**William Ferguson’s Statue**

I honour the Wiradjuri elders, past and present, the family of William Ferguson, and all those here who have enjoined the struggle for equality that he and others inspired. It is a credit to many Aboriginal people from far and wide and your staunch friends to see this marvellous monument to one extraordinary human spirit.

As a journalist, I look at that rolled up newspaper in William Ferguson’s hand and think how impressively this humble man fought to share the truth with this nation. This man who had only a few years of formal education, who learned his stuff in the shearer’s sheds and organising for the Australian Labor party, had a special talent for fashioning his words to achieve such a powerful effect. He learned how to find the words to unify people and make this nation listen.

In one memorable interview published on the front page of THE ARGUS newspaper down in Melbourne before the first Day of Mourning in 1938, William Ferguson said that “it would be better to turn a machine gun on us” than to allow the Aboriginal Protection Board to continue to oppress Aboriginal people in such disastrous fashion. We must remember that William Ferguson was taking action as the final calamitous damage of decades of the Frontier War was indeed threatening to wipe out life and Aboriginal culture. In fact, in the revolutionary pamphlet, ABORIGINES CLAIM CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS, penned by William Ferguson and jack Patten, they accused the government directly of trying to exterminate Aboriginal people under the guise of protection. In such a hostile climate, the calm and rational organisational skills displayed by William Ferguson helped create a battle strategy for the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

William Ferguson understood that the fight for equality would require us all to walk together on a very long road. This was a distinctively Australian civil rights movement. Along with Pearl Gibbs, William Cooper, Jack Patton and Fred Maynard these pioneers of human rights in Australia inspire us forever.

William Ferguson made the news in that newspaper rolled up in his hand because he challenged the fake news, the racist stereotyping in the media, and the unfair laws and policy, that together trapped the First Peoples in poverty and dispossession in your own land.

Since William Ferguson found the words to make news in that rolled up newspaper, we have seen the inspiration flow on to others. Eloquent writers like Kevin Gilbert reminded us that to be an Aboriginal patriot of what he called a “nation of the spirit” it took a very special vision and great courage. For this we honour William Ferguson and it is so truly moving to join you here today not far from where he gave his last public speech.

Jeff McMullen

Commemoration of William Ferguson Statue

Dubbo. NSW. Saturday 4th May 2019.

