The NAC Election in the Northern Territory 1981

**ELECTION NAC**

**MOBILE POLLING**

If you live in a remote area of Australia, or a place where there is only a small number of Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders, special arrangements may be made so you can vote in your community. Before election day many areas will be visited by polling officials with a ballot box. Your community will be told if and when they will be visiting your Area.

In some places the polling officials will come by truck, others by boat and some by plane or helicopter.

**EXTERNAL VOTING AND POSTAL VOTING. SEE OVER.**

**POSTAL VOTING**

If you are not able to go to any polling place on election day, or if you are sick, or if you are very old, or if you are having a baby or belong to a church which does not allow you to vote on Saturdays, you should apply NOW for a POSTAL VOTE.

All you have to do is:

- Get a Postal Vote Application form from any Australian Electoral Office or office of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, from your Community Centre or from the Aborigional Liaison Officer who will be visiting your Area.
- Fill out the form and put it in the envelope provided.
- Post the envelope promptly to the Area Returning Officer for your NAC Area.

**HOW TO VOTE**

Go to your nearest polling place where officials will first give you a Voter Card. Fill it out and sign it (or put your mark on it) in front of the polling officials who will witness it for you.

- Ballot papers for external voters do not have a photograph of the candidates and their names will be written in by the polling officials. The polling officials in any polling place will have a book available so they can tell you about the candidates from your NAC Area.

Australian National University North Australia Research Unit
Monograph
Darwin 1982
The NAC Election
in the Northern Territory
1981

P. Loveday
and
D. Jaensch

Australian National University North Australia Research Unit
Monograph
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Preface

In the course of our study of the Northern Territory election in 1980 we learned that the NAC election, tentatively scheduled for late 1980, would probably be put off for some time and it then became possible for us to make arrangements to study it too, building on the experience gained and the work done in the Territory election study. The NAC Executive in Canberra gave us permission to observe it officially, subject to the agreement of the Australian Electoral Office which was to carry out the election and that too was willingly given - and with it the fullest cooperation. To all of the people involved we give our thanks.

The study of any election is a team effort of necessity and the work reported here is no exception. The principal authors take responsibility for the text but they are glad to acknowledge the help of others, notably Deborah Wade-Marshall, Josi Craschaw, Sue McLean, Valda Juckums, Ron Slee, Will Sanders, Rolf Gerritsen, Jon Altman and Ian McLeod, all of whom helped gather the data on which the account is based. Others cooperated in a variety of ways, for example in providing information and advice and to them too thanks are due - especially the candidates themselves, people connected with the NAC and other Aboriginal organisations and the Aboriginal polling officials. People in the Electoral Office and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to whom our thanks are due include Debbie Vickery, Brian Howard, Ray Hegarty, Keith Pearson, Jeremy Long, John Queich and Kaspar Sheppers. For help in preparing the text we also thank Debbie Hill, Gillian O'Loghlin, Elaine Sommer and Gail Hewitt.
HAC Electoral Areas
NORTHERN TERRITORY
CHAPTER 1: THE NAC - DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) was inaugurated in 1978 in place of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC), a creation in 1973 of the Whitlam government. The NACC, set up partly to bypass the bureaucracy, had run into political and administrative difficulties well before the change of government in November 1975, difficulties which arose as much from the hostility of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs as from the NACC's confrontational political style. These had been examined sympathetically in a report to and in recommendations of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration set up by Whitlam and chaired by Dr H.C. Coombs (RCAGA Report and Appendix Vol 3, 1976).

The incoming Fraser government accepted that the NACC had to be changed and set up another inquiry, chaired by Dr L.R. Hiatt of the University of Sydney. In its submission to this committee, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) argued that the NACC had not functioned as an advisory body, partly because it was not given clear guidelines by government about its role. Although it had been set up as an advisory body it had attempted from the beginning to establish a wider role for itself - signified by a change of its name to National Aboriginal Congress in February 1974 - and DAA had found co-operation with it difficult. A financial management crisis in DAA led to the resignation of Gordon Bryant, the minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and the installation of a less sympathetic minister, Senator Cavanagh. Its work was virtually unknown to the tribal Aborigines, according to DAA, and those who were on it were at a disadvantage in committee work, allowing the more articulate urban Aborigines to dominate its proceedings. Its advice on land rights legislation was from people whose links with traditional clan territories were tenuous or non-existent. These and other criticisms were all gathered together by the committee of review which reported to the new Fraser government in 1976 (Hiatt Report, 1976).

The Hiatt Committee recommended that the name adopted in 1974 should be retained, that the Congress should be composed of elected Aborigines whose role should be that of politicians, that elections should be held every three years, that the organisation should meet at three levels, state, national executive and national congress, that a statutory commission for Aboriginal development should be created by 1980 to advise the minister and that the minister should 'present' the NAC with a 'charter' before the next elections in 1977. The Hiatt Committee, in other words, proposed to retain the 'congress' character of the organisation but to modify existing arrangements to ensure that government would also obtain advice which it felt it could use.

The government moved swiftly in the wake of the report but it did not follow the Hiatt Committee's recommendations closely. The new arrangements were announced to parliament in May 1977 by the minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Ian Viner. The new elected body would be called the National Aboriginal Conference, not Congress; it would consist of 35 members, not 46; its functions would be to provide advice to government and for that purpose it would meet once a year at the national level; the members from each state would constitute state branches which would meet at least twice a year; members to constitute a national executive would be chosen by the state branches; elections to the Conference would be held every three years. The NAC would choose five members to sit on a ten-member Council for Aboriginal Development which would be the formal advisory body to the minister. At least two of the NAC's five were to be chosen from 'tradition-oriented' communities. This and much more was spelled out in the charter which was drawn up for the NAC and announced to parliament in May (CPD, R, 30 May 1977, 2104).

Elections for the first National Aboriginal Conference were scheduled for November 1977, and, as the press noted, taking its cue from the minister, the new body was not to be an Aboriginal parliament (NT News 7 October 1977). The election - and indeed the NAC
itself - was provided for not by legislation but by administrative arrangement which, in the case of elections, entailed an agreement between two ministers, the minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the minister in charge of the Electoral Office, the minister for Administrative Services.

The election held in 1977 attracted over 300 candidates. Fifty-two of them were in the Northern Territory for a total of 7 Territory electorates. More than 32,000 Aborigines voted (Aboriginal News 3, 3 February 1978), 5,731 of them in the Territory (Heatley, 1979, 155 and 159; NT News 7 October 1977). Of the 52 Territory candidates, 48 were men. Successful candidates received an annual salary of $13,250 with an allowance of $4,100 for non-urban members, costs of an office and secretarial help, costs of travel to attend NAC meetings and installation and rental costs of a telephone (Aboriginal News 3, 3 February 1978). The salary has since been increased to $21,772 with an electorate allowance of $9,300. Telephone calls worth up to $1,200 are allowed; the secretarial salary is of the order of $11,000 and a representative in a remote area is allowed a radio telephone and 2-way radio for his vehicle.

When the results of the election were announced, the minister, Ian Viner, reminded the newly elected members that the NAC was 'strictly non-legislative' but that it did have an 'important' role to play in planning to meet the needs and future aspirations of the people. The Conference, he said, would 'no doubt speak up and speak out. This should not perturb anyone - least of all politicians' (Aboriginal News 3, 3 February 1978).

Encouraging statements of this kind did nothing to guide the NAC towards an understanding of the ambiguities inherent in its position as an officially sponsored political body, a body expected to function at least to some extent as a pressure group for an increasingly aware and intrinsically minority but yet without any legislative base whatsoever for its existence. With the experience of the NACC before it, there was little likelihood that it would go out of its way to embarrass the government or the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, especially since it had only five of the ten representatives on the official advisory body, the Council for Aboriginal Development, the other five being ministerial nominees.

Annual reports of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs recorded the history of the NAC from an official point of view. The report in 1978-79 recorded meetings of the NAC and its executive and of the Council for Aboriginal Development and the formation of sub-committees. A somewhat curious development was the incorporation of the NAC under the Commonwealth Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act - one of the few organisations to be incorporated under the Act - which enabled it to manage its own affairs, including its own budget (DAA, 1978-79, 12). The report the following year noted that elections which should have been held in 1980 had been deferred for a year because of the coming Commonwealth elections and that a steering committee of representatives from DAA, the NAC and the Electoral Office had been set up to plan for them. Among other administrative developments, the annual report listed four sub-committees, including one to consult on makarrata - 'agreement between the government and the Aboriginal people' - and another to prepare submissions to the government on legislation setting up the Aboriginal Development Commission which has since taken over a large number of the more routine and financial promotional aspects of the work of DAA (DAA 1979-80, 9-10). The minister, Senator Baume, let it be known in the Senate in October 1981 that the Council for Aboriginal Development had been replaced by the NAC executive as his advisory body (CPD, 8, 17 September 1981, 822). It is doubtful if any of these complicated administrative changes and developments were known to any but a small body of people 'in the know' in Canberra and in leading positions in the NAC itself.

In the Northern Territory in 1978, the seven newly elected members met and chose Aloysius Njaric, the representative for Area A - which included Darwin, Bathurst and Melville Islands and areas to the south and east of Darwin - as the chairman of their state-type branch. It is uncertain whether the branch met twice a year as it was supposed to do but, if it did, it made very little impression on the Aborigines in NT Area A. Some people commented to us at the time of the 1981 election that they recalled one or two
meetings at Bagot reserve in Darwin where NAC members had talked about some treaty or other, and the branch did hold a meeting in Alice Springs late in 1979 (perhaps other unremembered meetings were also held) but, broadly speaking, the Territory branch generated no news, as Aborigines said, from one election to the next; nothing came out of its activities and the elected members made no attempt to keep in touch with their electorates. These comments were made by respondents in the course of our survey, sometimes to explain why they would not bother to vote - why should we, they said, when the NAC has done little or nothing for us?

It is difficult not to recall a comment made by one observer about the old National Aboriginal Congress:

As with any parliamentary group, some of the representatives are active and committed individuals, whereas others appear to be on a rather pleasant, a rather long and a rather well paid holiday (Mullard, 1974, 55).

But there appears to have been more to its inactivity than that, at least in the Northern Territory. For many, if not most Aborigines in the Territory, these years - 1977-80 - were years of continuing struggle and some achievement in their attempts to win land rights. It was the pre-eminent question of politics and to handle it two - later three - land councils had been set up: Central, Northern and, in 1978, Tiwi. Many of the associated questions relating to mining and access roads were also handled by these Councils. In other words, the NAC representatives had no formal or even informal part to play in the most important political events at that time.

Furthermore, with the coming of self-government to the Northern Territory in July 1978 many of the remaining topics of a commonwealth character which Aborigines might have concerned themselves with through the NAC were transferred - or were soon afterwards transferred - to the NT government and it was not at all clear that the NAC's Territory branch had any legitimacy under its charter for concerning itself with matters of NT administration. Whether the branch ever considered the question is not known, but it does not appear from the records of discussions of Aborigines with the NT government on state-type matters that the local NAC representatives ever played any part in the discussions, although an invitation was given to the NAC to send representatives to a meeting of Aboriginal organisations in Darwin convened by the Chief Minister's Department in October 1981. In short, if the 'holiday atmosphere' prevailed, it was undoubtedly the consequence rather than the cause of the weakness of the NT branch of the NAC, a weakness which arose as much from deprivation of political function as from unimaginative and unenergetic leadership (a detailed history is in Weaver, forthcoming).
CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT OF THE ELECTION

The election in 1981 was unlikely to be influenced by national or local political events, except those that were directly of concern to Aborigines. The main event of this kind was CHOOGM, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Melbourne, which gave Aboriginal leaders and activists an opportunity to publicise a number of demands before an international audience.

Not much news about the NAC appears in the Territory press although there is a steady flow of information about Aboriginal affairs in it. News reports on the radio also regularly notice current Aboriginal affairs items. When two executive members of the NAC were invited to meet Commonwealth leaders at CHOOGM, the Northern Territory News gave an extensive report, under prominent headlines, of demands that would be aired and of a dispute in the NAC executive.

The NAC leaders 'unveiled' what was called a charter, a list of 21 demands of the makarrata, according to the News (29 September 1981). It explained that makarrata is a 'tribal word for treaty' and the object was to end almost 200 years of dispossession and injustice by an agreement under which a number of demands would be advanced, including the demand for compensation at the rate of 5 per cent of the gross national product each year until about the year 2176. It was also proposed that land for Aborigines be acquired by the Commonwealth and held in perpetuity, that all parks and forests which were previously Aboriginal land be returned, that all artworks, artifacts and museum pieces be returned, that rights be conceded to all mineral resources on tribal land.

This, with some additional demands and details about the dispute on the executive, was what readers of the News would see. The NAC itself in 1979 had called for a 'Treaty' to be 'negotiated' between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Aboriginal Nation and had produced a typed document about the treaty, entitled 'Makarrata Draft Proposal'. Little or nothing was heard of this by Aborigines in the Northern Territory as far as we have been able to ascertain. The document itself which sets out the 21 demands referred to in the News was not at all widely available.

In the Centre, the two Alice Springs newspapers, the Star and the Centralian Advocate, carried virtually no news of the national Aboriginal leaders' attempts to use CHOOGM to their advantage, of makarrata or of the NAC election. The main topics of interest to the Advocate were land rights and town camps and the normal pattern was to report a 'complaint' against Aborigines, such as remarks of Minister for Lands, Jim Robertson, about Alice being 'ringbarked' by land claims (Advocate 24 June 1981) and then to carry a collection of 'replies' or a 'report' on the subject (e.g. Advocate 15 July 1981). The Star in the Centre had even less on Aboriginal questions. Close to the time of the election, the Advocate carried a front page news item under the main headline 'Representation a Key Issue in Election', which apart from reporting factual information such as the number of local electorates and names of local candidates, gave a rather uninformative comment that 'present electoral boundaries follow state borders but cut across tribal areas', a reference to the Pitjantjatjara territory (Advocate 9 October 1981). There was even less news in other local press: the Katherine Advertiser, circulating in the town central to Area D, gave about 20 col- cm to the election, reporting the results for the area and, with a photograph, Willie Martin's return for a second term (Katherine Advertiser 29 October 1981).

There was however some 'movement' at the Commonwealth level and, using the CHOOGM publicity as a lever, the Aboriginal Treaty Committee and its friends in the Senate, succeeded in getting the Senate standing committee on constitutional and legal affairs to hold an inquiry into the makarrata proposal (Age 1 October 1981). This almost certainly passed unnoticed by Territory Aborigines even though the Senate committee placed an
advertisement in the *NT News* during the run up to the election, asking for submissions on constitutional and legal aspects of the proposal (*NT News* 16 October 1981). Another small CHOGM item of interest to Aborigines but not mentioning marrakatja appeared locally in the *News* (2 October 1981) but other reports, such as those in the *Age* (2 and 5 October 1981) passed unnoticed locally.

Meanwhile in the Top End one or two local disputes were developing, one with more than a local audience in view. A group of Aborigines from Croker Island, people who had been taken there (or their descendants) in the earlier phase of Australian administration when it was thought that the 'colour would breed out' if half caste children were taken away from their parents, planned to take a challenge to the World Court in the Hague against the Commonwealth government's land rights legislation and a decision under it in 1976 vesting the island in its traditional owners to the exclusion of the people brought to it by Australian administration in earlier decades (*Darwin Star* 1 October 1981). It was not the kind of dispute to attract the attention of the NAC, especially when the Northern Lands Council and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs were embarrassed by it.

At a more local level still, the press and television gave wide coverage to a dispute over flooding after heavy rain at Railway Dam, a town camp site for Aborigines. The town camps had recently been criticised, in terms widely regarded as racist, by the Lord Mayor, Cecil Black, but published comment was subdued. Bernie Valadian, spokesman for the Aboriginal Development Foundation which serviced town camps, and husband of one of the Area A candidates, Margaret Valadian, explained that the water was becoming a 'health hazard' to people living at the dam and that, though he had waited a week for something to be done, he did not propose to take legal action (*NT News* 5 October 1981). The media carefully avoided mentioning Margaret Valadian.

The 'heavy' comment was made by Joh Bjelke-Petersen on the day of the election. Attacking the NAC election as a wasteful exercise in duplication, he insisted that we did not want 'two governments for Australia, one for whites and one for blacks'. He saw NAC as 'duplication in its most unproductive and wasteful sense' serving only to 'promote divisions between black and white Australians'. He attacked the marrakatja proposal for demanding 5 per cent of the gross national product for Aborigines without proposing that they accept 'any responsibility for contributing towards economic prosperity'. The *NT News* reported it (17 October 1981) under the heading 'Premier blasts Aboriginal elections' but Bjelke-Petersen was not talking to Territory Aborigines.

For the locals, the press carried one or two other small items and some advertisements. The Electoral Office drew the attention of the media to the election and went out of its way to provide it with newsworthy items, sometimes in vain. Towards the end of the week before polling, the press carried two official advertisements, one in red and black, publicising the election. One which featured Slim Dusty and urged Aborigines to vote appeared in Katherine and Alice Springs as well as Darwin (*Centralian Advocate* 16 October 1981, *Katherine Advertiser* 15 October 1981). The Darwin *Sun*, a relatively small give-away paper, carried a factual item on the election several days before it was due to occur. The article reported not only that an election would be held but also explained who could vote, named the place of polling and observed that NAC members would earn about $27,000 a year. It also quoted Ray Nagus, manager for one of the candidates, Mick Adams, without mentioning that fact, as saying that the Darwin electorate had not been 'properly represented over the last eight years' - a thinly veiled reference to sitting member and competing candidate, Aloysius Narjic (*Darwin Sun* 14-20 October 1981).

Some local community newsletters reported the coming election and provided information about candidates and how, when and where to vote, for example the Central Australian Newsletter produced by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, *Yimi Wanga* Alpeilima Manyingkarirre Djurrang. The DAA's national Aboriginal Newsletter (No. 91, 2 October 1981) had a special NAC election issue in which all candidates for all electorates were named.
“Aboriginals... make your voice heard.”

Vote this Saturday October 17.

If you're an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 18 years or more and have lived in your NAC Area for at least a month you can vote in the NAC elections.

This election is your chance to vote for the person you think will be best to speak for you and your community.

Look for the NAC posters in your area, or contact your nearest Australian Electoral Office, for more information.

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE ELECTIONS.
YOU CAN VOTE AT THESE POLLING STATIONS:

BAGOT (Darwin) Adult Education Centre, CASUARINA Casuarina High School, BATHURST ISLAND (Regional) St. Theresa's School, DELSAYVILLE (Baypera), SHARK BAY (Malagol) Council Offices, DALY RIVER (Nama), Humaitai Recreation Hall, PEPPINESARTI Pentecostal Hall, GARDEN POINT (Putumani) Council Offices, PORT KEATS (Wattaray) O.L.S.M. School Room 8, CRACKER ISLAND (Midilang) Whirlwind Community Hall, COULIBURN ISLAND (Waruw) Council Chambers, MANINGRIDA Council Chambers, OEMPILLI Oempilli School.

This Electoral Office advertisement in the press included a photograph of Slim Dusty
CHAPTER 3: PREPARATIONS

The election in 1981 took place nearly a year later than might have been expected given that the first was held on 12 November 1977. It was delayed beyond the three years first because a federal election was called for October 1980, then because voting is impossible in the Wet in the north of Australia and finally because a review was being carried out in the Electoral Office early in 1981.

The election in October 1981 was conducted by the same rules as were applied in 1977. The electorates - drawn up on what had been described as DAA's administrative boundaries - were changed only in small ways, even though there had been some argument for major changes to the boundaries and for increasing the number of electorates. People who identified themselves as Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders and were so accepted by their communities were entitled to vote if they were 18 years of age or more and had resided for a month at a locality in the area for which they sought to vote. Although a register of voters had been compiled at the 1973 election to the NACC, a roll was not prepared from it and instead voters declared their entitlement to vote by signing a card at the time they voted. It was the same in 1981. All voters were asked to declare that they were 18 years of age or older, had lived in the area for one month or longer, had not already voted in the election and were of 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent', identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and were so accepted by the communities in which they lived. As far as we know, no voters had their claims challenged under any of these six criteria. Voting was not compulsory.

In 1977 and again in 1981 the administrative problem was not just that of arranging for the registration of candidates and the collection of votes but also that of ensuring that the voters knew an election was to be held and how to go about voting. In August 1977 Aboriginal Liaison Officers (35 for Australia as a whole) were selected and met in conference where they were addressed by the Aboriginal Senator for Queensland, Neville Bonner, who told them their job was to encourage people to stand as candidates and to enrol and vote and to explain to people the structures and functions of the NAC and other organisations. Special posters, films and cassettes - in a number of languages - were prepared. Journalists were seconded to DAA to help with publicity and to ensure wide coverage in the media; in Alice Springs DAA had an ex-radio journalist on its staff as publicity officer. The liaison officers visited communities to explain that an election was imminent and how it was to be carried out. The difficulty Aborigines in remote places might have in reaching a polling place was recognised and mobile polling teams were sent out to gather votes from them, in 1977 possibly the first modern use of the mobile ballot box in Australia - although there are locked saddle bag ballot boxes from 19th century, one being in the Electoral Office in Canberra. The administrative work of conducting the election was the responsibility of the Australian Electoral Office which from its headquarters in Canberra carried out its work through state offices. In the Territory the principal office is in Darwin but the 'subordinate' Alice Springs office of necessity had considerable latitude in handling the work in its own area, and full authority to plan the mobile polling runs.

One of the early tasks was to prepare publicity material, both audio material on cassettes and written leaflet and poster material. The latter included a large simple poster saying there would be an election, a small leaflet inviting people to offer themselves as candidates and to vote and more detailed leaflets on how to become a candidate and how to vote. Cassettes were prepared with the help of the Technical and Further Education section of the NT Department of Education which knew many people who could be asked to help by translating the basic message into local languages, nine being chosen. The cassetted message, interspersed with music, much of it country and western style, explained that there would be an election, that Aborigines should vote and how they could go about both claiming a vote and voting. The colour chosen for the poster, a rich
ochre-yellow background with bold black lettering, appeared likely to stand out in almost any context but the posters seem to have 'merged with the background' and become 'invisible' to many people before we carried out our survey. People whom we knew had been in offices where posters were prominently displayed said they had not seen them - and one observer at least had to remind himself to go back to see if they had been put up in the Council premises he had just visited - to discover he too had passed them without noticing on the first passage. In general, our reports indicated that posters were widely displayed - even if they did not go to all of the places to which they were addressed - but that they were often not noticed at all.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra produced a special election issue of Aboriginal News (No 91, 2 October 1981), but it is difficult to say how widely it was distributed. Copies were not seen by our observers except on one occasion in the Centre at Santa Teresa where the eight pages were displayed on the noticeboard. In both the Centre and the Top End some photocopied material was produced by DAA which briefly explained what the NAC was set up to do, who could vote and when and where votes would be taken. Besides these details, DAA's leaflets also included maps showing the electoral boundaries in the regions, explained who would be carrying out the election and gave the names of places where there would be static and mobile polling booths.

The election was also publicised by personal visits which were principally designed to make administrative arrangements, even though publicity was also intended. Early in September the four Area Returning Officers (AROs) of the Territory made extended field trips to recruit local Aboriginal staff to conduct the poll in each centre, to settle on places where the poll would be carried out and to talk to and win the cooperation of the local Aboriginal Councils. The policy decision on location of the polling place was normally taken only after discussion with the Community Council or, in some instances, local leaders. Two weeks later, a second visit was made to obtain information necessary to make arrangements for mobile polling, to publicise the election, especially in the outstations, to check other details and to advise people that meetings with liaison officers would be held concerning publicity and other arrangements for the election. Aboriginal Liaison Officers were chosen to help the ARO in Areas A, B and C. In Areas D, E, F and G, the AROs were people who, as electoral educators, were well known by the Aboriginal communities and who knew their way around them without need of much additional assistance. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs gave some help with publicity in these areas. The ARO for Areas A, B and C was also in charge of the principal electoral office in Darwin.

The plan was that the polling proper would be carried out by local people as presiding officers and poll clerks wherever possible, and the role of the staff from the Electoral Office would be minimal. The Area Returning Officers had the task of training these local people in how to conduct a ballot if they did not already know how to do it - which many did, since they had helped in earlier elections, notably the Territory election in 1980. A training session in the Centre, for example, would consist of a short lecture on the mechanics of running the election: the people to preside and to assist as clerks were given copies of Hints to Polling Officials; a role-playing practice session followed the lecture and there would be some discussion of difficulties that might arise, for example over the provisional vote: if someone's credentials were doubtful and the person demanded a vote, they would be given a provisional vote, rather than allow an argument to disrupt polling, and leave the entitlement to be proved later on.

Mobiles, to be staffed by Aborigines wherever possible, were to be sent to all places where the adult population was estimated to be between 15 and 40 people (the figure was 50 in 1979) though they might stop at smaller places en route. Places of over 40 people were to be given a static polling booth. Two Aboriginal Liaison Officers became presiding officers on mobile runs when their liaison work was finished. In all of the arrangements, there was variety and flexibility and the administration of the election benefitted accordingly. No one could have foreseen, for example, and made administrative provision for, the kind of difficulty which arose at one place where an important men's ceremony was
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL
CONFERENCE ELECTIONS
17 OCTOBER 1981

On October 17, thirty-six people will be elected to
serve for all Aboriginal people around Australia.
These thirty-six people will be Aboriginal, and only
Aboriginal people can vote for
them. These thirty-six people will
form the National Aboriginal Conference, known
as the N.A.C.

The N.A.C. was formed in 1977 and its job are:

- to speak for Aboriginal peoples at State and National levels
- to express Aboriginal views on what the Government's
  programmes should be
- to express Aboriginal views on what programmes the Government
  should adopt in Aboriginal affairs
and
- comment on whether or not the Government's existing programmes
  in Aboriginal affairs are working properly.

ELECTIONS for people wishing to be elected closed on September 17.
VOTING will take place on FRIDAY - OCTOBER 17.
RESULTS will be announced on Thursday, October 22.

WHO CAN VOTE?

You can vote if:

- you are at least 18 years old
- you have lived in the voting area for at least
  one month at voting time
- you have not already voted in this election.

DAA's leaflet for Top End electorates;
the first of two pages

being held. The Aboriginal Officer taking the poll was not permitted to enter the area,
being of the 'wrong' clan, but the white officer who was with him on the truck was
permitted to go in to collect votes. What was involved in the combined static and mobile
polling of a single electorate may be exemplified by the arrangements for Area G in the
Centre where static booths were to be set up in Alice Springs at the Central Australian
Aboriginal Congress office and at St Mary's Children's Village, and at Jay Creek, Areyonga,
Haasts Bluff, Papunya, Maryvale, Finke, Ayers Rock, Docker River, while mobile booths were
to be set up on 7 October at Inampa (Mt Ebenezer), Mt Leibig, Little Puts Puts, on 8
October at Kintore and Tukula, and on 14 October at the hospital and the prison in Alice
Springs.

The Electoral Office could not arrange all these activities without help, especially
since it appeared to be both understaffed and underfinanced. DAA, for example, had
information about the number of people in different localities, information essential to
the planning of the mobile runs, which it made available to the Electoral Office. But the
essential point was that it had no legislation, only an agreement between ministers, as
its authority for the conduct of the election and that agreement was translated almost
inevitably into a disagreement about details which was focussed principally on responsibility for the information campaign and the role of the temporary Aboriginal Liaison Officers.

The difficulty about the information campaign was that the Electoral Office had been instructed that it was not to 'publicise' the NAC itself but to inform people about the election. DAA staff who felt that they had a responsibility to 'promote' the NAC elections, if only in order to help get people to vote, thought the AEO's instructions were too rigid and bureaucratic and they somewhat resignedly felt it was therefore their job to pick up the publicity task where the AEO left off. DAA's concern for what it saw as its responsibility was increased when, in the first week of activity, it discovered widespread ignorance about the NAC. The central office in Canberra urged that greater efforts be made to get information about the NAC out to people and to activate them to vote. This in turn aroused the anxiety of the Electoral Office about the accuracy of the advice about the polling which DAA's staff might be giving - the basic point being that in this context it was impossible to separate information about the NAC from information about the election and give two separate departments exclusive responsibility for each body of information. The tension at the centre in Canberra, which the steering committee of representatives of the NAC and the two departments appears to have been unable to resolve, was considerably reduced at the periphery - both in Darwin and Alice Springs where the people concerned knew one another personally and had a direct operational responsibility to get on with the job which helped moderate the tension. Darwin officers were less concerned too than head office about the 'politics' of the administrative work, that is, possible radical criticism of it.

DAA employed two Aboriginal liaison officers in Darwin for its work and three in Alice Springs and the AEO employed three, one each in Areas A, B and C. There were some misunderstandings and - for those who did not get employment, disappointments - in the procedures to be followed and qualifications expected in hiring temporary employees or in seconding them from other positions. There was also some temporary confusion about who was in control of what staff for what tasks, confusion enhanced by the attempt to separate the electoral informing work from the NAC promotion and administration work. Much of this might have been expected as the normal consequence of attempting to carry out a 'task force' activity in a bureaucratic departmental setting and the problems were more easily ironed out the more the local officers were left to settle the details for themselves.
CHAPTER 4: ADMINISTRATIVE WORK

Preparations for the election, some of which have already been noted, began five or six months before the date set for polling. Staff to do the work had to be selected and, besides the principal people - the Area Returning Officers - Aboriginal Liaison Officers were needed in some electorates for several weeks before the election and, closer to the election, presiding officers and their assistants were needed in polling places. Drivers were also needed for the mobile polling teams. Staff, except for Area Returning Officers and some head office clerical staff, were to be Aboriginal, a ruling which was followed without difficulty, either in finding the necessary people or in explaining to them what they were expected to do. These people were either seconded from other duties or temporarily employed specifically for the work.

As the principal staff were chosen they had to make trips to communities to recruit local staff, talk to councils and community leaders, and train local staff. Information about the election had to be taken out to communities, posters and other material distributed. Local people had to be told of arrangements for mobile polling and postal voting.

An assortment of maps, lists, procedural notes, manuals and forms had to be revised, printed and distributed and this work went on from May to August. Then, when nominations closed (17 September) and a draw had been carried out in each electorate for position on the ballot paper, the ballot papers and the sheets showing candidates' photos and biographical notes for each electorate had to be printed. The draw was a public event which symbolised the opening of the election process for many of those involved.

Inevitably there were unforeseen delays, but none which seriously disrupted the timetable. Some would-be candidates did not get their signed nomination forms and deposits ($20) to the official addresses in time and, provided the Electoral Office was notified early enough that nominations were on the way, they were accepted, in some instances up to six days after the 'close' of nominations.

Mobile polling was carried out in a number of areas in the last week or 10 days before polling at static booths on 17 October.

Planning the mobile runs was not always easy. DAA advised about the population of the various communities, its latest information having been gathered in a comprehensive survey early in 1981. But runs also had to be planned within limits set by the availability of trucks and, in the Centre, planes, staff and funds. And when planned, the dates of runs and polling stops had to be made known to the communities. In Area F, for example, five different mobile runs were made by road from Alice Springs and one run was made by air to Willowra and Napperby. Some were one day runs, others two or three days in duration. Mobiles were used in all electorates, including Area A. In Area B they were sent out to outstations around Oenpelli and Maningrida and in Area A to a number of small settlements south and east of Darwin.

It was particularly important that people who were often out of reach of the media should be told about the election. In national and state elections candidates and parties not only buy time or space in the media to make themselves and their policies known; they also do things which generate a great deal of news and ensure wide exposure to them and their activities in the press, on radio and television. Most of the population is directly or indirectly within reach of the media and knows about an election largely because of the publicity given in it. The Electoral Office itself does little more than provide the simplest official notice in the prescribed places.
Publicity of these kinds could not be expected in the NAC election since it was not a general public event but nonetheless candidates did help to make the election known both by their campaigning and by their own publicity material. In Area A several of them had their own leaflets (see below) and in Area D, Willie Martin had a piece in the Katherine-based Aboriginal Pulngu Magazine (2, 2 June 1981) explaining what the NAC is and reminding people of the places which he, as representative, had visited since 1979 and of what he had done as representative. A local newsletter in Maningrida carried both information about the candidates and the election and exhortations from the local candidates to voters seeking their support. None of the four candidates in Area F had printed material and only two out of nine in Area G had handbills and how-to-vote cards. Recognising that only limited publicity would be given in this way, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Australian Electoral Office agreed that a publicity campaign would have to be carried out, much of it by personal visits to communities so that information could be spread by word of mouth.

The Electoral Office confined itself to publicity concerning the election proper; DAA was able to publicise the NAC both through the special edition of the Aboriginal Newsletter and by a simple photocopied information sheet which it produced in two versions, one for the Top End and one for the Centre.

Neither DAA nor the Electoral Office gave publicity to candidates or their policies apart from the information in the biographies provided by the candidates for the official printed polling booth statement.

A considerable amount of publicity material about the election itself was produced and sent out by the Electoral office. It consisted of:
* A large poster advertising the date of the election
* A leaflet announcing polling day, describing who could vote and inviting people to offer themselves
as candidates

Two more detailed leaflets on becoming a candidate and on voting.

All were in black on an ochre-yellow ground, intended to be eye-catching.

 Tombola party on election day

They were sent out to over 300 individual people, communities and organisations in Areas A, B and C alone, to addresses supplied by DAA. Others were posted up in various shops and offices in Darwin. Observers from the study team saw them in a number of public places in Manigrida, Omaro, Goulburn and Croker Islands, Gleeve, Bagot reserve, Yarralin, Elliott and Jajaranu, the Northern Land Council office in Darwin and - not very well used - on Bathurst Island. In the Centre, they were observed at Willowra, Santa Teresa, Bonny, Napperby, Hospital, Aamoguna, Congress, and other offices in Alice Springs and at places where Aboriginals congregated. There were other reports from Aboriginals that they had seen them at Hodgson Downs, at the Task Force office in Darwin Community College and other places. An observer did not see the posters at Bulu Camp, Victoria River District Station or Roper Valley Station when visiting with an Aboriginal Liaison Officer. In a couple of places our observer noted that Aboriginal recipients had stored them safely - and uselessly out of sight - in obscure places. Advertisements in public places in Darwin had lost their impact by about 10 October and were revitalised by the addition of a white reminder slip on those that could be reached.
There were many fewer reports of the use of or even the existence of the messages sent out on cassettes. Advertisements were put out by radio too, in the week before the election. The first, a message recorded by Slim Dusty, was on ABC radio in the morning of 12 October; other messages were broadcast on ABC and commercial radio later in the week and, in Alice Springs, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) arranged for frequent short 'spot' announcements and also had candidates speak on the radio. The television cassette film was available too late to be distributed to more than one or two places at the last minute. News items on the ABC radio which now reaches all the main centres in the Territory and many small ones, mentioned the coming election several times in the last week and on the day of the poll the NT News - available in the morning on a Saturday - carried not only official advertisements, but also a short news item about the election (NT News 17 October 1981).

There was some criticism of the publicity campaign. In Darwin an assistant to one of the candidates thought the publicity material was inadequate and felt that it should deal not only with the election and the NAC but also with the candidates. This or similar criticism was made at the national level too (Financial Review 2 November 1981). And the presiding officer at Bagot received two complaints, written out in the polling place by the complainants, about this subject. It will be sufficient to quote one of them:

I was greatly disappointed that the publicity was so small and that the candidates (sic) were not seen more publicly so that in most cases it was left for the voters to read the paper [i.e. the list of candidates with photos and biographies] at the polling booth.

This lack of publicity can be resulted in many people being unsure of exactly what the candidates are offering as it is one thing to read a piece of paper and an entirely different thing to see and hear the campaigns promises and judge for yourself the character of each candidate and the validity of their promises.

The other letter emphasised that voters had not been 'given much or any information on the people who are standing' and implied that a 'quick snap decision' at the polling place was unsatisfactory. These comments were principally a reflection on the campaigns of the candidates, rather than on the work of DAA or the Electoral Office. Candidates and voters forgot that most publicity of this kind in other elections is generated by parties which were, of course, not involved in the NAC election and that it is not the function of the Electoral Office to publicise candidates itself. But given that the ABC in other elections does give radio and television time to candidates, it is not surprising that critics who did not always bother to make fine distinctions felt that in this election too, candidates might have had greater help with their campaigns from officials and from the media.

Mobile polling also attracted some criticism, especially in Area B. Most of the mobile polling was without difficulties. In Area D, an observer reported that voting in the mobile van was 'quick, complete and good natured' and that the subsequent count in Katherine was 'handled most competently'. In the Centre our observer was able to attend on two runs and reported no administrative difficulties or unforeseen problems of the kind encountered in the Top End. There was however one 'potential disaster': the community at Willowra claimed that the posters advertising the election were all marked 17 October - a clear reference to the standard ochre poster - and that, since none of the candidates came to visit them, it was only by accident that they learned on 8 October that the mobile would visit them next day. It is not clear whether the proper poster for mobile runs, showing the date of polling, was also to be found in Willowra, but whatever the story was, it is clear there was confusion about the date and that the posters were at least part of the explanation. In Area A the mobile polling truck was unable to get through to a couple of small communities south of Darwin because there had been local heavy thunderstorms in recent days. In Area B, the timetable could not be met by the polling truck for several reasons, but this was only one of several things which were criticised in that area. Mobile polling there was complicated by a difficulty about the electoral boundary which
may be explained first.

The boundary of the electorate, as shown on the map, lay only a short way to the east of the town and, had it been observed, many voters would have been listed as Area C voters and not allowed to vote in Area B. These people were expected to vote predominantly for one of the Area B candidates and for a while there was talk of him arranging transport to bring these voters in to Maningrida. The official description, which was as follows

Area NTB

The north western part of Arnhem Land containing the following townships or centres of Aboriginal population: Maningrida, Genpelli, Goulburn Island, Croker Island, together with the Mann开启la Wildlife Sanctuary and the Cobourg peninsula, Woolwonga Aboriginal Land and the Madginberri and Munuarlary pastoral leases (NAC, 1981, 13)

was too vague to be of much help in deciding what to do about the polling and Canberra seemed too far away, if not too slow to react, to be able to make a decision and it had to be made by the Area Returning Officer who discovered the difficulty on a visit to Maningrida. The difficulty was resolved when it was decided to ignore the boundary on the map and that the poll truck should visit the Maningrida outstations in Area C although there were still some difficulties in deciding just where the outstations were to be found on the maps available.

But this decision had one unfortunate consequence. The dates of the mobile run for other places in the electorate had been notified to the communities and now that more polling places were added to the run the dates had to be changed. To make matters worse, the truck carrying the polling team broke down at the beginning of its run and had to be repaired on the road. The result of these two things was that the polling truck was unable to keep to its advertised run and arrived late at all polling places. It was said that some Aborigines had been unable to vote as a result, but that no complaints were pressed because they would have voted for the candidate who won in any case. Our observer - who was also one of the critics and a temporary local outstation resident - did however note that a larger number of votes were gathered in the region than in the Northern Territory election in June 1980 when a larger, better financed and supported poll team had carried out mobile polling for the first time. The explanation lies not only in the desire of outstation Aborigines to vote, but also in the fact that in 1980 many could not vote though they wanted to because they were not on the roll (for our observer's report, Altman 1981, 2-5).

The critics of polling in Area B also complained that the presiding officer was not a local but a Darwin Aborigine (overlooking his previous period of work in Maningrida) and that no use was made of the outstation transceiver radio network based on the outstation resource centre in Maningrida. As one of the critics pointed out, what mattered was to carry out the job properly. It needed someone impartial and conscientious, regardless of colour or affiliations (pers. comm.). He might have added that no single person would have the right 'affiliations' to alloy the 'suspicions of outsiders' (Altman 1981, 11) in all outstations and that, as the polling in 1980 proved, it was not necessary to do so. There is, however, no doubt that outstations would have had news of the changed schedule of polling had it been announced over the outstation radio network. It is necessary to set down dates and times for polling but impossible to ensure that they will be met regardless of circumstances such as local flooding and mechanical failure. Radios in outstations were used several times in 1980 (the radios in the teams' official trucks could not broadcast on outstation frequencies) to advertise the polling teams' movements and to notify changed arrangements; they might have been used in 1981. But the polling official and his driver were resourceful enough in locating people who had given up waiting for their arrival so that very few votes were lost, on this occasion, for this reason.
Polling Officials will come to this area in a truck, car, boat or aeroplane so that you can vote in the National Aboriginal Conference Elections on:

Time:

At:

If you wish to vote in the NAC Election, make sure you are there at this date and time.

AUTHORISED BY THE AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL OFFICE

Notices with the time and place filled in were put up at all places where there would be mobile polling some days before it occurred.
CHAPTER 5: THE CANDIDATES

In the Northern Territory a total of 37 candidates were nominated, two of them were women – one in Area A and the other in Area D. Four would-be candidates were rejected, two because they were too late by a considerable margin and two because their nomination papers were incomplete at the time of receipt. Efforts by the Electoral Office to obtain the missing signatures in time were in vain. In Area C, the retiring member was re-elected without a contest.

Candidates were each asked to supply a photograph and a short biographical note to go with it, so that a sheet could be prepared for each electorate showing candidates’ photographs and biographies alongside their names. The sheets were to be posted up in the polling places to assist voters in marking the ballot paper. Six supplied no photograph with their nomination and one provided no biography.

AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL OFFICE
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE ELECTION 1981
List of Candidates in order of appearance on BALLOT-PAPER

AREA N.T.B.

Don WEIBENANGA

I am a Liverpool River man belonging to the Gunawidji clan. Married with three children and concerned about preserving Aboriginal homelands and education that has meaning for my people.

John GWADBU

John Gwadbu was born and has lived on Goulburn Island all his life. He is a past member of NACC and has been a member of NLC for three years.

Ray MUNYAL

I am the current member for this area and I am worried about land rights and mining on Aboriginal land. I also want to see better facilities on all Aboriginal communities.

BIOGRAPHIES AS SUPPLIED BY CANDIDATES

Information sheet for polling places in NT Area B

These short biographical statements gave candidates an opportunity not only to tell voters about themselves but also to appeal for votes as well. The winner in Area A, for example, said where he was born, raised and employed, told his age and that he was married with two children and ended by saying:

For a genuine honest representative vote 1 Willie Clayton.
One or two mentioned things they were concerned about and would work for: Don Weibenanga in Area B was concerned 'about preserving Aboriginal homelands and education that has meaning for my people' while a fellow-candidate Ray Munyal (the retiring member) was 'worried about land rights and mining on Aboriginal land' and wanted 'better facilities on all Aboriginal communities'.

But these were the exceptions: the things most often mentioned included family and tribal or clan or locality connections, employment with government organisations (indicating experience), connections of some kind with Aboriginal organisations (indicating not only experience but also commitment and reliability on behalf of Aborigines) and occasionally sporting interests or education. The connection with Aboriginal organisations was mentioned most frequently by candidates.

These biographies could be elaborated by interviewing candidates in one or two areas where the study team could make contact with them, namely Area A, centred on Darwin, and Areas F and G centred on Alice Springs, each the base for the work of the study team. The general points made are probably applicable to candidates who could not be reached in other areas. In Area A all candidates were interviewed not only to add to the personal information publicly available about them but also to find out how they came to be candidates, how they proposed to campaign and what they thought about the NAC.

Of the Area A candidates, six are resident of and employed in Darwin and two are not - Max Kerinauia from Nguiu on Bathurst Island and Aloysius Narjic from Pt Keats. The social complexity of the electorate is greater than that of any other Northern Territory electorate and is basic to the understanding of much of the information elicited in the interviews.

Darwin is at the centre of the electorate both socially and geographically. To the north are the Catholic mission island communities, Nguiu on Bathurst Island and on Melville Island, Pularumpi (Garden Pt) and Milikapiti (Snake Bay). To the east and south a number of more scattered and smaller communities had to be polled - at Humpty Doo, Adelaide River, Batchelor. Further south and to the west were two small mobile communities in Wagait Reserve, at Daly River, Peppimenarti (now base for a thriving Aboriginal cattle station), and, on the coast, the large settlement of Pt Keats and its outstations. The three island settlements, Daly River and Pt Keats began as Catholic mission communities. Across the harbour from Darwin is the nearby community of Belyuen (Delissaville). The distance by air - the only means of transport - from Pt Keats to Bathurst and Melville Islands, via Darwin, is about 350 kilometres. Most other communities can be reached by road, although a few of them would be difficult of access in the wet season and perhaps virtually cut off - as Peppimenarti is at that time of the year.

In Darwin and its close environment the Aboriginal population lives in a variety of circumstances. Some people, both full and part Aborigines as they identify themselves, live in suburban Darwin scattered throughout most, possibly all suburbs. A few live in the caravan parks which cater for new arrivals, black and white, who are waiting for work, or, more probably, housing. Others live at Bagot Aboriginal Reserve, located close in at the western end of the aerodrome, or in the community on the Kulaluk Aboriginal land nearby on the coast. Bagot provides a town base for many transient Aborigines, people who have come in from a wide range of places to visit relatives, to have medical attention, to look for work or simply to have a holiday. Some have come in for a few days or weeks, others for indefinite periods. But the transient Aborigines (in our sample, they were from as far away as northeastern Queensland and the northwest of Western Australia) are also based in town camps such as the ones at Railway Dam and Doctors Gully not far from the centre of the city, at beach camps and at hostels run by Aboriginal organisations. In the vicinity of Darwin there are other camps, the fringe camps such as the one at Knuckeys Lagoon or the ones known as Seventeen Mile and Nineteen Mile - each of which was represented in our survey.
It is impossible to say how many people in this electorate were eligible to vote. Since there is no electoral roll, the candidates had to guess at the size of the electorate and three of the urban candidates offered figures between 3,000 and 4,000, rather more than half of them in Darwin. The difficulty is that, if there is no roll, anyone who wants to estimate the size of the electorate has to turn to population figures and make an estimate from them based on a number of assumptions which, in combination, can result in widely differing estimates. A complicating factor is that those who identified as Aborigines for the NAC election in 1981 might not have identified themselves as Aborigines for the census in 1976 (and vice versa) and, given the large number of part-Aborigines in Darwin, this may well introduce further significant errors into any estimates of the electorate based on census data.

The candidates were not only uncertain about the size of the electorate: it was not at all clear to anyone how best to 'communicate' with it. The media of public communications in an ordinary election were virtually useless to them. Two of the candidates made efforts to get themselves publicity in the press and on television and both failed, in each case apparently on the ground that to give publicity to one in the form of a news item would invite protest and claims for equal space or time from all the others. For the media the NAC election in Area A was a peripheral event, so peripheral that, apart from paid advertisements and contra news items, it might have passed almost without mention. In short, in the Darwin area, Aborigines had no access to it for their election, although in the Centre the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association was able to broadcast short advertisements and news items on the local radio network. It could, of course, be argued that news items about the election in the press and on television would favour those candidates likely to win votes from that part of the Aboriginal population which has TV sets and can read newspapers - principally those living in the larger towns. Radio, on the other hand, has the potential to be the most effective general means of communication given that press and television are not.

In this context the answers to our questions about campaign methods are of considerable interest but to understand how candidates viewed that work it is necessary to go back to their answers to the question about where their support would come from - which gave us some insight into their understanding of the electorate - and behind that to the first question about how they came to stand as NAC candidates.

The sitting member, Aloysius Narjic, gave a predictable answer: he was of two minds about standing again but his people suggested that he should do so. The other out-of-town candidate, Max Kerinaula, was probably 'self-starter', although he did suggest that the initiative came from the local council. Neither of these candidates appears to have attempted to assess their likely support and chances of success before nominating. Narjic had only the vaguest views about where his support might come from and seemed to be ignorant of the strong urban criticism of his inactivity as representative for the preceding four years. Asked about campaigning, he said he would make trips to Bathurst and Melville Islands and to Daly River but he had not thought out how he might campaign in the Darwin area - only fifteen days before the polling. Kerinaula recognised that he had very little support at Pt Keats or in Darwin, but made no attempt to campaign. Even in the Islands, where he thought his support was good, he took it for granted and spent several days fishing instead of campaigning.

Kerinaula's nomination was casual and accounts of it are confused but not all non-urban candidates emerged in that way. The fragmentary story of the nomination of candidates in Area A may be interrupted to contrast with it the story of the nomination of a candidate - who was unsuccessful - at a much more traditional place in a different electorate. The identity of the place must remain concealed and so too that of the correspondent from whose report the following extract is taken.

A. decided to put up a candidate this year ... one man in the community (the one who was given the [official] literature on the elections) was extremely anxious to put himself forward as a candidate. As he [said] ... he had the right (by traditional law) to speak for the Community and ... had the ability to do so. He
was quite frank about desiring the prestige of the position. His campaigning on his
own behalf focused a good deal of attention on the election.
We had a community meeting to discuss [another subject and ...] I was asked to
present the literature on the elections (none of the adults present are fully
literate, most are non-literate). I emphasised ... that the representative must
speak for the whole area ... I outlined the amount of time and travel involved ...
that the person chosen ... should be strong enough to think beyond their own family,
country and tribe .... Implicit in my words was the suggestion that the person
selected should be knowledgeable in all these areas [of the electorate].
The community decided to talk the issue over informally and have another meeting ....
In the intervening day I was asked quite a few questions - would Canberra be so cold
as to make people sick, is grog readily available there etc. The most important
question ... was, should a candidate be able to read and write. An affirmative
answer would rule out all the Aboriginal adults at A [but I believe ... that
literacy is not necessary to the job - intelligence is.
At the next meeting people had decided that they should nominate two candidates - a
man and a woman. I pointed out that as only one could be elected it would be as if
they were fighting each other; ... they decided to put up a man this time and a
woman next time .... A number of candidates were discussed. The initial campaigner
had been ruled out. Others were gently dissuaded on the basis of already having too
much for the community. In the end it came down to a show of hands. Some people
voted more than once, but there was a clear numerical superiority for X and so we
went on and filled out the forms .... The $20.00 fee came out of community funds
....

Of the six urban candidates, two said they had thought of standing for a long time,
Margaret Valadian for upwards of two years. The interviews did, however, suggest that all
six declared their 'interest' or availability to possible supporters and promotion groups
a short time before the nomination period. All, it is important to note, consulted groups
of one kind or another about standing and a meeting of a rather informal kind - to judge
by the meagre details available to us - of people from five Aboriginal organisations in
Darwin who were dissatisfied with Narjic's representation was held to consider which of
three people it would nominate and support. One of these, Nick Adams, became a candidate.

The other five candidates all had some measure of support and encouragement from
organisations or communities with which they were associated. At one level, Lawrie
Cubillo was encouraged, he said, by Wagait and Larrakeyah people and did enter his name.
He expected their support but he did not think he could get many votes in Darwin. Maurie
Ryan and Bill Liddy each had encouragement and probably would not have stood without it;
each apparently thought about the people who might support them, after nominating if not
before. But like Cubillo, neither of them could do much campaigning: all three of them
were employed and, in addition, Ryan had to attend a National Aboriginal Education Council
meeting in Canberra during the campaign. Liddy could not afford the expenses of travel to
campaign. The most they could do, they said, was to talk to people, especially community
leaders from out of town in the hope that they would be influential with their people, and
write letters. These three candidates had no leaflets or other campaign material and two
at least - there is doubt about the third - had no secretarial or managerial help in the
campaign.

The other three candidates - the ones who headed the poll - not only thought
carefully about the support they would be likely to win before they nominated and had a
more realistic assessment (to judge by the outcome) than other candidates but also thought
about the campaign they would have to carry out if possible support was to be translated
into votes in the ballot box. To provide details for each candidate on these points is
unnecessary: one named five supporting organisations in Darwin and explained that voting
support outside Darwin would come from throughout the electorate and was not concentrated
in any one place. All three thought that they would reach a wide and varied voting
population in all areas of the constituency as a result of the contacts they had made in
the course of their employment - in Legal Aid, the Aboriginal Development Foundation, the
Department of Social Security. One of them believed that traditional family ties and the friends built up in earlier years of upbringing and education would help win votes in key areas outside Darwin. These connections were reactivated by securing suitable people as signatories to the nomination form - a procedure which signified to the interested local public the commitment of their leader.

Each of these three candidates, Clayton, Valadian and Adams, managed to visit most of the major centres in the electorate during the campaign, taking leave or resigning from their employment to do so. The preferred method was to talk to people, not to hold public meetings, and in the course of 'talking' to make sure that they met local leaders where possible. Mick Adams who had been overseas on a training scholarship for some months had the additional task of letting people know he was back and was standing as a last-minute candidate. All three had campaign leaflets which carried a photo and a simple message asking for a No. 1 vote. Clayton's hope of having T-shirts with a suitable message fell through; so too did the other candidates' attempts to get media exposure. Each of the candidates had some help from other people with their campaign, for example in distributing leaflets, but only Adams in Area A and Forrester in the Centre had what would be called campaign managers.

Since voting for the candidates was not compulsory we asked whether any of them would make any special effort to get voters to the polls. Five of them said they would not and had apparently not thought about it at all; the three who headed the poll had each recognised that it might be done but there is no evidence that they were able to do so, possibly because vehicles were not available. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs reminded organisations that assets acquired with funds provided by the Department could not be used for electioneering on behalf of individual candidates. This may have discouraged some proposals but it would still have been possible to use vehicles to get voters to the poll. In the event, in Area A a bus was used only to take the inmates of a rehabilitation hostel and a group of pensioners to the polls. A Congress bus was used in the Centre to bring voters in to the Congress polling place.

None of the candidates had any more than casual contact with one another during the campaign. There were no arrangements to work together in any way and none of the candidates campaigned in opposition to the others - they were standing, but not standing against one another, they said, and the method of campaigning doubtless discouraged that. Some clearly understood that had voting been preferential they would have had reason to cooperate in the preparation of how-to-vote cards designed to achieve an exchange of preferences. Most of them thought position on the ballot paper mattered - that is, that there would be some 'donkey' voting which would benefit the person at the top of the paper - but a couple added that it did not matter very much because it was not preferential voting.

Our questions about the NAC revealed general dissatisfaction with it. One candidate in Area A said he did not know much about it but he did think it was the one national body Aborigines have and that it was noticed. The candidates all knew about it and the challengers were all critical of it. The retiring member in Area A, Aloysius Narjic, was criticised for never being available when people wanted to contact him and for not moving around his electorate to listen to the people and become known to them. Critics knew of Willie Martin's travels and work for people in Area D, and used that as a standard of the good representative against which Narjic's performance was measured and judged unsatisfactory.

It was recognised he should have called the Northern Territory members together and did not; it was also thought he should have had other meetings in the electorate. He did not circulate a newsletter or other information about the NAC and its doings, it was said. It was alleged that he looked after only his own community and that he was being used by whites. In the Centre, members in Areas F and G had not travelled their areas during the four years of their incumbency and it was said that 'they should be made to do so'.
I WANT TO BE YOUR N.A.C. REPRESENTATIVE.
I WAS BORN AT BARTUNG ISLAND, AND RAISED
AT CAPEM POINT AND DARWIN.
I KNOW MANY PEOPLE IN DARWIN AND THE
SURROUNDING AREA.
I WORK FOR ABORIGINAL LEGAL AID.
I REALLY BELIEVE THAT I COULD BE THAT
REPRESENTATIVE.
PEOPLE IN THE TOP END NEED A STRONG,
CONVINCING AND RESPONSIVE PERSON TO
LEAD THEM INTO THE NEXT DECADE.

I AM THAT PERSON.
I WAS BORN AND RAISED HERE, MY PEOPLE COME FROM WANGARRA,
SURE HAM, BARTUNG ISLAND, CAPEM POINT AND DARWIN.
MY PEOPLE ARE THE PEOPLE OF MY PEOPLE.
I ASK FOR YOUR SUPPORT BY ELECTING ME AS YOUR N.A.C.
FOR N.T.A.

MARGARET VALADIAN

My aim is to work with the communities so that I can—

☐ Present community problems to Government
☐ Ensure Government have more awareness of different community
   needs
☐ Fight to have a voice in each community at a national level
☐ Negotiate with Government for long term Community Development
   programmes
☐ Aim to have better working relationships between Government
   Departments and local communities

MICK ADAMS
FOR NAC.

WHY SHOULD YOU VOTE FOR ME

☐ Because I will work to represent all sections of the electorate
☐ Because I have worked within the Government for
15 years.
☐ Because I have the experience and qualifications needed for a
Representative of the NAC to ensure the wishes of Aboriginal people
are heard by the Government.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
Ex President of FORWANG (Foundation of Rehabilitation with
Aboriginal Alcohol Related Difficulties).

Aboriginal Task Force
Advisory Committee Darwin Community College

Member of Racial Discrimination Advisory Committee

Represented the N.T. at the National Aboriginal Football Carnival in
1972, '74, '75.

Coached and played for Wanderers Football Club played Rugby League for Broome 1972 - '75 Nightcliff 1980 - '81.

Leaflets of the three leading candidates
in NT Area A, selected panels
Similar criticism was levelled at the NAC itself and in particular at the executive in Canberra; it was, one candidate said, a Mickey Mouse outfit. Candidates said they had heard nothing about its doings and had seen no newsletters, that its members were 'quiet as mice' and did not 'speak out'. Two candidates in the Centre agreed that it was 'too quiet' and was 'not putting Aboriginal questions hard enough'. One group in Darwin recalled that they had received something from it but whatever it was had vanished into the unsorted papers in the office and could not be found. Even if the NAC in Canberra is more energetic than the candidates believed, it had not done much to overcome difficulties of communicating with its constituency. It was strongly criticised for being 'bogged down over makarrata' and the urban candidates stressed that 'tribals' were bamboozled in Canberra by the fast talking southern blacks, a view also strongly expressed by candidates in the Centre. Three of the candidates recalled that they had attended a meeting about makarrata in 1979 or 1980 at Bagot and noted that there had been no follow-up meetings. They had felt it was not of great local interest and that it was not being 'pushed' by the local representative. In the Centre, two candidates thought that the salary of the NAC members was too 'big'. So much money was a problem for most if not all Aborigines: they might spend too much on alcohol, they would be subject to constant calls from their relatives and it would 'remove' them from their people by enabling them to live in a manner beyond that of ordinary Aborigines.

Asked what policies they might push in the NAC and how they would keep in touch with the electorate, the candidates in Area A emphasised that the NAC representative should be 'assertive' in Canberra and 'active at the level of the NT where the action is'. Some of them could not specify policies but thought that what mattered was the character and experience of the candidate. As Clayton's leaflet put it, he should be 'strong, courageous, resourceful'. Others were prepared to be quite specific: the NAC at the local level should act as a 'watchdog' on a wide range of questions. It should press the Northern Land Council on land rights and the Aboriginal Development Commission for money. It should keep the Department of Aboriginal Affairs informed; it should take action not only on land rights but on fringe camps, Aboriginal employment, health and education.

The candidates then went on to say that it was the job of the representative to go around the electorate at frequent intervals, if necessary living briefly at communities, to understand what the people wanted, to gather and present their demands. When asked what these might be, candidates mentioned, besides things like land rights, health and education, more mundane hopes - cyclone shelters and emergency services, improved television reception away from Darwin and so on. Two or three of them talked of creating some kind of electorate-based NAC organisation to help the representative do the job, for example incorporating local community spokesmen and people from organisations in Darwin, and indicated that they were aware of the advantage it would also be to the incumbent to have such an organisation when the next election came round. But in this, as in some other instances, our follow-up questions may well have had the effect of 'talking-up' the ideas of the candidates. After the election these views seemed more nebulous, especially since they had included the suggestion that the defeated candidates might be able to help the victor through such an organisation.

There was, in other words, some sense that the Aborigines all ought to work together - indeed one candidate said the NAC might work 'to unite the Aboriginal race' - but the pre-eminent tasks for all of them were practical and immediate, the political side of servicing local needs and demands.

That they should view the NAC and its local representation in these instrumental terms was perhaps not surprising. None of the candidates in Area A had played a part on a 'national' stage, perhaps propelled forward by white sympathisers, none claimed to have taken part in large movements or agitations. All were married with families (or had been); the youngest was 26, a couple were in their thirties and none was over 50. Seven of them own or rent houses in Darwin. All but Max Kerinaua are employed - in stable public service or similar positions and some after years of struggle. The positions they held at the time of election included field officer, North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid
Service, book-keeper and community worker for the Aboriginal Development Foundation, senior Aboriginal liaison officer, Department of Social Security, mechanic, teacher at Koorlinda College, foreman and plant operator NT Department of Transport and Works. One reported a broken education amounting to three years of primary schools in two states; the others had all had more than that - one at Nightcliff High School, one with the Task Force in South Australia, one with the Army. Periods of unemployment loomed large in the memory of a couple of candidates and their jobs had included the usual bush jobs on cattle stations and urban casual work. One man had been with the Army for six years and seen service in Korea; another had been one of the part-Aboriginal children taken from their parents and put on Croker Island.

Only one of the candidates had no local position on a community council, or on one or more of the various committees handling Aboriginal activities in Darwin. The leaders in the poll appear to have had not only current connections of this kind but also a richer experience of organisations in contact with government departments and other bodies concerned with Aboriginal affairs. Of the men, four mentioned their sporting links, usually as prominent footballers and club members, and agreed that these would be important - at least in giving voters some idea of who they were.

We were told by a couple of candidates that religious affiliation might count and by others that it would not - three of the candidates identified themselves as having some connection with the Catholic church - but we have no evidence that this was relevant. Likewise we cannot tell whether being full or part Aboriginal mattered although some candidates thought that the division between traditional and urban Aboriginals, as they preferred to call themselves, would be important.

The events in Area C, in the northeast of the Northern Territory, throw another light on the process of nomination and representation and local attitudes to the NAC. Early in September the president of the council at Angurugu, one of the two Aboriginal communities on Groote Eylandt, wrote to the chairman of the NAC in Canberra, with copies to the ministers and to federal parliamentary representatives of the NT saying it would not take part in or assist the NAC elections in any way. He gave three reasons.

- The NAC representative [Peter Minyipirruwu] is very seldom seen.
- The election in this area favours the biggest community [i.e. Galwinku on Echon Island, the home of Minyipirruwu. The implication was that he represented only his own people, not the whole electorate].
- Decisions are taken by the NAC executive without any reference to the Aboriginal people, such as the decision to boycott the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane.

The President concluded by coming back to representation - it was a practical matter which should at least involve the local community.

In the past two elections this Council and members of the community have put a lot of effort in to making the election a success. Since the NAC first commenced we can only remember one visit from a member of NAC, therefore we feel that this organization is not much help to us in this area.

The matter was raised in the Senate by Senator Kilgariff on 17 September and the minister, Senator Baume, promised to study the problems of representation in the NT after the NAC elections (CPR, S, 17 September 1981, 822, 826). The incident was reported in the NT News eleven days later. A somewhat similar reaction was recorded from one community in the Centre, where the Aborigines decided that they would not vote.
CHAPTER 6: THE CENTRE

The Centre, in the NAC elections, comprised three electorates in the Northern Territory - Areas E, F and G - and parts of WAC and SAC in Western Australia and South Australia, based on Alice Springs as the administrative centre. This study focusses on the two NT areas north and south of the major town which is the geographical, social and administrative centre of the region. Both NT Area F and NT Area G contain a range of Aboriginal communities: Aboriginal-owned cattle stations such as Willowa; Aborigines on white-owned stations such as Alcoota and Napperby; mission-based communities such as Hermannsburg and Santa Teresa; and town camps in Alice Springs. The town camps vary in their facilities and the stability of their populations and, with the settlement at Amoonguna, eleven km. south of Alice Springs, provide a base for both permanent and transient Aborigines. The town camps are co-ordinated and assisted by the Tangentyere Council, which organises and assists in education, work and training programmes.

The Centre region contrasts with the Darwin area in that the Aboriginal population includes a much smaller proportion of part Aborigines. Besides that, large numbers of local Aborigines are resident in more or less remote tribal communities as well as in town camps. It is impossible to say with any degree of accuracy how many Aborigines live in which areas, let alone how many were eligible to vote. Some guide may be obtained from the 1976 census although it was more inaccurate for Alice Springs than elsewhere. The three NAC areas are relatively coterminous with the electorates of MacDonnell, Stuart and Barkly, and the two electorates in Alice Springs. In the census, of a total of 24,200 who responded to the question concerning racial origin, 8,436 in the Centre electorates identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Of these 7,322 (87 percent) lived in outback communities.

Such data, of course, are only very roughly applicable to the NAC election. The populations of town camps and outstations are constantly changing. But the data do emphasise that the overwhelming number of Aborigines in the Centre are resident in the outback area.

Such social geography provided major problems of communication for the NAC candidates and for the administration of the election. The mass media in the region were useless for campaigning or publicity. Alice Springs radio has a very limited range, the single television station broadcasting ABC programmes services Alice Springs only, and the local newspapers, the Centralian Advocate and the Star, circulate almost exclusively in the town. Even if radio and television could be transmitted to the more distant audiences and the distribution of the printed press across the region improved, few of the candidates from the traditional Aboriginal communities would have had the facilities or the skills to utilise them.

Planning and Administration

The tasks of publicising and administering the NAC election therefore demanded personal contacts with Aboriginal communities and thousands of kilometres of road and air travel.

The Electoral Office administration was headed by two Area Returning Officers, one for Area F, and one for Area G and the centre regions of WAC and SAC. As well, the Central Region Office of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was involved from August with the process of visiting Aboriginal communities to disseminate information and explain the election. Printed material was widely distributed by the Electoral Office and DAA liaison officers, and was posted to and available at a number of locations in Alice Springs.
There was no doubt that information had been delivered to Aboriginal communities in plenty of time. Our observers, however, reported that at least two communities claimed that material had either not been received, had been received too late, or was confusing. We received conflicting advice on this question of 'due and sufficient notice'. One comment was that what could be considered as sufficient notice for a European community, experienced in elections, may not be sufficient for Aborigines. More time should be allowed, it was said, for communities to decide whether to nominate a candidate, whether to vote, and who to vote for if they were to follow the traditional process of consultation and 'talking-out' decisions. The opposite opinion was that Aboriginal decision-making processes were allowed for by the administrative procedures and that there are other explanations of the complaints of lack of information - non-arrival of the material, the style of the poster, placement of it in the settlement, or simply short memories. After all, there are members of the white electorate who need to be reminded of impending electoral events.

Administrative planning was complex. Area F, for example, required the organisation, recruitment and training of staff to cover eight outback static polling places and 22 mobile polling places. The Area Returning Officer for the southern and western section of the region was faced with the organisation of two static and two mobile (Hospital and Prison) polling places in Alice Springs, 2 static and 23 mobile polling places in the outback areas. The task of finding enough people who were willing and able to act as Assistant Presiding Officers and poll clergies was a major one, and the training of these assistants took considerable time. The employment of Aboriginal electoral assistants had been developed in the 1980 Territory election for the Legislative Assembly, and the Centre region had a pool of experienced Aboriginal people ready for the NAC election. Because most of the ARO/Clerks employed in the Centre region had been electoral assistants and/or interpreter assistants in the 1980 election, they had prior experience and, in addition, reports on the conduct of both mobile and static polls in the Centre region testified to the effectiveness of the pre-election training. The polling was conducted efficiently, with patience, and with sensible interpretations of the formal rules.

**Candidates and Campaigns**

Twenty candidates nominated for the three areas in the Centre, seven in Area E, four in Area F and nine in Area G. As with the other Territory candidates, the biographies submitted for the official poster emphasised links with settlements and families, languages spoken, and positions in Aboriginal organisations previously or currently held. Billy Stockman was the only one of the three incumbents to re-nominate. He was also the only one who made a 'promise' about action if elected, and then in very general terms:

*If I am elected I will try very hard to talk with the government about any problems Aboriginals have. Vote for me and I will talk strongly for our people.*

The common choice of what to emphasise in the short biography was epitomised by Dennis Williams (Area G):

*1 belong to Walpiri, Anmatjira and Kaiditch tribes. Can speak Pitjantjatjara, Aranda and Luritja also. President of Aboriginal Legal Aid Council, Member for CAAC.*

Tribe, language, service and home were the important aspects of nearly all biographies.

It was not possible to contact and interview more than three candidates. But this small sample emphasised some important components of the campaigns and contests for the NAC, and the different environment of the Centre.

All three were considered as front-runners - Vincent Forrester and Milton Liddle for Area G, and Martin Jambajimba for Area F - but for different reasons. Stumpy Martin Jambajimba was nominated by his home community at Willowa, and he had strong advantages from the beginning. As Community Adviser and Cattle Adviser at Willowa he could depend on support from his home community. Contacts made over five years as a Land Fund
Commissioner and a member of the Aboriginal Development Commission meant not only that he was well-known throughout the area, but had built up a reputation as a man who could get things done, especially in helping communities obtain land. He was respected as an Aborigine 'who can handle whites'. To these advantages, Martin Jambajimbja added three weeks of intensive personal campaigning. He claimed he had visited every community and that his campaign had cost over $2,000. He did not use any brochures and emphasised that his method was 'to visit'.

In contrast, the other three candidates in Area F had neither the contacts nor the previous involvement, and they certainly did not campaign as intensively. In such a dispersed community, candidates needed either personal funding or some other assistance to be able to personally canvass outside of their home communities. It appears that only Martin Jambajimbja had been able to do so. The 'home-vote' was particularly important for candidates who could not campaign widely. In a first-past-the-post situation, a candidate who could ensure solid support from his own home community and from those communities where he had family or tribal links had a start in the contest. The question, then, was whether he would be able to 'split' the 'home-vote' of other candidates. Understanding voting behaviour in such traditional Aboriginal areas is therefore complex. Tribal, language and previous-service factors were obviously important, and yet judgments of the effects of personal campaigning in communities outside the home area are guesses only.

The Area G electorate was a somewhat different environment. It contained relatively large outback Aboriginal communities such as Areyonga, Papunya and Docker River where the 'home-vote' was an important factor. Formal organisations have developed a degree of influence and involvement beyond those of the Top End and these are probably more salient electorally in Area G than in Area F. The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) and the Central Land Council (CLC) have an impact and influence which should not be underrated in any electoral situation, and especially in the NAC environment. The CAAC is the focus of many activities of Aborigines in and around Alice Springs. It provides a meeting place, a co-ordinating organisation, a health service, and a community centre, not only for Aboriginal residents of Alice Springs, but also for Aborigines who come into town from outback communities. The CLC is the co-ordinating body on land claims for, and access to, Aboriginal communities, and is active and involved throughout the central region. Further, the Tangentyere Council for the town camps plays an important role in all Aboriginal activities.

These three organisations have a considerable common membership and leadership, and close relations with one another. Involvement in them, especially in the CAAC, meant that the person would be widely known, not only in the Alice town camps and township but in the outback communities.

It was generally agreed that the sitting member for Area G, Billy Japaltjari Stockman, had no hope of re-election. He had apparently not campaigned outside his community at Papunya, and was criticised by some respondents as having not served his area. Low recognition of him in the Alice Springs survey confirmed this. The front-runners all had present or past links with the key Aboriginal organisations. Vincent Forrester, current secretary of CAAC, had contested the NAC in 1977 when he had run second to Stockman. He had been urged by a number of outback communities, including Docker River, Areyonga and Jay Creek, the last where he had family ties, to stand again. His campaign efforts were concentrated into three weeks of personal visits to outback communities, but his membership and role in the CAAC were clearly advantageous. He also campaigned, with assistance from their leaders, in the Alice Springs town camps. Dennis Williams, current president of the Aboriginal Legal Aid Council and CAAC member, was expected to cut into the CAAC-influenced vote, but the main challenger to Forrester was thought to be Milton Liddle. His credentials were superficially as strong as Forrester's. Milton Liddle had been urged by Legal Aid and the CLC to stand in the Area F where he had worked for over fifty years. But as he had not lived in the area for the past six months he was technically not eligible for nomination, and he stood for Area G. His case is one instance of the need for revision of the regulations.
Milton Liddle is a senior member of a very well-known family in the Centre. As a Justice of the Peace, current President of Legal Aid, Vice President of the Land Council, a past President and Secretary of CAAC, a member of the previous NACC and with long involvement and wide contacts with the area, he was clearly a front-runner. He had strong views on the NAC - that it should represent the 'real Aboriginal people' and find out what they want, and 'not just the clever, articulate ones'. He was also concerned that while he, and a few other candidates, could afford, or find funds for, campaigning, canvassing and literature, most candidates could not, and he intended to press strongly for public funding. Liddle's main problem was that his active involvement in Aboriginal organisations was mainly in the past. Hence the CAAC impact could well be in favour of those candidates currently involved - Forrester and Williams.

National Aboriginal Conference
Election 1981
17th October

AREA N.T.G.

VOTE 1
MILTON LIDDLE

MILTON LIDDLE PROMISES TO MAKE REGULAR VISITS TO ALL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND SPEAK TO THEM ABOUT CRIME AND LITTER, HEALTH, EDUCATION, HOUSING AND ALCOHOL PROBLEMS. HE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CONGRESS, THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL AID SERVICE, AND THE CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL. HE IS A DECEASED OF THE ARINTA TRIBE AND MARRIED TO AN ALLYWARRA WOMAN. HE LIVES IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA. HE CAN SPEAK ARINTA, ALLYWARRA, LARISA AND ALURRA.

N.A.C. ELECTIONS
October 17th 1981

FOR A STRONG VOICE IN N.A.C.
Ngayatj nhenge Ngkerre nthewurrre
N.A.C. eke ngamyede.
Wangka kunpu pula N.A.C. 'ku.

VOTE 1
VINCENT FORRESTER

Candidates' leaflets from the Centre

As far as can be established, Forrester and Liddle were the only candidates in the Centre to prepare and use brochures, pamphlets and how-to-vote cards. Liddle did not campaign in the outback beyond a one-day trip to visit some places. He was perceived, by some respondents, as 'the CLP candidate'. Such a description was not the product of any overt involvement by political parties - in fact, neither party played any formal nor, as far as can be established, any informal role in the NAC election. On the other hand, Milton Liddle had assistance at one booth with how-to-vote cards from Mrs Rosie
Kunoth-Monks, a CLP candidate at the 1980 election, while Vincent Forrester had been campaign manager for a Labor candidate. In the Top End, a CLP member of the Assembly acted as scrutineer for one of the candidates, the two sharing common electoral territory. It is impossible to judge the effects of such vague party connections on the campaign and results.

Polling

Voting was observed at nine mobile polling booths and three static places. The overall impression was that the process went extremely smoothly and efficiently, and with one exception (see below) the voters were informed about the process, aware of what to do, and approached the vote with good humour. In all but a handful of cases the polling was completed quickly.

The process in the static polling places in Alice Springs showed that the training sessions had been effective, and even the rush when the CAAC buses arrived with voters from fringe camps was handled smoothly. The mobile polls observed were as effectively conducted. At most mobile polls, assistance in regard to names and estimation of ages was provided by teachers' aides, interpreters or school teachers from the communities.

Polling was generally completed early in the period set aside for it. At the statics observed - St Marys and CAAC in Alice Springs, and Santa Teresa - a steady stream of voters was polled early while the eight hours allowed for polling in the afternoon saw only a handful of people. It was impossible not to gain the impression that those who intended to vote would vote early, and that keeping the polling places open until 8 pm was unnecessary. A similar situation was reported by observers on the mobile polling runs. The people were ready to vote at the set time and voted early. It should be noted that in Darwin things were different: many voted at the last minute after football.

The polling was conducted very smoothly. Languages were less of a problem than in the Assembly election of 1980, partly because the administrative posts were staffed by Aborigines. The feeling of all observers who had seen polling in the 1980 Territory election was that Aborigines approached the polling places, the desks and the act of voting with more self-confidence than in 1980. There was also less of the mood of 'confrontation' apparent at general elections where parties are dominant. The competing how-to-vote teams co-operated in collecting 'used' cards from people who had voted, and the whole election process in the Centre seemed to be characterised by good humour.
N.A.C. ELECTIONS October 17th 1981

1 Vincent Forrester
Dennis Williams
Smithy Zimran
Milton Liddle
Billy Japaltjari Stockman
Gordon Campbell
Keith J. Jurra
Dalton Abbott
Charlie Walkabout Wilyarti

MILTON LIDDLE
Vote 1

How-to-vote cards used in the Centre, full size
CHAPTER 7: POLLING DAY AND PROBLEMS

The conduct of the poll in the NAC election was not without criticism and incident. At one polling booth the staff thought sudden wind had shaken the building only to discover later that Darwin had suffered a sharp tremor from an earthquake well out in the ocean.

The turnout in the Territory as a whole was probably 50 per cent and maybe a little more. At most of the polling places where we had observers the voting was at first fairly heavy and then eased off as the day wore on and people went about their day's activities: shopping, sport and so on. In Darwin one of the two polling booths had a relatively quiet time at first - Casuarina High School. The other booth was at Bagot Aboriginal Reserve and in 1977 when there had been two booths, one at Bagot and one at Millner, hardly any votes were gathered at the latter. The expense could perhaps be reduced by having only one booth this time but there were some complaints that a second booth was needed in the northern suburbs, not only because the Aboriginal population of the area had grown since 1977 and a new shopping complex set up which drew a large Saturday trade, but also because it was believed many suburban part-Aborigines would not 'take the trouble' to vote at a polling place in the reserve with Aboriginal people with whom they had little or nothing in common. Differences between Aborigines in the two localities may have been exaggerated but there is little doubt that urban Aborigines, as many described themselves, were dissatisfied with 'tribal' representation as they thought of it and wanted to ensure that they were given equal opportunity to vote without being disadvantaged. At a late stage Casuarina High School was chosen - and announced two days before the poll - as the second place for voting, after Nakara Primary School, a usual voting place for other elections, had been talked of. The winner, Willie Clayton, was unaware of the final decision and at first went to Nakara to vote. Nonetheless, the Casuarina High School booth, not far from the Casuarina shopping complex, took nearly half of the votes cast in Darwin, once the word had gone around that it was a polling place. The standard 'polling booth' signs were difficult to see at distances inevitable in the grounds of a secondary school and many people complained that even when they knew it was there somewhere they had difficulty finding it - an experience shared by the observer of the poll.

Outwardly, the polling was similar to the polling for the Territory election in 1980. At both static and mobile polling booths the rules for presiding officers were much the same. One important difference was that the candidates were not allowed to have scrutineers in the polling place for the NAC election, and another was that, since there was no electoral roll, voters had only to sign a declaration:

- I am a person who is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and am accepted as such by the community in which I live.
- I am 18 years of age or older.
- I have lived in the Area for one (1) month or longer.
- I have not already voted in this election.

rather than go through what often proved to be a somewhat trying discussion to establish that they did have their names on the roll (see Jaensch and Loveday 1981, 163-4).

It was arguable that, under the declaration, a person who had been resident for a month or more in, say, Area A but whose normal residence was in Area B, might be forced to vote for Area A candidates even though he or she knew nothing of them and be deprived of a vote in Area B. It was by no means a hypothetical case as our interviews in the street indicated: several people from Areas B, C and D, not to mention other states, had been in Darwin for
Polling in the Top End

A voter from Kulaluk at the Bagot Reserve polling place

Voting at the Casuarina High School booth

well over a month and were unsure if they could vote at all, and did not want to vote for Area A people. In the Centre, some people moved from camps in one electorate to camps in the other and, unless they clearly insisted on an external or absentee vote, they may have been 'forced' to vote for candidates they were not familiar with. The residence requirement was interpreted liberally and sympathetically. The difficulty was resolved by the ruling that, given a satisfactory declaration, they could vote as absentees for their home electorate. White residents of Darwin who are not permanently resident and maintain homes in the south to which they intend to return have been allowed a similar choice in other elections.

Presiding officers and poll clerks were all Aborigines and both men and women were chosen. Teams were mixed at Bagot and Nguin in Area A and at Congress and St Marys in the Centre, for example. But it was not always possible to ensure that each polling team was mixed. In Casuarina the staff were all women, at Lajamanu all men. In most places men and women voted without any evident embarrassment but at Lajamanu groups of men and women
took turns to vote, perhaps because the polling team was all male. Our observer on the mobile runs in the Centre reported several instances in which men and women, in groups, took turns to vote — and one place in which people voted in the 'usual' order, as it was described: old men first, then young initiated men, then old women, then young women, then uninitiated men and visiting women.

Another difference — not arising from the way the poll was carried out — was that the usual last-minute campaigning outside the polling booth was not widely carried on. There were no how-to-vote cards in the Top End (except in Area B where one candidate had a rumoured sheet, more like a leaflet than a how-to-vote card), no leaflets, no one to distribute them, no candidates lounging around talking to those working for them. Perhaps others shared one candidate's view that he did not like 'pushy' campaigning.

But some candidates were not averse to 'pushing' themselves and indeed saw it as necessary and in both the Centre and the Top End some took time off from their employment to travel around the electorates they contested and, as we have noted, two Centre candidates had how-to-vote cards. These were prepared for what seemed to them to be 'heavy' expenditure — up to about $800 was mentioned by a couple of candidates and one claimed he spent over $2,000. The successful candidates in Areas C and F spent most on their campaigns (see Financial Review 2 November 1981 for complaints elsewhere that those with substantial funds were better able to influence the election outcome).

Some feel for what it was like in a remote place in Area D where there was a static polling booth is given in a report from one of our observers.

I assisted people with their postal votes for the last NT elections and there was a good deal of public open discussion about candidates, parties etc. In this NAC there were no such discussions that I am aware of ... most surprising ... shortly after the polling booth was set up, all the 'old girls' came to vote. They live at the west end of the camp and it has been close to impossible to get them out for meetings ... this time I was about to take my truck up there and offer them a lift when they all arrived on foot. A lot of the kids wanted to vote too — to have their say. And there was some feeling that married women should be allowed to vote even if they were under 18.

Small but revealing incidents occurred at several polling places. A white man at Lajamanu misunderstood that it was only for Aborigines and tried to vote; the presiding officer at Casuarina had to lend her spectacles to several voters during the day so that they could see to vote. She also said that several people told her it was the first time they had ever voted. At one static booth in the Centre a voter, evidently drunk, tried to vote a second time and was turned back by officials who, being Aboriginal and so familiar with him, had no difficulty recognising him again and, when pressed, could prove it by reference to the card that he had already filled in.

Two or three aspects of the system itself caused concern and some dissatisfaction. Advertising, especially as it relates to the candidates, was a subject of some adverse comment but it is not part of the formal system (except in the most minimal form) and it has been dealt with above. (Financial Review 2 November 1981 reports complaints from South on this.)

The lack of an electoral roll caused some quiet concern. It is doubtful whether candidates realised how useful it might be in designing their campaigns, although now that it can be seen from the results how important campaigning might be, the demand for rolls for their practical use may well increase. What was recognised both by candidates and polling officials alike was that the distribution card did nothing whatsoever to prevent double voting by people prepared and perhaps organised to use different names at different booths. To check voters' names and addresses against the rolls, it was assumed, is a stronger safeguard. The possibility, it must be noted, arises chiefly when two or more polling places are within reach during the time of the election as they were in Darwin and Alice Springs, or with vehicular transport, in some remote places where both a mobile and
a static poll might be accessible. Even within one booth, a person might vote twice under the present system when, because of a rush of a large number of people and the absence of scrutineers, he or she might be prepared to risk recognition and detection. But we have no evidence that it occurred; only that people were aware it might.

Mobiles, unexpectedly, caused some dissatisfaction, expressed most clearly by one of the Darwin candidates. They have been used in the past in the 1977 MAC election, in the February 1980 Western Australian election in the Kimberleys and in the June 1980 Northern Territory election and in each case the object - uncriticised at the time and evidently attained - was to increase the vote of Aborigines and to ensure that, as far as could be, the system was accessible to all who were entitled to vote. In the two elections in 1980 but not in that of 1977 there was the additional point that since those enrolled were obliged to vote under penalty for failure to do so there was an obligation on the Electoral Offices in question to make the polls easy of access.

The criticism was both practical and theoretical. On the practical side, the candidate and his assistant were frustrated to find that the mobile had taken votes at one place the day before they visited it to campaign. Their effort was wasted and they felt their competitor had gained. But they would have been given the itinerary of the mobiles had they kept in closer touch with the Electoral Office. They also felt that polling should not be spread out over several days, as it is in mobile polling, but all held on the one day. And more important, the suggestion was that, with non-compulsory voting, it was up to voters who were interested enough to get themselves to a polling place on voting day - even if it did create an opportunity for candidates to arrange to bring their supporters in to vote (Financial Review 2 November 1981 for list of similar criticism).

The other problems connected with mobiles were those encountered in 1980 in the Territory election (see Jaensch and Loveday 1981, Ch. 12) and they arose again in one of the more difficult areas - around Maningrida, with the additional complication there that, as already noted, the eastern boundary of the electorate put a large number of outstations connected with Maningrida in an electorate, NTCC, with which they had no connections.
Voting at Willowra schoolroom (left)
and at Santa Teresa (right)

Polling in the Centre

Mobile polling truck at Derry Downs (left)
and Harts Range (right)
CHAPTER 8: THE SURVEY AND THE RESULTS

The NAC election was a collection of separate contests in each of the electorates, a collection lacking the unity given to state and federal elections by the control of the parties over the nominations and campaigns of the candidates. The discussion of the NAC election must therefore be largely on an electorate-by-electorate basis, but nonetheless some general points may be made, some based on survey data, which refer to questions where organisational control is not as important as it normally is in nominations and campaigning.

A street survey of Area A voters was carried out in Darwin between Tuesday 12 and Friday 16 October, interviews being conducted in the central area of Darwin, in Bagot Reserve and at Casuarina shopping centre in the northern suburbs. The object was to sample - however roughly - a population which included transients (in the central area), employed and unemployed Aborigines, men and women, part and full Aborigines, and those living in suburbs as well as the reserve. Another eighteen interviews of Area A voters were carried out in Nguiu on Bathurst Island. We sought out only those who appeared to be 18 years of age or more. A smaller number were interviewed in Alice Springs on the two days before the election.

Sampling in the proper technical sense is hardly possible both because the size of the population and its distribution are not accurately known and because it is difficult if not impossible to say what would be the relevant criteria for establishing the representativeness of the sample or to obtain the data from respondents necessary for testing representativeness even if the criteria could be agreed on.

In Darwin and Nguiu 182 interviews were completed, 49 per cent by men, and in Alice Springs 59, of which 63 per cent were by men (all percentage figures are rounded to the nearest whole number). A few people who said they belonged to and would vote for candidates of other areas were included - the visitors to town - but 91 per cent of those interviewed in Darwin belonged to Area A. In Alice, 78 per cent were from Area G. Respondents in Darwin were from 30 different places in the electorate including nineteen Darwin suburbs and several fringe camps.

Interviews lasted for about five or six minutes as a rule; people interviewed could see the sheet and what was written down on it for them. Names were not asked and we emphasised that this meant people need not withhold their answers. The interviewers in Darwin worked together in pairs, one man, one woman. In Darwin two self-identified part-Aboriginal women took turns to help a white man conduct the interviews; on Bathurst an Aboriginal woman helped a white man. Respondents, with only a handful of exceptions, had no difficulty in following the questions and in understanding what we were doing; they also took it seriously, did not give frivolous answers, rarely refused to give an interview at all and exhibited signs of shyness only in a few instances. The cooperation of respondents appeared to be greater because we showed them what we wrote down as they spoke. It may be added here that the survey itself had an informing function. Simply by asking people whether they knew that there was an election for the NAC was to give information to those who did not have it and they usually wanted more, for example to know where to vote, who the candidates were and so on.

We asked voters to say who they would vote for and, of the 182 Darwin respondents, 170 were voting for Area A candidates. These divided up into four roughly equal groups: those who were undecided (25 per cent); those who wanted to keep their voting intention secret (23 per cent); those who intended to vote for Mick Adams (24 per cent) and those who intended to vote for other candidates (28 per cent). Of the eighty-eight who made their voting intention known, 45.5 per cent chose Mick Adams. This compares with 43.4 per cent for him from the two Darwin polling booths, Bagot and Casuarina High School. In
Alice 30 per cent were undecided and, of those who could vote in Area G and gave us their intention, 61 per cent chose the eventual winner, Vince Forrester.

The 91 women in the Top End survey did not exhibit any special voting intention, for example high support for Margaret Valadian. The undecideds were 25 per cent, those who kept intention 'secret' were 22 per cent, and the remainder divided evenly for Mick Adams (26 per cent) and other candidates (26 per cent).

The tolerably close correspondence between the intended and actual votes for Mick Adams gives us confidence in our figures and this is strengthened by the similarity of proportion of men, 49.4 per cent, in the Darwin survey to the proportion reported from the 1976 census, 50.2 per cent male for NT Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

It was widely believed that very few people had heard anything about the NAC, at least in Darwin, and that few knew that there was to be an election for it on 17 October even though it had been widely advertised officially. Our first two questions obtained data on these points: leaving aside those who were not sure or seemed confused, 62 per cent had heard, however vaguely, of the NAC (especially when we spelled out what the acronym stood for) and 35 per cent said they had not. In Alice 88 per cent said they had heard about it. Fewer knew that there was to be an election at the end of the week: 51 per cent in Darwin and 85 per cent in Alice had heard that there would be. We also supposed that Aborigines who attended NAC affairs - if any - would have heard about 'nakarrata' and we asked all respondents if they had. A common response was to ask in reply 'who is that?' and when it was explained, people were likely to shrug and say it was some nonsense of the southerners. Only 14 per cent of the interviewees in both Darwin and Alice had heard the word and it was clear that many of them had no idea what it meant. One man from Maningrida made the obvious comment that a word from Galiwinku would be unintelligible to many other Aboriginal linguistic groups.

Some people involved with the election thought that voters in Area A might be deeply divided according to whether they saw themselves as urban Aborigines or as out-of-town Aborigines living a traditional pattern of life. It was also suggested that the distinction between part and full Aborigine would be important and that there was a rough correspondence between, on the one hand

- urban - non traditional - part Aborigine
- and on the other

- non-urban - traditional - full Aborigine.

Accordingly we asked people to tell us how they would describe themselves, as part or full Aborigines, as urban or traditional or not Aboriginal at all. The replies we obtained indicated that the categories were more numerous and complicated than we had supposed. Many part Aborigines were part Malay, part Chinese or part some other non-European group; Torres Strait Islanders and Thursday Islanders did not regard themselves as Aborigines at all. We did not use the term 'full blood' but many Aborigines insisted on being described as full bloods and then went on to explain that this was a better description than traditional because in places like Maningrida, Milingimbi, Galiwinku and Roper River - from which these respondents had come - the life of the people was no longer simply traditional (which of course we knew from first-hand observation) but a mixture of ways. Of course the use of the term full Aborigines (to say nothing of full blood) invited criticism and one Aboriginal respondent pointed out in no uncertain terms that there is no such thing as degrees of purity of blood. Other Aborigines insisted on describing themselves as 'just Aboriginal' or, in one case, as 'just Australian'. These people, not all of them part Aborigines as that term is commonly used, seemed to have a fairly high and usually 'activist' awareness of what was implied and their objection was to the making of administrative distinctions on grounds of colour or degrees of 'racial' admixture - distinctions as 'simple' as those made in the census or as brutal as those made in the assimilationist and earlier phases of official policy. The one respondent who wanted to be described as 'just Australian' saw it most clearly: administration should be blind to the colour, race and culture of the citizens, although that is not a position which people who benefit from measures of positive discrimination or from measures to remedy nearly two
centuries of neglect and oppression find it easy to accept.

Our figures from this part of the survey were not, therefore, of much significance but we had learned that the question was far more complex than our original informants themselves believed it to be, that it was clearly an important personal question for most respondents (about which they were good-humoured and articulate) and that they did not see the election as a contest between urban and non-urban candidates. Of the 141 respondents who gave useful answers, within the terminology we used, 42 per cent said they were full Aboriginal, 53 per cent said part Aboriginal and 5 per cent said something else. The full Aborigines clearly did not vote for the two out-of-town candidates who, at Bagot and Casuarina, won hardly any votes at all. The urban part Aboriginal candidates were not obviously at a disadvantage in traditional non-urban areas either, to judge by the voting.

Another question was to ask whether the respondent would vote - now that he or she knew there was to be an election. Of the 170 in Area A, 78 per cent said they would vote and 6 per cent said they would not, the remainder giving 'unsure', 'maybe' and other similar answers. In Alice 81 per cent said they would vote and most of the remainder that they were not sure. The 'yes' answers may have been inflated a little by people giving replies which they supposed white people or surveyors might be pleased to hear, but even if they are discounted for this to some extent, the answers to these three questions - taken together - have an important bearing on the understanding of turnout, that is, in explaining why an apparently small proportion of those eligible to vote actually did so.

From one point of view there is nothing much to explain. Voting was not compulsory and Aborigines did just as whites do in such circumstances, particularly in municipal elections: large numbers of eligible citizens stayed away from the polls on election day. In similar white elections turnout is often as low as 25 to 30 per cent and rarely much above 50 per cent, although it does rise higher in hotly contested constituencies. For the NAC, voting was not compulsory and although the contests attracted more attention than those of 1977, it would be hard to say they were hotly contested, at least in the Northern Territory (detailed figures are given in the appendix). The total number of votes cast was 6,760 (including 148 which were informal) but since there is no roll, turnout can be only estimated, working with 1976 census figures when Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Territory numbered 23,751. This figure should be increased by an unknown amount to take account of under-enumeration in the census, though not by much, and by some other amount, also unknown, to take account of population growth in 5 years. It should, however, be reduced by, say, one seventh since there was no contest in Area C. These considerations suggest that the population from which voters were drawn might have numbered about 23,000 people. Of them only those who were 18 years old and over were entitled to vote, and these were about one half of the total, according to the 1976 census, giving an electorate of about 11,500 people. On that basis turnout was about 58 per cent. Another more up-to-date basis for the calculation is provided by the survey of Aboriginal population carried out early in 1981 by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for its community profiles. This survey gave a population of 29,305 Aborigines in the Northern Territory (DAA 1981, 13). Localities in Area C which did not have a contest had a population of 5,536, leaving 23,749 for the other electorates. The detailed tables indicated that Aborigines in suburban Darwin, apart from those at Bagot and some fringe camps, were not counted. But since they were eligible to vote their numbers must be estimated. Using 1976 census figures, those who identified as Aborigines in the nine Darwin area electorates in that year totalled 2,700 approximately or 2,330 excluding Bagot. The total Aboriginal population in the six contested NT electorates was therefore about 26,000, of whom about one half, or 13,000, would have been old enough to vote. On this basis, turnout would have been about 52 per cent, still a 'respectable' figure for non-compulsory voting. The NT News, assuming a population of 25,000 Aborigines, thought that turnout was low but gave no estimate of it (NT News, 19 October 1981).

It is even more speculative to consider turnout at the level of the particular electorate, but it is possible - or even probable according to some commentators - that turnout in Area A was less than 50 per cent, perhaps as low as 30 per cent. This would
suggest that voters may have been apathetic about the election, particularly since it was not hotly contested. In non-compulsory elections in white society, it is assumed that the electorate is so well informed (especially by the media), that almost all potential voters know an election is coming and then low turnout is explained by lack of interest - apathy. But the answer to our second question provides evidence for an alternative explanation: lack of knowledge that there was an impending election. If we were to re-calculate turnout on the basis of what may be called the 'effective electorate' - that is, the 50 per cent of qualified voters who knew an election was coming on - then the 'effective electorate' for the two Darwin polling booths would lie somewhere between 300 and 450 voters and the turnout would be relatively high, say at least 60 per cent.

Comparison between turnout in the Territory election of 1980 and the NAC election sixteen months later cannot be made without taking a number of basic differences into account. Enrolment and voting were compulsory for Aborigines in the 1980 election, although it was made clear that failure to vote would not be penalised. The parties made efforts to increase Aboriginal enrolment and voting in many places in 1980 and campaigned vigorously. The high mobility of Aboriginal people also makes comparison over time very unreliable. And finally there are non-Aborigines - school teachers, advisers and church staff - in most Aboriginal communities, people who could vote in 1980 but not in 1981. Yet, even without these qualifications, turnout for the NAC election appears to have been as high in many places and even higher in some than it was in 1980, using figures from those places with a predominantly Aboriginal population where comparisons are possible - that is, where the same places were used for polling and more than 100 people voted. Estimates of population were made by DAA early in 1981 (DAA, 1981, 59-60) and, assuming that the 18 year olds and over were 50 per cent of the population, we can also make a rough estimate of the proportions who turned out to vote in many places. These proportions, along with numbers voting in 1980 and 1981, are shown in the following table.

Counting the votes at Bagot Reserve Community Centre for NTA
Preparing the counting table (left), unfolding the ballot papers (right)
## TURNOUT OF ABORIGINES - 1980 and 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polling Place</th>
<th>NAC Area</th>
<th>NT Election 1980</th>
<th>NAC 1981</th>
<th>Electoral turnout 1981 per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pt Keats (Wadeye)</td>
<td>NT A</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake Bay &amp; Garden Point (Milikapiti)</td>
<td>NT A</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oenpelli</td>
<td>NT B</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maningrida</td>
<td>NT B</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beswick</td>
<td>NT D</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamyili</td>
<td>NT D</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalkaringi &amp; Lajamanu</td>
<td>NT D</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliott/ Borroloola</td>
<td>NT E</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrabri</td>
<td>NT E</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willowra</td>
<td>NT F</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti Tree</td>
<td>NT F</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuendumu</td>
<td>NT F</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermannsburg</td>
<td>NT F</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Teresa</td>
<td>NT F</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amoonguna</td>
<td>NT F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryvale</td>
<td>NT G</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haasts Bluff</td>
<td>NT G</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areysta</td>
<td>NT G</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papunya</td>
<td>NT G</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportional estimates of turnout should be treated with reserve because population movements are high and, even in the six months between the DAA survey and the election, many places may have had a substantial temporary net gain or net loss of population. The two government agencies most concerned with the election, DAA and the Electoral Office, both expected that much less information about the impending election would reach possible voters through the efforts of candidates and the media than in an 'ordinary' election, if only because no parties or other organisations were directly involved, and knew that they would have to make special efforts to bring it to the notice of the electorate. The sitting member in Area A, Aloysius Marjic, had done little to keep himself - to say nothing of the NAC - before the electorate and only 11 per cent of those interviewed claimed to know (in most instances correctly) who the sitting member for the electorate was. Alice respondents were a little better informed - 24 per cent said they knew who the sitting member but it was not reflected in votes for him.

But before considering other figures about the electorate's knowledge of candidates the data we obtained on knowledge from media and campaigning should be noted. Sixteen per cent of the respondents in Darwin and 5 per cent in Alice had seen an official election poster; 11 per cent in Darwin and 5 per cent in Alice had seen a candidate leaflet and 9 per cent in Alice, 21 per cent in Darwin had seen one or other but could not say which. Sixty per cent in Darwin said they had seen nothing. Even more - 85 per cent - had heard nothing about the election on radio or cassette, even though the first official radio announcements were made before the survey started. Just over 5 per cent had heard an official message about it broadcast on radio and another 2 per cent claimed to have heard a candidate's radio message which suggests confusion at least since, as far as we know, no
Top End candidates used radio or cassettes in their campaign. Eight per cent in Alice claimed to have heard something on cassettes. Only official advertisements appeared in the press and the first did not appear until Thursday 15 October, by which time some of our interviews had already been carried out. On the Friday when about half of the interviews had been taken, several respondents volunteered that they had seen the advertisement the day before in the paper. This, it turned out, referred to the Darwin Sun since it alone had carried the advertisement that day, a 10 x 9 centimetre panel showing Slim Dusty and the words 'Aboriginals' and 'vote' prominently in the heavy type. Of the 84 Darwin respondents who might have seen a newspaper notice of the election, 8 per cent said they had and 80 per cent said they had not.

If these answers are compared with those for the first two questions, it is apparent that large numbers of voters had heard about the NAC and the election in ways other than through the media or the campaign messages of the candidates, presumably by word of mouth since the level of campaigning in Darwin was low. We asked whether people had been to any meetings about the election and only 15 people in Darwin said they had and 4 identified them not as candidate meetings but as official instructional meetings of one kind or another. In Alice 6 people (10 per cent) had been to meetings. The 'public meeting', as it would be called in white society, appears to be inconsistent with the Aborigines' way of handling these things but we have no more than hints about how the candidates went about making themselves known. For the election itself, the candidates appear to have relied on personal face-to-face talk and on talks with a local leader who, if favourable, was expected to pass 'the word' on to his people. In one instance, the leader's influence appears to have been applied to the desired effect but this is the only instance we know of.

Of course, long before the election and before the candidates had decided to stand, those who were to vote for them knew them in one capacity or another. Margaret Valadian was known as the wife of Bernie Valadian, well known through the Aboriginal Development Foundation especially in fringe camps - though she was sometimes confused with her sister-in-law of the same name; several of the men were known by reason of an occupation which took them around the electorate or from past or present popularity on the football ground. The data from a question 'do you know any of these people?' showed how well-known the candidates were even without campaigning media exposure. Several respondents, without prompting, asked whether we meant did they personally know the candidate or did we mean that they had merely heard of the candidate. The latter was, of course, the interpretation we adopted, although many respondents volunteered information that they were related in some way to one of the candidates, had played football with them or had some other direct knowledge such as knowing the candidate on the Bagot Council or in his capacity as a government employee.

The result was that all of the Darwin candidates were 'known' - that is, had at least been heard of - by over 40 per cent of the respondents. The figures in per cent are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liddy</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valadian</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubillo</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The corresponding figures for the two non-Darwin based candidates were 29 per cent for Aloysius Narjic (Pt Keats) and 34 per cent for Max Kerinaua (Ngiu, Bathurst Island). On Bathurst Island, Kerinaua was known by all but one of the 18 respondents and Narjic was known by all but six.

Another way of looking at the turnout is that, since there is no roll, it is the effective enrolment for that particular contest. In that case, the variation in enrolment between one electorate and the next may be noted, especially Area B's low of 715 and Area F's high of 1,494 - one less than half the other. It is doubtful whether the disparities of population are as great.
The figures given above also show that informal voting was low - 2.2 per cent of the total vote cast, although in Area C it was as high as 3.9 per cent. Votes were admitted to the count if the voters' intentions were clear and provided the voter did not write his or her name on the ballot paper. Many were declared informal because voters had written nothing on them at all; a few were disqualified because voters had tried to mark the paper preferentially and had given two or more number 1 votes. Others that were done preferentially without error of that kind were admitted; others with a tick or a cross were admitted if there were no ambiguities; so too were those with mirror image numbers, not uncommon in the 1980 NT ballot.

The other general point of importance is that only one of the four incumbents who contested the election was re-elected: Willie Martin. He was known widely - in his own electorate and elsewhere - for working steadily for all parts of the electorate throughout his term of office - even though it was not always what might be narrowly described as NAC business. And it should be added here that the unopposed candidate was unopposed not because of local satisfaction with his work but because those who were satisfied felt that the system gave them no hope of successfully contesting the seat.

The results in one or two electorates may be discussed in more detail in the light of the surveys carried out and the interviews with candidates. The results in Area A could not be predicted from a survey carried out only in Darwin and Bathurst. The survey did provide solid evidence to support an early hunch that, of the Darwin-based candidates, Mick Adams was 'strong' and Bill Liddy, Maurie Ryan and Laurie Cubillo were 'weak'. Neither Margaret Valadian nor Willy Clayton 'pollled' well in our survey but we believed on other grounds that they might poll well nonetheless on election day in the Darwin area. This meant that the Darwin vote might be split between three candidates and the outcome - given a single non-transferable vote, instead of preferential voting - might well be that, if either of the two out-of-town candidates polled strongly in their own localities and could get some support from elsewhere, either might win. But the Darwin candidates understood this and took steps to win votes out-of-town and in particular to challenge Narjic and Kerinauia in their own areas. As we have seen the 'stronger' Darwin candidates - Valadian, Adams and Clayton - made visits to the various centres of population to meet people and to activate their local supporters and their family connections. These tactics appear to have succeeded. In Pt Keats, where there were some reports of dissatisfaction with the sitting member even in his own 'territory', Margaret Valadian split the vote equally with Aloysius Narjic, only a bare handful going to other candidates. Clayton took a large part of Kerinauia's expected vote in Melville Island (Snake Bay, Garden Pt). In other words, a candidate who has not 'nursed' the constituency for which he or she is standing again, is vulnerable to vigorous challenge even in the area of traditional, local and family strength.

Another conclusion which the results in electorate A suggest is that where voters are divided into a number of separate centres and groups a candidate should have well-distributed strength to win. Compared with the other candidates, Clayton, Valadian and Adams all had fairly well distributed collections of votes, even though each was 'weak' in one or two places. They all campaigned vigorously by comparison with the other candidates and each had one or two areas of established strength - none particularly 'traditional', but rather based on known activities in the business of the Aboriginal community as a whole. Each was reasonably accurate in their assessment of this strength as they described it to us before the results were known, although there is little doubt that Clayton threw votes away by not visiting Garden Point as he had promised to do. Many candidates - including these three - included family and friendship connections, traditional relations and so forth in their explanations of their strength, but it is also clear from their references to the advantages their employment had given them - if only in making them known in the wider community - and their prominence in a variety of organisations that they did not rely on their 'traditional' and fixed connections, but on the more flexible and changeable connections which are as characteristic of many aspects of Aboriginal society as they are of white society.
There is, of course, evidence of bloc voting, perhaps best called 'home place' voting in Area A. Kerinauia's share of the vote in his home place at Bathurst Island was 47 per cent, well above his average of 11 per cent for the electorate as a whole. Narjic won 43 per cent of his home place vote as compared with 12 per cent for the electorate as a whole. The same thing is observable in Area D: Snowy Gulminya won 38 per cent of the vote on the West Side Mobile (west of Katherine) where his vote from his home place, Yarralin, was mixed with votes from other places. His share in the electorate as a whole was 6 per cent. Paddy Jangala won 78 per cent of his home place vote, Lajamanu, and 24 per cent of the whole vote and Andrew Joshua from Ngukurr won 54 per cent on the East Side Mobile - which included Ngukurr - and 20 per cent of the electorate as a whole.

In the Centre, one or two additional points emerge from the polling place figures as well as confirmation of 'home place' bloc voting. The figures for Area F may be taken first. Lindsay Bokie's vote, 15 per cent of the total, came principally from three places: his home place, Amoonguna, which was combined with Utopia (39 per cent of the votes cast), Napperby, where he has relatives (32 per cent of the combined Napperby-mobile vote) and Santa Teresa, where he was the only person to campaign (16 per cent). Fellow candidate Simon Enalanga did very little campaigning and most of his votes were from his home place, Hermannsburg, which gave him 90 per cent of its votes. Rex Granites, a local of Yuendumu, did not do as well - he gained 55 per cent of its vote, most of the other votes going to Stumpy Martin Jambajimba who had campaigned vigorously and, as Land Fund Commissioner, had helped people win back their land. It was also said that many women did not vote for Granites because of his remarks on drink. Stumpy Martin won 98 per cent of the votes at his home place, Willowa, but did equally well at Ti Tree, Ammaroo and Mt. Allen and on one of the mobile runs. At almost all other polling places he won a substantial proportion of the votes - the only candidate to do so. There can be little doubt that this general strength was the result not only of his help to several communities in regaining their land but also of his having long standing contacts in the area and his energetic campaigning. The same thing can be seen in Area G where the successful candidate, Vincent Forrester, was the only one to have general strength in most of the polling places. The two Alice Springs polling places gave 95 per cent of their votes to the three candidates, Forrester, Liddle and Williams, who had present or past strong links with Central Aboriginal Congress and other local Aboriginal organisations. Home place voting was not as strong as in Area F for other candidates: Zimran's 33 per cent of the Haasts Bluff vote and Jurra's 45 per cent of the Papunya vote are the only two clear examples.

One place in the Centre, Alcoota, provides an interesting parallel to Angurugu in the Top End. Each opted out of the election, Angurugu at the nomination phase and Alcoota in the polling stage - simply by casting no votes at all. Alcoota is a European owned-cattle station in Area F approximately 180 km north-east by road from Alice Springs. The mobile poll was scheduled to be open for voting on 15 October from 8.30 am for three hours. The polling team visited the Aboriginal camp on the evening of the 14 October to find out where the people would want the polling place only to be told that no-one from the community intended to vote. The polling place was set up on the following morning but no-one turned up to vote.

This was a surprising development. There had been a suggestion from another community that only after some discussion and convincing about the NAC had the people there been willing to vote but the absolute refusal by the Alcoota community contrasted with its ready involvement in the 1980 election.

Why the refusal? A number of conflicting reasons were suggested to us. One member of the community put forward the explanation that to hope to achieve eventual Aboriginal control of part or all of Alcoota they needed to keep out of elections, voting, land councils, NAC or anything that could cause trouble. A second explanation, reported from an earlier contact with the community, included three reasons why the Alcoota people decided to stand out of the election: the incumbent member had visited Alcoota only once in four years; the boundaries for the NAC took no account of tribal boundaries; and
insufficient time had been provided for nomination decisions with the result that no community east of the Stuart Highway had been able to have a 'home' candidate.

A third suggestion was that pressure had been applied to the community not to vote. A further proposal was that the Alcoota community had been 'unaboriginalised' - settled, with a fruit and vegetable farm on a 200 hectare property plus special purpose lease granted in 1974 - and that the NAC had become an interference with their way of life. A final explanation was put to us in the following way.

At a fundamental level, Alcoota did not vote because the whole electoral and voting procedure is unaboriginal, ignoring the traditional way that Aborigines deal with political matters. The process of consultation and decision-making is very slow and a month may be far too short a time for the electoral details to filter amongst everyone and for the community to decide whether or not to nominate some-one or even support some-one.

Then, if the nomination or election day arrives and if various activities are pushing them before they feel that they have had time to sort everything out, they may very well decide to jack-up and refuse to co-operate with these outside pressures.

Their public rationalisation may then be that they can and will look after themselves at their own pace and in their own way. And, indeed, if they are disillusioned with the procedures which are adopted for NAC elections (or any other political events) and if they feel that these procedures do not fit their own traditional processes of politics then why shouldn't they feel that they will do better out of dealing with politics using their own more familiar, more comfortable processes? After all, if Bruce Turner did only visit once and if the NAC hasn't produced any obvious goods and if activists do only visit just prior to elections, then why bother with the 'games of white fellas'?

The real reason for the Alcoota boycott may be any one of the above, or a combination of them. How to overcome such resistance to participation by a whole community, whether on rational or irrational grounds, is a task for candidates. It was not, on this occasion, a task in many places.
CHAPTER 9: REPRESENTATION AND THE NAC

Administration

Running any election is complex. A great number of small tasks have to be carried out according to a tight time schedule by personnel who - in the Territory - are separated by great distances and by communications which are not always reliable. The fact that the number of voters to be polled in the NAC election was only about a quarter of the number to be polled in a Territory election made little difference to the task, at least as it related to Aborigines. Fewer polling places had to be set up in centres like Darwin and Alice Springs and there was no roll to update, but otherwise the same preparations had to be made in this as in any other election.

But the administrative arrangements for making these preparations differed from those of other elections in two important respects, both of which increased the possibility for confusion in carrying out a complex task. Two departments, Aboriginal Affairs and Administrative Services, the departmental home of the Electoral Office, had an interest in and responsibility for the election, whereas only one is concerned in other elections. Secondly, the administration or the NAC election is carried out, not under the authority of legislation, but under ministerial authority - obtained by agreement between the ministers of the two departments. In the election this was exercised on the advice of an inter-departmental steering committee which included NAC executive representation. These two special features meant that the administration of the election might give rise to disagreements about duties and responsibilities if ministers had different priorities and emphases and to uncertainty about levels of staffing and funding that might be needed for the work. Not all difficulties of this kind were avoided although they were minimised in the area offices and in the field in the Territory.

Given the growing political activity of Aborigines and their increasing participation in other elections, it is important that the administration of the NAC election should be beyond reproach, otherwise it will be criticised on the ground that the Aborigines are being given a second-best system. The Electoral Office also has its own interest in maintaining the standard of administration. It has been in the forefront of innovations in such things as electoral education and mobile polling and has won the support and confidence of Aborigines which it needs if it is to carry out its work among groups which are sometimes volatile, intransigent and confrontationist. Adverse criticism of its work is inevitable if it is unable to maintain the high standards set in administration of other elections.

Boundaries

The boundaries for the 1981 election, unchanged from 1977, provoked some criticism in the Northern Territory. According to the Charter of the NAC the definition of NAC areas for the purposes of conducting an election will be as approved by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and any amendments to area boundaries will also require the approval of the Minister (clause 21). This does not tell us now or on what principles the boundaries are drawn although they have been drawn to conform generally to DAA's administrative boundaries. In some places they cut across family, tribal and language groups and this was particularly important in Area B where many supporters of one candidate would have been ineligible to vote for him had polling not taken place outside the boundary, and in Areas F and G in the Centre where, it was said, two communities refused to vote as a result. Another consequence was that Milton Liddle was precluded from seeking support from his home-country. It may be necessary to modify the residence requirements for nomination to take account of such cases; for example, where Alice Springs is the centre of the region and of two or more electorates, residence in the town should be sufficient qualification for either
electorate and allow the candidate to choose which he will stand in.

But to draw different boundaries or to find some different principle on which they might be drawn is not easy. Australian electorates (excepting those for certain limited interest groups) are geographical and defined to secure representation of people. They are expected to be, within limits, more or less equal in voting populations, to be arranged so that the parts are contiguous and to pay some regard to the 'community of interest' of the electorate.

To apply these principles to the NAC boundaries would lead to major problems and in fact some of the criticisms are derived from them. When the contiguous are grouped together, as they are in Area A, the town and rural Aborigines may well be said to lack community of interest and may be at loggerheads with one another on some questions. When grouped in Area C with the Elcho Island community, Angurugu felt that its interests were not properly represented, that is, there was no community of interest. In addition, hardly any of the communities in Area C are contiguous, communications between them are far from well developed and there are numerous divisions of tribe, language and family - and associated interests - between them, with little or no overriding community of economic interest to give meaning to the electorate as a whole. Most of the Territory NAC electorates show similar features. At the time it was said in Darwin that the NAC is hampered in the Territory by electoral boundaries which do not coincide with tribal boundaries (NT News, 19 October 1981). And a meeting of the Aboriginal Forum passed a resolution that

This Forum is concerned by the electoral boundaries in Central Australia
and prefer to have the area divided into more electorates formed in
consultation with the Aboriginal people in Central Australia. We call upon
the NAC to alter the boundaries to give proper representation for the
different tribes in the area (Identity 4, 4, 20).

To provide representation on a tribal basis seems plausible if only because tribes have more or less well-defined territories which could be regarded as the equivalent of the geographical areas of the rest of the electoral system. But there are several difficulties in this analogy, even if we leave aside problems of defining tribes and reconciling differences between tribes and language groups. There are Aborigines, some even tribal Aborigines, without any territory they can call their own and there seem to be some areas which are not the territory of tribes although Aborigines live there from time to time. The tribal principle, in other words, would have to be supplemented by other principles if all Aborigines and all land areas are to be part of the system as they are at present.

Furthermore, to provide each tribe, family or language group with an NAC representative is not the same thing as ensuring that more or less equally populated geographical areas each have a representative. It would ensure serious disproportionality in the value of the votes of individuals in tribes and language groups of different sizes and in the weight to be accorded to their representatives.

The groups into which the Aboriginal electorate as a whole might be sub-divided are so numerous that, if each had its own representative, a national Aboriginal conference would be an inchoate mass meeting. Even in the Centre the representation of language groups in Areas F and G would result in at least eleven rather than the present two representatives. The only way of obtaining a workable national conference from such a mass of representatives would be to regard them as a kind of intermediate electoral college, the sole function of which would be to select a smaller number of members to constitute the Conference proper. Such a resolution of the difficulty would create new problems and not satisfy those who sought tribal representation, if only because only a few of the many tribes would be represented in the smaller body. In addition, it may well be argued that already some candidates and some members do manage to rise above the particularities of tribe, kin and language and that the 'problem' is not, therefore, as intractable as some critics of present arrangements have believed it to be.
This is not to say, however, that the boundaries used in 1981 were beyond serious criticism: for example the boundary in Area B to the east of Maningrida is open to objection on the ground that it does divide a community between two electorates. In other words, some patching up or adjustment could be carried out between elections, although the Charter does not say what body of people would be authorised to do it. It may well be necessary, too, to give area returning officers a kind of emergency power to correct emerging anomalies during the actual preparations for an election, subject to the obligation to report publicly afterwards. But it does also need to be emphasised that, while there is no simple and obvious alternative to the existing system of boundaries, there is also no obvious or simple principle underlying those boundaries to guide either ad hoc adjustments or more extensive changes that might be made between elections. This suggests that when general changes are to be made, the widest possible consultation should take place if they are to be acceptable.

Electorate type and voting system

The 1977 and 1981 NAC elections were contested in single-member electorates using the most simple method of voting - first-past-the-post (FPP). Some of the difficulties arising from this have already been noted, but they may be emphasised here. It was suggested to us that in Aboriginal culture, a candidate from one community in a single-member electorate cannot visit other communities within the electorate. This was given as one reason why Turner and Stockman had not widely visited in their respective areas, and why their campaigning was limited. If there are social constraints of this kind, they did not hinder Willie Martin, the incumbent in Area D, from visiting all parts of his electorate regularly.

Another comment was that the single-member electorate system, in some areas (notably areas A and G), mixes town, fringe camp and rural Aborigines, and those who see themselves as full and part Aborigines. We were told that full and part Aborigines find it difficult to represent each other, although we also noted that they do not hesitate to do so in some circumstances. First-past-the-post voting does, however, have the potential to exacerbate local differences if candidates stand to take advantage of them. It pits each candidate against all others, each in the hope that his small minority will be big enough to win. There is no inducement for compromise, alliance, combination, no reason to try to overcome the divisions of tribe, language and locality which fragment the Aboriginal electorate.

One change which could have positive benefits, if the single-member electorate basis is retained, would be to replace first-past-the-post with preferential voting. It might be full preferential or optional, but whichever it is, it would help to produce an environment of reconciliation rather than confrontation between candidates and interests. Another benefit, the importance of which should be stressed, is that this would bring the NAC elections more into line with other elections in which Aborigines are involved. Many have already learned how to vote preferentially and understand its implications. This learning is a continuous process and is most effectively reinforced by being called upon in a context of importance to the Aborigines. Although they were not required to do so some marked their NAC ballot papers preferentially in a clearly discriminating fashion. To persist with first-past-the-post when preferential voting is used for other elections in which Aborigines are now voting may well be a source of confusion in NAC elections and possibly even a barrier to full participation.

A second alternative is to consider the benefits of a multi-member system of electorates. This would overcome some of the difficulties noted above. For example, a three-member electorate formed from the existing areas F and G would have positive advantages. A candidate resident in Alice Springs could then campaign in his own home-area and seek support from tribal, work or other contacts. Second, a candidate would not be forced to campaign in areas where language or community mores make difficulties for him, although there would still be some pressure for him to do so. Third, a system of multi-member representation could allow for different, even competing interests in an
electorate to be given voice in the electoral and political process. If there are
different needs and interests between, say, urban Aborigines, the residents of fringe
camps and rural communities, then a multi-member system would allow these to be formulated
and expressed with more effectiveness while, at the same time, not necessarily
exacerbating the divisions between such groups and interests.

The introduction of a system of multi-member electorates would not entail
proportional representation (PR). In fact, PR of the kind operating for the Senate and
Tasmanian Assembly elections would be inappropriate and could not be applied to the NAC
elections in the absence of party or similar group identification for the candidates. But
an election in a multi-member constituency could be decided on either a
first-past-the-post system or by a preferential system, which could be either full or
optional. In a three-member electorate, the first-past-the-post method would give the
election to the three candidates with the largest number of votes. In the preferential
system, preferences could be distributed until all but three candidates had been excluded.
Either method would result in improved representation of different interests within an
electorate, although the former, as in single-member systems, would not ameliorate
conflicts between such interests as effectively as preferential voting.

Election Mechanics

The mechanics of the NAC election in the Northern Territory were efficient and
effective. Very few complaints were reported from our observers, and these have been
mentioned above. Four specific points need to be considered.

Mobile polling was used for the third occasion in the Northern Territory and, as we
have noted elsewhere, it is a complex process which calls for detailed but flexible
planning. The planned schedules must be advertised well enough in advance to give all
voters the opportunity to vote and they should not be altered arbitrarily. But it should
be possible to modify them in the light of local circumstances to ensure that people are
not accidentally denied the vote and to provide enough spare time and back-up facilities
to ensure that if unforeseen breakdowns do occur the process is not totally disrupted.
These things are understood in the Electoral Office; they mean that a schedule for
polling should have a generous margin of time in it for delays; that back-up vehicles
should be available and, above all, that radio contact should be maintained with
Aboriginal communities so that the presiding officer can advise people of changes to the
schedule. It appeared to us that, because of the need to economise, not enough back-up
and spare time were built into some of the mobile runs and that, in future, more versatile
radio equipment should be available and used to keep in touch when schedules cannot be
maintained.

The mechanics of casting an external vote in the NAC election call for some comment.
At this election the poll clerk had to hand-write all names of candidates on a blank
ballot paper for the external voter. This could create a bottleneck in a crowded polling
booth. In 1981, only 149 of the 6613 (less than 3 per cent) votes cast in the Northern
Territory were external, and observers at polling places reported no major difficulties,
but serious delays and disorganisation might occur in future.

As noted earlier, the NAC election was administered without an electoral roll.
Nonetheless electoral rolls would be of use to candidates, as we have already observed.
Electorates were required to make a declaration of Aboriginality by means of a voter card.
To set up an electoral roll for the NAC election, separate from the roll for other
elections, would be a major administrative task. An insoluble complication arises from
the fact that voters identify themselves as Aboriginal. A person may so identify for one
election but not do so for the next - a possibility preserved by the card system but
inconsistent with an electoral roll. Card registration also overcomes the often
time-consuming process of finding the correct Aboriginal name on an electoral roll.
Nonetheless electoral rolls would be of use to candidates, as we have already observed.
One point raised concerning the voting-card registration was that it did not preclude double voting. An electoral roll does not do so either. Under the card system, where there are two polling places reasonably near to each other, or where a person had voted at a mobile poll and then travelled to a town or settlement with a static poll, double-voting is possible. Two points can be made in response. The cards are checked after the election, and any instance of double voting would be identified. Second, the system of crossing a name from a roll does not preclude a double vote at another polling place as, again, checking of rolls does not occur until after the election. The Zimbabwe method of dipping the voters' fingers into a dye once they have voted would be rejected out of hand when it is not used for white elections.

Another aspect of voter identification may be noted at this point even though it is not particularly a feature of the card system. The declaration a voter is required to give at an NAC election is broader than that in other elections. The intending voter declares Aboriginal descent and identity, community recognition of identity, age and residence as preconditions for eligibility to vote, as well as declaring that he or she has not already voted in the election. The declarations are then affirmed by a signature.

The fourth point on mechanics concerns the presence of candidate representatives—scrutineers—in the polling place. In the 1980 Legislative Assembly election in the Northern Territory, as in most other elections, party scrutineers were permitted in the polling booth and were able to challenge decisions of the presiding officer. Where a voter requested assistance from the presiding officer, they were permitted to observe the act of voting. Both roles were 'guarded' by strict regulations to prevent improper disclosure of any observations.

The NAC regulations did not allow scrutineers to be present in the booth at any time, except to cast their own votes. A strong case can be made that they should have been allowed the same rights under the same constraints as in Northern Territory legislation.

In the Territory election the scrutineers with only minor exceptions did perform in accordance with the letter and spirit of the rules. Their presence in the polling booth was a form of public guarantee that the election process was not only fair and above board, but seen to be so. In addition, on many occasions, scrutineers were able to assist in the identification of non-literate voters from the roll.

An even stronger case can be made for the presence of scrutineers in an NAC election. In all elections it is important that the rules not only be followed but also that voters and officers have been observed following them. When polling officials are highly interested in the outcome of polling or subject to strong pressure—as in polling for some party branch positions in inner city politics—the case is even stronger. It is the same for Aboriginal polling officials. An Aboriginal official may be subjected to strong pressure from family or tribe. It is easier for the official to resist these pressures, as he must, if scrutineers are present. Further, the tasks of preventing double-voting, or registration on cards (or establishing the correct names if rolls are used), and of administering the declaration of Aboriginality are made easier with the assistance of scrutineers, and with the rights of scrutineers to question and challenge. One possible difficulty—that, say, eight candidates could result in eight scrutineers in an already crowded polling booth—is a minor consideration in terms of the positive benefits derived from their presence.

Funding

In most elections, candidates have access to personal, party and pressure group funds to support their campaigns. In the NAC election, political parties were not involved and candidates consequently had no party funds. The overwhelming majority of the Aboriginal candidates had little if any personal money to spend on campaigning. Besides that, many candidates were unable to take time off from their employment to devote to campaigning,
and many could not afford to lose wages anyway if they had leave. Yet in order to
campaign at all, an NAC candidate would be faced with a cost of transport - in the case of
some outback electorates in areas bigger than Victoria - which would be beyond his means.
Under the existing arrangements, an incumbent who is energetic, and keen to be re-elected,
has tremendous advantages. His regular salary as a member of the NAC, and his expenses
allowance can establish financial benefits and a campaign potential which is beyond the
wildest dreams of even the most keen and energetic of his competitors. A strong case can
therefore be made for a system of public funding for NAC elections, on grounds of equality
of opportunity alone. This point was raised by several candidates, including some who did
have the personal or community funding to run their own campaigns at the level available
to an incumbent.

Representation

The purpose of representation, the roles of a representative and the proper functions
for representative organisations are complex matters of debate in any political system.
In the Australian system representation is provided for both people - or electors - in
geographically defined electorates and, in different and separate institutional
arrangements, for many of the organised interests in society. The NAC, if not unique, is
unusual in providing for a mixture of both kinds of representation - of people in
electorates and of the Aborigines as a distinct interest group. Some of the difficulties
about the principles on which electoral boundaries should be drawn follow from this
ambiguity about the organisation. So, too, do some of the difficulties which confront the
NAC member who tries to decide what his role as a representative entails. From one point
of view, it is not necessary to 'service' an electorate by attending to its people's
wants, keeping in touch with it and so on; it is sufficient to be an elected Aborigine
and to attend and speak at NAC meetings in Canberra. From another point of view the
representative who neglects his constituency is falling down on his job - and this is how
many NT Aborigines thought of their inactive NAC members.

But uncertainty about their role is not the only difficulty confronting NAC
representatives. The full tribal Aborigines, it was said, find the life-style of the NAC
representative so utterly different - commuting to Canberra, living in hotels, sitting on
committees - that the transition from one style to another can be difficult and
disorienting. Second, the role of an NAC representative involves most if not all of the
components of representation in other environments - decision-making, lobbying,
campaigning and so on - in other words it involves being a full political person but
without the 'training' most Australian politicians have for that role in local government,
business or some other organisational activity. Third, unlike most representatives in
other political environments, the NAC representative will generally not have an electoral
organisation to assist him and to fall back on when needed. He will have no party
organisation to provide a continuing link with the electorate and a support for him. And
he will be at a corresponding disadvantage when dealing with Aboriginal politicians who do
have this kind of support. Furthermore, the tribal Aborigine elected to the NAC will find
his own tribal life disrupted and will come under family pressures to stay around his own
camp. There will be a tension, then, between tribal responsibilities and white-man-type
politics, perhaps even erosion of his support among the people from whom he was elected.
Somewhat related problems arose concerning the member's salary, which some people thought
was too high. The notion was not that it was more than the member needed (though that
might be said if he was not expected to service his electorate) but that it put him too
far apart from people much poorer than himself. In fact, the NAC member is granted salary
and allowances sufficient to service an electorate and, especially for the representatives
of rural electorates, high costs for the work are inescapable.

Finally, there is uncertainty about the role of the NAC representative - what is he
or she expected to do in the electorate, in Canberra and elsewhere? The Charter, in
effect, defines some minimal duties, such as attending meetings, but beyond that it is up
to the member to shape the role. Even if he intends to communicate with and service an
electorate, it is not clear with what authority he can speak on behalf of it to government departments. The media are of little or no help, as the sparse publicity and news about NAC doings between elections and about the election itself indicate. Communication with an electorate is almost wholly by personal visit. The media's lack of interest is, at least in part, a result of the fact that an NAC representative, though he may serve an electorate, does not have a clear public role like a member of parliament, a role which would enable him to question ministers and administrators and secure publicity in the media. There is, in short, no public arena in which the NAC representative can work.

The NAC itself and its representatives in the Northern Territory have done little to draw the attention of the public to the organisation or to keep in touch with the constituencies from which they are drawn. As a result, the impact of the 1977-81 NAC on the lives and awareness of Territory Aborigines was minimal, if our interviews with candidates and our survey in Darwin, Bathurst Island and Alice Springs are accepted. The NAC is seen as something on the periphery of political life, remote, something down south in Canberra, something which lacks an organisational northern presence and has not attempted to speak up on the problems of Aborigines in the north.

It can do nothing about its inherent weaknesses but they add to the difficulties its members have in defining their roles and they must be noted in conclusion. For example, its authority to consider and make representations on matters which are under state government administration, such as Aboriginal health, is unclear and yet that is the kind of thing many of its critics think it should be doing. It is only one among many organisations speaking for Aborigines, some of them with positions entrenched in legislation or in administrative arrangements and therefore able to ignore the NAC. Many appear to be more effective politically than it is. Unlike so many other national interest group bodies, it is not a peak organisation which brings the voices of affiliated and constituent bodies together in negotiations, from a position of some strength and independence, with government. Its image among many of its critics - for example the Aboriginal Forum - is of a body too much under the influence of government and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, a body incapable of asserting itself politically against the government when the need arises. And that, as Sally Weaver's account shows, may be traced back to the limits placed on the NAC by government at its formation (Weaver, forthcoming).
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APPENDIX I

[Note: an abbreviated version of this appeared in Aboriginal News 3, 3, May 1978, 3, 7].

CHARTER OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE (NAC)

A. INTRODUCTION

This Charter sets out:
(a) the structure and functions of the National Aboriginal Conference
(b) the role and duties of NAC members
(c) the relationship between the NAC and the Commonwealth.

B. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

Composition

2. The NAC will be composed of 35 members elected for three years in accordance with the provisions of Part D of this charter. The role of the National Aboriginal Conference will be to provide a forum in which Aboriginal views may be expressed at State and National level and, in particular, to express Aboriginal views on the long term goals and objectives which the Government should pursue and the programs it should adopt in Aboriginal Affairs, on the effectiveness of existing programs in Aboriginal affairs and on the need for new programs in Aboriginal affairs. The NAC will also participate, through its entitlement to choose 5 of the 10 members, in the work of the Council for Aboriginal Development (see Attachment).

Structure

3. The role of the NAC will be carried out
   (a) by the NAC as a whole in an annual meeting;
   (b) by State Branches in biannual meetings;
   (c) by the Executive, meeting biannually; in accordance with the provisions of the following paragraphs.

The Annual Meeting of the NAC

4. The Annual Meeting of the NAC will be held in a place determined by the NAC. The first annual meeting will be held in Canberra within 12 months after the first elections. The Chairman of the Executive, or in his absence the deputy Chairman of the Executive, will preside over
the annual meeting. Rules of procedure for the meeting will be prepared by the Executive and submitted to the first annual meeting for approval.

5. The annual meeting will review the work of the Executive during the previous twelve months. It may recommend a reconsideration or rescission of previous decisions of the Executive. The Executive will be guided but not bound by these recommendations.

6. The annual meeting will receive and consider reports and recommendations from State Branches (through the Executive) and from the Executive. It may make recommendations to State Branches and the Executive.

7. The annual meeting may set up committees to consider, during the annual meeting, such matters as may be referred. It may request reports from the Executive or State Branches. It may, through the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, request information from the Commonwealth Government.

State Branches of the NAC

8. Members of the NAC elected in a State or Territory will constitute a State Branch of the NAC except that Victorian and Tasmanian members will together constitute one Branch. Membership of State Branches will be:

<table>
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<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria/Tasmania</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

State Branches will meet at least twice each year, in a place of their own choosing within their State or Territory. They will elect their Chairman and Vice Chairman annually. In their absence an acting Chairman shall be elected by majority vote of those present. The Chairman will be responsible for preparing and circulating the agenda for meetings.

9. The functions of State Branches will be:
   - to elect delegates to the Executive
   - to propose matters for discussion and action at the national level;
   - to form and maintain working relationships with other Aboriginal organisations, with regional offices of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and, through those offices with other Commonwealth and State Government departments in order to deal with matters related to Commonwealth programs arising at State level.
   - to consider reports from delegates to the National Executive.
   - to advise the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on matters referred by him to the State Branch.
10. The Executive - Members of the Executive will be chosen by State Branches from among their members as follows:

- Western Australia: 2 members (1 of whom shall represent a tribal region)
- Northern Territory: 2 members
- South Australia: 1 member
- Queensland: 2 members (1 of whom shall represent the Torres Strait area)
- New South Wales: 2 members
- Victoria/Tasmania: 1 member

Members of a State Branch may also elect one of their members to act as a substitute in any instance where a delegate is unable to attend an Executive meeting or otherwise undertake his duties as an Executive member. Members of the Executive will hold office for three years. The Executive will elect its Chairman and Deputy Chairman annually. In their absence an acting Chairman shall be elected by majority vote of those present.

11. The Executive will choose five of its members to be the NAC delegates to the Council for Aboriginal Development. At least two of the delegates will be representatives of tribal regions or of the Torres Strait area.

12. The function of the Executive will be:
- on the basis of recommendations of NAC meetings and meetings of State Branches, to brief delegates to the Council for Aboriginal Development;
- to prepare for annual meetings of the NAC;
- on the basis of recommendations of the Annual meetings and meetings of State Branches, to put the views and needs of the Aboriginal people before the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and before groups and individuals having responsibilities for, or interests in, Aboriginal affairs;
- to direct the activities of the NAC secretariat, including its financial management and employment of secretariat staff
- to prepare and distribute an NAC newsletter.

13. The Executive is obliged to consider recommendations from the NAC annual meeting and meetings of State Branches, but such recommendations are not binding on the Executive.
C. MEMBERSHIP

14. Membership of the NAC will be open to any Aboriginal over the age of 18 years who has been a permanent resident of the area in which he stands for election for a period of more than six months. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will be the sole authority on the number of members and the boundaries of the areas which members shall represent.

15. A member may cease to be a member of the National Aboriginal Conference before the expiration of the three year period of office by resignation or by declaration of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs after consultation with the National Executive of the National Aboriginal Conference that the member is no longer fit to hold office on the grounds of conviction for a criminal offence, gross neglect of duties or of ill health.

16. Casual vacancies arising from action taken under paragraph 15 or from death of a member, will be filled by election or other means approved by the Minister after consultation with the relevant State Branch.

17. Since members of the NAC are regarded as accountable to Aboriginals, Aboriginal organizations and Aboriginal communities in their areas, it will be their duty to consult with and represent the views of Aboriginal organizations and communities in their areas at meetings of State Branches and of the NAC.

18. Members will be available to advise organizations and communities in formulating requests for assistance and will take part in consultations on aid programs at Community, Area and Regional level.

19. Members will continue to reside in their areas while they hold office as NAC members. They will receive remuneration at the rate determined by the Remuneration Tribunal on the basis of their full-time service as NAC members.

D. ELECTIONS

20. Elections for NAC members shall be conducted by the Australian Electoral Office in conjunction with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Rules for the conduct of these elections, and any amendments to these rules, will be subject to the approval of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, in consultation with the Minister for Administrative Services.

21. The definition of NAC areas for the purposes of conducting an election will be as approved by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and any amendments to area boundaries will also require the approval of the Minister.
E. ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

22. Subject to budgetary requirements and within the context of overall Government policy, the Commonwealth Government will provide finance for the operation of the National Aboriginal Conference, including funds for:
- the remuneration of NAC members as approved by the Remuneration Tribunal;
- fares of members attending approved meetings;
- the salaries and other entitlements of NAC members' secretarial assistants as approved by the Public Service Board;
- accommodation and assistance for the conduct of approved NAC meetings where these requirements cannot be met by the NAC secretariat;
- the preparation and distribution of an NAC newsletter.

23. The administration of these monies, within the budget approved by the Minister, will be the responsibility of the National Executive of the National Aboriginal Conference, subject to the incorporation of the National Executive in a form acceptable to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and to arrangements for the accounting and audit of all funds provided by the Commonwealth in a manner acceptable to the Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs.

24. In addition to providing funds for the purpose described above, the Government will provide office accommodation, furniture and equipment and telephone facilities for each NAC member, for the NAC secretariat and for the annual NAC meeting and meetings of the Executive and States Branches of a standard approved by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

F. RELATIONS WITH THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

25. In addition to the matters provided for in this charter the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs may refer any other matter to the NAC Annual meeting, to the Executive or State Branches and such matters shall be discussed by the body referred to and a response provided.

26. Resolutions or requests affecting the responsibilities of Ministers other than the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, will be referred by the latter to those Ministers, and the replies will be conveyed through the same channel.

27. The NAC may seek assistance from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to fulfill its function and particularly for training of members and for the provision of factual information to assist it in providing advice to the Minister.
Amendments

28. This charter may be amended at any time by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs after consultation with the National Aboriginal Conference.

Explanatory Note
Council for Aboriginal Development

The Council for Aboriginal Development will be the formal advisory body to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and, through him, to other Ministers or Commonwealth authorities responsible for programs and policies having specific impact on the Aboriginal community in Australia. In particular, the Council will be a key body in achieving the Government's objective in ensuring that Aboriginals take a major role, at national level, in advising on the long term goals which the Government should pursue and the programs it should adopt; setting priorities for expenditure; and evaluating existing programs and formulating new ones.

30. The Council for Aboriginal Development will consist of ten members of whom five will be NAC members chosen by the National Executive from the members of the Executive, and five will be nominees of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs; all members will be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. At least two of the National Executive delegates will represent communities in tradition-oriented areas.

31. While there is no limit on the range of matters affecting Aboriginal Australians on which the Council may offer advice, it will be required to consult with specialist advisory bodies, such as the National Aboriginal Education Committee, with a view to avoiding duplicating the work of these bodies.
### APPENDIX 2

#### STATISTICS OF THE ELECTION 1971

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<tr>
<th>NTA</th>
<th>Elva Dickfoss</th>
<th>Joyce Schroeder</th>
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<th>James Tipungwuti</th>
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### APPENDIX 3

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**Votes cast for candidates by polling place and electorate, 1981**

(\% of formal votes in brackets, rounded to nearest whole number; the sign / equals 'and'; Post=postal, Ext=external)

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<th>Mick Adams</th>
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This is the first study of the election of representatives to the National Aboriginal Conference. A quickening of Aboriginal political activity was a noticeable feature of the election in the Northern Territory in 1981, a quickening accompanied by a growing awareness that northern Aboriginal interests are different from those of southerners and need more active presentation both nationally and in the Territory.

The account of the election discusses both campaigning and the administrative conduct of the election. A number of candidates were interviewed and a street survey of Aboriginal voters was carried out. The results of this survey are reported and discussed along with the results of the election itself. A statistical appendix includes results of the election in 1977 as well as results to the polling place level for 1981.