



**Bob Carnegie** - Branch Secretary | **Jason Miners** - Deputy Branch Secretary  
**Paul Gallagher** - Assistant Branch Secretary  
**Paul Petersen** - Central QLD Organiser | **Glenn Desmond** - North QLD Organiser

Hi Fellow Workers,

Please find attached a report from Paul Petersen concerning his recent involvement in the Wave Hill 50 years commemoration.

Paul and his partner Ximena did our branch and Union proud in this very important event in the indigenous people's struggle s for some type of a fair deal from an inherently unfair society.

I ask all members and our supporters to take time and read this engaging report.

In Solidarity

Bob Carnegie  
QLD Branch Secretary

## Wave Hill Walk Off 50 Year Anniversary

Fifty years ago on August 23, 1966 an event took place that would forever change Australia and give birth to the Aboriginal land rights movement: THE WAVE HILL WALK OFF.

Queensland, New South Wales and the Northern Territory branches of the MUA were all honoured to send representatives to Kalkarindji to pay respects to the Gurindji people and celebrate the 50 year anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk off.

This report covers what I learned about the Gurindji struggle to regain their land and put an end to the abuse suffered at the hands of pastoralists. I am proud of the role of the Australian Union movement in supporting the Gurindji to achieve a hard earn positive outcome, though the struggle still continues.

### ***The Pastoral Industry's way: Land Theft and Brutal Labour Practices***

Kalkarindji is located in Gurindji Country - referred by the government as Wave Hill station - approximately 600 km south of Darwin in the Northern Territory.

Gurindji Country was first invaded by Europeans in 1850.



By the time of Federation (1901) the traditional owners of the land, the Gurindji people, had their waterholes and soakages fenced off or fouled by cattle. Livestock ate or trampled on fragile desert plants, such as bush tomato, which was a key part of the Gurindji diet. Dingo hunters regularly shot the Gurindji's invaluable hunting dogs and kangaroo - a staple meat - because it competed with cattle for water and grazing land.

The Gurindji people suffered lethal "reprisals" for any attempt to eat the cattle – anything from a skirmish to massacres. One of many recorded government sanctioned massacres occurred at **Coniston** in 1928 lead by Constable William Murray, the officer who held the post of Chief Protector of Aborigines. At least 110 Indigenous men, women and children were brutally murdered in that one massacre.



To survive there was little choice for the Gurindji but to give up their traditional lifestyle and work on the cattle stations as stockmen and domestic help in exchange for meagre and inadequate rations. If the Gurindji couldn't live the traditional way, they could at least remain on their own land which is central to their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing.

In 1914, Wave Hill station was bought by the Vestey Group, a British multinational pastoral company comprising a large conglomerate of cattle companies owned by Baron William Vestey. On stations across Australia the Aboriginal people became the backbone of the Australian cattle industry, working for little or no money, minimal food and living in such appalling conditions that cannot be described as housing.

Until 1968 Aboriginal workers couldn't be paid more than an arbitrary amount in goods (flour, tea, sugar, etc.) and money. This arrangement basically amounted to indentured labour bordering on slavery. A 1945 enquiry found Vestey was not even paying Aboriginal workers the 5 shillings a day minimum wage set up for Aborigines under a 1918 Ordinance. Non-indigenous males were receiving £2.8 a week in 1945 but the Gurindji lived in tiny corrugated iron humpies without floors, lighting, sanitation, nor furniture or cooking facilities.

Billy Bunter Jampijinpa, who lived on Wave Hill Station at the time said:

*"We were treated just like dogs. We were lucky to get paid the 50 quid a month we were due, and we lived in tin humpies you had to crawl in and out on your knees. There was no running water. The food was bad – just flour, tea, sugar and bits of beef like*

*the head or feet of a bullock. The Vestey's mob were hard men. They didn't care about blackfellas."*

The few Gurindji who did receive minimal government benefits had this paid into pastoral company trust accounts over which they had no control over. In stark contrast, non-indigenous workers enjoyed minimum wage and job security with no legal limit on the maximum they could be paid. They were housed in comfortable homes with gardens and had full control over their finances.

An attempt to introduce equal wages for Aboriginal workers was made in 1965, but in March 1966 the Arbitration Commission, President John Moore, handed down the decision that "Male Aborigines should be paid equal wages but not for three years to allow pastoralists breathing space to prepare for the change" the Gurindji were once again let down by the justice system and extremely disappointed.

### ***1966: The Gurindji had had enough!***

On the morning of August 23, 1966, a great man and Indigenous elder Vincent Lingiari organised and led a walk off of 200 Gurindji workers and their families from a remote NT cattle station, to escape and fight servitude.



The squalid living and working conditions for Indigenous workers on pastoral properties became known by the Walk Off despite Vestey ordering the Aboriginal workers camp to be bulldozed within days of the Walk Off to avoid national press coverage of what could only be described as dog kennels or humpies.

Early one morning in March 1967 the Gurindji decided to move from their first camp in the dry bed of the Victoria River and go to Daguragu (Wattie Creek) to set up a permanent settlement of their own, where they would not be under the scrutiny of Welfare and Police.

Vestey's envoys offered the strikers two killers (slaughtered beasts) and higher wages if they returned to work. But Vincent Lingiari said, 'No, we're stopping here'.

In late 1966 the NT government offered a compromise pay rise of 125%, but the strikers still demanded wages equal to those of white stockmen and the return of their land. The government also made moves to cut off food supplies to the Gurindji and threatened evictions. Offers of houses, which the government had built for them at Wave Hill Welfare settlement (now Kalkarindji), were resisted. The Gurindji were adamant. They were not going back to work under the appalling conditions at Wave Hill. They persisted with their protest and stayed at Daguragu.



The Gurindji looked for support and found it in the Australian Trade Union movement and the Australian Communist Party.

### ***The Waterside Workers Federation's support of the Gurindji strikers***

Brain Manning, a wharfie from Darwin, took the first truck load of supplies along the 600km rough corrugated red road from Darwin to Daguragu in his old J series Bedford.



MUA Qld. Organiser Paul Petersen at Kalkarindji, Victoria creek. This is a replica of Brian Manning's famous Bedford truck which delivered vital supplies to the Gurindji strikers. (Brain Manning's actual truck is in the National Canberra Museum)

There were many Darwin wharfies, WWF members, who drove that harsh road to Daguragu to bring supplies to the Gurindji over the next few years: Paul Patten, Barry Reed, Nick Pagonis, Jack Phillips and George Gibbs all did the run numerous times.

A petition was prepared and sent to the Governor General, Lord Casey, requesting the grant of 500 square miles for use by the Gurindji. The Gurindji were going to run their own station on their own land. If Vestey did not agree they would fence the land off regardless.

Brain Manning was elected by the Darwin wharfies to attend the Waterside Workers Federation's All Ports Conference in Sydney as a fraternal delegate. He reported to the conference on the Wave Hill Walk Off with reference to the active support by Darwin's waterside workers in maintaining a line of supplies and to highlight the struggle of the Gurindji for some of their land and their decision to reclaim some by fencing it. The conference decided to recommend to the rank and file members a \$1.00 per member national levy to support the Gurindji claim for their land. This raised \$17,000 which became the Gurindji 'war chest' in their fight for land. Not only was the money spent on building fences but it was also used to support and drive an arduous campaign.

### ***The Gurindji struggle lasted almost a decade***

The tide of public opinion was beginning to turn in Australia. There were demonstrations and arrests in southern Australia in support of the Walk Off, many church, student and trade union groups gave practical and fundraising support to the Gurindji struggle.

But the Struggle would continue for more than eight hard years. During this period, Vincent Lingiari, and others toured Australia, with the support of workers Unions to give talks, raise awareness, build support for their cause and have meetings with major lawyers and politicians.

At one of these fundraising events a donor gave \$500 after hearing Vincent Lingiari speak. The donor – who said he had never before met an Aboriginal person – was a young Dr Fred Hollows, the eye surgeon and Communist activist.

When the Federal government offered a lousy eight square miles for a settlement, the Gurindji

continued their demands. They were still in Daguragu in 1972 when the Whitlam Labor government was elected with a promise to legislate in favour of Aboriginal land rights.

In 1975, the Labor government of Gough Whitlam finally negotiated with Vestey's to give back to the Gurindji a portion of Wave Hill station. This was a landmark in the land rights movement in Australia. The handback took place on 16 August 1975 at Daguragu. Gough Whitlam addressed Vincent Lingiari and the Gurindji people, saying:

*"On this great day, I, Prime Minister of Australia, speak to you on behalf of all Australian people – all those who honour and love this land we live in. For them I want to say to you: I want this to acknowledge that we Australians have still much to do to redress the injustice and oppression that has for so long been the lot of Black Australians."*

*"Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your hands part of the earth itself as a sign that this land will be the possession of you and your children forever."*



Vincent Lingiari was calm, compassionate and gentle in his stance. In his consistency and visionary persistence, he has shown us all how to stand for what is right and that this combination can break down powerful commercial and governmental interests.

Through his resilience and strength, Vincent has become one of the most outstanding Aboriginal leader of our time.

### **What can the Union movement do now to support Indigenous workers?**

Today unionists continue to be inspired by Vincent Lingiari. For Indigenous peoples the struggle for better living and working conditions is as relevant as ever. The aftermath of a brutal colonisation process and past and present unjust government policy can be seen in the low life expectancy, poor health and educational outcomes, high unemployment, extremely high incarceration rates, and over-representation in the child protection system of Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

The Union movement today can help in many ways but one of the major industrial struggles facing remote communities is called CDP or Community Development Program. This inappropriately named program does nothing more but disgracefully exploit Aboriginal workers in regional and remote Australia by paying them less than award wages for a mandatory 25 hours work week with none of the usual contemporary benefits of work like holiday pay, superannuation or long service leave entitlements. If people do not comply with draconian work-for-the-dole requirements they lose their welfare entitlements. This is clearly union business. This is a fight we need to take as matter of urgency.



*Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody have recorded a song in 1991 that will always remind us of the great*

*advancements and achievements made by the Wave Hill Walk Off in 1966. This is also a reminder that each one of us can make a big different.*

## "From Little Things Big Things Grow".

Gather round people I'll tell you a story  
An eight-year long story of power and pride  
British Lord Vestey and Vincent Lingiari  
Were opposite men on opposite sides

Vestey was fat with money and muscle  
Beef was his business, broad was his door  
Vincent was lean and spoke very little  
He had no bank balance, hard dirt was his floor

From little things big things grow

From little things big things grow

Gurindji were working for nothing but rations  
Where once they had gathered the wealth of the land  
Daily the pressure got tighter and tighter  
Gurindji decided they must make a stand

They picked up their swags and started off walking  
At Wattie Creek they sat themselves down  
Now it doesn't sound like much but it sure got tongues talking  
Back at the homestead and then in the town

From little things big things grow

From little things big things grow

Vestey man said "I'll double your wages  
Seven quid a week you'll have in your hand"  
Vincent said "Uhuh we're not talking about wages  
We're sitting right here till we get our land"  
Vestey man roared and Vestey man thundered  
"You don't stand the chance of a cinder in snow!"  
Vince said "If we fall others are rising

From little things big things grow

From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiari boarded an aeroplane  
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights  
And daily he went around softly speaking his story  
To all kinds of men from all walks of life

And Vincent sat down with big politicians  
"This affair", they told him, "it's a matter of state  
Let us sort it out, your people are hungry"  
Vincent said "No thanks, we know how to wait"

From little things big things grow  
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiari returned in an aeroplane  
Back to his country once more to sit down  
And he told his people "Let the stars keep on turning  
We have friends in the south, in the cities and towns"

Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting  
'Til one day a tall stranger appeared in the land  
And he came with lawyers and he came with great ceremony  
And through Vincent's fingers poured a handful of sand

That was the story of Vincent Lingiari  
But this is the story of something much more  
How power and privilege cannot move a people  
Who know where they stand and stand in the law

Paul Petersen  
Central QLD Organiser





50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
**FREEDOM DAY**  
FESTIVAL

COMMEMORATING THE GURINDJI WALK OFF & THE BIRTH OF ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS

**AUGUST 18 - 21 2016**

KALKARINGI & DAGURAGU, NT, AUSTRALIA

ngumpin, kartiya karru-la jintaku-la • blackfella, whitefella unite as one



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