

Stan Tipiloura: farewell to the biggest Tiwi Islander

When Stanley Tipiloura was elected the member for Arafura, he had a pair of very big shoes to fill.

Tipiloura was elected following the resignation of Bob Collins who had earlier been rolled as Leader of the Opposition by Terry Smith in what was possibly the most retrograde step of the parliamentary wing of the ALP (Collins is now a senator and is Minister for Transport & Communications; Smith resigned as Leader and the Member for Millner following the ALPs failure to gain any more seats in the 1990 election and now owns and runs a pub in Echuca).

Tipiloura was Collins' brother-in-law.

At 30, he was the baby of the parliament, notwithstanding that he stood well in excess of six feet.

Tipiloura was not the most articulate or witty member of the House, but he had a reputation as the most passionate.

Early in his political career, in a most unparliamentary performance, he deviated from his prepared speech and launched into an attack on the government, accusing it of tokenism in its treatment of all things Aboriginal before throwing his papers down and storming out of the House.

That resulted in the then Chief Minister, Steve Hatton, and Speaker, Roger Vale, summoning him to their respective offices to assure him that the government did not view Aboriginal issues in that way and explaining that interjections were part and parcel of the parliamentary process.

It was a process with which he was never comfortable.

The Opposition Leader, Brian Ede, said as much in Parliament during the motion of condolence for Tipiloura late last month.

"...Stanley was not happy during sittings of the Assembly," he said.

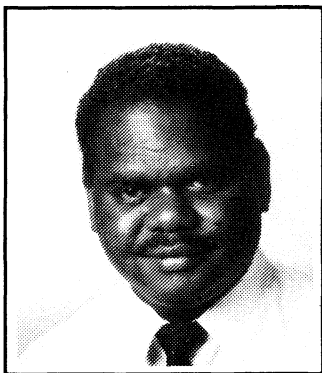
"It was not an area where he felt

Obituary by Robyn Smith

comfortable.

"The cut and thrust of political debate was not of the style that he favoured -- which was to find the solutions to problems through consensus," Mr Ede said.

There was a further outburst earlier this year from Tipiloura relating to the electricity dispute between the



*Stanley Gabriel Tipiloura
1957-1992*

Power and Water Authority and some Aboriginal communities.

He said something most unparliamentary which was promptly struck from the record.

Members of the House paid tribute to his passion and dedication during the special sitting of parliament to mark his passing.

Tipiloura developed kidney problems at an early age and was undergoing regular dialysis until his tribal uncle, Bernard, was deemed a suitable donor.

Both flew to Adelaide for the transplant operation.

The operation was a success, and both Stanley and Bernard Tipiloura were recovering in Adelaide when the 1990 Territory election was called.

Tipiloura was obviously in no condition to campaign in his bush seat, and he was contested by two Aboriginal candidates; Barry Puruntatameri (Country Liberal Party) and Jimmy Tipungwuti (Green Independents).

The election was shaping up to be a very tough contest for Tipiloura.

It was, ironically, the fairest of election campaigns.

Puruntatameri suffered a heart attack shortly after campaigning began and was laid up in hospital in Darwin.

The CLP decided not to withdraw his nomination in a effort to split the vote.

As it happened, that was a wise decision.

When nominations closed, Tipungwuti was campaigning in the Tiwi Islands with his nomination form in his pocket.

The battle for Arafura was now between two hospitalised candidates.

Tipiloura won two-thirds of the vote and held his seat.

He died in Melbourne on 19 September whilst on tour with the Tiwi Islands football team.

He was the first NT parliamentarian to die in office.

He was 35.

Bathurst Island air strip must have been the busiest in Australia on 25 September, the day of Tipiloura's funeral.

At 3.00pm the day before, 70 charters had been booked to Bathurst, even though there was a memorial service in Darwin on the same day.

That in itself is a testament to the respect the man commanded.

At the close of the September/October sittings, Parliament House was smoked by members of the Tipiloura family in a ceremony which moved Stan's spirit from the Chamber.

Stan Tipiloura will be remembered as a gentle giant whose priority was his people.