

**William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Premier of New South Wales, Bertram Stevens, 20 February 1939, New South Wales Archives and Records, NRS 905, Item No. [12/7584.1]**

On November 28th I forwarded a letter, copy herewith, to the Chairman of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, covering a petition of the natives of Cumeroogunga for the removal of Mr and Mrs M'Quiggan from the charge of the aboriginal station. To this communication I did not receive a reply but it was received for the names of the petitioners were posted at the Station, inviting those who wished to remove their names to do so. I submit that this is not in accordance with British tradition and would not be done for a fully white community and in itself constitutes a further grievance. The conditions which were so objectionable became more aggravated until the victimisation experienced forced a number of the people to leave New South Wales for Victoria, where they are living under very hard conditions.

I submitted our grievances and the people would have been satisfied if the enquiry had been granted, unless that enquiry was conducted by the very officers we are protesting about. We felt that in inviting the Chairman of the Board to arrange for this we were not going past those who had the administration of aboriginal affairs. Our people were prepared to submit their complaints and to support them with evidence and we felt that it was only necessary to do this when the will to do a fair thing would give some amelioration.

We aborigines are not agitators. We feel we have a right to British Fair Play and do make our representations in the right quarters, often with considerable satisfaction to ourselves, particularly in the Federal sphere. We ask only what we feel that the White public is willing to concede to us, for it is our experience that the general public is sympathetic to the Native cause. We feel we have grievances, not against the Government, nor so much against the Board itself as those who are employed by the Board and who act in a way the Board would not agree to, if it knew the facts. It never does know the facts for the only source of information by the Board is that submitted by the very officers we are protesting about. We are not an enemy people, and we are not in Nazi concentration camps. Why should we then be treated as though we were?

In regard to the present exodus from the station. This is our only way of protesting and of directing attention to the wrongs we are compelled to endure. It has had the effect of doing this and now that we have been able to bring the matter to the notice of the Government I trust we can expect that fair deal we seek. This is no ordinary strike, seeking conditions that employers will not concede. It is merely drawing attention to conditions which neither Government, Parliament nor Public would suffer, if they but knew them and to seek the conditions which we believe all three above mentioned would be glad to accede to.

A contented aboriginal population will be an asset, and we are satisfied very little, and we realise that the Government would like us to be happy and contented.

I have just visited the people in Barmah and the people tell me

1. That the treatment by the manager is very bad, that he uses vile language to them and is very abusive. The people are frightened of him at any time, for we have been

cowed down so long, but the fact that he carries a rifle about with him makes matters worse. We have been decimated with the rifle among other things and fear the result of one being carried now. Because of his utter unsuitability they ask that he be removed from the superintendency.

2. The rations are inadequate. The scale will be well known to you and its value can be checked up on. Unemployed natives in Victoria receive the "dole" and we feel that unemployed natives should be nearer this scale than they are. Our children are undernourished and this fact can be ascertained by examination.

3. Housing is inadequate and unsatisfactory.

4. The milk supply is impure and contaminated. With other factors the health of the people is bad and I append a list of infant deaths during the time Nurse Pratt was in charge of the treatment rooms. Mortality figures, including infant mortality is too high and should be investigated.

5. Education at Cumeroogunga is most unsatisfactory and our children are not acquiring a reasonable education. We consider that the present teacher is unsuitable and should be replaced.

6. The people feel keenly that the women do not receive the Child endowment direct and do not have the spending of the money for their children which White mothers have. We particularly resent being refused endowment altogether since the trouble and would suggest that this matter be specially followed up. Is the action taken legal? Our people applied for the endowment on 6th and 13th inst. and were refused.

The setting out of the above facts will show that we feel that we labor under disabilities that should not have to be suffered. We trust we have satisfied you that an enquiry is justified. May we therefore ask that you make it possible for the people to return to their homes because if they do so under present conditions they know they will be subjected to worse treatment still than they have suffered in the past ...