

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Leader of the Opposition, John Curtin, 9 July 1938, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858

The following is a copy of a part of the Northern Standard for June 5th [sic, June 3rd], published in Darwin:—

“Just what powers are wielded by the Aboriginal Department over half-castes it is very difficult to ascertain, but, according to a report handed to the Union on Tuesday last, it would appear that their power seems to be without limit. The half-caste in question is a male, aged 25, has a constant job with a contractor, and is satisfied with his employer. The young man has a clean police record. An officer of the Aborigines' Department approached both the employer and employee, and insisted on the latter giving up his job, and proceeding to Roper River on a droving job. This the young man refused to do, and he says that the officer warned him to be ready at 4 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon. Some time later a policeman came and asked him if he wanted to go to the Roper, but did not use any coercive measures. On the matter being reported to the Union, the secretary interviewed Mr Giles, Acting Administrator, and also the officer of the Aborigines Department, who admitted the whole business. He said the “boss” told him to see the half-caste, and “put it on strong to see if he would show any resistance”. Satisfied that there would be resistance, the official then announced that “they had decided to drop the case”. The Union most certainly will not drop the case and will place the matter in front of Parliament through the Labor members in the hope that steps will be taken to prevent a Government department becoming a Labour Bureau for the pastoralists.”

The League asks that the Federal Labor Party does not let the matter past. This League stands for Australian conditions for aborigines, freedom of contract for natives and, while it is anxious to see the aborigines fully and profitably employed, it protests against the natives being employed under conditions which break down the Australian standard. At present slavery conditions are often imposed which the Labour Party should have removed.