

***West Australian*, 22 November 1938, p. 9, Native Regulations. Aborigines' League Protest, William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, Letter to the Editor**

My attention has just been drawn to your issue of the 3rd inst., in which Mr Gray, M.L.C., commends the services of the Commissioner for Native Affairs (Mr Neville). Being in constant contact with Western Australia and having learnt from our own members of the condition of the natives, we were heartened when we learnt that the iniquitous and obnoxious regulations under the infamous legislation of Western Australia were to be dropped. To learn that they are not to be causes us dismay.

Rightly or wrongly, we regard the offensive legislation and regulations to be the inspiration of Mr Neville and absolutely contrary to Labour aspirations. Labour here is definitely favourable and sympathetic to native interests and the announced policy of New South Wales Labour forecasts the full emancipation of our people. When we tell Labourites here of the parlous condition of our brethren in the West and tell them of the un-British repression and persecution of the legislation and regulation, we are often met with the remark "and Labour is in power?" Cannot Labour see the folly of their Government's crucifixion of a harmless, defenceless people, for the blame must rest on the Government, even if it is only a rubber stamp in Mr Neville's office.

We are not satisfied with our conditions in any State, but in every one without exception, apart from Western Australia, there is the definite promise of improvement. With so much talk of the rights of minorities, which nearly involved Australia in war along with the rest of the Empire, it seems hard to believe that another minority can be ground to dust when it only wants the right to be loyal Britishers, sharing with their white brethren the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.

One clause in your issue referred to surprises. We never hear Mr Neville quoted as an authority and would be surprised if we did. We have heard it said that he was merely a civil servant who was appointed to the office regardless of his want of experience. We have asked that the authority now vested in an officer who is not acceptable to our people be vested in a board and we contend that those constituting that board shall be either experts or representatives of interests which have regard for the native race. There should be women on that board and definite representation of the natives themselves. Cannot such a board be created? It would inspire the confidence the present administration fails to secure.

The plea of our league is "a fair deal for the dark race", otherwise a pogrom would be preferred to slow torture. Surely it is not beyond the capacity of the dominant race to deal with the trouble in such a way that we will be on the way to the removal of all talk of a native problem. We believe that a wise solution of the present difficult position will remove all problem[s] and will be as good as adding a new province to Australia.