

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for Native Affairs, Western Australia, 17 July 1938, State Records Office of Western Australia, AU WA S2030—cons993 1936/0075

At a meeting of this league held on Saturday the resolution as set out attached was adopted and in forwarding it I desire to say that we aborigines keenly feel the repressive legislation under which the condition of our race in Western Australia has been worsened. Conditions have always been worse in Western Australia than in the rest of Australia and while we did not think it was possible for them to be worse than they were we have found that they have been worsened. It passes our comprehension why a Labor Government could be the instrument of forging our chains to be heavier and at a time when the Federal Government (non-Labor) is steadily improving our conditions and the Labor Government in Queensland is showing deeper concern for our welfare. The Labor policy for aborigines in New South Wales surpasses everything else contemplated in Australia, yet Western Australian Labor is out Hitlering Hitler in the way of hounding a harmless and well meaning race and regimenting the religious teaching and education we are to receive. Frankly we do not believe that the legislation enacted and the regulations under the act are the will of labor and we plead that the whole matter be referred to the party with a request that Labor express its voice in the matter. We do feel confident in the result if this be done.

I remain, Yours sincerely ...

Motion adopted at a meeting of the Executive of the Aborigines' League, held on Saturday, 16 July 1938.

Resolved that:

The Australian Aborigines' League, the organised voice of the Natives of Australia, having watched the trend of the repressive legislation in respect of aborigines in Western Australia and the regulations made under the act, with the serious effect of both on our people strongly protests against many features of the Act and the regulations particularly those prescribing:

1. The obligation of natives to seek a permit to visit Perth and to produce such permit on demand.
2. The obligation of natives to obtain a license to enable them to be eligible to work for a white man.
3. The intrusion of the Department for Native Affairs into the personal life of aborigines, requiring that it shall be consulted and its approval obtained before our girls are allowed to be married to men of mutual choice.
4. The obligation of natives to cut adrift from their own kith and kin not exempted from the operations of the Act in order that they may be eligible to obtain exemption from the operations of the act themselves.

We also strongly protest against the regulation requiring missionaries and educationalists to be licensed to preach to or educate our people and that licences which may be granted may be revoked at any time without the right of appeal from the decision of the Department. This we consider to be a menace to the right of Free speech, hampering our friends in their stand for justice for our people.

We further consider that too much power is vested in one person, the Commissioner for Native Affairs, and we advocate the formation of a Board for the Protection of Aborigines, on which our people shall have representation.

We appeal for the vetoing of the Regulations made under the Act and the amendment of the Act itself to enable the removal of obnoxious clauses and we call on all people who love justice to stand by our people in their present need.

A copy of this resolution is to be sent to the Hons. the Minister for Native Affairs in Western Australia and the Minister for the Interior, Canberra.