Mr SMITH (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, I move that: (1) the Chief Minister be censured by this Assembly for (a) deliberately misleading the Assembly in that he stated to the Assembly on 29 April 1987 that a Japan Australia Transport Study group had been formed, comprising, from the Japanese side, representatives from Japan Railway Technical Services, Japan Railway and Freight Company and the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan knowing, as later public statements have shown, that this statement was false; and (b) placing future negotiations with these Japanese companies at risk; and (2) this Assembly calls upon the Chief Minister to resign forthwith.

Mr Speaker, no doubt one day there will be a railway line linking Alice Springs and Darwin. Hopefully, it will carry both freight and passengers and it will be an extremely important part of the Northern Territory economy. Because it will play such an important role in the Northern Territory's economy, the cost of putting it in place will be more than outweighed by the benefits that it will bring to the Northern Territory. But, we are all very much aware of the difficulties in having that railway line built. I do not have time to go over the history of those difficulties today. It has been, and will be a very difficult exercise to have that railway line built. It can do without major blunderings by the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, whoever he may be.

This censure motion is about a major Chief Ministerial blunder which has involved misleading this Assembly. In that, he has been aided by the Treasurer and abetted by his interpreter or representative - call him what you like because the Chief Minister has called him many different names on different occasions - Dr Robert Ishizaki. He, of course, is now well known in the Northern Territory as a friend of the media, a real estate expert and a developer of fun railway projects.

On 29 April, the Chief Minister said, in reply to a dorothy dixer from the member for Ludmilla: 'We have formed what we have called a Japan Australia Transport Study Group. This comprises, from the Japanese side, representatives from the Japan Railway Technical Services, known as JARTS, Japan Railway and Freight Company, and the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan, and from Australia Henry and Walker, with the involvement of one of its shareholders, Kumagai Gumi'.

The opposition accepts that Henry and Walker and Kumagai Gumi are part of the study group. Mr Neville Walker from Henry and Walker and a representative of Kumagai are 2 of the study group's 4 members. The other 2 are Dr Neil Conn and Dr Robert Ishizaki. However, even now, 6 weeks later, there is no evidence that the 3 Japanese companies are part of the study group and there is no evidence that any of the companies is expressing anything more than polite interest in the railway project. They may well attend the meeting next Tuesday, but they are not members of the study group on the evidence presented by the Chief Minister, despite his statement of 29 April 1987 that they are.

It is important to note the context in which the Chief Minister's comments were made on 29 April. They were a calculated response to a set-up question. The member for Ludmilla served up a soft, friendly
half-volley which the Chief Minister hit back with a well-prepared unambiguous statement. He was not acting under pressure. He had advance notice of the question and he had his response written down. That came undone on 16 May when the Tokyo correspondent for the Herald and Weekly Times group, Mr Peter Wilson, reported information that proved that the Chief Minister had misled the Legislative Assembly. Mr Wilson wrote, and I quote: 'Japanese banking and rail firms have denied claims by the NT Chief Minister, Mr Steve Hatton, that they are involved in a study group looking at an Alice Springs to Darwin rail link'. He went on to say: 'The 3 Japanese firms have publicly denied any involvement in the study group and privately rejected any great interest in the proposed rail link scheme. One of the Japanese firms said that it had not even heard of Mr Hatton's study group'. Significantly, in that same article in the NT News of 16 May, both the Chief Minister and Dr Ishizaki agreed that Mr Wilson was right. A spokesman for the Chief Minister described the affair as: 'A stuff up'.

Attempts by Mr Wilson to speak to the Chief Minister, at that particular time, were resisted. However, Mr Wilson did determine from the Chief Minister's office that study group members were Dr Ishizaki, Under Treasurer Conn, an unnamed Australian businessman and an Australian Japanese businessman. Dr Ishizaki himself, when asked by Mr Wilson about the membership said, at first, that the Japanese companies were involved and, later, when he was contacted again by Mr Wilson, changed his mind and said that the Japanese companies were not involved in the study group. All of that was reported in the NT News of 16 May, and no other conclusion can be drawn from those statements by the Chief Minister and Dr Ishizaki than that the companies were not members of the study group on 29 April when the statement was made to the Assembly by the Chief Minister that they were members of the study group.

Mr Speaker, I will go over the basic points again. The Japan Australia Transport Study Group has 4 members, as told to us by the Chief Minister on many occasions. None of them is a representative of the Japanese companies named by the Chief Minister. Then, a couple of day after 16 May, the penny dropped: the Chief Minister remembered, or was reminded of, his reply to the Dorothy Dixer of 29 April. When he checked the question and reply, he knew he was hooked. From then until now, he has been swinging wildly, ducking and weaving, hanging punch-drunk off the ropes and, in typical Country Liberal style, trying to convince us that black is white. Mr Speaker, if you want a demonstration of his hanging punch-drunk off the ropes, afterwards I will show you the 7.30 Report interview with Pamela Bornhorst.

Mr Speaker, consider some of the intricacies of the positions the Chief Minister has advanced as he has floundered around on this issue. On 29 April, the companies were members of the study group. On 16 May, *not members of the study group*. Later that week, they were variously providing technical advice to the study group, though they were not actually physical members of the study group. At another time, they were members of a floating group which would provide advice to something called the 'core group' and, at 9 June stage, they were coming to a 9 June meeting with a view to determining whether they wanted to be part of the study group or not.

Mr Speaker, that was desperate stuff from a desperate man. Not only that, the media was abused by the Chief Minister and threatened by Dr Ishizaki who made noises about the media ruining the project. That, of course, brought back memories for those of us who have been around for a while and can remember the Myilly Point and other similar fiascos that this government has been involved in. It is always the media which is blamed when things go wrong with this government.

Dr Ishizaki quickly moved to centre stage and the Chief Minister clutched at him like a lifeline after the initial publicity stating that Dr Ishizaki's arrival on 20 May would reveal all. We then learnt that, in fact, Dr Ishizaki is an American entrepreneur who has widespread real estate interests but, in his own words,
no 'expertise in directly getting involved in the development of other types of properties'. In other words, the Chief Minister had engaged a person to represent the Territory on negotiations about the constructions of a great rail link who had no knowledge of, nor expertise in, railway development.

This raises the question of why Dr Ishizaki was chosen for this task. Here we get into an interesting sector of this saga that has not, so far, become public. When the Chief Minister and the Treasurer left for Japan, they had arranged to have talks with Kumagai Gumi and others in Tokyo who they hoped would facilitate their entree into the Japanese business world. But, after just a short time in Tokyo, it became clear that the Chief Minister was faced with an unenthusiastic response to his approaches. This was not good for a Chief Minister who was increasingly subject to criticism for governing by overseas junket, and for coming back with nothing. We need do no more than remember the great kenaf overseas junket.

At that stage, after the Chief Minister had been 2 or 3 days in Tokyo, up popped Dr Ishizaki. It is not clear who called whom in Tokyo, but he was the answer to a stricken Chief Minister's prayer. He was able to produce, in short order, brief, informal introductions to bemused representatives of 3 senior Japanese companies. The meetings were to save face - the Chief Minister's face - and they did that, temporarily. I am advised that the meetings lasted less than an hour, that they were held either on the last or the second last day of the time in Tokyo, and were typical of the kind of courtesy that a major Japanese company would show the visiting head of a provincial government. The extent of one company's commitment was outlined in the NT News of 16 May: ‘During a meeting of less than 1 hour, the Northern Territory delegation had mentioned the planned study group, but the bank was not asked to join it and had no plans to do so’. The tenor of these meetings was described freely by Peter Wilson in an interview on ABC's Territory Extra. He said:

They then sat and listened to what Mr Hatton and Dr Ishizaki had to say. As is the style of Japanese companies, they said: ‘Yes, we hear you’. They expressed polite interest but, at no stage, did they commit themselves. At the end of the meeting, Dr Ishizaki or Mr Hatton asked if the Northern Territory government could send further information on the project and the Japanese said: ‘Yes, that would be fine’. End of meeting.

Now, that certainly does not mean they were jumping up and down about the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link. It certainly does not mean that they have joined in groups or made any form of commitment whatsoever. If you walked into the office of a large Japanese company in Tokyo with a provincial government leader from overseas, they would certainly listen to you. When you left, they would then form their own opinion on what you were saying.

That made it very clear what the attitude of the Japanese companies was to those meetings. On the same day and on the same program, the Chief Minister made very clear his understanding of what had happened at the meetings, and his panic over his statement to the Legislative Assembly. Referring to the Japanese companies, he said: 'Now what I said was that they were part of a study group. Now they are not physically sitting on the study group. We named the people on it, and they obviously did not include their names'. Let me read that again: 'Now they are not physically sitting on the study group. We named the people on it, and they obviously did not include their names'.

Mr Speaker, I do not have to do anything more than read out that statement and say that the Chief Minister has misled this Assembly, because that statement just does not sit with the statement that he made on 29 April in this Assembly. It goes on to say:
I named the particular people that were on that study group, in various statements that I have made to the media. Now, in fact, with those other companies, we were in a meeting together in one particular meeting. They made the point that, whilst they would not have somebody sitting in the study group, they would be there.

Mr Speaker, one could be forgiven for guessing that the next words from the Chief Minister might be 'Now, don't you worry about that'.

Mr Hatton: Don't worry about it.

Mr SMITH: At one stage, when the Chief Minister was very much on the defensive about his difficulties, he even complained that the businessmen he had met could not speak English, as if that was the basic problem he faced and why he kept getting it wrong. I bet the Japanese would not have been similarly handicapped by the Chief Minister's inability to speak their language. The Chief Minister went on to say that people had been beating up and twisting the entire story. I do not think even the best beat-up artists in the history of journalism could have applied the mixmaster in quite the way the Chief Minister has done on this particular story.

Mr Speaker, the meetings between the Chief Minister and senior Japanese businessmen were important. We do not deny that they were important, but they were part of the formal ritual of meeting and they were not serious negotiations. That they were not serious negotiations is evidenced by the fact that the Northern Territory government did not even bother to take minutes of the meetings. It has not been able to produce any minutes of the meetings or any written understandings of what the meetings were about. They were clearly the initial meetings of courteous Japanese business people with the Chief Minister. No record was made of what was said, but the business houses were clear about one thing, as was evidenced by both Peter Wilson and Walter Hamilton: the Chief Minister's study group did not include them.

Meanwhile, what about the Chief Minister's loyal sidekick, the Treasurer?

Mr Coulter: Here we go.

Mr SMITH: Unfortunately, the Treasurer has not been able to throw much light on what really happened. He issued what must be counted as the world's most lukewarm, backhanded statement of support for a leader since the early days of the Peacock-Howard feuding. The Treasurer was not prepared to elaborate on the statement to the media or his part in the overall trip. But, of course, at least one of his ministerial colleagues was prepared to tell the NT News that he thought the Chief Minister had misled the parliament.

Mr Hatton: Who? Who?

Mr SMITH: You had better have your own witch-hunt. We know who it is, but we are not going to help you in that witch-hunt.

Mr Hatton: Put up or shut up.

Mr SMITH: Mr Speaker, this was just a part of the overwhelming public support that the Chief Minister did not receive from his ministers or his colleagues, and it was one of the interesting omissions that week that, in fact, apart from that very lukewarm support from the Treasurer, there were no expressions of support for the Chief Minister from any of his ministerial or other parliamentary colleagues.
Of course, as I have said, the Chief Minister was hoping that, when Dr Ishizaki arrived, he would solve all of his problems and reveal all. And Dr Ishizaki certainly revealed all at a news conference, which would have been hilarious if it had not involved the credibility of the Northern Territory.

One of my most graphic impressions from watching some of the TV shots of that news coverage was of the Chief Minister sitting stony-faced and somewhat embarrassed while Dr Ishizaki spelled out the difference between his version of the truth and the Chief Minister's. In his colourful way, Dr Ishizaki said that there was a study group and that 3 Japanese companies were part of it but, unfortunately, he could provide no written evidence that this was the case and would not supply the names of company executives whom Darwin journalists could contact. He went on, in a way that has become well known with this government, to attack the local media, saying - and I will not attempt the accent - ‘You guys are going to blow this deal if you keep on’. Then, in another attempt to intimidate the media, he added that people in Japan could not distinguish between a palace revolt in Timbuktu and what was happening in Darwin. Mr Speaker, so much for the credibility of Dr Ishizaki.

Unfortunately for this government, senior Japanese companies can tell the difference between a palace revolt in Timbuktu and honest and credible governments elsewhere. I am surprised that the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory saw fit to engage a consultant who sees things that way and does business that way.

The problem with the joint press conference that was to resolve everything was that, within hours, ABC reporter Walter Hamilton had smashed the Hatton Ishizaki story and all its permutations of excuses about what was happening. Mr Hamilton reported simply that, while the Long Term Credit Bank was remaining neutral about involvement in the group, Mr Sugawara of Japan Railways Technical Services was expressing surprise and doubt about the 9 June meeting proposed for the group. We had a bald, joint statement from the Chief Minister and Dr Ishizaki, issued immediately before the disastrous news conference, stating that the Hatton talks with JARTS, along with the bank and the Japan Rail and Freight Company, had resulted in early involvement in the study group. The only piece of paper that the Territory public saw from the Chief Minister and Dr Ishizaki was the joint statement. Apart from that, at the end of that press conference, there was not one shred of confirmatory evidence. Remember that, although the government had 6 weeks to get that confirmatory evidence together, it had not been able to deliver.

Because it was aware of that little problem, by the end of the week the Chief Minister's office had discarded Dr Ishizaki and begun telexing Japan with some begging message to the companies referred to in the Chief Minister's original statement to this Assembly. The message was in the form of a telex which the Chief Minister will not release, no doubt because it provides some incentives for the Japanese firms to come to the 9 June meeting. That telex shows just how much contempt there was for the parliament and its processes. Not only had the Chief Minister deceived the Assembly but he was now hoping to inveigle others into helping him perpetuate a total public relations myth that there were agreements in place on 29 April when, quite clearly, those agreements were not in place.

What was the result of these telexes sent on 20 or 21 May? The only result, as far as anyone is aware, was a rather extraordinary message from Dr Misao Sugawara of JARTS. That message did not save face for anybody, particularly the Chief Minister. It read: ‘I would like to thank you for your valuable explanation concerning the Alice Springs to Darwin railway project, conducted on 14 April 1987 in Tokyo. It was very significant and also fruitful to make our relationship closer’. That is a typically polite opening to a letter of the type any business house would write after making a new contact, especially with senior people from a foreign government.

Mr Coulter: You would know, with your vast experience of Japanese negotiations.
Mr SMITH: I think my experience might be a little bit better than yours.

Dr Sugawara went on to explain his area of business as if understanding that the Chief Minister did not know his credentials or expertise. He wrote: 'We, Japan Railway Technical Services, are the technical consultants involved in railway engineering in every project. We are very interested in further development of your project in terms of technical study'. Perhaps that is as far as the Chief Minister got when reading this message, because I have to say, so far so good. There is certainly no reference to membership of the study group cited by the Chief Minister but it does not chew his head off either. It keeps the options open and is non-committal and polite, as one would expect.

But, let me continue, because here comes the first slice of the samurai blade. Dr Sugawara wrote: 'We would like to engage in any technical study as a consultant only for your group'. Dr Sugawara told the Chief Minister that he was interested in consulting and emphasised to him that it is 'your group'. He spelled out that he was a consultant only - not a participant, just a consultant. He then continued: 'Rather, we are keen to participate in the group to find out more about the project so as to be able to make an informed decision at a later date'. Dr Sugawara needed to find out more since he knew nothing about the project at that stage. He promised to send somebody to the 9 June meeting and then concluded: 'Further, more details will be provided if your administration asks our office mentioned above, and please advise us whom we should contact from now on'.

Mr Speaker, that is incredible! According to the Chief Minister, we have had a senior business meeting in Japan, and the JARTS man does not even know who his prime contact is. If he had been a member of the study group, as the Chief Minister said he was, the first thing he would have known was the name of his prime contact - the link with his client. We have a clear statement from Dr Sugawara in that telex that that is one of the questions that he wants answered. Quite clearly, Dr Sugawara does not see his company as part of the study group, neither does the Long Term Credit Bank nor the Japan Rail Freight Service. They may well be prepared to go to the 9 June meeting, not as members of the study group, but out of a sense of Japanese courtesy. Neither Dr Sugawara's message, nor Dr Ishizaki's many moods and flights of fancy, nor any of the positions adopted by the Chief Minister, nor the fact that the Chief Minister will have the world looking in on his study group meeting next week, alter by one iota the simple fact that the Chief Minister did not tell the truth in the Legislative Assembly on 29 April.

The Chief Minister has failed signally to understand Japanese business operations. He has turned politeness into consent, preparedness to listen into action, an interest in gaining more information into a commitment to be involved and consultants into participants. In doing so, he has seriously misrepresented the positions of Japanese companies and done enormous damage to our relationship with them as a result of his failure to understand them. Damage has been done to the rail project as well. Of course, that is the bottom line and the most unfortunate thing about this whole exercise.

For those members who may have been held at arm's length during this debacle, let me run through the diary of events. There is absolutely no confusion about how the Chief Minister made his government look like a bunch of cowboys. On 13 April, the Chief Minister and his entourage flew to Tokyo for a round of unenthusiastic handshakes and then established contact with Dr Ishizaki for a round of smiling handshakes. On 26 April, through his Sunday newspaper column, the Chief Minister told the public that he had formed a study group, again mentioning Dr Ishizaki. On 29 April, the Chief Minister told the Assembly that the study group had been formed, and named 3 Japanese companies as members of that study group. On 16 May, Mr Peter Wilson reported the companies' denials, the confusion of the Chief Minister's office and the change of mind of the Chief Minister and Dr Ishizaki. On 18 May, the Chief Minister said the companies were not physically part of the study group. On 20 May, Dr Ishizaki arrived in Darwin and said the companies were members of the study group but could not produce any written
evidence at all. On 21 May, begging telexes were dispatched to the 3 companies in an attempt to save face. On 21 May, JARTS responded with a non-committal, polite reply which again indicated firmly that JARTS did not believe that it was a member or ever had been a member of the study group. A meeting has been planned for next Tuesday with Japanese companies and observers.

The railway project is important and deserves the support of every member of this Assembly and the people of the Northern Territory. The opposition has consistently supported efforts to raise interest in the railway project and we support the efforts that this government has made to involve Japanese companies in further discussions on this particular matter. That is why we supported the Chief Minister's trip. The rail project is so important that it should not be denigrated by such embarrassing bungling as we have seen in this case. It is a very sensitive issue. Clearly, the project cannot afford the embarrassment of this kind of bungling by the government and the misleading of the Assembly that has resulted.

A viable railway is a worthy goal for the Territory and its government. It is a project from which all Territorians will benefit. Unfortunately, the Northern Territory government and its 2 amateurs, the Chief Minister and the Treasurer, have made that job much more difficult to achieve and, more importantly, the Chief Minister deliberately misled this Assembly on 29 April as to the extent of the involvement of Japanese companies and the level of their interest in this particular project. As a result, he deserves the full censure of this Assembly and he should resign. I point out to members opposite that the motion before the Assembly relates to such a serious matter that, if the Chief Minister avoids censure because of the loyalty of government members, then those members must face the fact that they support the idea of misleading parliament.

Mr HATTON (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, if this were a court of law, I would simply submit to the bench that the case be dismissed because no case has been made. I am reminded of Shakespeare's play 'Much Ado About Nothing'. That is really what this whole exercise is about so far as the Leader of the Opposition is concerned. In his motion, he alleged that I deliberately misled the Assembly by making certain statements during the last sittings. Having made that allegation, the onus is quite clearly on the Leader of the Opposition to prove his case that I have misled this Assembly.

What is the Leader of the Opposition's proof? It is the reports of 2 journalists from Tokyo. We do not know what specific questions were asked by those journalists. We do not know which those questions were asked, or which particular people they were asked of within the organisations or, for that matter, which specific organisations were approached. My staff, having been advised of these allegations, approached one of those journalists and asked a couple of simple questions. This did not address the issue of asking a journalist to reveal sources. I can understand the sensitivity and the ethics of journalists who would not reveal sources of information that they use in the course of reporting. They were simple questions, dealing with 3 particular companies, and my staff asked who the company spokesmen were. That was not a request to reveal some secret source of information. It would be reasonable to say which company spokesman said what so that, at least, we can follow up and check with that person or those people with whom we had spoken.

Secondly, there was an allegation that at least one of those companies had never heard of us. We asked which company ...
Mr Smith: No.

Mr HATTON: Or had not even heard of the study group then. Again, we asked of that journalist which company said that. We were told that that was privileged information. He refused even to tell us which company said it had not even heard of the study group, making it very difficult for us to check. I can say that, on that Sunday, through Dr Ishizaki, who was our contact in Japan and the person whom all participants had agreed would be the point of contact, we confirmed that those companies were involved. On the Sunday, I issued a statement saying that but, as a matter of interest, Mr Speaker, that was never reported.

I would like to address the specifics of what, in fact, I said in answer to that question of 29 April. I said: ‘Recently, I visited Japan as part of the work towards the development of a private enterprise consortium for the construction of this rail line. I know there is a degree of scepticism in the community as to whether or not this will be at all possible, and there is no doubt that it will not be an easy task to achieve a private enterprise line’. I was being very dramatic, very expansive. ‘However, it is far from being an impossible task’. I said: ‘I have been very hearâ€”

the response that has arisen in the last month and I suspect that has been stimulated further by the recent re-election of a CLP government in the Northern Territory’. I went on to say: ‘It was our first visit to Japan and we anticipated opening the

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subject up and that, perhaps after several visits, we might arouse interest’. That is what I said in the Assembly. ‘The interest was far higher than that and, as a consequence, we have formed what we called a Japan Australia Transport Study Group. This comprises, from the Japanese side, representatives from the Japan Railway Technical Services, known as JARTS, Japan Railway and Freight Company, and the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan’. The Leader of the Opposition now accepts that there is a study group and that Henry and Walker and Kumagai Gumi are part of that study group.

Mr Smith: I have never denied it.

Mr HATTON: Mr Speaker, what this comes down to in the end is whether there is a study group and whether those three companies are part of the study group ...

Mr Ede: Were they at the time you said that?

Mr HATTON ... and were they at that time?

Mr Ede: And are they still?

Mr HATTON Certainly they still are. Of course, the onus was on the Leader of the Opposition to demonstrate that, if they were not, that I knew they were not.

Mr Speaker, it has been widely reported, and can be confirmed, that all of those people who are currently in the Northern Territory of Australia, who were at that meeting - that is, myself, the Treasurer of the Northern Territory, the Under Treasurer of the Northern Territory, my senior ministerial officer, Mr Gary Young, Mr Neville Walker, and Mr Tony Mitani from Kumagai Gumi - have confirmed the accuracy of what I said. They were at those meetings.
Mr Smith: What you said when? You have said a few different things on a few different occasions.

Mr HATTON: They have confirmed the accuracy of what I said in the Assembly and that that was a faithful representation of the situation at that time. And I maintain that it is still a faithful representation of the situation. Those people have all said that what I have said is accurate and that those companies are, and were at that time, involved in the study group. I said in this Assembly yesterday that, as recently as Monday of this week, I had received reconfirmation that they would be at the first formal meeting of the study group on the Japanese side. There are a number of other organisations, which I have no intention of naming in this Assembly, simply because I do not intend to place them under the sort of media scrutiny that those other 3 Japanese companies have been subjected to.

I had confirmed the membership of the study group. I had refuted the allegation of Mr Wilson. Another journalist gave a report which varied slightly from that of Mr Wilson. I am not going to play semantic games, but certainly that report indicated a high level of interest. I advised the media of this. Yes, I was angry at being accused of lying and I did express some anger at the Monday press conference. I do not deny that I was angry at those allegations. I have never done anything but refute them. I will not even chase that rabbit into its burrow. It is not worth the effort, Mr Speaker. The real question is whether those companies are in or not.

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The matter of going back to organisations and asking whether they were members of the group arose after Dr Ishizaki had come to Darwin and confirmed that particular companies were in the study group. We were placed in a situation where my words and the words of my Treasurer, my Under Treasurer, Mr Neville Walker of Henry and Walker, my senior ministerial officer and Mr Tony Mitani of Kumagai Gumi - all of whom were present at the Tokyo meeting - were being denied. Dr Ishizaki's word was being denied, and there was a demand for further proof. This came about following that famous Wednesday press conference when another article stated that those companies had denied involvement.

By this time, I was attending to government business at a police ministers conference in Hobart. As a consequence of that article, I thought I would have to finalise this matter once and for all. Despite the fact that I did not want to cause too much embarrassment by asking people to prove their word in writing, I asked my staff to put this matter to bed, once and for all, by contacting the companies and asking them to give some written confirmation because, although apparently the word of government ministers or senior businessmen from the Northern Territory of Australia could not be believed, a telex from Japan could. That was the reason, the only reason, that I asked that these companies be contacted. It was because I simply could not get people to accept the word of everybody who had attended the Tokyo meeting and was available in Australia, even though 11 of those people were saying the same thing. I presume that the only time this matter will be finally settled is next Tuesday when the study group meeting will commence and those people will be participating.

In respect of Japan Railway Technical Services and the letter that was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition, presumably he has a photocopy of it. He will notice that it has Mr Sugawara's signature on it and that, in the first paragraph, he says the meeting was very significant and fruitful to make our relationship closer. He is referring to the discussions that we had in Tokyo on 15 April. We have heard allegation after allegation about people being involved or otherwise. Honourable members will remember the TNT situation, where there was some confusion. I would use no stronger term than 'confusion'. I note that the Leader of the Opposition did not raise the TNT issue, because it had been clarified in writing. However, it was a matter of some considerable dispute in the first few days of this exercise.

Time and time again, the same thing has happened. Issues have been raised. We have refuted them, yet the interrogation has not stopped. Every time we say something, somebody in Japan is faced
with a series of questions. I do not believe that the continuation of this public debate will assist the railway. If anything, it will hurt the project. My office has been advised that there is some concern in at least one of those organisations as to whether it should continue with the project because of the level of public controversy. I might say that there are a significant number of other organisations from both within Australia and Japan that are interested in this project. It will not be a matter that will be debated publicly or discussed by my government or myself as we get down to the task of working towards, and I use these words carefully, the objective of bringing a group of companies together into a consortium which will decide whether it will progress to build a railway line. The purpose of a study group is to study the project. It was not called a construction consortium. It was not called a consortium in the way that the various stages of evolution of the gas pipeline consortium were called. We have gone back even one step further and called it a study group. That is exactly what it is. It will study the project - look at financing, go over technical issues, the land issues - and the interrelationships

Mr HATTON: Mr Speaker, he says: 'Forget all that. That is irrelevant'.

Mr Smith: I do not say that.

Mr HATTON: He is asking for a letter from 3 other companies in Japan. With the telex from TNT, which has been released, and the letter from Dr Sugawara, which the Leader of the Opposition has obtained, there are nine ...

Mr Smith: You issued it! You gave it to the press.

Mr HATTON: I did not say you stole it. Calm down! I said you obtained it.

On 9 separate occasions, people have said that what the Chief Minister said was accurate or they have confirmed it. That is not enough for the Leader of the Opposition, but it is enough for any reasonable man and it would be enough for any reasonable tribunal. I made the point at the beginning that the Leader of the Opposition had presented nothing to this Assembly to support his allegation that I deliberately misled this Assembly, not one skerrick of information to support the premise that I deliberately misled this Assembly. He is faced with 9 separate pieces of information, including 7 personal confirmations ...

Mr Smith: To whom?

Mr HATTON: To the community.

Mr Smith: I have not received any.

Mr HATTON: They can be obtained. I have no doubt the Treasurer will confirm the accuracy of the comments that I have made, as will at least 2 other persons who are sitting in the public gallery. If the Leader of the Opposition would like to walk across and speak to my senior ministerial officer and the Under Treasurer, they will confirm what I say. If he would like to ring Mr Neville Walker, he will confirm it too, as will Mr Mitani, the Australian representative from Kumagai Gumi who was in Darwin.

Mr Smith: Who is the seventh?

Mr HATTON: The other person who has confirmed that these people are involved is, of course, Dr Ishizaki and that is a matter of public record also. The facsimile letter from Japan Railway Technical Services is available and, as I undertook to do, I showed the Leader of the Opposition yesterday the facsimile letter that I had reconfirming the attendance of all of those companies at the meeting next week. He watered his speech down to the point of saying that they might attend the first meeting and seems to
think that that somehow proves that I misled this Assembly. What nonsense, Mr Speaker, what absolute, arrant nonsense.

The Leader of the Opposition is clutching at straws to try to save his own hide from his own party, because he has been an abject failure as a Leader of the Opposition. He has presented nothing to support his own party. He has been saved for the time being because the ALP has called off its annual conference because the Prime Minister has called an election. He is running scared and trying to con his way back into government as he did in 1984. It is just not going to work.

Mr Smith: What isn't?

Mr HATTON: The Leader of the Opposition trying to beat up some nonsensical story, as he is now, about this. It is absolute nonsense. There is not one bit of evidence. Overwhelmingly, there has been confirmation of the facts that I put to this Assembly.

I do not back off from any of the statements that I made in this Assembly. I refute any suggestion that I misled the Assembly and I certainly refute any allegation that I misled this Assembly deliberately. Even Mr Wilson suggested, on the Monday Territory Extra program, when he was interviewed directly, that it was not that I had misled people but that, at worst, maybe I had misinterpreted discussions. If I misinterpreted discussions, so did everyone else from the Australian side who was in that meeting, and so did the

2 Japanese participants, Mr Mitani and Dr Ishizaki, who were present at that meeting. Dr Ishizaki, who was acting as the interpreter, was present at that meeting. We all misinterpreted that, Mr Speaker.

Those are the facts, Mr Speaker. There is no case. The Leader of the Opposition wanted to challenge the credibility of Dr Ishizaki. Dr Ishizaki happens not to be an American. He was born in the United States.

Mr Smith: He has an American passport.

Mr HATTON: He took his first degree in the United States but he resides permanently in Japan. He is ethnically Japanese, as was quite clear to anybody who happened to be present at the negotiations. The fact that he spoke with an American accent and used very clear English does not take away from the fact that he is Japanese, that he is a senior lecturer for Osaka University in Japan or that he is a senior adviser to a company called EIE, Electrical and Industrial Enterprises. It does not take away from the fact that he recently completed negotiations, on behalf of that company, for the purchase of the Sydney Regent for $145m. He has been part of the negotiations for $500m worth of investment in Australia. I welcome his support and assistance in developing financing packages, introducing us to Japanese companies and bringing them together, and assisting us to bring those into contact with Australian companies to work towards developing a project. I welcome his enthusiasm for this project.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Chief Minister's time has expired.

Mr EDE (Stuart): Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister said that no case had been made. I do not know whether that is an example of his own inability to understand the contents of the charges against him or whether it is one more example of his attitude to parliament. He said that only journalists had disagreed with him, as though somehow that was to be discounted and that their investigations were meaningless. In fact, when the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, I heard the Chief Minister interject that maybe what he had done was mislead the journalists. If he misled the journalists, through the journalists, he misled the people of the Northern Territory.
I would like to take up the words that he used on Territory Extra. I am not relying on pieces of paper or fictitious support but on words that he stated himself on Territory Extra. He said: 'Now, they are not physically sitting on the study group'. The Territory Extra interview took place on 18 May 1987. He was being interviewed by Mr Brian Johnstone. The Chief Minister stated: 'He is not saying that I lied. He is saying that I misinterpreted what they said to me. Now, what I said was that they were part of a study group. Now, they are not physically sitting on the study group. We named the people that were on that and it obviously didn't include their names'. Mr Speaker, he made a statement like that and then expected us to accept that he could back-off from that and somehow say that it was the journalist's fault. That was broadcast live on Territory Extra. It was not edited. Those were his own words. He stands condemned by his own words.

The Chief Minister said that we have to demonstrate that, if they are not members, he knew that they were not members. He did say one true thing today. I was not in Japan at that meeting, but he was. But why was he there, Mr Speaker? Surely this government has the right to expect a little bit more nous from the Chief Minister than that we send him, at great expense, all the way over to Japan to sit in this meeting and, at the end of the meeting, not know whether the people there said yes or no. Mr Speaker, that is incredible.

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He intends to rely for his defence on the incredible idea that somehow he was not intelligent enough to be able to follow what the people were saying to him. Talk about the fool's option! That is all that he has raised in his own defence so far.

The Chief Minister said that all the other people who were at the meeting have confirmed what he said. The Chief Minister is facing an extremely serious charge today. I believe it is one of the most serious charges that can be made against a minister in a parliament. I would have thought that, at least, he would have tabled letters from these people, if not statutory declarations. He gave us one instance where there was a piece of paper from Dr Sugawara. And what happened, Mr Speaker? He completely misquoted what is on that piece of paper. If he is trying to rely on that letter to say that the people are members of the study group, that is not what it says. It says that Dr Sugawara's group would be happy to be paid consultants to the group. The Chief Minister has provided absolutely nothing from the Japanese groups.

Let us have a look at next Tuesday's meeting. Many companies have been invited to attend that meeting. It is not necessary to be on the study group to go to that meeting. You do not have to have been on it before, and you do not have to make a commitment to be on it in the future. He is right in that many people will join the group and will go out of the group. But, what is essential is that, when he is asked who is on the study group at any particular time, he does not volunteer information to this Assembly which is incorrect.

The Chief Minister did not attempt to rebut the statements of the Leader of the Opposition with regard to the sequence of events when he went to Japan. I hope that the Treasurer is listening at whatever place he has gone to and that, as another participant in that jaunt, he will be able to confirm for the Leader of the Opposition whether, in fact, it is true that, when they went to Japan, they had arrangements for talks with Kumagai Gumi and others in Tokyo which they hoped would facilitate their entree into the Japanese business world. I hope he will confirm that what happened, after only a short time in Tokyo, was that the response was remarkably unenthusiastic. He might also confirm that, as a consequence, the Chief Minister, who had been receiving criticism for the jaunts that he takes all over the world, realised that he might have a serious political problem and attached himself to Dr Ishizaki who, whether he was approached by him or it was the other way around, stated that he could produce some brief, informal discussions. I want the Treasurer to advise us whether or not that is true.
We have been told by the Chief Minister that his only mistake was that he was too honest. If what he has given us is an example of his concept of honesty, it is clear that we should be worried about the future of the Territory. He named the names. He was not honest enough to say that those people were not members of the study group. It was he who named the names and he has to bear the consequences of that.

Let there be no doubt about the support on this side of the Assembly for the Alice Springs to Darwin railway. We have backed the government consistently in its attempts to get this project off the ground. We would like to see construction start tomorrow, but there are complications. No government in Australia - federal, state or territory - can fund the project at this stage. Both sides of this Assembly have made statements applauding the federal government in its attempts to reduce the budget deficit. In the Northern Territory, we are going through a most painful period. Business confidence is dropping as capital works projects are trimmed. Ordinary

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workers, in both the public and private sectors, are being asked to make sacrifices or face termination. We have no fat, no hollow logs, that can be plumbed to get money for a railroad. But, this does not mean that we should do nothing. Labor governments around Australia are stitching together deals with private enterprise to fund what would once have been seen to be public works - the domain of the public purse. One only needs to look at the proposed tunnel under Sydney Harbour or the $4000m Sydney-to-Canberra high-speed railroad.

We believe there is a major role for this government to play over the rail link. The Leader of the Opposition has stated our position. We should get together a detailed description of the project and let it out internationally to seek expressions of interest. We should work with these groups to determine whether a consortium could be put together or whether it should go to international tender. This would cover financing, construction and operation of the railroad.

This government is killing the railroad project with its amateurish approach. The world of international finance is not a playground for amateurs. Mutual respect is the first step. International bankers are cautious and proper people, with a few notable exceptions. They expect people to follow established practices. As Dr Sugawara said, delicate initial approaches need planning and professionalism. There needs to be carefully considered documentation. Appointments need to be made well in advance, in writing, accompanied by outlines of requirements, aims and objectives, broad overviews and other relevant facts, on a commercial in-confidence basis if necessary, to give potential investors and project participants a feel for the concept and the security of the proposition.

You do not come blundering in on the last day of your trip on the wing of an agent who has hurriedly arranged eleventh-hour introductions. Serious bankers and international operators would not think that they were doing business. They would regard such activities simply as PR exercises or meetings with potential clients. Such people do not turn governments away from their doorsteps but, equally, off-the-cuff cosy chats do not constitute negotiations. Normally, people who understand how to manage business and international finance negotiation put in many months of planning and careful preparation, including feeling out prospective investors. Time is spent identifying corporations which match the project needs and evaluating the credentials of potential contacts. A host of other good management activities go towards ensuring successful contacts. The aim of the exercise is to establish interest, to gain respect and inspire confidence. The impact of our medicine-show approach will have been to create doubt and discount the chances of our proposition being taken seriously. To follow these antics up with telexes urgently imploring people to join our study group and requesting written acknowledgements of interest is to stretch the natural caution of good business operators.

That the Chief Minister managed one very carefully worded, non-committal, polite response from a group of consultants does not mean success. Indeed, the very act of sending such telexes would have
even further damaged our position. Business well knows the danger of making commitments in writing. Business people treat with suspicion organisations that try to push them into decisions or positions. They are successful because of their caution, because they do not allow themselves to be manipulated. They protect their interests and their good names and expect their clients to understand the game and follow the same rules.

Mr Speaker, let there be no doubt that this is a most serious debate. It rests upon an extremely important point of parliamentary principle. Without the application and vigorous defence of that principle, our parliamentary system will fail. Put simply and baldly, the principle is that ministers are not to lie to the parliament.

Let us put aside the basic immorality of lies for a moment to address the issue of why this parliament has a right and, indeed, a duty to take the sternest possible action against ministers caught lying to parliament. Ministers have enormous resources at their disposal through their personal staff and their departments. The Cabinet, or the executive wing of government as it is often called, has vast resources compared to us on this side of the House. However, it is the members of this parliament who are charged by the people to maintain control, on their behalf, of the executive. If that control is not exercised, the fundamental balance of the Westminster system of government is destroyed. An executive uncontrolled is nothing short of a dictatorship, whether power is exercised through a group or an individual.

We have to rely to a large extent on the work done by the executive, transmitted to us by the linchpin of the process, the ministers. We probe, we ask questions, we try to get what information we can, but, basically, we cannot match the resources of the executive. We have to rely on its truthfulness. Mr Speaker, pause for 1 minute to think what would be the result if lying to parliament were an accepted practice of ministers? How can we function as members of parliament if we do not insist on the basic tenets of parliamentary practice? We do not know every time a minister lies or stretches the truth. However, we can provide a dramatic warning for any minister who may, for his own purposes, decide to take that course by ensuring that we take the most stern and drastic action when we discover a case where a politician has deliberately misled the parliament.

The great parliamentary institution, of which we are but the custodians, must be succoured if it is to survive. It relies too heavily on precedent to easily bounce back from a failure of heart by members of one Assembly. We are not completely our own masters in this case. We owe a duty to this parliament that carries forward into the future. We must believe sufficiently in our parliament to insist on basic principles. We must stand up and be counted. Can we place our political objections aside long enough to sit in judgment upon one of our members?

Mr Speaker, I have gone through Pettifer and Erskine May with a fine toothcomb to find a precedent for what we have here today. There is one precedent that stands so tall as to virtually wipe all other cases from the record. That precedent was the cause celebre which set down the basic principles in a case of deliberate misleading of the House. If members turn to page 664 of Pettifer, they will see the reference to deliberately misleading the House. They will see the inexorable parliamentary process which occurs when a minister misleads parliament, as happened in the Profumo Case that rocked the English establishment in the early 1960s. I am not going to go into all the sordid details of that case, except to say that Mr Profumo was a junior minister, the Minister for War. The issue was not associated primarily with his role in that portfolio, but with personal matters. The first point we have to decide is whether retribution served upon a junior minister should also be forced on a senior minister. Of course it must be. The second point is whether a deliberate misleading, arising from a personal imbroglio, is worse than that arising out of the performance of a
ministerial function. Of course, that would be rubbish. A minister may have an uncertain private 
life yet do a good job as a minister. However, a minister who deliberately misleads the parliament in his 
role as a minister has nowhere to hide. He stands condemned.

Mr Speaker, Mr Profumo made a statement to the House of Commons regarding certain 
allegations against him. That statement was found to be false and Mr Profumo resigned. The House of 
Commons pursued him and passed a resolution declaring him guilty of grave contempt. He met his just 
desserts because parliament is bigger than any man, any minister and any Chief Minister.

What happened here was that, on Wednesday 29 April 1987, the government Whip asked a 
dorothy dixer. He asked for a general report on developments of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway line. 
The Chief Minister could have given a general answer but instead, in his arrogance and contempt for this 
Assembly, he fed us a lie. He said that he had formed a Japan Australia Transport Study Group and 
nominated the Japanese representatives on that group. We then found out from a journalist in Japan that 
those companies were denying involvement. At that stage, we simply had a prima facie case. We were 
waiting to see what the Chief Minister's response would be. We found that he dug himself a deeper and 
deeper hole. We found that his office was saying that it was a 'stuff up'. We found that Dr Ishizaki was 
saying that, and I quote from the front page of the NT News, 'the Chief Minister was a little premature'. 
The Chief Minister was not backed by Dr Ishizaki and, in an interview on Territory Extra, he stated that 
they were not members of the group.

This motion must be passed. What the House of Commons demanded of a junior minister in that 
House, we must demand of the Chief Minister here. He must be censured. He must be removed from 
office. Only in that way will we, as parliamentarians, show that we have the guts to carry out our 
obligations and that we believe in this parliament and its processes.

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

Mr HANRAHAN (Lands and Housing): Mr Speaker, at the outset, I really must say that I believe 
this is much ado about nothing. In fact, the whole effort from honourable members opposite is an 
absolute rort on their part to take advantage of so-called political innuendo. In listening to the member for 
Stuart's dissertation on parliamentary ethics, I knew immediately that he was in trouble because, as will 
be seen from a reading of Hansard, he offered not a single skerrick of proof in support of the motion.

I agree with the member for Stuart that this is, indeed, a very important matter. Any censure 
motion must be treated as a serious matter. We do look for certain proof. On a previous occasion, before 
my time in this Assembly, after a lengthy debate, the opposition tabled so-called proof which was 
subsequently shown to be false. I refer to a former Leader of the Opposition in this Assembly, Mr Isaacs. 
Perhaps members opposite are still getting over that and that is the reason they have offered no proof.

Mr Speaker, let me say that I consider that the incident, so to speak, has been unfortunate in that, 
from the point of view of someone on the outside looking in, it would appear that certain divisions have 
been created, certainly divisions between the press and the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister has stated 
that certain events have taken place and has stood by his statements, and rightly so, because I happen to 
know that the Chief Minister is sitting on all the proof in the world. One would have to agree with the 
Chief Minister that one would not be tabling it at the moment or showing it 

around because of the efforts of honourable members opposite who do nothing to further their 
cause or the cause of the Northern Territory.
I think the issue has gotten out of hand and that the facts of the matter are being overlooked. It is unfortunate that divisions occurred between the Chief Minister and the press. It would seem that it is okay for the Chief Minister's credibility to be questioned and also the credibility of the Treasurer, the Under Treasurer, senior ministerial officers, a senior businessman in Darwin and Tony Mitani from Kumagai Gumi. Looking from the outside in, it seems that, when the facts are raised and they contradict members of the press, that is not acceptable. From that point, the whole situation degenerated to a situation where the facts are no longer acceptable either to the press or the honourable members opposite.

Mr Speaker, I have travelled to Japan, as have the member for Barkly and other members of the government. Negotiations with the Japanese are always delicate. They always involve a certain amount of translation and interpretation. This government is not standing behind any walls or any excuses, neither has it said that any of the statements made by honourable members opposite are true. The Labor Party's argument is that statements have been reported in the media, but no proof has been offered in relation to those statements. The whole heart of the issue lies is in whom was actually spoken to. When we conduct negotiations overseas, they are conducted with chairmen, directors, vice-presidents etc of various companies - very senior people. Not a skerrick of information has been given by members opposite as to who was asked questions by the journalist in Japan and what questions were asked. The Leader of the Opposition, who failed miserably in his address to this Assembly, did not table one skerrick of relevant information.

May I draw honourable members' attention to the actual motion before the Assembly because therein lies the lie. It says that the Chief Minister should be censured by this Assembly for deliberately misleading this Assembly. The member for Stuart actually referred to it as lying. In his reply, I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to address that word 'deliberately'. Would he attempt to show this Assembly where, how and why the Chief Minister would even consider or contemplate deliberately misleading this Assembly over the issue of the formation of a study group for a great project, a project that this Territory has been trying to achieve for a very long time? The Leader of the Opposition should address his own motion because therein lies the lie. He should at least offer some semblance of an argument as to why the Chief Minister would 'deliberately mislead' the Assembly - his words not mine.

Mr Speaker, ample evidence has been tabled from this side of the Assembly during this debate ...

Mr Ede: Where? You have tabled nothing.

Mr HANRAHAN: ... as to the second point of the motion. It talks about the non-membership, I would presume, of the study group of the 3 Japanese companies. We have that evidence. The media and honourable members opposite have been told who will be attending on behalf of these 3 Japanese companies.

Mr Ede: Rubbish? Table it.

Mr HANRAHAN: Mr Speaker, I go back to the Chief Minister's point. There are 7 people who have been named that attended meetings with those 3 Japanese companies.

Mr Ede: You have no intention of proving it.

Mr Hatton: You made the allegation. You you prove it.

Mr HANRAHAN: It goes back to the fundamental point of this argument. It is your motion.
Mr Speaker, those 3 companies have reconfirmed with this government that they are members of the study group and will be attending the meeting next Tuesday.

Mr Smith: Prove it!

Mr HANRAHAN: No. You moved the censure motion. You prove to me that the people spoken to in Japan - the directors, the chairman - said what the press has purported they have said. You prove that, because it is your censure motion and relates to 2 points that you have failed to address or even acknowledge in your argument.

Mr Ede: On Territory Extra, your Chief Minister admitted they were.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr HANRAHAN: Mr Speaker, the third point of the motion before us says: 'as later public statements have shown that this statement was false'. Would honourable members opposite stand up and prove, as I have just said ...

Mr Smith: Don't you listen? Can't you understand?

Mr HANRAHAN: You prove to me that the people that the Northern Territory government representatives spoke to have made public statements or that any public statements have been made by anyone, that show that any statements made by the 3 companies named in your censure motion prove that they are not members of ...

Mr Smith: Don't you believe direct quotes from the front page of the NT News from the companies.

Mr HANRAHAN: No.

Mr Ede: The journalists have said that they are not. The Chief Minister has said that they are not. What else do you want?

Mr HANRAHAN: This is probably an apt time to describe how confusion occurs, and the member for Barkly may like to comment on this. A similar incident was reported in the newspapers and, subsequently, through other relevant media in the Territory about the involvement of TNT. I would be very surprised if the member for Barkly could not substantiate the fact that negotiations have occurred with TNT, at a very high level indeed. Yet, we had confusing statements made in the press simply because the negotiations taking place at that time were at that very high level, and were at a very sensitive stage. I am very aware of those negotiations because I have been involved in them, albeit on the periphery, for some time. I am aware of them.

We have 3 elements in the censure motion before us that have yet to be addressed by the members opposite. I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to reply to the actual censure motion.

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Let us look at the fourth element of the censure motion which really proves it be a furphy: 'placing future negotiations with these Japanese companies at risk'. I refer the Leader of the Opposition to the reply by the Chief Minister. It is no secret, nor have we attempted to make a secret of it, that next Tuesday, in Tokyo, at a place I am sure we will not be telling anyone about ...

Mr Ede: You won't tell us who is there.
Mr HANRAHAN: ... not only 3 companies, which are already the subject of rather extensive harassment by members opposite, but also several other companies will attend a meeting of a study group to investigate the possibility and the effectiveness of the formation of a group that will ultimately see the railway built in the Territory. I think that is a very credible enterprise on the part of this government, and certainly I am quite happy to stand and say before anyone that I fully respect the integrity and honesty of the Chief Minister.

Mr Ede: Why did you leak it to the newspaper?

Mr HANRAHAN: Unquestionably, the furphy of that part of the motion is there for all to see. That meeting will occur. The study group will meet. It is far more extensive than members of the opposition have even attempted - well, they wouldn't know, and I guess that is the basis of what I am saying. Next Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, or whenever the Chief Minister chooses to comment, all will be known. I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that he would be very surprised indeed to learn the extent of negotiations that have taken place. It is unfortunate that he continually falls for the old trap: third-hand, fourth-hand information, no proof, and what he has to wave about was printed somewhere and he would not know about it anyway.

Mr Speaker, let us deal with the fifth point that was so inadequately addressed by the member for Stuart, and that was that this Assembly call upon the Chief Minister to resign forthwith. I ask you, Mr Speaker, why? The Leader of the Opposition has not even attempted to prove or convince anybody in this Assembly why the Chief Minister should resign. We had a rather inadequate address by the member for Stuart about Pettifer and parliamentary precedents that proved absolutely nothing other than the fact that he did not have any proof, not one skerrick of evidence, to substantiate the ridiculous and stupid motion that we have before us. The credibility of honourable members opposite would be much better served by their getting behind the Territory and supporting us over the railway line. The member for Stuart had the audacity to say that the opposition has supported the government all the way along the line in relation to the building of a railway. It is true that they have done so recently because they want to jump on the bandwagon that we are attempting to create.

Mr Speaker, this railway project will cost some $600m or 700m. I challenge the Leader of the Opposition at least to furnish this Assembly and the people of the Northern Territory with some further proof that he is prepared to take up the cudgels with his colleagues in Canberra, albeit they will only be there for a very short time ... 

Mr Smith: Why don't you get a commitment out of your colleagues about it, in the wild event that they will win the election?

Mr Ede: Are you going to get anything from Howard?

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Mr HANRAHAN: ... to get at least 1 component of the railway project ratified.

Mr Smith: What have you got out of your colleagues?

Mr HANRAHAN: A lot of honesty, Mr Speaker, that is what we have got out of our people. What we need is that defence component, the recognition that the railway line is an important and integral part of the development of defence in the Northern Territory. The Leader of the Opposition has made a big play about his role in relation to defence and I am asking him to put it to the test. Let us have some proof and evidence that they will stand up and support at least the defence segment of this project because that will certainly help it come to fruition.
Mr Speaker, I am happy to have said those few words and now I am going to sit down. I have drawn honourable members' attention to the fact that this censure motion is really a load of rubbish. It has not been addressed in any factual context or form by members of the opposition. I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to stand up and say something sensible or at least to prove some of the allegations contained in this censure motion. There is no way known that members on this side of the Assembly would support a call for the resignation of the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory over this issue because, undoubtedly, the integrity and honesty of the Chief Minister on this particular issue is beyond question. I support him to the fullest, as do all honourable members on this side of the Assembly.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr HATTON (Chief Minister)(by leave): Mr Speaker, I have been reminded that, towards the end of my speech in this debate, I referred to negotiations in Tokyo, either recently or in the next week. I wish to make it very clear that negotiations are not proceeding. In fact, discussions are occurring with respect to a study group. In having used that word in the heat of debate, I do not want to be accused, in any way, of misleading this Assembly. I am not suggesting that negotiations are proceeding but rather that there are discussions of a study group directed towards the tasks that I have referred to. When formal negotiations start, I will use the word 'negotiation' in its proper context. I would ask honourable members opposite not to misconstrue the implications of that word.

Mr TUXWORTH (Barkly): Mr Speaker, thank you for the call. This debate and the saga surrounding the railway events of the last several weeks are rather reminiscent of the BBC production 'Great Railway Rides of the World'. I put it to you that the Chief Minister has just taken 150 000 of us on the greatest railway ride we are likely to see this century, and we do not even have a train.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Chief Minister misled the Assembly during the last sittings. There may be some doubt about his intention in doing so, and that question has been raised several times today, but the clear fact is that, on the statements made by the Japanese and the statement made by the Chief Minister on 29 April are not reconcilable. Either the Japanese changed their minds after the Chief Minister left Japan or the Chief Minister got it wrong when he was there and gave us wrong information when he got back. Whatever the circumstances, one thing is certain: the cover-up was indefensible. I can accept that the Chief Minister may have misled the Assembly unintentionally. That is quite easy to do and I will touch on that in a minute. Nevertheless, the cover-up is indefensible. The kindest thing that could be said about the statement the Chief Minister made on 29 April was that his mouth ran off and left him. If that was the case, it would not have been unreasonable for him to have said that he had got a bit ahead of events and to have indicated the actual situation.

The trip to Japan was pretty predictable. If you want to attract interest in a project, that is how you do it. Having come home, the wise thing for the Chief Minister to have done would have been to be a bit cautious and not say quite so much as he said. What he did was to make very definite and very important statements about who was involved in the study group. It is quite clear to the whole Territory now that, whatever the Chief Minister thought happened in Japan, he has not convinced anybody that the people referred to are members of the study group, whether they go to a meeting next Tuesday or not. This matter is particularly important because the completion of the railway project will mark the next stage of the Territory's industrial growth. We are all committed to it one way or another. While some of us might feel more strongly about it than others, we all believe that that is true. It will apply to the Territory, just as it applied to every other state during the development of this country.

Mr Speaker, we must start to be realistic about how we put this project together. We know, and the rest of Australia is ramming it down our throats, that, if it is to go ahead, it must be economic. It is a
technically feasible project; there is no doubt about that. We need a technical study like we need a hole in the head. We have been studying this thing for 7 years. What we do need is tonnage. That will be the financial drive which will make the railway project come together. If we cannot get tonnage, we need cheap money or a government subsidy. I have no doubt that the members of the party went to Japan to try to get some capital into the project. When they got there, they found people were politely interested. They then came home and made statements about the establishment of the study group. It is not quite that simple, and therein lies the problem.

I was interested in the Chief Minister's reference to the pipeline and the comparison that he made. I have listened with great interest over the last 4 or 5 months to the amount of self-praise and congratulation the government has heaped on itself over the establishment of the pipeline and the things that went with it. In fact, it was almost hard to believe that anybody apart from the Chief Minister and 1 or 2 others had anything to do with the pipeline. The lessons have not been learnt. What has come out of Japan is really a disaster in terms of putting the railway project together. Our whole integrity in the project has been seriously damaged. From the time advice came from Tokyo about the Chief Minister's visit, until the time the JARTS telex was made public, showing that that organisation was only in the study group on the basis of being a consultant to it, the integrity of this project has gone downhill so badly that most Territorians now believe it to be a joke. That is very sad.

Mr Speaker, what happens next Tuesday is really irrelevant. What happens next August is irrelevant, whether there is a study group or a consortium and whether it is made up of a dozen people who are the same or different to those involved at present. What is important is what was said on 29 April. The Chief Minister quite clearly said that particular people were in the study group. I can see what has happened. The Chief Minister came home from Japan with some pretty warm feelings about expressions of support. He put out a press statement on the basis that it would sound okay and the loose ends could be tied up later when it all came together. It did not come together because the Japanese believed that their position had been prejudiced.

Much comment has been made about adverse local comment on the project and the trip to Japan and the damage that will do to the project. The local comment is chickenfeed compared to the damage that has been done by the Chief Minister's cover-up. People no longer know whether they should believe anything that he says, and that is pretty sad. The TNT involvement is a fine example of this. We saw big headlines about TNT's involvement as a result of the trip to Japan. The reality is that TNT's position is the same today as it was in 1982, 1984 and 1986. It has no capacity to be involved in the establishment of the railway but it would be interested in running it. TNT considers that it would be pretty good at running a railway and I do not doubt that it would.

The Chief Minister said that he had learnt a really serious lesson about naming names and that he will no longer provide names of people involved in projects, because they will be harassed by the press. I can say amen to that. I can name a few who have been harassed over the years for one reason or another. However, there is no problem with naming names as long as you do not misrepresent people you are naming. Clearly, in this instance, Japanese were misrepresented. When you put together a study group or a consortium, you are locking people into a commitment to work, to provide resources of manpower, expertise and knowledge and money. By implying in his statement that particular organisations were a part of the study group, the Chief Minister implied automatically that they were committed to expenditure and resourcing of the group. Quite clearly, that is not the case because we cannot get confirmation from 2 of the parties. The company that has sent a telex says that it only wants to be involved as a consultant. Getting paid for your involvement is not really making a commitment.

The commitment of members of the group and a clarification of their position in the group is absolutely essential to the group's success. Are these people participants who may have an investment role at some stage and a benefit at the end of the day? Are they people who are going to pay a share of
the cost of the study group or are they people who are just in there to be advisers and be paid for a consultancy if a job comes along? If you do not sort those questions out in the very early stages and before you have your meeting, you immediately have a conflict of interest.

When the Chief Minister met with people in Japan, there should have been a discussion about the commitment and the role of the people who wanted to be involved and just how far they were prepared to go. That should have been minuted and confirmed in writing before anybody said anything to the press. If we arrive there next Tuesday and find 12 people in the room who are all looking for consultancies or to produce studies, and that is the limit of their involvement, we will look pretty silly. That is why I raised the point in public earlier. It was important for the Chief Minister to be able to produce minutes of a meeting showing where and how people had committed themselves. Such minutes and letters of confirmation would have clarified the relationship between the Japanese companies and the government, and the basis on which the group would operate.

I would be interested to know what will happen next Tuesday if the government representatives do a whip around the table and ask everyone present what they are going to put into the operation of the study group because, if they are not prepared to put in, they are not the people that we want. I am not saying they will not put in, and it will be jolly good if they do. However, I have a sneaking feeling that they have no intention of doing anything but provide a consultancy if the opportunity arises. As speakers before me have said, the Japanese are very polite. Their negotiations are generally protracted and they do not rush into things. I thought it curious that the Chief Minister was able to come home from Japan after a fleeting visit of a couple of days and announce that there were people committed to a study group. I was happy to give him the benefit of the doubt and to believe that he had put it all together but, as it turned out, that was not the case. We now have a real problem of credibility.

The Chief Minister's credibility is a matter for the public, himself and his party. The credibility of the railway is a problem for the whole of the Northern Territory because the very people that this parliament needs to support it in the drive to get the railway, now believe that it is a joke. I do not believe it is a joke. I think it is still a very real possibility, but how we put it together and how we present it to the Territory community will be very important.

I will now return to the Chief Minister's statement to the Assembly on 29 April. There is no doubt about what he said and I will just take a moment to read it:

It was our first visit to Japan and we anticipated opening the subject up and that perhaps after several visits we might arouse interest. The interest was far higher than that and, as a consequence, we formed what we have called the Japan Australia Transport Group. This comprises, from the Japanese side, representatives from the Japan Railway Technical Services, known as JARTS, Japan Railway and Freight Company, and the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan, and from Australia Henry and Walker, with the involvement of one of its shareholders, Kumagai Gumi.

There is nothing ambiguous about that. The Chief Minister stated it as a matter of fact. Regrettably, the people that he named are saying that that is not a matter of fact and that they will have further discussions about it when the time comes.

Whether the misleading of the Assembly was intentional or not is not an issue. The fact is that he has done it and has tried to cover it up. Resignation is not an optional extra for the Chief Minister to take
up at some time if it suits him; it is a convention of the Assembly that must be adhered to. If the party wishes to re-elect him after lunch that is a matter for the party, but the convention is not negotiable.

Mr COULTER (Treasurer): Mr Speaker, I rise to add a very pertinent point to this debate. So far we have not heard any such points from anybody. Today, the Leader of the Opposition has called for the Chief Minister's resignation. The Leader of the Opposition has called on 9 occasions for this Chief Minister's resignation or for him to step down. That is once every 6 weeks, and it is getting pretty monotonous. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition knows what it is like to gain a reputation for saying that the sky is falling in ...

Mr Smith: How do you arrive at 9 times?

Mr COULTER: Would you like me to read them out to you? In the past year, as Leader of the Opposition, Mr Smith has called for the Chief Minister's resignation 3 times on 3 separate issues. That is a total of 9 times that he has called for his resignation.

Mr Smith: That is pretty creative arithmetic.

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Mr COULTER: Now he is using his first censure motion. It is his big chance as Leader of the Opposition, but he has failed dismally. On 21 August 1986, the Leader of the Opposition said: 'The opposition has always used censure motions sparingly'. That is a quote from page 486 of Hansard. Today he has come before us with his first censure motion.

It is interesting that the member for Barkly has left the Assembly after giving us the benefit of his knowledge in this debate. One of the things that he called for the Chief Minister to do was to produce documentation. It is interesting to note that 4 censure motions were brought against the member for Barkly when he was Chief Minister and that one of those, in March 1986, concerned the lack of documentation regarding travelling allowances received by him. Now he is prepared to get on to the news and debate this motion ...

Mr Smith: But you blokes supported him then.

Mr COULTER: ... with his new-found buddies in the opposition.

Let us hear what the member for Millner, now Leader of the Opposition, said about the previous Chief Minister, the member for Barkly, on his handling of the railway affair. He made it quite clear, on Wednesday 20 November 1985, where he stood in relation to the member for Barkly. He said that the Chief Minister - referring to the member for Barkly - normally 'adopts a statesmanlike stance and delivers a statesmanlike speech'. Once again, he proved during question time this morning that he is not even a statesman's bootlace. They were discussing the development of the Northern Territory railway. We now see them teamed up together to fight against the Chief Minister on a motion of censure. Strange bedfellows indeed!

We will all be aware that study groups have been formed from time to time. I would like to take a little of the Assembly's time to go back over the history of the Northern Territory's railway. I am ashamed that we are discussing this particular motion in this particular way because it will be detrimental to the development of a railway in the Northern Territory. I am ashamed that the Leader of the Opposition has brought it to this Assembly.

In 1878, the first sod was turned at Port Augusta to build the railway. In 1911, the Commonwealth accepted responsibility for the Northern Territory, part of which was the obligation to build the railway. In 1929, the Central Australian Railway was built from Port Augusta to Alice Springs. In 1949, the standard
gauge railway was confirmed under Chifley and, in 1980, Fraser enthusiastically committed $10m to a route survey over 4 years. In 1983, we were told that it would be completed by 1988. I will show you a study group, Mr Speaker. In 1983, there was Senator Ted Robertson, Mr Bob Hawke and Mr John Reeves. They talked about the boost to Territory development. Listen to this: 'We will build the Alice to Darwin railway. We will build the Darwin International Terminal. We will upgrade the Alice Springs Airport. We will establish jobs on road programs'. This particular railway study group went on to say that it would reduce petrol prices, remove sales tax on freight costs, cut income tax and increase the Territory zone allowance. That was the last study group.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable minister will resume his seat. The member for Stuart will cease those loud cross-Chamber interjections and, indeed, all members will maintain some dignity in the Assembly.

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Mr COULTER: Let us go back to a talkback radio program involving Mr Hawke in 1983. I do not have the exact date. A caller asked Mr Hawke: 'How can we trust the ALP government, when the ALP government tells little fibs?'. Mr Hawke said: 'You name one'. The caller said: 'I cannot think of any offhand'. Mr Hawke said: 'Of course you cannot because we do not tell them'. The caller had a bit of a giggle and said: 'As far as we know, all politicians tell little fibs'. Mr Hawke said: 'I can assure you that I do not and my government does not'. The next caller pointed out that Mr Everingham had misled the public and asked Mr Hawke: 'Did you and your party do the exact same thing to us Territorians by telling us, in your campaign in March, that you would give us the railway?'. Mr Hawke replied: 'No! I would have thought that, particularly if you are interested in these things, you would have known what I said about this when I was here on my way through. Let me tell you the facts. In the election campaign, it is true that we said that we would be involved in the building of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway'. He went on to say why he should not be involved at that time. If anybody ever misled people on this issue, it was that particular study group. Nobody except the Australian Labor Party has misled Northern Territorians in particular and Australians in general.

In 1983, the ALP government said it would build the railway. In March 1983, Mr Hawke reviewed the election campaign promise and, in February 1984, we had David Hill saying that there would be no railway. I have brought along a small selection of reports on the railway: the Canadian Pacific Report, Financing the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway - a 3-volume submission by the Northern Territory government to the Independent Economic Inquiry into Transport Services for the Northern Territory - the Hill Report, the Department of Transport and Works' estimate of freight demand, the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway Feasibility Study, reports dealing with operational requirements and capital cost profiles for the Alice Springs to Darwin railway, detailed estimates - and it goes on and on. This railway has had more reviews than the Tivoli Theatre yet we are still arguing about how we can build the railway. Our forefathers, the visionaries who wanted to build this country, would have been ashamed of us and certainly ashamed of the opposition.

In 1983, a Mr Cotton in this Assembly on many occasions. On 1 August 1932, he wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald: 'The unfinished railway has little or no chance of ever being completed by any government'. I believe that he was simply expressing the frustration that he was faced with in 1932. Now we have a Chief Minister who is prepared to put aside all the reports and put together a railway package. What does he get from the opposition? He is caned for his efforts by the visionaries on the benches opposite who would trip over their own bootlaces.

The cost of Mr Cotton's railway was to be $15m which, given inflation, is considerably more than the $610m proposal today. In those days, London was the financial capital of the world and England was in a similar predicament to that of Japan today. Japan has a $68 000m surplus and it is looking around
The British developed Texas and paid for most of its railway infrastructure at that particular time. Prices, posal was that London interests would construct the line from Bourke to Birdum and reconstruct the line from Birdum to Darwin at an estimated cost of $15m out of a bond issue backed by the government. That was 1932 and we are still talking about building a railway. Probably, it will be suggested that we should commission more reports.

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The Chief Minister concluded his speech on the railway in this Assembly by saying: 'It is now, in a very real sense, up to the private sector, and particularly those who know more than we do about transportation, construction, financing and the running of railways, to set about building on the foundations we have established and to join us in taking the next step towards finishing the job'. That is what the Chief Minister said and his next step was to do exactly that. Negotiations have been continuing with private firms and banks. We have had banks working on this project for some 18 months now. We have negotiated with the very people the Deputy Leader of the Opposition praised for visionary projects such as tunnels underneath Sydney Harbour and a fast rail service from Melbourne to Sydney. I refer to Kumagai Gumi which is the proponent in both of those projects. We had the opportunity to sit down with principals of Kumagai Gumi in Japan and discuss this very project. This project is now in jeopardy because of the actions of the opposition which would not recognise an opportunity if it fell into one.

Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said that I made a lukewarm statement in support of the Chief Minister. However, he would not read out what I said. Yesterday I pointed out to honourable members how the Leader of the Opposition can distort the facts simply by not telling us exactly what happened. Let me read out what I said in my press release of 18 May. This is described by the Leader of the Opposition as 'lukewarm':

The Treasurer, Mr Barry Coulter, confirmed today that Japanese business houses had expressed positive interest in participating in a study into the Northern Territory railway project. He said he had attended all meetings in Japan at which the railway project was discussed, in company with the Chief Minister and Territory officials. 'My assessment of those meetings concurs with that of the Chief Minister', Mr Coulter said. 'The Chief Minister's public statements are in accord with my understanding of what took place. The level of interest in the Territory project was more than a polite audience and I can only hope that current media speculation will not prevent further discussion occurring'.

That is a lukewarm statement in the view of the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. It is interesting to note also that they are the only 2 representatives of the Labor Party present in this Chamber at the moment. The rest of their colleagues have left in shame because they have backed a loser. I can sympathise with them.

The facts are very simple. There is a great deal of interest in Japan and I would like the Leader of the Opposition's background information on how to negotiate in Japan. Let me assure him that I have been to Japan before. I have been involved with some of the very big companies and trading houses of Japan and, on many occasions, I have had the opportunity to discuss matters with them. They have visited me here in Darwin and discussed proposals for the railway. These are not people whom the Chief Minister has named at this stage. I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that I am well versed in such negotiations. I understand the difference between being polite in Japanese terms and being interested and willing to sit down and discuss proposals. Indeed, we have been involved in quite a number of proposals and we have a number of proposals currently on the drawing board. I can assure him that I have had that opportunity and I speak with first-hand knowledge of what went on.
Mr Speaker, as I have said, this censure motion has been nothing but a waste of this Assembly’s time. It was the Leader of the Opposition’s first censure motion and for that I give him credit but it was a very dismal performance indeed. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition tried to come to his defence. He talked to us about Profumo and a number of other people. I do not know what that had to do with this Assembly or developing a railway in the Northern Territory. He threw it in anyway because he had nothing else to talk about. That is just the usual sort of trick the opposition comes up with. The study group that has caused us most of our problems today was the one that I pointed out earlier in my speech.

The member for Barkly’s contribution to this particular debate has not endeared him to this side of the Assembly. He did cover some issues that made sense in terms of negotiations and how to go about achieving the end result of building the railway. I note that the Leader of the Opposition has now found a new friend in the member for Barkly even though he has criticised him in the past.

Mr Speaker, I move that the motion be amended by omitting all words after ‘that’ and inserting ‘this Assembly applauds the efforts of the Chief Minister and the government to promote the construction of the Darwin to Alice Springs railway and his continuing efforts to keep this Assembly informed of progress which has been made’.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr SMITH: (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, I must say I was taken by some surprise as I thought I had an understanding with you as to how the remainder of this debate would be handled.

Mr SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition is speaking to the motion, as amended, and in reply closing debate.

Mr SMITH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Obviously my task now is to oppose the motion as it has been amended.

The key question of course, right through this debate, has been the credibility of the Chief Minister. That question was expressed in the original motion which talked about the Chief Minister having deliberately misled the Assembly. There can be no doubt that the Chief Minister deliberately misled the Assembly. No one has denied the accuracy of his comments recorded in the Hansard of 29 April. I want to take you back over that because it is extremely important. He said: ‘The interest was far higher than that and, as a consequence, we have formed what we have called a Japan Australia Transport Study Group. This comprises, from the Japanese side, representatives of the 3 companies’. The Chief Minister said that the study group ‘comprises’ those 3 Japanese companies on the Japanese side, plus Henry and Walker and Kumagai Gumi. Any logical use of the English language and the word ‘comprise’ would mean that, if those 3 companies were taken out of the study group, because they comprise it, there would be no study group.

Without them, there would be no study group. That is the only logical explanation of that particular statement made by the Chief Minister in this Assembly. We have a very clear statement that there is a study group and that it comprises the 3 Japanese companies.

However, when the Chief Minister was placed under pressure in an interview on Territory Extra on 18 May 1987, he said that they were not physically sitting on the study group. He said: ‘We named the people that were on it and it obviously did not include their names. I named the particular people who were on that study group in various statements I made to the media’.
Mr Speaker, there is a complete and utter contradiction between the statement of 29 April and that of 18 May this year. And I put it to you that the only possible conclusion one could come to, in view of the Chief Minister's statement of 18 May that they are not physically on the study group, is that he deliberately misled this Assembly on 29 April of this year. He cannot have it both ways. If he says that the study group comprises those 3 Japanese companies, as he did on 29 April, he cannot say at a later date that the study group is there but it does not comprise those companies, and expect to be believed by this Assembly or by the people of the Northern Territory. Simple use of and respect for the English language makes that very clear. I submit, Mr Speaker, that the case has been proved beyond doubt. The Chief Minister deliberately misled this Assembly on 29 April. The evidence is the statement he made on Territory Extra on 18 May 1987. That statement contains his words, not the words of a journalist who may possibly have misinterpreted him. It contains his words and his words alone.

The amended motion reads: '...this Assembly applauds the efforts of the Chief Minister and the government to promote the construction of a Darwin to Alice Springs railway and his continuing efforts to keep this Assembly informed of progress which has been made'. There are 2 main parts. The first, that the Assembly should applaud the efforts of the Chief Minister and the government to promote the construction of a Darwin to Alice Springs railway, points up the main problem. This is that the efforts of the Chief Minister on his recent visit to Japan have had the unfortunate effect of making the job of getting the railway line, a job that we all recognise is difficult, a much harder task than it might otherwise have been. We have the unfortunate position where the Chief Minister came back from Japan and deliberately misled this Assembly, on 29 April and, in doing so, did considerable damage to our prospects of doing business with the Japanese firms that he had met. That is the unfortunate fact of the matter. The interesting feature of it is that, 6 weeks down the track, we still do not have any statements from the Japanese firms indicating that they see themselves as being members of the study group and are prepared, as the honourable member for Barkly said, to be members of the study group. Of course, that does not mean acting in a consultancy role, but acting as members of a study group and being prepared to invest funds, if necessary, to further the joint aims of that study group.

We do not have any evidence of that. What we are asked to rely on is new information given by the Chief Minister this morning that there are 9 pieces of evidence that that is the case. There is one bit of evidence in writing that I know of and, of course, that is from the JARTS organisation and that has the reverse effect, I would have thought. It does not prove that the Chief Minister has received the full cooperation of that particular organisation. It proves the point that that particular organisation is prepared to assist as long as it is on the basis of a consultancy to the Northern Territory government. It is prepared to go the next meeting of the study group, provided that it can be furnished with the name of a contact person so that its representatives know whom to approach, and it is prepared to have an ongoing commitment on a paid consultancy basis but it certainly is not prepared to be a member of the study group.

The Chief Minister said that 6 or 7 other people who were at that meeting are all of the same view as himself but, again, we do not have any evidence. Where is the written evidence? Where are the statutory declarations? Where are the other sorts of written evidence, that should be very easy to supply, from the people present at that meeting indicating that they are of a similar mind to the Chief Minister as to what had happened at the meeting. I would have thought that it would have been in the Chief Minister's interests, and it certainly would have enhanced his credibility quite considerably, if he had been able to produce that evidence. But no, he was unable to produce any evidence, in writing, to confirm the view that he put today, which I certainly had not heard before, that everybody from the Australian side who was at those meetings was of a like mind.
Mr Hatton: So we are all lying?

Mr SMITH: No, I am not suggesting that at all, but I am suggesting the Chief Minister had adequate opportunity to present that evidence in writing, but he has not taken that opportunity. Of course, the people who have had the opportunity to be questioned over what exactly happened have been persistently changing their minds. I remind you, Mr Speaker, that the Chief Minister has been through a number of changes of mind about what happened at that meeting or, at least, what his recollections were of what happened.

First of all, when he came back, he said in this Assembly that there was a study group and that 3 Japanese companies were involved. On 18 May, on Territory Extra, he said they were not physically involved in the study group. Another time he said that these companies were interested in providing information to the study group, and on yet another occasion he said that they would be prepared to attend the meeting on 9 June, and make up their minds after that. That is one example of a participant of that meeting who has changed his mind on a number of occasions.

The Treasurer managed to put out a lukewarm press release, as I said, which did not even mention the words 'study group' once. If that is not a lukewarm endorsement of what happened in Tokyo, and a lukewarm endorsement of what the Chief Minister was up to in Tokyo, I do not know what else ...

Mr Coulter: Let's just stick with the word 'endorsement'. Is it or isn't it an endorsement?

Mr SMITH: The words 'study group' were not mentioned in the Treasurer's statement once.

Mr Coulter: Neither was my Aunt Sally in Brisbane. Do you want to put that in?

Mr SMITH: Mr Speaker, Dr Ishizaki, the third member of this group of 7, who has been under some pressure from the media, has also changed his mind significantly on a number of occasions. On 16 May, he was quoted in the NT News as saying that those 3 Japanese companies were not involved in the study group. In fact, at his press conference, he said that the study group may not be a formal group, it may be a floating group and may change from time to time; it had no formal shape or formal structure. The Chief Minister nods his head, and I infer from that that he supports Dr Ishizaki's statement of 18 November.

Mr Hanrahan: Terry, please!

Mr Hatton: Oh, very cute. I'm just falling asleep, that is all.

Mr SMITH: Right, if he doesn't support it, he doesn't.

I want to take the Chief Minister right back to 29 April and the key words that the study group 'comprises, from the Japanese side' representatives from those 3 organisations.

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Mr Hatton: More semantics.

Mr SMITH: Now he says it is semantics. To a large extent, this debate is centred around the question of what is semantic and what is not. But, Mr speaker, I put it to you that no rational person, with a sound knowledge of the English language, could come to any other conclusion if he read the Hansard of 29 April than that there was a study group and that, on the Japanese side, it comprised those 3 Japanese companies. To take the reverse of that, if those 3 Japanese companies were not there, the only conclusion available is that there was no study group or, at least, no representatives from Japanese companies on such a group. The Chief Minister does not have the option, after this statement, of saying
that the 3 Japanese companies may have some connection with the study group other than being members of it. He has tied himself very firmly indeed to the mast that they are quite clearly on the study group, and indeed comprise the study group so that, without them, it simply does not exist. Mr Speaker, he cannot get away from that basic position and that basic proposition.

Mr Speaker, let us have a look at the second part of the amended motion that we now have before us: 'and his continuing efforts to keep this Assembly informed of progress which has been made'. We have done really well there, haven't we! We know now that, on the most generous interpretation, he misled the Assembly on 29 April. He stated a position that was not true. We all know the damage that that has caused to our relations with those Japanese companies. We heard from the mouth of the Chief Minister himself that one of those 3 companies has been seriously concerned about the controversy over here and is having second thoughts about participating in the study group. I put it to the Chief Minister that this is his own fault. If, for his own political purposes, he wants to go around misstating the position of those companies, as he did on 29 April ...

Mr Hatton: I did not.

Mr SMITH: You did not? You did it on Territory Extra. Despite sending begging telexes to Japan in late May, you have not been able to get any confirmation from any of the companies that they see themselves as being part of the study group.

Mr Coulter: Says who?

Mr SMITH: Says me, and says the Chief Minister by his inability to produce any evidence. If he has received telex messages from the Japanese companies, and that would have to be a highly unlikely occurrence, he has failed to do what the second part of the amended motion invites us to support: to keep this Assembly informed of progress which has been made. I would have thought that, if there were telexes around - and I bet there are not - that as part of this continued effort to keep the Assembly informed of progress which has been made, we would have been advised of them today. It is quite clear that no telexes exist and that the Chief Minister, despite sending off his own begging telex, which I understand is some 24 pages long, has not been able to obtain any confirmation from the 3 Japanese companies that they are prepared to be members of the study group.

The amended motion says that 'this Assembly applauds the efforts of the Chief Minister and the government to promote the construction of a Darwin to Alice Springs railway and its continuing efforts to keep this Assembly informed of progress which has been made'. Quite clearly, this whole exercise has had the reverse effect. Looking at the matter objectively, this Assembly could not possibly applaud the efforts of the Chief Minister and the government. Their activities have had the reverse effect. They have made the job of getting the railway harder. They have lost the confidence of the people of the Northern Territory who no longer believe that it is possible to build the railway. The railway has become a joke to many people and the actions of this government in the last few weeks have reinforced that view.

Of course, the ramifications of the government's attitude are not restricted to the Northern Territory; they are international. This government has made it more difficult for itself and for other governments that will follow it to undertake discussions and negotiations with overseas companies. That is because this government has shown that it does not have even a basic understanding of how to conduct sensitive negotiations without embarrassing the people with whom it is negotiating. That is one of the worst and the most embarrassing features that has come out of this episode. Respective Northern Territory governments since 1978 have embarrassed us in a number of quarters. At least before now basically we have been able to confine the damage to the Northern Territory. This particular episode has
spread our unwanted reputation as cowboys in the negotiating field beyond our shores and into the international arena. Unfortunately, that will have a dramatic effect in the future and, as I said, it will make the railway a much harder task to achieve. Mr Speaker, the opposition is definitely not going to support this amended motion.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 16

Mr Collins  Mr Bell
Mr Coulter  Mr Ede
Mr Dale  Mr Lanhupuy
Mr Dondas  Mr Leo
Mr Firmin  Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Hanrahan  Mr Smith
Mr Harris  Mr Tipiloura
Mr Hatton  Mr Tuxworth
Mr McCarthy
Mr Manzie
Mr Palmer
Mr Perron
Mr Poole
Mr Reed
Mr Setter
Mr Vale

Noes 8

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