

**William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for the Interior, John McEwen, Canberra, 3 January 1939, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858**

I am writing to dissociate myself and the league from the published utterances of the President of the newly formed aboriginal organisation, the Aborigines' Progressive Association (Mr J. T. Patten).

Mr Patten has recently telegraphed the Western Australian Government on its attitude toward missionaries and missions, "our greatest enemies". This league has no such feelings against missions and feel that they have been and are our best friends. We fully approve of your reported appreciation of missions and the intention to implement your new native policy largely through missions.

Mr Patten has also advocated over the air the formation of aboriginal regiments. I am father of a soldier who gave his life for his King on the battlefield and thousands of colored men enlisted in the A.I.F. They will doubtless do so again though on their return last time, that is those who survived, were pushed back to the bush to resume the status of aboriginals. I feel that Mr Patten is previous in that the aboriginal now has no status, no rights, no land and, though the native is more loyal to the person of the King and the throne than is the average white he has no country and nothing to fight for but the privilege of defending the land which was taken from him by the white race without compensation or even kindness. We submit that to put us in the trenches, until we have something to fight for, is not right.

The enrolment of aboriginal regiments would of course prove that the aboriginal had some value but it would only be in the circumstance of the native levies of European countries, as, for instance, the Senegalese. It is the creation of a mercenary army not an army of men fighting for all that is dear in life.

My point, Mr M'Ewan, is that the enlistment of natives should be preceded by the removal of all disabilities. Then, with a country to fight for, the aborigines would not be one whit behind white men in value. Can you not get my point. Can we not have a "Balfour declaration" for natives of a national home in Australia. It will cost nothing to give the native born in the land the same right, not merely of the persons of European blood, but of Maoris and people of Chinese, Japanese or other Asiatic peoples, who may happen to be born in Australia, but it will give a great asset to Australia and the addition of a valuable unit of additional population.