

**William Cooper, Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, 26 October 1937, National Archives of Australia, A461, A300/1, Part 3**

Thank you for your acknowledgement of our petition to His Majesty and the promise of fullest sympathy and consideration. We know you will give this and we do thank you for the definite interest you have in our cause. I would, however, offer the following comment in respect of the penultimate clause of letter of the 17<sup>th</sup> inst. and would request that these comments be in mind in the consideration promised.

His Majesty is *King of Australia*, and on this account, the State control of aborigines should not prevent consideration being given on a national basis. I am not, therefore, able to appreciate the reference to the natives of the Territory in particular and to the jurisdiction of the State Governments. We do trust that the division of the administration over State Legislatures, *which is always to our detriment*, will not retard our relief. With all respect, since our petition is to the *King of Australia*, it should not be possible for divided control hurting us in this instance.

Respecting the conference of Chief Protectors, from which we scarcely expected relief, and which so far as we can see only resulted in one decision which was not previously operative, and that the recognition of the wives of aborigines married according to Tribal Law being recognised as legal wives and thus not being compellable witnesses. From our point of view the conference was only a waste of time. We did expect a Magna Carta from the Premiers' Conference but from the conference of Chief Protectors we only got the confirmation of our humiliation. Frankly, we are alarmed at the intention to seek advice from countries where Negro populations constitute the dark problem, for we, notwithstanding all our indignity, are allowed to walk on footpaths, ride in public vehicles and trains and put up in many hotels where white men are residing. To add to our sorrows the humiliation of our dark brethren in the curfew and the pass system would be degradation indeed. In due course we will present you with our comment on the published minutes of the conference but meantime we are in protest against the whole result. We do claim that the forwarding of our petition be not clouded with the State aspect or the atmosphere of the Chief Protectors' conference.

Respecting our claim for parliamentary representation, we very definitely submit that the Maori population is approximately the same as our people, with any advantage to us. In an area the size of Victoria they have four members and a Ministry for Native Affairs, which has had a native minister. We are persisting in our claim for one who can speak for us in Parliament, influencing legislation on our behalf and safeguarding us from administrative officers who, with notable exceptions, interpret their responsibilities to the aborigines in much the same way as a gaol governor does his criminal population. Our desire is a change of heart in the electorate, reflected in Parliament and leading to a policy which will be different from that administered by our gaolers. So far from divided control being allowed to retard our securing representation, we feel that our member should have the right to sit in every legislature, and any constitutional difficulty could be overcome by legislation. If our member were a member of the Senate, perhaps as this is the States' Rights House, any difficulty might be more easily overcome.

Hoping to hear shortly of the granting of our requests.