

William Cooper, Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Premier of New South Wales, Bertram Stevens, 15 November 1936, New South Wales Archives and Records, NRS 12060, Item No. [12/8749-8750]

There are two communications from my league to you which have not been acknowledged and one which received a somewhat evasive answer, or so it seemed to me. The dates of the communications were for the first two, February 19th. of this year, and of the latter May 16th. I am quite certain that the delay has been due to your overseas visit, and am just as sure that had the matters come to your notice in the normal way, you would have received them, and have given them your careful consideration. I am summarising the communications and request your earnest kindly consideration.

I requested that you hear a deputation from this league on some occasion when you are in Melbourne, as doubtless you will be from time to time. The requests are:

(1) That full citizen rights be accorded to all aborigines whether living on a settlement or not. This to include sustenance where aborigines are not able to secure work.

This league appeals for full rights as enjoyed by white people and naturalized aliens, these rights being civic, political and economic. We claim the right to work for full wages or the payment of full sustenance (dole) if unable to work. We contend that our women should receive the maternity bonus in cases of childbirth. In short, we claim the removal of all disabilities so that an aboriginal person shall have the same status as the white person, a maori or a naturalised alien. In our deputation we would seek to convince you of the capacity of every member of our race in N.S.W. for full citizenship.

(2) That no-one be expelled from an aboriginal station without an enquiry to be conducted by the A.P. Board and that the aboriginal charged in such cases be entitled to assistance (legal or otherwise).

We contend that many men and women have been expelled for no good reason as agitators. Some of these have been good christians of unblemished character. We do feel that some, at least, have been irregular, being done by the manager without reference to the Board, or without the full case being presented. The cruel operation of expulsion is particularly felt when the person is old and desiring to go home in the evening of life. We appreciate the need of discipline, but this is aided when an inquiry takes place, as, if there should be any offence, due notice can be taken of it. The person will, if given a hearing, have the feeling of justice done. The assistance is asked for as one with a good case would be given the opportunity of presenting it satisfactorily.

(3) That lands occupied by aboriginals be developed by them, suitable instruction and necessary equipment being provided. When men are adequately trained, that opportunity be given to dark men to cultivate land for their own profit.

We will be able to show you that our men have been able to succeed in the past, and given a chance we are sure that many of them will succeed in the future. All we ask is that the lands now in use as aboriginal stations be fully exploited. When a native has

proved his capacity for successful work, and capacity to manage his own affairs, he be allowed to settle land for his own profit. We are aware that reasons will be given to show the impracticability of this proposal, but we have a complete answer to any objectors. We feel that the native will be assured of some income, and that the costs of the A.P. Board will be reduced if a fair try out is given to this proposal. A definite preliminary proposal is set out at some length later in this letter.

(4) That the schools now provided for aboriginal children be raised to the standard of schools provided for white children and that the curriculum of native schools be the same as that in the schools of white children.

It is an open secret that dark children are not to receive education beyond the third grade and they are not getting it in the schools conducted by the department. We claim that our children should get the full opportunity of attaining the fullest primary education and for secondary education where the capacity is evident. Our people say that they want their children to be able to become doctors, nurses, teachers, etc., just as it has been possible for other natives, Fijian, Indian, etc., in other parts. We claim that our race is just as capable and you will appreciate that we only ask the chance of doing so where competence is present.

(5) That parliamentary representation be allowed to aboriginals in the same way as the maoris of New Zealand are catered for.

The maoris have four members in their legislature. Until the time that there is no aboriginal problem we do feel that a member in the House to present their case and conserve their interests is but fair.

In the matter of the development of aboriginal lands we submitted a proposal for a try out at Cumeroounga, named because of its ideal situation on the Murray, with abundance of good water, with land easily irrigible, with fertility of soil and convenience to markets. We proposed as follows:

ORANGE CULTURE: At Madowla Park, near Cumeroounga, there is a grove of trees from which an average of 1750 per year is obtained, giving employment to six men through the year, including aboriginals, by the way. We suggest a planting of a number of trees at Cumeroounga. Of course other citrus fruits could be added according to the advice of your experts.

TOMATO CULTURE: This area would be quite as early as Echuca and the early crop would be marketable at profitable rates. The returns for the first year could cover all costs in connection with the planting. Late crops of the fruit could be pulped or distributed to the inhabitants of Cumeroounga or other stations. There has been tomato culture at Cumeroounga years ago, by certain of the dark folk. The breakdown of their pumping engine stopped what was a promising venture.

VINE CULTURE; TOBACCO CULTURE: Success is obtained in parallel circumstances elsewhere and we submit that experimental plots be established. We could add rice culture as the Murray flats can be so easily flooded for this cereal.

LUCERNE CULTURE: It is open to doubt if pig raising for the central markets would be a success, owing to the remoteness from the railhead at Picola (9 miles) and the distance from the markets. Ultimately curing would make it a possibility, but meantime an experimental plot of lucerne and a few cows and pigs would be of value, from the point of view of the instruction given and the supply of local needs.

FINANCE: We realise that this will be raised and in anticipation we would direct your attention to the Act of Congress, approved June 18th., 1934, to which you have doubtless access. (Public ... No. 383 ... 73rd. Congress). This Act provides for the development of Indian lands and for an appropriation from which loans could be made to Indians for the development of the lands. Our proposals could be made on a purely business basis, and we feel that there need not be any loss on the experiment. There will not be if the experiment be sympathetically made as a constructive move for the removal of admittedly difficult problems.

GOVERNMENT EXPERIMENTAL STATION: We suggested that the experimental work could be coupled with general experimental work as carried out by governments. This would enable your experts to couple with the ameliorative work for the aboriginals the matter of the exploitation of the Murray River lands, now so largely under forest, and yet of vast potential wealth. It may be that the dual aspect of our proposals will enhance the prospects of a thorough try out.

The labour for the work requiring to be done will be, of course, by the natives, who would work for sustenance received, receiving also a part of the profit according to the labour given.

Cumeroogunga is potentially wealthy. The people are very poor. We feel that such poverty in such potential wealth is wrong. We suggest that the needs of the people be related to the capacity of the soil for mutual advantage of the administration and the natives.

In submitting this I would be pleased if you would regard it as an earnest [demonstration] of the desire of the aboriginal to co-operate for his own uplift. I would suggest that our League can be, and is, willing to be of material aid in the uplift of our race. We therefore ask your most favourable consideration.