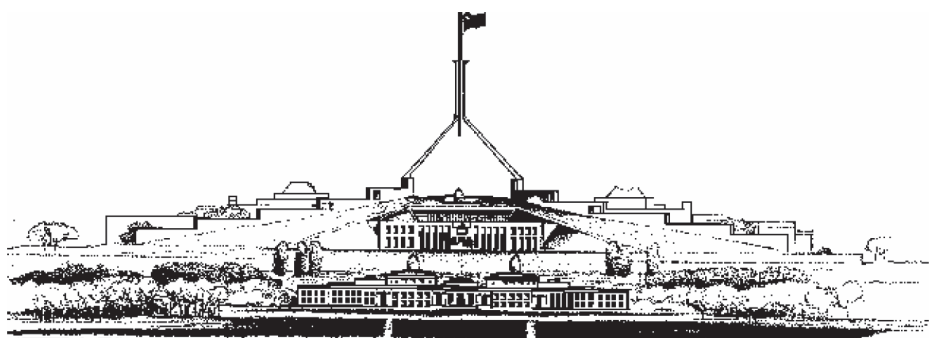




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 21, 1977
Thursday, 26 May 1977

THIRTIETH PARLIAMENT
SECOND SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Government's wages policy is inequitable and is preventing economic recovery in this country.

Motion (by Mr Sinclair) agreed to:

That the honourable member for Gellibrand be not further heard.

Question put—

That the motion (Mr Hayden's) be agreed to.

The House divided.

(Mr Speaker—Rt Hon. B. M. Snedden, Q.C.)

Ayes	31
Noes	75
	—
Majority	44
	—

AYES

Armitage, J. L.
Beazley, K. E.
Bowen, Lionel
Cameron, Clyde
Cass, M. H.
Cohen, B.
Crean, F.
FitzPatrick, J.
Fry, K. L.
Garrick, H. J.
Hayden, W. G.
Hurford, C. J.
Innes, U. E.
Jacobi, R.
Jenkins, H. A.
Johnson, Keith

Jones, Charles
Keating, P. J.
Klugman, R. E.
McMahon, Les
Martin, V. J.
Morris, P. F.
Scholes, G. G. D.
Stewart, F. E.
Uren, T.
Wallis, L. G.
Whitlam, Antony
Willis, R.
Young, M. J.
Tellers:
James, A. W.
Johnson, Les

NOES

Adermann, A. E.
Aldred, K. J.
Baillieu, M.
Baume, M. E.
Birney, R. J.
Bonnett, R. N.
Bourchier, J. W.
Bradfield, J. M.
Braishwaite, R. A.
Brown, N. A.
Bungey, M. H.
Burr, M. A.
Cadman, A. G.
Cairns, Kevin
Calder, S. E.
Carige, C. L.
Chapman, H. G. P.
Chipp, D. L.
Connolly, D. M.
Cotter, J. F.
Dobie, J. D. M.
Drummond, P. H.
Edwards, H. R.
Falconer, P. D.
Fife, W. C.
Fisher, P. S.
Garland, R. V.
Giles, G. O'H.
Gillard, R.
Goodluck, B. J.
Graham, B. W.
Groom, R. J.
Hamer, D. J.
Haslem, J. W.
Hodges, J. C.
Hodgman, M.
Holten, R. McN.
Hunt, R. J. D.

Hyde, J. M.
Jarman, A. W.
Johnson, Peter
Jull, D. F.
Katter, R. C.
Kelly, C. R.
King, R. S.
Lloyd, B.
Lusher, S. A.
MacKellar, M. J. R.
MacKenzie, A. J.
McLean, R. M.
McLeay, J. E.
McVeigh, D. T.
Martyr, J. R.
Millar, P. C.
Moore, J. C.
Neil, M. J.
Newman, K. E.
O'Keefe, F. L.
Porter, J. R.
Robinson, Eric
Robinson, Ian
Ruddock, P. M.
Sainsbury, M. E.
Shipton, R. F.
Simon, B. D.
Sinclair, I. McC.
Staley, A. A.
Sullivan, J. W.
Thomson, D. S.
Viner, R. I.
Wentworth, W. C.
Wilson, I. B. C.
Yates, W.
Tellers:
Cameron, Donald
Corbett, J.

PAIRS

Whitlam, E. G.
Nicholls, M. H.

Fraser, Malcolm
Peacock, A. S.

Question so resolved in the negative.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr ERIC ROBINSON (McPherson—Minister for Post and Telecommunications)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

Mr SPEAKER—Does the Minister claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr ERIC ROBINSON—In a way, I have misrepresented myself and I would like to correct the position. Regrettably last night a small error emanated from my office in a media release concerning Radio Australia.

Mr E. G. Whitlam—I thought you were correcting your answer to me today.

Mr ERIC ROBINSON—No. I would not want to change one single word of my answer today.

Mr E. G. Whitlam—Anthony and Lynch were very upset about it.

Mr ERIC ROBINSON—The Leader of the Opposition might cease interjecting and wait—

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent.

Mr ERIC ROBINSON—I want to explain that in the last sentence of the media release last night in my name it was said that the Waller report would not be tabled in the Parliament. That was an error. It should have said that the Waller report would now be tabled in the Parliament. It will be tabled next week.

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT

Ministerial Statement

Mr VINER (Stirling—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs)—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a statement concerning Aboriginal employment.

Mr SPEAKER—Is leave granted?

Mr E. G. Whitlam—I will be seeking leave after it. I suppose that that will be granted?

Mr VINER—Yes.

Mr SPEAKER—There being no objection, leave is granted.

Mr VINER—The Government has recently considered and approved new initiatives proposed by the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations (Mr Street), the Minister for Education (Senator Carrick) and myself to deal with the problems of Aboriginal unemployment. I now inform the House about these initiatives,

which together amount to a national employment strategy for Aboriginals. So that the Government would be fully aware of the nature of the Aboriginal unemployment situation, my colleagues, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, and the Minister for Social Security (Senator Guilfoyle), and I established an inter-departmental working party of officers of our departments to investigate and report on Aboriginal employment. The working party has reported. I now table the report for the information of honourable members.

The salient points of the current situation, which are updated from the working party report, are: At the end of February 1977 there were 12 218 Aboriginals registered for employment with the Commonwealth Employment Service, which represents more than one-third of the estimated Aboriginal labour force and is more than 6 times the unemployment rate for Australia as a whole; the working party report indicates that many Aboriginals do not, or are unable to, register with the Commonwealth Employment Service for employment and the working party estimates the actual level to be 50 per cent of the Aboriginal labour force; and despite the fact that the Commonwealth Employment Service placed 6600 Aboriginals in employment during 1976, the total number registered as unemployment rose by 1800 during that period.

These statistics do not reveal the full effects of unemployment upon Aboriginal citizens. Unemployment to this excessive extent, through its inter-relationship with health, housing, education and community development generally, is severely undermining the progress in Aboriginal affairs made by successive governments at considerable public expense since the 1967 referendum. What incentive is there for an Aboriginal child to succeed in his educational studies if his father is unemployed and there is every likelihood that the child may not be able to obtain employment at the conclusion of his or her education?

I now propose to describe the initiatives to assist those Aboriginals who live in remote or separate communities and who do not form part of the open labour market. The lifestyles chosen by Aboriginals living in these remote or separate communities vary considerably. Some, particularly those living in the central desert areas of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, prefer, as far as it is practicable, a traditional lifestyle. Others, through their proximity to economic ventures such as mining and the pastoral industry, have chosen a

lifestyle based on the kinds of goods and services that are available to other Australians. The traditional Aboriginal lifestyle was one that was full and rich. It provided sustenance by hunting and gathering. In most areas where Aboriginal communities now reside, this lifestyle is no longer possible. Much of the bush food once gathered is no longer found in abundance. Cattle grazing in particular has restricted its growth. Game formerly hunted by Aboriginal men is now in short supply. Because of this, Aboriginals have become accustomed to food supplied through stores on settlements. Consequently, they have required a cash income. Unemployment benefits have been available to Aboriginals as to other Australians unable to obtain work. In some cases, as the working party report has revealed, the lack of activity when combined with unemployment benefit has produced serious social problems such as alcoholism and other health hazards.

The initiatives to be undertaken in these communities consist of community development employment projects, or CDEPs as they will be known, which will provide work for all Aboriginals in a particular community who wish to work. Finance for the CDEPs will be provided to individual Aboriginal councils to enable the council to pay for work performed by individual community members, preferably on a co-operative, part-time or contractual basis. The total moneys available to a community would be determined in consultation between the community and departmental officers. In determining the amounts available, the entitlements of individual community members to unemployment benefit would be taken into account. The practice of paying lump sums to Aboriginal councils or incorporated groups who contract to perform other kinds of work for government authorities or private firms has much to commend it, and has already started.

As a positive demonstration of the Government's policy of encouraging Aboriginals to manage their own affairs, the Aboriginal council will be able to determine the projects it undertakes and how it allocates its labour. However, to assist in the elimination of social problems within communities, my Department will encourage the inclusion of projects such as youth activities and alcoholic rehabilitation measures. Projects such as the destruction of pests and afforestation to improve the physical and social environment will also be encouraged. Dr Coombs, former Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, is at present consulting with some communities to provide advice on projects.

Also, in conjunction with the CDEPs, special training will be provided for Aboriginals who wish to acquire or upgrade their skills to equip them to either take over skilled jobs within their community now undertaken by non-Aboriginals or, if they so desire, leave the community to join the open labour market. Mr Speaker, I seek leave to have the full guidelines for the implementation of the CDEPs incorporated in *Hansard*.

Mr SPEAKER—Is leave granted? There being no objection, leave is granted.

The document read as follows—

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYMENT
PROJECTS (CDEPs) BASIC OUTLINE AND
GUIDELINES**

Factors which led to the Development of the Program

1. High unemployment among Aboriginals living in remote areas or as separate communities where normal job opportunities are inadequate.

2. The resultant inactivity from unemployment, coupled with the payment of unemployment benefit, has led or contributed to deleterious social effects within the communities including:

adverse attitudes of Aboriginal men to work
severe drunkenness and associated violence

health hazards, and child neglect which occurs because some parents use their unemployment benefit for alcohol instead of food and clothing; and

acute juvenile delinquency.

3. Request have been made by communities to the Minister and Department to provide work instead of unemployment benefits. Certain communities have refused to accept unemployment benefit but face increasing pressure to accept it as a source of cash income.

4. Large imbalances in income being received by Aboriginals in remote or separate communities:

among Regions;

among communities; and

among individual Aboriginals within communities.

Objectives of the Pilot Program

5. To provide employment opportunities thereby reducing the need for unemployment benefit for unemployed Aboriginals within the community at a cost approximating unemployment benefits.

6. To include in the employment provided, activities directed at combating the social problems referred to, so as to help reduce their deleterious effects and progressively improve community stability.

7. To progressively eliminate the imbalances in incomes referred to in (4).

8. To maximise the capacity of Aboriginal communities to determine the use of their workforce.

Guidelines

9. Community Development Employment Grants will be applied to provide employment to unemployed members of an Aboriginal community and will be confined to Aboriginals living in remote areas or as separate communities where there is high unemployment and inadequate job opportunities and where the projects have been specifically requested by a community.

10. Grants will be paid to Aboriginal community councils but where appropriate may be paid direct to clan groups.

11. Grants to individual communities should not exceed the total entitlement of individual members to unemployment benefits as determined by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in consultation with the Department of Social Security.

12. Specific grants may be made for the purchase of materials and equipment required for the implementation of a particular project.

13. The type of employment to be undertaken will be agreed between the individual communities and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Projects may include: economic ventures; town management activities; social advancement; and environment improvement.

14. Each community will be encouraged to establish its own method of remuneration for its members who participate in the project provided that:

(a) all unemployed community members, eligible to apply for unemployment benefits will be given the opportunity to participate;

(b) each participating community member, provided he contributes the required minimum hours or satisfies other minimum criteria determined by the community, will be guaranteed a minimum income approximating his normal unemployment benefit entitlement.

15. In assisting communities to determine methods of remuneration for individual members, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs will encourage communities to adopt co-operative and/or contract employment systems.

16. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs will assist and advise communities in the implementation of the projects.

17. It has been agreed that the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations will provide/arrange vocational training to assist Aboriginals to participate in the project or where desired to obtain normal employment outside the community.

18. The community, when required, shall satisfy the Department of Aboriginal Affairs that the project is being implemented in accordance with these guidelines.

19. The community shall assist the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the project, including its social effectiveness.

Mr VINER—Initially, the CDEPs will be implemented in about a dozen communities. They will be carefully monitored and evaluated. If they prove successful, and there would seem to be every indication that they will, they will be progressively expanded to other communities. The Government does not regard CDEPs as a panacea for the problems of Aboriginal communities but it hopes they will help eliminate some of them. I am encouraged by a positive response from communities which have so far been consulted. Already a CDEP has commenced at Bamyili in the Northern Territory. Initial reports from the community indicate that it will be successful. Communities at Ernabella and Fregon in South Australia have also advised that they wish to have CDEPs for their communities.

I now turn to the initiatives to be taken in respect of Aboriginals who live in, or wish to move to, urban and rural areas where they will have access to the established open labour market. Many such Aboriginals do not have the skills or work experience which would enable them to compete in the open labour market for jobs. The Government therefore proposes to expand the services available to Aboriginals in the employment and training fields.

As a first step there is a need to expand the number and variety of employment opportunities available to Aboriginals in both the private and public sectors. It is proposed to initiate a national campaign, through the medium of a national Aboriginal employment committee, to persuade employers at top management level to train and employ Aboriginals in their establishments. Support will be available for training under the National Employment and Training system—that is the NEAT scheme—and the Commonwealth Employment Service will assist in identifying suitable Aboriginal applicants for the jobs which become available.

The Commonwealth Government will take specific measures itself to increase employment for Aboriginals in Commonwealth departments and authorities. Initially, assistance and training will be provided under the NEAT system to prepare Aboriginals to compete for employment. The Government is also examining measures to provide employment for Aboriginals, particularly in specific positions which need to be staffed and in which an Aboriginal background is required. In localities, where there is an abundant supply of Aboriginal workers, contractors on Commonwealth construction and similar projects and mining companies will be encouraged and assisted to explore means of offering employment and training to Aboriginals. This may be either in the form of direct employment or by way of contracts awarded to Aboriginal communities for the supply of goods or services.

Complementary to those initiatives to increase employment opportunities are programs to prepare Aboriginals for entry into employment so that they can take full advantage of the additional job vacancies. Increased staffing and other resources will be provided to the Aboriginal employment sections of the Commonwealth Employment Service to permit them to extend their efforts in the training and placement fields. The specialist vocational officers in these sections are responsible for providing job information to young persons and adults, counselling them on

their employment prospects, contacting employers to obtain suitable vacancies, arranging training and work orientation programs and in-plant training, arranging transport and accommodation, providing support and counselling during training and induction periods in employment and generally facilitating the transition into employment. In performing these functions the vocational officers are in contact with Aboriginals in urban and rural areas and in their communities. The increased resources which are to be provided will permit wider coverage and more intensive placement activity.

Vocational training activities will be expanded to assist the preparation of Aboriginals for jobs in the open labour market and for employment in their own communities. Already several successful initiatives have been taken in providing vocational training, especially tailored to Aboriginal needs, in most States and in the Northern Territory. Further development of such training courses in collaboration with technical and further education institutions and other organisations, with support from the NEAT system, is now planned. The NEAT system will also provide support for extended programs of on-the-job training. One facet of this will be the development of training schemes using training facilities available in Commonwealth departments and authorities to prepare Aboriginals for employment in both the public and private sectors.

Fundamental to any long term improvement in the employment status of Aboriginals both in remote communities and in the open labour market is an improvement in the levels of educational attainment by Aboriginal students. My colleague, the Minister for Education in consultation with the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and myself, will promote a redirection of education programs to prepare Aboriginals for a work environment or for specific job training.

The initiatives I have outlined involve action to be taken by several Ministers, including the Ministers for Education, Employment and Industrial Relations, Social Security as well as myself. I will be co-ordinating the progress made in carrying out these initiatives. This national employment strategy for Aboriginals can only be a start to a long term approach to the problem of Aboriginal unemployment. It is intended to cater for the differing situations in which the problem arises. As a start, however, the national employment strategy will lay the foundation upon which the Government can build in the future.

Mr E. G. WHITLAM (Werriwa—Leader of the Opposition)—by leave—On 28 May last year the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr Viner) announced that a working party of officials from his department and the Departments of Social Security, Education and Employment and Industrial Relations would begin a full study of the problems associated with Aboriginal unemployment. His official Press statement described the problem in these terms:

An investigation by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has shown that at least 50 per cent of the Aboriginal workforce was unemployed. This figure compared with 4.4 per cent of the workforce as a whole.

The working party was directed to prepare its report by 31 July last year. It did so. The Government was so concerned about the problem that it has taken 10 months for it to implement any of the findings or recommendations of the working party. On 18 November last the Minister told me that a submission to the Government was being prepared by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. He said: 'I expect the submission to go to the Government fairly shortly'. On 7 December he told me that he had before him a draft proposal with regard to the conversion of unemployment benefits within communities into work project payments. On 16 March this year he told me that the submission being prepared by the departments involved in that study had not been finalised, that it still had not been put to the Government. This was nearly 8 months after the report had been received by Ministers and 4 months after the particular Minister told me that the submission would be considered by Cabinet fairly shortly.

On 4 February this year it had become apparent that the proposal to convert unemployment benefits into work project payments had been torpedoed by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations even before it got to Cabinet. On that date I received a copy of a minute from the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations to employment office managers in Queensland. It effectively took unemployment benefits away from unemployed Aborigines who were living on church missions and Government settlements and who were not prepared to leave their traditional homes to find employment. The statement was incorporated in *Hansard* on 21 April at page 1110 in the course of an urgency debate which I had initiated. The best answer the Government could give was from the Minister for Health (Mr Hunt) who stated:

It is understood from the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Melbourne, that the circular was prepared to be sent to employment office managers, but all

action was subsequently suspended. Thus the circular was not distributed with the authority of the central office.

I ask honourable members to notice that this was a very guarded statement. In fact, already there had been on the notice paper from 30 March a question by me based on that statement and also on the matters which I have recited today. It is question No. 556 and it has been on the notice paper for 8 weeks. Since people reading *Hansard* might wish to see the question, I ask that it be incorporated in *Hansard*.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lucock)—Is leave granted? There being no objection, leave is granted.

The question read as follows—

556 Mr E. G. Whitlam: To ask the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations—

- (1) When did the Department of Labour eliminate the requirement that Aborigines who are full-time residents of church missions and government settlements must be willing to accept work away from those communities in order to qualify for unemployment benefits.
- (2) How many more Aborigines received unemployment benefits in each State because of the elimination of the requirement.
- (3) Did the acting assistant director of employment services in the Queensland branch of his Department instruct employment office managers in Queensland by a circular dated 27 January 1977 (file no. 62/3157) that the requirement was to be re-imposed.
- (4) Have other State branches re-imposed the requirement.
- (5) How many fewer Aborigines now receive unemployment benefits in each State because of the re-imposition of the requirement.
- (6) Did he and the Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs and Social Security have discussions before 28 May 1976 on the problems of Aboriginal employment, including the impact of unemployment benefits payments on Aboriginal communities.
- (7) Were officers of his Department and the Departments of Aboriginal Affairs, Social Security and Education appointed on 28 May 1976 to a working party to make a full study of these matters.
- (8) Did the working party complete its report on 31 July 1976.
- (9) On what dates, with which Ministers and with what results did he discuss the report.
- (10) On what date did his Department prepare its submission to the Government (*Hansard*, 18 November 1976, page 2844, 7 December 1976, page 3370, 16 March 1977, page 248 and 23 March 1977, page 481).
- (11) On what date and at what level was the decision taken to change the policy in the terms of the Queensland circular of 27 January 1977.
- (12) Which (a) Ministers and (b) departments were consulted before the decision was made.
- (13) Did the working party make recommendations on the report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs entitled *Aboriginal Unemployment—Special*

Work Projects (Hansard, 30 October 1975, page 2665).

- (14) Which (a) Ministers and (b) departments have considered (i) that report and (ii) Chapter 9 *Employment* of the report of the Select Committee on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Senate *Hansard, 26 August 1976, page 355*).
- (15) Will he bring up-to-date the monthly unemployment figures for Aborigines which the Prime Minister tabled on 26 August 1976 (*Hansard, page 604*).

Mr E. G. WHITLAM—The Government's inadequate and belated response to the problem of Aboriginal unemployment reflects the pattern of half-truths and evasion which now characterises the Fraser Government's administration of Aboriginal assistance programs. The whole nation is now familiar with the deception of Aborigines by the Attorney-General (Mr Ellicott) when, as Liberal Party spokesman on Aboriginal Affairs, he promised that there would be no cuts in the Aboriginal Affairs budget or programs. It took just 2 short months for that promise to be broken. On 4 February last year the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs announced that the budget of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs would be cut by \$7m in the balance of that financial year, including reductions in expenditure on employment generating projects of \$4.7m. The justification for these cuts in expenditure and for the \$32.4m which was slashed from this year's allocation for Aboriginal assistance programs, was the allegations of waste and extravagance promoted covertly and overtly by the Prime Minister.

Unfortunately for the Government and for the Prime Minister the Hay report failed to justify such mischievous allegations. After the Hay report had been leaked in its entirety to the Press, the Government could not withstand the mounting indignation of the Australian community, the Opposition and the Government's own back bench. On 5 October last year the Minister tabled the Hay report, fully 4 months after the Government had received it, and announced that an additional \$25m was to be appropriated for expenditure on Aboriginal welfare in this financial year. When compared with the Labor Government's appropriations for the Department of \$192m in the previous financial year, this financial year's total allocation of \$177m is still a reduction in funding of 18 per cent in real terms. The Hay report showed no instances of waste and extravagance in this area. Even this meagre allocation of funds may have yet again been reduced by this callous and secretive Government.

On 16 December last and on 1 February the Treasurer (Mr Lynch) announced that Government expenditure was to be reduced by a further \$300m in the balance of this financial year. The Treasurer refused to reveal what programs and services would be curtailed as a result of these decisions. But it was widely reported that the budget of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs had again been reduced. Stung by the public's outrage at this breach of election promises to Aborigines, the Government resorted to a diversionary tactic. In answering to pre-arranged questions in the House, the Prime Minister twice took the cheap and nasty course of trying to blame the Australian Labor Party Government for an increase in the number of Aborigines unemployed. On 26 August in response to a question from the honourable member for Kingston (Mr Chapman) the Prime Minister quite gratuitously offered the following comments:

One of the greatest harms done by the policies of the previous Administration was to increase Aboriginal unemployment very greatly In November 1972 about 3700 were unemployed; in December 1973 there were 9900 Aborigines unemployed as a direct result of the policies of the Australian Labor Party.

Again, in reply to the honourable member for Ryan (Mr Moore) on 15 September the Prime Minister asserted:

The Labor Government was the great perpetrator of Aboriginal unemployment.

These charges were made by a Prime Minister who is now presiding over the highest levels of unemployment since the great Depression and over a Government which abolished seasonally adjusted unemployment statistics and denied unemployment benefits to school leavers. The Prime Minister, after his first answer on 26 August last year, tabled statistics which showed the number of unemployed Aborigines at the end of July last year as 9667. The Minister now states that at the end of February this year there were 12 218 Aborigines unemployed. The Parliamentary Library Statistics Group has prepared a table which shows that at the end of March there were 12 293 Aborigines unemployed. I ask for leave to incorporate in *Hansard* the figures prepared by the Parliamentary Library Statistics Group for the months subsequent to those for which the Prime Minister tabled statistics on 26 August last year.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lucock)—Is leave granted? There being no objection, leave is granted.

The table read as follows—

UNEMPLOYMENT—ABORIGINES
Aborigines Registered for Employment with the
Commonwealth Employment Service
August 1975 to March 1977

1976—	
August	9 882
September	10 087
October	10 645
November	11 006
December	11 812
1977—	
January	12 323
February	12 218
March	12 293

Compiled at request by the Statistics Group of the Legislative Research Service from information obtained from the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations.

Mr E. G. WHITLAM—The number of Aborigines registered as unemployed stood at 8255 at the end of October 1975 which was the last full month of my Government. The Prime Minister is either deluding himself or attempting to deceive his colleagues and the Australian public if he maintains that this represented a real increase in unemployment under my Government. The Australian Labor Party uncovered the real extent of Aboriginal unemployment which the Liberal Party had concealed. The simple fact is that Aboriginal unemployment was already higher than 10 000 when my Government took office in December 1972 because successive Liberal-Country Party governments had ignored the problem by effectively preventing many Aborigines from registering. My Government took 2 initiatives which disclosed the full extent of Aboriginal unemployment and it extended to Aborigines the same rights as enjoyed by all other members of the Australian community.

In 1973 the work test which determines eligibility for unemployment benefits was modified so that Aborigines on missions and reserves did not have to move to stations and towns in order to make themselves available for employment. In addition, the strength of the Aboriginal employment section of the then Department of Labor and Immigration was increased from 65 positions in December 1973 to 122 positions in September 1975. The majority of these new positions were for vocational officers appointed to visit outlying areas and to encourage registration. An increase in the number of Aborigines registered as unemployed—not the number of unemployed Aborigines—was thus inevitable. If the Labor Government was guilty of anything, it was that it defined a problem which the conservative coalition parties were content to ignore. If Labor had not come to power in 1972, it is possible that

the number of Aborigines registered as unemployed would still be under 4000 while untold thousands of Aborigines would have continued to be denied assistance in gaining employment and income security.

Labor was not content simply to blame its predecessors for the problem that it had inherited. Innovative employment programs, including special works projects, specific grants to Aboriginal communities for enterprises, housing and town management, and the Regional Employment Development and National Employment and Training schemes were introduced to assist Aborigines to tackle the unemployment problem. Unfortunately for the thousands of unemployed Aborigines, the Minister's statement will have little effect on the problem of Aboriginal unemployment. It provides little hope that the Government intends to reduce the growing number of Aborigines who have been thrown out of work by this Government's economic policies. It fails to commit any additional expenditure to finance or support the community development employment projects or an expanded NEAT scheme. Presumably the Minister's proposals will have to limp along within very restricted funding that is now available to the Departments of Aboriginal Affairs and Employment and Industrial Relations and the restrictive ceilings on employment in those departments.

If the Government had genuinely intended to tackle the problem of Aboriginal unemployment, there was scant need to commission another working party to examine the problem. In the last 2 years there have been no less than 3 major reports presented to the Parliament which have dealt totally or in part with the problem of Aboriginal unemployment and have set out detailed recommendations for government action. The first main report of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty commissioned detailed research into poverty amongst Aboriginal families in Brisbane, Adelaide and rural New South Wales. These reports recommended major amendments to the procedures governing the payment of unemployment benefits to Aborigines, the extension of the very successful vocational officer service, further development of Aboriginal employment schemes, and the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation. A Standing Committee of this House, the Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, presented its report on Aboriginal employment on 30 October last. This all-party Committee recognised the need for significant government assistance and

innovation in this field. Paragraphs 28 and 30 of its report state:

The Committee recognises that special initiatives are needed to create and restore employment and training opportunities for Aborigines The need for special initiatives in the field of Aboriginal employment stems from the high level of Aboriginal unemployment, lack of general education, formal and on-the-job training, work experience and discrimination against them.

The Committee went on to recommend that the special works project scheme be greatly expanded and that the Australian Government should make the necessary funds available.

In August last year a Senate Select Committee reported on the environmental conditions of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and presented detailed comment and recommendations to alleviate the problem of Aboriginal unemployment. Page 213 of the Committee's report states:

Employment, and lack of employment, are but one component of a cycle which ensures the perpetuation of poverty. If a person is to break out of the poverty situation into which he was born, he must be able to achieve economic security, which implies permanent employment

The Senate Select Committee also presented 5 recommendations concerning Aboriginal employment, including a recommendation that the special works program be expanded. The overwhelming conclusion of all these commissions and committees was that immediate action by the Federal Government was necessary if the depressing cycle of Aboriginal poverty and unemployment was to be broken. I do say to the Minister, whose genuineness and endeavours in this field I recognise—we can all discern that he is inhibited by the reluctance of some of his colleagues and by his coalition partners—that he might have been generous enough to acknowledge the recommendations which have been made in this field by the Henderson inquiry, commissioned by the McMahon Government and augmented by mine, and by the committees of the 2 Houses.

The Minister's statement confirms the impression that the Government is still interested only in maintaining a facade of activity and interest in the problem of Aboriginal employment. The Government has not and will not commit or expend funds that are required to implement the findings of those 3 major inquiries or, one would think, fully to implement the recommendations which have been accepted from the working party's report of 31 July last. Instead of maintaining expenditure on labour intensive housing and enterprise activities, the Government slashed expenditure on those programs in January and August of last year. The allocation

of an additional \$25m for those programs still does not restore funding to the nominal levels established by the Labor Government, still less to the real levels. Instead of extending the vocational officer service of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, the Government applied severe staff and travel restrictions which effectively denied many Aborigines income, support and assistance in obtaining employment. Instead of immediate government action to alleviate this pressing social problem, another unnecessary and inadequate report was commissioned.

The result of this Government's duplicity and dishonesty is record levels of Aboriginal unemployment, which have risen every month during its term. The Fraser Government is not only presiding over record levels of general unemployment but also is responsible for the rate of Aboriginal unemployment which in official terms is running at 30 per cent of the Aboriginal work force and is unofficially estimated to be running in excess of 50 per cent of the potential work force. This is the cost of the Fraser Government's misdirected priorities, its passion for slashing federal expenditure, and its deliberate and inhuman policy of creating and then hiding unemployment.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Corporate Crime—Aged Pensioners—Apple Industry—Migrant Education—Political Activities of the Australian Union of Students—Whaling—Small Businesses—Overseas Visit by the Prime Minister—Prices and Wages Freeze

Question proposed:

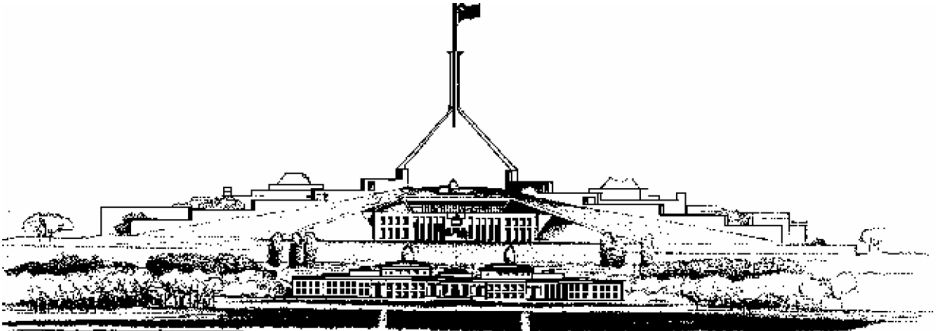
That grievances be noted.

Mr JACOBI (Hawker) (11.46)—In rising to speak in the grievance debate, I want to raise the issue of corporate crime and punishment, or rather lack of punishment. I should like to look at the problem of protecting the public and other traders against the actions of fraudulent directors and other officers of companies. The telling need for this protection was cogently exposed in an article by Graham Downie in the *Canberra Times* on 6 December 1976. He indicated that the Department of Business and Consumer Affairs had under consideration legislation which would provide for new offences and stricter penalties for dishonest or reckless company directors. The article also mentioned that legislation of this type was introduced in Victoria some 10 years ago. As I see it, amendments to the Victorian Companies Act to deal with delinquent



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 41, 1977

Wednesday, 12 October 1977

THIRTIETH PARLIAMENT
SECOND SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Third Reading

Leave granted for third reading to be moved forthwith.

Motion (by Mr Newman) proposed:

That the Bill be now read a third time.

Mr BRYANT (Wills) (9.21)—Mr Acting Speaker—

Motion (by Mr Bouchier) proposed:

That the question be now put.

Mr Bryant—May I have my dissent recorded?

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill read a third time.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 1977-78

In Committee

Consideration resumed from 11 October.

Second Schedule.

Department of Aboriginal Affairs

Proposed expenditure, \$90,774,000.

Mr BRYANT (Wills) (9.23)—I want to take a few minutes to talk about what is now called the National Aboriginal Conference and to remind the Parliament of the original concept behind the establishment of this body which in the initial stages was called the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee. Until 1972 when the Australian Labor Party became the Government very little had been done over the years to advance the cause of the Aboriginal people. One or two previous Ministers, such as the honourable member for Mackellar (Mr Wentworth), had made an impact but that was the first time that the Australian Parliament and the Australian Government had established a Department of Aboriginal Affairs with a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs responsible for that subject alone. As the Minister at that time I realised that one of the greatest difficulties one faced in arriving at proper policies and appropriate procedures in Aboriginal affairs was the difficulty of consultation with and consideration of the views of the Aboriginal people.

After some consideration I decided that the best thing to do was to convene a conference of Aboriginal people representative, as far as I could make it so, of all sections of the Aboriginal community—people from the Northern Territory tribal situations, people from the urban situation and prominent Aboriginal people. Honourable members may be interested to learn how one goes about such a task. There are some 400 communities in Australia in which Aboriginal people

are to be found. Some of them comprise three or four families; in others, such as at Maningrida, Papunya and Yuendumu and so on in the Northern Territory, there are upwards of a thousand Aboriginal people or more living in communities of their own. We took first of all the advisory committee that the previous Minister had established, then prominent Aboriginal people such as the late Harold Blair, Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls and so on, members of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and other people who represented their communities. Some 70 people gathered here in Canberra to consider the problems. I want to make it clear that the idea was that this was to be the unit which was to be the direct line of communication between the Minister and the Aboriginal communities.

Over the last three or four years, but particularly since the first election was held for membership of what is now called the National Aboriginal Conference in late 1973, I have heard it said that the National Aboriginal Conference, or national congress, whatever name it was called for the time being, has been a failure. If it has been a failure that failure should not be visited upon the Aboriginal members themselves. They had extraordinary difficulties to cope with. They were new to this kind of task. It was the duty of the responsible Ministers to establish a communication system—a continual communication system—with the Aboriginal people. The representative principle is difficult to establish in such a situation. In the end there was simply a division of Australia into 41 electorates and members were elected to represent those electorates. This was not a totally satisfactory technique because, for example, people in central Australia who live in communities 500 miles apart could not possibly adequately represent one another but it was the best thing to do in the circumstances. I do not believe that the amendments that have been made to the idea are going to work any better. In fact I think there are inhibitions in the system. There are impositions, such as the executive group which will be a part of it, which will, I think defeat its purpose.

I want to say a word in support of the general principle of direct representation by the Aboriginal people in the consideration of their own policies. I do not believe this idea has been a failure. I do not believe its members have failed. They have acted in the same way as we do. Each one of us has different techniques in our approach to the business of being representatives of people. Some people are more successful than others in public appearances but that is part of the system.

I hope that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr Viner) will take this concept to himself, that he will make sure that he establishes direct communications with the Aboriginal members who are spokesmen for their communities. I hope he will no longer talk about the National Aboriginal Conference, as it is now called, being a failure. It is our duty at this end to establish an effective communications system.

Nothing has been more of a whipping boy than the Aboriginal programs of the last four or five years. It has been so easy to say that money has been wasted, that programs have been at fault, that it has all been a total waste of time. It has not. The fact that there are so many Aboriginal people now able to speak in public, to act in the public domain as self-assured citizens, is a measure of the success of the campaigns of the last ten or fifteen years to advance the cause of the Aboriginal people.

I come now to the procedures and policies adopted by this Government immediately on its return to office. It had attacked very vigorously the programs and the expenditure of the Labor Government. The first approach was to reduce that expenditure. I believe that that was a serious error. It was an abdication of the responsibility to the people of Australia and to the Aboriginal people in particular. I cannot quite understand why there seems to be so much under-expenditure in the Budget that I see before me as apparent from the figures I see in Appropriation Bill (No. 2). Perhaps even in housing inadequate effort has been made. I put it to the Minister that he should not let himself be deterred in any way by these criticisms. Many of them will flow from people whose approach, unfortunately, is racist. I am not going to suggest that the people of Australia are racist in the sense that I think that the people in southern Africa are, but I do know that Australians place a heavy premium upon behaviour. People who do not behave according to the norms are likely to come under heavy fire.

Aboriginal people who for two centuries have been deprived of a proper place on this continent as a result of our arrival here ought to have special consideration showered upon their needs. I must express my bitter disappointment at the collapse of so many programs around Australia over the past year or so. As a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs I see so many programs which have been launched come to a relative standstill. One does not have time here tonight to discuss them. In so many ways the programs have come to a point of stagnation and have

caused disappointment and frustration to the Aboriginal people.

Last night an honourable member mentioned the matter of the turtles in the Torres Strait. One has almost continually to get the record straight. Back two or three years before we came into government—about 1970—when the honourable member for Mackellar was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, a proposal was put to him to develop a turtle growing program in the Torres Strait. A small amount of money—I think \$30,000—was put aside in the first instance to do that. It was to be an experimental exercise. Unfortunately, the person who became in charge of the program, operating through the Australian National University, saw an opportunity to expand the enterprise beyond his capacity to control it. By the time we came into government \$400,000 or more had been committed. I think about \$200,000 was allocated in the previous Budget and was transferred about the time we came into Government.

I visited the Torres Strait. I could see immediately that the project was not going to work. I do not have time tonight to expound the arithmetic on it, but honourable members only have to read the records I tabled before the Joint Committee on Public Accounts to find out how misled we all were. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs was misled in its predictions and prophecies. The governments were misled in applying to the task so much funds so generously, one might say. So when I see in the Budget Papers an amount of \$1.05m allocated for ecology, I wonder whether the Minister has really applied himself to the task of seeing whether we are going to get value for that money. I recognise the difficulties in the Torres Strait of maintaining economy.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN (Mr Jarman)—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr CALDER (Northern Territory) (9.33)—Strangely enough, I agree with what the honourable member for Wills (Mr Bryant) said about the new National Aboriginal Conference. It could well be an even worse representative of Aborigines than was the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee. I support the honourable member's request that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr Viner) should speak directly to the traditional Aborigines. I add that the Minister should speak to them and not to their advisers. He probably will then find some real home truths coming through. In this Appropriation Bill (No. 1) \$90.7m is allocated to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which is a rise of

\$3.8m on what was actually spent last year. The overall allocation for Aboriginal programs in 1977-78 represents an increase of 9 per cent, or \$15m.

We have heard much about grants-in-aid and money for housing, health, education, employment, welfare and so on for Aborigines. We see that in 1976-77 grants-in-aid for the Northern Territory totalled \$18m and in 1977-78 the amount allocated is \$22.1m. So this Government is taking very seriously indeed the matter of aid, help and assistance in every direction to Aborigines. This reflects the Government's overall policy. We hear so much about this from the Opposition. Its members seem to think that they are the only people who have ever seen an Aborigine. From their past performance I would think that until their three years in government very few of them had seen an Aborigine.

The national employment strategy of this Government is to raise effective levels of employment for Aborigines. We see in the Bill that the allocation for town management and public utilities this financial year is \$4.3m higher than it was last financial year and includes the Community Development Employment Projects, which are very well meaning and well thought out. I should like to see them proceed. This financial year we have an estimated expenditure of \$5.6m for those projects. This program is in keeping with the Government's national employment strategy to raise the level of employment among Aborigines.

We have heard the Minister say that Aborigines want to work. I think they fall within the same category as anyone else. If one did not have to work and could get away with not working, whether one was black or white, it would be questionable, to say the least, whether one really wanted to work. But it is far more soul destroying to Aborigines to be paid to sit down and not work than it is to pay social security benefits to white people. A white person knows in his heart of hearts whether he is bludging or whether he is genuinely in need of those benefits. We know that many of them are and I am not knocking them for that. But for most Aborigines the payment of what is called 'sit-down money' is not in their best interests and they know it.

In spite of the government programs and the money made available for Aboriginal work programs—the allocation under division 120.4.04 of the Bill for employment and the allocation under division 120.4.07 for town management and public utilities which have been increased by \$1.2m and \$4.3m respectively—we

have heard of cuts in town council spending, with attendant unemployment. What is the reason? We have already put this question to the Minister and he has provided a very sound answer. But I wonder whether this was a genuine error on behalf of a white Administrator or the advisers and/or the Department. If so, it is confusing and tragic to have people willing to work being told to go on the dole because of government spending cuts in this area.

I am not critical of the Minister because he righted this situation very quickly. But I am trying to get to the heart of that story. When it went around the Aboriginal communities it did a tremendous amount of harm. If the reason is political there should be a serious appraisal of the activities of those people responsible. I know that the situation which existed at Bathurst Island, Melville Island and Croker Island has been righted. But many people in those areas, especially at Bathurst Island, previously would not apply for the dole. Then, when they were confronted with the situation they hoped that their council would be able to get the money and set them to work to use that money. These are very real people about whom I am speaking. It is very gratifying to note that the Minister got on to this situation which was occurring at Bathurst Island. It was very serious but it has been corrected. The National Aboriginal Conference was mentioned earlier. I see from division 120.3.05 that \$475,000 has been appropriated for election expenses for this body. That is part of a total of \$978,000 which will be provided to run the National Aboriginal Conference election later this year and also to run the new concept—the National Aboriginal Conference—for the rest of the year.

The previous speaker, the honourable member for Wills, a former Minister, said that this was a worthwhile organisation. That maybe the opinion in some areas but I have been from the Arafura Sea to the Macdonnell Ranges in the last few weeks. Many traditional Aborigines have told me that they do not want either the National Aboriginal Conference or its predecessor the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee. To have such a body looking after their affairs cuts directly across the concept of what they understand. They do not want that any more. They previously told both governments, that is the Australian Labor Party Government and our own Government, that they did not want two large land councils. I have not been in those areas soliciting these remarks. These people told me that straight off the cuff. They hit me with it right between the eyes. The Tiwis are not alone

in their protestations with regard to a single land council.

Why do we inflict these unwanted organisations and people upon the real Aborigines? They are beginning to come to the people who live in this area and to ask: 'Why are you forcing these people on us? We have certain people put onto us but we do not want them.' That is why they have asked the Minister to go and speak to them. I am certain he will go because he is a very sympathetic and understanding man. The real Aboriginal people do not understand this concept. They do not want it. They do not understand why they receive the dole instead of being able to work. People who do not truly have Aboriginal interests at heart are not wanted by the Aborigines. They do not want people who do not understand their interests. Why, through these advisers, are we doing this? In relation to the appropriation, I ask the Minister: Where do we find the appropriation for the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and the medical service which the Congress purports to provide?

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN (Mr Jarman)—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr LES JOHNSON (Hughes) (9.43)—Mr Deputy Chairman, the Treasurer—

Mr McVeigh—The honourable member for the Northern Territory knows all about it. Why do you not listen to him?

Mr LES JOHNSON—Here he is again, old ocker.

Mr McVeigh—Did you—

Mr LES JOHNSON—Oh, shut him up.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN—Order! I have given the call to the honourable member for Hughes. I would like to hear what he is about to say.

Mr LES JOHNSON—The Treasurer (Mr Lynch) in his Budget Speech stated:

Overall expenditure on programs of direct assistance to Aborigines in 1977-78 is estimated to be about \$176m compared with \$161m in 1976-77.

Then, in a Press statement on 17 August, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr Viner) stated:

Expenditure on Aboriginal programs in 1977-78 would rise by \$15m or nine per cent to \$176m.

The Government has once again broken its promises to Aborigines by reducing expenditure on Aboriginal assistance programs in this year's Budget. The Government has allocated only \$171m for these programs in this financial year when a total of \$178m was allocated last year,

that is \$153m in the Budget and \$25m subsequently. That figure was \$13m less than the amount provided in the Hayden Budget in real terms. Expenditure on Aboriginal assistance programs has been slashed by 27 per cent in real terms over the last two years. Substantial cuts in funding for Aboriginal Affairs include: Housing, down by 3.81 per cent in real terms; education, down by 8.9 per cent in real terms; employment, down by 0.1 per cent in real terms; enterprises, down by 10.5 per cent in real terms and legal aid down by 0.9 per cent in real terms. These areas are important in many ways, but perhaps they are most important in providing jobs for Aboriginal people in Australia. These cuts will cause greater hardships and unemployment among Aboriginal people.

Further, the 1977-78 figures in relation to the adjusted Hayden Budget figures show decreased support for education, health, social security and Aboriginal programs. As a proportion of total Commonwealth Government outlays, spending on Aborigines has dropped from 0.89 per cent in 1974-75 to 0.66 per cent in 1977-78, that is the lowest proportion since 1972-73. Real per capita expenditure by the Commonwealth on Aborigines has dropped by 31 per cent, from \$909 in 1974-75 to \$625 in 1977-78. The proposed 1977-78 Commonwealth expenditure on Aborigines is the lowest in real terms since 1973-74, and in real per capita terms it is the lowest since 1972-73. Nominal expenditure by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1977-78 will be the lowest since 1973-74 and in real terms it will be the lowest since 1972-73. Real per capita expenditure by the Department in 1977-78 will be \$440, which is a drop of \$61 or 12 per cent on the previous year and a fall of \$273 or 38 per cent from the 1974-75 peak of \$713. That is the lowest real per capita expenditure since 1972-73.

Expenditure by the Department in 1977-78 will rise by only 2.4 per cent, from \$121m to \$123.9m, compared with an increase of 10.5 per cent in total Government outlays. Of the \$14.5m overall increase in direct Commonwealth expenditure on Aborigines, \$11.6m is allocated to Commonwealth departments other than the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Nominal grants to the States by the Department in 1977-78 for Aboriginal assistance programs will be almost equal to the amount provided in 1973-74, that is about \$32m, a drop of 41 per cent in real terms in four years. I mention something about Aboriginal housing because I am anxious to get these figures on the record. Proposed expenditure of \$35.3m in 1977-78 by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on Aboriginal housing will be

\$5.5m less than the amount expended in 1976-77 and 45 per cent less in real terms than the corresponding 1974-75 expenditure, that is a cut of almost one-half in three years. Over the same period grants to the States for Aboriginal housing have been cut by 60 per cent in real terms. I shall now say a word about Aboriginal health. Expenditure by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on Aboriginal health has been cut by 11 per cent in real terms over the past three years and expenditure on education has been cut by 12 per cent.

What I have said is in very sharp contrast to the commitments made on 28 November 1975 in the course of the election campaign. The then spokesman on Aboriginal affairs, the honourable member for Wentworth (Mr Ellicott) said, amongst other things:

Spread the word that there is absolutely no truth in Labor Party rumours about cuts in Aboriginal affairs budget. Under a Liberal-Country Party Government Aborigines will be better not worse off. Urge Aborigines to vote Liberal-Country Party on December 13.

I wanted those figures to go into the record. I wish to add a little more to what I have said about Aboriginal health because I believe that that is an area to which added emphasis needs to be given. Expenditure allocations were cut by \$1m in 1976-77, yet the actual expenditure for the year was only \$18.6m compared with the \$20.5m allocated for that year. The allocation for 1977-78 is \$21.7m, which is almost the same amount that was spent in 1975-76, two years previously.

I wish to give some additional figures in relation to Aboriginal housing. Allocations for Aboriginal housing have been seriously cut from \$40.9m in 1976-77 to \$35.3m. Theoretically that was because of a desire for greater cost effectiveness. But it represents a decline in cash terms of 11.6 per cent, being a reduction from the \$45m allocated in the 1975-76 Budget. That is a decline of 37 per cent in real terms from the allocation in 1975-76. I understand that those figures will take some digesting, but it is important that they go on the record. We now see emerging Aboriginal people with discernment. I think there has been a tendency to hoodwink them by means of good public relations activities, whereas in fact Aboriginal living conditions are degenerating in many ways.

The time made available to honourable members in considering the departmental estimates is very short. One of the matters that concerns all honourable members, I suppose, is the level of Aboriginal unemployment throughout Australia. I know that it concerns the Minister. There is

some argument as to the steps that are being taken, understandably, because some people contend that they are discriminatory. In August 1973, the number of Aborigines registered as unemployed was 3,053; in August 1974, the number was 5,080. Subsequently it has gone up. I will not have time to spell out these figures in detail. In August 1977—these are the latest figures available—the number of Aborigines registered as unemployed was 12,224. We are told that 50 per cent of Aboriginal people throughout Australia are now unemployed. That is a most disastrous situation. I just do not accept the proposition that sufficient is being done about that situation. I do not wish to say anything further about it. I hope that the Minister in his reply will answer those matters I have put to him.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN (Mr Jarman)—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr WALLIS (Grey) (9.53)—I wish to make a few comments on the estimates for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. First of all, I back up the statements made by my colleague, the honourable member for Hughes (Mr Les Johnson), who referred to the decrease in real terms in the amount of money being allocated to Aborigines. Although the figures in the Budget Papers indicate that the allocation is being increased, it is certainly an increase of a small amount. If we go back to the amounts allocated two years ago during the term of office of the Labor Government we find that in comparison the allocation for last year represented a very considerable cut. Of the amount cut, \$25m was restored, but it still left us \$8m short of the allocation made under the previous Labor Government. Of course, by the time inflation is taken into account, that decrease in the amount of money available for Aboriginal affairs drops considerably. In fact, if we take into account the inflation rate of approximately 24 per cent that occurred over the last two years we find that the decrease is quite considerable.

What can we see as a result of these cuts in the allocation of money to Aboriginal affairs? My colleague has already mentioned a matter that concerns me greatly and that is the large increase in the number of Aborigines who are unemployed. That situation is the direct result of these cuts in government expenditure. The amount of money allocated to the number of special works projects which provide employment for Aborigines in various country areas, of course, has been cut drastically with the result that town councils, district councils and so on that were able to make

use of these special works projects now find these doors closed to them and the direct result is that large increase in Aboriginal unemployment which my colleague mentioned.

I refer to the matter of Aboriginal housing. Some months ago I put a question to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Mr Viner) about the number of Aboriginal houses which will be made available in my own electorate of Grey. According to the figures which were given, the number is to be cut in half. That is a big blow to those people who are trying to overcome one of the serious problems facing the Aboriginal people—that is, the adequate housing of them. When we realise the work that has been done by the many building societies that have been established and the consequent availability of money for the purchase and the erection of homes, we can understand the way they feel about the cuts that have taken place. I have received telegrams from a number of people in my electorate in which I have been asked to protest to the Government about these cuts, because it is quite obvious that the work that they have been trying to do will be nullified by the action of the Government in cutting back the amount of finance available.

I wish to raise a few matters connected with Aboriginal affairs in my electorate during consideration of the estimates for this Department. Quite some time ago a pre-apprenticeship training scheme was established in Port Augusta, in conjunction with the Port Augusta College of Further Education. The aim of the scheme was to teach young people the basics that would be required if they were to go on to take up an apprenticeship. I have a copy of the syllabus and the type of preparation that these young people are given, and it is quite good. I can assure the Minister that these lads are being advantaged, and it certainly gives them a good grounding in the taking up of an apprenticeship at a later stage. In the statement which he issued some months ago on the employment of Aborigines, the Minister said:

The Commonwealth Government will take specific measures itself to increase employment for Aborigines in Commonwealth departments and authorities.

In the Port Augusta area a major Commonwealth instrumentality—I refer to Australian National Railways—trains apprentices. I know that the Minister has given me a reply to a question on this subject, but I certainly hope that, with the co-operation of his colleagues, some arrangement can be made whereby apprenticeships are made available to some of those lads who take part in the pre-apprenticeship training scheme so that they can have the opportunity of

taking on these apprenticeships and taking their proper place in society. I ask the Minister to give that matter his closest attention because it is a proposition which is worthy of support.

There is another matter which I have taken up with the Minister. Up to date I have received no reply in relation to it. A medical service has been established at the Davenport Reserve. That medical service has been financed mainly, I understand, from money provided by the Redfern medical service. Indeed, in order to keep the project going they wrote to me some time ago asking for my support in their approach to the Minister for funding for their activities. I have been absent from the Parliament for quite some weeks, but up to date I have received no reply which indicates whether they are to receive that financial support. I urge the Minister to give serious and sympathetic consideration to providing this medical service with the finance necessary to allow it to keep going, because it is providing a very necessary medical service in that area.

It would certainly be missed if it were to go out of operation. It is felt that that may happen if it does not receive that financial support from the Federal Government. Again I ask the Minister to ensure that sympathetic consideration is given to allowing that service to continue. As an indication of what it has been able to do, I point out that in the last 12 months it has treated more than 2,500 patients in that area. I think that that suggests that the work in which that medical service is engaged is important. Again I urge the Minister to give it his consideration because, if he does not and it goes out of operation, that will create a large gap as far as the provision of medical services for these people is concerned. Incidentally, I can add that the service is mainly voluntary at this stage. Apparently there is a doctor who does a fair amount of work for it. Again I trust that it will receive the necessary support.

One other matter concerns me. I refer to the statement by the Minister last May regarding the Commonwealth Development Employment Projects scheme. There are a few points about this scheme on which I would like some clarification from the Minister. One is that in the statement mention is made of the basis upon which the money would be made available. The basis is the amount of unemployment benefit that would be paid in a particular area. This might mean that the amount would be allocated to the particular administrative body in that area or to the council. It would allocate the work. That would certainly mean that a number of people would be employed full time. I assume that they

would receive award wages. The amount available would certainly mean that it would not be possible to employ all the people.

If we use the amount of unemployment benefit as the criteria for the amount of money available, one thing that comes to my mind is the question of the legality of this action. If the scheme is operated in such a way that a person who would normally be eligible for unemployment benefit finds himself without employment after the allocation of jobs at these settlements, are such people still entitled to unemployment benefit? I would like the Minister to clarify this point. If they are not, it appears to me to be a denial of rights to Aboriginals. I think it would be a big step backwards as it would mean that we would be creating discrimination, et cetera, amongst those people. Although the scheme has been highlighted by quite a number of people, I would hate to see in the operation of this scheme some steps which were backward steps. Whilst I agree that it is a lot better to provide finance which would provide work for these people than everybody to receive unemployment benefits, these people operate on a cash economy now. I think it would be tragic if we had half of them working and receiving money and the other half receiving nothing at all. I trust that the Minister will clear up that point when he replies.

If that is the way in which the scheme is to apply, I again question the legality of this type of operation. If a person in our community satisfies the criteria for eligibility for unemployment benefit he gets paid that benefit. If the system is to operate any differently in the areas where the CDEP system is operating, that could be described only as discriminatory and something that I think should be rectified. I appreciate that the Minister has gone to some trouble in trying to work out a scheme to overcome the unemployment problem amongst Aboriginals. I feel that it has grown during the last 18 months or so. I trust that if we use this scheme it will be augmented with grants which will ensure that all those people who are eligible to work on the reserves and settlements can find employment. I trust we will not have a situation in which half will be working and receiving money and the other half will not be receiving unemployment benefit. I think that is about all I have to say on this matter other than to express my concern about the operation of the scheme.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN (Mr Jarman)—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr VINER (Stirling—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) (10.4)—I have listened with interest to the comments made by honourable members in this debate on the estimates of my Department. Whilst I welcome many of the comments made by honourable gentlemen and their inquiries, such as those of the honourable member for Grey (Mr Wallis), there are a number of points that I should not only clarify but rectify. I refer particularly to comments made by members of the Opposition. So I would like to take a little time of the Committee to deal with some of them. Some mention has been made of the matter of funding for the Department this year and of the funding of programs administered by my Department and other Commonwealth departments. I think a comment made yesterday by the honourable member for Casey (Mr Falconer)—one which I have made on a number of occasions—ought to be drawn to the attention of the Committee, and that is that the value, the worth, of programs funded by my Department is not to be measured in terms of money alone. I think it is fair to repeat that statement because I am firmly convinced that it is correct. I said in an address to the National Press Club on 7 July of this year, which was very close to National Aborigines Day:

The status and role of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs should not be measured simply in terms of the money it spends.

Many members of the Opposition delude themselves into thinking that they can measure what a government is doing in the field of Aboriginal affairs by looking at the total amount of money either appropriated or expended. Of course that was the great fallacy of the former Administration. It pumped so much money into Aboriginal affairs so quickly, without having laid the foundation of properly planned and administered programs, that it did far more damage than the value of the money itself. So, when this Government came to office and was given the responsibility of funding special assistance for Aborigines, one of the first things that we were concerned to do was to get control of the administrative base upon which programs were implemented because we were convinced that we would get real value only if we had well planned, well thought-out and soundly administered programs. I feel quite sure that during the last 20-odd months we have put the house in order; we have achieved the objectives that we set out to achieve by way of sound administration, well thought-out and well planned programs.

So we have that foundation upon which we can expect that the appropriations will grow consistently and will fulfil those objectives that we all want to achieve. I indicate the way in which the Government approaches the matter of growth in expenditure by comparing the actual expenditure last year with the estimated expenditure for this year by way of the appropriations that the Government has made. I run down those figures very quickly within the totals of expenditure in 1976-77 of \$161.5m and the appropriation for estimated expenditure for this financial year of \$176m. That is an estimated increase of \$15m. For health, expenditure last financial year was \$18.3m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$23.3m. For education, expenditure last financial year was \$36.4m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$43.3m. For employment, expenditure last financial year was \$5.5m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$7.3m. For housing, expenditure last financial year was \$40m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$35m. For town management and public utilities, which provide a very significant source of funds for employment, the expenditure last financial year was \$31.3m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$34.7m. For legal aid, the expenditure last financial year was \$3.7m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$3.8m. For cultural, recreational and sporting activities the expenditure last financial year was \$639,000. The appropriation for this financial year is \$775,000. For enterprises, the expenditure last financial year was \$4.2m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$5.9m. For welfare, the expenditure last financial year was \$2.6m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$3m. General expenditure last financial year was \$17.7m. The appropriation for this financial year is \$18m.

So there has been a steady increase in key areas. There has been a downturn in the appropriation for housing. I remind the House that funding for the Aboriginal Loans Commission for housing started off at \$5m. An additional \$2m was provided in that financial year. We increased the amount last year to \$10m. That was a quick and substantial injection of funds into an area providing the basis for loans for home ownership in order to provide the Loans Commission with a substantial pool of money which will become a revolving fund. There has been a re-ordering of priorities in respect of these figures. That seems to be forgotten by Opposition members. Part of the on-going administration is to evaluate programs and re-order priorities. One

of the significant things we have done in the re-ordering of priorities is to ensure that Aboriginal organisations receive proportionately a bigger part of the Budget. In terms of our policy of self-management and self-efficiency we believe that more funds should be directed through Aboriginal organisations. This is a consistent pattern of the handling of finances by this Government.

Comments were made by a number of speakers about the unemployment situation amongst Aboriginals. This is a real and disturbing problem. As a Government we do not reside from that, nor from the problems which it brings. It was for that reason that I put down in this House on 26 May a statement on a national employment strategy covering the whole field of private employment, government employment, urban employment, rural employment and employment in the remote communities. It was out of our consideration of the problems facing Aboriginals in remote communities, in particular, where the ordinary labour market is not readily available to them that we devised the Community Development Employment Project scheme. Regrettably, as I have previously pointed out to this House, there has been a suggestion from the shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs casting doubts upon the legal validity of that scheme. There is no question about its validity. It is designed to cater for a particular problem in the remoter communities. It has been enthusiastically welcomed by all the communities which have been approached to take part in the scheme. Nor can there be any suggestion that in its operation the scheme will amount to a denial of any rights which Aboriginals have as citizens. There can be no suggestion that there is an intention to disentitle them to unemployment benefits. The essence of the scheme is that Aboriginals do not want to have sit down money. They have seen within their own communities the social destruction that that kind of money can bring. They wish to work for an income. This scheme has been designed to provide work for those who wish to work. In those places where the scheme is in operation the ordinary work test on unemployment benefits will apply.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr E. G. Whitlam) decried this Government's efforts in the land rights field. The full justification for what we have done in this area comes from the second report of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry. In considering how it would ameliorate the impact of mining on Aboriginal society the inquiry pointed out that through the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act introduced by this Government, Aboriginals