

hysteria during his defamation action to clear his name, particularly revealing. In fact, it is rather ominous in the post-9/11 climate of paranoia with dissenting journalists again facing vilification and worse.

As George notes in his preface, 'The real Wilfred, the man who broke the mould of sycophantic journalism, is found in the dynamic pages of this book' (p. xi). Two boxes of documents released by Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and other government departments contain the vendetta fodder.

References

- Burchett, W. (1982). *At the Barricades: forty years on the cutting edge of history*. New York: Times Books.
- Burchett, W., with Alley R. (1976). *China: the quality of life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Burchett, W. (1969). *Passport: an autobiography*. London: Nelson.
- Burchett, W. (1941) *Pacific Treasure Island—New Caledonia*. London: McKay.
- Knightley, P. (1976). *The first casualty: from the Crimea to Vietnam—the war correspondent as hero, propagandist and myth-maker*. London: André Deutsche.
- The long road home (1970, February 22). Editorial, Melbourne *Sunday Observer*, p. 4. Melbourne Observer Souvenir: (Accessed 17 September 2006) www.melbourneobserver.com.au/observer35.pdf

MONA PAPALI'I is an independent documentary film maker.

Crucial Pasifika achievement in an era of intense political consciousness

Polynesian Panthers, edited by Melani Anae with Lautofa Iuli and Leilani Burgoyne. Auckland: Reed Books, 2006, 144pp. ISBN-139780790010014

IT WAS the early 1970s, they were just teenagers, and the first generation of Pacific Island migrants to be born in New Zealand. Home and church were the circles that kept culture alive, but outside its boundaries was a world many faced alone.

This book is the story of the Polynesian Panther Party, a political group of inner city Pacific Island and Maori youth brought together through the shared experience of racism and, more importantly, the shared determination to fight it and the marginalisation in its wake.



Edited by ex-Polynesian Panther Melani Anae (director of Pacific Studies at Auckland University) and contributed to by a number of fellow members and friends of the party, *Polynesian Panthers* depicts an era of awakening political consciousness among New Zealand's newest migrants—in particular, through the eyes of their NZ-born children.

It was a generation that needed a voice, a leader, role models, something to be proud of. Confusion over parent's ideals, values, the fa'a Samoa way, and religious issues added to the experience. (Ness Sesega, p. 115)

Their parents were among the first wave of Pacific Island people to migrate to New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s. They came in response to New Zealand's need for a pool of unskilled labour as well as their own need for a 'better life and education

for the children'. Like all migrants from the 'developing world', they knew their place: to work hard, obey the laws, be silent, and more importantly, be invisible. The latter was fairly difficult if you were Polynesian in a land of predominantly Papalagi people, but for the rest, they did their best.

Their children they raised the only way they knew how, as Tongans, Samoans, Cook Islanders and Niueans. This, however, did not preclude learning the 'Papalagi way', and children were encouraged to speak English and to do well at school. Church was central to community, and Sunday School a must for all children. And though their adopted country may have seen them as just unskilled workers, that did not define them, they were chiefs, orators, historians, carvers, weavers, musicians, fishermen, navigators, proud.

Their children born in this land, however, were not so secure in their identity. Yes they knew they were Samoan, or Tongan, or Niuean. But they were born here, so shouldn't that make them New Zealanders as well, and if so, why did they not feel they belonged? As much as they would have liked to believe the myth of New

Zealand, land of racial harmony, experience told them otherwise.

I am a contemporary of this generation of Pacific Islanders, and grew up in a world that has found expression in this book. As I read I find myself saying ‘right on’, words I haven’t used in decades—my children look sideways and roll their eyes.

Also as a contemporary I thought I knew all about the Polynesian Panthers, but on reading I found I didn’t know much after all, even though this book, as the editor writes, is not the definitive book on the subject. Definitive or not, it brings that world to life.

Polynesian Panthers chronicles a little known, but significant part of NZ history, one that only its’ participants can truly express. It’s not a polemic, or even an analysis of the times, it’s better than that, it is a first hand account of events through the eyes of those who lived it. And when you look at how old they were—17 to 19-year-olds—and then look at what they achieved, the alliances they made, their political consciousness, and dogged determination to put theory into practice, you wonder, what could make teenagers turn their backs on what should have been a carefree and irresponsible time of life?

The accounts of the contributors enable you to see why. Set in the

1970s, you enter a time of intense political activism. The Vietnam war had politicised the youth of the nations that had participated, the tangata whenua’s fight for land and language had resurged with an urban face, the Land March, Bastion Point, Raglan, all expressed a radicalism as yet unknown in recent history. And in amongst it all were the Polynesian Panthers from the inner city suburbs of Ponsonby, Grey Lynn, and Herne Bay.

Within the confines of these small suburbs, community was tight and experience shared. In that world, they lived through racist slurs, exploitative landlords, police targeting, homelessness, hardship bordering on poverty, and of course the infamous ‘dawn raids’.

When the economy took a turn for the worst, their people became the scapegoats for all that was wrong with the nation, they were taking New Zealanders jobs, draining health and welfare services, increasing crime, and if there were a hole in the ozone at that time then you can bet the Pacific Islanders would have been to blame. The news media were unrelenting in their portrayal of Pacific Islanders.

As a reaction to the alienation of racism many drifted into ‘gangs’. But one gang, the Panthers, decided

to fight the victimisation face on, and it was from this gang that the Polynesian Panther Party was formed. Their recruitment drive enlisted a broad cross section of Pacific Island and Maori youth from gangs, churches, high schools, university, and the work force.

Their political inspiration came from the Black Panther Movement of the United States, modified to suit their reality. Their politics did not transcend their lives; rather they were founded from within it.

To many young Polynesians like myself the only way forward for us as a migrant people was self-help. We would have to stand up for ourselves and for our people and not wait for others to do it for us. (Wayne Toleafoa, p.61)

They looked around them, saw what was needed, and with the impetuosity of youth, they went for it. Along the road they made strong alliances with other political groups of the time such as Nga Tamatoa, People's Union, Care, Accord—as well as individuals like Betty Wark, David Lange, Robert Ludbrook, and Tom Newnham.

Working together they set up homework centres, tenants protection, prison visits, legal aid, emergency housing, food co'ops, help for

the elderly, a legal aid booklet, and the notorious PIG (Police Investigation Group) Patrol.

Now in their 40s and 50s, with children and grandchildren of their own, this book takes them back to that time of innocence in action. Yet for all that it is not a sentimental stroll down Ponsonby Road, nor is it a bitter tale of powerlessness. *Polynesian Panthers* reveals what can be achieved when hearts and minds meet to change the worldview of those who would do harm.