

A. P. A. Burdeu, President, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for the Interior, John McEwen, 25 November 1938, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858

We are hearing quite a lot of suggestions of late in respect of preparation for war, the empty North, population generally, and immigration. These all arise from Australia's preparedness for war and the consequences of unpreparedness.

No one seems to touch the real solution and Australia generally, does not seem to be aware of it.

Two things may be affirmed—

1. The empty North is Australia's heel of Achilles. Not a potential danger spot it is certainly the spot the enemy will strike at because no enemy could be resisted there.
2. A land hungry world will not suffer such land to lie idle while their millions lack elbow room.

Three other affirmations will not be contended—

1. Aboriginal reservations will only remain such till the land is wanted for other purposes, either by Australia or a country with eyes upon it, and in that day the Aboriginal will enter on the same blood bath his brothers have had to suffer unless definite arrangements to the contrary be made.
2. The Aboriginal is educable. He has proven this where there has not been any policy of Uplift. In fact, all Aboriginal attainment has been acquired not by plan, but despite the absence of one.
3. The Aboriginal loses his culture with the greatest facility. He as quickly acquires the culture of the superior race he contacts. (If that medium were foreign he would be a potential menace).

Cannot these matters be related and is not their relation the germ of an adequate solution of both the empty North and its Aboriginal population. Let us further note—

1. The North is unsuitable for Nordic peoples, particularly women, for laborious effort, while it is the only country the Aboriginal ever knew and to which he is fully adjusted. Both white men and white women are able to live in the North in conditions that do not involve undue labor.

In the light of these facts, all of which are admitted, I submit that an Aboriginal policy should be formulated for the complete exploitation of the resources of the Territory by Aboriginal labor under white direction and oversight. Into this industrialization the young men and young women should be brought, for the persons now adult can scarcely be expected to respond. If the service is made attractive, it will attract and interest. Coupled with this industrialization, should be an educational policy for youth which can be made attractive and interesting. It is admitted that the task is not just as easy as "say so", but it should be obvious that if the native has been industrialized and

somewhat educated without any policy, the implementation of a considered policy by experts, must be capable of much more.

And now for what has been misconstrued into my public utterances—

It has been crudely stated that I have suggested that natives should be put into khaki and used as soldiers. I never made any such ill-considered remark. What I did say and repeat is that the Aboriginal, civilized, industrialized, and emancipated, peopling the area which is home to him, will constitute a bulwark for the defence of the country, and in time of need he will be found ready to defend his country, and ours.

By this I obviously mean that if the Aboriginal is raised to full citizenship, he will assume the responsibilities of citizenship including defence, in parallel conditions with the white.

I would suggest that this is fully consonant with the policy of the Aborigines League, and should be given full consideration, as a matter of national importance. Such a policy will not be disruptive of any development of the Territory now being made, but being supplementary to that, to the extent that it is done, it must be advantageous.

Is it not apparent that the exploitation of Aboriginal possibilities is both advantageous to Australia and will add thousands to its effective population?

We contend that the relation of two problems will solve both and neglect of these will aggravate both.