NORTHERN POLITICAL RESEARCH

PAST AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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PREFACE

The two papers presented here were written in 1990, the first for the ACSANZ conference held in Armidale in July, the second for a (cancelled) NARU conference in November.

Peter Loveday, recently retired Executive Director of the North Australia Research Unit in Darwin for the past nine years, is a political scientist from the Australian National University. Dean Jaensch is Reader in Politics at the Flinders University of South Australia. Both have written extensively on politics in Northern Australia, as bibliographies appended to the two papers attest.

Loveday's paper on the political history of the north is a review of literature on northern politics since the 1950s. In it Loveday deals with interpretations of northern politics; with works on the constitutional and institutional developments, including works on parties and interest groups. The emphasis is on going behind the formal institutions to the political processes and behaviour which they mould and from this point of view there is much research still to be carried out. This is particularly obvious not only in relation to regionalism, local government and interest groups, but above all in relation to Aborigines, an often overlooked but major proportion of the northern population and the subject of much white northern politicking. So far few people have studied the politics of Aboriginal society, both in its internal aspects and in its interactions with white politics, and much existing work is limited by being focused on individual communities, by being undertaken from an anthropological perspective or by its emphasis on current 'issues' and conflicts about Aboriginal policy.

Jaensch's paper complements Loveday's by discussing a possible broad agenda for future research on northern politics. Since the early 1970s, NARU has been involved in research and publications on politics in the Northern Territory with some attention to the politics of the north - the region of interest for NARU. One reason for this focus, especially on the Northern Territory, is the unique opportunity to study an emerging polity in which constitutional and political developments have occurred at the same time. A second reason for the focus on the politics of the north is the developing involvement of Aborigines in the political process. The paper briefly surveys this research, and proposes possible directions for political research in the 1990s. In summary, the paper proposes that political research in the Northern Territory should continue in specific areas, but that the main focus should be on the region, with comparative and thematic emphases.

POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE NORTH

P Loveday*

The written political history of the Australian north is fragmentary and it exhibits a limited number of themes or interpretations. The themes, borrowed from other authors, are similar to some found in writing on the north in Canada and Alaska. This paper provides an extensive, but not exhaustive, assessment of the literature on the political history of the Australian north.

The time frame for this discussion is principally since the second world war. The north: I leave this poorly defined but basically it would be the area to the north of a line drawn from North-west Cape to Townsville, with a loop to the south to include central Australia. This is similar to the definition given by Courtenay (1982, 44). From some points of view this may be unsatisfactory but other possible lines such as the tropic of Capricorn are no better. Nonetheless geographical, climatic and resource endowments suggest that a north with something like these boundaries is a distinct regional entity, no matter what its internal diversity.

General histories, to begin with them, usually include material on political as well as other aspects of a particular place and time. For reasons to be discussed later there is no general history of the north as a regional whole. Instead we have state and Territory histories and politics texts. For Western Australia Frank Crowley's *Australia's Western Third* (1960) was the principal work for a long time until Stannage's *New History of Western Australia* (1981) came out. A series on the government of the Australian states was produced in the late 1970s but a volume was never produced for Western Australia. For the Northern Territory Powell's (1982) and Donovan's (1984) histories are the main ones, complemented by Heatley's *The Government of the Northern Territory* (1979). Cilento and Lack's centenary history of Queensland (1959) was for many years the only one. Johnston's *The Call of the Land* (1982) and Ross Fitzgerald's *From 1915 to the Early 1980s* (1984) are much less celebratory. Hughes (1980) has provided the politics text, *The Government of Queensland*. Geoff Bolton, whose doctoral thesis was on the pastoral industry in the Kimberley district in the north of Western Australia, has written the history of north Queensland (1972). In addition for Western Australia and Queensland, governmental year books provide historical outlines which include material on political history. These texts, with one or two exceptions, do not take us very far. Crowley's and Stannage's books contain very little on the north of Western Australia; Bolton's deals with political history only incidentally and devotes only a couple of pages to the subject in the conclusion. Hughes says very little about the north of Queensland although the section on regionalism is worth noting; Cilento and Lack's volume has only a few pages on politics after the first world war and none of it with reference to north Queensland. There is a substantial political component in one of the few historical essays comparing recent events in the norths of Canada and Australia (Loveday, Hodgins and Grant 1989).

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Studies of elections usually include narrative accounts of recent political and administrative events and could therefore be drawn on to help construct a political history, at least for the Northern Territory (see for example Jaensch and Loveday 1981). The political chronicle in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History* and the administrative chronicle in the *Australian Journal of Public Administration* are two other invaluable sources for more recent political history. Historical material with some political relevance can usually be found in the various texts on northern development, such as Kerr's *Australia's North-west* (1967,1975) and Courtenay's *Northern Australia* (1982).

Political history has some obvious components or topics. It should deal with parties, elections and the sequence of governments; the development of institutions such as constitutions, legislatures, electoral and administrative systems; the major issues of the time and how they develop and are settled. The presentation of the story on these matters is essentially narrative and descriptive and at a fairly general level. The events and topics to be dealt with are usually identified as important for the historian by the people who took leading parts in them, by later commentaries and by conventional judgments that such things as constitutional changes are the stuff of political history. The historian will then compress and summarise, normally making a few judgments along the way about people or events and almost certainly trying to identify some long term trends, without destroying the basic narrative character of the text. This is how Powell, for example, proceeds in his *Far Country* (1982) in dealing with constitutional change in the Northern Territory and with political issues in the field of Aboriginal affairs in his last chapter.

There is however another way of tackling the subject: to look for some distinctive tendency in events, preferably a tendency that links many things together and gives us a theme which we can pursue consistently when writing about a number of different topics in the past. The 'frontier hypothesis' has been proposed as one such theme. In 1947, Fred Alexander wrote *Moving Frontiers*, subtitled 'an American theme and its application to Australian history', in order to see how significant the frontier hypothesis, put forward by American historian Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, might be as an organising principle for the Australian historian and as a guide to the directions research might take. Of course he was thinking of Australian history as a whole, not of northern history, but it is worth asking whether what he said could be applied to the history of the north.

Alexander thought that, although Australia had no expanding frontier in the American sense, it had undergone frontier experiences. The early pastoral expansion of sheepmen in New South Wales 'rapidly revolutionised the penal settlement' and, as in America, fostered political as well as economic individualism (1969,27); the mining and agricultural frontiers followed, each adding to the impulse towards political democracy. Alexander judges that the Australian frontier has been more consolidating than sectional, to refer to another of the political consequences discussed by Turner (30), an argument taken up by Russel Ward. Alexander also notes the differences: the political and territorial limits to the expansion of the Australian frontier and the fact that urban industrialisation 'challenged' frontier influence even before the frontier was closed.

A few years later in 1958 Russel Ward wrote the influential *The Australian Legend* linking what he referred to as the myth of the Australian national character to the development of a distinctive bush and outback ethos in the nineteenth century. In

other words the ethos was linked with what Alexander called the frontier and notwithstanding Ward's disclaimers (1978,7-12) the general bearing was to link the bush or the outback - or rather the life of nineteenth century people in the outback - with a distinctive ethos and thence with the things which were central, as Alexander saw it (1947,6), in Turner's original discussion of the American frontier: its consolidating, national influence, its democratic tendencies and its cultural influence. I quote one brief passage:

> *From the beginning, then, outback manners and mores, working upwards from the lowest strata of society and outwards from the interior, subtly influenced those of the whole population...Towards the end of the nineteenth century...Australians generally became actively conscious, not to say self conscious, of the distinctive 'bush' ethos, and of its value as an expression and symbol of nationalism (Ward 1978,34).*

Ward, too, was writing of Australia as a whole and northern applications would have to be worked out carefully and critically. Perhaps the urbanites of northern towns like Darwin and Kununurra, Katherine and Normanton; the tour operators and park rangers all cherish the bush ethos, but would we really want to say that the mining companies, the owners of the big pastoral leases and the owners of the big hotels were also in its spell? Or that they really have not mattered in the opening up and shaping of the north?

The frontier concept is applied not only to first settlement but to later developments as well. A book published in Queensland in 1959 exemplifies the line of argument from frontier forward to the consolidation of white urban civilisation in the tropics. The book, *Triumph in the Tropics* (Cilento and Lack 1959) begins with discovery, exploration, occupation and separation from the older colony of New South Wales. Part 2 deals with Queensland's expanding frontiers. Like Turner in America, the authors, Cilento and Lack, identify not one frontier but several - mining, forests, maritime, pastoral and agricultural. Not surprisingly, this is where the Aborigines are fitted in along with law and order. Part 3, under the word development, deals with civic, economic and political growth.

Another text from around this time may be noted: J Macdonald Holmes's *Australia's Open North* (1963) which also depends on the frontier hypothesis in an argument for regional political autonomy and a new political structure for the whole of northern Australia.

The frontier hypothesis was in Geoff Bolton's mind when he wrote *A Thousand Miles Away, a history of North Queensland to 1920* (1972). He comments, following Turner's argument, that if 'North Queensland was an Australian frontier, it was not a frontier which seriously modified or altered the national character'(1972,323). Like north Queensland, the Kimberley in the north east corner of Western Australia is too far away from the rest of the country to have much effect on national character, but its history, as presented by Beattie and de Lacy Lowe (1980,103-146), is a story of exploration and settlement on the frontier followed by slow development. CLA Abbott's *Australia's Frontier Province* (1950) may be noted here for similar use of the themes of the frontier and development but without the selfcongratulatory tones of the Queensland volume. Elements of a similar story about the Northern Territory and the role of politicians and historians in perpetuating it are discussed by Reece and Coltheart (1981,1-15). The book *Struggle*

for the North (Kelly 1954) and the Australian Institute of Political Science's conference volume in 1966, entitled *Northern Australia, Task for a Nation* both hint at the frontier idea and the need for development in the words *task* and *struggle* and argue for more governmental intervention to assist in resource development.

It is at this point that something goes wrong when the frontier hypothesis is translated to the Australian context. It is all too easy to overlook or underemphasise the part played by government in the opening up of the frontier and in subsequent development and it is correspondingly easy to emphasise the rugged individualism, selfsufficiency and independence of the men, and occasionally the women, on the frontier in interpreting the history. The political component in the history is attenuated as a result. Another consequence is that the indigenous inhabitants are overlooked and treated as contributing little or nothing to development; they are relegated to the margins of history and may even be seen as standing in the way of development.

The frontier hypothesis is not adequate on its own to take us through many decades of history. Once the frontier stage has passed something different is needed as a theme if we are to show how we progressed from the frontier to where we are now. The word development provides the complementary follow-up theme if we are to tell a story about the growth of towns, of social and physical infrastructures, of communications, of production of goods and services, of the legal, banking, trading and property systems, of the political and administrative institutions. It may also lead on to a story about the relations of the incoming white society and the indigenous inhabitants, although this is most likely to be a story, not about their part in the progress of white society, but of their domination and marginalisation in it. Such a theme, the most common one mentioned in relation to the Australian north, would be development. It not only seems to make sense of the unceasing flow of events in the north, but it also seems to link together the various kinds of history: social, political, economic, constitutional and so on. Even if there is no other common thread, the thread of development can be traced through all of them, enabling us to select the topics to write about, the things to pass over lightly, the things to analyse and emphasise, the things to be identified as 'turning points'.

Development, although widely used as a theme in the story of the north, is more often than not a headline with little theoretical depth or explanatory power. In economic matters it usually means 'more' of something: mines, people, tourists, cattle; or something better, such as better roads or airports; or something new that produces income or goods and services which we did not have before (cf Courtenay 1982, 276-7). In political terms it is equated with attaining increasing degrees of selfgovernment and autonomy and the necessary institutions for selfgovernment, along with steady movement towards electoral democracy and the formation of a modern party system with responsible government. For Aborigines it means becoming accustomed to and taking part in nonAboriginal political institutions. It is a venerable tradition in British history to see this as progress and in political science texts of American origin it was once in vogue to describe the process, at least in developing third world countries, as political development.

In much of the literature the popular idea is taken for granted, namely that development is a replication in the north of a path of progress marked out down south. The question whether this is the appropriate path, given the differences between north and south, is not often examined nor is the question whether some

other course of development might be possible, for example a course defined by the economically dependent status of the north. This possibility is suggested by the political science literature.

In recent political science texts on state politics in Australia, writers emphasise that development is the great theme in state politics. Galligan (1986,251) says, for example, that 'the two great themes in state politics are development and management: development of the state's resources including the provision of economic and social infrastructure and the management of its establishment. In boom periods development predominates, while in recession...efficient management..' Another book chiefly about state politics is entitled *The Politics of Development in Australia* (Head 1986). 'Developing the north' was the title of a paper by Paul Everingham, the first of the Northern Territory's chief ministers, at a conference in 1981 (Everingham 1982). Galligan reminds us that in 1930 Hancock laid great emphasis on the role of government in ameliorating the 'harsh impact of adverse effects from a volatile world market' and in counteracting the effects of 'Australia's inhospitable conditions, vast size and sparse population' (1986, 249). There is then a political history to be told and not just the tales of rugged individuals and their efforts to survive and prosper in a harsh frontier environment.

Galligan also notes that there has been renewed interest in political economy in works on state politics which is not surprising given the importance of development to them (1986,ix). One result has been to bring new theoretical approaches to bear in the analysis, potentially as important for the writing of history as for the writing of political science.

One of these is staples theory. Referring to Canadian staples theory, Stevenson wrote in 1976 that

> *Australia's massive mineral developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s...provide what is surely a classic instance of the sort of basic economic shift...occurring several times in Canadian history...one might expect to see in recent Australian experience the same sort of...shifts in the balance of power, with resulting difficulties for federalism, that Canada experienced several decades earlier. Regions rich in newly discovered resources should be gaining economic, and eventually political, power at the expense of the less fortunate regions(1976, 3).*

A few years later, FJ Harman has argued that, in Western Australia, the then ruling Liberals and premier Charles Court based their economic development strategy on a

> *staged theory of growth [like] ...so-called modernisation theories...These theories reduce to a thesis that economies move through a series of stages, and can be encouraged to do so at a faster rate by specific state interventions... For development which is initiated by the large-scale export of a natural resource, the optimistic visions of Canadian staples theory provide a useful example of staged growth. A staple is a raw material exported in unprocessed form. [Quoting one Canadian commentator on the mechanism, Harman continues:]'the production of a staple induces linkages between the staple industry and other industries in the domestic economy...Eventually, these industries, all spawned by the*

staple industry, cut their umbilical cord to the mother industry, become independent... [and] over time become the important ones and the relative significance of the staple industry declines'(Harman 1982, 249).

The political implications are discussed in other texts, Head (1986,24), for example, doubting that there has been a historic realignment of power from the core states to the peripheral states. ML Alexander (1983, 57-8, 65-71) notes the recent convergence of staples or dependency theory and Marxist analyses in relation to Australia but does not say anything specifically about the northern peripheral areas. Courtenay (1982, 45-9) sees the north as peripheral in two ways: to the world economy and to the south-eastern Australian 'core' but he does not explore the political implications.

Gerritsen (1988,149) summarises another political aspect of the argument, which begins with Stevenson (1976), as follows: in Australia there

had developed two different blocs of states based on the differing impacts of the mining sector. These were the resource-rich peripheral states of Queensland, Western Australia (and the Northern Territory, added by Gerritsen 1984;1985) and the core states of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia....The Marxists adapted this model, emphasising the role of transnational capital (Crough and Wheelwright 1982a; Stilwell 1983) rather than the mining industry... The regionalists saw the states in each camp acting politically in concert and exhibiting similar internal dynamics in their political systems...Opposed to the 'naturally' Labor (or 'liberal' Liberal) core states, with their concern for the environment and social issues, Queensland and Western Australia (and the Northern Territory) were seen as being 'less liberal' (Stilwell 1980,30); as giving priority to economic development; as more attuned to the interests of multi-national corporations; and less sympathetic to the demands of Aborigines, women and social welfare recipients (Gerritsen 1988 for the references he cites).

Gerritsen, whose outline I have cited, then develops a criticism of this core-periphery typology based on an analysis of state budgets. Crough and Wheelwright, whom he cites, also argued at about the same time (1982b,85) for a progress, in which the role of the state was 'important', from 'dependence to...dependent development, through various forms of state capitalism' at the initiative of transnational corporate capital.

This argument about the different character of different groups of states seems to have taken us a long way from the north and its political history. The staples approach may well be questioned - for example, the cattle and mining industries do not show the linkages required to foster the growth of local autonomous industries - but it does have some merits. Australia's north lies across the three peripheral states and it is in this north that the largest part of the resource development of the sixties and seventies took place. It is also one area where the myth of the frontier, and perhaps a little of its substance, has lingered longest. Second the argument connects the political history to the kinds of economic development taking place in the north. This economic context is essential for an understanding not only of issues and policies but of the ensemble of parties and interest groups. Third the analysis is based not on the headline word development which can be interpreted in a variety

of ways but on a theory of how development might take place in a non-developed economy. Whether that theory is right or wrong is a separate question. To have a theory about development is to have guidance about what is to go into the history of it; choice need not be random or subjective or echo the politicians of the day.

One of the difficulties of a single tendency approach or a single theory is that it is made to do too much work; the more things it is supposed to link together the more vague and imprecise it must become and so too the linkages between different elements in the historical story. This is why 'development' is such a convenient theme; as long as it is imprecise it can be used as the headline to link together almost anything the historian cares to include in the narrative. On the other hand, the price of precision is to leave things out of the story because they cannot be clearly linked with the tendency. It seems preferable therefore to try a number of speculations or hypotheses about the north, speculations founded, of course, on observations drawn from the general literature. These speculations may enable us to test the adequacy of the existing literature.

The north has a number of special features, special by comparison with the south (see Courtenay 1982, 43-74) and the question is whether these features have any obvious consequences for politics and for political history in the north.

Some things seem obvious. We could expect the organisation of political parties and the conduct of elections to be affected by the small population, dispersed over vast distances and including a high proportion of Aboriginal citizens who have had the vote for barely a quarter of a century. For example, special measures have been necessary to ensure that no voter is deprived of a vote by reason of distance from a polling place and that Aborigines understand how to vote and can do so without being intimidated or improperly influenced. To take another example: a party branch structure will be difficult to establish and maintain if the primary social organisations so important elsewhere, such as trade unions, church congregations and personal membership pressure groups, are weak or non-existent. Similar organisations do not exist in Aboriginal society and Aborigines have not had the traditions of family or parental commitment over two or three generations to one or other party to make them into 'party identifiers'. These aspects of parties and elections have been dealt with in the literature as we shall see, principally for the Northern Territory. This is so too for social class.

Given the importance of social class in the shaping of voting patterns and political perceptions, the question is worth asking whether the class system found elsewhere in Australia is replicated in the north and, if not, what the implications of that might be for politics in the north.

Another speculation might be to ask whether the chauvinism which is so evident in the north, directed against Canberra and other metropolitan centres, especially at election time, is sustained by the myth of the frontier and to ask the political question whose interests are served by the myth and the chauvinism. It may be possible, by putting that question, to see what importance is to be attached to this distinctive part of northern political culture even if the notion of a political culture is rather vague. Political culture in Queensland as a whole rather than in the north has attracted one or two writers, notably Smith (1985) and, at a more popular level, Charlton (1983) but it cannot be assumed that the political culture of the north, if there is such a thing, is much the same as Queensland's.

Geography and climate are different from what are found down south and they have implications for the northern economy but no direct effects on political life. The resource mix, which is also different, is of the greatest importance since it shapes the economic activities of the north. The cattle industry for example is much more salient in the mix of economic activities than it is down south and farming of various kinds - wheat, sheep, dairy - is much less salient. Mining is a principal activity but manufacturing is miniscule. These patterns are unlikely to change; the north is not travelling a path of economic development similar to that of the south only 50 to 100 years behind. Instead it is on a different path and the question is whether this entails a different politics and a different political history.

It is a reasonable speculation that if the mix of economic activities is different, the ensemble of interest or pressure groups will also be different. Cattlemen will constitute an important group politically as well as economically; farmers will be much less important. The mining lobby will be stronger than the manufacturing lobby. Industrial unions will be weaker than they are down south and they will not therefore be as significant a component of the strength of the Labor party in the north.

If the mix of economic activities is different it may well be that the 'issue mix' is different too. Questions familiar in the south will arise in the political community (government, parties, media, administration, interest groups) such as questions about conservation and the environment, about communications and other infrastructure of development, about rates and kinds of development, about the exploitation of non-renewable resources, about rates of taxation, the role of multi-nationals, the impact of development on indigenous peoples, about the role of government in regulating and promoting development. If the 'mix' in the north is different, if some issues are more or less salient in the mix than they are down south, governments and politicians will not necessarily be able to follow the same strategies as their southern counterparts in negotiating conflict and they may well find that they have correspondingly different bases of support and opposition. The strange (by Australian experience) alliances of left and right populism in Queensland in recent times have been described by Mullins (1986). This in turn may well have implications for relations between a state government and the national government. For example, Scott and others (Galligan 1986,68) comment that 'because the sectional interests predominant in Queensland are generally opposed to high levels of tariff protection, restrictions on international capital movements, strong trade unions, and restrictions on land-use stemming from conservation measures or Aboriginal land rights, there is enormous scope for federal-state confrontation'.

Finally there is the fact of federalism. A political history with a twentieth century emphasis would present a rounded account of the role of the federal government in the north. At present, the material for much of this account exists but it is dispersed in the different histories of the states and the Territory. To bring it all together would entail a study not only of the federal administrative machinery but of its interactions with its state counterparts.

The north is not a single entity politically. State boundaries divide it into three parts and yet there are factors which might well give politics and political history in these three parts a distinctive character. A further point may be made. Although the Northern Territory is a political entity, the norths of Queensland and Western

Australia are not; they are parts of larger units which have their political foci in southern cities. The implication of this is that any attempt to organise a movement across the north or to reach some kind of northern inter-governmental accommodation in settling major issues of the region will be difficult if not impossible.

Another implication, even if trite, is that there is no one set of political institutions for the north. In Australia the creation of political institutions - a constitution, legislature, electoral system, administrative departments - has preceded and been the basis for political development. The history of political development in the Northern Territory exemplifies the point exactly. The political development of the norths of Western Australia and Queensland is likely to be retarded by comparison and, if it occurs at all, it will be as an adjunct of political systems focussed in southern cities.

The literature mirrors this division. There is no political history of the north as a whole and it is challenging to consider what it might be over and above an aggregation of separate sections on the Northern Territory and the norths of Queensland and Western Australia. Some topics are worth considering in more detail to see what has already been written on them.

Two consequences of this division must be specifically noted. On the one hand there have been arguments for the unification or coordination of the north, politically or administratively, across state boundaries and on the other hand there have been regional separation or new state movements.

Coordination of Northern Development

Before the second world war an attempt was made in the 1920s to coordinate development in the north across the state boundaries using an administrative mechanism, the North Australia Commission (Heatley 1979, 28-9; Powell 1982 169). The Commission achieved little and in 1931 it was wound up. The second and last attempt was made in 1945 with the setting up of the Northern Australia Development Committee, which with an associated policy committee included governmental representatives from Queensland and Western Australia (Heatley 1979, 31). It was backed by a committee of officials, chaired by HC Coombs, who commented that 'without an effective Authority with financial resources not much could be achieved...and the committee faded into disuse'(Coombs 1981, 71). Moves of this kind, which depended on the Commonwealth's direct administrative control of the Northern Territory, are no longer possible since selfgovernment was granted to the Northern Territory in 1978.

Regionalism

I noted above that Hughes's *The Government of Queensland* touches on the north in connection with regional decentralisation of administration. Harris (1984 31-2) also mentions regionalism of administration in north Queensland. Some of the political aspects are brought out in historical works like Doran's account of separatism in Townsville in the nineties (1981) and Moles's biography of Townsville's Tom Aikens (1979). Coaldrake (1973) has a study of the history and politics of moves to establish a new state in north Queensland. Crowley's history of Western Australia (1960, 224) mentions the creation of a department of the North-West in 1920 but

provides very little else on the north in that state. Regionalism has been of some political importance in each part of the north and it has been seen principally as a matter of how to devolve administrative activities to regional administrative centres while retaining firm central control. Inevitably, the question of consultation and influence then arises - how do regional administrative authorities relate to institutions of local government; how do local people get a say in what affects them? Harris (1978,138) has noted in this connection that if regionalism means adding a fourth tier of government with some of the functions of state and local government then local government in Queensland has been most antagonistic to it. Heatley (1982) has provided an account of regionalism in the Kimberley area which identifies the political aspects of it. He sees regional decentralisation in Western Australia as

> *a means of muting regional demands for more responsive, more sensitive and more expeditious administrative processes and blunting separatist sentiments...in electoral terms, a commitment, however vague, to decentralisation, or regionalism, is valuable in attracting extrametropolitan support...[and] a state regionalisation policy [was] a defence against an externally [federally] imposed regional system...Finally, and perhaps most importantly, regional programs have been promoted as a means for more efficient state-wide administration (1982,80).*

Something similar is implied in Hughes's account of regionalism in Queensland. In the Northern Territory, the phrase 'the Berrimah line' is popular shorthand for the cut-off point, just outside Darwin, beyond which regional, especially southern, dissatisfaction with administration from Darwin is expressed. As with regionalism in Queensland and Western Australia little has been written about it in either its administrative or its political manifestations and yet it is a topic of importance in the political history of the north.

Constitutional and political development

Constitutional and political development have been major topics in the political history of the Northern Territory and there is an extensive literature on them. Heatley (1979) and Jaensch (1979) have both written about constitutional change. The reports of the James committee (1974;1975) should be noted as sources and the selection of constitutional documents made by Heatley and Nicholson (1989). Jaensch's electoral history of the NT legislative council (1990) places the constitutional struggle in its electoral context. Heatley's *Almost Australians* (1990) is a more detailed and up to date treatment of the politics of moves towards selfgovernment in the Territory. Arguments about constitutional development and statehood were canvassed in detail at a conference in 1986, papers from which, along with constitutional documents, were published in 1988 (Loveday and McNab 1988).

In the Territory, the development of the party system, the legislature and the electoral system were interwoven with constitutional change. The governmental system itself - the shape and power of the executive, the administrative departments and the public service - evolved at the same time. Inevitably texts on any one of these topics make reference to the others. Some of them may be noted. Walker's history (1984) of the NT legislative council is an important source for the politics of

constitutional change. So too are the basic texts by Powell (1982), Heatley (1979) and Jaensch and Loveday (1979). Very little has been written on administrative arrangements in and for the north or about policy making on northern issues. There are a few items for the Northern Territory. Nelson (1954, 164-7) and Casey (1949, 31) both criticise the 'antiquated and muddled' administration of the Northern Territory by the Commonwealth, echoing criticism made in 1937 in the Payne-Fletcher Report. Apart from the administrative chronicle already noted, Heatley (1979) has a chapter on administrative arrangements at the time selfgovernment began. Mollah (1982) outlines the role of government in promoting three large scale failed agricultural projects in the Territory. Weller and Sanders in a study (1982) of ministers and their departments in the Territory discuss cabinet, the role of the chief minister and ministers' relations with parliament, party, the media and the electorate. This essay and another by Sanders (1985) on the role of the department of the chief minister since selfgovernment are two of the very few pieces on administration in the Territory since Heatley's account in 1979. Cyclone Tracy provided the circumstances of another story of administrative conflict concerning the north and its relations with Canberra in a crisis: Stretton's *Soldier in a Storm* (1978). Wiltshire (1985) has a telling general account, of relevance to the north, of the Queensland public service during Bjelke-Petersen's premiership.

For the Territory, there is a comprehensive set of election studies which constitute a major part of the Territory's political history and include a substantial amount of backgound information on constitutional and administrative development and on the contemporary condition of the party system. The study of legislative council elections (Jaensch 1990) rounds off earlier studies of the first and second elections to the legislative assembly (Heatley 1978; Jaensch and Loveday 1979) and of subsequent elections to the assembly since selfgovernment in 1978 (Jaensch and Loveday 1981; Loveday and Jaensch 1984; Jaensch and Loveday 1987).

It is an important feature of these studies that they provide information about the voting of Aborigines who constitute about 20 per cent of the electorate. Several other works also deal with Aborigines and the electoral system (Australian Electoral Office 1982; Loveday and Jaensch 1985; Loveday, Randall, Sanders and Jaensch 1988) and with one Aborigines-only election (Loveday and Jaensch 1982). In a wide-ranging discussion, Gibbins (1988) examines Aboriginal political development in a variety of institutional settings with particular reference to statehood for the Northern Territory.

Material on the political parties and politics in the Territory can be found not only in the election studies but in a few other texts as well. Galligan's *Australian State Politics* (1986) includes a discussion, by Jaensch and Gerritsen, of the special features of the Territory political system and its political economy which set it apart from the six states. The chapters on Queensland and Western Australia in this volume do not deal with the north of either state, but in *Comparative State Policies* (Galligan 1988) the focus shifts to administration and policy and although 'the north' is not of particular concern to the authors, what they say in essays on minerals and energy policy and on the theories underlying typologies of the states is of considerable relevance to the interpretation of northern political and administrative history. A good deal of material relevant to the north on the subject of uranium is to be found in the annotated bibliography by O'Faircheallaigh, Webb and Wade-Marshall (1989). Head's *Politics of Development in Australia* (1986) includes chapters on Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Harman

and Head's *State, Capital and Resources* (1982) is focussed much more on the north and on policies connected with northern development than other similar texts. The book includes a chapter by Heatley on parties and development in the Northern Territory. Two other recent works (Parkin and Warhurst 1983; Costar and Woodward 1985) contain chapters by Jaensch (1983; 1985) on the political parties in the Territory.

Parties and elections in Western Australia and Queensland are normally discussed only on a statewide basis with little or no reference to the north and any special features of parties and elections there. Work by Bolger and Rumley (1979; 1982) on the political role of Aborigines in the north of Western Australia should be noted and also a more recent study of campaigning and the Aboriginal vote in the Kimberley area in 1986 (Loveday, Jaensch and Sanders 1986).

None of these studies deals with national (federal) elections in the north as a whole. The works on mobile polling (Loveday and Jaensch 1985) and on the Aboriginal Electoral Information Service (Loveday, Randall, Sanders and Jaensch 1988) deal with federal electoral administration. The comparative discussion of electoral administration for indigenes in Australia and Canada has a strong north Australian element (Loveday and Jaensch 1987).

The sociology of northern electorates is virtually untouched although some work, exploring the implications of class and mobility, among other things, for voting patterns, has been done in Jaensch and Loveday's study of urban electorates in the Northern Territory (1983) and in electoral atlases (Jaensch and Wade-Marshall 1984; Jaensch 1987) for the Northern Territory. Taylor's *Social Atlas of Darwin* (1989) should also be noted in this connection.

Local government

It is arguable that, for northern citizens, local government may be more salient than it is for southern citizens. It is an important arena within which people gain political experience and get the chance to go further in party political life; it is closer to most citizens of small remote townships than most other forms of government even if the range of things which it can do is limited.

For the Northern Territory there is a handful of works on local government including studies of Darwin (Heatley 1986), Katherine (Lea 1987), Tennant Creek (Lea 1988) and Jabiru (Lea and Zehner 1986). The story of Alice Springs (Donovan 1988) was commissioned as a general history of the town and lacks the political and administrative focus of the other works. A little work on elections in small towns has been published (Jaensch 1989) along with a very detailed study, including historical background, of the special Territory community government legislation (Wolfe 1989). A conference volume on small towns in northern Australia (Loveday and Webb 1989) included several papers on local government and politics in small towns in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Rumley's paper (1986) on Aborigines and local government in Western Australia is based on work done in the Pilbara and Gascoyne-Murchison areas; H and D Rumley (1988) carried out a similar study in the East Kimberley for the East Kimberley project.

Interest groups

I refer principally to the organised interest groups, sometimes called pressure groups, rather than to the non-organised aggregations of people to whom interests are often imputed. In 1979 Heatley noted that, even though the population of the Territory was small and scattered, 'the range of group activities...is similar to that found elsewhere in Australia' (1979,176). He identified organisations for cattlemen, farmers, the mining sector, industry and commerce, employees (a 'low proportion' of whom are organised) and religious interests but he felt that a comprehensive study of them all was too large a task for his general text. There would be no difficulty in greatly extending Heatley's list now a decade later as the conventional glance at the yellow pages of the NT phone book or at *Who's What Where in the Northern Territory* (Department of the Chief Minister 1990) will show. There are tourist promotion associations, professional organisations, sporting, welfare, conservation, cultural and educational, animal welfare, local government, ex-service and migrant organisations. Similar comments could be made about organised interest groups in the north of Queensland and Western Australia although it should be noted that since the state-wide groups focus their activities on the state capitals the northern groups are more localised in range and interests than their northern counterparts in the Territory.

These are not all of equal importance in politics and some have little or no role at all. But the list of important ones for the Territory would include the NT Cattlemens Association, the Master Builders Association, one or two of the larger trade unions, the NT Chamber of Mines, the NT Confederation of Industry and Commerce, the Real Estate Institute, the Aboriginal land councils (which are not exactly comparable to most other pressure groups, Altman and Dillon 1988) and a few others.

To decide which interest groups are 'important' in politics is not easy. A more or less subjective judgment can be made by reference to the frequency with which a particular group or organisation is active in one political arena or another, by reference to its organisational strength (number of members, funds, coverage of the relevant group and so on), by reference to the salience of the economic or other activities from which it is derived and by reference to its success in influencing the course of events or the policy of governments. In this connection, it should be noted that for many of the more important groups the administrative arena which is a much less public arena than, say, the electoral and legislative arenas, is the most relevant.

From this point of view it must be said that we do not have very much information at all about northern interest groups and much of what we do have is in a fragmentary form, presented in the course of studies focussed on other things such as land rights, the cattle industry and so on. A list of works can therefore be only exemplary, rather than comprehensive. Heatley (1980,37) discussed the 'motivations, the strategies, and the effectiveness of pressure groups in their response to the formulation and implementation of land rights policies' in the Northern Territory. Cribb's account (1983) of strikes at Mt Isa in the sixties is one Queensland study of interest. Libby's study (1989) of the mining industry's campaign in 1984-6, focussed in Western Australia, against proposed national Aboriginal land rights legislation, likewise deals with a number of different interest groups (see also Vachon and Toyne 1983, Vincent 1983). Eames (1983) discusses the Central Land Council within a political context. Kelly's work on the beef industry (1971) mentions the Northern Territory

Pastoral Lessees Association but this industry, like a few others in the north, does not depend exclusively on its group organisation to make its views known to government. Altman (1989, 89-90) mentions tourism promotion associations, Aboriginal incorporated bodies and the environmental lobby in a study of Aborigines, tourism and development. The Northern Australian Development Council, a small promotional interest group, has been described by Zelenka (1988). A variety of groups are mentioned in studies of Territory elections, the principal conclusion being that in this arena they appear to be relatively uninfluential. The general conclusion is that a systematic study of the full range of interest groups in the north is overdue.

Aborigines

A good deal of information about the Aboriginal component of northern political history is available in general texts on Aboriginal affairs from a national point of view (a bibliography of some aspects of the subject is in Loveday 1983). Charles Rowley's three volume *Aboriginal Policy and Practice* (1970-71) and his *A Matter of Justice* (1978) are basic works. Tatz, in his *Race Politics in Australia* (1979) and in 'Aborigines and Politics' (1980) is critical of the conventional assumption that Aborigines are slowly undergoing 'political development' towards incorporation in the dominant white system. Lippmann deals with Labor and Liberal-National party policies in the seventies in a chapter in Patience and Head's *From Whitlam to Fraser* (1979) and her *Generations of Resistance* (1981) provides a history, with the emphasis on recent times, of Aboriginal struggles to obtain justice in a number of fields: land, health, employment, housing, education, law, elections, media. It includes information about a number of Aboriginal organisations but, as in Tatz's work, the focus is national, not on the north. Several other works with a national focus include a chapter by Rowley, in which he comments on the new organisations for Aboriginal affairs developed after the 1967 referendum (1980), Broome's *Aboriginal Australians* (1982), Yarwood and Knowling's *Race Relations in Australia* (1982) and Weaver's *Struggles of the Nation-State to Define Aboriginal Ethnicity: Canada and Australia* (1984). Three of the main actors have written, from a national point of view, about their roles in post-war Aboriginal affairs, Hasluck in *Shades of Darkness* (1988), Coombs in *Kulinma* (1978) and Whitlam in his *The Whitlam Government* (1985). Weller (1989), drawing on cabinet and other documents, has a few pages on Malcolm Fraser's negotiations with Queensland regarding Aurukun and Mornington. Hasluck's *Native Welfare in Australia* (1953) and a paper by Evans (1981) are two other useful sources. More northern in outlook are general histories such as Powell's *Far Country*, Heatley's *Government of the Northern Territory* and Fitzgerald's history of Queensland, all of which have sections on Aboriginal affairs. Jeremy Long's *Aboriginal Settlements* (1970) refers to policies applied in the north as well as in the east and includes an appendix on the Northern Territory.

There are a few texts which offer analysis and interpretation of Aboriginal affairs in terms of a theory of internal colonialism. Rowley used the term initially but not with the rigour which later writers like Hartwig (1978) thought necessary. The theory appears to have been principally applied to the interpretation of the situation of more remote and northern Aborigines although Howard applies it to Aborigines generally contending that 'it was their incorporation into the Australian colonial order and the colonial economic order that transformed Aborigines into an underdeveloped people'(1982,83). Beckett (1982) applied it to the history of the

Torres St Islanders in the pearling industry in earlier times and Drakakis-Smith (1983; 1984) has applied it generally but with particular reference to Aborigines in non-urban contexts, arguing that there is 'within the economy of the small settlements of Aboriginal Australia a mutual dependency between black and white. But within this interdependent relationship it is the dominant white capitalist mode of production that reaps the benefit' (1984, 134).

Several special components of politics and political history must also be noted. First, there is the politics and history of the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the north. A good deal has been written on this topic, but usually from a national perspective and most of it is to be found in the more general literature mentioned above. For Queensland, Fitzgerald (1984), for the Northern Territory, Heatley (1979) and for Western Australia, Long (1980) may be noted as sources for policy and administrative arrangements. The bibliography of uranium in Australia (O'Faircheallaigh et al 1989) includes a section on uranium and Aborigines. Ryan (1985) gives an excellent account of the administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs in Queensland in the Bjelke-Petersen years (1968-83) which is principally about the north. Singe (1979, 131-6) outlines the Torres Strait border problem in the 70s and the implications for the Islanders. Papers by Sanders (1984,1988) on Aboriginal town camping and local government and on the community development employment projects scheme are both concerned with special but politically important aspects of the administration of Aboriginal affairs, especially in north Australia. A limited amount of information can be obtained from official reports from the administering departments. It is the political history of how whites and governments tried to deal with Aboriginal society and nearly all of it is told by whites from a white point of view. A good history remains to be written of the administrative arrangements for Aboriginal affairs across the north and of relations between state and federal administrative arms.

Second, there is Aboriginal involvement in nonAboriginal society and politics and this subject is inevitably linked with the first. For the Northern Territory, a substantial start has been made in the various studies of elections and related matters, already listed. A little has been noted for the north in Western Australia but nothing seems to have been written on this matter for north Queensland. The proliferation of Aboriginal organisations for handling administrative matters between black and white has not been matched by a literature about these organisations, whether they are local level service delivery bodies like health, housing, legal, welfare and medical service groups, resource centres or progress associations, coordinating, consultative or representative bodies, funding bodies, media organisations, business enterprises and so on. Even though it is not easy to regard many of these as pressure groups (see Weaver 1983) most of them play a part in administrative politics of one kind or another, even if it is only in the battle to obtain funds, and some play a part on the wider and more public political scene. A few items may be noted: Eggleston (1977) and Lyons (1984) on legal services; comments on service and resource organisations in the Miller Report (1985), O'Brien's *Directory* of organisations in Western Australia (1982) and O'Faircheallaigh's discussion (1988) of two Northern Territory Aboriginal royalty associations. Bandler has written a personal history of the struggles of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (1989); administration and policy in Aboriginal housing in remote Australia are discussed in Heppell (1979); Heppell and Wigley (1981) have given an account of how Tangentyere in Alice Springs came to be formed; Altman (1983) and Toohey (1984)

provide information on the land councils; Weaver (1984) has written an as-yet unpublished paper on the role of Aborigines in the management of parks in the Northern Territory; Sullivan (1987) discusses Aboriginal representative organisations including the Kimberley Land Council, in one of the working papers of the East Kimberley project; Cowlishaw (1983) discusses ways in which public servants were 'still engaged in forcing Aborigines to accept a particular place in European society' in her study of a Northern Territory cattle station; Gilbert's *Living Black* (1977) includes autobiographical material from Aborigines who worked as public servants, were involved in politics or who had firm views about political action in or in opposition to non-Aboriginal politics.

Third, there is the politics and history of Aboriginal society itself and its communities, and in this field there are the journals *Aboriginal History* and *Australian Aboriginal Studies*. These communities are of great variety, in both rural and urban settings. Rural communities include outstations (Gray 1977; Morice 1978; Meehan and Jones 1980; Coombs, Dexter and Hiatt, 1982; Loveday 1982a), small communities on cattle stations, and settlements of several hundred people of both government and mission origin; urban communities include temporary camps near or in towns, permanent town camps and communities (not all of them in the urban area but close to it) and people dispersed throughout the urban residential area. Some communities have title to the land they live on; others do not but instead have leasehold land or are simply tolerated by the landholder. People in all of these communities are highly mobile. In all communities there is a mix, but seldom a blending, of traditional Aboriginal culture, sometimes very attenuated, and the dominant white culture. Like everything else local politics is deeply affected by this mixing, and often clash, of two cultures.

Anthropologists have had difficulty with the notion that there might be politics in traditional Aboriginal society and have usually argued that if there is politics at all it is a facet of law and religion. Sources on this point are noted in a short bibliographical piece on the politics of Aboriginal society (Loveday 1983,1) and in a discussion by RM and CH Berndt, in their *The World of the First Australians* (1988).

What the mix and clash of two cultures might mean is indicated by Nancy Williams in her *Two Laws* (1987), a study based on Yirrkala in the north east of the Northern Territory. As the title indicates, she deals with problems experienced by people who have to live by two laws, their own and the general Australian law. Williams clearly identifies both religious and political authority, the latter subordinate to the former, and goes on to say that

> *Yolngu regard men in both categories as being responsible for making and executing political decisions which affect the whole community as well as dealing with matters affecting their own clan or lineage,...The role of political authority also requires intervention in disputes, direction of the process of dispute settlement, and active protection of all those who are junior and acknowledge their authority as leaders(1987,45-6).*

She goes on to talk about authority and the village council, with particular reference to the management of disputes of different kinds.

The politics arises not only in the management and settlement of disputes of the kind dealt with by Nancy Williams but when matters affecting the whole community

arise. These include not only dispute settlement, but such things as the allocation of goods and services, especially collective goods and services, rules of the community (formal and informal), who has jurisdiction (decisions about who makes rules, settles disputes etc).

This is the scene of the most complicated interaction between Aborigines and non-Aborigines, between traditional and non-traditional ways, and the account of this interaction over time is one of the central things in the Aboriginal component of northern political history.

As far as the village councils are concerned, there is some work which complements that of Williams. Young's *Tribal communities in Rural Areas* (1981) includes some material on councils and local politics in three Northern Territory communities; Bern (1977) has written about another, Ngukurr on the Roper River, and Bagshaw (1982) has analysed the politics of an outstation community. A thesis by Armstrong (1967) gives some detail on the contemporary politics and administration of Maningrida in Arnhem Land. Gerritsen (1982a, 1982b) offers an interpretation of local Aboriginal politics, including council politics, in terms of factions and a typology of leaders and followers. Some polemic has developed on the subject as indicated not only by items in the volume on outstations (Loveday 1982a) but also in Tatz's criticism (1979,12), in a paper by Bern (1989), a report by Turner (1986) and in a paper by Mowbray (1989). My own contribution on local government in Aboriginal communities from the 1950s to the 1970s is an exploratory piece for the Northern Territory as a whole (Loveday 1989). Turner's account (1986) of community government in several Territory communities is another source. Wolfe's study (1987) of Pine Creek and its town camps includes some political material. A little information about past politics in mission communities can be gleaned from Leske's account of Hermannsburg (1977) and from Cole's histories of Roper River mission (1969), Groote Eylandt mission (1971), Oenpelli (1975) and Numbulwar (1982).

For Western Australia there is a limited amount of northern material. Tonkinson has written on Jigalong (1977, 1978, 1980, 1982). Some aspects of the politics of this clash are reported in articles in the journal *Aboriginal History*, charting development over time (see also Tonkinson 1981). Sackett (1978) discusses leadership and local council politics in Wiluna; Kolig (1973) has discussed Aboriginal group politics and leadership in Fitzroy Crossing in the early 70s; in more recent work, Sullivan (1987) describes single service agencies, resource agencies, the community council and the Kimberley Land Council all in the Kimberley region; Shaw (1974) and Willis (1980) describe various Aboriginal organisations and their roles in local politics in Kununurra while Rumley (1986) describes Aborigines and local government in the Pilbara and Gascoyne-Murchison and (1989) community relations and politics in Halls Creek. Hawke and Gallagher's *Noonkanbah* (1989) provides a detailed account of the politics of the clash over drilling for oil at the community of Noonkanbah and a useful assessment of the significance of the clash in the sequence of major confrontations in recent times between two laws and two peoples.

There appears to be less material for north Queensland. Burger's biography of Neville Bonner (1979) covers a wide range of contexts but includes some information on local community politics. Sutton and Rigsby argue that Aboriginal people on Cape York Peninsula have politics and that 'politics for them crucially involves control of land and resources' (1982, 155). Koepping (1977) gives a brief

description of the demoralisation of the Aboriginal council at Cherbourg in the 70s and three theses which discuss communities and their politics round out the list: Craig's on Yarrabah (1979a, also in 1979b), Buckley's on Aurukun (1980) and Trigger's on Doomadgee (1986). Some material on administration and local politics is to be found in Rosser's (1985) biographics of Aborigines in Queensland.

In summary, there is a paucity of work on community politics, especially work which analyses changes over time. Most of the publications deal with communities in rural areas and only one or two discuss Aboriginal community politics in 'mixed' Aboriginal-nonAboriginal towns like Kununurra, Katherine, Elliott, Camooweal, Normanton or Halls Creek and yet, as a rough estimate, probably a half of all the Aboriginal people in the north live in or near such towns. This neglect, not only in respect of politics, has been noted by Langton (1981) who comments that 'few anthropologists in Australia have studied Aboriginal life in urban contexts and those who have, have failed to challenge the insidious ideology of tribal and detribalized Aborigines - the "real" Aborigines and the rest of us'.

One topic remains: the strike or walk-off as a political protest. Doolan (1977) has given an account of how various Aboriginal groups, following the Gurindji precedent of 1966, walked off Victoria River Downs cattle station in 1972. The Pilbara Aboriginal social movement, growing out of a strike in 1946 (Brown 1976), is described by Wilson (1980; see also Wilson 1961 and Wilson 1970). Rowley (1971) mentions strikes and walk-offs in Darwin in 1947 and 1950-51, and at three Territory cattle stations. Bell (1978) describes the 1977 walk-off of Aboriginal stockmen and their families from Kurundi in the Territory. Markus (1978) sketches the postwar involvement of some unions, including northern unions, with Aboriginal political movements and organisations.

Conclusion

A large part of politics, the part often described as formal, official or institutional, is played out in arenas defined by constitutional and other legal arrangements. These arrangements, by means of rules laid down for action within the arenas they define, are very powerful determinants of action and of the nonofficial political structures within them. The actors include not only the officials such as ministers, members of parliament and administrators but also many nonofficial people such as the leaders and members of political parties and interest groups. The result is that at one level the political history of the north is divided into three parts corresponding to the three state-level jurisdictions with an interwoven federal component, corresponding to the federal jurisdiction, also territorial, overlying all three. Only one other regionally identifiable part of Australia is in a similar position: the Murray Valley. This fragmentation of northern political history is inescapable as long as the subject is approached through formal institutions.

It is not just a matter of how the subject is approached. An alternative approach will not do away with the realities of institutional political arrangements and the vested interests of various kinds, however irrational they may seem from the perspective of a geographically defined region, which grow up to take advantage of them.

The distinctness of the region in political terms is more likely to be identified if one or two complementary approaches are adopted. With so little writing to draw on, it is necessary to speculate about the implications of a more sociological approach.

There may well be a northern political culture but, assuming that most of the white population has been derived from within Australia, it is likely that it will be a variant of what is to be found elsewhere, for example a variant that gives much greater importance to 'pioneering spirit' or to 'rugged individualism' and to associated individualistic and authoritarian political ideologies. If political behaviour and class and status relationships are different in the north from elsewhere in the country, they too are likely to be variants. For instance, there may well be a smaller proportion of people who are Labor 'identifiers' than in the rest of Australia, a smaller proportion who could be regarded as upper class and few, if any, who could be regarded as a political elite. The question is not only whether the north is different in these respects but also whether, despite its own geographical and climatic diversities, the social differences are more or less uniformly exhibited by the population of the north. The impression of many people in the north, not all of them northern chauvinists, is that northerners are different and that the differences do matter in politics. Again, as I suggested earlier, there is good reason to say that, although the issues in northern politics are ones familiar down south, the 'issue mix' is different. Questions about the administration of Aboriginal affairs, for example, are much more salient than they are down south; the tensions between policies to promote mining, to protect the environment and to develop parks and tourism are much sharper; attitudes towards the federal government are more antagonistic than they are in southern capitals.

These comments entail some extension of the range of work for the political historian. The task then is not only to find sources which will give some insight into questions which, in contemporary political science and sociology, would be tackled with techniques not available to the historian, it is also to balance and interweave the formal and the non-formal features of the region to highlight its uniqueness, past and present.

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POLITICAL RESEARCH IN THE NORTH

AN AGENDA FOR NARU

Dean Jaensch

Introduction

The focus of this paper is research in the politics of the North, and I propose to report current research, evaluate past work, and look ahead imaginatively to identify new lines of research.

Much of the work of the North Australia Research Unit since it was set up in the 1970s has been on northern politics, and the Unit has produced a respectable and respected corpus of research, publications and scholarship. Rather than list the various publications and research reports for assessment, it is better to discuss the fields and topics of recent and current research.

In the preceding paper, Political History of the North, Peter Loveday provided 'an assessment of the literature on the political history of the north'. He mentioned (1990, 1-2) some 'obvious components or topics' in relation to political history:

> *parties, elections and the sequence of governments; the development of institutions such as constitutions, legislatures, electoral and administrative systems; the major issues of the time and how they developed and are settled.*

From this, we can devise a checklist of political research in the Northern Territory which has been done, and which needs to be done. By 'done', I mean researched, reported, and published: the quality of that research I leave to others to judge. At this point, I am referring to the Northern Territory; the focus will be broadened in a later section.

Many of the 'components or topics' of politics and political history are canvassed in general studies of the Territory's political history, and in regional and local political histories. In fact, the Northern Territory has been well-served by its political historians, especially in comparison with the norths of the two adjoining states, and by NARU which has conducted its own research into Northern Territory politics, and has fostered the work of others by support and publications. This support should continue. The following is a selected checklist of topics for assessing work on the Northern Territory's politics"

Institutions	Political Sociology
Constitution	Political Society
Federalism	Political culture
Parliament	Political behaviour
Cabinet	
Public Service	Electoral Sociology
Judiciary	
Local Government	Elections
Election systems; laws	Electoral Behaviour
	Aboriginal Electoral Behaviour
Sub-structures	Issues
Party and party system	Industrial Relations
Pressure groups	Law and Order
Trades Unions	Environment/Development
Mass Media	Politics of Aborigines

There is an extensive literature about the constitutional development of the Northern Territory and the political development which it stimulated. One feature of both the development and the literature needs emphasis: the Northern Territory showed a unique (for Australia) interweaving of constitutional and institutional developments with the concomitant development of components of the modern political system such as political parties and pressure groups. Obviously any political system is characterised by an inter-relationship of institutions and substructures - the referendum process involved in amending the Australian Constitution is a prime example. What makes the Territory important is that constitutional structures and processes; the governmental system - executive, parliament and public service, electoral systems and laws; and political parties and pressure groups, evolved and developed at the same time. In 1973, for example, the Northern Territory had a 'partial' legislature, an embryonic party system, a small public service, and little real authority over its own affairs. In 1974, the granting of representative democracy caused the parties and the party system to react. By 1983, self-government, with some restrictions, had been granted; a dominant party system, while still in a state of flux, had emerged; the Territory's public service had become a major component of the polity; a legislature had been established; and for most intents and purposes, the Territory was a full member of the Australian federation.

Discussions of these political developments can be found in general political histories such as Heatley (1979) and Powell (1982), and in more specific studies such as Jaensch and Loveday (1981) and Heatley (1989). In fact, the constitutional and political development of the Northern Territory has now been chronicled from the colonial Australian period to the present, with Warhurst's study (1990) the most recent addition.

The political society of the Northern Territory has also been a focus of research - at least, for the urban society. The 1982 survey of urban residents was one of the most intense studies carried out in Australia (Jaensch and Loveday 1983). Elections, electoral sociology, electoral behaviour, and Aboriginal electoral behaviour have

been specific foci, and the Northern Territory is the best served of the Australian states and territories in this area. Every election since the legislature was established in 1974 has been the subject of specific research projects, three of which included surveys. Aboriginal politics and the politics of Aborigines have been continuing foci of research at NARU for over a decade. The corpus of research publications includes specific studies - electoral, social, economic, demographic - and constant references in general studies.

Overall, the products of the efforts from, and through, NARU in political research and publication provide range and breadth which are simply not matched in the states. In the decade of the 1980s, for example, NARU publications alone, in the narrowest definition of politics, included 20 monographs.

To an outsider, however, a brief look at the publication list since 1977 in the political field, suggests a rather narrow focus - election studies. This would be a narrow interpretation. The research has produced a unique set of publications: the Northern Territory is the only political unit in Australia in which there is a study of every election since the inauguration of representative democracy - in the case of the NT, since 1947. Further, the Territory, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, provided the unique opportunity to research the politics and electoral politics of a political system in a state of transition from a situation of policy-making and administration from Canberra with only a limited legislature, through full representative democracy and approaching full self-government, to the present where the Territory is seeking Statehood.

Further, the electoral studies have encompassed a range of research materials, and included a range of foci, including demographic, economic and sociological, not only as components of the NT relevant to the elections, but as valuable research projects in these sub-disciplines. As well, the electoral studies included themes which have not been attempted before, especially in relation to Aborigines and the electoral process. These themes include surveys of Aborigines, studies of administration of elections in Aboriginal areas, and a study of a National Aboriginal Conference election. Finally, the elections were the focal points for the development of the polity, and the research included such issues as mobilisation, socialisation, the impact of political parties, and political and social change within a political system in a process of genesis and development. These studies are therefore important, if only because the Northern Territory offered a unique situation.

Where should NARU go in terms of NT politics

The obvious answer, all other things being equal, is in all, and more, of the topics noted above. Politics is a constantly developing area, and new themes within established research continually emerge. But there are obvious limits to, and constraints on, the issue of translating what could, to what should be done.

Funding is one constraint; the limited finances require NARU to select research projects to get value for money. But how to judge value? One judgement is to select topics, fields, themes which have been inadequately researched, or have not been researched at all. The list should also include those topics, fields and themes where there is a reasonable expectation, if not firm evidence, that there has been significant change.

I will start with a list of topics, fields and themes which, in the immediate future, are unlikely to show such change as to merit a substantive research project, but would merit short, low-cost, updating study.

Up-dating research efforts

Two themes of constitutional development require watching. The politics of Commonwealth - NT relations, analysed by Warhurst (1990), will remain in a state of flux for the immediate future. The second theme - the development of self-government and the possibility of Statehood for the Northern Territory - is probably limited to the former, and both may be affected by recent developments in the attitudes of both major parties to federalism.

The Northern Territory's constitutional situation in 1990 is in limbo: neither a Territory in the sense of pre-1974, or pre-1978 self-government, nor a State within the formal constitutional structure. Commonwealth-NT relations, especially financial relations, merit attention. But the federal environment itself may be in a process of change. In July 1990, R.J. Hawke proposed, in very general terms, another attempt to restructure the federal system. In the past, the Liberal and National parties have been at the forefront of resistance to virtually any changes, but the 1990 mood of the Liberal party suggests a new approach. Partly through the impact of the 'green' vote in the 1990 election, the Liberal leadership has indicated a new consensus in regard to federal reform. Any progress in this could have an effect in and on the Northern Territory. Any real trend to 'new federalism' may have any impact on the constitutional position of the Territory. In the 1980s, the NT government instigated a major push for Statehood (See Loveday and McNab 1986), and while this has lost impetus, the questions of discussion of powers and federal representation are still debated. The Hawke initiative and Liberal reaction may well have an important effect on the NT's effort to increase the scope of self-government.

The institutions of government and parliament are unlikely to change in the 1990s. The election of a Labor government would justify a second edition of *The Team at the Top*, but would probably not seriously modify the general structures and processes. The reports in the Political Chronicle (*Australian Journal of Politics and History*) and Political Review (*Australian Journal of Public Administration*) update what is happening, and sometimes analyse why.

The election systems and laws of the Northern Territory are unlikely to change radically. The political parties are of constant interest, and the daily events and changes occupy the media's journalists. But it is unlikely that the party system will undergo radical change in the 1990s. The National party has three possible futures: merge; disappear; remain as a minority irritant. The last is the most likely. This area needs to be watched, recorded and analysed, but preferably as one theme within wider research projects.

The political sociology of the Territory is constantly under the research rubric of NARU. It should continue to be so. But I do not feel that a major study such as the 1982 *Territorians or Mobile Australians*? can be justified in the 1990s: the urban society as discovered in 1982 is still there. But this is not to exclude mini-research projects as part of a wider focus, as suggested in the case of political parties.

Electoral studies

As noted above, much of the political research conducted through or by NARU has been within a field broadly defined as electoral studies. As this paper proposes that this field should remain as a research interest, at least through if not by NARU, and that it should be extended to encompass the north, then the field needs some brief explanation.

Electoral studies encompass a range of topics. To some, the arithmetic collation and analysis of election results defines the field. Certainly analysing results is part of the exercise; it is far from the whole field. Electoral studies rest on the assumption that elections provide a lens through which a range of components of the polity tend to focus their activities. Electoral studies therefore includes analyses of political parties, pressure groups, electoral sociology, elections, and voting behaviour, as well as the arithmetic analysis of election returns.

NARU's NT election studies have encompassed all of these components. Some components have been inadequately researched and reported: Aboriginal electoral sociology and voting behaviour, and the impact of political parties among Aborigines are examples of such. Placing the findings of electoral studies research in the NT within a comparative study, across the north, or across the states, is another.

NARU's agenda for the 1990s may well not place electoral studies as a top priority, given the amount of research completed, and the competition for funds. However, given the corpus of research which is available, NARU should at least encourage outside researchers to continue an emphasis through NARU. To this end, it will be necessary for NARU to retain a reputation of having a serious interest in the field, and to offer potential researchers the best possible data base, extending the area of interest of electoral studies to encompass the north as a region (see below).

An electoral data archive

Every NT election since 1974 has been the focus of a NARU research project. I do not believe that the next two or three elections call for such substantive research. This is not to say there will not be developments of interest and importance, but these will probably not merit a full project. However, I propose that NARU should initiate a limited archive collection of material relating to electoral politics in the 1990s. Given the limited research assistance available, this needs to be restricted to material necessary for a basic study and, more important, to a comparative study of the 1980s and 1990s. The archive should include material on election systems, including redistributions; on the election results, and as much on the political parties as can easily be obtained. Future researchers will have access to newspapers in other collections, hence the NARU collection should include material only of the period of the election campaign.

This suggestion is a change of policy for NARU; I would argue a justified one. As the NT is the only political unit in Australia where there is a detailed continuous study of elections since the inauguration of the Legislative Council in 1947 (Jaensch 1989), some effort should be made to continue the research, if on a more restricted basis. This is made more necessary as the 1990s will probably bring further changes in the party system, in electoral politics and, possibly, in the party in government. As

noted above, the party system in the Territory is still in a state of flux. Further, if the Labor party does achieve government, then a more detailed electoral study would be justified. I suggest that this limited electoral archive include both NT and federal elections.

New research topics - NT

There are topics and themes which should be taken on by NARU as major research topics. The study of pressure groups in the Northern Territory is one such project. Most studies of the politics of the Territory refer to activities of pressure groups - the building industry, pastoralists, developers, trades unions, for example, are of considerable interest; some are of major importance. This area of study needs attention.

The nature of the Territory's economy, society, and politics offers some interest groups fertile environment; for others, it causes major problems. The existing literature makes mention of examples of both. Organisations such as the Master Builders Association, development interests, and the pastoral industry play a major role in the economy of the Territory, and suggestions have been made that they exercise an undue influence in politics as well. In comparison, the trade union movement is weaker than, and significantly different from, the union movement elsewhere in Australia. The embryonic industrial development has resulted in a union base dominated by white collar and public sector unions.

One approach to this area could be encouraged by NARU: that of discrete studies, perhaps as theses, of the nature, impact, and especially the influence of groups in specific sectors, notably tourism, mining, building and construction and the pastoral sectors. A study of trade unions and the trade union movement needs to be carried out, with special attention on the public sector base in the Territory and what effects this has. Given the relatively small population of the Territory, the dominant economic position of some sectors of the economy needs to be examined in terms of potential and actual political impact.

One component of the Territory's electoral sociology should become a major research project. The political attitudes, political behaviour, and voting behaviour of non-Aboriginal citizens of the Northern Territory have been a past focus: election-based surveys have been conducted, election studies and analysis have been constant, and the 1982 survey was an intense study. These need to be complemented by a focus on the political behaviour of the Aboriginal voters in the Northern Territory. This will be difficult and expensive. It will involve NARU in obtaining the confidence of Aboriginal people and communities, in employing Aborigines and interpreters, and in studying not only the electoral behaviour of Aboriginal voters, but the various components of Aboriginal politics and political behaviour. If NARU can establish a joint research relationship, or at least a co-operative relationship, with the Centre for Aboriginal and Islander Studies at the NT University, then this research could be more cost-efficient, more product-efficient, and produce better research.

NARU should focus research efforts on specific institutions which have either not yet been studied, or which merit further research. The structures and processes of the judicial system needs exploration, linked with the general political issue of law and order in the Northern Territory. Local government, including developments in

Aboriginal communities, also merits further research. There are general histories of councils (for example Heatley 1986), and references within local histories (for example, Lea 1987, Lea 1989), but the general and comparative study remains to be done.

One research focus, to date, has been virtually untouched. The structures and processes of the Northern Territory public service, the nature of responsible government within the executive component of government, and the theory and practice of administration in the NT, should occupy at least some of NARU's attention. This has a number of sub-themes which merit research, for different reasons.

First, the tension between the free enterprise rhetoric and ideology of the politically dominant economic interests and their acceptance of the need for governmental intervention, both for the promotion of 'development' and for managing relations with the federal government and other states is more marked in the Territory than elsewhere in Australia. Notwithstanding the rhetoric, the Territory has the largest public sector, the highest public sector employment, and one of the most pervasive governments in Australia - on a comparative *per capita* basis. This public sector has been and will continue to be under pressure to perform and conform to the ideology of free enterprise.

The public service of the NT is under immense pressure. Its general level of funding has been cut, and the conditions of service have been eroded. Increasingly, traditional public sector functions have been contracted out to private enterprise. At the same time, it has been faced with a continuing demand for performance ideals and methods which are drawn from the private sector; an increasing proportion of its managerial sector is drawn from outside the service; 'political' appointments at senior level have increased; and the morale within the public sector has declined. These factors provide a situation which is occurring in the states, but given the size and relative importance of the public sector in the NT, they may have more impact. Hence the second reason for research in and on the public sector - the simultaneous development of constitution, government, parliament and public service and political parties - and from the fact that the NT public service has developed over sixteen years within a political environment monopolised by one political party, the Country Liberal party. This as at least two potential effects. One is the question of the extent to which 'neutrality', the central core of the Westminster model of a career public service, has been eroded simply through almost two decades of one party government. More specific is the question of the extent to which the CLP government has entrenched 'its own' at the equivalent of the Senior Executive Service in the NT; that is, the extent to which the public service has become, and been, politicised, and the effects of this trend.

A second theme, almost untouched by political researchers, is the nature of policy-making and administration in the Territory. Some research has been carried out on specific themes and cases: for example on service delivery (Loveday 1982, 1982(a), Mollah 1984), on relations within the executive branch (Weller and Sanders 1982), and in regard to Aboriginal communities (Loveday 1986, Ellanna *et al.* 1989, Loveday and Webb 1989). But the nature, processes and impact of policy-making and administration within the Territory's executive government remains virtually untouched.

Two issues, especially, merit research projects within NARU. The environment/development issue has become a key focus of Australian politics. While the intensity of the debate in the Northern Territory has not (yet) reached the levels of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania, it is clearly a major political issue. The 'green vote' in a recent by-election suggests it could become electorally important, and the continuing debates over national park control, Kakadu and mining exploration, uranium, and the strains on the finances of the NT government (probably to worsen under Hawke's 'new federalism') indicate that this issue merits research.

There are, in fact, two related fields of research. One field is part of NARU's recent and forthcoming development: the politics of the environment - economic, social and political. Environmental politics, especially electoral politics, is a related theme, but with different foci. The impact of 'green' candidates and parties has increased in recent elections. In the 1989 Tasmanian election five 'green' candidates were elected and currently hold the balance of power in the 35-member Legislative Assembly. In the 1990 Federal election, 'green' candidates won a remarkable 12.3 per cent of the votes, and their preferences were the basis of the Hawke Labor party's return to office. It is possible that this electoral impact will continue during the 1990s, and the NT will be affected.

NARU and the North

Some research has been carried out on specific political topics outside the Northern Territory (for example, Loveday, Jaensch and Sanders 1986), but one difficulty has been to attract researchers willing and able to carry out this broader research work. One reason for this, of course, is that while basic research has been carried out in the Northern Territory, and new work can build on this, there is no comparable base of regionally defined statistics for the north of Western Australia or the north of Queensland, let alone northern Australia as a whole. I refer, here, not only to electoral and related statistics, but to social and economic data in general, and to non-statistical information as well - for example, about the activities of the public services in the northern region.

This region of interest encompasses the area defined by Loveday (1990, 1) as

> *the area to the north of a line drawn from North-West Cape to Townsville, with a loop to the South to include Central Australia.*

In terms of federal electoral geography, this region includes the northern section of the electorate of Kalgoorlie, the Northern Territory, and the electorates of Leichhardt, Herbert, and the northern part of the electorate of Kennedy. This is a problem in terms of analyses based on federal electorates, but is less of a problem in state contexts. These include the electorates of Kimberley and Pilbara in Western Australia, the 25 Northern Territory electorates, and ten electorates (pre-redistribution) in Queensland (the provincial city electorates of Barron River, Cairns, Townsville, Townsville East; Country Zone electorates of Hinchinbrook, Mourilyan, Mulgrave; West and Far North electorates of Cook, Flinders and Mt. Isa). As Loveday (1990, 1) notes, the boundaries of the region are not completely satisfactory, but

geographic, climatic and resource endowments suggest that a north with something like these boundaries is a distinct regional entity, no matter what its internal diversity.

The major research focus for NARU should be the politics of the region - thematic and comparative.

Any comparative research will face the problem of comparing a discrete polity - the Northern Territory - with segments of the Queensland and Western Australian polities. Hence some standard topics of political science will need *caveats*. Comparisons of party systems, local government, policy-making and administration, for example, need to take account of three discrete institutional systems. But some standard topics can and should be studied and compared. Electoral behaviour, the nature of political parties, the nature and impact of pressure groups, the nature and effects of different election laws and systems, are some examples of comparative analysis which should be carried out. The Labor party, for example, has markedly different patterns of support and success across the three sub-regions. One research project, then, is to compare Labor's success and failure in similar populations/electorates across the north. The intervention and success rate of the National Party is a further theme.

Studies have identified a number of distinctive components of the Northern Territory polity: the nature and impact of parties in small and dispersed populations, aspects of Aboriginal electoral participation, and themes of voting behaviour. Little research has been carried out on these topics in the north of Queensland and Western Australia. A comparative study should be a NARU project for the 1990s.

Specific issues should be a focus. The greening of Australian politics is one prime example. Is the environment/development debate emerging in the north to the extent that it has in the Southern states? The north contains a number of existing or potential foci for the debate, from the Great Barrier Reef and oil exploration, through Kakadu and mining exploration, to Broome and the impact of tourism development. The politics of the environment across the north is a key research topic.

In general, in the recent comparative literature on the States, much of which has been mentioned by Loveday (1990), the distinctive elements of importance in the north are submerged and lost in the general accounts. They are also considered from a state point of view, not from the point of view of the north as a region. This is particularly evident not only in connection with Aborigines and politics, but also in connection with the major economic sectors - tourism, mining, pastoralism - and their potential manifestations.

A data bank for the North

A first task, however, is to increase the scope of the documentary sources on northern Australia already held in the NARU Library. It would be necessary to carry out basic research in the northern sections of Western Australia and Queensland to establish a data base at least equivalent to that held for the Northern Territory. Obviously, some topics are not relevant or not applicable. Some

institutions in Western Australia and Queensland cannot be studied simply from a northern perspective: constitutions, parliaments, cabinets, for example, have only peripheral impact to a study of the region as a whole. But the data base for north Queensland and northern Western Australia needs to encompass the political sociology and electoral sociology of the north of the two states. Census data, available from the ABS at CD level, should be translated to election districts, to provide a similar data base to that available for the Northern Territory. Recent Queensland and Western Australian election data should be collated and analysed, as should the election laws and systems. Research should be conducted into the nature, development and roles of political parties in the areas; into pressure groups, including trades unions, with a specific focus on groups which are relatively discrete in the area. This, of course, raises again the problem for research that pressure groups, for example, will play out their activities within a Queensland and Western Australian context as well as in the context of the north.

Politics of the North - thematic and comparative

Once the basic data for Queensland and Western Australian north have been collated, the focus should become the thematic and comparative study of the north. That is, the initial approach should be to replicate for the state components of the north the research already available for the Northern Territory, as a data base for developing the political research focus of NARU to the region as a whole. This proposal is not that NARU should use its limited resources to obtain and archive whole sets of data on the assumption that some researcher, some time in the future, may be encouraged to take up a comparative study. On the other hand, some data can be defined as basic to virtually all projects in politics in the north. I suggest census data at regional, and federal/state electorate levels; election results, both federal and state; and basic data on the political economics of the region (and sub-regions) would establish such a data base.

Case study

As an example of the regional approach on which I suggest NARU should now concentrate, the following paragraphs are a report of a preliminary investigation of elections across the north.

Table 1 sets out the patterns of party support in federal elections in the north 1975 to 1987. The data allow a comparison of three Queensland and the Northern Territory electorates. One pattern is that of remarkable stability over time in each electorate in Labor support. A second pattern of an equivalent stability of National and Liberal votes combined masks important differences between the electorates in party contests and in stability.

Table 2 sets outs comparative Labor support data for two types of electorates, one of which crosses the three sub-regions. The provincial city comparison is limited to Queensland and the Northern Territory; the comparison of patterns in rural electorates with a high proportion of Aboriginal voters crosses the three sub-regions.

The data in Table 2 pose questions which merit further research. First, are the comparisons valid? Does the placement of Alice Springs, Cairns and Townsville together constitute a reasonable comparative base? Do the electorates of Cook, Kimberley and Macdonnell have sufficient similar socio-economic profiles to justify

comparing electoral patterns across them? That is, the basic data bank for the three sections of the north is a pre-requisite for comparative research.

Assuming that the base is justifiable, then the data suggest further directions for research. For example, if Labor wins a stable majority in Cairns, why is Labor support unstable in Townsville and Mt. Isa, and why is Labor support so low in Alice Springs? The answers may relate to specific local factors, but clearly research is needed. In the rural/Aboriginal electorates, the patterns of Labor support in Cook, Kimberley and Victoria River show distinct variations in stability and in levels, over time and between the electorates. If these contain populations of similar characteristics, then why the different patterns?

Table 1: Voting Patterns in Federal Elections in the North
Per Cent of Formal Votes

		1975	1977	1980	1983	1984	1987
ALP	Leichhardt	47	46	46	52	51	51
	Herbert	42	37	47	50	50	51
	Kennedy	36	33	36	39	43	45
	NT	44	43	40	47	45	47
LIB	Leichhardt	-	-	-	-	7	10
	Herbert	58	34	48	34	14	16
	Kennedy	-	-	-	-	4	8
	NT	54	47	44	46	49	36
NAT	Leichhardt	38	47	49	48	36	36
	Herbert	-	20	-	14	32	28
	Kennedy	63	61	60	57	50	47
	NT	-	-	-	-	-	17
LIB+NAT							
	Leichhardt	38	47	49	48	43	46
	Herbert	58	54	48	48	46	44
	Kennedy	63	61	60	57	54	55
	NT	54	47	44	46	49	53

Table 2: Voting Patterns, ALP, the North: Selected Areas
Per cent of Formal Votes

Provincial Cities	1980	1983	1986/7	1989
Darwin	37	35	35	-
Alice Springs	26	25	25	-
Barron River	45	47	46	55
Cairns	59	51	56	63
Mt. Isa	45	52	46	60
Townsville	42	47	38	50
Rural/Aboriginal	**1980**	**1983**	**1986/7**	**1989**
Flinders	44	41	39	45
Cook	60	64	67	43
Pilbara	45	59	65	51
Kimberley	56	66	67	70
Macdonnell	58	54	73	-
Arnhem	-	44	42	-
Victoria River	53	26	29	-
Arafura	-	51	64	-

Possible projects

The thematic and comparative approach to the politics of the north should be the focus. The checklist above sets a general agenda for this, but I would propose some specific projects, and one exclusion. The major problem with any attempt to study the politics of the north is the institutional division of the region. The only occasion when all areas are under one political umbrella is at a national election, and then, in Western Australia, the north is only part of one federal electorate. Hence, modifying Loveday's comment (1990, 16):

> *The fragmentation of northern [politics] ... is inescapable as long as the subject is approached through formal institutions.*

The focus, then, should be on themes and topics which define the north, and can be researched and analysed within the region.

The proposal for a thematic and/or comparative approach needs a brief explanation. A thematic approach is suggested by the characteristics which are common to the north. As such, it is possible and justifiable to study some questions across the region. The politics of the mining industry, the theme of development versus environment, the politics of Aboriginal policies, the political sociology of Aboriginal communities, the electoral involvement of Aborigines, the politics of policy-making and administration in small towns, and similar questions, can be analysed across the north.

A comparative approach to the politics of the north starts from the parallel existence of similar characteristics across the region, but recognises the existence of discrete political environments. The socio-economic and socio-political context is similar across the north, but there are three distinct institutional components. The

comparative approach is based on a recognition of both. For example, electoral behaviours in the north should be based on the existence of similar characteristics but different political environments. The voting patterns across the north, across electorates such as the Kimberley (WA), Macdonnell and Stuart (NT) and Cook and Flinders (Q) will involve a study of similar populations but three distinct party systems. A comparative study of party and party systems would be based on parties which exist and compete across the north but within three distinct institutions bases - electoral laws and systems, party structures, and parties themselves. Studies of Aboriginal electoral involvement and behaviour involve both theoretic and comparative research as a result of the existence of three sets of laws and policies across the north.

This suggestion of a combination of thematic and comparative research across the north clarifies to some extent the nature and content of the data base research summary in the north of Queensland and Western Australia. I emphasise that this data base proposal is not to propose research for its own sake. It is to propose a data base which may both encourage potential researchers to inaugurate projects across the north, and make the basic material available.

One major research project should follow on the 1982 study of the Northern Territory (Jaensch and Loveday 1983). The 1982 survey focussed on demographic, sociological and political characteristics of the NT urban population. A further survey, in the mid/late 1990s, conducted in the urban areas of the north, would have two valuable results. It would provide the data for a comparison of NT urban societies over more than a decade. As well, it would provide a study of the urban societies of the region as a whole, and a basis for comparison across the subsets. For example, to take up one theme of the 1982 study, the theme of party identification is an important one. The Territory sample showed characteristics which were different from the rest of Australia's urban voters. One suggested reason for this was the embryonic nature of the party system in the Territory. A new sample survey would establish whether 'party' has become more entrenched in the Territory, and whether patterns of party identification are similar in the sub-regions where parties have been established for almost a century. Such an urban survey will test

> *The impression of many people in the north, not all of them northern chauvinists,...that northerners are different and that the differences do matter in politics (Loveday 1990, 16).*

The 1982 survey confirmed both impressions for the Northern Territory. A new survey would test this, and test the northerners across the region. I would propose this study as a priority for NARU.

NARU should also consider extending the survey of Aboriginal people, suggested above for the Northern Territory, to the north as a whole. The politics of, and politics in, Aboriginal society and societies need research across the region. The Aboriginal survey is an exercise which many have proposed, but no-one has yet carried out at this level. Its findings would be of value to research throughout Australia.

Research through NARU has made a start in this area, focussing on electoral behaviour. Surveys of self-identifying Aboriginal electors were conducted at the 1983 and 1987 Northern Territory elections (Loveday and Jaensch 1984; Jaensch

and Loveday 1987), and a survey was conducted in relation to the 1987 National Aboriginal Conference elections among Aborigines in Darwin and Alice Springs (Loveday and Jaensch 1982). The three surveys were methodologically limited, and the limitations need to be addressed before a full-scale survey is undertaken, in the NT and across the north. The issues of sampling, confidence of the Aborigines, methodology, and language will not be easily resolved, and any such project will be costly.

But it should be a priority, in both a thematic and comparative sense. The three surveys conducted in the 1980s established a number of tentative conclusions which should be tested further.

- the Aboriginal vote is by no means 'solid' across the Territory or through time
- only a small proportion of Aboriginal voters will vote for a non-party Aboriginal candidate in competition with non-Aboriginal party candidates.
- Stable and consistent party voting seems then to be fairly well established amongst Aboriginal electors of the Top End at least. In this regard they are little different from NT electors generally.
- Survey provides some evidence that they take an active interest in elections and vote discriminatingly (Loveday and Jaensch 1984, 56-66; Loveday, Randall, Sanders and Jaensch 1988, Ch.4, App.6).
- Aboriginal voters do <u>not</u> constitute a block vote for Labor (Jaensch and Loveday 1987, 166).

These suggest the importance of a comparative study across the north.

Overall, the prime focus of NARU and the north in terms of political research should be on thematic and comparative studies. This is not to say that the politics of the Northern Territory has nothing remaining of interest and importance. It is to say that studies of the Territory should be placed within the north as a whole; the focus should be the region in the 1990s. This could well start with two specific projects: the establishment of a limited data base for the north of Queensland and Western Australia, as outlined above, as a first stage in the comparative approach, and a major survey of the north, based on but extending the foci in the 1982 NT study.

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