

Jointly submitted by
Centre for Philippine Concerns-Australia, Brisbane Branch
and
Solidarity Philippines Australia Network
Mail Address: Justice Place, 84 Park Road, Woolloongabba Qld.
4102
CPCA Email: cpcabrisbane@cpcabrisbane.org
SPAN Email: span@span.org.au
URL <http://www.cpcabrisbane.org>

August 11, 2006

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into Stolen Wages

Thank you for the extension of time to make this submission. The members of the Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia (CPCA) and its partner organisation Solidarity Philippines Australia Network (SPAN) wish to add our voices to this inquiry.

There are appended here some articles about Stolen Wages that we have published in our network newsletter *KASAMA* in hard copy and online at <http://www.cpcabrisbane.org>.

CPCA and SPAN members have long been aware of and concerned about the unjust treatment past governments of Australia have shown to the Indigenous peoples of this country. Today's social indicators of poor health, early death, high rate of incarceration, and financial poverty that plagues Aboriginal people are the results of racial discriminatory practice. The Queensland and New South Wales governments have acknowledged the existence of money paid into the Aboriginal welfare funds and the balance of wages never paid out to Aboriginal workers. The Queensland government has made a lump sum offer of \$2,000 and \$4,000 each in settlement of these accounts and some people have rejected these sums as inadequate and unjust, while others have accepted payment for fear that they will not live long enough to benefit from a protracted dispute. Many others have not been made aware that they are entitled to make a claim.

CPCA and SPAN are community based organisations. CPCA is a Filipino only organisation and SPAN is comprised of both Filipinos and non-Filipinos. We are blessed in having close personal and organisational relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. We have met with Aboriginal families whose ancestors include Filipinos and through our ongoing research project we are learning about the 19th century Filipino presence in Australia. Filipinos visited and were settled in Australia at least from the mid-1800s and onwards. Some married into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Dr. Rosalind Kidd's research is a thorough investigation and analysis of official Queensland Government documents and her doctoral thesis and subsequent writings have been accessible for the past dozen years.⁽¹⁾ And yet, this theft - or call it 'misappropriation' if you'd rather, this 'outstanding unpaid debt' - is still unresolved.

There is certainly a need "to set the record straight". The contribution of the Indigenous workforce to the wealth and welfare of Australia is generally unrecognised and too many Australians still believe that Indigenous people have been recipients of special beneficial treatment not available to others.

We would appreciate being informed of the dates of the public hearings.

This letter and contents are being sent via email. A signed hard copy is in the post.

Yours sincerely,



Dee Dicen Hunt,
Co-coordinator, Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia, Brisbane Branch,
Committee member, Solidarity Philippines Australia Network,
and Editor of the network's newsletter "Kasama".

Encl:

1. Speech given by Dr Ros Kidd. Book launch organised by ANTaR Qld at the Brisbane City Council Central Library, 12 February 2003. 'Black Lives, Government Lies', in *Kasama*, Vol. 17 No. 1, January-February-March 2003, Solidarity Philippines Australia Network.
2. Speech given by Dr Ros Kidd at the National Sorry Day gathering in Brisbane, 26 May 1999. 'Journey of Healing: Dr. Ros Kidd', in *Kasama*, Vol. 13 No. 2, April-May-June 1999, Solidarity Philippines Australia Network.
3. 'Stolen wages activist accepts Government reparations offer', by Christine Howes. Reprinted in *Kasama*, Vol. 17 No. 1, January-February-March 2003, Solidarity Philippines Australia Network.
4. 'Gloria Beckett, artist and activist, 1943-2003', by Christine Howes. Reprinted in *Kasama*, Vol. 17 No. 2, April-May-June 2003, Solidarity Philippines Australia Network

⁽¹⁾ Rosalind Kidd commenced her BA degree in Humanities at Griffith University in 1984 and was awarded her doctorate in 1994 for her thesis, *Regulating Bodies: Administrations and Aborigines in Queensland 1840-1988*. Her books include: *The Way We Civilise: Aboriginal Affairs - the Untold Story*, University of Queensland Press, 1997; *Black Lives Government Lies*, University of New South Wales Press, 2000; *Trustees On Trial*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006 - reveals the extraordinary extent of government control over Aboriginal wages, savings, endowments and pensions in 20th century Queensland. To be released in September 2006. Dozens of Dr. Kidd's published articles and speeches can be accessed from her website at <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd/site/SpeechList.htm>

Black Lives, Government Lies

by Rosalind Kidd

The book consistently challenges those who maintain the policies of the time were merely misguided... it is powerful and quickly read, and will never be forgotten.

THE FOLLOWING SPEECH WAS GIVEN BY DR ROS KIDD AT THE BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL LIBRARY ON FEBRUARY 12, 2003. THE LAUNCH OF THE SECOND PRINTING OF HER BOOK *BLACK LIVES, GOVERNMENT LIES* WAS ORGANISED BY ANTAR QLD.

AS A CHILD I was always curious. I always wanted to know more than people would tell me. My questions were frequently brushed away with the words: "Curiosity killed the cat". But of course I was also stubborn Irish – so I kept asking anyway. And the more I discovered, the more questions I had.

Looking back, I realise the problem: I wanted to make up my own mind. At school in the 1950s I was terribly disappointed to realise that the men had already come up with all the answers, the facts were laid out, and all that was left was to learn them.

It was only in my 30s, when we had money to buy books and I formed the habit of reading everything that wasn't nailed down, that I realised with great excitement that almost all the "facts" could not only be interpreted in quite different ways, but that, if you could only think outside the square of your own intellectual limitations, there were actually no barriers to presenting completely new possibilities of knowledge.

That was the task I set myself in 1990 when I chose to investigate Aboriginal affairs in Queensland for my PhD project. It was an exhausting and exhilarating three years. And I did hope that the finished work might be of some practical use to future researchers.

It was the Palm Island under award wage case in 1996 which forced me to question myself. Facing threats from the Queensland government if I gave evidence to the HREOC Inquiry, my choice was to fight for what I knew to be true, or take up scone-making –for which I patently had no skills at all. And I will never forget that my husband, who's every wish was for a quiet life, told me if I was sure I was right, then I should go for it.

And this took knowledge into the realm of justice. The key to the Palm Island wages fight was that the government during the early 1980s knew it was acting illegally in underpaying its Aboriginal employees; and at the time of the Inquiry the government knew that I knew this – it was detailed in my thesis of which they had multiple copies. So in seeking to close out my evidence, I figured they were seeking to close out the truth.

The myth would then prevail that the government acted benevolently, paying people according to their skills and within the laws of the times. And if you hadn't seen the evidence, you wouldn't know any different. The evidence went in; their credibility went out. Compensation for this illegal exploitation is, I believe, presently climbing over the \$30 million mark.

In April 2000 I was asked to give a talk on ABC Radio National detailing what I thought of our prime minister's stance on the stolen generations. You know how it goes: "why should we apologise for something that happened a long time ago"; "officials meant well at the time"; "Aboriginal children had to be rescued for their own good". I was subsequently approached to extend that talk into a book, of which this is the second edition.

The question I asked myself was: "Why, if people were confined in government care 'for their own good', were they so disastrously worse off than those making their own way in the wider community?" And everything else follows from that: why were people denied sufficient food, clean water, shelter, medical care? Why were children denied access to education which was mandatory for all children? Why were people contracted out to work, and then denied their wages? Why did officials consistently reject pleas for greater funding at the same time as they compiled dossiers of malnutrition, preventable illnesses and early deaths?

And then, of course, you get angry. Why are governments still getting away with this myth of "benevolent protection"? How dare they claim as an excuse the distance of time when they know damn well the hunger, sickness and deprivation continued into the 1970s and 1980s, maintained by their carefully crafted decisions.

It frustrates me beyond belief that governments, which control the accumulated evidence of these deplorable conditions, paint themselves as the big white heroes, showering benevolent largesse on those who have "somehow" ended up on the losing side of life. There is no "somehow" about it.

Take our current struggle for justice on stolen wages in Queensland.

Files relating to the 60-year period of government control of wages are full of references to police frauds, scamming of the "pocket-money" portion, negligent account-keeping, government misuse of trust monies.

Any other banking institution with this level of entrenched negligence involving thousands of accounts would be subjected to a full public inquiry.

And what do we have? The Beattie government, which claims it is acting "generously" and "in the spirit of reconciliation" in throwing \$4000 or less to people it knows are so cash-poor they have little option but to take it; a government which cold-bloodedly ties those monetary crumbs to the signing away of all future rights to legal redress.

In demanding this signature while refusing to give everyone their financial records, the government's "offer" is revealed as a cynical attempt to buy off legal and ethical obligations. We have a petition circulating today, which demands the government renegotiate the conditions imposed on this payment.

This money was promised nine months ago; it must be paid before too many more sick and elderly die. But it should be a down payment while a tribunal is set up to investigate the whole history of Aboriginal labour, of wages withheld, of savings exploited for government gain. It is these decades of government interception which deprived the workers of the return for their labour upon which to build their lives and careers.

It is this interception which trapped so many families in deadly poverty. No wonder the government is trying to buy its way out of the truth.

And this is the whole point of this knowledge, this book, this struggle.

Surely, as we learn the truth of our past, we should stand up and demand our governments face it honestly. Surely, as we read the records of unjust and illegal practices — of which we white people are ultimately the beneficiaries — we should force our governments to be accountable to those they have wronged by their deeds of commission and omission, and also wronged — still today — by their weasel words.

I urge you to refuse to play the "benevolent protector" game which so disparages those whose labour and perseverance helped build this nation. If you swallow and regurgitate what governments feed you, then you are part of this lie. The records of history are yours; they should not be suppressed and distorted for point-scoring by temporary politicians. This failed social experiment is the biggest scandal in our history; it is the biggest injury to our national psyche. We can heal it by opening it up to careful examination, by reinstating those voices and lives, by learning from past experiences and bringing restitution for past injustices.

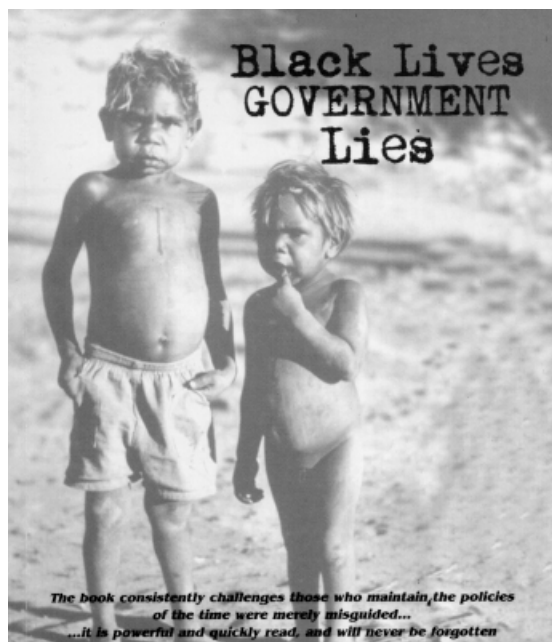
So please – ask your own questions. Make up your own minds. I put this knowledge in your hands.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: DR. ROSALIND KIDD is a specialist in Queensland's administration of Aboriginal people. She has worked as consultant historian on numerous Native Title claims and official inquiries. Her evidence to the 1996 Human Rights Commission inquiry into underpaid wages was crucial to the decision against the state government that has resulted in massive compensation payments. She is currently working to secure justice for missing personal savings and misused Trust funds. Her previous book, *The Way We Civilise*, was short-listed for the New South Wales premier's History Prize.

There are articles and statements by Ros Kidd on her web site at <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd/index.htm> and you can email her at roskidd@linksdisk.com

ON THE ANTAR WEBSITE AT [HTTP://ANTAR.DOVENETQ.NET.AU](http://ANTAR.DOVENETQ.NET.AU) you can sign an online petition to the Queensland Parliament about the stolen wages and savings belonging to Aboriginal people by clicking on the link to Sign the Stolen Wages E-Petition. Please attend to this right away as the closing date is April 13, 2003.

The loss of the wages and savings of Indigenous people was not just a policy of the Queensland Government. Other state and territory Governments also enacted some form of control over Indigenous wages. A national team of investigators led by human rights lawyer Helen Burrows, have started work on a report which will be used as the basis of an independent inquiry and presented to the Federal Government to answer. "We are interested in hearing from people who have information about Government control of Indigenous money, whether it was wages, trust accounts or personal savings," said Ms Burrows. If you have documentary or even anecdotal evidence or would like to make a submission to the report, phone Helen Burrows on (02) 4392 9947 or send her an email at stolenwages.nitimes@bigpond.com



CONTACT: ANTAR Qld, 25-27 Cordelia St., South Brisbane 4101 -
PHONE: (07) 3844 9800 - **FAX:** (07) 3844 9562 - **EMAIL:** antarqld@dovenetq.net.au

National Sorry Day 1999

THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION'S 1997 *BRINGING THEM HOME* REPORT RECOMMENDED THAT A NATIONAL SORRY DAY BE HELD EACH YEAR. LINK-UP (QLD.) AND THE QUEENSLAND SORRY DAY COMMITTEE ORGANISED AN INSPIRING PROGRAM ON MAY 26TH THAT BEGAN IN FIVE PARKS AROUND THE CITY, FOLLOWED BY A CEREMONY AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE AND A MARCH THAT GATHERED TO EXPRESS UNITY WITH INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA AND A COMMITMENT TO NURTURE AND GROW IN A SOCIALLY JUST SOCIETY. DR ROS KIDD, AUTHOR OF *THE WAY WE CIVILISE*, WAS ONE OF THE SPEAKERS ON THE DAY. THE FOLLOWING TEXT IS THE STORY OF HER JOURNEY.

Journey of Healing: Dr Ros Kidd

FIRST OF ALL I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this country, and say that I feel honoured to be asked to address you on this, the last National Sorry Day of the century.

Now, more than ever before, it is essential that we understand the experiences of indigenous people in Australia. It is because few people have this knowledge, that so many are confused, some even resentful, about the whole ideal of being sorry, of making apologies. I might have been one of those people myself, except that my work, in recent times, has opened my eyes to another dimension of history, another dimension of the human condition.

The theme of this Sorry Day is the Journey of Healing. I have been asked to share with you my own journey of understanding. It began ten years ago, when, as a middle-aged, middle-class white woman, I needed to choose a topic for my five-year PhD project. I was deeply aware of my ignorance when it came to Aboriginal affairs, and the erratic statements of the press and politicians only added to my confusion. So I chose to study Aboriginal affairs in Queensland.

Most of my research was spent analysing thousands of official documents, ranging from the middle of last century to only a few years ago. What I read, what I began to understand, was a horrifying, unbelievable story of abuse and repression, of negligence and unnecessary deaths, of forced labour and unpaid wages, of deprivation and institutionalised poverty. Much of this sorry circumstance, far too much of this sorry circumstance, directly resulted from actions of the police, the bureaucrats and the politicians who said they were 'protecting' the indigenous people of Queensland.

Did you know that from 1865 any Aboriginal child could be taken from their family, for no other reason than the child had an Aboriginal mother? Did you know that from 1897 almost every Aboriginal person in Queensland could be declared a ward of state and banished to a reserve? For no other reason than their Aboriginality? The one exception was mixed-race men, provided they severed all contact with their Aboriginal relatives. People were separated from their families, separated from their country, separated from society – only because they were of Aboriginal background. They lost all the rights which the rest of us take for granted – to choose where we live and work, to keep our earnings for the benefit of our family, to receive standard education and standard medical care, to keep our children with us and share with them our language and culture, teach them their heritage, strengthen them with love.

Until the 1970s, here in Queensland, Aboriginal children were routinely taken from their parents and locked into dormitories, Aboriginal teenagers were sent to work in remote areas for a year at a time, Aboriginal adults were locked into compulsory work contracts and the government took their wages: if you were lucky, if you asked nicely, the local policeman might allow you a little to spend. But from the earliest days police fraud on Aboriginal savings was prevalent, even when dockets had to be thumb printed and witnessed.

Over more than 70 years of financial control, despite countless examples of fraud, theft, and irregularities, the government refused to let Aboriginal people see any record of what was happening to their money.

This is not so surprising. Because without Aboriginal knowledge and consent, the government was taking their savings: there was a levy of 5% and 10% to help run the missions and settlements, there was another levy as an insurance against drought and sickness, although only a fraction was paid out to the workers each year. During the depression years, the government took the equivalent of over \$5 million of Aboriginal Trust monies to cover budget deficits, money that was never repaid. It took money out of workers' accounts to pay for fencing and improvements on country reserves; it took money out of invalids' accounts for medical treatment on Fantome Island, when the rest of the population was treated free in state hospitals; it took the child endowment monies, allowing mothers only a fraction of their entitlement. So while infant mortality at Palm Island was 15 times the state's average, the government was using these child endowment funds for capital works on the mainland.

Under this system, while Aboriginal families were living, and dying, in abject poverty around Queensland, their earnings grew to unbelievable levels. By the early 1930s Aboriginal savings were the equivalent today of nearly \$14 million: how much hardship and sickness could have been eliminated if Aboriginal families had kept their own earnings to spend on their own needs? But the government decided to keep over \$12 million to invest for valuable revenue, leaving only a small amount to cover daily transactions. No wonder so many workers were refused permission to make withdrawals. No wonder so many families continued in destitution. By the late 1960s, while governments publicly questioned the failure of many Aboriginal families to 'improve' their social standing, the Queensland government was keeping for itself the equivalent of around \$20 million as a revenue-producing nest-egg.

Life for the hundreds of families interned on missions and settlements was a horrifying struggle. From the earliest days Aboriginal needs, Aboriginal lives, were valued at only a fraction of whites. As late as 1938 the head of Aboriginal administration in Queensland conceded the government regarded Aboriginal children as less important than white children. This might go some way to explaining why, despite laws stating that *all* children must be offered a full education, *Aboriginal* wards of state were denied this: until the 1950s trained teachers were rare, schools were often run-down unlit structures, furniture and books were usually discarded from white schools, classes were overcrowded and rarely went past grade four level. High schools and accredited trade training were unheard of.

Records show that the government knew of these appalling conditions on communities, but refused ever to provide sufficient funds for basic physical needs. Inmates have died, year after year, from diseases caused by malnutrition, overcrowding, unsafe water, faulty sanitation. After each fatal outbreak internal reports also often criticised the scandalous state of medical attention and hospital amenities. This was always hidden from the public. Even into the 1970s, the blame was put on Aboriginal incompetence, or the eating of green mangoes.

Missions and settlements, the Aboriginal communities of today, were built and run on compulsory, unpaid, Aboriginal labour. Apart from a few key tradesmen, workers got only some lousy rations for their effort. In the late 1940s a ganger on Palm Island got 5/- a fortnight, that's about \$12.60 today, only 3% of the basic wage. And in 1957, when seven men went on strike over starvation pay... the men were arrested at gunpoint and deported. By 1978, according to a letter by Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the Queensland government was underpaying its Aboriginal workers by over \$10 million *each year* in today's terms relative to minimum wages, or nearly twice that relative to award wages. In the 1980s, in full knowledge that it was breaking state and federal law, the Queensland government was still paying its *Aboriginal* employees only 72% the basic wage. Today's government still has not agreed to pay all the wages which it knows are owing. And enormous sums of taxpayers' money is being allocated to deny Aboriginal claims of official malpractice and misappropriation.

To save money during the 1970s and 1980s the government sacked hundreds of workers; fewer houses were built or repaired; overcrowding became critical because families could not afford to pay rent; essential services were barely maintained. Community violence and alcoholism increased with poverty and despair. Yet these exact outcomes were predicted years earlier by bureaucrats and politicians, who decided to hold to their hardline economies while the communities under their control fell apart. For a hundred years the Queensland government has controlled every aspect of Aboriginal lives, running secret files on every Aboriginal person, growing rich from Aboriginal poverty. The situation of Aboriginal people today is the direct outcome of government controls. And these controls continued to the present.

So this has been my journey of understanding. How do I feel now that I know these things? I feel angry that the government created and sustained such appalling conditions for Aboriginal families, and continues to lie about it; I feel resentful that their actions were hidden from public knowledge; I feel sorry that children, mothers, uncles, grandparents had to suffer such untold hardship over so many years.

So for all those who reject the concept of Sorry Day, I say that this sorrow is not about guilt; it's about compassion.

The text of this article is reproduced with the kind permission of Ros Kidd.

Dr Rosalind Kidd's recent book *The Way We Civilise*, published by University of Queensland Press, gives a very detailed account of Aboriginal administration in Queensland.



Stolen wages activist accepts Government reparations offer

by Christine Howes

31 March 2003 -- Aboriginal activist Gloria Beckett, who spent her 60th birthday last Saturday in a hospital built from funds she's fought to retrieve for her people, has said she will accept the Queensland Government's offer of \$4,000 reparations for her stolen wages.

Speaking from her bed in Redcliffe Hospital, much of which was built during the 1960s after £100,000 [pounds] was borrowed from Aboriginal accounts held in trust by the government, Ms Beckett said she has less than 12 months to live.

"I have cancer," she said. "And I made this decision when I knew there was no cure for this, when I knew I was going to die. It was very very tough for me because my heart is telling me that my fight is still there for a better deal for our people."

After growing up in the Cherbourg dormitories, Ms Beckett was forced to work from when she was 16-years-old for wages which were withheld by the Government "in trust" for her — the Redcliffe Hospital Board took out the loan in 1962.

At that time Ms Beckett said she was working as a domestic on a station at Taroom in western Queensland. "That's the irony of it all. I was taken away, put to work. I spent most of my life fighting for that money and I did all that to end up in the same hospital I helped to pay for," she said.

The hospital agreed to pay the loan back to government by 1982 but despite the long fight for what is known as the stolen wages, neither Ms Beckett nor any of her people have ever seen or benefited from that money — until now. "My family, my two kids can't afford to pay for funerals or the care I need so I have to accept the offer," she said.

"They've given me up to 12 months to live, I have a death sentence and that was the thing that made me decide. To put it bluntly I don't have the extra time to go and fight it in court but my heart is there and if I had that time I would be there fighting. It's not only me, how many hundreds of Murri people are either so sick or so broke and going through the same thing? They can't even afford to bury themselves."

Ms Beckett, who told her story to media in May last year after Premier Peter Beattie put his "take it or leave it" offer on the table, has been at the forefront of her peoples' battle for the money. "I've had people calling me and thanking me for fighting this," she said.

"I probably have a lot to say to the government but I don't want to be vindictive, I just want to die in peace. It would make me a lot happier if my people got a better deal but I've got no fight in me anymore which is only because of the cancer. If I was able to stand up on my feet I'd still be out there fighting."

© 2003 Christine Howes
Reprinted with permission of the author.



"Too little, too late" is how Gloria Beckett described the Government's offer last year. Too little, for the five years spent working without wages on remote Queensland properties. Too late, for her elder sister Kathy who would have been eligible for the \$4000 payment had she not died four years ago, aged 55. Kathy was also a gifted artist. She made the beautiful necklace surrounding Gloria's photo above.

Gloria Beckett, artist and activist, 1943-2003

By Christine Howes

Chances are, if you happen into a library or government building around Brisbane, there will be a painting, mural or sculpture depicting some aspect of Aboriginal life or portrait of an Aboriginal person.

Chances are also high it might be Gloria Ann Beckett's work.

"Aunty Gloria's" artwork was an intended legacy for both her own people and the wider community. Just hours before she succumbed to cancer on May 22, she was organising art exhibitions and events.

Through her art she promoted understanding of a surviving and evolving culture born in more recent times from the struggles of her people. It was also an expression of her own personal struggles.

As a baby, she was taken from her parents along with her older sister Kathleen and placed at Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement in "the girls' dormitory" under the Queensland government's Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act.

She was educated to grade eight in Cherbourg and, at 15, sent to various outback properties where she was forced to work as a servant. She lived at Cherbourg or Palm Island for 19 years and worked for five years under conditions of extreme hardship.

"Aunty Gloria" became known for her passion, commitment and long public fight to resolve issues around the Aboriginal Welfare Fund and stolen wages in Queensland.

The lack of what she and other community people felt was a just and honourable resolution of the issue was her great regret.

After she was diagnosed earlier this year with terminal cancer, family, friends and the community understood her reluctant choice to accept the reparation offer to help her family pay for her funeral.

"I probably have a lot to say to the government but I don't want to be vindictive, I just want to die in peace", she told the Koori Mail after making her decision.

"It would make me a lot happier if my people got a better deal... If I was able to stand up on my feet I'd still be out there fighting."

She would ask, I'm sure, if you happened to be in that library or building and see some of her work, that you would remember those words and take them as a reminder of what could and should have happened within her lifetime.

This article originally appeared in Green Left Weekly, June 18, 2003