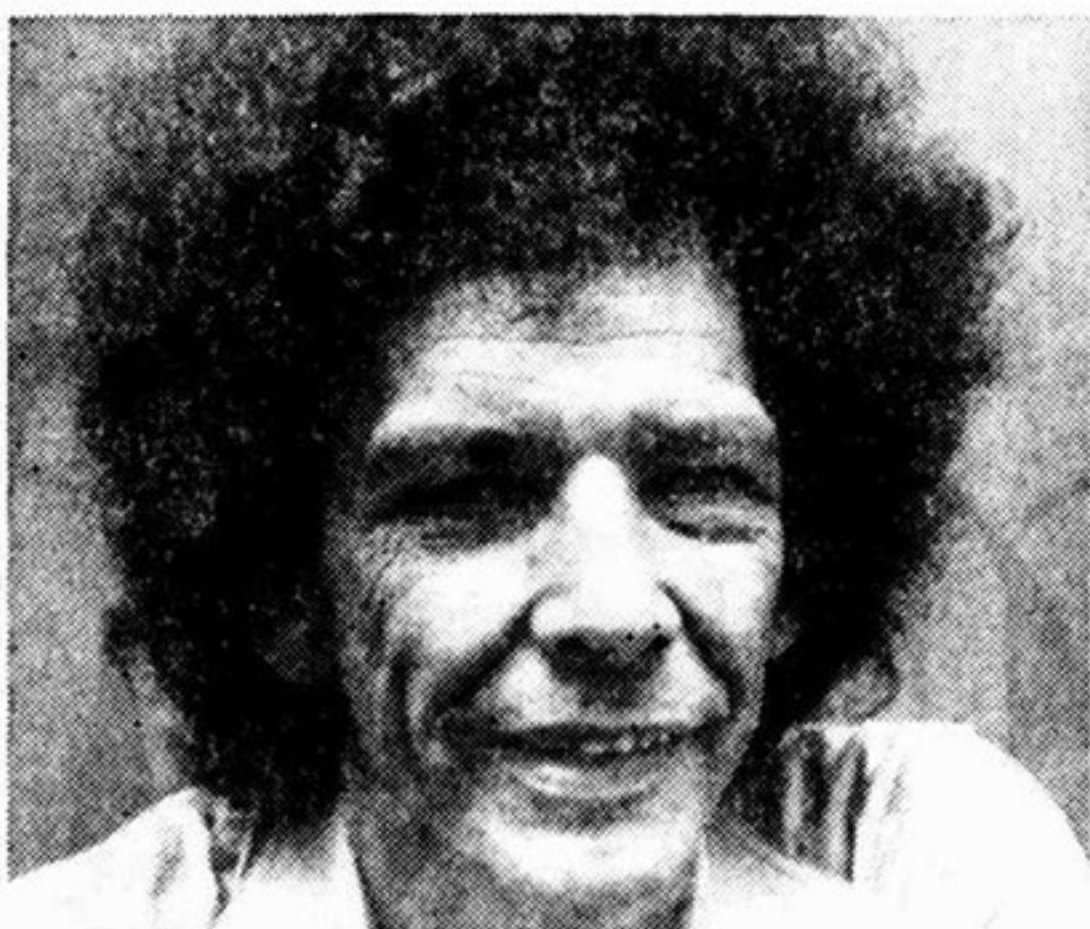


Aboriginal author optimistic

By RICHARD SCHERER



Mr Gilbert in Canberra.

DESPITE the grave sense of injustice at the wrongs which he feels have been perpetrated on himself and his people, Aboriginal author Kevin Gilbert is optimistic.

Mr Gilbert's second book, 'Living Black' was published two weeks ago and already more than half the 5,000 copies have been sold.

The book, he says, tries to make people understand the sense of injustice and depression felt by Aboriginal people in cities, suburbs, reserves and rural areas.

Depressing though the position of Aborigines throughout Australia is, conditions elsewhere are "almost a holiday" compared with what is happening to this people in Queensland.

In 1957, so a court in Dubbo subsequently found, Mr Gilbert murdered his wife. He spent 14 years in jail, including a stretch in former notorious "intractable" section of Grafton Jail.

He considers he was unfairly tried: among other things, no defence witnesses were called. According to Mr Gilbert, his wife died in an argument in which she produced a gun.

Several times he sought to appeal, and to complain about the treatment he received in jail. For his trouble he earned transfer to Grafton.

Since his release he has tried to build a community at the Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve in

in court: before it existed, "if you were black you were guilty".

He thinks Aboriginal communities should be allowed to impose their own laws and punishments because European punishment for tribal Aborigines means double punishment.

Mr Gilbert believes strongly that his people will get justice only if whites demand it for them. He points out that in 1967, 90 per cent of Australians voted to give the Federal Government power to improve the Aborigines way of life; surely, he says, 40 or 50 per cent of Australians have enough pride in their country to want a better life for all its citizens.

Despite the endorsement given it, the Government has not had the courage to stop Aboriginal apartheid in Queensland, or the kind of inhumanity which exists in the bed of the Todd River in Alice Springs.

He points to land rights as one of the major needs of his people, as well as helping Aborigines build an economic power base, land would give all his people a psychological boost.

Compensation for the dispossession of his people and the right for them to make effective decisions would also help restore Aboriginal identity and motivation.

He is critical of the "uncaring and socially immoral Government which has cut funds for urgently-needed medical and family centres. Little Federal Money reaches Aboriginal communities he says, much of it goes to white anthropologists, researchers and tradesmen.

A house which would cost a white \$18,000 can end up costing \$30,000 to \$40,000 if built for Aborigines because people such as architects and electricians regard "government money" as fair game for a rip-off.

One reason why Mr Gilbert was in Canberra was to seek a national inquiry into Aboriginal education.

He says \$35 million a year is being spent on basically assimilationist programs which teach

white values instead of allowing Aboriginal children to study their own history and traditions.

In their place an institute of Aboriginal education should be set up produce textbooks and materials based on Aboriginal history and values.

Mr Gilbert is pleased with the sales of his new book, which he hopes will help raise white consciousness; he doesn't expect to make much money from it.

He hopes this year to start a third book which in words and pictures will describe the conditions under which Aboriginal people live, and to produce a series of documentaries which he hopes will "bring about some measure of understanding" among whites.

Mr Gilbert is optimistic that the Aboriginal people will be able to take their rightful place, but predicts that, if action is not forthcoming, in eight to 10 years there will be confrontation, perhaps violent.

Taree — a virtually impossible task, he says, because of lack of finance and government action. There are about 300 people on the reserve. Most of the 30 houses were built 30 years ago.

Despite the lack of an adequate program for community development at the reserve Mr Gilbert has set up an art gallery, garden nursery and discount trading outlet. With the profits from tourist facilities he hopes to build an Aboriginal hall of heroes to show the history and dispossession of his people.

The Aboriginal Legal Service, he says, has at least given Aborigines a chance to be heard