five o’clock next morning. I never seen a white bloke in there. Fifteen blokes counting two women, that’s seventeen. Couldn’t believe it myself, everyone lying on the floor, sleeping on the seat, couldn’t believe it. I thought because of what we did that night, princess or whoever it was was here, policeman was thinking they pick up any blackfellow going on the street going home or not. Come to court the next Tuesday, we all got off with a fine. I was surprised with old man there too, that old with bent back, couldn’t even walk, his wife help him. Well he wouldn’t cause any trouble if he was that old would he? Funny things going on here. Sort of make me think.’

Despite the harassment, about 300 Aboriginal people gathered outside Government house that night chanting and pushing against the police barriers while Margaret circulated amongst guests at a garden party in the Government House grounds. A chant, ‘We want land, not medals’, rang out as the Princess presented an MBE to an Arnhem Land elder. There was no reply to a note the protestors passed to an Aide with the touring party. The note had asked that a delegation be allowed to present the petition. However, no opportunity arose to hand over the petition that night.

After the union buses had taken most of the protestors home, a smaller group stayed at the camp until the next day when a procession of black cars drove up the drive way and out onto the street. Because this was the last chance to present the petition, Johnny Maler, whose name appears prominently on the petition, volunteered to stand in front of the royal motorcade. Johnny tucked the rolled up scroll under his arm and broke through police lines but he was tackled and the petition was torn as police grabbed him and held him back. It was at this point that a large piece went missing, according to a covering letter signed by five leaders of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement when the petition it was later mailed to Buckingham Palace.

As you can see, the petition was torn in the struggle to break through the police lines. I think this is significant, because the petition was born in struggle. A bit of blood would have been even better. The exercise of trying to present the petition to royalty and being obstructed by Australian officialdom could be seen as an exercise in consciousness raising, demonstrating the barrier between Aboriginal people and the colonisers. Henry Reynolds and others record evidence that the British gave instructions that Aboriginal land rights were to be recognised in the colonies. However, apparently the Queen sent the 1972 petition to the Governor General Sir Paul Hasluck and from there it ended up in the archives. I notice that there is a file of correspondence related to the petition that is yet to be cleared by the Archives.

In the 1970s when Chou En Lai of China was asked about the result of the French Revolution, he replied, 'It is too early to tell'. After forty years, the same might be said about the effect of the Larrakia petition to Queen Elizabeth II. This reconciliation week the National Archives of Australia has made a valuable contribution by recognising the brave men and women who signed the petition.

By mounting this display, the Archives have compelled historians and the Australian public to reassess the petition in the light of the demands for a constitutional amendment to recognise the Indigenous inhabitants of our nation. For those involved in Aboriginal rights, it seems like an endless story. Native title under British common law has proved to be very divisive amongst Aboriginal people, although better than nothing. A treaty for Aboriginal people, on Aboriginal terms could be a step towards closure. I thank the Archives for preserving our history for future generations - generations who at the very least might be made aware of the sacrifices made by those who went before them.

William B Day

Canberra

29 May 2011

GWALWA DARANIKI ! THIS IS OUR LAND !

The British settlers took our land. No treaties were signed with the tribes. Today we are REFUGEES. Refugees in the country of our ancestors. We live in REFUGEE CAMPS — without land, without employment, without justice.

The British Crown signed TREATIES with the Maoris in New Zealand and the Indians in North America.

We appeal to the Queen to help us, the Aboriginal people of Australia.

We need land rights and political representation now. SIGNED :

Useful References

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- Series F1 Control 1973/6578 Item: Larrakia Land Claims 1971-1973.
- Series F1 Control 1971/3474 Item: Aboriginal Land Rights Demonstrations 1971-1974
- Series A6119 Control 3853 Item: Day, William Bartlett [ASIO File] Volume 2, 1973-1975.
- Series A6119 Control 3854 Item: Day, William Bartlett [ASIO File] Volume 1, 1971-1973.