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Alexander Street,
Mooroopna.
27th August, 1945.

The Rt. Hon. J. B. Chifley, M.H.R.,
Prime Minister of Australia.

Dear Sir,

I beg leave to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 23rd inst. and to state that it is very gratifying to know that you appreciate my remarks; they are really an expression of what has come from within. I regret much that you are unable to receive a deputation but am glad to note that you are willing to accept a statement setting out specifically matters that I wish to discuss with you.

When I first made application to you to receive a deputation, it was with the view in mind of securing personal contact, for I verily believe there is more to be gained personally than by letter writing, however, I shall make an effort to give you a brief outline of what I consider will help solve our problem and go a long way towards bringing about the amelioration of the conditions of our people.

(1) The system of administration

For more than a century we have been under a system that has been pauperising us, and I believe that any system which tends to pauperise a people is not uplifting, for this reason, we have been kept in a servile condition with no incentive to industry or progress. At present we are under the States administration, each State has its Aborigines Protection Board. This Board we understand is a trustee to disburse to the best advantage the moneys appropriated by the States for our maintenance, education, and general welfare. There are other responsibilities devolving upon the Board besides feeding, clothing and educating us by the terms Protection Board. We understand an institution which stands for promoting encouraging and if needs be creating such influences, that will make for our social, moral, intellectual development, and for intercepting those things which are inimical to our advancement. In these things we must say the Board has not lived up to its responsibility. We have not made any progress under its administration. For many years we have endeavoured to have the natives placed under Federal control.

(2) Native Representation.

In 1939 we made a application to the Federal Government for native representation in the Federal House. Some said "we were incapable of legislative powers". Mr. Joseph Lyons, late Prime Minister said "It was against the constitution of the Federal Government to allow Aborigines to enter parliament, the only way possible was by a referendum". The Aborigines are no longer a back number but are alive to the possibilities which confront them in these modern times and that was demonstrated in the fact that they played their part in this great enterprise, the struggle for freedom and justice. They fought and died with their comrades. There must be a beginning, and one is only to be reminded of the "Namasudra" people of India who astounded the aristocratic Brahmins with their intelligence. I say most emphatically that we do possess these combative qualities which enable us to hold our own in the stern contest of civilisation. I have discovered amongst our statesmen and politicians a very great failure to legislate for the betterment and preservation of our race.

(3) Citizen Rights.

I am amazed to find amongst the educated people of Australia such limited intelligence as to suggest that the aborigines are not fit and proper persons to receive citizen rights. When I look at the progress that aliens have made because they have been assisted and encouraged by the people of Australia, then I wonder why we are refused such status in our own country. Were we granted citizen rights we would be entitled to Maternity allowances, the old age and invalid pensions, child endowment, the right to vote and other blessings which we do not now enjoy.



(4) Education.

Most of our people are educated on aboriginal reserves. Teachers appointed to these schools as a rule are unclassified, and inexperienced, and in many cases act as managers of the reserves. They mostly work with a mutilated syllabus, reading, writing, and arithmetic which stand first in the curriculum of every school throughout the Commonwealth is not regularly and systematically taught and for that reason education becomes only a plaything and not a reality. Compulsory education should be introduced in aboriginal schools and teachers should all be classified. Technical education should be introduced and every effort made to secure good and regular attendance. Amongst other coloured races there are higher institutions, and cannot similar institutions be provided here, that the most able and capable ones may have the opportunity to aspire to higher things. An effort should be made to encourage secondary education with the view of securing entry to Universities and studying Law, Medicine, Science, Theology etc. Girls should be trained for domestic duties and nurses also.

(5) Unemployment.

During the post war period of the 1914-18 war our people practically lived in a state of semi starvation brought about by the depression. In normal times we are debarred from taking positions in the railways, trams, forest and Postal Department. If we possess the necessary qualifications, I consider we should be given positions wherever the vacancies occur, that is, equal rights. I am not asking for preferences. Plans have already been made for post war reconstruction and rehabilitation. Our boys will come back and probably go back to compounds or reserves, and there, spend their days without any incentive to progress or achievement. I suggest they be given land in perpetuity of sufficient areas in irrigated districts where they could settle permanently and make homes of their own. At present the aborigines are landless proletarians without any hope in the world, every bit of land on which they are living in reserves or compounds is vested in the Aborigines Protection Board.

(6) Remarks.

The aborigines should be divided into three classes the civilised the semi-civilised and the uncivilised. It should be the duty of our rulers to devise means whereby the needs of each class should be adequately met. Aborigines should be trained and sent out amongst their own people working firstly through the civilised to the semi-civilised, and eventually reaching the uncivilised, by this personal contact the aborigine himself would see a definite improvement in the conditions of one of his own.

An aboriginal inspector should be appointed to visit them from time to time and report failures and improvements. As the original owners of this country we should have a share in the administration of our own race and I strongly urge the Government to make an appointment of this kind.

I trust Sir, I have given you my views in an honest and straightforward manner. I thank you for the privilege of submitting this letter. I admit that I might have expressed my thoughts in a crude and unpolished manner but without any thought of abusing my privilege as a writer. Will you kindly give this matter your careful consideration and judge my claim on the facts I have submitted herewith?

Yours faithfully,

Acknowledged.

(SGD.) SEADRACH L. JAMES.

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