

STIR AMONG BLACKS

70 LEFT STATION
70 ARG. - 6 FEB 39

Consternation has been caused among the 350 aboriginal residents of the Cumeroogunga station, on the New South Wales side of the Murray River, by fears, officially described as groundless, that the station is to be declared a compound.

Taking their belongings, about 70 of the aborigines deserted the settlement on Friday, crossed the river in boats, and established a camp on the Victorian bank.

On the same day an aborigine who came to the station about a week ago from Sydney was arrested by New South Wales police and charged with having induced aborigines to leave their reserve. He was released on bail.

In Melbourne yesterday a statement was issued by the honorary secretary of the Australian Aborigines' League (Mr. W. Cooper), who said that a deputation had arrived from the station to discuss the position with him.

Representations had been made to the New South Wales Government and the leader of the Opposition in New South Wales, he said. Mr. Cooper claimed that the "refugees" were in need of food.

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Interviewed by telephone last night, the manager of the station, which is under the control of the New South Wales Aborigines' Protection Board (Mr. A. J. McQuiggan), said:—"A scare has been worked up among the aborigines, but we expect it to blow over in about a week, and then they will drift back again. They were told that their children would be taken from them, that the money they earn would be taken by the Government, and that the station was to become a closed compound, which they could not leave without permission.

"I have telegraphed the board in Sydney, and I have received a reply that there is absolutely no truth in the allegations. A notice has been posted up reassuring the aborigines.

"The aborigines are well supplied with food, because only last Thursday they received their issue of rations—the amounts of which are laid down in the regulations. They were given flour, tea, sugar, baking powder, dripping, jam, rice, oatmeal, powdered milk, potatoes, and onions, and other extras.

"They also received their weekly child endowment payments of 5/ for each child under 14 years."

At the station settlement the aborigines live in cottages, and are free to come and go as they desire. They receive rations from the Government, while some of the men earn wages by working for farmers and orchardists. A hospital staffed by two nurses provides medical attention at the station.