

Gurindji strike against NT Intervention

More than 200 Gurindji people joined an 11am stop work meeting today in Kalkaringi, 470kms South-West of Katherine, NT.

The rally was attended by workers from across the community including from the Victoria Daly Shire, Kalkaringi service station, the mechanics, the clinic and the school.

The Gurindji are demanding an end to the NT Intervention, investment in proper jobs and return of control over land, employment and services to Aboriginal people.

The protest was also joined by many non-Aboriginal support staff living in Kalkaringi, representatives from the LHMU and delegations of Aboriginal people from Alice Springs and nearby communities.

Support messages were read out from a diverse range of organisations including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission, local pastoralists, the Greens, St Vincent De Paul Australia CEO John Falzon and World Council of Churches representatives from Native American tribes and the Philipenes, as well as members of the Arts including writer Rosie Scott.

The crowd was addressed by veterans of the 1966 Gurindji walk-off from Wave Hill station such as Bernard Jalyirri, who called on the youth of the community to show similar determination in the fight against the NT Intervention.

Of major concern is the loss of jobs and exploitative employment conditions created by attacks on the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP).

Protest organiser John Leemans said that more than 250 people had been employed in Kalkaringi and Daguragu on the CDEP program. There are now less than 40 participants.

The smaller Gurindji community of Daguragu has been particularly hard hit, with the closure of many programs included the CDEP office, a brickworks, a retirement home and the family centre.

John Leemans said, "at Daguragu, people are still taking their rubbish out from the community in their own cars, because of the pile up since the Intervention cut our services".

Payment for the 'reformed' CDEP is now administered through Centrelink's Income Management system.

Gurindji worker Peter Inverway said:

"Our people walked off Wave Hill station for getting paid in flour, tea and sugar. Now we are getting paid on the BasicsCard. We need to continue with this strike action."

Judith Donald said:

"They took our land at Daguragu with a 5-year lease without asking. That is very wrong.

Gough Whitlam gave us that land back. They don't need a permit now. Everything is very hard since they stopped the CDEP, there's no workers there now. I think they want people to move away from that place. But Gurindji will never leave. We will fight until we get our land back".

The rally voted to endorse a statement demanding an end to the Intervention and 'Jobs with Justice' for Aboriginal workers, which will be published in the Australian newspaper and launched with national protest rallies on October 29. A Gurindji delegation will travel to Alice Springs to join the protest.

Reflecting on the rally, walk-off veteran Jimmy Wave Hill said:

"There is too much humbug from this government. They are trying to force everything away from the Aboriginal people. But we want to keep our culture strong. When we walked off from Wave Hill station we needed to stay real strong for our rights. We need to follow in Vincent Lingiari's footsteps with our fight today."

For more information see:

jobswithjustice.wordpress.com or contact Gabrielle Russel grussell@nccs.org.au

John Leemans
Paddy Gibson