



Mick Miller

Mr Michael (Mick) Miller, a great Aboriginal and Australian leader, died on 5 April 1998 in Cairns, Queensland. I attended the funeral at Saint Monica's Cathedral on 11 April 1998. Mick, as everyone knew him, was buried at the Beam Section Martyn Street Cemetery, Cairns. The gathering both at the Cathedral and the graveside drew the largest crowd of people ever witnessed. The Cathedral was filled to standing room only and spilled out on the surrounding gardens and road.

Mick was married twice: to Patricia O'Shane with whom he had two children (Lydia and Marilyn), and to Barbara Russell: they had one son (Michael). Mick was the son of Michael and Cissie Miller of Palm Island, and the eldest of seven children (seven girls and two boys). Mick was educated at Mt Carmel College, Charters Towers. He excelled at sport. His greatest accomplishments, however, were first as a qualified school teacher and secondly as a political leader and ideologue. He graduated from Kelvin Grove Teacher's College in Brisbane in 1959 and from there took up a teaching post at the Cairns North State Primary in the same year.

Mick's political career began when he joined the Advancement League and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). With his first wife Pat O'Shane, he travelled to Sydney to campaign for Aboriginal civil rights in 1969, which was where I first met them. Aboriginal rights to citizenship had not been gained in Queensland. They came to explain what life was like living under the oppressive and infamous Queensland race legislation.

Mick took an active role in FCAATSI and in 1971-2 he became Vice-President. At the same time he started the Aboriginal Legal Service and was instrumental in fostering the growth and development of the Aboriginal Medical Services in the 1980s. Prior to that, however, Mick and his close friend Clary Grogan, were employed by the national trachoma and eye health program with Fred Hollows. He was equally responsible for another famous struggle for land by the Koowatta family against the Queensland Government.

Mick spearheaded the struggle between the Federal and Queensland governments in their dispute over the creation of local governments for Aborigines. Here, the Fraser Government created the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Self-Management Act, a legislative instrument that went some way to moderating the conflict between Aborigines and the state's oppressive stand against Aborigines in Queensland.

Similarly, the struggle with Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ) in 1989, and other foreign mining companies saw Mick lead his people once more. Mick travelled the world supporting such struggles and did so while jeopardising his own personal and economic security. After the election of the Hawke Labour Government in 1983, that Government asked

him to inquire into education, training and employment and the 'Miller' report still stands as the basis of government programs in this area. Following this success he involved himself in local development, helping to establish Aboriginal housing and health worker training bodies.

Mick modelled himself on people like Paul Robeson and Martin Luther King and he passed away on the 30th anniversary of King's death. Like the black American response to King, Aboriginal people saw in Mick much of what they liked and admired. So too, like black Americans, Aborigines have lost a great leader.

Gordon Briscoe