

A. P. A. Burdeu, President, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Chief Secretary of Victoria, 23 June 1939, Public Record Office of Victoria, VPRS 3992/P, Unit 2813, File R4932

Today Miss Ada Austin, quadroon black, was deemed ineligible for an old age pension for which she made application, due to the fact that she has a preponderance of aboriginal blood. The wrong suffered by aborigines, as there indicated has been brought to the notice of the Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister, asking to enact legislative amendments removing this blot on Australia's dealing with her natives. I believe that we will ultimately have success for we have been pressing for relief for years and believing that the Government does intend to do something. Meantime the poor woman, 62 years of age, till recently in domestic service but now feeling the weight of years and in poor health, saw me and in tears told me that she did not want to go back to the aboriginal camp to get the relief that she would there receive in rations as an aboriginal. She has Christian friends in Melbourne, where she is welcome to stay and where she will if she can get her ration issue in Melbourne. I mentioned this to the Secretary of the Board today but he assured me that the rations could only be available if she went back to Framlingham. Now I submit that if this is to be the practice, it should not be an inflexible rule and I feel that she, a single woman, could quite reasonably be exempted from the rule without it being claimed that an exception, granted for special reasons satisfactory to the Minister in charge of the Department, could be a precedent unless the circumstances were parallel and I cannot call to mind one old aboriginal woman who is, like Miss Austin, single.

I would urge that there is no cost involved. At Framlingham the police would issue the ration and the Aborigines' Uplift Society of which I am secretary, would, if desired, act without charge for the Department here, that is to say we would undertake delivery to her, thus saving trouble or cost to the Board.

It is very hard that she is refused the pension which morally is her right. It is doubly hard if she is to be forced back to an aboriginal status and from her friends to get the relief the State would give in those circumstances.

I make this definite request from the purely humanitarian standpoint and would request that no departmental practice be allowed to add to the hardship the unequal federal laws have forced on the woman.