

A. P. A. Burdeu, President, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Chief Secretary of New South Wales, G. C. Gollan, 19 March 1939, New South Wales Archives and Records, NRS 905, Item No. [12/7584.1]

Rev. W. Morley, Vice-President of the Association for the Protection of Native Races, has told me of his interview with you and of your assurance that it is not proposed to raid aboriginal homes to take therefrom the girls and boys for Cootamundra and Kinchela. Personally I never thought it was contemplated, but when the manager, Mr McQuiggan, who is the one who put fright into native women by saying that it was to be done, my opinion wasn't worth much. I shall now pass that word on to the people and it will be accepted. Having said that, I do want to say that I feel that the homes are a good thing and there should be encouragement to allow the children to go. With tact I believe that it will be possible to keep the homes full with the good will of the natives. I am sure that the management of the homes is quite good.

I am sorry that I am not able to have a heart to heart talk with you for I am sure that if it were possible you would be pleased. This letter must do instead and I trust you will give full consideration to what I say.

It is now some years since the natives asked me to be President. None of the coloured people had the requisite ability for the position and they had every confidence in me. They feel that I am different from other white men in that I think as they do and understand them. Even their best friends have not this faculty, so they affirm. I accepted the position and resolved to endeavour to give that leadership that would be helpful to the people. As a Christian and being sure that the means of uplift must necessarily be with a Christian background, I sought to hedge them off any course that was unwise. To be definite, I have felt that this people, emerging from a subservient status, were in danger of being captured by subservient elements. This I wished to avoid. The people are loyal to the person of the Sovereign and the Throne, to a degree that many whites of their social stratum are not, but I have felt that they are a potential menace, given wrong leadership or in the absence of sane leadership. I have felt a responsibility to be of real assistance. Under my influence a campaign of seeking amelioration by goodwill has been carried out, with notable results in the Federal Sphere. My argument has been that the British people are minded to be fair and we should seek to let the claims of the natives be known by the constituency. I have argued that Governments reflected the mind of the constituency and that we should work to secure our aims by convincing the Administration of the justice of our claims in the first place and of our readiness to cooperate in making a success of what is done on our behalf. The policy of the League and its method of work has been definitely outworked in this way. I feel sure that our work over the years, in creating favourable opinion, and seeking relief by the means calculated to make the ones from whom we receive it feel glad to afford it, rather than to win something against the will of those in authority, has been quite good. I have been considerably thwarted by the action of those in authority in the present case.

When the petition to the chairman of the A.P.B. was returned and posted, with the intimation that anyone who wished could remove their name, a breach of good conduct was all that it could be classed as, as well as conveying the implication of victimisation. I know you would not have been party to such a breach of good conduct and if it had been done to any group of white people public feeling would have been

outraged.

If you regarded the walk out as a strike, when request for an inquiry was made, at least the persons would have been told, if an organised trades union, that return would be the first condition. I have sought in every way to get the enquiry but have had no response and feel that such disrespect could not but aggravate the position. In fact the only person to make the statement that the enquiry would not be held was the manager, Mr McGuiggan. Such a statement, in such circumstances was improper.

I mention these things to show that all my efforts to help the people in their emancipation can be nullified by want of due consideration on the part of the Administration. I want to see these folk come into full citizenship without a suspicion of anything subversive but the present A.P.B. methods can only cause this. It is as impossible to stop the progress of the aboriginal to full culture as it would be to block the tide of the sea and equally undesirable. The proper method by the Administration can only make these people a real asset.

I would like to remark that all the native needs till he is master of his own destiny is PROTECTION and this is admitted in the Board's title, Aborigines' Protection Board. Till now it has been the Persecution Board. The natives are afraid of the Board and the police, which the native mind joins. This fact leads me to make [a] request that when the enquiry is made that you give the right to give evidence to each native with the promise that there will not be victimisation for evidence given. There have been enquiries galore, held by Caesar in respect of the charges against Caesar. The natives have found the enquiries have always left them the defeated party and victimisation followed. If a free enquiry is allowed, and this league is allowed to be represented thereat, with the right of crossexamining witnesses you will have a story of the oppression of these people so obvious that you will realise that there is need for reform in the administration. I am sure you will see justice done but it cannot be when the people have not assistance which the league wishes to give.

I may say that I advised the natives to return to Cumeroogunga, telling them that I was sure they would get justice (this I believe). The advice was not welcome but many have done so. The others will if they can be satisfied that justice will really be done. The best way to prove this is to send your investigator as soon as possible, allowing this league to be represented by a person, whom we are satisfied with. He is not a lawyer. May I appeal to you to do this. I do. I shall be glad to have fair notice of the date of the enquiry.

Our relations with the Federal Government have been most cordial and I feel we have the utmost respect from the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Interior. I pledge the League to always go more than halfway to meet any gesture of trust. The kernel of our plea for a place in Australia is always that we feel that the native has a right to prove himself as an asset. We have urged that it is possible that an Aboriginal policy should always be self-liquidating in the expense it involves. The aboriginal has a part he can play in the developing of Australia and he wants that part. Given the helping hand up, White Australia will yet find the aboriginal not its least valuable asset.

I look for an early reply and thank you in anticipation of it.