

**William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for the Interior, John McEwen, Canberra, 17 December 1938, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858**

I have written to you generally on the subject of discrimination and have done so so that you might deal with the subject on the broad general lines of policy. I am writing to you separately on a specific matter so that you may be able to consider the matter apart from the general question, though it is very much related to it.

For years we have been seeking the removal of the reproach of color by the granting of pension rights and the maternity allowance. We did fully expect that we would have secured our long sought desire but a press announcement in the Argus of 8th inst. dashes our hopes to the ground. We are thoroughly disappointed and so feel that you do not fully appreciate the position.

We have near whites living under primitive or semi-primitive conditions. These have legal rights to full citizenship, which they cannot understand let alone exercise but *WE HAVE FULL BLOODS WHO ARE CULTURED ON THE FULL WHITE STANDARD*. What an indignity to have these branded as unfit to exercise the privileges of citizenship or to receive the benefits that accrue to the white person. We refrain from using names as a rule because dark folk have the same feelings as white people but what of David Uniapon and Rev. James Noble, full bloods, and christian gentlemen of education just to mention two who are famous. We can add to those names men of equal culture who are not so well known. What of little MENE, the child of 13 who won one of the Batman Essay Competition cups in the competitions recently carried out by the Uplift Society. Is he to grow up to be less than a man? We have even here in Victoria full blood natives and I call to mind one full blood family living here in Victoria, with the children in school with other colored children and whites for that matter. Some of these in this big family are just infants. Are they to grow up just different from those "favored" with white blood. This woman will get nothing for her maternity expenses but her neighbours get the bonus. In aboriginal eyes they are just the same as others and they live as others do on the "catch as catch can" basis. The most cultured christian gentleman who is not able to lay by sufficient for old age may not get a pension but must either go to an aboriginal station, there to queue up with all others to get the starvation issue that is given in most parts of Australia or have, if living privately to go to the police station for an even narrower ration. *If the white man wanted to think out an indignity for the man he has displaced, he could not do better than he has done by the natives.* We feel that while we are all indignant over Hitler's treatment of the Jews, we are getting the same treatment here and we would like this fact duly considered.

The Government has made its decision and we can quite understand the difficulties that presented themselves but they are more supposed than real. We do now definitely ask that there be added to this determination a proviso to this effect, *"NOTWITHSTANDING THIS POLICY, ANY PERSON OF MORE THAN HALF ABORIGINAL BLOOD MAY BE BROUGHT INTO THE BENEFITS OF THOSE OF HALF WHITE BLOOD IF IT CAN BE PROVEN TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE MINISTER THAT THEY ARE COMPETENT TO EXERCISE OR ENJOY THESE BENEFITS.* This is not in accordance with our claims but is a compromise. We claim

that the full rights should be admitted in law and the persons not competent to exercise them should be excised and provided for otherwise.

I have mentioned previously in correspondence a story which will show how the gun is loaded against the person of mixed parentage and how many times this circumstance has applied nobody can say. One of our finest women, very dark complexioned, splendidly educated and who taught bible class in one of our white Sunday Schools for years, became ill. Her husband was only a laborer. She applied for an invalid pension. It was refused on the ground that her illness was not necessarily chronic. Later, she qualified in age for the old age pension and applied for it. She was refused as being obviously more than half native. Being able, possibly one of our most educated women, she appealed to the Prime Minister, who regretted that the law did not permit granting a pension. She then applied for State aid (she should be entitled to one or the other) but was told that as she was more than half white she was not entitled to state aid. When the woman was told the result, she remarked that "I am too black for a pension and too white for relief as a necessitous aboriginal". She got nothing and her death closed a case which if presented publicly would have brought matters to a head.

I would emphasise that what we are asking for the aboriginal born in Australia is already available to chinese, japanese, or other alien, if they happen to be born here.

May we claim the further attention we are seeking.