

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for the Interior, John McEwen, 19 January 1938, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858

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 prejudicial 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 clean. 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 the 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-Centenary.

As there is no matter in my letter that demands a permission from you to allow [it] 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 ...

The Australian Aborigines' Progressive Association of New South Wales has called on all aborigines in the advanced stages of civilization 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 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 in a number of places and suitable resolutions passed. The 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 white man is essential to success they seek to justify the continuance of this sympathy. We now ask all Christian denominations to observe Sunday, 23rd 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.