

**William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for the Interior, Thomas Paterson, 16 June 1937, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858**

I am addressing you personally for the matters I have to communicate are so important from the Aborigines' point of view that we wish to know that the matters have your own personal consideration.

You may have heard that I have a petition to the King signed by some 2000 members of my race, setting out our disabilities and praying the intervention of His Majesty to intervene for the prevention of the further extinction of our race and that we be granted representation in the Federal Parliament.

This petition was ready for despatch some two years ago and I had already consulted the Military Secretary to the Governor-General as to its presentation to His Excellency for Despatch to his Majesty when the promise was made that the future of our race would be considered at the next meeting of the Premiers, to be held in August 1936. Because we felt that there was a generally improved attitude toward the former owners of the land and in view of the definitely sympathetic attitude of the Hon. The Prime Minister and yourself we held over the presentation of the petition till this meeting could consider the matter. This meeting proved abortive, as far as the aboriginal cause was concerned, consideration being deferred to a meeting of departmental officers to be held in February 1937. This meeting was postponed till April and though it was held then, the only announcements in the press are the usual matters, which, coming from the Administration whose reaction to the aboriginal problem we find objectionable, is all we could expect. We feel that all the delay, all the expense, all the talk is just to result in "As you were". We looked to the political field, representative of public opinion, and we were shuffled on to the Administration, which has never been sympathetic, but always repressive.

Frankly, I am disappointed. We did look to this move as marking an epoch in our history. We asked [for] bread. We scarcely seem likely to get a stone. We are not surprised that the Administration gave scant notice, in the lack of expressed public opinion, to organisations of white people, who are not sufferers, but we did expect that when the native voice was organised to speak for itself, being actual sufferers, some notice would be taken.

Imposed on, defrauded, exploited, oppressed, we have no redress because our oppressors are private people but when it is a matter of administration we feel that we can claim British justice, which should remedy our wrongs without further delay.

I am aware that the old bogey of Finance will be urged but with the passing of the depression every other class of the community demands and gets relief. The greatest sufferers should be the first relieved but we claim "*THAT ABORIGINAL UPLIFT CAN, AND SHOULD BE MADE SELF-LIQUIDATING*".

For five long years our league has been functioning and seeking the removal of the 150 years old oppression. We have got nothing definite except the refusal of our claim for representation in the Federal Parliament—no result but a refusal—and no prospects but continued exploitation. 80,000 aborigines in Australia deliberately kept

from uplift and refused one representative in Parliament. Yet in New Zealand the same number of natives have four members and one minister for Native Affairs. Our need is greater because our people are scattered. We only ask for a member with the same status as the Member for the White Population in the Territories. We quote this separate representation as a precedent but urge our much larger numbers as a better reason for representation than has the white population of the Territories.

We did the reasonable thing in withholding our petition to his Majesty for two long years, but unless we are assured that something definite will be done without further delay we will go ahead and solicit the intervention of His Majesty, which we believe we have the right to do and which prerogative the King has the right to exercise.

The aboriginal is poor, desperately poor, and designedly kept poor and no white man of means is sufficiently interested in our cause to spare of his means something for our uplift. If we had the means ourselves, or if it was made available we are sure that the first expense would be the greatest and that progress would be possible by the profits of the venture. We claim that the native has a right to live in the "Land of His Fathers". We claim he has the right to this without the need for working for it but we know that this is not desirable and would do harm to the race. We therefore claim the right to work for our living under modern conditions. We want the right to full education, academic, cultural and industrial and to be able to take our place beside the white race in full equality and responsibility. We ask the right to be fully British. In claiming this we protest with all our might against the discrimination between the full blood and the half caste. All are aboriginals and prefer to be so. Even near whites are more disposed to lean to the aboriginal side of the ancestry than the white.

The whole attitude of the administration is framed without regard to native opinion and from the assumption that the dark man admits the superiority of the White and desires incorporation in that race. This is most decidedly wrong.

The two races, side by side yet distinct, cannot be with any prejudice to the white race for our numbers are so inconsequential beside the number of whites. Equality in law will not mean actual equality as we know we must still suffer the disability of a minority and of color but equality in law is what we are asking.

Given time you will find that the dark race will prove an asset to Australia, being British to the core and loyal to a man.

While I have necessarily had to speak candidly, you will know that it is not personal. We know how well meaning the Prime Minister and yourself are and this we appreciate. We are further withholding the petition for a little longer while we ask what is the utmost you are prepared to do in the way of remedying our injustices.