

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Premier, New South Wales, Bertram Stevens, 19 February 1936, New South Wales Archives and Records, NRS 12060, Item No. [12/8749-8750]

My organisation is deeply troubled and grieved over developments in Aboriginal control in New South Wales, at any rate at Cumeroogunja. For some years now, in addition to the regular rationing, unemployed dark men have been issued with a ration for themselves and their families. The ration was meagre, certainly, but it was eked out to maintain life though it could not prevent cases of malnutrition. Recently action has been taken at Cumeroogunja to stop the rations of all families of which the breadwinner was an able bodied man. These have been directed to seek employment.

At the moment seasonal occupation is available and the men are so engaged but this will soon pass and we can only see starvation ahead for our people. Already distress is evident which will be accentuated by the approach of winter. We appeal to you, at once, to direct that adequate rations be issued to all dark folk needing them. In other words, we ask for a reversion to the practice obtaining prior to the recent action. But we ask this more as a temporary measure.

Aboriginal natives, no matter what the state of their culture, are debarred by legislation from obtaining sustenance as granted to white unemployed, *and to dark unemployed here in Victoria* as well as to the whites. This we contend is unreasonable and unfair as well as being quite unchristian. We definitely ask that the dole be extended to the dark people where they are unemployed in the same conditions as applies to whites. We feel that our request is most reasonable.

We anticipate that the question of cost will be raised but whatever that may be will be offset by the ration not issued and the cost will be further offset by work done for the dole. We do quite definitely feel that we are entitled to reasonable comfort, merely from the fact that this land was ours, with assured living, before the whites came, but we do not want to stress that because we believe that the emancipation of our race will not come that way. It is our considered opinion that the dark man must be taught to be self-reliant and industrious and to win his rights by sheer worthiness. Work for the dole will do this. Men will be paid for work done and they will spend the money obtained to purchase necessities. If these can be purchased from the depot at the station when a native is resident on one, this would be preferable to their having to go to a privately kept store. Those not living on a station would of course purchase their goods in the usual way.

The second matter is causing deep perturbation and even grief to the mothers. It is reported that, consequent on a visit of high officials to Cumeroogunja many of the young girls, some as tender in years as 13, have been compulsorily taken from their homes and, in some cases sent to situations, which they report are very hard. (It is quite realised that this may merely be because of the inexperience of the girls). Other girls, who have not had any training, are being sent to Cootamundra, which our people regard with dread as in the nature of a gaol. I have no very certain information as to the definite particulars of this complaint but you will have full details.

I would request, Sir, that you go personally into these two matters and that you deal with them with a kindness our race has not experienced.

Trusting to hear from you in reply at a very early date and hoping your communication will be of the nature of good news, I have the Honor to be, Your obedient servant ...