

## Your say: Learn from our First Peoples

August 26, 2020

This is an appeal to good Australians; people with good hearts and open minds who want a better future for our children and grandchildren.

Invasion, dispossession, genocide, unacknowledged frontier wars, unregistered massacres, *terra nullius*, our Constitution, stolen generations, discrimination against black veterans, deaths in custody, youth detention levels, prison incarceration rates, poverty levels, failures of Closing the Gap initiatives, the almost-never-ending negative media narrative about our Indigenous fellow Australians, the blatant, disrespectful dismissal by the Turnbull Government of the bipartisan Referendum Council's plea to support the "Uluru Statement from The Heart", the immoral but apparently legal destruction of a 40,000-year-old heritage site — racism ad nauseam.

How can this level of racism exist when each generation of Australians has so many good-hearted and fair-minded people? How can this be when the union movement has invested so much energy into improving the lives of our First Nations Peoples?

They have a blind spot to racism and all too often don't catch sight of it until it's too late to avert another tragedy: another school expulsion, another suicide, another incarceration, another death in custody, another political intervention. It took the brutal murder of a US citizen of African American-heritage earlier this year to awaken so many good, non-Aboriginal Australians to the fact that there have been 432 Aboriginal deaths in custody since the Royal Commission that made 339 recommendations 29 years ago. When racism is pointed out, good-hearted people know it's wrong. If knowing our racist history is not enough for good non-Aboriginal Australians to overcome our national, collective, organisational and individual blind spots towards racism, then what could?

For me, the answer is clear and simple. Learn and embrace "the gift" of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and speak out. Read the statement. Talk with others about it. Educate yourselves. Tell your local member. Tell your friends. Make it an election issue. Vote for it and do all of this over and over again, until our federal parliament genuinely listens to and learns from Indigenous Australians.

We also need to take a good, long look in the mirror at ourselves, at our work places and the organisations we belong to through the lens of "the gift".

Now is the time for walking sideby-side, in shared understanding, by learning from Aboriginal Australia.

Now is the time to share power and incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' knowledge systems and practices into the way we see and do things.

Not only do "Black Lives Matter", learning from Black Australia matters too. Elders say to us over and over again,



“Listen to us”. Communities say, “Include us in decision making ”.

## **QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS**

There are questions about how we, as teachers and progressive unionists, can learn from Aboriginal Australia, from our Aboriginal members. What are our blind spots? In 2020, what do we see in our rear vision mirror?

What can we learn and incorporate from Black Australia into our policies, rules and teaching? What stories can we share?\* What are our learning maps?\* What are our community links?\* In our union, we know that Black Lives Matter to us individually, to our colleagues, to our members, to our students, to our communities and to our nation. Our challenge as a union is to make learning from Black Australia matter.

**Philip von Schoenberg** is a Life Member \*I acknowledge the knowledge developed and shared through the “Eight Ways Pedagogies”.