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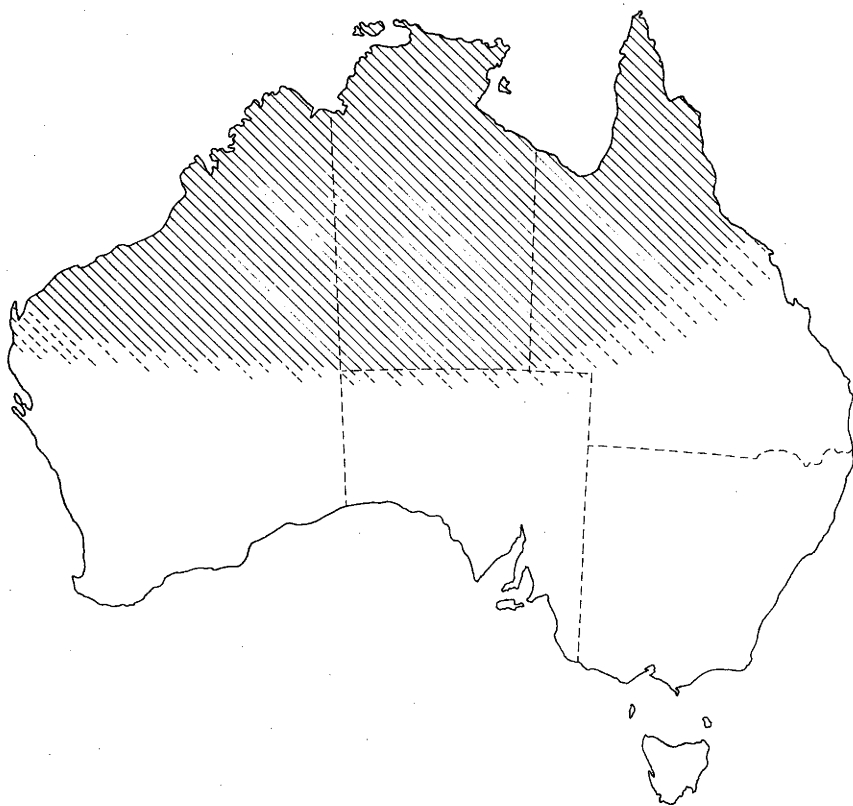
FOUR PAPERS ON NORTH AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

A.J. Heatley, H.H. Aschmann,
I. Moles and J. Bern

BULLETIN NO. 1

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Map of Australia showing areas in which NARU has interest

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**PAPERS BY A.J. HEATLEY, H. ASCHMANN,
I. MOLES AND J. BERN**

The North Australia Research Unit
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ANNOUNCEMENT

Inasmuch as this is the first of what is confidently expected to be a long series of publications, it is appropriate that a few comments be made concerning the purpose of the *North Australia Research Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* is the principal publication of the North Australia Research Unit, a northern agency of the Australian National University charged with the conduct and servicing of high quality research in the North. One of its major aims is to provide a vehicle for publication of results of research undertaken by Unit staff; hence it has something of the status of a "house organ". In overall concept, however, it has been planned on a much broader basis.

While some aspects of publication policy are still to be set, the basic outline can be simply stated. The pages of the *Bulletin* will be open to any author, regardless of position or affiliations, who offers material which is relevant to North Australia, bears clear evidence of having been thoroughly researched and is presented in a scholarly fashion. It will cater for material ranging from journal-length articles to substantial monographs. All manuscripts are submitted to at least two referees knowledgeable in the particular field. Approximately once yearly a number will consist of journal-length articles which may be given a specific focus. Correspondence relevant to material published in the *Bulletin* will be admitted at the discretion of the editor, and occasionally brief notes on NARU activities or other northern research projects may be included.

It is planned to publish at least four issues in any twelve-month period on a serial, rather than periodical, basis. Distribution will be handled by the Australian National University Press, as will subscriptions, and all correspondence relating to these matters should be addressed to:

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Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but must be typed in double-spaced format, and authors intending to submit a manuscript are requested to write the editor for a brochure setting out stylistic matters. Correspondence should be addressed to:

The Editor
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(F.H. Bauer)
Editor

PREFACE

Those who do not know it often consider North Australia to be a land of topographic monotony and its inhabitants rather curious folk who live on, or even beyond, the margins of civilisation. Such views are misleading, as are most generalisations. The North is a land of diversity in both its landscapes and its people, and it knows a full measure of one of man's more complex attainments: politics. While fortuitous, it is fitting that the first issue of a new journal devoted to the North should illustrate this considerable political diversity, for although the essays contained herein are strung on a political thread, they are nothing if not diverse.

Homer Aschmann takes a broad, *Vitlander's* view of some matters of basic concern to the development of the North, solutions for which must be basically political. Alistair Heatley looks at the recent past of Northern Territory politics, while Ian Moles recounts the story of a local politician unique in a land far from barren of such eccentrics. John Bern focuses closely on the political process in an aboriginal settlement. The authors are as diverse as their subjects: Aschmann is a geographer, Heatley a political scientist, Moles an historian and Bern an anthropologist.

We expect this publication to reflect the diversity of the northern physical and cultural environment. With this issue we think we have made a good start.

F.H. Bauer

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACOA	Administrative and Clerical Officers Association
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ALP	Australian Labor Party
APSA	Australian Public Service Association
ARU	Australian Railways' Union
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
CAAC	Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
CLP	Country Liberal Party
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CPD	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DLP	Australian Democratic Labour Party
JCNT	Joint Committee on the Northern Territory Enquiry
NACC	National Aboriginal Consultative Committee
NCP	National Country Party
NTA	Northern Territory Administration
NTLCD	Northern Territory Legislative Council Debates
NQLP	North Queensland Labour Party
NT News	<i>Northern Territory News</i>
QCE	Queensland Central Executive (of the ALP)
TDB	<i>Townsville Daily Bulletin</i>
TCC	Townsville City Council

LABOR'S LOVE LOST: AN APPRAISAL OF THE
LABOR ADMINISTRATION OF THE NORTHERN
TERRITORY, 1972-75

Alistair Heatley*

In a speech delivered in Darwin in mid-1973, Prime Minister Whitlam claimed that his government would usher an era of "enlightened administration" into the Northern Territory and would attempt "to give the people of the Territory an equal share in its government".¹ Similar promises from political leaders in Canberra had been made many times before but they had proved illusory. As the Territory at that time was under complete central control and was an area where the Federal Government could operate without being limited by State jurisdiction, Canberra certainly had the constitutional ability to effect such policies. But the Territory experience has shown that the two claims made by Whitlam were rather contradictory. Administration from Canberra, whether enlightened or not, usually did not involve greater political participation by Territory residents. Moreover, what was deemed "enlightened" in Canberra was not often seen in the same light in the Northern Territory. Would Labor be able to change the pattern? Would it succeed where its predecessors had failed? The major purpose of this paper is to assess the record of the Labor Government in the Territory in an attempt to answer these questions.

Before, however, such an assessment can be approached

* Dr Heatley has been Lecturer in Political Studies at the Darwin Community College since 1974. He has just completed a volume in the series *Government of Australian States and Territories* being published by the University of Queensland Press.

¹ *Northern Territory News*, 8.6.73:1.

intelligibly, the impact of Labor must be placed in its proper perspective. To do that, some aspects of the political climate of the Territory and its recent constitutional and political history should be noted.

Climate and isolation have been the key factors in determining the economic and demographic development of the Territory; they have placed severe limitations on economic enterprise and in turn the size of the population. Even with the marked increase since the 1950s, the population had reached only 101,700 in 1974.¹ Explaining the recent rapid growth is no easy task. Some importance should be given to the desire of the Federal Government in the post-war years to develop the north of Australia in the interests of continental security but much would seem to be growth without conscious plan or intent. However, more positive incentives for development, such as the discovery and exploitation of important mineral resources and tourism have contributed to population increase. These two activities today far exceed in significance the traditional staple industry of pastoralism.²

Despite economic progress and population increase, the Territory of the 1970s was still relatively underdeveloped

¹

This figure is "pre-Tracy". In the 1976 census, the population was 97,070 (Greater Darwin, 43,344; Alice Springs, 14,149; Katherine, 3,127; Tennant Creek, 2,236; Nhulunbuy, 3,552). A population count of Darwin on 30 June 1974 totalled 46,656. The growth of the Territory's population can be seen from the following figures: 1961, 44,481; 1966, 56,504; 1971, 86,390 (*N.T. Statistical Summary 1975 and 1976*).

²

In 1973-74, the value of mining production was \$125.9m, pastoral production \$26.4m and tourism revenue was estimated to be about \$30m, (*The Northern Territory Economy 1973-74*). Both mining and tourism have much higher growth potentials than pastoralism which has recently slumped dramatically in production.

and heavily dependent on the central government for financial sustenance. Some indication of that dependence can be reached by looking at recent budgets. Using the 1974-75 financial year as an example, government spending was estimated to exceed receipts by \$237.7m.¹ Another significant statistic was the number of civil servants; out of a total work-force in 1974 of about 45,000, some 25% (11,200) were employed under the Federal *Public Service Act*. When other groups such as the armed services, teachers, and local government and statutory body workers are added, that figure rises to about 40%. This massive government presence is of central importance not only to economic development but also to the formation of political attitudes.

As with Australia generally, the identification of a political culture in the Territory is a difficult proposition. To spell out simple generalisations would be a mistake as it is much more profitable to see the Territory culture as a fragmented one or as an amalgam of distinct subcultures based on factors like race, region, length of residence, or occupation. In fact, given the complexity in the nature and composition of the Territory's population, no other interpretation is sustainable. With the rapidly rising population, many residents are relative newcomers and, although the Territory exerts a powerful and immediate socialising effect on personal and group habits, it usually takes a reasonably long period of residence to nurture any political loyalty to the Territory. Moreover, the population includes sizeable numbers of transients who, in most cases, do not develop, nor could be expected

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The amounts of \$267.7m for expenditure and about \$30m for receipts did not include the additional spending caused by Tracy (*Report on Constitutional Development* by Joint Committee on the Northern Territory, Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper, 1974, 281:53). The receipts figures are hotly contested by local politicians who consider them to be grossly underestimated. In 1975-76 expenditure rose to \$438.9m although that figure included cyclone reconstruction (*Northern Territory Newsletter*, August 1975:10).

to develop, more than a superficial attachment to their temporary home.¹ Over a quarter (about 27,000) identify themselves as Aborigines, the great majority of whom are still politically unsophisticated and take little part in political activities in the Territory. There are also groups of recent migrants, particularly the large Greek and Italian communities in Darwin the bulk of whom, unlike the Chinese element which has long since been integrated into Territory life, evince little interest at this stage in local and regional affairs. As a final comment in this context, mention should be made of the regional diversity of the Territory. The urban centres which, contrary to the usual picture of the North, contain over two-thirds of the Territory's population, as well as the pastoral areas have their own special interests and senses of local loyalty. Consequently, there is certainly some regional rivalry - between rural and urban areas and between centre and centre. Perhaps the most noticeable is the long-standing tension between Darwin and the country "down the track", particularly Alice Springs, which is somewhat analogous to the relationship between the Territory generally and Canberra.

In common with other parts of Australia, there is widespread political apathy and this theme was one of the most recurrent in the evidence given to the inquiry into the constitutional development of the Northern Territory in 1973-74. On the question of constitutional development, it concluded that "the electorate was largely apathetic

1

The findings of a recent survey (The Darwin Community Opinion Survey, April 1974) suggest that Darwin people at least are not as mobile and transient as often considered. It found that the average length of residency was 4.5 years, that 20% of the population had lived there for over ten years and 65% over two years. The *Northern Territory Statistical Summary 1974*, Table 14:24, confirms some of these findings. But it still remains true that the population does include "sizeable numbers of transients".

to the move towards self-government".¹ But, at the same time, there did exist a group which, on constitutional issues, was certainly not apathetic. That "elite", comprising nearly all the local politicians since at least the mid-1950s and many of the longer-term residents, had developed a set of attitudes which could be described as "the Territory ideology".

The ideology is built around an intense faith in the future of the Territory and a fierce commitment to its political and constitutional advancement although differences may exist on the rate of progress and the ultimate status. It sees the Territory as suffocating under the heavy, albeit generous, hand of Canberra, which is obstructing the legitimate claims of the Territory to run its own affairs, preferring to organise it by remote control. Perhaps even more than the Federal Government, its *bête noire* has been the bureaucracy in Canberra and in the Territory which has been variously castigated as wasteful, inefficient, dictatorial, and self-seeking, dedicated only to preserving its place and influence. The main propagator of these ideas was the old Legislative Council and its debates only have to be scanned cursorily to find frequent and eloquent testimony to the ideology's importance and persistence. The evidence of the Legislative Councillors to the Joint Committee's inquiry could also fruitfully be

¹ *Report on Constitutional Development* by Joint Committee on the Northern Territory, Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper, 1974, 281:9. A great deal more research needs to be undertaken before really valid conclusions on Territory political attitudes can be reached. The April 1974 Darwin Community Opinion Survey is to date the only one of its kind. Using a 1% random sample of Darwin's population, it sought to assess the community response to the desirability of statehood within five years; 41% replied "yes", 39% "no", and 205 registered no opinion.

used for a like purpose.¹ It is difficult, however, to judge the measure of popular support for the ideology given the nature and complexity of Territory society.

The pre-eminent role of the central government was mitigated by the existence of a Legislative Council which was established in 1947 by the Chifley Labor Government. Empowered to "make ordinances for the peace, order and good government of the Territory",² that plenary legislative role was however, effectively controlled by both the composition of the Council and the reservation and veto powers of the central government. To 1972, the pattern of constitutional advance was one of increasing the elected component in the Council while, at the same time, of ensuring

¹

Transcript of Evidence, Joint Committee on the Northern Territory Enquiry (JCNT), pp. 766-1048, 1226-60, 1690-1760, 1799-1848 and 3019-3105. Another attitude argues for the basic retention of the existing system. Some proponents even contend that wider central control should be exercised, that the Territory should aspire to nothing more than the management of what in the States would be local government functions. A clear statement of this view can be found in the evidence of the Public Service Organisations, ACOA and APSA, to the Joint Committee: Transcript of Evidence, JCNT, pp. 2382-2452, 2897-2914 (ACOA) and 2680-2728 (APSA).

²

Northern Territory (Administration) Act, 1919-53, para. 4u.

adequate control over it.¹ As the elected element became more effective in the use of its numbers after 1959, so did the Federal Government resort more and more to the use of the reserve legislative controls. Between 1964 and 1974, for instance, assent was refused in whole or in part to forty ordinances. To do the Federal Government some justice, however, only on one occasion - the 1961 *Supreme Court Act* - did it use its overriding power to make laws for the Territory.

The constitutional changes came about not so much from the willingness on the part of Canberra to relinquish control but from the insistent demands by the Legislative Councillors for advancement. That campaign led by such Council stalwarts as Dick Ward, Fred Drysdale, Neil Hargrave, "Tiger" Brennan, Ron Withnall and Goff Letts, was punctuated with many committees, seemingly endless rounds of negotiations, mass resignations, remonstrances and sundry other tactics. Any advance was hard-fought and hard-won.² Statehood for the Territory was the aim of most

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The original Council had seven official and six elected members. In 1959, this was changed to six officials, eight elected and three non-official appointed members. The final change in membership was in 1968 when the non-official group was replaced by three extra elected members. Other advances include the establishment of an Administrator's Council in 1959 which, although it proved to be little more than a regulatory body, did provide elected members with access, however limited, to executive authority; and an elected President in 1965. For an assessment of the Council, see A.J. Heatley, *Politicians in search of power: the Northern Territory Legislative Council, 1947-1974*, unpublished ANZAAS paper, Canberra, 1975.

2

See A. Powell, "Australia's everlasting colony? Legislative attitudes to constitutional change in the Northern Territory, 1948-1974" unpublished ANZAAS paper, Canberra, 1975, for a scholarly treatment of that development.

of the early agitators but by the late 1960s and the early 1970s that demand was being given much less prominence. In the election campaign of 1975, however, it returned to mid-stage when it became the most important part of the Coalition policy on the Northern Territory.

Improved political representation in Canberra was another long-standing objective. Although the Territory had been represented in the House of Representatives since 1922, voting rights on local affairs was not conceded until 1958 and it was only in 1968 that the member received full voting privileges. Agitation by the Council was primarily responsible for the former change and cynics (with some reason) explained the latter by the winning of the seat by the Country Party candidate in 1966. Senate representation was also a consistent feature of the Council's programme for reform.

A traditional gripe of politically-conscious Territorians was the lowly status accorded to the Northern Territory Administration (NTA) before 1972, a rather paradoxical position perhaps in view of their attitude to the public service generally. Territory affairs formed part of the responsibilities of the Minister for Territories to 1967 and of the Minister for the Interior thereafter. It was considered an affront which could only be rectified by a separate portfolio with the bulk of its officers, especially the senior echelons, based in the Territory and progressively controlled by Territorians. Of particular concern was the erosion of the responsibility of the NTA and the hiving-off of State-type functions to other government departments. One critic expressed it thus:

We must put a stop to the insidious and gradual takeover of the Northern Territory by departments of the Commonwealth Government which is becoming more and more marked as the years go by. The Northern Territory is a playground for the people in the public service who

don't understand government without land.¹

Some comment should also be made on parties and pressure groups. The Labor Party is by far the longest established and was for many years the only organised political party. Much of its support came from the urban areas, particularly Darwin, the mining settlements, and the public service. From 1947 to 1974, it usually had between two and four members in the Council. The Country Party, by way of contrast, was organised only in 1966, found its main support in the pastoral areas and in Alice Springs, and was represented by four or five members from 1968 to 1974.² Party divisions, except at recent Federal elections, seldom ran deep and in the Council before 1972 there was little serious party rivalry. On the important constitutional issue, the elected members invariably formed a compact, united bloc in opposition to the official group. The most significant pressure groups operating either through the Council or the Federal Government have been the pastoralist and mining lobbies, the public service, the trade unions, and, increasingly, aboriginal organisations.³

¹ Northern Territory Legislative Council Debates (NTLCD), 12.2.70, 6:45 (R. Withnall). The whole debate (11-20 February, pp. 11-72) is an illuminating summary of Council attitudes to political and administrative arrangements in the Territory.

² Two other parties had short existences on the scene. The Liberal Party launched an expensive, lavishly-mounted campaign in 1968 but failed to win a seat despite polling 27.3% of the vote. It lingered on to 1971. The North Australia Party, an Alice Springs-based group, contested a few seats in 1965 and did succeed in winning one.

³ The most important of these organisations are: the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, the regional Land Councils, and the NT Aboriginal Advisory Council.

Much has been written or implied already about Federal policy towards the Territory before 1972 but the scattered threads should be drawn together. In 1947, when the legislation to set up the original Council was debated, government speakers emphasised that effective control should be retained so long as "the Northern Territory is not self-supporting financially, and ... the greater part of the expenditure on its development must be provided by the Commonwealth".¹ That approach generally was followed by Liberal-Country Party Governments to 1972 and explained their cautious and restrained attitude to the constitutional development of the Territory.² The pace of progress and its future status were seen to be closely linked with increased population and the ability of the area to contribute more substantially to its own development. On the positive side, however, the Coalition did place considerable emphasis on economic and social policies which were in fact the necessary preconditions for constitutional advancement. Mention should also be made of the encouragement given to the development of local government - municipal corporations being established in Darwin in 1957 and in Alice Springs in 1971 for example - and to the creation of several statutory authorities which increased local participation in Territory affairs.³ In October 1972,

1

Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD), 14.5.47, 191: 2321 (N. Lemmon).

2

A. Powell, "Australia's everlasting colony? Legislative attitudes to constitutional change in the Northern Territory, 1948-1974" has traced the various attitudes and approaches of the Federal Government to constitutional development since 1947.

3

Katherine and Tennant Creek have Town Management Boards with official and elected members and there have been recent discussions on further advance. The most important statutory authorities are: the NT Housing Commission, the NT Tourist Board, the NT Reserves Board, the Museums and Art Galleries Board, the Port Authority and the Betting Control Board.

after lengthy negotiations with the Council, a ministerial statement was issued setting out proposals for further political change.¹ As with previous government policy these proposals were limited and cautious suggestions but they did indicate for the first time a willingness to extend a significant executive role to the Council. A range of local functions and revenue areas was to be transferred to the control of the Council but the central government was to retain responsibility and overriding legislative authority over key areas such as primary industries, mining, rural land, education, health, transport and aboriginal affairs. The elected component in the Council was to be expanded although a reduced official representation would remain to introduce and defend government business. Reactions to the proposals in the Territory were somewhat mixed. Those of the Country Party persuasion, while stating reservations, counselled fair and close examination but the more typical response was that they were disappointing, patently a political gimmick, and designed to give the Territory only "the crumbs".² In Canberra, the Labor Party roundly attacked the proposals on similar grounds.³

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) can make a reasonable claim to be the party which had done most for the constitutional progress of the Territory. In 1931, the Scullin Government made an abortive attempt to set up a Legislative Council and it was the ALP which was responsible for its successful establishment in 1947. During the long years out of power, the party consistently and strongly opposed the Coalition's policies and advocated faster and more substantial progress. Labor speakers in that period managed

¹ CPD, 25.10.72, H. of R. 81:3150-59.

² For the response in the Territory, see *NT News*, 26.10.72: 1, 8; 27.10.72:3 and 8.11.72:1, 9, 11.

³ CPD, 25.10.72, H. of R. 81:3152-54.

to sound very much like the Legislative Councillors in the vigour of their denunciations of the Government.¹ In its treatment of the Territory, the Coalition was accused of following "*ad hoc*, uncoordinated, stop-go political policies".² The Labor programme, as spelled out by Rex Patterson, the spokesman on northern affairs, was claimed to be much more forward-looking and systematic. There was to be an acceleration of constitutional reform although it should be approached "step by step in an orderly manner".³ The main features of the programme were the gradual introduction of a fully-elected Legislative Council, the progressive transferring of local affairs to the control of a Territory executive, Senate representation,⁴ and extension of referendum voting rights to Territorians. In the light of later developments, it is interesting to note that Patterson envisaged the Territory having control over police and eventually over lands and minerals.⁵ The question of the future status of the Territory in the Federal structure was never clearly articulated. There was some talk of a "new" Federal relationship apparently based on the proposed division and resultant balance of powers

¹ Two representative examples from many were: "The Legislative Council ... is the least representative and most subordinate legislature in any British community", CPD, 27.11.62, H. of R. 37:2581 (Whitlam); and Patterson, speaking of the "Cinderella treatment" of the Territory in 1971, accused the Government of "contempt and arrogance". He referred to the Territory as having "a pseudo-colonialist type of government, controlled by a bureaucracy in Canberra", CPD, 17.3.71, H. of R. 71:1085-86.

² CPD, 4.11.71, H. of R. 74:2971 (Patterson).

³ CPD, 11.10.72, H. of R. 81:2400.

⁴ Both in 1968 and 1970, Whitlam had put forward private members' bills to give the Territories representation in the Senate.

⁵ CPD, 4.11.71, H. of R. 74:2971-73, 11.10.72, 81:2400-02.

between the central government and the Northern Territory. But it can be safely said that statehood was not an ALP objective. Both before and after the elections in 1972, Kep Enderby, the first Labor Minister for the Northern Territory, strongly opposed the idea¹ and he was supported by the Prime Minister in mid-1973 when he bluntly remarked that statehood for the Territory would be "a disaster" to the future development not only of the Territory but also of Australian federalism.²

As with many other fields of government involvement, the Labor administration's handling of Territory affairs was one of bustling activity. There were few aspects of the life of Territorians - be it political, economic, or social - that were not affected by new government initiatives, whether or not they were general policies or designed specifically for the Territories. As in the ACT, untrammelled by the constitutional restraints of the States, the Labor Government had a greater opportunity to implement its programmes. Given the fiercely critical nature of the political "elite" in the Territory, that freedom was bound to offend even in sympathetic quarters. Dick Ward, the popular Labor leader in the Council, commenting on the treatment of the Territory after only seven months of Labor rule, suggested that the area was being used "to advance the cause of the federal government and the federal parliament in respect of their case against the states".³ Perhaps his independent and dissident attitude in part explains why he was appointed as a judge on the eve of the Territory elections in 1974! In fact, there were few occasions where government action did not antagonise large sections of Territory opinion. Opposition, of course, is always to be expected to new policies, but on

¹ Report of speech in Darwin in *NT News*, 8.11.72:1, 9; NTLCD, 14.2.73:27-28.

² Report of speech in Darwin in *NT News*, 8.6.73:1.

³ NTLCD, 27.6.73:576.

the score of support, the record of the Labor Government was not good. The result of Assembly elections in October 1974 was sufficient testimony to that.

Under the Labor Government, there was no lagging of the commitment to develop the Territory. Indeed, if budgetary figures were used as a guide, it was apparent that there was an intensification. From \$139.3m in the 1972-73 financial year, expenditure was estimated to rise to \$325.2m in 1975-76 - an increase of about 133%. (That figure, of course, excludes the sum of about \$114m allocated as a result of Cyclone Tracy.) A large portion of the increase was directly attributable to the greater emphasis which the Labor Government placed on aboriginal advancement and the improvement of health and education programmes in the Territory. While due allowance must be made for the effects of inflation and the cost of the marked rise in the numbers of public servants (14½% in 1973-74), the increase was impressive.

While Territorians generally welcomed the continuing commitment and the higher levels of expenditure, there was widespread dissatisfaction expressed on many of the Government's policies or on the manner of their implementation. Obviously, in a paper of this length, one can do little more than note the most important policies and indicate the nature and source of the opposition to them.

For much of Labor's term of office, the two basic primary industries of the Territory - mining and pastoralism - were in a depressed condition. Although many of their difficulties stemmed from general economic recession - low prices and reduced world demand - both industries accused the Government of insensitivity to their problems and of pursuing measures which contributed to their reduced state. In particular, they pointed to the unwarranted withdrawal in the 1973 budget of a number of concessions and subsidies, to the lack of any really positive assistance to the industries, to misguided general economic policies, and to the absence of firm, clear-cut programmes, especially in

relation to mining.¹ In fairness to the Government, however, in 1975 there was, with the price support scheme for the pastoral industry and the setting out of clearer guidelines for the development of uranium resources, a moderate improvement in the relationship between the Government and primary producers. A measure of the dissatisfaction of the mining and pastoral communities in the Territory can be gauged from the electoral returns in October 1974. The non-aboriginal voters in the pastoral areas and in Alice Springs and Katherine, while traditionally anti-Labor, spurned the Labor cause as never before. More significant were the results from the mining areas around Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy. Even with attractive candidates, Labor failed to win either. (The electorate centred on Tennant Creek had, in fact, been held by Labor since 1951.)

The Labor Government's aboriginal policy, based on self-determination, land rights, and improved social and economic conditions and involving vastly increased spending, received a mixed response in the Territory. The majority of the white community applauded the new initiatives and there was wide approval for the proposals of the Woodward Aboriginal Land Rights Commission.² Goodwill and general support notwithstanding, there was much disenchantment with the implementation of the policies. Without delving into the contentious and emotional history of racial relations and attitudes in the Territory, it is enough to point out that such a reaction was predictable - some might say inevitable.

¹ For an expression of such views, see Transcript of Evidence, JCNT, pp. 1597-1689 (Chamber of Mines); pp. 1957-2018 (Cattlemen's Association of the NT); pp. 2576-2620 (NT Cattle Producers' Council). One government decision which should be cited was the large rise in freight rates for the North Australia Railway which led directly to the closing of the Frances Creek iron ore project.

² See, for example, the response of the Council, NTLCD, 1974:628-44, 719-27 and *NT News*, 8.5.74:1, 2, 8.

Several grounds of criticism can be identified. To many whites, the amount of money devoted to aboriginal welfare and development was seen to be profligate and ill-advised and both the use that was made of the money and the alleged waste attracted cynicism and some doubt as to the wisdom of the current pace of development. Others, particularly in areas outside Darwin, compared unfavourably the liberality extended to Aborigines and the Government's apparent lack of interest in ameliorating other problems. Such sentiments lay behind the establishment in early 1973 of the Katherine-based Rights for Territorians group (or "Rights for Whites" as the *Northern Territory News* dubbed it). Fears were also expressed that land rights would impede the Territory's economic progress especially in relation to mineral development¹ and there was considerable opposition to the land rights legislation as it was introduced into Parliament in October, 1975.² The situation was not made easier by the extreme sensitivity of many Territorians on racial questions and its pricking by several incautious statements by government Ministers. One typical example was the outburst by Senator Cavanagh, then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, when he declared that Alice Springs was on the verge of racial warfare and that the police were using terror tactics against Aborigines.³ Nor, finally, did the increased assertiveness of aboriginal organisations and spokesmen on the land rights question and the general place of the Aborigines in Territory society augur well for future relationships.

The Labor Government can point to many solid achievements on behalf of Territory Aborigines but its policy was

1

See Transcript of Evidence, JCNT, pp. 1597-1689 and NTLCD, 1974:634-37 (Fisher).

2

See *NT Parliamentary Record*, 16.10.75 6:605-09; 22.10.75: 633, 655-73; *NT News*, 7.11.75:2, 11.11.75:3; *NT Newsletter*, October 1975:6.

3

See *NT News*, 3.3.75:1, 4.3.75:1.

another area in which it won scant support from white Territorians. Moreover, aboriginal voting patterns in 1974 as far as they can be ascertained, did not indicate increased Labor allegiance as a result of the new policies.¹ It is ironical to note that, in the Assembly elections, the Country-Liberal Party had one aboriginal candidate and he was elected handsomely in a largely aboriginal electorate while the Labor Party with three aboriginal candidates in similar electorates succeeded in none. The 1975 voting figures were, however, more encouraging to Labor, especially in the south of the Territory.²

In the last Legislative Council (1972-74), as for many years before then, the official bloc of six voted together consistently in support of government policy either in opposition to the elected group or in association with

¹ In the NACC elections in November, 1973, there were 7,281 Aborigines on the Northern Territory roll, 5,423 of whom voted. It has been estimated that about the same number would have been enrolled for the Assembly poll in 1974 but there are indications that a lower percentage actually cast ballots. Approximately 12,000 Aborigines would be qualified to enrol in the Territory.

² The southern aboriginal communities of Yuendumu, Warrabri, Hermannsburg, Areyonga, Santa Teresa and Papunya polled heavily in favour of the ALP House of Representatives candidates as did Snake Bay and Croker Island in the north. In the Senate poll, the swing to Labor was less marked as Charles Perkins, standing as an Independent, captured a large proportion of aboriginal votes.

some elected members.¹ Before 1973, there was some party rivalry but, after the Labor Federal victory, it increased markedly. The official members allied with the Labor group were able to bring into effect much Labor-oriented legislation which caused some of the bitterest debates in the Council's history. During this period, controversial laws such as the abolition of the death penalty, the introduction of rent control, the reactivation of price control, the tightening of company control, and land acquisition were passed.

The issue of land acquisition of freehold lands around Darwin for future urban planning purposes was one of the *causes célèbres* of 1973 and one which continued to give occasion to some elected members to snipe at the Labor Government in 1974. Since 1970-71, freehold land around Darwin had been taken up by land developers and small-holders. The Pak Poy Report, commissioned by the previous government, recommended that about fourteen square miles should be acquired for future Darwin expansion. The decision of the Labor Government to acquire thirty-two square miles angered many small-holders whose grievances were supported by the Council and the Opposition in Can-

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After 1971, the official members did not vote in divisions on "local issues" although it was not clear what, in fact, constituted a "local issue", a situation often pointed out by elected members. From 1971 to 1974, the official members voted as a bloc on 134 of 135 divisions. Of 160 divisions, the Labor group voted together 131 times, thirty-four of those in association with the official group especially in 1973 and 1974. The Country Party voted together on 121 divisions but only on eight did they vote as a bloc with the official members. On fifty-five divisions, the elected members voted together in opposition to the official members.

berra.¹ Criticism was directed at the size of and necessity for the acquisition and later at the compensation arrangements and the terms on which the land would be leased. The issue was significant also as it contributed to the deteriorating relations between the Legislative Council and Enderby, the Minister responsible for the Northern Territory during most of 1973.

Enderby's standing in the estimation of the Councillors and other Territorians was also diminished by his association with and his spirited defence of the re-organisation of administrative arrangements in the Northern Territory and his approach to the question of constitutional development. There was general satisfaction with the establishment of a separate Department of the Northern Territory largely based in Darwin but the removal of several of its traditional functions to other departments aroused considerable rancour.² Particularly irritating was the transfer of the responsibility for police to the Attorney-Gen-

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The acquisition was nullified in the Senate in June 1973, but it passed in October when the DLP Senators supported the Government. In March, the Else-Mitchell Committee was set up to investigate urban land use in the Territory. In its report in December, it recommended the freeholding of residential leases, that leasehold tenure for commercial and industrial enterprises should be continued, and that all development rights should be reserved for the Crown.

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Other transfers were survey and draughting to the Department of Services and Property, civil defence to the Department of Defence, and the functions of the old Welfare Division of the NTA were split up among other departments - aboriginal and general community welfare to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (although general welfare was returned a year later), aboriginal health to the Department of Health, and aboriginal education to the Department of Education. For the reaction, see: NTLCD, 13.2.73:8-24; and *NT News*, 12.4.73:1, 2; 19.10.73:8.

eral's Department and that issue, as in the ACT, engendered continuing resentment.¹ Later, the transfer of the control of some Territory national parks from the Northern Territory Reserves Board to the National Parks and Wildlife Commission and Service rekindled the suspicion that the central government ultimately intended to reduce the Territory to the status of a glorified municipality. That fear was reinforced, as the Councillors saw it, by the increasing tendency of the Federal Parliament to legislate on State-type activities in the Territory. Both Goff Letts, the Majority Leader in the Legislative Assembly, and Ward, the ex-Labor leader, saw the Labor Government as using the area as "an experimental plot".² Labor's predecessor had almost invariably used the Council as the vehicle for legislation specifically concerning the Territory. Faced with an Assembly which was likely to be antagonistic to many Labor objectives, however, it was no surprise that the Government resorted to that expedient.

As Minister-designate before the 1972 elections, Enderby, alluding to constitutional reform, had emphasised that the Labor philosophy was "to wipe the slate clean". Although in passing, he did mention the possibility of establishing a Joint Parliamentary Committee to act as a liaison group between Canberra and Darwin, he denied that there was any intention of imposing a solution on the Territory.³ It was understood that the traditional methods of consultation

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In October 1975, legislation was introduced into Parliament to amalgamate the NT Police into the Australia Police Force. The bill lapsed on the dissolution of Parliament. One of the first acts of the new government was to restore the control of the police to the re-established Department of the Northern Territory.

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Report of Letts' speech at the National Country Party Convention, *NT News*, 5.5.75:3; Ward's comment to author, November 1974.

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Speech in Darwin, reported in *NT News*, 8.11.72:9.

and negotiation were to be continued and, until mid-1973, that was the pattern followed. By June, Enderby had decided that the Council's demands were too extreme and could not be accommodated within Labor policy and negotiations ended abruptly. Henceforth, the Joint Committee, which had been set up in mid-year, was to become the advisory body on the nature and extent of constitutional reform - a development which was bitterly received by the Council. One Councillor caustically noted that the employment of the Joint Committee was rather like "planting boiled potatoes".¹ Until the end of its life, albeit mollified somewhat by the announcement of the establishment of a fully-elected Legislative Assembly by 1975² and the granting of substantial pay increases to members, the elected members kept up an unremitting barrage of criticism against the Government and the Joint Committee. As a gesture of their opposition, they steadfastly refused to legislate for an increase in the local levels of stamp duty throughout 1973 and 1974, a tactic which the Assembly was to use again in 1975 in protest against government inaction and reform.

The Joint Committee's inquiry, which was interrupted by the double dissolution in mid-1974, lasted a year. It was charged with examining "measures that might be taken in the long and short term to provide the Northern Territory with responsible self-government in relation to local affairs ...".³ To that end, in both Canberra and the Territory, it received submissions from and interviewed a number of witnesses, chief among whom were the Councillors, and representatives of local political groups, government departments and unions, community and commercial organis-

¹ NTLCD, 15.2.73:43 (R. Withnall).

² CPD, 17.7.74, H. of R. 89:290-91.

³ *Report on Constitutional Development*, by Joint Committee on the Northern Territory, Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper, 1974, 281:iii.

ations, producer groups, and aboriginal communities. There is no space in this paper to analyse the evidence - 3,276 pages of it. This is unfortunate as it does provide fascinating insights into the range of Territory opinion, into the claims and objectives of the departments and public servants, and into intra-committee politics and its reaction to outside criticism.

When the committee's report was published in November 1974, it received wide approval in the Territory. Even those who had argued for more extreme solutions conceded that it was a responsible, albeit cautious, document which set out liberal guidelines for future development. Broadly, the proposals were seen as federalist rather than centralist in nature and, at the time, they did allay some of the fears and suspicion which had been aroused by Labor's recent attitude to the Territory's constitutional future.

The report emphasised that any significant change in the Territory's status would be a lengthy process and that the rate and the extent of the process of change should be the subjects of negotiation between the Territory and Canberra. A progressive transfer of a wide range of local functions and reserves was recommended but "for the time being" the Australian Government should retain control of important State-type activities like rural land, mining, health, education, companies and the Supreme Court. Other activities such as roads, police, national parks and urban development should, in the sort term, be controlled jointly. In all areas in which the Australian Government was to have authority, emphasis was placed on the need for full co-operation with the Territory and as much local involvement as possible. Although some limitations were placed on areas of non-local responsibility, full legislative power was to be retained by the Assembly. Other recommendations concerned the financial and administrative adjustments which were contingent on the devolution of responsibility. One interesting suggestion made in the administrative area was the vesting of executive responsibility for all State-type functions retained by the Australian Government in one

department.¹ Such a move would have reversed the process of fragmentation of Territorial functions which had been accelerated by Labor.

The proposals, except for the degree of legislative control over "non-local" activities, were very similar to the 1972 Coalition offer on constitutional reform. By the end of 1974, therefore, it seemed that constitutional advance would be resumed and would be buttressed by a non-partisan approach to the subject, at least in its initial stages. The question of the ultimate status of the Territory, on which the major parties in Canberra and of the Territory differed, was an issue the resolution of which appeared to lie well in the future.

In the year that followed, confidence in the Labor Government's willingness to accept the report's recommendations rapidly dwindled. The Legislative Assembly throughout 1975 increasingly criticised the delay in implementing the first stages of the transfer of functions despite frequent assurances that the process was being expedited. Both parties in the Territory - CLP and Labor - unsuccessfully pressed the Government for action. By the end of the year, the Assembly had become convinced that the Labor Government had no real intention of doing anything at all.

The Government legitimately argued that the effects of Cyclone Tracy had to be taken into account and, for that reason, the Joint Committee was reconvened in February 1975. In the second report, however, except for a recommendation that the responsibility for urban land should be given to the Darwin Reconstruction Commission for a period of five years, all the earlier recommendations were recon-

¹ *Report on Constitutional Development*, by Joint Committee on the Northern Territory, Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper, 1974, 281:xi-xvi.

firmed.¹ Subsequent delay was less easy to explain but three factors could be suggested. It might have been caused by the reluctance of the various government departments to surrender their positions of authority in the Territory, or by the twin fears of the Labor Government that any loss of central control would weaken its capacity for "enlightened administration", and that the CLP majority in the Assembly could not be trusted with greater power. It is interesting to note in response to the proposal of early statehood made by the Liberal-National Country Parties in the 1975 election campaign, that Labor pledged, if re-elected to government, to begin the initial transfer of functions immediately.

One positive political decision in 1975 exacerbated the deteriorating situation. In June, the Department of the Northern Territory was merged into a new Department of Northern Australia and many of its senior officers were re-assigned to Canberra. That action was interpreted in some Territory quarters as a harbinger of a return to full Canberra and bureaucratic control.

Two other Labor political promises of 1972 - the extension of referendum voting rights and Senate representation - should be noted. Without going into the involved background detail, it is enough to point out that Labor did succeed in securing two Senators for the Territory. At the change of government in late 1975 the Territory was still denied a vote in the referenda process, although

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Report on Constitutional Development in the Northern Territory Second Enquiry, by Joint Committee on the Northern Territory, Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper, 1974, No. 134. This report did strongly re-emphasise the urgency of setting up the department to supervise all State-type functions and the formation of a committee of the Territory Executive and the Minister to oversee constitutional development.

through no fault of Labor.¹

Earlier references have been made to the Legislative Assembly election in October 1974, but some further comment is warranted as it has been used to demonstrate the public response to the performance of the Labor Government by late 1974. The election² was rather unusual both in its style and its result. As there was at that time no indication of the functions and powers of the new Assembly, local affairs were of distinctly secondary importance in the campaign. Indeed, the platforms of the major parties, Country-Liberal (CLP)³ and Labor, and the Independent candidates were, as would be expected, basically similar and it was difficult to distinguish differences in their approaches to local issues. The central themes were the defence of or attack on the Labor Government's policies and administration nationally and in the Territory. The result was a triumph for the CLP which secured seventeen of the nineteen seats and a disaster for Labor which failed to win one. If, in fact, it had not been for the personal popularity of the two successful Independents, the CLP

¹ Territorians gained this privilege in the referenda submitted to the nation in May 1977.

² The election was for nineteen single-member seats, elected on the optional preferential system. A substantial part of the Joint Committee inquiry was concerned with the desirability of giving Aborigines separate representation. The first report (p. xi) recommended against it as did most of the witnesses, both white and Aborigines. Senator J.B. Keeffe submitted a dissenting view proposing six separate aboriginal electorates. (This view was shared by the NACC, CAAC and the DAA.)

³ This party with the strange-sounding name was formed in mid-1974 in an effort to maximise the anti-Labor vote, particularly in the Darwin area. Most of the CLP Darwin candidates would claim to be of Liberal persuasion.

would have collected all the seats. Territory-wide, the CLP won 49% of the vote, Labor 30.5%, and the Independent candidates 20.5%. In the nine seats in Darwin, traditionally one of Labor's strongest areas, the proportions were 41%, 31% and 29%. The outcome of the poll emphasised the popular disenchantment with the Government, an unpopularity which was also reflected in the results in the ACT and Queensland elections held at about the same time.

The 1975 Federal elections saw some growth in Labor's support in the Territory.¹ If the 1975 figures were used to allocate Assembly seats, Labor would have captured four or five seats in the Darwin area and possibly MacDonnell, a southern electorate with a large aboriginal population. But, even with that improvement, Labor's electoral base in the Territory remained at a dishearteningly low level.

In its political ramifications, the "post-Tracy" period provided yet another example of strained relations between Canberra and the Territory. Most residents would agree that the Federal Government's response to the Darwin tragedy was swift and generous in terms of immediate relief, the commitment to rebuild, and compensation. However, there was bitter criticism of the manner in which the problems of reconstruction were approached. As usual, the major centre of discontent was the legislative body but it represented much wider frustrations. Of prime general concern were the delays and confusion in planning and reconstruction, the implementation of the permit system, and the liberal treatment accorded to public servants in Darwin.

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Approximate percentages for the major parties were: House of Representatives - NCP 52.1%, ALP 42.3% of the primary vote. (The personal popularity of the Labor candidate, Jock Nelson, may have inflated the Labor vote.) This should be compared with the 1972 results (CP 45.1%, ALP 37.5%) and the 1974 result (CP 48%, ALP 44.2%); Senate - CLP 50.35%, ALP 33.33% of the primary vote. (The candidacy of Charles Perkins who captured 4.17% of the vote - mainly Aborigines - would, in this case, have reduced the Labor share.)

In addition, the members of the Assembly, both from the CLP, led by the newly-formed Executive Committee, and the Independents, accused the Government of using the disaster as an excuse for postponing political reform, for over-riding legitimate legislative processes, for fastening the grip of the bureaucracy on the Territory even tighter, and for making injudicious and politically-biassed appointments to reconstruction agencies.¹ In particular, Dr Patterson, as the responsible Minister at that time came under concentrated attack for his handling of the situation and his early popularity in the Territory receded markedly towards the end of his term of responsibility.

Patterson's position was, of course, not an unusual one for the Minister responsible for Northern Territory affairs. Given the nature of Territory political opinion, that post has never been an easy road to popularity. Since the 1950s, every Minister - Paul Hasluck, C.E. Barnes, Peter Nixon, Ralph Hunt, Enderby, Patterson and even Paul Keating in his short period of office - has incurred local disfavour. As agents of the distant Canberra government, they could hardly have been expected - or themselves expected - to win widespread and lasting approbation.²

Two broad themes have been examined in this paper - the

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The Assembly particularly objected to the use of the veto on its attempts to liberalise the permit system and to extend the life of the City Corporation; to major legislation being introduced in Canberra rather than in the Assembly; to the recalling of the JCNT; and to the failure to move ahead with reform. See Legislative Assembly Debates, January to March 1975, *passim*. Many of the Assembly grievances were aired in Parliament in February 1975 by Opposition speakers.

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See the comments on the conflict between Patterson and his critics, especially Ron Withnall, in the press (*NT News*, 23.4.75:4; the *Australian*, 17.5.75) and in Parliament (CPD, 26.5.75, H. of R. 95:2790-96; 28.5.75, 95:2905-06).

political character of the Northern Territory and the record of the Labor Government as it concerned the Territory. Without an appreciation of the first theme, it is difficult to arrive at a fair assessment of the second. It would be altogether too facile to dismiss Labor as a failure simply on the grounds of vigorous criticism or even of lack of support. These are basic facts of life for the Federal Government in the Territory. In some policy areas, moreover, there was a broad continuity of development by both Labor and its predecessors. But, without entering into discussion on the longer-term wisdom, value or results of new initiatives, it would be reasonable to suggest that the Labor Government outdid its non-Labor predecessors in so quickly alienating so much Territory opinion without attracting any appreciable compensatory support. Whilst there are grounds to argue that Labor in some areas did encourage a higher degree of local participation at the community level, it would be difficult to convince many Territorians that there had been any significant change in the reality of Canberra control over Territory affairs.

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*VIEWS AND CONCERNS RELATING TO
NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT*

Homer Aschmann*

Excluding the relatively developed east coast of Queensland the more than 3,000,000 square kilometres of the Australian North contains less than 200,000 inhabitants. More than a quarter of these are Aborigines, many of them seeking to maintain their cultural identity by separating themselves from the European population. The small size of this population, spread over three political jurisdictions, precludes its having significant direct political influence. The Northern Territory raises in taxes only a tiny fraction of the funds the Commonwealth regularly spends there, and while the mines in north-western Queensland and northern Western Australia make substantial contributions to the revenues of those States, only by sufferance of the overwhelming legislative majorities based in the south will these revenues be used in the general regions where they are raised.

* Professor Aschmann is Professor of Geography at the University of California (Riverside), and was a recent Visiting Fellow with NARU. Of this paper he says: "I am a geographer from Southern California most of whose field studies have been in the American South-west and Latin America and included considerable work with Indian groups in both areas. This essay is the product of a sabbatical year in Australia, based in post-cyclone Darwin, but including extensive surface travel on virtually every paved and many of the unpaved roads from Townsville, Queensland, to Carnarvon, Western Australia. This was my first exposure to Australia, hence my impressions may be considered those of a naive and uncommitted observer. That the state of the beef market was especially poor during my stay may account for my less than enthusiastic view of the pastoral industry in the North." The editor would note that an outsider's view, even of that which to residents is commonplace, is often objective and hence doubly valuable.

Northern development has been in the past and will continue to be stimulated or impeded by the wishes of the majority of the Australian population, expressed through Commonwealth and State Governments, and these people live in the south. Even private mining and pastoral enterprises that are based exclusively on northern resources have their terms of investment and conditions of operation determined by southern legislators and Federal officials. Despite an occasional blast at spending government funds in the North rather than closer to major population centres,¹ I am convinced that Geoffrey Bolton more accurately describes the general Australian attitude when he says "In the uninterrupted prosperity of the two decades since 1945, northern development has become at least in principle an article of faith in Australian politics."²

The bases on which Australians in general support northern development, the intensity of commitment to this support, and the extent of the resources people are prepared to invest in it, however, vary enormously. Articulate lobbies, both within the North and outside it, promote different and often contradictory points of view. Only the future will tell which points of view will prevail in the political arena, but this essay attempts to identify explicitly the several concerns, to show where they are supportive of each other or would be opposed in their general impacts and, it is hoped, indicate how a particular concern such as conservation or aboriginal welfare relates to government willingness to invest in northern development and the efficacy of such investment.

Definition of Area

The twenty-sixth parallel south has acquired legal

¹ The most widely publicised and heavily documented attack is B.R. Davidson, *The Northern Myth*, 1972.

² Bolton, 1969:142.

status in Australia as the northern limit of comfortable living. To the north a resident receives formal tax concessions and wage awards commonly include extra money and vacation benefits to compensate for having to live beyond the pale of civilisation. In actuality this astronomical line crosses the continent at its greatest longitudinal extent and for at least four-fifths of the distance runs through nearly uninhabited dry lands. Moving it 500 kilometres north or south, except close to the east and west coasts, would not change the ambience of the immediate districts it separates. This is true both physically and culturally. The only general justification for picking the twenty-sixth parallel to divide "easy Australia" from "hard Australia" would seem to be that it defines a distance from the capital cities to the south. Though it holds more independent astronomical status the Tropic of Capricorn similarly does not divide environments that a person might perceive as distinctive. Some place to the north of it one passes from normally dry though occasionally flooded country to country that is regularly wet in summer.

Eastern Queensland and the Cape York Peninsula are excluded from this study, primarily because scattered along the coast and in a few interior localities there are long-established districts of close agricultural settlement. The southern boundary of the area of primary interest is the Tropic of Capricorn in Queensland and the twenty-sixth parallel further west.

The Concern for the Aborigines

In the past generation two independent but fundamental changes in the situation of the Australian Aborigines have occurred, one attitudinal and the other biological. A widespread attitude of the European settlers of Australia toward Aborigines was that they were potential labour to be exploited, and as that proved difficult, vermin to be eradicated. More humane viewpoints were espoused by the British Government and individuals and groups in Australia, but they pointed toward shorter or longer and more or less protected tutelage of Aborigines

to enable them to fit into the colonial or the national economy. Implicit in plans for aboriginal protection and training was that the aboriginal cultures were doomed and that Aborigines were declining in number and likely to survive biologically only as half-castes who would ultimately be assimilated in the general, basically European population. Humanity demanded only that individuals be treated decently while these processes transpired.

The rise of a collective guilt complex concerning the historic treatment of Aborigines in Australia paralleled that in Anglo-America over past treatment of the Indians, differing somewhat from more complex and longer developing attitudes in Latin America. Its general emergence may have come from believing World War II propaganda, but its present generality is striking. Among Australians of all classes and political persuasions it is hard to find an individual who would not agree, at least in public discourse, with the statement that Aborigines received a rough deal in the past and that modern society should make amends to their descendants. The form these amends should take is not a matter of agreement either among those who deal with Aborigines regularly and intimately as do many people in the North or those who know of them only through secondary sources as do most people in the south. If many northerners seem to be less sympathetic to Aborigines it may be less a function of economic competition than of having directly observed the dysfunction of aboriginal betterment programmes.

In the North where perhaps half of the Aborigines retain significant amounts of their original culture and social structure three significantly incompatible programmes are being pushed. The simplest and probably most widely supported approach is that Aborigines should receive the extra training and preferred access to employment that would permit them to be assimilated fully into the Australian economy on an average rather than socio-economically minimal level. Achievement of this goal might require many being moved to present metropolitan centres rather than being left in the North where employment opportu-

ities will be restricted for a long time.¹ The speed with which this economic assimilation should be accomplished and the amount of pressure on the Aborigines and on the rest of society that might legitimately be applied to achieve it are not matters of agreement.

A more romantic view is that the aboriginal cultures have intrinsic merit and should be encouraged to survive and develop in their own terms and with their own value systems. Such development may be possible only in effective isolation from European communities, but it is at least theoretically feasible in the North where extensive aboriginal reserves have already been designated and even larger areas have few or no European occupants. The aboriginal reserve programme has already come into conflict with some national interests with the discovery of major mineral deposits on some reserves, but more theoretical barriers to the intellectually appealing aboriginal culture preservation programme may be more significant. Would Australian society encourage the retention or revival of mutilating initiation practices producing significant morbidity and mortality that seem to have been central to many aboriginal cultures, and could its legal system tolerate the application of traditional tribal sanctions, often lethal, for the violation of cultural norms? Conversely, are aboriginal cultures viable without them? In any event few people would think it appropriate to create isolated compulsory reserves for those Aborigines who are effectively detribalised and living on the fringes of the general economy even though social malaise in the form of drunkenness, wife-beating and child neglect is evident among them. Such persons make up about half of the Aborigines of the North (and most of those of the rest of the country).

A third option is that the Aborigines themselves determine how they will develop. A basic problem is whether this determination should be communal or on an individual

¹ Davidson, 1972:8.

and democratic basis. If the latter, how much exposure to European-type education and the common material culture and comforts of Australia should aboriginal children be permitted? Authority in traditional aboriginal cultures is gerontocratic and, at least in some communities, influential elders decry the corrupting effects of European contact on their young people. In the past they have been supported by missionaries and they continue to receive some support from the governmental advisory structure. If free democratic decision making should be required by government policy it is doubtful that the oncoming generation of Aborigines will opt for substantial separation from the material and social opportunities that come from contact with Europeans, even those as apparently demoralising as access to alcoholic beverages.

The biological change is equally pervasive and is especially important in the North, although its potential for creating economic and social instability has scarcely been explored. A generation and a half ago the long-term and steady decline in the numbers of Aborigines in Australia ceased, and birth rates came to equal death rates. For nearly thirty years there was little change in the total number of Aborigines, but the age distribution within the population was changing to give it greater reproductive potential. In the last two decades the aboriginal population has begun to explode and, despite heavy infant mortality, and morbidity from diseases such as leprosy and trachoma that scarcely touch the European population, its net reproductive rate is over 2.0; that is, it will go on doubling each gener-

ation.¹ Conversely the net productive rate in the European population is about 1.0, meaning that in a generation it will cease to grow by natural increase.

The impact of these demographic changes in the North is especially great. At present about half of the population of the Kimberley district in Western Australia is aboriginal.² If the cities of Darwin and its suburbs and Alice Springs and the mining communities of Gove and Tennant Creek are excluded, Aborigines would account for half of the population of the remainder of the Northern Territory. Even in all those cities except Gove there are substantial aboriginal populations. Barring immigration induced by major new mining developments Aborigines will form a strong majority in the non-urban region in a decade.

The government bureaucracies concerned with Aborigines, both in the North and in the capitals, may be the most immediately potent forces in determining aboriginal development. As individuals, both those of aboriginal and those of European ancestry seem sincerely motivated to work to enhance aboriginal welfare. In practice this

¹ The Australian census materials, because Aborigines have been counted only since 1971, do not permit direct documentation of this strong conclusion. Indirect documentation accords it confidence. In the 1971 census the aboriginal age cohort 5-9 was 16,400 and the age cohort 25-29 was 6,976, (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Canberra, July, 1973). It has been suggested that some of the increment results from mixed bloods choosing to identify as Aborigines as legal disadvantages disappeared and some advantages in aboriginal status were recognised. Doing so, however, would not seem likely to affect the two cohorts differentially. They are largely parents and children.

² Western Australia, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, March 1975:23-25; also Australian Bureau of Statistics, Western Australian Office, 1976.

comes down to seeking resources to do more of what each individual and his immediate organisation is now doing, be it education, supplying direct welfare payments, protecting communities from corrupting contacts with whites, building houses, encouraging native crafts, or offering legal advice. Supported by the general Australian guilt complex toward Aborigines they have proved to be effective lobbyists, both with the public and with governments, in gaining such resources. As a result they form a powerful force to maintain the mixed and directionless *status quo*. Some tribal groups are kept isolated; communities fringing European towns are offered special support and protection that preserve their separateness; programmes that might end the need for any presently provided services are resisted.

Two instabilities threaten present aboriginal programmes. The explosive population increase will raise costs to a level that places evident strains on national and State budgets while only negative progress has been made in integrating northern Aborigines into the productive economy. The granting of award wages to Aborigines working on pastoral stations, while it has consistent moral justification, has in practice resulted in reduced use of aboriginal labour. Families no longer live on the stations, and employment is offered only for a few days for specific tasks. Straight welfare is for many their only support. At the same time the practice of special grants to families as well as to students for going to school, and preferred and financially supported access to secondary and tertiary education, is provoking rising resentment among non-aboriginal northerners whose access to such education is notably inferior to national standards.

On the other hand, to a greater degree than most northerners are aware, aboriginal welfare payments make a major and disproportionate contribution to the commercial economy in the North. Aborigines spend all their money there, not saving it for investment in the south when their northern tours of duty end as do many government

and commercial employees.

At least two conclusions seem inevitable. The costs of aboriginal welfare programmes will rise, becoming an ever-greater fraction of the burden northern development places on the Australian taxpayer. The only reasonable means of reducing this rise is accelerated economic development that will afford more employment to which Aborigines are adapted. Their culturally deeply-held value for sharing seems to effectively preclude their functioning in commercial enterprise. Secondly, expanding land reserve programmes and other efforts to preserve aboriginal cultures that are barriers to development, however attractive from a moral standpoint, will have costs that will rise exponentially for the foreseeable future.

The Economic Concern

The history of development of the several States of Australia has been one of an initial investment of capital and introduction of people, sometimes involuntary, extensive pastoralism, and limited subsistence farming, followed by mineral discoveries, generally gold, that attracted enormous immigration. Extensive agriculture first developed to feed those immigrants, often subsequently specialising in a commodity for export. Manufacturing and the service industries then developed to supply primarily the established population base, and the whole complex could be regarded as economically self-sustaining, generally more than repaying the initial investment.

In the North, except along the east coast of Queensland, the sequence was interrupted at the beginning of the agricultural stage. Actually this interruption has occurred repeatedly in different places and at different times. The gold rushes to Pine Creek, Halls Creek and Marble Bar, and the influxes to the mines around Cloncurry stimulated only cattle raising on huge properties that found themselves suffering for want of markets when mining activity waned. Especially since 1960, though they began earlier at Mount Isa, major mining developments focusing

primarily on the baser metals seem to have reinitiated the first phases of the sequence, and the agricultural follow-up is still in abeyance. The conclusion expressed perhaps most vigorously in *The Northern Myth*,¹ is that because of climatic and soil disabilities the establishment of the agricultural phase will never occur and promoting it would be a waste of Australia's resources. A more analytical statement is that, while expensive, transporting agricultural and other products from the developed parts of Australia to any northern market is cheaper than producing them locally. In all events any activity in the North labours under a cost structure that is high even by Australian standards.

If rigorous cost-benefit analyses such as Davidson applies to northern agricultural development projects were applied to all activities in the North, the cutback in government and public expenditures would go deep indeed. Only some mining operations, a few seasonal prawn fisheries, and those pastoralists who would accept far greater isolation than they now suffer could survive.

Writing at a time of high and rising world market prices for beef, Davidson accepted that extensive, low-intensity cattle grazing operations were profitable. Even then this industry was not servicing the debts created by the construction and maintenance of the beef roads and several meatworks that were supposedly built to support it. With the recent fall in beef prices and reductions of export quotas the pastoral industry is in trouble even with its infrastructural support. Limited as they are, the mail service, the primary schools for small groups of children, and the flying doctor service and regional hospitals in the North must be more heavily subsidised than in more densely settled areas.

¹Davidson, 1972.

Providing for aboriginal welfare in the form of direct payments, advisory, social and educational services and housing takes a large budget, almost none of it raised in the North. It is certain to grow as long as the stated policy of raising aboriginal living standards to the general Australian level is pursued even half-heartedly. Aboriginal welfare payments form the main basis of support of the hotels and other commercial establishments in most northern country towns from Burke-town through Camooweal to Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing and on to Roeburne and Onslow in the west. Goods and services are meagre and highpriced, but without the aboriginal market they would not exist at all. The cheapest way to raise aboriginal levels of consumption would be to move all Aborigines south to places where moneys spent on Aborigines would buy more and where more diverse opportunities for employment exist. Such action would be regarded as inhumane both by the Aborigines and by other Australians concerned with their welfare. In this large and rapidly growing area of investment of public funds cost-benefit ratios have never been considered and probably will not be, but as the aboriginal population grows subsidised local economic development that could provide employment and relatively lower prices may prove to be the most effective means of controlling costs.

The large-scale mining operations, most of them developed or greatly expanded since World War II do meet the criteria of a cost-benefit analysis, and as such have been able to attract private investment, much of it foreign, despite government-imposed requirements that add to costs without direct economic returns. Although it was constructed by the Queensland Government, the railway extension to Mount Isa has been more than paid for by the freight charges generated in serving the mine, and those charges make the whole line to Townsville almost uniquely profitable among publicly-owned Australian railways. The iron-hauling railways of the Pilbara and the ports they serve have been fully financed by the mining enterprise. Unfortunately those railways afford no extra-corporational

regional service. The construction of excellent and expensive housing and community facilities at each of the major mining centres was in part in the companies' interest in recruiting and stabilising their labour forces, but more than a minor fraction of their costs was involved in satisfying environmental protection and design demands set by governmental planners, both locally and in the capitals, whose permits were needed to begin operations. Such demands have a regional developmental basis rather than a strictly economic one, since the latter would involve allowing the mines to maximise their profits and then taxing them.

By their nature, mining operations are transient. Despite technological improvements that make possible the use of lower grade ores and occasional increases in demand on the world market, a time will come at each mine when there is no more paying ore left. In isolated areas where the mine must support the entire infrastructure the arrival of that time will occur sooner than in generally developed regions.¹ The minerals extracted will be gone and cannot again form the basis for regional development. The infrastructure created to support mining operations will have no function unless other self-sustaining local activities have arisen to use it, and it can only decay or in part be moved to other localities. Above all, the well-paid labour force will face unemployment or forced emigration. Repeatedly such groups, when threatened by a mine closing, have urged governments to forgo taxes and sustain the infrastructure once provided by the mining concern in order to prolong the life of the mine. When this is done, and it often is, one can no longer regard mining as an economically self-sustaining activity from the national standpoint.

The northern tourist industry may be regarded as an economically sound activity that generates employment and potentially serves the entire Australian population. The

¹ Aschmann, April 1970:172-89.

emptiness or unspoiled character of the North is certainly one of its tourist attractions, but significant tourist use requires a network of at least minimal services supplied by a resident population. In addition to roads, food, and accommodation, some health security and effective and prompt communication with the outside world are needed at least. The wet season that makes most of the North inaccessible for half the year also makes supplying services to tourists during the other half extremely expensive. With what is probably a temporary interruption due to the Darwin cyclone, the northern tourist industry has shown steady and rapid growth. This success, however, depends on an infrastructure created for other purposes: the beef roads, the mail and telecommunication services, flying doctors, etc.

Ayers Rock is probably the sole tourist goal in the North that is sufficiently attractive to generate enough activity to develop and support its own infrastructure, and even it depends considerably on what is available in Alice Springs.

In sum it is fair to say that many of the investments of public funds in northern development have been made and are being made without regard to their generating enough increased economic activity to pay for themselves. Few, if any, activities are likely to do so. A more fruitful analysis would seek a synergistic strategy with attention to those investments that would reduce the costs of carrying on other activities. Agriculture or horticulture which might supply local markets would look better in these terms than in Davidson's analysis.

The Concern to People in the North

Activities carried on to maintain the territorial integrity of a national State have never had to justify themselves economically or submit to strict budgetary control. ¹ The extraordinarily early efforts to settle

¹*Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene 4.

the Top End, beginning on Melville Island in 1824 and continuing at Raffles Bay and Port Essington over the next two decades, were expensive failures. Their continuance could only have been justified as a move to keep other colonial powers out of the region and as a basis for penetrating commercially into the Dutch-held East Indies.¹ The enthusiasm with which the Darwin area and other parts of northern Australia were garrisoned against possible Japanese invasion during World War II was out of all proportion to the strategic or economic value of the lands involved. It is improbable that a serious attempt by the Japanese to land on the north coast could have been blocked, but there is little indication that one was ever planned.

The difficulties of maintaining garrisons in the almost undeveloped North, supplied with everything by long overland routes, impressed themselves directly on tens of thousands of Australian soldiers. Occupying and developing the North that it might be better defended against a potential invader captured the national imagination. The beef roads programme is widely believed, especially by the pastoralists who use the roads and know how expensive they were to build and maintain and how few vehicles use them, to be a cover for a military road system. If this were the case it is not surprising that it receives little official comment. References are made to northern development generally and to permitting the meatworks at Broome, Derby and Wyndham to get enough cattle to operate at capacity, but the beef road programme has not had to bear the scrutiny of a cost-benefit analysis.²

The development-for-defence concept has experienced some resistance. It has been suggested that in a road-

¹ Bauer, 1964:28-37.

² An example is *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Representatives*, 19.4.66 to 13.5.66:1775-1806.

less and resourceless state the North would constitute the most effective defence against attack on the settled parts of Australia from the north and that physical developments would be of more advantage to an attacker than to defender.¹ Evacuation of a large and exposed civilian population would add considerably to difficulties in defence. The technical military arguments in relation to modern equipment and strategy are probably not subject to resolution by any layman. It is, however, certain that many Australians feel uneasy about extensive coastal stretches of their continent not being under effective national control because there is no resident European population. Maintaining an official presence there without a resident population will be expensive and without any economic reward.

A more general disquiet about leaving unused extensive potentially productive lands in a world in which food shortages can occur is probably more persuasive. In the post-World War II era forecasts that the world's population growth curve would shortly intersect the curve of increased food production were met, especially by economists, with empirical evidence that for more than a century food production, even in densely settled lands, could be and was being increased more rapidly. This economists' nonsense was never really satisfying to those whose experience with the land itself had demonstrated absolute limits to productive capacity per unit area, and in 1973 a world food crisis caused by crop failures in the U.S.S.R. and elsewhere was barely managed with the fortuitous aid of grain stores in the United States. In that year mankind ate more food than it produced. Actual starvation is not imminent except as interregional distribution systems do not work, but enforced alteration of diets away from consumption of animal products is.

A thoughtful examination of the long history of failure of agricultural enterprises in Australia's North can

¹ Davidson, 1972:6-7.

scarcely fail to conclude that high labour costs, both in crop production and in transporting supplies in and products out, was the unmitigable cause. Problems of soil fertilisation, crop selection, varietal breeding development, and pest management are real, but many have been and more can be overcome by research. For example, high yielding cotton varieties, adapted to the black soils of the Ord River Project, were introduced. Insect pests attacked them but could be controlled by frequent spraying. The costs of spraying, added to others in growing, harvesting, and shipping the crop, however, have made cotton production uneconomic. The Australian ideal of a high minimal wage for all residents of the country has been achieved after long struggles. It will not be abandoned easily, but in the North universally high wages are both a result and a cause of raising costs of such things as construction to twice what they are in metropolitan areas.

That there are large populations in Southeast Asia who would be happy to work at one-tenth of the Australian minimum wage, and could survive and prosper relatively at such wages because they could also produce much of their own food, must be reckoned with. The once widely-voiced fear that an Asian power would conquer and occupy valuable unused Australian land has subsided, at least temporarily. Australia's ability to play the role of friendly neighbour to populous and poor countries to its north has been sustained by gifts of monetary, commodity and technical aid, but it is politically impossible to expand such gifts to a level that meets the problem, even difficult to sustain them at all when local economic problems arise.

A scenario in which either private individuals or the Australian Government undertook to establish Asian farmers in an area such as the Ord River Valley or the Adelaide River plains to grow food crops for their hungry countries could well yield far more aid for a given investment than current arrangements. It could even be

profitable. At the present time the main barrier to such an arrangement is insistence on the same basic wage structure throughout the country. Maintaining this barrier into the twenty-first century on its present moral and humanitarian grounds is likely to be impossible. Doing so by power-based legalism may not be easier and would certainly be expensive. The Aborigines lost their continent as did the North American Indians because others wanted to and could make more intensive use of it. While a world-wide propaganda attack on Australia for holding resources undeveloped that others would like to use and feel they need may be deferred for a decade, assuming its permanent avoidance requires a Bourbon-like confidence. In my judgement in the longer term the real question is whether the Australian polity or some other one will manage the agricultural development of the North. What is happening to the natives of West Irian, almost without world objection, might well be considered by those so concerned about aboriginal land rights.

The Concern for Conservation

Simply because of the low population density wild landscapes characterise the North. Those who have seen the region realise that they are not pristine landscapes. Few places on earth are so regularly and completely raked by fire; much, though not all, the burning is man-caused. But here is a vast wilderness where the native flora and fauna survive with minimal human interference. Areas of such extent are scarce in the world's tropics and are rapidly becoming scarcer. The goal of preserving extensive wilderness, both for scientific study and the preservation of the gene pools of organisms threatened with extinction and for its aesthetic appeal to visitors, has a strong attraction for many persons, often influential and articulate ones. Extensive parks have been set up, particularly where striking topography enhances the scenery. To the extent that tourism has proven attractive the wilderness aspect is locally reduced, and the conservationist may seek to preserve wider areas. The incom-

patibility of this goal with settlement is patent.

The conservation of mineral resources presents a distinctive and complex set of problems. Through most of Australia's history mining has been a vital element of the economy and most of the products, in raw or partly refined state, have been exported for the sustenance of larger and more industrialised economies. Commonly the financing of major mining projects was done by foreign capital and profits, often very large ones, similarly were exported. The benefits to Australia were employment at relatively high wages, taxes and royalties, often rather modest, and an important amount of foreign exchange that has allowed the country to stockpile agricultural exports at times when prices were especially poor without the full impact being felt by the population in general. The cost was the depletion of a fund resource.

It has been a truism of western economics that mineral resources should be worked whenever it was possible to work them profitably. Failure to do so would risk their ceasing to be resources because of the discovery of deposits elsewhere or the development of substitutes. This dogma has been shaken by the petroleum crisis of the last few years. By sharply limiting their production, at the same time prolonging its life, the petroleum exporting countries have been able to raise prices to achieve increased gross returns on lower output. With rapidly growing industrial demand for minerals the possibility of raising prices by limiting supplies has occurred to people in Australia and elsewhere. The efforts in regard to copper, where Australia's resources are modest, have not been notably successful, but there is widespread opinion that in high grade iron ore and uranium, where Australia holds a large fraction of the world's exportable reserves, deferring development or restricting production could be advantageous in the long term and not too costly immediately. In this regard there is probably a fundamental difference between northern and southern views. In the North increased mining activity is widely, and

probably accurately, recognised as the only immediately available basis for improved economic conditions and the creation of an infrastructure that will make living conditions more comfortable. In the south other economic options seem to be available. I have encountered in the North ardent proponents of limiting mineral production but have no assessment of how representative they are. All such proponents were, not surprisingly, employed or supported by some government agency.

For most people, including this author, attitudes toward conservation in general and in its several aspects are based on moral and aesthetic considerations. They are not based on economic analysis, and it is hard to forecast one's own, let alone another's, position when a trade-off with an economic consideration is possible or necessary. In general those with strongly positive attitudes toward conservation are in the privileged sectors of society, especially educationally but also economically. That this is an elitist minority is compensated by its being an especially articulate one. Many things can be conserved, from especially scenic features to the most ordinary landscapes (of interest just for their ordinariness) to unspoiled aboriginal cultures.

In the vast nearly empty spaces of the Australian North many things can be conserved for a long time with little disruption to the economic life and development of the area. Even extremely fragile phenomena can be so far away from any modern human activity that they are *ipso facto* protected. It should be noted too that if they require such protection they will not be available for even the most carefully controlled observation by tourists or anyone else. A fully independent aboriginal community is a case in point. Obviously it should be self-sufficient for sustenance, but it should also be able to exercise social control according to its own rules. Many of the traditional aboriginal sanctions and validations of status through initiation ceremonies are not only illegal in the eyes of Australian laws but grossly immoral by national

standards. If a fully independent aboriginal community were desired, admission to it of Aboriginal Affairs advisors, health services, and educational personnel is no less unsettling than a tourist hotel built adjacent to the community, though the effects are more subtle. Protection from prying tourists or anthropologists can more effectively be approached from the general standpoint of right to privacy. The same considerations apply to a delicate ecological situation where sensitive endemic species suffer from any intrusion.

One gets the feeling from the press and the electronic media that there is a body lying in wait to oppose any economic project by waving the banner of conservation. An ultimate and never-absent defence rests on the existence at the place of proposed activity of spots that are or were sacred to some aboriginal group.¹ Cutting any plant or disturbing any animal community damages Australia's unique biotic heritage.

As one firmly committed to the conservation ethos I would hope that it will strive toward more limited and perhaps realisable goals. Aboriginal communities can no more be kept apart from the rest of the world than Australia can remain free of economic and social influences from Asia. The most that can be feasible is to afford them some protection while they develop adaptive modes to aid their members in interacting with the outside world. Because of sparse settlement there are still ecological communities where rare endemic species can survive and failure to preserve them would be a tragedy. The notion that every individual galah or wallaby must be protected along with its environment cannot be implemented, and non-discriminating protectionism risks losing the unique

¹The listing of sacred sites on the Gove Peninsula, presented in all seriousness, could be matched anywhere in Australia. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper 227, 1974:20-21.)

ecologic niches as well. Where major tourist attractions have been identified the problem is one of controlled and reasonably sited development rather than exclusion.

The vast extent of the aboriginal reserve in east Arnhem Land makes it especially vulnerable. Thousands of square miles of it away from the coast are not even visited by one Aborigine a year. Attempting to prohibit its exploration so that no resources attractive to exploitation will be discovered is likely to be a complete failure in a world of limited resources and increasing demands on them. It has recently been pointed out that providing the Aborigines of Arnhem Land with outboard motorboats and four-wheel-drive vehicles as well as nets and guns has already seriously depleted the crocodile population and threatens its local extinction. Other species of birds, fish, and mammals that have value for food or sale are under similar threat.¹

The Bureaucratic Concern

A recent examination of labour deployment in Darwin² showed that just prior to the December 1974 cyclone more than one-fifth of the total population was employed by some government agency. The 1971 census shows something less than half of the population as part of the labour force. A rough combining of the two figures leads to a conclusion that, apart from mining towns where the ratio is much lower, 50 per cent of the labour force consists of direct government employees. Such a figure would apply to Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine in the Northern Territory and at least to Kununurra and Derby in Western Australia. Since government support provides

¹ Messel, in *The Australian*, 12.6.76:21.

² Bauer, February 1977:24-31.

the principal income to all aboriginal settlements in the North, with the possible exception of those on Groote Eylandt where there are mining royalties and some mine-related employment, those Aborigines may also be regarded as government employees, sometimes engaged in maintenance or other work around the settlement.

In Australia as a whole the portion of the total workforce engaged by the Government is about 25 per cent, a relatively high figure because many fundamental economic services such as water supply, electric power, and frequently rail, sea and air transport are provided by government agencies. When this figure goes up to 50 per cent, as in the Northern Territory and in the Kimberley district of Western Australia, a singularly government-dominated economy is represented. Since governments provide housing for their employees the bulk of the residential construction industry depends on government contracts. In addition to government office buildings, the large edifices constructed by insurance companies in Darwin only exist because they are assured of rents from government occupants. Finally, commercial enterprises in such towns depend on government orders and the business of government employees.

Because of the many services Australian governments normally provide - education, police, sanitation, postal and telephone service, etc. - a considerable fraction of the employment at the normal settlement will be from the Government, probably 20 per cent, and it will increase proportionately to population growth. (Where it is lower in certain mining towns it is because the mining companies have taken over normal government functions.) There is normally a continuing and probably healthy tension between government agencies that want to expand their functions and the private sector which wants to restrict them to hold down taxes.

When the proportion of government employment rises as high as it has in the Northern Territory, however, that

tension disappears. The private sector of the economy recognises that its prosperity and growth depend on sustaining and expanding governmental activity and expenditure. Further, it is easy for all parties to recognise that the funds to support this activity are raised in taxes primarily from other parts of the country. Thus the government bureaucracy and its economically dependent supporters constitute the principal political constituency in the North. Even the mining companies, though concerned to minimise the taxes and royalties they pay to State and national governments, tend to want to see as much of their contributions as possible spent in the North, relieving them of supplying more than their share of the infrastructure than is the national norm and providing greater amenities for their labour force.

The Parkinsonian principle seems to be inherent in government bureaucracies. Its operation is so structural that virtually all individuals engaged comply with it. Each department seeks to enlarge its functions and increase the resources available to it. In that way each member obtains security of employment and improves his chances for advancement. Although there may be inter-departmental competition over the assignment of functions all co-operate in seeking to maximise the total available resources. Within the North itself there is no effective countervailing force.

On an attitudinal basis government employees in the North can be divided into two groups. Among both State and Federal employees there are those who foresee a career in the locality or at least in the area where they are working. The other group sees itself as transient, serving a finite term to gain more rapid advancement or in penance for poor performance in a capital or other more comfortable locality. Though probably a minority, the latter group includes a large fraction of those in managerial and policy-making positions. While both groups support the Parkinsonian principle and seek the highest income and the greatest possible amenity in their

living and working conditions, there are probably subtle and not easily analysable differences in the goals they pursue in the expenditure of the resources available to them. It seems likely that those who foresee a full career in the North would more strongly favour long-term developments leading to a more balanced, less government-dependent economy. Those planning a briefer stay would seek immediate increases in government expenditures.

The countervailing force is a distant one, the general Australian public who will ultimately resist a single sparsely populated region getting an ever-larger fraction of the national budget. The threat is real but easy to overlook when all one's colleagues press for more personnel, new projects and wider responsibilities. In the Northern Territory, which is currently seeking greater political autonomy and influence, an unusual political configuration reigns. A strongly conservative Legislative Assembly gives almost unanimous support to increased government expenditure and enlargement of the local bureaucracy.

Conclusion

From a survey of the history of the Australian North from 1824 to the present one is forced to conclude that truly enormous public funds invested in settlement and development have been singularly unproductive. The only real achievement was in keeping any foreign power from establishing itself on the continent. The mining booms, to the extent they were profitable, and the pastoral activities which were profitable only when they could supply a mining boom, received little and needed little public support.¹

It is suggested that a major reason for this failure in the past and particularly in most recent times is that

¹ Bauer, 1964: Part 2.

public policy was pursuing more than one goal at the same time, and these goals at least partly conflicted with one another. A simple example of such a conflict is the investment of millions of dollars in beef roads for the expressed purpose of reducing costs and improving the productivity of the pastoral industry. Shortly after the programme got underway pastoral costs were greatly increased by the legal requirement that Aborigines on the stations be paid award wages. Each of these programmes met a public concern and its goals were sincerely regarded as virtuous by its sponsors. In effect they more or less cancelled each other. Aboriginal employment decreased and another major investment in aboriginal welfare was required.

I see little prospect for significant results from public investment in the North until a system of priorities among goals is firmly established. What they should be can only be determined by informed political judgement by the entire Australian population. Since each goal has legitimacy none need to be completely abandoned. Permitting the pursuit of one goal - conservation for example - to negate the effectiveness of a major investment in agricultural development, however, can only be disillusioning. If protection of large populations of magpie geese and brolgas has the more imperative claim, large-scale rice production probably will not be allowed to develop and public investment to support it would be wasted if not counter-productive.

Explicit identification of inherent conflicts among diverse popular goals is essential to informed political judgement.

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*"HOSTILITY, WARNING, SUSPICION":
TOM AIKENS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE
NORTH QUEENSLAND LABOUR PARTY,
1939-1949*

Ian Moles^{*}

I

When the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in Queensland was practically annihilated as a political force in the 1974 State election, the longest and loudest chortles came from a man whom for thirty years the ALP had tried politically to obliterate, for not only did he himself survive the debacle but in doing so also outlasted every other contemporary in the Queensland Parliament, Labor or non-Labor. He had become the doyen or "father" of the legislature, the man who had survived in elected office longer than any other incumbent, the man who may well hold the record for longevity as an Independent in any parliament acknowledging the pater-nity of Westminster. He was Thomas Aikens, since 1944 leader and sole parliamentary representative of the North Queensland Labour Party (NQLP).¹ The NQLP originally the Hermit Park Branch of the Australian

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¹ In the first half of 1974 the word "labour" was finally dropped from the party's name. The significance of this change was simply that the party leader adjudged official Labor's electoral chances throughout the State as being the worst for decades. He was soon proved devastatingly right.

Labor Party until its "expulsion" in 1942 by the ALP's Queensland Central Executive (QCE), dominated the municipal politics of Townsville, now Queensland's largest provincial city, from 1939 to 1949. For three of those years (1943-46) the NQLP ruled Townsville in coalition with the Communist Party - the first of only two occasions in Australian electoral history when the Communist Party gained not merely elected representation but also active participation in government.¹

Historically, the isolation of North Queensland communities both from one another and the main centres of population in the south had produced what its historian has described as "fierce local loyalties", "go-it-alone patriotism" and "direct-action radicalism".² Aikens' election to parliament in 1944 was a manifestation of all three phenomena; so, too, were two other features of the same election - a spectacular drop in public support for the ALP Government that had ruled Queensland continuously, with but a single brief interruption, since 1915, and the electoral success of two other radicals (one of them the only communist ever to enter an Australian legislature) in North Queensland seats which were traditional ALP strongholds. The 1944 election was the more remarkable to the extent that in the entire period 1915-41 the ALP had at no stage held less than three-quarters of the State seats between Mackay and Cairns, and for three successive elections (1935, 1938 and 1941) won all nine

¹

The other was the Kearsley Shire Council in New South Wales. Between 1939 and 1946 the Communist Party gained considerable support in local government elections throughout Australia and scored a number of electoral victories. Five communists were elected to the Kearsley Shire Council in 1944 in local government elections at which a total of eighteen communists throughout New South Wales were successful. (See Jones, 1972:27 and Davidson, 1969:93.)

²

Bolton, 1963:163, 320, 336.

of the electorates in the northern region.

"Go-it-alone patriotism" was aroused whenever North Queenslanders felt that Queensland Governments were neglecting the north. Mass defections from the ALP were one way in which they registered their disapproval, and in fact the 1944 election was merely the culmination of a long series of disputes going back to the 1860s. All the grievances could be epitomised in the catchcry that "Queen Street Governments were indifferent to the north and even contemptuous of it". ALP Governments were sensitive to northern criticism and tried to combat it. Indeed, in addition to being a party that deliberately set out to attract all classes and all interests throughout the State, the ALP was also the only consistent "northern" party. "By spending loan moneys freely in northern and far northern Queensland on public developmental works such as roads, bridges, harbours, sewerage, forestry, schools and other buildings", the party set out to kill "with the one stone both the Separation Movement and the Country-National Party".¹ The north also received a generous allocation of Cabinet portfolios, not to mention Premierships (Theodore, Gillies, McCormack and Forgan Smith all represented North Queensland constituencies); it had influential voices within the councils of the ALP; its major industry, sugar, was well protected. But to many in the north such solicitude was often seen as inadequate or insincere, or both - as indeed it seemed in itself a tacit admission on the part of governments that the north really had been neglected.

"Direct-action radicalism" was an amalgam of two regional peculiarities. On the one hand, isolation and localism bred self-reliance, independence of spirit, the sort of "irreverent" radicalism, according to Bolton, "which chose a man irrespective of his label, and enjoyed cocking a snook at respectable party politicians".² On

¹ Fry, 1935:90.

² Bolton, 1963:337.

the other hand, the very nature of most employment in the north, which was seasonal, irregular and itinerant or semi-itinerant in the mines and the bush or on sugar farms, wharves and railways, itself bred a "rugged individualism", a "conditioned recklessness" and an "undisciplined vehemence" that merely reinforced the primary influences of history and geography.¹

Both essential elements of the North Queensland tradition fused in the upbringing and education of Thomas Aikens who was born in Hughenden on 28 April 1900. As a schoolboy in Charters Towers, Tom was brought up in an aggressive anti-capitalist environment, a product both of the miners' collectivist vigour in remedying their grievances and of the exceptional quality of their leadership which life on the gold fields seemed invariably to engender and attract.² Later, as a roustabout in the shearing shed of Oxton Downs Station outside Julia Creek, he also absorbed the rebellious spirit of the "nomads" and "ramblers" - the shearers and itinerant bush workers of North Queensland whose militancy was a byword in the labour movement.³ Finally, in Cloncurry, he joined the Queensland Railways and completed an exacting political apprenticeship as Acting Secretary, Vice President and President of the Australian Railways' Union (ARU), Delegate to the Northern District Committee of the ARU, Secretary of the Cloncurry Branch of the ALP, Councillor and Deputy Chairman of the Cloncurry Shire Council.

The years during which Aikens held elected office in Cloncurry were also characterised by a progressive disillusionment among workers with the ALP State Government that ruled in Brisbane. When the ALP eventually fell from power in 1929, after fourteen years continuously in

¹ Cutler, in Iremonger *et al.*, 1973:81-102, esp. 82, 85.

² Stoodley, chap. 11, in Murphy *et al.*, 1970:esp. 164-67.

³ Cutler, in Iremonger *et al.*, 1973:83-84.

office, this was because large numbers of its hitherto loyal supporters deserted it.¹ The root cause of the problem was a twofold one: on the one hand, some sections of the labour movement deplored the snail's pace at which socialisation appeared to be proceeding; on the other hand, a much larger core of workers discovered to its chagrin that the Labor Government was not only not the model employer that they had expected it to be but even a downright unsympathetic one. Nowhere in Queensland were these feelings more pronounced than in the north and in the ranks of railway workers. As early as 1919 railwaymen had begun to denounce their employer for bureaucratic "injustice, pinpricking and tyranny".² Of the men who long led the ARU, Cribb remarks that they were "left-wing oriented", though not communists, "vigorous" in their beliefs, "frequently sounding like communists" and constantly proselytising an ideological position which was "one of socialism with strong Marxist over-tones".³ Increasingly the Government responded by stigmatising them as "revolutionaries" and "communists".

Transferred to Townsville during the interregnum of the Moore Government, Aikens became a foundation member of the Hermit Park Branch of the ALP whose members, almost to a man, belonged to the ARU. He also found that the political climate of Townsville was even more militant, if that were possible, than the one in which he had earlier received his political initiation. Many of the ramblers and nomads from the west eventually ended up in Townsville; the place had also acquired a reputation for industrial anarchy that most residents traced back to "Bloody Sunday" in 1919 - the riotous culmination of

¹ Volker, 1962:14.

² *The Militant*, 1.9.19.

³ Cribb, 1964:29, 39; Cribb, in Iremonger *et al.*, 1973: 228, 236.

a meatworkers' strike in which police fired on workers and a number of people were injured. After 1922, Townsville's radical reputation was further enhanced by her status as organisational centre of the communist movement in North Queensland. Throughout the 1930s the Communist Party enjoyed a period of "remarkable growth" which was without parallel anywhere else in Australia, culminating in 1944 when F.W. Paterson, barrister, Townsville alderman, former Rhodes Scholar, became the first and so far the only communist member of an Australian parliament.¹

An accomplished bush orator, Aikens played the role of acknowledged left-wing spokesman with relish and panache. In 1936 he was elected to an aldermanic seat on the Townsville City Council; on his second try in 1939 he became deputy mayor after polling more votes than any other Labor candidate. Most lunchtimes, the Labor municipal caucus met conspiratorially behind the locomotive foreman's office and, huddled over their battered black tucker boxes, thrashed out the policies which were to shape Townsville's destiny over the next decade. What eventually emerged was a determination not only to proceed with the public acquisition of the city's main utilities, but also to initiate municipal competition in a great many lesser fields traditionally reserved to private enterprise; in short, to inaugurate a bold, thoroughgoing and, in many respects, novel programme of municipal socialisation. During and immediately after World War II, a city council controlled by a coalition of Hermit Park "ALP" and communist aldermen (which in 1943 went to the polls as the "Greater Townsville Labour Party") effected the public ownership of a remarkable range of utilities and services - a ladies' rest room (incorporating a free baby-stroller service for mothers shopping in the city), a wood depot, a fruit and vegetable mart, a legal aid department, a municipal ice works and a child care centre; by 1949 plans were well in hand

¹

Jones, 1972:57, 91.

for the development of "workers' housing", a people's bakery and the "municipalisation" of all bus services when the Hermit Park group finally fell from power.

II

From the very outset, however, there had been a snag. Tom Dougherty, later Federal Secretary of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) and then its northern district secretary, a man whose stature and pertinacity made him at least the equal of Aikens, challenged the left-wing champion for leadership of the labour movement in Townsville.¹ As the principal local mouthpiece and representative of ALP right-wing orthodoxy, which was gradualist, multi-class and moderate, Dougherty was bound to clash with Aikens: each was so very much alike in the strength of his ambition and ideological conviction, but each faced the other from opposite ends of their party's ideological spectrum - Aikens on the left, Dougherty on the right.

Aikens already had reason to be suspicious of the AWU. The inner cabal of the ALP's ruling body in Queensland, the QCE, whose members possessed impeccable, right-wing AWU credentials, had once before frustrated Aikens in the search for his political grail. In 1933, less than three years after arriving in Townsville, he had nominated for selection as an ALP aldermanic candidate at the municipal election of that year, only to have the QCE refuse his endorsement "because of insufficient member-

¹ T.N.P. Dougherty, General Secretary of the Australian Workers' Union since 1944. Dougherty was AWU District Secretary for North Queensland from 1938 to 1942. The AWU District Organiser at the time was W.F. Edmonds, later Federal Member for Herbert and an unsuccessful opponent of Aikens' in the 1960 State election (after being defeated in Herbert in 1958). Moles, in Hughes, 1969: 314.

ship qualifications".¹ It seemed an incomprehensible decision in view of his already long experience as an alderman and Deputy Chairman of the Shire Council in Cloncurry. Subsequently, Aikens' nomination as a candidate for the 1936 municipal election was approved,² presumably dispelling any lowering clouds of resentment.

But not for long. The death of the ALP State Member of Parliament for Townsville, M.P. (Mossy) Hynes, early in 1939 coincided with Aikens' re-election to Town Hall in a poll that gave him only a handful of votes fewer than Talbot Heatley, the most conspicuously popular figure in the history of local government in the city; and Townsville soon buzzed with the name of the man who was odds-on favourite to win the party plebiscite for selection as ALP candidate for Townsville, in succession to "Mossy" Hynes. All of Townsville, that is, except Tom Dougherty.

In the intervening years since 1936, the dignities and perquisites of elected office, far from moderating Aikens, had only made him more militant, more confident of the eventual realisation of his socialist goals. Early in 1936, with civil war menacing in Spain and the Popular Front there already formed, the Labor Party in Queensland had taken pains to redefine its attitude towards communism.³ All ALP branches throughout the State were instructed not to "participate in any movement originating from the Communist Party or any of its affiliat-

¹ QCE Mins. (Exec.), 10.11.32; 1.3.33; 22.8.33; 12.10.33.

² QCE Mins. (Gen.), 26.11.35. Twenty nominations from Townsville went forward to the QCE for endorsement. All were confirmed except those of J.T. Bolger and G. Bordujenko, two men with known communist associations.

³ QCE Mins. (Gen.), 4.3.36.

ions".¹ However, the actual outbreak of war in Spain had the same effect upon Aikens that it did on legions of socialists all over the world, particularly those who possessed an intellectual commitment to the socialist dogma: it not only rekindled their loyalties but invested them with crusading fervour. In Townsville, bastion of working-class radicalism, the Townsville Branch of the ALP was first cautioned and suspended by the QCE,² then deregistered "because of wilful violation" of ALP Rules, including "association with anti-ALP bodies".³ The Hermit Park Branch now held aloft the banner of orthodox Labor, annoying as it no doubt seemed to the QCE that the obstreperous Aikens, through his membership of Hermit Park, should have survived their recent purge. Another ploy therefore had to be devised to extirpate Aikens and the radicalism and contumacy which he personified.

Dougherty set out to strip Aikens of his power by alienating him from the other ALP aldermen of the municipal caucus over which Aikens, as deputy mayor, presided. From the beginning of 1939 Aikens found himself regularly

¹ *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 4.3.36.

² *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 14.10.36.

³ *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 15.10.36. See also *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 10.9.37, where, under the heading "Communist Activities", the QCE Secretary reported on the closing of the Townsville Branch and "the publication of the letter directing the closure in the *North Queensland Guardian*, a Communist paper, five days after the letter had been posted from Brisbane." Upon representation from Mr C.G. Jesson, State Member for Parliament for Kennedy, the electorate immediately contiguous to Townsville on the northern side, and incorporating the northern suburbs of Townsville City, the Townsville Branch was shortly afterwards "resuscitated" within the Kennedy electorate. *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 12.1.39.

accosted by the other ALP aldermen immediately before the monthly Thursday-night meeting of the full council; and it invariably transpired that the purpose of these improvised encounters in the Town Hall vestibule was to inform the deputy mayor of their intention to flout caucus decision. Aikens soon discovered that, at the conclusion of the customary Sunday-morning caucus meetings, his fellow aldermen repaired over the road to the Alexandra or Excelsior hotels where Dougherty received them in earnest conclave. His suspicions of collusion were amply confirmed when one of the aldermen suggested that Dougherty be given a seat at the caucus table.¹ Aikens objected volubly.

Meanwhile, the QCE had received ten nominations to contest the plebiscite for official endorsement as the party's candidate for the Townsville seat. All were approved except Tom Aikens'.² An outcry at once went up in Townsville against this cavalier treatment of the popular deputy mayor, the favourite son of the working class. There was "no more loyal Laborite" than Tom Aikens; the treatment meted out to him deserved "emphatic

¹ *Memoirs of Thomas Aikens*, unpublished transcript of tape recordings in four folders, held by the writer (*Aikens Mem.* [1] - [4]), (3):141.

² *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 11.4.39. See also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 11.4.39: "The Secretary reported the recommendation of the Executive Committee that all the candidates for Townsville, with the exception of T. Aikens, be endorsed. The meeting decided to adopt the recommendation and submit the question of endorsing T. Aikens to a ballot. The ballot resulted in ten (10) votes for endorsement of Mr. Aikens and twenty-one (21) against his endorsement."

protest".¹ Aikens himself made no attempt to appeal against his exclusion from the plebiscite,² probably not in dudgeon but as a gesture of cool, political calculation: there were plenty of others only too eager to take up cudgels on his behalf. Indeed, in response to an avalanche of complaints, the QCE decided to reopen the matter and convene a special meeting to reconsider Aikens' case.³ But there were sound reasons why Aikens' head had to roll, and the original decision was reaffirmed.⁴

There were in fact two reasons - one real and one spurious - for what to Aikens was his inexplicable rejection by the party he loved and which he had served so loyally and so long. How to reconcile so manifestly unjust a decision as that just made by the QCE with his election earlier in the same month (April 1939) first as alderman and then as Deputy Mayor of the City of Towns-

¹ *Minutes of the North Queensland Labour Party (NQLP Mins.)*, 30.4.39. In 1939 Aikens was Vice-President of the Hermit Park Branch. Fervently protesting the QCE slight on Aikens, the branch carried a resolution that "if any person or body can or will lay a charge or charges of disloyalty or of contravention of the Rules and Constitution or the spirit of the Labour Party, this Branch is ready to have such charges investigated and, if it can be substantiated, will immediately discipline Aikens."

² *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 18.4.39. However, the QCE said that it was prepared to consider an appeal from Aikens if he made one.

³ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 21.4.39.

⁴ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 26.4.39. See also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 26.4.39.

ville? ¹ How to justify such aspersions on the party loyalty and credentials of a man just elected by the second-largest popular mandate in Townsville's history? Aikens knew that he was invulnerable to attack on political grounds; perhaps for that very reason he appeared the more vulnerable and unprepared for the sort of attack that came. The word was put around that Aikens had a flaw in his character which brought the party into electoral opprobrium and disfavour: he drank too much. This was the spurious reason.

There is no doubt that Aikens tiddled a lot, a habit he acquired in the dry and sun-scorched plains of western Queensland. The characteristic style of social drinking in the west was the "bender", in which stationhands, stockriders, shearers, miners and fossickers, who normally spent weeks or months at toil in remote places, suddenly descended upon the pubs and brothels of towns like Hughenden, Richmond, Julia Creek and Cloncurry for wild binges lasting a weekend, a week, or even a month. The railwaymen and workers living in the towns were sucked into the vortex of social swilling set up by their thirsty agrarian cousins. There are indications that Aikens' drinking increased in the latter half of 1939 and in 1940, culminating in an attempt to remove him as deputy mayor "in view of [his] continued illness and present indisposition". ² In a sense, it would have

¹ There was, of course, a prima facie inconsistency between the QCE's recent endorsement of Aikens as an official ALP aldermanic candidate and its refusal to endorse his candidature for a State seat. One reasonable explanation would seem to be that, from the vantage point of ALP *apparatchiks* in Brisbane, Aikens, the big fish, could not do too much damage in the little pond of Townsville; but it would be too dangerous to let him loose in the much larger lake of State politics.

² *Townsville City Council Minutes*, Vol. 23 (TCC Mins. [23]):1443. See also *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* (TDB), 16.8.40.

been surprising if his intake had not risen. At a crucial time in life for any man - he was now in his fortieth year - disappointments and setbacks seemed to crowd in upon him. There was the estrangement from his colleagues in caucus; his exclusion from the plesiscite for the State seat; the whispering campaign about his most spectacular vice and his unfitness to belong to the ALP; the crisis of conscience which every ardent socialist experienced about this time when, on 23 August 1939 communism and nazism, supposed to be ideological opposites, concluded the Nazi-Soviet Pact, stupefying the world; finally, there was the devastating blow of having his enlistment in the armed forces rejected on medical grounds.¹

And all the while there was the struggle with Dougherty for hegemony within the working-class movement of Townsville. An issue typifying the mounting tension and antagonism between the two men concerned the implementation of one of Aikens' pet schemes - the granting of morning and afternoon "smokos" for council employees on manual work. The pro-Dougherty faction of ALP aldermen naturally could not oppose so popular a working-class measure, and Aikens, vehemently supported by the communist alderman, Paterson, easily had it passed at the council table.² However, Dougherty was opposed to the scheme because of a certain embarrassment which it caused him: the ten-minute morning and afternoon teas now available to AWU council employees had not yet been won

¹ See Aikens' remarks on his enlistment in a Legislative Assembly debate on 18 October 1945 (*Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, [1945-46] Vol. 186:942).

² *TCC Mins.*, (23):1302. See also *ibid.*:1314, 1322, 1371, 1382; and *TDB*, 16.12.39, 18.12.39. F.W. Paterson capped a distinguished scholastic career by winning a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, before being called to the Bar in Townsville. After a stint as alderman on the Townsville City Council, he was twice elected to the State Parliament as Member for Bowen (1944-50).

for AWU employees in other occupations.¹ Aikens had clearly won this round in their fight for the title of working-class champion in Townsville.

But Aikens' insistent, even ostentatious, brand of radical socialism was anathema to the QCE and its minions. This was the real reason why he had to be destroyed. Earlier in the year, the QCE had made pointed reference to his "anti-ALP activities" and had accordingly blocked his attempted entry into State politics.² As the year went by, Aikens' popularity in Townsville waxed; not only that, he remained obdurate and unrepentant in his socialist zeal despite such transfiguring events as the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Soviet invasions of Poland and Finland. Clearly the man had to be discredited; just as clearly the man's political popularity made this a formidable undertaking. When a frontal assault on Aikens' politics proved a miserable failure, his enemy tried the more insidious approach of undermining his character.

The initial political attack was launched as a movement to depose him as deputy mayor. It was alleged that some members of the Labor Party, among them "those who held representative positions", actually spoke off the same platform as members of the Communist Party;³ that these renegades excused themselves by saying that they spoke not as members of the ALP but as officials or members of their unions; that they included Alderman Aikens

¹ TDB, 20.12.39. When Dougherty addressed a meeting of workers at the new aerodrome at Garbutt, his embarrassment was plain. Asked why the smokos had not yet been introduced at the aerodrome, he told the men that he had received "no official intimation from the Council concerning smokos".

² QCE Mins. (Exec.), 18.4.39.

³ NQLP Mins., 22.11.39.

in particular, whose conduct was "definitely having a detrimental effect upon the Labor movement in Townsville".¹ At a special meeting of the Hermit Park Branch on 22 November 1939, it was moved successfully that Aikens be asked to tender his resignation as deputy mayor.²

Characteristically choosing offence as the best form of defence, Aikens refused to resign and instead began to muster his supporters in the party - those who gravitated towards the extreme left of the party spectrum. His efforts met with notable success when, on 21 January 1940, he was re-elected vice-president.³ At the next monthly meeting of the branch, it was now Aikens' turn to move successfully that the QCE be asked to conduct "an impartial and comprehensive investigation into the political and industrial history of Alderman T. Aikens in order to convince the QCE that no valid reason operates for his non-endorsement by that body".⁴ In order to impress on the QCE his indifference and contempt towards those fulminating against him, he also defiantly

¹ *NQLP Mins.*, 22.11.39.

² *NQLP Mins.*, 22.11.39. Three prominent members of the anti-Aikens faction at this time were Aldermen Corcoran, Hamilton and Illich, all of whom later defected from the Hermit Park Labour Party. The motion to request Aikens' resignation was put by Illich.

³ *NQLP Mins.*, 21.1.40. Aikens had previously been vice-president in 1935, 1936 and 1937. He was president in 1938.

⁴ *NQLP Mins.*, 25.2.40. Aikens also gave notice that at the next meeting (March) of the branch he would move the rescission of the November resolution requesting him to tender his resignation as deputy mayor. The *NQLP Minutes* for March 1940 contain no record of what actually occurred, but Aikens remained deputy mayor.

nominated for election to the Federal Senate.¹ Later, disingenuously seeking an explanation for the QCE's expected, and indeed, brusque, non-endorsement, the Hermit Park Branch was told that the QCE did not have to give reasons for its actions.²

But if the QCE could prevent the explosion of Aikens on to the State and Federal political scene, its attempts to stifle him locally were so far proving dismally ineffectual. The secondary, personal attack on Aikens was therefore launched with the aim of expelling him from the Hermit Park Branch and from the ALP.

After a "bender", Aikens often dried out in a Gordonvale pub under the benign and tolerant eye of its licensee, his mate Jack Sullivan. In July 1940 Aikens was "on holidays"³ from the Railways Department and forwarded an apology for his absence from the July monthly meeting of the city council. The mayor was also due to take his holidays in the following month, and at the July meeting the motion was moved and carried that "in view of the continued illness and present indisposition of the Deputy Mayor", Alderman Mindham be appointed acting mayor for the period of the mayor's absence.⁴

Aikens was livid when he received word of this new attempt to defame and depose him; but again he proved more than a match for his detractors. There was statutory provision in the *Local Government Act* for the

¹ QCE Mins. (Gen.), 13.2.40.

² QCE Mins. (Exec.), 3.4.40 (in response to a similar request from the Oonoonba Branch in support of Aikens).

³ The euphemism was used by *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, reporting a public statement by Aikens after a lapsed meeting of the council in August (see TDB, 16.8.40).

⁴ TDB, 16.8.40.

appointment of an acting mayor, but only when both the mayor and deputy mayor were simultaneously absent or ill. Knowing this, Aikens hurried back to Townsville before the mayor's departure, denounced the "indubitably illegal" resolution, and assumed the duties of acting mayor.¹ Alderman Mindham had accepted the acting mayoralty only because he believed it to be "some internal arrangement" between Aikens and the other ALP aldermen.² When he learned that Aikens had been ignorant of the entire proceedings, he eagerly sought escape from his embarrassing position. There then occurred what must surely rank as one of the most extraordinary scenes in the history of Australian local government: "Tom, I tell you what I will do. I have been elected to office by a full meeting of the Council; but it will satisfy my conscience if you order me from the mayoral chair in the presence of the Town Clerk." Aikens summoned the town clerk: "Charlie Mindham, you are illegally occupying the mayoral chair. I order you to vacate it and restore to me my rights." Alderman Mindham hastily took his hat and left.³

For the next month Aikens became virtual dictator of Townsville. In a final, desperate attempt to remove him the other ALP aldermen took the unprecedented step of boycotting both the committee meetings and the full council meeting in August. All scheduled meetings lapsed for want of quorums, and at four of the five committee meetings Aikens was the only alderman present. Immediately before the scheduled meeting of the full council on 15 August, which in normal circumstances would have brought down the city's annual budget, Aikens was advised by the city accountant that, unless the rate were struck, the council would have insufficient

¹ *TDB*, 16.8.40.

² *Aikens Mem.* (3):142.

³ *Aikens Mem.* (3):142-43.

resources to meet its wages bills.¹ Moreover, as a calculated strategem in the ALP conspiracy to discredit Aikens, the Chairman of the Finance Committee had refused to countersign the usual pay cheque. As soon as the full meeting of council lapsed, Aikens ordered the town clerk quietly to accumulate cash-over-the-counter takings and to pay council employees from this unbanked reserve. Aikens himself tells the story with relish: "Word got around that the employees weren't going to get paid, that there was no money 'because of drunken Aikens'. So on pay day a large crowd of men and women gathered in the vestibule of the Town Hall. They were murmuring and restive. Eventually, three or four fellows came up the stairs, gingerly at first, but more brazenly with every step they took. At the top of the stairs, one shouted: 'We're here for our pay, but we know there won't be any; the women and kids will starve because of that drunk Aikens.' But the pay clerk called them forward, and, with enormous dignity tempered only by a look of mild surprise, said, 'Here is your pay.' And there they were, the pay envelopes, all nicely stacked up, with the pay sheets ready to sign. The men just stared in blank disbelief; and as soon as the crowd saw them retreating sheepishly down the stairs, there was a joyful rush up-stairs. Naturally, I was keen to get as much publicity for myself as I could, so I called some press reporters into the Mayor's parlour and gave them a prepared statement. Just at that moment, the Finance Committee burst in and the chairman said: 'We are here to sign the pay cheque.' I said" 'Too late, too late; you can sign it next week if you like, but I don't much care when you sign it.'" ² Aikens was fast transforming a seemingly hopeless situation into a personal political triumph: the attempt by his colleagues to depose and ostracise him had backfired. Indeed, far from being even remotely

¹ See "City Council: Temporary Overdraft" (TDB, 28.8.40).

² See "Lapse of Meeting Owing to Lack of Quorum" (TDB, 16.8.40). See also *Aikens Mem.* (3):143-44.

discredited, Aikens was now appearing as the saviour of the city and the cynosure of working-class acclaim.

A great burden has been thrown upon me, but I am determined to carry it through. I want to pay a tribute to the executive officers of the Council, all of whom, knowing the impregnability of my legal position, have rallied loyally round me and been of inestimable help and assistance in my endeavour to keep the people's ship afloat ... I have dealt with as much of the business as possible, secure in the belief that I am right, and that the great majority of the people will support me. ¹

Aikens' party opponents were now implacable in their determination to be rid of him. On 4 August a special meeting of the Hermit Park Branch was called "to discuss the position that had arisen in regard to the Deputy Mayorship of the Townsville City Council". ² A subcommittee was formed "to take all steps necessary to arrange to bring about the resignation from the Deputy Mayorship of Alderman Aikens"; ³ and Dougherty, at last making his entrance from the wings, proposed that the next meeting of the branch "deal with Alderman Aikens in conformity with Rule 105 for failing to carry out the instructions of the Labor Municipal Caucus". ⁴ However,

¹ TDB, 16.8.40. Aikens made many enemies on both left and right because he was "too often carried away by his love of the dramatic". See the communist newspaper, *North Queensland Guardian*, 19.4.40.

² NQLP Mins., 4.8.40.

³ NQLP Mins., 4.8.40.

⁴ NQLP Mins., 4.8.40.

another motion of no confidence in Aikens as Labor deputy mayor was withdrawn. ¹

Aikens was charged by letter; at the scheduled meeting of the branch on 18 August, he formally denied the charges made against him. ² Dougherty at once moved Aikens' expulsion from the Hermit Park Branch of the Australian Labor Party. Aikens' supporters moved an amendment that the charges against the deputy mayor be referred back to the municipal caucus and that they be dealt with by that body. ³ The amendment was defeated, but Aikens' men filibustered by gaining the suspension of Standing Orders to permit a full and unfettered discussion of Dougherty's motion. When, after long and heated wrangling, the motion was finally put and passed, though only by the narrow margin of twenty-four to nineteen, ⁴ the understanding prevailed that Aikens' membership was merely being suspended temporarily, "as a disciplinary measure", but not withdrawn; later, after a decent interval, a suitably contrite Aikens would be invited to resume his membership. ⁵ However, in a few

¹NQLP Mins., 4.8.40.

²NQLP Mins., 18.8.40.

³NQLP Mins., 18.8.40.

⁴NQLP Mins., 18.8.40.

⁵*E relatione* A.D. Murgatroyd. Party Rules distinguished between formal expulsion and "automatic" expulsion. For example, Rule 106 read: "Any member of a Branch or Affiliated Union who is definitely known to assist or in any way further the candidature of any candidate in opposition to an endorsed Labor candidate shall automatically cease to be a member of the ALP, and shall not be readmitted to membership without the approval of the QCE." Rule 105, under which Aikens was charged, attempted to encompass a much broader category of sins involving "violation of Party discipline" (see the corresponding Rules 48 and 49 in Australian Labor Party [State of Queensland], *Constitution and General Rules* amended 1971).

weeks, the QCE officially expelled him from the ALP.¹

Aikens never again became a member of the ALP, though he did resume his membership of the Hermit Park Branch. The explanation for that apparent anomaly consists in the fact that the branch itself was presently expelled from the ALP. By an astonishing quirk of fate, Tom Aikens leaped back on to his political platform; then, by equally astonishing political aplomb and in defiance of every accepted canon of political survival, he made the Hermit Park Branch into the dominant political force in Townsville, slaying the Goliath of the ALP and reversing the political behaviour of a generation.

III

Just as, historically, those Catholics who persisted in defying the Pope were on the whole the least zealous in their religion, so the most zealous of socialists in the first half of the twentieth century were those whose faith in Russia remained unshakeable the longest. True, the faith of many such votaries was severely strained at the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the subsequent Russian invasions of Poland and Finland; a generation more versed in ideology than in power politics was dumb-founded. But it could still be argued that the Nazi-Soviet alliance, like the alliance between Napoleon and Alexander I, was never a warm or willing one, and that both parties, foreseeing war with each other, had probably entered it mainly to gain time. A strong "Hands Off Russia" movement therefore persisted in the world's socialist parties, including Australia's, despite official ALP policy which proscribed any affiliations with communism and even prohibited ALP members from speaking at

¹ On 1 October 1940 the QCE asked Aikens to "show cause why he should not be expelled for unsatisfactory behaviour as a Labor Representative" (see *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 1.10.40). Since Aikens ignored this request, his expulsion presumably became effective from that date.

meetings also patronised by communists.¹ By the middle of 1941, however, Hitler had invaded Russia, the only qualms of conscience were thereby dissipated, and the protagonists of "Hands Off Russia", until then forced into a defensive posture, sallied forth with a vigorous campaign in direct support of Russia. Increasing numbers of Labor men publicly declared their sympathies for Russia and for various organisations in Australia marshalling financial and material aid for the Russians.²

One such organisation was the "Aid to Russia" Committee, a branch of which was formed in Townsville in August 1941. Although the initiative for the formation of the committee came from Aikens' close friend and ideological cousin, the communist alderman, Fred Paterson, the committee was coaxed into existence at a public meeting, and subsequently convened, by the city's respected and politically unexceptionable first citizen, the mayor, J.S. Gill, himself.³ Shortly afterwards, during October, the council decided to nominate two official representatives for appointment to the committee.⁴

¹ See, for example, *NQLP Mins.*, 21.4.40.

²The thoughts of the Federal Member for Herbert, which he expressed in a personal letter to Arthur Murgatroyd, Secretary of the Hermit Park ALP, are unusually frank and evocative: "I will just say this - if it was not for Russia, Germany would have smashed everything in England to pieces before now. With all due respect to any other opinion, I believe that if Hitler had not attacked Russia, and had spent the same energy and shown the same determination of beating Britain, my firm belief is that the British Empire would be no more." See Martens to Murgatroyd, 5.10.42, *Private Papers of Arthur Murgatroyd*.

³*TCC Mins.*, (24):1558.

⁴*TCC Mins.*, (24):1571. The nominees were Aldermen Mindham and Hamilton. Aldermen Corcoran and Illich were the nominees of the Hermit Park ALP.

Meanwhile, faced by mounting internal pressure, the ALP was in the process of redefining its policy towards communist and communist-front organisations. On 2 September, 1941 the Federal Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party in Opposition, John Curtin, issued a public manifesto denouncing any attempts to compromise Labor principles: "The Labor Party throughout the two years of war has resolutely refused to have anything to do with political intrigue and with seeking after advantage and position. We have said that we would give our all; our record has shown that we have done that. And we will continue to do so. ... I make [this] statement because I know the mind of the workers of Australia. They want none of manoeuvres and jockeying for position. Least of all do they want a Labor Government that would be but the miserable echo of a name. Their pledge, and our pledge, is to Australia." ¹ Promptly translating that manifesto into policy specifics, the Federal Executive of the ALP "[welcomed] Russia as one of our Allies and [congratulated] the people of that country on their magnificent fight against Nazi aggression", and approved the necessity of concluding military, diplomatic, and trade pacts with Russia, but excoriated the attempts by the Communist Party "to capitalize for their own purposes on the magnificent effort of the Russian people". ² The ALP's attitude towards the Communist Party and its subsidiaries therefore remained one of "hostility, warning, and suspicion". ³

With almost indecent haste (in view of the fact that its actions had yet to be endorsed by the full assemblage of the QCE), the Inner Executive on 4 September framed its own declaration in terms only slightly different from those of the Federal Executive. ⁴ The organisations

¹ *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 8.10.41.

² *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 8.10.41.

³ *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 8.10.41.

⁴ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 4.8.41.

placed under interdict in Queensland were the "Australia-Soviet Friendship League", the "Australian-Russian Association", and other "kindred" bodies. ¹ A circular embodying this declaration was at once despatched to all organisations affiliated with the QCE. ²

There was swift and excited response from a wide cross-section of working-class organisations. "Protests" came from the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, the Plumbers' and Gasfitters' Union (Brisbane), the Waterside Workers' Federation (Townsville), the Queensland Life and Fire Insurance Employees' Union, the Australian Builders Labourers' Federation, and the Bulimba (Brisbane) Branch of the ALP; "opposition" was voiced by the Wilston-Grange (Brisbane) ALP and the Federated Storemen and Packers' Union; "rejection" was demanded by the Kelvin Grove-Newmarket (Brisbane) ALP; and the United Operative Bricklayers' Society registered an emphatic "objection". ³

The Hermit Park ALP had not participated in this outcry against the QCE, undoubtedly for the very good reason that "Aid to Russia" was not among the organisations named in the circular of 5 September. Indeed, the ALP Federal Executive had specifically exempted from proscription a body known as "Medical Aid to Russia" because it was in fact an affiliate of the International Red Cross. ⁴ And, of course, in Townsville everyone knew that "Aid to Russia" was above reproach, patronised by the loyal and dignified old mayor and propped up by a heterogeneous membership of clergy and prominent business-

¹ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 4.8.41.

² This was sent out on 5 September 1941 (see *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 30.9.41).

³ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 30.9.41.

⁴ *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 8.10.41.

men. Possibly the QCE would have remained forever ignorant of its existence but for the disgruntled allegations of one man,¹ which were the immediate cause, on 10 November 1941, of a letter from the QCE to the Hermit Park Branch asking it to "define the position of members of the Hermit Park ALP supporting the Townsville 'Aid to Russia' Committee".² A dispute appeared to be developing as the rather ludicrous result of widespread confusion over nomenclature, for only now did the QCE decide that "Aid to Russia" was also a "Communist subsidiary organization".³ Lest others should fall into similar error, another circular letter, supplemental to that of 5 September, went out on 19 November to all ALP branches in Queensland, adding "Aid to Russia" to the index of banned bodies.⁴ Party members were enjoined "not to address meetings or take part in the business or any other activity of [the] Communist Party subsidiaries".⁵

The Hermit Park Branch at once repudiated the QCE

¹In October 1941 a plebiscite of ALP members in Townsville was held to select candidates for the local government election due early in 1942. One of the disappointed candidates, A.J. Eastaughffe, wrote to the QCE drawing attention to the association of several ALP members with the Townsville "Aid to Russia" Committee (see *Aikens Mem.* [3]:145). See also fn. 2, p. 89.

²Bryan (QCE Secretary) to Murgatroyd, 10.11.41 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³*QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 17.11.41; also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 18.11.41.

⁴Bryan to all ALP Queensland branches, 19.11.41, (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁵Bryan to all ALP Queensland branches, 19.11.41, (*Murgatroyd P.P.*). See also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 18.11.41.

directive; by twenty-eight votes to six it decided to retain its delegates on the Townsville "Aid to Russia" Committee because of its "non-political and non-sectarian" character.¹ "Only a very small minority [of the membership of "Aid to Russia"] had anything approaching Communistic sympathies",² and its ALP members were in fact aldermen representing the city council not only on "Aid to Russia" but also on other reputable community organisations such as the Australian Comforts Fund for the armed forces. If the aldermen were forced to resign from the committee, this would be an "unwarranted interference with their citizen rights"; such duress, moreover, would only "give an impetus to any move by those sympathetic towards the Communists to gain control of the Committee".³ It would be a "great loss" to the labour movement if Labor stalwarts, who had fought Labor's fight for up to forty years, withdrew from a committee which was "in existence simply to aid in securing a victory for the armies fighting for democracy in the present war".⁴

For the time being, the QCE replied in fairly temperate terms merely noting the Hermit Park decision "with regret".⁵ For its part, anxious to prevent the hardening of attitudes and the intervention of precipitate decisions, the Hermit Park Branch politely requested that a full inquiry be conducted into the differences

¹ Murgatroyd to Bryan, 24.11.41 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*). See also *TDB*, 25.11.41 (reporting the QCE letter and the Hermit Park vote).

² Murgatroyd to Bryan, 24.11.41 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³ Murgatroyd to Bryan, 24.11.41 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁴ Murgatroyd to Bryan, 24.11.41 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁵ Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1.12.41 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

between the two bodies.¹

Then the hammer-blow fell. On 15 January 1942 the QCE advised Hermit Park that, in response to the branch's request, a full investigation would be held "as promptly as possible";² but on the very same day letters went out to Aldermen Hamilton, Corcoran, Kogler and Illich, advising them that they had acted in contravention of resolutions both by the Federal Executive and the QCE of the ALP, and that they had therefore, by their own actions, "left the Party".³

When members of the Hermit Park Branch assembled for their annual general meeting on 26 January 1942, they were in a truculent mood. Corcoran and Illich, whom the QCE had forbidden to attend meetings of the party or the branch, were elected president and vice-president.

¹ Murgatroyd to Bryan, 21.12.41 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

² Bryan to Murgatroyd, 15.1.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³ Bryan to Murgatroyd, 15.1.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*). Similar letters went out to Jack Abercrombie, who was not yet an alderman, and to P.J. Eustace, who was not a member of the Hermit Park Branch (see Bryan to Hamilton, Corcoran, Kogler, Illich, Abercrombie, 15.1.42; also Bryan to Murgatroyd encl. to Eustace, 23.1.42 [*Murgatroyd P.P.*]). The decision to excommunicate, so to speak, was taken by the QCE on 12.1.42 (see *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 12.1.42). Discussion at this meeting suggests that Abercrombie and Eustace, though not aldermen, were added to the list of renegades because they were endorsed candidates for the expected municipal election (which the State Government postponed until 1943, however, because of the war emergency). See also *TDB*, 27.1.42. Eustace and Abercrombie at once appealed against the QCE decision, the former successfully, the latter unsuccessfully. (See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 19.2.42, 16.3.42.)

respectively.¹ By that single act of defiance, of course, the branch signified that it had no intention of deserting its comrades.² If a collision with the QCE were unavoidable, the QCE would bear sole responsibility; indeed, if the QCE persisted in its intransigent attitude, the entire labour movement in Townsville would be "smashed".³

Although the QCE remained unmoved,⁴ such dire prophecies were not wholly without foundation: events were already producing a clear polarisation of loyalties. In Brisbane, a mass meeting in the City Hall in support of "Aid to Russia" (31 October 1941) was indicative of the movement's growing momentum. The QCE launched investigations into the loyalties of branches and individual members,⁵ subsequently withdrawing its recognition from three ALP branches.⁶ "Are these people, the QCE, attempting to bring about the same thing that occurred in New South Wales without realizing what they are

¹Murgatroyd to Bryan, 10.2.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

²Reporting the meeting, the *Bulletin* called attention to the almost unanimous vote (thirty-four to one) of solidarity towards all six renegades (see *TDB*, 27.1.42).

³Murgatroyd to Bryan, 10.2.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁴At a meeting on 19 February 1942, the QCE decided that "as Messrs Illich and Corcoran were not entitled to be members of the Branch they could not be officers, and two loyal members should be elected in their place" (see *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 19.2.42).

⁵*QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 26.3.42. The Brisbane branches were Enoggera Terrace-Ashgrove, Kelvin Grove-Newmarket, and Wilston-Grange.

⁶*QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 26.3.42.

doing?" expostulated George Martens, Federal Member for the Townsville seat of Herbert, with the Secretary of the Hermit Park ALP, Arthur Murgatroyd.¹ "In Victoria they have done the same stupid thing - expelled them out of the Labor movement for being active in the Aid to Russia campaign. All I can say is 'God Bless Russia'!"²

Despite the menacing portents of branch deregistration in Brisbane, Hermit Park had not yet come under direct attack. For a time, it continued to plead with the QCE for the restitution of the rights of its most prominent members.³ The QCE not only declined to relent but for the first time, on 3 August 1942, issued a threat that Hermit Park might also be called upon "to return all books and property of the Branch to the QCE".⁴

¹ Martens to Murgatroyd, 5.10.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

² Martens to Murgatroyd, 5.10.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³ See, for example, *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 8.7.42.

⁴ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 3.8.42.

The threat was carried out a month later. ¹

Since the dénouement had now come, the Hermit Park Branch asked its friends to stand up and be counted. There seemed two possible avenues of support, local and national. First, was it true that "the sympathy of the vast majority of true Labor supporters in Townsville" ² went out to the men of the Hermit Park ALP? Second,

¹The rupture came in the curious form of a personal letter from the QCE Secretary to the Hermit Park Branch Secretary, Arthur Murgatroyd: "It is with deepest regret that I have to inform you that, in view of the decision arrived at by the Branch, conveyed in your letter of August 24, and following out a direction of the QCE, that the Hermit Park Branch is no longer a Branch of the ALP, Queensland Branch. You are therefore requested, at your earliest convenience to forward to this office all books, property and money in your possession." The text of this letter, but not its date, is reproduced in the local newspaper (*TDB*, 23.9.42). This date remains uncertain because the letter is missing from Murgatroyd's *Private Papers*, and there is no QCE Minute instructing the letter to be written (so that a taint of Machiavellianism still clings to the affair). *NQLP Minutes* for this particular period have also been lost. However, there was an advertisement in the *Bulletin* on 19 September calling a meeting of the branch on Sunday, 20 September "to discuss QCE letter re functioning of Branch". Murgatroyd no doubt inserted the advertisement immediately after receiving it the previous day (18 September), which means that it was probably written and posted on 16 September.

²This was the branch's claim in February when it took the crucial decision, in defiance of the QCE directive, to continue admitting banned members to meetings (see Murgatroyd to Bryan, 10.2.42 [*Murgatroyd P.P.*]).

would not a successful appeal to the Federal ALP to vindicate their stand and exculpate their members have the effect of presenting the QCE with a triumphal *fait accompli*? Accordingly, on 21 September 1942, Murgatroyd wrote to all branches in the Mundingburra, Townsville and Kennedy electorates, asking them to declare their sympathies.¹ The following day, he wrote a similar letter to the Federal Executive of the ALP in Melbourne, setting out the circumstances of the dispute with the QCE and requesting the good offices of the coming Federal Conference of the ALP as arbiter.² In each case it was stressed that the QCE had so far laid no formal charges against the Hermit Park ALP, nor had it convened the "inquiry" promised several months before. Hermit Park had declined to refuse its president and vice-president (Corcoran and Illich) admittance to its meetings; and it now wanted to know if its fellow branches and the Federal ALP recognised Hermit Park as a branch of the ALP or whether they agreed with the "undemocratic and unjustifiable instructions received from the QCE".

Not even the darkest of human tragedies is wholly devoid of drollery, and the downfall of the Hermit Park ALP was not for everyone the only focus of their anguish and concern. Sheer banality was not long dispelled by mighty questions of high principle. Among the manifold activities of the irrepressible Arthur Murgatroyd on behalf of the ALP, not the least was his position as Divisional Returning Officer for the Federal electorate of Herbert. A Federal election was imminent, and the nominations of all local aspirants for parliamentary honours closed with the QCE on 10 October. As

¹ Murgatroyd to Branch Secretaries of Garrick Street, Townsville, Oonoonba, Stuart, Ingham, Ayr and Kennedy ALPs, 21.9.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

² Murgatroyd to McNamara, 22.9.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

soon as the sitting Member for Herbert, George Martens, who lived 2,000 miles away in Sydney, heard of the brouhaha in the north, he frantically wired Murgatroyd to see if his nomination had gone forward before the blow-up in Townsville.¹ It had not; for, in addition to being divested of the office of Secretary of the Hermit Park ALP through its proscription by the QCE, on 1 October Murgatroyd also found himself relieved of any responsibility for the coming Federal election. He received a telegram: "IN VIEW OF YOUR DISLOYALTY TO THE ALP, THE QUEENSLAND CENTRAL EXECUTIVE HAVE WITHDRAWN THEIR APPROVAL OF YOUR BEING RETURNING OFFICER FOR THE FORTHCOMING PLEBISCITE FOR THE SELECTION OF A LABOR CANDIDATE FOR HERBERT STOP PLEASE FORWARD ANY BOOKS OR PROPERTY BELONGING TO THE HERBERT DIVISIONAL LABOR EXECUTIVE TO THIS OFFICE".² Martens was dismayed, but Murgatroyd, ever the loyal and hard-working servant of his party, decided that Martens' "interests [should] be protected and his nomination [put] in order".³ Two days before the closing date for nominations, the official nomination form and pledge over Martens' signature was forwarded to Brisbane;⁴ only then did Murgatroyd

¹ Murgatroyd to McNamara, 28.9.42; also copies of telegrams, Murgatroyd to Martens and Martens to Murgatroyd, 25.9.42-27.9.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

² Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1.10.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*). The QCE may also have been prompted by a letter from the President of the Townsville (Kennedy) ALP, the disgruntled Alf Eastaughffe, asking if an advertisement in the *Bulletin* "calling for nominations for Herbert over the signature of Murgatroyd" had been authorised by the QCE (see *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 30.9.42).

³ Undated telegram, Murgatroyd to Martens (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁴ Murgatroyd to Bryan, 8.10.42; also Bryan to Murgatroyd, 13.10.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

relinquish his duties as returning officer in obedience to the QCE's earlier despatch by telegram.¹ After his brusque, if not panic-stricken, exchange with Murgatroyd, a relieved Martens now resumed his role as *sauve* and generous lawgiver: "I hope that you will be yet on the job when some of those little-minded, power-drunk creatures [in the QCE] are known no more."²

Events now moved swiftly towards their inexorable conclusion. Murgatroyd received inside information from a sympathetic member of the QCE that no meeting of the QCE had ever in fact authorised the expulsion of the Hermit Park ALP and that "it [was] just another action by the Inner Executive itself".³ The moral boost provided by that information encouraged Hermit Park to address the QCE again with renewed confidence in the righteousness of their stand. A telegram from the QCE asking Murgatroyd if it was still his intention "to continue to be Secretary of the disbanded Hermit Park Branch ALP"⁴ provoked a barrage of angry replies. "The petty Pooh-Bahs who imagine that they control the Labor movement may think that the Hermit Park Branch of the ALP is dissolved, but, in reality, it is still energetically and constitutionally functioning";⁵ it was to be deplored that the QCE had not acted "constitutionally and democratically instead of arrogantly and despotic-

¹ Murgatroyd to Bryan, 19.10.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

² Martens to Murgatroyd, 5.10.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³ TDB, 24.10.42. The informant was very likely the Member for Mundingburra, the Hon. J. Dash (see fn. 3, p. 96).

⁴ Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1.10.42 (letter confirming despatch of the telegram); see also Murgatroyd to Calwell, 28.9.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁵ TDB, 24.10.42.

ally";¹ the QCE would do well to advise the party "the date of the QCE meeting and the Rule under which [the] disbanding [was] allegedly effected".² The branch also decided to follow up its previous letter to the Federal Executive with another containing details of the new moral armament with which it was equipped, requesting Federal Conference to "countermand the advice of the QCE that the Branch is no longer a Branch of the ALP".³ Pending a dispensation from that august source, it was resolved to continue the fight against the QCE.⁴

¹ Murgatroyd to Bryan, 19.10.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

² Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1.10.42 (confirming receipt of Murgatroyd's telegram in these words) (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³ Murgatroyd to McNamara, 28.9.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*). The Hermit Park counter-charges listed in this letter (but not in the earlier, more cautious letter to McNamara on 22 September [see fn. 2, p. 88]) became the basis of the branch's case in all later debates up to 1946, when the last hopes of reconciliation were dashed. They were: "(i) The aldermen in question and the Branch have not been charged, neither had an investigation been held under the Rules and Constitution of the ALP, State of Queensland; (ii) The aldermen and Branch should have been notified which Rule was alleged to have been violated and also under which Rule the matter was dealt with; (iii) The matter has not been dealt with by a meeting of the QCE; (iv) Neither Aldermen Corcoran and Illich nor the Branch have been guilty of any violation of the Rules, Platform or Constitution of the ALP, State of Queensland; (v) The advice that the Branch is no longer a Branch of the ALP, State of Queensland, is legally and morally wrong, and is a grave injustice, and is totally opposed to democratic principles."

⁴ TDB, 28.10.42.

Meanwhile, too, Hermit Park found that it was not without allies in its struggle. Declarations of solidarity and support came from the Australian Railways' Union, the Builders' Employees' Federation, the Railways Salaried Officers' Union, the Vehicle Builders' and Employees' Federation, the Federated Clerks' Union, and the Townsville Trades and Labour Council.¹ However, when replies were eventually received from the sources in which Hermit Park had initially reposed its hopes - the Federal body and local ALP branches - there were scant grounds for jubilation. Federal Executive blandly replied that the "rule of Federal Conference [was] ... that no appeal can be made to Conference or the Executive unless leave to appeal be granted by the respective State Conference or State Executive".² Apparently consumed by fear or jealousy, the local branches maintained a basilisk silence.³

The tawdriest act in the increasingly obscurantist charade now unfolded: Arthur Murgatroyd was expelled from the ALP.⁴ The earnest and energetic Secretary of the Hermit Park ALP, devoted servant of the ALP in a variety of spheres - alderman, branch secretary, divisional returning office, union secretary - was peremptor-

¹ TDB, 28.10.42, 24.11.42.

² McNamara to Murgatroyd, 6.10.42; see also McNamara to Murgatroyd, 1.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³ Two of the branches, Townsville and Townsville (Kennedy) responded to the call from Hermit Park for a declaration of sympathies merely by forwarding the requests to the QCE. Another (Ayr) lost no time in making application to the QCE to be recognised as the new "Head Centre" of the Mundingburra State electorate in succession to Hermit Park (see *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 30.9.42).

⁴ Bryan to Murgatroyd, 10.11.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*), which "terminated" Murgatroyd's membership of the ALP.

ily dismissed for "continuous disloyalty".¹ In fact, Murgatroyd was the only member of the Hermit Park ALP to be singled out by the QCE for formal expulsion.² It was the unkindest cut of all.

The hackles of Hermit Park now stood out in rage. An ultimatum was served on all parliamentarians whose constituencies took in Townsville.³ What was their attitude towards the "outrageous action" of the QCE? Did they agree that Hermit Park had not departed "in any manner whatsoever" from the principles, platform and objectives of the Labor Party, and that to bow to the QCE's decision would be "contrary to all democratic ideals"? Were they aware that Hermit Park was not only continuing to function as an ALP organisation but was also prepared to launch a campaign for the "cleansing of the Labor Movement"? Did they know that Hermit Park, in its "determination to overthrow despotism", would shortly extend its activities and establish itself as a branch of the ALP "covering all approved Laborites in the

¹ Bryan to Murgatroyd, 10.11.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*). See also *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 4.11.42; *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 11.12.42; and *TDB*, 18.11.42.

² Technically, of course, Corcoran, Kogler, Illich and Abercrombie were not "expelled"; by their own actions they voluntarily "left the Party".

³ Murgatroyd to Hons. J. Dash, G. Keyatta, C.G. Jesson, 23.11.42; and Murgatroyd to G.W. Martens, MHR, and Senators G. Brown, J.S. Collings, B. Courtice, 24.11.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

Mundingburra, Townsville and Kennedy electorates"? ¹
 If the honourable gentlemen did not define their attitudes within a month, the branch would be forced to adopt the view that "those who are not with us are against us". ²

The replies made up a fascinating collage of casuistic somersaulting. Keyatta was cautiously sympathetic: "I personally do not hold with the decision regarding the expulsion and it is my intention always to strive with the object of having the Branch and members readmitted."³ Dash was realistically blunt: "The question you ask means which would I have my political head cut off by - the QCE or by the sympathisers of those members who have been declared outside the ALP? I have to adhere to decisions of the QCE." ⁴ Jesson held himself loftily aloof: "I have to advise that I am prepared to stand by the pledge of the Platform of the Australian Labor Party, which is Australia-wide, and which I signed many years

¹ Murgatroyd to Hon. J. Dash *et al.* This last action had been foreshadowed as soon as deregistration was known (see *TDB*, 23.9.42: "Should other Branches of the ALP refuse to recognize this Branch, the present Branch boundaries would be discontinued and the Branch would widen its scope and fix fresh boundaries within which the Branch will function."). See also *TDB*, 21.11.42, referring to "a campaign for constitutional and democratic control of the Labor movement"; and *TDB*, 24.11.42: "the Hermit Park Branch of the ALP had decided to cancel the present boundaries of ALP Branches in the Mundingburra electorate, and that the Hermit Park Branch admit to membership all approved applicants resident in the Mundingburra, Townsville and Kennedy electorates".

² *Murgatroyd P.P.*, see fn. 1, p. 91.

³ Keyatta to Murgatroyd, 15.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁴ Dash to Murgatroyd, 15.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

ago." ¹ Martens was querulously apprehensive: "It will be my misfortune if I have to be the scapegoat for something which has been done which I am not a party to, and I must leave the matter at that." ² Collings was imperiously indignant: "You know me well enough to know that intimidation will not work in my case." ³ Brown was wistfully vague: "It is to be deeply regretted that the present state of affairs has arisen with the Hermit Park Branch." ⁴ Courtice was bureaucratically sententious: "Owing to being very busy in Canberra I have had no opportunity of securing information. The workers can only be defeated by being divided." ⁵

The lukewarm and equivocal support of the politicians, far from daunting the rebels of Hermit Park, only spurred them on to new measures of defiance. ⁶ At the branch's final meeting for 1942, it was decided that unless the dispute with the QCE had been satisfactorily settled by the time of the annual general meeting in January, a "strong team of candidates" would contest the municipal elections due early in 1943. ⁷ Since it was impossible to conceive of any "strong" field of candidates which did not include the increasingly popular deputy

¹ Jesson to Murgatroyd, 15.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

² Martens to Murgatroyd, 8.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

³ Collings to Murgatroyd, 2.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁴ Brown to Murgatroyd, 3.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁵ Courtice to Murgatroyd, (undated) (*Murgatroyd P.P.*).

⁶ *TDB*, 18.12.42: "Replies of parliamentary representatives re attitude towards Branch." See also *TDB*, 23.12.42, in which the branch gave out the comforting, but decidedly exaggerated, information that the politicians were promising "all assistance".

⁷ *TDB*, 23.12.42.

mayor, Tom Aikens, who meanwhile had been making "every post at the Council Table a winner",¹ the branch invited its prodigal son to return to the fold after more than two years in exile.

There were now definite signs that Aikens' return and the unflinching attitude of the Hermit Park Branch were causing some concern to the QCE. In a letter to George Martens, Bryan, the QCE Secretary, referred to the disbanding of Hermit Park and went on to say (which "some what surprised" Martens) that "the dissolving of the Branch does not mean that the members of the Branch have been expelled".² Bryan also hinted to Keyatta that "a further enquiry" would be made into the position of the Hermit Park Branch "at the earliest opportunity".³ It was finally decided that the long-awaited inquiry would be convened "as promptly as practical",⁴ and that it would be conducted by no less a personage than the Deputy Premier himself, the Honourable E.M. Hanlon.⁵

¹ *Aikens Mem.*, (3):144.

² Martens to Murgatroyd, 21.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*), informing Murgatroyd that Martens had written to Bryan about the dispute on 7 December and had since received a reply containing these "surprising" remarks.

³ Bryan to Keyatta, 16.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*). See also Dash to Murgatroyd, 15.12.42 (*Murgatroyd P.P.*), mentioning that the QCE had now decided that "a complete investigation would be made at Townsville into the whole of the matters". See also *TDB*, 23.12.42.

⁴ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 14.1.43.

⁵ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 19.1.43. When rumours reached Hermit Park of the moves afoot in the QCE, Murgatroyd wrote to Bryan demanding that the inquiry be held in the interests of "Labor principles and common justice" (see Murgatroyd to Bryan, 21.12.42, [*Murgatroyd P.P.*]). See also *TDB*, 23.12.42.

Hanlon met Aikens, Corcoran and Illich in the Townsville Court House on 8 February 1943, and his recommendations to the QCE represented an unconditional capitulation to the demands of the Hermit Park Branch.¹ Pointedly cocking a snook at the QCE, Aikens celebrated the victory by presiding at a "monster public meeting" of the "Aid to Russia" Committee, commemorating the foundation of the "great, invincible Red Army", honouring the defenders of Stalingrad, and lauding "the heroes of Rostov and Kharkov".²

Yet only a battle had been won, not the war. Hanlon's report was unexpectedly rejected by a special meeting of the QCE,³ whereupon the Hermit Park Branch embarked on an irreversible course of recrimination and radicalism. In fact, there was only one further attempt at effecting a *rapprochement*. The astonishing successes of Hermit Park Labour at the 1943 municipal election, in which Aikens topped the poll, seven of the ten elected aldermen were Hermit Park rebels, and not a single ALP alderman was returned, convinced some ALP notables that the schism was fratricidal. Frenzied efforts to restore unity thus preceded the 1946 municipal election,⁴ but, by that time, a 1943 pre-election marriage of convenience between Her-

¹ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 17.2.43, 19.2.43, 26.2.43, 1.3.43. See also *TDB*, 10.2.43, containing the Hermit Park demands. Hanlon recommended that "in view of all the circumstances I would recommend that the Hermit Park Branch be readmitted to the ALP and the position restored as it was before this dispute" (see *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 1.3.43).

² *TDB*, 19.2.43.

³ *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 1.3.43.

⁴ *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 9.1.46. See also *TDB*, 11.12.45, 12.12.45, 28.12.45, 3.1.46, 7.1.46, 9.1.46, 18.1.46, 24.1.46, 26.1.46, 28.1.46. See also *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 28.12.45.

mit Park Labour and the Communist Party had become a contented as well as mutually beneficial union. When, on the eve of the 1949 municipal election, the Hermit Park schismatics announced the formation of a North Queensland Labour Party, "incorporating the original Hermit Park ALP", this, to the ALP, was no more than the formal and belated acknowledgement of irreconcilable heresy.

Of course, it was not merely local outrage at QCE "despotism" which resulted in such a dramatic reversal of ALP fortunes. Townsville was also at war, and probably no other community in Australia during World War II was thrown back quite so rudely on its own resources in the face of such formidable odds. At least that was the judgement not only of Townsvilleans themselves but also of a host of surprised and concerned outsiders.¹ All testified to the demoralisation of a citizenry beleaguered by Japanese air raids, the threat of imminent invasion, widespread evacuation, protracted military occupation by forces heavily outnumbering the civilian population, persistent shortages of essential goods, a sense of isolation from the mainstream of Australian life and of actual abandonment by remote and insensitive governments - of

¹*Commonwealth Records Series A816, 37/301/199* (A.A. Conlon, Chairman, Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale, to Prime Minister, 1.4.43; and encl., *Report on Civilian Morale in North Queensland*, by Professor R.D. Wright, Professor of Physiology in the University of Melbourne, and Dr Ian Hogbin, Lecturer in Anthropology in the University of Sydney, pp. 15 [typewritten, unpaginated + appendices]). The two academics visited North Queensland from 6 January to 26 January 1943. For a detailed analysis of the effects of war on Townsville, see my chapter, "Townsville During World War II" in B.J. Dalton (ed.), *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville, 1974):213-39.

which the QCE's ostracism of the Hermit Park Branch seemed a particularly crass and palpable example. As late as mid-1944, North Queenslanders still nurtured "an abiding sense" that southern governments in Brisbane and Canberra were ignorant of their total war-time experiences and indifferent to them. The chief spokesman of that mood was Tom Aikens and in 1944 Townsvilleans also elected him to parliament in Brisbane to evoke it, to shame and bludgeon government with it.

There were several reasons why Aikens was subsequently re-elected to parliament over and over again. To his constituents, "as far as orators go, there were only two men in Australia, that was Menzies and Aikens, and Aikens had it on Menzies because he put humor in his speeches"; and as a campaigner he was a politician's politician, continually refining the techniques of his art.¹ But pre-eminently it was because he proved a "local" member *par excellence*. As a representative, he was not only always visible, accessible and helpful, but his policy - "A Square Go for the North" - seemed consistently attuned to the deepest of his constituents' emotional and historical predilections. There were plenty of mavericks in North Queensland, and they enjoyed having one to represent them.

¹See my analysis in C.A. Hughes, *Images and Issues*, 1969: 304-18.

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*THE VILLAGE MEETING IN A DEPENDENT
ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY*

John Bern^{*}

This paper is concerned with one aspect of the political process in a community of dependent Aborigines in southern Arnhem Land.¹ The village meeting which is the principal context of public discussion occupies a pivotal place in the community's political organisation. It is the most inclusive continuing forum, enfranchising all the adults of the community. Its proceedings highlight the competition between the different interest groups within the community, the opposition to European domination, and the powerlessness of the community.

The village meeting is not a decision-making body. Much of the lives of its members are directed by other institutions in which the village has no say. Even in those areas of life where the village is relatively unconstrained the ability to impose its will is hampered by a lack of sanctions. The village meeting is a central feature of the local polity because it is the public context for expressing the community ideology and the public platform for the village to assess their leaders.

In recent years anthropology has shown some interest in

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¹ The field-work on which this account is based was supported by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Throughout the paper the present tense refers to the period 1970-71.

the political processes of local communities.¹ One aspect of this interest has been the examination of the place public fora such as councils or village meetings play in this process.

The recent anthropological literature on public fora in local communities and small-scale societies has concentrated on their formal characteristics. The studies of Bailey² and Kuper,³ have been concerned to establish functional relationships between different types of decision-making procedure (voting, consensus, etc.) and particular formal characteristics of a council (mode of membership selection, internal divisions, structural relation of council to public). With the exception of Bloch⁴ the contributions to this literature do not discuss the public fora as an instance in the overall political milieu of the community, but rather as the structure which contains the polity. The literature, as a whole, is not concerned to arrive at an understanding of the political life of the community or society being studied, but rather to isolate one structure - councils - and treat it as though it is the totality of the polity.

In the present paper I am concentrating on a village and its public meetings, as the base of a political pyramid. It is a community which lacks the political and economic resources to withstand external domination. It is a community which is acted on rather than acting, and affected rather than effective.

It is my thesis that the participation in the village

¹ Swartz, 1968:89-108; Swartz, 1966.

² Bailey, 1965:1-20.

³ Kuper, 1971:13-28.

⁴ Bloch, 1971:56-60.

meeting offers the community a focus through which to express an identity of interests. These interests are political, not because they are the result of tactical and strategic choices or because decisions about them define internal power relations, but because they provide a defensive framework by which the community protects itself from being obliterated by the dominant authority.

The village meeting is the public representation of its constituency - the aboriginal community. It is axiomatic that no community is totally undifferentiated. Some segmentation and stratification is at least incipient. The divisions I am referring to are the major persisting divisions of age, sex, class, ethnicity, etc. A number of points are relevant here. One would expect, as Bailey has suggested,¹ that an hierarchically ordered community would organise its representation differently from one which is relatively undifferentiated. Many of the village communities which anthropologists study approximate to the latter type. These communities, when viewed in the context of the wider society, are proletarian, peasant, or economically and socially marginal.

Relative lack of differentiation in class terms is often embodied in an ideology of egalitarianism.² That is, in social intercourse and in the general life of the community, none is recognised as another's superior and none should act as if he is. Prestige and prominence can accrue in two ways. This can be through holding a specialised position, such as ritual leader or craftsman, or by competing to represent the community or undertake tasks on its behalf. Prominence of the latter type depends on individual success and is inherently unstable. The attainment of prestige is valued. Jayawardena's

¹
Bailey, 1965:9-12.

²
Jayawardena, 1968:413-15.

analysis shows that egalitarian ideology need not and usually does not prevent the recognition and political utilisation of segmentary divisions based on sex, age, kinship, place of origin, or ethnicity.

All categories of lower-class communities are dominated by the State. They are dependent communities in which the source of political and economic domination is located outside the community. The political organisation of such communities is constrained by this absence of local control. Though this is true of all lower-class communities it is most clearly evident in institutionalised ones such as Australia's aboriginal settlements.

The aboriginal community lives on a government institution on the Arnhem Land Reserve in Australia's Northern Territory. The settlement has an aboriginal population of about 350 and twenty European staff. The settlement has a cash economy, with nearly all income coming from government employment and social security payments. Most staff are employees of the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration: the branch of the Australian Government responsible for the administration of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. The Welfare Branch provides practically all local employment, of which the main component is general maintenance work. The only potentially productive employment is in the local beef cattle project, which absorbs about 15% of the work-force. The Aborigines' per capita income is between a fifth and a quarter of the national average.

The Aborigines of this area have been in continuous and intensive contact with Europeans since the 1870s.¹ The early contact was disastrous for the indigenes. They were driven off their land by Europeans who attempted to annihilate them. They were alienated from their land and unable to pursue their indigenous pattern of life. The Church Missionary Society (an Australian-based Anglican

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Bauer, 1964:139, 150; Cole, 1968:5-6; Hill, 1951:112-13, 178-79; Searcy, 1909:103-31, 169-81.

evangelical mission) established a settlement in the area early this century, and this became the main residential centre for the aboriginal population. In 1968 the Australian Government took over control of the settlement from the CMS.

The majority of the aboriginal population (the core) are the descendants of survivors of a number of more or less independent groups which occupied the area prior to European intrusion. These groups spoke different languages, had no overall political unity, and practised different (though similar) varieties of traditional culture. They did share a common ideology, which, in general terms, expounded the relationship between the people and their environment (the concept of the Dreamtime with its totemic affiliations and myths). The particular expression of the ideology was contained in the major religious cults which the groups shared. The most important of these cults were the Jabuduruwa and the Gunabibi. The present population is integrated through the common dependence on the settlement for protection and subsistence. However, the continued adherence to common cults supports the integration of the community and supplies its ideology.¹

The settlement cannot independently determine either its internal organisation or its external relations.

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Bern, J. Unpublished:103-20. There are four criteria for the division of the village's sectional interests: generation, sex, kinship groups, and place of origin. There are two named interest groups whose existence needs some explication. The "old mission mob" are the conservative senior generation who grew up on the mission, and see the settlement as protecting them from the outside world. The Mara/Alawa group are the descendants of elements of the indigenous population whose main ritual interests are south of the area. They often act in opposition to the dominant northern and eastern interests in ritual matters.

Control of the settlement is located outside its environs. This control is concentrated in the hands of the Australian Government, which provides the finance, personnel, and direction for the maintenance and development of the settlement.

The aboriginal community (the village) does not see itself as being deprived of autonomy by its subordination. The settlement does not organise all aspects of the lives of the villagers. Outside the work situation there is little direct interference with the organisation of the village. The village is relatively free to organise its internal activities, in so far as these do not conflict with Australian laws, government ameliorative efforts, or the economic organisation of the settlement.¹ Indeed, the village regards itself as autonomous, by organising its internal affairs as if the locus of power is contained within the village. Objectively, this view is false, but it is an ideal which must be taken into account when discussing the political actions of the village.

The Aborigines organise politically in two contexts: the village and the settlement. These contexts overlap and manoeuvres in one may be used to gain an advantage in the other. The village organises its own regular meetings in which it publicises and debates matters of relevance to the community. The organisation of settlement public affairs also bring villagers and staff together in a number of committees.

There are four such committees in the settlement: Church Council, School Council, Station Council and Citizens Club Executive Committee. The first two have narrowly defined areas of competence which impinge very little on the organisation of the village, or its relations with settlement authorities or the Government.

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Such conflict does arise. A full discussion of a crisis which culminates in a village strike is to be found in Bern, J., 1976:213-24.

The Station Council, started by the CMS in 1962, operates as a consultative body for the running and development of the settlement.¹ The council has sixteen members: the settlement superintendent, seven staff appointed by him, and eight aboriginal members elected by the village. The superintendent is council chairman. The council is not competent to make decisions affecting the organisation of the settlement. They are limited to making requests of the superintendent, or through him, of the Government. The initiative, in council, lies with the superintendent and, to a lesser extent, the staff. Each staff member has administrative control in some area of the settlement, and the superintendent has overall administrative control. The superintendent, as chairman, also determines the structure and course of council meetings.

The Executive Committee of the Citizens Club controls the local general store. The committee is elected annually by the club membership, which consists of all residents of the settlement. The affairs of the committee are directed by its president (usually a European staff member), the European store manager, and its major creditor - the Government. The village committee members have no control over the management of the store, because the key office-bearers in the committee are normally Europeans, the direct management of the store is in the hands of a salaried European manager, and because the Government (as creditor) constrains the committee's freedom of action.

The village interests are not adequately represented in the settlement committees. The village has developed its own organ for discussing matters of relevance to it and organising its affairs.

The village meeting is a more or less regular affair,

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Cole, 1968:26.

open to all village residents, in which all matters of interest to the village population are discussed. Every question that is raised in the other fora of either the village or the settlement is also discussed by the meeting. The villagers state that meetings should be held every Monday night. The actual time between meetings ranged from two days to four weeks depending on the immediacy of issues and the mood of the village. In the six-week period leading up to and during the strike there were seven meetings.¹ The four-week gap occurred immediately after the collapse of the strike, at a time when people's morale was low. At other times, when there was no pressing reason either to hold a meeting or not to have one, they tended to occur fortnightly.

Monday night was the favoured time for the meeting and ten of the twenty-four meetings recorded in 1970 and 1971 took place at that time. Competing activities made it difficult to organise meetings on the other nights of the week. Tuesdays were set aside for the various committee meetings, Wednesdays for the village church service, Thursdays for films, Fridays for films, and on alternate weeks cards, Saturdays for films or dances or cult performances or cards, and Sundays for cult performances or village church service or cards.

The numbers and regularity at meetings varied considerably. The adult population of the village (men and women over the age of 16) averaged around 160. The mean attendance at meetings was sixty with a range of from thirty to ninety. The ratio of adult males to females in the village was 0.8:1.0, but the mean attendance was forty for males and twenty for females. The percentage of the male population at meetings ranged from 34% to 67%, while the proportion of the female population was from 9% to 27%. There was also a marked difference in the attendance of core and non-core residents. Core residents were two-

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Bern, J., 1976:216-19.

thirds of the village population but comprised 80% to 100% of the attendance at meetings.

The core and particularly the core men controlled the meetings. I attended a total of twenty-four meetings during 1970 and 1971, at which there was a total of forty-three different speakers. All the discussions were initiated by one or more of twelve men, all of whom were core residents. Twenty of the other thirty-one speakers were also core men (five of them were recently returned *émigrés*), nine were core women, and only two were non-core men. If one excludes those speakers whose sole contribution was either in support of another speaker or answering a question, then the number of active contributors is reduced from forty-three to twenty-seven: twenty-two core men, four core women, and one non-core man.

The meetings were held in a cleared area centrally located in the village. The convenor of a meeting was usually the village president, though other leading men who wished to have something discussed occasionally initiated meetings. Meetings were called together by the convenor ringing the bell at around 7.00 in the evening. Over the next half to one and a half hours he and a few early arrivals would call for people to attend, with increasing exasperation. The meeting would commence when sufficient people had arrived. The quorum for a meeting was around twenty adults. There were three occasions when less than twenty had arrived one and a half hours after a meeting was called, and on all three the proposed meeting was called off. On two other occasions the meeting convenor stated there were insufficient people in attendance, but the meeting went on (the numbers present were thirty-five and approximately eighty). Most meetings commenced with a speech by the convenor, touching on the matters he wanted discussed. On two occasions - one when a missionary was present and the other when the church catechist was the convenor - the speech was preluded by a Christian prayer.

The meetings had no formal agenda, but each meeting

had specific matters for discussion, most of which were widely known beforehand. The main purpose of the meeting is usually stated by the opening speaker who also gives his view on the issue. He is then followed by other speakers who put their views. Most issues raised do not lead to a decision requiring action to be taken. In the event that such a decision is needed it is never taken on the basis of discussion at only one meeting, but is discussed at a number of meetings as well as being brought up at other fora in which the particular issue is relevant. Discussions are often concerned with censuring or praising decisions taken in other fora, and with the behaviour of sections of the village population (particularly that of the women and younger men). Each topic is debated, with representatives of each of the interested parties expressing their points of view. The topic is terminated either when there are no further speakers or when a speaker is successful in changing the topic. Termination may or may not be accompanied by expressions of support for the prominent sentiments, or alternatively it may be brought on by people leaving the meeting.

During a meeting there is much coming and going. People arrive throughout the proceedings and leave when they have had enough. There is no formal arrangement of seating though each group has its own spot. Some of the main male speakers do vary their position. When they are leading a debate or aligning with the speaker on a contentious issue, they stand or sit in the central lighted area of the clearing. At other times they sit with their families or age mates. Meetings are generally noisy and give the appearance of being chaotic. At any time there are children playing and numerous side discussions in progress. Interjections are common. There is a tendency for the speaker to take his position in the central lighted area while talking, but this is only a tendency, and at least one of the main speakers never did so.

The topography of seating is an issue at many meetings. This occurs despite the constancy of the seating arrange-

ment. The bulk of the audience is seated in a wide arc around the edges of the clearing. Most people are seated in small family groups, with the non-core families and old mission mob concentrated on the river side furthest away from the light and speaker. The area around the light and hut is occupied by the main speakers and other, usually young, men. The young men alternate their positions between the speakers' area and the roadway on the periphery of the clearing. The scattering of people gives rise to regular and numerous complaints: the audience complaining that they cannot hear the speaker, and the speakers continually calling on the audience to move in closer. Despite this expressed dissatisfaction the seating arrangement remains constant.

Little deference is shown to senior speakers. Other men or women interrupt or interject as they please even if the speaker is the village president or a senior ritual leader. Debates on contentious points are often heated and can become laced with personal invectives, particularly between members of the same family. The vitriolic interchanges subside with the ending of the debate, and people regard their occurrence as a sign of the success of a debate. Heated exchanges, they say, are an indication that the issue is being treated seriously, and a speaker often prefaces his introduction of an important topic with the remark that people "should speak from their hearts". After one occasion on which the exchanges were particularly heated and personal, the contenders came together and congratulated each other on the good meeting they had just had. One of the men put the feeling succinctly when he said "argument was good, and people found out what he was thinking".

The meeting of 19 January 1970 was one. This meeting was called by RA, the senior village spokesman, to discuss two matters: the sudden departure of his younger brother from the settlement, and the poor attendance by women at the previous weekend's Jabuduruwa performances. The following description of that meeting highlights the con-

cern for communal solidarity.

Example 1: The meeting commenced at 10 past 8 on Monday night, 50 minutes after RA first rang the village bell. The first two speakers were RA and the church catechist who both decried the general behaviour of the young men of the village. RA specifically criticised his brother for leaving his job and the settlement without giving notice, while the catechist rounded on all those who were persistently late for work and were not diligent on the job. After 20 minutes, during which they were not interrupted, RA concluded by declaring that gambling was responsible and should be banned. There was mild laughter at this from most of the younger people, and LA, RA's elder brother, mocked the suggestion as being unrealistic. LA's son, DA, then cut in complaining that he had been sacked that morning for being half an hour late for work. RA changed his tone and said he couldn't understand why the superintendent would do such a thing. The catechist, who was DA's foreman, said that he had had nothing to do with the dismissal, but added that DA was a problem to him.

At this point, RA changed the direction of his attack, and stated that if the superintendent didn't like blacks he would go and see the Australian Government Minister of Interior (who has ministerial responsibility for Aborigines) and have him removed. LA mocked RA's implied claim to have influence with the Government. RA reiterated that he would go right to the top, and was again mocked by LA.

RA did not reply, but again changed the direction of attack. He upbraided people in general for not keeping their houses clean and tidy. LA turned the complaint back onto RA, who agreed that his wife was too busy playing cards to look after the house. At this RA's wife rounded on him saying that she worked the whole week, including Saturdays and Sundays, while he just loafed around. RA replied that he was only talking (that is,

he didn't mean it), and then quietly said that cards should only be played after work and should finish by half past 10. He rounded off his reply with an aggressive statement that if the superintendent tried to tell him what to do in the stock camp (of which he was foreman) he would call a strike of all the stockmen.

Without a pause LA then swung into a new theme. Supported by RA and their father A he criticised the women's attitude to the Jabuduruwa performances. The three men told the women that they were not fulfilling their responsibility to look after the novices and do the cooking. They stressed that this failure was (a) an insult to the women's fathers, both living and deceased; (b) dishonourable for the village; and (c) it could bring trouble (that is, sorcery) to themselves and their families. This attack concluded with a demand which met with wide approval from both sexes and no dissent, that the women attend to their duties properly at the next performance or suffer the consequences (which were not specified). This rebuke lasted about half an hour, was uninterrupted, and at its conclusion the meeting terminated.

This meeting was primarily concerned with the village's external image, and with rebuking those whose behaviour some sections of the village felt was inimical to that image. RA's attempt to censure gambling was blunted by the wide range of conduct he chose to attack. On other occasions such a censure motion could expect to receive the support of the meeting. Partial bans on gambling were agreed to by two other meetings in 1970. However, in this meeting, RA not only attacked gambling but also succeeded in offending the young men and women and even his own family (by singling out his younger brother and elder brother's son). As a result he had to successively modify his censure, and finally make a tactical withdrawal. In contrast to this the censure of the women for ritual laxity was very successful. The meeting fully concurred with the sentiments of the speakers and supported the demand for greater diligence. However, both moves

were unsuccessful in altering people's behaviour outside the meeting context. Both women's ritual laxity and the pattern of gambling remained the same.

Example 2: The concern with the village as a community was not only directed at censuring delinquent behaviour. External threats from the settlement staff, Government, and other aboriginal communities were used to elicit expressions of unity in the meeting. Such occasions were not infrequent.

March of 1970 was an explosive period. The strike was under way and the Jabuduruwa ceremony was also in a crisis phase.¹ On 10 March one of the strike leaders returned from Darwin with news concerning four prominent ritual men. He reported that the four men's lives had been threatened with sorcery by a cattle station ritual leader, for their alleged ritual infringements. None of the four was active in the secular politics of the village, though two of them were deeply involved in the organisation of the Jabuduruwa. Three of the men were members of the Mara/Alawa family group, and the fourth was a non-core man associated with A's family. The news caused some consternation in the village, and not least for the four men. It also came at a convenient time for the village because it drew attention away from the internal divisiveness of both the strike and the Jabuduruwa, and focussed opposition onto an outside source.

The existence of the threat was used by the community's leaders to elicit expressions of community solidarity at the meeting of 14 March. The four men claimed that they were not guilty of breaching ritual law, and that therefore the threat was motivated by other feelings. They alleged that the cattle station leader feared them and was jealous of their ritual positions. This was reinforced by the commonly-held village belief that the

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Bern, J. Unpublished:220-21.

cattle station people were jealous of what the village regarded as its own ritual prominence.

The call for support for the four men was preceded by extensive criticism of both women and young men by a number of leading speakers and older men. The criticism concentrated on lack of diligence in the Jabuduruwa performances. Fighting among some novices and younger initiates was singled out for special mention, and WG, the village president, threatened to call in the police if they did not stop. This provoked a hostile reaction from the young men, who called for the termination of the meeting and began to leave. At this point RA announced the news that the lives of four men had been threatened, a fact which was already widely known. His public announcement had the effect of halting the breakup of the meeting. He said that the men were their people, and all of them were endangered by the threat, and that the people should carefully protect the men and their families. People from all sides of the meeting expressed their solidarity with the threatened men, and voiced the opinion that the village was one people who must stick together.

The meeting, as the village's regular public forum, does not limit its activities to the expression of community identity. The meeting is the village in its political guise. As such it is the body responsible for choosing people to represent the village, and is the body through which information is disseminated to the village (particularly the proceedings of the settlement committees, and the government pronouncements). More importantly, the meeting is a public platform for the community leaders and other activists to demonstrate their prominence and gauge support for their actions or proposals. Village activists display their public concern at the meeting. The more successful of them (which includes the leaders) initiate topics of discussion and have resolutions passed on proposals they support. This success is only an indication of the man's public prominence and not of any right or ability to lead the village.

Passing resolutions and eliciting expressions of support are a common feature of most meetings and they carry no commitment to implement them. The resolutions on gambling and women's ritual behaviour discussed in example 1 are essentially votes of confidence (or in the case of RA's failure to gain a resolution, lack of confidence) in the men who propose them, but do not imply an acceptance of the resolution.

During June 1970 one leading villager, who was also the settlement orderly, attempted to enforce a ban on gambling during working hours, which the meeting had imposed a few days earlier. He succeeded in confiscating a pack of cards from a group of women gamblers, but was forced to retreat under a hail of abuse. After some animated discussion by the women about the man's impertinence, they produced another pack of cards and continued playing. The man did not return, though he knew the game had recommenced, and he made no further attempt to enforce the resolution.

Although effective decision making is not a function of the meeting, there are policies which need the tacit approval of the village for their implementation. Thus those individuals or groups who want to implement a particular line of action may use the meeting to test the village response.

Example 3: When I arrived at the settlement in December 1969 WG was the village president. He had held the position for only a few months, and had been chosen when RA had declined to stand for re-election. RA had previously held the position almost continuously since 1964. During the first four months of field-work RA often attempted to usurp (sometimes successfully) WG's prerogatives, using his greater familiarity with government officials and WG's occasional absences from the settlement. The strike, which occurred in this period, saw the two men on opposite sides, with WG being one of the main spokesmen for the strikers. Late in April WG said that he would like to resign the

village presidency because of a crisis in his personal relations. This came at a time when RA's prestige was very low with two important sections of the village: the strike supporters, and the Mara/Alawa group.

The question of a new leader was raised at four meetings before a decision was finally made on 17 August. At the first meeting, held on 2 May, RA stated that WG was going to leave and the village would choose a new leader in two days' time. Participants at the meeting put forward the names of three men they thought could fill the position. RA's name was not put forward. The question was not raised at the following meeting, nor was it raised a month later when the meeting chose its representatives for the new Station Council. The choice of village president was again raised at the meeting of 6 July along with the filling of casual vacancies for the Citizens Club Executive and Station Council. None of those present offered himself for village president, and the one nomination that was put forward was ignored by both RA and LA who were jointly running the meeting. The question was again raised on 20 July. I was not present at this meeting but my informants told me that two names were suggested, and RA, who was not one of them, argued successfully that they could not decide because the stockmen were absent on a muster.

The choice of village leader was finally made at the village meeting of 17 August. RA opened the meeting with his account of the proceedings of the Church Missionary Society's Field Council (a body with representatives from all the society's Northern Territory organisations) to which he was the local representative. He went on to inform the people that he had, while in Darwin, represented the village in talks with government officials about proposals for a pastoral lease for the community. He concluded this account with the announcement that a village president had to be chosen, and added that the Government had told him that he was the leader of his people. Two old mission people said RA should be the

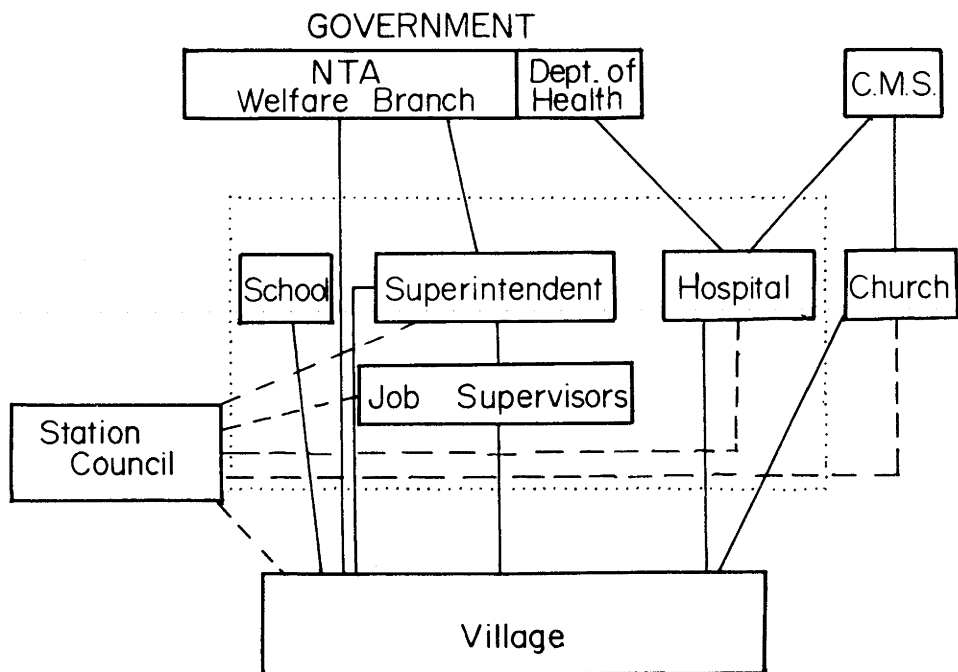
leader. After a short pause, in which no one else spoke, RA said that he would take it on for this year, but only because they had important business (negotiations for a pastoral lease). The meeting then immediately proceeded to other business. There was no voting, no opposition, and no comment.

The village meeting is part of the complex web of the local political structure. It is the most inclusive continuing political forum, for its composition includes all the adults of the village. The proceedings highlight the competition between the three main family groups, the process of escalating opposition to European domination, the ideological conflict between the old mission mob and the young, the women's continuing policy of obstruction to any domination, and the overall powerlessness of any group to enforce its will on the village as a whole. All these foci are apparent within the meeting, but none is fully contained by the meeting. No issue has its birth there and none is resolved there. In this sense the meeting is not a decision-making body. Its resolutions are largely rhetorical and it has no mechanism for implementing its decisions, nor can it apply sanctions against their breach.

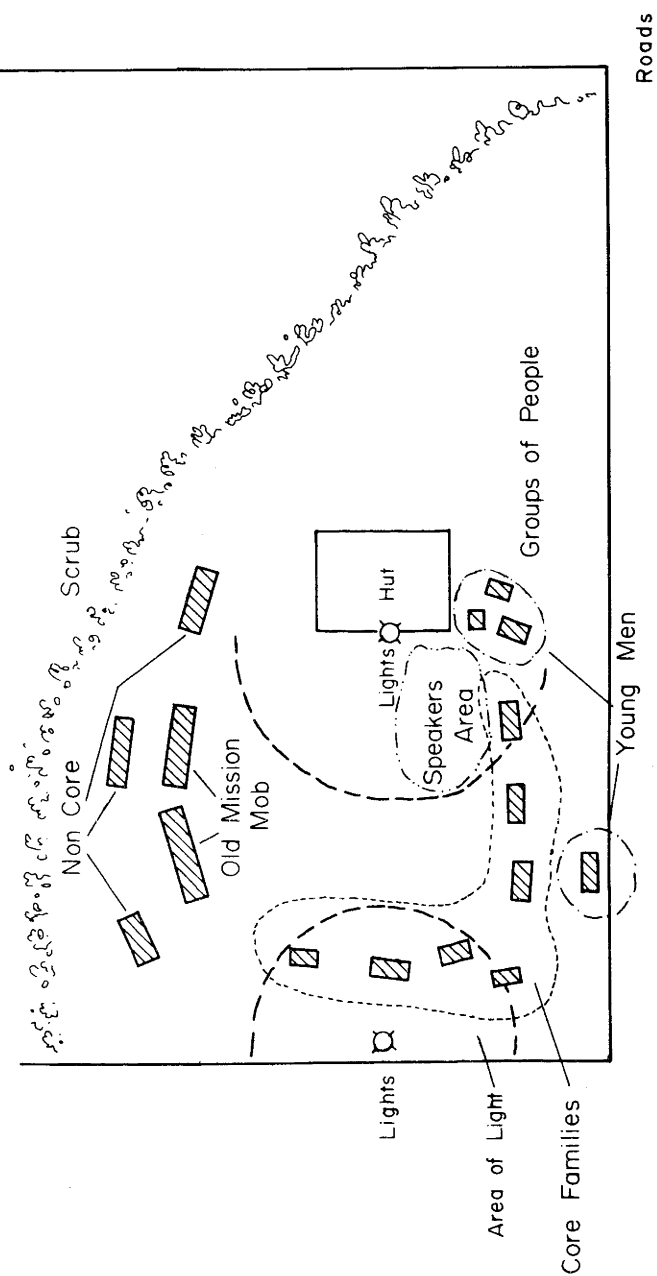
The forum of the meeting is in itself a focus of community. The corporate existence of the village and its political identity are represented through the meeting. The people are village citizens - that is, they are enfranchised by, and in relation to the village. This consciousness of community is an explicit part of the meeting's proceedings. In nearly every meeting the speeches of leading spokesmen contain references to an ideal pattern of village behaviour, whose breach should be censured and whose attainment should be pursued. These references have a persistent negative content, being directed against gambling, work absenteeism, neglect of houses and hygiene, and ritual laxity. On the positive side the stress is on the village's commitment to its own development.

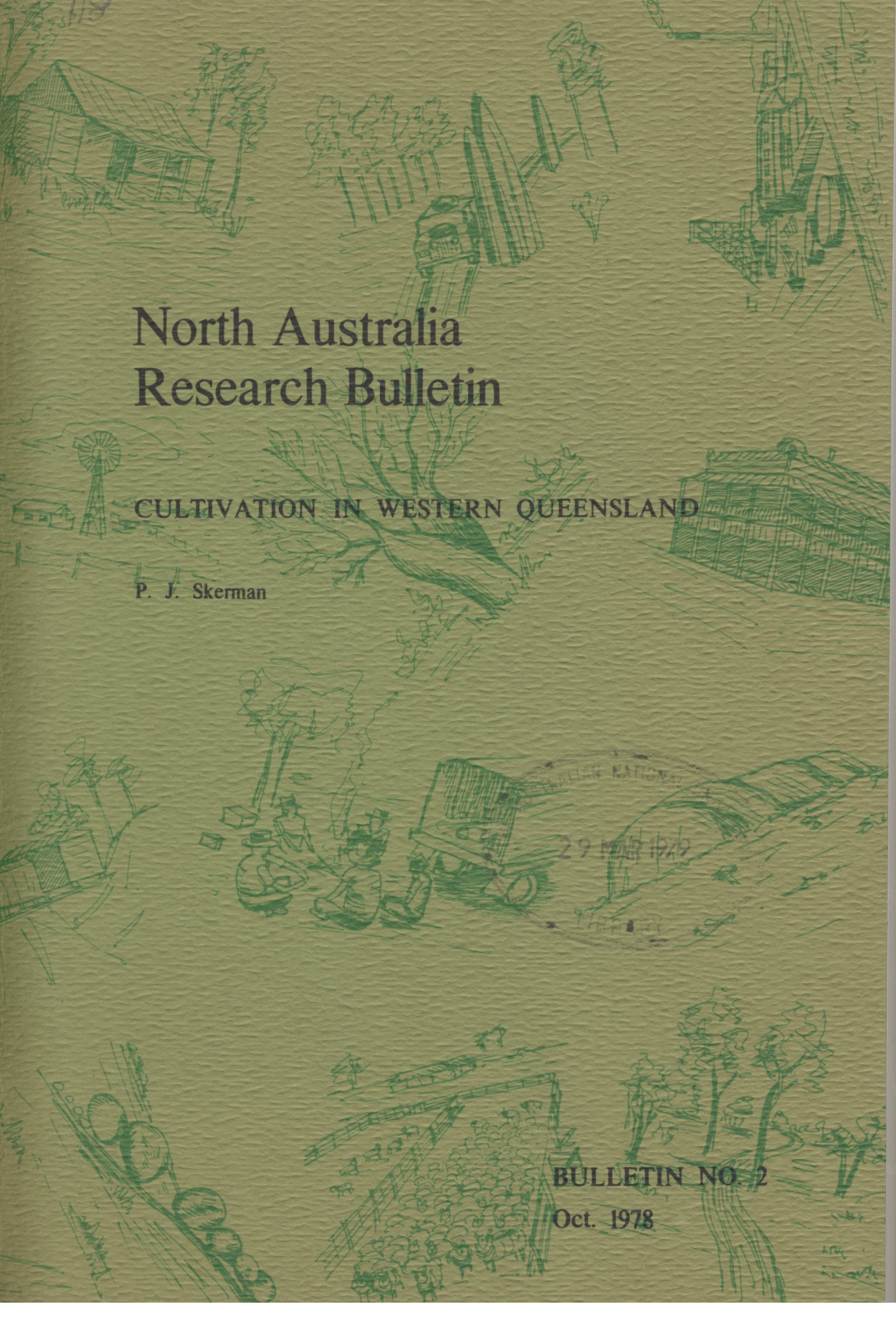
The village meeting is not a local parliament. Internally, the absence of mechanisms of control prevents leading spokesmen attaining positions of authority within the community. The lack of sanctions has the further effect of negating decisions made by the village meeting. The village meeting operates in a context of domination. The community is economically dependent on the Australian Government. Government agencies control the major areas of community life. They control the local economy, schooling, health, welfare, housing, and overall maintenance of the settlement. Religion is the one area not under government control. Even here, however, local religion must compete with organised Christianity, and operate within the constraints of settlement authority. Seen against this background the pattern of proceedings, the triviality of much of the content, and the continuous emphasis on community consciousness, attain a force as a reinforcement of common interests, and of egalitarianism, in opposition to the hierarchy of authority which directs much of their existence.

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THE VILLAGE MEETING





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