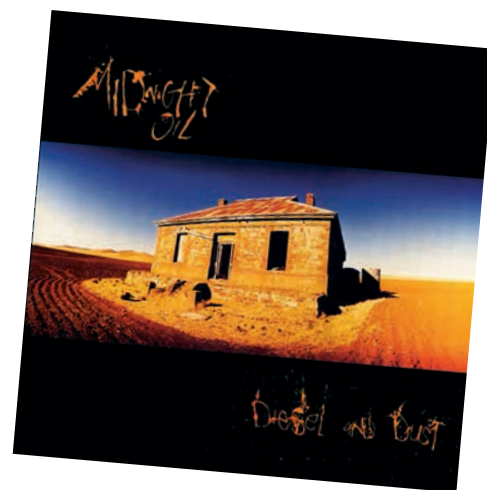


TUNE INTO ENGLISH

Midnight Oil's Beds Are Burning



Nel 1987 il gruppo di Sidney raggiunse la fama mondiale con questa canzone dal forte carattere politico, che reclamava giustizia per l'oppressione e le sofferenze inferte agli aborigeni australiani.

In 1985, Australia's Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock) was returned to the First Nations people¹. Around that time, Peter Garrett, the politically-active vocalist of Australian rock band Midnight Oil, visited an exhibition on the theme of fascism in Italy during the Second World War. He was told that partisans often used the phrase "How could you sleep when beds are burning?" and saw similarities with the fate² of displaced indigenous tribes in his native Australia.

Beds Are Burning is a plea³ for justice that was written while the band toured Australia's desert and island communities, performing⁴ with local musicians. Described as a song about the nation's greatest shame⁵, the lyrics paint a vivid picture of the desolate life lived in the Outback⁶. The song is almost entirely in the present simple, and centred on that one recurring rhetorical question. Understood to be one of Australia's greatest protest songs of the last fifty years, *Beds are Burning* was released⁷ just months before the country's 1988 bicentenary celebrations, becoming an unofficial alternative anthem. Midnight Oil performed it at the closing ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, with the word "Sorry" printed



Top: Uluru in Northern Territory State. Left: Midnight Oil's vocalist Peter Garrett in 2017.

ed on their clothes. Eight years on, the Australian government finally issued⁸ a formal apology⁹ to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for "the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief¹⁰, suffering and loss on these, our fellow-Australians¹¹." In 2009, a star-studded¹² cast re-recorded the song, this time to highlight¹³ the climate emergency before United Nations talks.ⓧ



SCAN, READ & LISTEN
09

LOWER INTERMEDIATE B1

GLOSSARY

- 1 **First Nations people:** popolazioni indigene
- 2 **fate:** destino
- 3 **plea:** appello
- 4 **to perform:** esibirsi
- 5 **shame:** vergogna
- 6 **Outback:** profondo entroterra australiano
- 7 **to release:** pubblicare
- 8 **to issue:** presentare
- 9 **apology:** scuse
- 10 **grief:** dolore
- 11 **fellow-Australians:** connazionali australiani
- 12 **star-studded:** pieno di star (dello spettacolo)
- 13 **to highlight:** sottolineare
- 14 **wrecks:** rottami, carcasse
- 15 **to boil:** bollire
- 16 **steam:** vapore
- 17 **to belong:** appartenere
- 18 **cockatoos:** cacaotua
- 19 **to dry up:** asciugarsi
- 20 **bloodwood:** specie di albero australiano
- 21 **desert oak:** quercia del deserto
- 22 **carmaker:** costruttore d'auto

where the river broke: a river 'breaks' when it dries up¹⁹.

Holden: Holden is Australia's carmaker²².

to say fair's fair: "Fair go" is an Australian expression used in protest to try to change someone's mind.

how can we dance when our earth is turning?: this is a metaphor for time passing, with the injustice continuing.

four wheels: motorised transport (cars etc).

we're gonna give it back: the use of 'we're gonna' ('we're going to') instead of the previous 'let's' is a statement of intention.

Out **where the river broke**
The **bloodwood and the desert oak**
Holden wrecks¹⁴ and **boiling**¹⁵ diesels
Steam¹⁶ in **forty-five degrees**

The time has come
To say fair's fair
To pay the rent
To pay our share

The time has come
A fact's a fact
It **belongs**¹⁷ to them
Let's **give it back**

How can we dance
When our earth is turning?
How do we sleep
While our beds are burning?

How can we dance
When our earth is turning?
How do we sleep
While our beds are burning?

The time has come
To say fair's fair
To pay the rent
Now to pay our share

Four wheels scare the **cockatoos**¹⁸
From Kintore east to Yuendumu
The western desert lives and breathes
In **forty-five degrees**

The time has come
To say fair's fair
To pay the rent
To pay our share

The time has come
A fact's a fact
It belongs to them
We're gonna give it back

the bloodwood²⁰ and the desert oak²¹: these are tree species common to the Australian desert

forty-five degrees: this is the extreme heat of the desert.

the time has come: the declaration "the time has come" in the present perfect is a reference to a 1972 Labor Party election campaign "It's Time".

to pay our share: this means, both literally and metaphorically, to pay a fair contribution for the use of the land unjustly taken from indigenous people.

give it back: to give back is a phrasal verb meaning 'to return' something to its legitimate owner. Here it refers to returning the stolen lands to their legitimate, indigenous inhabitants.

from Kintore east to Yuendumu: these central Australia towns have a predominantly Aboriginal population. Kintore, an Anglo name, is west of Yuendumu, an Indigenous name, so east is used here as a direction.

SCAN & WATCH



Scan this QR code with your smartphone or tablet and listen to the official song on YouTube while reading the lyrics.

Fergal Kavanagh runs the website www.tuneintoenglish.com, the web's largest free resource for learning English through pop music.

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