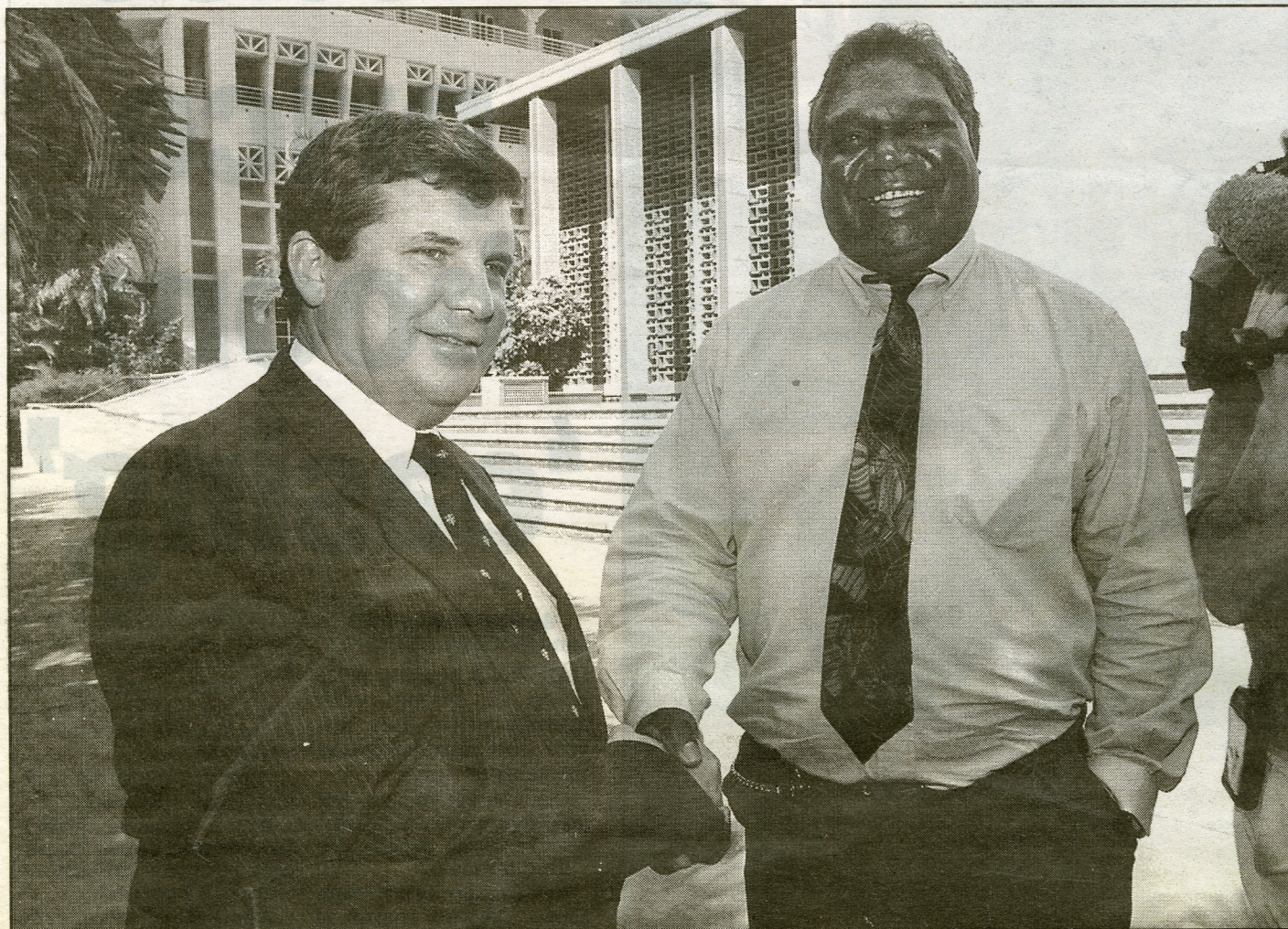


Former CLP chiefs back an apology

Saying sorry shouldn't be that hard



SURVIVORS: Shane Stone and Galarwuy Yunupingu in 1998. Their friendship endured

Stone joins Tuxworth on indigenous issue

By NICK CALACOURAS

FORMER Chief Minister and Liberal Party president Shane Stone yesterday backed a Labor Federal Government plan to apologise to the stolen generation.

He is the second former CLP Chief Minister to come out in favour of the Labor proposal after Ian Tuxworth also backed the plan on the weekend.

Territory Opposition Leader Terry Mills also supported the apology, but said it would be useless without "determined action by governments".

Mr Stone admitted he had tested the veracity of every land claim.

"I am not big on being welcomed to someone's country or parliaments being

opened by a smoking ceremony or dancing blackfellas," he said.

Mr Stone said he had been outspoken on indigenous affairs "on occasion" — such as calling then Northern Land Council chairman Galarwuy Yunupingu "just another whingeing, whining, carping black".

"There is little doubt that I have been in the front row of race relations in this country. No regrets, except I was too harsh on Galarwuy and I am grateful our friendship survived our constant verbal brawls."

Mr Stone has since gone into business with Mr Yunupingu.

He said Australians were wasting too much energy on deciding whether to apologise — which was distracting from finding real solutions.

"Successive governments at all levels

and political colour have had varying success in meeting these challenges," he said. "Generations of the indigenous leadership have failed their own people as much as governments."

Mr Stone offered his own apology to the stolen generation as a model for the federal government.

"I am sorry for what has happened in the past to our indigenous people and for what continues to this day. I hope that we will all accept responsibility for our own actions and failings and as one people work together to make this country a better place for all Australians."

"I think you can say from hindsight that there were parts of it we got badly wrong and we did a lot of damage to lives and families," Mr Tuxworth said.

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Aborigines march on Canberra

ABORIGINES from Central Australia will make the trip to Canberra to "stand up" for their rights.

The *Convergence on Canberra* includes a February 12 march on Parliament House.

It calls for an immediate review of the NT intervention, restoration of the Racial Discrimination Act and implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

"We have to roll back the intervention and reinstate the Act," *Convergence* organiser Barbara Shaw said.

No regrets in success story

By MATT CUNNINGHAM

A MEMBER of the stolen generation — and one of the Territory's leading businessmen — says he would probably be in jail if he hadn't been taken away from his family 60 years ago.

Syd Rusca, 65, was taken to the Croker Island Mission when he was four years old.

While he believes the Government owes the stolen generation an apology, Mr Rusca (pictured) said he had benefited from the controversial former policy.

"Me, myself, I was happy I was taken away because I would be killing people now," he said.

"I would be in jail for sure."

"I got educated, I got taught to respect other people."

"You got taught to go to work ... and look at my people, they never got out of what I call the pigsty."



land. He said there were two keys to success for any young person — hard work and education.

"Education is the passport to success," he said.

Mr Rusca said he had taught his children the same strong work ethic that had paid dividends for him.

"To be successful you have got to get out and work," he said.

"All I had was a pocketknife and a bag of marbles — and I thought 'I want more for my kids than this'."

Mr Rusca now runs a successful earthmoving business, S & J Earthmoving, that operates across both the NT and Queens-

land. Mr Rusca, who was born to a white father and Aboriginal mother in Borroloola, said the Australian public had nothing to be sorry for.

But he believed the stolen generation deserved an apology from the government.

"I suppose they have to be sorry for taking you away," he said.

"If I walked into your house and said 'I'm going to take your kids, boss', I bet you would kick up a fuss."

"But in those days an Aborigine had no rights whatsoever."

But he said he was not concerned about compensation.

"It doesn't worry me one bit — it's entirely up to the government," he said.

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PROMINENT Liberal and former NT CLP Chief Minister Shane Stone has been a controversial figure in the national race relations debate for more than a decade. This is an edited extract of an email Mr Stone has distributed to explain why he now backs an apology to members of the stolen generation.

THERE will be those surprised at my views on this matter.

As many would be aware when in government I tested the veracity of every land claim made in the Northern Territory. I was one of the authors of the *Wik Ten Point Plan* adopted by the Howard Government. I am not big on being welcomed to someone's country or parliaments being opened by a smoking ceremony or dancing blackfellas.

I have on occasion been known to be outspoken on indigenous affairs and individuals having once referred to Galarwuy Yunupingu as just another whingeing, whining, carping black.

There is little doubt that I have been in the front row of race relations in this country. No regrets except I was

too harsh on Galarwuy and I am grateful our friendship survived our constant verbal brawls.

While some take pride in having walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge I have blackfellas around for dinner, count many as friends and business associates — always have. I live my bona fides in the Territory.

Quite frankly, if we as a nation are going to expend our continuing energy on whether we apologise or not as Australians we are going backwards — all of us, black, white and brindle.

Over the next few years there are going to be far more important issues to worry about that affect all of us. Most importantly there are bigger issues for our indigenous people than words. Some people need to hear the words, others aren't fussed.

The inescapable facts are that indigenous people have been on the receiving end since our lot arrived — 1788 to present day. Our indigenous people are among the most disadvantaged Australians beset with monumental health, education, housing and employment problems.

Whose fault is it? Does that really matter? Mother Teresa when challenged by the great commentator Malcolm Muggeridge about why she bothered helping those who would not

help themselves responded that she would be accountable to The Almighty for her actions, they for theirs and that is the nub of it.

Successive governments at all levels and political colour have had varying success in meeting these challenges. Generations of the indigenous leadership have failed their own people as much as governments.

Not all the stolen generation wants an apology. Not all Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders demand compensation.

Most indigenous people have a different take depending on their circumstances. That said, we as a nation should put to one side all the arguments about whose fault it was, whether we are personally responsible or in any way culpable for past generations and

in the spirit of friendship and together as one people say sorry for what has happened to all indigenous people, including the stolen

generation. As a nation we must confront what has been going on in the communities. Most importantly we all need to do better, black and white.

Prime Minister Rudd should make available to all others in the Parliament a copy of what he proposes to say and aim for a consensus.

He cannot legitimately claim to speak for all Australians unless he is able to say that the Parliament is largely in agreement. He should be supported and he in turn should take up the commitment of John Howard to hold a referendum to accord the first Australians their symbolic place in our Constitution.

A conscience vote is a nonsense — this is time for leadership. It's time to step up to the plate and move on.

I'll go first.

I am sorry for what has happened in the past to our indigenous people and for what continues to this day. I hope that we will all accept responsibility for our own actions and failings and, as one people, work together to make this country a better place for all Australians.

That wasn't hard, and I mean it.