NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Third Assembly
Second Session

Parliamentary Record

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NORTHERN TERRITORY LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Third Assembly
Second Session

Speaker
Chief Minister and
Minister for Lands, Industrial
Development and Tourism

Opposition Leader
Treasurer and
Minister for Education

Minister for Primary Production and
Conservation and
Minister for Community Development

Attorney-General and
Minister for Mines and Energy

Minister for Transport and Works and
Minister Assisting the Treasurer

Minister for Health and Housing and
Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation and
Minister Assisting the Chief Minister

Members of the Legislative Assembly

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Arnhem
Barkly
Casuarina
Elsey
Fannie Bay
Gillen
Jingili
Ludmilla
MacDonnell
Millner
Nhulunbuy
Nightcliff
Port Darwin
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Sessional Committee — Parliament House

Mr Speaker
Mrs Lawrie
Mrs O’Neil
Mr Perron
Mr Steele
MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I read message No 14 from His Honour the Administrator of the Northern Territory:

I, ERIC EUGENE JOHNSTON, the Administrator of the Northern Territory of Australia, pursuant to section 11 of the Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978 of the Commonwealth, recommend to the Legislative Assembly a bill for an act to make interim provision for the appropriation of moneys out of the Consolidated Fund for the service of the year ending 30 June 1984.
Dated this 18th day of May 1983.
E.E. JOHNSTON
Administrator

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Mr ROBERTSON (Attorney-General): Mr Speaker, the procedure notice is a little inaccurate as to the intention of the government this morning. I move that so much of Standing Orders be suspended as would prevent the Chief Minister moving a motion relating to the construction and funding of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway line.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION
Alice Springs to Darwin Railway

Mr EVERINGHAM (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, I move that this Assembly call on the federal government to fulfil its legislative obligations and honour the firm undertakings made to the people of the Northern Territory to construct and wholly fund the Alice Springs to Darwin railway, with a completion date of 1988.

Mr Speaker, much of this is history but, in moving the motion, I think I should recount some of it. On 26 October last year, the Leader of the Opposition took great pride in reporting to us that Australia's Labor leaders had consolidated their commitment to major pro-Territory initiatives which were then part of the party platform. The Alice Springs to Darwin railway was one of those commitments. On 15 February this year, the federal Labor member for the Northern Territory said that a federal Labor government would give Territorians a better deal. A week or so later, he also said: 'There is going to be one person from the Territory in the House of Representatives so it is important to talk out and talk out loudly'. Last Thursday night, we found out exactly what it means to have the Alice Springs to Darwin railway in the Labor Party platform, what it means to give the Territory a better deal and what it means to talk out loudly for Territory interests.

During the recent federal election campaign, the Prime Minister made an election promise. He said: 'If elected, we will complete the Alice Springs - Darwin rail link'. The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Bowen, while campaigning here, told us that he thought the Northern Territory had been
very much neglected. The federal Labor Minister for Transport, Mr Morris, told us that the ALP's comprehensive transport package for the Northern Territory included construction of the Darwin - Alice Springs rail line with a target completion date of 1988 and completion of the Stuart Highway by 1986. Last Thursday night, Territorians found out how much the Prime Minister's election promises meant. We found out how the Labor Party proposed to end the long neglect and how the Minister for Transport would defend our vital transport interests.

On 30 March this year, the Leader of the Opposition said: 'If the Territory is to achieve its true potential, the federal government must constantly be conscious of our needs and aspirations'. On 8 May, just over 2 weeks ago, the federal member for the Northern Territory told us that only a Labor government could be trusted to build the Alice Springs to Darwin railway. Last Thursday night, we learnt how the Leader of the Opposition was representing our needs and aspirations and we learned something about trust.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition has defended his party cronies by telling us that things are tough, that the economy is in bad shape and everyone must tighten his belt, Territorians included. With amazing foresight, the Leader of the Opposition told us on 22 February that there were 'dark clouds on the Territory horizon'. They say a prophet is without honour in his own country, and I begin to understand why they say that, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition has participated in one of the most dishonourable performances that we have seen for a very long time.

At the recent National Economic Summit Conference, we congratulated the Prime Minister on calling together national leaders in a climate of consensus. He talked about national recovery. He said that job-creation schemes could maximise the number of real jobs. We agreed on the need to ensure improved transport, infrastructure and export development. Last Thursday night, we found out what the federal government means by 'real jobs'. It does not mean jobs created in the building up of Australia's infrastructure and enhancement of its future productivity; it means make-work schemes and fence painting in Sydney and Melbourne. Whatever honourable members opposite may say and however they may try to dodge around it, the fact is that last Thursday night's decision was a betrayal: a betrayal of binding legislative commitments, a betrayal of promises solemnly made, a betrayal of the principles which the federal government told us it had and, lastly, a betrayal of Territorians.

The Leader of the Opposition says that the principle of Territorians paying for the railway is reasonable. He says that 40% is a little bit too much but $1 for $2 would be reasonable. I thank him very much for his resolute defence of the Territory's interests.

Mr B. Collins: Can't you do better than that?

Mr EVERINGHAM: Is that the same person who said: 'If the Territory is to achieve its true potential, the federal government must be constantly conscious of our needs and aspirations'? Is that the same person who returned in triumph from his party's conference and talked about the party's commitment to major pro-Territory initiatives? Is that the political colleague of our federal Labor member who said that only a Labor government could be trusted to build the Alice Springs to Darwin railway? Is that the political colleague of our federal Labor member who said a federal Labor government will give Territorians a better deal? Is that the political colleague of the opposition's spokesperson on development who called on the government to launch a vigorous campaign with the then federal government to
have an early start on the construction of the railway? The federal
government, the federal Labor member for the Northern Territory and the
honourable Leader of the Opposition do not seem to know what it is all
about. They are either totally ignorant or totally cynical.

The so-called offer by the federal government is not only monstrously
wrong but also based on not one false premise but four. The first is to
call the railway a Territory project to justify the argument that Territorians
should pay for it. Federal governments, and federal Labor governments in
particular, have always held the view that railways are a national and
federal responsibility. The previous federal Labor government spent millions
to take over the South Australian and Tasmanian railway systems. Federal
governments have built and rebuilt the Transcontinental Railway to Western
Australia. We have always plugged the railway as a national project,
Mr Speaker, and why not? After all, its benefits would be national in their
scope and impact. Defence would be one of those benefits. It was the
Labor Deputy Prime Minister who spoke of Australia's defence potential in the
north as being abysmal. I wonder how Tindal stands now. Secondly, there is
national development. Thirdly, there is trade and, finally, there is
employment. It was the Labor federal Minister for Transport who spoke of
the railway as a major boost to the ALP plans for economic recovery.

The second attempt at deception is the argument that the Territory is
generously treated by the Commonwealth in its funding arrangements. This is
an insult and for the Leader of the Opposition to support and endorse that
attitude of his federal colleagues is cowardly and damaging to the interests
of Territorians. It may be true that the Territory receives more per capita
than other parts of Australia. I make no apology for that. Indeed, I am
proud of it because it demonstrates that, since self-government, we have
forced the Commonwealth to recognise its previous neglect of the Territory.

For nearly 70 years, Territorians have survived a total lack of
interest in this part of Australia by the Commonwealth. The states
have built their railways and their roads, and have established their
industries, their agriculture and other services. Many of their industries
are propped up, I might add, by tariffs with the benefit of federal financial
assistance. The Territory remained a complete backwater. Under the previous
coalition government, those historical injustices began to be put right.
We entered self-government under a financial arrangement which was designed
to build roads, bridges, schools, health facilities and all the other
services that other parts of Australia built years ago and have taken for
granted ever since. Let me tell those honourable members opposite, who
accept the monstrous proposition that the Territory is somehow overfunded
and can easily afford to pay for the railway, that we have a long way to
go before we catch up with the inheritance of Australians in the states,
an inheritance which includes essential transport links and, more specifically,
railways.

The Leader of the Opposition keeps talking about my painting the
Territory government into a corner and about my going to Canberra to present
the Prime Minister with an ultimatum. Nothing could be more of a
misrepresentation. It is the federal government which has presented the
ultimatum and which, without consultation, has dropped the bombshell on us.
I will not indicate what I am prepared to discuss with the Prime Minister
until I am talking to him, except for one thing: there is no way that I or
any responsible Territory leader would or could compromise future generations
of Territorians by agreeing to accept $1 of responsibility for the construction
of this railway. I note that, as late as yesterday afternoon, the federal
Minister for Transport, Mr Morris, said that it is still a good offer, a good
deal.
Since self-government, the Commonwealth Grants Commission has visited the Territory regularly. For the benefit of honourable members, perhaps I should explain the role of the Grants Commission. It is a Commonwealth statutory authority set up to examine the financial needs of the states and the Territory and to recommend appropriate levels of special purpose funding. We fought hard to bring the Territory under its jurisdiction at the time of self-government. The commission has pored over Territory budgets and been into our schools, our hospitals and our communities and, firstly, confirmed the Territory's continued need for accelerated funding and, secondly, acknowledged that our isolation, distance and our population structure and the like mean that our costs in providing similar levels of services to those in the states are very much higher. The Grants Commission's verdict was that extra funding was recommended just to keep the Territory moving towards parity with the rest of Australia. In other words, the Grants Commission, the expert body for over 50 years, has confirmed that the Territory's funding arrangements are not generous but barely adequate. Why is this? The answer is simple. We have received funding for every specific function that has been devolved on us or we have refused to accept responsibility. We are not going to start breaking that rule with railways.

The third fallacy is the imputation that the railway really can go ahead on the basis of the offer made. Mr Speaker, it cannot. The Territory just cannot afford it. To follow the practice of the federal Treasurer, I have several scenarios here as to why the Territory cannot afford it: scenario A, every Territory family to pay $20 a week forever just to pay the interest; scenario B, every Territory family to pay $30 a week over a period of some 10 years; scenario C, every Territory family to pay $30 a week; and scenario D, every Territory taxpayer to pay $20 a week. They are available to any honourable member who wants them.

The capital cost of the railway - and these are yesterday's prices - amounts to 3 Darwin Hospitals, 30 high schools or 4 years of total construction and maintenance expenditure on all roads in the Territory. The interest bill alone would amount to more than our total budget for police, fire and correctional services every year forever. The interest bill alone would amount to $20 per week for every Territory family and that is taking the 1982 escalated cost of $540m. In fact, as anyone with any knowledge of major construction projects will understand, the final cost is likely to be very much greater and Territorians will still be up for 40%. You will notice they did not put any fixed amount; they put a percentage. We cannot reduce expenditure in other areas to meet this bill. To do so would not only be a breach of faith with all Territorians, it would also mean that we were rejecting the very principles of self-government which saw both us and former federal governments committed to the delivery of state-type services in the Northern Territory. Nor, Mr Speaker, can we raise revenues to fund the bill. Territory taxpayers are already contributing 107% more in local taxes and charges as their contribution since self-government. They have met this burden because they can see the benefits, but to impose a further $20 a week on every family for ever is just beyond the realms of possibility. The Leader of the Opposition is truly misleading Territorians in suggesting that we should negotiate a suitable basis for sharing the bill. He would commit us to reduced services and draconian taxes. I do not believe that Territorians should accept that and there is no reason why they should.

Mr Speaker, the fourth mistaken premise is the federal government's blithe assertion that a unilateral offer has been made and it is now up to the Territory to decide whether the railway will go ahead. That is not so, Mr Speaker. The federal government has a binding legislative commitment not only to build the railway but to pay for it. The commitment was first
accepted in 1911 under the terms of the Northern Territory (Acceptance) Act. It was confirmed and amplified by the Railways Standardization Act of 1949.

Let us be clear about what the 1949 act says. In section 21, it describes the standard gauge railway from Port Augusta to Darwin and, in section 22, the Commonwealth accepts the cost for carrying out the necessary work.

No matter how you read it, no matter what sidetrack the honourable members opposite might like to take us down, 2 things are clear. The Commonwealth accepted an obligation 72 years ago to build a railway. So far as I know, of the many obligations accepted under the 1911 legislation, the railway is the only major one which has not been honoured. In 1949, the Commonwealth clearly accepted the responsibility to pay for it. It is ironic that it was a federal Labor government, the Chifley government, which accepted that obligation. We know of the Prime Minister's admiration for Mr Chifley, and mine too, for that matter. The federal government's offer casually jettisons some very firm promises made by the Prime Minister and his ministers during the recent federal election campaign.

The facts are these: there is a long standing legislative undertaking by the Commonwealth to build the line, the Commonwealth has accepted a legislative commitment to pay for the work and the current federal government, until last Thursday night, has taken every opportunity to reiterate that it would honour all commitments made. If that is not plain enough, let me just draw attention again to the Minister for Transport's statement of 1 March 1983. He said: 'The ALP's comprehensive transport package for the Northern Territory includes construction of the Darwin-Alice Springs rail line with target completion by 1988, and completion of the Stuart Highway by the 1986 target date'. The Leader of the Opposition tried to run a hare — I think over the weekend — that 1988 was a political date. I assure you, Mr Speaker, that the Chief Engineer of Australian National Railways assured me that 1988 was a realistic and practical date to be set and that, in fact, the railway could be completed before 1988 if funds were available.

Mr Morris had earlier assured me that a federal Labor government would honour all commitments to the railway. That surely includes the commitment on Commonwealth funding. But, as late as yesterday evening, the Minister for Transport was quoted as saying: 'The railway offer of 40% payment by the Northern Territory is reasonable'. Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is talking to us about negotiations. Is that the way the federal Minister for Transport is going to negotiate?

The Leader of the Opposition has been told by his federal masters to take the line that times are tough and that it is only fair and reasonable for Territorians to share in the costs. He has been told to bleat about the dreadful state of the national economy. I know all about the state of the national economy. As the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out in recent press statements, I helped draft the summit communique. I thank him for pointing this out because it reminds me that there were a number of very important conclusions from the economic summit. We all know that times are tough. The issue is: what can we do about it?

At the summit we agreed — that is, the federal, state and Territory governments and employers and employees — that the only course for national recovery was renewed economic growth. We agreed on a number of important steps for growth. You cannot have more jobs unless you have growth in the economy. We agreed that job-creation schemes should maximise the number of real jobs and that we therefore needed to be concerned about developing the nation's economic infrastructure. We agreed on the importance of improved transport links and new opportunities for export development. What we get
instead from the mini-budget is that $300m is to be spent in 1983-84 on fence painting projects, mostly in Sydney and Melbourne. Mr Speaker, that is our railway money. At the summit, we talked about real jobs, not make-work ones. The Leader of the Opposition knows what I mean by real jobs. He too visited Whyalla recently. He knows the employment impact of this project for the iron and steel industry alone.

I might add that, when we are talking about the creation of real jobs, the Territory's uranium industry could make an enormous contribution. In his mini-budget, the federal Treasurer, Mr Keating, described the new jobs as being 6-months' full-time work. He undertook to spend $300m to create 70 000 such jobs. Under the Keating job-counting technique - that is, counting a job as 6 months' work - the Territory's uranium industry could generate about 60 000 new jobs: 10 000 in the construction of Jabiluka, 2500 in the construction of Koongarra, 44 000 in the operation phase of Jabiluka and 3600 in the operation phase of Koongarra. These are new jobs to go with the existing employment in the uranium industry and they do not include the additional jobs created in service and support industries. The cost to the federal government of that would be nothing. Indeed, it would represent an injection of $1000m into the Australian economy. In one stroke, jobs could be created and that $300m could be put back where it belongs - into our railway. The references in the summit communique to transport, infrastructure and exports are not there just to take up space. If the federal government does not commit itself to those projects which build up our national productive capacity, which open up new investment, trade and commerce opportunities and which create an environment for improved productivity by Australian industry, then the ideals of the summit will never be translated into reality. That is why the railway is essential.

Mr Speaker, I have to put the Leader of the Opposition right in one more respect. 'Let's be reasonable', he says, 'let's not close the door. Let us negotiate and get our share down a bit. Let us be bipartisan' - although that, of course, is only yesterday's idea. Yesterday afternoon, during our TV debate on Territory Tracks, the Leader of the Opposition decided to call on me to make a bipartisan approach to the Prime Minister with the South Australian Premier and himself. Obviously, the idea had just occurred to him. As soon as he had rushed back to his office, he put out a press release in the hope of putting me on the spot to join him and Mr Bannon, neither of whom has any authority to talk for the Northern Territory, in an approach to negotiate a contribution of less than 40% on the railway line.

Mr B. Collins: Mr Bannon was not going to talk for the Northern Territory.

Mr EVERINGHAM: Mr Speaker, I have already explained the many reasons why the Territory, either in principle or in practice, cannot afford to make any contribution but I think these tactics by the Leader of the Opposition display his duplicity. The man is a fabricator. He makes things up as he goes along. He said on Territory Tracks that he had called on me to make a bipartisan approach with him. No such request has been received by me to this time other than hearing him refer to it on TV and seeing it in a copy of his press release of yesterday. The real position is that the Leader of the Opposition decided it was good politics last Friday for himself and the South Australian Premier to go to Canberra, on a prearranged basis, to meet with the Prime Minister and get the figure of 40% dropped to 30% or 33.33%.

The talk of the media in Darwin is that this has already been arranged
to make the Leader of the Opposition look good. But he knows now, from the reaction that he has had from Territorians, that there is nothing that will make him look good unless he stands up and fights the federal government and makes it honour its promise to build this railway line without contributions from Territorians. Yesterday, we had a new bipartisan approach with the Leader of the Opposition trying to weasel out of his earlier announced partisan approach together with Mr Bannon with absolutely no consultation at all with me, Mr Speaker, before he made his announcement. I have already explained why that is simply unacceptable. But the Leader of the Opposition does not seem to see the danger.

Where will we end up, Mr Speaker, if we start paying for the federal government's constitutional responsibilities? It now wants us to pay for 50% of the subsidy on the east coast shipping service as well. Will it be 50%, 40%, 30% or even 5% of the new Darwin airport? What else will Territorians, alone amongst all Australians, have to pay to have Commonwealth services established here? Defence establishments and airport terminals in this place have been neglected for 70 years or more by the Commonwealth. It owes a special responsibility to this place as a territory.

Is it really the Leader of the Opposition's intention to aid and abet his federal colleagues in subverting the Memorandum of Understanding? That is what he is proposing. That is where his so-called reasonable attitude would lead us. This is the very opposition which told Territorians that self-government would cost them top dollar. Now we are told that we must negotiate a contribution of $220m, or a bit less perhaps, to the cost of this railway line. That is not where my government intends to take the Territory and nor would any state leader countenance such weak and irresponsible behaviour. Will Mr Bannon put a cent towards this railway which means so much to South Australia?

Mr Speaker, the Territory has had to fight and fight hard for its achievements since self-government. I do not intend to accept any offer which is less than what we are entitled to and I do not expect members of this Assembly, wherever they sit, to sell us out. Let us now see how bipartisan the Leader of the Opposition really is. The resolution before the Assembly asks nothing more than what we have been promised. No one who puts the Territory first can fail to support it. I commend the motion.

Mr B. COLLINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, we all know how upset the Chief Minister and indeed his press secretary become when the Chief Minister does not score the front page on the NT News 5 consecutive days out of 5. I did not realise it would upset him quite that much. Before I move on to the railway itself, I would like to make one comment about something the Chief Minister said during his speech. I condemn him for it and I have condemned him for it before. It is the sort of condemnation that he richly deserves because his approach is not really a patriotic Territory approach, but an incredibly egocentric approach. I refer to the mini-budget brought down just recently. I point out that the government had absolutely no obligation to make that financial statement. Indeed, it had no obligation to make one until August this year. It chose to do so to inject into the economy some millions of dollars for job creation.

The reason that I want to dwell on this is because, clearly, the Chief Minister never has, and does not now, appreciate, as I have appreciated, what it is like to be unemployed. He writes off these job-creation schemes – just throws them out the window – as fence painting in Sydney and Melbourne and he ignores the fact that the money has been evenly distributed across Australia to give at least some temporary employment for people who are in
a desperate financial and mental condition. If he wants to dispute that, then let him do so with people who know more about it than he obviously does.

The statement I refer to is this: $300m has been allocated — and I commend the federal government for it — for job-creation schemes to provide employment on a fair basis across Australia. The Territory will get its share. The Chief Minister said in respect of that money: 'That $300m that has been given to create jobs throughout Australia is our railway money'. It is for that kind of approach that I will continue to condemn the Chief Minister. No one in the Northern Territory could be a more one-eyed Territorian than I am. I have been here for 16 years and I intend to spend the rest of my life here. How can he say that, of the $300m that the federal government will spend to give at least 6 months of employment to the people who have been out of work for 2 years, to give them a little bit of self-respect and financial independence, every single cent of that money is our railway money? That is a disgrace. Obviously, the Chief Minister's wonderful sentiments expressed at the economic summit and in the communique of which he was co-author apply to everyone else in this country except him. It is not Everingham land; it is the Northern Territory and it is about time that this one-man band woke up to it. He cannot continue to run this place the way he sees fit all the time. Other people are involved and they have different points of view. To lay a claim, as he did, that the $300m for job-creation schemes should be taken away from those people who are in a desperate situation and who have not had a job for 2 years or more because it is our railway money is an attitude that should be condemned by everyone.

Mr Speaker, the first point that I want to make in talking about the railway is that no persons in the Northern Territory would have been happier than myself and my Labor colleagues had the Treasurer announced that the federal government would fund the railway in its entirety as had been promised during the election campaign. I wish this furphy were true about the Chief Minister being upset about missing a Northern Territory News report about my having made some prior arrangement with Canberra. I refer the Chief Minister to my own comments. The very reason that I wanted the Chief Minister to be part of a bipartisan arrangement — and we have supported the railway in a bipartisan way from the very beginning — was that I wanted the Chief Minister to accept a share of the responsibility for whatever came out of that approach to the government. I do not know whether it will be a failure or not; I hope it will not be. I do not know how he could miss that point. I was offering him across-the-board support to join me ...

Mr Tuxworth: Big deal.

Mr B. COLLINS: It is a big deal in respect of trying to convince people in Canberra that this is not a party issue. If he cannot see that, he is blind.

I was offering the Chief Minister a chance to accept either the responsibility of success in renegotiating this deal or a failure along with me. He refused to accept it. I heard of his total rejection on the 6.15 am news on ABC radio. I did not see any point in contacting him during the day because he was locked away in his Cobourg hideaway on Friday where I could not find him. I intended to put it to him on Monday morning but, after hearing the 6.15 am news, I did not think that there was much point in putting it to him.

Mr Speaker, I and my colleagues are as dismayed as the Chief Minister by the federal government's announcement. My view is that the current level of the proposed cost-sharing arrangements places an unrealistic and excessive
burden on the Northern Territory. As I have pointed out in recent days, the Territory's budget is heavily tied to on-going health, education and welfare programs and simply cannot absorb extra imposts, particularly those of the size proposed by the federal government. I have made these views known as clearly as I can to the Prime Minister and I released that letter to the press yesterday. I expressed dismay at the heavy burden the federal government is asking the Territory to carry and pointed out that the cost factor was simply unworkable on the Territory's present budget. It is at this point, and I do not want anybody to be in any doubt about this, that the Chief Minister and I now differ.

The Chief Minister says that he is going to Canberra to tell the federal government that the Territory will not contribute $1 to the cost of the railway. He says that he has precedent for saying this because railways are a complete Commonwealth responsibility, nothing whatever to do with the states, it has been accepted that way for years and it is the way it always works. Like many of the Chief Minister's arguments, it does not stand up to 10 seconds' examination. I will mention a few more things that he said in the debate yesterday. To give one example - and there are many - the Chief Minister himself has used, straight off the top of his head, South Australia and Tasmania and the railway deals there as examples of where the Commonwealth entirely funded major railway initiatives. He is trying to con Territorians into believing that a dreadful deal has been offered to the Territory. It is not the 40% - we are in total agreement that that is too much - but the very concept of asking us to contribute anything. He said it has never been done before and it is outrageous because it is a total Commonwealth responsibility.

The Chief Minister also used the Western Australian rail standardisation in the 1960s as an example. That really intrigued me. I would like to give the Assembly and the Territory details of that agreement. The details are contained in act 67 of 1961 of the Western Australian parliament. I give them to you now. The Commonwealth paid seventeen-twentieths of the total cost, but the details, in fact, were less generous than that. Seven-twentieths was an outright grant; that is, only 35% of the cost was an outright grant from the Commonwealth. Seven-twentieths was repayable by WA over 20 years. Three-twentieths was repayable by WA over 50 years and three-twentieths was paid outright by Western Australia. In fact, on the very example the Chief Minister has used to justify not paying a cent, the present offer, which I say is too much, in fact is more generous than the deal that was given to Western Australia. He never does his homework. He is pretty good on political rhetoric and, as I have said again and again, it might convince a few people here in the Territory. That is what it is designed to do. But, when it comes down to a hard examination of getting a deal from people who know what goes on, it does not stand up for 5 seconds. In fact, the Chief Minister ends up making an ass of himself by using these specious arguments. I have pointed that out again and again. It might be good for domestic politics - though I doubt it - but it does not stand up when he is trying to negotiate with people who are a little more hard-headed. The possibility of the railway transporting bricks and fibre cartons from the Territory is a stupid argument. This is the same nonsense. The Western Australian example that he uses was, in fact, a worse deal for that state than the 40% is for the Northern Territory.

He also knows that the South Australian act on which he is proposing to base his court action, the 1962 act, was in fact an arrangement where the Commonwealth paid seven-tenths and South Australia paid three-tenths of the cost of that railway. The proposed electrification scheme - $300m promised by Fraser in the 1980 election campaign to electrify the line between Sydney
and Melbourne – was a joint proposal. It was to be jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the New South Wales and Victorian governments. It was on that basis. Those examples in Western Australia and South Australia, both examples the Chief Minister used, completely refute his arguments and make nonsense of them. I do not see, and precedent bears me out, that there is anything wrong in principle with a cost-sharing arrangement being struck between a state and the federal government in respect of railways. It has been done before.

Mr Speaker, I might add that I have been interested to see in recent days that a number of very prominent Territorians also share this view. The Chief Minister might find himself alone. My office has received quite a number of phone calls over the last few days from people who are as genuinely distressed as I am at the level of financial support expected from the Territory. However, not one of them thinks it unreasonable for the Territory to spend a dollar for the railway. They support the calls that the Mayor of Katherine made recently to the same effect. I am heartened by their attitude. It says a lot for the Territory and its people, certainly more than the Chief Minister's current attitude.

The game is getting rougher. There is no doubt about that. There is one thing I would like to nail down in the Chief Minister's statements. He said that this railway is something that was floated dishonestly. He called it a fabrication. Mr Speaker, have a look at the record. The federal Labor Party, when in opposition, was told in the budget papers – and I refer the Chief Minister to them – that the Commonwealth had a deficit of $3500m.

During the course of the election campaign, Mr Fraser grudgingly acknowledged that, in fact, it was $4500m. The Labor Party, along with the rest of Australia, accepted that figure to be an honest statement of the situation that we were in. The Chief Minister, along with everyone else, now knows that that was false. It was on that $4500m deficit that the Labor Party based its entire program for this country. I remind everyone sitting in this room that that proposal was a modest expansion of the deficit. It had set an optimum figure of $7000m and most of the economic analysts around this country supported it, unlike the Chief Minister yesterday in a debate on television. Particularly in respect of home loan interest rates, we could not afford a deficit of more than $7000m. The Labor Party laid out a program of capital works and costed it in the vicinity of $2000m. It actually proposed expanding the deficit by that sum. It is a matter of record that the entire cost of the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link was in the $2000m of extra expenditure for which the government was prepared to borrow. Let us just nail that to the wall.

Yesterday during the TV debate, the Chief Minister said that deficits do not matter. I would like to hear a comment from his Treasurer on that. He said that it does not matter if the deficit goes beyond $10 000m. He said: 'We can pay that off at our leisure'. Provided, of course, that it is the Commonwealth government that has to pay it off and not the Chief Minister. We all know that the Northern Territory's Treasurer has said on many occasions that he likes balanced budgets or, at the most, modest deficits.

The Hawke Labor government found when it came to govern that, to obtain its optimum of $7000m, it could not inject another $2000m into the economy, part of which was the entire cost of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway. To get to that figure, it needed to cut down expenditure by $2000m the other way. If the mandate given to that Commonwealth government was not to get this country back on the rails again, I do not know what mandate it had. I
speculated yesterday about where we would be with this railway if the previous government had been re-elected. The reason I did so was because of a public statement made last week by Mr Howard, the shadow treasurer. In respect of the mini-budget, Mr Howard said that it did not cut back expenditure enough. He called it 'a timorous document' which did not take hold of the hard decisions and did not trim the deficit down by more than $500m. That is the official view of this mini-budget by the current shadow treasurer of Australia. Where would we be if the previous government had been re-elected and forced to own up to the fact that the deficit was more than twice the figure it was prepared to announce publicly?

The railway was not an election gimmick, Mr Speaker. It was costed. It was costed as part of a planned $2000m expansion of the deficit to reach an optimum figure of $7000m. The government then found it had to cut $2000m to get back to that figure. The entire fault for that can be laid at the door of the former Prime Minister and former Treasurer who misled this entire country in respect of that deficit. How the Chief Minister can continue to push that aside and ignore it indicates the complete degree of financial irresponsibility he is prepared to apply to the Commonwealth government as long as it is not applied to his own budget. I look forward to a comment from the Northern Territory's Treasurer on that.

Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister has made a number of interesting public statements. During the debate yesterday, I said that he had made much of being part of the committee that actually drew up the communiqué from the summit. Certainly, since he has come back, he has made many public statements about the need for restraint. To my absolute astonishment, the Chief Minister looked me right in the eye and said: 'Oh, you are wrong. That communiqué did not talk about restraint at all. It said nothing about restraint. The whole theme of the communiqué that I helped to write was modest expansion'.

May I quote the Chief Minister, Mr Speaker, from an article in the Northern Territory News. He will be happy to know that he got the whole page. On page 2 of the NT News of 5 May, the Chief Minister was talking about the communiqué which, he said yesterday on television had nothing to do with restraint. He wrote this article or at least his name is on it:

The vital issue now is whether the parties can settle differences in a new spirit of cooperation and consensus so evident at the summit or whether there will be a return to the sniping, self-interested attitudes that have done Australia so much damage to date.

It did not take long for that nice sentiment to evaporate.

The Territory's inclusion on the communiqué drafting committee and on the working party to establish the Economic Planning Advisory Council places us in a unique position to influence the long-term results of the summit.... Clearly, restraint is the key which must influence our actions in times ahead. To quote the communiqué: 'There is recognition that to achieve recovery will require restraint in expectations and claims from all sections of the community except the impoverished'.

And, of course, what that means – and he did not write it into the communiqué but perhaps it did not get past its co-authors – is restraint and a reduction of expectations by all sections of the community except the impoverished and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory.

Those are his words, Mr Speaker. Quite categorically, everyone in this country knows that the key of that communiqué which he wrote was restraint and a reduction in expectations for the whole community. Yet
he said quite baldly on television yesterday that restraint did not rate a mention in the communique. As I say, when you lump the Chief Minister's arguments together, they do not stand up to 10 seconds' examination.

To my total astonishment, the Chief Minister said yesterday that a $10 000m deficit was no problem at all. He said that we can pay it off at our leisure. I can assure the Chief Minister that that has horrified a few economists around this country. The cold hard facts are that, if we allow this deficit to balloon out much more, it will mean that interest rates, particularly on housing loans, will go through the roof as they did before. I am sure that, whilst the Chief Minister does not see that there is any problem at all for the Commonwealth government – and he is advocating this – to be economically irresponsible in a way that his own government never has been, he is quite happy to disadvantage everyone in Australia who wants to borrow money to build a house. The Chief Minister is a very egocentric person indeed.

The federal government has acknowledged that the rail link between Darwin and Alice Springs must go ahead. It has said that it is prepared to outlay $320m on the project as long as the Territory pays 40%. I agree that that figure is too much and must be renegotiated. The Chief Minister stated yesterday that we do not have to worry about deficits, just let them blow out and pay them off at leisure. What a great economic solution for all of us! It will be nirvana when he is Prime Minister. We will get everything we want. We will just borrow forever and it will not matter. We will pay it back some time in the next century or the century after that. Have a look at his performance yesterday and tell me that that was responsible economic management. I think everyone in the Northern Territory will have much to fear if he applies those same principles to the Northern Territory's own budget.

I would like to turn to the question of legal action and the Chief Minister's figures about how much we will have to pay. He started off by saying that all taxpayers in the Territory – and that is what was on ABC news – would have to pay $20 a week for the bill. He then slid into saying that it was $20 for each family – that was a change during the day which he did not bother to explain. His original figure was $20 per head per week for 40 years. That is $1m a week, $50m a year and $1600m over the 40 years that he says it will take to pay it. Add the Commonwealth contribution based on the same calculations and you end with a railway that will cost $4000m. Obviously, it will be a great boost to Kalgoorlie, not Whyalla, because it will use gold for the rails instead of steel.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mrs O'NEIL (Fannie Bay): Mr Speaker, I move that the Leader of the Opposition be granted an extension of time.

Motion agreed to.

Mr B. COLLINS: Mr Speaker, I thank the Assembly.

The Chief Minister cast doubts in the Assembly on the reality of the deficit but when he came back from the summit, he was quite happy to acknowledge that it was a real figure. His answer to it is that it does not matter.

I quote from the Chief Minister's NT News article after the summit. 'Australia is fighting for its economic life on both the national and
international fronts. Only through restraint, cooperation and common understanding about problems can we hope to meet the gravest economic crisis in this country for half a century'. Yesterday, he said that he did not mention restraint. In a recent speech in Darwin, the Chief Minister said: 'I lie awake at night worrying about the perilous state of our economy'. That is from the co-author of the summit communiqué. He said, 'Clearly, restraint is the key which must influence our actions in times ahead'.

Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister says that he will take the Commonwealth government to court and he will get a judge to say that the Commonwealth has to pay out certain amounts of money. I am fascinated by that. The Attorney-General of the Northern Territory government has a High Court action proceeding at the moment. It is an appeal against a decision of Justice Nader that the Territory government has to provide facilities for the grossly handicapped or criminally insane. The basis of the Crown's appeal, and I quote the public statement, is that 'the courts do not have the power to make decisions that require appropriations of money'. I might add that the courts agreed with the Attorney-General, as they did in the South Australian case in 1962.

The Chief Minister says he will base his court action on 2 acts of parliament: the Northern Territory (Acceptance) Act of 1910 and the South Australian Railways Standardization Act of 1949. Section 14(b) of the Northern Territory (Acceptance) Act of 1910 provides that the Commonwealth shall construct a railway from Darwin to the South Australian border and no time for construction is specified in the act. Section 19 of the same act, which the Chief Minister carefully avoided mentioning, says: 'Nothing in this act shall be taken to be an appropriation of any revenues or money'. South Australia took court action in the High Court against the Commonwealth on the very act that the Chief Minister is proposing to use. I refer to the Railways Standardization Act. I stress again that this was a situation where the Commonwealth government had agreed to spend seven-tenths of the money in a joint funding arrangement between itself and South Australia. The court found that there was no enforceable obligation on the Commonwealth as no time limit was specified in the agreement. In fact, the court found that, as the agreement was a political document subject to economic considerations, it could not be enforced at law. I do not think that you have to be a lawyer to work that out; it is just common sense. Governments' commitments to do anything that costs money depend entirely on how many dollars they have at any particular time. For the Chief Minister to suggest that he will go to Canberra and tell the federal government that the Territory will not pay a dollar for the railway and, if the Commonwealth does not knuckle under, he will take it to court and sue it is ratbaggery of the worst kind. It is ratbaggery that we have become used to from the Chief Minister over the last 5 years.

The Chief Minister has many strengths but he also has a few weaknesses that he demonstrates every now and again and that is one of them. Nothing would be gained by taking the Commonwealth government to court except wasting more Territory taxpayers' money. I might add, for the benefit of people who do not know it, that we have already a spectacular record of expensive failure in the High Court of Australia.

Mr Speaker, I will have to skim through the rest of my arguments unless the Chief Minister will agree to a suspension of Standing Orders. I need another 10 minutes and I am not going to get it.

This railway must be built. I might add again that the Chief Minister is already backing off from his totally committed statement of yesterday.
It will not be built by the Chief Minister saying that his approach to the government - and he said this 3 times in one day - will be that we will not pay a cent ourselves and that, if the Commonwealth will not knuckle under, we will take it to court. That is the message that he intends to take to the Prime Minister. I am sure that will not advance the Northern Territory's cause one whit.

Mr Speaker, I think that it can be negotiated; I do not know that it can. I hope that it can. I offer again to join the Chief Minister in a visit to Canberra with the Premier of South Australia. I assure him that Premier Bannon in no way presumes to be talking for the Northern Territory; he will advance the South Australian case for having the railway built. As the Chief Minister himself has used South Australia and Whyalla as a reason for the railway, that should hardly cause him any surprise. If he does not agree to that, I offer to go with the Chief Minister on his trip to Canberra to see the Prime Minister. My reason for making that offer is quite deliberate. I am offended because the statement that there is any sort of prior arrangement between myself and the federal government is untrue. Such an arrangement would be contemptible if it existed. I tell members quite honestly that I have not the slightest expectation of what will result from renegotiating this agreement. I say to the Chief Minister that I am quite happy to share with him the responsibility of either achieving something or failing to do so.

For the third time, I make that offer to him. I am prepared to go with him to Canberra with Premier Bannon or without Premier Bannon to indicate to the federal government that the dissatisfaction with the deal being offered has the complete support of this Assembly and not just the Country Liberal Party. I offer to share with him the responsibility for whatever comes out of that meeting. I ask him again to reconsider that particular offer and either reject it again publicly or accept it.

The railway has to be built. I do not think the approach the Chief Minister is taking will succeed. In fact, I predict that it will fail spectacularly. Telling the federal government that $10 000m deficits are not a problem and making statements that the $300m that will be spent for unemployed people is our railway money will not advance the Territory's cause one whit. In fact, it will damage it severely. I would like to try to help the Chief Minister to temper his approach a little bit.

Mr PERRON (Treasurer): Mr Speaker, we heard the Leader of the Opposition tell us that we should be grateful to the federal government for bringing down the mini-budget. It appears to me that perhaps we are getting our bad news in 2 doses instead of one.

During the election campaign, the Minister for Transport, Mr Morris, said 3 things that are certainly central to this issue. Firstly, he said that the ALP is committed to completing the railway by 1988. Secondly, he said that contracts arising as a result of the rail construction would provide a major boost to the ALP's plans for economic recovery. Thirdly, he said that the railway line would be complemented by the sealing of the Stuart Highway south of the Northern Territory border by 1986. These statements are central to the issues embodied in the motion moved by the Chief Minister today. Mr Morris' words were repeated during the election campaign by both candidate Reeves and the Leader of the Opposition. Linking those firm, unqualified statements with recent events has demonstrated that we are the victims of a giant sellout. If these were earlier and wilder times in the history of the Northern Territory, we could fear for the wellbeing of the Leader of the Opposition and the Territory's new federal member. In earlier days, those who betrayed the Territory were not brought to account within the civilised
confines of the Legislative Assembly. They faced retribution outside in a more direct sense.

Recently, I read a transcript of a weekly radio broadcast of the Leader of the Opposition and I was struck by an opening remark. On 22 February, he began his radio talk by proclaiming: 'It gives me no pleasure tonight to say that there are dark clouds on the Territory horizon and I am not talking about the weather'. Mr Speaker, rarely has the Leader of the Opposition been more prophetic. The clouds are dark indeed and they blow to us from the direction of Canberra. In those dark clouds are dangers for the Territory which go far beyond the outrageous proposition which has been put to us in relation to the railway.

We need to look at the attitudes of a couple of people towards the Commonwealth decision that has been presented to the people of the Northern Territory for our deliberation. I quote now from a news program on 19 May on Channel 8 in Darwin when the Leader of the Opposition was talking on the very subject of whether the Northern Territory should contribute towards the cost of constructing this national project:

I will tell you why it would be sensible. The problem is that we have got a global budget of $1000m, the majority of which comes from Canberra. There has been no indication given whatsoever of where cuts are to be made in that budget. There is a lot of logic attached to that proposition. It would certainly be a reluctant federal government that would say to any state government, even though they are supplying most of the funds: 'You will prune this or that out of your budget'. It seems to me that a very sensible way to go about it would be to say: 'This project will cost you this much out of your global budget. You will determine what your priorities are and you will determine where cuts will be made'.

I think there lies the key to why we have been told in the Northern Territory that, if we want a railway constructed, then we will pay, despite the fact that it is a federal responsibility. We have been told to pick up somewhere between $216m and $220m of the cost. It is giving us the soft option, the option of chopping our $1000m budget around to save the federal government doing it for us. They are very important words. The most disturbing part is that this approach has the clear support of the Leader of the Opposition and the member for the Northern Territory in the House of Representatives. They describe this action as sensible: 'I will tell you why I think it would be sensible'. He went on to say that we should not let them touch our budget and that we should do it ourselves first. What a sellout! The message is there now and is becoming clearer with successive statements from ALP politicians both in the Territory and in Canberra. I believe the message is telling us that the very principles of self-government are under threat at present.

Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition and his colleague in the House of Representatives are willing cohorts in this sell out of the Territory. From the moment the ALP won government federally, these 2 champions of the Territory have been babbling about what they see as an unjustified level of Commonwealth support for the Territory. We heard the classic at the last sittings: the Leader of the Opposition was embarrassed about the level of federal support that the Territory receives. Now his federal colleague has joined in the chorus. Let us just look for a moment at the Territory's funding because those 2 politicians and the honourable member for Nightcliff at least have made statements that show that they believe that some, if not all, of the $216m being demanded of us could come from the Territory budget.
Those people should take the time to browse through one of the submissions to the Grants Commission and they will learn a great deal about the relative disabilities which face the Northern Territory.

I will give a few examples of why we receive many times the per capita grant from the federal government than any state in Australia, and explain why we receive it totally without shame or embarrassment. It is what the Territory deserves and it is what the Commonwealth is committed to pay, whether we have self-government or not, to administer one-sixth of this country. The type of thing which makes it very expensive for governments in the Northern Territory compared to those interstate is that 50% of hospital services in New South Wales and Victoria are provided by the private sector. In the Northern Territory, the figure is 3%. Obviously, the government has to pick up that extra 47%. The Northern Territory's contribution to housing is enormous and is well known. As a percentage of the budget, it is the greatest contribution to housing made by any government in this country and no one would argue that we should cut it by $1. Indeed, we wish we could put more money towards housing in the Territory. We have no leeway there for savage cuts.

The proportion of Aborigines in the Northern Territory is 57 times greater than in New South Wales and Victoria. Mr Speaker, I imagine that even the leader of the Opposition can understand the implications for government to have such an enormous proportion of the population come from a disadvantaged sector of Australian society which consumes enormous government resources on a per capita basis. Of course we receive several times the contribution the states receive. How else could such services be provided? The recruitment costs to engage an expert public servant when one must advertise nationally can amount to thousands of dollars. Flying people across the country for interviews, removal expenses for the officer and his family, the provision of a house, air fares etc can be an incredible expense to the Territory. That is why we get several times the funds.

Statistics show that our police force and judiciary have twice the average crime rate to contend with than those in the states. We have 23 times the average road lengths per capita in the Northern Territory. Of course we need additional funds to maintain them. Would anyone advocate that we look after only the small portion of roads that would equate us, on a per capita basis, with New South Wales? We have 3 times the population growth of New South Wales and Victoria, bringing upon us a burden of infrastructure in the form of schools, police stations and other facilities which simply have to be provided by government from whatever source is available to it.

Mr Speaker, a clear demonstration of this is the fact that the Commonwealth itself has 3 times the per capita staff in the Northern Territory than it has in any state in Australia. The Commonwealth has to provide those staff with special conditions to bring them to the Territory. It provides them with housing, tropical leave loadings and air fares that are not provided to Commonwealth public servants interstate. It does not do these things because it is big-hearted. The federal government does them because it has a responsibility to carry out certain functions in the Northern Territory which are very expensive relative to the states. For goodness sake, let us put to rest this talk that the Northern Territory is grossly overfunded. We have 'money running out our ears' is the sort of expression used by members of the House of Representatives. With advocates like that down there, it is no wonder the Territory is getting a reputation of being overfunded. Perhaps they should do a bit of homework one of these days and find out the exact reasons why the funding for the Territory is
as it is.

Mr Speaker, the levels of funding for the Northern Territory were embodied in formulas within the Memorandum of Understanding and were the very conditions of the acceptance of self-government. Every year since self-government, the opposition in this Assembly has attempted unsuccessfully to cast some doubt upon the integrity of those arrangements. It has queried how long they will remain and whether there is an expiry date in the memorandum. It has not succeeded because the memorandum has served us well and remains strong. With the election of a federal Labor government, the opposition's tactics have changed. Suddenly, in absolute subservience to their federal masters, the Leader of the Opposition and the federal member are now trying to tell Territorians that they should feel guilty about what is justly and rightly our entitlement as Australians.

To highlight the threats to our self-governing status, I would like to mention 2 points made recently by the federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. These points are very important and every Territorian should dwell on them carefully and consider their implications. I quote now from an interview on the ABC television program, 'Territory Tracks', of 18 April. Responding to a question about funding for Aboriginal projects, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Holding said: 'There are some minor differences but there is plenty of room for cooperation. After all, more than 80% of Mr Everingham's budget is supplied by the Commonwealth, and I would think that should provide a very positive basis for cooperation'. Let us examine that statement. The threat is not even implied: it is crystal clear. The message is that we must do what they tell us or they will withhold our funds. Despite all the waffle about consensus, about bringing Australia together, the Labor Party has revived the old standover tactics. It knows what is good for the Territory. It will tell us what to do and our role will be to do it.

For the other quote from Mr Holding, I turn to a copy of the Northern Territory News of 13 May 1983. When speaking about funding a private school in central Australia, Mr Holding announced emergency funding payments to the school. He said: 'If it is not registered, paving the way for funding, the Commonwealth will fund it directly and withdraw the cost from the Territory's overall Commonwealth allocation'. In the 5 years since self-government, we have never had such statements made by a federal minister that threaten the very foundation of self-government. At this stage, they are only threats; there has been no tampering with the formulas for funding the Northern Territory yet. Mr Speaker, there had better not be.

The fundamental basis for self-government was that Territorians would take over the funds the Commonwealth was spending in the Northern Territory for administering the Northern Territory. We would also take over the responsibility for those functions as to whether they were correctly or incorrectly performed. In turn, we would raise a reasonable level of state-type taxes to contribute towards the running of those functions and we have done that. The whole concept is that we would make the decisions on the state-type services that were transferred to the Territory. The Commonwealth should have no role in determining what funds are used for in the Territory for those functions provided those funds are lawfully spent. To interfere in any way with the way the Northern Territory government allocates its money would be an attack on self-government. Unfortunately, it appears that the opposition no longer supports those principles of self-government.

The Leader of the Opposition has stated in this Assembly that the new federal government had, in his opinion, every justification to renege on its election promises and that his only objection would be if we were asked to
bear a greater burden of restraint than anyone else in the community. He has even sold out that last principle: whilst we are all Australians and we all have to take some of the bitter pill, he would fight tooth and nail for us if we were asked to bear a larger burden than other Australians. That is exactly what we have been asked. Where is the fight? It has been demonstrated clearly that what we are being asked in the joint funding arrangements for the railway is to bear a greater share than any other Australians for that national project. Does the Leader of the Opposition demand that we be relieved of this burden to the extent that other Australians are not contributing? We hear him tell us that we should be grateful and we should fund it from our own budget. He suggests we could cut out a few hundred homes or a few schools because we are overfunded anyway. Perhaps it would relieve our consciences a little to give some of it back to the Commonwealth.

In addition to telling us to find $216m for the railway, the federal Treasurer tells us that $60m of the federal government's contribution will come from funds now destined to complete the sealing of the south road. We really are getting into a sleight of hand or thimble and pea. Firstly, they tell us to pick up 40% of the tab and then, as an aside, they tell us that part of their 60% contribution would be at the expense of a currently committed Commonwealth project: $60m worth of sealing of the south road. That project has been in operation for some years. We can have either or but we cannot have both. What happened to that very early statement from Mr Morris: 'The railway line would be complemented by the sealing of the Stuart Highway south of the Northern Territory border by 1986'. Now it is either or. They will take away what we already have to give us 60% of what we do not have.

Mr Speaker, the dirty tricks keep on coming. We are told that, if Australia is to get a north-south railway, it is conditional not only upon 1% of the population of Australia paying 40% of the cost, but that promised funds already allocated to upgrading a portion of the country's basic road transport network will be diverted. It is a national disgrace that that road was not sealed years ago as part of a basic infrastructure for a country the size of Australia.

We hear ad nauseum about the deficit being an excuse not to do things. $9600m or $10 000m is a figure now being mooted as being a deficit that is just too much for the Labor government to bear. However, we can afford some other airy-fairy schemes which may not help Australians but they will help others elsewhere. Aid to Vietnam is a fairly topical subject at present. There is no talk about how much we can afford to give. A peace-keeping force in Kampuchea is also being floated as a good idea. There is no talk about whether the budget can stand it or not. If we are going to be in a peace-keeping force, why not bring in the Japanese or whoever else. Do not tell them.

Mr Speaker, I also recall an offer of about $500m to the Tasmanian government to stop building the Franklin Dam. That was made at the time of the election and indeed after the election. The budget deficit was known then. There was no screaming that we could not afford it any more. We can afford to stop developing Jabiluka and Koongarra. A decision was taken not to develop those uranium mines. Those mines would have generated thousands of jobs, hundreds of millions in private capital development and billions of dollars of foreign exchange earnings for this country - and, goodness me, we need it now - over the next 2 decades.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's time has expired.
Mr SMITH (Millner): Mr Speaker, as is his wont, the Treasurer started off with a throwaway line that was not very well thought out. He said that, by its mini-budget, the government had in fact given us 2 doses of bad news instead of one.

Mr Perron: The second one is yet to come.

Mr SMITH: Thank you. The Treasurer could not make his statement clear enough at the time and has taken the liberty of an interjection to clear it up for us. He may feel free to do so as I go along.

Mr Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition quite clearly pointed out, the federal government took the opportunity in the mini-budget to signal the broad areas in which it wanted to move. I would have thought that this government in the Northern Territory would have the courtesy at least to recognise that there were important initiatives in the area of job creation. Instead, we have the Chief Minister dismissing it in the cavalier fashion that he did previously. I would like to spend a couple of minutes dealing with that cavalier dismissal of the increased money available in the job-creation program.

I think that the Chief Minister's comments quite clearly demonstrate that he has lost touch with what is going on in this community. Unemployment in this community is a very real problem. If he spent more time in the Northern Territory and if he spent some time in his electorate office, he would find that he would be getting regular contact from groups of unemployed people who are desperate and who want jobs even for 6 months. Through my office I have had a large number of contacts in the last few months. It is particularly distressing to see 18 and 19-year-old kids who want to work, who have been tramping the streets and who have been to all the official agencies like CES, CYSS and others but who have not been able to find anything. Their hopes have been raised by the initiatives in the mini-budget last week. They will not be particularly appreciative of the Chief Minister's comments that the additional money that the government has put into those programs is basically wasted and should be used for the railway line. I think it is an absolute disgrace that the Chief Minister made those comments.

The second area that this government should have mentioned is the additional money that has been put into housing. The Hawke government has committed itself to a 50% increase in the amount of money made available for housing in the 1983-84 financial year, an increase from $333m to $500m. It will result in 130 000 new starts on homes in the 1983-84 financial year. This is a substantial increase in the number of starts that have been made this year. We all know that investment in housing is one of the most effective ways of putting money into the community because of the way the money circulates. It all goes into the local community; very little of it escapes beyond the bounds of that community. It is a very good way of priming the economic pump in particular communities.

As well as that, we have the initiative for a $7000 grant for first home buyers under certain very generous conditions. Again, no mention was made of that. I submit that the balance of the mini-budget proposals was to get this economy moving and that those 2 things that I have outlined are most important. It is extremely remiss of this government not to have made passing and favourable mention of them.

Mr Speaker, the Treasurer said we are talking about a railway. You would never have known it from his comments. Let me get back to another
point that he was making. He said at one stage that the very principles of self-government are under threat. The basic reason given by himself and the Chief Minister for the principles of self-government being under threat is that the Northern Territory government is required to put some money into the railway. That was a very basic premise of the argument of this government on this particular issue.

The Leader of the Opposition effectively destroyed that premise this morning when he revealed to a stunned group of people opposite that it has been done before and that in fact it has been the usual method over the last few years of getting railway developments off the ground. He mentioned the Western Australian example in the early 1960s. He mentioned the South Australian example and he mentioned the Fraser government's pre-election offer in 1980 to join with New South Wales and Victoria to electrify the Sydney to Melbourne railway line. We all know that, after the election, the Fraser government withdrew and did not commit $1 to that project.

The Treasurer also made a case why the Northern Territory government could not be expected to make cuts in its budget allocations. He spent quite a bit of time on that. He did not approach the question of where the Commonwealth government could effectively make cuts. He did not broach the question of whether, if it could not make cuts, he was prepared to allow the Commonwealth budget deficit to blow out even further. The Treasurer is quite clearly on the record as saying that he supports balanced budgets. The Chief Minister is quite clearly on the record supporting a blowing out of the deficit at least at the federal level. Despite the fact that he had a firm invitation from the Leader of the Opposition to state his position, the Treasurer omitted - deliberately I would suspect - to address that particular issue.

The monetary figures that have been floated in terms of the cost of development of the railway basically rely on the 1979 joint Commonwealth-Territory task force report. It estimates that the cost of the railway line is about $540m in 1983 figures. But, on top of that, there would be a rolling stock component of about $60m. It also estimated that, provided the capital was written off, to break even the railway line would have to transport about 500 000 t of products each year. It was anticipated that it would be the mid-1990s before this would be possible.

However, there must be some doubt about that. I do not want to throw any doubt on the feasibility of the railway line but I have a slight concern about whether the projected dates are realistic. My doubts emanate from the estimate of the tonnage coming out of the Peko mines - 77 000 t a year. We all know that the mining market has slowed quite considerably. My doubts also emanate from the estimated tonnage in agricultural produce - 123 000 t a year. We all know that there have been problems in the agricultural area. Perhaps that view may have been overly optimistic. The result is that 200 000 t of the anticipated 500 000 t are a bit rubbery. We have the situation where we could expect the federal government to be in a position, when the railway line is built, of having to pick up a deficit of some description.

Therefore, 3 months after the new federal government has been elected, we have a commitment of $320m for the capital cost, a commitment of $60m for the rolling stock and a commitment to meet the operating cost deficit. All of these commitments come from the federal government.

Mr Speaker, as has been pointed out quite clearly, the opposition does not believe that that offer is good enough. We believe that we need to go
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back to the Commonwealth government and seek a better offer. But it is a meaningful commitment at this stage particularly when contrasted with the attitude of the Fraser government in 1980. In 1980, it said it would spend $10m on survey and design work for the Alice Springs to Darwin railway. In the 3 years before the election on 1 March, it managed to spend $5.3m. In fact, the Hawke government has had to chuck in $5m to finish the work the Fraser government undertook to do in 1980. In other words, at this stage, we have a Labor government which has been in office for 3 months and has committed 60% of the $540m that is necessary to build the railway line. That is compared with the Fraser government which, in 3 years, committed 50% of the $10m that it offered.

This commitment was made in the face of a $9600m deficit. We all know that the Labor Party knew nothing about that deficit until the Sunday after the election. Honest John the Treasurer, the $10 000m man, had forgotten to tell us in the election campaign that the budget had blown out. It was a deliberate decision by himself and the Prime Minister not to tell us. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, that changed the scene within which the government was making its decisions. It believed that it was facing a budget of $4500m. It believed that it was in a realistic position to increase that deficit to about $7000m. It was within that context that it had planned for the full development of the railway line. Instead, it was faced with the prospect not of spending $2000m but of saving $2000m.

Mr Speaker, the federal shadow Treasurer's response to the mini-budget, as has been pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition, was also very interesting. He said that the government had not struck hard enough; that it had not done enough to pull back the budget deficit, a budget deficit that we all know he was responsible for. With those sorts of comments coming from the federal shadow Treasurer who could be in any doubt about what would be the attitude of a federal Liberal government, if it had been re-elected, to the railway line proposal.

The other thing that is very interesting is that, as far as I am aware, apart from Senator Kilgariff, not one member of the federal opposition has spoken out and condemned the Hawke government for this particular action. I think that proves that it is very much a Territory issue and it is very much an issue on which we have to be united or we will not get anywhere. There will not be any national uprising on either the federal government side or the federal opposition side. It is an issue which we have to take up and it is an issue on which, if we take it up on a bipartisan basis, we will get much further than on the party political basis that the government is attempting to pursue at the moment.

As has been very clearly pointed out, the opposition supports the railway line. We believe that it must go ahead. We believe that the present offer from the Hawke government is not satisfactory. We believe that we need to go back to Canberra and talk to the government. But the basic difference between the government's position and our position is that, if it comes to the crunch and we have to put some of our own money in, we would be prepared to do it to make sure that the railway line goes ahead.

Mr TUXWORTH (Primary Production): Mr Speaker, let me start off by saying firstly that I support the motion put forward by the Chief Minister this morning. I think that that is something that has not been said by the people on the other side of the Assembly. So far the remarks of the opposition members have been innocuous. For 45 minutes, we had a diatribe from the Leader of the Opposition. He was offended that the Chief Minister had said untrue things about him. He was angry. We had a very noisy diversion
that said very little except that he wanted to give away a couple of hundred million dollars of Territorians' money. He failed to support the motion put forward by the Chief Minister. I would like to make the point that, as far as I am concerned, his attitude so far has been nothing short of treacherous.

In February and March this year, the Labor Party campaigned on the hustings with the Liberal Party and the National Party and it competed for votes by offering to do whatever needed to be done to win power. It bought its way into power and it promised anything to get it. That is fair enough. If it wanted to be in power so much, that responsibility carried with it the responsibility to provide the people with the things they were promised.

Mr Speaker, let us have a quick look at the promises. We would have tax cuts, pensions would rise in the first pension cheque after voting day, petrol would be reduced by 3c a litre, there would be a decrease in the level of unemployment, we would have a free health scheme - mark 5 of Medibank - inflation would be reduced and 500 000 jobs would be created. Amongst all of these promises, to buy a couple of votes and to win a seat in the Northern Territory, the Labor Party said it would build a railway. It has said it and I do not think it is unreasonable that the people of the Northern Territory expect the government to honour its promise. All this business about the size of the deficit is just bilge water.

At a very early stage in the new government's life, it became pretty obvious that there would be some large financial and political sacrifices. If it wanted to be politically pragmatic, the Northern Territory was a sacrifice that could be given up very easily. Let us look at the financial aspects first. It promised a railway worth about $540m. It was in for $87m for the airport, $15m for the bicentennial road program, $130m-odd to shift the RAAF base, $105m for the BTB eradication program and various miscellaneous expenditures for airports and shipping subsidies. Over a period of 5 to 9 years, that would total $900m.

Let us examine the political trade-off. The Labor Party won the seat by a very small margin. It could not assume that it would win it again. It would hardly be worth spending that sort of money on an ALP oncer. Obviously, from the point of view of people sitting in Canberra who do not have our interests at heart, it was quite an easy option for them to say: 'Write it off. If they still want the railway, let us make them an offer we know they cannot accept because we know they cannot afford it and then all will be sweet. We will come out of it as the good guys'.

Let us consider the issue of the sacrifice and how early that decision was made. In the last sittings, the honourable Leader of the Opposition foreshadowed almost a dozen times that the economy was in difficulties, money might not be available, we should not have high expectations and, if the Chief Minister wanted a railway, he should at least put up a good argument for one. He said that we could not automatically accept that disease control funding would be available. The list was increased over a period of days and I raised it as a matter of interest during the debates. The scene was being set to sacrifice the Northern Territory and the Leader of the Opposition was instrumental in setting that scene.

Mr Speaker, let me ask you why a Territorian, a political leader of a party that aspires to government and a person who collects his pay packet from the people of the Northern Territory, would accept that the Northern Territory would be subjected to financial strangulation just because people in Canberra decided it. The financial strangulation was only part of it. He is prepared to accept his own political demise which must follow from it.
He is also prepared to make excuses for election promises that are broken. Let me put it to you that the honourable member was not fighting for Territorians and sticking up for us. He has no allegiance to us. His philosophies transcend the Northern Territory's aspirations and the wishes of the people. His allegiance is to people in Canberra.

Mr B. Collins: I thought you were going to say the Russian embassy.

Mr TUXWORTH: He may laugh and treat it very lightly, but it has taken some time for the people of this Territory to realise that this man has been selling us out, and for a long time. This debate on the railway has given us a good opportunity to see the man in his true colours.

Mr B. Collins: Are you upset because I went to Tennant Creek?

Mr Speaker: Order! The honourable member on his feet will be heard in silence. I ask all members not speaking to be quiet, and that goes for both sides.

Mr TUXWORTH: Mr Speaker, it is always easy to tell when you are getting close to the quick with the honourable Leader of the Opposition. His mouth runs off. He is doing it today to try and avoid his party's embarrassment.

Mr B. Collins: That's really solid stuff.

Mr TUXWORTH: Mr Speaker, the honourable member was not only involved in a cover up but he sold us out deliberately. When he sold us out, he not only sold out the railway but he gave away $200m of our money at the same time. Insult has now been added to this injury because the honourable member is saying: 'I think I could negotiate a better deal. John Bannon and the Chief Minister and I could go to Canberra and we could talk them down'.

Mr B. Collins: I did not say that.

Mr TUXWORTH: Why would he go to Canberra, Mr Speaker, to make a name for himself?

Mr B. Collins: To try.

Mr Speaker: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will not interject and I request the Minister for Primary Production not to be too provocative.

Mr TUXWORTH: Mr Speaker, I can assure you that I am restraining myself as best I can.

The Leader of the Opposition is going down to try to reduce the Territorians' tag from $200m to $150m. He knows, we know and the federal government also knows that we would not have $150m either. If this is the Leader of the Opposition's way of representing the Northern Territory and doing us a favour, I hope I am a million miles away if ever he decides to doublecross us.

Let us come to the promise, Mr Speaker. Let me read a few lines from a well-meaning document: 'The Hawke Labor government will develop the Territory. Point 1. Build the Alice Springs to Darwin rail line with a 1988 target completion date'. This is not just Bob Hawke's promise because this document has been authorised by Bob Collins, 83 Lee Point Road Casuarina. Nowhere in that document are there any caveats, provisos, ifs, buts or maybes;
it is a straight promise. Let us look at the promise. Are we asking for something very special? Yes, it is important to us and special. Are we asking for something that none of the states have? No, Mr Speaker. Are we asking for something that this country cannot afford? The answer to that is no. We are asking for a railway just like the railways that exist in the states. I would make the point that most of those railways were funded while the states were basking in the luxury of Commonwealth funds for the last 70 years, and when we had none.

Mr Speaker, let us just look at the cost of the railway at $540m - about $100m a year. The total budget of this country last year was $47 600m and these people are saying that Australia cannot afford $100m a year for 5 years to build the railway. What we are asking for in the Northern Territory is not special; it is just overdue. I do not think that it is unreasonable that the Labor Party meet its promise and its commitment.

The Leader of the Opposition is now saying that we should pay. How much we pay is a matter of conjecture. On a program on television the other night with Randy Westcombe, he said that the country was pulling in its belt and asked what was so special about us. I will tell him what is so special about us, Mr Speaker. The states have their railways and all the benefits that go with them and we have not. It is not unreasonable that we should expect to get a railway. We are not even arguing whether we delay it. We are arguing that the Northern Territory should not be required to cough up 40%. I am not saying that 40% should be taken from funds to create jobs for people whether they are painting fences or whatever. I am arguing that, in a $47 000m budget, we can afford $100m in this country for a few years to fulfil a promise that was first made 70 years ago.

The Treasurer touched on a point that is so important that it cannot go unnoticed. If we should accept the 40% proposal by the Commonwealth, it will also mean that our road-funding program will go down the tube. If that is not one of the craziest sell-outs that I have ever heard of, I do not know what is. How the Leader of the Opposition can subscribe to a view like that when he knows as well as we do the need for road money in this Territory has me beat. It can only be described as a sell-out.

A couple of weeks ago, the federal government put the kybosh on the 2 uranium mines. Do you recall the Leader of the Opposition sticking up for the Northern Territory, the companies, the traditional owners or anybody who might wish to see the projects go ahead? Mr Speaker, he was not interested. The silence was ominous. Let me reflect for a moment on the Koongarra situation. As members know, 21 of the 25 people at Koongarra would like to mine on their land. Mr Speaker, have you heard the Leader of the Opposition sticking up for the people who want to mine on their land? No, Mr Speaker! We are dealing with the railway and the sell-out. He would sell out anything in the Northern Territory that he did not agree with. He hates uranium mining and anything to do with it and he would do anything that he could to prevent it.

Mr Speaker, you did not hear the honourable member sticking up for the Territorians when petrol and av gas price rises were advocated. Not a word - just a big cover up for his mates down south. The charade is over. The Leader of the Opposition will not get away with the persiflage that he gave us this morning. He said that the railway must go ahead and then said that Territorians must contribute something to it. He knows as well as you and I, Mr Speaker, that Territorians cannot afford it. How can he argue for the railway with the knowledge that it cannot proceed because Territorians cannot afford it?
Mr Speaker, the trick that has been perpetrated by the federal Labor Party and condoned by people opposite is nothing less than deceit and treachery of the first order. They ought to be condemned for it. Let me remind the honourable members opposite again of the motion: 'That this Assembly call on the federal government to fulfil its legislative obligations and honour the firm undertakings made to the people of the Territory to construct and wholly fund the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway, with a completion date of 1988'. If it is beneath their political dignity to support that, there is no hope for them.

Ms D'ROZARIO (Sanderson): Mr Speaker, we have heard some amazing views about the state of the economy today. We heard the Chief Minister tell us that 700 000 unemployed mean nothing to him because he considers that the funds for the program that the federal government has undertaken, as a result of the clear mandate given to it on 5 March to create programs which would alleviate the high rate of unemployment that presently prevails in Australia, are his and that that money is his railway money. We heard from the Minister for Primary Production that a $10 000m deficit is so much bilge water. These sorts of perceptions about the economy cause ministers in Canberra to laugh. The Territory government ministers give no impression at all that they are grasping the situation that confronts not just the Territory but the entire nation. They seem to believe that somehow or other the Northern Territory has no part to play in bringing about economic recovery.

I would like to consider last Thursday's decision in the context of the mini-budget. We have a federal Labor government that was elected on 5 March. The Minister for Primary Production said - and this is probably the only sensible thing he said - that when governments are elected they have a responsibility. Indeed, this government has grasped its responsibility with both hands. In the brief time that it has been in office, it has sought departmental briefings about the true state of the economy - something which was kept from it and from the people of Australia by the former Prime Minister and his deputy, Mr John Howard, who now bleats about the mini-budget not being forceful enough. Since that time, the Prime Minister convened an economic summit which was approved by all participants. As a result of the views expressed at the economic summit and the communique that issued from it, the one that we are told that the Chief Minister participated in the drafting of and of which he is so proud, and indeed he should be proud, we have had the formulation of a mini-budget. All this has happened in the space of less than 3 calendar months.

The Minister for Primary Production said that the Leader of the Opposition had commented that, in the early life of the government, there'would be hard times ahead. Mr Speaker, 3 calendar months is early in the life of the government. I do not know what the Minister for Primary Production is on about but clearly he has forgotten the events that the rest of the nation holds so clearly in its collective mind. Let it not be forgotten that the popularity of the Prime Minister and his government was never higher than just after the economic summit. No one in this country has claimed that the economic summit was a waste of time or a failure for the government.

I would also like to point out, as I think a couple of members have before, that the government was not required to bring down a budget until August. However, in line with the Minister for Production's view of what a responsible government should do, the federal Labor government has shown economic responsibility by responding promptly to the conditions which became so plain during the economic summit. Moreover, it is responding to the principles which were agreed to at the economic summit. A lot was said
about the participants at the economic summit. Some people complained that they had not been invited and other people complained that they had only been invited as observers. Nevertheless, the federal Labor government accredited delegates from the Northern Territory: the Chief Minister and his deputy. If what the Chief Minister is now saying is that he did not agree to the principles that were agreed to at the economic summit, notwithstanding that he co-authored the communique, then I think that we are not seeing a sleight of hand but rather a sleight of tongue. The mini-budget was brought down as a prompt response to this government's perception of its responsibility to the Australian people. It could have carried on in the way that another government might have. No government likes to take unpopular decisions. As I mentioned, the standing of the Labor government in Canberra was never higher than during the week after the economic summit.

Let us traverse the options which were available to the federal government. It could have waited until August and we would not have seen any of the petulance that we saw from the Chief Minister last week. It could simply have continued to ride on its current popularity wave. It is a popular government as the polls will show. It could have kept the Northern Territory happy by doing what its predecessors did in respect to the railway: continue to allocate small amounts for things like surveys and identification of the ultimate route. As I said, no government likes to take unpopular decisions. This government has responded to the conditions in the economy and I think it deserves credit for that.

Despite all the things that the government could have done to retain its popularity, after a mere 3 months in government, it has done more than any previous government in the way of a commitment to the Northern Territory railway. The federal government has made a firm commitment to allocate $320m above its other allocations and in excess of its commitment to rolling stock. Furthermore, the federal government has shown itself willing to negotiate on reducing the Northern Territory contribution.

Mr Speaker, let us see what we had from previous governments. We had occasional small sums of money appropriated in the annual budgets. When we saw these, we took heart that in fact a Northern Territory railway was still somewhere in the government's mind. But, of course, it was quite obvious that it was well to the back of the former government's mind. As the member for Millner pointed out, in the last budget the Liberal government allocated $10m to continue surveys of which we find that only $5.3m was ever expended. Let us not minimise now what the commitment of this Labor government is to the Territory railway. This is the first government that has ever put up a proposal that $324m would be committed unequivocally to the Northern Territory railway.

I exhort members to regard this commitment in terms of the government's budgetary processes and, more importantly, the objectives of any budget that is brought down by the Commonwealth government. I think it is an important point that it is not necessary for the federal government to state its objectives before August. However, in keeping with its decision to inform the nation of the economic situation confronting it, this government has taken the step of bringing in a mini-budget in order to make economic information available to the state governments. The budget is an estimate of the proposed expenditures for a given period or for a given purpose, and it includes the proposed means of financing them. This government is the first to propose an expenditure of $324m for the Northern Territory railway, and that is a clear indication of its plans for the future. It is a clear statement of its intention to build the Northern Territory railway.
Mr Speaker, the mini-budget in respect of the Northern Territory railway indicates a willingness by the federal government to incur on behalf of all Australians contractual obligations which reflect expenditures which will have to be made over the ensuing years. We have heard 1988 spoken about and, if that target is to be met, it would mean expenditure in excess of $60m every year for the next 5 years. I ask the people on the other side whether they can point to any commitment of that size from their former federal colleagues. The answer, of course, is a clear shriek of silence.

The federal government has taken on its own head a commitment which will involve other Australians in contractual obligations towards Northern Territorians. This is no small decision to take. It is not the timorous decision that the former Treasurer who now rightly sits in opposition, Mr John Howard, has claimed it to be. If his government were still in power, he would be telling us that there is no way the government could see its way clear to fund the Northern Territory railway. So much for promises, Mr Speaker. This contractual obligation which has been entered into by the federal government is very important. It is particularly important in view of the limited means by which the government can fund long-term capital projects and can introduce them into its budgets.

Many times in this Assembly, we have talked about public expenditure committees. Indeed, there were a couple of motions introduced to establish one of our own. Let us look at the finding of the Committee on Public Expenditure of the House of Representatives with respect to the particular point of the means by which new long-term capital projects are introduced into federal budgets. In 1979, the House of Representatives' Committee on Public Expenditure reported to the federal parliament as follows: 'The Department of Finance told the committee that perhaps 98%-99% of the annual budget is currently accounted for by on-going expenditure. New program proposals are virtually constrained to compete only with one another for the thin margin of free resources left after the needs of the on-going programs are met'.

In view of that report to the federal parliament, let me stress that this is a mini-budget. I stress this for good reason. The expenditure reviews of all departments of the federal government are not yet complete. What we have in the mini-budget is the federal government making a commitment on the thin margin of free resources that its standing committee reported and not taking into account any other demands which may be forthcoming from other areas. Mr Speaker, if you think that is a gutless proposal, then I think that members on the other side had better look to the means by which capital projects are funded. The expenditure reviews of other departments are not required to be completed until the end of this financial year. The data collected in that review will form the economic statement which will be brought down in the August budget.

Notwithstanding that the government did not have to make any commitment to the railway until August, this government, in advance of its expenditure review, has made a commitment of $324m to the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory's aspiration in respect of a railway has been accommodated without complete knowledge of other needs in the Australian community. Of course, there are alternative ways of funding such a large project and I imagine that there would have been some shrieks of hysteria if, in fact, the government had sought other ways. One way is to forget about the expenditure side of the budget and look at revenue. The easiest option for the federal government would have been to raise taxation. It was not an option that this federal government considered for the mini-budget. It has been unequivocal about that. The raising of taxation was never an option. I
think that the government is to be commended for that. Instead of attempting to restrain household consumption by raising taxes, it has opted for a moderate expansion of the economy by a huge injection into the housing program in particular and into a program to ameliorate unemployment as well.

Mr Speaker, my advice to the people concerned with the eventual construction of a Northern Territory railway is to accept the goodwill which has been extended by the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier of South Australia, John Bannon, to recognise that a 40% contribution is far too high for the Northern Territory to make and to continue to negotiate with the federal government to reduce that contribution. This is not a sell-out. We have heard some very strong words from the Minister for Primary Production. We have heard talk of treachery, duplicity and deceit and we have heard nothing about what this Northern Territory government is prepared to do in order to bring about the eventual construction of the railway. The attitude taken by the Chief Minister will not advance our cause. It is based on confrontation. The Chief Minister seems to have a completely different view now to the one he held during the economic summit. He now says that he will take the federal government to court on this matter if the money is not forthcoming.

We are invited to support a motion which says, quite clearly, that the federal government has a binding legislative obligation. As the honourable Leader of the Opposition has pointed out so adequately, there is no binding legislative obligation. The matter was resolved by the High Court in 1962, and the option as far as the railway is concerned is either to continue negotiations to reduce the Northern Territory's share of the cost or to say that the railway will not eventuate. Let us imagine what the federal government would do if the Chief Minister dashed down to Canberra with a writ in one hand and abuse in his mouth. What would happen is simply that the federal government would stand back and say: 'We withdraw our offer of $324m. We will wait for a decision of the court to compel us to pay'. As we know, this matter has been resolved once before when a similar action failed. To all of us who have an aspiration to see a Northern Territory railway, the sensible course of action would be to accept the commitment that has so far been made and to continue negotiations to reduce the Northern Territory's contribution. That is the only way in which the Territory will see a railway.

Mr HARRIS (Port Darwin): Mr Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the motion. At the start, I would like to say that one of the things that has disappointed me most about this whole exercise is that the Alice Springs to Darwin railway has already had its first passenger and that was the NT member in the House of Representatives, John Reeves. I think that everyone would agree that he is in Canberra because of the very issue that we are debating here today: the construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway. I think that disappointment is shared not only by members on this side of the Assembly but by many other Territorians. It is also disappointing to see that the powers—that-be as far as the Australian Labor Party is concerned were aware that, if their policies were to be implemented, it would be necessary for there to be massive cuts and that some of the local projects, such as the Alice Springs to Darwin railway, the Darwin international airport, the south road, defence areas such as Tindal Base and the upgrading of RAAF facilities, the airport at Alice Springs etc would be placed at risk.

I understood, and I am sure my colleagues and all supporters of our political persuasion realised, that for the Labor Party to implement those policies, enormous amounts of money would have to be spent. It would require millions and millions of dollars to implement those policies and someone
would have to pay for them. It is unfortunate that it appears that the people who will have to pay, at this stage, are Territorians. It is not, I believe, a matter of negotiation; it is a matter of trying to explain exactly what the issue is all about. The Alice Springs to Darwin railway is a national project. It is a project that would benefit all Australians. For a government to say that 1% of the Australian population is required to contribute 40% plus towards a national project is unacceptable. Incidentally, that 40% will be a lot higher because the 60% that is to be funded by the federal government would include some of our taxes anyway.

I am quite convinced that the federal government does not realise exactly how important this particular project is to all Australians. I refer particularly to the defence of this country. Despite the remarks made by the member for Sanderson that no commitment had been made prior to this government's commitment, I feel very strongly that the commitment made by the former government to proceed with the Alice Springs to Darwin railway was made because of that very issue of defence. Enormous amounts of money have been spent in this area. Already we have a naval patrol base costing $25m. Commitments were made with regard to upgrading Tindal and also the RAAF base here in Darwin and hopefully those commitments will proceed under the present government.

Another thing needs to be pointed out. When we talk about defence spending, $540m is not really a lot of money. An aircraft carrier costs $1000m and a destroyer costs in the vicinity of $200m. If you start getting into aircraft, tanks etc, you will find that $1m does not go very far.

The other point that needs to be raised is that, irrespective of whether we in the Territory or the people of Australia or the Australian government like it or not - whichever government is in power at the time - Darwin is a strategically placed city. Darwin is important for the defence of Australia and we must pursue this particular issue. It is important with the massive expenditure in this area - the $25m patrol base, the upgrading of the RAAF facilities, the bringing of fighter squadrons here - that we have all modes of transport available to service those particular facilities, and that includes a railway.

Mr Speaker, on the benefit side, I believe that tremendous opportunities are available here for job creation. Instead of providing jobs for a limited period of 6 months, I believe that such a labour-intensive project as this would create employment for a much longer period and those jobs would be much more secure. We have heard today about its importance to the steel industry; the Chief Minister touched on that. I would say that the steel industry is another industry which is vital to Australia and it is experiencing a very difficult period at this time. It is important that this industry be given the chance to continue in a viable manner. Projects such as this, which will require huge amounts of steel, will give jobs to those people who would otherwise be out on the streets.

Many other people have commented that the jobs that would be created would not suit the unemployed. It upsets me somewhat to see that, when some people refer to the unemployed, they believe that these people are not qualified. Many unemployed people have a great deal of expertise; some of them are professional people. A job-creation project such as this would give tremendous potential to provide jobs for a wide variety of people. Once the railway is completed, there is no doubt that there will be enormous spin-offs, not only to Darwin people but to people right throughout Australia. One thing I will be very interested in is the possibility of a national travel scheme for aged people. At present, in all the states, aged pensioners
receive a government rail subsidy. This would give us the opportunity to provide to our senior citizens, people who are proud to live in this country, an opportunity to see Australia at a price that they can afford.

Mr Speaker, on the local scene, there are projects that will not realise their full potential unless the Alice Springs to Darwin railway is constructed. I think that we are all aware of these projects. One that comes to mind is the wharf. Some $27m has been committed to upgrade the facilities to handle container shipping. The railway would open the way for the southern states to establish contact with South-east Asia. In relation to agriculture, the railway will play a vital part. It is an industry that has had a very difficult start in the Northern Territory. It has been fraught with disasters and is going through a difficult period. These industries involve grain storage and the transport of grain from the growing areas to the ships. These are areas that will benefit most definitely from construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway.

Mr Speaker, a number of comments have been made, not only today but throughout this whole exercise, about the enormous amount of money that Territory people receive from the federal government. I think the Treasurer covered that particular area amply. I would like to say to people in other parts of Australia that they are also funded to a great extent by the federal government. The impression that I have on occasions is that we are the only ones who receive benefit from this source. Whilst it could be said that, overall, on a per capita basis, we receive more, as the Chief Minister mentioned this morning, the Grants Commission recommends that we should be receiving more. If we are going to use that as an argument, we could say to other states of Australia that perhaps, in certain areas, they should be pulling their weight a little bit more. I refer here to export earnings. We see that the value of exports per head of population for the Northern Territory has been more than double the figure for the rest of Australia. Our exports have been growing more quickly than in the rest of Australia.

The other area to touch on is mining. From 1972 to 1982, the mining turnover per head of population in the Northern Territory was 5.5 times that of New South Wales, 5 times that of Victoria and nearly 4 times greater than for Australia as a whole. Currently, value added in the mining industry per head of population in the Territory is 5 times the figure for Australia as a whole and is growing more quickly. This shows that there are 2 sides to the story. We are receiving a greater amount per capita from the federal government but we are also making our effort in returning revenue.

There has been a great deal of comment that we need to pull our weight. I am concerned about how much the fourth Labor government will cost the people of the Northern Territory. If the Australian government is serious about its approach to unemployment, inflation and overcoming the deficit which we hear so much about these days, then I believe that it must look at its uranium mining policy.

I must say to the member for Sanderson that I was disappointed with some of the aspects of the economic summit. It appeared that everyone intended to go down there with an open mind and, God willing, give and take a little. The unions were there with that view and so were employers and governments from all parts of Australia. One matter that disappointed me was the failure of the ALP even to consider looking at its policy in relation to uranium mining. This is an area that could create massive employment. It needed to be looked at. If the employers, unions and state governments were prepared to look at the issue of unemployment generally, the policies of the
ALP should also have been looked at.

This morning, the Chief Minister gave some details about the employment that would be created if the construction and development of Koongarra and Jabiluka were to proceed. Over 2000 jobs would be created in the initial development stage and then the multiplier effects would occur. If all 4 mines were operating, a workforce of over 1600 would be required. The 1982 production of Ranger and Nabarlek totalled $345m. If the 2 other projects, Jabiluka and Koongarra, had proceeded, over $800m would have been generated over that period of time. It is particularly significant that, if the uranium industry were allowed to develop unhindered - and I am not referring to the requirements of law placed on those particular companies - the value of production and construction expenditure to the year 2000 would be $15 000m. That is a lot of money and I believe the ALP must give consideration to changing its policies on uranium mining. It is not up to us to make decisions about the availability of markets. That is up to the companies concerned and it is important that this area be looked at. If the present federal government policies are followed it could mean a loss to the people of the Territory in the order of some $11 000m. That is a lot of money, Mr Speaker.

I would like to comment on a remark made by the member for Millner in relation to the Treasurer's comment that the principle of self-government was under threat. He said that it was because of the railway. I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that I am also concerned that the principle of self-government is under threat. The opposition was not in favour of self-government when it first came into this Assembly. We need only to look at the philosophies of the ALP as far as centralisation of power in Canberra is concerned. We have fought very hard to get away from that. We have our self-determination and we are proud of it. We need to look only at what is happening in Tasmania and the Northern Territory to see that there is a very real threat to our self-determination status. I make that comment to the member for Millner. It is not only in relation to the railway. There are a number of things happening which place self-government under threat.

In closing, I say that the defence aspect should be emphasised in stating a case for a railway. It is a national project. It is something that all Australians need. If we are to get a railway, that is the line that we should be taking. I accept the arguments that have gone on here this morning but I believe that the way to approach this whole exercise is to convince the people of Australia and the ALP that it is important to have a railway in the Territory. Of course, we will benefit but the rest of Australia will also benefit.

The Leader of the Opposition said that the game is getting rough. I say that, before long, we will find that the game will become a lot rougher.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Hon R.T. Hope MLC

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of the Hon R.T. Hope, member for Meander in the Tasmanian Legislative Council. On your behalf, I wish the honourable gentleman and Mrs Hope a pleasant stay in the Northern Territory.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr DOOLAN (Victoria River): Mr Speaker, perusal of previous Hansards will reveal that I have been advocating the upgrading and rebuilding of the Territory's railway each year since I was first elected in 1977. At
one time in 1978, I issued a press release which elicited a reply from the general manager of Commonwealth railways. It was not very hopeful. I do not think that any Territorian in his right mind could deny that the proposed railway would be of inestimable value to the Territory. It is undeniable that the Territory cannot raise enough revenue to contribute 40% of the cost of this railway.

As the Chief Minister told us this morning, 72 years ago, the Commonwealth government promised to build us a railway. It is an historical fact now. During the last sittings, I said that I felt sure that the present Labor government would honour the previous Liberal government's promise to complete the railway by 1988. Unfortunately, it would now appear that I was wrong and I would like to say that I am just as disappointed as the Chief Minister or any other honourable member of this Assembly. Nevertheless, I think that the Chief Minister is being quite unfair in his vitriolic attacks on the Hawke government. After all, what Prime Minister Fraser gave was merely a promise which was unfulfilled. The Chief Minister seems to have conveniently forgotten that his masters in Canberra did not disclose the correct extent of the enormous deficit of some $9500m when the Hawke government made this promise.

Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister also appears to have forgotten that the enormous sum of $300m is to be injected into the economy to provide extra jobs. He prefers simply to dismiss this as painting fences in Sydney or by some other ridiculous remark. Because of the duplicity of the Fraser government, it is obvious that someone will have to suffer. It appears that the Territory, together with the rest of the country, will not get all that it would like. That is the real reason why we may not get our railway in 1988. In fact, it was the dishonesty of the previous government which has caused this and not any policy of the present Labor government.

Mr Speaker, why doesn't the Chief Minister, when he speaks to the Prime Minister - and he said that he is going to - make a suggestion that the 40% contribution to the cost of the railway be debited against the appropriation allocated to the defence department? The honourable member for Port Darwin mentioned defence and I could not agree with him more. It is vital. Even the old railway that we had kept the Territory going during the war. It could be said that you can blow up a railway fairly fast but you can also repair one fairly fast. Surely this railway would be a most necessary asset to the whole Commonwealth as a vital part of the defence of the country. It would probably be of more value, for instance, than an aircraft carrier. I have no doubt it would be less costly to the taxpayer in the long term.

Mrs O'NEIL (Fannie Bay): Mr Speaker, I do not think that the Attorney-General will need necessarily to rise to his feet to reply to me. I would have thought that he would have been grateful that he now does not have to defend the curious court case that the Chief Minister has landed him in. I am beginning to think that the Attorney-General might somehow regret the reshuffle of portfolios that occurred last December because he is now in the position of having to defend and perhaps pursue, the Chief Minister's off-the-cuff statement in relation to a legal case against the Commonwealth. That would be quite inconsistent with the stand the Attorney-General has taken only recently in relation to an appeal which claims that courts cannot require public expenditure.

Nevertheless, the Chief Minister is saying that he will take the federal government to court so that the court can require federal government expenditure. The inconsistency quite amazes me. The terrible disadvantage
of this legal challenge, if it does go ahead, is that it will drag out the whole issue for some considerable time. There is no doubt that, when things get into court, usually the only people who benefit in the long run are the lawyers. Court cases take a long time and cost a lot of money. Such action will create a further incredible delay in achieving this railway which we all desire.

It is not just the Attorney-General who has some problems. I begin to think that the Minister for Health, who is sleeping over there on the back seat, might have some problems too. He must be worried about the schizophrenic behaviour of his Chief Minister, bearing in mind the inadequate psychiatric facilities we have in the Northern Territory. On the one hand, earlier this month, the Chief Minister said: 'The vital issue now is whether parties can settle differences in a spirit of cooperation and consensus or whether there will be a return to the sniping, self-interested attitudes that have done Australia so much damage to date'. Mr Speaker, if ever we encountered a sniping, self-interested attitude, it was that displayed by the Chief Minister in his address to this Assembly. On 5 May, he went on to say: 'Clearly, restraint is the key which must influence our actions in the times ahead'. Apparently, the Chief Minister is very much a man of 'do what I say, not what I do', because he showed no evidence in today's debate of following those precepts which he was prepared to endorse. In fact, he contributed to writing the document which came out of the economic summit. Today, he says that he will not accept $1 of responsibility. How is that for restraint? How is that for being self-interested?

We had further evidence of that with the Chief Minister's total rejection of the legitimate claims of the 700,000 Australian unemployed for their share of federal government revenue. If there was anything that I never wanted to hear the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory say, that was it. The Hawke government was elected because of the state of the economy and because of the plight of those hundreds of thousands of Australians. Through its economic statement, it has done what it was elected to do. But, in effect, the Chief Minister says: 'I do not give a damn about them; I am only interested in myself'.

The statement by the federal Treasurer, Mr Keating, contained a number of things which the Hawke government was elected by the Australian people to do. There were the unemployment and housing programs to which my colleague the member for Millner has referred. These will be of great economic benefit to Australia. Further, there was the commitment of $320m to the Northern Territory's railway. Within 3 months of the election of the Hawke government, $320m has been allocated towards that railway.

Mr Tuxworth: It isn't allocated.

Mrs O'NEIL: Committed to that railway. I withdraw the word 'allocated', Mr Speaker. How does that compare with his predecessor, Mr Fraser? He offered us $10m and spent only $5m of that. In this federal government's statement, we are offered 60% of $540m - $320m. Nevertheless, the Chief Minister is not happy. I say to the Chief Minister, that I do not think it is enough; I would like more. I do not think that we can contribute the required 40%. But, the federal government has offered $320m towards that railway and the Chief Minister now says that he does not want it. It is all or nothing for him.

We had an explanation from the Minister for Community Development as to why that is so - a peculiar explanation. He said that we will not pay a jot because the states all have railways and we want what they have. We
want a harbour bridge, an opera house and God knows what else paid for by
the Australian people. The facts are quite contrary to those the Minister
for Community Development claimed in his address this morning. Railways in
most Australian states have been paid for wholly or partly by the people
in those areas, and there are historic reasons for that. Many of them have
been there since before federation. It is certainly not the case that the
federal government built all the railways in the rest of Australia therefore
it has to build ours as well. That is nonsense and the Minister for Community
Development knows that it is nonsense.

There are recent precedents for both cases. There is the case of the
Tarcoola to Alice Springs railway and we know the great contribution the
former Labor government made in that area. I agree with the Chief Minister
that it was initiated by the McMahon Liberal government, but that government
did not spend 1c on it either. The first funds for it were committed by the
Whitlam government. Recently, there have been as many examples of railways
in Australia that have been funded by joint arrangements of one sort or
another. The Leader of the Opposition and other members referred to the
Kalgoorlie to Perth standardisation arrangements. There was the electrification
of the Sydney to Melbourne line. Once again, that was one of those Fraser
promises that was broken. That was proposed as a joint state Commonwealth
funding arrangement. Of course, there was the famous case in the 1960s in
South Australia which will be the rock the Attorney-General perishes on if
he takes his claim to court.

We have this offer of $320m towards the Northern Territory railway
compared with the expenditure by the Fraser government of a miniscule $5m.
What would have been the chances of getting that $320m if the Fraser government
had been re-elected?

Mr B. Collins: According to Howard, none.

Mrs O'NEIL: Precisely! The former Treasurer, Mr Howard, has made it
perfectly clear that he does not think the Hawke government has saved enough
money. The mini-budget is a timid document and it should be cutting back
even further. You have to view that also, Mr Speaker, in the context of the
innumerable broken promises of the Fraser government: medibank, tax indexation,
this one, that one and the other one. If all those matters had ended up in
court, Australia would have done nothing else in the last 8 years but fight
cases in court.

I am reminded by a point made by the honourable member for Port Darwin
that there was another broken promise. I can remember Mr Fraser coming up
here in 1975 and saying he would give us statehood in 5 years. I am not
ashamed to say that I opposed that as absurd. I was proven right because,
clearly, we have not been able to achieve statehood in 5 years for all sorts
of reasons. That was an election promise by Mr Fraser: statehood for the
Territory in 5 years. Where is our statehood? That is where our railway
would have been if the Fraser government had been re-elected. We have from
Mr Keating an offer of $320m.

Obviously, the Minister for Community Development did not bother
to listen to what the federal Treasurer said because he made a statement
in this morning's debate regarding road funding which was quite erroneous.
For his benefit, and for the benefit of anybody else who was foolish enough
to believe anything the Minister for Community Development might have said,
I will quote from the economic statement delivered on 19 May by the federal
Treasurer: 'Part of the Commonwealth contribution would be funded by
transferring about $60m currently allocated to upgrading the Stuart Highway
in the Northern Territory'. He did not say the south road. 'Should the Northern Territory not accept this approach, the Commonwealth would be prepared to provide, in place of the railway, a high standard road link from Alice Springs to Darwin by 1987 and additional rail facilities for Alice Springs to provide an efficient transport alternative'. The Minister for Community Development was quite wrong because what the federal Treasurer is talking about is providing a high quality road from Alice Springs to Darwin or a railway from Alice Springs to Darwin, but not funding both. It is important that members realise that that is what the federal Treasurer said and not what the honourable Minister for Community Development would have us believe.

A number of other claims were made in this morning's debate which bear looking at. In relation to one of them, and I think it was repeated twice, there seems to have been an element of paranoia on the part of the government members since the election of the Hawke government. They ought to have been paranoid earlier but they did not learn until too late. They quoted from a statement by the Leader of the Opposition. They referred to a radio speech which he had given. 'I am told there are dark clouds on the Territory horizon and I am not talking about the weather' was the opening sentence of one of the Leader of the Opposition's weekly radio talks. The Chief Minister and the Treasurer would have us believe that, somehow, the Leader of the Opposition was talking about the economic circumstances in Australia and their implications for the Territory.

Mr B. Collins: That was quite a misrepresentation.

Mrs O'NEIL: I presumed that they had listened to his radio talk if they managed to extract that quote. If they had listened to the rest of it, they would have found that the Leader of the Opposition was referring to racial tension in the Territory, specifically that relating to the Katherine Gorge land claim. So much for the Leader of the Opposition announcing in dramatic words, some months ago, that the Territory was in for bad economic times. It is a great shame that those 2 government members cannot get their facts straight and that they stoop to misrepresenting the truth and the words of the Leader of the Opposition in this matter.

Let us return to the attitude that we have heard expressed principally by the Chief Minister, an attitude which causes great disappointment to Territorians. We have heard him whingeing, whining and refusing to concede that unemployed people in Australia need assistance and refusing to contribute $1 towards this railway which will be of such benefit to the Territory. That is not an attitude which Territorians endorse and it is not the sort of approach that Territorians want to see pursued by the Chief Minister. They are prepared to strive to ensure that we get not only this $320m but such additional funds as we will require to have that railway completed. What Territorians expect from their Chief Minister is some leadership on this issue. They do not want him sitting there and saying, 'It is not fair; I will not pay a cent'. Other Territorians are prepared to pay a cent. The Mayor of Katherine has demonstrated that she is prepared to work out how we can make contributions and so are all other Territorians. The Chief Minister can do nothing but complain and that is an attitude greatly to be regretted in the Northern Territory. It is not the attitude of this opposition. From the outset, we have adopted a bipartisan approach to the railway but the situation has been complicated by the Chief Minister's confrontationist attitude. All he wants to do is score party-political points and adopt an all-or-nothing approach. The end result may be that Territorians will end up with nothing because he will not take what is offered and then try harder for some more.
We are determined that the railway will be built even if the Northern Territory has to contribute. We are not happy - and we have made that clear - with the deal that has been offered. The Leader of the Opposition is on record as saying that the Territory cannot pay 40% of the cost and that has been pointed out to the Prime Minister in a telex. We cannot pay that 40% even if we eliminate the innumerable extravagances of the Chief Minister with his charter flights, lobbyists, extra MLAs and flags and stickers and goodness knows what else.

Mr Everingham: The Leader of the Opposition has charter flights.

Mrs O'NEIL: Around Australia? No, that is a speciality of the Chief Minister.

The Territory cannot pay 40% of the cost and maintain our services in education, child care, health and so on. In an attempt to obtain a deal with Canberra that we can afford, the Leader of the Opposition has been negotiating with the federal government. He has already had some successes. We have obtained an agreement that the construction be over a longer period and that it should be built by 1992 instead of 1988. Once again, that was a question of fact that the Minister for Community Development got wrong in his speech. We differ on that matter. We want the railway. We will wait another 4 years for it but we will get it. The advantage of that is that it would spin out repayments and reduce annual costs. Even on the present funding formula, it would reduce the average annual cost to the Territory to $23.8m which is closer to what we can afford. There would be economic advantages for the Territory in spinning out construction. Local contractors, who are mostly small on a national scale, would have enhanced participation in the project and the longer construction period would provide security of employment for Territory workers.

There are other matters about which the opposition is negotiating with the federal government. The Leader of the Opposition has arranged a joint approach with the South Australian Premier to the federal government and that has already been referred to today. A change will be sought to the funding formula to reduce the Territory's 40% contribution because the South Australians have a vested interest in this. They will benefit by the provision of 200 000 t of steel rail manufactured in Whyalla. The lack of a railway at present costs the South Australian economy an estimated $70m. Thus, from South Australia, we can expect wholeheartedly bipartisan support. Secondly, the Leader of the Opposition has begun negotiating with the federal government to get the Territory access to Loans Council funding above our present allocation. If successful, these negotiations could reduce the average annual cost to the Territory, even under the 60:40 funding formula, to about $15m.

Mr Speaker, a deal can be worked out if the Chief Minister and the government, along with the opposition, do what Territorians want: keep fighting for that extra money. Within 3 months of the election, the Hawke government has proposed $320m. We all agree that we need more. It is up to the Chief Minister to do his duty as a Territory leader and work with the Leader of the Opposition and whoever else is prepared to help to ensure that we obtain the rest of that money so that the railway can be built. For that purpose, I propose to move an amendment to the motion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr B. COLLINS: Mr Speaker, I move an extension of time for the honourable member so that she can move her amendment.
Motion agreed to.

Mrs O'NEIL: Mr Speaker, I move that all words after 'that' be omitted and the following words be inserted: 'the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to enter into meaningful negotiations with the Commonwealth government to ensure the successful completion of the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link'.

Mr EVERINGHAM (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, I am rising in reply. I will be speaking to the amendment and closing debate on the motion.

Mr Speaker, it will be difficult for me to speak to the federal government whether by myself or with the Leader of the Opposition because the Prime Minister has refused to give me an appointment. The Prime Minister sent me a telex this morning saying that he was too busy. I received it just before lunch and he has referred me to the Treasurer. Mr Speaker, any discussions that I may have with the Treasurer will not be meaningful and will not be decisive because the only person whom one can speak to in any government on a subject such as this, with any meaning to the negotiations, is the Prime Minister. I invite the Leader of the Opposition to open his own negotiations with the Prime Minister.

Mr B. Collins: That is not the way to do it.

Mr EVERINGHAM: I will have no part of it. I will be no part of any deal with the Commonwealth that relates to Territorians paying money towards this railway line.

Mr B. Collins: Well that is likely to sink me then.

Mr EVERINGHAM: Mr Speaker, I have made this claim right from the outset. The Leader of the Opposition can go down and do what ever deals that he purports to do, not on behalf of Territorians but on behalf of the opposition. He can arrange to negotiate a sum to be paid - if he ever obtains government in this Territory - by Territorians. He can come back and tell Territorians how much they are going to be taxed to pay for this railway when they should not be taxed 1c more than any other Australian for the construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link.

We heard a lot of hogwash today. We heard the Leader of the Opposition pull statements right out of the air. He has said that he has taken them out of yesterday's debate on the ABC, that he has taken them from here and that he has taken them from there. He dreams them up. He twists them. He distorts them. I suggest the Leader of the Opposition sit down and listen for a change, just as I listen to him.

Mr B. Collins: You have to be joking.

Mr EVERINGHAM: Mr Speaker, everyone on the opposite side of the Assembly agrees that to contribute 40% to this railway line is too much. What they cannot agree on is what is right. But I can tell you, Mr Speaker: not $1 more than any other Australian pays is right.

The Leader of the Opposition has tried to fudge the issue. He has talked about this, he has talked about that and he has said there are contributory statements in acts in other states. I would like to refer you, Mr Speaker, to what I said this morning in the statement. For the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition - who does not listen to what I say and goes back to the statements prepared for him by his staff, who twist and distort
anything they can find - I said about the railway this morning, and I have said it all along:

The first is to call the railway a Territory project to justify the argument that Territorians should pay for it. Federal governments, and federal Labor governments, in particular, have always held the view that the railways were a federal responsibility. The previous federal Labor governments spent millions to take over the South Australian and Tasmanian railway systems. Federal governments have built and rebuilt the transcontinental railway to Western Australia.

I was not talking about internal South Australian railways back in 1949 or 1962. I do not even have a copy of the 1962 act in front of me. I was not talking about the railways in Perth.

Mr B. Collins: It is not 1962. There is no such thing ...

Mr EVERINGHAM: That is what the honourable Leader of the Opposition referred to this morning. I invite the Hansard tape to be replayed at this moment because the Leader of the Opposition just said that he did not say the 1962 act. The simple fact of the matter is that the Railway Standardisation Agreement Act of 1949 says that the Commonwealth will undertake the construction of this railway from Port Augusta to Darwin. It was passed by Ben Chifley's government. I read section 22: 'The Commonwealth shall bear the cost of carrying out the work specified in the last preceding clause'.

We have had all sorts of prognostications on what legal action the Territory might take. The Leader of the Opposition and all his cohorts, his clones, have said ...

Mr B. Collins: I do not know about that.

Mr EVERINGHAM: ... that the Territory government will rush into legal action. I said the Territory government will take legal action as a last resort. I defy any of them to find any other statement I made about legal action. If we take legal action, we will not be taking legal action of the type that we are appealing against at the moment where a judge has directed the executive to spend money to build something. We will be taking legal action to seek a declaration from the High Court that the law says that the Commonwealth must pay the cost of building this railroad. We will seek a declaratory judgment, Mr Speaker, if we seek one at all.

Mr B. Collins: It went to court in 1962.

Mr EVERINGHAM: Mr Speaker, am I going to be heard in silence? I think I have the right to ask that.

Mr SPEAKER: The honourable Chief Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr EVERINGHAM: I did not say a word during the Leader of the Opposition's speech. I suffered his personal insults, which is what his whole speech amounted to. It was just a tirade against me. There was nothing of substance.

We will be seeking a declaratory judgment, if we go to court at all, that the Commonwealth must pay the bill for this railroad. If we get that declaratory judgment, then we will have preserved the integrity of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Northern Territory and the federal government which relates to our financial arrangements on self-government and to which, in the interests of all Territorians, we cannot suffer any
prejudice whatsoever. Those people over there are prepared to rush in and prejudice the interests of future generations of Territorians.

The honourable member for Fannie Bay said: 'Mr Fraser said he would give you statehood in 1980. He said it in 1975 and he said you will get statehood in 5 years. Mr Fraser promised it. It is a promise he did not live up to'. The reason that Mr Fraser did not carry out that promise is because Mr Fraser listened to Territorians and listened to the Territory government. That government was at least susceptible to the approaches of and the interests of Territorians. I could get an appointment at the drop of a hat with that Prime Minister or any of his ministers. I sent an urgent telex on Sunday night to the Prime Minister. I am told that he is too busy with legislative and other commitments. But he can see the Tasmanian Prime Minister about the dam which is a single-issue thing which he is engaged upon. He has time to see Mr Gray but he does not have time to see the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory when he has just breached a very solemn commitment that he made to the Northern Territory. In fact, the Tasmanians knew he was making war on them. They at least knew it. We have been caught by an ambush.

We have heard more talk about the deficit today. It has been said that it is the deficit that is stopping this. The Labor government had been in office 1 month and 4 days when, on 8 April 1983, the Leader of the Opposition issued a press release. The deficit, we are told by the Leader of the Opposition, was discovered the Sunday night after the election and immediately threw everything into reverse gear. But 1 month and 4 days after the election, the Leader of the Opposition said on his own letterhead:

*Federal Transport Minister, Mr Peter Morris, has assured Territory Labor leader, Bob Collins, that preparations for the construction of the Darwin-Alice Springs rail line are proceeding on schedule. At a meeting in Canberra yesterday, Mr Morris told Mr Collins necessary legislation was being drafted and a budget submission was being prepared for Cabinet.*

Mr Speaker, the deficit has changed it all. Is that the deficit that we knew about the Sunday night after the election? It has all been changed. Indeed, if we talk about raising and maintaining expectations, about deceit and about fraud, and if we are to believe his arguments today, this is what the Leader of the Opposition said as late as 27 April: 'Territory Labor leader, Bob Collins, and South Australian steel union officials have urged the federal government to make an early announcement on the starting date for the construction of the Darwin to Alice Springs rail line'. Now, 27 April was well after the summit. The other statement may have been made during the summit but the Leader of the Opposition made that statement weeks after the summit.

Mr B. Collins: You are just trying to ...

Mr SPEAKER: Order, order! The honourable Leader of the Opposition is conducting a running commentary.

Mr B. Collins: Mr Speaker, in my own defence, I must say that, if the Chief Minister continues to be personally abusive and provocative, he is inviting interjection.

Mr SPEAKER: It is not interjection; it is running commentary.

Mr EVERINGHAM: Mr Speaker, he raised the expectations of Territorians
only to have them dashed on the rocks last Thursday night. We are told that we are selfish in looking for that money that will create 6-month jobs in Sydney and Melbourne. On the contrary, Mr Speaker, the whole thrust of the summit was that real jobs be created. Restraint was certainly talked about in the summit communique and I have never denied that. But, it was restraint of a personal nature, by everyone, by every company director, by every shareholder, by every employee in this country and by every government. And this government has restrained itself. It has not put up charges, except electricity, Mr Speaker, and that has not come about as yet. But what we have here is a clear breach of the summit communique, where we are having massive amounts of money spent to create make-work when money should be spent to create real jobs.

The reason that this federal government will not take that hard decision is that it is not prepared to tell the truth to the people down south who are unemployed. The truth, Mr Speaker, is this: there will never be full employment again, even if there is full economic recovery. The fact is that, unless this government engages in major restructuring of the whole face of this country, there will never be full employment again. It has fudged it in this mini-budget. It has made more schemes of the same type that Goff Whitlam made under the RED Scheme back in 1974. It has not taken the hard decisions that will shift the population away from where the work is not to where the work is because it is too concerned about votes and about running for election next year before the expiration of its 3-year term, Mr Speaker. It does not want to rock the boat. So we are being given 70 000 6-month jobs and you can watch the federal government continue to blossom. The real jobs, that are to be created largely in the north of this country, will continue to be sacrificed while its political ambitions conquer everything else.

Mr Speaker, I am not prepared to go to Canberra to talk to the federal government with the Leader of the Opposition whilst I believe that he is prepared to sacrifice the interests of Territorians in respect to the Memorandum of Understanding. There can be no concessions. We need every dollar that we are presently funded. Until I receive an unequivocal assurance from the Leader of the Opposition that we will fight to obtain for Territorians the rights that they should enjoy as Australians in terms of this railroad and not concede that Territorians should pay more than any other Australians, then I am not prepared to go to Canberra with him. How can I negotiate with him torpedoing me all the time?

Mr Speaker, we have talked about litigation. We have talked about all manner of things. I hope that this debate has shown you that the Leader of the Opposition and the people on the opposite side of the Assembly have little realisation of the true realities in Australia today, let alone any true realisation of the nature of the litigation that the Territory government might be forced to embark upon as a last resort.

Mr Speaker, I commend to honourable members the motion that I put this morning and I invite defeat of the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

NORTHERN TERRITORY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
(VESTING OF LAND) BILL
(Serial 282)

Continued from 24 November 1982.
Mr B. COLLINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, the opposition indicates that it is not opposed in principle to the establishment of such a body but it is rather curious about the circumstances in which this bill comes before the Assembly. I would invite some comment on this matter from the sponsor of the bill.

The bill seeks to do by legislation what the government purported to do by lease in respect of land involved in the Warramunga Land Claim. I stress again that obviously such a body simply is not designed to accommodate one particular situation. We have no objection to the establishment of such a body but, obviously, the topical case is the Warramunga Land Claim. The action of the government in leasing the land has been challenged in the High Court. Mr Justice Mason has granted an order nisi restraining the Northern Territory Minister for Lands in respect of the leases. The full hearing of this matter is set down for June this year. In other words, it will be expedited. Mr Barker QC, in appearing for the Northern Territory government, indicated to the High Court that the passing of this piece of legislation would depend on the outcome of the June proceedings of the High Court.

I believe that the minister should give this Assembly some explanation as to why, when the government’s own counsel appearing before the High Court of Australia said that the passing of this legislation would depend on the outcome of the proceedings of that court, which are due to take place next month, we now have the bill before the Legislative Assembly. I would like an explanation from the minister.

I believe it is a matter of some concern. The interpretation that I place on the remarks made by the Northern Territory government’s counsel to the High Court would seem to indicate – and I hope this is not the case – that, when this bill passes through the Assembly, the High Court will be in the position of having been misled by the Northern Territory government. Given that the matter is currently before the court, and that it will be expedited next month, I find it very difficult to understand why the government is proceeding with the bill at this time. Why is it proceeding before the hearing is completed?

The government would find it difficult to explain what it would lose by waiting until what would be in effect the next sittings of the Legislative Assembly. By then, the hearing before the High Court would be well and truly concluded. Why isn’t the Northern Territory government prepared to abide by the statement made to the High Court that the bill would not proceed until the court handed down its decision on the leases? I would like to challenge the minister to explain why the government is taking this action in apparent contradiction to the advice it gave to the High Court. If that explanation is not satisfactory, it should simply defer consideration of this bill until after those matters have been settled by the High Court in June.

Mr ROBERTSON (Attorney-General): Mr Speaker, in speaking to this bill, I was expecting to have to provide a fairly detailed reply to the Leader of the Opposition. I note that he has indicated that the opposition does not object to the establishment of the authority for the purposes of holding such land. Indeed, it would seem to me that it has not indicated any dissatisfaction with the actions of the government.

Mr Speaker, as you would be aware, this legislation has been sitting before this Assembly for quite some time. It is quite true that there is a matter currently before the High Court relating to much the same question. Obviously, the government and, I would suspect, the public would be somewhat curious as to what the attitude of the opposition might be to the legislation.
It is for that reason that I brought it forward so that it might be at least aired by the opposition. Whether or not the government would wish to proceed with it at this sittings is a completely separate matter. I certainly have no instructions from Cabinet to ask this Assembly to proceed with it at this sittings.

Certainly, at this stage I find it somewhat curious that the Leader of the Opposition raises objections to passing legislation when a matter is before the High Court. That would seem to be utterly and completely inconsistent with what his masters are doing in Canberra in relation to the matters currently before the High Court pertaining to the Franklin dam issue. Of course, in their own words, they have indicated that the whole purpose of their legislation relating to the Franklin dam is to strengthen their argument before the High Court.

Mr Speaker, there is no intention to do that. Clearly, there have been observations. I must be careful not to make comment on a matter which is currently before the High Court which may be embarrassing to myself. Anyone who reads the previous judgments of the High Court would be aware that there seems to be a divergence of opinion. Some judges of the High Court maintain the view that the High Court can review certain matters which are taken by executive action but cannot review matters which are taken by legislative action. That is our advice. It is open to question that a government's actions in an executive matter can be challenged. It certainly does not seem to be open to question that the motives etc of a parliament can be challenged.

The government believes it is of vital concern to the Northern Territory that areas of land which are set aside for public purposes remain accessible to the public; that is, for all time and for all of the public. That is the reason that the original leases were issued. Prior to the High Court determining a date to hear the matter of validity of those leases or otherwise, this government quite rightly decided to put the matter beyond question by legislating in this place for the alienation of that land and thereby the protection of those public areas for the public for all time. That was the motivation behind it. The history has been canvassed here before. It was part of the 10-point package that claims in respect to public lands and lands for public purposes would not be sought by way of claim. We all know that the Central Land Council, notwithstanding that agreement, proceeded blithely with a prosecution of the hearing before the Land Commissioner. That is the history. That is why the matter is before us.

I was anxious to find out the attitudes of the opposition. We are content to hear what the opposition has said. I agree with him on the first part. The question as to whether or not it will proceed at this particular stage is something that I do not have directions from Cabinet on. I anticipate that it will not be dealt with at this time. Indeed, we will be waiting for the outcome of the High Court's decision.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr ROBERTSON (Attorney-General): Mr Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.