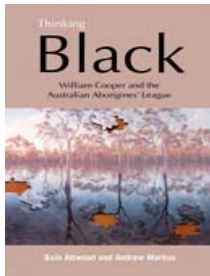


**Thinking black: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League** by Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004, pp. 144, A\$34.95, paperback, ISBN 0-85575-459-1.



The historians Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus have added another work of collected documents to their corpus of material on the history of Aborigines in Australia. This collection reproduces material that the authors have published before, some of which was contained in their 1999 collection *The struggle for Aboriginal rights: A documentary history* and rather more in Markus' 1986 collection *Blood from a stone: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League*. However, in adding additional sources the authors have also drawn on recent developments in Australian historiography, which place greater emphasis on the autonomy of indigenous peoples.

Consequently we may look afresh at Cooper's correspondence with government officials tasked with Aboriginal supervision in the 1930s. In it we can see the growing articulacy of a man and the coherence of the politics he saw as the way forward for his people. Largely, these were the aspirations of citizenship in an age when indigenous peoples were considered incapable of holding it, but among Cooper's claims was one for an indigenous member of parliament. The campaign he mobilised, including the petition he tried to send to King George V, are well documented in the book. Attwood and Markus borrow a phrase from one of Cooper's letters – 'thinking black' – to resolve the difficulty of an indigenous politics that did not yet exhibit many of the features that the term indigenous connotes today.

The 1938 Day of Mourning is also well covered in the book, with the key texts, newspaper clippings and important correspondence between Cooper and his co-organisers included. The occasion was held in Sydney on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of British colonisation to draw attention to the exclusion of Australian Aborigines and remains important as a moment of indigenous political unity and dignity. By the late 1930s, however, Cooper had become increasingly disillusioned, worn down and angered by the repeated denials of Australian authorities.

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