

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, 23 May 1938, National Archives of Australia, A431, 1949/1591

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 States 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 are 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.