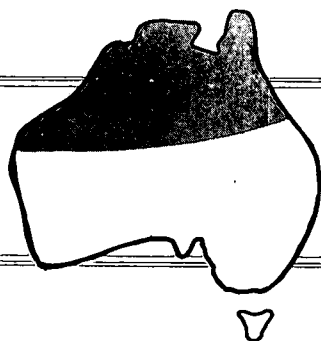
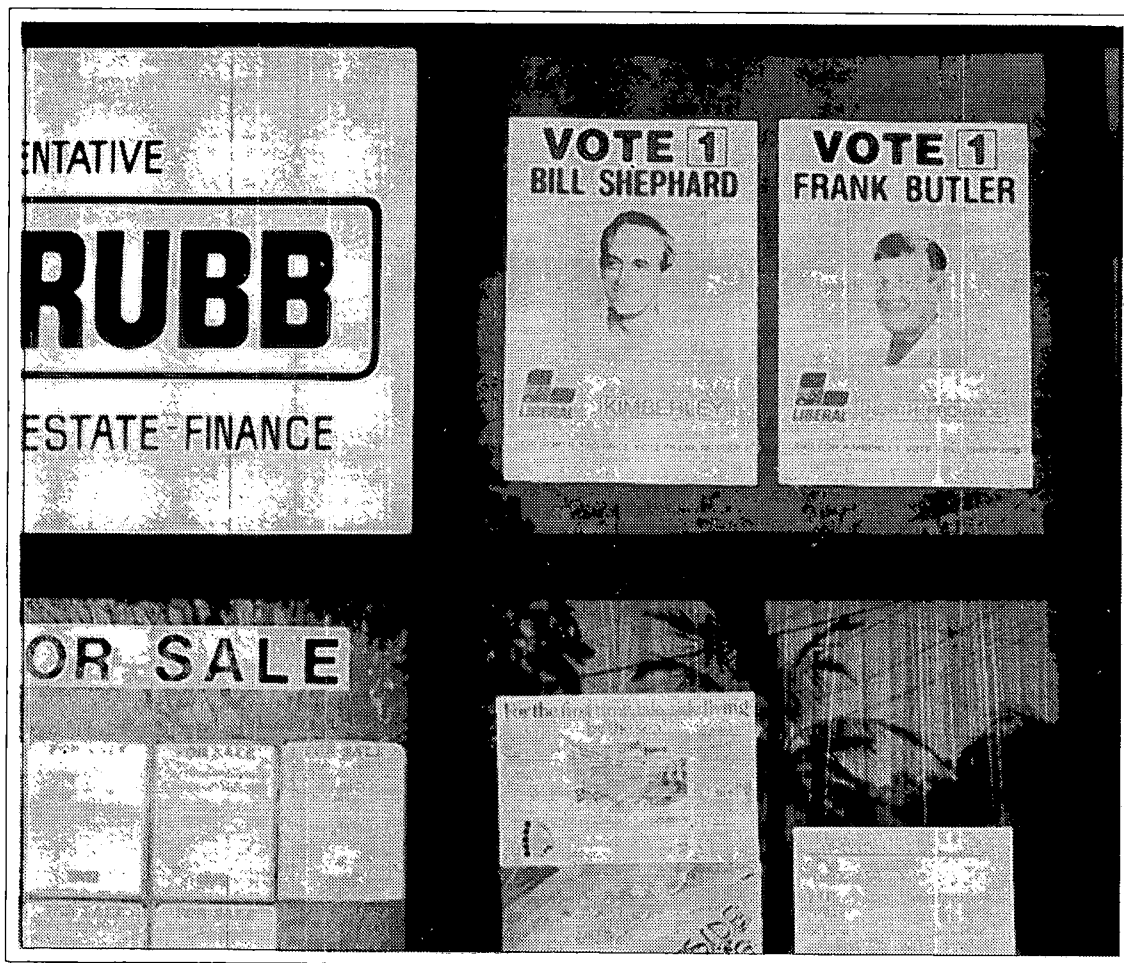


P Loveday
D Jaensch and
W Sanders

The Western Australian
State Election 1986
and the Aboriginal Vote
in the Kimberley



Australian National University North Australia Research Unit
Monograph
Darwin 1986

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Peter Loveday
Dean Jaensch
Will Sanders

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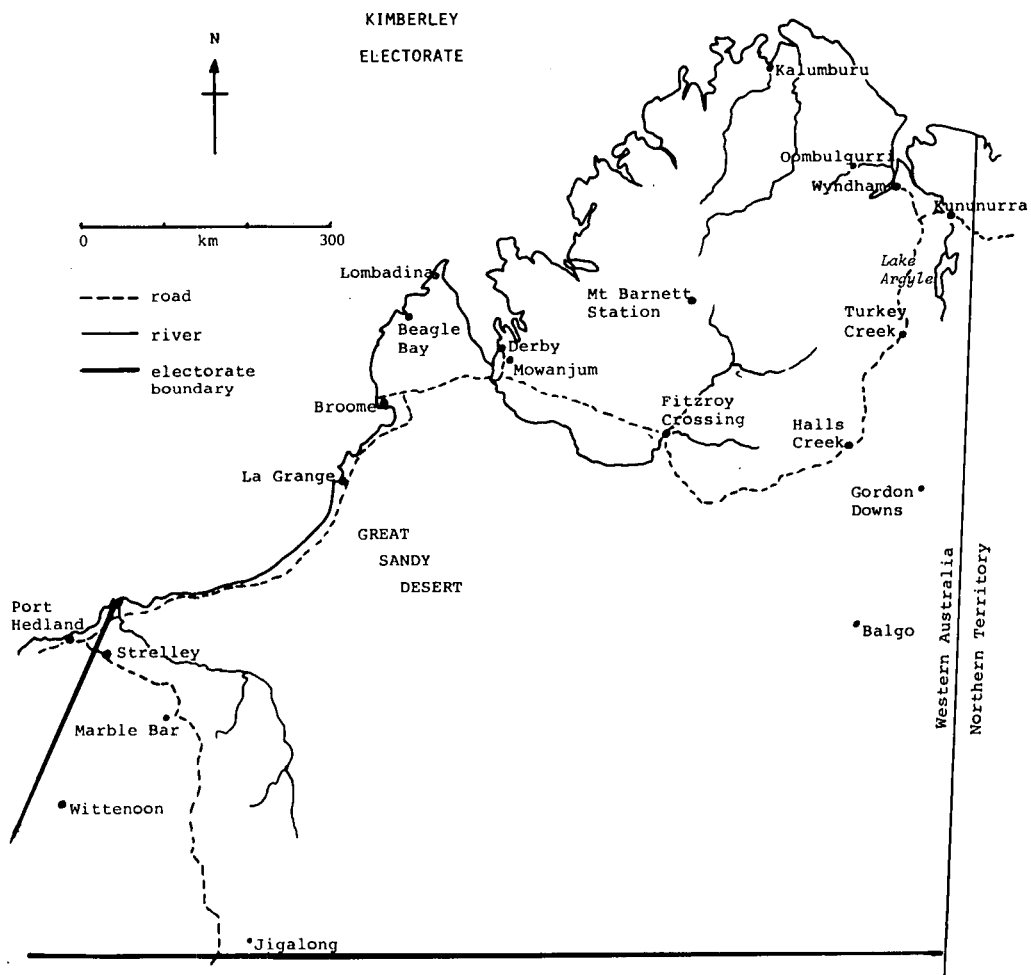
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THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE ELECTION 1986 AND THE ABORIGINAL VOTE IN THE KIMBERLEY

Background

For people in the Kimberley, events in Perth, three thousand kilometres away, are seemingly remote and yet in politics the Kimberley is an integral part of the state. The party contest is much the same as it is elsewhere in the state, or for that matter elsewhere in Australia; decisions taken in Perth in administrative departments and business firms closely concern the northerners and the media, especially television, reaches northern audiences with the views and events of the capital city as if they were in its suburbs.

The election of 1983, which resulted in a change from a Liberal government to a Labor government in Perth, provided the background for the 1986 election. The Burke Labor party won government in 1983 with a clear majority of both total votes and seats in the Legislative Assembly. But it failed to break through the severe malapportionment in the electoral geography for the Legislative Council. Despite winning 50.6 per cent of the Legislative Council votes, Labor won only seven of the 17 seats, and the party lines in the Council were Labor 13, Liberal/National 21.

As a result, electoral reform became a major plank of the new government. It attempted a reform bill in 1984, based on one vote, one value for both houses, a proposal summarily defeated by the Liberal majority in the Council. A second attempt in 1985, proposing a 'compromise' based on reducing the malapportionment to approximately 2:1 in favour of country electors, was again summarily rejected by the Council.

The 1986 election was therefore held on the 1983 boundaries, with a heavy malapportionment in favour of the extra-metropolitan area, and hence in favour of the non-Labor parties.

Political and Party Environment

A number of developments in national politics and within the national parties, impinged on the Western Australian political processes in the pre-election period. The effects of these could only have worked in favour of the Labor party and against the chances of the Liberals.

The continuing policy decisions of the Hawke government provided a public image of the national Labor party as far removed from 'socialism'. On the other hand, the national Liberal party seemed to be moving from one crisis to another. The party was increasingly internally divided between 'wets', 'damps' and 'dries', and the divisions were increasingly public in nature. The change of leadership from Peacock to Howard did nothing to ease these tensions.

Of course, the argument can be made that trends in national politics, and in political parties in Canberra, do not necessarily impinge on the electoral politics of a single state. And the argument can be assumed to be stronger for Western Australia, separated the most from the national party scene, and with a long history of parties both willing and able to be different. In fact, the Western Australian parties and leaders, more often than most, were at odds with their national counterparts, and drew benefits from this within the parochialism of WA politics. Arguing 'with Canberra' was regarded as an asset in the West. However, the pragmatism and popularity of the Hawke government, and the fragmented national Liberal party, were other factors influencing the outcome.

The South Australian election of December 1985 also contained components, the effects of which were noted across the Western border. The Bannon Labor government was the archetype of the new Labor party: conservative; development-oriented; with excellent relations with the business community; with a leader with record levels in the public opinion polls; and able to claim that the economy had improved under Labor.

The Liberal party in South Australia attempted to counter this with a four-theme campaign: privatisation as a means of fulfilling a promise of tax cuts; a focus on 'mortgage belt' voters in marginal urban electorates; a full involvement by Mr Howard; and an opportunity for voters to 'send a message to Canberra'. All four failed. The privatisation issue collapsed during the campaign as the polls began showing a lack of voter interest, and as television advertisements opposing the policy, especially from the Public Service Association, clearly had effects on voter opinion. Mr Howard was forced to admit that privatisation had been 'overblown'. With the demise of the issue the basis of the Liberal's promises of tax cuts evaporated.

Further, the 'swinging' voters in the marginal mortgage belt seats sided with Labor. Mr Howard's intervention on the interest rates issue was not to the benefit of his party. Finally, the call for a 'message to Canberra' turned into a shift to the Labor party, and a message to the Liberal party.

The Burke government from the beginning made use of the ethos of Western Australia. It accepted and continued the approach of Sir Charles Court - that economic development was the key to the West. The party, once a collection of slightly left quasi-factions, became the Burke party. Premier Brian Burke set out to establish strong connections with the business community and succeeded. The combination of these factors meant that Labor in the West, like Labor in South Australia, had captured the 'middle ground'. This was consolidated by a new Labor style for the west - professionalism, cultivation of the media (normally strongly anti-Labor), and a populist leader skilled in handling the media and public relations.

Faced with this new situation, the Western Australian Liberal party had shifted to the right. At the same time, it needs to be emphasised that the WA party, of all of the state divisions of the Liberal party, had always been the furthest to the right. But the collapse of privatisation in South Australia severely damaged the Liberal campaign in the West. Partly as a result, but also because of the policies and pragmatism of the Burke government, the Liberal party campaign was forced to be reactive and negative, with a leader, Bill Hassell, whose image was damaged by national Liberal divisions and whose popularity in public opinion was very low compared with that of Premier Burke. Its previous fall-back position, that only the Liberal party could manage the economy effectively, was less convincing given the continuing economic improvement under three years of the Labor government.

The Liberal party had a further problem in the re-birth of a united National party. In the 1970s, partly through activities by Liberal Premier Sir Charles Court, the Australian Country party in the west split into a National Country party (with federal affiliation) and a National party. The Liberal party took advantage of the division to seek to win former Country party seats, encouraged NCP members to join the Liberal party, and promoted further divisions. In late 1985, following more than a year of discussions and negotiations, the parties re-united under Mr Hendy Cowan, and re-emerged as a real threat to Liberal hegemony in the rural areas.

Land Rights

The issue of Aboriginal land rights took on increasing importance following the election of the Burke government in 1983. The 1984 national Labor Conference had incorporated an unequivocal plank on land rights into the party platform. This included a guarantee of land rights based on the recommendations of the Woodward Commission, a guarantee of

Aboriginal veto over mining on Aboriginal lands and, if necessary, the use of Commonwealth constitutional powers to enforce a uniform policy throughout Australia. The platform in principle binds all Labor governments and Labor members.

In 1984, the Burke government established a public inquiry, the Seaman enquiry, on the issue which reported with a recommendation for actions along the lines of the Labor platform. But the land rights bill introduced by the government was a weak version of what was in the platform - excluding any veto powers, for example. Even so, the bill was defeated by the Liberal majority in the Legislative Council.

In late 1985, following a commitment by federal Minister Clyde Holding to a uniform land rights act, the Burke government came under severe pressure from anti-land rights groups. A hostile campaign by the WA mining industry, and heavy campaigning by the Liberal party, was given impetus by evidence from public opinion polls that as many as 90 per cent of Western Australians rejected any form of land rights.

Burke obviously realised the issue could result in electoral damage and he completely de-fused it early in the campaign. Using personally signed statements in the media, he guaranteed not to introduce any land rights legislation, to resign as leader if the Labor party forced the introduction of a bill, and to resist any attempt by the federal Labor government to impose a national land rights policy, if necessary by challenge in the High Court. In terms of electoral tactics, these statements prevented the Liberal party using the issue in the election.

Results

The Burke government was returned to office in February 1986, with a continuing clear majority of both votes and seats in the Legislative Assembly. Despite a marked increase in enrolment (from 754,225 in 1983, to 883,239 in 1986), there was little change in general patterns of party support, and no change in the Labor-non-Labor division of seats.

There were, however, different shifts across the three regions of Western Australian electoral geography. In two regions there was a slight shift against Labor but a shift to Labor in the north west. The National party in 1986 contested eight electorates, where the National and National Country parties had contested 14 in 1983 and this provides some explanation for the reduction in the National's share

Table 1

Legislative Assembly election results

Party	Formal Votes			Seats Won	
	n	%	Shift 1983-6 (%)	1983	1986
ALP	416,803	53.0	-0.2	32	32
Lib	324,960	41.3	+1.4	20	19
NP	29,156	3.7	-1.4*	5*	6
AD	5,192	0.7	-0.1	-	-
Other	10,280	1.4	+0.3	-	-

*Combining NCP and NP in 1983.

Table 2

Party support by regions, Legislative Assembly
(per cent of formal votes)

	(30 electorates) <u>Metropolitan</u> (shift)	(23 electorates) <u>Agricultural, Mining, Pastoral</u> (shift)	(4 electorates) <u>North-West Murchison Eyre</u> (shift)
ALP	57.4 (-0.3)	41.1 (-0.2)	59.6 (+2.1)
Lib	40.7 (+0.1)	43.3 (+5.3)	38.4 (-1.1)
NP	- -	13.5 (-5.1)*	- -
ADemoc	0.6 (-0.2)	1.0 (+0.1)	- -
Other	1.4 (+0.5)	1.1 (-0.2)	2.0 (-1.0)

*Combining NCP and NP in 1983.

Table 3

Legislative Council election results 1986

Party	Formal	Seats					Total	(Change)
	votes	1983	Retired	Remained	Elected			
	(% formal)							
ALP	44.6	13	6	7	9	16	(+3)	
Lib	41.9	19	10	9	5	14	(-5)	
NP	3.3	2*	1	1	3	4	(+2)	
ADemoc	8.1	-	-	-	-	-		
Other	2.1	-	-	-	-	-		

*Combining NCP and NP in 1983.

of the vote. In fact, the National party increased its representation in the Assembly by one seat.

The result in the Legislative Council (see table 3 above) was a marked increase in Labor representation, and a significant decrease in Liberal numbers. This result provides the National party with the balance of power, and therefore the numbers to decide the fate of any legislation, especially electoral reform proposals.

Implications

As electoral reform remains a priority of the Burke government, the changed situation in the Council is crucial. The National party has proposed that it would accept reform to the point of no less than a 2:1 weighting in favour of extra-metropolitan areas. This, in fact, was the proposal in the 1985 government bill, and while it falls far short of the government's original aim of one vote, one value, it would be a significant reform.

The election result confirms that the pragmatic policies of the Burke government are politically attractive. Development will continue as a top priority. The issue of land rights is in the hands of the federal Labor government and the national Labor conference. Any attempt to enforce a national land rights policy will bring a confrontation with the Burke government. This, if Burke remains implacably opposed, will have implications for the national Labor party but, given the general political nature of the west, it will do the Burke government no real harm.

The Western Australian Liberal party is in limbo. Defeated in the Legislative Assembly, with its former power base in the Legislative Council removed, faced with a revitalised National party which has the balance of power in the upper house and will use that to generate further publicity, with its neo-conservative policy apparently rejected by the clear majority of the electorate, the Liberal party will be forced to re-think its whole strategy and policies.

The survey of Aboriginal voters in the Kimberley*

Social and historical background

The state election of 8 February 1986 provided an opportunity for a limited survey of the opinions of

*The authors are indebted to Ms F Lawrence, Mr Rod Dixon and Dr A Heatley for comments on an early version of the analysis of this survey.

Aboriginal voters in the Kimberley electorate, one of the few electorates in Australia in which Aboriginal voters might play a major role in determining the outcome of a particular contest. The survey to be discussed below was designed to provide data comparative with that from similar surveys in 1983 and 1984 in the Northern Territory in a Territory election (1983) and a Federal election (1984).

Little is known about the Aboriginal vote in these remote and sparsely settled areas although pioneering work has been done by A Bolger and H Rumley on Aboriginal participation in the 1977 state election and on political developments among Kimberley Aborigines between 1977 and 1980 (Bolger and Rumley 1979, 1982).

The election in 1977 was notable for the disputed return in the Kimberley electorate. An Aboriginal, Ernie Bridge, standing as the Labor party candidate, challenged Alan Ridge the sitting member and Minister for Health and for Community Welfare in the Charles Court government. Ridge won by 93 votes and Bridge challenged the result. The Court of Disputed Returns established that 97 votes for Bridge were invalidated for a variety of reasons, including electoral malpractice, and ordered a by-election which Ridge won in December 1977 (Tatz 1980, 505-509). But in the general election of 23 February 1980, Bridge won the seat, becoming the first Aboriginal member of the Western Australian parliament, and held it again at the next state election on 19 February 1983 when the Burke Labor opposition defeated the Liberal government. He was therefore the sitting Labor candidate in February 1986 and on the government side of the house. Reelected in 1986, Bridge has been appointed a minister in the Burke government, the first Aborigine in Australia to win ministerial office.

The hearings of the Court of Disputed Returns aroused Aboriginal interest in the electoral process but they were by no means the only events to do so. Late in 1977 and again in 1981 there were elections to the National Aboriginal Conference and in the years 1978 to 1980 the dispute over the drilling for oil at Noonkanbah was another of the 'major factors underlying the significant increase in Aboriginal participation in the state electoral process in the area' (Bolger and Rumley 1982, 313; Vincent 1983). The formation and activities of the Kimberley Land Council have also helped to increase Aboriginal political awareness and electoral participation (Bolger and Rumley 1982, 317-321) and since then the activities of the Ashton Joint Venturers in developing a diamond mine, affecting Aboriginal sacred sites, in the east of the Kimberley area (Thompson 1982) and the drilling for oil have been two other developments heightening Aboriginal concern about the effect of mining on their sacred sites and on land they still see

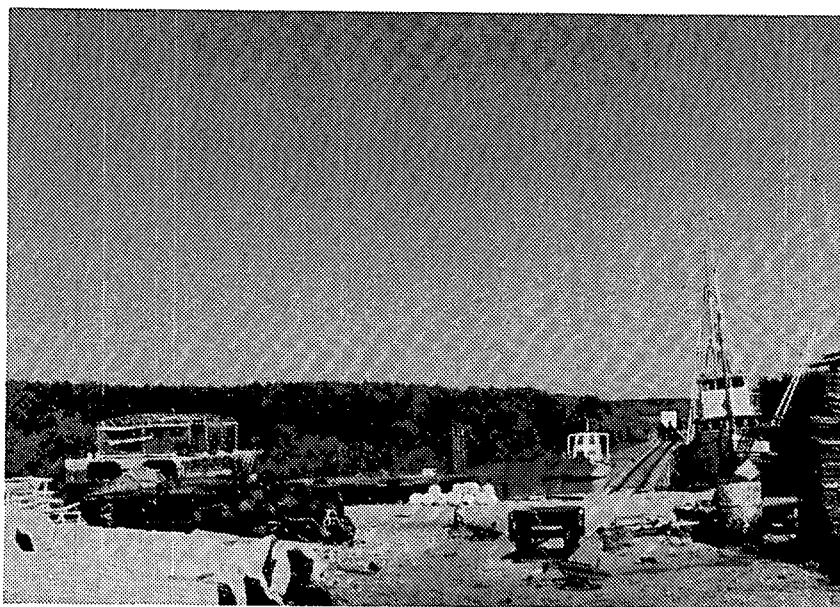
as 'theirs'. This concern was expressed from time to time in answers to questions in the survey.

The Kimberley electorate is one of 57 for the Assembly and it is included in the electorate of North Province for the upper house, the Legislative Council, which also includes the Pilbara Assembly electorate. Half of the 34 councillors retire every three years. The candidates in the 1986 election for the Kimberley Assembly electorate were the incumbent, Ernie Bridge, challenged by the Liberal party's Bill Shephard. For the North Province, Tom Stephens, Labor, elected in 31 July 1982, was the non-retiring Council member and the contestants for the vacant seat, all new candidates, were Frank Butler, Liberal party; Tom Helm, Labor party and Bernice Aquilina for the Australian Democrats.

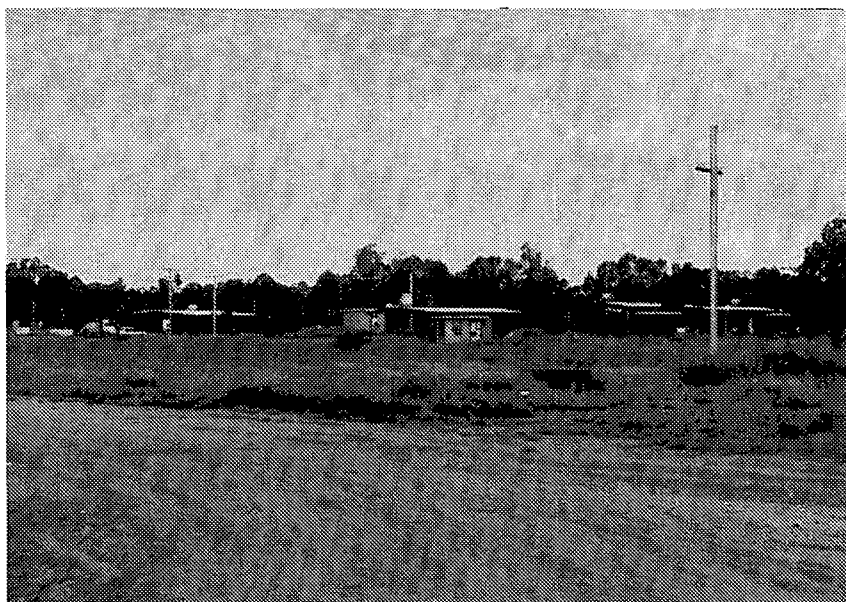
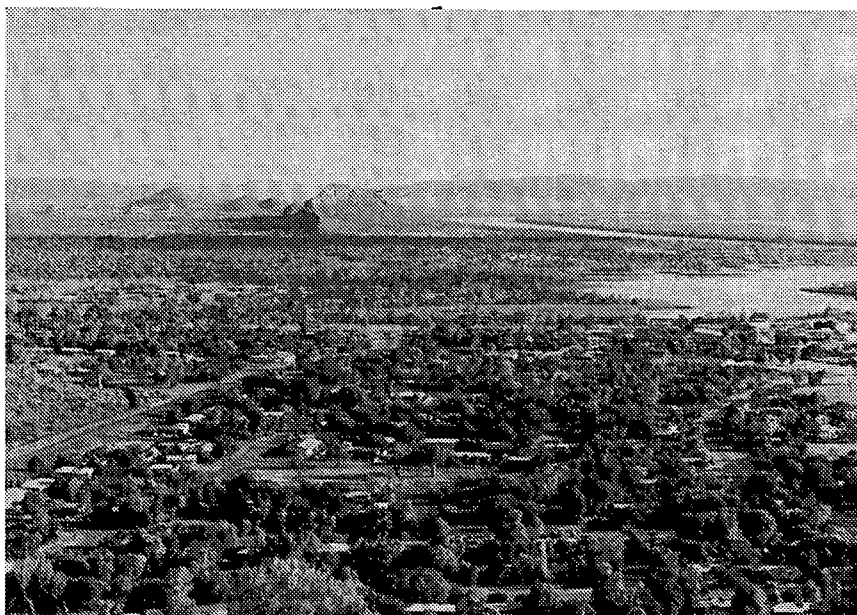
Voting for both houses is preferential and it is compulsory for all people on the electoral roll. People of the age of 18 or more are entitled to vote and enrolment is compulsory for everyone of that age, including Aborigines. The Kimberley electorate had 12,511 electors on the roll in 1983, of whom 10,546 voted. Bridge won with 65.9 per cent of the vote and a majority of 3,167. In 1986 enrolment had risen to 17,918 when the rolls closed for the election and much of the increase may be attributed to the introduction of compulsory enrolment for Aborigines. Bridge won with a slight increase in his support, 66.5 per cent, and a majority of 4,269.

The electorate is the vast, sparsely populated north eastern section of the state, abutting the Northern Territory on the east and on the west the state electorate of Pilbara. The south west corner of the electorate includes Marble Bar, the one-time asbestos mining centre of Wittenoom, the iron mining township of Goldsworthy and Aboriginal communities like Strelley and Jigalong. These parts of the electorate were beyond the range of the survey in 1986.

Between this part and the north east of the electorate lies the Great Sandy Desert, the two parts linked on the surface only by the coastal road. In the north and north east are the Ashton Venturers' diamond mine, between Turkey Creek and Lake Argyle, the lake formed by the damming of the Ord River for irrigation on the plains below, the towns of Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham linked by a road which loops south east and then north east around the rough country of the Kimberley before striking off into the Northern Territory. A number of pastoral stations and Aboriginal communities such as La Grange, Lombadina, Mowanjum, Noonkanbah, Turkey Creek, Oombulgurri and Kalumburu, to name only the largest ones, complete the list of population centres. East Kimberley



Plates 1 and 2: Civic Centre, Derby (above) and Wharf, Broome, West Kimberley.



Plates 3 and 4: Kununurra (above) and Turkey Creek, East Kimberley.

townships named in the 1981 census had a total population of 5,668, of whom 2,322 were Aborigines; the West Kimberley towns had a total population of 8,473, including Aborigines totalling 3,893. Aborigines of voting age, 18 years or more, numbered 1,131 in the east and 2,031 in the west at that time.

In the Kimberleys, as elsewhere, Aborigines were almost certainly underenumerated in 1981, but it is difficult to say by how much. In 1981, the Aborigines of 18 years age and over who were entitled to vote in the NAC election of that year were estimated from DAA statistics at 2,289 in the West Kimberley area and 1,575 in the East Kimberley. In the event, 2,283 out of a total of 3,864 voted. Since voting in the election was not compulsory, this bears out the general contention that in the census of 1981 Aborigines were underenumerated and suggests that it might have been about 700 - 800 people, or 25 per cent higher, than in the census. A similar estimate of about 30 per cent underenumeration was given in 1985 by the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (1985, 21) which reported an estimate of 40,000 for the Aboriginal population in 1985 for the whole state, as compared with a census figure in 1981 of 31,351. There is no way of knowing whether the underenumeration in the Kimberley was higher or lower than in the state as a whole, or whether it was higher or lower in the 18 years and over age range.

The population of the northern part of the electorate is concentrated in a handful of towns. Derby in the west and Wyndham in the north east are old port towns which once had substantial exports of meat and cattle. Now the meatworks are closed or closing and the towns show some signs of stagnation. Derby, population about 3,500, of whom about a quarter are Aborigines, provides some services for the surrounding pastoral industry. Some government agencies, such as Telecom and the state departments of agriculture and roads and works have substantial regional offices in the town. It also provides services for local Aboriginal communities, of which the one-time mission station, Mowanjum, population 200-300, is the largest and only a few kilometres away. Likewise, Wyndham services the community of Oombulgurri, but it is off the principal highway. Although it does not have a significant pastoral industry in its immediate hinterland, it does have an abattoir which is at present under threat of closure.

Broome in the west and Kununurra in the north east have more economic activity. Broome, population about 3000 non-Aboriginal and, including transients, perhaps 1500 Aboriginal, still has a significant pearl industry, based on pearl farms; in the dry season it attracts a large number of tourists, and, besides the usual service activities for

roads and the pastoral industry, it has a meatworks and an active port. La Grange, 170 km to the south west, is an old Catholic mission station, with a substantial Aboriginal population (4-500) which has its own cattle station. To the north are other Aboriginal coastal settlements, principally the one-time mission station of Lombadina which was inaccessible in the survey because of poor roads and flooding. Kununurra, a government town of the sixties, was originally built up when the Ord River was dammed to provide for a very large irrigated tropical agricultural development on the plains near the town site. Some agriculture is still carried on but the scheme was never as successful as had been hoped. Now, apart from servicing the highways, the town has a small but growing tourist trade and, in the hills nearby, the Ashton Joint Venturers' diamond mine. And Halls Creek, site of an 1890s gold rush, is now a service centre for the highway and for a number of Aboriginal communities around about. Fitzroy Crossing, further to the west, is similar to Halls Creek and like it has a large Aboriginal population. Both towns have not only the usual food, fuel and drink outlets, and accommodation for travellers, but Aboriginal community resource centres. Fitzroy Crossing was flooded and inaccessible at the time of the survey.

The social geography of the Aboriginal population is complex. Many live on cattle stations or in more or less large settlements which were once under government or mission control but are now run by Aboriginal councils. Others live in camps on the boundaries of the townships or nearby, yet others live in the towns themselves, in housing provided by the Housing Commission. The settlements usually have a handful of resident whites; the town camps do not and the township suburban Aborigines are usually mixed in to some extent with the resident white population. In towns like Broome and Derby there is a substantial measure of miscegenation. And a substantial number of more or less transient Aborigines can be found at any one time in all population centres, usually visiting relatives in town and in camp. Even though no districts or camps are exclusively for Aborigines of a single social category, there are concentrations and some differentiation. Some camps provide especially for old people, others for drinkers and transients. Another is an alcohol rehabilitation centre. People in the suburbs in Housing Commission homes include a higher proportion of employed people and people in better social and economic circumstances than those in town camps. The principal point is that care was taken to draw respondents from all areas and different types of population grouping in the survey.

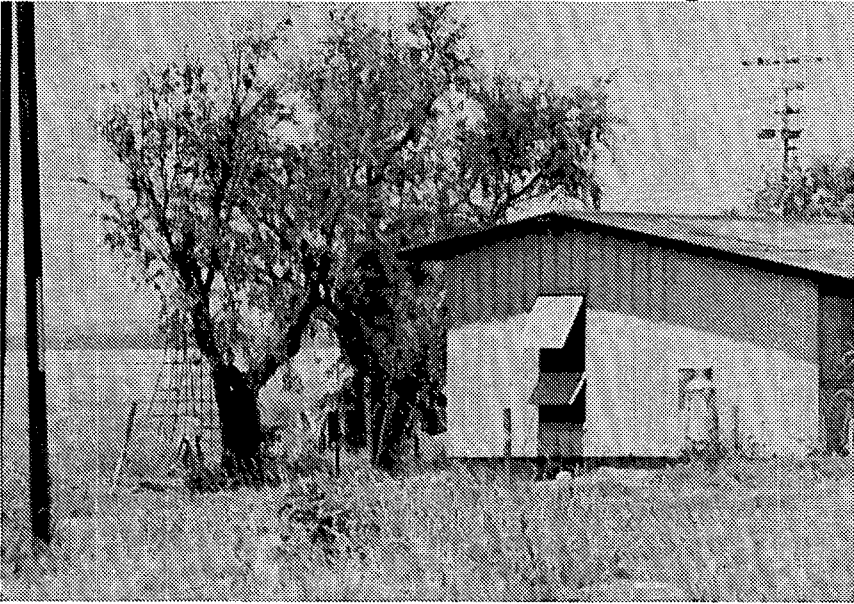
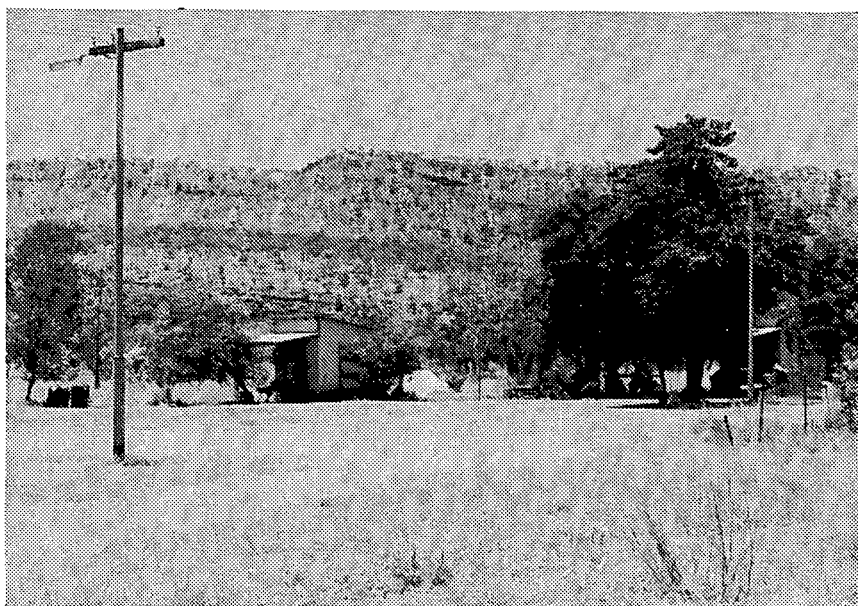
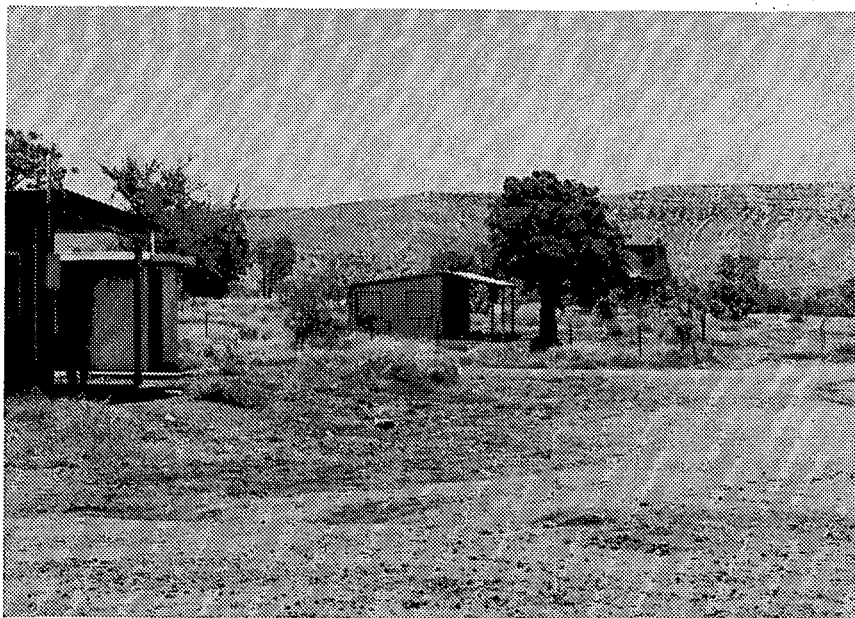
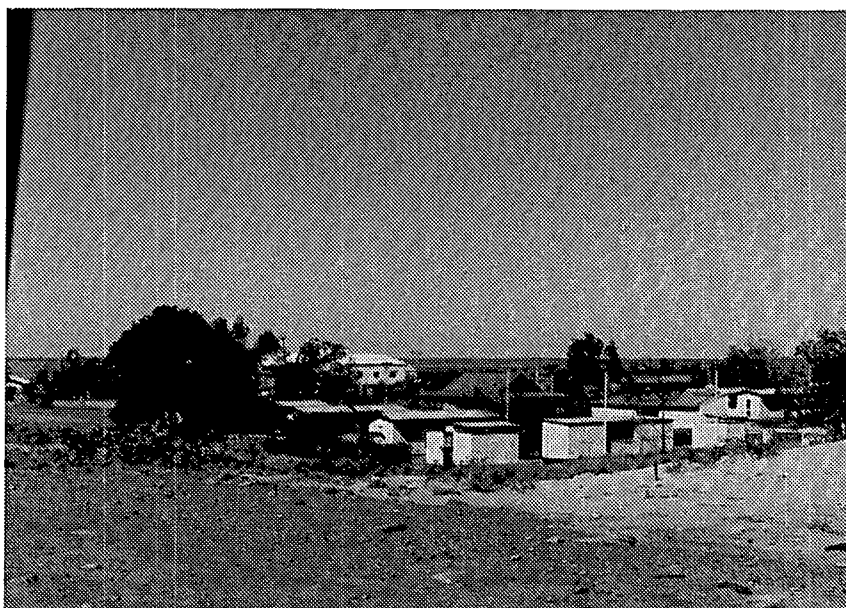


Plate 5: House, the Reserve, Derby.



Plates 6 and 7: Guda Guda camp (above) and Fork Creek Community, both near Wyndham.



Plates 8 and 9: Broome, Urban housing (above), Camp, both occupied by Aborigines.

The Respondents and the Questionnaire

A survey provided most of the data used in this report. The Aborigines interviewed numbered 350, of whom 222 were from the western part of the electorate, in and near Broome and Derby, while the remainder, 128, were from the north eastern part, from Halls Creek to Wyndham. The breakdown by location is given in the following table.

Table 4

<u>Where interviews were carried out</u>		
	n	%
La Grange	22	6.3
Mowanjum	25	7.1
Broome	110	34.1
Derby	65	18.6
Halls Ck	42	12.0
Turkey Ck	33	9.4
Kununurra	25	7.1
Wyndham	28	8.0
	<u>350</u>	<u>100.0</u>

The survey questionnaire was similar to that used in the surveys of Aboriginal voters in the Northern Territory election of 1983 and in the Commonwealth election in the Territory in 1984 (Loveday and Jaensch 1984, 1985). Several questions were the same as those asked in the Territory in the 1983 and 1984 surveys, but others were added, in particular a group of questions about the National Aboriginal Conference, which had been wound up in June 1985, and land rights, a current topic of high interest, despite the Labor party's attempts to prevent it becoming a major election issue.

The basic questions concerned enrolment, knowledge of parties and candidates, past voting behaviour and present voting intention, electoral education, sources of information about the election and problems which the government should do something about. The questionnaire concluded with the usual questions about sex, age, occupation, residence and education, and with questions about self identification and tribal group.

Interviews were generally brief - six to seven minutes - although they were often extended by related conversation and explanation. The same procedures were used as in earlier surveys; that is, local Aborigines, both men and women, were

selected with the help of local Aboriginal organisations for employment as interviewers. For reasons discussed elsewhere (Loveday and Jaensch 1985, 72-3), sampling in the technical sense is not possible and respondents were chosen at random in houses, public places, camps and offices, care being taken to choose only those of voting age, to get a rough balance of sexes, a range of ages from youngest to oldest and a cross section of interviews from the full range of residential localities.

The group of respondents comprised 59 per cent men and 41 per cent women. (More interviews were conducted by males than by females.) Some minor differences between men and women will be noted in the text, but little importance can be attached to them given the fact that, though the respondents were randomly chosen, they do not constitute a strict random sample. There was also variation by place, the percentage of men in the group of respondents from each place being as follows: La Grange 50; Mowanjum 56; Broome 61; Derby 62; Halls Creek 57; Turkey Creek 45; Kununurra 76; Wyndham 61.

The larger proportion of the people interviewed, 61 per cent, lived 'in town'. People from 'out of town' included those from several camps, only a few kilometres from the larger towns, some from remote cattle stations and also others from places like Fitzroy Crossing who could not get back home because of the flooded roads. The proportion 'out of town' is higher than in the 1984 survey in the Northern Territory.

Table 5

Normal place of residence

	<u>WA 1986</u>		<u>NT Fed.1984*</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
in town	206	61	261	85
out of town	133	39	46	15
	<u>339</u>		<u>307</u>	
nd	11			

*The figures for 1984 in this and later tables are drawn from Loveday and Jaensch 1985. All percentages are rounded in this and later tables.

The age distribution is shown in the following table.

Table 6

Age distribution of respondents (%)

	<u>WA 1986</u>	<u>NT Fed 1984</u>
18-20	5	14
21-29	24	38
30-39	27	24
40-49	19	10
50-59	13	9
60+	12	3
	<u>n = 329</u>	<u>n = 302</u>
	nd = 21	nd = 2

A much higher proportion of this group of respondents reported that they had no school education as compared with the group interviewed in 1984.

Table 7

Levels of education of Aboriginal respondents

	<u>WA 1986</u>	<u>NT Fed. 1984</u>
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
none	87	26
primary	91	28
attended secondary	105	32
completed secondary	33	10
other	13	4
	<u>329</u>	
	nd = 21	

A high proportion, 67 per cent, of those interviewed were not employed and many of them were old people beyond the age of employment or women caring for children. Of the 116 who had jobs 20, or 17 per cent, were station hands. Labourer, domestic employment and teaching assistant each had 10 people, each just over 8 per cent. And the most common occupations reported by the remainder were clerical (non-government) 8, community worker and field officer, each 6 people, and gardener, 5 people. Other occupations, both blue and white collar, were reported by a total of 41 people. They included a plumber, three earthmoving plant operators, a garbage collector, four secretaries, three bookkeepers and so on.

As in earlier surveys, those interviewed were asked to say how they would describe themselves using a list of names

say how they would describe themselves using a list of names shown to them. The proportions in the categories are similar to those of the 1984 Northern Territory survey.

Table 8

Self identification by Aboriginal respondents

	<u>WA</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>NT Fed.</u>	<u>1984</u>
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Aboriginal	147	42	23	
Australian	11	3	5	
Urban Australian	-	-	1	
Part European	-	-	1	
Part Aboriginal	44	13	21	
Traditional Abor.	6	2	9	
Torres St Islander	-	-	1	
Mixed	7	2	2	
Urban Aboriginal	3	1	na	
Australian Abor.	132	38	36	
	<u>350</u>			

We also asked each respondent to tell us which tribe, land or language group he or she belonged to and, as is to be expected, there is variation in the answers by residential location as shown in the table below. Of those who live out of town, 85 per cent gave their tribal names and another 8 per cent named their land or language. Of the town dwellers, 60 per cent named tribe and another 5 per cent named land or language. And 88 per cent of those who said 'no tribe' or 'don't know' live in town.

Table 9

Tribal identifications by place of residence

	<u>In</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Out of</u>	<u>Town</u>
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Tribe named	124	60	112	85
Land, language named	10	5	10	8
No tribe, dk	71	35	10	7
	<u>205</u>		<u>132</u>	

Out of 11 who identified as 'Australian' only one named neither tribe nor language, but this respondent was

identified as Aboriginal by an Aboriginal from the community and left in the survey.

The Data Analysed

Enrolment and Voting

Enrolment was made compulsory for Aborigines in Western Australia in 1983; it has been compulsory for Aborigines in the Northern Territory since 1980 and for the Commonwealth since 1983. A few of the people who said they were not on the roll said they were once but they had been 'taken off' and they had not bothered to try to get back on again.

Table 10

Enrolment WA 1986, compared to NT 1983, 1984

	<u>WA 1986</u>		<u>NT Fed. 1984</u>	<u>NT 1983</u>
Enrolled	n	%	%	%
Yes	292	84	84	91
No	55	16	16	9
	<u>347</u>			
nd	3			

For Australia as a whole the level of enrolment in 1981 was estimated at 94.5 per cent, for Western Australia 90.9 per cent (Australian Electoral Office 1983, 2). The level of enrolment in the Kimberley in 1986 was much the same for men, 85 per cent, as for women, 83 per cent. But the levels of enrolment were lower for those resident in town than for those resident out of town. This suggests that the Australian Electoral Education Program may be more effective in communities like Mowanjum, La Grange, Turkey Creek (and Halls Creek for that matter) than in the larger towns with a more dispersed Aboriginal population.

Table 11

Enrolment by place of residence

	<u>In Town</u>		<u>Out of Town</u>	
	n	%	n	%
enrolled	162	79	122	93
not enrolled	43	21	9	7
	<u>205</u>		<u>131</u>	

For the purposes of the in town/out of town distinction, Halls Creek, Derby, Broome, Kununurra and Wyndham were defined as towns; all other residential locations were 'out of town'. The groups from some places are very small and consequently the figures from them must be treated with reserve; they are as follows.

Table 12

Enrolment by place of interview

	<u>Enrolled</u>		
	n	%	n
La Grange	19	95	20
Mowanjum	25	100	25
Broome	86	79	109
Derby	48	74	65
Halls Ck	40	95	42
Turkey Ck	33	100	33
Kununurra	17	68	25
Wyndham	24	86	28

The second question, will you vote in this election, evoked some surprise from a number of respondents, many of them in communities to be polled on 8 February, who had not heard that an election was to be held in 8 to 10 days time. For some people in remote places the word was that they would vote early in a mini-poll, conducted by plane on or about 1 February, but few people from remote places whom we interviewed, including some who were in town, knew this. The Returning Officer for the area used radio to tell communities to be visited for polling before 8 February of the forthcoming visits of his mobile teams. It was expected that all other places, where polling would be conducted in static booths on 8 February, would learn about the coming election from the media and from visits by candidates. We conducted all interviews but those at Wyndham before 1 February. Of those we interviewed, 27 gave no answer when asked if they intended to vote. Of the remainder 86 per cent said they would vote and the rest said they would not, which suggests that they were not fully aware that voting is compulsory. A slightly lower proportion, 11 per cent, said they did not intend to vote in the federal election in the Territory in December 1984 (Loveday and Jaensch 1985, 91). Of course, with a week to go before polling many of these people could have discovered that voting is compulsory and changed their minds about not voting.

Knowledge of parties and candidates

Several observations should first be made about the way respondents answered questions on these topics. Some people gave only one party name, Labor, when first asked which parties were contesting the Assembly election in the Kimberley electorate, but if they knew the name of the Liberal candidate, or thought they did, in answer to the next question, asking the names of the candidates, and could correctly give the party of the Liberal candidate then that was counted as knowing that two parties were contesting the election. It was also of considerable interest that many people explained, when they said they could not name parties or candidates yet, that they had not yet received any how-to-vote cards, or 'papers' as they were sometimes described. People were very confused about Tom Stephens, largely because they knew nothing about the Legislative Council. Consequently, they did not know that he was not up for re-election in 1986. Instead he was frequently spoken of as if he were some kind of partner to Ernie Bridge, a co-member of a vague parliament. It was assumed that both must be standing if an election was coming. This leads to another observation: the question asking the names of candidates so often evoked the names 'Bridge, Stephens' as a combination that it was clear people knew them as the incumbents, if not as the candidates. A handful of respondents, especially in the Broome and Derby area, mentioned the retiring North Province Councillor, Peter Dowding, or the Pilbara Labor candidate, Pam Buchanan, as candidates for the Kimberley Assembly seat, indicating their uncertainty about electorates and houses of parliament.

The Australian Democrats were seldom mentioned in replies to the questions which parties were contesting the Assembly seat and the Council seat. However, results from a couple of polling places show a sizeable Democrat vote for the Council (see table 24 below). This is testimony to the campaigning of a Democrat party worker who visited the area in the days after completion of our survey and before the taking of the poll.

Just over 40 per cent of the respondents were unable to give us the name of one or more parties contesting the election; and although 35 per cent were able to name both Liberal and Labor, a further 19 per cent could name Labor as compared with only 3 per cent who could name Liberal. Candidates' names, especially the Liberal candidates', were less well known. And the importance of incumbency and the long-term media exposure it brings is suggested by comparing knowledge of Everingham, in the NT in 1984, competing against a sitting member, Reeves, with knowledge of Shephard in the Kimberley in 1986: Everingham, retiring Chief Minister of the Territory was known by name by 29 per cent;

Table 13

Knowledge of parties and candidates, WA Assembly 1986

Party	n	%	Candidate	n	%
Labor	61	19	Bridge	88	26
Liberal	9	3	Shephard	2	*
Labor & Liberal	114	35	Bridge & Shephard	8	2
Lab, Lib & other**	4	1	Other**	63	19
dk	139	43	dk	178	53
	<u>327</u>			<u>339</u>	
nd	23		nd	11	

Party and candidate	n	%
Bridge, Labor	83	50
Shephard, Liberal	1	*
Bridge Lab and Shephard Lib	7	7
Bridge, Liberal**	4	2
Other**	16	10
dk	56	34
	<u>167</u>	
nd	183	

* = less than 1 per cent
 ** = incorrect

and Reeves, the incumbent, by 31 per cent (Loveday and Jaensch 1985, 104).

Knowing the names of the parties contesting the Assembly seat did not vary significantly by place of

Table 14

Know names of parties, Assembly, by place of residence

	In town		Out of town	
	n	%	n	%
Labor, Liberal,				
Labor and Liberal	112	58	70	53
Incorrect	4	2	-	
dk	77	40	61	47
	<u>193</u>		<u>131</u>	

residence or by sex. In the two following tables the correct answers, Labor, Liberal, Labor and Liberal, are combined to give one percentage figure.

Table 15

Know names of parties, Assembly, by sex

	Men		Women	
	n	%	n	%
Labor, Liberal, Labor and Liberal	111	58	70	54
Incorrect	3	2	1	1
dk	76	40	59	45
	190		130	

There are however differences between the east and west Kimberleys, those from the east showing greater knowledge of parties, probably because candidates had campaigned there more than in the west by the time of the survey. The table below gives the figures.

Table 16

Know names of parties, Assembly, by place of interview

	Labor, Liberal		Incorrect		dk		n
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
<u>West</u>							
La Grange	-		-		22	100	22
Mowanjum	14	56	-		11	44	25
Broome	27	30	3	3	59	66	89
Derby	39	62	-		24	38	63
<u>East</u>							
Halls Ck	30	71	-		12	29	42
Turkey Ck	27	82	-		6	18	33
Kununurra	22	88	1	4	2	8	25
Wyndham	25	89	-		3	11	28

Knowledge of candidate and party showed variation with education, increasing the higher the level of schooling.

Table 17

Know names of candidates and parties, Assembly,
by level of schooling

	No Schooling		Primary only		Attended Secondary		Completed Secondary		Other	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Bridge, Lab; Shepherd, Lib; BLib, SLib	22	48	17	40	31	65	14	78	4	80
Incorrect	3	2	9	22	6	13	1	5	-	
dk	21	46	16	38	11	23	3	17	1	20
	<u>46</u>		<u>42</u>		<u>48</u>		<u>18</u>		<u>5</u>	

Questions about parties and candidates contesting the Legislative Council seat showed that very few people indeed had any notion that there is a second chamber in the legislature. Some respondents then asked us to explain it to them and even then, after they had heard about the 'two halves' of parliament for which they had two votes, they were still quite unable to recall the names of candidates or to sort out the confusion about Stephens. Some, however, knew enough about the party system to be able to say that if there was a Council election, then Liberal and Labor were sure to contest it. A few had heard of the Council as a separate entity, but others, by including Democrats in the parties contesting the Assembly seat, revealed another version of the confusion about the two chambers. And there

Table 18

Knowledge of parties and candidates, Council, WA 1986

Party	n	%	Candidate	n	%
Labor	49	16	Helm	5	2
Liberal	7	2	Butler	1	*
Liberal & Labor	61	20	Helm & Butler	4	1
Democrat, Lib & Lab	3	1	Helm, Butler, Aquilina	1	*
Other (incorrect)	6	2	Other (incorrect, mainly Stephens)	55	20
dk	183	59	dk	214	76
	<u>309</u>			<u>280</u>	
nd	41		nd	70	

were yet others who revealed their confusion by mixing up the names of Assembly and Council candidates, often mixing up parties as well, when they tried to name Council candidates.

Usual vote and voting intention

Most people had no difficulty with the questions: do you usually vote for one party? if so, which one? which party will you vote for this time in the Assembly election or which party did you vote for in the 1983 election? Of the 274 who answered the question do you usually vote for one party, 90 per cent said yes, and of the 250 who named the party they usually voted for, 89 per cent said Labor, 10 per cent Liberal and one person, less than 1 per cent, said Democrat. When asked which party they intended to vote for this time, 76 per cent said Labor, 10 per cent Liberal and 12 per cent did not know. The figures for recalled 1983 vote are broadly the same.

Table 19

Usual vote and voting intention Assembly WA 1986

	<u>Usual Vote</u>		<u>Intend to Vote</u>			<u>1983 Vote</u>	
	n	%	n	%		n	%
Labour	223	89	217	76		220	85
Liberal	26	10	28	10		11	4
Democrat	1	*	other	6	other	4	2
			dk	35	dk	25	9
	<u>250</u>		<u>286</u>			<u>260</u>	
nd	100		nd	64	nd	90	

The intended vote for Labor in 1986 is considerably higher than was actually cast for Labor on polling day in the places where the survey was carried out - 76 per cent intended as compared with 62 per cent actual. Of course, Aborigines were not the only voters in these places and in Broome, Derby and Kununurra they would have been outnumbered by white voters. Since white voters are likely to be more evenly divided between Labor and Liberal, it may be expected that the Labor vote in Broome, Derby and Kununurra would be lower than the Labor portion of the intended Aboriginal vote from these places, while the intended and actual votes should be much closer in those places where most of the inhabitants are Aborigines. A place-by-place breakdown of the figures goes some way towards substantiating this

hypothesis, as the following table indicates. The figures have to be treated with reserve: not only are the total numbers at any one place quite small, which makes it impossible to carry out tests of significance, but the numbers include some 'out-of-town' people who were interviewed in each place.

Table 20

Comparison, by place, of voting intention and vote
WA Assembly 1986

	<u>Respondents</u>	<u>Intended Vote</u>	<u>Actual Vote</u>
	<u>n</u>	<u>% Lab.</u>	<u>% Lab.</u>
Broome	86	85	64
Derby	42	74	59
Kununurra	33	88	49
La Grange	18	50	85
Mowanjum	22	73	72
Halls Creek	41	59	68
Turkey Creek	18	94	90
Wyndham and Wyndham East	22	69	68

The actual Labor vote at Broome, Derby and Kununurra is lower than the intended Labor vote of Aboriginal respondents and at Mowanjum and Turkey Creek the two are much the same. These are the results to be expected if the hypothesis above is correct. Unexpected results came from Wyndham, where the actual Labor vote was not lower than, but equal to, the intended Labor vote of the Aboriginal respondents and from La Grange and Halls Creek where the actual Labor vote was much higher than the intended vote when, according to the hypothesis the two should have been fairly close in both places. No explanation for the figures for Wyndham is forthcoming. For the other two places, both with high proportions of 'don't knows' (44 per cent at Mowanjum, 20 per cent at Halls Creek), it may be argued that those who 'did not know' how they intended to vote when interviewed, in fact mostly voted Labor on the day of polling.

Only one person refused to tell us how he would vote on the ground that voting is secret. Another respondent said he always voted for both Liberal and Labor candidates in the past and would do so again, 'to give them both a fair go'. Many people who did not know which party or candidate they would vote for indicated that they had heard of Ernie Bridge and knew he had something to do with parliament. One respondent commented on question 10, would you vote the same way if Ernie Bridge was not an Aboriginal?, saying that

Aboriginality was not an issue in the election. And most people, 93 per cent, agreed, especially those who regularly voted Labor, although 141 people, over one third of the sample, did not answer this question. One person only said 'I would vote "blackfella" if there was one', meaning blackfella party it seemed.

Table 21

Would vote the same way if Ernie Bridge
was not Aboriginal

	n	%
Yes	194	93
No	15	7
	<u>209</u>	
nd	141	

The lack of knowledge of the Council often made it difficult to ask question 11, which party will you vote for this time in the Legislative Council? Nonetheless, it was there and many people replied Labor, Bridge or some other combination just as they had for the Assembly. Given the confusion about the Council, the data must be treated with reserve: respondents may have thought we were simply asking the question again that had already been asked about the Assembly, or they may have given an answer secure in the general knowledge that parties contesting the Assembly would also contest the Council seat. Of course, if they understood the question in this second sense they were giving an 'intended vote' answer, but not if they thought we were asking the Assembly question a second time. The correspondence with voting intention for the Assembly is very close.

Table 22

Voting intention Legislative Council WA 1986

	n	<u>Party</u>	%
Labor	195		78
Liberal	25		10
Democrat	3		1
Other	1		*
dk	26		7
	<u>250</u>		—
nd	100		

If voting intention for the Assembly (76 per cent Labor) is compared with the usual vote (89 per cent Labor) and the recalled 1983 vote (85 per cent Labor) it appears that there is some dissatisfaction or uncertainty about Labor which was expressed at the time of the survey by the 'others' and, especially, the 'don't knows'. But this is inconclusive; indeed the actual results from the places where we interviewed all show an increase in the proportion of Labor vote as compared with 1983.

Table 23

Elections 1983, 1986: Labor Party Support:
Legislative Assembly
 (% of formal votes, rounded)

	<u>1983</u>	<u>ALP</u> <u>1986</u>
Broome	64	64
Derby	58	59
La Grange	76	85
Mowanjum	64	72
Halls Creek	62	68
Kununurra	39	49
Turkey Creek	79	90
Wyndham	53	69
Wyndham East	65	68

However, the dissatisfaction does seem to have been registered, not in the Assembly vote but in the vote for the

Table 24

Election 1986: Party Support: Assembly and Council
 (% of formal votes, rounded)

	<u>Labor</u>		<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	
	<u>Assembly</u>	<u>Council</u>	<u>Council</u>	<u>Assembly</u>	<u>Council</u>
Broome	64	53	8	36	39
Derby	59	48	7	41	45
La Grange	85	88	2	18	10
Mowanjum	72	49	9	28	42
Halls Creek	68	55	3	32	42
Kununurra	49	36	13	51	52
Turkey Creek	90	65	22	10	14
Wyndham	69	59	6	31	35
Wyndham East	68	53	4	32	43

Council, where in all except La Grange the Labor vote is lower than for the Assembly. The beneficiaries of this protest appear to have been both the Liberals and the Australian Democrats. The effect of Democrat campaign - and the handing out of how-to-vote cards - at Kununurra and Turkey Creek is also indicated in this table.

Some minor differences can be seen between men and women. Ninety-three per cent of men said they usually vote for one party whereas 86 per cent of women said the same. A higher proportion of men usually voted Labor and intended to vote Labor in 1986.

Table 25

Usual party vote and intended vote, Assembly, by sex

	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>		<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Labor	138	93	79	82	129	78	82	71
Liberal	9	6	17	18	16	10	12	10
Democrat	1	1	-	-				
Other					4	2	2	2
dk					16	10	19	17
	<u>148</u>		<u>96</u>		<u>165</u>		<u>115</u>	

The stability of the vote appears to be high although there are a few who change, or say they do. First there is a comparison between the recalled 1983 vote and the reported usual vote which shows that 91 per cent of usual Labor voters gave Labor their votes in 1983. Assuming accuracy of recall and allowing that the numbers are very small, 35 per cent of usual Liberal voters voted Liberal in 1983 - the others almost all voted Labor, while a bare 2 per cent of usual Labor voters supported the Liberals in 1983.

Table 26

Usual vote compared with recalled 1983 vote

1983 Vote %	Usually vote %	
	Labor	Liberal
Labor	91	61
Liberal	1	35
Other	1	4
dk	7	-
n	<u>204</u>	<u>23</u>

Table 27

<u>Usual vote compared with intended vote 1986</u>			
Intended vote %	Usually vote %		
	Labor	Liberal	Dem.
Labor	89	20	
Liberal	4	64	
Other	1	-	*
dk	6	16	
n	217	25	1

A handful of usual Labor voters intended to vote Liberal in 1986, 8 voters or 4 per cent of the usual Labor voters, and a few - 5 - usual Liberal voters intended to switch to Labor.

Reasons for vote

Although we did not attempt to ask people in a short interview why they were voting for a given party a few volunteered comments on this subject. A handful of respondents criticised Labor members or the Labor party for having done little or nothing for Aborigines and for having failed to live up to their promises. For one or two disappointment had grown to the point where they were disenchanted with politicians and the system in general. Some quotations will capture the character of the dissatisfaction.

First, the disappointment with Ernie Bridge:

- We grew him up but he never helps native people. Tom Stephens, we never get nothing out of him neither.
- Which party will you vote for this time? Don't know. Ernie hasn't done much good. But might still vote Labor.
- Lot of people vote for Ernie, but he don't help my Aboriginal people. Undecided [about the Council]. Again, Tom Stephens hasn't done much. Undecided, I might vote Liberal.
- Ernie used to be a good fellow. Won't vote again for Ernie.

More general disenchantment could follow:

- Election time and white fellas come and talk to Aborigines and other times never come around much. Ernie too.
- Don't give a f... if I don't vote for anybody. Had enough of them - all promises, no action, lying bastards. We getting sick and tired of voting for Labor. After all these years we got nowhere - we went to World War II. We got nowhere.
- We are enrolled to vote, but we had no real voice; in housing, for example, there is no consultation about the location of houses
- The government always says there is no money. And we didn't see anything from Labor last year [as a reason for refusal to answer the question on problems which the government should do something about].
- We are still lost in history. Government reckon you get your land back - for years, but nothing doing.

There were, of course, balancing comments to the effect that because Labor had done things for Aborigines the respondent would go on voting Labor.

- Liberals haven't given us anything, Labor gave us a 99 year lease here.
- Labor did a lot of things, we are free.
- We had a lot of promises about land from Labor. We belong to Western Australia and we should vote for our government.
- Menzies, Whitlam, Nugget [Coombs], Dexter, Howson, they all did good. Nothing from Fraser; we have promises from Hawke.

But most Labor voters did not bother to explain why they were not voting for the Liberal candidate.

There were far fewer comparable quotes from the few Liberal voters. One person, who said he usually voted Liberal, identified as part-Aboriginal and gave his occupation as a small business (fencing) contractor said he would vote for Hassell because he was 'for small business'. Government, he thought should

cut out the dole for kids at the end of school and do more for coloured people [that is, part Aborigines].

And one other respondent commented, indicating less concern with party lines, that

we don't know government business and we just hope to vote for someone who can help us.

Knowledge of elections and voting

The basic figures from the election itself show a very low level of informal voting. Of course, this may be the result of both assistance to the voter in the polling place and the educational campaign carried out by the Australian Electoral Education Program (AEEP) in the area.

Table 28

Formal and Informal voting, Legislative Assembly, 1983, 1986

	Voted		Informal		Formal			
	1983 n	1986 n	1983 n	1986 n	1983 n	1986 %	1986 n	1986 %
<u>West</u>								
Broome	922	1206	38	43	884	96	1163	96
Derby	656	849	34	18	622	95	831	98
La Grange	113	90	20	8	93	82	82	91
Mowanjum	67	75	11	7	56	84	68	91
<u>East</u>								
Halls Creek	268	355	33	4	235	88	351	99
Kununurra	696	874	37	11	659	95	852	97
Turkey Creek	120	147	12	2	108	90	145	99
Wyndham	87	92	6	5	81	93	87	95
Wyndham East	290	392	22	16	268	92	376	96

Given the AEEP's educational campaign, we thought it worthwhile to ask a number of questions designed to show what contact with the AEEP teams people could recall and whether they thought the program was desirable. The questions were

- has someone explained to you about elections and voting?

And 168 people (49 per cent) said yes, while 178 (51 per cent) said no. Four gave no answer. And if the respondent answered yes, the next two were

- could you tell us who it was?
- and when was it, how long ago?

The answers to these two questions were grouped under the headings shown in the following tables.

Table 29

Who explained about elections

	n	%
Polling official, 'on the day'	4	3
AEEP team/person	58	37
Person from political party	13	8
Family	4	3
School teacher, church leader, health sister	5	3
Unspecified non-Aboriginal	7	5
Unspecified Aboriginal	3	2
Other	16	10
dk	47	30
	<hr/> 257	
nd	193	

Table 30

When the explanation was given

	n	%
Recently	7	5
Last year	66	48
Last election	7	5
Two years ago	4	3
Long ago	23	17
When enrolled	3	2
At school	4	3
dk	24	17
	<hr/> 138	
nd	121	

There appears to have been slightly more 'explanation about elections', most of it from the AEEP, in the West than in

the East of the Kimberley. Of the western respondents, 53 per cent (116 out of 220) said someone explained, while only 41 per cent of easterners (52 out of 126) said the same.

They were then asked

- is it a good idea for someone to explain about elections?

And if the respondent said yes - and 93 per cent of them did -

- who should do it? Someone from: the government, the electoral office, political parties, a school teacher, candidates, other?

Table 31

Who should explain about elections

	n	%
Someone from government	15	5
Someone from electoral office	95	29
Someone from parties	15	5
Teacher	51	16
Candidate	34	10
Other	87	27
dk	29	9
	<u>326</u>	
nd	24	

'Explained to you about elections and voting' meant many things to respondents from the most basic explanation given at the polling booth about how to number the squares according to preferences through to the more wide ranging explanations of enrolment, voting and related matters given by the AEEP. Consequently, a wide range of people were identified in response to the question asking who had given the explanations. And, even more important, this variation in what kind of explanation people had in mind shaped their answers to question 16, who should do it? But since we had not asked people to tell us what they meant by explanations of elections and voting and had given them no firm guidance on how to understand that set of words, we cannot connect kind of explanation to the answers to the question who should do it? If the respondent thought explanation meant hearing about the parties and their policies, then they were likely to say parties and candidates were the best people to do it, but if they thought explanations were about the

legislation relating to enrolment and voting then they were likely to say the electoral office people should do it.

It is also noteworthy that many of the people under 'other' gave either 'Aborigines' or 'someone from the community'.

Sources of information

We asked Aboriginal voters how they had found out about the election and whether they had tried to follow news about the election, but before reporting the figures it is necessary to comment briefly on the media and campaigning in the Kimberley area.

In Derby, Broome, Kununurra, Wyndham and Halls Creek ABC television and ABC radio are the only electronic media. The radio station, 6WS, carries a short daily regional bulletin of local Kimberley area news in the evening, but during the period of survey in these two towns, few of the items dealt with the election, then only 8 to 12 days away. Of course, news of the flood following Cyclone Hector which drenched first the parts around Wyndham and down beyond Kununurra and then the Fitzroy Crossing area, took up much of the available time. Television news of the election, including the televised party broadcasts, was state wide in character and content, not regional. As a result some Aborigines who knew that an election was coming on thought they would be voting for Burke. On radio, Burke was interviewed emphasising that Labor would not try to legislate on land rights in the coming parliament, while Opposition leader Hassell, on radio and television, claimed that Labor would give land rights without legislation by its failure to act against the unauthorised occupation of land by Aborigines.

The major newspapers were the state-wide West Australian, published from Perth, interstate newspapers and the Australian. Apart from news of the election campaign, the West Australian carried advertisements listing all candidates by party and a variety of text advertisements of party messages on basic themes such as land rights, the rural crisis, electoral reform and so on. None was specifically designed for the Kimberley. A free community newspaper, the North West Telegraph, was widely available in Broome and Derby but not in the eastern area. The North West Telegraph of 22 January - the week before the survey of voters was carried out - had a front page devoted to the election, headlining Burke's and Hassell's speeches in Karratha (Pilbara area) earlier in the week. Labor had four advertisements: two were devoted to Pam Buchanan, the party's candidate for the adjoining Pilbara electorate, and

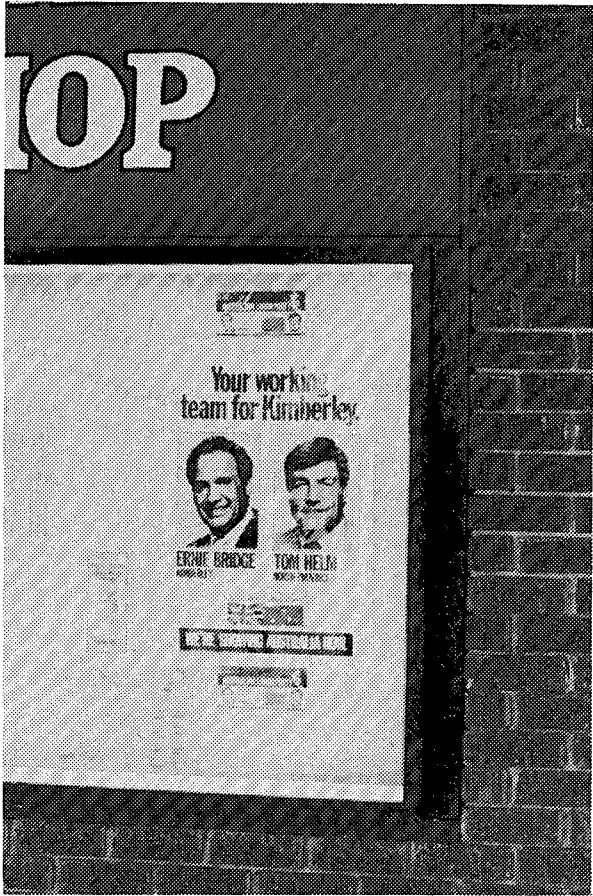
two were full page advertisements, one promoting Pam Buchanan for Pilbara and Tom Helm for the Council seat of North Province and the other featuring headlines from Western Australian newspapers emphasising that Burke was 'set to take on Hawke over land rights' and that the 'mining industry backs Burke on land rights stand'. Labor advertisements in the Telegraph did not mention the sitting member for the Kimberley, Ernie Bridge, which may explain why some voters, if they noticed advertisements in the local paper, thought Buchanan was the candidate. The Liberal party ran a half page advertisement with the names and photos of their candidates: Shephard for Kimberley, Butler for North Province in the Council and van Uden for the Pilbara seat in the Assembly - along with a 'We believe' text in the advertisement. The Australian Democrats candidate for the North Province in the Council, Bernice Aquilina, from Onslow, was announced in a short news item, with a photograph. She was mentioned on radio on 31 January, the report being that her funds were too limited for her to travel widely in the electorate.

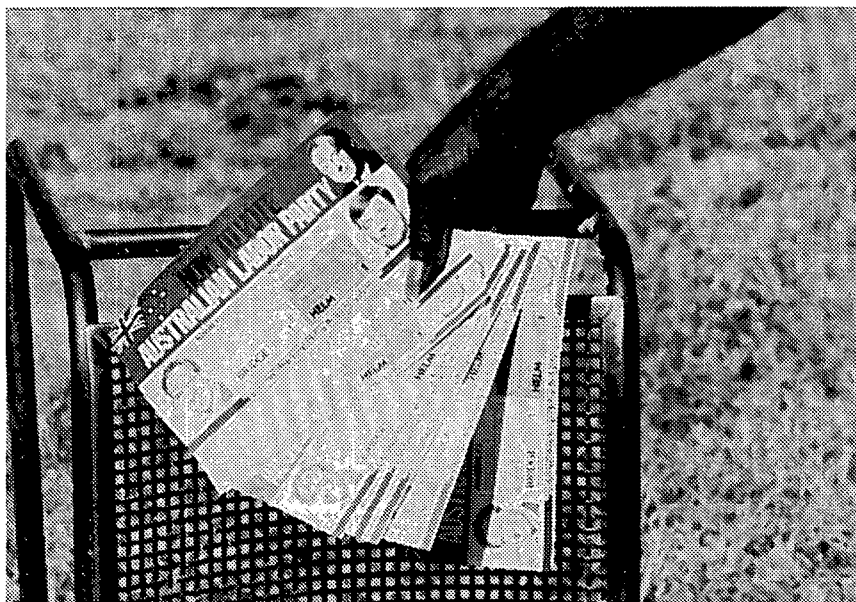
Party workers had carried out some canvassing in Derby and Broome but no posters were seen in public places. How-to-vote cards for Labor had been handed to Aborigines in Derby, for distribution on or before the day of polling. A stockman in Derby had a Liberal how-to-vote card in his pocket; the how-to-vote cards of both parties were pinned up in the council office at Mowanjum. A Liberal party worker handed out how-to-vote cards in one shopping area in Broome, and presumably Labor did the same but one local informant thought that it had not done so by 29 February. The Liberal worker tried to hand out cards at one community but was told they did not want them because they all voted Labor and were waiting for the Labor cards to come.

In Halls Creek on the eastern side of the electorate, Ernie Bridge had handed out pamphlets the week before the survey and a poster for the Liberal candidate, Bill Shephard, was displayed in the window of a deserted shop - behind bars. A Labor leaflet and Liberal stickers were noticed in Turkey Creek and the Liberal candidate had recently visited the area. He had also been in Kununurra handing out leaflets and more Liberal and Labor posters were evident than in other townships. The signs in the week of the survey were that by then there had been slightly more campaigning in east than in west Kimberley.

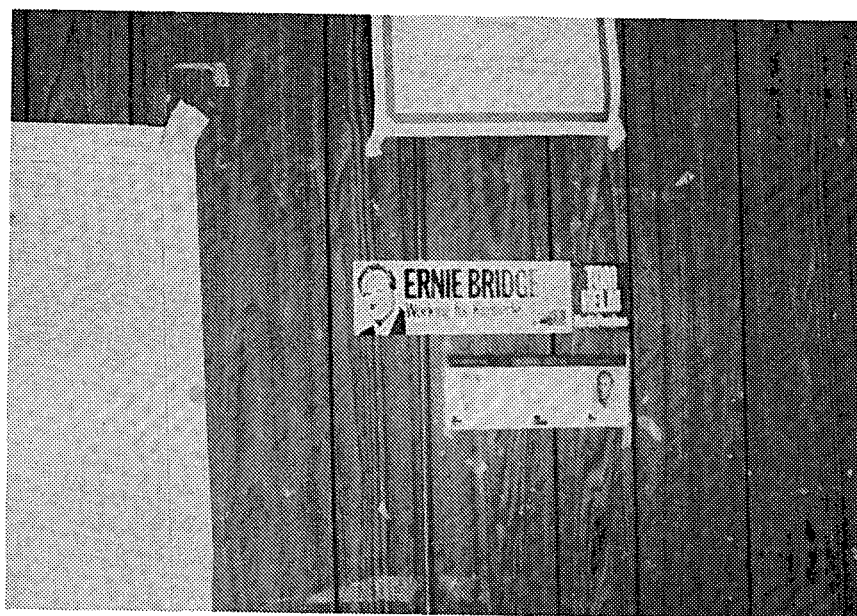
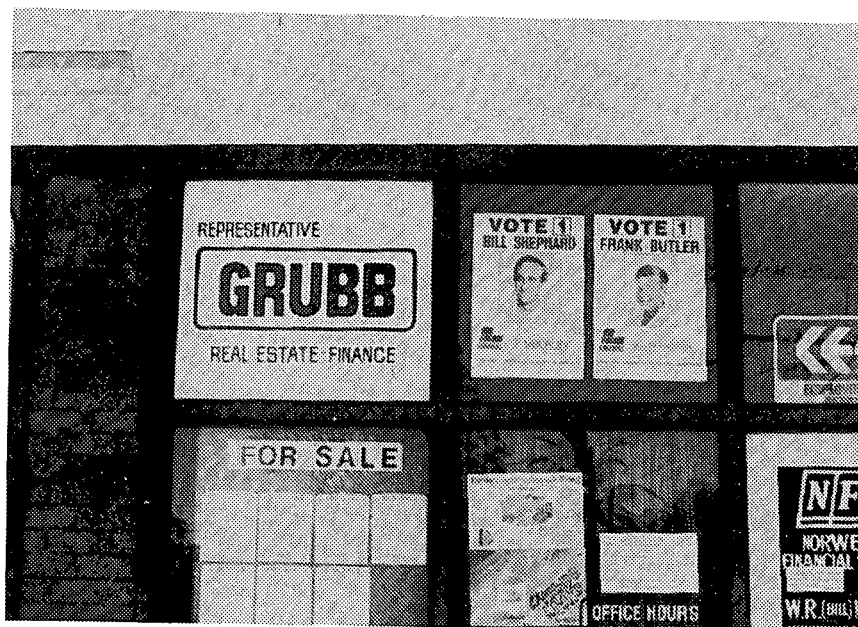
Items in the Kimberley Land Council Newsletter of June 1985 and in the Aboriginal Newsletter of December 1985 were the only ones directed specifically towards Aborigines, the former on land rights and the latter on the testing of electoral education material for Aborigines under the

Plates 10 & 11:
How to vote
cards, Labor
at Kununurra
and Liberal
Creek.





Plates 12 and 13: How to vote cards, Labor (above) and Liberal, Derby.



Plates 14 and 15: How to vote cards, Kununurra shop front (above), Mowanjum council office.

headline Aboriginal Votes Count, but neither of them made specific reference to a coming state election.

No official notices of the date and place of the polling were observed in either the Aboriginal communities or the townships of Broome and Derby and no official announcements were monitored on radio or television, although they may have been made at times or in places not visited by the interview team. It was announced on radio on 31 January that the Electoral Office staff had commenced three days of early polling by plane in twenty small remote communities with a visit that day to Mt Barnett Station. This was eight days before the main poll.

The two questions, have you tried to follow the news about the election? and how have you found out about the election? could be answered independently. That is, some respondents had not tried to follow the election, but they had heard about it and could tell us how they had found out, 'how?' being defined by a list as by what medium? Others who had tried to follow the news told us 'how' they did this in the second of these two questions.

Table 32

Has tried to follow news about the election

	<u>WA 1986</u>		<u>Fed. NT 1984</u>	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	75	25	23	
A little	109	39	31	
No	115	37	46	
	<u>299</u>			
nd	51			

The proportion who tried to follow the news is slightly higher than in the 1984 federal election survey in the Territory, but the difference is not enough to warrant a firm conclusion that for Aborigines state election politics in the West is more salient than federal election politics in the Territory.

Most people, 296, answered the question how they heard about the election and they were allowed to specify more than one of the sources of information we nominated. As in the 1984 survey, radio, television and general talk were the more important sources.

Table 33

Source of information about the election

	<u>WA</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>Fed.</u>	<u>NT</u>	<u>1984</u>
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>		<u>%</u>	
Radio	138	47		32	
Television	122	41		56	
Talk	103	35		30	
Newspapers	34	12		23	
Party meetings	22	7		12	
Candidates	8	3		4	

The survey included a higher proportion of people who had no schooling than the 1984 survey and this probably explains the lower proportion in the Kimberley who relied on newspapers for their information. The fact that a higher proportion lived 'out of town' also probably explains why the proportion relying on television for information is lower than in the 1984 survey.

Problems for government and party policies

We asked respondents to name up to three problems they thought the government should do something about. A number of people were quite unable to offer any list of 'problems' in answer to this question, even if it was framed in a slightly different way, such as: when you are all sitting around talking and complaining about something and someone says 'the government ought to fix it up', that is what we are asking about. This occasionally helped people, but it seemed that many people did not think of government as having the job of 'doing something' about problems. Since we did not have the relevant questions, we do not know whether they knew about 'the government' even in a vague sense, as distinct from Labor or Liberal or parliament or, if they did, whether they supposed it was a group of 'bosses' somewhere down south, that is, that its main function was to rule.

But, this having been said, it must be emphasised that the majority of respondents clearly assumed that the government does have the job of 'doing something' about peoples' grievances and demands. Their attitude is the same as that of the vast majority of other voters and the questions uppermost in peoples' minds are listed in the following table. The people who gave one or more response numbered 278 and the total number of responses was 633 or just over two responses, on average, per person. The difference between percentages of responses and percentages

of people should be noted. For example, the total number of responses saying housing was a problem government should do something about was 171, which is 27 per cent of all responses and 62 per cent of all the people who answered the question. The responses are summarised in the following table.

Table 34

Problems the government should do something about

	n	WA 1986 Percentage of Respondents Responses		Fed. NT 1984 Percentage of Responses
Education	61	22	10	15
Economy (esp. employment)	167	60	26	25
Housing	171	62	27	17
Health	33	12	5	3
Social services & related	52	19	8	10
Mining	6	2	1	1
Land Rights, equality	114	41	18	20
Transport	20	7	3	-
Other	9	3	1	9
No. of responses	<u>633</u>			<u>496</u>

One or two comments from the questionnaires may be recorded before we discuss the answers in more detail.

One respondent said

- I don't really know as long as I've got shelter, food and my pension.

Many people mentioned land rights, as we have seen in the table.

One or two added remarks:

- Aborigines shouldn't have to fight for land rights. They (white fellas) think if we take over the land 'what can they do with it'.
- Why land rights, I was born here and they take everything. We can share 50/50.
- We vote for Canberra and Perth and we want help to get our own country.

A few people mentioned 'land' and then clearly distinguished this from land rights or 'country' meaning large ancestral tracts by saying 'should listen to Aboriginal people for what they ask for. Like land they ask for. Not big land but just small block'. Other aspects of this topic will be dealt with below.

Very few people commented on administration in this section. One person who had a good knowledge of administration stressed that there were many unsatisfactory features of what she described as the 'structure of policy making for Aborigines' and in particular the definition of positions and how 'they' [departments] appoint Aborigines to them. Another person, as noted above, commented that although Aborigines voted, they had no real voice in administration about things like the location of houses. The police were occasionally the subject of cautious adverse remarks, and there had recently been complaints about the apparently violent death of a man in gaol at Wyndham (Age 20 January 1986) but no one mentioned the administration of justice or the maintenance of law and order as a 'problem' the government should do something about.

One respondent thought that Aboriginal Affairs should not be a matter for differing and opposed party policies: they 'should all be one working together'.

Land rights, according to 41 per cent of the respondents, was a problem government should do something about. In 1984, in the Territory, a similar proportion, 39 per cent, thought the federal government should do something about it. It may be noted here that some observers have commented that the proportion naming land rights as a problem is lower than they expected. One hypothesis is that from about 1978 to about 1983, Aborigines had high hopes that some form of land rights would be legislated for by a state Labor government. The failure of both the state Labor government elected in 1983 and the failure of federal Labor to uphold its platform in 1984 against the state government may have resulted, so the argument runs, in large scale disillusionment and reluctance to treat land rights as a problem which either level of government would do something about. The data we gathered do not have a time dimension and therefore do not allow us to test the hypothesis. There is, however, some local variation in responses to this question. Thirty per cent of those who live in town thought land rights was a problem for government while 38 per cent of those living out of town thought so. These were 16 per cent and 24 per cent of responses (table 35).

A higher proportion of responses from urban residents nominated the economy as a problem for government, presumably indicating respondents' greater awareness of

Table 35

Problems for government: as perceived by in town and
out of town residents

	<u>% of responses</u>		<u>% of respondents</u>	
	<u>In</u>	<u>Out of</u>	<u>In</u>	<u>Out of</u>
	<u>Town</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Town</u>
Education	10	7	14	5
Economy (esp. employment)	30	19	42	14
Housing	25	32	35	24
Health	5	6	7	4
Social services	10	6	14	4
Mining	*	2	*	1
Land Rights	16	24	22	18
Transport	3	3	5	3
Other	2	4	3	*
Number	<u>393</u>	<u>209</u>	<u>278</u>	<u>278</u>

current debate and contemporary political questions, and for those out of town housing was a more important issue than for those in town. The third comment justified by this table is that, although there are some differences of emphasis between town and out-of-town residents, for all of them other issues besides land rights are of considerable importance. Nonetheless land rights has been at the forefront of political argument for so long that we decided to include a question on it framed in terms of recent controversy.

Land Rights

The question on land rights was the most difficult on the questionnaire but it seemed worthwhile to try it out as an experiment. We thought it might yield some useful data and there is little doubt that it did. The question was put thus:

Land rights are an issue in Australia. What do you think is best?

Aboriginal veto over any development or mining

OR

Arbitration over disagreements.

We recognised that this had three difficult words in it: issue, veto and arbitration and, in discussion with

respondents, we noted that we should have given the question more precision by specifying that it was about Aboriginal land. The difficult words were dealt with as follows: after presenting the question, often a couple of times at the respondent's request, we then said we would explain it and the explanation used in the western area was usually along the following lines:

people have been arguing a lot about land rights in Australia and they say two things.

Some people say Aborigines should be able to say no you can't come on our land to a mining company, go away and stay away. That is a veto.

The other people say, it is best if the Aboriginal mob and the mining mob sit down to talk about it and someone like a judge or a land commissioner hears the discussion and then tells them all at the end, you mining mob you can do this but you can't do that, you Aborigines can do this but you can't do that, a bit like sharing. This is the arbitration. Now which do you think is best, veto - or arbitration.

In the eastern area and in some western area interviews a somewhat briefer version of the same explanation was developed along the following lines 'Veto means Aboriginal people have the last say about whether development or mining should occur on their land. Arbitration means a judge decides, after discussion'.

If anything, the first mode of presentation slightly favoured the arbitration response, but it is impossible to give an impression of the extent of bias introduced. The important thing is that there was then seldom any hesitation or difficulty about the response.

Table 36

Veto or arbitration best in disputes
over mining on Aboriginal land

	n	%
Veto	132	39
Arbitration	135	40
dk	73	21
	<hr/> 340	
nd	10	

Cross tabulations by age and sex reveal very little variation on these percentages between age groups or between men and women. Breakdown by place of residence shows that 'out-of-towners' have a higher proportion of 'don't know' responses than those resident in town: 27 per cent as compared to 18 per cent, with their support for the veto and arbitration both slightly lower as a result.

It was suggested to us that there may well be variations by place depending on a complex of local politics, past history and level of urban commitment. This we tested by making three subsets from the responses as follows:

Subset 1 comprised all responses from Halls Creek, Turkey Creek, Mowanjum, and all 'out-of-town' responses from Derby, Kununurra and Wyndham.

Subset 2 comprised all 'in town' responses from Broome

Subset 3 comprised all 'in town' responses from Derby, Kununurra and Wyndham.

The following table does reveal differences between the three subsets but we have no supplementary data which would enable us to offer an explanation of the differences.

Table 37

Three subgroups compared: veto or arbitration
in land rights disputes

	<u>Subset 1</u>		<u>Subset 2</u>		<u>Subset 3</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Veto	87	45	24	30	55	56
Arbitration	46	24	54	68	27	28
dk	62	32	2	2	16	16
	<u>195</u>		<u>80</u>		<u>98</u>	

Some comments which came up in discussion are worth recording. Unfortunately, the way the question was set out did not allow for a distinction to be made in the veto alternative between sacred or 'law' land and other land - and a few people insisted that they wanted an absolute veto on this land but they were content to share other land. These answers were coded with the veto alternative. A veto on sacred land only may well have attracted more support had

it been specifically offered as a third alternative. Other people told us about their difficulties with oil companies and other mining companies; one person complained bitterly of being locked out by a station manager and so denied access to sacred sites, others said 'we should all be equal' meaning in sharing the land. A Jehovah's Witness who identified herself as such when refusing to be interviewed explained that Witnesses did not worry about land rights because they would come into their Kingdom in the after life. The man who always voted for both Liberal and Labor to give them a 'fair go' emphasised that

if you have land rights you must be able to work the land and make progress

and another respondent said 'should develop it' explaining that the mining companies should, 'but we should get some royalties'.

National Aboriginal Conference

The disbandment of the National Aboriginal Conference at the end of June 1985 and the subsequent decision of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs that Aborigines should be consulted about the form of a successor body gave us a rare opportunity to ask one or two questions about this subject. According to the offices of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Derby and Kununurra, a few copies of Lois O'Donoghue's discussion paper, Proposal for an Aboriginal and Islander Consultative Organisation (Canberra, September 1985) had reached the area late in 1985 and were distributed to organisations then. Another much larger batch had arrived since then and was about to be distributed more widely.

Table 38

Has heard talk of the NAC; should it be revived

	<u>Has heard talk</u>		<u>Should be</u>	
	<u>lately</u>		<u>revived</u>	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	82	24	168	58
No	258	76	32	11
dk	na		91	31
	<u>340</u>		<u>291</u>	

We asked three questions about the NAC, the first two being 'have you heard any talk about the National Aboriginal Conference lately?' and then 'Do you think that the National Aboriginal Conference should be revived?' A substantial number who had not heard talk lately of the NAC thought it should be revived. In many instances, after asking the first of these questions interviewers had to tell respondents that the NAC had been disbanded before asking the second question. This was done without any elaboration. And there is little doubt that a national Aboriginal body is thought of as a 'good thing' and so merely to name it and to say it has been disbanded is to invite the immediate response that it ought to be revived, even from people who otherwise know little or nothing about it.

Those who had heard of the NAC had a higher proportion in favour of its being revived and a lower proportion against than those who had not heard of it. They also included a lower proportion of 'don't knows'. The consistency of these figures suggests that we did have considered responses, even from those who had not heard of the NAC - at least lately.

Table 39

Has heard of NAC compared with
thinks it should be revived

	<u>Has heard</u>		<u>Has not heard</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Revive	59	73	108	53
Not revive	5	6	27	13
dk	17	21	70	34
	<u>81</u>		<u>205</u>	

The third question sought opinions about how the NAC's replacement body should be formed. Most people, as the following table shows, thought that the new body should be formed 'by all members elected by Aboriginal people like the old NAC'. One person remarked specifically 'grass roots' at this point and another added 'but more independent of government'. For some people, of course, the question was overly subtle, a political scientist's question; that is, for these, Aboriginal organisations were no different from the Aboriginal people and so they hesitated and a few wanted both alternatives marked. Nonetheless, a minority preferred the second option, that some members should be chosen by Aboriginal organisations, showing clearly that they did see the point of the distinction.

Table 40

How best form NAC replacement body

	n	%
All members elected by Aboriginal people	147	62
Some chosen by Aboriginal organisations	43	18
Other	4	2
dk	43	18
	<u>237</u>	
nd	113	

We asked people who said that organisations should choose some members to tell us which organisations should choose and the replies are listed as follows.

Table 41

Aboriginal organisations which should choose
some members of replacement for NAC

	n	%
All Aboriginal organisations	11	31
Land Councils	6	17
Aboriginal Resource Centres	2	6
Local Aboriginal organisations	5	14
Named Community Council	2	6
All communities	4	11
Interested groups	2	6
Other	4	11
	<u>36</u>	
nd	314	

Of these, the third to sixth items inclusive, totalling a third of the responses, are 'grass roots' organisations. These figures are, of course, open to interpretation. The most plausible interpretation appears to be that people who gave the 'organisations' answer thought that those who know about 'government business' would be best able to choose NAC representatives. These are most likely to be people in organisations, but many of these respondents thought that the proper organisations are those closest to the community.

A higher proportion of people who live 'out of town' had heard of the NAC lately than of the 'in town' residents. But only a marginally higher proportion of 'out-of-towners' thought that a replacement body should be formed and there

was no significant difference between the two about how it should be formed. The following table presents the data on these points.

Table 42

<u>Town and out-of-town residents compared: has heard of NAC; need for replacement body; and how form it</u>				
		<u>In town</u>		<u>Out of town</u>
		<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u> <u>%</u>
<u>Heard of NAC lately</u>				
Yes		39	19	40 32
No		166	81	85 68
n		205		125
<u>Replacement should be formed</u>				
Yes		99	55	59 59
No		21	12	11 11
dk		61	34	30 30
n		181		100
<u>How form</u>				
All members elected		89	62	50 61
Aboriginal organisations choose some		24	17	17 21
Other		3	2	
dk		28	19	15 18
		144		82

One close observer from the Kimberley area thought that the NAC might have greater salience in some communities than others and this was checked by a breakdown similar to the in town/out of town tabulation but comparing responses from Turkey Creek and Derby on the one hand with those from Broome, Mowanjum, Halls Creek and Kununurra on the other. These threw up only very small distinctions which are of doubtful significance statistically: slightly more of the Turkey Creek/Derby group had heard of the NAC than the others (27 per cent compared to 22 per cent); and a slightly lower percentage of them - 54 per cent compared to 57 per cent - thought that a replacement body should be formed. A slightly lower percentage of the Turkey Creek/Derby group - 57 per cent compared with 63 per cent - thought that it would be best formed if members were all elected by Aborigines.

Conclusion

As we noted earlier when introducing the description of our survey of Aboriginal voters in Kimberley, there has in the past been very little systematic study of Aboriginal participation and interest in electoral processes in remote areas of Western Australia apart from the work of Bolger and Rumley. This, however, does not mean that people do not already have some beliefs about Aboriginal voting and electoral participation. One still hears it said that, although it is now compulsory for Aborigines to vote, they in fact have no understanding of electoral processes and participate only in ignorance. Alternatively it is sometimes claimed that Aborigines have no interest in the electoral system and do not want to participate because they regard it as irrelevant. These assertions are usually based on only the flimsiest of evidence and neither is borne out by our survey.

In Western Australia, as in the Northern Territory, we have found that Aboriginal interest in, and knowledge and understanding of the electoral process is substantial. Both enrolment levels and intention to vote in Western Australia in 1986 were high - above 80 per cent and on a par with those we have recently found in the Northern Territory. This might be attributed in part to the introduction of compulsory enrolment for Aborigines in 1983, but it certainly does not suggest that Aborigines are an apathetic or uninterested group of voters. Although knowledge of the parties, candidates and the system of government was not complete, our respondents were far from uninformed. The two house parliamentary structure was not well understood but the same may be said for a substantial minority of the national population. In a recent survey carried out by the Roy Morgan Research Centre for the Australian Electoral Commission some 22 per cent of a national sample were unable to answer the question 'federal parliament is made up of two houses. To the best of your knowledge, what are their names?' And 40 per cent could not say or could not correctly say in which house of parliament Mr Hawke and Mr Peacock sit (Roy Morgan, nd, 1, 11). Although our Kimberley respondents were poorly informed about state parliament, the great majority of them could name some party or parties and candidates contesting the election. Sixty four per cent had also made at least some attempt to follow news about the election either through the media or through other forms of communication - this was again on a par with findings of our recent surveys in the Northern Territory.

Though these figures would have more force if they were backed by survey data over time in the Kimberley, it does appear that Aboriginal understanding, participation and interest may have been increasing in the immediate past. As

we noted early in the study, there have been a number of notable political and economic developments in the Kimberley electorate since the court of disputed returns inquiry in 1977, all of which have probably added to Aboriginal experience of and interest in the electoral process. But some of the credit for this increase in understanding and interest must also go to the Australian Electoral Commission's recent electoral education program. This was well known among the respondents and seems to have been well received. Clearly then, there is little evidence to suggest that Aborigines in the Kimberley are either disinterested in, ignorant of or reluctant to participate in the states' electoral processes.

As to actual voting patterns, it is clear that among the Aborigines of the Kimberley there is a solid majority who have in recent years begun to vote consistently for the Labor party and a significant though fairly small minority who have done likewise for the Liberal party. There are, however, two provisos which need to be added. First there appears to be considerable variability between Aborigines living in different communities, with Labor support in one community dropping as low as 50 per cent and in another reaching as high as 90 per cent. Second, as revealed in the respondents' reasons for voting and the handful of usual Labor voters who intended to vote Liberal in 1986, there was some disaffection with the Labor party and its local members of parliament at the time of the survey. To be even handed though, it should also be recalled that a handful of usual Liberal voters among our respondents intended to change their vote to Labor in 1986. Clearly this low level of disaffection on the part of usual voters of both party persuasions does not greatly affect the emerging pattern of majority Labor and minority Liberal support. It does, however, suggest that the political parties might be tempted to take the Aboriginal vote as already either won or lost. This we suggest would be a misinterpretation on their part. If the Aborigines in the Kimberley are like those surveyed in the Northern Territory, they may well change their vote in special circumstances, even though they vote consistently for one or other political party most of the time.

The questions on a replacement body for the NAC and on the veto or arbitration as methods for settling disputes over land had no counterparts in earlier surveys but the data obtained from them leave little doubt that questions of this kind can usefully be included in surveys concerned with Aboriginal electoral knowledge and opinion. In this initial test, not enough supplementary or follow-up questions were asked on the two issues to explore the complexity of opinions about them. Consequently there is room for differing interpretations of what the data might tell us. Nonetheless some things emerge clearly.

A large majority of those who had opinions thought, for example, that a replacement body for the NAC should be formed and that it should be directly elected by Aborigines, such as the old NAC had been. And many of those who thought organisations should choose named local organisations as the appropriate choosing bodies. This seems to mean (and interpretation is necessary when additional questions were not asked on the point) that respondents thought those who choose representatives for dealing with government - or white fella business - should themselves be experienced in this kind of business - but still local people close to their communities. The respondents do not, therefore, favour a national 'peak organisation' of the kind which is orthodox in Australian interest group politics, that is a peak organisation formed on the basis of subordinate organisations at the state or regional level. They seem to prefer what we might call the 'direct election' model. And there is much to be said for this. Unlike the orthodox interest group whose hierarchical organisation extends down to base units such as a trade union or a farm organisation branches, most Aboriginal organisations which do have some strength do not have a grass roots structure in their constituency. They are functionally specialised and operate principally as adjuncts to the administrative arms of government and they are only marginally concerned with the gathering and shaping of broad grass roots opinions among Aborigines. In other words, there is no strong and appropriate intermediate structure in existence yet which could link the local communities and their organisations through to the national body.

The data on the veto and arbitration are equally definite - and yet in need of interpretation. Aborigines are divided in their opinions about the veto or arbitration and, although land rights is a major question for them, especially for the more traditional and more rural among them, it is by no means the only question of importance for them. These differences of opinion and of emphasis about what is important are not surprising. For one thing, 'land rights' refers not to one issue but to a cluster of interrelated issues which can be evaluated in different ways by Aborigines with different interests. As fragments of evidence showed, for some a right to land had come to be little more than a slogan for a plot of land on which one could live in peace and with a little independence. For others, it meant much more, perhaps having land on which to live in the traditional manner, or perhaps having control over 'law' land with the possibility of protecting sacred places from non-Aboriginal intrusion and of reestablishing traditional ceremonies at them. For those who could make a successful claim if Western Australia had legislation like that in the Northern Territory, winning control over traditional land would increase their power in dealing with

mining companies and other pressures from non-Aboriginal society. But as many Northern Territory examples show, the social and economic problems, especially of education, health and unemployment, are not solved by successful land claims. These problems remain for people in town and bush alike. For many town residents, a return to traditional land is no longer possible but support for land rights is both a way of showing solidarity with the Aboriginal movement and of emphasising how the original deprivation and its consequences have now engendered a host of new problems in education, housing and unemployment, to name only the three most salient, about which governments have so far done little. As a slogan, therefore, land rights has a profound importance for all people and yet, as the survey shows, it also has a strong potential for dividing them. Whether this has been recognised by what is loosely called 'the land rights movement' is another question.

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