Introduction to Documents of William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines League (AAL)


Introduction

Four major forms of action are open to those wishing to influence the political process under a parliamentary system of government.

1. Work within the electoral process to secure parliamentary representation with the objective of gaining a ruling majority or a minority position of strength.

2. Using methods sanctioned by that system they can work outside the electoral process to influence the ruling political party or faction; this may be achieved through creating awareness of the necessity for change in the ruling party, or in sections of the electorate.

3. Employ methods which are within the letter of the law although not sanctioned or encouraged by the political system, such as strikes, boycotts, pickets, marches, sit-ins and fasts, with the objective of creating awareness or of producing sufficient disruption for change to become preferable to the maintenance of existing conditions.

4. Commit illegal acts with the objective of influencing or overthrowing the ruling body.

In the inter-war period there was no prospect of improving the position of Aborigines through direct participation in the electoral process, although this was not Cooper’s view and some of his efforts were directed to the achievement of parliamentary representation. The major form of action, however, falls within the second category. Employing the forms sanctioned by the system, appeals were directed to politicians through letters, deputations and petitions; there were also appeals to the general public through public meetings and the press, and also to specific pressure groups, notably the churches. A further possible tactic, the appeal to overseas opinion, was not employed in this period. The third option, legal forms of protest not sanctioned or encouraged, was not pursued by urban activists; the Day of Mourning marked the nearest, although not close, approach to the politics of confrontation. While this option was not employed in the capital cities was a form of protest well known on Aboriginal reserves, one notable example being the Cummeragunja (pronounced Cummeragunja) strike of January 1939. The final tactic, acts of illegality including violence directed at person or property, was again not employed and was indeed completely abhorrent to Cooper and the leadership of Aboriginal organisations.

It is clear that in the inter-war period Aboriginal political activity in the urban centres was limited to the forms sanctioned by the British political system; it is equally clear that the impact
of these activities was, it best, marginal. In the short term little was achieved beyond a possible: contribution to the raising of political awareness. Cooper’s views, much of which are in accord with policies adopted or championed a generation after his death, were ignored by politicians in the 1930s who listened instead to “experts”, such as the anthropologist Professor A.P. Elkin, and to vested interests, notably the pastoral lobby.

Aborigines attempting to influence the political system through methods sanctioned by that system faced, and continue to face, major difficulties. Their fundamental problem stems from the relatively small number of Aborigines, who comprise less than two per cent of the adult population. The numerical disproportion is further accentuated by economic disadvantage: the absence of economic resources which could serve as a lever to prize concessions from an unwilling political system. Given these disadvantages, one option for Aboriginal leaders is to enlist the support of significant elements within the wider community, but in Cooper’s time there were major obstacles to such an undertaking. There was no tradition of according serious consideration to Aboriginal viewpoints and the dominant assumptions of his day meant that Aborigines were dismissed as an irrelevancy, an inferior “race” destined for extinction. As if these obstacles were not sufficient, Aborigines were of necessity forced to operate in an alien political environment, there was lack of full agreement amongst Aboriginal politicians, and government authorities acted to stifle their political activity. Further, Aborigines were denied civil rights, including in most cases the right to vote. Typifying governmental disregard for Aboriginal politics, the petition to his King which had occupied so much of Cooper’s time never reached its destination; its progress was halted by a cabinet decision that no useful purpose would be served by its transmission to England.

Documents

Readers of the William Cooper documents will note that many are written by Thomas Shadrach James and his son Shadrach James whom are William Cooper’s brother in law and nephew. Thomas Shadrach James married William Coopers sister Ada. The relationship that emerged through the efforts of this humble but rather formidable trio, and the political strategies that were used to expose the denial of Indigenous rights in the late 19th and 20th Century, is reflected in the documents.
The founders of the Australian Aborigines League, who protested the persecution of the Jews in 1938.

Holocaust Museum plaque to honour Aboriginal Nazi protest

Peter Kohn

THE Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre will unveil a plaque on Sunday acknowledging the little-known efforts of the Aboriginal community, which tried to aid the desperate plight of the Jews of Europe on the eve of World War II.

In December 1938, a few weeks after Kristallnacht (the Night of the Broken Glass), a group called the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL) passed a strongly-worded resolution condemning Nazi Germany's treatment of Jews. As the Argus newspaper (December 3, 1938) reported, the resolution, which was due to be presented to the German Consulate, condemned "the cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi Government of Germany" and asked that this be brought to an end.

A subsequent report in the Age (December 7, 1938) said the deputation was refused admission to the German Consulate in Melbourne.

The executive director of the Jewish Holocaust Museum, Jonathan Morris, said the protest was significant and historic. "It's interesting to note that back in 1938, three decades before Australian Aborigines were even given voting rights in this country, they knew that it was the right thing to do to stand up for other victims of racism. They acknowledged then what we all know now — that racism, wherever it comes from, is directed against all of us."

The plaque will be unveiled at a ceremony to be addressed by retired Federal Court judge Justice Marcus Einfeld, a well-known human rights advocate, and by Geoff Clark, the Victorian commissioner of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Troy Austin, a senior official of ATSIC, will be attending.

Also present will be Alf Turner, the grandson of William Cooper, founder of the AAL, and a well-known Aboriginal internationalist who saw the persecution of Australian Aborigines in the context of world developments in the 1930s. He will be joined by Dr Wayne Atkinson, Cooper's grand-nephew.

Dr Atkinson told the Australian Jewish News this week Cooper's legacy inspired him to become the first Yorta Yorta person to attain a PhD. "I inherited the rich oral tradition that flows through the Yorta Yorta community from the achievements of Uncle William. His voice and his words have inspired me when I read about our people's struggles back then for what were fundamental citizenship rights."

The plaque will read: "The Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre honours the Aboriginal people for their actions protesting against the persecution of Jews by the Nazi government in 1938."

It was a significant year for Australia's indigenous population, Dr Atkinson said, because January 1938 marked the 150th anniversary of European settlement in Australia and it was marked by Aborigines as a "day of mourning" similar to a day they observed 50 years later at the bicentenary in 1988.

A second plaque, acknowledging that the Holocaust Centre is built on land belonging to the Kulin people, a Koori group that lived in the district, will also be dedicated at the ceremony.

The Holocaust Museum joins B'nai B'rith and the King David School's Orrong Road campus as apparently the only three Jewish communal organisations in Melbourne featuring plaques on their premises acknowledging Koori ownership of land.

The B'nai B'rith plaque was unveiled by Premier Steve Bracks on March 26, 2006, acknowledging ownership of the land by the Boonerwung people. The plaque was erected as part of Hands Across Australia, a Federation 1991-2001 Fund project. The King David School plaque pays tribute to the Wurundjeri people as the original land owners. The Progressive Leo Baeck Centre in Kew has included a special prayer for indigenous peoples as part of its prayers for the Australian people and nation.

The unveiling of the plaque will take place at the Holocaust Centre on Sunday (December 15) at 11am. Inquiries: 9528 1985.
Petition to King

William Cooper, Petition to the King. Herald (Melbourne), 15 September 1933

“Whereas it was not only a moral duty, but also a strict injunction included in the commission issued to those who came to people Australia that the original occupants and we, their heirs and successors, should be adequately cared for; and whereas the terms of the commission have not been adhered to, in that (a) our lands have been expropriated by your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth, (b) legal status is denied to us by your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth; and whereas all petitions made in our behalf to your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth have failed: your petitioners therefore humbly pray that your Majesty will intervene in our behalf and through the instrument of your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth grant to our people representation in~ the Federal Parliament, either in the person of one of our own blood or by a white man known to have studied our needs and to be in sympathy with our race.”

William Cooper to Rev E. R. B. Gribble, 17 December 1933

Dear Sir you will please find enclose, a letter I received from Mr Makin M. P, who I asked to approach the Government for Permission to allow all Aborigines to signe the Petition that is to be forwarded to the King when Completed. I asked for Queensland NSW and Victoria so there is no need for the Natives to be afraid to signe, as you will notice on Mr Makins letter, if any of the authorities should interfere you will Please notify me at once, I forwarded one Copy of the Petition to you about the 1/8/33, trusting you have received it safely. I am anxious to hear from you soon, I May Mention I have received Permission from south and western Australia also from Northern Territory, these states I have received a large number of signatures, I am Pleased to say the Church Missionary Both here and South Australia have taken up this good Cause, my People also in South Aust have formed a very strong Group for the Purpose of trying to get Better Conditions for all, and other Bodies are taking (Horner, 1974).


“I can only express myself in crude and unpolished phrases,” said Shadrach James. - -
“This massacre of my people has been going on for years and years. “What have the whites done to help us in the past 80 years? There has never been a vigorous or decisive effort made to help us. Whatever efforts have been made to help us have been by the missionaries. They are the only people who have attempted to lift us to citizenship.

“What do you propose to do with us in the future? Do you propose to keep us in a servile state until we disappear as a people? If you believe in the God you have taught us, as I know you do, you will help us.

“Some people say the blacks have no intelligence, and, are incapable of keeping -any religious
impression. I have seen many of my own people live and die in the faith.

“In the history of my people I only know of one instance where a person who has killed some of us has been punished.

Food Not Everything

“I do not believe in police protection for my people. What have the police done to help, uplift or teach us? They consider that rations and clothes are sufficient return for the inestimable benefits that white civilisation is gaining from the land we have lost. Herald (Melbourne) 12 April 1929.

ABORIGINE WANTS M.P. FOR NATIVES

“My People Seek Part in Country’s Development”

Mr Shadrach Livingston James, a full-blooded aborigine, attended the conference today called by the Minister for Rome Affairs (Mr Abbott) to discuss the Bleakley report on native problems. Mr James represented the aborigines.

Mr S.L. James is a fullblood aborigine with the poise and cultured speech of the educated white man. Though still quite a young man, he is profound in his reflections on the problem of emancipating his people. He wants them to take their share in the development of the country of which he feels they are the rightful heirs.

His father was for some years a teacher in the Cummeragunja district in N.S.W., but has now retired and is living in Melbourne. Mr James, sent., is noticeably proud of his clever son, and hopes to see him accomplish great things for the cause to which they are both whole-heartedly devoted.

MISSIONARIES PRAISED

“The missionaries are the best help our people have,” said Mr. S.L. James today. “It is to their efforts that we owe what opportunities we have to raise the standard of our civilisation, and take our place in the modern world.

“Many of us are as intelligent and as well educated as lots of white men, but we cannot get the chance to prove our ability. Even Government departments discriminate against us.

“What we want is an aboriginal representative in Parliament, and a native administrator working for us under the direction of the Minister.

“The hearts of many of my people are burning with ambition, but the only way they can rise is with the aid and encouragement of the Government.
CIVIL REFORMS WANTED

“Our lands have been taken, and for lack of opportunity we are a backward people. The missionaries have tried to teach as many of us as possible. Now we ask for proper scope to develop.

“I think that the spiritual leadership of the churches is of the greatest value, but it should be supplemented by reforms in the civil administration.”


THE WRONGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL

Shadrach James

It is a tragic fact that the condition of my people still remains a problem for which all the wise heads of the Governments of this land, for a hundred years, have failed to find a satisfactory solution. The hearts of those of us who have been watching the trend of events in the history of our people, have been gladdened, from time to time, when there have come, from the voice and pen of some benevolent statesman, intimations of laudable schemes for our betterment, buoying us with the hope of a better day — which never came. So far there has never been a vigorous, resolute, decisive, and intensive effort to lift us up socially, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

Whenever and wherever such an effort has been put forth, we credit the missionaries for the experiment, and my people have responded well.

The Governments of Australia have had the Aborigines for over a century in their hands and have not yet taken them out of the experimental stage.

What have they done to educate them to take their places worthily in the community? The Australian whites, with justifiable joy and pride, boast of their marvelous achievements in countless phases of life amongst their own people. What have they done and what are they doing for the uplift of my people? Do they consider the weekly ration, the annual supply of blankets and clothing, an adequate compensation for the inestimable benefits they are daily deriving from this land, which, by divine right, belongs to us? The white man’s answer to this is that the civilisation he has introduced has brought to us many compensating advantages. We grant that, and also gratefully acknowledge the debt we owe to the whites for the knowledge of the true God and His worship. But, alas! they have brought also vice, disease, and the curse of liquor. When will the Australians wake up to their national duty, their responsibility and obligation to us? They complain of our ingratitude. We ask, when will they pay the debt of gratitude they owe to us for the untold gain that has come to them through our irremediable loss?

To quote the words of one of your statesmen, Dr. Basedow, *The Aborigine has not had a dog’s chance*. We wonder if we will ever, under present conditions, get a chance to lift up our heads. Although much dispirited, we have not lost heart. We still possess a residue of courage,
ambition, and determination to strike out and secure a worthy place in the community if our protectors would, in the name of justice and humanity, give us an opportunity.

I would now draw your attention to some of the disabilities under which we suffer, and under the present administration there is no prospect of their being removed. There is a great deal of unemployment amongst my people, which accounts for their poverty and distress. With the exception of shearing and harvesting seasons, which absorb five months, we are practically out of employment for the rest of the year. During these months we do some fishing and trapping, which yield but a precarious living, and the consequence is nearly seventy-five per cent are living in a semi-starved condition.

I venture to say without the least fear of refutation that twenty-five per cent, of our men are quite capable of entering many fields of labour and, standing alongside of the white Australians, work equally as hard and as well as they. We have splendid axemen who could undertake sleeper hewing, forest thinning, road making, etc., but they are denied their licences and employment in these fields. Some of us are intellectually fit to fill some positions in the Government service — railways, tramways, forest and postal departments, etc., but we are debarred from taking these positions.

Reserves for the use of the Aborigines have been set apart in many places throughout the Commonwealth, and they are vested in the Aborigines’ Protection Board, but the Aborigines are denied the right of using the land, and in some cases these reserves are leased to white men. Many of the reserves have river frontages, and could be cut up into irrigation blocks and allotted to the capable Aborigines, where they could settle permanently and make homes of their own without the fear of being disturbed.

I know of several Aborigines who were granted some 30 to 40 acres of land some years ago and were promised larger grants if they proved their capability of clearing and working this land. These men worked hard, their wives helping, on scanty supplies of ration, and fenced and cleared about

900 acres of densely timbered land, and just when they were expecting fair returns from their land the blocks were taken away from them, with no prospect of compensation for their labour.

Our girls, at the age of 14 years, are forcibly taken from their homes and sent out to service. We do not object to their being trained to work as domestic servants, but we strongly object to their being sent at that age when they need a mother’s protection.

I wish to correct the general belief that our days are numbered. I say most emphatically that my people are not doomed to extinction. They may yet be saved. Let the authorities secure the needed legislation for their protection, betterment and preservation, and undertake the work of caring -for them, not as heretofore, with the conviction they are a dying race, but with the confidence that the remnant can be saved. Here I wish to offer some constructive ideas and make some practical suggestions with reference to the care of my people.

I strongly advise the placing of all native aboriginals throughout the Commonwealth under the
Federal Government. At present the care of the Aborigines is entrusted to an institution known as the Aborigines’ Protection Board, which works through the Police Department. This Board, we understand, is a trustee to disburse to the best advantage the money appropriated by the State for our maintenance, education and general welfare. There are other responsibilities devolving upon the Board besides feeding, clothing, and educating us. By the term Protection Board, we understand an institution which stands for promoting, encouraging, and, if need be, creating such influences that will make for our moral, social, intellectual development, and for intercepting those that are inimical to our advancement. In these things we must say the Board has not lived up to its responsibility. We have not made any real progress under their administration.

We desire the appointment of a Native Administrator, because he would be in sympathy with us and grasp more readily our needs, and for the same reason we ask for a native representative in the House, to voice our needs and disabilities, and a Native Protector in each State to see that our people were well cared for.

For the moral and spiritual care of my people, I advise the appointment of itinerant white and Aboriginal evangelists who shall visit the Aboriginals who are not connected with mission stations.

I am quite sure we are in the dawn of a new day for our people. I feel that the influences and prejudices that have been operating against us for a century, keeping us in a servile condition and withholding from us our natural rights, is now giving place to genuine sympathy for my people and a willingness on the part of our rulers to yield some substantial good to them.


HELP MY PEOPLE!

Native Preacher’s Strong Plea

CASE FOR THE ABORIGINES (By Shadrach L. James, Aboriginal Preacher)

It is gratifying to note that another gracious and courageous friend has stepped into the arena to fight our battle. - The article on this question, which appeared in The Herald on Saturday,’ is a momentous one, and will, undoubtedly, lead other sympathetic friends to do likewise and expose the injustice and wrongs under which my poor, helpless, downtrodden people are being hustled into an untimely grave.

No sooner had the white man invaded our land than the extermination of our people began, and it has gone on, and is still going on, under various guises. It is an undeniable fact that the early colonists, not- only dislodged our people from their hunting grounds, but with the help of the police, shot down hundreds of them. It seems the police can do so still with impunity, although not going to the same measure of excess. Their wickedness in this respect knew no bounds; they armed and taught our men to go on a pleasure excursion occasionally, shooting down their own people for the squatters’ rum and “bacca”.

8
ATTITUDE OF WHITES

The whole attitude of the white man towards the aborigine has all along been to dispirit and humiliate him, to extinguish his self-respect, to suppress his ambition; in short, to kill his hope. To his natural disabilities the white man has added other disabilities which I cannot enlarge upon here, and which make the conditions of life seem so hard that the very atmosphere in which he lives appears hostile, and the consequence is he has no will to live.

Our so-called protectors are diligently attending to the care of my people, with the full conviction that they are slowly but surely passing out. “Let us”, say they “make them as comfortable as we can before they pass out”. Hence all their efforts for the care of my people are mere palliatives, only sop. There is absolutely nothing, as a matter of fact, in all their activities, feeding, clothing, housing and caring, which can be counted as of vital interest to lift us up by education and other means to aspire to the dignity of citizenship. Other colored races in Fiji, New Zealand, Samoa, New Hebrides have been raised to the dignity of teachers, lawyers, doctors and clergymen.

The mentality of my people, according to the late Sir Baldwin Spencer, the greatest authority on this question, is not inferior to the white man’s. While the efforts put forth for the advance of the colored people, I have just mentioned have been attended with success, because they have been carried on with confidence, earnestness and assiduity, there have been no serious attempts for our advancement in Australia.

‘Donald Thomson, ‘A Plea for a Vanishing Race’, Herald, 22 March 1930. Drawing on his recent fieldwork in the Cape York Peninsula, Thomson highlighted what he saw as the positive attributes of Aborigines, such as the “Loyalty and courage and selfless devotion of which the blackfellow is capable in serving the white man”, and argued that extinction of the Aborigines in the near future could only be prevented by: complete change, of policy -on our part”. The only hope lay in “complete segregation in adequate reserves”.

THE RACE CHANGING

Do not think of the future fitness of the aborigines to improve intellectually, socially and morality in terms of the past. The aborigines of today are different from those of yesterday. They are more industrious, more ambitious, more intellectual, more provident and less vicious. They are eagerly but patiently waiting for the time to come when the white people now occupying our land and enjoying the inestimable benefits it yields (I mean the white people in power, who are still possessed of a live conscience) will shake off their indifference and heartlessness and wholeheartedly arise to give our cause the hearing and consideration it deserves. We are the descendants of the people you have unjustly disinherited of their land, and of their privileges.

We are not unreasonable in asking you to secure for the us the best prospects of free development and to provide for us a full opportunity to display our capacities, and so legislate that we should know that we live and move and have our being in Australia as right, not on sufferance. We are at present-shame on the Governments of this land-landless and homeless
wanderers; We ask you to secure land and homes for us by public law and not by regulation of the Aboriginal Protection Board.

NATIVE M.P. WANTED

As one who thoroughly knows his people, their thoughts and feelings, their likes and dislikes, I may be privileged to suggest that the aborigines should be placed under the supervision of the Federal Government. They should have a native representative in Federal Parliament and a native protector with an advisory council comprising whites and aborigines in each State.

We strongly deprecate the policy of placing us under the supervision of the police. Many of my people shun the aboriginal stations controlled by the Aborigines’ Protection Boards because of this and its gaol-like conditions. Police and gaol are inseparables in the mind of an aborigine, and this association does not tend to elevate, but depress him.

5. W. Cooper, 120 Ballarat Rd., Footscray, to The Board of Protection for Aborigines, Victoria, n.d. (? September 1933).

On behalf of my people I have the honour to most humbly approach you. Seeking your permission to send to, and have signed by the Aboriginal population under your Charge, the undermention petition a Copy of which is to be forwarded to His Majesty King George V. of England asking him on our behalf to do his utmost in taking suitable steps in preventing the extinction of the Aborigines race. Obtaining better conditions for all. Obtaining Power to propose a Member of Parliament to be Chosen by My People to represent them in the Federal Parliament.

Trusting that my humble request will receive every Consideration. I have the Honour to be yours sir obediently.

6. Herald, 15 September 1933.

MJLR. FOR NATIVES
King to Be Petitioned
UNIQUE MOVE

Australia’s native race — the aborigines — is taking steps for the first time in its history to secure from the King representation in the Federal Parliament. This is demanded, as a right in a petition which is being circulated for signatures.

Some people of aboriginal blood are interesting themselves in the move, and much of the initial work is failing to ‘the lot of Mr William Cooper, of Ballarat Road, Footscray, who said today that the object was to place the aborigines on the same footing as the Maoris. In New Zealand, he said, Parliamentary and Government offices were open to Maoris equally with Europeans.

2Cooper’s letters are reproduced in their original form, without alteration to spelling ox
gram.

3 Similar letters were sent to authorities throughout the country. See W. Cooper- to the Board of Protection iox Aborigines, Perth, n.d. [Sept. 1933], AA Brighton, CRS B337, 187; W. Cooper to the lion. Mr. Lyons, Prime Minister of Australia, 23 October 1933, AA, CRS A431, 45/1591. A second letter written to-the prime minister on the same day states that “a Petition has been forwarded on to Sydney, South Australia, Queensland, Perth and Victoria Boards for Protection of Aborigines”; W. Cooper to Aboriginal Welfare Board, New South Wales, 13 April 1934, Archives Office of New South Wales, AWB. Minutes, microfilm 2792.

Extracts from the petition as it will later be presented to the authorities are as follows:
“Whereas it was not only a moral duty, but also a strict injunction included in the commission issued to those who came to people Australia that the original occupants and we, their heirs and successors, should be adequately cared for; and whereas the terms of the commission have not been adhered to, in that (a) our lands have been expropriated by your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth, (b) legal status is denied to us by your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth; and whereas all petitions made in our behalf to your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth have failed: your petitioners therefore humbly pray that your Majesty will intervene in our behalf and through the instrument of your Majesty’s Government in the Commonwealth grant to our people representation in the Federal Parliament, either in the person of one of our own blood or by a white man known to have studied our needs and to be in sympathy with our race”.

Mr Cooper will seek the signatures of aborigines and half-castes at mission stations. Even without these he hopes to secure about 600.

7. W. Cooper, to Mr Perkins, Minister for the Interior, 15 January 1934. - -

On behalf of the members of my race, I’m exceedingly pleased to convey to you, our commendation for the action and stand you have taken, and valuable suggestions for the relief of the Aborigines and half-castes; also, the report of half-caste girls who have had such good instruction, and by their citizenship proves and dispels the idea, that no good could come of training them to white peoples custom and habits.

The arrangement’ of Married Police protectors is a step in the right direction, yet, we think if a Separate body of protectors be appointed (Married by All means) who have been properly instructed to win the confidence of the pure Aborigine, greater results and more [word illegible] relations would be established as a native is naturally antagonistic to Officialdom a Police protector always carries, even if he has not got any uniform on when in touch with them, this is one thing to be avoided, to prove to them the honesty of the Government instructions, as the Aboriginal is very quick in observation.

Yours Respectfully
8. W. Cooper, to Mr. A.E. Parker, 17 March 1934.

Would it be Possible to get Permission from you for a Visit to Coranderrk on Saturday staying there one night with W. Russell. My object is to speak to them of Aboriginal affairs. Trusting to receive’ a successful reply.

I am yours faithfully . . . P.S. Visit shall be Saturday 24/3/34

9. W. Cooper, to The Honorable the Minister for the Interior, 7 ‘May 1934.

It is proposed that a deputation, composed of one representative of the Aboriginal race from each State, should wait upon the Commonwealth Government in September next, with the object of securing some amelioration of the conditions under which the native people are at present living.

I respectfully beg to be informed whether it will be possible for free railway transport to be provided for the members of the deputation, whose names and places of residence are as follow: W.A. Mr. N.C. Harris, Wongan Hills.
S.A. Mr. W. Taylor, Port Victoria.
Vic. Mr. W. Cooper, Melbourne.
N.S.W. (not yet appointed.) -
QLD. Mr. Jas Noble, Palm Islands.

Thanking you in anticipation of your consideration and reply, I am Sir, Yours respectfully,

10. W. Cooper, to The Honourable J.A. Lyons, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, 20 June 1934.

As it is the intention ‘to present a Deputation consisting of a Representative from each State of the-Aboriginal Races, sometime during November next, to wait upon the Federal Parliament to proffer their petition to appeal for more amelioration and better conditions than those existing, as, the very hard treatment some are receiving, which only causes bitter feeling and a desire to do something desperate in spite, and so increase greater difficulties to overcome before a proper understanding can be gained.

Would you, as Premier arrange for a free pass of transport for one representative from each State to the Federal Parliament, as they have no other means by which they can get there. I may state that Dr. Maloney is in support of my application for this assistance.

Trusting that my humble request will receive every consideration, I have the honour to be, Yours obediently …

11. W. Cooper, to the Honorable Mr Lyons, The Prime Minister of Australia, 28 July 1934.

In view of the approaching Federal Election, I am writing to ask for your views, concerning the representation of my people in Parliament. If returned to Parliament will you do your best to
further the cause. The Maories of N.Z. have had Parliament representation since 1867. There for the Parliamentary representation of the Aborigines of Australia is long overdue. Trusting to receive an early reply, I am Sir, Yours Obediently

12. Notes of Deputation representing Aboriginals and various associations interested in aboriginal welfare work which waited upon the Minister for the Interior at Commonwealth offices, Melbourne, on Wednesday, 23 January 1935, at 2.30 p.m.

*Mr. Cooper* presented the following statement which was read on his behalf by Mr. James-This deputation has the honor to represent the aboriginal population of Australia. We, on behalf of the descendants of the aborigines naturally are greatly concerned in everything effecting our-people. We consider that it is one of the most pressing problems of the day, yet it does not seem to seriously trouble the mind of the Government.

Therefore, on behalf of the aboriginal population of Australia we appeal for a constructive policy with better conditions than those existing and under which our people have to live. We respectively remind the Government that a strict injunction to the effect “that the aborigines and their descendants should be properly cared for” was included in the Commission issued to those who came overseas to Australia, and we trust the present Government will take every lawful means to extend the protection to the native population, who are His Majesty’s-subjects, and the Government must punish, with exemplary severity all acts of violence and injustice which may in manner be attempted as practiced against the aborigines who are to be considered as much under safeguard of the laws as the white people under the British Flag.

Believing the British Empire to stand for justice, order, freedom and good Government we pledge ourselves as citizens of the British Commonwealth of Australia to maintain the heritage handed down to us by the Creator which we believe- to be true, and we, therefore, with confidence, desire moderation and forbearance to be exercised by all - classes in their tutercourse with native inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting to fulfill His Majesty’s most gracious and benevolent intention to them by promoting advancement in civilization under the blessing of Divine Providence.

This injunction has not been carried into effect for our people have been driven further and further into the, barren wastes on which it is impossible to live for much longer, consequently, the native people are faced with extinction.

Many of our civilised aborigines have not been given the status of citizens of the Commonwealth. Many have no voice in its Government and no-vote in the election of Parliament, and are apparently cut off from all opportunity of becoming good citizens and a valuable asset to the country.

I wish to point- out having had 60 years’ experience of a fruitless task and waste of good energy on- an Aboriginal Settlement on which no useful industries have been given to enable them to become useful and independent of the support of the Government.

The aborigines should not be blamed because it is not their fault, but the fault of the policy pursued by the various Governments in not adopting the suggestions mentioned before.
The Maoris of New Zealand have had Parliamentary representations since 1867; therefore, the Parliamentary representation of the Australian aborigine is long overdue.

In view of these facts, we, on behalf of the native races of Australia, respectfully submit the following requests:

(1) That we be allowed aboriginal representatives to protect our interest in the State and Federal Parliaments;

(2) That a Federal Department of Native Affairs be established to unify the aboriginal work of all States so that Australia may work out a national policy for her native race;

(3) That a sympathetic officer be appointed for this Department to do for the aborigines what Sir Hubert Murray has done in New Guinea.

As, Sir, there are other speakers, I thank you for your patient hearing”.

13. W. Cooper, Real Australian Aboriginal, Association, to Mr Paterson, Minister for Interior, 1 April 1935.

As a Big Game Hunt and study of Native Custom life and condition of the Aboriginals in their primitive state, is being arranged, personally conducted by motors, to Central Australia during the months of May June and July next.

It is hoped that the Government will take every Lawful means for the Protection and care of the Aboriginals during the Sportsman’s hunting, and that nothing so callous as the willful shooting at natives will take place while the expedition are enjoying themselves, and that those who are conducting the party, will be men who have been chosen to carry Out their duties with integrity and fully conscious of their responsibility, as nothing so revolting revelation as was disclosed by Friday evenings “Herald” 29 March 1935,- is desired.

Trusting that all precaution will be fully maintained. I beg to remain, Yours Respectfully


My organisation is deeply troubled and grieved over developments in Aboriginal control in New South Wales, at any rate at Cummeragunja. For some years now, in addition to the regular rationing, unemployed dark men have been issued with a ration for themselves and their families. The ration was meager, certainly, but it was eeked out to maintain life though it could not prevent cases of malnutrition. -Recently action has been taken at Cummeragunja to stop the rations of all families of which the breadwinner was an able bodied man. These have been directed to seek employment.

At the moment seasonal occupation is available and the men are so engaged but this will -soon
pass and we can only see starvation ahead for our people. Already distress is evident which will
be accentuated by the approach of writer. We appeal to you, at once, to direct that adequate
rations be issued to all dark folk needing them. In other words, we ask for a reversion to the
practice obtaining prior to the recent action. But we ask this more as a temporary measure.

Aboriginal natives, no matter what the state of their culture, are debarred by legislation from
obtaining sustenance as granted to white unemployed, and to dark unemployed here in Victoria
as well as to the whites. This we contend is unreasonable and unfair and -well as being quite
unchristian. -We definitely ask that the dole be extended to the dark people where they are
unemployed in the same conditions as applies to whites. We feel that our request is most
reasonable.

We anticipate that the question of cost will be raised but whatever that may be will be offset by
the ration not issued and the cost- will be further offset by work done for the dole. We do quite
definitely feel that we are entitled to reasonable comfort, merely from the fact that this land was
ours, with assured living, before the whites came, but we do riot want to stress that because we
believe that the emancipation of our race will not come that way. It is our considered opinion
that the dark man must be taught to be self-reliant and industrious and to win his rights by sheer
worthiness. Work for the dole will do this. Men will be paid for work done and they will spend
the money obtained to purchase necessities if these can be purchased from the depot at the
station when a - native is resident on one, this would be preferable to their having to go to a
privately kept store. Those not living on a station would of course purchase their goods in the
usual way.

The second matter is causing deep perturbation and even grief to the mothers. It is reported
that, consequent on a visit of- high officials to Cummeragunja many of the young girls, some as
tender in years as 13, have been compulsorily taken from their homes and, in some cases sent
to situations, which they report are very hard. (It is quite realised that this may merely be
due to the inexperience of the girls). Other girls, who have not had any training, are being
sent to Cootamundra, which our people regard with dread as in the nature of a gaol. I have no
very certain information as to the definite particulars of this complaint but you will have full
details.

I would request, Sir, that you go personally into these two matters and that you deal with them
with a kindliness our race has not experienced.

Trusting to hear from you in reply at a very early date and hoping your communication will be
of the nature of good news, I have the honor to be, Your obedient servant,

On 29 March 1935 the Melbourne Herald carried an article under the heeding “Fantastic Stories
of Our Cruelty to Blacks” reporting publicity accorded to the views of an English writer, Mr S.
Morrell, in his homeland and Sweden. Morrell asserted that Aborigines in the north were
denied justice in courts of law; that a missionary who reported a. massacre of Aborigines by
police was removed while the police were exonerated; that Aborigines were robbed of their
land; that for the sum of ten shilling5 a settler could buy a license “which gives him power to
use the labor of natives without any other cost”; that Aboriginal women were thrashed and
otherwise mistreated; that -“5 until recently it was the usual Sunday sport among white settlers to go out and hunt- natives with guns”.

15.W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Hon. The Minister for the Interior, 22 February 1936.

I am forwarding herewith a copy of the constitution of our League, setting out, in a summarised form, what the darkman conceives should be the programme for the raising of the race from its present deplorable condition. ~ We trust that your Government will take steps to improve our lot along the lines indicated. Nothing less than the elevation of the race to equality with the white race is entirely satisfactory to the dark folk but everything done to help on the way is deeply appreciated.

We are delighted to see the increasing interest evidenced in our race a desire which extends to the administration. It does appear that there is, on every hand, a willingness to mitigate the conditions applying rather than to regard them as the permanent condition.

Though our previous approach to you was not entirely successful, we do feel, and are glad to say it, that we did consider you were anxious to help us and for that we thank you.

We will later take an opportunity of requesting you to meet us again when we will move for further ameliorative effort.

With best wishes, I remain, Your obedient servant

Australian Aborigines’ League Constitution

Name THE Name of the League shall be the “AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES’ LEAGUE”.

Membership Membership shall be either Full or Associate. Full Full Membership shall only be open to persons possessing some degree of aboriginal blood. Any person who has attained the age of 18 years and is fully or partly of aboriginal descent may register as a member. Those under 18 years may register as Junior Full members.

Associate Any person, other than an aboriginal native, who is sympathetic with the Aims of the League may register as an Associate Member. Life Membership Membership, for life, Full or Associate, may be granted on the payment of One Pound (one pound) toward the Funds of the League.

Honorary Life Membership Honorary Life Membership, for services rendered, may be granted at the pleasure of the Executive of the League.

Badge Any member, Full or Associate, shall be entitled to wear any badge which may be adopted by the League. The Badge of the League shall be sold to members, full or associate, at a price to be determined, but, at the discretion of the Executive Committee, a badge may be given to any person who, in the opinion of the Executive, should be so recognized.
Officials While the administrative positions in the League should primarily be filled by full members, it shall be competent for Associate members to be appointed to any position.

Contributions Excepting for Junior Full members, whose annual contribution fee shall be sixpence (6d) the annual fee for membership shall be One Shilling, for either Full or Associate Membership, to be payable in advance. It shall be competent for the Executive to admit aboriginals to full membership without such charge if this course is justified.

Annual Meeting The Annual Meeting of the League shall be held, if possible, in the month of November each year, on a date to be arranged by the Executive.- At this meeting the occupancy of all offices shall be considered. At this meeting the Treasurer shall present a statement of receipts and expenditure, duly audited.

Objects The Objects of the League shall be to cooperate with any Organization working for the promotion of a national policy, or for the amelioration of the disabilities of aboriginal natives of Australia or to make representations as may be necessary to promote the well-being of the said natives.

The ultimate object of the League shall be the conservation of special features of Aboriginal culture and the removal of all disabilities, political, social or economic, now or in future borne by aboriginals and to secure their uplift to the full culture of the British race.

Immediate Programme The immediate programme of the League shall be the progressive elevation of the aboriginal race by education and training in the arts and crafts of European culture in the manner as set forth hereunder.

For Primitive aborigines

Until such time as the primitive aborigines are civilised, and while living in their primitive state, to secure the unalienable possession of adequate reserves, to which white men shall only have access by the authority of the Chief Protector of Aboriginal Natives.

Offences by white men against aboriginal natives to be punishable by similar penalties to those inflicted for like offences against white men.

The establishment of special Courts of Justice for the trial of native prisoners in which the recognition of Aboriginal tribal laws and customs as complementary to the laws of the land shall be given effect to:

Full sustenance to be ensured to all natives.
Progressive civilisation of the young people by the medium of education, including Industrial Training.

For the Semi-Civilised and De-tribalised Natives:

The provision of reserves of land suitable for stock, agriculture or other farming, with adequate
machinery, equipment and training, to be unalienable and to which white men shall have access only by the authority of the Chief Protector or Aboriginal natives.

The safeguarding of the interests of aboriginal natives who may be in the service of white men.

The right to work for adequate remuneration or the provision of full rations and housing where no work is available.

The issue of full rations to aged or infirm natives with adequate housing.

Free education in State Schools or the provision of special schools, with qualified teachers, for native children: Scholars to be encouraged to qualify up to the standard of White education. Education to include technical training.

Legal protection for natives.

Punishment of offenders to be rigorously enforced as in the case of offences against white people.

For Civilised Natives

The provision of allotments of land suitable for agriculture or other farming, with requisite machinery and equipment, to be available to natives to work for their own profit. Such land to be unalienable property of the native concerned, and to be disposable by Will to the next of kin of the native concerned.

The right to work for adequate remuneration or the provision of full rations and housing for aboriginal natives of both sexes.

Invalid or Old-Age Pensions, or their-equivalent in rations and housing, to be available to all aboriginal natives similarly as to white people. No aboriginal who is living privately to be compelled to return to a settlement before becoming entitled to this provision, unless in special circumstances, as may be decided by the Chief Protector of Aboriginal natives.

Free education in State Schools or the provision of special schools, with qualified teachers, for native children: Scholars to be encouraged to qualify up to the standard of the White education. High schools or secondary colleges to be available to aboriginal children qualifying to enter same or the provision of special schools in which shall be provided the same privileges as obtain in similar schools for white children. Education to include technical training.

Full political, social and economic rights to be available, including the Francise and eligibility for maternity bonus.

Legal protection for natives. Punishment of offenders to be rigorously enforced as in the case of offenders against white people.
Amendment Of Constitution

Additions and alterations to this Constitution may only be made at the Annual General Meeting, or at any Special Meeting called for that purpose, and of which due notice shall be given.

Similar letters enclosing the League’s constitution were sent to authorities throughout the country: W. Cooper to Mr. McLean Esq., Chief Protector of Aboriginals, South Australia, n.d. [1936], State Archives of South Australia, GRG 52/1, 1936; W. Cooper to Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Perth, 15 February 1936, Aboriginal Planning Authority, Western Australia, 75/1936; W. Cooper to Aboriginal Welfare Board New South Wales, 4 March 1936, Archives Office of New South Wales, AWS Minutes, microfilm 2792.

16. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, 23 March 1936.

I note by the press that a proposal is made for a relaxation in the restrictions on aboriginals in the Northern Territory to the extent that half castes and those of lighter shade will have authority, among other things, to enter public houses and be served with liquor.

This organisation welcomes every gesture of sympathy toward the aboriginal and thankfully accepts every advance toward full liberty. We realise that newspaper reports are not always wholly to be accepted and in the present case we do not regard the report as being necessarily official in the form in which it appeared. Nevertheless we are perturbed about one aspect which we feel is in line with White opinion, an opinion that this League does not share. The concession or relief is to be available to half castes and those of lighter shade only.

This league stands for the aboriginal race, full blood and coloured and definitely believes that the full blood is capable of advance to full culture as possessed by the white. This is not in any sense an opinion not backed by evidence. We can demonstrate this at any time from our own cultured community. We therefore request that, in the proposed concession, it may be made to include, additional to half castes and quadroons, “approved full blooded aboriginals”. We would further request that this be an accepted standard for any future amelioration.

With thanks, Yours sincerely,

17. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Hon, the Minister for the Interior, 9 May 1936.

At a meeting, held on 16th ulto which was convened by my League for the purpose of discussing the coordination of the work of the various Aboriginal ameliorative organisations here in Melbourne, the following resolutions were carried by a very representative and influential gathering: That this meeting, consisting of representatives of aboriginal ameliorative societies, and interested friends, welcomes the proposal to form a council of such bodies and recommends that the representatives of the societies concerned submit this proposal to their own organisations.
That this meeting supports the claim of the Australian Aborigines’ League that all aborigines, of full or mixed blood, should be afforded opportunities of education in common with other citizens of the Commonwealth, and urges that where such opportunities are not already provided, special schools should be established, under competent teachers with special training. It further draws attention to the rapidly increasing number of half castes, which now exceeds 22,000 persons, the majority of whom are without occupation, and emphasises the need of vocational training for all adolescents.

That this meeting protests against the discrimination still being exercised against the aboriginals of Australia. We urge that full citizenship rights be accorded to those of full aboriginal or mixed blood who may be qualified to exercise them and that, pending the elevation of the whole race, parliamentary representation in each legislature, State and Federal, for the safeguarding of aboriginal interests, be accorded.

We would request your earnest consideration of the proposals embodied in the two last resolutions.

Very sincerely yours,...

18. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, 15 June 1936.

The attention of our League has been drawn to the staging of an aboriginal corroboree at Darwin for the benefit of American Tourists.

It is our opinion that the commercialising of the aboriginal people in this way is derogatory to the cause of their uplift, causing on the part of partly civilised people, a resuscitation of undesirable practices which will retard their uplift.

Our League does desire the preservation of the best features of aboriginal culture and feels that the preservation of certain corroboree dances, in the way the Old World peoples have retained their folk dances, is in harmony with this, but great care should be exercised till such time as the native race is so fully civilised that the outlook on the corroboree is just that of the Old World civilisation on their folk dances.

We, too, feel that our people being merely an exhibit is demeaning in the eyes of cultured people and, in itself, a factor in retarding the emancipation of the race.

We request that you will give instruction that no further instance be allowed to take place. - -

Thank you, Yours sincerely,


I am writing in appreciation of The Sun’s leading article, Blackfellow’s Role. The aboriginal population of Australia taken as a whole, is increasing, and will continue to increase, but the fact that some tribes are dying out, and that some are quite extinct from remediable causes, is a reproach to Australia and quite unnecessary. The increase in the aboriginal population would be relatively greater but for the high mortality rate, brought about from diseases as tuberculosis,
induced by under-nourishment and insanitary housing conditions, which the poverty of my people cannot improve. Every voice raised in protest helps our cause.

W. Cooper (hon.sec., Australian Aborigines’ League, Footscray)


I have been instructed by the Executive of the Australian Aborigines’ League to write to you thanking you for your earnest and valuable interest and -the suggestions made by you, as appearing in the Press, on behalf of the aboriginal people of Australia.

For some years now, in fact from the time of the apprehension trial and acquittal of Tuckair on the charge of murder, it has been daily evident that the sun of the Aboriginals’ Cause is rising. We have been encouraged as we saw the steadily improving outlook and I have been personally heartened at the thought that, though now somewhat aged, I will see the emancipation of my people an assured thing.

I hope, and indeed, believe that the administration of which you are a member will go down to Aboriginal posterity as the emancipators of our race. May God guide you in the days ahead.

We feel it but right that our people should be the responsibility of the Federal Administration and we learn with delight from public statements that at least some of the States, South Australia and Western Australia as cases in. point, are prepared to hand over their responsibilities to the Commonwealth. We know that the Commonwealth can discharge its responsibilities and we appreciate that the States cannot -for the reason that -where the white population is relatively smallest the dark population is largest while in the States with a large and wealthy white population the number of aboriginals is comparatively small: thus the-bigger the need, the smaller the capacity to meet it.

For now over 100 years we have had experience of the waste of energy and loss of aboriginal lives through neglect. Our cause is will~[sic] not be neglected further if the Commonwealth assumes the responsibility. This is our hope and pleading.

At this time, so fraught with import to us, we feel that we must raise our voice iii constructive appeal and we do request that the most careful attention be given to our requests. The forthcoming meeting of Chief Protectors and experts is well aware of the substance of our claims but we take the opportunity of again outline our opinions:

1. **Full bloods and- half-castes.**

We would emphasise the fact that the full bloods are the descendants of the original owners of Australia. They are the descendants of their fathers. The change in ownership by conquest should not invalidate their title to reasonable part of those lands and these rights should be admitted without cavil. I am sure that they are and only emphasise the point because it seems to be current opinion that half-castes have special rights as against the full blood and there is
official discrimination against which we are ever in protest.

The halfcaste is the descendant of the aboriginal and therefore joint heirs with the full blood. They are also descendants of the white man and thus heirs with the white race of all the rights of British nationhood.

Disregarding the matter of the emergence of the half-caste with either race, we disclaim acquiescence with current opinion and feel that, at any rate for a long time, the half-caste problem will continue to be present. We stress the real humanity of each section and our claims are based on that fact. To the extent that there has been -discrimination- in the past or the advantage of one section without regard to the other, we are in protest. We claim for each section the full rights of British nationality.

2. Capabilities of aboriginais

The question of the uplift of the whole aboriginal population to full European culture depends on the capabilities of the race to assimilate that culture. We claim that it has been fully demonstrated that aboriginais of both full blood and mixed blood can do anything a white man is able to do. We further believe that the aboriginal must be a partner in this own uplift. Certainly expert guidance will be necessary, but, apart from that, he must “work out his own salvation”. This is in the interests of the aboriginal himself and he is not seeking anything else than the right to obtain what he proves himself to be entitled to by his capacity to use it. Emancipation must come by the way of full manhood.

We have not produced doctors, lawyers and other professional leaders merely from the lack of the opportunity given to other colored races. We have produced practical men of varied experience as seamen, including masters, shearsers with both gun and hand shears, wool classers, agriculturalists with expert knowledge of all farming operations, orchardists, millhands, motor and machinery experts, horse breakers. We have among our ranks those who have made good as squatters. We have public speakers, preachers, teachers and we claim that what has been done in the past can be again done by those yet uncultured. We are not insensible of the task but we would urge that civilisation has been acquired in the past merely by picking it up and the process took about, three generations. We feel sure that an ordered plan of uplift, carefully and sympathetically applied must be more successful than the haphazard method or want of method.

3. Settlements

We feel that the comparative smallness of the numbers of aboriginais in the Southern portion of the Commonwealth and the considerable number in the Northern and Central areas constitutes two definite problems with quite different solutions.

Southern Aboriginais

The small number of aboriginais associated with the large white population introduces the economic disadvantage of color. In the years ‘of depression it was found that preference to whites brought the dark race to extreme poverty. The usual avenue of employment for colored
people is generally seasonal work. With the closing of the normal avenues of the White, the normal avenue of colored opportunity was taken. While this condition is now adjusting itself, the possibility of recurrence must always be borne in mind. Coupled with the fact that, in most cases, the sustenance for white unemployed was not available for dark persons, a continuance of the practice of having settlements for dark persons must continue. Men should be encouraged to compete in the general labor market and thus to live outside these settlements but in times of adversity or unemployment, the asylum in the settlement should be kept open. When illness or increasing age renders a person incapable of labor, the privilege of return to the settlement should be open. We claim that this should be voluntary and not compulsory and to make this possible we urge full citizenship rights as dole, Old Age or Invalid pensions, etc. should be available to dark and fair alike. This should apply also in settlements and from these allowances the dark folk should purchase their necessities instead of being given, an issue of rations.

We feel that the policy of small settlements is not the best and the value of the community services, shopping facilities, garage etc. being given by aboriginals for aboriginals will be no small factor in uplift. At present community services are generally in the hands of white people, in cases tending to exploitation of the dark people and developing an inferiority complex.

The closed smaller settlements should not be expropriated but should be cut up for closer settlement farms, etc. for colored people. -Northern and Central Aboriginals. We submit that a practical ideal should be “the development of the North and Centre by Colored Australians instead of the proposed immigration of Nordic peoples and Southern Europeans. The policy of settlements is essential for training purposes and, to the extent that the aboriginal is a worker for wages, to be a base of operations. All settlements should be worked under expert supervision and on a commercial basis.

The aboriginal is most loyal to the person of the King and His administration. It will be seen that, to the extent that, the aboriginal is used in the peopling of the somewhat empty areas it will be the exploitation of the country by those with the British sentiment. Above all this is the justice of the matter. All settlements set apart for colored people in a primitive condition of life, should have permanent water and all reservations should be unalienable under any circumstances.


It is our considered opinion that emancipation and uplift can best be secured in co-operation with Christian Missions. This service is generally unselfish and certainly is most economical. - We pay tribute to the work of all denominations among the aboriginal population.

5. Finance.

We believe that all we ask for is financially possible in that we are sure that the work can be made self-supporting and any loans necessary would be self-liquidating. We affirm that justice supports our requests and the well being of the dark race demands that any scheme of uplift
must be contributed to by the Dark race itself.

In presenting our wishes for your information we do genuinely appreciate your anxiety to do the best in the discharge of your trust and we extend to you our grateful thanks,

On behalf of the League, Yours sincerely,


The white race, in its dealings with the dark race, seems always to think in terms that involve the aboriginal as something sub-human, or, at least, outcast. Many of our friends—even seem to be infected with a superiority complex which is not fair to our race. May I plead for an attitude that will recognise our real humanity for, though we have suffered unspeakable horrors since the coming of the white race, we still have that self respect which causes a feeling of hurt when received with a superior and merely tolerant attitude.

My league very definitely appeals for a fair deal for the whole race, fullblood or coloured. We definitely protest against discrimination in favour of any one section. Might I submit our claim in brief? The full-blood is the descendent of the race that has peopled this continent for many hundreds of years. The coming of the white race and the passing of the sovereignty should not have affected the title to his share of the soil, and his coming, by conquest, under British rule, should have brought him British citizenship with all the rights and privileges thereof. The attitude that only by virtue of some white blood can a native claim some consideration is definitely wrong.

The aboriginal has a right to the best. The half-caste or preferably the coloured native, is descendent also of the aboriginal, and heir to all that such descendent involves. He is also son of the white man and I submit, heir to all that involves.

The supposed superiority of the half-caste is not admitted, and in fact, all thought of breeding the half-caste white, and the desire that that be accomplished, is a creature of the white mind. The coloured person has no feeling of repugnance toward the full blood, and in fact, he feels more in common with the full blood than with the white.

- We dark folk have no regret that we are coloured, nor do we admit any fundamental superiority in being white. We are proud of our race. We know that a dark person, full blood or half-caste, can do anything he is shown how, and can do it as well as a white man. Our plea and aim is merely that the whole dark race be lifted to full modern culture, and be granted full equality in every way with the white race.

22. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. Stevens, The Hon. the Premier, New South Wales, 15 November 1936.

There are two communications from my league to you which have not been acknowledged and one which received a somewhat evasive answer, or so it seemed to me. The dates of the communications were for the first two, February 19th. of this year, and of the latter May 16th. 1
am quite certain that the delay has been due to your overseas visit, and am just as sure that had the matters come to your notice in the normal way, you would have received them, and have given them your careful consideration. I am summarising the communications and request your earnest kindly consideration.

I requested that you hear a deputation from this league on some occasion when you are in Melbourne, as doubtless you will be from time to time. The requests are:

(1) That full citizen rights be accorded to all aborigines whether living on a settlement or not. This to include sustenance where aborigines are not able to secure work.

This league appeals for full rights-as enjoyed by white people and naturalized aliens, these rights being civic, political and economic. -We claim the right to work for full wages or the payment of full sustenance (dole) if unable to work. We contend that our women should receive the maternity bonus in cases of childbirth. In short, we claim the removal of all disabilities so that an aboriginal person shall have the same status as the white -person, a Maori or a naturalised alien. In our deputation we would seek to convince you of the capacity of every member. of our race in N.S.W. for full citizenship.

(2) That no-one be expelled from an aboriginal- station without an enquiry to be conducted by the A.P. Board and - that the aboriginal charged in such cases be entitled to assistance (legal or otherwise).

We contend that many men and women have been expelled for no good’-reason as agitators. Some of these have been good christians of unblemished character. We do feel that some, at least, have been irregular, being done by the manager without reference to the Board, or without the full case being presented. The cruel operation of expulsion is particularly -felt when the person is old and desiring to go home in the evening of life. We appreciate the need of discipline, but this is aided when an inquiry takes place, as, if there should be any offence, due notice can be taken of it. The person will, if given a hearing, have the feeling of justice done. The assistance is asked for as one with a good case would be given the opportunity of presenting it satisfactorily.

(3) That lands occupied by aboriginals be developed by them, suitable instruction and necessary equipment being provided. When men are adequately trained, that opportunity be given to darkmen to cultivate land for their own profit.

We will be able to show you that our men have been able to succeed in the past, and given a chance we are sure that many of them will succeed in the future. All we ask is that the lands now in use as aboriginal stations be fully exploited. When a native has proved his capacity for successful work, and capacity to manage his own affairs, he be allowed to settle land for his own profit. We are aware that reasons will be given to show the impracticability of this proposal, but we have a complete answer to any objectors. We feel that the native will be assured, of some income, and that the costs of the A.P. Board will be reduced if a fair try out is given to this proposal. A definite preliminary proposal is set out at some length later in this letter.
(4) That the schools now provided for aboriginal children be raised to the standard of schools provided for white children and that the curriculum of native schools be the same as that in the schools of white children.

It is an open secret that dark children are not to receive education beyond the third grade and they are not getting it in the schools conducted by the department. We claim that our children should get the full opportunity of attaining the fullest primary education and for secondary education where the capacity is evident. Our people say that they want their children to be able to become doctors, nurses, teachers, etc., just as it has been possible for other natives, Fijian, Indian, etc., in other parts. We claim that our race is just as capable and you will appreciate that we only ask the chance of doing so where competence is present.

(5) That parliamentary representation be allowed to aboriginals in the same way as the Maoris of New Zealand are catered for.

The Maoris have four members in their legislature. Until the time that there is no aboriginal problem we do feel that a member in the House to present their case and conserve their interests is but fair.

In the matter of the development of aboriginal lands we submitted a proposal for a try out at Cummeragunja, named because of its ideal situation on the Murray, with abundance of good water, with land easily irrigable, with fertility of soil and convenience to markets. We proposed as follows: ORANGE CULTURE: At Madowla Park, near Cummeragunja, there is a grove of trees from which an average of 1750 per year is obtained, giving employment to six men through the year, including aboriginals, by the way. We suggest a planting of a number of trees at Cummeragunja. Of course other citrus fruits could be added according to the advice of your experts.

TOMATO CULTURE: This area would be quite as early as Echuca and the early crop would be marketable-at profitable rates. The returns for the first year could cover all costs in connection with the planting. Late crops of the fruit could be pulped or distributed to the inhabitants of Cummeragunja or other stations. There has been tomato culture at Cummeragunja years ago, by certain of the dark folk. The breakdown of their pumping engine stopped what was a promising venture.

VINE CULTURE; TOBACCO CULTURE: Success is obtained in parallel circumstances elsewhere and we submit that experimental plots be established. We could add rice culture, as the Murray flats can be so easily flooded for this cereal.

LUCERNE CULTURE: It is open to doubt if pig raising for the central markets would be a success, owing to the remoteness from the railhead at Picola (9 miles) and the distance from the markets. Ultimately curing would make it a possibility, but meantime an experimental plot of lucerne and a few cows and pigs would be of value, from the point of view of the instruction given and the supply of local needs.
FINANCE: We realise that this, will be raised and in anticipation we would direct your attention to the -Act of Congress, approved June 18th., 1934, to which you have doubtless access. (Public . . . No. 383 . . . 73rd. Congress). This Act provides for the development of Indian lands and for an appropriation from which loans could be made to Indians for the development of the lands. Our proposals could be made on a purely business basis, and we feel that there need not be any loss on the experiment. There will not be if the experiment be sympathetically made as a constructive move for the removal of admittedly difficult problems.

GOVERNMENT EXPERIMENTAL STATION:

We suggested that the experimental work could be coupled with general experimental work as carried out by governments. This would enable your experts to couple with the ameliorative work for the aboriginals the matter of the exploitation of the Murray River lands, now so largely under forest, and yet of vast potential wealth. It may be that the dual aspect of our proposals will enhance the prospects of a thorough try out.

The labour for the work requiring to be done will be, of course, by the natives, who would work for sustenance received, receiving also a part of the profit according to the labour given. Cummeragunja is potentially wealthy. The people are very poor. We feel that such poverty in such potential wealth is wrong. We suggest that the needs of the people be related to the capacity of the soil for mutual advantage of the administration and the natives.

In submitting this I would be pleased if you would regard it as an earnest of the desire of the aboriginal to co-operate for his own uplift. I would suggest that our League can be, and is, willing to be of material aid in the uplift of our race. We therefore ask your most favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely, ...

23. Australian Aborigines’ League Annual Report, Year 1938

Dear Fellow Members of the Dark Race,

It is with mixed - feelings that I report for the year. At times I get very discouraged at the slow progress of our cause and at other times the evidence of improvement heartens me. - The fact is that there is continued improvement all the time of late years, but the rate of progress is too slow. At the moment, the, Star of our Hope is in the ascendant. We have suffered enough, God knows, but surely the day of our deliverance is drawing nigh. I hope to live to see it. It is sad to think that all our miseries were uncalled for and that the intolerance of our position should be allowed to continue for a moment. It is wicked that a baptism of blood has been the portion of a people who have never given any provocation. Our friends among the white race are growing in numbers and interest, though we are often sorry to note that some of these regard us as inferior clay. We want equality. We are dark complexioned and we do not wish to be otherwise. It is not too much to ask for the recognition of our full humanity and the right of full uplift for every member of our race. Our work is a goodwill one. Any complaints we have to make we do make, and we do not compromise in respect of our just claims. We are most temperate in our submissions and we must say that, generally speaking, our correspondence is
received with good spirit.

With but little exception, the official and departmental attitude to us is considerate and we appreciate this and are pleased to set it on record.

The year has been a busy one. Every movement affecting our interests is watched carefully and due representations made when necessary. A programme of advance is kept before the authorities, and, as a result, correspondence is very heavy. Letters are received from every State and from England.

Death of King George V

The condolence of the league in the death of His Majesty, King George V, was sent to His Majesty King Edward VIII, Queen Mary, and the Royal Family. This was presented through the Governor General and duly acknowledged by the Private Secretary to the King, Lord Wigram, on behalf of His Majesty.

Petition to the King

The Aboriginal race looks on His Majesty as their Protector. 2000 natives, from all over Australia, have signed a petition to the King praying for the Royal intervention to prevent the extinction of the race, the giving of better conditions to its members and for Parliamentary representation by one of our race, if possible, falling that, by a sympathetic white man of our choice. The petition is ready for despatch but is being held pending the finalisation of the consideration of the aboriginal matters submitted to the Premiers’ Conference recently held in Adelaide.

Copra and Cotton

Reading in the press of a proposal to inaugurate the growing of cotton and copra by aboriginals on their reserves in the Commonwealth Territory, a letter was sent asking for details, commending the principle which we want to operate on every aboriginal reserve. A reply was received that the details of the scheme were not yet finalised but that the Minister was considering a number of proposals for the advantage of aboriginals in the Territory.

Council of Ameliorative Bodies in Victoria

Feeling that the number of small bodies advocating the cause of the aborigines in Victoria was leading to a dissipation of interest, which should be for the benefit of our race, a meeting was convened of all ameliorative bodies with a view to coordinating all activities. The meeting was held and the proposal enthusiastically endorsed. There are strong bodies in most of the States and with Victoria in line the interests of our race will be in capable hands. Early finalisation of the matter is hoped for.

Affiliation with Peace Council
During the year the Executive of the League agreed to affiliate with the United Peace Council.

Special Consideration for Half Castes, Northern Territory

Noting by the press that consideration was to be given to certain half-castes in that restrictions now applying to them as aboriginals would be removed, I wrote to the Minister for the Interior suggesting that any concession made to half-castes should also be made to approved full bloods. I urged that there should not be any distinction between the treatment of half-castes and full bloods, pointing out that the latter is equally capable of full culture up to the standard of the white race. In reply I was notified that it was not intended, at this juncture, to grant the concessions to full bloods. We should nail our colors to the mast in respect of this matter making our slogan “Full equality for the dark race with the white race, and no differentiation between the full blood and those of mixed blood”.

Development of Aboriginal Lands, New South Wales

I wrote to the Acting Premier of New South Wales in the matter of the development of aboriginal lands in that State, pointing out that it was not right that these lands should be neglected and that their development by the dark people would improve the status of the people, give them an assured income beside cheapening the cost of aboriginal administration. A suggestion was made for an experiment to be made first at Cummeragunja, and in the light of the success there the question of other reserves to be considered. Cummeragunja was suggested because of its ideal situation with large areas of fertile soil, easily irrigable and with abundance of water. I suggested experimental plots of oranges, tomatoes, vines, tobacco and lucerne. It is regretted that a reply has not been received to this communication.

Aboriginal Corroboree, Darwin

Attention being drawn to undesirable features in connection with a corroboree at Darwin, which was organised for the amusement of American tourists, I wrote in protest. It was represented that the Darwin natives were not considered suitable to secure realistic enactment and so uncivilised natives were brought in. The corroboree was made so ‘realistic that many white people were afraid of the outcome. It was said that the corroboree revived features long forgotten in Darwin, resulting in trouble. My protest was against the exploitation of the natives for the amusement of tourists.

The Minister for the Interior replied that the report was inaccurate and exaggerated; that the Administration would not countenance any commercialisation of the aboriginal corroborees; that it is in accord with our sentiments for the preservation of the native culture and ceremonial, only with the elimination of undesirable features.

Discrimination Against Aboriginal Children, Barmah

My attention being drawn to the treatment of colored children at Barmah State School, Victoria, by the Head Master, representations were made to the Minister in the matter.
Acknowledgement was made but the matter is not yet finalised.

**Premiers’ Conference, Adelaide**

Promise having been made that the question of aboriginal administration would be discussed at the Premiers’ Conference I wrote advocating,

1. The Federalisation of aboriginal control, enabling a uniform policy for the whole of Australia.
2. In this event, we desired representation for the aboriginals in the Federal Legislature.
3. Failing Federal control, we asked for a common policy, under Federal influence, and subsidising of the States by the Federal Parliament
4. In this latter event parliamentary representation was sought in each legislature, particularly Western Australia and other States where the aboriginal population is numerous.

Arising from the Premiers’ Conference it was decided that the different conditions in each State were against the Federalisation of aboriginal administration but it was arranged that there should be from time to time a conference of Chief Protectors and Experts. The first of these Conferences is scheduled for the New Year and we are waiting the result for from that will be determined what our future action will be.

**Sustenance for Natives, New South Wales**

The matter of sustenance for natives in New South Wales was and the following requests were made:

1. Payment of sustenance on the basis applying to white person unemployed instead of a *ration* which is *inadequate* and meanwhile,
2. Rations to be issued to all unemployed natives.

A somewhat evasive answer was received but it is hoped that can be taken up by deputation on some occasion when the Pr Stevens, is in Melbourne.

**Request for a Deputation to the Premier of N.S.W.**

In February last I wrote to Mr. Stevens, Premier of N.S.W., he receive a deputation, at some time when he is in Melbourne, of the following matters:

1. Full citizenship rights to all aboriginals whether living or not. This to include payment of sustenance, as to unemployed natives.
2. That no dark person be expelled from a settlement without at which legal assistance would be *allowed* to the native.
3. That lands occupied by aboriginals be developed by their instruction and necessary equipment being made available for pose. When men are adequately trained opportunity to be dark men to settle land for working for their own profit.

4. That aboriginal schools be raised to the standard of white schools.

5. Parliamentary representation to be allowed to aboriginals in way the Maoris in New Zealand have representation.

To this memorandum no reply has yet been received, possibly due to the absence of the Premier overseas. The matter has been taken up again.

Appointment of Women Protectors

One of the most necessary reforms is the need for the appointment of women protectors in the remote parts of Australia. While the present practice of travelling dark women, either on charges or as witnesses, some distance to Police Courts, continues, the travelling in charge of male police officers should be discontinued in favor of travelling with women protectors. This League supports the agitation with this end in view.

A.P. Board, Victoria

When the late Mrs. Ban died, the League nominated Mr. Burdeu for the vacancy on the Board. A reply was received that if it is decided to make an appointment in place of Mrs. Ban, the representations of this League will receive careful consideration.

Education of Natives

The matter of the education of aboriginals has been kept well to the front. Liberty certainly follows education. We natives know the value of education and ask that all natives have the same opportunity to qualify as white people have. Our enemies know the value education would be to us for one said recently that he objected to the native being educated as he will not then die out. We claim the same right as other colored people have for our smart children to be able to qualify as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and nurses.

Conclusion

Our League is organised. Its work is known throughout the Commonwealth and in England. Everybody admits our disabilities and most people wish us well in our advocacy of our rights. We should endeavour to extend our ranks for our income is not sufficient to carry out the necessary work. This is Our Movement. We must support it and use it.

May the new year of service be fraught with even better success this year and may the day soon when we will have achieved “Full equality for the dark race with the white race and full uplift member of the race”.
W. Cooper, Hon. Secretary.

Mrs. A. Bon had maintained an active interest in the welfare of Aborigines from the 1860s until her death in 1936 at the age of 98. She was an influential lobbyist and member of the Board (or the Protection of Aborigines from 1904 to 1936. See J. Gillison, “Bon, Ann Fraser”, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7, 1891-1939, Melbourne, 1979, pp. 338—9.

24. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Rt Hon. The Prime Minister, 16 January 1937.

I take the liberty of enclosing for your information a copy of an agenda of suggestions for the forthcoming meeting of Chief Protectors of Aborigines and other administrative officers.

We looked forward to the late Premiers’ conference as the means of our emancipation. Now that the consideration has been passed on to the administrative officers for consideration recommendation we are hoping that our proposals will be kept in mind.

I will forward a copy also to the Minister for the Interior and one to each Minister of the Crown concerned and the Chief Protectors.

Our case is desperate in different parts and only by subsidy can the States hope to improve our lot. They have, in some cases, the will to do so but lack the financial capacity.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES’ LEAGUE: AGENDA of proposals submitted by the Australian Aborigines’ League for the consideration of the Conference of Chief Protectors and others.

1. That all aboriginal interests be federalised with a Federal Ministry for Aborigines. Failing this

2. That there be coordination between State Departments with a view to a common policy for the whole of the Commonwealth.

3. That a National Policy be formulated for the uniform and systemic uplift of the whole of the aboriginal population throughout Australia.

4. That the cost of administering the aboriginal policy be a on a per capita basis, against the whole of Australia, thus enabling the States with a large white population and a comparatively small aboriginal population sharing the cost with States with a large aboriginal population and a relatively small white population.

5. That all approved aboriginals of full or part aboriginal blood be allowed to adopt an independent status and that, in that case they be not subject to any disabilities in law, political, civil or economic, as aboriginals. Those aboriginals be entitled to rights of
white persons as maternity bonus, old age and invasions, sustenance (work for dole and relief work) while unemployed etc.

6. That all aboriginals of full or part blood have the right to live in reserves set apart for aboriginals. That expulsion from reserves for breach of discipline or other cause shall not be permitted without open enquiry at which the charged aboriginal shall be allowed assist his defence, legal assistance if desired. Any aboriginal discharged from an aboriginal station shall be treated in the matter of sustenance as an aboriginal electing to live privately, if unemployed.

7. That no advantage shall accrue to any class of aboriginal over another, i.e., that full bloods with those of any degree of mixed blood shall have equality of treatment and opportunity.

8. That the aboriginal population shall be grouped into classes determined by the stage of their progress and that the policy of the Administration shall be the progressive elevation from one class to a higher one till the whole race is fully civilised and cultured. These groups shall be:

   a. Myall Aboriginals.
   b. Partly civilised and detribalised aboriginals.
   c. Civilised aboriginals.

9. That education be provided for all aboriginal children to permit all who are capable of qualifying, to attain to the standard. As may be justified, secondary schools for aboriginal children shall be provided. Where this is not possible, aboriginal and young people shall have the right to attend secondary school apart for white children. The education of all aboriginal children shall be academic and vocational.

10. That all aboriginals be encouraged to work in the industry of civilisation; that they have the right to work and that nil able-bodied unemployed, aged, sick and infirm aboriginals shall have the assurance of full sustenance, the third group of aboriginals to be treated for sustenance as whites in parallel circumstances are treated, viz., payment of dole, old age or invalid pension, or as the case may be.

11. Suitable areas of land shall be set apart for the increasing aboriginal population. These should be large enough to permit of the development of full self-reliance, all community services being rendered, where possible, by aborigines. All reserves should be fully developed by the most up-to-date methods under expert direction. Young aboriginals should be encouraged to settle in these reservations but there should not be any compulsion on aged persons to leave areas that they have become attached to. Aboriginal reserves to- be inalienable and whites not to be allowed thereon only by permission.

12. That trained and qualified aboriginals be allowed to settle on lands and to work them for their own profit, the ultimate design of all raining in settlements belong with this
in4ependency in view.

13. All offences by aboriginals to be subject-to punishment only to the extent that white persons are punishable, due regard being paid to the implications of aboriginal law or psychology. Offences by whites against aboriginals to be punishable on the same basis as offences by whites against whites and offences by aboriginals to be punishable only to the same degree as in the case of offences by whites against whites. In other words there shall be full equality of whites and aboriginals before the law.

25; W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. Paterson~ The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, 18 February 1937.

I am addressing you more personally than may be proper in departmental correspondence because I know that the concerns of my people are regarded by you as a personal responsibility as well as an official one. Because I know your heart is so genuinely in the matter I am writing again when perhaps it may be thought that I am over anxious and importunate. I am sure you will understand that the Aboriginal problems have a different reactions to we civilised aboriginals that even to the most kindly disposed white persons, unless it be to the very small number who have learned to “think black”. Generally the average kindly disposed white person to wait the outworking of an ameliorative scheme but we continue meanwhile.

I am chiefly concerned about two aspects both of which are in consideration of your department and both of which I know will be by you in a Statesmanlike and Humanitarian way. Of this I am convinced and thoroughly appreciative but-and you will not consider my impotunity unreasonable - we continue to suffer while the remedy is not applied. Naturally we want our suffering minimised first and ended as soon as possible though we realise that the implementing of your policy is going to be difficult, because white Australia, however kindly disposed, does:

not, “think black”. We are merely something inferior, biological specimens, anthropological exhibits, rather than weaker brothers. This I say passion for the psychology of the native is not retributive or vengeful. We do feel that if we had manifested these attributes, while we may suffered more at the time, our militancy would have won a standing comparable with the Maoris. We merely plead as an inconsequential minority for kindliness of heart on the part of our white brothers that them to plan our uplift and culture to the full European standard. The fact that some of us have been civilised, not by any plan but despite absence, is proof of what can come with a plan carefully considered and patiently applied. Do you know that I feel that a definite plan which we could apply ourselves if we bad the financial capacity w’ the present generation so far from the present primitive conditions would scarcely be recognized as the same people but out hope is generation. We desire to help the present generation as much ~ but the child now and to be should be the chief concern. These, coming into civilised conditions would be quite civilised by the time the) adult age. We further believe that their civilisation will not provoke any new problem but will lead to the removal of the present ones in due course. In the aboriginal you have all the man power required for the dev of Australia’s unsettled parts if they are given due training, dire’ leadership and, might I add, inspiration, and its peopling by a population not merely European in culture but British in sentiment and loyalty would be a bulwark of defence. You are yet to find that the aboriginal Australia will be as worthy as any other colored race in the
empire making for the stability of Australia and the defence of our hen this is in the power of the white community and its administrative neglect of this cannot be otherwise than serious.

My reason in writing is, firstly, to say that I am disappoint hearing anything further as to the implementing of the announced policy now some months old. This did not concern us so greatly when we understood that a conference of aboriginal administrators was to be held this month (February) but its postponement perturbed us. If we even knew that further consideration of your policy was pending the conference we would have been contented but we do not know if there is any relation of the one to the other. Would you kindly make a pronouncement as to the implementing of the announced policy?

The second reason for writing, of far less general import than the one mentioned because it springs from the conditions obligating that policy, is yet of the more pressing import at the moment. It is the matter of the sale of the lubras to the Japanese. It is easy to think and to say that “the men are only too willing to sell the girl? and to white psychology this seems to be correct. It is fundamentally incorrect. In the clash of culture the white person is apt to get the wrong perspective on the aboriginal mind. We are opposed to wrongdoing and, under our laws; our fathers killed any base characters on the principle that if they were dead they could not propagate their kind. The clash of cultures made practices, not unwholesome in the aboriginal setting, extremely unwholesome by distortion and exploitation. Economic causes are the root of the trouble on Bathurst Island and elsewhere. Shortage of food is the basic cause of the sale of the women.

Mr. Paterson, my distress is that my people are suffering and the remedy is wholly in your hands. Our girls are taken on t~ vessels there to be the vehicles of Asiatic lust. These girls are used as long as they can be and are then thrown overboard. Any who get back to their people only, do so to corrupt them the more with acquired disease and to live a life of misery themselves. Generally they will not get ashore and it were better so.

The law is there-it is broken - and we suffer, and while suffering is the portion of the aboriginal, the cry of the people goes up to a God of deliverance. You are the only Moses who can lead the sufferers into the Promised Land.

That these are my people gives me the right to ask for adequate patrol of the coast but more than that even, for the assured sustenance for the natives, including meat (goat flesh is most suitable) to be made available through the Mission on the Island.

26. A.P. Burden, President, AAL, 41 Winchester Street, Moonee Ponds, to the Secretary, Minister for the Interior, 18 April 1937.

I presume that you will be issuing a statement of the deliberations forthcoming conference of Chief Protectors, etc., and in this event I would be glad if you will issue one to me for the information of the members of this league.

Aborigines are looking forward to the decisions of this confer their ultimate acceptance by the various administrations as the Al Magna Carta.
Thank you, Yours sincerely

27. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec. AAL, 27 Federal Street, Footscray Hon. the Premier of New South Wales, 31 March 1937.

I have written from time to time asking for the favor of your re deputation from us when you are in Melbourne and I would be grateful if you would personally agree to see us at some convenient time: meantime I am asking your personal consideration of one outstanding matter as fact.

As you may know, Cummeragunja is located on the Murray, where an abundant supply of beautiful water exists. There is a pumping and water is laid on to some of the homes. The land is fertile and it must be patent that if the natives were encouraged to grow vegetables their health would be better. We are criticised for not doing so but the fault is not ours.

During the heat of summer, a member of our executive noticed the dark folk passing to and from the stream with kero tins, drawing water from the river. He questioned the matter with the Assistant Manager who did then pump twice a day while he was there. When he went away one filling was reverted to per day and again, in the heat of the summer, the natives had to cart water by bucket. Now, only a matter of oil fuel stands between an adequate supply of water laid on and the conditions which did exist. I am at a loss to understand why two or even three pumpings per day cannot be made. It may be urged that the natives would waste the water. Would you accept that excuse from white people in similar circumstances? See that the taps are capable of being turned off, ration the use of water for gardens so that different people can use it at different hours, forbid wasting and follow up disregard and there could not be any trouble on that score. There are other matters that I have put up to you concerning that station which may have been a factor in not acceding to, but the cost of adequate water would be very low.

Can we have the assurance that next summer will see adequate water? If so, we can use our voice to bring to the notice of the people that we have secured this advantage and they must help us to retain it.

The present manager, whom we hold in high regard, will be able to warn any defaulter of the consequences of disregard of instructions and, if to this be added the weight of native opinion, I do not anticipate any difficulty whatever.

Thank you, Yours sincerely,

28. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, Ballarat Road, Footscray, to Mr. Stevens, The Hon. the Premier of New South Wales, 9 May 1937.

I do thank you for your letter of 24th nit. and for the promise of improved water supply at Cummeragunja. This will make possible the further improvements I have advocated on behalf of our League. I am writing because that matter is not mentioned nor did you promise the deputation sought.
Aboriginal interests have been subordinated to financial considerations but I note by the press that the N.S.W. budget is now balanced so that our interests may be able to receive more notice. Will you please do this?

I would, however, point out that all we seek is the right to prove our capacity for self support. We have the water and the climate. The markets are available and surely we natives are entitled to a share of these markets with Chinese and other aliens.

Some years ago the natives of Cummeragunja had a small pump with which they irrigated a small patch of tomatoes. The break down of that plant put an end to that small industry. Could not a start be made with tomatoes this year? The manager could oversee the work and the natives do it, the proceeds being distributed among the workers in relation to the labor put in. We are merely asking for a chance to prove that aboriginal control and uplift can be made a self-supporting matter. It can, therefore, be made a means of training for self-reliance and independence.

Might I request that you call for our correspondence and refer it to your agricultural department for investigation and I would be glad to hear further from you; also please consider the request for a deputation when we can answer your objections as well as explain our wishes.

Can we not ask that the 150th anniversary of your State have as one of its objectives the honest endeavour to lift the aboriginal to the right to full manhood and British citizenship

Yours sincerely,…


We are getting on quite nicely. The reaction of authority, at first suspicious, is now quite cordial and we feel that good is being done. Especially am I pleased with the reaction of Mr. Paterson and Mr. Lyons, in the order given. Certainly we have not yet got past the promise stage but our representations have led to definite promise, which we hope will materialise. We know the biggest hurdle will be the entrenched departmental officials, to whom we are but inferior clay (and this applies to your State, as well as to other States and the Commonwealth). Even in New South Wales we have had encouraging replies, though only after long ignoring and later evasion. At our instance, Cummeragunja, on the wonderful Murray, is to be supplied with an up-to-date and powerful pumping plant and water is to be laid on to new homes, which are to be built. The last thing we were able to secure was the provision of an area of land to be fenced and worked as a market garden. We asked for the culture of tomatoes, vines, oranges, lucerne, tobacco, etc., all possible in our fertile area, so well watered by the Murray. Only official apathy can prevent our request for a model aboriginal station to prove the inmates, and ultimately to be a pattern for Commonwealth wide imitation, from being a success. Our petition for the King has been ready for dispatch for some time. We held it up to see what the last Premiers’ Conference would bring forth. We further held it up to see what the conference of Chief
Protectors would do. When this proved abortive, as far as we are concerned, we notified Mr. Lyons that we had the petition ready for dispatch and the next move is with the Government. If it satisfies us we will not forward the petition. ...

30. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, 43 Mackay Street, Seddon, to Mr. Paterson, The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, 25 June 1937.

I do thank you for your willingness to discuss the matter of the aborigines with me by letter. It is but another token of your genuine desire to do the right by my people. You say my previous letter was in a pessimistic strain. Mr. Paterson, I am an old man and I did hope to live to see my people in a fair way to uplift. My hopes are not being realised, hence my despair. If my claims for my people are just, why should I not look for immediate relief? If they are unreasonable cannot I claim to be shown in what way they are? I am being assured all round that what we ask is only our right and therefore I feel that I am right when I persistently press for this right.

Australian Aborigines League: A fair deal for the dark race
43 Mackay Street
Seddon, W.11
VICTORIA
June 25th 1937

William Cooper, Hon Secretary

Doug Nicholls, Hon Treasurer

The Ron, the Minister
for the Interior, CANBERRA

Dear Mr. Peterson,

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I am delighted at the assurance that your colleagues in the Federal Cabinet are likeminded with you and the Prime Minister in sincere desire to do the very beat by our people.

I understand that the Federal Parliament has jurisdiction only over such aborigines as nay live in the Territories. There are over 18,000 full bloods in these parts and I venture the opinion that if the Federal Government deals adequately with the problem as it affects the aborigines under its
control a definite lead will be given to the State Governments and a favorable psychology will be developed in the general public.

Mr. Paterson, your kindness is so genuine that I feel I can respectfully say to you, without impropriety, that you should, just for the moment, forget that you are a white man so that you may look at the matter as we do. To see things as we do to feel as we do is the best way to realise the extent of our disabilities. We do not want our people to remain primitive, uncultured and a prey to all corners. Why should we remain in the near Stone Age? The British were once where we are now. The conquering power of Rome, whatever else it did, lifted the British to culture and civilisation. We want that same uplift. Are we unreasonable?

We have proven our capacity, all over Australia, to become capable, in every form of husbandry. In places we have made ourselves indispensable. We have acquired faculty for the arts

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We have proven our capacity, all over Australia, to become capable in every form of husbandry. In places we have made ourselves indispensable. We have acquired the faculty for the arts and crafts of civilisation, our men drive motor cars, are expert motor mechanics and engineers. We have orators, ordained clergymen, teachers and singers and I venture to say that our people, so capable of imitation, are to be found in every phase of modern culture. All we have attained to has been merely picked up. What we would have been with planned uplift may only be assumed. We want our yet uncultured brothers to get the uplift we have received but we claim it should come by plan. Our uplift came throughout by a baptism of blood and only to a residue, the rest-bang destroyed by the contact. We are asking that, on their own reservations, according to the capacity of the soil, the dark people be trained in modern methods of agriculture. Progress will not be meteoric but we feel that it can be made practically self-liquidating. We urge that this should be the aim and the plan can be tried out experimentally first.
While not presuming more than to make a suggestion, we feel that planned uplift can be made through Christian missions more cheaply. We submit that the Commonwealth should supply the requisite machinery and expert supervision or advice. Whether the work is carried out by the departmental officers or by missionaries, under Government supervision, the uplift should be associated with educational facilities for the children, which should be progressively raised in status until the aboriginal child has, the same educational facilities as the white child.

Now, still looking at our problems from the point of view of the native, please forget the white man’s discrimination between the half caste and the full blood. Except where the notion is put into the head of the half caste no one thinks of the white strain at all. AU are aborigines and content to be so, proud to be so. The full blood is a full man and fully British and fully entitled to uplift. Our only thought in respect of preference to half-castes is pleasure that someone is getting something and the more the better.

There is nothing fantastic in our claim for full uplift for the aboriginal. To settle the matter as we suggest will confer a twofold benefit: It will settle the problem of the aboriginal and settle it justly.

Now as to why we want a Parliamentary representative in the Federal House. Nearly 20,000 aborigines, including half castes, are surely not asking too much when they request what a handful of whites in the Territories have now got. We feel that a member representing our race can maintain contact with our people, study their needs and present their claims. He can watch legislation with a view to seeing that his constituency is not omitted or penalised. He can initiate legislation. Though he would have no voice in respect of other states, he would have members privileges when travelling and his opinion might be of value as an interpretation of aboriginal thought.

Mr. Paterson, We claim that, given a trial, we will prove that we are capable of producing a yeomanry that can open up and develop the outback better than anyone else. We are acclimatised, and as our primitive people become civilized, they lose the aboriginal culture and outlook taking on the psychology of the white man. The aboriginal is loyal to the Throne and Person of this Majesty. The development of Australia by civilized aborigines is therefore sound in that it provides a bulwark for the defence of your land and ours.

I do hope that the administration of which you are so honored a member will have the privilege of initiating the movement for emancipation of my people, in which you will have our full co-operation of my people, and that we will have an earnest of your good will by an early installment of reform is the earnest prayer of

Yours sincerely,
Australia has never given her native people a fair deal. In this interview, Mr. W. Cooper, spokesman of the aborigines and secretary of the Aborigines’ League, pleads for opportunity, by education and general help, for the aborigines to become a citizen fit to take his place in the forefront of Australian life.

“Why should not the aborigines themselves develop the north?” he asks. And, but for the iniquitous treatment which for the last century they have received, he sees no reason why we should not already have bad aboriginal doctors, lawyers and airmen.

Mr. Cooper is 76 and hopes to see a change for the better before he dies. He is doing all he can to bring it about. Like many of his countrymen, he is a fluent talker.

He had but seven months’ regular schooling when he was a youth. Much of his childhood he spent in the household of Sir John ‘(O’Shanassay, in Camberwell, and his young manhood he spent on pastoral properties.

More than 60 years ago he saw the remains of the. Burke-Wills Expedition at Cooper’s Creek.

I went to talk to him because I have long been interested in the problem of the aborigines. My own countrymen in Tasmania by a combination of cruelty and stupidity, succeeded in exterminating a whole race within 75 years.

The Victorian aborigines are going the same way.

“Education and opportunity will overcome the problems of the me,” he said.

Our aims are set forth in the constitution of the Australian Aborigines’ League. The immediate programme of the league is the progressive education of the aboriginal race by education and training in the arts and crafts of European culture.

“For primitive aborigines, while they remain primitive, we ask unalienable possession of adequate reserves to which white men shall have access only by authority from the Chief Protector.

“We ask that offences by white men against aborigines shall be punished by similar penalties to those for similar offences against white men, and to ask for special courts recognising tribal laws. We ask for education and industrial training.

“For the semi-civilised and detribalised natives we ask for reserves of agricultural land, the right to work and provision of full rations when no work is available, full rations to aged and infirm natives, and free education in State schools or in special schools.
“For civilised natives we ask the provision of agricultural land machinery, the right to work, invalid or old-age pensions, and complete educational and political rights.

“We are human. We may be uneducated by white standards: we are fully educated by our own. I do not know whether all colored peoples are the same, but we have a very high moral code and the principles of Christianity are part of our life.
“We want to get up to the same standards as the whites. But we are coming to the end of our tether. Now we are sending a petition to the King”.

MR COOPER took down a great roll of signatures. “If we cannot get full justice in Australia we must ask the King”, he said. “Some tell us that the King has no power now in these things, but we shall try anyway. There are 2000 signatures here, from aborigines all over Australia, not only in the towns, but at Palm Island, Bathurst Island and other distant places. Those who could not sign their own names have made their marks”.

“Up till the present time the condition of the aborigines has been deplorable”, Mr Cooper said. “Their treatment was beyond human reason until the Lyons Government cane in. I speak of a man as I find him, and I find Mr. Lyons a gentleman. His Government is the first in the history of Australia to take up the cause -of the aborigines. But it is not enough.

“Before that things were bad indeed. I am very very sorry that the white people of Australia must carry the bloodstains of the aborigines for evermore. It was the doing of uneducated white people and criminals in the first place, and the tradition of cruelty was handed down from white generation to-generation to the present day.

“Fortunately the present generation of white people is becoming more sympathetic. That is very encouraging to me. I sit here working hour after hour in correspondence with my people thinking. How can we save them?

“I feel for my people as anyone would. Now the shootings, poisonings, and extermination have ceased, so far as I can tell. I get letters. from Palm Island, from Mount Isa, from Central Australia, and all parts of Australia from my countrymen, and. there is a great improvement in their treatment. We must give the present Government credit for that. “But for our principal needs, what is done? We talk to politicians, and they say, Yes, they’ll do this, and do that, but the years go on, and what is done?

“We need education, and we need industry. You will never bring our people forward without-t those things. The policy- of the Governments at present will keep them laborers all their lives. You may read the views even of sympathetic white men. But they are not our views. We are the sufferers; the white men are the aggressors.

“We need a modern technical school for our people. You may ask where is the money to come from. But we have lost countless millions to the whites - the whole wealth of Australia. Are we not entitled to this? Must we lose our money as well as our lives?
“Our people should be given the training so that they may become doctors and nurses and teachers and teach our tribes the rules of hygiene and the best ways of living. But instead of lifting our people up, the early corners to our country destroyed them.

“They were destroying people better than themselves! If we had been a treacherous race they might have been excused. But there is no excuse for the murders which were committed upon us. There is no excuse for taking a man’s life away without cause.

“Yet if these people had been different, how different already might have been our story! Then you would have had already a colored race that Australia could be proud of. We should have been soldiers, doctors airmen. We have the courage and the resource.

“Now our people have nothing: all was taken from them. They will never have anything so long as the present state of things endures. They will be laborers, rabbit-trappers, casual fishermen perhaps.

“Nor do I think you can ever bring the present generation of aborigines up to the highest standard. They have a horror and fear of extermination. It is in the blood, the racial memory, which recalls the terrible things done to them in years gone by.

“Even now they do not like to say much. They think, ‘If we open our mouths we will lose even what little we have’. But the next generation of aborigines: you can bring them up to any standard you like.

“In Fiji, not very long ago, the people were cannibals. Now they have their own doctors and lawyers and professional men. Is it not shameful that Australia should be so backward in training her native people?

“Now we hear much of developing the north. Why should not our own people develop it? Why will the Government not let us have a chance to do it, to make our own State in our own country?”

**Background to Day of Mourning Political Strategy**

32. *Argus*, 13 November 1937. ABORIGINES’ DAY OF MOURNING, Plan for 150th Anniversary

Plans for the observance by aborigines throughout Australia of a “day of mourning” simultaneously with the 150th anniversary celebrations in Sydney, were announced at a meeting last night convened by the Australian Aborigines’ League.

“While white man are throwing their hats into the air with joy”, said the chairman (Mr. A.P.A. Burdeu), “aborigines will be in mourning for all that they have lost.”

It was hoped, Mr. Burdeu added, that the day of mourning would direct the attention of the people of Australia to the desire of the aborigines for full rights of citizenship.
Stating that he was proud of his aboriginal blood, Mr. William Ferguson, organising secretary of the Aborigines’ Progressive Association of New South Wales, said that aborigines did not want protection. “We have been ‘protected’ for 150 years, and look what has become of us,” he said.

“Scientists have studied us and written books about us as though we were some strange curiosity, but they have not prevented us from contracting tuberculosis and other diseases which have wiped us out in thousands”.

Mr. Ferguson complained bitterly of the treatment of aborigines at aboriginal settlements in New South Wales. “It would be better for the authorities to turn a machine-gun on us”, he said.

Mr. Douglas Nicholls, a leading Fitzroy footballer, who is an aborigine, said that aborigines were- not satisfied merely to be kept alive by a weekly issue of rations. “We do not want chicken food”, he said. “We are not chickens; we are eagles”.

Resolutions were passed urging the development of North Australia by aborigines in preference to non-British Europeans.


The Minister for the Interior (Mr. McEwen) has received, through Rev. J.H. Sexton, honorary secretary of the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association, a letter from Mr. David Unaipon, a full-blooded aborigine, in which Mr. Unaipon, speaking for the aborigines of Australia, takes exception to the proposal that the opening day of the anniversary celebrations in Sydney should be regarded by Australian aborigines as a day of mourning. Mr. Unaipon is an authority on native legends, on which he has written a book. Mr. Sexton’s letter read:

David Unaipon a well-known native leader in Australia, a full-blooded aboriginal, and a prince of his tribe, has asked me to forward you the enclosed letter for your information. He is not in sympathy with the day of wailing being staged in Sydney on Foundation day. He considers it will only harm Australia abroad, and he says you can make what use you like of his letter. David is the author of a booklet on native legends, and is a good speaker, with an excellent English vocabulary, is very gentlemanly in bearing, and, you will see by his message, a man of common sense. The “wailing day will be availed of to criticise Governments and generally finding fault, instead of showing appreciation of the efforts being made to aid the aborigines”.

Mr. Unaipon’s letter was as follows: This day of mourning is a huge mistake, because it is of a political character. The movement is largely an emotional one, sponsored by sympathetic white people and half-castes in order to call attention to native grievances. But the 50,000 full-blooded aboriginals will have very little part in this matter. These will stoically and silently await the coming of a new day.
The signs of this are already on the horizon, for the Prime Minister of Australia has already promised a Commonwealth review of the position. The most effective way of bringing this about is not by traducing Australia and giving it a bad reputation abroad, but by expressing appreciation of what is being done and contemplated for the aborigines. The many hopeful signs of an awakening interest in the native races is a cause for rejoicing, rather than weeping. The most effective way of helping the natives is not in weeping and bemoaning the past, but by acting in the living present. There have been grave faults on both sides, causing misunderstanding and friction, and the exclusion of the natives from the Federal constitution intensified the problem, because this left a national concern to be handled by State Governments.

As a representative of the race, I would like to urge that the 150th anniversary of Australia should be celebrated by the inauguration of a new programme, by which all the privileges of the dominant race should, given to the blacks. The time is past to talk of segregation. Let my people come more fully into the national family. There have been enough scientific investigations already, and no new facts have been brought to light, and yet there is still a plea to segregate the natives, keeping them practically in bush museums for scientific purposes.

The natives should not be kept in the cradle any longer. The aborigines want to be released from the ties that bind them to a decayed system, and want to be associated practically with the whites in the development of Australia, and they ask that the 150th anniversary of the continent may-be marked by the wiping off of old scores and the inauguration of a worthy nation programme for the promotion of their well being.

34. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, 73 Southampton Street, Footscray, to Mr. M’Ewan, The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, 19 January 1938.

At an executive meeting of this league held last evening, considerable perturbation was caused by the fact that the press of yesterday contained references which, if left unnoticed, might be prejudical to our organisation. Though we do not know if it was so, the report of the Age left the impression that you had communicated the matter to the press. This report said, inter alia, “the ‘wailing’ day will be availed of to criticise governments and generally finding fault, instead of showing appreciation of the efforts being made to aid the aborigines”.

You will know that this league has always been most courteous and appreciative. We have again and again told Mr. Paterson and the Prime Minister that we were thoroughly seized of their good will. We have always felt that we had too good a cause to have to resort to any other policy and the years of our dealings with - the Federal Government and State Governments has proved the wisdom of our method. We have never let up on our claim for equality and never ceased to protest at any proposed adverse action but- we have always kept our hands and pen dean. This your colleagues well know. We do not intend to depart from our practice. We are buoyed up with the-knowledge that our cause must triumph and with the assurance that the present Federal Government desires this.
As to the day of mourning, This is but a protest to our white fellow Australians. There is nothing ulterior and we are not able to appreciate how any reasonable person could twist the matter as has been done.

We try to keep from personalities and replying in the same way as we are criticised but I must say that David Uniapon never did and does not now occupy any place of leadership among natives. We have felt that his great ability could have been used to help his people but this-- task has had to be assumed by those of inferior capacity and opportunity. The day of mourning does have the support of aborigines who- are advanced, enough to understand it and Mr. Uniapon will not have- enough company of antis to keep him warm.

We know that you will appreciate all I have said and will sensibly understand both the need for the protest and the manner-of it.

I enclose a- copy of a memorandum sent the head of every denomination in Australia, which will show the spirit in which this-league approaches the Day of Mourning and the Sesqui-Centennary.

As there is no matter in my letter that demands a permission from you to allow to be published, I have supplied a copy of this letter to the “Age” newspaper only for the reason that if we waited the advantage of a reply would have no value. We trust that you will approve our action. We feel that the adverse comment following the dropping of a spanner in our machinery by one who should know better demands early action.

W. Cooper Hon. Sec., AAL, 43 Mackay Street, Yarraville, 27 December 1937.

Australia Day 1938 Aborigines’ Day of Mourning

The Australian Aborigines’ Progressive Association of New South Wales has called on all aborigines in the advanced stages of civilisation and culture to observe a DAY OF MOURNING concurrently with the white man’s DAY OF REJOICING to celebrate the 150th year of the coming of the white man to Australia. The aborigines, by this means, hope to call the attention to the present deplorable condition of all aborigines, of whatever stage of culture, after 150 years of British rule. It is expected that such action will create such sympathy on the part of the whites that full justice and recompense will follow.

The “DAY OF MOURNING” has been endorsed by the Australian Aborigines’ League, the Victorian body, which also looks after Federal matters, and it is expected that meetings will be held an a number of places and suitable resolutions passed. This League now asks the Christian community to help us in another way.

We know that sympathy with the aborigines is widespread and growing and, because the aboriginal knows that the goodwill of the whiteman is essential to success they seek to
justify the continuance of this sympathy. We now ask all Christian denominations to observe Sunday, 3rd January as **ABORIGINES’ DAY**. We request that sermons be preached on this day dealing with the aboriginal people and their need of the gospel and response to it and we ask that special prayer be invoked for all missionary and other effort for the uplift of the dark people.

We regret the unavoidable delay in submitting our request, which was not avoidable in all the circumstances, but we feel that a suitable notice from you in your church press will give that wide publicity that is so essential.

Very sincerely yours, W. Cooper.

35. *Age*, 22 January 1938. **THE ABORIGINES. Protest to Minister.**

Resentful of the comments from Adelaide regarding the proposal that Australian aborigines should regard the opening of the anniversary celebrations in Sydney as a day of mourning, the Australian Aborigines’ League has written the Minister of the Interior (Mr. McEwen) outlining its attitude. The comment at which the league’s complaint was directed was that attributed to Mr. David Uniapon, viz. “the ‘wailing’ day will be availed of to criticise Governments and generally finding fault, instead of showing appreciation of the efforts being made to aid the aborigines”.

In its communication to the Minister the league stated that it was perturbed by the references, which, if left unnoticed, might be prejudicial to it. The league had always been most courteous and appreciative, and had repeatedly informed the Prime Minister and Mr. McEwen’s predecessor (Mr. Paterson) that it was seized of their good will. The league had felt that it had too good a cause to have to resort to any other policy, and years of dealings with the Federal and State Governments had proved the wisdom of its methods. Never had the league let up on its claim for equality or ceased to protest at any proposed adverse action, but it had ways conducted the campaign with clean hands. It did not intend to dep~4f4tom that course, being buoyed with the knowledge that its cause must triumph and by the assurance that the Federal Government desired it.

The day of mourning, the league continued, was but a protest to white fellow Australians. There was nothing ulterior in it.

The secretary of the league (Mr. W. Cooper) said yesterday that his executive was very perturbed at the bitter comment Rev. J. H. Sexton, honorary secretary of the Aborigines’ Friends Association Adelaide, regarding the day of mourning. The term wailing used by Mr. Sexton was mean, to say the least of it. It was felt that wide publicity given to his remarks, unless repudiated, must prejudice the case of the aborigine in the minds of white people, whose good will the league sought to cultivate.

36. W. Cooper, Hon. Secretary, AAL, to Mr McEwan, The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, 19 February 1938.
Mr. E.E. Kramer has explained his proposals regarding the ration depot at Alice Springs and the natives who are not in employment being removed to a suitable location where there is sufficiency of native food. I am thoroughly in accord with the proposal and would like to explain the policy of our league in that connection.

We feel that the natives should be educated and civilised on their own reservations so that they will ultimately be able to take their places in civilised society as valuable units. We appreciate that little can be expected from the present generation who should be allowed to live their own lives as largely as possible, but we do feel that a definite policy of uplift should take the young people and fit them for the civilisation of the white people. We therefore suggest:

That the people not in employment be removed from Alice Springs to the suitable location mentioned. That the location be an aboriginal station as is the practice in more advanced parts, as Palm Island. That a Manager be placed in Control to organise the young natives, and the old ones to the extent they are willing, in the development of a portion of the land according to its capacity by up to date methods. Certain of the area should be used to stock with cattle, etc. so that our idea of making the native settlements self-supporting can be tried out. It should be possible to do this without immediately displacing the native animals, which are the normal food of natives. In short that a policy be framed to take the native as he is and bring him to the full culture of the white. There should be educational facilities for the children. CANNOT THE GOVERNMENT REGARD THIS AS A GOOD PLACE FOR AN EXPERIMENT WHICH SHOULD BE SYMPATHETICALLY CARRIED OUT AND WHICH MAY, ACCORDING TO THE EXPERIENCE GAINED, BE A PATTERN FOR FUTURE WORK. WE SAY, QUITE DEFINITELY, THAT ABORIGINAL Uplift SHOULD BE SELF-LIQUIDATING AND THE GOVERNMENT POLICY SHOULD BE BASED ON THIS COMMENDABLE PRINCIPLE.

I do trust that you will be able to meet the wishes of Mr. Kramer, of many years experience in those parts and a man who regards us as human beings capable of thorough culture.

Might I suggest that while you are in the Territories you call at Bonny ‘Well, the Station of Mr. Curtis, south of Tennants Creek. You will there see aboriginal capabilities given full expression. We want you to see that we are practical and that when we make claims we are not merely theorists. We want also to impress that it is white interests that will be served as well as aboriginal when the problem which is not insoluble is properly tackled.

May I summarise Aboriginal claims in a few sentences

1. Aborigines are entitled to a quid pro quo for the loss of their lands and liberty. This is implied in the term BRITISH JUSTICE. If the aborigines are merely a conquered and enslaved people it is not consonant with British principle.

2. Aborigines do not ask Charity but Uplift. They ask for full equality in law but also
the opportunity to qualify for it. Aboriginal uplift can be made self-liquidating and it ought be.

3. Aborigines must not be an exploitable cheap labor but they must be fully equipped to serve Australia and should ultimately be living under Australian conditions. When the aboriginal people are fully cultured and are Australian in the fullest sense of the term you will be proud of us.

4. There is that transitionary period. A policy, longsighted and sympathetic, must be framed and carried out to bring the aboriginal over in the shortest time and the most thorough fashion.

5. NO OUTWORKING OF THE WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY SHALL WORK DETRIMENTALLY TO THE NATIVES. FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS POLICY, THE ABORIGINAL IS WHITE. (IS NOT THAT REASONABLE?) WE BELIEVE AND CONTEND THAT ABORIGINES, NOT SOUTHERN EUROPEANS, ARE THOSE WHO SHOULD DEVELOP THE OUTBACK. WE CAN DO IT, UNDER WHITE GUIDANCE, BETTER THAN ANY OTHERS FOR THE CLIMATE HAS NO TERRORS FOR THOSE WHO RAVE NEVER KNOWN A MORE FAVORABLE ONE. WE CLAIM THAT THE PEOPLING OF AUSTRALIA’S UNSETTLED AREAS WITH CIVILISED ABORIGINES IS THE BEST WAY TO CLOSE AUSTRALIA’S BACKDOOR FOR THE ABORIGINAL IS LOYAL AND EFFICIENT.

TRY US OUT! WE LOOK TO YOU. WE HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN

Yours sincerely,…

37. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to the Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister, 31 March 1938.

I am sending you the enclosed, which I have compiled to give the aboriginal mind on the problem of the Native race. I will be glad if you will consider this because I feel very disappointed from time to time with the public statements by White men, made with all good intention, no doubt, but which, written from the point of view of the white man, does not reflect the opinions of natives . . .

From an Educated Black

Believing that there is a spark of human kindness in nearly every heart and knowing that the vast majority of men are opposed to oppression, I think that the majority of Australians and British people in general, need only KNOW what my people have suffered and are suffering, to bring the relief long sought and now much overdue. Hence this letter.

My earnest ambition always has been to publish abroad the truth about my people, the Australian Aborigines, in order that the white people might know something of the facts
concerning the treatment of my race.

I have addressed numerous letters to the editors of the various newspapers and find that my pleas for better conditions are, in nine cases out of ten, “pigeon-holed”.

In spite of this fact we live in the hope that some day the newspapers will begin to publish the truth concerning Aboriginal affairs so that the public, being informed, will see that the great evils from which we are suffering are remedied.

Failure to publish letters which seek to lay before the public the truth concerning aboriginal conditions is as unfair to the public as it is to the aborigines. Additionally it is very inconvenient to the Aborigines who are forced to seek other channels to get information through to sympathetic white friends. The whites are starved for want of the facts on the subject. The blacks suffer through this starvation. Thus the newspapers contribute to the plight of both parties.

**Definition of Protector**

We Aborigines are a “protected” people. I understand that the correct meaning of the work “Protector” is:” One who protects from injury - one who protects from oppression; a guardian; a regent; one who rules for a sovereign”.

A slightly different version of this document, headed ‘From an Educated Aboriginal’, was sent to 3. McEwan, Minister for the Interior, on 21 January 1939 (CRS A659, 40/1/858).

It would please us greatly to have a protector over our people who would live up to that standard but how do our protectorates work? Sometimes there is a measure of kindness shown to us, more often there is not. Take for instance the policeman who was appointed as a protector of the Aborigines in Central Australia. He went out one day to arrest a native who was reputed to have killed a white man.

He stated in his evidence that he shot 17 natives, and later shot another 14, and a so called “Justice of the Peace” officially without a trial justified the constable for shooting these 31 people. Now, I ask you, do you think that this Justice of Peace could justify the Constable before God?

Do you think that he could justify his own judgment before the King? No! The whole thing is contrary to British Justice and cannot be justified even before a much lower tribunal, the white people, (if they knew the facts) and of these, you are one!

History records that in the year 1771 white men first landed on the shores of what is now called Botany Bay. They claimed that they had “found” a “new” country — Australia. This country was not new, it was already in possession of, and inhabited by, millions of blacks, who, while unarmed, excepting spears and boomerangs, nevertheless owned the country as their God given heritage.
From the standpoint of an educated black who can read the Bible upon which British
constitution and custom is founded, I marvel at the fact that while the text book of present
civilization, the Bible, states that God gave the earth to man, the “Christian” interferes
with God’s arrangement and stop not even at murder to take that which does not belong
to them but belongs to others by right of prior possession and by right of gift from God.

In our primitive state we Aborigines were gentlemen. Many of our present vices and
defects have been imported. In our primitive state blacks were never known to take their
own lives. No full blooded aboriginal ever went insane. We never had any sexual perverts
in our midst, and we can proudly say that our moral standard was second to none and cart
take pride of place with the white people of our day.

While it is true that many of the whites who were sent here alter the colony had been
opened up were unjustly convicted and over-severely punished, it is also true that there
were many criminals of the worst type let loose in our land and without doubt it was very
unfortunate for us Aborigines to come into contact with the worst side of civilisation.
This contamination has been detrimental to us.

Every shape and form of murder, yes, mass murder, was used against us and laws were
passed and still exist, which no human creature can endure. Our food stuffs have been
destroyed, poison and guns have done their work, and now white men’s homes have been
built on our hunting and camping grounds. Our lives have been wrecked and our
happiness ended. Oh! ye whites!

The animals at the Zoo are looked after. They have servants to care for them, Food is
supplied for them. Their homes are sure. Not so the blacks. We still feel unsafe in the
hands of those who are controlling and “protecting” us. We still meet people who, with
their sense of British superiority, look down upon us with disdain as unworthy of
consideration — as “Abos”, a race of another color—whereas the two races should be on
the best of terms and give to each other full credit for the good qualities of which they are
possessed.

Although usually treated with marked indifference, when we are not being ill treated,
there are times when we are considered useful. For instance, at least a thousand
Aborigines were among the first to enlist in the defence of the British Empires in the
1914-18 war and for which Empire they gave their lives.

It was a thankless task for them, no thanks being given for the valuable services rendered.
We get no encouragement, and the result of this neglect appears to be that we are looked
upon as a useless race and greatly misrepresented thereby. This condition is to ray mind
due to State control, and so long as it exists the Aborigines will never be a valuable asset
to their country.

I fear that these conditions will remain as they are until the Christian organisations, and
other sympathetic friends, come forward with a definite determination to help to uplift
these much down-trodden and broken people. We have never had the opportunity to prove that we can make good citizens and be useful to the country under white men’s rule. We were good “citizens” when we owned the country.

All of us had plenty of food; no one starved while others had more than they could use. We had no depressions. Cancer, syphilis, and consumption were all unknown to us. They belong to the white civilisation. Our wives were OUR wives, and our morals without reproach. We WERE good citizens. We can adapt ourselves to the present arrangement and make good citizens NOW if we only get the chance.

If we are a burden on the country it is not our fault, but it is due to the fact that the various governments have not adopted the various practical suggestions, which have been offered from time to time by men who know, including myself. Any lack of good citizenship on our part is due to the ill-considered and impracticable methods adopted when dealing with us.

It appears to me that because the governments have, to date, failed to view the life of the aborigines as the Aborigines see it themselves, we still find them crying for “protection”, although what is really needed is “understanding” – . . . . Our millions have vanished. There are seventy thousand of us left . . . we are a dying race . . .. Will you let us die?

Those of our people who are educated are becoming greatly concerned about the disabilities of the others and are putting up a stiff fight to try and get our people their rights. We still continue to try to persuade the Governments to do the right thing and appeal to all Christian people to view the matter with compassion and do their utmost, as opportunity arises, to try and help the Aborigines throughout the continent to get their rights, to get TRUE PROTECTION– and thus enable the race to continue and not become extinct.

Up to the present, petitions, deputations, requests, and other means and movements on our behalf have failed, so far as the Commonwealth Government is concerned. Scientists, anthropologists and other distinguished gentlemen have also failed to bring relief, and we don’t like being kept merely as material for scientific investigation, research, etc. etc. That is all valueless so far as the blackfellows’ present needs and comforts are concerned.

Sending anthropologists into isolated parts of the continent amongst wild people with the object of doing the blacks good may have its scientific value, but after all, there are very few scientists in our midst to appreciate the scientists’ point of view, whereas from our point of view it is a failure. It does not help the black fellow one little bit. We suggest that the proper method of dealing with the primitive people would be to send educated and cultured Aborigines to their own uncivilized people. These men, of the same blood, would understand their people and would be able to suggest to the government means whereby the hardships and sufferings of these people could be alleviated or removed.

Up to the present we have not been given an opportunity to help our less fortunate
brethren in their hard struggle, because we have been left homeless and penniless.

Many of us have not been given the right to vote. We have no right to vote. We are not even counted. We are not recognised as British subjects and have therefore no rights, and are unable to defend ourselves.

**Context of Not On Iota p.81 para 1.**

The Maoris of New Zealand have had parliamentary representation since 1867 and can place their grievances before the authorities through their representatives. Parliamentary representation for us has been refused. The inane reason advanced for the refusal being “it is unconstitutional”.

In the early days the land was forcibly taken from the Maoris in some instances. In other instances it was “traded”. A few axe-heads for instance, were traded for thousands of acres of the best laid in the Bay of Plenty district. Today, through legislation and negotiation, the descendants of those from whom the land was first taken or obtained have been and are being financially compensated for their loss, and rightly so.

_How much compensation have we had? How much of our land has been paid for? Not one iota! Again we state that we are the original owners of the country. In spite of force, prestige, or anything else you like, morally the land is ours. We have been ejected and despoiled of our God-given right and our inheritance has been forcibly taken from us._

As for ourselves we are a fast diminishing and dying race.

The time is long overdue when the Aborigines should be considered as much and as fully under the protection of the law as any other citizen of the Empire, and equally entitled to the privileges of British citizenship.

This more particularly in view of the fact that history records that in the commission originally given to those who came from overseas the strict injunction was given that the Aborigines and their descendants had to be adequately cared for.

This benevolent intention of his most gracious Majesty towards his primitive people was not carried out. We, therefore, now plead for moderation and forbearance to be exercised by all people in their dealings with the native people, and hope that the Government will seize every opportunity to carry out His Majesty’s original intention to facilitate our approach toward civilization.

When we learn of these instructions given, and know the history of the manner in which we have been treated these last 150 years, our confidence in the professed Christian nation — standing for good government justice, and freedom — is sadly shaken. Nevertheless, we pledge ourselves to be loyal citizens of the Commonwealth of Australia, and believe that, as a people, we should be dealt with by the Commonwealth Government.
and NOT by the States. The States cannot return us a reasonable compensation without Commonwealth aid, so why not deal with us direct? Surely the Commonwealth, which controls all that originally belonged to us, could make what would be a comparatively meagre allowance for us, by way of recompense.

The taking of rightful belongs has not yet ceased. A large percentage of hard-earned Aboriginal wages is even now handed over to the government and placed in the bank for the Aboriginals, in the “Aboriginal Trust Account”.

Those wages amount to somewhere around a quarter of a million sterling and we have no knowledge regarding how we shall receive the benefits of this money. It is a mystery to us, who own it. We think that the Aborigines should be transferred to the National authorities for Federal Control. We are glad that the Lyon’s government has done something and that Mr. Patterson, the Minister for the Interior, has shown some interest in our people.

Until now, in Federal Quarters, and still in other State Political circles, interest in the Aboriginal has been very nominal with all Administrations, or, at least, interest was merely of a scientific nature.

The only knowledge the native had of the Administration was the Iron hand of the Law he did not understand. The recognition of the aborigine as a human being is, so far as it yet applies, but of recent date. Interest in the aboriginal generally is daily more evident and conditions for the dark race seem to be more hopeful than ever before.

The change is most noticeable but nowhere so much as in -the Federal Governmental sphere. For the first time in history the will to do a fair thing is evident and we trust that this good-will will work out for our emancipation, Mr. Lyons is kindly disposed and assured me that his cabinet share the same interest, but the Minister for the Interior, Mr. Patterson who is responsible for Native Affairs, manifests an anxiety to do the utmost for us.

Communications with him have not been merely courteous (this is more and more the nature of all communications from each administration) but they have been kindly and considerate, resulting partly, from our representations, and he has asked his officers to investigate the whole position.

Already announcement of a programme has been made, and, though nothing material has yet been done, we trust that the wards of the Federal Government will shortly he on the way to full uplift.

This must inspire State Administrations and it appears that we have reason to feel that the Day of Hope is already dawning. When the uplift is materially advanced our promise of being a loyal, capable people, for which the outback is no problem, will be shown to be no vain promise and in the day the open back door to invasion will begin to close. The dark folk have not failed to tell the Prime Minister and Mr. Patterson how deeply grateful
they are for the good will they are showing. But let us now get back to present realities.

The State has no useful work for us to do, and no educational move has been made to incorporate our people in national industry. It is unfair to treat us as a people of low mentality with treacherous tendencies who cannot be taught anything. We don’t want to be kept hiving in captivity on Aboriginal settlements under the management of a retired policeman, in the sight of God we are as valuable as other men, amid we feel sure that we could be taught, and we merely ask for an opportunity to prove that we can.

The treatment meted out to us has been so bad that the present generation of blacks lives in a state of fear and horror. The mass murders of the past, the prohibitions amid restrictions of the present, and the dismal prospect of the future do not tend to bring out the best in us.

We suggest that we be placed under FEDERAL care, that we be dealt with via Christian Bodies, and educated blacks and half-castes, who know the view point of the blacks be used as contact men, and that by treating those now living, kindly the fear will be removed from the rising, and the next generation and that the generations following will prove that the time and money spent on their education was worth while.

Who better could deal with the great problems of the Northern Territory than an educated race of aborigines? The Aborigines have brains. These brains need cultivating.

It can be done. Will you do it? The aborigines have human affections which can respond to human treatment. Will they get it? Finally, do you intend to become as culpable as our original despoilers? Are you like the prominent Parliamentarian who, as late as 1935 said “The nigger has got to go, the sooner the better”.

Will you, by your apathy tacitly admit that you don’t care, and thus assume the guilt of your fathers? Are you prepared to see a race of people, without whom the centre and north of Australia can never be brought under human control, die and become extinct while you stand by and do nothing.

OR — are you prepared to admit that, since the Creator said in his Word that all men are of “one blood”, we are humans with feelings like yourselves in the eyes of Almighty God, that we have joys and our sorrows, our likes and our dislikes, that we can feel pain, degradation, and humiliation just as y~ do? If you admit that, will you like true men do your bit to see a great injustice at least mollified by agitating for us to get a fair deal before it is too late?

I feel that the time has arrived for me to express the appreciation of my race for the increasing kind regard being shown by so many of the white race, and I take pleasure in doing so. Many of the present generation of white people are so sympathetic that I feel sure that the justice we are fighting for, and rightly desire, is coming. This is of particular value because it must be recognised that all the goodwill of the best of our Parliamentary leaders cannot avail, as it should unless there is behind them the goodwill of the people.
At a meeting convened by this league and attended by hundreds of white citizens the following resolution was unanimously adopted: That this meeting of Victorian citizens criticises the Government of Western Australia for the deplorable conditions existing amongst Western Australian aborigines and half castes, particularly the half-castes in the South West, where only a very small percentage of children are receiving any education whatever and the ration allowance for adults is valued at less than 1/- per week.

This meeting also urges that proper educational facilities be immediately established and that the Franchise, full sustenance allowance and all other Social Services be granted without delay.

It recommends that the financing of aboriginal administration should be on a National basis.

The meeting was held on Yarra Bank, on the afternoon of Sunday, 8th instant, and was well attended by unionists who also passed a motion calling on all Trades Unions to support the claims of aborigines.

Faithfully yours,

39. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister, Canberra, 23 May 1938.

Re our petition to the King for a representative in Parliament in respect of which there was considerable press publicity some months ago, which we believed to be inspired.

We are much concerned with the fact that there is now no further comment and no word from you in the matter. Would you please tell us how it now stands.

There have been statements that the whole matter of Aboriginal Administration is being referred to another conference of Premiers but not having heard of this either we wonder if that has also been abandoned. We certainly were perturbed about two matters, one being in the minutes of the conference of Chief Protectors to the effect that advice was being sought in America and South Africa on the problem as there existing and the other was from your Department to the effect that the Commonwealth was seeking to induce the State in the way of initiating legislation similar to the iniquitous legislation recently enacted in Western Australia. In the matter of the first we trust that there will not be copying of the shocking treatment of the natives in either place. Here, if we have the money we are allowed to ride in trams and walk on footpaths and, in the civilised parts, white men will treat colored women as women. Cannot our legislators evolve a scheme for Australia and cannot that scheme be that every civilised man and woman, full blood or half caste shall have full equality in law. Why should we be legislatively considered as
we were when the white man came to our shores. Is there no time that we can look forward to when we shall be fully human in the eyes of white legislation?

The second matter, the suggested legislation in all States on the lines of the Western Australian legislation. We feel quite definitely that the white community here would not stand for the degradation of the native here as he has been degraded in West Australia in the last months. There men who were educated and have been in the enjoyment of the franchise for quarter of a century are declared aboriginals. They may not now give their daughters in marriage without in every case receiving the personal consent of the Commissioner for Native Affairs. They may not go to Perth without a permit nor work for a white employer without securing a license at the price of 1 per year. For God’s sake don’t have us all pushed back to West Australian status but rather show that State that their retrospective legislation is foreign to Australian sentiment.
We fully trust you and your Government. We know we can look to you for justice but we are not so sure of the Administrative officers in the States who may be able, as in West Australia, to manipulate legislation to our detriment.

We are waiting most anxiously and will be glad of a word from you.

Yours sincerely,

40. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, 73 Southampton Street, Footscray, to The Hon. the Premier, Western Australia, 11 July 1938.

At the Annual meeting of the Australian Aborigines’ League the following resolutions were adopted:

1. “That this League expresses its protest against the recently enacted legislation of Western Australia in respect of Aborigines”.

2. We feel that the position of our race has been worsened from the bad position it was in previously in Western Australia and this at a time when improvement is being effected in other parts of Australia.

3. “That the deplorable condition of aborigines in Western Australia calls for urgent relief, and, pending the adoption of a Federal policy for Aborigines, this meeting asks that a grant be immediately made to Western Australia by the Federal Government, the expenditure of such grant to be subject to supervision by the Federal Government”.

4. To ride in trams and walk on footpaths and, in the civilised parts, white men will treat colored women as women. Cannot our legislators evolve a scheme for Australia and cannot that scheme be that every civilised man and woman, full blood or half caste shall have full equality in law. Why should we be legislatively considered as we were when the white man came to our shores. Is there no time that we can look forward to when we shall be fully human in the eyes of white
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We fully trust you and your Government. We know we can look to you for justice but we are not so sure of the Administrative officers in the States who may be able, as in West Australia, to manipulate legislation to our detriment.

We are waiting most anxiously and will be glad of a word from you.
Yours sincerely,

41 W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Hon. the Chief Secretary or Minister for Native Affairs, Perth, 17 July 1938.

At a meeting of this league held on Saturday the resolution as set out attached was adopted and in forwarding it I desire to say that we aborigines keenly feel the repressive legislation under which the condition of our race in Western Australia has been worsened. Conditions have always been worse in Western Australia than in the rest of Australia and while we did not think it was possible for them to be worse than they were we have found that they have been worsened. It passes our comprehension why a Labor Government could be the instrument of forging our chains to be heavier and at a time when the Federal Government (non-Labor) is steadily improving our conditions and the Labor Government in Queensland is showing deeper concern for our welfare. The Labor policy for aborigines in New South Wales surpasses everything else contemplated in Australia, yet Western Australian Labor is out Hitlering Hitler in the way of hounding a harmless and well meaning race and regimenting the religious teaching and education we are to receive. Frankly we do not believe that the legislation enacted and the regulations under the act are the will of labor and we plead that the whole matter be referred to the party with a request that Labor express its voice in the matter. We do feel confident in the result if this be done.

I remain, Yours sincerely,

Motion adopted at a meeting of the Executive of the Aborigines’ League, held on Saturday, 16 July 1938.
Resolved that: The Australian Aborigines’ League, the organised voice of the Natives of Australia, having watched the trend of the repressive legislation in respect of aborigines in Western Australia and the regulations made under the act, with the serious effect of both on our people strongly protests against many features of the Act and the regulations particularly those prescribing:

1. The obligation of natives to seek a permit to visit Perth and to produce such permit on demand.

2. The obligation of natives to obtain a license to enable them to be eligible to work for a white man.

3. The intrusion of the Department for Native Affairs into the personal life of aborigines, requiring that it shall be consulted and its approval obtained before our girls are allowed to be married to men of mutual choice.

4. The obligation of natives to cut adrift from their own kith and kin not exempted from the operations of the Act in order that they may be eligible to obtain exemption from the operations of the act themselves.

We also strongly protest against the regulation requiring missionaries and educationalists to be licensed to preach to or educate our people and that licences which may be granted may be revoked at any time without the right of appeal from the decision of the Department. This we consider to be a menace to the right of Free speech, hampering our friends in their stand for justice for our people.

We further consider that too much power is vested in one person, the Commissioner for Native Affairs, and we advocate the formation of a Board for the Protection of Aborigines, on which our people shall have representation.

We appeal for the vetoing of the Regulations made under the Act and the amendment of the Act itself to enable the removal of obnoxious clauses and we call on all people who love justice to stand by our people in their present need.

A copy of this resolution is to be sent to the Hons. the Minister for Native Affairs in Western Australia and the Minister for the Interior, Canberra.

42. W. Cooper, Hon Sec., AAL, 73 Southampton Street, Footscray, to Mr. M’Ewan, The Hon. The Minister for the Interior, 26 July 1938.

I have been deeply concerned about the policy for aborigines and particularly in respect of the reply to our petition to the King for representation in Parliament. From the replies to my correspondence I gather that nothing will be done in the matters of our concern till you return from the North and have drawn up the observations you will have to make in the matter. Because I feel that so much depends on your report I am taking the liberty of writing you asking that you frame your recommendations from the point of view of the
interests of the natives. We are only too sensible of the White attitude in the North and, since you will have conferred wholly with those interests and seen the aboriginal problem only through a White Man’s eyes we fear that you may be unconsiously biased. I say this with every respect for you. I know you will do what you deem to be the right, fearlessly, but you cannot be expected to see the position through an aboriginal’s eyes.

You will not have got the mind of the native, and the White men will probably have given you to understand that the native has not got one. But he has. He is not vocal, yet, but he is very definitely properly sensed of the injustice of his position. He is uncomplaining but don’t take that to mean he has no complaints to make. He is human, please do remember that.

We aborigines feel we have a right to a place in Australia and we feel we are robbed of that place. We do ask that place and quite definitely say that, Payne Commission Report and all other such policies, written or otherwise, the White Australia policy is not just when it shuts out aborigines from the scope of the protection afforded by that policy. We claim that it is not British stock that is wanted for the Territory, certainly not Southern European but Aboriginal, British Australian aborigines. We claim that Australia, in the areas where the aboriginal is still numerous, should be developed for and by the aboriginal and it seems clear to us that we have proved our aptitude for primary industry so proving that it is not merely visionary when we talk of an aboriginal race, civilised, industrialised and bearing his share of responsibility for his country. WE CLAIM THAT THE INSPIRATION FOR A POLICY FOR ABORIGINES SHOULD BE “THE ABORIGINAL — AN ASSET”

We don’t want to be zoological specimens in Arnhem Land or in any other reservation, though we realise that reservations are essential for a long time yet. We don’t want to be on charity. We want to be real men in our Own Australia, Loyal subjects of the Empire and the Commonwealth. Given a chance and a patiently worked out policy of Uplift, we will yet make Australia realise that we are an asset. Give us a helping hand out and you will get 90,000 units, more or less, to help Australia work out her destiny.

No honest White man claims that we have had a fair deal or that the aboriginal problem (of the White man’s making) is not capable of easy solution given the will to do right by us. We just ask what the White Man, in his heart, knows is bare justice.

This is where we need our member, able to watch legislation on the floor of the House, able to speak for the native and to represent native interests. We are of the opinion that if we had a good man devoted to our interests he could do more for our cause that “a majority” in Parliament. Though he would have no vote and be the stronger for that fact, he would be the most powerful factor in the House. We haven’t got our member, YET, but we have friends and among them are the men who have been, and one now is, Minister for the Interior. In fact we feel that we have a majority in the House and would like to see this matter dealt with in a non-party spirit.

Do not misunderstand me when I sign myself in the words of our League motto, “For a
Fair Deal for the Dark Race”,
Yours sincerely,

43. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. Stevens, The Hon. the Premier, New South Wales, 5 November 1938.

With pleasure we learn from the press that legislation is to be introduced to reorganise Aboriginal Administration. From the reports there is one factor, which we regard of supreme importance, and that is “representation of aboriginal interests”, to which there is no reference. It will be calamitous if provision is not made for this.

We ask that we have representation on the Board, for representation only by an anthropologist is not satisfactory to us. Such a representative can keep the Board advised of Aboriginal aspirations and can be a liaison with the natives.

We further ask representation on the Aboriginal station administrations. There will not be any cost in this and better results will come when the native finds he has a voice in his own destiny. Our suggestion is that a council of natives be elected by the natives on the stations and that responsibilities be devolved to them. This will make the manager more in the nature of a representative of the Government, and ultimately of the King, to whom, personally, and to his throne and government, the natives are proud to be loyal.

This step will be a great factor for the full uplift of our race and is fully consonant with British ideals.

Thanking you, Yours sincerely,...

44. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to the Chairman, Board for the Protection of Aborigines, Sydney, 28 November 1938.

While conditions in some parts of Australia are improving, for a long time I have been receiving complaints about conditions at Cummeragunja. What impressed me was that complaints were made by men of sterling character, people of fine type. Some of the complaints I was not able to verify, not being on the spot and in respect of others I told those, concerned that the League would have to have something definite before we could take up the matter. I felt that there was a good backing for some of the statements made but our league is careful in what it says and does not want to lose its good name by irrational statements. I wanted to be able to prove the statements made.

Later I received a petition, which I forward herewith, and which you will see is very representative of the people living on the settlement. On receipt of this I made personal enquiries and herewith is set out the complaints of the people. They are prepared to substantiate them to you personally or to a board of enquiry you may appoint. They are not satisfied that the Inspector (Mr. Smithers) or some other officer conducts an informal enquiry. This in the past has never been satisfactory and it is as much a protest against
such officers as against the management. They and this league ask for an enquiry which will seek to know facts with a view to a remedy.

1. The manager and the matron call all the married women only by their christian names. The married men object to this and the women support their protest. The women say that they are required to always call Mrs. MQuiggan Matron and they feel that she and the manager should call them Mrs. Jones, or as the case may be.

2. Natives are not allowed under any circumstances to travel in the cab of the station truck. This rule is never varied, no matter what the weather, even with convalescents returning from the hospital. Native women, known to be tubercular, have been compelled to sit on the back of the truck, in the cold and wet, while there is room in the cab for these delicate people. The natives contend that the truck was supplied for the use of the station and that it is, unreasonable to force delicate women out into the cold and wet while there is room in the cab for them.

3. The houses near the river do not get sanitary clearances though they are but a short distance from the centre of the township. The occupants bury the night soil. When the River rises over the land this night soil is disturbed and the water of the river is polluted.

4. The meat issued to the natives is from sheep so badly conditioned as to fit only for boiling down. The carcasses average only 20 to 25 lbs. in weight. The meat is secured from the Echuca Freezer and is starving stock. It is unfit for human consumption and much is thrown to the dogs.

5. Many of those to whom clothing was issued under previous administrations do not now receive it which is now only issued to old people. A wider issue was made prior to Mr. M’Quiggan being appointed.

6. The manner of Mrs. M’Quiggan to the women is most offensive. She goes to the homes when she likes and says what she likes. If things don’t suit her she bounces the women, If they pick her up for the way she speaks the rations are stopped’ or, if they are old people, their curry and

7. The natives ask that the Health Inspector visit the place and report on its condition.

8. Open night pans are infested with flies, which also pollute the food. A ‘more suitable type of W.C. is necessary or, preferably, a septic tank system should ‘be installed.

9. The streets are in bad order. In heavy rain, people are up to their knees in mud and
water.

10. The rooms of the houses are too small and the number of rooms too few for the size of the families. Overcrowding results and there is much dissatisfaction.

The complainants are ready to submit evidence to a Board of Enquiry or yourself. They are not prepared to do so to the Inspector or other Officer of the Board responsible for the conditions.

The League supports the claim for a full, free and impartial investigation.

Yours sincerely,


Deputation Not Admitted *(Deputation to German Consulate re Persecution of Jews)*

A deputation from the Australian Aborigines League which visited the German Consulate yesterday, with the intention of conveying to the Consul (Dr. R.W. Drechsler) a resolution condemning the persecution of Jews and Christians in Germany, was refused admittance.

A letter requesting Dr. Drechsler to forward the resolution to his Government was left at the Consulate.

The resolution, voiced “on behalf of the aborigines of Australia, a strong protest at the cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi Government of Germany, and asks that this persecution be brought to an end”.

Delegates will attend the immigration conference called by the Council for Civil Liberties at the Assembly hall tomorrow night and on Saturday.

46. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. M’Ewan, The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, Canberra, 17 December 1938.

There have been copious extracts in the press, which indicate that the long promised policy for aborigines has been issued. If this be so will you kindly let me have a complete copy so that I may fully examine it.

If these extracts are correct it would seem that there are, from our point of view, some blemishes which I trust you will be able to satisfy our aspirations on. One of these is discrimination between those of more than half aboriginal blood from those of half white or whiter color. This is our chief bone of contention over the years and is indicative of the
white outlook on a problem in respect of which the dark people have quite a different opinion. I would like you to meet us in this respect, “Do not suppose that the colored folk have, generally, aspirations to’be white or possess any regret as being colored”. Do not therefore suppose that we feel any different toward any member of our ~race who is full blood as against one with some white blood. It may shock you to know that, very generally, even octaroons look with more sympathy on the aboriginal side o their ancestry than on. the white side. There are exceptions, of course, but these prove the rule. The white man cannot “think black” but I submit that our chieftain, which is your particular position, and the Government, which is our guardian, should set themselves to learn to “think black”. We speak thus to you only because we know in our hearts that you personally, and the Government of which you are a member, do want to do the right thing by us. We respect you, personally, and the Government, and repeat what we have told you before, amid made no secret of publicly, that no Government previously has shown the same interest as the present Lyons Government in. the natives. It is possible for us to ask of you what we want instead of being in the position of being suppliants for mercy from unsympathetic over lords.

What we ask is that fullbloods and near blacks be accorded the same opportunity to rise as half castes and near whites. Let the determination be, not color, but capacity. There are octaroons and quadroons unable to exercise the privileges of civilisation but there are full bloods who are fully able. Though you do not mean it, the discrimination shown by whites for those of partly white parentage is offensive and hurtful to colored people. Remove all barriers from the race to full progress and make our condition at least comparable to the person of alien blood who is born in the land. At present it is a stigma to be full blood or near black and yet the white man holds the land of our fathers without penny of compensation. This should not be and I know it will not be ultimately but I should like to feel that the Magna Carta you are granting us does not retain the blemish I have referred to. You can, in one sweep, put us all on the same footing as the whites and super add the temporary conditions that will give the necessary help to the uncultured, near black or near white. Won’t you do this? It will not cost a penny but if it did surely the debt of the white man to the dark one is not to be repudiated on the score of cost.

Mr. M'Ewan, the white man has not yet shown any capacity for “thinking black”. This is the whole position in a nutshell. Will you learn to do it?

We deeply appreciate your service to our race and cordially wish you, as you wish ourselves, the best of good wishes for the New Year.

47. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. M'Ewan, The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, Canberra, 17 December 1938.

I have written to you generally on the subject of discrimination and have done so that you might deal with the subject on the broad general lines of policy. I am writing to you separately on a specific matter so that you may be able to consider the matter apart from the general question, though it is very much related to it.
For years we have been seeking the removal of the reproach of color by the granting of pension rights and the maternity allowance. We did fully expect that we would have secured our long sought desire but a press announcement in the Argus of 8th inst. dashes our hopes to the ground. We are thoroughly disappointed and so feel that you do not fully appreciate the position.

We have near whites living under primitive or semi-primitive conditions. These have legal rights to full citizenship, which they cannot understand let alone exercise but WE HAVE FULL BLOODS WHO ARE CULTURED ON THE FULL WHITE STANDARD. What an indignity to have these branded as unfit to exercise the privileges of citizenship or to receive the benefits that accrue to the white person. We refrain from using names as a rule because dark folk have the same feelings as white people but what of David Uniapon and Rev. James Noble, full bloods, and christian gentlemen of education just to mention two who are famous. We can add to those names men of equal culture who are not so well known. What of little MENE, the child of 13 who won one of the Batman Essay Competition cups in the competitions recently carried out by the Uplift Society. Is he to grow up to be less than a man? We have even here in Victoria full blood natives amid I call to mind one full blood family living here in Victoria, with the children in school with other colored children and whites for that matter. Some of these in this big family are just infants. Are they to grow up just different from those “favored” with white blood. This woman will get nothing for her maternity expenses but her neighbours get the bonus. In aboriginal eyes they are just the same as others and they live as others do on the “catch as catch can” basis. The most cultured christian gentleman who is not able to lay by sufficient for old age may not get a pension but must either go to an aboriginal station, there to queue up with all others to get the starvation issue that is given in most parts of Australia or have, if living privately to go to the police station for an even narrower ration. If the white man wanted to think out an indignity for the man he has displaced, he could not do better than he has done by the natives. We feel that while we are all indignant over Hitler’s treatment of the Jews, we are getting the same treatment here and we would like this fact duly considered.

The Government has made its decision and we can quite understand the difficulties that presented themselves but they are more supposed than real. We do now definitely ask that there be added to this determination a proviso to this effect, “NOTWITHSTANDING THIS POLICY, ANY PERSON OF MORE THAN HALF ABORIGINAL BLOOD MAY BE BROUGHT INTO THE BENEFITS OF THOSE OF HALF WHITE BLOOD IF IT CAN BE PROVEN TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE MINISTER THAT THEY ARE COMPETENT TO EXERCISE OR ENJOY THESE BENEFITS.

This is not in accordance with our claims but is a compromise. We claim that the full rights should be admitted in law and the persons not competent to exercise them should be excised and provided for otherwise.

I have mentioned previously in correspondence a story which will show how the gun is loaded against the person of mixed parentage and how many times this circumstance has applied nobody can say. One of our finest women, very dark complexioned, splendidly
educated and who taught bible class in one of our white Sunday schools for years, became ill. Her husband was only a laborer. She applied for an invalid pension. It was refused on the ground that her illness was not necessarily chronic. Later, she qualified ‘in age for the old age pension and applied for it. She was refused as being obviously more than ‘half native. Being able, possibly one of our most educated women, she appealed to the Prime Minister, who regretted that the law did not permit granting a pension. She then applied for State aid (she should be entitled to one or the other) but was told that as she was more than half white she was not entitled to state aid. When the woman was told the result, she remarked that “I am too black for a pension and too white for relief as a necessitous aboriginal”. She got nothing and her death closed a case, which if presented publicly would have brought matters to a head.

I would emphasise that what we are asking for the aboriginal born in Australia’ is already available to chinese, japanese, or other alien, if they happen to be born here.

May we claim the further attention we are seeking,
Yours sincerely,

48. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. Kitson, the Hon. the Chief Secretary, Public Offices, Perth, W.A., 30 December 1938.

At a meeting held on 30th ultimo, the following resolution was adopted by this league, with membership in the different States and the responsibility for the interests of aborigines all over Australia: That this meeting of the Australian Aborigines’ League, on behalf of the aborigines of Australia, strongly criticises the attack on missionaries made by Mr. Kitson. While recognizing that regrettable episodes have occurred on some missions at various times, the league has intimate knowledge of the good work being done by the missionaries of all branches of the Christian church.

It is of the opinion that without the protection of missionaries our people would be much worse off, if not completely exterminated.

We therefore call on the Governments of Australia, particularly of Western Australia, to give greater moral and financial support to the missions of all denominations, thus enabling them to carry out constructive work for our people iii cooperation with the Governments.

In forwarding this resolution let me reiterate that “we have never received anything of real value from any other source than missions, which are, amid remain, our best friends.

Yours sincerely,

49. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. M’Ewan, The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, Canberra, 3 January 1939.

I am writing to dissociate myself and the league from the published utterances of the
President of the newly formed aboriginal organisation, the Aborigines’ Progressive Association (Mr. J.T. Patten).

Mr. Patten has recently telegraphed the Western Australian Government on its attitude toward missionaries and missions, “our greatest enemies”. This league has no such feelings against missions and feel that they have been and are our best friends. We fully approve of your reported appreciation of missions and the intention to implement your new native policy largely through missions.

Mr. Patten has also advocated over the air the formation of aboriginal regiments. I am father of a soldier who gave his life for his King on the battlefield and thousands of colored men enlisted in the A.I.F. They will doubtless do so again though on their return last time, that is those who survived, were pushed back to the bush to resume the status of aboriginals. I feel that Mr. Fatten is previous in that the aboriginal now has no status, no rights, no land amid, though the native is more loyal to the person of the King and the throne than is the average white he has no country and nothing to fight for but the privilege of defending the land which was taken from him by the white race without compensation or even kindness. We submit that to put us in the trenches, until we have something to fight for, is not right.

The enrolment of aboriginal regiments would of course prove that the aboriginal had some value but it would only be in the circumstance of the native levies of European countries, as, for instance, the Senegalese. It is the creation of a mercenary army not an army of men fighting for all that is dear in life.

My point, Mr. M’Ewan, is that the enlistment of native should be preceded by the removal of all disabilities. Then, with a country to fight for, the aborigines would not be one whit behind white men in value. Can you not get my point. Can we not have a “Balfour declaration” for natives of a national home in Australia? It will cost nothing to give the native born in the land the same right, not merely of the persons of European blood, but of Maoris and people of Chinese, Japanese or other Asiatic peoples, who may happen to be born in Australia, but it will give a great asset to Australia and the addition of a valuable unit of additional population.

Yours sincerely,

50. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. Stevens, The Hon. the Premier of New South Wales, 20 February 1939.

On November 28th I forwarded a letter, copy herewith, to the Chairman of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, covering a petition of the natives of Cummeragunja for the removal of Mr. and Mrs. M’Quiggan from the charge of the aboriginal station. To this communication I did not receive a reply but it was received for the names of the petitioners were posted at the Station, inviting those who wished to remove their names to do so. I submit that this is not in accordance with British tradition and would not be done for a fully white community and in itself constitutes a further grievance. The conditions which were so objectionable became more aggravated until the victimisation
experienced forced a number of the people to leave New South Wales for Victoria, where they are living under very hard conditions.

I submitted our grievances and the people would have been satisfied if the enquiry had been granted, unless that enquiry was conducted by the very officers we are protesting about. We felt that in inviting the Chairman of the Board to arrange for this we were not going past those who had the administration of aboriginal affairs. Our people were prepared to submit their complaints and to support them with evidence and we felt that it was only necessary to do this when the will to do a fair thing would give some amelioration.

We aborigines are not agitators. We feel we have a right to British Fair Play and do make our representations in the right quarters, often with considerable satisfaction to ourselves, particularly in the Federal sphere. We ask only what we feel that the White public is willing to concede to us, for it is our experience that the general public is sympathetic to the native cause. We feel we have grievances, not against the Government, nor so much against the Board itself as those who are employed by the Board and who act in a way the Board would not agree to, if it knew the facts. It never does know the facts for the only source of information by the Board is that submitted by the very officers we are protesting about. We are not an enemy people, and we are not in Nazi concentration camps. Why should we then be treated as though we were?

In regard to the present exodus from the station. This is our. only way of protesting and of directing attention to the wrongs we are compelled to endure. It has had the effect of doing this and now that we have been able to bring the matter to the notice of the Government I trust we can expect that fair deal we seek. This is no ordinary strike, seeking conditions that employers will not concede. It is merely drawing attention to conditions which neither Government, Parliament nor Public would suffer, if they but knew them and to seek the conditions which we believe all three above mentioned would be glad to accede to.

A contented aboriginal population will be an asset, and we are satisfied with very little, amid we realise that the Government would like us to be happy and contented.

I have just visited the people in Barmah and the people tell me

1. That the treatment by the manager is very bad, that he uses vile language to them and is very abusive. The people are frightened of him at any time, for we have been cowed down so long, but the fact that he carries a rifle about with him makes matters worse. We have been decimated with the rifle among other things and fear the result of one being carried now. Because of his utter unsuitability they ask that he be removed from the super intendency.

2. The rations are inadequate. The scale will be well known to you and its value can be checked up on. Unemployed natives in Victoria receive the “dole” and we feel that unemployed natives should be nearer this scale than they are. Our children
are undernourished and this fact can be ascertained by examination.

3. Housing is inadequate and unsatisfactory.

4. The milk supply is impure and contaminated. With other factors the health of the people is bad and I append a list of infant deaths during the time Nurse Pratt was in charge of the treatment rooms. Mortality figures, including infant mortality is too high and should be investigated.

5. Education at Cummeragunja is most unsatisfactory and our children are not acquiring a reasonable education. We consider that the present teacher is unsuitable and should be replaced.

6. The people feel keenly that the women do not receive the Child endowment direct and do not have the spending of the money for their children which White mothers have. We particularly resent being refused endowment altogether since the trouble and would suggest that this matter be specially followed up. Is the action taken legal? Our people applied for the endowment on 6th and 13th inst. and were refused.

The setting out of the above facts will show that we feel that we labor under disabilities that should not have to be suffered. We trust we have satisfied you that an enquiry is justified. May we therefore ask that you make it possible for the people to return to their homes because if they do so under present conditions they know they will be subjected to worse treatment still than they have suffered in the past.

51.W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Mr. M’Ewan, The Hon. the Minister for the Interior, Canberra, 19 April 1939.

I was very distressed to read in the “Age” of 30th ultimo the following news from Canberra: “One of the chief steps taken by the Department will aim to secure uniformity of Commonwealth aboriginal laws with those of West Australia, where the most modern legislation has been framed to date”.

I do not regard all I read as being authentic for I am misreported myself but I would like to submit the following for your investigation:

1. While the legislation of West Australia is the latest it is the most reactionary in Australia, bringing my people into serfdom. Under this legislation a large number of regulations were promulgated and the whole of them have been disallowed by the West Australian Parliament. The Government, under pressure from Public opinion has agreed to bring in new legislation and then new regulations and is to call in the dissenting interests to confer in respect of the matter.
2. The man inspiring the legislation and framing the regulations is regarded by us and most aboriginal emancipatory organisations as the greatest enemy of our race. His policy of absorption of aborigines into the white population is as unfavorably viewed by us as by the white organisations. We prefer the administration of Mr. Chinnery to Mr. Neville.

May we therefore claim the investigation into the proposals by Mr. Chinnery and the framing of suggested laws by the Federal Government. The announced policy of the Federal Government can be a basis for such legislation and we would suggest that the Government do in Federal matters what the West Australian government has agreed to do, viz: consult missionary and ameliorative organisations including the Natives’ own organisation. We will have pleasure in submitting a full policy for all classes and conditions of aborigines if you permit.

Thanking you for past interest and asking that we be assured of the same sympathetic treatment, helping us to become what we wish to “Australia’s finest asset, the aborigines”.

Yours sincerely,

52. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to The Hon. the Premier, Sydney, N.S.W., 28 April 1939.

At a meeting convened by this organisation but attended by a large number of the General Public, the following resolution has been carried, “That this meeting of Victorian Citizens strongly criticises the Government of New South Wales for its failure to appoint an impartial enquiry into the just grievances of the aborigines of Cumberagunja. It urges that an enquiry be immediately held and that Mr. Mark Davidson, M.L.A. be appointed to conduct the enquiry”.

In forwarding this resolution I would express disappointment in that our protests and requests in the matter have not resulted in more than an acknowledgement. No other State fails to respond to our correspondence, whatever their decision may be. In the Federal sphere the utmost courtesy and consideration is always shown and this we claim is consistent with the principles of British Justice, which should be accorded to a persecuted minority.

May I have the honor of a reply from you at an early date. The position at Cumberagunja is now more acute for the Manager is intensifying the persecution we have had to bear in the past. It is now almost intolerable. If public opinion only knew the nature amid extent of the persecution, victimisation, stoppage of rations, there would be a great outcry. If you knew yourself, it would stop at once.

Yours faithfully,

53. W. Cooper, Hon. Sec. AAL, to The Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister, 31 August 1940.

In your letter of May 1939 and on other occasions you have expressed your “active
interest in the welfare of the Australian Aborigines” and I am therefore again writing to bring the needs of my people to your notice before the Federal Elections.

I regret troubling you when the gravity of the International situation is needing your constant attention but I would point to the fact that the serious condition of my people does call for immediate consideration. Unless their position is speedily rectified their condition will inevitably deteriorate, therefore from the point of view of economy alone it is surely wise to increase financial assistance amid so help them to become useful members of the community instead of the outcasts they must otherwise become.

Are you in favour of carrying out the Federal Governments policy as outlined by Mr. McEwen when Minister for the Interior, or at least the main essentials of this policy as recommended by Mr. Chinnery, Director of Native Affairs?

These are

1. The provision of more reserves for the preservation of the natives still in their tribal state of culture.

2. The provision of Mission or Government Stations on the fringe of the reserves for the establishment of pastoral and other industries. This would prevent the drift to the towns, which is bringing about the deterioration and inevitable extinction of my people. Land for their own use is the first essential for my people and any that is given now is small compensation for all they have lost.

3. We also desire the appointment of more District and Patrol Officers with Assistant Patrol officers of aboriginal blood instead of native police who will administer justice, render medical assistance and supply rations where necessary.

You will realise that for carrying out this policy an adequate financial grant is essential.

We congratulate the Federal Government on the appointment of Mr. Chinnery as Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory but would point out the fallacy of expecting him to carry out his work effectively unless the Government places the means at his disposal. If the Government refuses to go forward because of the war it will find that after the war it will be too late for any real constructive work for my people.

We would point to the deplorable moral conditions which exist at present in Darwin owing to the large number of troops, and to the number of undesirable civilians who have flocked to the town and we request you to take immediate steps to remedy this state of affairs. We ask you to press for the provision of several trained Women Protectors, to be assisted by women protectors of aboriginal blood, for the proper protection of aboriginal and half caste women. We commend the steps already taken by Mr. Chinnery for improved educational and recreational facilities and urge that still greater steps be taken
in this direction at a centre further removed from Darwin than the present compound. My League is pressing for the federalisation of aboriginal affairs with a national policy of a constructive character, but until this can be brought about we would urge the Federal Government to provide a grant to Western Australia for the purpose of aboriginal education. W.A. has the largest aboriginal and smallest white population of all mainland states and therefore cannot, or will not, adequately tackle this problem. Half-castes in the S.W. of W.A. are growing up in deplorable squalor and are becoming a community of outcasts. Out of 1,600 children in the S.W. less than one quarter are receiving any education.

If Australia is sincere in her stand for democracy and her desire to free the peoples of other lands from the oppression of Hitlerism, her sincerity will be shown by the attitude she adopts towards her own exploited minority. Lip service to democracy and Christianity is not enough. “By their fruits ye shall know them”.

I would point to the fact that no answer has been given to the petition of my League for an aboriginal representative in Parliament.

Trusting you will find time to deal with this important matter. Yours faithfully, P.S. I hope to attend your meeting in the Camberwell Town Hall on Monday evening.

Sources - correspondence


7, 9,10, 13 Department of the Interior, Correspondence files, ‘Representation of Aborigines in the Commonwealth Parliament’, AA, CRS A431, 45/1591.

11, 24, 39 Prime Minister’s Department, Correspondence files, ‘Aboriginals ‘Policy ‘, AA, CR8 A461, A300/l, parts II and III.

12 ‘Department of the Interior, Correspondence files, ‘Welfare of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory: Deputation to Minister 23.1.35’, AA,

CRS Al, 35/3951. 14,22, 27,28, 43, 44, 50, 52 Premier’s Department, New South Wales, Treatment of Aboriginals in New South Wales, 1936—63’, part 1, 12/8749, A36/1028 and A38/93-1.


18 Department of the Interior, Correspondence files, ‘Corroborees at Aboriginal Compound, Darwin’, AA, CRS Al, 36/7014.
23, 38, 40, 41, 48 Department of Native Affairs, Western Australia,’ Australian Aborigines League, Melbourne’, Aboriginal Planning Authority (W.A.), 75/19–J6.

26 Department of Immigration, Correspondence files, ‘Conference of Commonwealth and State’, AA, A659, 42/1/8104.
