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Gary Foley: "Malcolm Fraser is looking better and better."

Aboriginal activist speaks out in anger

By FIONA CAPP

Gary Foley, Aboriginal activist, speaks in the fearless, almost self-destructive manner of a man who feels he has nothing to lose.

He has criticised Australian politicians — his latest attack involved his resignation as head of the Aboriginal Arts Board over the Government's handling of land rights — and black African leaders for not speaking out during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia in 1981. He has attacked a prominent Aboriginal leader, Mr Neville Bonner, for attending a Right to Life rally, and recently chastised the president of the African National Congress, Mr Oliver Tambo, for his speech to Aborigines in Sydney which Mr Foley considered to be patronising and uninformed.

As a result he has been much criticised. Some Aborigines feel he is too concerned with being "radical". In response to a question about Tasmanian Aboriginal

activist Mr Michael Mansell's association with the Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi, he replies: "Why shouldn't we be (involved with Libya)?" He refers to Australian trade with Libya and talks passionately about the "Americanisation" of the South Pacific.

It is apparent, even before he calmly mentions it, that his driving force is anger. He can identify the incident that triggered this anger and says that it inspired him to help set up the first Aboriginal Legal Aid centre in Australia.

When Gary Foley was 17 and newly arrived in Sydney, he says, he was picked up by the police in Railway Square for talking to a white girl. He says he had seen the girl at dances organised by the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs and was asking her if she was going along that weekend. That, he says, is as far as the conversation got before they were both taken to the Regent Street police station. There, he says, he was

phone book until he was forced to admit that he had been having sex with the girl.

"Then, they put us both in the car, took us over to CIB and I was forced to watch while the police-women bashed this girl," he said. "They told her: 'This is what you get for hanging around with boongs.' I got charged with offensive behavior."

This experience "politicised" Gary Foley. At this time he and his friends were reading black American literature because it was all they had access to. The idea for the legal service, he says, sprang from a similar set-up organised by the Black Panther organisation in California. "They had a pig patrol where they monitored the activities of the coppers and that's what we did," he said.

So disillusioned is Gary Foley with the Hawke Government that he says that Mr Malcolm Fraser is looking better and better as a Prime Minister from an Aboriginal viewpoint. This is quite a state-

ment given that he says the only time he has voted was for Gough Whitlam.

Gary Foley may have detractors, but he lives by his uncompromising beliefs. "I've always been a hardliner on Aboriginality," he said. "Aboriginality means to me that you live in accordance with traditional Aboriginal values. Those values that are important to me are non-individualism and more importantly, non-materialism. I've earned 150,000 bucks in the last three years and as I leave this job I've got absolutely nothing to show for it. I don't own a decent pair of shoes. I've never owned a car in my life. I don't own a house. I've got no Swiss bank account. I've literally no assets except the clothes I stand in and a trunk full of papers accumulated over the past 20 years, and that's the most valuable possession I own. I've given away all the money I've earned to my kids (who live interstate) and to people who need it more than me."