



*Top:* Pearl Gibbs when elected to N.S.W. Aborigines Welfare Board, 14 August 1954.

*Photograph courtesy of Jack Horner.*

*Bottom:* Pearl Gibbs at Dubbo in August 1980.

*Photograph by Coral Edwards.*

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS (1901-1983)

#### PEARL GIBBS: ABORIGINAL PATRIOT

Kevin Gilbert

Pearl Gibbs often described herself as 'a battler'. Maybe, after a lifetime of battling the odds against white Australia, this description should be her epitaph. However neither that nor any other lauding of her fighting spirit would do her justice. Nothing short of justice, humanity and land rights for Aborigines could signify even a portion of the great love of this land that Pearl held.

When I heard of her death I was assailed by emotion and guilt, self-recrimination for having deserted her at the end of her life, because her painful quest for Rights, Justice, Love, Humanity, International Covenants and love for Australia, our land, became too much for me to bear. A song I once sung, once wrote upon a poem, came back to mind: 'She was of Kamilroi / a Princess in stature / a Goddess of nature / though only a child . . .' and, from a dimly recollected image a line from the Bible: 'These are the heirs, come let us kill them that the inheritance will be ours'.

There'll be no epitaphs for Pearl  
In copperplate upon a stone  
No funeral of State or trace  
Of civic honor to remark  
Her passing though her feet have trod  
The Halls of Justice haunting God  
And man and woman child and fool  
Who makes the Nation's Law a tool  
Of massacre and hate  
Injustice, land theft tortured fate  
Befall the rightful heirs their sons  
Must fall to strychnine and the guns  
The last descendants to imprisonment  
The will negated, overthrown  
The phantom killer called the Crown  
By Acts repeals the Right  
Of victims of its conquering lusts  
And holds the land by might.  
Yet in some far off distant land  
A Royal Seal a trembling hand  
May moved by conscience still repeal  
Infamous Acts and heed appeals  
Before a Falkland comes  
A Cuban Syria Red war drum  
Sounds to the thieves 'retreat'

---

*Kevin Gilbert is a leading Aboriginal poet, playwright and author. His most recent book is People are legends: Aboriginal poems (St Lucia, 1978).*

And prophets, patriots standing forth  
Shall speak as Pearl did for the worth  
Of life and justice for her race  
Somewhere somehow to reach the heart  
And soul of death's white face.

Throughout history, wherever there has been massacre, genocide, deprivation of human right – wherever tyranny ruled – the human spirit objected, often rising to heroic proportion. One such spirit was Pearl Gibbs. Garrulous, cranky, hurt, bitter, defamatorily lashing out in frustration, she held one course: justice, humanity, honour within this country. That such could only come when the newcomers grew a little, matured enough to develop a real and substantial love for this land and an honourable national spirit, spurred her on: testing, waiting, hoping like a mother for her child to grow to realisation. May her spirit live on.

There are no heroes or heroines in contemporary Aboriginaland. Our beliefs in legends and life were traumatised, shattered so that the only reality became survival; a singular group conscience; a racial identification. The total infrastructure of the personal ego was suppressed and denigrated to the point of a catastrophic personal insecurity and identification syndrome that negated heroic proportions. After all, heroes were winners and Aborigines hadn't won a round for a long long time.

Today the only bearable reality is self and the confirmation, the groping and fighting to assert self in a dynamic proportion that allows no image superior to one's own to emerge for fear that a comparison may reveal or undermine the very basis of the infrastructure. An infrastructure that at all costs needs be constantly seen to be itself, reinforced and built upon. A case of independent growth, worth, emulating none, indebted to none. Hence no heroes, no heroines. A pity in this case, for Pearl Gibbs was a patriot, a very human one indeed but nevertheless a true and enduring patriot in her country, her land.

Her remarks on the non-recognition bit (taken out of context from my memories) would have been: 'Them's the bloody breaks. Just grin and bare it – like the doctor said to the nurse', and, when she'd finished chortling, she'd have added, 'Who's a bloody hero anyway? Black or white, if we *had* a hero, we wouldn't be sitting here whinging now, we'd have our Land Rights, one way or the other!' and, 'Our heroes have all got big balls, but they keep 'em for the white women's games!'

After the laughter she'd say 'Here's ten dollars. Get us a bottle of brandy and then we'll talk. Ah, before you go, I must tell you this. I met old Jessie at the hospital. I said "What are you here for?" She said, "I dunno the name of it but the doctor said they're gonna take me gears out!" I said back to her, "They're probably like mine, all stripped out years ago!" ' And amid our laughter we would sit down with a bottle of brandy to talk.

Pearl was amongst the most politically astute in the Aboriginal community. She lived and breathed, ached and bled Aboriginal affairs. She believed, despite the ongoing fact of discrimination and dispossession, that white Australia would one day ratify the 'Yes' vote of the 1967 referendum; that justice would be done and the federal government would legislate to override the states and give Aborigines their due. In her years at the Dubbo hostel Pearl had a direct phone link-up throughout the length and breadth of Australia to 'people who knew' what was happening, what was going

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

to happen, why it didn't happen. Even the not so lustrous Prime Ministerial offices, the opposition's Shadow Ministers, never managed to escape her pleas and belabourings.

Her favourite 'sons and daughters', sisters, brothers of the Aboriginal community 'dropped in' as they passed through the town or travelled to see her. For many, facing her growling, her dressing down, her rare words of praise, loved Pearl with a deep and tolerant love. And where there is much love there is also hurt, anger, bitterness. Pearl, in her lifetime, had evoked all of these responses. I visited Pearl in 1972 to obtain her views for a book I was currently writing. I quoted what she said:

There's no white men, or woman, who has that feeling we have. They can study us all they like, but we've got them studied too. Because this is *our* country – the country of my mother's mother, a full-blooded Australian Aborigine. And it is *my* country . . . It is *our* country. It belongs to us, it is precious to us. And that is something no white man will ever understand, except perhaps Bill Harney and Don McLeod. They understood a little bit of what we feel and what we are.<sup>1</sup>

Pearl had battled most of her life in an attempt to evoke a sense of right, to get the white man to understand a little bit, to little avail. In the days when Aboriginal reserves and stations, the 'missions', were often concentration camps with police and managers acting as the camp Kommandants – in the late 1930s – Bill Ferguson, Bert Groves and Pearl Gibbs raised their voices in protest at the slavery, the abuse of human rights, the evil of this gestapo system of control. Pearl convinced Michael Sawtell, a well-disposed man who became a member of the N.S.W. Aborigines Welfare Board, to help her launch a public appeal, an exposé if you like, of the terrible conditions Aborigines suffered under. Her speech was broadcast in 1941; in 1972 she gave me permission to publish her radio script.<sup>2</sup> Here are some excerpts:

Good evening listeners,

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Theosophical Society of Sydney in granting me this privilege of being on the air this evening. It is the first time in the history of Australia that an Aboriginal woman has broadcast an appeal for her people. I am more than happy to be that woman. My grandmother was a full-blood Aborigine. Of that fact I am most proud. The admixture of white blood makes me a quarter-caste Aborigine. I am a member of the Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship.

My people have had 153 years of the white man's and white woman's cruelty and injustice and unchristian treatment imposed upon us . . . A person in whom the Aborigine blood predominates is not entitled to an old-age, invalid or returned soldier's pension. There are about thirty full-blooded returned men in this state whom I believe are not entitled to the old-age pension. A woman in whom the Aborigine blood predominates is not entitled to a baby bonus.

Our girls and boys are exploited ruthlessly. They are apprenticed out by the Aborigines Welfare Board at the shocking wage of a shilling to three and six per week pocket money and from two and six to six shillings per week is paid into a trust fund at the end of four years. This is done from fourteen years to the age of eighteen. At the end of four years a girl would, with pocket money and money from the trust, have earned £60 and a boy £90. Many girls have great difficulty in

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert 1973:12-13.

<sup>2</sup> The full text appears in Gilbert 1973:13-17.

getting their trust money. Others say they have never been paid. Girls arrive home with white babies. I do not know of one case where the Aborigines Welfare Board has taken steps to compel the white father to support his child. The child has to grow up as an unwanted member of an apparently unwanted race. Aboriginal girls are no less human than my white sisters. The pitiful small wage encourages immorality. Women living on the stations do not handle endowment money, but the managers write out orders. The orders are made payable to one store in the nearest town – in most cases a mixed drapery and grocery store. So you will see that in most cases the mother cannot buy extra meat, fruit, or vegetables. When rations and blankets are issued to the children, the value is taken from the endowment money. The men work sixteen hours a week for rations worth five and sixpence. The bad housing, poor water supply, appalling sanitary conditions and the lack of right food, together with unsympathetic managers, make life not worth living for my unfortunate people.

Pearl was a good talker. She made point after point about inadequate education, the prejudice found in schools, the impossibility of owning land, the fact that Aborigines were 'deprived of all federal social services'. Giving details of what Aborigines wanted in their claim for citizenship rights, she reminded listeners of 'the great debt that you, the white race, owe to my Aboriginal people'. Aborigines had guided 'explorers', tracked lost people, saved airmen from crashed planes, served in the Boer War and 1914-18 war and were currently serving overseas while Aboriginal women helped with war charities and enlisted as WRANS. She concluded:

Please remember, we don't want your pity, but practical help. This you can do by writing to the Hon. Chief Secretary, Mr Baddeley, MLA Parliament House, Sydney and ask that our claims be granted as soon as possible . . . Remember we, the Aboriginal people, are the creditors. Do not let it be said of you that we have asked in vain. Will my appeal for practical humanity be in vain? I leave the answer to each and every one of you.

Pearl knew the answer before she died but she, like the whole of the Aboriginal community will not, cannot, accept defeat. Her spirit soared with every thrust of the Aboriginal movement, with every hard won step by the newer younger generation.

The late Charlie Leon once told me how he and Jim Morris had formed an Aboriginal vaudeville troupe called 'Leon's Entertainers'. They travelled throughout New South Wales and wherever they performed they donated half the takings to the local hospital so that Aborigines could receive treatment. In an address published in a Rotary Club Bulletin Charlie Leon later told what he and others owed to Pearl Gibbs:

It was not until 1930 that I began to work in earnest for my people. I could see the need for some kind of development and . . . It was Mrs Pearl Gibbs, Mr Bert Groves, Mrs Faith Bandler and Miss Grace Bardsley who were responsible for the forming of the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship which was formed in 1955-56 and was registered as a charity in 1957. The Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement was born: the first meeting took place in Adelaide; then N.A.D.O.C. was formed . . . I do believe it was due to what I would call the "mother" organisation . . . and the honour goes to the people I have mentioned previously.

One day, Aborigines will stop living and dying in hope. When that happens, land rights will come, our people will look at history and historic figures and we'll see Pearl

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

again, in an Aboriginal Hall of Fame together with Bill Ferguson, Bert Groves, Charlie Leon and our tribal patriots, and the patriots starving now in the parks, chained on the reserves, battlers battling in the streets of Redfern, Moree, Woodenbong, Canberra, Brewarrina, Bourke, Nowra, Dubbo, Condobolin, Cowra. In that hall of glory will be the names of the nations Pearl knew and influenced – Wirradjuri, Kamilroi, Ngembo, Bipi, Bunjalung, Yuin, Awabakul, Dunguthi<sup>3</sup> – each nation among nations formerly linked by commerce, trade and the secret language of tradition will assert their nationhood, and the true story will live again in this land as Pearl hoped.

Pearl collected every item of Aboriginal news. The total collection of clippings, photographs and artifacts formed an extremely important historical record for the whole of the Aboriginal community. Many people, white and black, knew this and, probably in an effort to protect that material, they well may have destroyed it. For, as Pearl lay dying, as news reached the community that she had died, various people descended on her house; some took the news clippings, some the artifacts, some something else. Love and protection – protectiveness – take many forms, but that information, the total aspect of that property is of vital use to the whole of the Aboriginal community. National and State libraries should not receive them or they will become lost to the community. They should be held, housed, in one location. In short, Pearl and her property should be used as she intended, a hammer of truth to 'educate 'em, a little bit', and show the true story and glory of our peoples' struggling.

<sup>3</sup> I have spelt their names as I heard them from people proud to belong to them. The ultimate irony (pointed out by Diane Barwick) is that any student who cares to learn what has been written about these groups will have to look at the New South Wales 'tribal' list and map compiled by Tindale (1974:191-201); in the esoteric orthography of the professional linguist/anthropologist the names are spelt Wiradjuri, Kamilroi, Ngemba, Birpai, Badjalang, Yuin, Awabakal, Daingati.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Gilbert, Kevin J. *Because a white man'll never do it*. Sydney, 1973.  
Leon, C.L. 'Memories of the past and work of the present and future', *Churinga* [Aborigines' Progressive Association, Sydney], (2), 1965:15, 17, 19.  
Tindale, Norman B. *Aboriginal tribes of Australia*. Berkeley and Canberra, 1974.

*PEARL GIBBS: A BIOGRAPHICAL TRIBUTE\**

Jack Horner

Pearl Gibbs, who died in Dubbo on 28 April 1983, made Australian history in many ways. She was the first Aboriginal person to deliver her own scripted radio talk. She was a prominent organiser and public speaker in the Aboriginal protest campaigns of the 1930s, a member of the first deputations to the Prime Minister and Commonwealth Attorney-General, and served as secretary of the Aborigines' Progressive Association and other pioneering Aboriginal organisations. She was the first and only woman member of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board (1954-57). In 1956 she founded the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, a multi-racial body based in Sydney which attacked discrimination with resounding success. Subsequently she established the first hostel in New South Wales designed to serve the needs of rural Aborigines requiring hospital treatment. The funeral service for Mrs Gibbs, on 2 May 1983, revealed the esteem in which she was held. It took place at the North Dubbo Roman Catholic Church, made available for the occasion. The officiant was Pastor Ossie Cruse of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship.

Her sturdy Aboriginal roots came from her mother, Mrs Margaret Murray. In 1967, a year after she herself applied for the old age pension, Pearl showed me copies of the baptismal certificate from Yass and marriage lines from Brewarrina which her mother had obtained in 1940 in order to prove entitlement for the age pension. These papers declare that Mary Margaret Brown, born at Brewarrina in 1875, was a daughter of George Brown, a European 'labourer' (the current official term for any station or shed hand) and Maria, an Aboriginal woman. Whether Pearl's grandmother Maria belonged to the Muruwari or Ngembi<sup>1</sup> people I still do not know, despite diligent inquiries, but the marriage certificate shows that she was dead before 1910.

Pearl's mother was aged twelve in 1887 when the Brewarrina Aboriginal Station was established near the town. This 'mission' with its dormitory and provisional school was at first managed by the Aborigines' Protection Association, but the government Aborigines Protection Board soon assumed full control. At the age of sixteen Pearl's

*Jack Horner has conducted research in Aboriginal history for many years. He is the author of Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom (Sydney, 1974), co-author of A Dictionary of Australian History (Melbourne, 1970) and editor of Karoobran, by Monica Clare (Sydney, 1978).*

\* During research for this obituary I found that there appears to be no published account of the work of Pearl Gibbs except the scattered comments in my own biography of William Ferguson (Horner 1974), which lists newspapers and other written sources in footnotes. Interviews with the late Herbert Groves and William Onus, with Sir Douglas Nicholls, Pearl Gibbs herself and others who shared or knew of her work, notably Faith Bandler and other members of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, were my main source of information. I am grateful for helpful comment by Diane Barwick, who enjoyed Pearl's friendship from 1961.

<sup>1</sup> The reminiscences of Jimmie Barker (Mathews 1977) mention that as a child in 1910 he met an old Muruwari woman named Maria at Milroy Station, north of Brewarrina, but this woman reportedly died in 1919. Tindale (1974:197-201) declares Muruwari a valid alternative spelling for the name he renders Morowari; his map distinguishes 'Ngemba' territory (extending south from Bourke and Brewarrina to Byrock and beyond) from that of the 'Wongaibon' stretching southward to the Lachlan river. In the practical orthography recently adopted by the Wangaaypuwan community for their language, the spelling is Ngyampaa (Kennedy and Donaldson 1982:5).

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

mother was living at Yass, already a prosperous market town for the many merino sheep stations of that district. Budget limitations forced the Board to use police as its local agents, and it was probably the police or the Brewarrina manager who placed her as a domestic servant at Yass. A policeman would have been the railway escort. Her employers John and Catherine Sheehan duly had her baptised as a Catholic at the St Augustine church in Yass on 24 May 1892.<sup>2</sup>

Mary Margaret Brown had two daughters, Olga and then Pearl Mary, two years younger, who by her own account was born not in Yass but at Botany Bay. Why her mother went to Sydney for the birth is uncertain, but she may have had relatives living there.<sup>3</sup> The girls' father, surnamed Barry, is now forgotten but the Barry name is remembered in Yass for a wheelwright and blacksmith's shop that closed as late as 1922.<sup>4</sup> Pearl recalled living in rooms over a draper's shop at Yass, where her mother worked as a cook.

Beginning at kindergarten age, Pearl and her sister attended the Mount Carmel convent school run by the Sisters of Mercy. Local prejudice had forced the Education Department to exclude Aborigines from the Yass school after 1887 (this expulsion was duplicated in innumerable New South Wales towns<sup>5</sup>); at the Catholic school in Yass they received the same lessons as 'white' children but in a separate class. Pearl's teacher, Sister Loreto, made efforts in the charitable manner of that day to visit the homes of children who came from the riverbank to school. She was anxiously concerned about their health and careful to see that provision of the proper style of clothing should prevent playtime cruelty. She encouraged the 'white' children to act decently. Among these day-pupils Pearl found a particular friend, Mollie Coen, a playmate two years younger who took her part in any arguments.<sup>6</sup>

By 1910 Mary Margaret Brown and her daughters had returned to the far west of New South Wales. At Bourke, almost sixty miles west of her former home at Brewarrina, she found work as a station cook. There she met Richard 'Dick' Murray, an Aboriginal widower aged thirty-three who was employed as horse-groom at a pastoral station. Their wedding took place in Brewarrina on 5 June 1910. The Murray

<sup>2</sup> Father T.P. O'Donoghue of Yass provided the 1940 copy of Mrs Murray's baptismal certificate, according to Pearl's copy. Historical information about the Yass Aborigines appears in Read 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Pearl told me in 1965 that she was born at Botany Bay, yet in later interviews implied that she had not known the La Perouse people before she joined the Unemployed Workers' camp in 1930. An Aboriginal fishing village had grown up on the northern shore of Botany Bay by 1840; in 1848 it was described by a gang building the Redfern-Botany road which was possibly intended to serve the mill and factory owned by Simeon Lord from 1814. The factory was still there in 1855. Some Aborigines were living there when the industrial suburb of Mascot began to develop just prior to World War I.

<sup>4</sup> In an interview in the *Dubbo Liberal*, 29-30 January 1983, Pearl identified her father as David Barry of Yass.

<sup>5</sup> Goodall 1983 provides a detailed account of such exclusions based on oral evidence and Education Department records.

<sup>6</sup> I came to know the same Mollie Coen during the 1930s when her family lived in a flat above ours at Randwick; a letter from Mollie's younger sister, Mrs Douglas Stewart of Sydney, provided these first hand comments about the style of racial interaction at this school.

family, including nine-year-old Pearl, then went to live at the homestead of a vast sheep station close to the Byrock railway siding, nearly fifty miles south of Bourke and Brewarrina. Murray was the stable groom, Margaret Murray was cook, Olga worked with her mother in the kitchen and Pearl, with starched apron over her schoolgirl's frock, soon began to wait and serve at table. Recalling this congenial apprenticeship to her career of domestic service, Pearl told me how her loving parents had encouraged her to work well. She spoke warmly of the hearty grazier, a retired army colonel, whose confidence in his employees gave the Murray family material security. She enjoyed recounting his reaction to one incident at Byrock: Pearl, carrying a huge silver salver loaded with food, was about to leave the kitchen and walk up the passageway to the dining room when a remark by the Chinese gardener affronted her self-respect. She impetuously dumped the salver's contents on him. When the grazier inquired where his dinner was, Pearl unabashedly replied 'I threw it over George'. All the people at table joined in his roar of laughter.

Life on the household staff at Byrock had attractions for a growing girl – casual shooting and fishing jaunts, interesting visitors, new clothes from distant Sydney. The rigid social structure of far west pastoral stations, which normally excluded Aborigines (and shearers too), bent a little for the Murrays. But of course Olga and Pearl were expected to give up all thought of return to ancient Aboriginal ways. When the sisters left for Sydney in 1917 they were exemplars of a new Aboriginal style of life which blended the memories and loyalties of their mother and stepfather with their own experience of school and service. They were ready for whatever the city might bring.

Their first 'place' was at Victoria Barracks, Paddington, possibly through the good offices of 'the Colonel'. Their mother's competent training enabled the Murray sisters to graduate from maid to cook in various wealthy homes at Potts Point. 'Living-in' at first, Pearl came to know by sight many of the personalities of King's Cross, razor gangs and all. During the carefree 1920s she married an English sailor, a naval steward aboard *HMAS Australia*, and reared a daughter and two sons (one of whom followed his father into the navy and was mentioned with pride in her wartime radio broadcast).

Pearl's work in the sumptuous kitchens of Victoria Street, Challis Avenue and Macleay Street brought her into contact with other Aboriginal girls, the first she had known since her days at Yass. Most were lonely kitchenmaids, without hope or cash, who had been indentured as servants by the Aborigines Protection Board after a few years or mere weeks of training at the Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls' Home. Realising the injustice of an apprenticeship scheme which placed the girls' wages in a trust account until they completed their indenture and allowed them only a few pence of pocket money, Pearl decided to help them.

The Board's offices were in a building (since pulled down) behind Sydney Hospital and facing the Domain. Years later Pearl had vivid memories of walking across the wide park with these girls, appalled by their tales of how Inspector Donaldson and a police escort had forcibly removed them from their families, by their accounts of the severe regime at Cootamundra, and by their reports of many instances of mistreatment

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

by employers.<sup>7</sup> Pearl never forgot the autocratic and unsympathetic reaction of Board staff when she tried to speak up for the unfortunate apprentices.

In 1930 Pearl found herself unemployed. Domestic servants were the first victims of the great depression. For a few months she and her mother lived in a mean tin humpy in a vast shanty town, the Unemployed Workers' Camp at La Perouse, one of many such camps that surrounded Sydney during the 1930s. They then moved to Nowra on the south coast and joined a pea-picking crew made up of Aboriginal women. In the off-season they took any jobs available in the district. Pearl ruefully recalled that she was a slow picker. At the worst time of the depression she was starving. But at Nowra she made a life-long friend: Mrs Sarah Cruse (mother of Ossie Cruse, later an ordained pastor and a member of the National Aboriginal Conference). Her efforts to improve industrial conditions for pickers were also supported by a Labor Party man, Jack Beale (later Minister for Conservation in a New South Wales Liberal government). This was Pearl's first experience of the effective work of a structured organisation, and she kept it in mind.

For the first time, too, Pearl and Mrs Murray encountered the full repressive might of the New South Wales *Aborigines Protection Act* (1909-1963) and regulations. It gave the Board and its police agents powers, originally intended to protect Aborigines, which could too easily be used to control and exploit them. For their own good, so they were told, Aborigines could neither drink nor possess liquor; they could be prevented from leaving New South Wales; after 1936 they could be removed from any place on a magistrate's judgement. 'Whites' associating with them could be prosecuted on suspicion of procuring. As legal guardian of Aboriginal minors the Board could assume control and custody of any child it deemed 'neglected'. When Pearl and her mother became acquainted with the community at Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station they heard of further petty rules imposed by the manager. Pearl chortled when recalling how she undermined his order that the women must shop in Nowra only in his company. He held their 'chits' (probably their income from the new Child Endowment benefit) to pay for purchases; at Pearl's instigation the ladies embarrassed him by insisting that he supervise their purchase of underclothing.

The Board had dismissed the manager of its Brewarrina station at the end of 1936; his complaints to a sympathetic M.L.A. were relayed to William Ferguson, a prominent Aboriginal spokesman who was campaigning for an inquiry into Board administration of this and other reserves.<sup>8</sup> After the June 1937 meeting at Dubbo which founded the Aborigines' Progressive Association, Ferguson came to Sydney to organise evidence for an expected parliamentary investigation of Board affairs. Pearl visited Sydney to meet Ferguson and at his suggestion applied to the Board for employment as cook at the Brewarrina dormitory. Ferguson wanted her to check reports that a European man habitually attempted to seduce girls living in the dormitory, and to provide some

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from Pearl's contemporary comments appear in Horner 1974; Tucker 1977 and Edwards 1982 describe experiences at the Cootamundra Home. Read [1982], a report published by the N.S.W. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, notes that at least 5,625 Aboriginal children were taken from their families between 1883 and 1969.

<sup>8</sup> See Horner 1974 for a detailed discussion of the issues.

independent evidence of residents' comments on their generally poor conditions. She found plenty to be indignant about in a few weeks at the station.<sup>9</sup>

Back in Sydney Pearl happened to meet two of the domestics she had assisted nine years earlier and accompanied them to the weekly tea-party sponsored by Mrs Joan Kingsley-Strack, a sympathetic employer who was likewise outraged by Board treatment of indentured servants. Their spontaneous friendship led Sydney's Feminist Club to nominate Pearl as their witness when the Parliamentary Select Committee began its hearings on 17 November 1937.<sup>10</sup> This inquiry lapsed when an election was called and the minutes of evidence were not published until 1940.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile Pearl remained in Sydney, deeply involved in planning the 'Aboriginal Day of Mourning' on 26 January 1938, the sesquicentenary of Australian colonisation. Both Pearl and her mother were among the twenty Aborigines who went as a deputation to Prime Minister J.A. Lyons a week afterward. Lyons' wife immediately told reporters how Pearl's speech had moved her. Decades later Dame Enid Lyons could still quote Pearl's declaration, 'I am more proud of my Aboriginal blood than of my white blood'.<sup>12</sup> Those words sum up Pearl's allegiance. They also tell something of her suffering in eight years of depression conditions.

Over the next few months Pearl was chairman of several heated meetings at which two founders of the Aborigines' Progressive Association, William Ferguson and Jack Patten, argued their different views about future action. At the June 1938 State Conference of the Association in Dubbo Pearl was elected secretary, and Ferguson president. Pearl's mother and stepfather Dick Murray (now retired from pastoral work) were the delegates from Nowra. Pearl already had another prominent role as speaker for the Committee for Aboriginal Citizen Rights, formed in April 1938 by representatives of churches, women's groups and workers' organisations. For two years the secretary, Mrs Strack, and her friend Mrs Gibbs addressed various societies and public meetings night after night. Both were forthright and knowledgeable about the distress of Aboriginal servants and reserve residents. Pearl's gift for phrases which stirred the social conscience of 'white' Australians helped to focus public concern.

In February 1939 Pearl was a member of this Committee's deputation to the new federal Attorney-General, R.G. Menzies, to protest capital punishment (specifically, the hanging of a convicted Aboriginal); Pearl's statements, interpreted as antagonism to Christian missionaries in press reports, led to a breach with Ferguson. A month later Ferguson repudiated a press report that Pearl would contest the Parramatta seat (held by the Minister responsible for Aboriginal affairs) on behalf of the Aborigines' Progressive Association in the next State election. This premature announcement had been provoked by news that no Aboriginal representatives would

<sup>9</sup> See Mathews 1977 and New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1940 for descriptions of conditions at Brewarrina; Pearl may have made written as well as oral reports to Ferguson but I could not locate any surviving copies.

<sup>10</sup> Biographical information and a detailed chronology of events appear in Horner 1974.

<sup>11</sup> New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1940.

<sup>12</sup> Information from correspondence with Dame Enid Lyons; for contemporary press accounts see Horner 1974:68-70.

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

be included in the reconstituted Aborigines Welfare Board.<sup>13</sup> This Board, appointed to implement a revised policy of 'assimilation and welfare' following amendment of the Act in May 1940, included some new members but the staff and restrictive regulations were almost unchanged.

Meanwhile Pearl had left Sydney to be near her parents at Nowra. Although dismayed by the seeming hopelessness of the fight for reform, Pearl had not retired. She continued to serve as speaker at various meetings organised by Michael Sawtell, the pastoral worker turned socialist reformer who helped to found the Committee for Aboriginal Citizen Rights. On 25 January 1941 (the Sunday on which churches first implemented William Cooper's idea of a National Aborigines' Day), the Committee organised a public meeting aimed at ending the exploitation of Aboriginal housemaids as cheap labour. The prominent reformer Archdeacon R.B.S. Hammond was roused to action by Pearl's blunt statement that

Aboriginal girls are no less human than their white sisters and a wage of a shilling a week encourages immorality. Frequently the young girls who are hired out as helps from a government compound become the mothers of "half-caste" babies and are returned to the compound.<sup>14</sup>

On 8 June 1941 Pearl made a radio broadcast, heard over 2GB Sydney and 2WL Wollongong. She thanked the Theosophical Society of Sydney for making it possible. Her pointed and well-reasoned description of the discrimination current on reserves, the cruelty of excluding Aboriginal children from state schools, and the fate of Aboriginal apprentices ended with a shrewd appeal to conscience. She reminded listeners that the original occupation of Australia would have been impossible 'without my people's help and guidance of the white explorers' and told how Aborigines had saved airmen in recent years. She mentioned Aboriginal work for war charities and the service in three wars of 'men of my race' — including her son 'somewhere on the high seas'. She asked only for justice.<sup>15</sup>

A week before this William Ferguson had addressed the State Conference of the Australian Labor Party (which then governed the state). Knowing that her mentor Ferguson now despaired of reform, Pearl doggedly went on talking and writing. Her demands for Aboriginal representation on the Board appeared in serial articles published by the *Nowra Leader* from April to August 1942. Her description of official oppression and her appeals for legislative reform so that Aborigines gained the rights and status of other citizens were set out so clearly they could hardly be ignored. The *Aborigines Protection Act* was amended in 1943 to provide for Aboriginal representation. On 8 November 1943 Ferguson was one of the two men elected to Board membership by New South Wales Aborigines.

<sup>13</sup> Ferguson's views, and official actions, are outlined in Horner 1974:82-85.

<sup>14</sup> *Sunday Sun*, Sydney, 26 January 1941. A 1943 amendment enabled apprentices to receive their full wage entitlement. But the authorities could still use legislation such as the *Child Welfare Act* to take children from their families to further the official policy of assimilation.

<sup>15</sup> Pearl's script for this broadcast was published in Gilbert 1973:13-17. The date and time, 6:30 p.m. on Station 2GB, is noted in a letter by Michael Sawtell dated 31 May 1941 in the Albert Thompson Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

During the war years Pearl remained in Nowra and was active in community activities — she and Mrs Sarah Cruse once organised a Red Cross dance — but she kept in touch with the Aborigines' Progressive Association which met monthly in the Clarence Street rooms of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. Ferguson was still president and the Cumeroogunga man Bill Onus had succeeded Pearl as secretary. The rules allowed 'white' people to speak but not vote. When Pearl was in Sydney to speak, with Sawtell, at meetings about citizenship rights, she often urged 'white' audiences to become members of the Association. At one of these meetings in the middle of 1943 a young office secretary, Grace Bardsley, came forward. Pearl had a way of forming strong friendships and this one proved most helpful to Aborigines. The Aborigines' Progressive Association was also active in Dubbo through the war years; Pearl recalled a meeting held there in May 1945 at which Onus spoke of high school students who had to take up domestic work.

By war's end Pearl yearned for a change. In 1946 she took her widowed mother and her sister Olga to Dubbo, staying first with the Fergusons then moving to the West Dubbo home of Mrs Maud Carney. Mr Tom Carney, a tank-sinker, owned land and was financially independent. Early meetings of the Aborigines' Progressive Association had been held in the Carney's house in 1937. Now Pearl was talking of an organisational link between Aboriginal communities of two states. On 28 May 1946 Pearl ran a big dance to start a Dubbo Branch of the Australian Aborigines' League. The parent League in Melbourne had been founded by the late William Cooper of Cumeroogunga in 1932; Ferguson and Pearl had worked closely with him and were well acquainted with Bill Onus, Doug Nicholls and other Cumeroogunga folk now revitalising the League. Pearl was immediately elected vice-president of this branch.

The postwar period was not good for Aborigines. Housing shortages and a slump in employment opportunities drove many from cities and towns to camp on reserves and riverbanks as they had in the 1930s. The 'white' Australians who had talked of reforming Australian society in the depression years, and had treated Aborigines as equals in a wartime mateship, now seemed more interested in securing comfortable brick homes for themselves than obtaining justice for Aborigines. Pearl listened to William Ferguson's worried reports about the Welfare Board's deferment of housing programs at reserves (materials were certainly in short supply but dispersal of reserve communities was also a major goal of the Board's assimilation policy); she also heard about his observations that conditions were little better outside the reserves. Pearl kept in touch with the news and views circulating through Aboriginal communities via the 'Koorie telegraph' and was well aware that conditions in other states were much the same. Only the wages were better than before the war. She went on doing what she could do: organising fortnightly social events which enabled the Dubbo community to raise money to help themselves.

Her organisational skills were demonstrated in September 1949 when, at very short notice, she brought together a large Aboriginal gathering at Palms Hall, La Perouse, to farewell the Aboriginal singer Harold Blair on his departure for further musical studies in North America. Bert Groves (Ferguson's long-time friend, elected to replace him on the Aborigines Welfare Board when Ferguson died suddenly in January 1950) helped Pearl with this venture — and long afterwards told me about it to explain his admiration for Pearl's administrative talents. On Ferguson's death Pearl became

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

Secretary of the Dubbo Branch of the Australian Aborigines' League. She continued to run the social activities which raised funds, and on this shoestring managed to maintain Ferguson's regular round of visits to the scattered Aboriginal communities of western New South Wales. She also maintained and strengthened her network of contacts with Aborigines and their sympathisers beyond this State's boundaries.

The Council for Aboriginal Rights, a small but influential organisation particularly concerned with civil liberties and legislative reform, had been formed in Melbourne in 1951. In the next year a concerned Sydney man, Ross Hornshaw, established a Sydney branch which conducted a public meeting at Dubbo on 4-5 March 1953. At this conference, attended by delegates from the western districts of New South Wales, the main speakers were Hornshaw and Pearl. She described how the living conditions of Aborigines in various towns she had visited were getting worse. The Korean War was still on, and when Pearl disclosed that a magistrate in a western town had fined a recently returned Aboriginal soldier for entering a hotel, the meeting discussed discrimination against Aborigines, state laws which forbade possession of liquor, and the consequences for Aborigines of the federal policy of compulsory military training. They resolved to ask the Premier of New South Wales for citizen rights, equal representation on the Aborigines Welfare Board, and the dismissal of a Board member, Michael Sawtell, whose public statements since his recent appointment were resented by many Aborigines who believed he had deserted their cause.

On 19 March 1953 Pearl and Mrs Merle Latham (of the well-known Peckham family) represented the Dubbo branch of the Council for Aboriginal Rights at another Council meeting at Gulargambone chaired by Mr L. Lake, Sr. Speakers discussing incidents of social discrimination revealed that a barber and two cafés refused to serve Aborigines, the school bus did not pick up Aboriginal children, and Aborigines attending the picture show had to sit in a section roped-off from other townspeople. The meeting deplored 'rampant' discrimination in this town. Afterwards Pearl visited the local reserve and press accounts noted that she was shocked by housing conditions. On 19 May 1953 the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a letter written by Pearl as Organising Secretary of the Council for Aboriginal Rights. She took up a suggestion by the Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions, Archdeacon C.S. Robertson, that 'citizens' committees be established to make contact with the people on reserves'. In supporting this idea Pearl mentioned that

In a recent talk in Sydney with Mr Saxby, Superintendent of the Aborigines Welfare Board, I pointed out to him that we were more than eager to co-operate with the Board, and that we ask for full representation on the Board. We appeal to church organisations and trade unions to support our claim for full citizen rights.

In August 1954 Pearl was elected to membership of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board, succeeding Herbert Groves.<sup>16</sup> She was dismayed to find that she could not visit reserves except on official tours together with other Board members. Thus no frank discussion with reserve residents was possible. At its monthly meetings in Sydney the Board made decisions affecting Aborigines throughout New South Wales but the Aboriginal representatives had little influence. Pearl felt constrained by the formal rules of debate and strongly suspected she was excluded from major policy

<sup>16</sup> *Dawn* 1954:18.

decisions. (After the meetings lengthy discussions took place in hotel bars where women were not allowed.)

Pearl's discontent led to plans for a new kind of organisation. She was not selfishly seeking a secure new power base but imagining the possibilities of an association in which politically-minded Aborigines and others could educate one another, work together for 'citizenship rights', and draw public attention to the needs of isolated rural Aborigines who had little chance of a hearing from officialdom. Pearl persuaded a younger woman, Faith Bandler, to bring together some concerned people in Sydney. About twelve persons met in March 1956 to organise an initial general meeting in July. For thirteen years the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship was a force in New South Wales Aboriginal affairs. Its efforts to reform legislation, co-ordinate the work of many rural 'assimilation committees', and accumulate informed knowledge about Aborigines and their hopes for change were prompted and guided by many Aboriginal members of the executive.

Aboriginal and other members worked (to quote the A.A.F. constitution) to achieve acceptance of Aborigines 'on the basis of complete social and political equality'. Grace Bardsley, the friend Pearl had recruited to the Aborigines' Progressive Association in 1943, was a foundation member; another woman, Irene McIlwraith, was elected Secretary. In deference to men, however, members chose Herbert Groves and not Pearl as the first A.A.F. president. On 29 April 1957 the A.A.F. convened a great public rally at the Sydney Town Hall to launch a national petition for changes in the federal Constitution. It was Pearl who organised the attendance of some five hundred Sydney Aborigines at that meeting.

After twelve months Pearl resigned as a vice-president although remaining an active member of the A.A.F. In 1957 she also left the Aborigines Welfare Board. Never daunted in her concern for the Aboriginal folk of the far west, she persuaded the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation to provide funds and sponsorship for a small hostel near Dubbo Base Hospital to house Aboriginal patients receiving treatment. It was to be her home until she died. By 1960 the Aborigines Welfare Board had accepted responsibility and until the Board was abolished late in 1969 Pearl, as hostel Warden, was a member of the Board's staff. She spent herself tirelessly caring for hostel residents, and earned the warm respect of hospital staff.

Her employment as a public servant did not deter Pearl from investigating all reports of injustice. While I was Honorary Secretary of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (1958-1966) she would pass on such complaints by post or telephone. No detail in her reports was ever wrong: I often thought what a good lawyer she could have been. Once the Board threatened to dismiss her over a case but the A.A.F. was able to bring pressure to bear from high places to save her, and the letters from Dubbo continued.

Pearl relished the opportunities to learn about distant communities provided by the first national organisation for Aborigines, the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (a title later changed to include Torres Strait Islanders). The Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, like other affiliated organisations, sent representatives to its national conferences held annually from 1957. The A.A.F. itself held two state-wide conferences in 1961 and 1965. The 1965 meeting was wholly managed by Aborigines, as a matter of principle. Beforehand Pearl travelled through the northwest with Ken

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

Brindle and Ray Peckham, urging Aborigines to attend. From that time her interest in Aboriginal conferences became almost an obsession, and most organisers remembered to invite her. Her public statements at these rallies veered between careful criticisms and pure vitriol. She was never guilty of flattery. All her life Pearl showed courage in advancing her convictions. This was consistent with her strong views of citizenship, shaped by Mrs Murray and William Ferguson. In private, relaxed among her friends, her public rage vanished and her gentle, jocular, penetrating comments and ironic laughter made conversation a delight. Late in life she took a warm interest in young students and particularly in young blacks who understood their politics.

Pearl was proud of the accomplishments of her pioneering generation of Aboriginal activists and helped many researchers. To the end of her days she was Ferguson's disciple. But she could be touchy about a fancied slight, as we learned when we visited her at Dubbo in 1966 to record information about Ferguson. We went first to the swimming pool to cool off and somehow she heard of this; by the time we arrived at the hostel she was furious and would not speak to us all evening. But by morning we were forgiven and the next two days were full of high spirits. She made a point of introducing us to her mother, Mrs Murray, still a beautiful woman at over ninety years of age.

Pearl Gibbs did much to change public opinion about Aborigines and force governments to improve the wretched living conditions of reserve residents and young servants who had few other champions. Though her loyalties were with the Aborigines, she had many 'white' friends too. She made us see our own faults of ignorance and paternalism. She was concerned to make us aware (as much by her own sturdy independent spirit as her direct talk) of the common Aboriginal experiences of which we knew very little – insult, insensitive treatment, prison, discrimination, unfair laws, the frustrations that go with poverty – and to face them honestly. We had to put aside any middle class ideas of judgement, and speak to people just as they were. Pearl also taught us not to admit defeat.

Pearl Gibbs understood better than most that in creating cordial relations between the two races ordinary Australians have a useful role to play. She shared the experiences of ordinary Australians of her time. With extraordinary courage she spoke and wrote and worked to ensure that in her time Aboriginal people would be represented and consulted whenever decisions were made about their lives. That achievement is sufficient memorial.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dawn: a Magazine for the Aboriginal People of N.S.W.* [Official organ of the Aborigines Welfare Board], 3 (7), 1954.
- Edwards, Coral. 'Is the ward clean?', in Bill Gammage and Andrew Markus eds. *All that dirt: Aborigines 1938*. Canberra, 1982:4-8.
- Gilbert, Kevin. *Because a white man'll never do it*. Sydney, 1973.
- Goodall, Heather. A history of Aboriginal communities in New South Wales, 1909-1939. Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, 1983.
- Horner, Jack. *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal freedom*. Sydney, 1974.

- Kennedy, Eliza and Tamsin Donaldson. 'Coming up out of the nhaalya: reminiscences of the life of Eliza Kennedy', *Aboriginal History*, 6 (1), 1982:5-27.
- Mathews, Janet. *The two worlds of Jimmie Barker: the life of an Australian Aboriginal 1900-1972, as told to Janet Mathews*. Canberra, 1977.
- New South Wales, Legislative Assembly. *Select Committee on administration of Aborigines Protection Board appointed during the Session of 1937-38 . . .*, Joint Volumes of Papers Presented to the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, Session 1938-39-40: VII 597-738.
- Read, Peter. 'A double-headed coin: protection and assimilation in Yass 1900-1960', in Bill Gammage and Andrew Markus eds. *All that dürt: Aborigines 1938*. Canberra, 1982:9-28.
- . *The stolen generation: the removal of Aboriginal children in New South Wales 1883-1969*. Sydney [1982].
- Tindale, Norman B. *Aboriginal tribes of Australia*. Berkeley and Canberra, 1974.
- Tucker, Margaret. *If everyone cared: autobiography of Margaret Tucker*. Sydney, 1977.

## PEARL GIBBS: SOME MEMORIES

Heather Goodall

Many people have recollections of Pearl Gibbs. Many are more qualified than I to write on her work and her character. I can only offer these brief notes of what she told me as a tribute to a complex, intensely principled woman who was committed to recording the history of the Aboriginal movement.

When I spent time with her in 1981 age had left her isolated and frustrated. She had by no means given up: she was determined to assert her independence and right to control her situation, and still closely followed Aboriginal politics as far as her failing health allowed. She could still be warm and optimistic. Nevertheless there was a sadness and loneliness about her that was probably not typical in earlier days.

When I talked with Pearl about her motivations for joining the Aborigines' Progressive Association in 1937 a number of points recurred frequently. These are the issues which Pearl considered most significant in her own 'politicisation':

- Both her mother, Maggie Murray (nee Brown) and her stepfather Dick Murray had been 'hired out' as servants around Brewarrina in the period before the Aborigines Protection Board gained formal powers of apprenticeship but police and managers arranged the hiring. Her stepfather's employment was not too bad but her mother's experience was unpleasant.
- When Pearl was at Brewarrina Aboriginal Station as a child with her mother and stepfather she met Polly Marshall, one of the survivors of the Hospital Creek massacre. She learnt the story of this massacre in Polly's lifetime; to me and I think to Pearl this fact symbolised the immediacy of the Aboriginal past.
- Pearl often referred to her experience of school segregation and the racism of 'white' children. She recalled being turned away from the State school at Cowra when her mother took her and several other children to be enrolled. They were told 'no blacks were allowed'. At Yass the State school excluded Aborigines so they

*Heather Goodall recently completed a thesis on Aboriginal communities in New South Wales 1909-39 and now teaches at Tranby Co-operative College for Aborigines in Sydney.*

### THREE TRIBUTES TO PEARL GIBBS

attended the convent school. She also had to face hostility from children at the convent school in Bourke and the State school at Byrock.

- Pearl was deeply influenced by her suffering, during the depression years, at the 'Happy Valley' unemployed workers' camp, where she watched police try to stop contact between 'whites' at the camp and Aborigines on the reserve at La Perouse, and discovered the difference between the dole and the rations allotted Aborigines.
- Her fighting spirit was further shaped by experiences while pea-picking in the Nowra district; she told of organising stop-work meetings to gain basic working conditions, and of organising a boycott of one of the Nowra picture shows to protest against the segregation of Aborigines.
- Pearl's sensitivity to injustice was sharpened by conditions at Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station; she mentioned an instance (also recalled by a number of other former residents) when the manager locked one of the community's leaders in the station office and severely beat him.

Several direct quotations from Pearl's reminiscences, recorded 6-9 March 1981, seem to exemplify both the force of Pearl's deep resentment and bitterness and her equally deep commitment to human rights and to the peace movement. Describing her first public speech in Sydney in 1937, she recalled how:

Bill Ferguson and Michael Sawtell had arranged to go down to the Domain and I tagged along with them. They had a ladder [about three feet high] so they got up on their ladder and they spoke . . . Naturally it was about the Aborigine. There were very few people around us. There was a big political speaker [C.P.A.] about a hundred yards away or more from us and we might have had only five or six people around us. And then I got up on the ladder. I got up there and I shook and I shivered and the ladder was rocking and the reason was because of all this hatred and resentment I'd had . . . I was so fighting mad, I didn't know what to say first because there were so many things . . . and all this hatred. I couldn't talk. They had to get me down on the ground and then I started! You think my voice is loud now but it's nothing to what it was. And the people came — a woman was a sort of novelty speaker then and so the crowds came. And that was my first experience at public speaking.

When she was recording the history of the early protests Pearl could speak with detachment of her own role, but remembered injustices still roused her to passion:

We had the same policy right through: Full Citizenship Rights. They [William Ferguson and Jack Patten] left me to talk about women. One of the main things was the hiring out of girls: this was a tragedy, one of the tragedies that broke up the relationship between the Aboriginal people. The girls were told not to mix with Aboriginal people, sent to strange places, separated from all their relations. And they wholly and solely belonged to whoever employed them — and I call that slavery! It took away their independence. A lot of them were helpless and intimidated: they weren't allowed to be responsible. Then I talked about how we had to have proper schooling. Then there was the poor quality of the rations and the terrible power of the managers over the people.

Pearl saw the Aboriginal fight for justice in a broader context. She spoke often of her pride in being Aboriginal. Often she added a comment such as 'I don't think colour or creed makes much difference. Let us put in our time for human rights and let us

live towards that'. Again and again she told me, 'This is what I want people to remember'.

In her Dubbo home Pearl was surrounded by memories of the past. Her newspaper cuttings documenting the protests of the 1930s were tangible evidence of the long-ago struggle and its achievements. One of the mementoes 'most precious' to her was a carved statue, 'a gift from the Maoris of New Zealand to the Australian Aborigines for World Peace', she explained, 'given to me for my work for world peace and for safe-keeping for all the Aborigines of Australia'.

Several generations of Aboriginal activists, university researchers and concerned sympathisers who wanted to learn about the Aboriginal past were told to 'see Pearl Gibbs of Dubbo'. It seems appropriate to quote the recollections of a Dubbo man, Jack Booth, a 'white' railway worker closely involved in the Dubbo Aboriginal movement from 1932. This old comrade-in-arms, who died in 1981, had an unbounded admiration and respect for Pearl Gibbs:

The first thing you'd realize about Pearl was that she was straightforward. That's why she stood out, because she'd have a go. She could adapt herself to any audience — be fiery or softspoken — but she wouldn't pull her punches. She wouldn't crawl to the influential people and say "Please give us this or that"; she said "We have to get stuck into the bastards". And she did. And by God, she got results . . . Pearl was prepared to make enemies, and if a person is prepared to make enemies they must also make friends.