

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to Sir John Harris, Secretary, Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 16 March 1937, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, Weston Library, Oxford University, MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 22, G378

Steady improvement in prospects, if not yet in actual experience, characterises the administration of Mr Lyons as Prime Minister of Australia, as far as aboriginal matters are concerned and we are glad to pay this tribute. Still we have to plead our cause and argue our rights and in one matter in particular we are seeking your assistance. It may be that the changing battleground gives us advantages and when Mr Lyons arrives in London it will be to our advantage to impress on him that his responsibilities follow him.

I am forwarding herewith a copy of our correspondence with the Prime Ministers Dept. which gets nowhere with the usual departmental disposition to introduce red herrings or evade the point at issue. You are familiar with every aspect of the case, I know, but you will permit me to reiterate. We claim the right to advance to full European culture and we feel that the time is "ripe and rotten ripe" for a plan to take the place of the haphazard of the past. The aborigines must no longer be regarded as a necessary evil but a responsibility. We are the potential solution of the neglected empty spaces and a plan of culture, giving the aboriginal the status of manhood, will result in the peopling of the vast hinterland so unsuited to the European, with a virile race capable of developing the vast resources of Australia. A statesmanlike policy will make Australia safe to the Empire for the Aboriginal is more British often than the white. They are intensely loyal to the person of the King and the Empire and as they lose the primitive culture, destined to ultimately perish, they assume the culture of Britain. Trained in modern conditions, the aboriginal will be the bulwark of the defence system as it affects the country so peculiarly his own. How preferable is this policy for settling Australia to bringing in of Southern Europeans, a policy which is already disadvantageous where it has been done.

In the matter particularly in question at the moment we would refer you to the letter of Mons. Gsell. In this respect we ask your support of our claims and the endeavour, as may be possible, to secure the agreement of Mr Lyons to the request for additional support for missions in respect of the work that is peculiarly the responsibility of the Government and not the missions, viz:— sustenance and education.

Appreciating greatly the work you are doing for us.