

**William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for the Interior, John McEwen, 26 July 1938, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858**

I have been deeply concerned about the policy for aborigines and particularly in respect of the reply to our petition to the King for representation in Parliament. From the replies to my correspondence I gather that nothing will be done in the matters of our concern till you return from the North and have drawn up the observations you will have to make in the matter. Because I feel that so much depends on your report I am taking the liberty of writing you asking that you frame your recommendations from the point of view of the interests of the natives. We are only too sensible of the White attitude in the North and, since you will have conferred wholly with those interests and seen the aboriginal problem only through a White Man's eyes we fear that you may be unconsciously biased. I say this with every respect for you. I know you will do what you deem to be the right, fearlessly, but you cannot be expected to see the position through an aboriginal's eyes.

You will not have got the mind of the native, and the White men will probably have given you to understand that the native has not got one. But he has. He is not vocal, yet, but he is very definitely properly sensed of the injustice of his position. He is uncomplaining but don't take that to mean he has no complaints to make. He is human, please do remember that.

We aborigines feel we have a right to a place in Australia and, we feel we are robbed of that place. We do ask that place and quite definitely say that, Payne Commission Report and all other such policies, written or otherwise, the White Australia policy is not just when it shuts out aborigines from the scope of the protection afforded by that policy. We claim that it is not British stock that is wanted for the Territory, certainly not Southern European but Aboriginal, British Australian aborigines. We claim that Australia, in the areas where the aboriginal is still numerous, should be developed for and by the aboriginal and it seems clear to us that we have proved our aptitude for primary industry so proving that it is not merely visionary when we talk of an aboriginal race, civilised, industrialised and bearing his share of responsibility for his country. *WE CLAIM THAT THE INSPIRATION FOR A POLICY FOR ABORIGINES SHOULD BE—"THE ABORIGINAL—AN ASSET"*.

We don't want to be zoological specimens in Arnhem Land or in any other reservation, though we realise that reservations are essential for a long time yet. We don't want to be on charity. We want to be real men in our Own Australia, Loyal subjects of the Empire and the Commonwealth. Given a chance and a patiently worked out policy of Uplift, we will yet make Australia realise that we are an asset. Give us a helping hand out and you will get 90,000 units, more or less, to help Australia work out her destiny.

No Honest White man claims that we have had a fair deal or that the aboriginal problem (of the White man's making) is not capable of easy solution given the will to do right by us. We just ask what the White Man, in his heart, knows is bare justice.

This is where we need our member, able to watch legislation on the floor of the House, able to speak for the native and to represent native interests. We are of the

opinion that if we had a good man devoted to our interests he could do more for our cause than “a majority” in Parliament. Though he would have no vote and be the stronger for that fact, he would be the most powerful factor in the House. We haven’t got our member, YET, but we have friends and among them are the men who have been, and one now is, Minister for the Interior. In fact we feel that we have a majority in the House and would like to see this matter dealt with in a non-party spirit.

Do not misunderstand me when I sign myself in the words of our League motto, “For a Fair Deal for the Dark Race”,