

Lex Wotton is coming to Melbourne

Support the campaign to drop the charges

The campaign to throw out all charges against Palm Island Aboriginal leader, Lex Wotton, is gaining momentum. The Indigenous Social Justice Association (Melbourne) is organising a Victorian speaking tour for Lex from 6 – 10 August 2008. Wotton participated in the November 2004 protest against the killing of his friend Mulrunji, a respected community member and father, while in police custody. Singled out in the crackdown that followed, Wotton faces charges of “riot with destruction” -- a charge that could lead to a jail sentence of more than ten years.

No justice, no peace. A blatant cover up of what happened to Mulrunji in the Palm Island watch house enraged the community. Responding to *years* of racist state violence, and now Mulrunji's death, they demanded justice. What triggered the angry protest was the release of the first state inquiry into Mulrunji's killing, which, while noting that he had suffered a ruptured liver and four broken ribs, concluded that his death resulted from a “scuffle.” A second coronial inquiry in September 2006 confirmed what everyone already knew: that on November 19, 2004 at the Palm Island police station, Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley had struck Mulrunji with such force that it caused the Aboriginal man to die.

Four hundred people took part in the 2004 Palm Island rebellion -- over 10% of the entire island's population! The large demonstration marched on the police station and courthouse -- the symbols of racist injustice. Queensland authorities retaliated with vicious repression and targeted individuals for persecution. On March 22, 2007 a jury acquitted four Palm islanders charged with “riot” in connection with the November 2004 demonstration. But the state continues to scapegoat Lex Wotton, whom they allege was the leader of the protest.

Far from being a “riot,” the Palm Island protest was an act of anti-racist resistance. This struggle, like that of Redfern after the death of T.J. Hickey nine months earlier, brought the racist hounding of Indigenous communities across Australia to international prominence. The resistance on Palm Island revitalised a national movement to expose the causes of Aboriginal deaths in custody and stop the ongoing death toll that amounts to genocide. This resistance is a big factor in *why* Senior Sargent Chris Hurley was brought to court. His acquittal once again confirmed how stacked the legal system is against Aboriginal Australians and how justified it was for the people of Palm Island to stand up to the institutions of this racist system in November 2004.

We will not be intimidated! By jailing Lex Wotton, the state hopes to head off future opposition to racist persecution. The Queensland government is trying to scare people away from responding to the whitewash of Mulrunji's killing and resisting Canberra's draconian invasion of Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.

This subjugation of Indigenous Australians is another form of the repression being unleashed against trade unionists who stand up for workers' rights. The Australian Building Construction Commission has spied on, intimidated and threatened to imprison several building workers for organising strikes and other resistance against exploitation.

Supporters are organising solidarity action all around the county in the lead-up to Wotton's trial. We demand: Stop the Racist Political Persecution of a Palm Island Aboriginal Resident! Defend the Right to Oppose Racist State Brutality! Drop the Charges Against Lex Wotton!

We have only a few months before Lex faces court and charges that, if upheld, could see him jailed. A preliminary court hearing moved the date of the trial from April 21 to October 6. A huge national solidarity convergence will take place in Brisbane in the lead up to the new trial date.

In August, ISJA-Melb is organising this Victorian speaking tour for Lex Wotton to tell his story and further strengthen the campaign. Wotton will address unions, workplace meetings, campus events, media and community gatherings. A huge benefit evening featuring a speech by Lex and an array of performers donating their talents will take place on Saturday 9 August at the MUA Hall in West Melbourne. To propose a speaking opportunity for Lex or to contribute to the success of this solidarity speaking tour, contact ISJA-Melb on 9388-0062 or 0401-806-331

The Queensland government continues to urge Aboriginal people and their supporters to have faith in a system which acquits Senior Sargent Hurley but threatens to jail Lex Wotton for at least 10 years. The “justice” system exists to protect the rich and the powerful. It is a system where, to quote legendary singer songwriter, Kev Carmody, Aboriginal people can be “executed without trial” while

held in custody. It is a system that hunts down opponents of racism, like Wotton, who protest against this injustice. We demand Lex Wotton's freedom, now!

