Taking Stock
Aboriginal Autonomy Through Enterprise

1972 - 1992
20 YEARS
GROWING STRONG

The Arnhem Land Progress Association 1972 – 92

Samantha Wells

North Australia Research Unit
Australian National University
Darwin 1993
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AADS  Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services
ABS   Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABTA  Aboriginals Benefit Trust Account
ABTF  Aborigines Benefits Trust Fund
AD    ALPA documentation
ADC   Aboriginal Development Commission
AEDP  Aboriginal Employment Development Policy
ALC   Aboriginal Loans Commission
ALPA  Amhlem Land Progress Association
AR    ALPA Annual Report
ARDT  Aboriginal Resource and Development Service
ASTS  Aboriginal Store Training School (ALPA)
CC    Central Committee (ALPA)
CDEP  Community Development Employment Projects
CEDAR Civic and Economic Development Council Inc
DAA   Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DEIR  Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
DEET  Department of Education, Employment and Training
EKRTS East Kimberley Region Aboriginal Training School
FITIQ Food Industry Training Institute of Queensland
KARAS Katherine Aboriginal Retail Advisory Service
MOM   Methodist Overseas Mission
NACC  National Aboriginal Consultative Committee
NCW   North Centre West
NEAT  National Employment and Training System
NLC   Northern Land Council
NSW   New South Wales
NT    Northern Territory
Qld.  Queensland
RATE  Remote Area Teacher Education
SA    South Australia
UAICC United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
UCNA  United Church in North Australia
UCA   Uniting Church of Australia
Vic.  Victoria
WA    Western Australia
PREFACE

The first question that you as a potential researcher have to answer is, why am I engaged in the process of research in Aboriginal communities? Why am I here? Is it really for Aboriginal people? (Shaw 1990, 3).

The Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) has operated stores for up to twenty years in many Arnhem Land communities. It started by buying ration stores formerly operated by the Methodist Overseas Mission. These were mainly small, poorly stocked counter stores, generally operated on an intermittent basis by the mission staff and their families. The organisation at both the local level and at the central administrative level has gone through many changes during its twenty years in operation including its formal separation from the Church, the building up and expansion of the retail store infrastructure in each ALPA member community, and various changes in direction and philosophy under the leadership of the different ALPA Group Managers (now called Executive Directors). In an era when the operation of retail stores in remote communities has proved extremely risky (see Young 1984), ALPA has succeeded in providing the communities with efficient, well stocked, modern retail stores with many ancillary services.

Since its inception ALPA has seen itself as an alternative development agency catering for Aboriginal communities both in Arnhem Land and in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Not content with providing an essential retail service, ALPA has viewed the stores and the profits generated by the stores as a means of providing training, scholarships and other educational opportunities for Aboriginal people, allocating starter loans for family and clan businesses, and underwriting community projects in the settlements in which it operates. ALPA has provided store training services to other organisations such as Anangu Winkiku Stores (AWS) in Alice Springs and non-ALPA Aboriginal communities across the north of Australia. Throughout its history the Association has remained fiercely proud of its economic independence of government.

Although ALPA has successfully operated stores in Aboriginal communities for over twenty years, there are many unresolved issues facing the organisation today. Many of these issues are not directly concerned with ALPA the organisation, although there are some which pertain directly to the nature and style of operation of this particular organisation. Problems have arisen because of the difficulties associated with service delivery to remote Aboriginal communities and the conflict between the 'money side' as opposed to the 'community side' of the organisation providing these services. Sometimes the problems are really part of the politics in settlements or the typical grumblings made by most store customers in any community, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. And sometimes the problems are part of the wider questions about the national and Territory economy, the politics of Aboriginal autonomy, Aboriginal land rights, the apparent paternalisms which dominate many non-Aboriginal dealings with Aboriginal people and so on.

As well as being proud of what the organisation has achieved and wanting this documented as a celebration of its twenty years in operation, ALPA was concerned
about resolving the issues and questions affecting the stores and the Association today. For this reason the Association sought an evaluation of its work hoping that the exercise would give some pointers on how best to deal with these issues while simultaneously achieving its constitutional objective of 'the social and economic development of Aboriginal people'. After negotiations with NARU, ALPA agreed to fund a large part of a research project with the following objectives:

- to produce a well documented history of ALPA, its activities and achievements over the last twenty years;
- to evaluate the objectives, goals and aspirations of ALPA, the relevance of those objectives, and how they have changed over time;
- to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and impacts of ALPA programs;
- to make comparisons with similar associations both in northern Australia and overseas;
- to make recommendations and suggest strategies for change.

These objectives were to be met by writing a history and a general historical evaluation of ALPA, preparing a draft evaluation of the Association for the Directors of ALPA, and preparing a comparative report of similar organisations. The research team assembled to work on the project comprised David Lea (Executive Director, NARU), Samantha Wells (Research Assistant, NARU), Greg Crough (Senior Research Fellow, NARU), Christine Christophersen (Research Assistant, NARU), Elspeth Young (Associate Professor, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra) and Ritchie Howitt (Lecturer, Macquarie University).

Data for the project were collected from eclectic sources. Some, especially in the early stages, were obtained from background reading on outback stores, indigenous enterprises and culture contact in general, particularly those readings concerned with reconciling western thought and business practice with Aboriginal thought and modes of production. This was followed by an in-depth study of the files of ALPA, archival material and of other organisations both in Australia and North America. Much of the information collected for the project was derived from structured and unstructured interviews with individuals and groups in homes, offices and communities; formal and informal discussions; meetings with communities, organisations and groups; and observation of events. For reasons of confidentiality, many names of people spoken to, especially in the communities, have been withheld.

Rough drafts of confidential reports were presented to ALPA's Board of Directors in July 1992. ALPA subsequently withdrew from the project leaving NARU to complete it. It is likely that NARU will publish Young's Support Organisations for Aboriginal Stores: the Arnhem Land Progress Association and its counterparts in Central Australia and the North American Arctic, and Crough and Christophersen's Some Perspectives on the Arnhem Land Progress Association in the near future.

This historical account of the Arnhem Land Progress Association reflects the organisation's pride in its survival, operations and growth over the last twenty years. It also reflects ALPA's concern about where it is going and where it should go. It is to the credit of the Association that it was eager to learn from the past and to share its experiences in what is a difficult and sensitive field. It is therefore appropriate that I
should first thank the Directors, management and staff of ALPA who supported this project and assisted me in many ways, in particular Stuart McMillan, George Rawnsley, Henry Harper, Lori Katarski, Donald Nulupani and David Djalangi. I would also like to thank the various ALPA representatives who read the final draft of the history manuscript and submitted comments in order to prevent or reconcile any discrepancies before publishing the work.

The store managers and their spouses in various Aboriginal communities provided me with much time, hospitality and knowledge. This was greatly appreciated as was the tolerance of the storeworkers as I nosed in and out of aisles or interrupted tea breaks for a chat. It is impossible to mention all the people who shared insights with me about their communities, lives, the stores and the Association but I would like to acknowledge this and for being given permission to experience first hand a remarkable land, people and culture. Other people (see Appendix 2) in towns around Australia also deserve mention for agreeing to be interviewed and making these interviews as pleasant and rewarding as possible. Stephen Evans was able to provide much insight and information into the workings of ALPA for which I am exceedingly grateful.

The North Australia Research Unit provided a congenial 'home' while I was working on this book. I am extremely appreciative of the research team's support, criticisms and discussions throughout the project. Especially David Lea who read and reread drafts providing constructive criticism, helpful suggestions and finding resting places for many wandering apostrophes. Other NARU staff and visitors to the Unit provided much assistance throughout the project, in particular Ann Webb (copy editing and production), Sally Roberts and Colleen Pyne (library research), Meriel Weir (computing), Nicki Hanssen, Janet Sincock, Jann King and Toni Bauman. NARU provided not just institutional help but financial assistance, technical help and hours of stimulating debate.

The Northern Territory Archives Service, the State Library and the Uniting Church provided much assistance and made the research task a little easier. My family, friends, housemates and associates all deserve mention for coping with the stress of what, at times, became a particularly difficult project. Thanks also to 'Green Ant' who designed the cover.

Finally my special thanks to Adrian Deville who served as editor, inspirationalist and friend the whole way through.

Note: NARU observes a number of publishing conventions in its publications. These are set out in a style booklet which is readily available. However, because many quotations are used throughout this book, it should be pointed out that material in quotations is never changed unless a series of full-stops indicates that something is omitted or square brackets indicate something has been inserted within them. Thus, within the quotations, there are frequent infelicities of style, grammar and spellings. Abbreviations are often different from those used in the text. For example there are various spellings of 'Yolngu' and Arnhem Land is sometimes presented as one word. These quotations are used because they are relevant or important to the text. I feel that the context will make any conflicts or ambiguities between text and quotations clear.
INTRODUCTION

Strong organizations that have adequate resources play a tremendous part in raising the status of Aboriginal people in their own eyes and in the eyes of non-Aboriginal society. Such organizations are able to negotiate with the non-Aboriginal society from a position of some strength and recognised position, to command respect and attention. Of course, they are not all equally successful but many of them are very successful; they have become an accepted part of Aboriginal society and generally retain the support of the people for whom or amongst whom the organization is set up ... (Commissioner Elliot Johnston, QC 1991, 23).

The Arnhem Land Progress Association Incorporated (ALPA) was established in 1972 by the United Church in North Australia with which the Methodist Overseas Missions had amalgamated. It is a retail organisation which currently operates stores in five Arnhem Land communities: Ramingining, Milingimbi, Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella), Galuwin'ku (Elcho Island) and Minjilang (Croker Island). ALPA offers management and accountancy services to other communities throughout northern Australia. These consultancy services are currently supplied to three Northern Territory communities (Belyuen, Warruwi and Umbakumba) and two in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (Warmun and Noonkanbah) (see Map 1). ALPA, although having a centralised administration section in Darwin, has a board of directors consisting of Aboriginal representatives from each of the communities in which it operates a retail store (see Appendix 1).

Since its beginnings, ALPA has maintained that the object of the Association was 'to further the social and economic development of the Aboriginal people in Australia'. ALPA's formation and the adoption of this objective coincided with the Whitlam government's notions of Aboriginal self-determination circulating at the time. An ALPA publication records that ALPA's 'mother' was the Methodist Church and its father was 'self-determination' (AD/ASTS 1983, 3). According to the Reverend Bernard Clarke, the Arnhem Land Progress Association was conceived in response to the widespread belief that Aboriginal people could only reach the nascent ideal of self-determination if they were economically independent. The formation of an organisation such as ALPA could assist Aboriginal people toward this end by the development of community stores which would eventually be owned, managed and staffed by Aboriginal people. ALPA is committed to both the principle and practice of 'community development' whilst striving to maintain efficient, viable community stores. These themes dominate the Association's history.

This study is a celebration of 20 years of ALPA's operations and involvement in many Aboriginal 'communities' throughout the north of Australia. Few organisations have had such a long, profitable and efficient existence and few communities could boast such modern, well stocked community stores. However, ALPA and other organisations concerned with establishing enterprises in Aboriginal communities, have had to contend with many factors which make the establishment of these enterprises difficult. These factors derive from: the way Aboriginal people and issues have been 'dealt' with in the past under different government policies and legislation; a backlash against the missionaries and the Church; the pragmatics of establishing a retail organisation in isolated Aboriginal communities with underdeveloped supply
lines, high transportation/freight costs, a limited local resource base and poor premises from which to operate the retail business; fluctuating government policies on finance; the lack of opportunity and skills training in managing enterprises given to Aboriginal people on the missions, government settlements or cattle stations; and the difficulties arising from socio-cultural and socio-economic differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies which include kinship networks, traditional authority hierarchies and intergroup relations, traditional exchange/reciprocity cycles and human/land responsibilities (see Ellanna et al 1988). The prime challenge faced by ALPA has been the conflict between its community development ideals and the pragmatics of establishing and building up a non-Aboriginal commercial practice.

In order to understand 'the ALPA story' and its successes and challenges, this book looks first at geographic, demographic, social and historical aspects of Arnhem Land and the Yolngu people. The movement of missionaries to the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve and the development of mission stations by the Methodist Overseas Mission is discussed in some detail. Some of the north and north-eastern Arnhem Land missions, settled during the early to mid twentieth century by the Methodist Overseas Mission, have particular relevance to this study as they are the areas in which the Arnhem Land Progress Association now operates its retail stores. Government-mission relationships and the support of the missionary movement in implementing such policies as protection and assimilation are discussed, as is the gradual breakdown in this relationship and its implications for Aboriginal people. Descriptions of the way in which stores operated under the mission system provide the historical context for an analysis of store changes which have taken place in a relatively short time frame under ALPA's administration.

The main section of the book examines the Association and the changes, achievements and failures that have occurred over the twenty year period. This includes the complete restructuring and building up of the community stores and the development of management and administrative systems to enable the Association to become a successful commercial enterprise. Various schemes that ALPA has initiated are discussed in detail. These include a wholesale operation; management and accounting consultancy work in both Western Australia and the Northern Territory; the establishment of Aboriginal Store Training School at Galiwin'ku; the Family Enterprise Scheme; and the nutrition program developed in conjunction with the Menzies School of Health Research. Each chapter follows the path of ALPA's successive Group Managers (later called Executive Director) because of the influence of each of their personalities on the growth and direction of the organisation.

The research for this project involved searching through a vast amount of documentation of both the Uniting Church and ALPA found in the Northern Territory Archives and in ALPA's archives. In addition to this, over twenty formal interviews were conducted with people across Australia who have had some involvement with ALPA in the past or others who could offer some insight into ALPA through their own experiences in similar situations. Many informal discussions were held with various people both in the communities and in Darwin. Visits were made to all the communities in which ALPA operates except Umbakumba. Being able to sit in on
various directors' meetings, community and council meetings provided much insight into the internal workings of the organisation as did many lengthy discussions with key ALPA personnel.

Young (1984) outlines some factors which need to be considered when studying isolated community stores. These include that people's views and understanding of these enterprises often conflict; individual viewpoints are coloured by the specific perspective held; and people are often ill-informed, basing their ideas on rumours triggered by the media through the 'local gossip cycle' (Young 1984, 1). Furthermore, Young contends that 'with the exception of Aboriginal customers receiving an appropriate service, most people see retail services in Aboriginal communities in a negative way'. This study, probably the most comprehensive of any conducted, was undertaken in 1982–83 but the sentiment is, in the main, still true. One difference is that many Aboriginal people are no longer content to accept the quality and quantity of services offered. To a certain degree, Aboriginal people are realising that they have consumer power and are beginning to exercise this in their stores and in their communities. ALPA has also accepted and acknowledged that there is a general negativity toward the service which they provide and has attempted to alter this predicament through the various measures discussed in chapter seven.

One of the fundamental problems in assessing community stores or the organisation operating these stores is highlighted by Young's question, 'are these stores to be assessed as commercial enterprises or are they primarily providers of an essential service, with an extremely strong social component?' Young argues that the failure to recognise the existence of these contrasting (or perhaps contradictory) goals explains the reasons for errors in store operation being repeated throughout their relatively short history (Young 1984, 3). Retail stores in Aboriginal communities have a mixed success rate in terms of the social and economic benefits provided to the communities. Many stores suffer from huge financial difficulties — often a result of mismanagement (usually by non-Aboriginal managers), poor accounting procedures and lack of support for the store by the communities. If this occurs the stores are usually placed in a debt situation to government funding bodies. Other ramifications of a malfunctioning store are expensive stock, a limited variety of stock, 'out-of-stock' situations on essential items and irregular store opening hours. The people who suffer from these circumstances are first and foremost the Aboriginal people residing in the communities. The community store is far too important an institution for this situation to be tolerated. The existence of ALPA has alleviated many of the problems surrounding the delivery of this particular service to Aboriginal communities. The following 'ALPA story' sheds light on how the Association has achieved this, the problems encountered in the process, the issues and challenges facing ALPA today and the future prospects of the Association.

Notes

1. In 1955–56 the United Church in North Australia (UCNA) was established as a cooperative venture of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. In 1972 the Methodist missions were integrated with it as a separate branch and called the Civic and Economic Development Council Incorporated (later renamed the Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services [AADS]). The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) was inaugurated in 1977 in Sydney with the United Church of
North Australia becoming its northern Synod. In this work, references to 'the Church' are either UCNA (pre 1977) or UCA (post 1977).

2. Reverend Clarke was employed by the MOM, the UCNA and then the UCA and was ALPA's second chairperson following the resignation of Reverend Gordon Symons.

3. According to Williams (1986) in all the dialects of north-east Arnhem Land, the word for Aboriginal human being is 'Yolngu'. McMillan, ALPA's Executive Director from 1988 to 1992, believes that the term 'Yolngu' can also be applied to non-Aboriginal people and is a general term for 'people' or human beings living in north-east Arnhem Land. The term 'Balanda' is usually used by north-east Arnhem Landers to describe non-Aboriginal people.

4. Most non-Aboriginal personnel in the communities are employed by either the Federal or Territory government. They order food from stores in Darwin which is flown into the communities. The particular department that employs them pays the air freight charges on these goods.
CHAPTER ONE

ABORIGINES, ARNHEM LAND AND MISSIONARIES

The whole question of the position of the aborigines in the Territory will require careful and patient consideration in its various bearings. There can be little doubt that the attack upon poor Noltenius, Houschildt, and party, was a premeditated and carefully organised scheme; the object of which was plunder. No one who knew the murdered men, and their honest, large-hearted natures, can, for one minute, imagine, that any reasonable cause was given to the natives for the attack ... the only fault for which the poor murdered fellows can be charged, is that they were too kind and had far too much confidence in the harmless nature of the blacks ... Backward the natives must move before the tide of civilisation, or, if they will not give place peaceably, and show that their natures are as dangerous as the venomous serpent, even as every man will crush a snake under his heel, so must the hand of every man be raised against a tribe of inhuman monsters, whose cowardly and murderous nature renders them unfit to live ('Outrage by the blacks', editorial, Northern Territory Times, 4 October 1884, quoted in Headon 1991, 54).

There was a proper big mob of blackfellers there I tell you, to dance the bulga, Baimbarr and many Gadjerong. As they were dancing about, the word passed around: 'Ah policeman; allabout there'. At night all the police boys made a camp and some lubras came out. They sat down until daybreak and then some went round one way, and others — the policemen, police boys and Forrest River boys — went around another way and rounded them up. They put chains on everyone: blackfellers, lubras and piccaninnies. They shot all the dogs. They travelled down a gully and tied all the blackfellers at a big tree; tied another lot to another tree; tied a third group at another tree. They shot the first lot and finished them off. There may have been more than twenty. They shot those at the other tree, picking off the old women and piccaninnies there. There may have been somewhere bout two-twenty, more than the people on this Reserve. They then went to the third lot and shot them: piccaninnies, old old women, blackfellers, old old men — somewhere about a hundred ... (Shaw 1981, 109).

This chapter seeks to describe the historical context in which relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people developed in northern Australia. It focuses on pre 1788 non-Aboriginal contact with Aborigines, the subsequent movement of the colonialists to northern Australia, early government legislation relating to Aborigines, the ramifications of the 1928 Bleakley Commission, the movement of missionaries to northern Australia and the establishment of mission stations by the Methodist Overseas Mission.

The Yolngu of Arnhem Land

The immense complexity of Aboriginal culture, social structure, kinship relationships, language and spiritual differentiation is well recorded in Thomson's Economic structure and the ceremonial exchange cycle in Arnhem Land (1949) as well as in NM William's The Yolngu and their land (1986), WEH Stanner's White man got no dreaming (1979) and various works by RM & CH Berndt. Donald Thomson, an early anthropologist working in Arnhem Land, described Aboriginal people from this area:

The natives of Arnhem Land are a nomadic people who live by hunting and collecting. They have no settled village life, no gardens or agriculture, they know nothing of pottery, and they have no domestic animals other than the half-wild dingo, which serves as boon companion and
hunting ally ... The people have a simple but specialised material culture, and show much skill in technology. Their houses are well-constructed and of several distinct types, each well adapted to a special environment or seasonal condition, or related to material available ... [They] are expert in weaving or spinning by hand ... are skilled as wood carvers and make elaborately-barbed spear heads of wood, carved sacred totemic objects ... as well as wooden dugout canoes (Thomson 1949, 8–9).

Before European occupation of north Australia, Aborigines experienced contact with Dutch and Portuguese explorers, Japanese pearlers and Malayan and Macassan fishermen from the Celebes (now Sulawesi). Dutch and Portuguese mariners in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries named this area in the north after the vessel Aernem. British explorers later frequented this area during the early nineteenth century. The most consistent contact between Aborigines and non-Aborigines was with the Macassans who fished for trepang (sea slugs) along the north Australian coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The trade relationship between Aborigines and Macassans was based on the exchange of Macassan pituri (tobacco), tools, food and other materials for Aboriginal knowledge of trepang habitats together with pearl or tortoise shell collected by Aboriginal people. In addition to this, Aborigines helped collect and prepare the trepang for sale in Macassar. Macassan contact with Aborigines occurred seasonally (as their journey to and from Australia was dependent on the trade winds). According to McKenzie (1976, 67) the bartering of Aboriginal women became part of the trade transactions and was later to become a source of conflict between Aborigines and non-Aborigines in this area. Although the trade links with the Macassans were probably the most consistent and well developed, Cole maintains that Macassan influence did not ‘transform the fundamental basis’ of Aboriginal society. Aborigines simply incorporated words and objects into their own culture (Cole 1980, 18). It is possible that the Macassans provided Aborigines with a ‘world view’ which, to some extent, may have prepared them for the impending colonial intrusion.

During the early 19th century explorers, British colonial officers and crocodile hunters entered, mapped and exploited the north. To prevent a French invasion and provide a base for trade with Asia, the colonial government, between the years of 1824 and 1849, established three different settlements in northern Australia: Fort Dundas on Melville Island between 1824–29; Fort Wellington in Raffles Bay on the Cobourg Peninsula from 1827–29; and Port Essington, now Victoria, from 1838–49 (Mulvaney 1989, 68). An example of the relationship between the Aboriginal inhabitants and the colonial government forces was recounted by Mulvaney (1989, 69).

At both forts [Dundas and Wellington], mutual distrust prevailed under unsympathetic and incomprehending commandants, who ruled by discipline and the gun. It culminated in bloodshed within a few months at Raffles Bay. Commandant Smyth hated the place and despised the Aborigines. Exasperated by habitual pilfering, followed by the wounding of a soldier, Smyth responded by ordering an indiscriminate attack on the encampment. In this senseless massacre, possibly thirty men, women and children died. The northern frontier was initiating a sadly familiar settlement pattern.

However, this changed with the appointment of new commandants to this area and the Iwaidga people of the Cobourg Peninsula ‘adapted positively to British occupation’ and 'Port Essington proved a remarkable frontier of peaceful co-existence' (Mulvaney 1989, 69). The spread of debilitating diseases such as malaria, the tropical climate, the failure to establish trade links, and the destruction of buildings caused by white
ants meant that these settlements were eventually abandoned. One of their legacies was the introduction of domesticated animals from Indonesia such as water buffalo, pig, banteng (Bali) cattle and Timor ponies. These animals, although providing Aborigines with an alternate food source and latter employment in the buffalo industry, succeeded in destroying the delicate wetlands ecology of Arnhem Land and desecrating important Aboriginal ceremonial sites (Mulvaney 1989).

By the late nineteenth century mining prospectors and pastoralists were beginning to stake claims on land in the 'North'. The 'contact' between these new non-Aboriginal occupants and the traditional owners of this land paralleled the relationship between these two vastly different civilisations in the 'South'. Reports of murders, cattle stealing and ambushes were to become commonplace in such chronicles as the Northern Territory Times (see Headon 1991). Although this period of contact was traumatic for Aboriginal people, several writers contend that in Arnhem Land, as opposed to other areas of Australia, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal contact occurred more on Aboriginal terms than usual. The reliance of non-Aborigines on indigenous knowledge of resource availability was the basis for this relationship, although this was later to become a source of conflict between Aborigines and non-Aborigines (McGrath 1987; Young 1988, 6; Dewar 1992).

The contact between explorers, prospectors and pastoralists resulted in the establishment of trading posts, or what Young describes as the prototype of contemporary community stores. They were essentially places where Aborigines were given certain goods, especially tobacco, in order to either prevent conflict or as rewards for giving information concerning the whereabouts of waterholes and other vital knowledge (Young 1984, 5; see also McGrath 1987). As pastoral properties or towns became more established, the regular handing out of rations from these 'depots' occurred.

I should have recorded before an interesting event — the distribution by the visitors of largesse to the blacks, in public half-circle assembled in front of the hotel [in Darwin]. The gift was in the shape of flour — next to tobacco the best-esteemed native luxury — doled out in a grocer's scoop in anything but grocer fashion ... 'Twas pitiful, though still amusing, to see these people as they came for flour — came with old tins, and bits of dirty paper, and rags, and leaves ... the dusky crowd moved off to their camp to put their different lots of flour together and to have for once, at least, 'one big, big fellow feed', while their benefactors went upon their journey (Sowden 1882 quoted in Headon 1991, 73).

These early trading posts were one of the earliest and most consistent suppliers of Western goods to Aborigines and resulted in Aborigines gathering where these goods were available. The dispersion of rations became a function of the cattle stations as they were distributed as a wage but were also given to elderly or disabled Aborigines who were unable to 'work for their tucker'. Foster's study of the establishment of ration depots in South Australia in the mid 1800s sheds light on ulterior motives for the establishment of these depots. He believes that the ration depots served two functions: the first as compensation to appease the colonialist's social conscience for undermining traditional Aboriginal economy and hunting-gathering practices; secondly, as a means of controlling the behaviour and movement of Aboriginal people using rations as a political tool, to reward or punish Aborigines for good or bad
behaviour (Foster 1989, 77). It has also been suggested that rations were issued on the early mission settlements as a means of encouraging people to attend Church (Christophersen, pers. comm., 1992).

The Bleakley Commission and the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve

In the name of frontier progress and a combination of land settlement, introduced disease and premeditated violence,\(^1\) Australia's Aboriginal population was forced into rapid decline. Aboriginal protection societies, missionaries and other interest groups were established in the south (around the early centres of colonisation) to prevent this continuing. The likelihood that non-Aboriginal settlement of the north would mirror the atrocious settlement of the south later prompted these missionaries and protection societies to divert their attentions. Missionaries moved to northern Queensland and northern Western Australia during the nineteenth century and to the Northern Territory later in the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century in an effort to quell the further destruction of the Aboriginal population and also to bring Christianity to the 'native' population (see Appendix 3).\(^2\)

Missionaries and Aboriginal protection societies called for the introduction of legislation to assist in the protection of the north's Aboriginal population. In 1910 the Northern Territory Aboriginals Act was passed by the South Australian Parliament in preparation for the impending administrative takeover of the Northern Territory by the Commonwealth government. The emphasis of this Act was said to be on:

rigid protection, with control of individuals defined in racial categories and legislated for as passive recipients of special treatment, much in the manner of prospective inmates of institutions (Rowley 1970, 230).

Under this Act provision was made for:

- the establishment of an Aboriginals Department under the Chief Protector;
- the declaration of Reserves and the appointment of superintendents to these Reserves;
- the leasing of Crown lands to missions;
- the removal to and retention within a Reserve of any 'Aboriginal or half-caste' (excepting employed persons and females married to non-Aborigines); and
- the Chief Protector, represented by a protector in each Protector's District, was to be the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and 'half-caste' child regardless of whether their parents were living or not until the age of eighteen (Rowley 1970, 231).

In addition to this it was ratified that: only Aborigines and authorised persons could enter Reserves; the Protector could order Aborigines to remove their camps from any township; a police officer could 'expel' an individual Aborigine for loitering; a government officer, Justice of the Peace or Chief Protector could either refuse or grant licences to potential employers of Aborigines and were to ensure that all wages paid to Aboriginal employees was to be in money (although there were no provisions for a minimum wage) with the Chief Protector being able to demand that all wages be paid to him or his representative; any township could be declared a prohibited area for unemployed Aborigines; the Chief Protector had control of Aboriginal property, and, finally, that marriage between an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal person was to be subject to ministerial permission (Rowley 1970, 231). The Aboriginals Ordinance
Aborigines, Arnhem Land and missionaries

1911 (Commonwealth) (gazetted in 1912) incorporated much of the South Australian Act but extended the powers of the Chief Protector in issuing and cancelling licences to employers of Aborigines and delegated to police officers the task of taking Aboriginal people into custody. Under this Act the Administrator of the Northern Territory became responsible for declaring towns and other places prohibited areas for Aborigines. The Chief Protector had many difficulties enacting the protective Clauses contained within this legislation due to the government deferring to pastoral interests, 'police and other officials' sharing the pastoral and mining communities' prejudices against Aborigines, and conflict between anthropologists and Northern Territory administrators (Rowley 1970, 235). Furthermore, Rowley stressed that:

the concentration on western economics and the assumption that Aborigines presented only the temporary problem of a race doomed to disappear meant that this legislation became a form of words to placate the outsider and the critic of government (Rowley 1970, 235).

After the war years (1914–1918), in response to the more obvious signs of Aboriginal social disintegration, a comprehensive Ordinance of the Northern Territory (No. 9 of 1918) was introduced. This replaced all the previous legislation and formed the basis for subsequent legislation until the Welfare Ordinance 1953 (Rowley 1970, 235–6). This Ordinance gave the missions the authority to become institutions for Aboriginal and 'half-caste' children and extended the 'categories' of those to be 'protected'.

During the mid 1920s, the Commonwealth government was petitioned by Aboriginal interest associations and church organisations to make a firmer commitment to 'protecting' Aboriginal people. One of the measures enlisted was the ordering in 1928 of a commission of inquiry 'into the present status and conditions of aboriginals, including half-castes' in northern and central Australia (Bleakley 1929, 5). JW Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland from 1913 to 1940, headed the inquiry which consisted of the inspection of various mission stations in central and north Australia. These included Bathurst Island, Oenpelli, Goulburn Island, Milingimbi, Roper River and Groote Eylandt. His final recommendations included:

- the appointment of a Deputy Chief Protector and a travelling Protector to north Australia;
- the appointment of a full-time Chief Inspector and a Government Medical Officer for central Australia;
- the appointment of additional Country Protectors;
- the regular medical inspection of 'bush blacks';
- the establishment of Aboriginal clinics;
- the provision of blankets and clothing;
- that mission management of institutions be adhered to and that these institutions be inspected regularly;
- that native offenders, 'where more suitable', be deported to island missions;
- that special courts for the trial of primitive natives for tribal crimes be constituted;
- that extra police be appointed in the Victoria River area where cattle spearing is complained of (Bleakley 1929, 39).

Some of the recommendations more relevant to this study were that the whole of Arnhem Land be reserved for Aborigines; that more missions be established; and that these and existing missions receive increased government funding. Bleakley strongly recommended the creation of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve because:

The large number of primitive natives in Arnhem Land calls for effective measures for their protection and supervision ... There should be no obstacle to this, as the country is very poor, no
one requires it, and those who have previously taken some of it up have abandoned it ... (Bleakley 1929, 24–34).

Bleakley's report documented the contemporary scepticism of anthropologists and other concerned parties. These 'sceptics' believed that the creation of this Reserve administered by missionaries would:

cause disintegration of [Aboriginal] tribal life and [their] eventual extinction ... they [the missionaries] do harm by allowing religious enthusiasm to over-ride the native culture ... harm is done by gathering natives together for purely religious teaching and bringing them up as pensioners. The contention of the objectors is that, beyond reserving for their use suitable and sufficient country and protecting them from outside interference, nothing should be done to interfere with their living their own life in their own way (Bleakley 1929, 24).

Bleakley, although recognising that these concerns were 'born of sincere desire for the welfare of the natives', stressed that:

the native, once having come into contact with the white man or alien and acquired a taste for his foods and luxuries, is not likely to longer remain a contented savage. There are few places now left of which it can be said that the natives are absolutely uncontaminated, and it is doubtful if any exist where they do not need protection from the unscrupulous, waiting to exploit their hunger for such luxuries. The disintegration of tribal life, already encompassed by the encroachment of the white man, has created the need for something more, in the way of protection and relief, than can be afforded by a Protector they seldom see and very often are afraid of ... this need can best be served by an institution, conducted by experienced men, with benevolent motives, who, while avoiding the dangers feared by the sceptics, can win the confidence and trust of the people, by ministering to them in sickness or distress and generally exercising a watchful eye on their welfare (Bleakley 1929, 24).

In the years following the establishment of the Reserve further concern was expressed over the social and cultural upheaval of Aboriginal people and its economic viability. TT Webb, a Methodist missionary based at Milingimbi, declared in 1934 that:

To make these reserves of any real value, there needs to be established upon them institutions, by means of which new interests would be provided, and the means afforded for the introduction of the aborigines to new industries and to a richer and more satisfying type of life (Webb 1934, 30).

Webb criticised the creation of huge Reserves as being 'unworkable and impossible ... owing to the intense attachment of the aborigine to his home territory' and described this attachment as having 'its roots in the most profound spiritual conceptions' (Webb 1934, 30). In more recent times the creation of the Reserve has been criticised as a means of containing and segregating Aboriginal people for administrative and authoritarian reasons (see Rowley 1970; Downing 1988; Markus 1990).

Bleakley also recommended the removal of children, classified as 'half-caste, quadroon or octaroons', from their parents. These children were to be placed in institutions for 'training' because 'their blood entitles them to be given a chance to take their place in the white community ... on as favourable a footing as possible' (Bleakley 1929, 29). This practice of removing 'half-caste' children from their families and institutionalising them in 'homes' and compounds with non-Aboriginal houseparents was the prime means of destroying traditional Aboriginal socialisation patterns. The implementation of this policy was inhumane and had a deleterious and interminable impact on individuals, families and communities (see Rowley 1970; Cummings 1990).
It also succeeded in developing intense criticism of Australian missions who were partly responsible for administering this policy:

The thing was, it wasn't good to see these little parts or half-breeds running around the blacks' camps because you didn't know who to blame. Station manager? Storeman? Policeman? Teacher? So they came out with all these sincerest motives, you know ... to give these poor little devils a chance in life. Giving them a chance meant putting them in compounds. A lot of us have this experience — Betty's mother and my mother — the same way. All done to give them their break in life. There's a chance for 'em, you see, there's some hope for 'em because they've got white blood in their veins ... even though they wouldn't admit that these kids had white fathers (Gilbert 1977, 7).

Regardless of these criticisms and the obvious failure of earlier 'protection' policies, the Commonwealth government, in response to Bleakley's recommendation, adopted a full-scale policy of protection, with the missions being the most efficacious means of carrying this out. The Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve, covering 95,828 square kilometres, was created in 1931 and encompassed land from the Roper River west to the Victoria River. Arnhem Land's diversity and beauty is described by Keith Cole, a historian of Arnhem Land missions:

The scenery enchants the visitor and captivates the residents. The western escarpment has a timeless and unspoiled grandeur. The rolling sand-dunes of the Eastern coast have a solitary splendour. The inland forests are like an evergreen heart. The serpentine rivers team with fish. The swamplands are the home of myriads of water birds. Rocky outcrops are the haunt of rare and timid animals. Long, white, sandy beaches gleam in the tropical sun. Arnhem Land is a Northern paradise (Cole 1985, 17).

Arnhem Land has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons: the Wet (November to April) and the Dry (May to October). Arnhem Land's geography is extremely diverse: sweeping beaches of white sand and brilliant blue/green water dominate the coast line; sandstone escarpments ranging in colour from light brown to rich orange, red and gold are found inland; crocodiles inhabit the mudflats and mangrove swamps in the northern estuaries; narrow gorges flowing with water during the Wet create huge waterfalls and pools; watery filled lakes and billabongs are home to hundreds of different types of birds and animals; forests of eucalypts, cycads, acacia, grevillea, eugenias, pandanus, casuarinas and cypress pines cover specific areas of Arnhem Land together with extensive river patterns, estuaries, tidal areas and flood plains. In addition to this, areas of Aboriginal cultural significance — including art sites, sacred sites and important ceremonial grounds — are located throughout this area.

Missionaries were active in northern Australia from the 1850s but on a much smaller scale than in the south. Their efforts were concentrated primarily in northern Queensland and northern Western Australia rather than the Northern Territory. At the time of Bleakley's Inquiry, there were about seven small mission stations operating in the newly designated Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve. The Methodist Overseas Mission had established missions at Warruwi in 1916 and Milingimbi in 1923. These two missions are discussed in greater detail below. Missionary endeavour in the north was focused on the need to both 'civilise' and Christianise Aborigines but was further concerned with protecting Aborigines from harmful contact with non-Aboriginal
people. The general disillusionment missionaries in the south were facing also brought about the need for a locational change:

The population loss under the destructive impact of settlers left no pagan societies to redeem and civilise, and the sad survivors were objects of charity rather than of mission (Edwards & Clarke 1988, 191).

This preoccupation with sheltering Aboriginal people from harmful contact with white culture partly helps to explain the general isolation and distance from urban centres of most of the missions established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in northern Australia. Those more critical of the creation of the Arnhem Land Reserve and the official policies designed to keep Aborigines on Reserves and settlements stress that:

So it was that segregation became the answer after the early conflict and bloodshed. It suited many pastoralists. It suited the governments, who felt obliged to take some action to protect people from the evils of our society while seeing that they did not suffer more than was necessary as they eventually died out. And it suited the missionaries who also wanted to protect them from the evils of society and, at the same time, to convert them to the 'blessings' of the Christian Life, and to 'civilise' them (Downing 1988, 32).

The Methodist Overseas Mission In Arnhem Land

During the early 1900s the Methodist Overseas Mission (MOM) focused its attention on Arnhem Land. Reverend James Watson was instructed by a Board meeting of the Methodist Church on 2 July 1915 to ascertain the character and extent of the area allocated to the Methodists by the Interdominational Committee, estimate the number of Aborigines and where they could be reached and influenced, and suggest a site for a mission accessible by both land and water. He was also instructed to report on distances, passenger and freight costs, soil suitability, the proximity of non-Aboriginal populations, recommendations for establishing a mission and prospects for evangelism, education and industry, and to estimate initial capital outlay and annual expenditure (McKenzie 1976, 1–2). Watson was moved to write after his explorations in Arnhem Land that:

Surely as one lives with them day by day, and hears the rippling laughter of the children, the shrieks of delight ... surely, I repeat, these are not 'vermin to be got rid of', but people whose lives should be enriched from the treasures of knowledge, and especially the knowledge of God: people whose minds should be freed from the bondage of the devil devil. Strange that the Methodist Church should have neglected such interesting people all these years. I wonder why? (quoted in McKenzie 1976, 6).

Warruwi

Watson, with the help of AE Lawrence, chose South Goulburn Island (Warruwi) as the first Methodist mission site. Warruwi is situated off the north Arnhem Land coast approximately 300 kilometres from Darwin. The island is about 12 km long and 5 km wide and is flat, rising only a few metres above sea level in most areas. Watson was superintendent of this mission for three years from 1916.4 In keeping with the government's 'protection policy', Watson was appointed Protector of Aborigines in the district. Watson, with the help of newly arrived missionaries from the south, built a
small school and several mission houses and attracted Aborigines from Oenpelli, the Liverpool River and Port Essington to the mission. According to McKenzie, Watson achieved this by offering Aborigines flour, sugar, tea and material in return for work and by telling stories and showing a roll of illustrated bible stories (McKenzie 1976, 11–12). Fruit and vegetable gardens were established and trepanging was encouraged by the missionaries. The early days of mission settlement were less than idyllic with isolation, disease, cyclones, storms and an oppressive tropical climate severely testing the perseverance of the missionaries.

Bleakley, on visiting Warruwi in 1928, was able to record that:

The general appearance of the station is pleasing, everything being orderly and well kept. The natives seem healthy, well nourished and happy. The children are well housed in dormitories, with cots, the young men in separate quarters, with bunks, and several married couples in small homes of their own. There is also a native camp for the nomads and visiting natives, who have not yet adopted civilised conditions (Bleakley 1929, 23).

Although Bleakley believed that the mission was running well, he was critical of the potential for agricultural or stock development because of the lack of suitable irrigation on the island (Bleakley 1929, 22). In later years other projects initiated at Warruwi included cattle and goat raising, dairying, fishing, oyster farming and the making of artefacts.

Watson returned south after serving his three year term at Warrwui but was called back to Arnhem Land in 1921 to help establish other missions in the area.

**Milingimbi, Nangalala and Ramingining**

The plan to establish a new mission on Elcho Island (Galiwin'ku) was thwarted due to mining interests in the area. Consequently, Watson turned his attention to Milingimbi where he established a mission in 1923. Milingimbi is one of the Crocodile Islands near the northern central coast of Arnhem Land between the Blyth River and the Goyder River and is approximately 450 km from Darwin. The island is about 70 square kilometres and is only a few metres above sea level. It has a strong Macassan influence, evidenced by the large number of tamarind trees present on the island.

Watson remained at Milingimbi until 1926 and was succeeded by Reverend TT Webb, who was to remain there for thirteen years. In 1928, Webb and his family were joined at Milingimbi by Harold and Ella Shepherdson to assist with the establishment of what was becoming the base of Methodist mission activity in Arnhem Land.

Bleakley visited Milingimbi in 1928 and reported that the island was not a perfect location for a mission station as it had few good building sites, although it did have a good water supply, fertile soil, millable timber and sheltered anchorage for boats. He described the 'Milingimbi natives' as a:

distinct type, coming from the Liverpool River on one side, and as far as the English Company and Wessell Islands on the other. They do not mix unrestrainedly with the neighbouring natives. A general improvement is reported as apparent amongst those who have become
attached to the mission. They are becoming more orderly in their conduct, more industrious and cleaner in their habits and mode of living, and more amenable to discipline (Bleakley 1929, 22).

In describing the mission, Bleakley stated that 'spoon-feeding is studiously guarded against, the native customs and ceremonial are interfered with as little as possible, and the general tone is good' (Bleakley 1928, 22). Several enterprises were established at Milingimbi, including gardens and Harold Shepherdson's timber mill. Webb, although at first critical of Aboriginal culture, grew to respect and admire the people and helped establish and enlighten Methodist mission policy.

During the 1960s water shortages and the expanding population at Milingimbi resulted in several families moving back to the mainland and settling first at Nangalala. Nangalala was settled on a sacred site which caused severe trauma to the traditional owners of that area. Growing Aboriginal awareness of land rights led to their subsequent refusal to allow any further development of this area. This prompted a relocation of services and buildings to Ramingining approximately eleven kilometres south-west of Nangalala.

In Bleakley's general summation of the existing missions in Arnhem Land he stressed their importance stating that the early northern Australian missions were:

all working on right lines: the officers making themselves conversant with the native language and customs and endeavouring, without unduly pressing the whiteman's civilisation upon them, to induce them, by the education of the young, to see the advantages of the settled and industrious life ... It should be clearly defined that the aim, at the beginning, is not to draw the people away unnecessarily from their tribal life, but to win their trust by kindly ministrations, relieving them in distress or sickness and guarding them from abuse (Bleakley 1929, 24–33).

Bleakley's recommendations, his support of the missionaries, the subsequent creation of the Reserve, increased funding to existing missions and the government's petitioning of mission societies to become involved in this area prompted the Methodist Overseas Mission (MOM) to consider the establishment of more missions and the further development of those already in existence.

Yirrkala

Yirrkala Mission was established by the Reverend Wilbur Chaseling in 1935 and is situated on the Gove Peninsula on the north-eastern tip of Arnhem Land, just north of Cape Arnhem. Chaseling pointed out the difficulties in locating suitable mission sites:

For months we combed its coast line, creeks, and valleys, searching for a site for the new station, but strange as it may seem, a suitable site was not discovered, although we had three hundred miles of coastline from which to choose. For that matter, I have never seen any site in Arnhem Land providing all the essentials for a self-supporting community. At least one requirement was always missing. When a rare pocket of rich jungle soil with palms, ferns, tangled vines, and tall shady trees was found, then the jungle was lowly and useless as a building site. If an anchorage, where fresh water and building areas were ideal, then not a square foot of good soil was to be seen (Chaseling 1957, 8).

Yirrkala mission has an interesting background in that the establishment of the mission was partly in response to the murder by Aborigines of a group of Japanese fishermen at Caledon Bay, on the east coast of Arnhem Land and the subsequent
killing of a police officer, McColl, sent out to investigate these murders (see Dewar 1989). As Rowley states, 'Such attacks were nothing new, but the social climate was' (Rowley 1970, 291). Fear was expressed, from both government officials and the police, of an Aboriginal uprising against all non-Aboriginal people in the area and, although reassurances were given by Reverend Webb at Milingimbi and the Anglican missionaries on Groote Eylandt that everything was calm and peaceful, a 'punitive expedition' was organised. In reaction to this proposal, missionaries on Groote Eylandt petitioned for a 'peace expedition' claiming that they would locate McColl's suspected murderer and those involved with the attack on the Japanese. The missionaries were successful in this venture and brought the Aboriginal suspects into Darwin for questioning and their eventual trial.

The Aborigines tried for the murder of the Japanese trepangers were sentenced by Justice Wells to twenty years imprisonment with hard labour. Wells's trial of Tuckiar (the suspect in McColl's murder) and his issuing of the death sentence provoked intense criticism from academics, missionaries and the general public for his conduct of the trials. Critics made a number of claims: Wells's white supremacist argument disregarded claims concerning immoral aspects of the police officer's behaviour; he used the court system to pervert justice; he refused (or was unable) to take Aboriginal cultural considerations into account; and he accepted the improper methods used by police prosecutors to sustain their cases (Rowley 1970, 292–7).

These trials not only created a public uproar but emphasised the problems and deficiencies in administering a white justice system on traditional Aboriginal social structures. They provoked such intense criticism of the legal system that an appeal on behalf of Tuckiar was upheld by the High Court of Australia in November 1934. This resulted in the conviction being quashed and the appellant being discharged. This public outcry was not the result of an isolated case but was in response to several cases which raised questions of cross-cultural justice and the severity of sentencing for Aboriginal people — a problem which has not been resolved to this day (Rowley 1970, 290–297; McKenzie 1976, 67–77; Donovan 1984, 105; Cole 1985, 93–95.). In a 1934 lecture Stanner had pointed out that:

Today the blacks are without legal or constitutional rights as such. They were shabbily treated in the Australian Constitution. They cannot vote, they are not represented in Parliament, they may not own land, they command no political power either indirectly or directly. They are not eligible for pensions, even if they are civilised. The scattered camps in the east are pushed as far away from the non-Aboriginal towns as possible, and even their presence is deprecated. Most of the larger groups live in areas so remote from the centres of Australian life and thought that they cross the periphery of daily interest only when they are felt to be worth space in the headlines. This has usually meant that they are in the headlines only in the context of atrocity charges, murder and witchcraft trials ... or in association with highly emotional movements of the reform of native policy and administration (Stanner 1979, 5).

McKenzie reports that Reverend TT Webb, on his exploratory tour of Yirrkala, 'was deeply moved that these wild men had taken him to their hearts' and that:

he wanted to secure justice and human consideration for them. He knew that each of them could and would kill if their law required it, but he felt utterly wrong to brand them as naturally treacherous and bloodthirsty (McKenzie 1976, 78).
Minjilang

Minjilang (Croker Island) is situated off the north-east coast of the Cobourg Peninsula; it is separated from the mainland by the Bowen Strait and has an area of 325 square kilometres.

From 1941 until 1967 Minjilang was a 'home' for Aboriginal children of mixed descent. These homes were administered by the Methodist Overseas Mission which claimed that the disgusting conditions of the Kahlín compound in Darwin forced them to take responsibility for the 'half-castes' (see Cummings 1990). In November 1941, ninety-six children were bought to Minjilang by the mission lugger, Larrpan, from Darwin and Alice Springs via Pine Creek and Goulburn Island. On Easter Monday, 1942, the children were evacuated to Otford Valley, south of Sydney, because of encroaching wartime activities. They remained there for four years with most returning to Croker Island in 1946. The mission was run on a cottage home system — ten children in each cottage supervised by a cottage mother:

In this way, the mission encouraged children to live much the same lives as children in normal families. Domestic science and home duties were part of the training for the senior girls (Cole 1980, 40).

In 1958 a Child Welfare Ordinance was introduced to legislate against any distinction between European, part-Aboriginal, and Aboriginal children which, meant in effect the end of the 'half-caste' children's homes. The mission for 'half-caste' children was closed in 1967 and the children were moved to Darwin to take up residency in the newly established Somerville homes. From that stage on Minjilang became an Aboriginal community administered by an Aboriginal Town Council.

Galiwin'ku

Galiwin'ku (on Elcho Island) was re-established as a mission in 1942 by Harold and Ella Shepherdson who had spent the 14 years preceding this move at Milingimbi. Elcho Island is about 50 kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide and lies just north of the Arnhem Land mainland about 530 kilometres from Darwin.

Harold Shepherdson moved his sawmill operation from Milingimbi to Galiwin'ku because the presence of a wartime airforce base posed a threat to the people at Milingimbi (Edwards & Clarke 1988, 196). This enterprise was very successful and provided timber to surrounding communities. Shepherdson also had constructed his own aircraft and used this plane to deliver various goods and services to Aboriginal people in homeland areas. Lake Evella (Gapuwiya — 'the place of salty water') was one of these homeland areas and draws its name from two women missionaries — Evellyn Webb and Ella Shepherdson. It is one of the newest of the Arnhem Land communities and has grown from a small outstation to a large community in a short period of time.
Life on the missions

These missions constituted important points of contact between non-Aborigines and Aborigines and were to become the major areas of the concentration of Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land. The size of each community varied because of a number of factors including seasonal migration, trouble in other communities and the preponderance of ceremonies.

The missions were controlled by a mission superintendent who was often given the additional status of 'protector' of Aborigines. With the limited staff on the mission stations, the personality of the mission superintendent determined the philosophy and general administration of the missions. Chief Protector Cook, in a 1938 report, claimed that:

Unfortunately, there are amongst missionary personnel individuals of low intelligence and poor capacity ... mission work ... offers them a livelihood which their personal ability and merit could not elsewhere obtain ... it places persons ... into positions of authority which only too often are exploited by their vanity to establish themselves as autocrats whose administration, inspired by personal advantage, marred by indolence and unguided by intelligence, has a disastrous effect upon the welfare and morale of native peoples (quoted in Markus 1990, 78).

However, there were some outstanding, hard working and enlightened missionaries such as the Reverends Wells and Webb.

Each mission settlement was run on different lines. On some mission settlements Aboriginal children were housed in dormitories while their parents and other adults resided in 'camps' on the mission grounds. There was a special camp on the outskirts of the mission for visiting Aborigines, the 'wild bush blacks or myalls' (Markus 1990, 69). Prior to the development of retail outlets, Aboriginal people on mission or government settlements had their food provided for them. It was government policy up until the 1960s that funding for food for children on the settlements would be provided. The missionaries utilised this money to provide food for everyone in the community and did this through serving food three times a day in communal eating places. This was encouraged on both mission and government stations because of its supposed educative and welfare role. Aboriginal people would become 'accustomed to the European style of eating' and authorities could ensure that all were eating properly (Young 1984, 7). This policy was eventually phased out because of cultural problems and hostilities arising from this practice. Stanner was a firm critic of the ration system:

Official rations are issued in some of these areas to aged and infirm blacks, but the food received in this way is a mockery of an adequate level of diet. The rations were originally intended only to supplement the food gathered by natives in their traditional hunting way. But, unfortunately, in so many outback areas these official rations, which are inferior in quality and insufficient in quantity, have become almost the only foods some natives receive. The rations thus given consist of a little white flour, and small quantities of polished rice, tea, sugar, and tobacco. There is no official meat ration. The quantity is often just sufficient to encourage the natives to stay around the ration depot, but not sufficient to give them all one square meal a day. In most cases the old, tired natives are obliged by tribal custom to share the food out with other members of the tribe. Thus, what in itself is insufficient to feed the old people themselves becomes part of the tribal foodstuffs as a whole... A generous and sensible official gesture has thus been perverted in the course of a few years into a thoroughly ruinous principle (Stanner 1979, 8–9).
Stanner based his comments on central Australia, but in coastal communities people had greater access to traditional foods which included turtle, dugong and other seafoods and were perhaps less dependent on rations than their central Australian counterparts.

A typical day consisted of an early start with a morning prayer and communal breakfast. Following this, duties would be allocated to able-bodied Aborigines, and children would be sent to school. Bakeries and gardens were established which provided the missions with fresh bread, vegetables and tropical fruit and enabled individual missions to trade with other settlements or with Darwin. Pastoral and agricultural industries were established, although inexperience with the soils, climate, crops and lack of skills made many of these enterprises unsuccessful. The exceptions were the cattle industry at Minjilang and Oenpelli and Shepherdson's timber mill. Other projects initiated on the mission settlements included oyster farming, trepang fishing and goat raising (see Cole 1980). Various mission stations introduced sporting events and carnivals including football and canoeing. By the late 1950s some mission stations had acquired movie projectors and 'picture nights' were held on a regular basis.

Cultural interference was more marked on some mission stations than others with some missionaries refusing to learn Aboriginal languages and prohibiting selected Aboriginal practices such as polygamy, child betrothal, initiation ceremonies and revenge killings. Punishment was inflicted on Aborigines who refused to give in to modes of behaviour demanded on mission settlements (see Markus 1990). Maisie McKenzie, probably unintentionally, alludes to the fact that not all Aborigines were willing to accept life on the mission station:

Every now and then there was an outbreak of violence. It was hardly to be wondered at. Things would come to a head, and someone would chafe against restraints and start throwing spears. One young man in particular, Nundal, was a 'stirrer'. He believed that the mission was a threat to the old way of life and did his best to incite the Aborigines to riot. He encouraged the boys to break out of the school dormitory, organised the abduction of some lubras, engineered a strike among the workers, and set out to cause trouble among the trepangers. In addition he went to the mainland and came back with a war party of twenty-four friends who menaced the mission. Watson decided that this had gone far enough. He handed over Nundal and three other 'scoundrels' to the police in Darwin, and peace reigned once more (McKenzie 1976, 17).

Some missionaries acknowledged that the salvation of souls would have to take second place to the greater problems of understanding a completely different culture and then reconciling these two distinct cultures. An enlightened Webb stated:

Time does not permit of any detailed analysis of the causes which have produced such disastrous results for this aboriginal race, but let it be briefly stated that these causes may be classified as: (a) conscious brutality and exploitation, and (b) the unconscious violation of the most sacred and basic principles of aboriginal life and social organisation. Behind the tragedy lies the almost absolute failure to recognise the fundamental rights of these people as human beings, and the absence of any real attempt to understand their social organisation, spiritual beliefs, tribal laws, and sacred sentiments (Webb 1934, 29).

Webb also recognised that the 'Aborigine must be adequately prepared for this event'. He proposed that this be done with the aid of specially trained education officers and by 'determining ways and means whereby the rights of the Aborigines would be
Plate 1. Loading the mission lugger
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0587

Plate 2. Women's basketball team, Warruwi, 195?
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0902
Plate 3. Mission sports day, Warruwi (Goulburn Island)
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0904

Plate 4. The mission gardens at Yirrkala
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0778
recognised and preserved' which 'would make the contact of the two races a much more just and humane thing' (Webb 1934, 31).

Some missionaries endeavoured to learn local Aboriginal languages which enabled them to better understand and respect Aboriginal culture and the richness of Aboriginal spiritual life as well as helping them to impart their Christian message. Some missionaries were able to provide some of the earliest ethnographic and linguistic studies which shows their appreciation of traditional Aboriginal life but in no way suggests that they did not try and supplant Aboriginal behaviours with non-Aboriginal notions. The success rate of Aboriginal conversions to Christianity differs in each community, although it appears that the missions established throughout Arnhem Land during the twentieth century were more successful than their earlier southern counterparts (see Woolmington 1974, 1985). The influence of the Church in these communities today and the number of ordained Aboriginal ministers is testimony to this.5

Missions and missionaries have been criticised time and again for their denial of Aboriginal rights to their own culture. However, some writers give credit to the role played by missionaries in Arnhem Land. Rowley states that the 'destruction of Aboriginal populations was eventually arrested, partly by the efforts of missions on large Reserves' (Rowley 1970, 246). Nevertheless, other writers contend that missionaries, under the notion of 'muscular Christianity', shared some of the responsibility for the atrocities, both mental and physical, committed on the Aboriginal population (see Markus 1990, 74–79). This latter view as well as the philosophy of removing 'half-caste' children from their families and institutionalising them in 'homes' with non-Aboriginal house parents, has led to strong criticism of Australian missions by both black and white Australians. Supporters of the role of missions, while acknowledging problems in past missionary behaviour, argue that missionary efforts

to achieve long-term positive effects were hindered by the hostility and example of other Europeans, the effects of disease and alcohol, the problems of culture clash, government policies and the pressure on land (Edwards & Clarke 1988, 187).

Increased funding to missions from the 1950s onwards resulted in the missions' individual growth in terms of staff numbers, buildings, equipment and facilities and the development of more 'projects'. Arnhem Land, with the help of an aeroplane service, became more accessible to outsiders including doctors, anthropologists and educationalists. The number of mission staff employed in the settlements preceding the 1950s was fairly minimal. By the 1960s this began to change with teachers, linguists, healthworkers, builders, carpenters, mechanics and other skilled persons being employed on the settlements. Although funding to missions had increased, some missionaries felt that the conditions on the settlements remained less than satisfactory:

While he [Rev. Wells] battled for the rights of his aboriginal folk at each Synod, year by year — for reasonable wages, better living conditions, more available education, and a regard for their language and way of life — he fought as well for the dignity of position, for their need to be treated as responsible people without fear or favour in reference to work which carried responsibility, for them to be employed without either exploitation or sentimentality... (Wells 1963, 229).
Plate 5. Adobe building, Milingimbi
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0712

Plate 6. Mission House, Minjilang
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0220
Plate 7. Superintendent’s residence, Warruwi, 1954
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0334

No matter how well intentioned, an air of paternalism pervaded all non-Aboriginal dealings with Aborigines. Explorers, missionaries, cattle station owners, pastoralists and government representatives enacting official policy were all guilty of wreaking havoc on Australia’s Aboriginal population. Each different group of non-Aborigines that Aboriginal people came into contact with managed to aid in the process of destroying what was fast becoming an ‘endangered culture’. By no means condoning missionary endeavour, it was recognised that, in non-religious terms, missionaries were able to provide linguistic and ethnographic studies, made some impact on public opinion, provided a ‘shelter’ from some pastoralists who were determined to eradicate or exploit the entire Aboriginal race and provided health and educational services. The way in which official government policy supported, reinforced and then finally denied mission policy and missionaries place on the new ‘communities’ will be discussed in the following chapter.

Notes
1. see Rose (1992, chapter one).
2. Overseas mission societies concentrated their efforts on Australian Aborigines from the 1820s but had restricted their operations to settled areas in the south. It is widely believed that it was the 18th century English evangelical revival which contributed to the rise of the modern missionary movement and the establishment of several missionary societies (Woolmington 1974).
3. This area underwent many boundary changes up until the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976. This area is now called the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Land Trust. The Arafura Sea
(including the offshore islands) forms the northern boundary, the Roper River and East Alligator River its southern and western boundaries respectively. The Gulf of Carpentaria is its eastern boundary. The Cobourg Peninsula and the mining towns of Nhulunbuy (on the Gove Peninsula) and Alyangula (on Groote Eylandt) have been excised from the Reserve.


5. In later years the Church developed a syncratic approach to teaching Christianity which, among other things, involved using Aboriginal spirit names for biblical figures and likening aspects of different clans' 'dreamings' to elements of Christianity. The success rate of this approach can be measured by a spiritual revival movement which occurred at Galiwin'ku in 1979 and the preponderance of Aboriginal Ministers in Arnhem Land communities. The revival was probably due to three factors; the willingness of the Church authorities to accept and acknowledge Aboriginal leadership; the willingness of Aborigines to take up these positions within the Church; and the provision of 'preacher' training at the community level as early as 1965 at Nungalinya College for Aboriginal people leading to their ordinations. The revival, under the leadership of Djininyi Gondarra and others, led to increased numbers of baptisms and ensured that Aboriginal people could aboriginalise Christianity. In August 1983, the Rev. Charles Harris, an Aboriginal Christian leader working in Brisbane, called 80 Aboriginal Christian leaders together where they constituted themselves as the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. They have since gained control of the Aboriginal Ministry and Aboriginal Advisory and Development service within the Uniting Church (Edwards & Clarke 1988, Keith 1990, Woodley n.d.).
CHAPTER TWO

GOVERNMENT AND MISSION POLICY

What we still lack is the perception that we ourselves need a new idealism — an ideology that has cast out completely not only in words, but also in reality, that pathetic and unscientific belief in white superiority which is still hampering our more enlightened policies so grievously (Strehlow 1964, 35).

'Consultation,'

Me, Mate?
You'll get no views from me!
Where did I ever go?
Who did I ever meet?
What did I ever see?
Nothin' just the old river, the gumtree
The mission. Me seven kids, four grandkids
Blacks gamblin' drunk, fightin', laughin', cryin'
 Mostly gamblin'. Playin' "pups" wild deuces game
Doin' it, risking their twenty cents to try to win thirty
Price of bread, you know. You know, life aint too bad here
No runnin' water, no fireplaces, huh, no houses even
Jus the kerosene tin and hessian bag humpies.
They say there's "welfare" for blacks these days
But the mission looks the same to me. Seven I got
An' another one in the barrel — put there by the "manager"
'Cause his wife cut him short or somethin'
Nothin' changes. I don't ever see nothin' much
An' no-one asked me my view before (Kevin Gilbert 1978).

This chapter looks at the development of both State and Federal government policies in relation to Aborigines and the role the missions played in implementing those policies. A notable turning point was the December 1972 election of the Whitlam Labor Government and the sweeping changes which occurred during this period in government. These changes reflected the climate in which the Arnhem Land Progress Association was conceived.

Government and mission policy before 1972

In 1951 a major reshuffling of Northern Territory administration occurred when the Territory's administration became a function of the Department of Territories. Paul Hasluck was appointed Minister for Territories with FJS Wise as Administrator. Under Hasluck's guidance, the Legislative Council passed the Northern Territory Welfare Ordinance in June 1953 (Rowley 1970, 241). Under this new injunction, Aboriginal people were officially defined as 'wards' rather than Aborigines and 'a native will be committed to the care of the State [not because of race, but] solely on the grounds that he or she stands in need of special care and assistance' (Donovan 1984, 201). The Native Affairs Branch of the Northern Territory Administration was
replaced by the Welfare Branch under the jurisdiction of the Director of Welfare, Harry Giese. The Welfare Branch's main function was the supervision of the welfare of wards, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The Branch's administrative domain included the management of settlements, Aboriginal education, health and hygiene services which included feeding schemes, Aboriginal vocational training and employment, mission administration, legal counsel for Aborigines and construction work on the settlements. In 1964 the number of staff employed by the Welfare Branch was 504. By 1971 this number had grown to 986 (Donovan 1984, 202).

The Director of Welfare was given similar powers to those previously wielded by the Chief Protector and was to be the guardian of all wards — controlling their movements, where they might live, and their property. The director retained the power to segregate 'wards' on Reserves, to prevent wards living together and to approve or refuse marriage involving a ward.

Increased lobbying by Aboriginal interest groups, including missionaries and anthropologists dissatisfied with the workings of the protection policy, demanded a new deal for Aboriginal people. By the 1950s government policies emphasised the need to 'train' Aboriginal people so they had a greater chance of 'fitting in' to the rest of Australian society — a policy that was later officially defined as the assimilation policy. Many of the policies introduced from the first decade of the twentieth century which had been considered necessary for the 'protection' of Aborigines were now incorporated into new legislation during the 1950s and 1960s aimed at assimilating Aborigines into non-Aboriginal society. Assimilation was defined as enabling Aborigines to:

attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians (Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, quoted in Altman & Sanders 1991, 2).

Intensive education and training, the provision of more services and large increases in funding to mission and government settlements were to assist this change in policy which, however, utilised the personnel of the protection era. Once Aborigines had been declared 'successfully assimilated' they were to be granted an exemption from the above mentioned legislation which made all Aborigines wards of the State. Successfully assimilated, Aborigines would no longer be categorised with their own special (but discriminatory) legal status and would no longer be excluded from citizen entitlements such as the benefits of the mainstream welfare system, award wages, regulated conditions of employment and the franchise. Prior amendments to social security legislation had made Aborigines living away from Reserves eligible for pensions and other benefits, although this caused some consternation that it would encourage Aborigines to move away from the Reserves. In 1953 these benefits were extended to all Aborigines except those categorised as 'nomadic and primitive' (this provision was later removed in 1966). Aboriginal people were now included in the Australian social security system on the same basis as other Australians except for the fact that individual Aborigines did not receive payments directly. Aboriginal Welfare Authorities or mission superintendents distributed this money as wages for Aborigines working on mission projects or used it to upgrade existing services on the settlements.
The introduction of the assimilation policy was not without its critics. Not all missionaries or people employed on the settlements supported this policy. AL Ethell, superintendent of the Moore River settlement in Western Australia, presented a paper, *The problems of assimilation*, to a public meeting at the Methodist Church in Darwin, November 1953. An extract reads:

Assimilation, to my mind is a plaything of politicians, a nice sounding word used to disguise lack of official planning, and an escape hatch whereby a Government can, with one word, render a lip service to a separate ethnic group, without committing themselves to any positive or direct action ... If you destroy the native's culture, you must destroy him, and that is why I contend that assimilation is an ugly and dangerous word, and the application of its policy ... can only mean ultimate disaster and tragedy for a people who have no voice in their own affairs, and in any case are unable to govern or acquit themselves according to the standards required of our community (Ethell 1953).

Regardless of this dissension, missions were no longer to be the means of segregating the Aboriginal population but were to be training grounds for the successful assimilation of Aborigines into non-Aboriginal society. The importance designated to these institutions as vehicles for assimilation is evidenced by the establishment of new government administered settlements, for example at Papunya in 1956 and Maningrida in 1957. In Hasluck's opening address to the second National Missions Administration Conference in 1955, he defined the role of the missions in implementing these new government policies:

It is the hope of the Government that these meetings will continue and that a free and open exchange of views will help all to see more clearly what needs to be done and what is the best way of doing it ... I believe that both on the Missions and in administration activities there has been a steady improvement in measures to raise the living standards of the natives, and widening the opportunity for them to live happy, useful and good lives in the Australian community. We have a very precious charge in our keeping and a grave responsibility to work hard and work wisely to help these people ... We need to remember, too, that in working towards the social acceptance of the native people by the Australian community, we not only have to change the native people to make them acceptable; we also have to open the minds and hearts of those who already enjoy to the full the privileges of living in this great and pleasant land so that they will not only receive these original Australians in a mute recognition of their merit but will stretch out to them a ready hand of friendship. The force behind the Churches can help a great deal to bring about that change (Hasluck 1955).

The 1955 conference dealt with such issues as financial assistance to missions, economic projects on missions, the need for Aborigines to be engaged in work, compulsory apprenticeships and the role of the trade stores on mission settlements. The stores on the missions were described as being a 'useful and necessary' adjunct to the mission, 'keeping the natives themselves contented and providing an income for internal development'. It was suggested that the further establishment of these trade stores would prevent Aborigines 'from feeling the attraction of the towns too strongly' (Albrecht 1955).

The conference also discussed the emerging problem of assimilating Aboriginal people into non-Aboriginal society when the 'native people are inherently lacking in certain attitudes for their assimilation'. One of the major barriers to assimilation was perceived to be the inability of settlement staff to inculcate the work ethic in the minds
of Aboriginal people. The Reverend TT Webb had predicted in 1934 that Aborigines would fail to understand the necessity of work and other related concepts because:

their simple and inexpensive needs are met by white-man and they are thus relieved of the necessity of personal effort ... Unless they are able to see the direct connection between their own effort and the reward secured, we cannot expect them to have any vital interest in activities which are entirely strange and foreign to them, and in which they will consequently engage in a purely perfunctory manner ... our constant endeavour must be to employ these aborigines not merely as servants, which would develop a servile mind and character, but as partners with us, in an endeavour to elevate and enrich their race (Webb 1934, 30–36).

The fact that assimilation policies were not working and that Aboriginal people were becoming dependent on the provisions of the mission settlements was highlighted by the Mission Administration Conference in 1967. Although not stated explicitly at this conference, the threat of an increasing Aboriginal population becoming more dependent on government funding meant that the missions and governments began to recognise the importance of self-sufficiency for each community. Papers presented at this conference emphasised the role of 'work' in the development of Aboriginal people:

Work should be one of the chief processes of doing something TO the Aboriginal, in helping him advance towards a new way of living, in establishing an individual, personal independence as distinct from the tribal, in inspiring him with pride in a job well done, an ambition to establish and hold his own in a new world he has come to know through work ... Employment must maintain his natural self-reliance, self-confidence, pride in himself as a person and as an Aboriginal. Destroy this and you destroy a person even a whole race ... employment for the Aboriginal is essential and fundamental, without employment the many efforts that are being made to help him are doomed to failure! Instead of being helped he is being spoiled. Without employment our whole approach has about it something of the irrational (Leary 1967).

Employment opportunities available to Aboriginal people on the Reserves included gardening, cleaning, domestic service, motor mechanics, carpentry and building. A Methodist Overseas Missionary on Croker Island during the late 1960s believed that this training was necessary 'so that these people could know how to look after themselves' (Deering, pers. comm., 1992). It appears that at this stage Aboriginal people were skill-trained but were not given the opportunity to learn management or supervisory skills.

In order to aid the mission and government settlements in implementing the assimilation policy the government increased staffing subsidies and funding for capital works, health, education and training programs throughout the 1960s. The settlements began to change. Water and electricity supplies were connected, sewerage systems were installed, hospitals, schools and houses were built or upgraded and vocational training was given to Aborigines. These initiatives were undertaken with funding assistance by the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund (ABTF). This fund was created in 1952 and derived its income from royalties paid for mining or timber operations on Aboriginal Reserves (Donovan 1984, 203).

From the mid 1960s many changes took place in relation to Aborigines being accepted into mainstream Australian society. In 1965 the Commonwealth electoral franchise was extended to Aborigines on a voluntary basis. Industrial awards regulating conditions of employment were extended to cover Aborigines and in 1967 a national
referendum was held to determine whether or not the Commonwealth Parliament would be given power to legislate in respect of Aborigines throughout Australia. Over 90% of the Australian population voted to give this power to the Commonwealth which opened up the possibility for direct Commonwealth government involvement in policy formulation and program administration. For some, this referendum marked a significant changing point in Aboriginal affairs while others believed that it:

was widely misunderstood by Aborigines and non-Aborigines as guaranteeing civil rights, when all it did was give the Commonwealth powers concurrent with those of the State in matters of Aboriginal Affairs, and the power to include Aborigines in any national census counts (Tonkinson & Howard 1990a, 72).

In 1968, the Minister for Social Security issued a directive detailing that Aboriginal people should receive direct payment of benefits. The initial implementation of this directive proved difficult and many institutionalised Aborigines remained dependent on State and Territory welfare authorities because of the lack of information regarding accessibility to these benefits and the reticence of some mission and other government settlement staff to inform Aborigines of their entitlements.

An Employment Training Scheme for Aborigines administered by the Commonwealth Employment Service was introduced in July 1969. It was designed to encourage employment of Aborigines and to facilitate their movement to areas where they could obtain a wider, more skilled range of employment. This scheme provided financial incentives designed to encourage Aboriginal people to participate as well as subsidies for employers. In addition to this a 'training allowance' for Aborigines on settlements was introduced in 1969
to give Aboriginals opportunity to obtain increased cash wages and occupational advancement by increasing their work skills and improving their work habits, and to place greater responsibility on income earners and their wives by giving them a full cash wage instead of a wage in cash and kind (Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Territory Division Annual Report 1972–73).

The scheme involved a hierarchy of subdivided grades with the superintendent of each settlement being given the authority to determine the level at which individual workers would be placed. The upper two levels of this graded hierarchy required a particular skill or supervisory ability. Reverend Bernard Clarke believes that the introduction of a training allowance in 1969 was a crucial factor in the establishment of the Angham Land Progress Association and changed the whole economic basis of the communities. With the introduction of the training allowance, lump sums of money were paid to Community Councils based on a local government model. This, together with the introduction of award wages for Aborigines, had serious implications for the continuance of various industries established by the missions. The missions could not afford to pay award wages because of the loss of government funding and Aborigines were attracted by the higher wages the Council offered under the training allowance scheme. Clarke believes that this led to the destruction of the economic base that had been built up with the missions through these industries, and, furthermore, changed the relationship between reward and labour (although not stated explicitly this probably refers to people being paid money through the councils without having their work adequately monitored (Rev. Clarke, pers. comm., 1992)).
It was during the late 1960s that the number of Aboriginal organisations concerned with a wide variety of economic, social and cultural concerns substantially increased. Organisations such as community progress associations, housing associations and social clubs came into prominence at this time and succeeded in changing the make-up of the Community Councils which had previously had non-Aboriginal membership with the community superintendent as the chairperson. These organisations were usually advised by Church or government community workers and provided the basis for the Aboriginal Councils currently administering the communities. Aboriginal people also became more politicised (in a western sense) at this time and began agitating for a recognition of their 'rights' as citizens and as traditional owners of this country. This led to Aborigines walking off cattle stations at Wave Hill and Newcastle Waters mainly in demand for better wages and working conditions and the Yirrkala land rights case which, in part, resulted in the presentation of the now famous bark petition to Parliament.

By 1971 Aboriginal opinion about the management and development of policies directly affecting them was finally taken into consideration with the formation of the Aboriginal Advisory Council. This council consisted of 12 Aborigines and was required to advise the Minister on Aboriginal affairs. The census of 1971 also adopted a self-identification definition of Aboriginality and has been described as being indicative of a whole change of philosophy in Aboriginal Affairs policy development (Altman & Sanders 1991, 4).

Despite increases in expenditure for Aboriginal affairs, the build up of a 'community' infrastructure on the settlements, the introduction of a training allowance, the granting of an award wage, the establishment of various training programs, and the greater input from Aboriginal people into policy decisions, Cole maintains that the mission settlements were becoming 'little theocratic states' with the government settlements being worse because of the excessive employment of large numbers of non-Aboriginal people to administer the settlements.

The change in emphasis from protection to welfare had been a great advance in policy, but it was by no means the final answer ... [Aborigines] were institutionalised and managed for their welfare, instead of being free people determining what they themselves wanted. They were educated and given vocational training in artificial communities and under paternalistic control. They were second-rate workers, given a training allowance because they had not yet achieved sufficient status to equal even the uneducated labourer outside the reserves ... Aborigines were just not being assimilated, despite the devoted services of large numbers of welfare and mission personnel and the expenditure of enormous sums of money ... Something dramatic had to be done. The change was started when Labor swept to power in December 1972 (Cole 1979, 102).

The transition begins

The change of government in 1972 brought, among other things, significant changes to policies concerning Aborigines. Labor Prime Minister Whitlam declared that the 'basic object of my government's policy, is to restore to the Aboriginal people of Australia their lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs' (Cavanagh 1974, 12). Labor's election platform proposed to grant land rights over Aboriginal Reserves, to establish a land fund which could purchase alienated land, to outlaw racial discrimination, to provide legal aid for Aborigines, and establish
a statutory basis for Aboriginal communities and their political and administrative organisations.

'Self-determination' became the new catch phrase of government policy and Aboriginal people were finally entitled some input to the policy making machinery. To create the administrative infrastructure to allow this to happen, the Whitlam government formed a separate Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) by combining the relatively new Office of Aboriginal Affairs with the older Aboriginal Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration. This department was to be advised on issues pertaining to Aborigines by the newly formed National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) made up of Aboriginal representatives from various parts of Australia.4

One of the more significant achievements of the Whitlam government was the commissioning of an inquiry into Aboriginal land rights which became the precursor to the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. Mr Justice Woodward was commissioned in February 1973 to inquire into the means whereby Aborigines be given freehold title to traditional land. The resultant Woodward Report (1973, 1974) represented a landmark in Aboriginal affairs because it recognised that restoration of land to Aboriginal people would not only alter their economic status but would make possible the 'preservation of a spiritual link with his own land which gives each Aboriginal his sense of identity and lies at the heart of his spiritual beliefs' (Coombs 1978, 8). This legislation has been described as representing the most 'tangible expression from a succession of governments of a concern for Aboriginal Welfare' (Donovan 1984, 240–241). Under this legislation Aborigines would receive communal inalienable freehold title to land on Northern Territory Aboriginal Reserves and other vacant Crown land. This Act also provided for the establishment of Land Councils and the appointment of a Land Commissioner to hear claims on unalienated Crown lands.

Free to decide

Changes in government policy, beginning in the late 1960s, entailed the withdrawing of direct funding to missions. This, together with the increasing emphasis placed on Aborigines having a right to determine their own futures and a concurrent backlash against missionaries who were seen to be depriving Aborigines of this fundamental right, motivated the Methodist missions to reassess their position in the communities. In 1972 the Methodist missions became incorporated as a separate agency of the United Church in North Australia. This agency assumed the duties of the Church's 'development arm' and was called the Civic and Economic Development Council Incorporated (CEDAR was later renamed the Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services [AADS] by the Church).5

Cole's analysis of the introduction of the policy of self-determination and its immediate effect on the communities is indicative of the resentment felt by missionaries for, what was considered, the hasty introduction of these policies:

The initial working of the policy of self-determination in the Arnhem Land communities was traumatic. Almost overnight non-Aboriginal staff were asked to change from directive to
advisory roles. Established areas of authority, work patterns and administrative structures had to be redefined. For many months Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff were confused (Cole 1980, 16).

Although doubt was expressed about the nature of the introduction of these policies, the Reverend Gordon Symons (Executive Officer of the UCNA and ALPA's first chairperson) issued a letter to all missionary staff stating that:

it is extremely important that we as missionaries do not take dominant positions. I feel that we must be more and more prepared to step into the background, I know that this is not easy for a number of reasons, I realise that some of the Aboriginal people do find it hard to step into positions of leadership, nevertheless, if they are not given the opportunity they will never get to this point (AD/letter: Symons to mission staff; 31 July 1973).

In August 1973 the United Church in North Australia resolved to send a Commission of Inquiry into Arnhem Land. The aims of the Inquiry were to recommend which activities of AADS be handed over to Aboriginal people and to examine the structure of AADS making recommendations for its reorganisation (Clarke 1974). The Commission, made up of six non-Aboriginal people from the Church, visited each community and met with Community Councils, clan leaders, organisations, individual Aborigines and staff in the communities. Preparation for the Commission's visit to each community was undertaken by Jonetani Rika, a Fijian community development worker based at Yirrkala. This was considered a necessary prerequisite as it would give Aboriginal people time to sit down and determine which questions needed asking and to reach resolutions before the Commission actually arrived. In 1974 the findings of this Commission were prepared as a final report under the title of Free to decide. According to this report, the 'climate' in Arnhem Land suggested Aboriginal people had 'rising expectations' in that the future would hold more social, economic and cultural benefits. The Church recognised and acknowledged that Aboriginal people wanted their independence. 'The people say that we want the missionaries. However we will organise things, organise the work and all this, but we want the missionaries' (Clarke 1974, 85).

The Commission found that the influx of non-Aboriginal appointments into the communities to assist in the implementation of the self-determination policy and the changes in administration of the communities created clashes:

At the moment we have two powers, or two forces, one the Church which has nurtured the Aboriginal people from the beginning and the Government coming in so fast it makes it difficult for the Aboriginal people, and also separates the Aboriginal people. It divides them up, one going with the Church, another with the Government, and so on (Clarke 1974, 8).

The Report alluded to the fear that Aboriginal people had of 'other balanda':

Are we going to live ourselves or is the mission going to be here with us. If we push you, the missionaries, away the other balanda will come ... We ourselves are just frightened of the other balanda. I still myself know we want the missionaries to stay with us ... We are not thinking of other balanda, only missionaries because missionaries think of us ... They don't push us around, but work side by side (Clarke 1974, 25).

The Church endeavoured to allay Aboriginal people's fears that they were going to withdraw completely stating that 'where and when Aboriginal communities wanted the assistance of AADS ('the mission') we would do everything possible to respond'
(Clarke 1974, 1). The members of the Commission discussed other changes taking place in the communities and in government policy including: discussions of Aboriginal people's rights in matters relating to land, resources and authority; award wages; the need for continued training and skills learning; the role of the newly created National Aboriginal Consultative Council (NACC); the incorporation of Community Councils; education; alcohol; sacred sites; and the growing homeland/outstation movement (Clarke 1974).

The Church denied that it found changes in government policy threatening, stating that 'it welcomes the freedom (from administration and service duties) and the wider scope it gives to Aboriginal people' (Clarke 1974, 114). The Church respected and supported Aboriginal aspirations for independence and resolved to adopt an advisory role in the communities:

The Commission sees self-determining communities as one of the objectives of a liberating mission ... It would stress the importance of a consultative, rather than initiating, function within a community whose life style must predominate, and in which people are free to choose their own direction, style and pace of change (Clarke 1974, 95).

The Report claims that the Gospel was not perceived as a threat by Aboriginal people to their Aboriginality and believes that the Church's role was not to impose but to 'proclaim' and to 'liberate' (Clarke 1974, 107–8). The Church, through the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and the Aboriginal Resource and Development Service (ARDS), remains a significant force in both the Arnhem Land communities and in Darwin.

A major consequence of money being paid directly to Community Councils was that funding, which had previously been allocated to the missions, gradually diminished. Regardless of the policy direction the Church had resolved to pursue, this loss of funding forced the missions to scale down their operations in the communities. The then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Cavanagh, informed the 1975 National Mission Administration Conference:

I sympathise with missions who consider that they still have a secular role to perform in Aboriginal communities and I think it would be most unfortunate if they felt compelled or pressured into precipitated action. They have a long-standing relationship of mutual trust with Aboriginal communities and their withdrawal would leave a vacuum which the Government would be hard put to fill in terms of physical resources, let alone in terms of human relationships ... Having said this I must make it clear that the Government can only support mission conducted programs which coincide with its own views as to the future of the Aboriginal communities (Cavanagh 1975).

From mission to community

By the 1970s the term 'community' began to replace terms such as 'mission' and 'settlement' especially when discussing policies affecting Aborigines and the delivery of services to Aborigines. Community advisors and development workers, Aboriginal Community Councils and Aboriginal Community Resource Centres all came into existence.
Smith contends that to ensure the smooth transition of government policy:

an immediate blanket solution was demanded and 'community' was vague enough to cater for a self 'determination' strategy which fitted within the parameters of the broader community; a strategy which suggested civil equality, democracy and free choice; a strategy which could accommodate both the residual protectionist, institutional approaches and attitudes of old staff and the aspirations of the new personnel working under this policy ... 'community' suddenly became a self-evident cultural characteristic. It would seem it was the medium through which to deliver all sorts of policies and services in a manner which would automatically be culturally appropriate, democratic, ensure equal access and at the same time be politically and socially acceptable to the majority of other Australians (Smith 1989, 4).

Aboriginal people had been forced to live on settlements by the creation of 'Reserves' and the introduction of 'protective' legislation stipulating that Aboriginal people move onto these Reserves. They were further lured to these settlements by the distribution of western materials, services and technology. Aboriginal people never existed in settled 'communities' as non-Aboriginals understand them but were hunters and gatherers moving within well defined territories in extended family groupings, sometimes meeting with other clans during special ceremonies. The creation of mission and government settlements took little account of traditional clan structures or sensitivities. These factors remain one of the many barriers to effective 'community development' program implementation and the establishment of economic enterprises in Aboriginal communities today.

Community Councils became incorporated under the Commonwealth Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976) or the Northern Territory Associations Incorporated Act (1978). The incorporation of councils and organisations enabled registered groups to hold property and receive and disburse funds and to provide for financial accountability and legal responsibility. Aboriginal Community Councils were to be autonomous and were in charge of community administration including service delivery and any decisions directly affecting the communities were to be channelled through them.

Increasing amounts of money were channelled into Aboriginal communities and into the growing bureaucratic infrastructure designed to assist Aboriginal people throughout the 1970s. This resulted in huge changes on the settlements including house and building construction, the provision of electricity and water services and increasing numbers of hospitals and schools and personnel employed to operate these facilities. In addition to this, different government departments instigated training programs and devised employment and 'development' programs designed to assist in the transition of the communities into self-sufficient entities. Apart from the instigation of training and employment programs, priority was also given to economic development in the communities through the establishment of enterprises or industries. In the early 1970s the priority areas for economic development were mining, pastoral, fishing, forestry, buffalo, agriculture and horticulture industries and art (DAA NT Division Annual Report 1972–73). The financial support for these industries was to come from the Aborigines Benefits Trust Fund.

Currently, there are approximately 20 large Aboriginal communities with many 'outstations' attached to these communities scattered throughout the Northern Territory. They vary enormously in population size, being subject to various factors
such as the climate, the number of ceremonies occurring in a particular area and movements to outstations or into towns. As the following table indicates there remains a large proportion of non-Aboriginal people resident in these communities.8

Table 1. Total population in selected* Aboriginal communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander</th>
<th>Total Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belyuen (Delissaville)</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minjilang (Croker Island)</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warruwi (South Goulburn Island)</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island)</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>1,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella)</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milingimbi</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramingining</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umbakumba</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yirrkala</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Communities selected represent ones in which ALPA has maintained some involvement.


As the settlements changed character and populations in these communities began to increase, the community stores also underwent a marked transition. From a starting point of providing people with a food ration service, the store was to become enmeshed in the social, economic and political life of the community. Elspeth Young's comprehensive study, Outback stores: retail services in north Australian Aboriginal communities, provides much background for the assessment of the role of stores in isolated Aboriginal communities. Stores have a much broader role in these communities than in non-Aboriginal communities, although many of their functions do overlap. Store functions in isolated Aboriginal communities include the straightforward retailing service together with the less obvious banking and financial operations, economic, social and educational functions.

The physical well-being of the community is one of the more important aspects of store activities given that there is usually only one store in a community. It, therefore, has the responsibility of providing the community with adequate choices regarding the consumption of goods — in terms of nutritional content, size variation and appropriate pricing policies.

Aboriginal community stores are usually the only cheque cashing agency in the community because there is often not enough business to support a bank agency or because neither the council nor bank hold cash floats large enough to deal with normal transactions.
Plate 8. Store day at Milingimbi, 1957
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0707

This situation could occur in isolated non-Aboriginal communities, although the pressure on stores in Aboriginal communities for this service is probably greater because of the higher proportion of people receiving social security benefits.

The store's social and educational functions include providing neutral ground for people of different clans to meet and discuss community matters. The store also provides an appropriate forum for learning about the goods available at the store in terms of their monetary, social and nutritional value. The store's economic functions include the employment and training of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal labour. The stores are often the only community employers not dependent on government funding. Training includes basic store work but can also lead onto clerical work and supervisory and management duties.

The stores are usually managed by non-Aborigines and employ a number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers. Stores are often the only outlet for locally produced goods, such as fruit, vegetables and artefacts, and can therefore stimulate economic enterprises within the community (Young 1984).

The role of the store in the community today has changed dramatically since the mission days when the 'store' was a depot for distributing rations of food, tobacco, blankets and sometimes clothes.
A booklet published by ALPA's Aboriginal Store Training School (ASTS) described the distribution of rations:

Three times a day the flour and tobacco was taken outside the store-room. Yolnu were given their share — old women in the morning and workers at lunchtime and dinnertime ... Everyone had to work for their food. Some yolnu went hunting and swapped the things that they caught ... Others made art and craft that could be sold down south ... When more and more Yolnu came to the mission stations, it was harder to feed everyone outside the storeroom ... so yolnu were asked to line-up and walk past a window with their cup (AD/ASTS 1983).

Up until the late 1960s the Federal government had provided the missions with sums of money to buy food to be distributed as rations. This money was administered by the superintendent on each mission. After purchasing supplies for the depots, any residual money was spent on upgrading facilities on the missions. Stock for the ration depots was usually ordered from Jolly's in Darwin with the owner of Jolly's being the accountant for the missions (AD/ASTS 1983, 9). The missionaries also used credit or sold Aboriginal artworks and fruit and vegetables grown on the missions to this supplier who in turn gave the missions supplies of flour, tobacco, calico and golden syrup. The mission lugger was used monthly to deliver supplies to the communities with the actual rations being distributed daily.

Policy changes regarding direct payment of social security benefits to Aborigines and the introduction of the training allowance had important implications for community store operations. During the late 1960s, ration stores were superseded by counter-service stores which could offer a wider variety of goods and opened for longer hours. This was in response to the growth in personal income of some Aborigines because of the above policy changes, increased demand for new or different products, the increasing population on Aboriginal settlements, and the loss of direct funding to the missions which had previously enabled them to distribute rations.

These counter-service stores operated in tin sheds with concrete floors and an opening at the front where people would wait to be served. A description of this kind of counter-service at Yuendumu follows:

At busy periods the women made a lot of noise, talking and laughing, and were ordered rather than asked to lower their voices by some of the staff. They were also told to queue to be served when there were many customers ... Queuing was, however, rarely maintained for long, as most of the women wanted to stand along the counter where they could see the foods displayed and watch what others were buying (Middleton & Francis 1976, 93).

At this stage most of the communities operated a generator which was only available for one hour in the morning, at lunchtime and in the evening. The efficiency of the monthly barge service was a determining factor in the availability of goods, although an air service could fly in essential or perishable goods. The arrival of the barge, during the day or night (somewhat difficult to determine because of poor communications systems at this stage), meant that all able-bodied people in the community were required to assist with the barge unloading. The stores provided basic stock such as flour, sugar, tea, tobacco, soap, tinned meat, powdered milk, knives and fishing gear and usually opened one afternoon a week. This changed as the stores began stocking a wider variety of goods and Aboriginal dependency on longer store opening hours increased.
Plate 9. Unloading the barge at the Ngalalala/Ramingining barge landing
*Source:* ALPA files

Plate 10. The 'Warawi' Mission lugger was used to transport goods to the communities before the barge service became commercialised
*Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0584*
Increasingly, Aboriginal people came to be regarded as paying customers rather than passive recipients of a ration handout. Aborigines could also exchange art work or local produce for goods sold at the store.

Stores in Aboriginal communities have been affected by the official government policy of the day. The store has now assumed a place of major importance for cultural, social, political and economic reasons. During the 'assimilation era' stores were organised 'to assist in the process of aiding Aborigines to adopt European lifestyles'. The payment of social security benefits to Aboriginal people plus the increase of Commonwealth government funding paid directly to Community Councils, impacted strongly on the development of community stores. In keeping with policies of self-determination and economic independence being a prerequisite to this, newly incorporated Community Councils were placed in control of the stores. The Councils, having no expertise or training in this area, were encouraged to employ non-Aboriginal store managers who had the dual role of running the store and training Aboriginal staff in store operation.

The United Church played a significant part in the transition of the stores from ration depots to counter-service stores and then finally to self-service supermarkets. In keeping with the government's policies of Aboriginal self-determination and need for economic independence, the mission handed over all its assets, including buildings and materials, (except the Church building) to the Aboriginal Community Councils. This included the store building or ration depot and any associated assets.

![Plate 11. The Church building at Milingimbi](image)

*Source: S Wells*
Even though the store buildings were handed over to Aboriginal Council ownership, the control and operation of the stores was generally retained by the current mission administration 'who felt that, since they could ensure that codes of honesty were upheld, they had the best interests of the community at heart' (Young 1982, 63). According to documentation from the Arnhem Land Progress Association:

the church let go of the control they had in the mission stations. The church did not hand over the stores to the yolnu because the yolnu did not know enough about running the store business ... They wanted to give yolnu power to decide the future of the stores in their communities ... What they did was to go to the balanda law and make a backbone and a body. The arms were to be the stores on every Methodist mission in the top end of the Northern Territory ... They did this by calling the body the Arnhemland Progress Association (A.L.P.A.) and incorporating it to give it a law of its own (AD/ASTS 1983, 25–27).

Notes

2. In the late 1940s the total mission subsidy was £2,700; by 1953 it was £130,000; in 1954–5 it increased to £166,244 and for 1971–2 $3.3 million was spent on Aboriginal welfare through the missions (Donovan 1984, 200–1).
3. Funds paid into the ABTF were to be used for the general benefit of Aborigines in the Northern Territory as determined by the Minister for the Northern Territory. This fund is now called the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Account (ABTA).
4. According to Altman and Sanders (1991) the DAA encountered many initial problems such as forcing the States to channel their own resources into Aboriginal affairs rather than being reliant on Commonwealth money and in encouraging other departments to assume a more active interest in Aboriginal issues.
5. A document produced by AADS states that their approach to community development 'recognises that each Aboriginal community has the right to determine the pace, style and direction of its life' with the role of AADS development staff being to 'work alongside the community as it grapples with current problems and future possibilities'. AADS resource officers concentrate on community development, human development and race relations initiatives in isolated Aboriginal communities and in Darwin. AADS has recently changed its name to the Aboriginal Resource and Development Service (ARDs) and currently administers the Aboriginal Women's Resource Centre in Darwin which has an educative, health and social work role. All ARDS workers are required to undergo a community development workers training course at Nungaliyana College.
6. The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme was one of these programs. It was introduced during the early days of the Fraser Liberal government in 1976/77. This scheme aimed to provide Aboriginal people in remote communities with employment in community development projects as an alternative to receiving unemployment benefits. It has experienced a mixed success rate in many communities (see Sanders 1988).
7. The homeland or outstation movement describes Aboriginal movement away from the larger settlements into small communities in remote areas, generally in their own specific tribal homelands.
8. The 1991 Census of Population and Housing (preliminary data) places the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander population at 37,698. Total persons in the Northern Territory at the time of the census was recorded as 175,253. The Northern Territory has the largest number of Aboriginal people relative to the rest of the population of any state in Australia. It was not until the 1950s that non-Aboriginal people began to outnumber Aboriginal people in the Territory. Over the last thirty years there has been a significant decrease in the number of Aboriginal people living in rural locations. In 1966 approximately 85% of the Territory's Aboriginal population lived in rural areas. This decreased to 70% by 1986 (ABS 1990).
CHAPTER THREE

ALPA — THE BEGINNINGS 1972–76

They had Europeans behind the counter of the store, but the Navajo were the bosses. They had Indians behind the counter too. The Indians were the boss and could employ anyone they liked. It should be working here. It is what we are struggling for ... We should have more say in running the town (Clarke 1974, 6).

This chapter looks at the first four years of ALPA's existence: the changing role and shape of the stores, the formation of ALPA's constitution and constitutional objective, the administrative structure of the Association and the difficulties and successes experienced in establishing a western commercial structure in an isolated Aboriginal community. The transition of the store from ration depots to counter-service stores with a limited range of goods to self-service supermarkets with an increased variety of goods was an outcome of the changes occurring in the communities throughout the 1970s. The transition to a self-service style of store was a slow process and occurred at a different pace in each community.

The Arnhem Land Progress Association conceived

Opinions differ regarding the motivation for the formation of the Arnhem Land Progress Association. This conflict reflects, to a certain extent, the differences in philosophy of staff employed in the communities during the early 1970s — especially between the remaining mission staff and incoming government personnel. One view is that financial cuts to the missions during the early 1970s forced them to seek an alternative funding base. Community stores were seen to be potentially lucrative enterprises and could perhaps support the Church in maintaining the work begun before changes in government policy forced them to rethink their role in the communities.1 Others insist that the concept behind the formation of ALPA was in keeping with the principles of self-determination circulating at the time. The Church wanted to create an organisation for Aboriginal people which would support them on their path towards independence. This debate remains unresolved today. ALPA has attempted to strike a balance between true self-determination/Aboriginal control and maintaining appropriately run and financially independent community stores in an increasingly competitive environment. This is important to the story of ALPA, and the way in which ALPA has endeavoured to deal with this is addressed in this book.

Graham White, a mission employee based at Minjilang, stressed that the Association was formed to provide an essential service for Aboriginal people while also generating an income for the mission: 'ALPA was there to generate funds because we didn't know how long the mission would be funded' (White, pers. comm., 1992). White's contention that ALPA was to be an alternative funding agency for the United Church of North Australia (UCNA) in Arnhem Land is not supported by the Reverend Bernard Clarke who maintains that the Church had to divert funds from other areas in order to establish and develop the Arnhem Land Progress Association. A report from
the Trade Store Association Committee in 1971 which originally discussed the
conception of ALPA stated that the 'first principle to be kept in mind when drafting
the rules and regulations of the proposed association' should include:

recognition of the fact that sooner or later this incorporated body will be handed over to
Aboriginals who will end up being the owners of the incorporated body ... It is proposed that the
organisation of the trade store association incorporated should be as much as possible along
business lines so that the future Aboriginal owners will have an opportunity of seeing how a
business organisation is run on a district basis (AD/Trade Store Association Committee Report
to 1971 Synod, Yirrkala).

This report was straightforward in its contention that ALPA was to transform what
were trade stores into efficient, viable businesses — handing them over to Aboriginal
control when this was the case. This directive does not seem problematical except
when the climate in which it was to be implemented is considered. Aboriginal
communities experienced a great deal of upheaval during the 1970s with changes to
welfare legislation and government policies and the influx of non-Aboriginal people
into the communities. The Association did not escape the turmoil of these years.

White alludes to the Church's antagonism towards the government's community
development agenda and self-determination policies. Previously, the missions had
been responsible for implementing government policy even though some had felt
these policies to be misplaced. By 1972 the missions were almost universally
condemned as being the propagators of such evils as assimilation and the forced
separation of families. Their long-term experience in administering the settlements,
the strong relationships which had evolved between mission staff and Aborigines, and
various industries established on the missions were no longer given the credit some
felt they deserved. During the first fews years of ALPA's existence there was much
conflict between the incoming government personnel employed to assist the
settlements in becoming self-determining communities and the mission staff already
stationed there.

Unfortunately, dissidence also arose between mission personnel in the communities.
In establishing an Association such as ALPA, the Church maintained its position and
influence within the communities. However, the Church's newly adopted 'hand by
hand' advisory approach to their work conflicted with their aim of developing the
community stores. The operation of the stores required a directive rather than an
advisory role because of Aboriginal inexperience in this kind of enterprise
development. Aboriginal people were not initially included in the development of the
stores and some staff felt that this conflicted with the notions of self-sufficiency and
self-determination. In addition to this, some Church staff resented ALPA's profit
orientated business approach to the development of the stores (Everall, pers. comm.,
1992). Some Church people felt that they should not be involved in economic
enterprises but should remain content with overseeing the spiritual and moral
development of the communities.

Theoretically, at the Darwin administration level, the concept of Aboriginal ownership
and control of the stores was a determining factor in the decision to create an
Association such as ALPA. On the other hand, the priority of the Association, as seen
by the local store managers, was in the building up of the physical infrastructure of the
stores on a commercial basis. Their primary task was to make the stores profitable
and the organisation as a whole self-supporting as quickly as possible. At this stage the stores were generally experiencing significant trading losses, and had limited opening hours, lacked effective management, and were poorly stocked and staffed. The task of building the stores up to be viable enterprises was extremely challenging.

The actual inauguration of the Arnhem Land Progress Association passed relatively unnoticed both in Darwin and in the communities. The administration of the organisation remained within the jurisdiction of the United Church, and staff for the stores were recruited from mission personnel already working in the communities or in Darwin. There was no separate accounting system for the Association; the United Church's accountant was responsible for overseeing a joint account of both AADS and ALPA. Stock was supplied to the stores on the same basis that the ration stations and then counter-service stores had operated. The MOM operated a store in Darwin which drew its supplies from a warehouse operated by the United Church. This warehouse was to expand considerably as the community stores increased their range of stock on sale.

The Reverend Gordon Symons and John Vanderwal were appointed ALPA's first chairperson and Secretary/Accountant respectively. Graham White, superintendent at Minjilang, was transferred into Darwin to oversee ALPA's overall business operation, to monitor the stores in each community and to supervise the United Church's warehouse facilities. At this stage the Arnhem Land Progress Association assumed responsibility for the stores at Minjilang, Nangalala (later transferred to Ramingining), Milingimbi, Galiwin'ku, Warruwi, Gapuwiyak and Yirrkala (see Figure 2).

L–R: Harold Shepherdson, Bernie Clarke, Peter O'Connor, Gordon Symons, Gavan Armstrong, Marcel Spengler, Wally Fawell, Lazarus Lami Lami, Moses Latu
Source: NT State Library, no. 0049/0131
Plate 13. The store at Warruwi
Source: ALPA files

Plate 14. The store at Minjilang
Source: ALPA files
Figure 2. ALPA stores and consultancy stores in Arnhem Land and Western Australia
Aboriginal participation within ALPA at this time was minimal, the organisation being very much a service provided for the people rather than by the people. This is reflected in ALPA's first Constitution/Rules where it is made quite clear that the organisation was for Aboriginal people with the controlling agents being the Church. The idea of ALPA was not conceived by Aboriginal people but by Church officials determined to provide Aboriginal people with an essential service which had the potential to become a lucrative business and help Aboriginal people develop skills necessary for self-determination.

Making the 'rules'

When ALPA was first incorporated in 1972, the objective of the Association recorded in the original Constitution was 'to further the social and economic development of the Aboriginal people in north Australia'. Furthermore, the Association was to be 'a non-profit organisation' with no part of the Association's accumulated funds or assets [to] be distributed in any way whatsoever or used except for the purpose of fulfilling the Association's objects'. ALPA's constitution has been labelled the 'Rules of the Arnhem Land Progress Association'. Hereafter ALPA's constitution will be referred to as 'the Rules'. The 'powers of the Association' were:

- to erect, demolish, rebuild, repair, alter or improve any buildings or existing buildings, works or improvements of any description on any land of the Association or to which the Association has any estate or interest;
- the borrowing and receiving of funds; the acquisition of property;
- the distribution or diversion of funds 'not immediately required';
- the establishment and support of associations, institutions, funds, trusts and companies of any kind;
- the donation of funds for religious or charitable purposes;
- the supply of managerial assistance or advice to other stores 'owned by Aboriginal communities in which there is not a retail outlet of the Association'; and
- 'to do all such other lawful things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects' (AD/Rules of the ALPA, 1972).

ALPA's Central and Executive Committees

Initially the organisational structure of the Association consisted of a Central Committee and an Executive Committee. The Central Committee was made up of the Association chairperson, Darwin/Association manager and the Principal Accounting Officer together with six members of the Association. These six members were to be elected at the Annual Meeting of the Association with the added provision that at least three of those elected be Aboriginal. These elected members were to hold office for one year. Annual Meetings were to be attended by representatives from each ALPA member community — this included one ALPA staff member and one Aboriginal member of each 'local committee' — as well as ALPA's chairperson, the Darwin/Association manager and the accountant from the Civic and Economic Development Council Incorporated.

The Central Committee was to act as the standing committee of the Association to decide issues which arose between Annual Meetings. This Committee was to be responsible for the finances of the Association although 'routine payments' could be
made by the Accountant on the authority of the chairperson or Darwin manager. All
decisions made by the Central Committee were subject to the approval of the Annual
Meeting or any Special Meeting. It was provided for in the Rules that the Central
Committee could designate responsibilities to the Executive Committee, although 'in
the event of emergencies, the Executive may take action as it sees fit and report to the
Central Committee or the Synod as necessary'. The Rules also gave authority to the
chairperson to bring a casting vote in the event of an even number of votes on any
decisions made by the Central Committee.²

The Executive Committee consisted of the three 'ex-officio' members of the Central
Committee, that is, the Association chairperson, Darwin/Association manager and the
Principal Accounting Officer. The positions of chairperson and Darwin/Association
manager were to be appointed by CEDAR with it being mandatory that the
chairperson of CEDAR also be the chairperson of ALPA. The chairperson's powers
included that in the event of any unforeseen circumstances for which there were no
provisions in the Rules, or if there was any doubt as to the correct procedure for any
occasion or a dispute over the interpretation of ALPA's Rules, the chairperson, having
regard to the Rules, was to make the final decision. The Rules provided for the
dissolution of ALPA which was dependent upon a two-thirds majority rule of
members personally present at the Annual Meeting.

Local committees

The United Church's earlier commission of inquiry (1973) investigated the role and
operation of the store in the communities visited and highlighted the role of local store
committees as a means of ensuring Aboriginal input to store operation. Discussions
were also initiated with the Aboriginal Community Councils concerning the
possibility of accepting responsibility for the local store committee as a sub-committee
of the Council. It was believed that this would assist in making the Councils
responsible for the store in association with the store committee and the manager and
'within the limits of the ALPA budget' (Clarke 1974, 132). These local committees
were to be elected once a year by 'all the Association members resident in the area
concerned and present at the local Annual Meeting' and were to consist of 'not less
than seven and not more than eleven members, the majority of which should be
Aboriginal'. Local store managers were entitled to attend these local store committee
meetings but could not vote unless they were elected members. The local committee
was to make 'such recommendations on the management of the local store(s) as it
deems fit' with the Community Council, the local store manager and the Association
manager taking such recommendations into account when making decisions
concerning the stores. The local committees were also required to submit reports to
ALPA Annual Meetings (AD/Rules of the ALPA, 1972).

Membership

Membership of the Association was offered to Aborigines, employees of CEDAR and
'other approved persons who are resident in towns where facilities of the association
are located', the Ministers of religion and 'their staff and assistants associated with the
work in Arnhemland' of the UCNA and any other 'approved persons'. The subscription rate for membership was 20 cents. The eligibility of both non-Aborigines and Church representatives for membership of the Association was probably necessary because the Association, originally incorporated under the *Association Incorporation Ordinance* of 1963 would not have been able to have a restrictive membership. The stores also instituted a rule that entitled only members of the Association to buy from the store. The Association could hardly restrict its membership to Aborigines when many of its non-Aboriginal personnel were dependent on goods from the store.

ALPA's rules have undergone many changes over the twenty year period and reflect changes occurring in both management and in the communities over this period; they will be discussed throughout this book.

**Transforming the stores**

The character and personality of Graham White, ALPA's first Darwin based manager, significantly influenced the transition of the stores from a counter-service style of operation to a self-service supermarket. White moved to the Territory in 1960 after a 'call from God' one Sunday to take up a position with the Methodist Overseas Mission as builder/carpenter on Minjilang (White, pers. comm., 1992). White had an entrepreneurial spirit and endeavoured to undertake a crash course in tropical building before embarking for Minjilang two weeks after arriving in Darwin. After spending several years at Minjilang, White moved back to Darwin, under the title of Clerk of Works, where he began an assignment building the Somerville cottages. These cottages were to house the children formerly based at the children's homes on Croker Island (Minjilang).

White returned to Minjilang in 1969 as the first lay superintendent after the abandonment of the cottage home system. On his return to Minjilang he found many things 'antiquated and wrong' — especially the service provided by the store (White, pers. comm., 1992). He immediately instituted changes that were to permanently alter the face of community stores. He appointed a full-time store manager and revolutionised store structure by dismantling packing crates and other materials to be used as shelves, thereby creating a self-service style of operation rather than the previously utilised counter-service. He increased the variety of goods and the range of brand names so that people could 'buy anything on Croker that they could in Darwin'; he introduced pre-packaged goods rejecting the former practice of people purchasing items which they stored in old flour drums; and he eventually instituted a lay-by policy which, theoretically, enabled Aboriginal people to buy anything available in the stores or in Darwin (White, pers. comm., 1992).

These vast changes did not go unchallenged. Some missionaries believed that there were certain things in a western culture (such as carbonated drinks, biscuits, breakfast cereal and tobacco) that would be intrinsically wrong to introduce into Aboriginal communities. The function of the store was to provide Aboriginal people with what was 'good' and nutritious not the 'rubbish' of a non-Aboriginal culture. White challenged this view believing that Aboriginal people had a right to choose or
determine what was or was not 'good' for them and believed that Aboriginal people should have access to everything available to non-Aboriginal people in non-Aboriginal communities. White believed in 'one rule for everyone' and prohibited certain practices. For example, non-Aboriginal people were no longer able to 'owe' money on their purchases but were required to pay for them up front like everybody else (White, pers. comm., 1992). According to a long-time store manager at Minjilang, Joyce Deering (pers. comm., 1992), Aboriginal people:

enjoyed seeing different things as long as it wasn't too complicated because at that stage there weren't many who could read a great deal so it was really a visual type of thing ... it was really an educating process as much as anything else, one to handle money and two to make choices about things instead of having those choices made for you and accepting what you were given.

White's enthusiasm in operating and developing the store service at Minjilang coupled with his desire to see equality in the services offered to Aboriginal people no doubt inspired the Church to transfer him into Darwin and place him in charge of supervising store transition in other Arnhem Land communities. This was not an easy task. Although some communities (Goulburn Island & Yirrkala) did improve their stores, White criticised the reticence of other store managers and superintendents to implement policies similar to his and could not understand why people would not convert to self-service and widen the variety of merchandise available. He described the practices at Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) as like 'running your head into a brick wall' because the store manager insisted that Aboriginal people did not want or need the variety of goods offered.

I tried to send them out doormats and things like this ... never even tried to sell them ... all they wanted to stock was the fishing gear they'd bought for the last fifty years and the few very basic foods ... the people had to choose, it made them think ... if the missionaries had them why can't the Aborigines have it ... it was our whole philosophy through it (White, pers. comm., 1992).

Plate 15. Joyce Deering
Source: ALPA files
However, the stores were forced to accommodate the changes taking place in the communities during the 1970s. Aboriginal people became more geographically mobile and were able to experience the offerings of non-Aboriginal culture first hand. Growing numbers of non-Aboriginal people in the communities brought with them a number of material items many Aboriginal people had never seen before. Aboriginal people were no longer content with the limited choice of products offered at the stores and began to demand a greater variety of goods. To support these demands there was a significant increase in the personal incomes of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people became paying customers rather than passive recipients of a ration.

The first three years of ALPA's existence were concerned with: building up the physical infrastructure of the stores with limited resources and materials; expanding the range of goods available; establishing transportation, communication, ordering, management, accounting and store operation systems between the individual communities and ALPA's Darwin office; and generally trying to deal with the problems involved with establishing a western commercial enterprise in an isolated Aboriginal community — a concept which would have been completely alien to the majority of Aboriginal residents in the communities.

1975 — a year of disaster

On Christmas Eve 1974 Cyclone Tracy devastated Darwin killing an estimated 49 people and almost destroying whole suburbs in its fury (Donovan 1984, 233). The Amnhem Land Progress Association did not remain unaffected by the cyclone having approximately $97,000 worth of stock, stored at the United Church's Winnellie warehouse, lost or destroyed.\(^5\) Two days prior to the cyclone, ALPA discussed with its insurance company, Australian Eagle, the need to undertake a more comprehensive insurance policy. This policy, because it was only verbally discussed, meant the damaged stock was not covered by ALPA's insurance policy because it was defined as being 'in transit'. The insurance company believed that ALPA could not account for the stock lost. But after the supply of evidence from the Arnhem Land stores indicating that there were in fact outstanding orders corresponding to the items included in the claim, the claim was later settled by Australian Eagle for $50,000.

One 'positive' aspect of the cyclone for ALPA was that the Salvation Army was desperate for mattresses, cutlery and other utensils, and nappies for the emergency relief centres established for people who had become homeless as a result of the cyclone. ALPA was able to supply these items quickly and efficiently and provided vehicles for their immediate transportation. The Association was well reimbursed at a later date by the Department of Repatriation.

Cyclone Tracy was not the only shock suffered by the Association at this stage. Certain events in 1975 provoked a drastic reassessment of ALPA's financial position. ALPA's growth in terms of its business potential was shown by a steady increase in total sales for its first few years in operation. White reported at ALPA's fourth Annual Meeting that for the financial year of 1972/3, the total sales were $1,136,131. For 1973/4 they were $1,686,515 and for 1974/5 they were $2,800,000 approximately (AD/August 1975 AM minutes, Minjilang).
The stores' individual sales were increasing but this did not necessarily result in the Association becoming more profitable. The expressed desire of people in communities to be provided with a greater range of goods combined with White's overwhelming desire to supply the stores with anything that was available in Darwin had its problems. Lack of management expertise at the local level and in the Association's administration in regards to stock management and control were cited by Reverend Bernard Clarke as the reasons for these 'problems' (Clarke, pers. comm., 1992). Clarke explained that ALPA:

began to get into a situation in which the whole of the basis under which we'd been operating the trade stores collapsed ... people had money and they wanted to spend it. We wanted them to spend it on the community and the only way of doing that was to provide the goods for them to buy but in order to provide goods to buy we had to spend money we didn't have ... we got into very deep liquidity problems ... (Clarke, pers. comm., 1992).

This realisation coincided with the arrival of John Everall, an accountant from Canberra. Everall came to the Territory in response to advertising requesting 'work parties' to assist in the massive clean up taking place after Cyclone Tracy. He was recruited by the UCNA to help their Assistant Synod Treasurer, John Mann, in sorting out and improving the Church's and ALPA's accounting systems. His initial task was to sort through ALPA's financial records to assess their financial position at that time. This task proved difficult because the accounting systems of ALPA, AADS and the UCNA were managed jointly.

Everall's investigations exposed the fact that ALPA was $1 m in debt to the United Church of North Australia. This debt consisted primarily of the Bill of Sale for the business but also included loans made by the Church to ALPA for store improvements, the purchase of stock and financing the original operating losses of the stores. According to Everall, this debt was incurred because the Church had converted the stores into commercial organisations with little real knowledge of the procedures required to make the organisation work. Another problem area was that at the end of each financial year the money owed to creditors (ALPA's suppliers) was not included in ALPA's budget. In addition, individual store managers in the communities were not held accountable for their stock on hand and did not correctly document their ordering and sales. To address these deficiencies, Everall introduced ordering, accounting and management systems which made the store managers more accountable for their day to day operation of the stores. He also introduced consistency of pricing, except for freight charges. ALPA's pricing policy at this stage was that if the stores made more than the required profit margins then their prices would be adjusted down; conversely, if stores were not operating profitably, the prices would be adjusted up to meet the costs (Everall, pers. comm., 1992).

At an ALPA store managers conference in Darwin in December 1975, Rob Edwardson, Galiwin'ku store manager, emphasised the seriousness of the high stock/flow working capital situation within the organisation. In a circular to all ALPA managers preceding this meeting, Edwardson stressed the need for adequate preparation before the conference of sound, workable proposals for more efficient operation of the stores while shedding light on the difficulties associated with store operation in Aboriginal communities. He warned the ALPA managers not to get
carried away by the 'opulence' of the conference venue. 'It is so easy' he said 'to be optimistic and think we have resources beyond measure, while surrounded by luxury.'

Whatever plans are made for the future of ALPA must be workable amid the dust; the mud; the dogs; the illiterate and unskilled workers; the packing crate furniture and fixtures; and the host of other challenges to our dreams of 'supermarket glory' (AD/Edwardson, circular to all ALPA store managers, 15 November 1975).

Everall witnessed, as a relatively independent observer, the problems which the organisation encountered in changing from a mission based organisation with a beneficiary role to a commercially orientated organisation — interpreted by some critics as a fairly mercenary operation. This conflict occurred more at a community/local level than within the ALPA and Church hierarchy in Darwin. Everall believed that the conflict between the Church's AADS staff and ALPA staff resulted because the former found it difficult to accept the concept of a profit motive being introduced in Aboriginal communities let alone in the stores which for a long time had held a ration distribution function. This conflict was exacerbated when ALPA began to recruit store managers from non-Christian backgrounds.

Everall's observations concluded that although the store was a vital element in trying to control the regular flow of money in communities, the profit motive was never the highest priority. For Everall, ALPA's highest priority and commitment was the Aboriginal people they were working for. ALPA was establishing an infrastructure which would eventually make the organisation a lucrative business able to be handed over to Aboriginal people. For Everall, 'store transfer was always part of the plan but that it was a question of timing' especially when Aboriginal people had little idea of what business practice or enterprise viability meant (Everall, pers. comm., 1992).

ALPA's apparent emphasis on profit making during its first few years in operation was justified by the Reverend Bernard Clarke (who had replaced Symons as ALPA's chairperson) at the December 1975 store managers conference. He explained that ALPA's emphasis on profit was a pragmatic decision. He believed that since Aborigines were now entitled to citizen entitlements such as award wages, normal commercial prices and practices should apply in store operation. ALPA was responsible for handing over to Aboriginal people a viable organisation and not one which would fall into 'financial embarrassment' when the Church withdrew its support. According to Clarke, the Church was not interested in the profits arising from the business, but was solely concerned with establishing an organisation which 'at the right time Aborigines would have a viable on-going store to take over'. Clarke maintained that:

Aborigines have used the time to gain experience [and] confidence to assume control. Control not as management necessarily. Control in exercising policy decisions. Even if transferred to people tomorrow [the] need for managers still exists although people would set policies (AD/Clarke 1975).

Clarke claimed that non-Aboriginal people in the organisation had become aware that they were guests in the community and had realised that the one key to working with Aboriginal people was 'no longer are we there as if by divine right' (AD/Clarke 1975). He stressed that the relationship between ALPA and the Community Councils would have to become closer as it was expected that these councils would begin to assume a
greater role in store policy formulation. Clarke also referred to ALPA's key link in the community economic system being one of the few organisations not dependent on government money. This is an achievement which ALPA has maintained with pride until the present day believing that 'dependence can be a deadening influence on people stifling initiative, confidence and enthusiasm' (AD/Clarke 1975).

On reflection, Clarke described this period as having a 'climate of uncertainty' because of the rapid changes taking place in the communities. The introduction of legislation requiring Aboriginal Councils to incorporate, the increasing tendency of the government to place these councils in charge of administering community services and the willingness of Aborigines to assume the control offered to them altered the 'power base' in the communities and made it difficult for ALPA to understand what the communities wanted with respect to store operation and the presence of Church staff in the communities (Clarke, pers. comm., 1992).7 ALPA's present chairperson, George Rawnsley, recounted the status of ALPA's affairs during the 1972–75 period:

In 1975 we had to get things 'together'; we had a lot of 'growing' problems. In each community a Council made the rules. We had no real systems, or total, true management. As a result ALPA went 'up and down' until by 1974/75 things were as 'bad' as they had ever been. Stores were not profitable, and Managers were not getting much help ... From 1975 we have never looked back (AD/Central Committee [CC] minutes, 16 April 1985, Alice Springs).

Organisational changes

In May 1976 ALPA's central office was reorganised. This entailed combining the United Church's purchasing department with ALPA's, resulting in a separate wholesale division. The purchasing work previously undertaken by AADS was now transferred to ALPA with the staff necessary to ensure its functioning. It was resolved that a new position of Association manager or Group manager be created and that this person have separate duties from the Darwin warehouse manager. It was also resolved that ALPA's administration section operate independently of ALPA's Winnellie warehouse. The individual stores were to be made autonomous with separate accounts and monitoring, as was the Winnellie warehouse. White remained the Darwin based warehouse manager but resigned in June 1976 to accept a position with the Salvation Army. The position of Group manager was filled by David Harrison, who had 16 years retail experience with Woolworths in management, supervision, buying and administration.

The emphasis of ALPA during its formative years was on making the stores self-sufficient if not profitable businesses. This entailed organising the stores along commercial lines, increasing the stock variety and improving the physical infrastructure of the buildings.8 Although the stores were showing the potential to become profitable businesses, the Association had encountered many problems. This was not surprising given the newness of this particular set-up in Aboriginal communities. These problems included: the irregularity of the barge service; problems with transmitting store orders; unreliable electricity services; poor structural conditions of the stores; the lack of trained staff for the expanding stores; and the friction occurring between ex-mission staff and new ALPA store managers.
Executive Committee

Group Manager

Administration

Finance Officer

Senior Clerk

Arnhem Land Stores

Wholesale

Purchasing Agency

Storeperson

Delivery

Clerk

Figure 3. 1976 ALPA administrative structure
Source: Executive Committee Minutes, 27 April 1976
(N.B. no mention of the Central Committee within this structure)
On an administration level the problems encountered included poor stocktaking practices/procedures made more difficult by the inaccurate calculation of stock in transit; incorrect calculation of selling prices due to freight charges and mark-ups; communication difficulties between the community stores and ALPA's administration; and difficulties in recruiting suitable management staff.

The following chapter looks at the way in which ALPA's new Group manager endeavoured to deal with ALPA's 'teething' problems and the introduction of initiatives and directives under this new manager.

Notes

1. The MOM had joined the UCNA by this stage and for this reason the term Church will now be used even though the settlements were often referred to as missions throughout the 1970s.
2. This procedure still exists although George Rawnsley, chairperson from 1976 to the present, states that it has never been used.
3. ALPA's incorporation changed with the introduction of subsequent legislation. In 1978 it was automatically incorporated under the Northern Territory Associations Incorporations Act 1978 even though there were provisions for the incorporation of Aboriginal organisations under the Commonwealth's Aboriginal Councils and Incorporations Act 1976. ALPA would not have been able to incorporate under this legislation because of the requirement that the Board of Directors be all Aboriginal.
4. White's method in dealing with this conflict was recounted humorously by him. One hot afternoon he called a staff meeting and handed around the much criticised soft drinks. These were appreciated by the staff present and White pointed out the hypocrisy of their actions in refusing Aboriginal people access to these goods.
5. White had adopted the idea of 'scientific buying' and set himself up as a distributor for southern companies such as Yamaha in order to make the warehouse more viable.
6. John Mann arrived in the Territory in 1970 to work for the UCNA. He was posted to Galiwin'ku as the Assistant store manager. From there he was transferred to Minjilang as the store manager before moving into Darwin in 1975 to become the Assistant Synod Treasurer.
7. There was and still seems to be a generational conflict with older Aboriginal people raised under a mission system rejecting, out of loyalty, familiarity or perhaps power relationships, changed government policies and the withdrawal of the mission staff from the communities. In comparison younger people were wanting to assume more direct control and blaming the missionaries for encouraging Aboriginal dependence on non-Aborigines.
8. Although the priority of the Association in its formative years was on building up the stores to become viable enterprises, ALPA resolved to contribute $10,000 from the profits arising from the stores to fund the training of selected Aboriginal candidates in 'fields otherwise lacking financial support'. These candidates were to be chosen by ALPA's chairperson, the Darwin manager, the accountant and one elected Aboriginal representative.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE HARRISON YEARS 1976–79

Harrison's vast experience in retailing shaped the Association over the next three years. His second report to the Annual Meeting as group manager conveyed his outlook for the Association:

the realisation has grown that A.L.P.A. operations in Arnhemland are a different situation from any that have been encountered in my previous experience in commerce and retailing. However, equally strong has been the conviction that there are just as many sound business principles that must be applied if A.L.P.A. is to be a viable operation... Operation of retail stores is NOT some mysterious process with which Aboriginal people cannot be involved. Cultural factors and limited education standards may restrict the extent of their understanding. Nonetheless we must find the ways to communicate what we are doing more effectively (AD/Annual Report 1977).

Even though Harrison expressed the need for Aboriginal involvement and increased understanding about the operation of the store, ALPA's debt and the non-profitability of the stores at this time ensured that this period was devoted to organising the stores along more rigid commercial lines. Harrison turned his attention to improving the fabric and general infrastructure of the stores by allocating $200,000 to store improvements, such as the purchase of cash registers, cars, shelving, storage, refrigeration and freezer facilities.

The 1977 Annual Report listed the areas of major importance for the Association for the following year:

- reduction of freight costs;
- establishment of a basic range of goods that all stores would stock but to which the manager could add merchandise for local needs with the provision that the stores did not exceed stock budgets;
- more efficient use of ALPA's total turnover as a lever to convince suppliers that ALPA was interested in value prices; and
- upgrading of store facilities especially refrigeration, equipment and fixtures to assist in the control of stock levels and to reduce spoilage and damage.

This report stressed that 'empire building' at the expense of local autonomy was not ALPA's objective and that it made commercial sense to use the combined purchasing power of the Association to exert pressure on freight companies and suppliers (AD/Annual Report 1977).

Harrison emphasised the importance of introducing measures designed to aid the Association in reaching 'a profit level that [would] meet expenses, and the future costs of replacing stocks as prices increase'. Increasing the mark-ups (percentage added to cost price to reach selling price) on such goods as powdered milk and tea, soap powders and detergents, butter and margarine, bread, local produce, sugar and flour, was one of these measures. Categories of stock which did not receive an increased
mark-up were fruit and vegetables, frozen foods and meat (Harrison: memo to all store managers, n.d.). Harrison alerted the store managers to this proposed change in policy stating that, 'We would like your comments prior to their approval by ALPA Executive, especially where your pricing is different from the official mark-ups' (Harrison: memo to all store managers, n.d.). Further correspondence shows that, for Harrison, the calculation of selling prices and mark-ups was extremely important to the Association's overall profitability. This correspondence suggests that individual store managers could use their own discretion in adhering to 'set' prices and mark-ups. It also suggests that it was ALPA's Executive Committee who was responsible for determining policy in regards to pricing with apparently little communication with the local committees, the Community Councils or the store staff.

Training and orientation versus viability

It was acknowledged during this period that if the stores were to operate more efficiently, the training of store workers was necessary. In December 1976 a managers conference was held over three days (14–16 December) in Darwin to discuss proposed training initiatives. The Executive Director of the Food Industry Training Institute of Queensland, Barry Reid, was invited to this conference and organised one of the training seminars. He displayed and distributed a 'training kit' to be used for 'on the job' training of store workers. The basic purpose of the course was 'to motivate store managers to the stage where they both want and are willing to train the people who work for them'. The manager was expected to explain the theory and practical benefit of the training kit to each staff member. Such topics as 'equipment and terms used', 'points to packing', 'price marking', 'fixture filling', 'customer relations', 'checkout operations', 'retail security' and an 'introduction to refrigerated products' were discussed at this conference. It also dealt with methods for ordering stock, stock control and the calculation of selling prices.

The poor financial results of both Milingimbi and Nangalala stores were attributed by the Executive Committee (EC) in June 1977 to 'cultural and personnel problems' between the Balandja manager and the Yolngu workers (AD/EC minutes, 29 June 1977). To counter these cultural problems and misunderstandings, it was recommended that a policy to assess all ALPA personnel at the conclusion of each two year period be adopted. Apart from this assessment, various people believed that a structured, formal course directed at 'orienting' store managers towards their role in the community and the development of the store was needed. In reference to a new store manager at Milingimbi, R Sigston, the community advisor, stated:

I believe the problem lies squarely on the shoulders of the ALPA organisation, a person shoved raw into the store without explanation and/or orientation as he was, facing one of the most difficult and harassing jobs in the place, must necessarily crack under the strain (AD/letter, Sigston to EC, 14 June 1977).

Sigston listed in detail the problems that the store manager was experiencing. These included the manager's inability to communicate with store staff; the problems in store operation; his inability to delegate responsibility for any areas of store operation; his preference for non-Aboriginal staff in the store; and his 'deliberate ignorance' of any suggestions made by the staff as to various aspects of store operation. Sigston
concluded, 'despite all that, and including an incident when he fired his rifle over the heads of some drunks to quieten them, I believe he is potentially a good storeman and a dedicated Christian person' (AD/letter, Sigston to EC, 14 June 1977). Sigston noted that the Community Council endeavoured to understand the store manager's attitude but found it difficult because previous store managers had been willing to communicate with the community and store staff on matters pertaining to store operation. Sigston also cautioned the Association about the problems of building up large enterprises, believing that with smaller enterprises Aboriginal people would be more inclined to assume responsibility for them (AD/letter, Sigston to EC, 14 June 1977).

This correspondence exemplifies the problems which non-Aboriginal store managers face on entering and working in a different cultural setting. It also highlights the need for community consultation and control over the recruitment of appropriate management staff. An extract from a short story based on a non-Aboriginal bookkeeper's experience in an Aboriginal community, although cynical, presents a good description of the problems which new managers face in the communities:

The new flunkey shopkeeper and his wife are still novices to the island and are only learning to be good flunkeys. It doesn't take long, because slow learners and hopeless learners are soon told to go home. For the first three months they'd amused us old-timers with their eagerness to run a good, friendly store. They trusted everybody, they liked everybody and they believed that they were being well accepted ... At the end of the three months they had an $11,000 loss and hardly any of the credit they had given their customers was paid ... (Richa 1991, 125).

Most people interviewed for this study supported the contention that the store usually decreased in efficiency and profitability when a changeover of store managers occurred. This was shown by the increased amount of 'leakage' from the store and the reticence of store workers to show up for work either on time or not at all until the manager was accepted by the community.

The problems experienced by non-Aboriginal management staff were recognised by ALPA but on a fairly superficial level. For example, the allocation to each store manager of a $250 per year 'entertainment allowance' was introduced to assist managers in becoming more involved with the social life of the community (AD/EC minutes, 15 September 1977). The responsibility given to store managers for the training of staff was an unrealistic proposition given the amount of pressure already on managers to develop the stores commercially. In addition to this many managers lacked the necessary 'training' skills to successfully impart information. This may have been an indication of ALPA's Darwin-based administration's lack of real understanding of the difficulties in managing a community store.

Harrison justified the emphasis placed on store profitability and the building up of the stores at the exclusion of providing comprehensive management training and orientation because of ALPA's debt to the Church and the fact that some stores were running at a loss of up to $30,000 per year (AD/letter, Harrison to Nowland [AADS Training Officer], 6 June 1977). Harrison stressed that although ALPA was a non-profit organisation,

in point of fact we had reached the stage of being a loss organisation. The subject of why one (and even every) store must make a profit is simply stated sometimes as being 'so that the
organisation continues to exist. The meaning of 'non-profit' is not to be a loss situation!
(AD/letter, Harrison to Nowland, 6 June 1977).

Harrison acknowledged that making a profit was seen by many as 'unchristian or less
than godly' but contended that to 'continue to exist, we must stem the tide of losses
and stabilise the financial position of every store'. He suggested that with extra
training, managers would be confused as to what their 'real jobs' were and that:

After careful thought, I am led to believe that [the] absence of managers from their stores at this
time (without competent replacement and relieving management) would not only be risky but
financially irresponsible (AD/letter, Harrison to Nowland, 6 June 1977).

In theory, Harrison was not against the further training of store managers. The lack of
excess funds and support staff, the repayment of the debt to the Church and the need
to make the stores viable and hence ALPA self-supporting required Harrison to
prioritise aspects of store development. Unfortunately this 'prioritising' reflected
badly on ALPA's reputation. ALPA was not seen either to be part of the community
or to be encouraging Aboriginal participation within the organisation. Bernard Clarke
alluded to these problems in a letter to community workers and advisors employed by
the Uniting Church:

In view of the non-involvement of Aboriginal people in store management/policy it, is
imperative that AADS Community Advisors/workers initiate ongoing consultations with ALPA
Group Manager, Store Managers, Staff, Committees, Councils, and [the] community in general
in order to increase the communities understanding of the store and to ascertain the people's
expectations of the store (AD/letter, Clarke to all community advisors/workers,

Richard Trudgen, Ramingining Community Advisor, also stressed that ALPA needed
to make their objectives clearer to Aboriginal people, stating that, 'something that is a
shadow of the old mission system, where people just stepped in and did all sorts of
things is not satisfactory' (letter, Trudgen to EC, 15 June 1976). However, it was not
until the establishment of the Aboriginal Store Training School (ASTS) at Galiwin'ku
in 1981 that orientation courses for managers and store worker training courses were
formalised.

Wholesaling

ALPA expanded their warehouse activities during this period. The Darwin warehouse
had been a venture of both the Church and ALPA. It sold directly to the public and
supplied goods to the Church Missionary Society community stores and stores at
Snake Bay, Maningrida and Bagot. From 1976, ALPA began to act as a separate
wholesale entity, although they kept the contracts with the previous customers. A
1976 managers conference discussed the need for ALPA to become a competitive
wholesaler. It had been discovered that, apart from 'National' brand products, the
communities could buy their goods at discount prices equal to what ALPA could offer
from their warehouse (AD/minutes, 1976 Managers Conference). It was suggested
that the Community Councils would buy their stores directly from suppliers and only
utilise ALPA's wholesale outlet on odd occasions if ALPA could not provide them
with a better deal. The idea of establishing a buying department and a buying
negotiator was proposed as this would enable ALPA to obtain the best source of
supply at the lowest prices for the stores. By mid 1977 it was thought that ALPA's warehouse should have a future in two distinct areas: purchasing on behalf of the communities, UCNA and other clients, and bulk buying/wholesaling.

In January 1978 a paper documenting the role of ALPA Darwin was circulated in what seems to have been an attempt to rekindle support for the wholesale division. According to this paper, ALPA Darwin provided six services (AD/Role of ALPA Darwin, 1978):

- acted on behalf of ALPA stores in obtaining the best deals by bulk-buying essential items from southern suppliers, importers, or manufacturers on a forward ordering basis;
- acted as a purchasing agent for communities and stores;
- acted as a wholesaler in lines which needed to be bought in bulk and could be resold to communities and stores at a better price than direct ordering by the stores;
- obtained sample ranges of goods for stores;
- served as a clearing house for the stores' dead stock;
- advised stores of the best source of supply and ordering details for wanted goods.

This paper stressed that 'it is essential that when ALPA Darwin buys in bulk that stores draw supplies only from ALPA Darwin'. ALPA's purchasing department levied a charge against the community or the store for providing the purchasing service. This charge was based on the cost of the item purchased, and varied between 2.5% and 5%. By this stage ALPA was the sole purchasing agent for Minjilang Community Incorporated, Ramingining Housing Incorporated and Warruwi Community Incorporated. They were also able to act on behalf of other communities and ALPA stores in purchasing items from Darwin suppliers. ALPA's wholesale department has undergone significant changes during the Association's twenty years of operation. This will be looked at more closely in the following chapters.

**Warruwi departs, Yirrkala packs its bags**

Throughout 1976 and part of 1977 the Warruwi community discussed with ALPA their proposal to assume responsibility for the control and operation of the store. In July 1977 Warruwi Community Incorporated took over from ALPA the operation of their store following the approval of a $67,000 loan by the Aboriginal Loans Commission (ALC) in October 1976. This loan was to be spent on the purchase of the 'existing plant', the purchase of the existing stock, and provided 'working capital' for general use. Warruwi Community Incorporated was to provide security for the loan by means of a registered Bill of Sale and repay this loan over a ten year period at 5% interest by monthly repayments of $865. The Aboriginal Loans Commission was to be receive quarterly financial statements relating to the stores operation and Warruwi Community Incorporated were advised that, under the terms of the loan, they were not entitled to:

- distribute more than $1,000 per annum of the store profits generated to its members, or for the benefit of its members either in kind or specie, without first obtaining the approval of the
Aboriginal Loans commission (AD/letter, ALC to Warruwi Community Inc. undated but received 26 October 1976).

On the transfer of the store the Association handed over the store manager's house, the store building, the freezer room, the two coolrooms and the open topped refrigerator. The current store manager was retained by the Warruwi Community Council. After a few years of independent operation a letter from the Aboriginal Loans Commission to Warruwi store expressed satisfaction with the trading results of the store but voiced concern over the lack of Aboriginal employment or training being conducted by the store (AD/letter, ALC to Warruwi store, 26 June 1979, NTRS 38 A7394). Keith Cole believed that the transfer of the store to the Council worked well 'but its success has depended on the non-Aboriginal manager'. Cole also commented on the health of the people at Warruwi claiming that it was 'fairly good' with 'the poor diet of tinned and processed foods from the store ... augmented at the weekends by bush tucker and seafood' (Cole 1980, 49–51).1

A reason given for Warruwi's decision to withdraw from ALPA was that the store manager at the time was dissatisfied with ALPA's overall operation and pressured the community into leaving. Warruwi was not the only community which expressed a desire to withdraw from ALPA and assume control of their store at this stage. In early 1976 ALPA's Executive Committee received a letter from a newly formed store committee following problems at the Yirrkala store which had resulted in its closure. These problems seem concerned with losses amassed by the store because of the non-payment of goods and the community in general not respecting the store. The committee, formed to deal with the problems which had arisen, claimed that:

We are all looking forward to the time when the store at Yirrkala is run by the Dhanbul Association, when it is our store and we are managing it fully, and when people will all buy at the store here at the same prices as Woolworths and the money will come back to the community ... During this meeting difficult and complicated matters concerning money and the business of running a store were brought up. We dug into them deeply, we did not just look at them on the surface. We began to feel that we were really working toward the store being taken over and run by Aboriginal people in the future (AD/letter, Dhanbul Association/store committee to Clarke, 23 February 1976).

One of the changes initiated by this committee was the installation of an 'old man' in order to supervise the smooth running of the store, to ensure that people paid for damaging goods and that children did not leave the store without paying for their goods. The committee also resolved to accept that the homeland centres would buy their supplies from Woolworths in Nhulunbuy 'until ALPA can give us the support that we need to cut down prices so that homeland centres will buy from the Yirrkala store and money will come back to our own community (AD/letter, Dhanbul Association/store committee to EC, 23 February 1976).2 At ALPA's Executive Meeting of 29 June 1977 it was proposed by the Executive that Yirrkala community take over their store. 'This proposal was rejected because the executive felt that before any store is transferred it should be operating at a profitable business level' (AD/EC minutes, 29 June 1977).

Two years later the Dhanbul Association proposed to establish a milkbar and dress shop at Yirrkala. A letter to Harrison regarding this proposal outlined the problems that the Yirrkala people were having with the store and the reasons why they wanted
to operate their own store. This included that shelves were empty, that the store should have more food and clothes and should stock the kind of food that Aboriginal people wanted. The letter also discussed such issues as the price variation between Nhulanbuy and Yirrkala and criticised the store for not being open at appropriate hours (AD/letter, Dhanbul Community Association to David Harrison, 26 July 1978). ALPA’s first response to the proposed opening of these new ventures concentrated on the detrimental effects this would have on the financial success of the Yirrkala store. In reply to the criticisms of the store’s operation at Yirrkala, ALPA stressed that the poor sales and condition of the store were the reasons for the lack of variety and availability of stock. The proposal was rejected by ALPA, although it was recognised that the Council had a right to make decisions which specifically affected their community.

In April 1978 it was recorded that the Yirrkala store’s turnover had dropped by more than 50% from $641,478 in 1976 to approximately $282,000. Regardless of this decline, ALPA’s Executive Committee resolved to forward an invitation to the Dhanbul Council to take over the store (AD/EC minutes, 14 August 1978). This offer was rejected and ALPA continued their tenuous relationship with the Yirrkala store for a number of years.

Management recruitment

One of the largest problem areas experienced by the Association in its early days was the recruitment of satisfactory management staff. A decision made at the first Annual Meeting of the Association in August 1972 stressed that the future appointment of managers be based on the potential applicant’s retail and commercial qualifications rather than on their affiliation with the Church. This caused problems as it was felt by the community development workers of the Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services that these incoming managers had very little training or knowledge of working with Aboriginal people and were often harbingers of the white backlash against missionaries.

From 1973 ALPA was allocated the responsibility of recruiting staff in conjunction with Methodist Overseas Mission state officers and the UCNA. An advertising and recruiting fund of $2,000 was to be set aside for this purpose. Overall, ALPA’s financial consultant, suggested that a means of attaining satisfactory management staff was by organising store managers’ salaries along a commercial basis and offering better working conditions. Previously managers were paid according to the mission wage system — which was significantly lower than wages paid to store managers working in retail stores in non-Aboriginal communities. ALPA’s current store managers were resentful of the fact that they were still paid on a mission basis and believed that ALPA’s commercial viability necessitated the payment of a ‘proper’ wage to managers. Furthermore, it was claimed ‘if salaries came up to a commercial level, ALPA could then assess a manager’s performance on commercial terms of achievement of budgets of sales and profit rather than personal opinions’. It was subsequently proposed that ALPA negotiate salaries with new applicants ‘having regard to their qualifications and management experience, and the size of the position
to which they are appointed' and that all present managers salaries and conditions of
service be reviewed (AD/Harrison, n.d.).

The three characteristics required of store managers were substantial retail experience,
an active Christian commitment and skills in interpersonal relationships 'in social
situations of some complexity' (AD/EC minutes, 21 March 1978). ALPA's
employment contract exemplified the pressure on managers both to make the stores
profitable businesses and ensure Aboriginal staff were properly trained. Managers
were directed to train their staff with the prospect of working themselves out of
employment in the future. A 1978 employment contract between ALPA and its
employees contained fairly rigid stipulations as to what the Association expected of its
management staff and alludes to the rather complex environment in which store
managers were working. The contract stated that:

the Employee shall devote his whole time and attention during working hours to his duties and
should do all in his power to make, develop and extend the interests of the Association and shall
not directly or indirectly engage or be concerned or interested in any other business of any kind
whatsoever without the consent in writing of the ALPA executive (AD/ALPA Employment

The duties and responsibilities of the employee included:

• the correct management of the store 'within the bounds of policy laid down by the
  ALPA Executive' and to 'accept and work within the guidelines advised by the
  Executive as conveyed by the group manager';
• to act at all times in keeping with the objects of the Association;
• to cooperate with other agencies working within the same community so long as
  their activities are in keeping with the objects of the Association;
• to adhere to the lawful directions of the Community Councils and to assist Council
  officers in the execution of their duties;
• to train all staff and encourage them to accept responsibility for sharing in the
  operation of the ALPA store;
• to advise the Association wherever and whenever it appears that its interests are
  affected or likely to be affected by activities within the community;
• to develop and maintain a close relationship with AADS staff; and
• 'to conduct himself in such a way at all times so as to bring credit to the
  Association'.

The benefits included ten weeks leave every two years on full salary and fares for the
employee and his family at the commencement of employment. In addition to this the
store manager received relatively cheap accommodation (AD/ALPA Employment

According to a report on an interstate staff recruitment trip in March 1978, there were
disappointing results. There were few applicants, if any, of Christian commitment or
Church membership who were prepared to serve in the community and most of the
potential candidates' employment records showed little retailing experience. ALPA
resolved to offer a more attractive package deal to potential store managers. This
resulted in an April 1979 resolution to revoke a previous decision which involved
donating a proportion of each store manager's salary to the Uniting Church (AD/Notes
to, and forming part of, the financial statements for the year ending 30 April 1979). This course of action does not seem to have been sufficient as Harrison reported in 1979 that further revision in this area would have to take place because 'recent advertisements suggest that our salary scales are lower than market levels' (AD/Harrison, n.d.).

ALPA decided to alter its recruitment strategy. Management 'teams', usually consisting of husband and wife, were now sought. This increased the popularity of the position because of the double wage offered. Women, as assistant managers, usually undertook office duties and the supervision of staff while the male managers ordered stock, organised the barge unloading, stacked shelves and supervised the storeroom.

Also it was realised that expectations on management staff were fairly unrealistic. For this reason, and to ensure that the stores were operating in accordance with ALPA's 'systems', it was decided that all price marking and calculations be conducted at ALPA's Darwin administration branch and that the emphasis on the store manager's training role be abandoned in favour of the establishment of a Training School. By this stage the stores were beginning to stock a larger variety of goods including clothing, an expanded food range and a range of electrical appliances and household goods. The stores were also beginning to employ a larger number of Aboriginal store workers.

Turning the tide

In early 1978 ALPA's position was one of organisational stability and financial viability. The debt was down to $40,000, losses incurred for store operation were less, stock levels were substantially lower and ALPA's new accounting and management systems were beginning to show results. This optimistic state of affairs prompted ALPA to concentrate on 'building bridges between itself and the community' believing that the Association needed to develop relationships with AADS staff and the community in general in order to resolve past differences. ALPA's financially stable position was also cause for some reflection on where ALPA had come from and where its future should lie. Ken Nowland, Training Officer with AADS, recounted the 'dramatic economic changes' which Aboriginal communities had made over the last 14 years, stating that:

The role of the store in the communities has altered. In [the] early days the store was a tool for wielding disciplinary power over the community. The role has now reversed and the community is now moving toward a new area where they control the store ... This growth and change has required corresponding changes in ALPA to meet the needs of the communities. At the time ALPA was formed, the Church (or MOM as it was then) had found that it wasn't able to cope with the strains being put onto it by the communities for store facilities. Since then ALPA has been able to fulfil this need in the communities, providing the goods and services necessary for their growth (AD/Minutes, Store Managers Conference, Telford International Hotel, July 1978).

The original premise that the stores be handed over to community control once ALPA's debt to the Church was repaid and the stores made viable resurfaced at this stage. Discussions at a July 1978 Executive Committee meeting concerned 'the effect of ALPA's salary policies upon the Accounts staff, the disposal of trading surpluses
and the provision in ALPA's rules for the termination of the Association'. It was resolved that ALPA alert the communities as to its intention of withdrawing from responsibility for the ALPA stores within two years while reassuring them that ALPA would continue as a central resource service in matters pertaining to purchasing and the supervision of the stores (AD/EC minutes, 27 July 1978). It was not until the early 1980s that the practicalities of 'handing over' the stores to the communities were discussed.

By the end of 1978 ALPA had fully repaid its debt to the Church. This resulted in increases in the levels of funding allocated for capital expenditure to each community. This was spent on such things as shop refrigeration, lining buildings, changing to louvre windows, the installation of 'proper' checkouts, new vehicles, installation of security systems, improvements to shelving and clothing displays, improvements to storage spaces and the purchase of pallet jacks. The accommodation provided for management staff needed to be improved, as some managers were housed in caravans next to the store.4

To complement the material development of the Association, the Executive resolved to put into practice an earlier decision to establish a trust fund of $10,000 for training ALPA staff and to offer 'opportunities of an educational nature' to Aboriginal people in the communities in which ALPA operated. At the 1978 AGM $50,000 was added to this training reserve. In addition to this, George Rawnsley, ALPA's accountant, advised ALPA that they should invest $20,000 and that the interest earned on this amount over the next five years be given annually to the Board of Education for the Ministry to assist in the training of Aboriginal ministers (AD/Annual Meeting [AM] minutes 1978).

The allocation of funding to the Church during the late 1970s indicated that the Church remained a significant force within the Association. This is also evidenced by changes made to ALPA's rules at this stage. These changes altered the criteria for the appointment of ALPA's chairperson and revised ALPA's membership rules but did not lessen the influence of the Church within the organisation. Previously the chairperson of AADS was automatically appointed ALPA's chairperson. This was revised to allow 'either the Secretary for Church and Community, the Synod Treasurer or the Chairman of the Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services to fill the position (AD/ALPA Rules 1978/9). The necessity of the Northern Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia approving any recommendations made by the Central Committee including the appointment of both the group manager and the chairperson was maintained with the additional stipulation that approval must be sought from the Church for the Association's dissolution.

Membership of the organisation was extended to include people employed by Aboriginal groups in Aboriginal communities as well as the previously discussed categories of members. The membership charge increased to 50 cents and it was determined that every person over the age of 17 years had to be an ALPA member to purchase from the ALPA stores. Eventually this charge was lifted as there were no taxation requirements to have financial membership of the Association — because it was classed as a benevolent society.
There was provision in the first contribution to establish a local committee in each ALPA member community. The idea was to guarantee input to store policy from Aboriginal people. However, in practice, this was not the case. Harrison's report to the 1977 Annual Meeting stressed that local committees were not functioning effectively:

Certainly they have not been a continuing bridge between store management and the community. One impression is that local Councils see store committees as a distraction from their influence. The store seemed at times to be a symbolic prize in a power struggle with the manager and his staff in the middle (AD/Harrison, AM minutes 1977).

In this revised constitution it was stated that 'a council [Aboriginal Community Council] may make such recommendations on the management of the local retail outlet of the Association as it sees fit' (ALPA Rules 1978/9). ALPA personnel believe that these local committees did not work because they challenged the authority of the newly incorporated Community Councils who were to be in charge of the general administration of the communities. It was suggested that local Community Councils be substituted for the local store committees as this would:

...give the Councils a feeling of control and also greater participation in running each store, and would give us more of an opportunity to educate the Councils in the operation of ALPA (AD/Memo, Ford to Clarke, 20 September 1979).

**Exit Harrison**

On June 15, 1979 Harrison resigned as group manager of ALPA. This position was subsequently filled by John Ford, manager of the Galiwin'ku store. Harrison submitted a final report to the Executive Committee before his departure stating that 'it is heartening that the organisation is in better shape generally than when I joined it in September 1976'. Harrison surmised that this was the result of 'four particular policies and practices' which emerged during his period as group manager. These were joint management, manager's salary structure, freight recovery and mark-ups.

The joint management practice was criticised because it increased the number of Balanda employed at the expense of Aborigines but Harrison maintained that the concept improved 'efficiency, security, staff training and profitability'. The assistant manager was able to provide full support for Aboriginal staff when the manager was absent from the store; a proper standard of accounting and administration became possible; and the financial appeal of ALPA management appointments encouraged greater stability of management staff because of the double wage offered to the 'teams'.

In his report Harrison assigned importance to the correct calculation of 'freight recovery' stressing that freight represented a large cost and 'therefore needs to be closely and constantly monitored' both in negotiation with large firms and in the calculation of selling prices (AD/Harrison, n.d.). Freight recovery was a 'simple' percentage added to the invoice cost of goods to arrive at the selling price. Harrison warned that this calculation had become open to 'in-built error' because some items held a higher freight component than would be applied by the costing of weight and volume freight of each item: the more expensive the item, the higher the freight
component. Harrison proposed the creation of a reference chart for different kinds of foodstuffs which varied in mass and volume.

Harrison’s report reviewed ALPA’s policy of adding mark-ups to ‘landed cost’ (sales price plus freight). He believed that it was time to review the ‘chart of margins’ (mark-ups) in two major areas — food prices and customer orders — as they had not been revised for a number of years. He recommended that a new mark-up policy in line with commercial trade levels be formulated for the purchase of boats, cars, outboard motors, bikes, caravans and other expensive items, admitting that ‘in the case of major purchases [the] application of our previous percentage mark-up has made our pricing unfairly high having regard to the no risk nature of the transaction’ (AD/Harrison, n.d.).

Reports submitted to the 1978 Annual Meeting showed that, while the Association as a whole was operating profitably, not all the stores were experiencing success in all areas of their operation. Mathematics lessons were held at Galiwin’ku store every Friday for staff and the relationship between the store workers and the community was described as being ‘of the highest order’. The manager’s report from Milingimbi was not so impressive. The store manager had just resigned because of a ‘serious breakdown in communication between himself and the council and community’. The store was described as having a low standing in the community with many break-ins. The Gapuwiyak report stressed that the council did not understand the benefit to the community of having a well stocked, well equipped store with dependable, well trained staff. It was recommended that ‘stronger store rules’ be introduced in order to prevent stock breakages, theft and to increase the efficiency of the store workers. A report from WW Lanhupuy, formerly Town Clerk at Galiwin’ku and currently MLA for Arnhem Land, stated that:

> the time that these people [ALPA staff] have spent on the Yolngu workers has been limited and not encouraging at all to those who have to live at Galiwin’ku and work here after the balanda staff leave. It seems to me that they are only concerned about the operation of the store in whole and not the workers (AD/1978 Annual Report).

Lanhupuy stressed that this predicament had recently changed with the appointment of John Ford as Galiwin’ku store manager in that added responsibility was given to Yolngu workers.

A letter from Ian Yule, Assistant Principal at Shepherdson College, highlighted the need for the promotion of nutritional work in the store suggesting that Adult Educators and Community Development workers work together in making this a reality.

Other submissions to this Annual Meeting concerned the lack of clarity of ALPA’s objectives within the communities. J Voute, store manager at Gapuwiyak, raised questions concerning ALPA’s public relations and listed questions that he felt ALPA should address such as: What does ALPA stand for? How many shops are there in the group? Where is the main office? Where do the profits go? How do you get the goods here? Where do the goods come from? Voute suggested that a printed letter explaining ALPA’s aims be sent to the Councils, community advisors, adult educators, schools, Church officers and Department of Aboriginal Affairs officials together with a printed notice posted on the store building explaining that it is an ALPA store. He
also suggested educational films on ALPA's activities, and occasional lecture tours by the group manager.

Voute's questions highlighted important issues facing the Association at that stage. During the Harrison period the need to repay ALPA's debt to the Church and the desire to make the stores viable dominated policy decisions. The need to provide what had become an essential service to the community coupled with the Association's desire for economic self-sufficiency meant that the retail stores were a service provided for the people rather than by the people. This was a contradiction of the earlier principles under which the Association was established. John Ford, ALPA's incoming group manager, acknowledged and began to address these issues throughout his lengthy term as group manager.

Notes

1. ALPA was, after a few years and some financial difficulties, employed by Warruwi Council as an independent consultant. It seems that ALPA and Warruwi Community Incorporated have not had a problem free relationship since the separation. Correspondence between Stephen Evans (ASTS training manager) and Stuart McMillan (operations manager) discussed the difficult financial position of Warruwi store in 1983. It was also claimed that the trainee store manager was acting irresponsibly:

   I have today spoken to John, the President, and advised him that ALPA cannot continue as
   Accountants for the store unless we are appointed Managers, ie, not just recruiting a
   Manager for them but having management of the store, and control over the Manager
   (AD/letter, McMillan to Evans, 18 November 1983).

2. Yirrkala was the only ALPA member community that had any direct competition. This was posed by Woolworths at Nhulunbuy and created many problems, especially with price comparison and stock variation, because NABALCO (a large bauxite mining company) subsidises Woolworths who in turn can offer cheaper prices than the store at Yirrkala. One of the reasons for ALPA's commercial success is that they are usually the only major food outlet in the communities in which they operate except for take-away food shops which often open during different hours. This lack of competition has recently been challenged by small family based stores providing an after hours service and stocking a limited range of products.

3. Until 1975 the store manager's wage was subsidised by government funding.

4. The Galiwin'ku store manager's house was allocated $60,000 for improvements in 1978.

5. During this period, ALPA had donated $40,000 to the Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services; repaid their debt to the Church; allocated large sums of money for expenditure on capital works in the communities; bought 1000 shares in Associated Wholesale and 75 in Tickle Wholesale Distributors; and established a staff training reserve of $10,000, which soon grew to $60,000, and invested a further $20,000.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE FORD ERA BEGINS 1979–84

In the early years of A.L.P.A. the administration had the very difficult task of establishing a new thing in the Aboriginal Communities. The work was different and the responsibilities of a store were different. Today we must always remember the hard work that was done by the first executives, and more so, store managers. It took until 1978 to work out most of the early problems so that A.L.P.A. could then start to do the kind of work it was meant to do ... [to assist] the 'Social and Economic Development of Aboriginal people in Australia' (AD/Rawnsley, 1984 AM minutes).

John Ford, group manager of the Arnhem Land Progress Association from 1979 to 1988, has been hailed as 'father of the modern ALPA'. Ford began working for ALPA in early 1977 as a store manager at Galiwin'ku. He was based there for over two years before accepting the position of group manager and moving to Darwin to take up this position. Another hierarchical change also occurred during this period with George Rawnsley (UCA Accountant) replacing the Reverend Bernard Clarke as ALPA's chairperson in 1980. Chapter Five discusses initiatives undertaken by the Association during the 1979–84 period including the establishment of the Store Training School, changes to store management structures, and constitutional and administrative changes. During this period also attempts were made by ALPA to 'aboriginalise' the Association and to increase Aboriginal levels of involvement within ALPA.

The management and accounting systems introduced by Everall and enhanced by Harrison's retail expertise were coming to fruition by the late 1970s. The Association was beginning to accumulate surpluses which allowed financial backing for new initiatives, such as staff training. Apart from the Association as a whole operating smoothly, several reports from the communities indicate that the improved stores were accepted at the local level. A 1979 Annual Report from the managers of the Nangalala store stated:

Now this is what we feel we have achieved; the store not only has held its own business wise for this past year, but more important we have established a sense of security for the people. No longer do they need to call constantly to the house to check if the store is going to operate for the day, they know that in the set down hours the store will always be open. They know they can be sure of the essential things and luxuries to spend their extra money on. We like to think that we have established a sense of pride in their appearance that the people never had before by supplying clothes to look attractive for no real extra cost; they take pride now because they can compete with others from more established areas (AD/L & J Whaley, 1979 AM minutes).

This report discussed the congenial relationship that had developed between the Council, the community and the store as a result of the increased circulation of information about ALPA. In this same year, Roger Sigston, Milingimbi's Community Advisor, commended the operation of the store and 'its service to the community' because of the efforts of the store manager and 'the administrative officers' (AD/Sigston, 1979 Annual Report). Better communication between the store and the community eventuated because of the store's improved quality of services, such as the constant supply of basic items, and the 'time taken in explanation to Council and
community members about the realities of store running expenses, markups [and] profits'. According to Sigston this resulted in better understanding and appreciation of stores than in the past (AD/Sigston, 1979 Annual Report). He also mentioned the assistance provided by ALPA to the outstations through buying local produce for sale in the ALPA stores which enabled the outstations to generate their own income. The communities awareness of their ability to take control of the store when they wanted was indicated by Sigston, although it was felt that Milingimbi was not yet prepared to do so (AD/Sigston, 1979 Annual Report).

Not all the communities were as receptive to the Association. Ford's letter to Neville Minshall, Galiwin'ku store manager, stressed the need for 'caution' as the store was reported as being in a 'most delicate position' which required 'great diplomacy and consideration within the bounds of ALPA policy'. Without specifying the exact nature of the problem, the letter referred to the community's lack of knowledge about the Association's overall objectives and the detrimental effect this had on the operation of the store. Ford's previous experience as an ALPA store manager enabled him to understand the importance of improving the community's knowledge about the Association and its operations and accentuated his determination to 'educate' all the
communities about ALPA's 'motives'. Furthermore, he suggested that the promotion of community interests by distributing an ALPA newsletter, selling local produce, producing sports trophies and cooperating with the school's work experience program would assist the relationship between the store and the community (AD/letter, Ford to Minshall, 6 July 1979).

The first meeting at which all ALPA staff, both Yolngu and Balanda, were present was held at Galiwin'ku in June 1980. At this stage ALPA had 51 employees — 32 Aboriginal and 19 non-Aboriginal. At this meeting, Ford expressed his vision for the Association declaring that the 'further along the path we tread, the quicker we will realise the ambitions we have of Yolngu people solely running their stores' (AD/Ford, Galiwin'ku 14 June 1980). This meeting discussed such issues as the need for a better explanation of the price calculation of stock; the need for team work and more constructive communication between Balanda managers and Yolngu staff; ways to deal with store curses;¹ the need for trust and responsibility to be given to Yolngu staff members; the need to educate the community about the store; the need to revise store terminology (especially usage of words such as 'haberdashery', 'manchester' and 'hardware'); the effects of family pressure on staff and the methodology for dealing with this;² and, finally, the need for a greater definition of each person's role in the store. These meetings were to assist ALPA's new Training School in formulating the courses offered.

Plate 17. A very well presented store
Source: ALPA files
Aboriginal Store Training School

The Arnhem Land Progress Association was one of the first organisations in the Northern Territory to establish a Training School based in an Aboriginal community (Galiwin'ku). The School attempted to offer culturally appropriate training courses in an amenable environment. Some non-ALPA communities have training of store workers provided by the community project officer, the store manager, external consultants, or adult educators based in the community. This method can be successful, especially in recognising training needs for an individual in a particular setting, but can fail if the person in charge of training has too many other responsibilities or leaves the community and is replaced by someone who does not have a commitment to this training.

The Aboriginal Store Training School was officially opened on 17 February 1981 by Senator Bernard Kilgariff. The opening was attended by managers and staff from the ALPA stores, the Central Committee, representatives from ALPA's key suppliers, some Northern Territory government officials and members of the Galiwin'ku community. ALPA's fundamental objective in establishing the Training School was:

- to enable Aboriginal communities to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary, to successfully conduct the business of the store, in their own communities, by their own staff, under their own managers (AD/Future Policy, 1982).

Plate 18. The opening ceremony of the Aboriginal Store Training School, Galiwin'ku 1981
Source: ALPA files
Ten additional objectives were formulated:

1. to establish the Training School facility at Galiwin'ku;
2. to devise, implement and develop a range of courses;
3. to review courses, to ensure their continuing relevance and effectiveness;
4. to establish and confirm store operating procedures and standards;
5. to construct suitable training materials for use by others;
6. to assist other non-ALPA communities with the training of store workers;
7. to assist in management selection procedures;
8. to provide orientation of successful applicants;
9. to prepare materials for community education about the role of the store; and
10. to train aboriginal staff to manage the Training School (AD/ASTS Annual Reports 1981/2).

The Training School conducted an extensive range of courses in its first few years in operation. These courses ranged from basic store workers courses, to supervisors courses and cultural orientation courses and were attended by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from communities across the north of Australia. The School also prepared a number of 'packaged materials' including videotapes, student workbooks and supplementary notes for the store manager/adult educator, and information booklets designed for students and the general community in order to better inform them of ALPA's activities. Apart from this, the School produced an extensive store manual for store managers intended to ensure the smooth operation of the store. These productions and ALPA's training philosophy and methodology as it has evolved over the last eleven years will be discussed in this and the following chapters.

Initially the Training School was staffed by training manager, Stephen Evans, and secretary/assistant, Joy Evans. The School's staff grew to include training officers, Tony BuwanBuwan, Sue Reaburn, Anne Carter and Sam Bun'tarrawuy. Knowledge of the Training School was promoted by word of mouth and via the distribution of leaflets explaining the nature of the courses offered and the facilities provided at the school, together with course fees and the methods of paying these fees. Course fees were $230 per week which included accommodation and meals while the charge for those 'living out' was $180. Trainees could pay their fares to Galiwin'ku and course fees by obtaining government funding through the NEAT (National Employment and Training) or ABSTUDY grants scheme or by the individual participant or the participant's community financially supporting them.

The Training School's first year of operation was very much an experimental year with courses being devised to meet the needs of the students and individual communities. The courses offered during the first year were a supervisors course, a stockkeepers course, and a storepersons course and included instruction based on everyday aspects of store operation such as checkout operation, pricing, packing shelves, ordering stock and rotating stock on the shelves and in the bulk store room. The Training School was able to utilise the Galiwin'ku store facilities to 'practise' the students in the methods being taught at the School. Activities such as price marking, filling shelves, checking stock on show, counting storeroom stock and checkout operation were more easily explained and demonstrated by practical in-store training. A communications course, designed to improve communication between Yolngu and Balanda and examine areas of misunderstanding between the two cultures, was conducted from June to July 1981 (AD/Evans, personal files, July 1981).
Attendance for both the stockkeepers and storepersons courses was good; the supervisors course only attracted small groups of about 4–5 people which enabled the trainers to give special attention to individual participants. The supervisors course concentrated on the role of the manager in the store, the manager's relationships with staff and customers, maths and English instruction, and the relationships between each department within the store in order to show not only how but why things were done in a particular way (AD/Evans, August 1981). It was envisaged that further courses of this kind would attempt to explore:

some of the mysteries that previous managers have kept for themselves. With knowledge comes many things. One of the things we hope to see, is the 'sense of responsibility' needed to successfully manage the community store (AD/Evans, Supervisors Course Report, August 1981).

One of the major problems experienced by the School in its first year of operation was attracting enrolments for the courses offered. Evans's enthusiasm was not dampened by this lack of interest:

I am very optimistic about the future at this stage. Hopefully ALPA managers will be convinced of the value of the courses now, and with the large mailing going out, I expect a growing interest from other communities (AD/letter, Evans to Ford, 31 March 1981, Evans personal files).
Store managers were responsible for selecting candidates to attend Training School courses and were not convinced of the validity of training store workers at this stage. Considerations such as the organisational difficulties in obtaining funding for store workers to attend the Training School, the lack of relief staff to fill the position of the trainee while they were absent at a course, and the unwillingness of families to send young unchaperoned women to other communities affected some store managers' decisions to send their staff to the School. Some store managers believed that Aboriginal people did not want or need the extra training which would provide them with the skills to fully manage and operate their own stores (Evans, pers. comm., 1992). Store managers also used the Training School as a means of rewarding staff—they came less to be trained than to have a break from the usual routine.4

Another problem was making the training programs relevant to the trainees from individual stores. The small number of Training School staff and their inability to spend much time in the communities made it difficult to assess what the training needs of individual community stores were. At this stage almost half of the course participants were from non-ALPA stores and used different systems and methods from those used in the ALPA stores (AD/ASTS Report, October 1981). To deal with this problem, Evans made the following recommendations: that training programs be planned three months in advance to allow flexibility for the stores; that each ALPA store be visited at the beginning of each year to assess its training needs; at least 60 vacancies be provided for trainees to attend courses at the Training School; and an advanced course of up to eight persons be conducted for Aboriginal trainee managers throughout the year (AD/Evans, November 1981).

The store workers course

By the end of 1981 courses at the Training School were restructured. A 'store worker' course which comprised all elements of store operation up to the supervisor level was offered as an alternative to the separate courses conducted previously for stock keepers, store persons and supervisors. Individual participants could then determine which aspects of training they wanted to undertake in accordance with their own experience and their positions within the store. The store worker course was structured for people already employed in community stores as checkout operators, supervisors or general storepersons, and was geared towards upgrading the participants' existing skills. It also solved the problem of limited numbers for some of the courses with seven participants being the average attendance rate for this course.

The store worker course expanded and developed over the next few years concentrating on areas of store operation such as stock control, cash control and 'personal development'. A component of the course dealt with the training team's conviction that 'the cash economy' and 'the relationship between a successful store and the community' was not easily understood by Aboriginal people. To address this problem a basic 'food story' course was developed. This course identified and explained the different types of retailers and their roles; it discussed the image and role of the store in the community; it endeavoured to explain the journey of the money the customer paid into the store; and explained the role of the store worker in maintaining store profitability. The importance of stock control to the running of the
store was emphasised by discussing how stock was ordered, received and paid for. Together with this, the correct methodology for price marking, filling shelves using stock rotation, explaining the main principles of ordering and using stock control books, and understanding both the role of the stockperson in the stock control cycle and how profit/loss is calculated was discussed in great detail. Subjects such as personal hygiene and appearance and English and maths skills were also taught within this course.

The three major goals established for the Training School in 1982 were:

- to provide stores with workers who have the necessary skills to operate the store confidently and successfully and to provide the on-going support to continue their training in the community.
- to provide communities with an improved store operation, with fresh appealing stocks at reasonable prices.
- helping store workers to gain confidence in their abilities, to develop their self-esteem as well as improving their job knowledge and skills.

The Training School's programs designed to fulfil these aims fell into three main categories: basic courses, advanced courses and visits to communities. One of the 'advanced courses' was the Aboriginal trainee manager course for 'individuals of outstanding potential'. Some participants for this course had undertaken the supervisors course offered in 1981. The promotion of a course such as this instigated a drastic reassessment of the role of the Balanda management teams in the stores and inspired the introduction of a new concept in ALPA's management strategy — the 'support manager'.

**Yolnu trainee managers and Balanda support managers**

A 1982 paper entitled *ALPA's Future Policy* detailed the need for the revision of the management of ALPA's stores:

Most of the ALPA stores have a stable Aboriginal staff content who have been employed by anything up to seven years, and have therefore seen a variety of European managers come and go through their store. Various levels of Aboriginal training have advanced and declined with each change of manager, who sees each staff member in a different light: some staff members are thought to be lazy, dishonest, tricky, stupid, 'not worth training', while others are looked at in a more sympathetic vein by another manager, and are coached accordingly. However the overall 'end' result has been, no noticeable advancement in confidence, or real training in responsibility. Added to this situation further, to ensure that the store operated viably and that there was some training in operation, a European assistant manager was employed, invariably resulting in a 'husband and wife' team. Although some of the Aboriginal staff have now advanced to a stage where they could be given further responsibility, because of their natural slowness and the workload that is at present seen to be done by the management team, these people have been kept at a distance, and have not furthered in the responsibilities in which they should be growing (AD/ALPA Future Policy, 1982).

It was therefore resolved that, in future, ALPA restrict its non-Aboriginal staff in each store to one. This person would take on the role of 'support manager'. The support manager's role was to provide non-Aboriginal support for the Aboriginal staff, especially the trainee manager; to review all store work relating to cash accounting
and buying procedures; and to continue the training of Aboriginal staff. Although the previous management teams managed the stores effectively, it was thought that the creation of this position would enable and encourage the Aboriginal store staff to accept more responsibility for store operations. A document outlining the duties of a support manager specified that:

the support manager remains the authority in the store, but his directions need to be channelled through the Assistant Manager ... However the guiding principle is that the Aboriginal Assistant Manager is to become responsible for the 'day-to-day' operation of the store (AD/Job Description, May 1982).

The Yolngu trainee manager was to be placed in charge of the store when the support manager was absent so that the Training School could assess the trainee's performance and determine how their 'weaknesses or strengths could be improved' (AD/ALPA Future Policy, 1982).

One of the problems with the implementation of the support manager's role was the repercussions it had on the employment status of the 'assistant' manager. In effect, the redefinition of a 'manager' resulted in the elimination of the assistant manager position (usually held by the store manager's wife) hence the loss of one wage. In order to make the position attractive it was recommended that the support manager's salary be increased by 20 percent and that, in addition to the normal leave every twelve months, an extra week be given to the support manager during the first six months of her/his employment.

Although the creation of the support manager role was designed to give more responsibility to the Aboriginal trainee manager, Evans believed that the greatest obstacle to this working effectively would be the support manager's inability to allow the trainee managers and staff members to assume that responsibility. In order to address this problem Evans advised that equal time be spent on educating the incoming support managers as to their specific role and the motive behind the 'support' concept. Evans advocated a training period for Balanda support managers of one year during which time all aspects of store operation in an Aboriginal cultural setting would be addressed. On completion of the training, the Yolngu manager, store staff and the community would decide whether a particular person should undertake the role of support manager. Furthermore, Evans suggested that women be trained as support managers because they would not represent as much of a challenge to male Yolngu managers.

The way in which this concept was to work was that the support manager would work with the trainee manager until the Yolngu manager, staff, Store Training School staff, group manager and support manager agreed that the Yolngu manager had 'both competence and confidence in the role'. The support manager would then be withdrawn from the store but would continue to provide any back-up support or advice that was necessary. Evans anticipated that the success of a Yolngu manager would be dependent on support from the store staff and stressed that staff members be trained in all areas of store operation to ensure that they were not 'working in the dark'. This would also enable the store workers to understand the pressures faced by the Yolngu manager and to assist this manager wherever possible (AD/Evans, personal files, 14 May 1982).
The importance of community support for the Yolngu store manager and the store itself was also recognised. This prompted the Training School to discuss with the community their perceptions of the store. This discussion led the Training School staff to believe that there was little general knowledge about how the store 'worked' in a western economic sense. The Training School produced a video, The Food Story, which endeavoured to deal with this problem. It was believed that the 'story' would have to go 'back to the very beginnings' by discussing the development of different foods, how they grow, where, why and when. The tape also dealt with the roles of the producer, the manufacturer, the wholesaler, the retailer and the customer in explaining how food arrived at the store. One of the more frequently asked questions during the community discussions was, 'Where does all the store money go?' The videotape endeavoured to explain this.

The money to pay all of these thousands of people, all of it, comes from the customer, Mrs Yolnu [sic]. Maybe she is a very rich person you must think. No, that is not the answer. Let's look at the bag of flour again. Mrs Yolnu pays maybe the $1.00 for the flour. Does the store keep all of it? Does the manager keep all of it? No. The retailer has to pay the Wholesaler first. Usually, he will have to pay the Wholesaler about 80c of that $1.00. This means the retailer (store) can keep 20c of that money. But wait. The store has to have a manager. It must have a good staff. It needs to buy refrigerators and shelves. It needs to pay for a vehicle to bring things to the store. It has to pay its staff holiday pay. It may pay the Council rent for the store, or A.A.D.S. It has to keep the store painted and looking clean. It has to pay to help build new stores.

All of the money for this comes from the 20c left out of the customers $1.00. If the store is running well, then this will cost about 15c and it means the store can keep 5c out of that $1.00. If the store is not working properly, then it might cost 18c or 19c. Then the store is only making 1c or 2c. If things are really bad, it might cost 22c and we have only 20c. This means we are losing money, and the store will probably close (AD/Evans 1982, 'What is Profit? What is loss?').

Apart from alerting the communities to their responsibility in making the Aboriginal trainee manager/support manager concept work, Evans also advised the ALPA administration that in order to support this new management structure the administrative staff would have to be especially thorough in their own duties. If paperwork mistakes were detected, the trainee manager and the Training School staff should immediately be notified (AD/Evans, personal files, 14 May 1982).

When the trainee managers course was formally introduced, little enthusiasm was expressed by Balanda managers. John Ford pressed store managers into recognising the value of this training, which resulted in six Aboriginal people from ALPA stores being enrolled. The course was designed to provide an understanding of management techniques utilised in the operation of a retail store including leadership, delegation and an understanding of the role of the store in a community. This course involved much on-the-job training under the supervision of the local store manager and the ASTS. The course consisted of three one-month live-in training periods for the trainee plus store visits, the full evaluation of trainees by ASTS staff and follow-up training. The course covered all aspects of store operation dealing extensively with individual areas of store operation and their relationship with each other. These areas included marketing, use of stock control books, receiving goods, invoice and price checking, freight and sales price calculation, damaged stock, outstation orders, inter-store transfers, cash register operations, layby, refunds, petty cash, store hygiene and
appearance, credit sales and the filling out of a weekly sales report. The conclusion of this course was a study tour of Darwin transport companies and merchandise suppliers. This training, although labelled a 'trainee managers course', did not necessarily mean that all trainees would instantly become managers. It was designed to 'consolidate the trainees' positions in their home stores' with their future prospect of management being 'dependent on their desire to continue, as much as their ability' (AD/ASTS Annual Report 1982/3).

In 1982, an exercise dubbed 'yolngu store operation' was conducted at the Galiwin'ku store. This community was chosen because of the high levels of training already experienced by the Galiwin'ku store staff and the immediate back-up available from the Training School. The exercise was to be a training ground for the introduction of the support manager role and the Aboriginal trainee manager in all the communities.

'Yolngu store operation'

The exercise entailed the handing over of the operation of Galiwin'ku store to the Aboriginal store staff with the assistance of the Store Training School staff, mainly Stephen Evans and Tony BuwanBuwan (training officer). Both Sue Reabum (training officer) and Joy Evans (general assistant and secretary) were available for specific assistance on occasions. The existing management team of John and Barbara Hoare was transferred into Darwin to undertake other ALPA duties. The Balanda support manager was to be installed in the store after the Yolngu staff had undergone a period of operating the store by themselves.

Before the project formally began, Ford issued letters to the traditional owners and Council members of each community seeking permission to conduct this exercise, explaining how it would work and appealing for their assistance:

Please help us to make this a success and help the whole community support the store, as the whole of the Northern Territory will be looking very closely at what happens, and this will help Aboriginal people everywhere if this is a success at Galiwin'ku, and if the store-staff show that Aboriginal people can do anything that they want to, with the Mala leaders and traditional owners' support (AD/letter, Ford to Stephen Bubatunj, 21 June 1982, Evans personal files).

Evans, Ford and other members of the ASTS held meetings at Galiwin'ku with people from the Health Centre, the hospital, adult educators and tutors, traditional owners and the store workers in order to discuss the objectives and implementation of this project. Ford expressed his concern at these meetings that outside 'pressure' would be placed on the store staff if there were not any Balanda present. In order to prevent this happening the community leaders made three decisions: that approval be given for the trial project; that no credit be given to Yolngu or Balanda; and that the Police Aide, Alfred Djupindhauy, would enforce the store rules (AD/Evans, personal files, 7 July 1982).

A store Council was formed consisting of Stephen Evans, Willie Dandjati (trainee manager) and Mick Daypurrryun (Traditional Owner) as the chairperson. The store was to be operated by three department managers, Wendy Gaypirra (Grocery), Tony BuwanBuwan (Variety) and Ricky Bayun (Stock Control). Galiwin'ku Council was
expected to support the store and the traditional owners were asked to provide the authority for the store staff to carry out their jobs (AD/memo from Evans, 6 July 1982, Evans personal files).

In preparation for the trial Yolngu store operation, Evans outlined the three areas he thought would create problems for Yolngu at the time. These were: a clear understanding of the 'food story' which involved the explanation of the above-mentioned videotape and the store money cycle; a 'recognition of the consequences of failure'; and the importance of having one person 'accept responsibility for the store' and supervision of the store keys and vehicle. Evans recommended a 'surrogate' person who had the respect of the staff and the community and could carry out their duties 'honestly and consistently' for this position. Other potential problems for Yolngu store operation outlined by Evans included: staff absenteeism or lateness; coping with 'hard-talking Balanda'; getting advice; obtaining community support for the staff, especially the supervisors; and communicating with Balanda helpers (AD/Evans, personal files, 14 May 1982).

Before the actual exercise began some problems arose. ASTS training officer, BuwanBuwan, sent Ford a letter criticising the lack of broader community consultation in the preparation of the exercise (AD/letter, BuwanBuwan to Ford, 7 July 1982). Evans also stressed the need to use 'considered terms' when referring to the exercise:

We are not in any way talking about Yolnu Management of the store at this early time. We are talking about Yolnu Operation of the store ... When, and only when, the staff have demonstrated the ability to handle management tasks, will they take over management ... Good management is not something that is granted with a certificate, or a handshake. It is a matter of gaining knowledge, and developing skills. Gaining knowledge can be relatively simple, but developing skills can only be done through experience. This does not mean that the exercise will not have valuable qualities (AD/memo from Evans, 6 July 1982, Evans personal files).

After one month of the exercise being in operation it was reported by Evans that, 'ALPA, including myself, are a bit overwhelmed at the success of the project' (AD/Evans, personal files, Report on Exercise, May 1982). The store staff expressed a desire to continue the operation as no major problems had occurred. Meetings were held each morning to discuss relevant issues or problems arising. Store improvements were taking place including alterations to the store layout and the cash register results were reasonable with a register pride chart monitoring the work of each operator. A sales chart was also displayed so that staff could be aware of how the store was operating.

Store Council members, Gaypirra and Dandjati, outlined to ALPA's Executive Committee their perceptions of the way in which they envisaged the store continuing to operate — especially in relation to the incoming Balanda support manager:

We would like him to assist with the paperwork only. We would like to try to work by ourselves as much as possible and for that man to look after such things as ordering, if we have problems, or with pricing goods in the store. This includes ordering a bigger variety of men's and women's clothing. We get so many requests from customers for new and different varieties that we never seem able to get enough of the right things ... In the past, we have had managers that have set themselves above and apart from us. We have responded to this lack of trust by pretending to work well. We have known that this is not true and so have they. We want other
people to see the support manager and the staff working together in hand and in heart ... We do not want this person telling us what to do. If we are having trouble with the work we are doing, then we will ask him to help us ... We, Gaypirra and Dandjati, will look after the keys to the store at all times. Dandjati will look after the store truck during the day, and the support manager can look after it at night (AD/letter, Store Council members to BC, September 1982, Evans personal files).

This letter outlined the additional responsibilities of the support manager including that 'he' was to be responsible for radio schedules 'and to select one of the staff to work with him' and to assist in barge unloading 'only if he wants to'. In addition to this it was specified that the support manager and a staff member would attend community meetings together; the community was to see Dandjati or Gaypirra for matters concerning the store; and the support manager was to refer any 'complaints or criticisms' about another staff member to Dandjati, Gaypirra or Daypurryun. The letter also suggested that willing store staff travel to different places, such as the Commonwealth Bank in Darwin, to compare work practices.

In September 1982, the store experienced some problems involving store break-ins and other damage. In response to this, Evans commented that:

Dandjati has born up extremely well under great pressure, and I am doing what I can to support him without becoming overbearing. There have been times when I have had to bite back against saying something or other, particularly in the meetings each morning ... It is absolutely essential that Dandjati is supported, and his actions or words not criticised in open discussion — certainly not without having discussed it with him first ... This is however having a depressing effect on me, and making my communication more difficult. I have tried to overcome this by doing other things — like spending a couple of hours restocking the snack bar cooler ... The main lesson so far, has been that although the physical jobs are understood quite well, and the staff attack their jobs, enthusiastically, usually — there is still an absence of a clear understanding of the need to complete paperwork tasks quickly and properly. I believe that this area must be given priority by the incoming Support Manager (AD/memo from Evans, 27 September 1982, Evans personal files).

According to Reaburn, one of the main problem areas for the store was that the staff were not willing or able to delegate responsibility which caused a degree of resentment amongst the staff. Reaburn also warned the Darwin administration against giving 'inappropriate and insensitive support to the staff' claiming that the staff were actually embarrassed at the amount of attention they were receiving (AD/Reaburn 1982).

Evans believed that the greatest area of concern raised by the project at this stage was the pressure exerted on store staff by family members and other relationships between the store workers and the community (AD/memo from Evans, 16 September 1982, Evans personal files). In light of the decision by store staff to continue the exercise, Evans recommended that more attention be given to the 'food story' in order to better educate the community about the store and commended the implementation of the exercise by claiming that 'the project proved that there is tremendous potential here for real development of the storeworkers'. Another area which presented difficulties for the Yolngu store workers was in the area of cash and ordering control. Previously these areas were the province of the Balanda manager and assistant manager with very little Aboriginal input. Evans paid tribute to the ideas of Richard Trudgen, a community worker at Ramingining, believing that he posed a possible solution to the problem of imparting information about these aspects of store operation. This solution
involved Trudgen's idea of relating certain aspects of store operation to the 'ceremonial exchange cycle' in order to better educate store workers and the community about the monetary aspects of store operation.6

In October 1982, the 'job description' for the incoming support manager to the Galiwin'ku store claimed that 'there is a requirement for the continuing presence of a non-Aboriginal person, based at the store for at least five years, depending on the local situation (Job Description, 5 October 1982). The inference about the 'local situation' indicates that the exercise may have deteriorated. A further clue is evidenced by the job description which referred to the need to have a Balanda who was not susceptible to traditional politics in charge of the store. The benefit of having a non-Aboriginal on site is that in difficult situations, such as family pressure, Yolngu staff can defer to a Balanda manager as the authority for refusing requests (Job Description, 5 October 1982). However, a report filed on the store's condition a few months after Bradley had been installed was very positive:

We [the ASTS staff] see this as having been an overwhelming success. The attitude and quality of work has risen dramatically. Productivity has had a marked increase, and recently, the store set new sales record of almost $50,000! When we began, we had no clear picture of how things would work out, but we certainly hoped for less than what has taken place ... Once again we underestimated the capacity of Yolngu people. This has been a criticism we have levelled at others, and yet, we certainly do it ourselves. The project has continued successfully now for nearly 5 months, and is getting better all the time. Long-range measurements will be the true gauge however, and it is the years ahead that we will see the real effects. It must be said so too, that the store organisation has not evolved in quite the expected manner. Subtle changes have occurred in the people involved. They have made the idea of Yolngu Store Operation work, because they have changed the way that it works. It has to be allowed to function in a yolngu way, so that they will be comfortable ... There are certain boundaries and deadlines to be accommodated — but within those bounds — is tremendous freedom. The sense of loyalty and responsibility shown has been outstanding! (AD/Report, 18 November 1982)

The subtle inferences in Bradley's job description to problems within the community — 'the local situation' — and to family pressure seem, by early 1983, to have a more solid foundation. Several factors which made the operation of the store difficult occurred including a funeral which entailed the store being shut on pay day, the barge being overdue, conflict between staff members in the store's office, and insufficient monitoring of wages or checking of completed work by the supervisor or manager.

Another problem related to the Aboriginal trainee manager at Galiwin'ku believing that ALPA was not entirely serious about this exercise. In February 1983, Dandjati (Galiwin'ku trainee manager) addressed a letter to ALPA's Central Committee concerning ALPA's recruitment of managers, the contracts signed and the manager's ability to earn additional bonuses. Dandjati pointed out that as the manager he was not on a contract and did not have access to the same privileges that other managers were entitled to. He asked the Central Committee to consider giving him a wage increase, furnished accommodation for himself and his family and six weeks holiday instead of four. In another letter to Ford he reiterated these requests and suggested further the possibility of himself and other senior Yolngu store staff joining a superannuation scheme (AD/letter, Dandjati to CC members and Ford, 7 February 1983, Evans personal files).
Reaburn, who often interpreted and transcribed letters for Aboriginal people wishing to communicate with ALPA's head office, explained the reasoning behind Dandjati's letters:

He knows that what he is asking is part of ALPA's new direction and that decisions concerning his 'contract' will set precedents for others. He also knows that it may be a financial headache for ALPA but he feels he has the right to ask ... What Dandjati is doing is issuing you (that is us balanda ...) a challenge ... His position is negotiable but it is necessary that you be seen to be acting in response to his 'challenge'. I feel that he does not recognise the Central Committee as a decision making body (AD/letter, Reaburn to Ford, 8 March 1983, Evans personal files).
These letters and McMillan's following letter indicate that there was an internal power struggle occurring in the store. Stuart McMillan, ALPA's operations manager, clarified Bradley's position as support manager in a letter which stressed that while joint decision-making between the support manager and trainee manager was to take place, the support manager retained the authority to control all the financial and procedural matters in the store. McMillan then stated:

We realise only too clearly that the step we took at Galiwin'ku was too great, and now we must institute the necessary controls and slow the process down so that true development of Aboriginal people can take place (AD/letter, McMillan to Bradley, 14 March 1983, Evans personal files).

Ford elaborated:

We were very cautious in our initial approach to the Yolngu take-over, but the August result was fairly reassuring. However, it would appear now that there is some doubt that this result was accurate. The latest gross profit figures after the most accurate stocktake that was done would show that there has been some sort of leakage right through the period (AD/letter, Ford to Evans, 15 March 1983, Evans personal files).

Evans drafted a long and emotional letter in response to the above assertions. In response to McMillan's claim that the step taken at Galiwin'ku was 'too great', Evans asked, 'By what standard? Who has made this decision? and Why were those directly involved (ie Galiwin'ku) not included in this decision?' Evans pointed out the problems in looking only at the profits as the indicators as to whether the exercise was a success or a failure rather than at any other advances that may have been made in terms of staff training and the increased responsibility given to staff (AD/unsent letter, Evans to Ford, 21 March 1983, Evans personal files).

By May, 1983 John Ford informed Jim Bradley, Willie Dandjati and Stephen Evans that the store was showing a gross loss of $150,000. Evans suggested in the ASTS Annual Report that further investigation should take place in order to ascertain the 'exact nature of the problem' but stressed:

It must always be remembered that the store cannot be looked at in isolation from the community. In the same way parts of the store cannot be taken in isolation. It is not enough to continue because staff morale and confidence is high, while the G.P. [gross profit] rate deteriorates rapidly. A G.P. rate that is high however, is not enough if the community is hostile to high prices and tough policies. We must always look at the whole picture for our decisions (AD/ASTS Annual Report, 30 May 1983, 4).

Evans's immediate approach to the problems occurring at Galiwin'ku was to speak with the store staff and explain the situation to them. By practical example he used a copy of the stores profit/loss statement sheet and burnt it before the assembled staff, extinguishing it when it was half burnt as an indication of where the store was currently placed. Evans suggested that community meetings be held and mentioned problems the community was having in regards to the bank being closed down, the effect of the store 'going down' on the morale of the staff and the effect of rumours in the community and the store itself (AD/Evans, personal files, 2 June 1983).

The Training School also produced a document, Where has the money gone?, designed to assist the staff in assessing the problem areas in the store.
These 'problem areas' were identified as being:

1. staff do nothing about things people aren't buying
2. staff are careless with stock
3. staff do not do anything about stock which gets damaged
4. staff not being careful about wasting things
5. staff not rotating stock (letting things go bad)
6. ordering too much stock (can't sell it and it gets broken)
7. not ordering enough stock (can't sell it if its not there)
8. not using stock control book properly (wrong orders)
9. leaving doors open when no-one is around (helping people steal)
10. staff trying to put too much on shelves (they fall and break)
11. staff not making sure that all stock leaving store has been paid for
12. staff not being careful with perishables (wasting $1,200 in 2 weeks at Galiwin'ku)  
   (AD/Evans, personal files, 2 June 1983).

Other areas of store operation in which problems were likely to occur concerned poor management of the stock room and poor operation of the checkouts and more generalised factors which could adversely affect store sales and operations. Lists of these problem areas are contained in Appendix 5 and exemplify the type and extent of problems occurring within the community stores. However, it is important to note that these problems are not confined to Aboriginal community stores. They occur, to a different extent, in every retail store throughout Australia.

Once the estimated 'leakage' of $150,000 had been proven, Evans made the following recommendations in order to prevent leakage of that magnitude occurring again:

1. restrict the use of the keys to the non-Aboriginal manager after work hours
2. keep all non-staff out of the storerooms or back areas
4. increase after hours security
5. ensure the security of the building against break-ins (all windows barred and adequate locks on doors)
6. close the Alley gate entrance permanently, and roof over the top to prevent entry
7. seal single door near toilets
8. replace double doors at mens/ladies with swinging doors as at Milingimbi and Ramingining
9. open up non-food area by allowing customers to move freely between the sections of the store
   — only exit the front checkouts
10. prevent all entry via front checkouts when they are open
11. maintain an effective security person at the checkouts when they are open
12. appoint a second pair of balanda eyes to assist overall control
   (AD/Evans personal files, 1 June 1983).

Evans's frustration with both ALPA and the 'failure' of the exercise is evidenced in the above recommendations and the following comment:

It must be emphasised to both the store staff and the community that they are no longer trusted as they once were. Their reputation (name) has been destroyed ... They are the only ones who can repair that damage (AD/Evans personal files, 1 June 1983).

Further recommendations for the store included:

- the immediate termination of all 'suspect' or non-productive staff;
- the reduction of staff numbers to 15;
- closure of the tick-book and lay-by system;
- the prohibition of husband and wife working in the same store;
- casuals only to be used under special circumstances but must be terminated immediately when the situation no longer called for them;
the close examination of the current system of approving payments;

• a closer examination of barge deliveries;

• the review of all freight schedules;

• the careful checking of all invoices for April;

• spot checks of five invoices for each month; and

• restricting the pricing of all invoices to the support manager.

(AD/Evans, personal files, 1 June 1983).

Evans also asked, in light of the Galiwin’ku store workers having the most prolonged and consistent training of all ALPA staff,

Does the failure of the concept of Aboriginal management in this situation reflect a basic error in the training strategy adopted? If so, does this mean we have overestimated the abilities of workers? Have we overestimated our ability to train? Is retailing successfully too hard for Aboriginal people? If not, how can the STS be best used to overcome current problems?

(AD/Evans, personal files, 1 June 1983).

Evans questioned the efficiency of ALPA’s Darwin administration in not detecting such a large deficit earlier, believing there was a communication gap between ALPA administration and the stores. Evans recommended further action which included the necessity of a June stocktake; the imposition of a buying budget; full weekly checks; the reduction of staffing levels; the immediate prosecution of any staff found stealing; that department keys be used at all times to provide an indication of account sales; and that the re-education of some staff take place (AD/letter, Evans to Ford, 1 June 1983, Evans personal files).

By early September 1983 Galiwin’ku's profit/loss statement showed a marked improvement, although Ford questioned the accuracy of this result:

It appears there has been an extremely good result, with a surplus on theoretical profit ... so you have achieved, with the systems and the control you have instituted there, a reversed situation, to now have an over-recovery position. Obviously there is a mistake somewhere, but according to our Accounts department they have checked and rechecked, and this is the figure arrived at.

(AD/letter, Ford to Evans, 2 September 1983, Evans personal files).

Although the store was once again operating profitably, the ramifications of this exercise reportedly left the store climate ‘poor’ and ‘contributed to a most disruptive, and untrusting attitude by staff’ (AD/letter, Evans to Ford, 2 November 1983, Evans personal files).

Over the next couple of years support managers and trainee managers were appointed to most of the ALPA stores. Although the Galiwin’ku exercise must have disappointed Ford, he was able to claim in his 1983 annual report that:

This policy has brought many concerns and in some cases, traumas, but I feel that it has also brought development in as much that people are undergoing experience they would never have been able to gain under the old system of total control by Europeans. It has cost ALPA in profitability in some cases, but some time in the future I am sure we will see the real benefit of this policy (AD/Ford, 1983 Annual Report).

In February 1983 a second trainee store manager course began with most trainees from stores outside the ALPA group. The course program was virtually the same but allowed for the flexibility of non-ALPA stores. In addition to the trainee managers course, non-Aboriginal 'orientation' courses were conducted at the school for both
ALPA managers and other interested parties. Although both the Uniting Church and the Education Department held orientation courses for their staff, they were usually conducted in Darwin or Gove. The ASTS felt that people already employed, especially at Galiwin'ku, would find it easier to participate in a course closer to 'home'. The School could then provide follow-up training and consultation with these people. The aim of the orientation course was:

To expose non-Aboriginal workers, who are new to settlement living, to knowledge and strategies that may assist them to fulfil more effectively the requirements both of their job and of living in a remote Aboriginal community (AD/ASTS Annual Report 1983).

The many objectives of the course were:

1. to identify reasons for coming to Galiwin'ku;
2. to gain an understanding of the history of Northeast Arnhem Land;
3. to explain the 'power' bases at Galiwin'ku and what this meant;
4. to discuss socio-linguistic behaviour which could cause misunderstanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people;
5. to discuss non-Aboriginal behaviour which could cause offence;
6. to explain Aboriginal language and sign language;
7. to explain Aboriginal expectations of non-Aboriginal people in the communities;
8. to explain the outstation movement;
9. to understand culture shock;
10. to explain Aboriginal cultural behaviour; and
11. for participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the course and to discuss any follow up needed.

The course was designed to give a realistic view of life and work in the community; it was able to provide follow-up support to those who needed it and could provide local input from Aborigines and non-Aborigines in the community. In addition to this course the ASTS published a booklet entitled *Culture shock* in 1984 to help new non-Aboriginal store managers or non-Aboriginal staff deal with the realities of living in an isolated Aboriginal community.

By 1984 the trainee store manager course was no longer offered formally by the School. People with the potential to become store managers were trained in their own stores. Although this course was withdrawn from the Training School's program, the principles under which the School was to operate in 1984 emphasised Aboriginal management of their stores. These principles were:

1. Aboriginal people have the capacity to decide their own future;
2. Given sufficient knowledge and experience, Aborigines are able to manage their own stores;
3. Given positive community encouragement and support, Aborigines can do so successfully;
4. For a retail store to be successful, it must be able to operate at a reasonable profit, without external funds; and
5. Training alone will not ensure the profitability of any store

**The Training School changes course**

The courses offered at the Training School underwent significant changes during 1984. A major factor affecting these changes was the decrease in government funding allocated to the school. This funding decrease affected the training programs because it became difficult to obtain funding for participants coming from outside Arnhem
Land to attend courses. Since the School's inception, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs provided the School with one salary for a non-Aboriginal trainer each financial year and the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR) provided funding for course fees and travel costs to enable participants to attend the Training School. However, the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations redefined their policies regarding the funding of training programs offered by the ASTS in late 1983. A 'Manpower Training Subsidy' (an amount equalling approximately one third of the award wage) was now paid over a three month training period to the store from which the trainee came from rather than to the school for training the trainee. This subsidy was designed to induce employers to either take on new staff and train them or upgrade the existing staff's skills. By 1984 funding was made available by the Department of Education and Youth Affairs to unemployed people wishing to participate in the store worker course. ALPA continued to contribute a large proportion of the Training School's costs.8

Table 2. ASTS income and expenditure 1981–1985

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>59,251</td>
<td>74,956</td>
<td>85,673</td>
<td>81,670</td>
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<td>School costs</td>
<td>10,264</td>
<td>11,575</td>
<td>15,898</td>
<td>19,193</td>
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<td>Vehicle costs</td>
<td>3,426</td>
<td>2,353</td>
<td>4,121</td>
<td>4,275</td>
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<td>Operating costs</td>
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<td>25,821</td>
<td>22,622</td>
<td>20,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration costs</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>98,277</td>
<td>118,705</td>
<td>133,314</td>
<td>130,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEIR</td>
<td>33,142</td>
<td>25,316</td>
<td>31,702</td>
<td>10,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAA</td>
<td>19,889</td>
<td>20,770</td>
<td>21,029</td>
<td>22,861</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALPA</td>
<td>45,246</td>
<td>72,596</td>
<td>80,583</td>
<td>92,429</td>
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</table>

Source: AD/Evans, personal files

The decrease in funding coupled with the belief that there were enough people in the stores with sufficient experience to train incoming store workers saw the demise of the existing store worker course. This course was replaced by 'in-store training', the aim being to 'improve the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal storeworkers, in an on-site/in-service course'. The in-store training program consisted of a team of trainers visiting a community and carrying out programs with the entire staff after discussion with the store manager. An advantage of this was that trainers were able to relate their training to a particular participant's own working and social environment. The trainers also endeavoured to educate the store workers about the role of the store in a community, the wider concepts of retailing, the role of the store worker in maintaining
store profitability, the movement of stock from producers to consumers, the value of teamwork and co-operation and served as a support network to both the store manager and staff members.

As well as providing in-store training to different stores, the Training School became responsible for the monitoring of the stores' weekly sales reports in order to help store staff improve the accuracy and quality of these reports before sending them into Darwin administration. As well as achieving a more acceptable standard of reporting, this monitoring allowed the Training School staff better insight to the operations of each store which was then passed on to ALPA's central administration (AD/ASTS Annual Report 1984).

Table 3. ASTS number of courses and trainees 1981–85

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. courses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. trainees</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AD/Evans, personal files

Table 4. ASTS course type and number 1981–85

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses Held</th>
<th>No. courses</th>
<th>No. weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storeworker</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-store training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forklift operator</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storeperson</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee manager (basic)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee manager (advanced)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee manager (supervisor)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study tours</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checkout operator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation (non-Aboriginal)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language (non-Aboriginal)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officeworker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol rehabilitation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AD/Evans, personal files
In addition to these changes occurring at Galiwin'ku, ALPA established a training facility in Darwin to provide store training and management support to the Aboriginal communities in the Darwin region (Minjilang, Daly River, Delissaville, Garden Point, Goulburn Island, Nguiu, Oenpelli, Peppimenarti, Pine Creek, Port Keats and Snake Bay) and to coordinate ALPA's training services in the East Kimberley and Katherine regions. In late 1984, Stephen and Joy Evans moved from Galiwin'ku into ALPA's Winnellie administration base to coordinate and manage the activities of the new Darwin training branch and the existing services at Galiwin'ku. It was hoped that this change in location would remove some of the problems of isolation and improve communications between the ASTS and various government departments. Richard Frampton was recruited to fill the position of training manager at Galiwin'ku and Henry Harper, formerly an ALPA store manager, became a Darwin training officer (AD/ASTS Report, 28 June 1984).

The Darwin region retail trainer's duties were: to inform communities about ALPA'S training programs; to identify the training needs of community stores; to establish programs to meet the needs of stores; and to establish contacts with government departments. Visits were also made to the ALPA stores to make an assessment of the store operation including the progress of store workers and the inspection of store facilities such as store layout, stock variety, correct pricing methodology, security procedures and the general status of the stores' physical condition. Training staff from both Darwin and Galiwin'ku travelled to the ALPA communities to discuss with the store staff financial results for the stores, the role of ALPA's Annual Meetings and Central Committee meetings, and proposed constitutional changes.

Rawnsley expressed enthusiasm for the Training School's achievements:

All A.L.P.A. Stores, as well as many others, are better today ... because Aboriginal people were prepared to go to the training school, work hard, and learn. This was the next step in development and one we must continue to work at ... A.L.P.A. must understand and accept, that training is part of its responsibilities. What A.L.P.A. has taught so far means that Aboriginal people have been able to take over, and in many cases do better than anyone else, most of the important jobs in the store, including management. We still believe that a Support Manager is necessary, to protect the staff from some pressures and to help with the very difficult and serious problems (AD/Rawnsley, 1984 Annual Report).

Another major achievement of the School's was the employment and training of Aboriginal staff trainers.10 Others were not so enthusiastic about the training programs or the success of the support manager position. At a 1985 Trainers Conference, Evans recorded that the long-term results of the hastily introduced support manager and Yolngu trainee manager roles were 'very acrimonious, and ALPA has not fully recovered, even today'. Evans then stressed that 'the standards of the stores now [with the return to non-Aboriginal control and management] to those of mid 1983, are far, far worse' (AD/Evans, report prepared for Trainers Conference, June 1985).

Harper stressed that the 'reluctance of many store managers to adopt serious training attitudes' was 'probably the biggest single barrier' to effective training (AD/Harper, 1985 Annual Report). Evans criticised the Association's inability to establish 'effective procedures and standards within ALPA stores' which made both training and the improvement of store operation difficult. Furthermore, Evans believed that 'until
we can establish the basic guidelines [for store operation], and get general agreement on following them by all, we will continue in our present chaotic manner' (AD/Evans, Report prepared for Trainers Conference, 1985). Both Evans and Harper recommended the completion of ALPA's 'store manual' as a possible solution to these problems which were compounded by the frequent turnover of management staff in the communities. The store manual would educate new managers about the standard application of procedures throughout the ALPA stores:

In the past, it has been enough to have the in-location manager organising the store much to his own liking. This is usually satisfactory when dealing with the base workers in the store. But when we begin training staff to take on more responsibilities and higher positions, they need to be able to see a wider view, to hear more than one opinion. Both courses and reference manual are part of this (AD/ASTS Annual Report 1981/2, 4).

Evans was instrumental in developing this manual and by the time he left ALPA (Evans resigned in December 1985) the manual contained eight incomplete sections, each averaging approximately one hundred pages. The sections were store operations, staff matters, stock control 1, stock control 2, profit control, cash control, selling stock and community relations. The manual was subsequently completed, although substantially reduced in size through more concise explanations of store operation and procedures. The manual is updated continuously to cater for any changes in ALPA's policies regarding store administration or operations. It deals with all aspects of store procedures and operation from ordering, calculating freight percentages and mark-ups, barge unloading and cashing cheques to ceremonies, funerals, store curses and cyclones.

The School also produced 35 training booklets and collected or made 115 training or community education videos. The booklets were divided into 4 main areas: store procedures, store culture, traditional culture and general topics, and provided information about particular aspects of store operation such as operating the checkout, price marking stock, ordering and controlling stock, how to deal with culture shock and the role of the store in the community. These books were designed for store staff and provided follow-up instructions for people who had attended the Training School's programs. They are extremely detailed in their portrayal of what each position and department in the store is responsible for and all the tasks which are carried out in the day-to-day operation of the stores. The booklets also deal with issues not specifically concerned with store operation such as vehicle maintenance, cross-cultural communication and the stores role within the community.

Through various measures, such as the establishment of the Store Training School, the creation of the support manager and the Aboriginal trainee manager positions, and the production of numerous community education video tapes and booklets, ALPA endeavoured to have Aboriginal people more actively involved in the Association.

Ford also formulated procedures which would give the communities greater financial control of their stores. At the 1980 Annual Meeting it had been resolved that a percentage of ALPA's net profit be paid into a special account which would provide for the individual communities to take over their stores. In 1981 this 'store takeover reserve' was accredited with $34,640. In the following year it increased to $66,861. In 1983 a further $44,000 was allocated to this reserve bringing the total amount up to
$110,861 (AD/1981/82/83 Annual Reports: Financial Statements). The establishment of the takeover reserve was in keeping with ALPA's commitment to their original premise of handing over the stores once they were financially viable. The likelihood of the communities soon assuming responsibility for the store was frequently discussed during the early 1980s at Central Committee meetings. This may have been because of Yirrkala's decision to finally withdraw from the ALPA group (AD/CC minutes, January 1983).

On April 31, 1983 the Dhanbul Association assumed control of the store from ALPA while retaining the services of the store manager. This was partly a result of long-term difficulties between that particular community and ALPA. Recent discussions have indicated that the Yirrkala store staff, including the manager, felt that they were capable of operating the store by themselves and together with their strong desire for independence withdrew from the ALPA group.¹³

In 1984 it was proposed that ALPA change the name of the 'takeover reserve' to 'community reserves'. Under this system ALPA was to pay five percent of the individual store's profits into this 'reserve'. A further ten percent of the individual profit was to be paid directly to the community to administer as they so desired (AD/Annual Meeting minutes, July/Aug 1984, Galiwin'ku). Initially the takeover reserve was established so that once the communities felt capable of assuming control of the store they would have accumulated enough funds to withdraw from ALPA. With the alteration to the name of the reserve and the payment of a percentage of this money to the communities, the basis of this reserve changed. Large sums would no longer be building up in a special account but would be paid into the community where it would automatically be spent. In effect this would mean that the communities would have to wait a longer time before being financially secure enough to withdraw from the Association. However, paying a proportion of the profits to the communities was a direct means of showing the communities that ALPA was an Aboriginal organisation working for them.

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<td>Minjilang</td>
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<td>5,131</td>
<td>5,808</td>
<td>6,899</td>
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<td>Galiwin'ku</td>
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<td>32,616</td>
<td>34,626</td>
<td>40,332</td>
<td>52,961</td>
<td>64,545</td>
<td>52,415</td>
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<td>Gapuwiyak</td>
<td>18,397</td>
<td>18,397</td>
<td>22,162</td>
<td>26,929</td>
<td>29,764</td>
<td>29,764</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milingimbi</td>
<td>22,470</td>
<td>22,470</td>
<td>25,930</td>
<td>27,129</td>
<td>27,129</td>
<td>29,198</td>
<td>29,198</td>
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<td>Ramingining</td>
<td>21,094</td>
<td>21,094</td>
<td>24,939</td>
<td>28,229</td>
<td>28,764</td>
<td>28,764</td>
<td>28,764</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yirrkala</td>
<td>11,155</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>110,863</td>
<td>110,863</td>
<td>112,786</td>
<td>128,427</td>
<td>145,517</td>
<td>159,170</td>
<td>147,040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: AD/1983–89 Financial statements*
Changes to ALPA’s rules during the 1980s also attempted to place more control into Aboriginal people’s hands while simultaneously taking away much of the power previously invested in the Church.

Revising the rules

During the late 1970s Aborigines had played a minimal role within the organisational structure of ALPA. Although there was Aboriginal representation on ALPA’s Board of Directors, control of ALPA policy was the province of the non-Aboriginal group manager and chairperson (Mann, pers. comm., 1992). Ford promoted the ‘aboriginalisation’ of ALPA and instituted several changes to ALPA’s rules in 1980/81 to assist this transformation. A letter circulated to all ALPA store managers discussed the necessity of these changes:

The object [of Aboriginalisation] as stated is very broad and can be interpreted in many ways. If we seek to interpret it however in its highest and most useful sense, considerable discipline can emerge as required of us. We see that as this object is gradually fulfilled, the need for our involvement could possibly reduce, consequently the reason for courage and discipline ... The seeming transfer of power from the Executive and salaried staff to the Aboriginal members is designed, in our opinion, as a positive step in the fulfilment in the object mentioned above. Previous methods of decision making were necessary but with the greater involvement and responsibility being exercised by Aboriginal people, we feel the timing is now right for this change (AD/letter, Ford to ALPA store managers, 6 August 1980).

The changes which took place at this stage included:

- the chairperson was no longer able to call meetings at her/his own discretion;
- the chairperson could not change the financial year; and
- the group manager’s position was to be appointed by the standing committee of the Synod rather then the Executive Committee thereby making this position responsible to the ‘senior court of the Church’.

In addition to this, salaried staff and executive members were precluded from membership of the Association which meant that they were no longer entitled to vote at Central Committee or Annual Meetings. This move was designed to increase Aboriginal input to policy formation while simultaneously decreasing the power of store managers — although store managers were required to submit written reports to Annual Meetings which allowed them some input to policy formation.

Another reason for Constitutional revision at this stage involved ALPA’s ineligibility for funding from the Aboriginal Development Commission or the Aboriginals Benefit Trust Fund. The Aboriginal Development Commission, discussing ALPA’s application for funds to construct a new store at Ramingining, stated that:

the need for such a supermarket is considerable in view of the condition of the old Nangalala store; its location on a sacred site and its effect on the traditional owners; hardship to the residents of Ramingining as a result of distance to and from the Nangalala store; and severe health risks to the community. The proposal is strongly supported by both the Ramingining and Nangalala communities ... The operations of A.L.P.A. have produced improved financial results and projected budgets and intentions indicate a successful future. The future continued success
of the Association is very dependent on sound administrative and financial management, and A.L.P.A. has established a successful management infrastructure (AD/ADC Report on ALPA Ramingining submission, December 1980).

The ADC report finished with the recommendation that a grant of $60,000 and a loan of $55,000 over ten years at 5% p.a. interest, with repayments of $528 per month be approved. This report was later revised with the following adjustments and concerns:

Although the Constitution of ALPA is such that the objects are predominantly to further the social and economic development of Aboriginal people and although Aboriginal membership is very high, it cannot be said or maintained that ALPA is an Aboriginal association or organisation. Therefore, under these circumstances, legal impediment exists preventing A.L.P.A. receiving financial assistance from the Commission ... (ADC Cover note to ALPA Ramingining submission paper; letter, Ford to Harper, 23 December 1980).15

Because of this 'legal impediment', the Commission suggested that Ramingining Community Incorporated was the 'only logical organisation to receive ADC assistance for the store'. The cover note then suggested that because Ramingining Community Incorporated 'probably does not have sufficient managerial expertise or experience to operate the store on its own' it should either lease the new store to ALPA and through lease payments repay the loan obligations or the Council should undertake a store management agreement with ALPA. The cover note continued that if the Community Council was deemed to be the borrower, 'the ten year period (the proposed time frame for the $55,000 loan repayment) would not necessarily be applicable as the expected life of the building would be in excess of 10 years'. It was concluded that ALPA's application for a loan/grant mix be rejected in favour of: a straight loan totalling $120,000 to Ramingining Community Incorporated — subject to the negotiation of a satisfactory management agreement between the Community Council and ALPA; the drawing up of a satisfactory loan repayment scheme; and, approval by the Commission 'prior to any disbursement of funds' (ADC cover note to ALPA submission, 23 December 1980). The Ramingining store building was eventually built and officially opened on 17 August 1982.16

ALPA was to have further difficulties in securing funding for new store buildings during the early 1980s. Correspondence from Ford, on behalf of Gapuwiyak and Galiwin'ku Community Councils, to Maurie Brown from the Aboriginal Development Commission, stressed the urgent need to expedite the processing of funding requests:

We are in receipt of a reply to both Gapuwiyak and Galiwin'ku Community Councils from the A.B.T.F. regarding the building of their new stores, stating that they will give a grant of $100,000 and $300,000 respectively on the provision that A.D.C. provide the balance of $160,000 for Gapuwiyak and $300,000 for Galiwin'ku. I would like to point out that this loan application has been in to A.D.C. for approximately 2.5 years, and to point out also the urgency with which both of these communities view the building of their new stores. Both communities have tremendous problems with the size of their stores — overcrowding, and both are decidedly overstressed in relation to their populations ... Could I urge you to place top priority on both of these loans so that we may avail ourselves immediately to commence building (AD/letter, Ford to Brown, 9 December 1983).17

The question of ALPA qualifying legally as an Aboriginal organisation or not and therefore being eligible for government funding became an extremely problematical and contentious issue which was not resolved until the mid 1980s following extensive alterations to ALPA's Rules.
Plate 20. The store at Ramingining, 1992
Source: S Wells

Plate 21. The store at Galiwin'ku, 1992
Source: S Wells
In 1983 and 1984 further changes were made to ALPA's Rules in order to address the problem of ALPA not being considered an Aboriginal organisation. In order to 'Aboriginalise' but also protect the organisations finances and to disassociate it from the Church, changes were made to Clause 3(g). In 1983 this clause read 'To make donations for religious or charitable purposes'. By 1984 it read:

To rebate to the members, by payment to the Community Council, a proportion of profits earned each year in the store, of that community operating as an ALPA store as may be recommended by the Executive (AD/ALPA Rules 1984).\textsuperscript{18}

The 1984 Annual Meeting discussed this amendment. Djalangi, ALPA's Chief Liaison Officer, stated that 'the government sees only the "Church" and not the Yolnu people inside the Church'. Assurance was given to the meeting that the organisation could still donate funds to the Church if it so desired. Furthermore, the meeting resolved that ALPA was prepared to 'argue to the government' that the rules concerning the Synod's appointment of the chairperson and the group manager remain because 'it is protection for Aboriginal people' (although the clause stating that all decisions made by the Central Committee must be approved by the Synod was deleted) (AD/Annual Meeting minutes, 31 July – 1 August 1984, Galiwin'ku).

Another major change to the rules consisted of amending Dissolution 37 which stated that 'No proceeds of liquidation shall be payable to members or their heirs excepting repayments of debts or loans'. The proposed amendment was that 'All proceeds of
liquidation shall be made payable to the locally-constituted Aboriginal Council for any lawful purpose for their work within the community where ALPA has generated those funds.

Throughout the latter half of 1984, ALPA submitted letters to various people within the Aboriginal Development Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The purpose of these letters was to prove that ALPA was an Aboriginal organisation by explaining that ALPA's rules had been substantially amended to disempower non-Aboriginal people within the Association:

As you can see this Constitution has no ALPA staff member with the right to vote, it drastically limits the powers of the Chairman, and puts all rights into the Aboriginal peoples' 'hands' (AD/letter, Ford to Castine, 12 July 1984).

These letters were no doubt submitted to ensure that ALPA be considered for government funding in the future. In late 1984 there was much correspondence between officers of the Aboriginal Development Commission and John Ford regarding ALPA's status as an Aboriginal organisation. According to the Aboriginal Development Commission Act of 1980 the definition of an Aboriginal body included the following stipulations:

Aboriginal body means a body corporate:

a) that is controlled, whether directly or indirectly, by Aboriginals; and
b) the principal objects of which are conducive to the advancement of Aboriginals.

The Aboriginal Development Commission found problems with ALPA's membership being open to the Ministers of religion and their staff associated with the Synod of the Uniting Church. There were also problems associated with the make-up of the Central Committee which according to the Constitution consisted of the office bearers and six members elected at the AGM 'at least three of whom shall be Aborigines'. The commission believed that this should be changed to 'the majority of which shall be Aboriginals'. Furthermore Clause 10 did not stipulate that the Central Committee was under the control, directly or indirectly, of Aboriginal members of the Association:

ALPA's Rules, are not, therefore, in accordance with the Commission's requirements ... I hope the above comments will assist the Association in reviewing its Rules, particularly if it wishes to apply to the Commission for funding in the future (AD/letter, Winroe [ADC Officer] to Ford, 20 August 1984).

In further correspondence ALPA was advised that although Clause 10 had been amended to allow for the Central Committee to have a majority of Aborigines on the Committee, both Clause 11 and 33 were unacceptable because 'they contain an express power of veto by the Synod of the Uniting Church or its Standing Committee'. This power of veto was not in keeping with the Commission's Act which precluded funding for Aboriginal bodies which were not directly or indirectly controlled by Aborigines. This provision needed to be deleted if ALPA was to be classified as an Aboriginal organisation (AD/letter, Bailey [ADC Principal Legal Officer] to Ford, 15 September 1984).
A September 1984 meeting of the Northern Synod of the Uniting Church resolved to alter ALPA's Rules by deleting any clause or part of a clause which gave the Synod the power of veto over decisions made by the Central Committee. In addition to this the Church's and the Synod's name and any reference to these were to be deleted from ALPA's Rules. This amendment affected the criteria for membership of the Association which, although deleting the reference to Synod members and Ministers of religion, still provided for non-Aboriginal people employed by Aborigines or Aboriginal communities or organisations residing in communities where ALPA operated a store — which could in effect mean Church representatives — to be eligible for membership.

The September meeting recommended that 'Congress' (United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress) be appointed as consultants to ALPA on the 'ethical and cultural aspects of business'. The Synod secretary, Reverend G Bence, stated in a letter to ALPA:

that this Synod, having willingly complied with the request of ALPA to change the Constitution to sever formal links, wishes to assure the Central Committee of ALPA of the Synod's continuing interest in the work of ALPA and of its willingness to be of assistance to ALPA in the future, if called upon (AD/Rev. G. Bence, Secretary of Synod, 26 October 1984).

In reply ALPA declared:

The basic work established by the Rev. Gordon Symons and the then mission staff, to be picked up and continued by Rev. Bernie Clarke, gave the foundation of an enterprise that is unique in the commercial life of the Aboriginal people, with a potential to contribute in even greater ways to the development and financial stability of its members, as well as the Northern Territory generally ... Please be assured that although through circumstances beyond our control, the church has been removed from the Constitution of A.L.P.A. in a 'legal' sense the present administration will exercise whatever influence it has to ensure that the 'spirit' of the church will remain as ever (AD/letter, Ford and Rawnsley to Bence, 23 November 1984).

By November 1984, Ford was able to claim:

the Aboriginal members of A.L.P.A. and our Central Committee now visibly have the control which they have in fact had over the last couple of years, but which is now officially theirs (AD/letter, Ford to Chief Minister Tuxworth, 28 November 1984).

**ALPA changes gear**

In correspondence with Ford during July, Evans asked about the apparent 'crisis' taking place within the Association referring to the sudden increase in prices and changes to the stores' opening hours. Evans also queried the large financial losses the Association was experiencing and suggested that the massive increase in the organisation's expenditure over the last year was a possible reason for this. According to Evans, the salesperson's commission at Winnellie was $24,000 even though the warehouse was operating at a loss; other staff wages increased by 53%; pay roll tax was introduced; store rent increased by 158%; house rent by 87%; rates increased by 107%; security costs increased by 272%; vehicle repairs increased by 233%; charges for cleaning, entertainment and staff amenities were introduced; travel and accommodation expenses for the ALPA salesperson increased to 1450%; and legal
fees were up by 1365%. According to Evans, these and other increases represented an overall increase in the level of spending on expenses of 73% while for the same period sales only increased by 20% (AD/letter, Evans to Ford, 1 July 1983, Evans personal files).

In reply to Evans, Ford claimed that the rapid expansion of ALPA's warehouse had been responsible for the 'cash flow problem' and that structural changes within ALPA's administration, computer problems and staff changes in the accounting department had resulted in the annual financial report containing many mistakes such as various expenses appearing to have increased by over one thousand per cent (AD/letter, Ford to Evans, 5 July 1983, Evans personal files). ALPA had also created new employment positions which would have drained their resources. The position of Liaison Officer was created and filled by Joyce Deering. In September 1983 Valerie Gurrangurr, a Galiwin'ku woman with much experience at the stores on Galiwin'ku and Minjilang, was recruited as a trainee Liaison Officer. The training, subsidised by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, consisted of learning all facets of office work and the clothing section of the warehouse including ordering and advising on suitable stock for the stores.

Things looked somewhat brighter at a community level. It was reported to the 1984 Annual Meeting that the stores were operating well and to the communities' satisfaction — especially in reference to the freight subsidy available for fruit and vegetables which made them more affordable to the community. A letter to Henry Harper, Ramingining store manager, from the Ramingining Rural Health Centre pointed out the necessity of having a cheap but good quality supply of fruit and vegetables and finished the letter by relating that the regional dentist, on a visit to Ramingining:

was impressed by the standard of healthy teeth in this community among the young. After inspecting the store, he seemed to feel that part of this was attributable to the lack of high carbohydrate foods which is found in other stores in the region (AD/10 June 1983).

This letter and a letter from the principal at Ramingining school commended ALPA on the cleanliness of the store, the helpfulness and cheerfulness of the staff and thanked ALPA for their support of the school (AD/20 June 1983).

In nearly every manager's report to the 1984 Annual Meeting it was stressed that the staff working in the store were, on the whole, very efficient and good to work with and would become even better with more training. In 1984 nine Yolngu workers were eligible for long service leave having given over seven years service to the organisation (AD/1984 Annual Report). Some stores were conducting cooking demonstrations and there were references to 'specials' being offered at the store. There is a marked level of excitement over the 'development' and achievements that Aboriginal people within ALPA had made:

A.L.P.A. believes that the Yolngu of tomorrow will be accountants, administrators and merchandisers, their objective being to have their own organisation which can provide jobs for their people, and also a fast efficient and courteous service that is the equal of any (AD/Ford 1984 Annual Report).
The support manager and trainee manager roles were still functioning and some of the previous problems had been rectified. In a letter to Evans, Ford outlined the current recruitment tactics for management staff in response to applications from people lacking retail experience:

I know they haven't much experience, but with the sort of situation you have there, is that if you did have a Woolworths or Coles-trained person, he probably couldn't 'hack' it! So that here we have people that we can place in the situation, give them the rudimentary knowledge of stock control, re-inforce it from time to time, and train people 'our way' for this place. This is my theory, anyway! The hard part is that you have to carry it out (AD/letter, Evans to Ford, 6 July 1982, Evans personal files).

By the end of 1984 it was reported that:

The time has come now for A.L.P.A. to have another good look at what it is supposed to do and move on further—A.L.P.A is really 'Aboriginal people helping Aboriginal people' and we have to keep saying: 'How can we do this better so more people can learn, and have training?', 'How can we improve our service to more Aboriginal Communities?' (AD/Rawnsley, 1984 Annual Report).

At this stage ALPA was supplying management and accounting services for the stores at Umbakumba, Belyuen, Marwuntu store at Balgo Hills and at Ajurumu store in Warruwi. These stores, at the time that ALPA assumed management or accounting duties, were all experiencing many problems. These ranged from low staffing levels, 'out of stock' situations on essential items and 'out of date' on others and poor quality store structures. The development of ALPA's consultancy management and accounting services will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Plate 23. The store at Belyuen with the store manager's accommodation attached
Source: ALPA files
A submission to the Aboriginal Development Commission in 1984 for assistance to the ASTS outlined ALPA's aims as they stood in 1984. These were:

1. To conduct all business in an exemplary manner, to strive personally, and encourage others, to give our best, consistently and constantly.
2. To provide customers with adequate, fresh, appealing stocks at competitive prices. To provide efficient, friendly service, and to provide the extra service and endeavour needed to supply the requirements of remote communities.
3. To provide its staff with the best possible working conditions, good wages, and the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes at all levels.
4. To provide training and opportunities for advancement to all, to allow staff to develop to their full capacities.
5. To enable Aboriginal communities to acquire the knowledge and skills to ensure the efficient and successful operation of stores, in their own communities, by their own staff and under their own managers.
6. To preserve the delicate fabric of Aboriginal culture, whilst helping it to find a comfortable relationship with European culture, so that the two may co-exist in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
7. To assist non-ALPA stores, in any areas that they require assistance, particularly with respect to the areas of accounting, recruiting, store procedures, pricing policy, and training, as well as community education (AD/ALPA submission to the ADC, 15 March 1984).

ALPA's future objectives were fairly optimistic. The way in which ALPA attempted to meet these objectives and their success are discussed in the following chapter.

Notes

1. To 'curse' something, in this case the store, means that whatever has been cursed is taboo. Only people who have traditional knowledge and power can 'curse' but in recent times this has been abused with younger people cursing such things as the store out of frustration. If the store has been cursed it is often closed down until the curse has been lifted. Traditionally the person who has cursed usually remained anonymous and it was the place of the elders to lift the curse. Currently, younger people, sometimes from telephones in Darwin, place curses because of something that has happened in their community.
2. This family pressure includes 'pressure' being placed on young store workers to provide goods for their older relatives who are in a traditionally more powerful position. It also concerns land owners or clan leaders demanding goods because of their status within the communities. 'Family pressure' has been recorded as one of the greatest obstacles to effective enterprise management by Aboriginal people.
3. The Training School maintained a strong commitment to training Aboriginal people as Training Officers for the School. Formal and informal training sessions were conducted in English as well as Yolngu-matha. Carter was an Aboriginal woman who helped establish the training centre but then moved on to work with TAFE as an itinerant adult educator. Reaburn replaced Carter in 1981. She had been a teacher at Galiwin'ku for many years and was able to provide the Training School with an insightful understanding of Yolngu language and culture. According to Evans, Reaburn was able to act as an interpreter, not just in language but in ideas behind the words. Bun'arraguy was sponsored by ALPA for three years to be trained in all areas of retail operation through the Food Industry Training Institute of Queensland. BuwanBuwan replaced Bun'arraguy (who went back to work in the Galiwin'ku store) and, with his wife Rose, took on the responsibility of overseeing the trainees who were accommodated at the School. Two women (related to BuwanBuwan) were employed by the School to cook and maintain the premises. Other local Aboriginals who were later employed by the School included Dorothy Yarmiwa and Yurrandij. According to Evans the whole atmosphere of the School endeavoured to avoid the 'European school type atmosphere' and aimed at making people attending the courses feel as comfortable as possible. Apart from the formal courses offered at the School the trainees' time was also spent fishing, hunting and partaking in appropriate social events within the community. The community was responsible for the behaviour of the people who came to
Galiwin’ku and the Training School workers acted on advice from the community leaders (Evans, pers. comm., 1992).

4. Charlie Fletcher, store manager at Gapuwiyak, was a notable exception. He ensured that all of the staff attended most of the programs offered and arranged for the School to spend much time at the Gapuwiyak store for in-store training.

5. The Food Story continues:

But to get that 5c only if we can sell everything we buy from the Wholesaler at the right price. If the barge loses some stock, or the forklift damages one bag of flour without paying, or if it falls off the truck bringing it to the store, we lose more! Most stores will lose some stock. But if we lose a lot, or a lot is stolen, or if it is damaged, the store will not get five cents, it will get 2c or 3c, or nothing at all!

The $1.00 we are talking about is a picture. It is what the customer pays for a bag of flour. We have to add together all the flour that the store sells. All the sugar and all the other groceries and blankets, everything the store sells to find out the real amount of money.

For every $1.00 the store receives, 80c goes to pay for the things we sell. It pays the Wholesaler, and it pays the freight to Barge companies and aircraft. From the 20c left, the store has to pay at least 15c for staff and store costs. There is 5c left, but if the groceries are lost, damaged or stolen, this might be only 1c, or nothing.

It is not just the store staff, but the whole community which keeps the store going (AD/Evans, 'What is Profit? What is loss?: An explanation of how food gets from the farm to the store', draft for a community education videotape, June 1982).

6. In October, Richard Trudgen, a community worker from Ramingining, came to the School to discuss the 'similarities between the traditional ceremonial exchange cycle, and the system that the store (and other businesses) uses to pay for goods/services' (AD/ASTS Annual Report 1982/3). Aboriginal elders participated in this course and over a period of two and a half days compared the two systems. Evans reported that a 'great deal of immediate understanding was the consequence, particularly amongst the older ones in the group' although it was stressed that before entering further into this course need for closer examination of the expressions and concepts used was needed (AD/ASTS Annual Report 1982/3, 5).

7. Evans also felt that an unreasonable amount of blame for the failure of the operation had been placed on Jim Bradley. Evans stressed that Bradley had gone to Galiwin’ku to become a trainer not a store manager and that he had received little support in this role (Evans, pers. comm., 1992).

8. Since 1981, excluding $40,000 spent in 1980, ALPA contributed $263,706 to the training costs — an average of $65,927 per year. In the period 1981 to 1985 ALPA staff have taken 172 of the 309 training places taken. The average cost to ALPA of each of these places was $1,530. The expenditure for the period 1981 to 1985 was $457,396. The average cost of the 44 training programs was $10,395 of which ALPA paid $6,029. The average cost for each of the 309 trainees was $1,480 with ALPA paying $858 per person. (AD/Evans, Report prepared for Trainers Conference, 1985, 48).

9. These courses were attended by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal employees although the number of Aboriginal participants was much higher than non-Aboriginal. In terms of resources applied to developing programs for Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals the amounts were 83.6% and 16.4% respectively (Evans, Final Report to ALPA 1985, 4, personal files). 54.6% of the trainees were from ALPA owned stores, 8.5% were from ALPA managed stores (Warruwi, Balgo Hills, Belyuen, Warmun, Umbakumba) and 36.9% from non-ALPA stores (see Appendix 4 for an example of the widespread acceptance of ALPA's training programs).

10. ALPA's Darwin based training department employed Elsie Pocock as an Aboriginal trainee trainer in the mid 1980s.

11. According to Evans there were 40 management changes in the 8 stores (ALPA owned and consultancy stores) over a five year period. In the five ALPA stores there were 28 changes in this same period (Evans, Trainers Conference, June 1985, 10). One of the reasons for this high turnover was the introduction of the support manager role and the subsequent loss of the assistant manager position — generally held by the manager's wife.

12. The booklets contained such titles as *You, the Checkout Operator; Banking; Price Marking Stock; Goods Inward Summary; Leadership; Delegation; Power Bases; A Customer May Be; A Good Storereporter; Storekeepers; Store Image; Culture Shock; Cross Cultural Communication and Training* and *Development*. The videotape titles included *Gun Laws; Me and my People; The Spoilers; Million Dollar Pantry; We've Just Gotta Do it; 'Cost, Profit, Breakeven'; Ceremonial Contract System; Financial Management Course; Ice Cream Handling; What about sugar; Mind Your back —
back problems; From Farm to Table — Egg marketing; Watch yourself — Drinking; Look a Long Way — eye health; Fresh is best; Handle with care; A New Achievement — a Film Australia production; Handling cash; Historical perspective, Language signs; Burrumurra Speaks; Coping with stress; Hickman/ALPA; Numbulwar in-store course; Milingimbi Easter Show; Your vote — Elections; 1984 Storeman course; Darwin study tour. Apart from these videos, managers conferences, Central Committee meetings, Community Council meetings and ALPA’s Annual Meetings were also filmed and shown in the communities.

13. Yirrkala’s Dhanbul Association was able to utilise the money in the store takeover fund but were still required to pay approximately $90,000 to the Association for the purchase of the stock and the store fittings (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992).

14. The Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) was formed in 1980 by the incorporation of the Aboriginal Lands Fund Commission, the Aboriginal Loans Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affair’s enterprise program. The ADC was in charge of the purchase of lands, acquisition of leases and the provision of personal, housing and enterprise loans and direct DAA Grants-in Aid specifically for the establishment of Aboriginal enterprises. The ABTF is now called the Aboriginals Benefit Trust Account (ABTA).

15. The way in which ALPA distributed its profits in 1981 provides not only a good indication of the Association’s commitment to the Church but also to their ‘social and economic development of Aboriginal people’ objective. ALPA allocated $120,000 in the following way: $20,000 was apportioned to the Board of Education for Ministry to support the training of Yolngu Ministers; the UCNA’s Aboriginal Advisory and Development Service received $14,000; a researcher for the Board of Church and Community was allocated $5,000; $32,000 was placed in the Stores Take-over Reserve; freight subsidies were $15,000 and outstations were awarded with a special subsidy of $5,000; and a ‘special reserve’ of $9,000 was created for the Central Committee to utilise at their own discretion throughout the year.

16. After the opening of Ramingining store ALPA received enquiries from communities at Groote Eylandt, Mornington Island and Roper River concerning their desire to build similar stores.

17. However, it was not until mid 1986 that the new stores at Galiwin’ku and Gapuwiyak were opened.

18. By 1983 the make-up of ALPA’s Executive Committee had been altered. It was now to include the two ex-officio members of the Central Committee (chairperson and group manager) plus three additional persons to be elected by ALPA members at the Annual Meetings.
CHAPTER SIX

ALPA EXPANDS 1985–87

Although A.L.P.A. sells groceries, food, clothing, electrical goods, blankets and many other things, it's real business is People: the Development of People ... A.L.P.A. believes that in pursuing the objectives in the areas in which it operates, the business enterprise must be successful, and a good foundation will be laid for the independence and security of Aboriginal people for many years to come (AD/Rawnsley 1984).

Ford's dynamism and opportunism is evidenced by the number and type of enterprises ALPA attempted to establish during the 1985–87 period. At ALPA's 1985 Annual Meeting he stated:

It is with excitement and anticipation that in the coming years we will continue with enthusiasm and determination to provide the solid base of a commercial organisation that is patriotically Australian, that unites all members of the community into acceptance of Aboriginal people in the commercial world, and acknowledges their growing skills, and which gives them the ability to stand competitively in the commercial arena. It is my personal view that ALPA can be an Aboriginal organisation, but one that will reflect the ability of the two cultures to work alongside one another with mutual respect, and provide a worthy service to all members of any community in which we are actively engaged (AD/Ford, 1985 Annual Report).

ALPA's chairperson, George Rawnsley, also described the Association's future as:

more exciting than it has ever been in the life of A.L.P.A. ... It is now seen as very important for the members of A.L.P.A. to establish a large commercial base owned and operated by Aboriginal people ... The Northern Territory is growing rapidly and businesses there are expanding. A.L.P.A. must not be left behind, Aboriginal people must have their share of this prosperity (AD/Rawnsley, 1985 Annual Report).

The double emphasis on growth and the working together of Yolngu and Balanda dominated ALPA's objectives over this period which saw 'unprecedented growth in all areas of the company'. According to the 1985 Annual Report, ALPA's retail turnover, operating profit and wholesale turnover had all increased their profit percentage margins (1985 Annual Report). This promising financial outlook for the Association encouraged ALPA to speculate on some grand scale enterprises such as a furniture/timber industry in Timor and the wholesaling business. Apart from this expansion, ALPA also increased their involvement with community stores in other regions such as Alice Springs, Katherine and the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

The Association's training programs underwent some changes in response to ALPA expanding into these areas. The three major goals outlined for training, at this stage, reflected ALPA's diversification. These goals were to plan and provide relevant store training programs within local regions; to react to the expressed needs of client stores within those regions for particular training and services; and to improve the competence of trainers through a program of courses and workshops.
Several initiatives were introduced in order to achieve the first two goals. These included:

- the further development of the training schools curricula in the area of basic courses, advanced courses and supervisor courses;
- the organisation of seminars for both Aboriginal trainee managers and balanda store managers based on ALPA's operations manual;
- the regular visit of stores by Training School staff to develop relationships between the store workers and the communities;
- the assessment of the performance of the store in one nominated area of the store manual during each visit with this assessment to be discussed with the manager and trainee manager;
- the preparation of applications for government funds for staff training and development;
- the processing of approved claims; and the publication of ALPA's activities and plans (AD/Evans, Major goals for Aboriginal Store Training, 28 October 1985, 5).

Training for the ALPA training staff was revised in accordance with these new objectives. The concept of 'training the trainer' was introduced and concerned the trainers' ability to teach general retail and store operation skills as well as their ability to explain ALPA's store manual on both a literal and a conceptual level. It was proposed that this training take place through workshops of a week's duration to be attended by store managers, the operations manager and the department supervisors from each store. These workshops were to discuss such issues as the relationship between the store manager and the community; the way in which people see the store; management attitudes towards the staff; the need for mutual respect between the manager, community members and store workers; the manager's ability to comprehend the community power structure or the nature of 'obligations' between community members and store staff; and the need for community consultation in determining store policy (AD/Harper 1985).

In the mid 1980s ALPA's Darwin training office had extended their training programs and conducted four forklift operator courses in conjunction with the Darwin Institute of Technology. Two courses were held in Darwin at the Territory Training Centre, one at the ASTS and one at Yirrkala. It was also recorded that ALPA's store workers courses were attracting interest from the 'broader community' because of 'their comparative low cost and high employment outcomes' (AD/Letter, Harper to Ford, 31 July 1986). Another initiative of the Darwin training department was the instigation of a 'transition to work' program for post primary students. This program involved students or unemployed people undertaking a block two week training program followed by work experience and then hopefully employment.

Apart from these initiatives ALPA's Darwin based training office concentrated on providing training for store workers from the stores in the regions where ALPA was having an increased involvement. This took up much time and energy because of the stores having different systems and procedures to the ALPA stores which made the demand for courses more diverse. In addition to this, the distance between Darwin and the stores in the Kimberley, Katherine and Alice Springs regions made training program implementation difficult. ALPA did not have enough surplus funds to establish training centres in Katherine or Alice Springs, although many people from these areas attended courses based at the Training School on Galiwin'ku. Some in-store training courses were also held in these regions.
ALPA's consultancy service

The Arnhem Land Progress Association provides management and accounting services for their own stores but also supplies these services, on request, to other stores in Aboriginal communities on a consultancy basis. These services include interviewing and employing managers, the monitoring of management staff in terms of wages, ordering and stock control, store audits and stock takes, regular visits to the store by the ALPA management team and training. The consultancy stores agree to pay ALPA for whatever service they are utilising, that is, accountancy on its own, management on its own or both. In the ALPA stores payment for the manager, accountant and administrative costs are set against store profits.

ALPA's proficiency in managing competent, reliable and financially viable community retail stores was reflected by interest shown in their services by bodies outside Arnhem Land during the early 1980s. ALPA was approached by the Aboriginal Development Commission in Perth and representatives from the Pitjantjatjara Council in central Australia to consider entering the retail and training field in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and the Uluru (Ayers Rock) area of central Australia. In July 1982, Pat Green from the Pitjantjatjara Council proposed that ALPA become involved in the establishment of an organisation consisting of fifteen stores serviced by a Training School, warehouse facilities and management and accounting services — representing a replica of ALPA in the Centre. This proposal was abandoned after much discussion between ALPA and the Pitjantjatjara people because it seemed too problematical. According to McMillan, Aboriginal people approved the concept but were warned off by non-Aboriginal advisors who believed that forming a 'group' such as the one envisaged would entail the communities losing their 'individual freedoms' (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992). Other problems with this proposal concerned financial details such as the securing of money to initiate the proposal, ownership of the assets of individual communities, and the distribution of any profits arising from the Association.2

In August 1983 Ford applied to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for $55,200 to finance store training facilities in the Katherine region. Once again this initiative lacked support at a community level because it was interpreted by people in this area that ALPA's prime interest was in taking over the stores. This, together with ALPA's inability to finance a separate training facility in this area and the reticence of the government to fund such an enterprise, terminated this proposal. However, Aboriginal people from the Katherine region did undertake courses offered at the Store Training School at Galiwin'ku. In-store training was also provided to stores in this region.

Although government funding for ALPA's training proposals was not forthcoming, ALPA was requested by the ADC to become involved with the Katherine Aboriginal Retail Advisory Service (KARAS) and Baruwei Enterprises. Baruwei Enterprises, a wholesale company, was established in 1978 as a joint enterprise between the Yulngu Association and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to provide a better wholesale service (dealing mainly with dry goods, hardware, variety goods and some dairy products) for Aboriginal community stores in the Katherine region.3 Baruwei also provided some financial advice to the stores it serviced. KARAS, initially funded by
the Aboriginal Development Commission, began its operations in 1981. Its aim was to provide an efficient management service to Aboriginal stores in the Katherine region and to other stores supported by the ADC, such as, Milikapiti (Snake Bay) and Barula (Derby). KARAS was active in employing suitable management staff as well as providing back-up support and advice for store managers on aspects of store operation such as pricing policies and stock control (Young 1984, 23).

The ADC believed that ALPA's proven expertise and experience with retailing operations in Arnhem Land would assist in the development of both Baruwei and KARAS. ALPA anticipated that this involvement would help their budding wholesaling activities by expanding their public profile in these regions (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992). John Ford was recruited to the board of directors of KARAS, however in mid 1983, KARAS ceased its operations. The reasons for this included the competition posed by Baruwei and the refusal of community advisors and existing store managers to accept the service because of the high management fees charged.4

In March 1983, Ford and Rawnsley travelled to Perth at the expense of the Aboriginal Development Commission to discuss with a Committee of Federal and State bodies the problems with community store operations in Western Australia. It was believed that the Perth branch of the ADC approached ALPA because of the Association's sound credit relationship with their suppliers; their good reputation; the lack of a suitable alternative; and because of their 'demonstrated stability in accounting, wholesaling, training and management for Aboriginal community stores' (AD/Evans, ASTS Annual Report 1983/4). The Western Australian Committee requested Ford to survey a select number of Aboriginal community stores in the Kimberley region, to return to the Committee with the findings and advise the committee on the course of action to be taken, and to assess the situation and determine if ALPA was interested in undertaking management consultancy and training for a number of these stores. The survey was conducted by an accountant, a supervisor and a training officer who found that the major reason for the stores not being profitable was because of high management turnovers and inadequate management systems.

This survey led to ALPA's involvement with stores in the East Kimberley region. Ford believed that the addition of the stores from this area was a 'strengthening of what ALPA is doing' and would enable ALPA to 'gather a strong team' with the additional resources being utilised to 'assist each member more than if it was a little organisation that is battling to respond to demands put on it' (AD/letter, Ford to Evans, 15 March 1983, Evans personal files). By having 'extra arms' ALPA would be able to employ a co-ordinator and to have managers 'properly trained' before they took up their position in the communities. It was also stated at this time that 'no other organisation can provide what ALPA can now' and that:

ALPA can be seen to be part of the Church by its actions: it can be seen to be conforming to some sort of rules, by going out and 'taking action', and the Church is obtaining benefit by what ALPA is seen to be doing, doing things in a practical way; this is what is needed in Aboriginal communities (AD/EC minutes, 18 March 1983).

In November 1983 it was proposed by the Western Australian committee that ALPA prepare budgets for the three possible strategies for implementing the scheme. The three proposals were running an organisation like ALPA from Western Australia,
from Darwin by ALPA, and from within Western Australia by ALPA. It was finally resolved that ALPA undertake consultancies for two stores in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (Marwuntu store at Balgo Hills and the Wungkul store at Warmun, Turkey Creek) to be managed by an ALPA base in this region. At this stage both stores were in financial difficulties, with poor stock variety and inadequate store facilities.

Operating these stores was a challenge for a number of reasons. ALPA had to learn the different supply routes and establish contacts with wholesalers and suppliers in Western Australia. To make matters more difficult, Balgo community is often inaccessible during the 'Wet season'. This necessitates bulk Wet season ordering which many suppliers will not grant if the store is not financially viable. However, by 1985 the Marwuntu store was reported as 'going from strength to strength' because of the loyalty of the staff members including Ruby and Jimmy Malarvie and Bonny James (who was eventually appointed trainee manager). Since this time the store has been on fairly shaky ground, experiencing years of both profit and loss, store break-ins, high management turnover and staffing difficulties.

ALPA appointed a store manager, Charlie Fletcher, to rectify problems occurring at the Wungkul store in Warmun. According to the 1985 Annual Report the store accomplished 'success' within the first two and a half months under ALPA's management. BW Stokes, an accountant employed to audit the Wungkul store, referred in his financial report to ALPA's involvement with and the need for community support of the store:

It is probably worth stressing this patronage, for without it, even the proven ability of The Arnhem Land Progress Association Incorporated to operate your store successfully could be jeopardised, while with it, the store management can provide a better service to your community, confident of your custom, they are able to stock otherwise risky lines, expanding the total range of the store and are thus able to satisfy the needs of the majority of the community the majority of the time (AD/Report on Wungkul store, Financial Accounts, 30 June 1985, BW Stokes, accountant, WA).

The Wungkul store's success resulted from increased sales gained by offering a better range of products and raising community awareness about ALPA and the services offered (1985 Annual Report). The store was opened excessively long hours — ten hours a day, six days a week — because of competition from the road house two kilometres away. Fletcher operated the store single-handedly because of the lack of willing store workers and his accommodation was an old caravan parked beside the store. These factors are a good indication of the problems often faced by store managers in isolated Aboriginal communities and the dedicated and loyal services often provided by these people.

From a perusal of correspondence between Stephen Evans and some key ALPA staff it appears that the Association was not welcome in the Kimberley region. After a visit to the East Kimberleys in October 1984, Evans stressed that ALPA needed a 'firmer approach' in both asserting its position within the region and implementing training programs. Evans mentioned problems relating to the unpredictable nature of government funding and ALPA's operations being resisted by 'the establishment in Kununurra'.
Evans suggested that it was now time:

- to begin making contact with community resource people;
- to provide local support to managers at Warmun and Balgo Hills;
- to investigate the training needs of the aboriginal store workers in the region and provide access to training programs;
- to negotiate more efficient purchase arrangements which reflected the needs of the region; and
- to assess the possibility of providing increased retail services to the East Kimberley region (AD/Evans, Report No. 3, East Kimberley Region, 10–11 October 1984).

Evans's recommendations motivated ALPA to appoint Paul Loeven to the new position of East Kimberley Region Aboriginal Training (School) Officer (EKRATS) in March 1985. Loeven's responsibilities included liaising with government departments and local resource agencies and monitoring the store's operations at Balgo Hills and Warmun. He was also required to visit other Aboriginal communities in the region including Billiluna, Lake Gregory, Kalumburu and Oombulgurri to discuss ALPA’s consultancy services, training and the role of ALPA in Amhem Land. Loeven's perception of ALPA's future involvement in this area was expressed in his report to the 1985 Annual Meeting:

It's true that A.L.P.A. can only be what it is asked to be. It must germinate with people who trust us enough to extend that initial invitation ... I can only say that I can see expansion, excitement and enthusiasm as the ingredients for the next course of A.L.P.A. in the East Kimberleys. I hope with John Ford as Chef in the kitchen and willing waiters like myself in the community dining rooms, we can look forward to many happy customers in the years ahead (AD/Loeven, 1985 Annual Report).

ALPA's decision to adopt a firm approach to their activities in this region coupled with their increased buying power as a significant retailer is evidenced by Loeven's report:

Another business in town has lost the contract to supply bread to our Balgo Hills store. For a 3 month trial period we will buy from Perth. The door is still open. We would prefer to support Halls Creek businesses. We will not ask the Aboriginal people in our stores to pay one cent more than necessary for basic items such as bread (AD/Loeven, 1985 Annual Report).

In response to the circulation of information concerning ALPA's activities and their ability to operate stores successfully at Warmun and Balgo Hills, interest was expressed by other communities in this region in employing ALPA's services. ALPA responded to this interest because of their need to build 'the necessary infrastructure for EKRATS to become self-supporting' and because ALPA felt that they had a responsibility to 'help any store that asked for our help' (AD/letter, Evans to Granville, 28 August 1985, Evans personal files). In September 1985 a new community store at Kalumburu was opened by the Community Council who subsequently employed ALPA's management consultancy services. The store faced competition from the reopening of the old mission store which initially detracted from sales at the new store. The Kwinini store at Kalumburu did not seem to suffer from the same staffing problems experienced by other stores in the Kimberley region. It was able to appoint
an Aboriginal trainee manager and had punctual and consistent store workers from the time that ALPA entered this community.

It appears that the consultancy stores in the Kimberley region felt isolated from ALPA’s central administration in Darwin. A report to the 1985 Annual Meeting from Stewart Blair, support manager at Marwuntu store, stressed the importance of having ALPA’s executive visit the communities in the Kimberley region:

I feel that more contact with people behind the scenes is important to our development. As ALPA progresses, so does the staff it employs; an executive is obviously going to breed a sense of well-being within the organisation, but what about the problems further down the line? Communication with people in the ‘hands on’ environment is just as important as the motivation aspect ... Contact of this nature can help both parties, if a problem can be solved at this level, then the operating level within the organisation can be improved, thus stabilising and hopefully boosting the organisation through its changes (AD/Blair, 1985 Annual Report).

In 1986 Marc Sutherlin, a former store manager, was promoted to the new position of operations manager for the East Kimberley region. After a few months in this position, Sutherlin stressed the need for more comprehensive training of store workers in this region. The instigation and monitoring of training programs in this area because of the large distances between places made this a difficult task. Sutherlin’s annual report refers to the success that the stores under ALPA’s consultancy system were experiencing and described the future for ALPA in the Kimberley as being very positive ‘with the possibility of further communities wishing to enter the ALPA consultancy group’. He anticipated that the region would be able to operate its own Training School in the future with the added suggestion that the Kimberley region become its own entity, with its own board of directors — a ‘clone of ALPA’ which would ‘spell success for the development and advancement of Aboriginal people of the Kimberleys, through enterprise’ (AD/Sutherlin, 1986 Annual Report).

In 1986 Yungngora store at Noonkanbah employed ALPA’s consultancy management services. The store was expected to operate from premises described by the manager, John King, as:

an old windowless-lightless powerless tin shed; devoid of any fixtures ... Old shelving, bed steads — anything that would support a tin of meat was acquired from other old buildings and put to use. A second hand calculator served as our cash register (A cash register was bought later on, this was mounted on a stack of soft drink cartons). Power was installed eventually. A second hand freezer plus drink chiller was purchased ... Shopping conditions in the store were very trying with temperatures in the mid forties each day, but to the people’s credit they accepted this knowing that they were supporting their own store ... Living conditions for the manager were on par with the store. A partly wrecked caravan was towed in from an outstation and installed in a tin shed ... (AD/King, 1986 Annual Report).

A new store building was soon constructed which, together with support from the community, increased store sales. This resulted in a larger range of produce being available which attracted customers from nearby areas. The support of the community for the efficient operation of the store is recorded by King:

Our sales have doubled during the past couple of months. This is due in great part to the efforts of our community Chairman, Dicky Skinner. He has strongly urged other outside communities and stations to shop at ‘our’ shop instead of going into Fitzroy Crossing thereby keeping money
in the community. Our returns show that his efforts have been very successful. I must record that the support I have received from Dicky and indeed the whole community has been very encouraging (AD/King, 1986 Annual Report).

In 1987 Bill Burrell replaced Sutherlin to become the East Kimberley operations manager. In his first report to ALPA's Annual Meeting, Burrell stated that the four stores had improved their stock variety and appearance, although stock control and some 'ALPA procedures' required better supervision. Burrell also mentioned that several enquiries from other communities with a view to joining ALPA were received during the year 'as word of our four stores continued successes became known' (AD/Burrell, 1987 Annual Report). Each of the three ALPA people directly involved with this region commented on the unfavourable relationship between the 'local resource agencies', government officials and residents in this region with the Association. By 1988 this situation appeared to have stabilised with Burrell reporting that communication with the local resource agencies, particularly ADC, had been 'cordial and friendly' (AD/Burrell, 1988 Annual Report).

It is worth noting some of the differences in operating a store under a consultancy agreement as opposed to being part of the ALPA group. In the case of communities who have undertaken a consultancy agreement with ALPA, the community is in control of the finances of the store with any profits being paid to the council who then distributes this money accordingly. The consultancy communities own both the business and the store building whereas in the case of the ALPA stores the community owns the store building and the Association owns the business. The ALPA stores have well defined management systems and procedures, reinforced by a manager's manual which provides store managers with specified mark-ups and pricing policies. In the case of consultancy stores, although adhering to ALPA's management systems, the Community Council has the right to determine, among other things, when the store should open, what it should stock, pricing, mark-ups and whether 'book-up' is allowed in the store.

Apart from ALPA's expansion in terms of increasing the number of stores within the group, the Association endeavoured to expand their wholesaling operation.

**ALPA wholesale**

During the early 1960s there was only one major wholesaler in Darwin for dry grocery. This was Thomas Brown & Sons, a Brisbane based company which shipped goods to northern Australia from the eastern States and Western Australia. This company supplied goods to most of the Aboriginal settlements in Arnhem Land as well as Katherine, Tennant Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham. The major wholesalers for the Top End since the 1970s have been SC Eyels, Independent Grocers, Humphries and Muller, Golden North (under the auspices of Southern Farmers), the Mauri Brothers, Barry Humphries Pty Ltd and Hickmans. During the early 1980s ALPA decided to enter the wholesaling field on a grand scale.

In March 1982 ALPA purchased a Winnellie warehouse for $320,000 for the purpose of containing ALPA's existing wholesaling and purchasing departments. At this stage the wholesale department had a fairly limited capacity, stocking primarily
variety lines such as clothing, hardware and electrical goods. The purchase of the larger warehouse enabled the organisation to increase their wholesaling capacity and house ALPA’s updated computer department, the accounting department and the administration in one building. This led to improved communications and supervision of each department. The new warehouse was to have updated computer equipment which provided computer printouts of invoices, gave information on stock control and produced computerised order forms — all devices which made the role of the store manager much easier and the monitoring of store operations more effective.

In 1982 it was reported that ALPA’s wholesale section had seen their 'best ever' year with a 50.7% increase in sales — resulting in a record profit for this department. ALPA had changed their buying policies which entailed purchasing interstate in order to find the best source of supply, and dealing directly with manufacturers and importers for bulk orders, and it adopted 'an aggressive sales approach to outside stores' (AD/ALPA’s Future Direction, 2 March 1982). By this stage ALPA was supplying 19 other stores on a fairly regular basis ranging from Mornington Island in the east, to Oombulgurri in the west and as far as Indulkina and Finke in the south (1982 Annual Report).

Although prospects for further development of ALPA’s purchasing and wholesaling departments seemed fairly optimistic, by March 1983 it was reported that ALPA’s warehouse operations needed restructuring because of the failure to meet its estimated budget. The new position of 'Operations Manager', filled by Stuart McMillan, was created to supervise this restructuring. McMillan was assigned the following tasks:

- to establish effective organisational procedures and controls in the operation of the stores and wholesale division;
- to develop and expand the wholesale division to a profitable level;
- to establish Winnellie as the central warehouse for ALPA stores;
- to establish basic lines to be carried by all stores; and
- to look at the continued growth and development of ALPA stores as profitable units

(AD/EC minutes, 18 March 1983)

With the emphasis placed on strengthening ALPA’s wholesale division, individual store managers were cautioned about where their allegiance was to lie in terms of ordering stock:

As I mentioned to you at Galiwin’ku we are working towards ALPA stores drawing from Winnellie as a central Warehouse. It must be remembered that the income generated by Winnellie allows ALPA to develop and provide training and education programs for Aboriginal people. For this reason there is no question about [the] source of supply for ALPA Store Managers, it must be from ALPA Winnellie (AD/letter, Ford to Harper, 28 April 1983).

By September 1983 it was reported that the wholesale department's sales were increasing and that the budget of $2.1 million was 'running true' (letter, Ford to Evans, 2 September 1983). McMillan suggested that because of ALPA's improved profitability in this area, Yolngu store workers should become involved with the wholesaling section by flying into Darwin/Winnellie to be trained in all aspects of ALPA's warehouse operation such as stock control, buying techniques and ordering.
John Ford elaborated his idea of expanding ALPA's existing wholesale operations:

With the future as one of self-reliability, working side by side, Yolnu and Balanda, A.L.P.A. as a 'service' organisation has the possibility of becoming the 'premier wholesaler' if it can increase the range of goods it sells by wholesaling dry goods and perishables, adding the volume of purchasing of Aboriginal communities to that of European supermarkets in the cities, a strong purchasing base would be established to give each small community all the benefits that southern stores enjoy by belonging to a similar buying group (AD/1984 Annual Report).

A few months later, Ford reiterated this message stressing the need for Aboriginal people to 'have a financial stake in the future growth of the Northern Territory' by establishing a wholesaling business which would 'unite all the purchasing of Yolnu and provide a service to the European stores (AD/memo, Ford to CC, 8 March 1985).

In order for ALPA to establish themselves as significant wholesalers they firstly needed to purchase a food/grocery wholesale business to complement the existing wholesale department's variety lines. ALPA planned to purchase Hickmans Pty Ltd, a grocery wholesaler, but were usurped by Southern Farmers, an Adelaide based company. In early 1985, ALPA bought Barry Humphries Pty Ltd, a wholesale grocer with a 3.5 million dollar turnover, for $300,000 (AD/CC minutes, 15 April 1986).

To make the wholesale department profitable, ALPA needed to convince other stores and associations to buy from them. In May 1985 ALPA's board of directors (the Central Committee) toured various communities in Western Australia to explain the role of ALPA in the Northern Territory and the ways in which ALPA could assist Aboriginal communities in WA. The communities visited included Port Keats, Kununurra, Balgo Hills and Noonkanbah. The message ALPA spread was:

We want to see if more Aboriginal people want to work together to build up a big business for Aboriginal people to manage and reap the benefits ... we plan to start a wholesaling business in Darwin, and we [want to] encourage other communities to become members. If that little group can do so much, we wonder how much bigger we could become if communities joined together. A big strong business that can be owned by the Aboriginal people for the benefit of Aboriginal people (AD/CC minutes, Report on Western Australia visit, 28 May 1985).

It was also proposed that ALPA establish a wholesale warehouse in Alice Springs in conjunction with the Yanangu Yappaku group. Ford advised the Central Committee that ALPA representatives should speak with this group because 'it is important that Aboriginal people unite together for strength and independence in the commercial field' (AD/memo, Ford to CC, 8 March 1985). ALPA employed a management team, Richard and Rhonda Rozario, to establish the wholesale operation in Alice Springs. By April 1985 approximately 16 communities had been visited by this team with the aim of informing the communities about ALPA's wholesale initiatives.

In September 1985, North Centre West (NCW) Enterprises, ALPA's new wholesale division, formally began its operations. The acquisition of Barry Humphries Pty Ltd combined with ALPA's existing variety merchandise meant that the organisation was now able to provide the community stores with a full range of grocery and variety products.
It was claimed that:

The business has been formed to better serve the needs of this market place, and with specialised customer knowledge and understanding, compete with southern companies ... We will provide quality merchandise at competitive prices and introduce planned promotional activity on the products you want! (AD/letter, McMillan to various stores and organisations, 23 August 1985).

McMillan claimed that within 11 months of purchasing Barry Humphries Pty Ltd. and moving to their new warehouse at Berrimah, ALPA had brought the wholesaling business up to $10 million. In February 1986 ALPA established the following objectives for NCW:

- be competitively priced with major southern wholesalers;
- aggressively promote products to all retailers;
- enlarge the range of grocery lines carried to meet the needs of Aboriginal community stores;
- restrict and rationalise variety lines to obtain a more profitable result;
- take away from our competitors the Aboriginal community business; and
- obtain a larger share of the Darwin/Katherine independent retailer's business and at the very least maintain it at the level prior to takeover.

ALPA hoped that their wholesaling business could 'change the image of Aboriginal people, across Australia' (AD/CC minutes, 15 April 1986):

Our next step is to gather in as many Aboriginal communities as we can, and each community may become a member of the N.C.W. group, obtain shares which are issued through the purchase of goods (the more you purchase the higher the share value is that you are given), thereby creating unity, which as you know is strength, and provides for a harder negotiation from manufacturers ... Further benefits would be that profits will go back to each of its customers, more employment would be available for Yolngu, and Aborigines would have a business which is growing as the Territory grows (AD/Ford, undated paper).

Ron Dickson, ALPA's sales manager, issued an 'Offer to Participate in Ownership' of ALPA's wholesale operation to the chairperson of approximately 25 Community Councils across the Top End declaring that:

Since it is necessary to have strength when dealing with the manufacturing industry and 'unity' ... it has been decided by our Directors to offer shares in our company so that it may become your company (AD/letter, Dickson to various chairpersons, 29 April 1986).

ALPA listed the advantages to these communities of joining NCW, emphasising Aboriginal control over their own enterprise:

- Aboriginal communities would own the supply business to their own stores;
- they would receive some financial return each year;
- they would have a part in the economic growth of the Territory;
- it could be the centre for Aboriginal development and education; and
- member communities would have a distribution centre for their own produce.

Furthermore, NCW promised to provide the member communities with new levels of service to their communities; to have sale staff visit regularly; to have an annual store managers meeting to discuss the needs of the community; to broaden the range of
merchandise in response to Aboriginal need; to not compromise on quality; and to be competitive with interstate suppliers (AD/CC minutes, 15 April 1986). The way in which the participating communities would receive financial benefit was through the distribution of shares. Each ALPA member community was to automatically receive five shares with each non-ALPA 'participating' community receiving one 'fully paid up' share every year for five years. During this five year period the shares offered were not to be traded or sold with the provision that if the community wished to renounce the agreement the shares would revert to NCW. The only provision of entering into this agreement was that the community store place all its business through NCW, 'there is no other charge'. NCW offered these communities a complete range of goods, and promised to:

attack the 'Manufacturers Pricing Policy' on your behalf to ensure that our prices are competitive with any other N.T. Wholesaler. We are determined to obtain 'Capital City Pricing' status for Darwin which will be passed on to our customers. This will not necessarily happen quickly, but it will happen as long as we maintain unity! (AD/letter, Dickson to various chairpersons, 29 April 1986).

After the five year period the 19 participating communities would become equal owners with the founding ALPA stores and one member of each community would be eligible to become a director of NCW. ALPA's Central Committee was assured that 'ALPA maintains the control and the right to the most voice in how things happen: we are protecting the ALPA stores' (AD/CC minutes, 22 October 1985). In view of the funds which ALPA invested in this venture and the unpredictable nature of enterprise development in Aboriginal communities, this degree of control was probably a reasonable position for ALPA to take.

In early 1986 it was claimed that NCW had managed to obtain from their competitors 60–70% of the Aboriginal community business in the Top End and were increasing their variety range to suit the different needs of each community and had:

aggressively promoted products to the point where we have received national recognition from major manufacturers, and they are requesting that their products be promoted through us (AD/NCW Report, 27 February 1986).

This report also claimed that about 50–60% of NCW's prices were competitive with prices in other capital cities but warned that:

the competition we face is aggressive and ruthless. A local competitor which is now owned by a large multinational company has offered to match all our prices and give a 2% rebate to customers purchasing through them (AD/NCW Report, 27 February 1986).

It was believed that the NCW enterprise could easily be worth $15–20 million after their first five years of operation. A dividend would not be available for the NCW member communities for the first couple of years, although it was suggested that a rebate could be offered (AD/CC minutes, 15 April 1986). NCW envisaged that a future prospect for them would be in acting as a selling agent or distributor for community produce such as fish, prawns or bananas and that they would be able to support other commercial enterprises in the communities (AD/letter, Dickson, 29 April 1986).
Through special sole distribution arrangements, NCW was able to supply other wholesalers, such as Baruwe and Hickmans, with a range of products. In addition to this, NCW supplied Woolworths with one company's complete product range, supplied stock to fashion boutiques and operated a food service/catering company for hotels and restaurants in Alice Springs and Darwin. As a means to offsetting the costs of being a wholesaler rather than a purchasing agent, ALPA dabbled in exporting products such as chocolates and snack foods to Brunei (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992).

Although the literature available for this period conveys enthusiasm regarding the success of NCW, it was subsequently reported that ALPA had failed to draw the required number of Aboriginal communities into their wholesale operation which would have assured its prosperity. Senior ALPA management believed that vested interests operating within the communities advised individual councils against this move:

Essentially ... Aboriginal people could accept the idea but their white advisors were threatened by ALPA and the thought that ALPA might be trying to take over their stores and this was a backdoor way to get control of them ... (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992)

In a 1992 interview McMillan reflected on the importance of recruiting Aboriginal communities into NCW and why the failure to do so partly resulted in the collapse of this project:

without Aboriginal communities we were in strife. We were in trouble anyway because we were trading within ourselves too much so the cash flow to build this business was coming from the stores and the stores were the major customers so it was all happening in house and it was stretching everything to the limits, it was extremely taxing (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992).

This predicament, coupled with the move on behalf of Southern Farmers (who had sold to Independent Grocers — a wholesaler with a $700 million base) to take over the wholesaling business in the Northern Territory proved too competitive for ALPA/NCW. A Central Committee meeting in July 1986 discussed the difficulties faced by NCW and resolved that ALPA would sell the NCW plant, stock and equipment to Independent Grocers (AD/CC minutes, 8 July 1986). It was resolved that:

A.D.C. ... be notified that we do not need to borrow money. We could handle Hickmans and Golden North but we don't feel that we can compete with I.G.C. Had we been able to get A.D.C.'s help 3 years ago to buy Hickmans we would have been strong now and able to meet I.G.C.'s competition. So we are going to withdraw our application for money (AD/CC minutes, 8 July 1986).

NCW was sold to Independent Grocers in August 1986 and so finished a short but dynamic chapter in ALPA's history. A report to the 1986 Annual Meeting reflecting on NCW stressed that the operation could have been successful if it was not for the competition posed by larger wholesalers and the reticence of the government in funding this enterprise (AD/Humphries, 1986 Annual Report). ALPA's chief accountant, RL Johnson, reported to the 1987 Annual Meeting that the good profit from the sale was 'most gratifying'. He seemed relieved that the enterprise did not succeed:
the future for N.C.W. was one of a small and risky marginal profit, a profit that could never be withdrawn but had to be re-invested in wholesaling together with funds from other operations and a minimal Yolnu participation. The decision to become a wholesaler may have been right but it was equally correct to withdraw when the opportunity came ... from a personal viewpoint N.C.W., especially in its early days caused tremendous difficulty. A.L.P.A. has always been demanding but the workload and strain of N.C.W., added to other problems we faced then reached unendurable proportions and it is not an experience that I would care to repeat (AD/Johnson, 1987 Annual Report).

This wholesaling dream, combined with the increased number of stores utilising ALPA's consultancy services and ALPA's emphasis on training through the Store Training School is an indication of the perceived future directions of the Association. Once the stores had been relinquished to community control, the Association would continue to exist as a resource agency comprising management, accounting, training and wholesaling facilities.

By this stage many changes had occurred within ALPA's Training School. Evans had resigned at a stage where the Training School was bankrupt of any new ideas for further training (Harper, pers. comm., 1992). Richard Frampton also resigned as manager of the Training School in August 1986. A new Training School was built at Galiwin'ku and officially opened by Paul Everingham on June 18, 1986. The number of courses held this year at the School was reduced because of time spent by the Training School staff on helping to build the new School. Courses and activities held at the School this year included: a basic storeworker/checkout operator course; a basic officeworker course; a trainee managers meeting; a forklift course; introduction to officework course for people from Western Australia; a Djamarrpuyngu language course; and a community store operation course. There were also in-store training programs held at Ramingining, Galiwin'ku and Milingimbi.

The philosophy behind the School at this stage was to concentrate on one particular aspect of store operation and ensure that this specific area was working well in each store. Apart from this, the ASTS staff were involved with conducting store audits and the relief management of stores (ASTS Annual Report 1986). The training priorities for the remainder of the year were listed as:

a) completing and updating the store manual;
b) further developing trainee managers and setting a good standard of management performance;
c) making sure that basic training was happening in all the ALPA stores, utilising store staff to do this training;
d) preparing further high quality training resources;
e) providing orientation materials to managers;
f) developing office work skills in ALPA staff to a high level; and
g) providing training as requested and needed, by both ALPA and non-ALPA stores.

At this stage, government funding for ALPA's training programs also began to decline. As a consequence of this, ALPA faced a growing training bill if it was to maintain the existing training structure. After a reassessment of its programs, the Training School reduced its capacity. The emphasis of the School switched from formal courses to in-store training administered from Darwin with an in-store checkout trainer being chosen by the staff in each store to fulfil the capacity of
checkout trainer for that particular store. Skills training had been adequately learnt and could be taught by long-term store staff with the training staff offering back-up support and the reinforcement of certain skills. By 1987 the Aboriginal Store Training School was renamed the Galiwin'ku Training Centre and concentrated primarily on helping establish and administer ALPA's Family Enterprise Scheme. The role of the Training Centre in establishing these enterprises will be discussed in a later section.

The demise of ALPA's wholesaling activities and the restructuring of ALPA's Training School heralded new directions for ALPA. These new directions consisted of a proposal to establish a timber/furniture industry in Timor and the development of enterprise activities, based in communities, for the benefit of individual families. By late 1986 ALPA saw itself:

more strongly than ever before, as having the role of a 'People Development' enterprise. The only real need for A.L.P.A. to exist is that through its operations the people of the member communities gain the experience and skills that will equip them to understand modern business practice and to handle more of their own affairs in the future (AD/Rawnsley, 1986 Annual Report).

ALPA goes international

In November 1987 Rawnsley asked a Central Committee meeting:

What type of community do you want? What type of life do you want — now, and for your children ... This is the only organisation of its type in Australia; people in the southern states do not understand what Aboriginal people are doing ... What can the five communities have in 5 years and what can their children look forward to? The 'starter motor' of ALPA stores has started to generate the funds (AD/CC minutes, Rawnsley & Ford, August 1987).

This 'starter motor' inspired ALPA to consider enterprise development in Timor. Rawnsley enthusiastically outlined this proposal to the Central Committee:

We must assess the viability of the project. This project could be worth $700,000 p.a. (or more). In addition, cypress is being investigated in Arnhemland; we could regenerate the sawmill, cut the timber ... From our stores we could get another $200,000 p.a. making a total of $100,000 each year, and at the same time our family enterprises are growing. The vision is even bigger. The five communities can be the wealthiest communities in Australia; and the money is not coming from royalties, but from businesses. The people have the resources, they have the land, the timber, the fish, the manpower and the brains. These things can make the people wealthy ... Timor needs cattle. We have land and we have cattle. If we could make enough money out of the furniture and timber, we could set up an abattoir in Kupang that could sell meat to the U.S. and Japan utilising their labour (their wages are $2.00 per day). One of Australia's problems is its unions, and people demanding more and more money. We could graze cattle and ship them on our barge; that barge could bring back the timber. So more and more money is being made ... That is why we should set our goals ... Now is a very exciting time. This could be the first Aboriginal organisation to go internationa, with unlimited potential ... We must support ourselves and be independent; be proud of what we achieve, and so thence being truly free (AD/Ford/CC minutes, 7 August 1987).

After discussions with the Governor of Timor (who had assured ALPA in writing that the Association could use all the rosewood in Nusa Tenggara Timor and any other person or company would be forbidden to take timber from this area), it was recommended by Ford that experts from New Zealand undertake a feasibility study of
the proposed project — costing approximately $26,000 (AD/CC minutes, 18 November 1987). While this project was being considered, ALPA opted to investigate other business enterprises such as tourism, the purchase of more retail stores, market gardens, craft, fishing and poultry industries, a fish canning factory, crocodile farming and oil exploration. The criteria, which formed the basis of selection under which new business proposals would be investigated, included the potential viability of the enterprise, the level of Aboriginal participation in the enterprise and the competition posed by other groups or established businesses. The need for Aboriginal people to be financially independent of government resources was emphasised:

Aboriginal people must have independence. They must have their own money. They must look to the future of having freedom from Government and relying on cheques. They must make their own decisions. If they are enthusiastic, the future is here, now. The future is with our 5 communities. The ALPA stores have money, they must make it grow, and build it so that their children will be free and independent (AD/CC minutes, 8 July 1986).

In March 1988, after a Central Committee meeting held in Timor to discuss the proposed development, several problems with this initiative were highlighted. One of the major problems was the high cost of transporting timber to Australia from Timor (Special Directors Meeting minutes, 3 March 1988). The project was deemed risky and therefore was waived; it was decided to concentrate ALPA's resources on building up the nascent family enterprises.

The Family Enterprise Scheme

In 1987 ALPA adopted a policy to revive industries and enterprises which had previously operated in the communities but had become idle. It was envisaged that this policy would give the opportunity for 'development within the community ... for training and ... for individual families to develop a financial independence by working and contributing to the needs of their community' (Rawnsley 1987 Annual Report). It was anticipated that ALPA's directors would benefit through these enterprises because they would lead to a better understanding of 'domestic industries' and the finance and discipline needed to manage them in a 'business like way'. Finance for the enterprises was to come from the stores, trading profits with the enterprises being considered as a part of ALPA's five year economic plan:

More money will generate and more families will have enterprises ... We should be motivated by the Garrawarra [Take-away enterprise]; we will be the richest Aboriginal communities. After the five-year plan there is further possible investments, i.e., cattle industry, beef, more fishing, bakery, peanut factory etc ... We as Directors are flying our own aircraft; there is enormous potential for Aboriginal people in Arnhemland (AD/CC minutes, 1 October 1987).15

Ford stressed the importance of the family enterprises arguing that they not only recirculated money within the community but also brought in new money from outside. He recommended that priority be given to industry-oriented projects which brought in this 'new money' such as fishing and market gardens. Henry Harper,
ALPA's Training Co-ordinator, described the Timor inspired Family Enterprise Scheme as being:

by far the most outstanding to date with implications and benefits that will have the profound effect of giving an employable future to community residents and their children ... Aboriginal groups have entered into joint agreements with outside interests only to find they have lost control for very few returns and only very basic employment opportunities (AD/Harper, 1987 Annual Report).

The Galiwin'ku Training Centre (previously the ASTS) played a significant part in setting up and administering these enterprises. The Training Centre conducted an evaluation of the potential enterprise and then presented the enterprise to the board of directors for approval. Once the directors had agreed to support the enterprise, a loan agreement was formed between the respective family and ALPA. Payment of interest was not required on these loans under the condition that once the individual enterprise began to make a profit a proportion of the loan would be repaid. Loans generally ranged from anywhere between a few thousand dollars to forty thousand dollars.

The Galiwin'ku Training Centre provided training for members of the family in all facets of the enterprise being established. Betty Greer was the Co-ordinator of the Training Centre. David Djalangi, as chief liaison officer, assisted both Greer and the individual enterprises. In 1988 Richard Gandhuwuy was appointed to the position of Enterprise Co-ordinator Trainee after undertaking courses at Batchelor College in Community Management. In this position he spent time supervising and assisting various enterprises at Gapuwiya, Ramingining, Galiwin'ku and Milingimbi. The Training Centre also helped in the development of a coxswains, course in conjunction with the Maritime College, Darwin, and provided training for people wishing to establish an outstation store. Training for 'D' licences in order to operate the bus service enterprise was undertaken by the adult educators and supported by the School because of the need to translate the regulations into Yolngu-matha.

By November 1987 ALPA had undertaken the support of four family enterprises — Marrawirrku Fishing Company, Rrawubali Bus Company, Garrawurra Take-away Food and the Burala Barge Service. The Garrawurra Take-away repaid in full its $35,535 loan after only a few months in operation. This enterprise has experienced a mixed success rate over the last few years. It has often been the case that one family will operate the take-away for a few months at a fairly profitable level and then vacate it for another family to come in and take over, although it remains owned by a group of people from the Garrawurra clan.

The Burala Barge Service did not experience much success. The actual barge was not big enough to enable it to provide an appropriate service for outstations and was in need of structural improvements. It was also believed that the government sponsored Resource Centre at Galiwin'ku was going to buy a barge for outstation use which would therefore present the Burala barge with some competition. Rawnsley and McMillan recommended to the Central Committee that ALPA wait for a few months in order to see if the Resource Centre would buy a barge. This move conflicted with the wishes of the Central Committee whose main concern was that outstation people would have to wait a long time for supplies while this problem was resolved.
This issue was compounded by the family operating this particular service not being completely satisfied with ALPA's administration of the enterprise scheme:

A.L.P.A. business[es] are all right but only if everything is explained clearly and understood ... A.L.P.A. have not told the family everything about contracts, money, running of the business and about the barge ... When the inspector came to check the Burala, we were not told the truth until about 3 weeks after by A.L.P.A. ... There was no money paid and no contracts signed by the family, so the business is still in A.L.P.A.'s name, but A.L.P.A. keeps saying it belongs to the family. It really belongs to A.L.P.A. When something goes wrong, then A.L.P.A. say the business belongs to the family, but it doesn't ... We have not been told the truth about the cost of the barge. We were not told the truth about anything to do with Burala ... We have heard a story that A.L.P.A. is going to get another barge, but we don't want anything to do with that. If A.L.P.A. want to buy another barge and they are going to ask the family if they are interested in it, we might be if — (1) A.L.P.A. tell the truth (2) contracts and money are talked about early and (3) A.L.P.A. agree to the family getting 'outside' help for their part in the business, for example, advice from Adult Educator, Legal Aid, D.A.A. (AD/letter, Djabani and Yitirri to CC, 16 November 1987).

The Central Committee decided that a feasibility study into the barge service be conducted and that the present barge be sold to acquire a larger one with ALPA operating the service 'until another family comes forward who wish to operate it' (AD/CC minutes, 18 November 1987, Galiwin'ku).

Greer (now Cunningham) believes that the concept of family enterprises was an excellent idea and stressed that problems mainly occurred when the families decided that they could operate the enterprise themselves without assistance from the Training Centre (Cunningham, pers. comm., 1992). Family enterprises established more recently will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Increasing Aboriginal participation**

The last two chapters have dealt with moves designed to encourage Aboriginal participation within the Association, at both a central administration and policy level and at a community level, that is, the operation of the stores. In 1985 the Central Committee had expanded from six members to consist of anywhere up to seventeen members. This was due to the co-opting of the Council Chairperson from each ALPA-member community plus the election of two members from each community to the ALPA board of directors. According to John Ford the make-up of the Central Committee was revised in order to give Aboriginal people on the Board a larger majority and to provide support for each other (Ford, pers. comm., 1992).

With the recruitment of a large number of new directors to the Board, ALPA endeavoured to explain what the role of the director was within the Association. The three major characteristics that directors were expected to exhibit were 'integrity', 'responsibility' and 'accountability'. This last characteristic was considered the most important because the directors were seen to be the spokespeople for the communities.

We call ourselves the 'Central Committee' and this Meeting is a Meeting of Directors. It is our job as Directors to do things honestly and to work out the plans of ALPA ... We must remember to always use integrity, we have to always be responsible, and we have to be accountable to our communities, and report to our A.G.M. (AD/CC minutes, 22 October 1985).
Directors were also responsible for educating the communities about ALPA, 'If a store goes well, the people will benefit, but directors have a job to do in getting the story of ALPA to the people' (AD/CC minutes, 1 October 1987). Directors were to formulate goals for the Association. Ford asked the directors, 'to have money and be self-supporting' were 'our priorities — are they also yours?' The emphasis on the 'accountability' of directors was reiterated in October 1987 with the formation and adoption of a 'set of rules' for the directors. These rules were required because:

some people are born traditional leaders, others may have enormous potential although they are not born leaders. If we are running a business, it may be that someone who is not a born leader understands business. We must try to get around these problems. This is the reason for rules for Directors. Once we agree on the rules we must keep the rules (AD/CC minutes, 1 October 1987).

These rules were:

a) Directors must have integrity, ie be honest in all things
b) We have to act in the interests of the community
c) Set an example — be reliable
d) Directors must have one mind — one voice
e) Be honest with each other
f) Be moderate (patient)
g) Trust each other
h) Be willing to change
i) Must be disciplined and act with restraint
j) Make wise decisions based on understanding and judgement
(AD/CC minutes, 1 October 1987)

ALPA's interpretation of 'integrity' is listed below:

I 'I am the way'.
N Now — We need to make changes for the better.
T Trust — To build a strong team we must trust each other.
E Energy — We need energy to keep going
G Gifts and Abilities — We are all gifted in different ways and in different skills.
R Respect — We need to have respect for other people.
I Individuals — We are all separate people. We are all of equal value to ALPA and have something to offer ALPA.
T Training and Teamwork - We always have to keep training and learning.
Y Yolngu Youth — Yolngu youth will benefit from the hard work put into ALPA now
(AD/Rawnsley, 1984 Annual Report).16

The initiatives taken during this time were evidence of increased input to policy decisions by the directors. In October 1986 the Central Committee resolved to award each and every worker six weeks annual leave and to begin a superannuation scheme for ALPA workers commencing on 1 January 1987. In April 1987 the Central Committee resolved that directors fees be distributed at the end of each meeting and that people must not leave for private business while the meeting was in progress.17 It was also unanimously agreed by the directors that store credit for staff must not exceed $100 and must be cleared each pay day. The directors' pride in and growing sense of responsibility for the Association is reflected by the following statements made at a Central Committee meeting in April 1987:

we looked at the ALPA organisation and believe that we are on the right track. ALPA is looking closely to the future of Aboriginal communities, for Aboriginal's benefit. We see ALPA is the backbone for Aboriginal enterprises and for finance in many ways in the future, because of tight Government funding ... So we are telling the Government there is no way to turn the clock back. We are not feeding on milk now, but solid food; we are adults. We want to see things happening and we don't want to see Aboriginal people held back (AD/CC minutes, April 1987).

A new director offered her perception of the Association:

We have had lack of communication, but I will go back and tell my people that ALPA is an Aboriginal organisation which is there; their aim is to help Aboriginal people to self-management. ALPA is there to support people, and is helping Aboriginal people with businesses (AD/CC minutes, April 1987).

ALPA's enthusiasm for the way in which the Association was progressing is indicated by the move to invite various people (especially those who had expressed criticisms of Aboriginal people) to partake in ALPA's Central Committee meetings or store opening ceremonies. The intention of these invitations was to show what an organisation like ALPA and what Aboriginal people in general could achieve. Sir Joh Bjelke-Peterson and Lang Hancock were invited to attend store openings at Gapuwiyak and Galiwin'ku in 1986 but declined the invitation (AD/CC minutes, 15 April 1986).
Another initiative taken during 1986/7 was the creation of three assistant operations manager positions. Three Aboriginal people were chosen for these positions which were based in ALPA's Darwin administration section. The three chosen were Donald Nulupani Gaykamangu, Richard Gandhuvuy and Ian Gumbula. They were trained in office and accounting duties, store operation procedures and participated in in-store training programs held in the community stores. Nulupani is currently employed by ALPA and is working from the Darwin office as an Accounting Officer. Gandhuvuy became the Trainee Enterprise Co-ordinator and then left this position to become Galiwin'ku Town Clerk and manage the Garrawurra Take-away. Gumbula left ALPA and became the Adult Educator/Assistant Principle at Ngukurr School. He left Ngukurr to accept the position of Adult Educator with TAFE at Galiwin'ku. He is currently employed as a teacher at Galiwin'ku School.

Several other changes occurred within the Association during this period. A new NCR computer system was installed in the Darwin offices together with the development phase of the Portable Data Entry Device (PDEs) system which was to be used in each store. It was believed that this system would create new training areas for ALPA staff 'enhancing their skills in the use of modern computer hardware' and would also reduce in-store paper work, save on administrative overheads and provide current and detailed information for more effective store management (AD/McMillan, marketing manager, 1987 Annual Report).

Before discussing the various changes, initiatives and issues with which the Association became involved during the last four years (1988–92), it would be worthwhile to assess ALPA's credibility in the communities in terms of the operation of the stores and their acceptance as an organisation working for and with Aboriginal people. The following chapter provides some insight into the issues and challenges that have confronted the organisation over the past sixteen years and which have inspired the Association to analyse its current position within the communities in which it operates today.

Notes

1. The 'train the trainer' concept was derived from the Darwin Institute of Technology's training programs.

2. An association which could monitor the stores in this region was still needed. Consequently Anangu Winkuku Stores (AWS) was established in late 1982 to provide accounting, management and training services to these communities.

3. The Yulngu Association, a Department of Aboriginal Affairs funded association, was established in 1975 to coordinate and improve services to communities in the Katherine region. Yulngu provided accountancy services to Community Councils and other Aboriginal organisations, a workshop service including mechanical repairs and some skills training, and the administration of social security services combined with trust account savings schemes.

4. Young suggests that people refused this service in order to prevent any external investigations of the stores' activities (Young 1984).

5. The community at Balgo was and still is extremely polarised. The tension between the two 'camps' is exacerbated by the land which the store is situated on having disputed ownership. The Bishop of Broome holds title to this land, although proceedings have been instigated to clarify the ownership question and to hand back the land.

6. Jimmy and Ruby Malavie were to remain with ALPA for over ten years years before leaving to set up their own store in their homeland.
7. In 1992 the Bulgo community expressed dissatisfaction with ALPA's services and together with the internal politics of this region forced ALPA to make a decision to withdraw their services.
8. 'Establishment' meaning local government funded Aboriginal resource agencies.
9. For example, Bill Burrell found on his table one night at a local restaurant a 'land rights for whites' badge.
10. 'Book-up' is a form of 'credit' available to people who have run out of money or who require extra money because of the requirements of a particular ceremony. Each person's credit tally is recorded by the store and is usually deducted from that person's pension or social security payments. If people are eligible for these benefits, the system can work quite well, although the stores are often susceptible to intensive 'humble' as people try to increase the recognised book-up limit. For people who do not have access to these benefits, the store's recovery of the debt can often be difficult. Retailers also abuse the book-up system by increasing the limit as an incentive for people to shop at their stores. This has happened at both Belyuen (NT) and Warmun (WA), two communities which have direct retail competition. At a meeting between Evans, Loeven and the Turkey Creek Council in April 1985, the Council stressed the community's desire to allow book-up in the store, claiming that the road-house two kilometres further on offered book-up to one and all. It was suggested at the meeting that a lump sum of money be paid into a special fund to help people who ran out of money or for ceremonies (AD/Evans, East Kimberley visit report, 2-4 April 1985, 9 April 1985, Evans personal files). The matter was raised again by the Warmun community in August 1985 with the following resolutions made:

a) a committee to discuss book-up
b) all book-up arrangements to be conducted through the council office
c) only those who receive cheques through the council office to be eligible for book-up
d) any credit was to be automatically debited
e) a maximum of $50 credit to any person in a cheque period, that is, fortnightly
f) an absolute total maximum of $1,000 credit — after which credit would cease until the next pay-day
g) those approved by council office were to be issued a voucher to shop at the store. This was to be treated as cash with no change to be given
h) all vouchers were to be redeemed by the council office each week
i) $1,000 from the store profits could be used to set up this account, so that the store was never placed in a debtor situation
(AD/Evans, Confidential report, 27 August 1985, Evans personal files).
11. The Unitig Church loaned ALPA $200,000 for this purchase with the remainder coming from ALPA's reserves and short term deposits.
12. This sale remains one of the relics of ALPA's discontent over government funding policies. According to ALPA, the Aboriginal Development Commission were too slow to approve a loan for Hickmans and ALPA was usurped by Southern Farmers.
13. Evans resigned from the Association because his position had become more involved with administration than training. Although not believing that the training school was 'bankrupt of ideas', Evans accepts that there were difficulties in carrying out the training functions adequately after his departure. This primarily related to ALPA's inability to recruit suitable people as trainers (Evans, pers.comm., 1992)
14. The Aboriginal Development Commission provided a $65,000 loan which paid for the building materials and some 'extras' and DEIR provided the assistance for labour and paid a 100% training subsidy for 3 trainee builders and one supervisor.
15. ALPA had previously purchased from Sherrand Aviation Co. a 421C aircraft for $125,000. In April 1985 the Central Committee members voted to sell this place in order to purchase a larger one which would have a better freight capacity. The 421C aircraft was sold but a larger plane was not bought.
16. According to McMillian and Rawsley, the paper entitled 'Integrity' was written in 1984. At the request of the Directors, it was rewritten and produced for circulation among the new Directors a few years later.
17. In 1988 fees paid to Directors were increased to $100 per day for meetings in the communities, $150 for meetings in Darwin and $200 for meetings of a few days. In addition to this the Directors airfares, accommodation and other expenses were paid for.
18. Nulupani has recently been appointed to the position of understudy Chairperson.
CHAPTER SEVEN

ALPA'S PUBLIC IMAGE

Aboriginal input, approval and support for any enterprise development or project occurring in an Aboriginal community is an absolute necessity if the enterprise/project is going to succeed. This requirement has been recognised as a priority of the Association for a number of years. ALPA has endeavoured to gain support for the Association through a variety of measures and has not remained impervious to criticisms directed at it. ALPA believes that the primary reason for this criticism concerns a lack of knowledge about the organisation and it has tried to address this situation by: the production of educative videos and the installation of video recorders in the stores; community workshops and discussions; the Store Training School’s production of information booklets; the production of an ALPA newsletter; a store worker competition; and the circulation of a questionnaire designed to assist ALPA in recognising problem areas, in regards to the store, within the communities. The Store Training School at Galiwin'ku was able to provide much insight and advice on the the problems ALPA was experiencing at a grassroots level.

Video and Information technology

A means of spreading information about the Association through a medium that was immediately accessible was to install video recorders in each store. Ford believed that for Aboriginal communities the 'one picture is worth a thousand words' adage applied doubly (AD/letter, Ford to Evans, 13 May 1982, Evans personal files). Videos of Central Committee meetings and other meetings, store opening ceremonies and some training films, which included information on the procedures of store operation, barge unloading, how goods arrived at the store and how prices were determined, were shown in the stores (AD/ALPA Future Policy, 1982). The Food Industry Technology Institute in Queensland (FITIQ) and the Northern Territory Health Department also produced videos concerning the role of health workers, nutrition education, and explanations of the colour coding of foods to be shown in the store.1 Community education films were researched and developed to:

assist communities to understand the economic necessities of running a store, a bank, or a workshop ... There has been any amount of training [given] to Aborigines over the years, but they have returned to their communities and left to 'sink or swim' with other people, who have no concepts of what the people were taught (AD/ALPA Future Policy, 1982).

It was hoped that these films, which dealt in part with the role of the store in the community and the need for community support of the store, would assist the work of the trainee store manager:

[It] is useless training Aboriginal people to responsible positions, unless we also make communities aware of the problems that the Trainee Manager may encounter, and we will be able to help this per medium of the T.V. in each of our stores (AD/letter, Ford to Evans, 13 May 1982).
The initial practice of screening videotapes in the store worked well. However, as more people gained access to television and video recorders, the novelty wore off. People began to ignore the videos and they were subsequently discontinued (although the Training School continued to produce films for use at the School).

Community meetings

During the early 1980s it was considered important to have representatives from ALPA’s Darwin administration and Board of directors frequent the communities and liaise with the people on matters concerning operational aspects of the Association and the stores. Dandjati, Galiwin’ku trainee store manager, had expressed concern over the lack of communication between the ALPA directors and the communities:

All the people who have been on the Central Committee in the past have not shared with us what happened at those meetings ... We would like two store workers from each ALPA store, one male and one female to go to the meetings so that they can bring back the news of what was talked about. We would like this because we can be sure then to hear what has happened at the meetings ... We have a lot of ideas we would like to share with the Central Committee and we would like the chance to talk straight with you (AD/letter, Dandjati to Central Committee, 1 October 1982, Evans personal files).

Rather than have store workers attend meetings in Darwin, meetings were held in the communities, for store workers and the community in general. These meetings were designed to give the Darwin administration a better understanding of the way in which the Association was perceived at a community level.

A meeting in late 1982 between the Moderator Graham Bence, Dick Udy, John Ford and prominent members of the Galiwin’ku community was videotaped and translated by ASTS training officers, Reaburn and BuwanBuwan. The translation sheds some insight into problems concerning ALPA’s credibility at a community level and raised twelve 'confusion areas' for Yolngu about ALPA:

1. When did UCA hand over to ALPA?
2. Who owns ALPA? How do they own it?
3. Who looks after the money?
4. Where does the money go?
5. *Yolngu* thinking is: ‘ALPA sounds like 'helps' and helper is what the church does, therefore: ALPA = helper = church’.
6. If the above formula is true and ALPA = helper = church then stock prices should be lower.
7. ‘Missionaries’ sometimes used the ‘church to avoid answering *yolngu* questions. ‘You’re working for God ...’, especially about money and prices. *Yolngu* started to think that money things were sacred.
8. Missionaries kept the ‘inside’ jobs to themselves, they always held the power.
9. Training is important so that *yolngu* can learn these inside jobs.
10. Who pays for the Store Training School?
11. Why doesn’t ALPA pay rent to the landowners?
12. Why does John Ford go south looking for new managers, wasting money — and then the people who come are no good? (AD/letter, Evans to Ford, 5 November 1982, Evans personal files).

A member of this meeting wanted to know which side the Balanda were on and whether 'they are truly working for us':

if they are working for us, how come ALPA charges too much money. We *(yolnu)* don’t have much money because we have to share it with our families ... It’s OK if ALPA puts the prices
up, but why do they put them up so high? ... For our community or for God? Do they really help us (yolnu)? (AD/Videotape transcript, 5 November 1982).

Another argued:

I want a yolnu in the store as manager now — a yolnu boss ... [If] the yolnu is manager, 'they' cannot keep the money secret. No hiding the money, because later someone will say 'where's the money?' If it's not there they will accuse [the] yolnu manager of taking it and say 'you got new things, you took the money'. If there's money gone then yolnu will think wrongly and think the manager (yolnu or balanda) took the money. The manager gets upset and leaves. I am worried that the staff will not look after the money properly. I'm just making a point (AD/Videotape transcript, 5 November 1982).

A couple of weeks later another video recording was made of a Galiwin'ku meeting between Yolngu store workers from some of the ALPA stores. One point raised at this meeting involved the need for Balanda to work with and train Yolngu staff and stressed:

it's up to you whether you're really going to work ... because the store belongs to the community ... Maybe you know, maybe you don't — ALPA is trying to give us the 'work' and its up to us whether we are going to 'take it by the horns' or not (AD/Videotape transcript, 26 November 1982).

Most people did not have a problem with having a Balanda present in the store to conduct training. The main issue concerned the lack of responsibility given to Yolngu workers:

that 'old man' [balanda store manager] he's taking away responsibility from me. And I feel ashamed. I've had training here ... and what for? I go back to Milingimbi and nothing happens. When someone gets training then that training should be accepted — otherwise we [trainees] are just wasting our time (AD/Videotape transcript, 26 November 1982).

The frustration with not being able to apply the training undertaken by the store staff in their own communities was expressed by another person:

I know how to do filing and invoicing because I worked for one year at the U.C.A. office in Darwin. I know how to book keep and office procedures. I'm trying to learn more ... I tried to ask David for work, 'how 'bout, after I finish the banking, I do the office work?' I said. He got very upset at me so I took off (AD/Videotape transcript, 26 November 1982).

The feeling that the Balanda members of ALPA were either hiding something from the Yolngu members or that they were not really working for Aboriginal people as expressed in the first tape translation was also discussed at this meeting:

The balanda want us to look at them and think they're for us. But they are moving a 'secret' way and spending all our money. Through the years and months we have been thinking that balanda are very good (AD/Videotape transcript, 26 November 1982).

A long-term employee with ALPA who had received much training expressed pride in his skills but also confusion as to what his position within the Association actually was:

I work everything myself — bookwork, ordering shelves — all while the customers are waiting for me. But I don't get tired because I know [the jobs] I have worked a whole ten months, me and a balanda. Then I put my wife to work last month doing part time shelving. After that I bought my sister to work fulltime. I only do the bookwork [now] but I still help with the
shelves. Also I help the community outside the store like a councillor. When I knock off from work, I've got work at home because there's no time during the day to finish the paperwork. I even work on Saturdays and Sundays, nearly every day, and every night. I don't know what its like to be tired because I know how to do the work. Its what I like ... My feeling is that I don't want a balanda manager. My law says I'm going to depose them. For me, I'm not frightened of balandas. I can speak face to face to them. Its good that there's a balanda beside me at the moment. After this year he is going, then I'll be by myself. But I don't know what I'm going to do after that. They have told me that I'll be moving around through each community working [in a different place] each year. That's it. There's no problems for me over there because I'm the only one working. There's lot's of you helping each other in the different stores. I'm by myself — but I'm used to it. My feeling and skin are used to it. I like it, and I like it that way — I will kick out the balanda and work by myself. It's good that there's a balanda beside me ... so that he can encourage me. But he's not the boss because he's going to go — he's just visiting ...

(AD/Videotape transcript, 26 November 1982).

Ford was quite disturbed about this particular section of the transcription and immediately contacted the person to inform them that their position was not a manager and that a visit was required in order to make the person's position and future with the Association clearer (Ad/letter, Ford to Bun'tarrawuy, 1 December 1982, Evans personal files).

Store workers also voiced their concerns with ALPA to the Training School staff. Training Officer Reaburn informed Ford about the lack of trust that some Yolngu workers felt for the Balanda ALPA staff. This was due to the lack of 'true' communication between Yolngu and Balanda. After a lengthy conversation with one store worker Reaburn related to Ford the feeling that both sides (Yolngu and Balanda) merely 'butter each other up' with no real understanding of what was actually going on from either perspective: 'we (balanda) do not communicate to yolnu on a deeper level ('inside'/sacred), which is where our meaning is supposed to lie'. According to Reaburn, some Yolngu believed that this had 'been a conscious act on the part of past Balanda and still happens today to keep Yolnu down so that they have no access to equality' (AD/letter, Reaburn to Ford, November 1982, Evans personal files).

Further methods of dealing with Yolngu 'misconceptions' about the store were devised by Evans and involved enlisting 'local identities' to assist the School in 'telling the story straight', from a Yolngu perspective. It was felt that, by using traditionally 'powerful' men who could speak 'in language' using cultural terms acceptable to the community, information regarding the store might be more effectively conveyed (letter, Evans to Ford, 22 February 1983). Evans highlighted the problems an organisation like ALPA (with notions based on 'western' social and economic principles) has in working in a different cultural setting claiming that, 'Our objectives are balanda, our recipients are yolnu' (AD/letter, Evans to Watson (ALPA planning assistant), 3 October 1983, Evans personal files).

Evans believed that although some ALPA stores had a good reputation and image in the communities, the Association as a whole did not. According to him, factors which contributed to this poor image included ALPA's pricing policy, the variable quality of ALPA's employees at all levels, inadequate store services in communities, and the unsupportive attitudes of management staff. The isolation of managers, both physically and mentally, from ALPA's central administration resulted in them expressing discontent with the Association which was picked up on by the community in general who no doubt felt more supportive of the local store manager than the wider
organisation. Evans believed that one of the strengths of the Association was its economic viability. However, he qualifies this by alleging:

this very profitability may be a weakness that goes unrecognised. With it goes the concept of 'greedy people' who take more than they need! The way that it disburses Profits is neither understood or valued (AD/letter, Evans to Watson, 3 October 1983, Evans personal files).

This last extract alludes to a problem that has become extremely contentious in the ALPA member communities today — the distribution of dividends. This issue will be covered in more detail in the following chapter.

**ALPA News**

Another measure taken to disseminate information about ALPA at a community level and also in Darwin was the production of an ALPA newspaper. The community meetings had revealed that knowledge of ALPA in the communities was 'vague' and 'misguided' — two factors which badly affected the morale of the store manager and store workers. It was suggested that the newspaper could boost the morale of store managers and give a better understanding of the activities of managers and the stores as well as keeping the communities aware of what was happening in other stores.

**ALPA News** contained such items as resolutions made at ALPA's Annual General Meetings and Central Committee meetings, constitutional changes, and the latest developments in each ALPA community, such as store improvements and details of competitions held by ALPA. The newspaper also discussed such issues as ownership of the Association, where the money paid into the store went and how the Association utilised the stores' profits. The paper included a definition of 'business words' used in the store, such as 'turn over', 'gross profit', 'net profit', 'operating expenses' and 'mark up', in order to familiarise people with store procedure. One issue of the paper endeavoured to explain why ALPA stores had higher prices than in Darwin citing high freight costs, salaries, payments to directors, and ALPA's commitment to training as the reasons. 'ALPA's prices are not high when these things are considered. They are a fair price to maintain a strong store and meet training costs' (**ALPA News**). The newspaper also explained ALPA's mark-up policy, claiming that although there were fixed mark-ups on most grocery items, essential items such as tea, milk, flour, eggs, bread and butter were allocated a smaller mark-up.

The instigator of the newspaper initiative, Henry Harper, claimed that the paper was discontinued after only a few issues (produced throughout 1984) because of the lack of interest or contributions from ALPA staff or community members.

**The store worker competition**

ALPA endeavoured to improve its public image and increase Aboriginal store workers' pride in their jobs by holding a store worker competition between staff members employed by the ALPA stores and consultancy stores. The competition was broken into two categories of points — stores and individual workers. Points gained for the store were added to the points allocated to individual workers within that store.
The rationale for this derived from ALPA's belief that store staff had substantial control over the successful operation of the store. The allocation of points was based on monthly assessments for attendance and performance of duties with additional points awarded for responsibility and initiative, customer ratings, the store's ability to meet profit budgets, store inspections and 'the quality of standardized ordering and reporting procedures' (ALPA News, n.d.). According to a report in the *Sunday Territorian* (16 November 1986) the aim of the competition was 'designed as an incentive to improve the efficiency of Aboriginal staff [and create] a greater level of community awareness of itself, its aims [and] objectives.

Plate 25. Winner of the ALPA logo design competition, 1985
*Source: ALPA files*

First prize of a Toyota Hilux 4WD was awarded to Margaret Dipulpuy of Galiwin'ku out of approximately 70 competitors. Second prize of a video cassette recorder went to Brenda Mutha also of Galiwin'ku. Three other finalists were awarded television sets. Jimmy Malarvie of Balgo Hills was the regional winner.²
Questionnaire

In 1987, a questionnaire produced by ALPA was issued to each community in which there was an ALPA store. The questionnaire aimed at assessing individual community perceptions of the Association and their reaction to the activities/projects ALPA had launched. The questions asked in the survey were:

- What do you think about the store and ALPA?
- What could ALPA do to assist the smooth running of the community?
- Do you see the store worker competition as a positive motivator?
- Who owns ALPA?
- Have you heard about ALPA's family enterprise scheme? What do you think about this scheme?

The community response to these questions was varied and represented a wide cross-section of the community from children to Balanda community residents to older Aborigines. Anonymous responses to the various questions indicated the range of opinion about ALPA:

We have a nice store and from what I hear about other cty's [communities] we have a good variety of things to buy. I think everything is too expensive ... stop trying to run the cty. Be a lot friendlier. Lower prices. I can't afford to buy all I need from the store I'll be blewed if I can work out how the yolngu can, especially the pensioners. [Who owns ALPA?] Who knows?!! Maybe a few select people who are getting a nice lot of money. You certainly can't come under the flag of the Church anymore because Jesus came to help the poor not take all their money ... 

I am happy with the store people and most of what they are doing. Apart from high prices ALPA seem sensitive to the opinions of the local store manager.

ALPA is nothing to do with community. We got council there for the community ... Nobody ever heard of who ALPA really is ... Is it really Baland[s] or Yolngu.

I think it is a good store and run nicely ... Yes I saw the competition, it was good and exciting ... Community owns the ALPA store.

Good to see larger range and selection of foodstuffs on the shelves. Keep up the good work.

In response to the question concerning ways in which ALPA could assist the community, one respondent commented at length:

1. Operate the garden
2. Provide fresh food
3. Accept that aboriginalisation is a 30yr programme
4. Provide scholarships for academic yolngu
5. Assist councils in administration
6. Negotiate for decreased yolngu allowances and increased council grants
7. Continue the family enterprise scheme

The same respondent stated further, 'ALPA has lost credibility with most communities due to high prices and misspending. ALPA has great potential for solving many community problems, so please get your act together'. One suggestion for ALPA's future was:
Dissolve the Assoc. Divide the accrued [sic] profits between the communities and have the communities and staff run their own co-op. After all ALPA should have by now trained enough people to look after their own affairs. If ALPA is not of this opinion then it is ALPA that has failed not the communities.

Other respondents highlighted such issues as the need for back-up and support for the family enterprises, the need for more fresh food and 'quality merchandise' in the stores, the need for smaller and regular local store worker competitions, the lack of knowledge of who actually 'owns' ALPA, wrongly priced goods, store cleanliness, out-of-date stock, inappropriate store opening hours and the need for culturally appropriate language in the questionnaire.

Regardless of whether the questionnaire was filled out by Yolngu or Balanda community residents, it is obvious that there was little real knowledge about ALPA the organisation. A report from Harper addressed to the ALPA support managers about the results of the questionnaire stressed the need for better communication between management, staff and communities. Harper also asked the managers to consider stocking different quantities of the same stock in order to give people a choice about how they will spend their money and also warned about stocking 'black and gold' and other 'no name' brands:

Past history indicates buyer resistance to products that are not easily identified. Many customers have poor literacy skills. After discussions with staff, who will do the bulk of the promotion, introduce products slowly in the smallest quantities, making sure yourself, that the quality is good (AD/memo, Harper to Support Managers, n.d.).

Harper warned against 'fobbing people off by side stepping issues', maintaining that it:

buys a little time, but has minimal value and is often detrimental in the establishment of good long term working relationships ... The community view of the store is largely a reflection of the manager's view of the staff and community. Representatives to meetings bring these values, attitudes, opinions and special lobby projects with them, and they are identified as such (AD/memo, Harper to Support Managers, n.d.).

The Food Story

It was generally believed (and still is) that the reasons for criticism of ALPA by Aborigines was because of a lack of understanding of how the store 'works'. Some of the issues that were emphasised during the 1980s in relation to this problem were: that Aboriginal people did not understand the obligation to give money for all goods from the store; did not understand how prices were determined; failed to see the significance of a signature or a contract; and did not recognise why it was important that the store be profitable. The Store Training School at Galiwin'ku placed much emphasis on devising methods of improving people's knowledge in this area. It was generally believed that if these concepts could be explained, then the problems which arose from customers questioning high prices or not paying for goods or not understanding where the money paid into the store goes would be more easily comprehended.

The production of a booklet in 1984 entitled The Food Story, as an accompaniment to the previously mentioned videotape, was a recognition that the 'single most
contentious issue in communities concerns the store's prices, and where the money goes'. The purpose of this publication was to offer an outline of the 'food chain' showing the journey food products make to reach Aboriginal community stores. It attempted to explain how the money paid into the store was distributed and why. It was not believed that *The Food Story* would solve or remove the problems identified, but as a way of beginning to clarify some of these issues (AD/ASTS Annual Report 1983/4).

*The Food Story* describes in detail the role of the producer, manufacturer, wholesaler, retailer and finally, the customer as part of the food chain. The methodology in explaining this food chain was to pose a series of questions and answers while providing examples for each part of the process. Take, for example, the following extract:

What is a *Wholesaler*?

A Wholesaler: — sells in *large* quantities  
— sells goods from a warehouse  
— sells only to *Retailers*  
— Which Wholesalers do you know?

What is a *Retailer*?

A Retailer: — sells in *small* quantities  
— sells goods to the customer  
— adds a 'tail' to the price  
— Which *Retailers* do you know?

Retailers are *like a tree*.  
There are many different branches.

Some of these branches are

— electrical retailers  
— sporting goods retailers  
— hardware retailers  
— food retailers

Discussion of the different categories of food retailers such as chain stores, group stores and convenience stores followed. To explain the path of money going into the store and out again, the booklet stated:

The store receives lots of money from the customers who come and buy food and other things from the store ... The customers mainly think that the store keeps *all the money for themselves* ... This can make them very angry ... They think that the people who work in the store are greedy, and this can make really big problems in the community ... But its not true! ... The store doesn't keep the money at all. Let's find out now where it truly goes.

Does it go to the government?  
Does it go to the Church?  
Does the Manager keep it?  
No!  
Let's see where it *does* go.

A pie chart was used in order to show the dispersal of money paid into the store by the customers. The methodology used to explain the workings of a pie chart was to liken it to a traditional distribution system. The example of a damper shared amongst a family was used:

After the damper has been cooked, about half will be given to the cook's mother ... This isn't for that person to eat on [his/her] own — it's for that side of the family to share. The husband and children of the cook's mother ... This is the same for the Suppliers too. The warehouse can't keep all the money for themselves — they must pay the Manufacturers and transport company, and all the people who work in the warehouse from their share (ASTS 1984, The Food Story, 15).

The payment of freight companies was the next part of the pie discussed:

*Freight* means the money we have to pay to get someone to bring the goods from the Wholesaler (supplier), to the store. In many communities, the Wholesalers are a long way away. The further the distance away, the higher the cost ... The people who bring goods to the store are called Freight Companies. They use the money to pay them, to pay the wages of their workers, and to buy trucks, planes and ships they use to bring the goods ... They can't keep all the money — they must share it. If the store doesn't pay their freight — no-one will bring the goods for the store to sell.

The role of the freight companies in the pie chart was related back to the distribution of the damper:

The next piece goes to the cook's husband's mother (mother-in-law) ... This is very important. It is not as big as the piece for the cook's mother — but it is all for that person. This is different to the big piece given to the cook's mother, which must be shared out to many others ... Remember that this story is not exact. It is only a story.

Wages for staff were also included in this 'traditional' story:

The cook's husband will probably get the next piece ... After the parents have received their share - showing respect — the husband of the cook will then receive a share ... The share is about the same size as for the last one [freight] ... The wages for the store are just as important as the husband receiving the right share ... Without the staff — there is no store ... Without the husband — there is no family (AD/ASTS 1984, The Food Story, 19).

*The Food Story* continued in this vein, conveying the operational costs of the store and relating it back to the traditional distribution of goods until only a small amount of money was left. This amount was the net profit and was used for new cash registers, freezers, shelves and other store improvements. This net profit was explained as the cook's share:

When everyone has received a piece of food — the cook has the last piece ... If the shares have been correct, there will be a nice piece left for the cook ... If someone has eaten more than their share — there might not be enough for the cook ... This would be very sad - because the cook did all the work ... maybe next time, there won't be any damper at all, because the cook got nothing for her work — not even enough food (AD/ASTS 1984, The Food Story, 25).

A discussion of store profit and store loss followed this explanation:

If the shares are not right ...
someone will miss out!
They won't be happy about it.
If the Supplier isn't paid ...
        they won't send more goods!
If the Freight Company isn't paid ...
        they won't bring the goods to the store!
If the Wages aren't paid ...
        there won't be any workers!
If there's no money for vehicle or store repairs ...
        there won't be any store!
If there's no Profit or Reward left at the end ...
        Why did we do all that hard work? (AD/ASTS 1984, The Food Story, 27).

The importance of everyone in the family receiving the right portion of food was related back to the operation of the store:

        If one person is greedy and takes more than their share, someone else misses out. If they miss out on their food, they will be very unhappy — especially if someone else is getting fat eating more than their correct share ... With the store's money, each person or group should receive the right share! ... After a while, this can kill the store, if one part is not getting the right amount because another is using too much (AD/ASTS 1984, The Food Story, 29–32).

The areas in which potential 'store killers' could occur were listed as being in stock control; checkout control; in the storeroom; housekeeping; the office; inadequate sales; and the store manager. The way in which each of these areas could affect the efficient and viable operation of the store was shown earlier in relation to the Yolngu store operation trial period. The conclusion to The Food Story was:

        If we are not careful our store might die!!! That would be bad for our store, bad for our jobs, and bad for the community (AD/ASTS 1984, The Food Story, 43)

**ALPA opens up**

Another measure which ALPA instigated to make people aware of what the Association was doing was to invite people from different organisations to visit either the store Training School or to sit in on Committee meetings.

Visitors to the School included the manager of the Food Industry Training Institute of Queensland, Les Miles. Miles assisted the School in developing videos explaining the function of checkouts in the stores. He returned later in the year with representatives from the Australian Dairy Corporation to look at nutritional education in the stores. As well as these visits, a Film Australia crew arrived at Galiwin'ku and utilised the School's facilities to make a film highlighting a number of 'Aboriginal achievers'. A representative from NTTTC (Northern Territory Industry Training Council), Hiram Ryan, visited the School in February 1982. Evans stated that:

        Hiram has developed a vision of Galiwin'ku becoming the centre for all Aboriginal training, with ALPA's training school as its hub ... I honestly support the proposition he puts, after all, we do it better than anyone else, at least we are doing [it], whilst most people are just talking (AD/Evans, 23/4 February 1982, Evans personal files).

In June 1982 a number of Aboriginal people from Mornington Island and Doomadgee visited the school and the Galiwin'ku community on a trip organised by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Mt Isa. In early 1983 the School was able to produce a video in conjunction with the Aboriginal Liaison Unit of the Chief
Minister's Department on gun laws in the Territory. The School also played host to ALPA Central Committee meetings, managers' and trainers' seminars and a group of people from Ernabella seeking more information about ALPA.

ALPA, from the time of its inception, has maintained a firm stance to be independent of government. This may have been a result of the deterioration in the relationship between the Church and the government which occurred during the changes of the 1970s. This resentment may have been exacerbated due to the poor response ALPA had received from government funding bodies with regard to ALPA's loan or grant submissions in the past. During a 1987 Central Committee meeting, the directors discussed the reasons for the hostility between their organisation and government funding agencies:

Some of the things are happening because of the way that ALPA is going forward; this becomes more reality. They are trying to stop the vision and the dream of self-determination for Aboriginal people so that they will control (and this has always been the aim of the Government); they don't want to see success for Aboriginal people, because ALPA is meeting that aim. ALPA is trying to see that Aboriginal people will succeed in controlling and managing. ALPA is taking positive steps; there is now way that they will stop us going where we are. We will keep going towards our goal (AD/CC minutes, 29-30 April 1987).

This topic was raised because of the failure of government funding agencies (in particular the ADC) to accept an invitation from ALPA to attend a Central Committee meeting to discover how ALPA operated and to give the directors a chance to express their feelings to these representatives. After many requests, Colin Black (ADC regional manager) finally agreed to accept an invitation to a Central Committee meeting. Black suggested that ALPA seemed like a mini-ADC. Ford agreed, stressing that ALPA had many of the same goals of the ADC and did not want to work against them. Black informed the directors that it was time to forget any past troubles between them and begin again. Reverend Djiniyini told Black how ALPA had helped Aboriginal people by being financially strong and independent of government finances:

We have been able to begin to help our people to break down the system of dependency in order to be able to think for themselves, to build up reserves to benefit not only our people but the people in the Northern Territory as well as in Australia. This is something new for us. Welfare in the past has been so much dependency. We don't want to hear about Aboriginal people getting handouts. These Directors are thinking for their people, for their future ... (AD/Djiniyini CC minutes, 11 March 1988).

The issue concerning the ADC's past belief that ALPA was not an Aboriginal organisation was broached at this meeting. The directors informed Black that they did not have a problem with having non-Aboriginal people working for the Association believing that this provided them with skills which Aboriginal people had not yet gained:

I have heard a lot of people say that John and George are the ones who run ALPA, and that we are just a label behind them. But you can see yourself that we make the decisions, we talk about our goals, opportunities and strategies. George is the brains for us, he shapes us, he directs us to the business world. John is there making sure things are carried out. We have been working together for a long time now. Obviously John and George know more about the business world and with their wisdom, knowledge and guidance we have built up confidence together (AD/CC minutes, 11 March 1988).
ALPA's desire to be independent of government finance is reflected in various economic moves made over the last four years (1988–92). These include ALPA's involvement in the Darwin property market and the buying and selling of shares. In 1991, as the property market was realising better returns than the current bank interest rate, ALPA's accountant advised the Board to buy four strata titled units (at a total cost of $392,000). ALPA director, Keith Djiniyini, moved a motion that a further two units be purchased. According to the 1992 Annual Report, ALPA now has $855,200 invested in real estate. In addition, they have shares in Independent Holding Limited and have recently sold shares in Associated Grocers Co-operative Ltd. (1992 Annual Report). These moves were designed to strengthen ALPA's financial position and to safeguard them for the future. The need for ALPA to consolidate and have reserves because of unknown future developments is recognised at most levels of the organisation. The fear that one day government funding or social security benefits will no longer be available to Aboriginal people is behind this need to 'develop ALPA for the future'. There is fierce determination within the organisation that it be independent of government 'handouts'. This and the need for the ALPA member communities to band together and present a united front has been reiterated many times:

The importance of the five communities banded together as one corporate entity, to support one another in times of trouble, has been continually emphasised by the Directors: Aboriginal people supporting Aboriginal people and growing strong together, shaping your own future (AD/McMillan, 1989 Annual Report).

As is evident from this chapter, ALPA has recognised and attempted to deal with a huge range of problems which centre around establishing a business based on a non-Aboriginal economic structure in an Aboriginal community. Integral to this is a strong suspicion on the part of Aboriginal people about non-Aboriginal involvement in the communities. Some people firmly believe that these organisations are profiting from the 'Aboriginal industry' or Aboriginal money. Having said this, it is important to realise that this affects most organisations in Aboriginal communities regardless of the level of Aboriginal input to the particular organisation because of the community politics of a particular region. If an organisation is seen to be favouring one particular family or clan, there will not be a broad acceptance of the enterprise established. In ALPA's case, this issue has been highlighted recently because, through efficient management at a community and administrative level, the stores have become lucrative enterprises. Problems have arisen within the communities because of the distribution of the store's profits. This difficulty is compounded by such concerns as customer demand for lower prices and the payment of rent to traditional owners of the land on which the store is built. Questions such as 'if the stores are making a profit why do prices continue to be high?' are frequently asked. The land owners are aware that profits made by the store are paid back to the community and that they are entitled to a proportion of this money. However, in some cases this money does not make it to the traditional owners. These issues will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter but it is important to understand that although these problems exist and are very real for a number of people in the communities, many people are aware that the stores in the ALPA communities far surpass any others in Arnhem Land in terms of the employment of more staff than necessary to run the stores, the range of goods available, the frequency of store opening hours and the stores' desire to cater for the specific needs of Aboriginal people especially during big ceremonies.
Notes

1. A Health Department initiative was the colour coding of food as a means of educating people about the nutritional content of certain products. Each colour pertained to traditional bush tucker foods and food sold in the store. Blue represented 'spear' food (animal) — the protein group (meat). Orange was for 'coolamon' foods (roots, seeds, nuts) — carbohydrate (breads, flour, cereal). Green was 'dilly bag' food (leaves and fruits) — vitamins and minerals (fruit and vegetables).

2. Another competition was held in 1985 for school children who were asked to design a logo for ALPA. Joanne Wanabi of Gapuwiyak won this competition and received a colour television set (NT News, 29 May 1985).

3. In fact, the ADC had requested ALPA in early 1988 to become involved with the flailing Barula store. ALPA's response was one of resentment:

   It is too hard for ADC so they look to us to take that worry away. We must consider the growth and viability of ALPA ... We asked them [ADC] to join with us when we had our wholesale operation and they chose not to. At this present stage we should not take on any more worries for such a small return (AD/CC minutes, February 16 1988).
CHAPTER EIGHT

A CHANGE IN DIRECTION 1988–92

It is now a time of consolidation, time for a thinner and stronger A.L.P.A. to work together ... The present hard times in remote Aboriginal communities place more importance than ever on the need for members to use the association to build a dignified and self reliant future, not dependent on hand outs (AD/Harper, 1988 Annual Report).

This last chapter traces the past four years of ALPA's operations, including the departure of John Ford and his wife Margaret — two people who served the Association for over ten years. It also considers the change in direction for the Association under the leadership of Stuart McMillan and the challenges and prospects faced by ALPA during this period.

Exit Ford

At a 1988 Central Committee meeting both John and Margaret Ford formally submitted their resignations. ALPA director, Reverend Djiniyini, expressed his regret declaring, 'You have given love not just to the people in Arnhemland but a vision of loyalty to all Aboriginal people. Thankyou for that service' (AD/CC minutes, 11 March 1988). In the final few months of Ford's leadership, priority was given to the need to determine ALPA's future directions. Ford asked the directors, 'How do we increase our strength as far as the whole of the Territory is concerned? Do we want to grow, or do we want to stay as we are?' (AD/CC minutes, 16 February 1988). With this in mind the directors split into two groups to 'workshop' their ideas. Expansion of the organisation was favoured by both groups, although one group felt that ALPA should concentrate on expansion outside of Arnhem Land:

ALPA should look ahead to establish business not only in Arnhemland but where the money is. We must look seriously to training of yolnu in business management having in mind the future. We should promote ALPA in the Territory where people can know of our existence. Possibly we could buy something in Darwin. Also tourism is a possibility. We know we must make money to survive and business cannot run without money (AD/CC minutes, 16 February 1988).

ALPA's chairperson, George Rawsley, reminded the directors of the importance of retaining 'business trained people' within the Association until such time 'as some of your people have been business trained'. Rawsley stressed the need for the continued training of store workers but pointed out the necessity of training Aboriginal people to undertake administrative duties and positions within the Association (AD/CC minutes, 16 February 1988).

As is evidenced from the previous chapters, John Ford instigated grand schemes for the organisation believing that this would assist in the 'social and economic development of Aboriginal people'. He emphasised the need to fulfil ALPA's
'corporate goal', reiterating the importance of the words 'goals', 'opportunity' and 'strategy' to the directors. ALPA's goals were embodied in their newly devised five year plan:

The family enterprises are short-term plans to assist us in reaching our long term corporate goal of a large, Aboriginal-owned organisation ... The other side of the 5-year plan is the corporate plan, which is the plan to have an increasingly large business which is owned by yolngu, giving them income with which to further expand and use as they wish to further the development of Aboriginal people ... (AD/Special Directors meeting minutes, 3 March 1988).

The proposal to buy into the barge industry which serviced Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory was a means of finding a business which would fulfil ALPA's 'corporate goal'. The strategy was to join with two other businesses and buy out the VB Perkins barge company. The cost of this venture to ALPA would have been in the vicinity of $2.5 million giving them a one-third share in the company. It was agreed that owing to ALPA's past failure to secure government funding for any of their earlier major propositions it would be worthwhile to commission an 'expert' from Canberra to prepare the loan submission. This submission would then be presented to the Aboriginal Development Commission by the ALPA directors. ALPA's plans were thwarted when the owner of VB Perkins barge service decided that the company could overcome the financial difficulties it was experiencing and withdrew the business from the sales market.2

Consolidation under McMillan

The resignation of Ford from the group manager position signified the end of an era for ALPA.3 His replacement, Stuart McMillan, influenced a marked change in direction for the Association which saw its basis in 'consolidation'. Ford's grand schemes were abandoned in favour of smaller community based initiatives with the prime emphasis being on community development. This change in direction was as much a pragmatic decision as a philosophical one. The Association was not as profitable as it could potentially be due to a number of factors. Les Johnson, ALPA's accountant,4 believed that the reasons for this were the result of inconsistent store profits, higher employment costs through the creation of additional Yolngu jobs and that 'appropriations' over the last three years had exceeded annual profits.5 Terry West, the regional operations manager, reported to ALPA's 1988 Annual Meeting that all the stores were not operating profitably. West believed that this inconsistency was due largely to the lack of commitment shown by the manager, staff and the community as a whole to having a well run, profitable store (AD/West, 1988 Annual Report). The need to 'secure the stores and their relationship with the community' was therefore listed as a priority by Rawnsley at the 1988 Annual Meeting.

A means of improving or 'securing' the relationship between the store and the community was to hold separate meetings in each community to better inform people about ALPA's activities. Issues raised at these meetings included discussions about ALPA's pricing policies and the quality of goods, particularly fruit and vegetables, in the stores. The directors and McMillan endeavoured to explain how store prices were determined, which included discussions about the operational costs of running the stores, the freight charges, staff salaries and other hidden costs. In response to these
concerns the directors resolved to implement a 15% reduction on large goods such as fridges, televisions and video recorders and considered running store 'specials' for two weeks in every month. This proposition was conditional on negotiations with ALPA's suppliers.

Apart from these community meetings, ALPA introduced other measures to improve the Association's and the individual stores' profile. For example, local liaison officers were employed to enhance communication within the communities and also between central administration and each store.⁶
ALPA also adopted a policy geared towards providing more jobs for Aboriginal people which resulted in a 30% employment increase.\textsuperscript{7} In addition to improving communication, these measures plus the support of family enterprises and the promotion of senior Aboriginal people in ALPA management and administration, also sought to 'Aboriginalise' the Association (Harper 1988 Annual Report).

Another policy designed to improve the Association's relationship with the communities and to make the communities aware that they were the owners of the Association was the introduction of a 'dividend'. The 1988 Annual Meeting resolved that 15% of the stores' quarterly profits, previously paid into the community reserve, be paid into a special account as a 'dividend' for each community. If a particular store had not made a profit, an initial payment of $1,000 would be deposited into this new account. The Community Councils were responsible for the allocation of this money. There were to be no advances allowable and it was suggested by the group manager that a meeting be held with the communities when each cheque was handed over. At the Annual Meeting in August 1989 it was resolved that a 20% 'dividend', as opposed to the previously arranged 15%, be paid to each community and that a further 5% of the individual store profits be paid into a Rotating Community Reserve.\textsuperscript{8} In 1989 a total of $115,479 was paid back to the communities in dividends.
According to ALPA's human resources manager, Henry Harper, McMillan endeavoured to facilitate active and genuine participation by Aborigines in ALPA's operations. This was reflected by the handling of the ADC's treatment of Milingimbi Council's application for a loan for a new store building. Allegedly, a Field Officer from the Aboriginal Development Commission told the Milingimbi community that to acquire a loan would entail them withdrawing from ALPA. The loan agreement for Milingimbi store was to contain a clause which stated that in three years the store would be given back to the community. This proposal met with a familiar resentment, 'they [ADC] can't see that ALPA is already the community. They think that ALPA is a Balanda business. They need to look at our constitution and see that the power is with the people' (AD/Rawnsley, CC minutes, 19–20 April 1989). Aboriginal representatives from ALPA and other Milingimbi community members met with the ADC and expressed their dissatisfaction with the proposal, claiming that they wanted ALPA's continuing involvement in the store. The loan was subsequently processed and today Milingimbi has an excellent community store — arguably the best in Arnhem Land.

ALPA's program of consolidation appeared to be working. The 1988/89 financial year was ALPA's most outstanding to date with the stores recording significant achievements in their gross profit and Galiwin'ku store producing a record $3 million in sales (1989 Annual Report). In addition to this McMillan managed to cut the administration costs of the Association by half in his first year as group manager (Cunningham, pers. comm., 1992). Credit for the improvement in store profits was also given to the directors and the communities for their increased efforts in working together to solve any problems arising (McMillan, AM minutes, 23 August 1989, Galiwin'ku). ALPA's increased profitability meant that:

We can look forward now with enthusiasm to the coming year and see a growing together of new team members and a further development of a strong organisation, possibly the only one of its type in Australia, with the purpose of assisting the Aboriginal people to a greater degree of independence (AD/Rawnsley, 1989 Annual Report).

The Association was encouraged to look further afield for new business ventures while also seeking to establish more family enterprises and community oriented projects.

**Arunta Art Gallery**

Rawnsley's report to ALPA's 1988 Annual Meeting stressed that because of the demise of ALPA's wholesale operations the organisation would now have to wait for an opportunity to present itself for future business developments that would make ALPA 'part of the general commercial life of Australia, and contribute to the independence of the members in Arnhemland' (AD/Rawnsley, 1988 Annual Report). This opportunity arose in 1989 with the proposed purchase of the Arunta Art Gallery in Alice Springs. McMillan supported this initiative believing that it would be worthwhile to acquire other business interests which would 'empower A.L.P.A. to achieve its development goals'. The purchase of this Art Gallery would also provide an 'ideal platform' for ALPA to become involved in the marketing of Aboriginal art 'in
a location which is fast becoming the 'centre' for Aboriginal art in Australia (AD/McMillan, 1989 Annual Report). It also showed promise of being a lucrative venture that could enhance ALPA's public profile in this region and would give 'wider experience' to ALPA's directors as well as being an outlet for Arnhem Land art.

In April 1989, Rawnsley, McMillan and some ALPA directors travelled to Alice Springs to investigate the purchase of the Art Gallery. After discussions with the gallery's owners, ALPA resolved to negotiate the purchase of the gallery plus an adjoining bookshop for a sum not exceeding $250,000. The directors considered some of the negative aspects of this proposal: it would need a Balanda manager to manage the bookshop; ALPA was inexperienced in this kind of enterprise; and there would at first be a poor return on the capital (AD/CC minutes, 19–20 April 1989). In March 1990 ALPA representatives met with the Ngurratjuta Association in Alice Springs to discuss joint ownership of the Arunta Art Gallery, but by July 1990 the proposal was abandoned because of poor communications between the parties involved.

More family enterprises

ALPA concentrated their energies on increasing the number of family enterprises sponsored by the Association. By August 1988, ALPA had assisted with the establishment of seven family enterprises and it was thought that in the coming year the number of enterprises would double. The enterprises were Garrawurra Take-away, Marawirrku Fishing, Rrawubali Bus, Atu Store, Mapuru Store, Ben Garr's Fuel Depot and JMB Videos.11 The Enterprise Co-ordinator's report to the 1988 Annual Meeting recorded that Garrawurra Take-away had paid up to $55,000 in wages to family staff members since beginning its operations the previous year. Marawirrku Fishing was also considered a success with the family being able to pay off their boat in regular repayments. The bus service was recorded as not being very profitable as constant repairs to the bus, staff wages and other expenditure were not covered by the takings. The Enterprise Co-ordinator, Betty Greer, emphasised that:

This problem is not really anyone's fault it is simply not the sort of business which returns a lot of money, I think this is mainly due to the limited population on communities, rough roads which eat up tyres etc. (AD/Greer, 1988 Annual Report).

The bus service business had only made one repayment to ALPA; at that rate it was estimated it would take seven years to pay back the loan. The directors resolved to take back the bus from the owner/operator, Gaymuniny, and sell it.

Some problems arose in the communities concerning the family enterprises; it was alleged that family enterprises at Galiwin'ku attracted preference over enterprises in other communities. Other problems arose when enterprises were suggested that were not deemed appropriate by ALPA. A proposal to set up a clothing outlet at Gapuwiyak had been forwarded to ALPA who were not in favour of this project because it would take business away from the ALPA store. The directors stressed that ALPA needed to support enterprises which would not weaken the store as it was from the store profits that enterprises were able to be established (AD/CC minutes, 17 August 1988).
An additional problem with this kind of enterprise was that there would no longer be the need for a clothing section in the store which would necessitate two ALPA workers losing their jobs. The group manager reminded the directors that 'the aim of ALPA with the enterprises was to create more jobs for the people not taking them from one place and putting them in another place to work (AD/CC minutes, 23 November 1988). It was finally resolved that the directors speak to the family involved and explain that ALPA would not support that enterprise because of the above factors and that they should consider an alternative proposal.

Furthermore, McMillan expressed concern over the 'size and rate of development' of some of the enterprise activities. He suggested at the 1989 Annual Meeting that the enterprise scheme needed to be reviewed so that a future direction could be set which 'realistically meets the needs and requirements of our members' (AD/McMillan, 1989 Annual Report). Harper suggested that smaller family businesses were easier to operate and were working more efficiently than the larger ones. For this reason it was proposed that small businesses from people's homes be promoted in the future. The Galiwin'ku Training Centre's 1989 annual report recounted that some of the enterprises had:

experienced major problems due to pressure for credit or money, resulting in a lack of cash flow and the ability to pay accounts. Only when this problem has been met head on and rectified have the businesses picked up to become viable once more (AD/1989 Annual Report).
A report on the family enterprises in March 1991 detailed the outstanding debts accrued by a number of the businesses. Dangatanga from the Marrawirruki Fishing enterprise sent ALPA a letter claiming that he would have to return his boat because of lack of support from his family and because he was finding it difficult to keep up with the business. A more positive picture is presented of JMB Videos with the business trading by itself without assistance from ALPA.

In late 1991, a new enterprise proposal was put before the board of directors by Peter Gambung. This proposal was a transport/taxi service for Ramingining. His submission detailed the areas to be travelled and an estimation of the financial returns of such a business. The chairperson of Ramingining Council, Milurrurr, stated that:

Mr Gambung has the full support of the Ramingining Council in this matter and hopefully he will be able to arrange funding to assist him in this worthwhile enterprise ... If ALPA can assist Mr Gambung it would be of enormous benefit to the Ramingining Community as well as being a viable business proposition (AD/letter, Milurrurr to ALPA, received 28 November 1991).

This proposal as well as a revised proposal by ALPA director, Keith Djiniyini, to establish a take-away at Gapuwiyak were put before the board of directors in December 1991. The board of directors immediately resolved to support the taxi service after a short discussion between themselves and the applicants present at the meeting. Djiniyini's proposal was presented to the board complete with drawings from an architect and financial costings. It was resolved that a select committee further investigate the proposal as the sum Djiniyini had initially requested had grown from $25,000 to almost $100,000. At a June 1992 directors meeting in Kununurra, Djiniyini was allocated a loan of $95,000 to build a take-away at Galiwin'ku with the following stipulations: direct costs could only be taken from profits; surpluses were to be paid to ALPA on a monthly basis to offset the loan; and that ALPA reserved the right to audit the accounts of the business at any time. It was further resolved that if the business failed or if Djiniyini failed to make repayments, ALPA had the right to take control of the business until such time as the loan was fully repaid (AD/CC minutes, 9–10 June 1992). The taxi service and take-away service are still in the developmental stage with the transport enterprise being thwarted due to the lack of people within the business eligible to attain a 'd' class licence.

Apart from the support given to individual families in the formation of these business ventures, ALPA established initiatives designed to benefit the whole community. ALPA's commitment to its objective — the social and economic development of Aboriginal people — was the basis for these new initiatives.

**ALPA and 'community development'**

McMillan listed the strategic objectives for the 1990s as being:

- to continue to perform strongly;
- to provide an improved level of customer service;
- to develop truly aboriginal administrative structures; and
- to enhance community development (AD/McMillan, 1990 Annual Report).
Community oriented projects and initiatives such as the introduction of a 10% discount for any food purchases made for ceremonies and the establishment of special reserves such as the tertiary education reserve and the youth fund were introduced to fulfil these objectives. McMillan stressed the importance of developing these financial reserves:

If we assume that, ultimately, control comes down to the opportunity for Aboriginal people to make choices about their future and their children's future then ALPA strives to facilitate an environment through its business activities where its Aboriginal members can more readily grasp the options and make the choices — that is, development both social and economic ... ALPA perceives its education and training process as being much more than providing jobs in institutions and enterprises. We believe that through this process ALPA is empowering peoples and facilitating community development (AD/McMillan, 1990 Annual Report).

These new initiatives will be discussed in detail below.13

Tertiary education reserve

In 1990 the board established a tertiary education reserve of $20,000 to encourage and assist Aboriginal people who wished to undertake further study. The capital was to be kept intact at all times with the interest being available for the scholarships. By March 1991 the total amount allocated to this reserve reached $100,000. It was resolved that 'traditional people' from the five ALPA communities, regardless of where they were living, be eligible for the scholarship and that the scholarship would only be available to people involved in a 'recognised full-time course of study' which would result in a tradesman certificate or university degree (AD/CC minutes, 21 March 1991). By early 1992 this education reserve remained untouched. A resolution to better inform the communities of its existence and availability was made by the directors.

Nutrition policy

In recognition of the vital role that community stores play in the dietary intake of Aboriginal people, ALPA initiated meetings with the director and research staff of the Menzies School of Health Research to discuss nutrition education in Aboriginal communities — particularly a project underway at Minjilang coordinated by Annie Bonson and Dr Amanda Lee. The board felt that a commitment to a nutrition policy partially fulfilled the Associations prime objective:

our constitution objective is two fold, social and economic. Our directors believe that the investment of funds, skills and time in the area of nutrition education is an important social direction we should take (National Conference on Aboriginal Nutrition in Remote and Rural Communities, Alice Springs, 8–10 April 1991).

The ALPA board elected a committee to formulate a nutrition policy for ALPA and resolved to allocate $50,000 towards the joint nutrition program with the proviso that ALPA have the responsibility of administering this money.

The practical implementation of ALPA's nutrition policy was the installation of 'Good Food People' in each store. These people were employed to ensure that the store
promoted and stocked a range of healthy foods and to liaise with customers, health centres, schools, councils, and resource centres about ALPA's nutrition policy. A 50% freight subsidy on the price of fruit and vegetables was introduced to encourage people to buy more of these products. Air freight, although expensive, is the most efficient method of transporting fruit and vegetables to the communities. The barge which carries ALPA's 'dry goods' and 'bulk freezer lines' only delivers fortnightly and perishable goods such as fruit and vegetables, apart from having a relatively short 'shelf life', can often be damaged in transit. The freight subsidy meant that fruit and vegetables became cheaper and therefore more accessible to people on limited incomes.\textsuperscript{14}

A 'good food' workshop was held in Darwin for three days during February 1991. It was organised by dieticians from the Rural Health Department with assistance given by Betty Cunningham and Lori Katarski (ALPA's manager of Retail Operations and administrative officer respectively). The 'good food' person from each ALPA store and Northern Territory consultancy store attended this meeting with the workshop's objective being to assist the 'good food' workers in carrying out their duties within the stores. Nutritional education and practical demonstrations of the way in which 'healthy food' could be prepared and displayed in the stores was given. This was assisted by the distribution of 'sandwich kits' to each participant. Salad and meat sandwiches, hard boiled eggs and fruit juices are offered as an healthy alternative to meat pies, pasties and soft drink. A low cholesterol pastry base is currently being
developed to make popular take-away food items such as pasties and meat pies healthier. In February 1992 a 'good food' workshop was held in Halls Creek and attended by store staff and community members from Noonkanbah and Balgo Hills. A workshop was also held in October 1992 for ALPA staff members which was designed to assist them in assessing the success of the nutrition program by analysing the sales results from each particular department within the store and through stock order forms.

According to McMillan, the greatest barrier to the successful development and implementation of the nutrition program was the inconsistent attendance and performance of the 'good food workers' in the stores (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992). Another problem affecting the implementation of the program was that the 'good food' people, in accordance with traditional law, were in 'avoidance' relationships with some members of their communities. This meant that other people were responsible for disseminating information so that it could reach a larger proportion of the community. McMillan highlighted the need for the greater education of the 'good food' people anticipating that this would result in a better understanding of the importance of the nutrition program. Becoming more aware of the importance of this program would encourage the 'good food' workers to take their knowledge to other community groups such as the school and women's groups. While these problems were being addressed ALPA introduced a further freight discount (now equalling 100%) for fruit and vegetable purchases. This meant that ALPA would pay the full freight costs on fruit and vegetables delivered to the communities.

The Federal Health Department has recently allocated funding for further development of this project. A program like this can only be effective with enough resources, personnel and Aboriginal input, understanding and education to make it happen.

**Women's Committee**

In 1990 ALPA formed an Aboriginal Women's Committee which was coordinated by Betty Cunningham and Lori Katarsi. The committee was made up of two women from each ALPA community and was to meet at least four times a year. The lack of representation by women on the board of directors necessitated the formation of this committee. It was anticipated that this committee would be able to provide feedback between Aboriginal women, the stores and the Association. Two representatives were expected to report to the board of directors on any decisions or issues discussed by the committee.

The responsibility for the Nutrition Education Program and the Good Food Program was delegated to the Women's Committee. A major concern for this committee was the need to monitor the food intake of elderly people. In most communities younger generations look after the older but in some circumstances this was not happening. It was resolved to broach this matter with the Health Department in order to gain some ideas and recommendations.
The decision to stock paper bags and boxes rather than plastic bags for customers goods was recommended by the committee and letters were sent to each store advising them of this policy and in 1992 most of the communities were supplying paper carry bags for groceries. A managers conference resolved to suggest to the Women's Committee that the stocking of disposable nappies be discontinued because of problems relating to their disposal. The committee rejected this proposal and decided instead to petition the Councils in each community to install dog resistant garbage bins in the communities. The idea of providing a childminding service for working mothers was discussed in the belief that it would help the mothers, provide interesting activities for the children and provide employment for several women.

This committee is still in its early stages of development with two meetings being held so far. The communities have not decided who are going to be the official members of the committee; this is complicating its development process. The present lack of enthusiasm for this committee and for the implementation of the nutrition policy could be a result of the lack of resources and personnel devoted to establishing these initiatives at a community level. A 1992 suggestion to reform local store committees in each community may be a means of addressing these problems.

**Youth Fund**

In 1991 it was resolved by the ALPA directors that 1% of ALPA's net profit be allocated to a Youth Fund. Rawnslie, acknowledging the importance of youth as future facilitators of community development, said:

> It is now time for the Aboriginal leaders in each community to look wider than ALPA and to assess the strength of the community by the strength of the people who live there. By this I refer to the younger people who are going to have to learn to manage the community and carry the responsibilities for Aboriginal people in the future. The heart of the community is really the willingness and the energy coming from the young people within the community to learn and work and take responsibility (AD/Rawnslie, 1990 Annual Report).

Communities were to be notified of this youth fund and were instructed to approach ALPA with funding requests for sport and recreation programs. Funding requests were to be authorised and administered by the Community Council in each community. Incentives/awards of $200 were also offered to students who achieved well at school either academically or in another pursuit.

In 1992, $2,250 was allocated to Ramingining school to provide lights for the school's basketball court and ALPA considered a $7,750 request from Shepherdson College, Galiwin'ku, to fund a school excursion to Alice Springs. Milingimbi community also submitted a request for the partial funding of a school sports tour to New Zealand. Due to the Council being non-functional at this time, the school made a direct funding request to ALPA. The proposal was eventually abandoned by the Milingimbi community after attempts by Donald Nulupani (ALPA's Accounting Officer) to organise the funding request through the school and community leaders failed.
At ALPA's 1992 Annual Meeting, the board of directors resolved to set aside an additional $20,000 for the Youth Fund as well as $50,000 for the Enterprise Reserve bringing the balance of this fund up to $136,000.

'Dividends'

In 1990 ALPA recorded a 63.5% increase over the previous year's profit to record a new high of $846,228. This increase in profit resulted in the distribution of greater 'dividends' to the communities and a greater amount being paid into the rotating reserves. In 1990 the total amount paid back to the communities in the form of a 'dividend' was $129,157. As the amount of dividends paid to the communities increased so too did the problems associated with distributing these dividends. People in the communities began to question how much money each community was given and where this money was going. The directors felt that it should be left to the individual Councils (in charge of distributing this money) to devise ways of informing the communities about how this money was being utilised. It was proposed that some kind of notice or 'barometer' be displayed in each store for the community to witness the amount in 'dividends' distributed to each community (AD/CC minutes, July 1990).

ALPA's directors, as well as the Community Councils, were held accountable for the dissemination of information regarding the dividends. Some fairly confrontational questions were asked of the directors at an October 1991 meeting at which McMillan stressed that the dividend issue 'has to be tackled by the directors in an honest way':

- What has your community done with its money in the last three years?
- What do people understand of dividends?
- What is your concept of appropriate use of dividends?
- How do you see your role as director — power or service?
(AD/CC minutes, 8 October 1991).

The directors discussed this issue at length and decided that they should initiate consultations between the Councils, landowners and the rest of the community in order to reach some kind of resolution concerning the dissemination of information regarding the amount of, and way in which, dividends were distributed (AD/CC minutes, 8 October 1991). This issue has become one of the more contentious issues facing the Association today as community meetings held in all of the ALPA member communities in 1992 have shown. The dividend problem and other issues raised during these meetings will be discussed later in this chapter.

Training

During this four year period ALPA's training methodology was revised with changes made to the training programs. These changes eventuated because ALPA felt that their training programs were not as successful as they could be. Aboriginal people, although trained in most areas of store operation, were not employed as store managers. It was also thought that the training previously given did not take into account Aboriginal social or cultural structures. Although ALPA felt that their training methodology needed revising they were proud of their achievements in terms
of providing skills training for Aboriginal people. A sign of the credibility and acceptance of ALPA's training programs was in the Central Australian Aboriginal stores group, Anangu Winkiku Stores (AWS) purchasing, in March 1991, a licence to utilise ALPA's complete Storeworker Training Resources and Programs.  

Early in 1990, the Galiwin'ku store was once again used to trial a new concept in store operation. The position of 'team leaders' or 'department heads', who were to be responsible for individual departments within the store, was created. Team leaders would meet each week to discuss any matters which arose during the course of that week within their individual departments. David Djalangi, as operations manager for Eastern Arnhem Land, was to supervise the operation of this exercise, although a relief manager was to be based at Galiwin'ku to support Djalangi and help train the team leaders. ALPA regarded the introduction of this approach as 'another step forward':

We will have a store run by Yolngu people. With Galiwin'ku we are trying to find a way that Yolngu can run their own store without the stress that one person would have as the manager (AD/CC minutes, 15 March 1990).

Supervisors for each department are still in existence today and have accepted much of the responsibility for operating the stores. When managers meetings are in progress the stores are usually operated by the Aboriginal staff.

In September 1991 an ALPA store worker's workshop was held at Galiwin'ku. It was recognised that ALPA's original training programs had been modified from mainstream supermarket courses and that most of this training was controlled by Balanda with minimal Yolngu input. This workshop was recorded as being:

a step in the process of yolngu becoming the real owners of that training ... While balanda know lots about running shops they know little about the social and cultural things that cannot be separated when considering yolngu owned and operated businesses (AD/Cunningham & Harper 1991).

The workshop was centred on the 'participatory action research' methodology. It was designed with assistance from Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) lecturers and students associated with this training methodology, the Homeland Centre School Curriculum development centre at Yirrkala and Leon White, an educator trained in participative action research methodology. The Darwin training officer, Henry Harper, described this 'participative' training approach as consisting of 'on-going negotiations between the manager, training staff, store staff, directors or other community representatives to facilitate reaching mutually agreed goals'.

The objectives of the September workshop were: to review ALPA's training processes utilising the experience of ALPA staff; to make recommendations about training and provide information for a larger review process; and finally to devise a new planning strategy for ALPA store training. Nine people, the majority being women from the ALPA member communities, attended this workshop. The workshop began with discussions about what each participant believed they would gain from the workshop, relating their aims back to their own store situation. One of the main issues arising from this discussion concerned Yolngu staff knowing how to do many jobs but Balanda staff not giving them the opportunity to practise these skills. Past training
ideas were also discussed in order to discover what Yolngu considered an appropriate training methodology. Aspects of store training that were criticised by the participants concerned:

- the lack of courses run by ALPA and the lack of training supervisors to train staff;
- the need for Training Centres in other communities;
- the impossibility of store managers training people and working at the same time;
- insufficient staff to fill in for people being trained; and
- the Galiwin'ku Training Centre being too isolated.

Other issues discussed included the merit of in-store training; the need for Yolngu storeworkers to work together and practise the variety of skills learnt; the importance of asking questions and listening to instructions and talking to other staff members; and finally, the need to being given more responsibility within the store. Further ideas for training included the need to learn mathematics, management skills, and other aspects of store operation such as ordering and stock control. Attention was given to sharing ideas and talking with the community especially in regards to how Yolngu store management tied in with Aboriginal self-determination.

A training curriculum was then devised by both the students and the teacher through 'curriculum negotiation' which recognised that 'both the teacher and the learner have valuable information to offer when making a plan' and 'when everybody owns a training program it has a much better chance of working' (AD/Cunningham & Harper 1991, 17). The 'action research' methodology was discussed and described as 'a process for helping people evaluate how things are going' (AD/Cunningham & Harper 1991).

In early 1992 an adult educator, Harvey Creswell, was appointed by ALPA to assist with the implementation of this plan and was based at Galiwin'ku. Harper recognised that the participatory training approach would take a couple of years to produce results but accepted that this was the nature of that particular methodology — 'ALPA doesn't know what it needs to know' in terms of more successful training and the direction for future training will evolve as the research proceeds (Harper, pers. comm., 1992). The need to incorporate Aboriginal aspirations and Aboriginal culture into ALPA's training programs as a means of making them more successful (the interpretation of successful being to have Aboriginal people in control of the stores and the training provided within the stores) was also felt within the overall structure of the Association.

**Future directions**

At a directors meeting in July 1991 Rawnsley spoke of the fact that ALPA was approaching its 20th year which was a cause for celebration but also a time for reflection on where ALPA had been and where it was going:

There is no other organisation which is run by Aboriginals with the success of ALPA. We are proud of what we have achieved and this is time to try and gain a picture of the next 20 years
and what's going to be here when we aren't. We must plan now for the future. Perhaps we need to change to continue to fit in with the rest of Australia to enable us to keep being a success? (AD/Rawnsley, CC minutes, July 1991).

In December 1991 the 'Rules for Directors' banner was removed from the wall of ALPA's boardroom as a symbol of the need to search for new directions. Rawnsley suggested that it was now time for the directors to:

work together to build a new understanding ... We may make up a new roll to put up when the Directors have decided on how [the] Directors should operate. We will not grow strong unless we are honest with each other. No 'sugar talk', we have to talk straight with each other (AD/Rawnsley, CC minutes, 5 December 1991).

A workshop, with the main objective of determining the way in which Yolngu culture could be incorporated into the mechanisms of ALPA's board of directors, was held during this meeting:

Why do we see the same faces at the Board meetings? Is this the right way? ... How can we use the Yolngu structure to improve the ALPA Board so that it benefits the whole community (AD/CC minutes, 5 December 1991).

In March 1992 more questions relating to this issue were raised:

What do we want ALPA to do? Do we want to continue as we are making profit from the stores year after year?
Do we want to expand into other businesses?
Do we want to be involved more in the community to teach the local people about business? (AD/CC minutes, 4-5 March 1992).

One method of teaching local people about business and instigating Aboriginal participation in community development was the decision to divert ALPA funds to employ Aboriginal work teams to construct a house in each of the five ALPA member communities over a period of five years. This idea is still developing but it was thought that ALPA could employ building teams to construct duplexes which would allow the ALPA store manager to live in one half and the other half be rented out.

By 1992 ALPA was commercially successful with the stores generally operating profitably and stocking a broad range of merchandise at comparatively reasonable prices. Apart from this, ALPA was able to provide employment and training for a number of people in each community; their management and accounting systems were operating efficiently; they were able to give back a substantial proportion of the stores' profits to the communities in grants to Councils; various programs and projects had been instigated (some more successfully than others); the directors were having a significant impact on policy decisions; and ALPA's training programs were nationally accredited.

For ALPA this was not enough. At a grassroots level, ALPA was not always recognised or appreciated as being an Aboriginal organisation working with and for Aboriginal people. Community meetings were held in June 1992 in order to address this problem. These community meetings, held between a full board of ALPA directors and representatives from each community within their own communities, reiterated many issues that the Association has been grappling with for a number of years.
Table 6. Net assets of ALPA 1972–1992

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>270,253</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>986,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>517,525</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1,066,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1,212,326&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1,234,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>84,981&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1,180,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>179,074</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1,117,298</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>314,608</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1,015,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>555,171</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1,382,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>758,277</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2,021,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>914,205</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2,987,963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>1,144,870</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3,449,236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> It is difficult to determine the reasons for such a large jump in assets from the previous year but it may pertain to ALPA's and the Church's confused finances at this stage.<br><br><sup>b</sup> ALPA wholesale not included.<br><br><i>Source: AD/ALPA Financial Statements 1972–92<sup>16</sup></i>

The issues discussed concerned the role of the Church in ALPA, the distribution of dividends, ALPA's pricing policies, lease payments to traditional owners, and membership and ownership of the Association. It is worth a closer examination of these issues as ALPA's ability to deal with the questions that these issues raise will have a significant impact on the Association's future.

The 1992 community meetings

Dividends

The dispersal of store profits is probably one of the more problematical areas of store operation and management. This is an issue which the ALPA stores and every other store or enterprise in Aboriginal communities have to deal with. It becomes even more problematical for stores like those in the ALPA group which have become lucrative enterprises.

Commercially successful stores are seen to be the generators of community income for community needs. When up to 90% of the community income is paid into the store, problems arise if it is interpreted that only a few people actually benefit from this enterprise. The organisation or people operating this enterprise will subsequently come under intense criticism.
Plate 30. Central Committee meeting, Milingimbi 1992
Source: S Wells

Table 7. Payment of dividends 1988–92

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minjilang</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7,473</td>
<td>6,603</td>
<td>7,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galiwin'ku</td>
<td>80,435</td>
<td>41,486</td>
<td>44,246</td>
<td>43,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gapuwiya'k</td>
<td>2,532</td>
<td>26,125</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>17,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milingimbi</td>
<td>32,512</td>
<td>33,704</td>
<td>46,616</td>
<td>41,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramingining</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>20,369</td>
<td>54,036</td>
<td>47,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115,479</td>
<td>129,157</td>
<td>187,501</td>
<td>156,413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AD/ALPA Financial Statements 1972–92

In many cases, the store is the only independent economic enterprise in the community and, because of this independence, can be used as a means to enhance the political status and power of a particular family, clan or individual within the
community. Unlike many government financed enterprises, the stores which are owned by the communities or by a private organisation cannot be held 'accountable' for the allocation/distribution of any finances arising from the business. ALPA's directors have been challenged time and again with the responsibility of the distribution of this dividend but they too are affected by the political workings of the communities. It is fairly unrealistic to expect that any profit arising from the business will not be utilised by a small number of people (which is then distributed to their families) who feel that they have some 'right' to these resources.

One answer to the problem could lie in a reconsideration of which body best represents the interests of the broader community, although this is an extremely difficult question which is expected to be resolved in a 'socially and politically complex environment' (Ellanna et al 1988, 24). Community Councils have been in charge of distributing this money. It is difficult for them to specify where this money has been spent as it is often used to supplement the inadequate funding allocated to the Councils as local government bodies.

Plate 31. Keith Djiniyini addressing a community meeting at Gapuwiyak 1992
Source: S Wells
It may be worthwhile for ALPA to consider the re-establishment of a previous concept — the local store committee. This committee could consist of the chairperson and ALPA directors from the community, traditional owners and other representatives from the community in which the local committee has been established and would be responsible for administering an agreed part of the store profits (dividends) and making any policy decisions in regard to their stores. In addition to this the local store committee could be seen as a more accessible body to which people could take their grievances as many feel that ALPA's Darwin administration is too remote.

Another solution lies in the question of whether it is necessary for the stores to operate on a profit margin which allows them these large dividends. If the community as a whole was to benefit from these profits why not allow them to do so in the form of reduced prices for store goods which would in effect abrogate the practice of allocating a dividend based on the store's profits? There are many pros and cons to this argument which ALPA has acknowledged. These include that ALPA's profit margin — which is not excessively high — allows the stores to support each other in times of financial difficulties. This may have been true in the past but ALPA has established financial reserves which would enable them to deal with this problem if it arises in the future. However, reducing prices rather than allocating a dividend could affect other uses of the dividend money such as financial support for families during ceremonies and funerals. This problem could be solved by establishing a funeral fund or a ceremony fund administered by the local store committee.

Although the dispute over dividend distribution is a serious one, some people within the Association believe that this debate has had a positive affect on the Association because it challenges ALPA's established 'networks' in each community. One ALPA worker contends that it has forced Aboriginal people to stop believing that only certain people have access to employment in the store, can be an ALPA director, can affect store policy or have a say in dividend distribution. People are beginning to question the stores and the Association:

what's happening over the dividends in the last 18 months has generated more debate than all the videos and brochures and visits and everything I've done since I've worked for ALPA [since 1978] (Harper, pers. comm., 31 May 1992).

According to Harper the problem with this debate is that it is only happening amongst the 'heavies' in the community, although he does believe that the debate must start somewhere and that already there is a greater distribution of the dividend money among people who are being incorporated into the 'structure' than previously.

In ALPA's case this issue needs to be resolved because of the commitment to its 'social and economic development of Aboriginal people' objective; because of its taxation status; and because ALPA perceives that the only way the store will not fail in the future under Aboriginal management, is if the whole community is aware that the store is theirs with its success completely dependent on them. This last point or expectation has been reiterated to the storeworkers and communities over the last ten years but will continue to be a hollow prospect if the broader community discerns that the proceeds of their efforts go to a select group and do not benefit the community as a whole.
Pricing

ALPA's pricing policy is an especially important issue at a broad based community level. The Association has interpreted complaints about prices to be founded on a general lack of knowledge in the community about the way in which prices for goods are determined, how the goods arrive at the store and who actually pays for them. A question which is intrinsically related to this lack of knowledge is 'what happens to all the money that goes into the store?' ALPA has attempted to educate both the communities and storeworkers about this issue using previously discussed methods such as the production of booklets and the screening of videos, community workshops, and visits to Darwin, Canberra and other areas in Australia in order to develop an understanding of both the 'money cycle' and the 'food cycle'. The need for this kind of education or dissemination of information was highlighted by Young (1984):

While storeworker training must be a major factor in enhancing Aboriginalisation of the store's role in the community, extending basic information among the customers, whether they are members of a store committee, councillors or merely residents, is also important. The need for this type of community education is much greater for Aborigines than Europeans because Aborigines in remote communities have only come in contact with conventional retail stores in the last couple of decades, and still have difficulty in understanding the underlying structure of the service ... Many Europeans still assume that Aborigines do not want to know about the hidden parts of the operation — the routine ordering and costing systems, the book-keeping and the requirements of accountants and auditors. They also assume that there is no need for customers to know where products come from, and to learn how to select goods for specific reasons such as price differences. Instead they feel that it is better to present people with a 'fait accompli', a service devised and planned by Europeans with Aboriginal welfare in mind, but without their participation in decision-making. This is yet another example of attitudes which have survived from earlier predominantly paternalistic periods of administration (Young 1984, 117).

ALPA, to some extent, is an exception to this general rule and has felt it essential to educate both storeworkers and communities about these issues, believing that an explanation of the way in which prices are determined is much more important than what the prices actually are:

The Aboriginal customer will pay almost anything for something they want. Conversely if they do not want something you cannot give it away. A recent example in one of our shops was a table of dresses to clear at $2.00 each, without one sale — this would never happen in the urban centres of Australia (McMillan 1991b).18

At each community meeting the directors endeavoured to explain how ALPA calculated the prices in the stores. This involved a discussion of freight charges, wages and the establishment of various funds designed to assist Aboriginal people in these communities. A can of soft drink was utilised in order to show the distribution of the money paid for that one can of drink. ALPA's prices are not exorbitant as is the case in some other Aboriginal community stores. Harper relates that people question the prices at Woolworths, Nhulunbuy (where the prices are lower due to NABALCO subsidies), and maintains that, as in a non-Aboriginal society, the store is a place for people to vent their frustrations — especially if people are trying to subsist on low income levels. In addition to this, ALPA's head office does not believe that lowering ALPA's store profit margins would result in much lower prices (McMillan, Harper, pers. comm., 1992).
It has been suggested that shopping bills could be greatly reduced if Aboriginal people did not have such strong brand loyalty. According to ALPA, 'Homebrand', 'Black and Gold', and 'No-name' products do not sell in Aboriginal communities. This could be a repercussion of the mission era where select brands were adhered to and it could have something to do with the extent of major brand advertising on television — a commodity that Aboriginal people have had increasing access to over a very short period of time. Advertising by retail chains such as Woolworths, Coles and other large retail organisations also makes people question the prices they pay for goods in the community stores. ALPA has endeavoured to 'run specials' or discounts on some of their produce. Previous attempts at this were not effective because it made people feel that Balanda were in control of the prices and could raise or lower them at whim (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992). For ALPA's twentieth birthday celebrations the stores carried specials on many of the fast selling lines. ALPA may be moving back to this concept of having 'specials' as people, through advertising, are becoming more aware of the concept of 'specials'.

Aboriginal management?

In the past ALPA has maintained that Aboriginal store management is a priority of the Association. A 1984 copy of ALPA News ran the following story on John Byrne, a retail consultant at Daly River and Bathurst Island. The report read:

He [Byrnes] says too many Europeans stick with old ideas about Aboriginal people ... They talk about Aborigines as 'not ready yet' or insist that progress towards management must be based on moving slowly ... Some people still insist that Aboriginal people 'don't want management responsibility' or that 'relatives won't let them succeed' and often, that they are 'not educated' ... Mr Byrne has strong views on what management really is, and a total belief that Aboriginal people can, and should, manage their own stores and hold other executive positions (AD/ALPA News, February 1984).

Evans, ASTS manager, also highlighted the need for Aboriginal store managers:

Over many years, Aboriginal community stores have suffered financial disaster. The causes of these disasters have been many and varied, but in most cases, the people in the community have not understood either the nature of the problem, or how to deal with it. The store has provided their basic needs, but in many cases, Aboriginal people have felt they have been used and ripped-off by the store, particularly via its management ... The response to this has been to place Aboriginal people into positions of 'watching' European managers, or of throwing these people out, and replacing them with their own people ... Without training or experience in store management, the collapse of many stores operated in this way, have survived only through the assistance of D.A.A. or A.D.C. bailing them out each year ... No serious attempt has been made to meet the need of Aboriginal store managers until now (AD/Evans, Trainee Store Manager Course Outline, 10 February 1984).

Various training programs were devised to meet this objective but have not been successful. The support manager/Aboriginal trainee manager concept is no longer in place, although the Aboriginal people previously trained for this position usually occupy the second most responsible position in the store — the supervisor. In retrospect, Henry Harper, ALPA human resource manager, believes that the failure of this management concept highlighted the fact that skills/vocational training of Yolgu
was not enough. The Aboriginal trainee managers selected to do the job were not culturally appropriate and consequently each community would not recognise this person as having any authority within the store.

When someone participates in a ceremony and learns new skills and stories ... they come out of that ceremony [and] the community recognises them as adults. [W]hat store training has done and all other training for that matter ... its put people in the ceremony, given them the training but when they've come out the society hasn't given them the power to do the job ... With the management programs we thought well, OK, this person knows what to do ... you've been through this ceremony now we'll hand you the keys or we'll give you authority [but] what happened is the person's social and cultural obligations far outweighed [any other obligations] ...

In many cases, the support manager appointed to assist the trainee manager was not able to surrender much responsibility and authority to Yolngu trainee managers because of community politics. The politics of a community includes the interaction between the Aboriginal Community Council and outside bodies such as the Land Councils and representatives from government departments concerned with service delivery to Aboriginal communities. It also concerns non-Aboriginal community residents with conflicting philosophies imparting different messages to Aboriginal people, traditional hierarchical structures, and hostilities between different clan or family groups. (In a large community such as Galiwin'ku there are approximately twenty different clan groupings.) The directors are largely responsible for bridging this gap but as Ellanna et al (1988, 33) note:

Even strong and experienced leaders will have a monumental task in maintaining themselves and making councils work as instruments for the generation, collection and refinement of local opinion about the 'collective' or 'public' business of the community and for maintaining community commitment to decisions once they have been taken. The sense of community is not only very weak, but the mechanisms for the identification and discussion of matters of public business and the generation of a community (or even a majority) opinion about them have never been developed.

According to some ALPA staff, community members undermined the authority of the trainee managers by interacting with the Balanda support manager rather than the Yolngu trainee manager thereby placing the Balanda manager in a 'no-win' situation (Cunningham, pers. comm., 1992). In addition to this problem, McMillan believes many of the staff actually resented Aboriginal store managers:

[T]hey were rejected by their own staff in a lot of cases because they weren't doing anything, just holding the keys ... they became mala leaders overnight and they weren't mala leaders ... They saw themselves as head of this particular ceremony ... They were boys essentially and the rest of the community saw them as boys and they couldn't deal with them as managers ... In a sense this urgency to have Aboriginal management is not fair to them, it's not fair to good people ... (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992).

Independent studies recognise the difficulties in recruiting Aboriginal management staff because of the conflict with traditional power structures:

Since many of those involved in the financial and management sides of enterprise operation are younger, more highly educated members of the community it follows that their authority may frequently be overruled by their older kin, and they may feel obliged to hand on benefits to the detriment of the commercial side of the business (Ellanna et al 1988, 60).
This problem also occurs at the general storeworker level:

Young women are particularly vulnerable in this way, both because of age and gender. Loss of stock in Aboriginal retail stores, where most check-out operators are young women, can be partly attributed to older men taking advantage of their powerful positions in the community (Elianna et al 1988, 60).

ALPA has developed a solution to this problem at the checkout level through the introduction of a system called 'family law'. At the request of the operator or because the manager feels that it is appropriate, the operator is removed from the checkout and given other duties while the operator's family is in the store.21

The question of non-Aboriginal management of Aboriginal enterprises is a highly controversial issue for both Aborigines and non-Aborigines.22 During recent community visits the question of Aboriginal store management was raised on a number of occasions — usually by people who have been working in the stores for a number of years and had been trained in all facets of store operation. There are mixed feelings about Aborigines assuming the role of the manager in the store. Younger people are generally eager for this to happen while some older people seem content to have a Balanda working with or for them. The generation of Aboriginal people in communities in Arnhem Land who would be deemed the most 'culturally appropriate' to take on this position grew up and were educated under a fairly strict mission system. In most cases it was the missionaries who ran the store, who ran the projects on the settlements and who had the authority to give orders. Trigger (1992, 223) asserts that:

Aboriginal people have been enmeshed within a pattern of consumption of commodities and services that have come to be regarded as essential. And the treadmill of consumption, with its experienced immediacy of material needs, is important in understanding the development of Aboriginal consciousness. As White staff have historically organised the ongoing provision of commodities and services, realistic alternatives to the system of paternalistic White authority were not easily framed within Aboriginal consciousness.

McMillan is no longer sure that Aboriginal store management is the 'appropriate structure' for the stores or for the Association as a whole:

I'm not sure that the appropriate structure is just replacing the manager with an Aboriginal manager ... I'm not sure that that's appropriate for Aboriginal people ... If you read all the papers, education papers that have been written ... it says ... develop this authentic Aboriginal administrative style and I hope that's what ALPA has been doing in the last few years and it's trying to achieve ... and that mightn't be just replacing white people with the black people. It's still their organisation, they still control it, they're still involved in it ... It's still theirs while it's here. There's not much point in putting people in positions that they fail in and it's not much point for the organisation to fail if it's going to be anything for them ... (McMillan, pers. comm., 1992).

Apart from these considerations it is not clear whether many Aboriginal people would actually want to take on this position in the first place, although the preponderance of Aboriginal people establishing small scale ventures such as shops dealing mainly with tobacco, soft drinks and other 'take-away' merchandise and the enthusiasm for family enterprises seems to indicate otherwise.23
Another factor which affects the transition to Aboriginal store management concerns the training of the Aboriginal person and the support given to this training by the non-Aboriginal store manager. Non-Aboriginal store managers often do not have the inclination, time or skills to properly train Aboriginal people in store management. Apart from accepting the notion of 'working yourself out of a job' so that the Aboriginal store manager can take over, the store manager's major concern (reinforced by regular stock takes, audits and a budgeted store profit percentage margin) is making sure that the store is operating as efficiently and profitably as possible. Consequently, store managers lack time to further train the trainee and are unable to hand over responsibility because of the pressure on them to run the store as efficiently as possible. ALPA's future training programs may address these issues and Aboriginal management could have a future. With ALPA's 'systems' so firmly in place assisted by a detailed store operations manual and with much of the store operation actually being conducted in ALPA's Central Office, it may be possible that Aboriginal people could be placed in some kind of career structure within the Association. These 'systems' that ALPA has established provide Aboriginal managers with an 'outer' if that is what is required in facing family pressure. By deferring to an organisation based in Darwin it may seem harder for community residents to put pressure on the managers. On the other hand this centralisation of much of the store operation could actually be what is hindering the success of Aboriginal people in understanding all aspects of store operation.

If the notion that Aboriginal people cannot manage stores (when they've been managing complex social, political and economic ceremonies for thousands of years) is perpetuated time and again it will become an overriding assumption. It denies that Aboriginal culture is dynamic and will either change or adapt these enterprises to suit their own specific needs and cultural groupings while maintaining their viability or that they can run a European enterprise in parallel with their own socio-economic system.

Leases for traditional owners

Another area causing considerable concern to ALPA is the payment of land leases to traditional owners. This issue has affected the relationship between the Association and the communities where it has not been satisfactorily resolved. The need for the payment of rent for the store building and leases for the land which the store building is on was raised at the 1984 Annual Meeting:

A.L.P.A. is 'the people', and A.L.P.A. is running the store for the people, so that if the Council decides that rent should be paid, it will be. Traditional landowners, by the law, are entitled to some rent, and this must be fixed once and for all, so that everyone is happy with what is happening. We have talked with NLC on what is a fair rent to pay. This committee must try and work out a plan that is fair to A.L.P.A. ... there [are] a number of skills that Aboriginal people have which Balanda do not have, and deciding on rent to landowners is one of those skills (AD/minutes, 1984 Annual Meeting).

Rawnsley reminded the Central Committee that in determining an appropriate amount of rent, the money would come 'from the profits of the store ... it comes from the prices that people pay in the store' (AD/minutes, 1984 Annual Meeting). This meeting
resolved that rent be paid to traditional owners (for the land) and the Council (as owners of the store building) and would be distributed by each Community Council. The directors questioned the reasons for the Church not handing over some of the store buildings to the Councils and resolved to write a letter to the Property Board of the Church requesting that the buildings be transferred from the Church to the councils.

At ALPA's 1985 Annual Meeting mention was once again made of the need for formal lease agreements with the traditional owners because the Northern Land Council had issued ALPA a letter insisting that this be done. It was resolved that ALPA wait to receive the leases from the Northern Land Council and that 'we accept what the Council accepts for the traditional owners' (AD/minutes, 1985 Annual Meeting). Although ALPA had agreed to pay rent for the stores and land (and was paying this in most cases), it appears that formal lease or sub-lease agreements were never arranged.

In 1990, after consultation with traditional owners, the board devised a new system of lease payments which took into account the landowners' 'desire to see some equity in payments' and ALPA's concern over 'the relative size of communities and the business ability to pay' (AD/1990 Annual Report). Traditional owners would now be paid a base amount of $3,000 per annum plus 1% of the stores profits. Lease payments would be made quarterly, along with the dividend allocated to each community. ALPA Darwin would deposit a cheque into the same account as the dividend money which placed the Councils in charge of distributing this money to the traditional owners. This method of payment became the accepted practice because ALPA felt that the Community Councils were more informed about traditional land ownership in these areas. Unfortunately it has not been successful in every community.24

ALPA has been honouring its lease agreements but in some cases the money does not reach the traditional owners. Community Councils, in charge of distributing this money, are placed in an awkward position. They are trying to administer these communities on limited budgets and any incoming money is readily put to use. In addition to this, there is a conflict in some communities as to whose land the store is actually on. This issue could best be resolved by initiating discussions with the Northern Land Council, drawing up formal leases and making direct payments to the traditional owners. Rent for the store is a different issue. In the ALPA member communities the Council (which owns the store) has its rent payments paid into a special account. If the store has been built with the assistance of a government loan, this money is automatically debited from the bank account in order to pay off that loan.

Other issues put before the directors at these meetings included the role of the Church in ALPA, the growing prevalence of store 'curses' and membership/ownership of the Association. Some people were confused over whether the Church had any influence in the operations of the Association. The official ALPA position is that the Church no longer has formal ties with the Association but that the 'spirit of the Church' remains within ALPA. This was not criticised and is not necessarily a problem for the
workings of the Association. People merely wanted to know what the involvement was — especially in regards to any payments made to the Church. The issue of store 'curses' and membership/ownership of the Association is far more complex.

'Cursing' the store

In November 1988 the problem of 'cursing' a store was recognised — 'Young people are playing with old laws. Young people are using curses on the store. Law says "only those with white hair can swear", not young people' (AD/CC minutes, 23 November 1988). The directors resolved to confront this issue in each community by talking with the elders and finding a solution to this problem using the 'old law'. It appears that this issue was not resolved as the situation with curses, in some communities, is deteriorating. To 'curse' something means that whatever has been cursed is taboo. If the store has been cursed it is often closed down until the curse has been lifted. Traditionally the person who has cursed remained anonymous and it was the place of the elders to lift the curse. Recently, the practice of 'cursing' has been abused with younger people cursing such things as the store out of frustration. The system is abused because the young people cursing do not have the traditional knowledge or power to do this. If this is the case and the curser is identified it is sometimes ignored. However, the elders, who respect the curse out of uncertainty, no longer feel capable of lifting the curse. ALPA's directors believed that the elders felt that traditional law was no longer effective and they therefore needed to devise a new solution to this problem. A meeting was arranged between the Northern Territory's Department of Law and ALPA representatives in order to discuss possible solutions which are currently being formulated.

This is a very superficial account of the practice of cursing. Cursing occurs differently in every community and within every clan grouping. It is almost impossible to generalise and therefore solutions have to be worked out in relation to each different situation. If this matter is to be taken seriously it might mean that ALPA will have to employ an applied anthropologist to assist in working out the best possible solution. This person could also assist in other areas such as leases for traditional owners, questions concerning 'rights' to involvement within the Association and determining which people would be the most appropriate store managers.

Membership

During the 1992 community meetings the directors endeavoured to convey to the people present that ALPA was their organisation working for them. This was done by explaining that the people in the communities were all members of the Association and therefore could have some input to the Association. ALPA's membership records had not been updated since the early 1980s and it was stressed that people in the communities sign up for membership to update these records.

Currently, membership of the Association is open to all persons residing in an Aboriginal community and any person eligible for membership who signifies a desire to be a member or who is nominated by the Community Council (ALPA Rules, 1992).
These provisions entitle Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to be members of the Association. Membership can be confused with ownership. ALPA is registered as an incorporated Association rather than a company. If it was a company, people would be allocated shares which would attract returns/dividends based on their financial input. As an association there is not a formal ownership structure which means there are no provisions for separate categories of shareholders or owners. ALPA documentation states that ALPA is owned by the Yolngu residents of Minjilang, Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwin'ku and Gapuwiya yet its membership is open to both Balanda and Yolngu. This issue could prove problematical in the future and needs to be resolved.

Provisions in ALPA's Constitution for the termination of the Association are also a problem given these factors. Are all the communities equal owners of the Association and if so are they all entitled to an equal share of any profits arising from the dissolution of ALPA? Galiwin'ku store has a far greater profit making capacity than most of the other stores. Would this entitle them to a larger proportion of the rebate? These issues of membership and ownership, the distribution of dividends and the payment of leases have only become a difficult issue since ALPA has become a lucrative enterprise. ALPA has too many assets and investments for these issues to remain unresolved.

Apart from any legal implications that could arise from the confusions over ownership and membership of the Association, ALPA could actually benefit from a clarification of these issues. If Aboriginal people understand that they are owners of the Association 'humbug' may be cut down substantially, pilfering could decrease and both storeworkers and community members may take on more responsibility for the store. Most people in the communities would realise that the store building is owned by the Community Council of a particular community yet many are unaware of the ramifications of membership and ownership of the Association. This is easier said than done.

For a number of years and through many different approaches ALPA has endeavoured to make community residents aware of the fact that they are the owners of ALPA and that the Association is an Aboriginal organisation working for them. For example, a booklet designed by the Store Training School attempted to make people aware of what the implications of ownership and membership were:

Who is ALPA? ALPA is not a person. ALPA is a group of people. It is a very large group of people, many thousands ... They are the people who live in communities where there is an ALPA store. The people who live in the community are allowed to become members of ALPA ... Each year ALPA gets bigger, and it is harder to see how it works ... the members of ALPA have the real power in ALPA. They are the ones who give the authority. Everyone who is a member of ALPA has a say in how ALPA works, and what it does ... ALPA is a non-profit business. This means that it does not try and build a big bank account every year. The money that ALPA has left each year, is used to help Aboriginal people in the communities where there are stores (AD/ASTS Booklet 1984).

The payment of dividends, the employment of surplus Aboriginal staff, community meetings and workshops, the emotional and economic support given during ceremonies, the Family Enterprise Scheme, the adoption of a nutrition policy and the establishment of financial reserves designed to assist Aboriginal sporting or academic
pursuits have also been initiatives introduced to make the communities aware that ALPA is an Aboriginal organisation working for the greater benefit of Aboriginal people. In addition to this, the organisational structure of the Association as perceived by ALPA in its 1992 Annual Report (see Figure 5) appears to cater for community needs, desires and input to the policy decision making process.

Figure 5. Organisational relationships defined by ALPA, 1992
Source: Arnhem Land Progress Association 1992 Annual Report
However, attempts to make community residents aware that they all, theoretically, control the Association and that ALPA is working for Aboriginal people have not been entirely successful. It could be a legacy of the way in which stores were established in the first place. Although well intentioned, the stores were set up as a non-Aboriginal enterprise by non-Aboriginal people. Another problem relates to the Association’s administrative centre which is in Darwin and therefore isolated from the communities in which it works. Control of the Association and to some extent the stores is not localised and therefore makes the Association as a whole inaccessible to Aboriginal people.25 A means of overcoming this is to have directors and Annual Meetings in the communities. However, some directors prefer the meetings to be held in Darwin because they are not then distracted by community or family business and because they like coming into town occasionally. Community residents are therefore not aware of the level of Aboriginal input to these meetings and perceive that ALPA is still run by Balanda from Darwin. The fact that ALPA has retained a non-Aboriginal chairperson who lives in Adelaide could also be a factor which makes the Association isolated from Aboriginal people. The directors have debated the question of whether the Association needs to retain a Balanda chairperson and have decided that Rawnseley should remain until a Yolngu has been adequately trained to assume this position. Donald Nulupani, ALPA’s accounting officer, has recently been appointed to the position of understudy chairperson. The ALPA directors know that they have a significant input to meetings and Association policy but community members do not know this.

Another theory as to why the Association is not broadly accepted at a community level has been suggested by a long-term staff member. Harper believes that there is a perception among Aboriginal people that they do not have the right to speak for or control resources, be it a store, land or another enterprise, if they do not have traditional rights/ownership to it (Harper, pers. comm., 1992). Harper believes that there is a general lack of understanding about where goods sold in the store originate, how they get to the store, how prices are reached and other factors associated with ‘money cycles’ and ‘food cycles’. Although ALPA has tackled this problem in the past (through various interstate trips for storeworkers to the mint, banks, farmers, manufacturers, warehouses and other retailers and through community discussions and workshops), Harper believes that it remains a problem because of the way in which knowledge about these processes is disseminated. According to Harper there are particular ‘rights’ associated with having access to this knowledge, to being employed in the store, to becoming a director. ALPA’s directors have become ‘custodians’ of the Association which entitles them to the benefits of that responsibility but, ultimately, it is the ALPA Balanda hierarchy (which includes the local store managers) who possess the most knowledge and therefore power.26 There is a perception among Aboriginal people that Balanda are hanging onto secret stories, that there is a ‘behind story’ which storeworkers and the community in general do not have access to:

there is a perception in the community that yulngu do all the jobs but they don’t get the underneath knowledge and it is possible they believe that managers are hanging on to their sacred stories — the only thing is that the managers don’t know that they’ve got any sacred stories (Harper, pers. comm., 31 May 1992).
For these reasons, ALPA is concentrating on a 'demystification' program, devised by Richard Trudgen and Dr. Rev. Djiniyini Gondarra, for Aborigines in communities. It is currently believed that:

through a program of demystification (taking the mystery out of the Western economic system) and using their own traditional system as the teaching medium, [Aborigines] will be able to truly control their own development because they will know the ground rules that the nation operates out of economically ... Through the age old wisdom of their own economic system, the people may see the reasons why the welfare system is having such devastating effects upon them, and give them the tools to move back to a production base (Trudgen 1991, 59).

The first of these workshops have been held and it is likely that ALPA will continue to employ Trudgen and Gondarra to teach these concepts.27

Looking forward

In mid 1992 McMillan resigned from the position of group manager. After consultation between the directors and ALPA central management, Frank Mannix, a lawyer from Melbourne experienced in working with minority groups in Sarawak and Los Angeles, was appointed to this position. In Rawsneys's 1992 Annual Report he presented the directors with a choice regarding the future of the Association. The first option was that ALPA continue to operate with the 'fixed current percentages of profits' which would provide dividends and resources 'for the future' or to change and operate on a 'cost plus basis' which would keep prices to a minimum (AD/Rawsney 1992 Annual Report). The second option would mean the slight reduction of prices for goods sold in the store with little being distributed to the communities in the form of a dividend. According to Rawsney, Councils would lose 'the ability ... to assist their people where they feel necessary'. The first option would be more difficult because of the issues discussed throughout this chapter. Rawsney offered encouragement to the directors:

we know that these exercises [distribution of dividends] are difficult, we know they cause frustrations, sometimes arguments, sometimes mistrust, but that is the responsibility people have if they wish to be independent (AD/1992 Annual Report).

It is unlikely that ALPA's directors would opt for the 'break even' option. They have reiterated time and again that ALPA meant 'yolngu helping yolngu' and that 'ALPA was for the future, for our children'. The directors are extremely proud of the Association for showing the business potential that it has and would not sacrifice the gains made.

Apart from deciding which option the Association will pursue, the 1992 Report speaks of the need for ALPA to find an appropriate 'culture':

We have now developed to a stage where it is difficult to decide whether A.L.P.A. is operated by 'Balanda' culture or 'Yolngu' culture. There is no doubt in the minds of the directors and staff that A.L.P.A. is controlled by Aboriginal people for the benefit of Aboriginal people, and just who those people are. The dilemma comes when it is necessary to structure A.L.P.A. in a form that complies with Balanda law ... One of the responsibilities we have as a board of directors is to work out a 'Business Culture' that runs a business with balanda skills where necessary, but for the benefit of yolngu people at all times. Such a strategy as this will take all of the skill and
courage we have, it will take all of the honesty and thoughtfulness that we can produce so that we have a structure that will continue for the next twenty years or even longer, and the young people in the community will accept and keep going (AD/Rawnsley, 1992 Annual Report).

Much credit has recently been given to the Gapma theory, described in Helen Watson’s recent publication, Singing the land, signing the land. This theory, describing 'the forces of the streams [which] combine and lead to deeper understanding and truth', is reported to hold a 'good deal of meaning' for ALPA and their search for an 'ALPA culture' (AD/McMillan, 1992 Annual Report). According to McMillan, ALPA's board of directors views ALPA's approach to issues of development and leadership as moving from a state of dependence to independence to interdependence:

It is why A.L.P.A. balanda and yolngu are working together — interdependently! So the harnessing of the forces of the streams — the struggle to find an authentic A.L.P.A. culture continues, and is a constant challenge before us. The process itself is developmental and has built what the Anhemland Progress Association is today (AD/McMillan, 1992 Annual Report).

Notes

1. John Ford was awarded an Order of Australia medal in 1989 for his service to Aboriginal people. George Rawnsley was also awarded an Order of Australia medal.
2. Other difficulties with this proposal arose because of ALPA's taxation status. ALPA, classified as a benevolent society, did not have to pay tax while the other two businesses in this joint venture did.
3. In keeping with these changes, ALPA sold their Winnellie base and subsequently moved to new premises in Coconut Grove.
4. Greg Harris replaced Johnson as ALPA's Principal Accounting Officer in 1989.
5. Another factor foreshadowed to affect ALPA's future profitability was the introduction of Power and Water Authority charges for electricity in each community. McMillan advised the directors that this charge was likely to amount to approximately $100,000 each year and that ALPA would have to decide how this bill was going to be paid. The family enterprises would be heavily affected by these charges — an important consideration when establishing new enterprises. In November 1988 the Central Committee resolved to increase the take-away mark-up to 50%, that the hardware mark-up be changed to 50% and toys to 70% as means to cover electricity costs, increased wages and other expenses.
6. Liaison officers had also been employed for the individual stores in response to the failed concept of Aboriginal trainee managers. These officers were generally older men with traditional and ceremonial power who were to assist the storeworkers and managers in their duties and to prevent 'family pressure' on the workers from occurring. With few exceptions this concept failed because the officers selected either abused the power invested in them or had too many obligations outside the store. One ALPA worker described this idea as a 'spectacular failure both socially and financially' because it increased confusion as to the role of individual workers in the store and by doing so opened up the store system to abuse (Harper, pers. comm., 31 May 1992).
7. By 1992 the ALPA stores were employing approximately 62 people on a regular basis.
8. This 'rotating reserve' was later converted into shares in Independent Holdings Limited. A 'parcel' containing 25,000 of these shares was sold in the following year and realised a profit of $51,384.
9. To improve and maintain store efficiency, ALPA's 1988 Annual Meeting had resolved to offer incentives and bonuses to store staff, including managers, who performed well. These bonuses amounted to $200 paid to each person if the store made a greater than 5% net profit per quarter (AD/CC minutes, 17 August 1988).
10. By 1990 it was claimed that the ALPA stores 'now contribute only 1.4% of revenue to maintain the management, accounting, training and on-costs provided by the administration staff (AD/1990 Annual Report).
11. At the end of 1988, extra financial assistance was allocated to two enterprises: $8,500 was made available to Fred Atu for the purchase of a new boat and Mapuru store was advanced $10,000 over a
period of two years for the purchase of a vehicle. A store at Nangala and a laundromat were also considered for funding at this stage.

12. The initial proposal was for the building to be erected at Gapuwiyak. This change has interesting implications. ALPA was already supporting a take-away business on Galirin'ku under the management of Richard Gandhuwuy, a former ALPA employee and now Galirin'ku Town Clerk. The granting of this loan to Djiniyini will place him in direct competition with Gandhuwuy.

13. Apart from these initiatives, attention was also given to an initiative devised by the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) concerning the production of 'Experimental management and training for Aborigines' games. These were designed to assist people with 'budgeting' their income. In October 1991 Rev. Djiniyini requested a $30,000 loan to assist in the printing of the games. One of the directors fully supported this idea stating that:

Yolngu don't know how to run business in the Balanda way. They don't know how to handle their money. They see and feel things in a different way than Balanda. They haven't learnt any skills in handling money or business. They need to have practical experience in handling money and these games could help (AD/CC minutes, 8 October 1991).

It was resolved by a directors' meeting in October 1991 that the success rate of a scheme like this was not guaranteed and that ALPA should advance a smaller loan of $15,000 for a pilot set of games to be run.

14. This freight subsidy was made possible because of an increase in the price of cigarettes and tobacco.

15. Anangu Winkiku Stores is an Aboriginal retail support organisation based in central Australia. It was established in 1982 and is owned by Anangu Pitjantjatjarakku which represents the Pitjantjatjara communities in the northern section of South Australia. Apart from offering managing, accounting and training services to communities in this area, AWS also assists five stores in the Northern Territory. Both ALPA and AWS have been instrumental in the accreditation of two TAFE certificate courses for storeworkers. ALPA's training programs are also used extensively in Vanuatu.

16. Some of the earlier figures may not be accurate because of problems discussed earlier concerning ALPA's and AADS joint accounts.

17. That is, the 'cargo cult' theory.

18. McMillan recounts an experience in one of the communities where a person chartered a plane to fly in Kentucky Fried Chicken and charged community residents exorbitant prices for it — which they paid.

19. Advertising and increasing access to Darwin has also made people question the range and variety of goods (especially clothes) offered at the store. Although ALPA offers a broader range than most stores it may be worthwhile for it to consider expanding the number of wholesalers it is currently buying from in order to increase this range/variety in response to Aboriginal demand.

20. Many people took advantage of these specials to stockpile goods that would keep, such as powdered milk. The storeworkers have a greater knowledge of pricing and influenced peoples decisions about the value of buying a few items thereby saving money in the future.

21. Again, this problem is not confined to Aboriginal community stores. It is the practice of any large retailing organisation to forbid checkout operators to serve members of their own families.

22. Byrnes's (1988) case studies of fifty Aboriginal enterprises located throughout Australia reveals that in these enterprises the majority of positions dealing specifically with management and supervisory or trades skills were held by non-Aboriginal people. The bulk of Aboriginal employment was in the semi-skilled, unskilled and casual categories (see also ABS 1990, 86, 94). However, Byrnes does note that there was a relatively high proportion of skilled Aboriginal employees and supervisors.

23. Jill Byrnes's case studies of fifty Aboriginal enterprises throughout Australia ranging from financial management companies, air charter services and nurseries to fishing, media/music, tourism and agricultural industries, retail stores, restaurants and Arts and Crafts production and promotion indicates that Aboriginal people are involved in a large range of enterprise activities. The reasons for establishing these enterprises as recorded by Aboriginal people are interesting. These reasons include Aboriginal training/education, Aboriginal employment, community development, to make money, for cultural enhancement, financial independence, for 'our children's future', 'to show we could do it', to provide a better service at a lower cost, to have more control over our lives, to preserve the environment, tell the important stories, keep the laws, and to 'keep our kids off the grog' (Byrnes 1990, 4).

24. Richard Barakal resigned from ALPA's board of directors partly because of the difficulties in distributing this money. At a recent community meeting, Jacky Barakal informed ALPA that if the appropriate steps were not taken to ensure that the lease agreement was being paid to the traditional owners, legal proceedings against ALPA would be initiated.
25. However, as Cassidy (1991) has noted there are many factors which make full community control of an organisation problematical. A major constraint on the workability of community control is the lack of social and cultural homogeneity within a community. Cassidy further suggests that, given community control is an option, community control does not necessarily mean full community participation and that community control of a particular organisation could well make the already powerful members of a community even more powerful in social, economic and political terms (Cassidy 1991).

26. An additional problem is that ALPA is seen to favour one or two families in each community which causes resentment against the store and the Association.

27. In addition to these workshops, ALPA also invited Stephen Evans (ex-ALPA training manager, now independent management training consultant) to conduct some workshops on the role, nature, responsibilities and powers of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council (ATSIC) for the benefit of the regional ATSIC Councillors, interested community members and the ALPA directors.
CONCLUSION

If Aboriginal enterprise owners are to use enterprise as a means to an end they need to learn to balance the commercial needs of the enterprise (profit making) against their community (social, human) objectives. The community objectives will not be achieved if the enterprise 'fails'. The enterprise must be self-supporting and making a small profit before it will be safe to syphon off funds for community purposes or before many people can be carried by it as employees/trainees. Where this point of balance is, and how to attain and maintain it, is perhaps the most difficult cross-cultural lesson to learn, and the most challenging (Byrnes 1990, 15).

Retail stores in isolated Aboriginal communities are one of the most essential and frequently used services by the majority of residents in these communities. The maintenance of this service and the ability of the organisation providing this service to cater for social, economic and cultural aspects of Aboriginal life is of extreme importance to both the continuing viability of the Association and the people it services. Over the last twenty years, the Arnhem Land Progress Association has addressed the various factors which make the establishment and operation of a commercial venture in an isolated Aboriginal community a challenging and demanding undertaking. ALPA has done this with much energy, dedication, insight and imagination.

ALPA's bulk buying power (for the eight stores in Arnhem Land) and their regular usage of transport and barge services has lead to reductions in the price of goods, freight discounts and an improved, reliable transport service. The ALPA stores are well stocked, have a large variety of goods and endeavour to cope with increasing consumer demand. They are comparatively reasonably priced and have an added emphasis on nutritional content in the food lines. The stores open regularly and do their best to cater for any special ceremonial event, such as a funeral, occurring in a community at a particular time. In addition to offering a discount on food purchases for these ceremonies they have also provided communities with extensive economic and emotional support on these occasions.

ALPA's establishment of financial reserves, their careful management of monetary investments, the accumulation of various assets, their entry into the share market and Darwin's property market and the provision of accounting and management consultancy services to other non-ALPA communities have resulted in ALPA maintaining a strong financial base, making them independent of government resources and enabling them, as a group, to support a store if a crisis occurs in a particular community. ALPA is proud of their independence of government financial support believing that this independence is a means of securing Aboriginal self-determination.

The combined profits of the stores have also enabled ALPA to establish additional commercial enterprises in the communities through the Family Enterprise Scheme and by buying local produce from outstations or community residents. ALPA has made a huge resource commitment to such initiatives as skills training in all facets of store operation. It has recognised sporting and educational achievements of young Aborigines through the presentation of awards and provided financial incentives to

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matriculating students in pursuit of higher education. ALPA has also aided in the instigation of a nutrition policy believing that the stores have a vital role to play in this area.

One of the more problematic aspects of enterprise development in Aboriginal communities is the recruitment of management staff who are able to place the interests of the community above their own interests while maintaining efficient, viable businesses. After twenty years of experience in management recruitment, ALPA is generally able to employ proficient store managers — although there have been some mishaps. The establishment of management systems, the careful monitoring of the financial operations of the store, the production of a detailed store operations manual and the support given to management staff by ALPA's personnel/human resources department have ensured that the ALPA stores and the consultancy stores are provided with a consistent, well monitored management service.

ALPA has recognised over its twenty years of operation that a general negativity towards store services by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of the communities in which they operate will hinder both the stores' and the Association's future development and viability. ALPA's 1992 Annual Report claims that 'the normal trading activities of the Association depend significantly upon member Communities of the Association continuing to remain members of the Association' (AD/1992 Annual Report, 12). A means of ensuring this continuity of membership has been to educate and inform the communities about the activities of the store and the Association. ALPA has not presented the communities with a fait accompli in terms of store operation but has endeavoured to educate and inform the communities about the role of the store in the communities, the different processes associated with running an economically viable enterprise, and has provided much scope for Aboriginal involvement within the Association by having an Aboriginal board of directors, and high Aboriginal employment in the stores and within ALPA's central administration. Apart from this, the Association has attempted to make the communities aware that ALPA is an Aboriginal organisation working for and with Aboriginal people. Various funds, reserves and initiatives, such as the distribution of dividends, the extensive training of store workers, numerous community meetings, the youth fund, the tertiary education fund, the family enterprise reserve, the nutrition policy and the Women's Committee have been created in order to demonstrate that ALPA is an Aboriginal association with its prime objective being the 'social and economic development of Aboriginal people'.

However, it was evident from several community meetings and the literature gathered over the last twenty years that although ALPA has poured much energy and resources into making the communities in which there is an ALPA store aware that the Association is their organisation and that they are the members and owners of ALPA, it has not been very successful. Many Aboriginal people still perceive the store to be a Balanda operation owned and controlled by non-Aborigines based in Darwin. The historical context of store development provides some insight into this predicament. Many enterprises were originally established in Aboriginal communities during the 'assimilation era' when it was thought that enterprises would provide the necessary skills training required to better outfit Aboriginal people for entry to non-Aboriginal society. They were not designed as profit making ventures but as training schemes.
More often than not, the training provided was for semi-skilled positions and Aborigines were employed as labourers or domestic workers. This is reflected today in the lack of knowledge of management and financial matters amongst Aborigines trained under the 'mission system' and their doubts about assuming responsibility or control of an operation that has its origins in the missions. ALPA's story differs a little in that the Association recognised that apart from establishing the enterprise, it also had to become lucrative so that Aboriginal people would attain the economic independence of government which would expedite their moves toward self-determination.

Although ALPA was committed to the notion of handing over the control and operation of the stores to Aboriginal people from the time of their inception, it did not initially instigate the mechanisms to ensure this transition. ALPA's formative years were concerned primarily with building up the stores to become lucrative businesses. Aboriginal people remained excluded from the management, financial and operational side of the enterprise until the establishment of the Store Training School and the introduction of courses specifically aimed at imparting this information. However, this initiative may have been too late. The Association could smell success and resources and energy were therefore committed to building up and extending the Association under the guise of achieving Aboriginal economic independence through business. The fact that the organisation was expanding too rapidly and Aboriginal people were inevitably becoming lost in this process was recognised by McMillan. When he assumed the group manager's position, McMillan attempted to take the Association back to its roots in the communities and tried to devise means by which Aboriginal people could participate more fully in the organisation. For many reasons this bid has not been entirely successful.

ALPA's directors are extremely proud of the skills that they have learnt through being involved in a strong, profitable enterprise such as ALPA and are well aware of the way in which belonging to an organisation like ALPA can assist Aboriginal people. However, many community residents do not see these benefits. They see that ALPA is a profitable enterprise and are told that ALPA is their Association but they also see that the more obvious or tangible benefits of the Association are disseminated among a select group of people. ALPA has introduced strategies aimed at assisting or benefiting the community as a whole, such as the youth fund, the nutrition program and the tertiary education fund but, so far, these schemes have not produced the desired results.

ALPA has the difficult task of defining community needs at a local level thereby building up support for the Association while maintaining efficient, viable community stores which will enable them to instigate their 'development' projects. However, this balance between 'commercial' and 'community' needs seems not to have been attained. Greater consultation and participation with and by Aboriginal people in the formation of these initiatives may assist this process. Furthermore, ALPA may have to consider a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approach to community development if it is going to succeed in this area.

If Aborigines are to be in control of enterprises in their communities they have to be the ones who work through the difficulties associated with making them operative. Aborigines are better
able to do so with enhanced prospects for success if outsiders accept the fact that there must be Aboriginal control in order for such enterprises to be successful (Ellanna et al 1988, 30).

ALPA is working in an extremely complex environment. It is to ALPA's credit that it recognises and tries to resolve the issues that have confronted it in the past and are challenging it in the present. Ultimately the primary issue which ALPA faces is who has control of the Association. This means control over all management aspects of the Association and its relations with and impact on the 'social fabric and culture of the people undertaking it' (Ellanna et al 1988, 253). The ramifications and importance of this control are highlighted by Cassidy:

Community control can also be an exercise in self-government, as communities come to control their own authoritative decision-making units ... Community control can be even more extensive. It can be a manifestation of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, as communities grow to depend upon themselves to provide what they need. Most importantly, community control can mean self-determination, the power to control cultural, social, political, and economic conditions that characterise a community (Cassidy 1991, 31).

There are various constraints on the actual workability of community control as this study shows. Nevertheless, this issue is one that can best be worked out by the people directly affected by it — those Aboriginal people living in the communities. Despite these problems, the importance and necessity of this control is powerfully expressed in a statement produced by the Papunya Council.²

The history of Papunya, and many other settlements like ours, is a history of decisions being made by others and not the people directly affected by these decisions. What European people need to understand is that this history is not the past for us, but what we are still living today ... Whatever the intentions of people involved in the establishing and running of this settlement may have been, the effect over time has been to give us a feeling of powerlessness over our own lives (Papunya Community Council 1992).

For the Arnhem Land Progress Association, 'control comes down to the opportunity for Aboriginal people to make choices about their future and their children's future' (McMillan, 1992 Annual Report). It should be specified that Aboriginal people also have to define the context and set the parameters within which to make these choices. According to their 1992 Annual Report, 'ALPA's primary function is the empowerment of people'. If this is so and not just rhetoric, the Association will have to be committed to recognising the importance of the various issues facing ALPA today. Opening up their own Association to criticism and communicating with other Aboriginal organisations may be a means of assisting ALPA to address these issues in ways which will genuinely assist the Aboriginal push for self-determination.

Notes

1. ALPA's 1991/2 financial statement records that the Central Committee's expenses for that financial year were approximately $70,000. This primarily involved the transportation, accommodation and living expenses of the directors while at community meetings or in Darwin.
2. Papunya is an Aboriginal community in central Australia.
LIST OF APPENDIXES

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2. Interviews conducted 1991–1992
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4. Location of trainees who attended the ASTS courses
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6. Staffing levels and attendance 1991–92 financial year
APPENDIX ONE

ALPA's board of directors 1992–93

George Rawnsley (Chairperson)
Stuart McMillan (Executive Director until August 1992)
Frank Mannix (Executive Director from August 1992)
Alfred Djapandawuy (Milingimbi, Council Chairperson)
David Marpiyawuy (Milingimbi)
Henry Djerringal (Milingimbi)
Archie Brown (Minjilang)
Frank Nabalamierri (Minjilang)
Rachael Nimilga (Minjilang)
Charlie Mungulda (Minjilang)
Keith Djiniyini (Galiwin'ku, Council Chairperson)
David Barnukula (Galiwin'ku)
Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra (Galiwin'ku)
Geoffrey Gurwanawuy (Galiwin'ku)
Andy Wadjugu (Galiwin'ku)
John Dhupun (Gapuwiyak, Council Chairperson)
Donald Binindjirri (Gapuwiyak)
Paul Guliwutjipitj (Gapuwiyak)
John Weluk (Ramingining, Council Chairperson)
John Wanimilil (Ramingining)
Albert Djowarda (Ramingining)

Mathew Nulupam (Milingimbi), Djandjay Baker (Milingimbi), Wes Bandi Bandi (Gapuwiyak) and Mary Yarmirr (Minjilang), who decided not to stand for re-election to the board of directors at the 1992 Annual Meeting, also provided me with assistance and insight throughout the course of the work.
## APPENDIX TWO

### Interviews conducted 1991–1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Rawnsley</td>
<td>October 10, 1991</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 3, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen and Jean Bagshaw</td>
<td>November 11, 1991</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Hannay</td>
<td>January 2, 1992</td>
<td>Brisbane, QLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les &amp; Joycelyn Shepherd</td>
<td>February 6, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce Deering</td>
<td>February 4, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February 18, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Len Richardson (ATSIC) &amp;</td>
<td>February 11, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Lane (ABTF)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Trudgen (UCA)</td>
<td>February 19, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Amery (UCA)</td>
<td>February 25, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Djalangi</td>
<td>March 6, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Bernard Clarke</td>
<td>March 10, 1992</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capt. Graham White</td>
<td>March 10, 1992</td>
<td>Bendigo, VIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Mann</td>
<td>March 11, 1992</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeff de Suza (ATSIC)</td>
<td>March 12, 1992</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Everall</td>
<td>March 12, 1992</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Ford</td>
<td>March 13, 1992</td>
<td>Wollongong, NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Evans</td>
<td>April 10, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stuart McMillan</td>
<td>April 16, 1992</td>
<td>Darwin, NT</td>
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<td>Henry Harper</td>
<td>April 13, 1992</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May 31, 1992</td>
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<td>Betty Cunningham</td>
<td>June 3, 1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donald Nulapani</td>
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APPENDIX THREE

Missions established in the Northern Territory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Jesuit Catholic</td>
<td>Rapid Creek, Darwin (relocated to Daly River 1886)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Kapalga, South Alligator River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Roper River (now Ngukurr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Missionaries of the Sacred Heart</td>
<td>Bathurst Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Methodist Overseas Mission</td>
<td>Goulburn Island (Warruwi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Emerald River, Groote Eylandt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Methodist Overseas Mission</td>
<td>Milingimbi, Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
<td>Oenpelli (Gunbalanya), Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Methodist Overseas Mission</td>
<td>Yirrkala, Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Missionaries of the Sacred Heart</td>
<td>Port Keats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Missionaries of the Sacred Heart</td>
<td>Alice Springs (relocated to Arltunga in 1942 and then Santa Teresa in 1953)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Emabella, central Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Missionaries of the Sacred Heart</td>
<td>Melville Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Methodist Overseas Mission</td>
<td>Elcho Island (Galiwin'ku), Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
<td>Numbulwar, Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Missionaries of the Sacred Heart</td>
<td>Daly River</td>
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Source: Cole (1979); Swain & Rose (eds) (1988)
APPENDIX FOUR

Location of trainees who attended the ASTS courses

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Places</th>
<th>No. of trainees</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areyonga</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayers Rock</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyangula</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belyuen**</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
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<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Docker River</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Finke</td>
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<td>Freegon</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galiwin'ku*</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>Gapuwiyak*</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Maningrida</td>
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<td>Milingimbi*</td>
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<td>Minjilang*</td>
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<td>Nguiu</td>
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<td>Numbulwar</td>
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<td>Balgo Hills**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bayulu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngangarra</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oombulgarrri</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doon Doon Station</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billiluna</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Gregory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queensland</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WujalWujal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djarra</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kowanyama</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mornington Island</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>393</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ALPA store; ** ALPA consultancy store

Source: Evans, personal files
APPENDIX FIVE

Additional problems which could occur within the store

Poor management of the storeroom:

1. staff not cleaning up properly (cannot see the 'true story')
2. doing nothing about cockroaches and mice (causes damage and waste)
3. not rotating stock (letting things get old and stale)
4. not checking the prices are correct
5. leaving big doors open all day (helping people steal)
6. not being careful with the forklift (causing more damage)
7. not fixing things that are damaged (stop them getting worse)
8. not counting everything clearly with the invoice (paying for more stock than received)
9. not making sure that everything is ours, not someone else's
10. not thinking about good security
11. using tools from stock to do jobs and not putting them back or paying for them

Poor operation of the checkouts:

1. bad packaging at checkouts (causing more damage)
2. ringing up wrong prices
3. giving wrong change
4. not asking the customers for enough money
5. Stealing — giving refunds that aren't true, giving discounts to family and friends, not paying for everything, taking cash from the register, lying about over-rings
6. staff eating stock in the store without paying
7. customers eating stock in the store without paying
8. no prices on the stock (operators guess the price)
9. wrong prices on the stock (someone changing the price)
10. people promising to pay later (but never remember)

Factors which could adversely affect store 'sales':

1. not opening the store on time
2. not having enough stock on the shelves
3. running out of stock altogether
4. having a bad attitude to the job
5. having a bad attitude to the supervisor/manager
6. having a bad attitude to the customers
7. not knowing enough about the store, and what it does
8. not knowing what the store sells, or how it should be used
9. not keeping the store clean and tidy
10. not having enough change for the cash register
11. not showing the customers the stock, and how it should be used
12. leaving rubbish in the aisles and near checkouts
13. taking too long at tea-breaks
14. not thinking

Source: Evans, personal files
APPENDIX SIX

Staffing levels and attendance 1991–92 financial year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average staffing levels</th>
<th>Attendance (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minjilang</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galiwin’ku</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gapuwiyak</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milingimbi</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramingining</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Evans, personal files
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Since its inception ALPA has seen itself as both a commercial operation and an alternative development agency catering for the needs of Aboriginal communities. While fiercely proud of its economic independence from government, it has operated efficient, well stocked, modern retail stores and ancillary services. From the profits generated ALPA has undertaken training, supported the work of local Aboriginal Councils, provided scholarships for students, made starter loans available for clan and family businesses, and underwritten community services in all the settlements in which it operates. Inevitably there has been conflict between the ‘money side’ and the ‘community side’ of the Association’s operations.

Sometimes the problems are part of the politics of settlements or the typical grumblings of store customers. Sometimes they are part of wider questions about the Territory or national economy, the politics of Aboriginal autonomy, land rights, and the apparent paternalism which dominates many non-Aboriginal dealings with Aboriginal people. In a period when so many stores in Aboriginal and remote communities have failed and Aboriginal directors and managers are a rarity, the ALPA story has many lessons for us all.

This book, written by Samantha Wells, a graduate of the University of New South Wales and a temporary research assistant at NARU, is a record of ALPA’s achievements, activities and problems.