NORTHERN TERRITORY LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

First Assembly

Speaker
Majority Leader
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Local Government
Cabinet Member for Law
Cabinet Member for Resources
Cabinet Member for Community Services
Cabinet Member for Transport and Industry
Cabinet Member for Education and Planning

John Leslie Stuart MacFarlane
Godfrey Alan Letts
Grant Ernest Tambling
Elizabeth Jean Andrew
David Lloyd Pollock
Ian Lindsay Tuxworth
Roger Ryan
Marshall Bruce Perron

Members of the Legislative Assembly

George Eric Manuell
Rupert James Kentish
Ian Lindsay Tuxworth
Nicholas Dondas
John Leslie Stuart MacFarlane
Grant Ernest Tambling
James Murray Robertson
Paul Anthony Edward Everingham
Roger Michael Steele
David Lloyd Pollock
Roger Ryan
Alline Dawn Lawrie
Milton James Ballantyne
Ronald John Withnall
Elizabeth Jean Andrew
Roger William Stanley Vale
Marshall Bruce Perron
Hyacinth Tungutalum
Godfrey Alan Letts

Alice Springs
Arnhem
Barkly
Casuarina
Elsey
Fannie Bay
Gillen
Jingili
Ludmilla
MacDonnell
Millner
Nightcliff
Nhulunbuy
Port Darwin
Sanderson
Stuart
Stuart Park
Tiwi
Victoria River

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Government Printer of the Northern Territory
PART I

THE DEBATES
The Northern Territory (Administration) Act 1910

Legislative Assembly for the Northern Territory

Whereas, by Section 4M(1) of the Northern Territory (Administration) Act 1910, it is provided that the Administrator may prorogue the Legislative Assembly for the Northern Territory and may also appoint such times for holding the sessions of the Legislative Assembly as he thinks fit:

Now, therefore, I, John Armstrong England, the Administrator of the Northern Territory of Australia, in exercise of the powers conferred by the said Northern Territory (Administration) Act 1910, do, by this notice, prorogue the Legislative Assembly for the Northern Territory as on Friday, the twenty-fifth day of February, 1977 and appoint Tuesday, the first day of March, 1977 as the day for the Legislative Assembly to assemble and be held for the dispatch of divers urgent and important affairs and all members of the said Legislative Assembly are hereby required to give their attendance accordingly in the building known as the Legislative Assembly Chamber at Darwin at the hour of ten o'clock in the forenoon on the first day of March 1977.

Made under my Hand and Seal of the Northern Territory of Australia this eleventh day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven.

J.A. England
Administrator

First Assembly - Second Session

On Tuesday 21 December 1976, the Assembly adjourned until 10 am on Tuesday 1 March 1977. The Assembly was prorogued by His Honour the Administrator under the provisions of the Northern Territory (Administration) Act on 25 February until 1 March 1977. The second session commenced on that day.

Tuesday 1 March 1977

The Assembly met at 10 am pursuant to the notice of prorogation and appointment made by His Honour the Administrator.

The Acting Clerk read the notice.

Mr Speaker: I am informed that it is the intention of His Honour the Administrator to attend at the doors to the Legislative Assembly Chambers at the hour of 10.10 o'clock and it is my intention to present myself to him there. I shall be pleased if honourable members will accompany me.

Sitting resumed

Mr Speaker resumed the Chair at 10.17 am.

Dr Letts: Mr Speaker, His Honour the Administrator requests me to inform you that it is his pleasure to attend the Assembly now to declare the causes of his calling the Assembly together.

Mr Speaker: Will the Serjeant-at-Arms kindly inform His Honour that the Assembly is ready to receive him.

Administrator's Speech

His Honour the Administrator took the Chair, with Mr Speaker on his right hand. His Honour was pleased to deliver the following speech:

Mr Speaker and members, the calling together of this Legislative Assembly for a new session at this time is particularly appropriate. It is an Assembly vested with new powers following the enactment of Commonwealth and Territory legislation which, for the
Mr SPEAKER: I wish to inform honourable members that the Honourable Albert Evan Adermann, Commonwealth Minister of State for the Northern Territory, is within the precincts. With the concurrence of honourable members, I shall invite the Honourable Minister to take a seat on the floor of the Assembly.

Members: Hear, hear!

The Minister took a seat on the floor of the Assembly.

DELEGATION FROM THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT

The Serjeant-at-Arms announced the presence of a delegation from the Commonwealth Parliament.

Mr SPEAKER: I propose to the Assembly that, with its concurrence, the delegation be received at the Table.

Members: Hear, hear!

The members of the delegation took their seats at the Table.

The delegation comprised:

Senator the Honourable C.L. Laucke, President of the Senate
The Right Honourable B.M. Snedden, Q.C., Speaker of the House of Representatives
Senator J.B. Keefe
Senator S.F. Kilgariff
Senator E.A. Robertson
Mr S.E. Calder, M.H.R.
Mr S.A. Lusher, M.H.R.
Mr D.M. Blake, V.R.D., Deputy Clerk, House of Representatives
Mr K.O. Bradshaw, First Clerk-Assistant, the Senate

Mr SPEAKER: Mr President Laucke, Mr Speaker Snedden, and members of the delegation, on behalf of the Assembly, I extend to you a warm welcome. I understand that the joint leaders of the delegation have decided on this occasion that Mr Speaker Snedden will address the Assembly on behalf of the delegation. I would be grateful, Mr Speaker, if you would do so now.

Mr SNEDDEN: It is a pleasure for all the delegation to be in Darwin for this significant occasion. The President and I are honoured to lead the delegation from the Commonwealth Parliament. The delegation has no members who are strangers to the Territory. Three represent the Territory in the Parliament, and no more staunch or eloquent advocates of Territorians' interests exist. The others of the delegation are kindred spirits and friends of the people of the Territory. We are messengers bringing you the friendship, the goodwill and the encouragement of the Commonwealth Parliament.

You are not strangers to us. You, Mr Speaker, we have seen in Canberra on select committees of your Assembly and we have met you at Presiding Officers Conferences and hope to do so again in future.

Mr Majority Leader and Chief Secretary, you are a frequent visitor to Canberra and you have played a notable part in constitutional development, not only in the Territory but at the Australian Constitutional Convention. We have many colleagues and friends whom we meet as members of committees in international and regional conferences and seminars.

This is no mere courtesy visit constrained by formal niceties and protocol; this is an opportunity for parliamentary colleagues to congratulate you on a significant advance in parliamentary and democratic process. This Assembly is now responsible, through the Majority Leader and Chief Secretary and his Cabinet, for such things as constitutional development - I am not quite sure who sets the pace for that, but you have a responsibility - local administration through your own public service; husbanding and improving your own environment; local government and its finance; housing and town management; law and order; civil defence and emergency services; transport and communications; local industries and public works; educational planning; and community services, including welfare, recreation and consumer protection. These are the very essence of living and human relationships and the management will now be where it properly belongs - with the people and with you,
their elected representatives. This is just part of the continuing evolution of democracy - devolution in management of the affairs of people by their elected representatives. This is not "a great leap forward". What has happened can be seen only as a measured and orderly tread in the direction towards statehood.

Mr Speaker, we do not come bearing gifts as did the Greeks with such disastrous consequences for the Trojans. I am here to make a promise of a gift - and I do not want any wry smiles from Territorians about promises from Canberra, please. We thought it should be something in the tradition of parliamentary interests. We would have liked to have promised you a new and permanent parliament house but we thought perhaps we had better build our own first. We hope, however, that we will be invited to Darwin again to see a new parliament house that will be a focal point linking the two parts of the city. It occurred to us that it may be acceptable to the Assembly if we were to offer as a gift 2 dispatch boxes and we will hope that it will not be long before we will be in a position to offer a mace to the Assembly on the achievement of self-government and statehood in the Territory.

Mr Speaker, it has been a great honour to all delegation members to be here to mark the occasion of the opening of the second session of the first Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory. Through their representatives in the Commonwealth Parliament, the whole of Australia wishes you success in your deliberations, discretion in your judgement, and the achievement of the aspirations of the people of the Northern Territory.

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Mr SPEAKER: I call upon the honourable member for Gillen to move a motion of thanks to the delegation.

Mr ROBERTSON: I move that the following resolution be agreed to:

We, the members of the Legislative Assembly for the Northern Territory, in Assembly assembled, express our thanks to the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia in sending to us a distinguished delegation to attend the opening of the second session of the first Assembly. The presence of your delegation at a time of a significant constitutional development in the Territory is welcomed as a mark of the continuing regard of the parent legislature for the welfare of this institution. We reciprocate your warm greetings and expressions of goodwill and look forward to the continuation of a friendly association that has always existed between our respective Houses.

I note first of all, Mr Speaker Snedden, that you do not come, as you have pointed out, bearing gifts so that we need not be wary of you. Perhaps when you come next time and bring the dispatch boxes we may have cause to be wary of you.

The delegation before us has, as its joint leaders, the two highest ranking members that Parliament can send as a delegation. They send to us the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate.

Mr Speaker Snedden is no stranger to us in the Territory. Indeed, I recall the many visits you made, sir, as the Leader of the Opposition. In the process of that, you assisted us greatly and you made many undying friendships. Mr President Laucke, I have seen you in your Chamber and I thought, from my humble position as Chairman of Committees in this House, that your impartial conduct in that House was an example to us all. I welcome you both here very sincerely.

I turn now, to the two senators who are members of the Australian Labor Party. I welcome Senator Keeffe as Shadow Minister for the Northern Territory and Senator Robertson, I welcome you here as one of our opposing Territory members. I suppose that in your own way, Senators, you have a certain distinguishing feature - I speak in a spirit of levity - you are the first 2 members of the Australian Labor Party to pass through the Bar during a sitting of this Assembly. I daresay you will be doing your absolute best to ensure that you are not the last. You are welcome here.
Steve Lusher MHR comes to us and is welcome in his capacity as a member of the Government's Internal Committee on Federal Affairs. Mr Lusher has recently visited us in his capacity as a member of a subcommittee of that committee and he is very welcome back here. Indeed we hope, sir, that you and your colleagues on that committee come back again. I think that it is a most useful exercise and you are welcome in that capacity.

Mr Sam Calder MHR - what do I say in this Chamber about Mr Calder? He has devoted many years of service to the Northern Territory. It gives me great pleasure to welcome to this Chamber a man who has been of such inspiration to me. I have been a supporter of Sam's for a long time and now find myself in the position of speaking to him on the floor of this House. Sam, you are very welcome here.

Senator Bernie Kilgariff - again what do you say about Senator Kilgariff? We are not really welcoming him to the floor of this Chamber but welcoming him back to it. Senator Kilgariff was the first Speaker of this Assembly. It is significant that he comes back to us on this occasion when you bear in mind that he first came here on the first constitutional development of the Chamber. From my recollection, that was when he was originally elected. I extend to you, Senator, a very warm welcome.

Thank you all for coming, thank you for your kind words and I would also like to say thank you to your Clerks who have attended.

I cannot really close without mentioning, on an occasion such as this, the presence of Mr Justice Ward in the Gallery. I think that too is very significant.

Mrs Lawrie: I second the motion.

I see the presence of the members of the Commonwealth Parliament as the recognition, approval and endorsement by the people of Australia of our orderly constitutional development. This is a moment of unity, not division. It is a recognition that we are firstly and primarily Australians, a free people, governing our own destiny by a very democratic process. The Australian people through their representatives are present and wish us well and we thank them for their presence and approval.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr Speaker: With the unanimous concurrence of members, I declare the motion carried.

Mr Snedden: On behalf of the delegation, Mr Speaker, I would say we appreciate the opportunity to be here and may we now withdraw?

The delegation withdrew.

Minister's Speech

Mr Speaker: With the concurrence of members, I now invite the Honourable the Minister for the Northern Territory to address the Assembly.

Mr Adermann: This is indeed an important day in the constitutional history of the Northern Territory, marking as it does the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly in which the members have direct executive responsibility over a substantial number of state-type activities. Today sees the beginning of a process which will bring the Northern Territory to a situation of responsible self-government and ultimate statehood. This is a commitment which the Government made to the people of the Northern Territory when it was elected to office. It is a commitment which will be honoured.

Before addressing myself further to this important event, I take the opportunity to dispel rumours suggesting that the Government intends to mark time on the total re-establishment of Darwin and in the developmental progress of the Territory as a whole. There is no truth in these rumours; the Government is committed to the development of Darwin as a great city, to the progress of all other centres, and to the orderly development of the enormous resource potential of the Territory.

It is true that Territorians, and the
region, have had to share in the general economic problems that have beset Australia as a result of the worst world-wide economic climate since the great depression in the 1930s. It is not true that these difficult times have anything to do with a deliberate policy of containment of Darwin growth and NT development. Indeed, despite the difficult budgetary situation facing it, the Government consciously sought this financial year to ensure that adequate funds were provided to maintain the impetus of Darwin reconstruction and the development of the Territory generally. It has been, and it remains, our fullest intention to provide adequate funds, within the scope allowed by these still difficult but improving times, to meet the needs and aspirations of the Northern Territory. We are just as committed in this regard as we have proven to be on our promise to take the first real step towards the conferral of executive responsibility on the Legislative Assembly. While some here will not see today's important event in constitutional development as being as far-reaching as they would have liked, it is a major step. We have set in train an irreversible process which must inevitably lead to political autonomy for the Northern Territory.

Today's ceremony, as you all know, was rather abruptly and devastatingly postponed by Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Day of 1974. At this point, may I digress a little to pay tribute to the magnificent job done by the Darwin Reconstruction Commission.

On Christmas morning 1974, only 400 of Darwin's 8,700 homes were left substantially intact by Cyclone Tracy's winds. But, by the second anniversary of the devastation of Darwin, the DRC had completed 1,350 new homes and 150 flats; work had been done on other major government building projects; private residents, with the help of the Government's concessional home loan scheme, had built or rebuilt 1,800 homes, and the Northern Territory Housing Commission a further 500. Within 2 years, 3,650 homes had been built or rebuilt in addition to those restored to their pre-Tracy condition. We have witnessed a building effort unique in Australia's history. The Darwin Reconstruction Commission has been so effective in performing its task that it has proved possible to wind it up on 31 December next and revert to normal procedures for public works in the city from that date.

That said, here we are today in a city that is moving ahead very quickly towards complete reconstruction, in a Territory with an obviously great future, and it gives me great pleasure to know that this Legislative Assembly rose to the occasion through very difficult times. It is encouraging to note that the Assembly is pressing strongly for more responsibilities in the drive to ultimate statehood. The Government will cooperate with the Assembly in the orderly achievement of that goal.

This may be the point to recall the history of constitutional change or reform in more recent times. The Legislative Council was established in 1947 with power to make ordinances for the peace, order and good government of the Territory. The composition of the Council from then until 1959 was: the Administrator of the Northern Territory as President, 7 official or government appointed members and 6 elected members. In 1960, the Council was redesigned to provide some more influence from elected representation. The Administrator remained as President, there were 6 official members, 3 government appointed non-official members and 8 elected members. This situation again changed in 1966 when, from the same number of MLCs, the President was elected from non-official and elected membership. In 1968, the composition became 6 official and 11 elected members, and in 1974 the now Legislative Assembly was established with 19 elected members.

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It is fitting that tribute be paid to some of the major political figures of the past and present, people deeply involved in the move towards ultimate self-determination, to people like the first Northern Territory federal member, the late Harold Nelson, who fought his campaign on the catchcry: "No taxation without representation", to his
son Jock, who held the seat for 17 years after the war and, although on the other side of the political fence, did his job with great dignity. Representing the Territory since has been Sam Calder who is untiring in his efforts on behalf of the Territory and its people.

I pay tribute to the leader of the 6 elected members of the Legislative Council who fought to win changes in the 1950s - I refer to the then Mr Dick Ward, now His Honour Mr Justice Ward of the Northern Territory Supreme Court. Other names spring to mind - Senator Bernie Kilgariff, originally one of the government appointed non-official members who won popular support when he stood as the member for Alice Springs and who became one of the Northern Territory's first 2 senators; men like Ron Withnall MLA, still here and still independent and still pressing the cause of constitutional advancement; "blinkin' bods" like former MLC and Mayor of Darwin, Mr Tiger Brennan, who regularly used the phrase "the holy city" to describe Canberra; the late Fred Drysdale of that noted NT pioneering family; and the late Harry Chan, Chinese community leader and former President of the Legislative Council and Mayor of Darwin.

There are many more, including the official and appointed non-official members of the old Legislative Council. Time does not permit my mentioning them all by name but the Territory owes them all a debt of gratitude.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr ADERMANN: Looking to the future, I would remind you that the Government has set itself the target of progressively transferring to the Legislative Assembly Executive responsibility for all state-type functions within the next 3 to 4 years. In the coming financial year, the Legislative Assembly will determine the financial priorities to be accorded to the functions for which it is responsible - for the first time there will be a full scale budget in the Assembly.

Pending the transfer of other functions, the Government will continue to consult with and seek the advice of Executive Members in respect of those matters. We have established the essential framework for the further transfer of powers, including provision for Executive Members and the Northern Territory Public Service. A good deal more remains to be done.

In the coming months, the Government and the Legislative Assembly will turn their attention to the development of a separate fiscus for the Territory and the establishment of a Northern Territory Government as a legal entity. These complex matters will be given priority, as will the determination of an agreed timetable for the transfer of further powers to the Assembly.

Nobody can doubt that the Territory has a great and bright future and it is the Government's intention that the people's elected representatives should play their full role in the realisation of that future as dictated by your wishes and demands - the demands of the people of the Territory, the people of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Mr SPEAKER: On behalf of the Assembly, I thank the Honourable the Minister for his speech.

The Chair will be resumed at the ringing of the bells at approximately 2 pm.

Mr Speaker MacFarlane resumed the Chair at 2 pm and questions without notice were asked.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Dr LETTS: I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr STEELE: Question on notice number 1629 was directed to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Local Government. It concerned the contractor company in charge of the construction of the Timber Creek Police Station - a $600,000 to $700,000 job. The question asked whether it was true that the company was having financial difficulties; I was told that this company was having problems in carrying on the work down there. This is a pretty important facility in that area, we are all of
the opinion in this House that these isolated bush stations must have 2 policemen instead of one, and the construction of this police station is obviously a step in the right direction.

The question also asked whether the construction of Timber Creek Police Station was on schedule in keeping with the requirements of the Department of Construction and, if not, what the problems were and why there was a delay. I thought the question was important enough to put on notice and I am disappointed that the answer has not been forthcoming. I do not know what the system is in regard to questions unanswered for a certain time. Who is responsible for providing an answer? It is important that these departments do come back with this information. We will certainly find some way of re-directing the question or making sure that these people do provide some sort of information.

Mr VALE: Mr Speaker, I am very glad to see you looking a lot more like yourself. This morning, when you were all dressed up and looking so distinguished, you reminded me of a story about the fellow who had been away from home for so long that when he got back the dog bit him in the front yard, the kids started to cry and his wife phoned the police to say that there was a prowler in the yard.

The point I wish to raise concerns the serious and grave position of local business houses and firms in Alice Springs concerning payment by the Government for the supply of goods and services. The delays by the departments in paying for these goods and services has dragged, not into days, not into weeks, but into months. The position has become so critical that these small firms have had to go into heavy bank overdrafts to make ends meet while waiting for payments from the Federal Treasury. The position is so critical that I suggest there is only one method to shake the Government out of its lethargic payment of these accounts is for these firms to withhold their taxes.

Mr ROBERTSON: The new floor covering may have its advantages but I doubt that these chairs enhance that advantage. I cannot understand quite frankly why people insisted on keeping these things.

I would like to endorse the remarks of the honourable member for Stuart. I have been very closely involved in the difficulties of business houses in Alice Springs recently, in particular their difficulties in obtaining payment from the Government. I went public during the term of office of the Australian Labor Party and I made a comment to the press which was printed in the Centralian Advocate. I said that, until the Government paid its debts to the business people of Alice Springs, I would not pay my debts to the Government. I now reaffirm, and they can print it again that I will be paying nothing to the Government, on exactly the same basis as I have previously, until such time as the Government honours its commitments and its debts to the business people of my town. They are going out backwards and it is this, as much as anything else, that is causing it. The Government must accept ultimate responsibility for what its servants and officers do. The difficulty clearly is in the departments. Whether that is the result of the Government's control of finance or whether the Government is not receiving money in sufficient time to pay it out, I do not care. The fact of the matter is that in Wilkinson Street alone last week I was informed of the loss of 6 jobs. One of those firms that put 4 off have been owed $40,000 continually over 90 days. In a small company of local business people who have put their whole heart and soul into establishing a business, a small firm that started off in the back of a van and ended up employing 22 people, consumers in our town, those consumers are now losing their jobs and it is largely a result of cash flow difficulties.

There is another matter which I wish
to go into now. It is very serious and I start off by saying that the comments I am going to make are in no way whatsoever directed towards the Aboriginal people as a people. It is a situation which has developed and it has been debated in this House before; I refer to the report of the Parliamentary Committee on Alcoholism among the Aboriginal people which was debated here. I said at that time that we are unlikely to have any panaceas. We are unlikely in the present circumstances to come up with a cure although I hope we can. The honourable member for Barkly, in his capacity as Cabinet Member, is currently heading a liquor commission legislation proposal in which I am assisting him. Whether that is going to solve the problem, I do not know.

I have here a letter from Australian Pacific Tours Pty Ltd, addressed to Mr L.J.R. Underdown, Hotel Alice Springs, PO Box 5, Alice Springs NT 5750, and I have Mr Underdown's personal approval to read this letter to the House. It results from a letter he wrote to the company querying why, after many years of that company using his hotel for accommodation on tours, they have cancelled that arrangement. Their letter says:

Thank you for your letter of 11 January. I must apologise for not replying earlier, but I have been on leave until February. We regret the necessity for having to cancel the tour which was booked into your hotel over the New Year period, but unfortunately, due to circumstances apparently beyond your control, trouble with Aboriginals at the hotel has caused considerable alarm and discomfort to our passengers, to a point where we could have been guilty of misrepresentation in that we knowingly allowed the next party to stay at your hotel after the incidents which occurred on the previous tour, and the fact that there was no guarantee that all would be well for a second tour. I must point out that we would have placed ourselves in a very difficult situation in relation to the new Trade Practices Act if we had knowingly booked our party into your hotel after having made the statements in our brochure that we do with regard to checking of hotels and the high standards of the establishment we use. Unfortunately, complaints we have received from our passengers have left us with no alternative.

I can assure you that it is not a decision we came to easily. We realise that you, as well as ourselves, are in an awkward position. We do thank you for the assistance we have received from your hotel, staff, management and company over the years, and we hope that when the hotel recovers from its present problems, we will once again be in a position to make use of same.

The implications there for Alice Springs are very dire indeed. We are in a serious economic situation in Alice Springs. I believe in some areas that business exaggerates its difficulties and I also believe that a lot of business problems, from my own observations in Alice Springs, are the result of ineptitude in management and in many cases want of common courtesy. I am not generalising; there are only one or two firms involved in this, but you will always find that those firms do the most grizzling.

This is a letter from a major tour operator to a major hotelier in our town at a time when we desperately need tourism. We desperately need to encourage it. In fact it is at the moment one of the very few viable industries we have, although hopefully the cattle industry will pick up to some extent. I read the letter to honourable members to give us all an idea of the difficulties we face with the alcohol problem in respect of our Aboriginal people. What we can do about it, as I have said in this place before, I do not know. I am afraid that, when we came into this place, when we were elected by the people and were sworn in here, we were not given a magic wand at the same time as we took the oath.

Mr WITHNALL: I would like to say a few words this afternoon on the subject of town planning. I am aware that there is a proposal that town planning legislation will be introduced, but my particular comments this afternoon are
directed towards what I might call the subterfuges which the Darwin Reconstruction Commission are using in order to justify their retention of a very expensive and, I suggest, very useless, town planning staff. The Darwin Reconstruction Commission, under section 8 of the act, has the right to indulge in town planning schemes, but no town planning scheme can be put into operation until it has been properly advertised and has received the approval of the Minister. There has been some advertisement of some abortive proposals but in no case has the Minister approved of any town planning scheme. It would appear, however, that the Darwin Reconstruction Commission has received some advice that, because it has power under section 15 of its act to approve the sorts of buildings that may be erected, it may indulge in unlimited town planning by simply dealing with the types of buildings which can be erected on particular land. Nothing could be further from the truth. While I admit that the Darwin Reconstruction Commission may refuse to permit on a particular piece of land buildings to be erected which are within the existing town plan, it cannot approve of the erection of buildings on any land within the city of Darwin which are in excess of the town plan because the fact remains that, in the absence of a town plan approved under section 8 of the Darwin Reconstruction Act, the existing town plan is valid; it may not be denied and may not be contravened even by a body so august as the Darwin Reconstruction Commission.

I illustrate this by saying that in an area at the west end of Smith Street, around Beagle Street, an advertisement has appeared under the authority of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission proposing the erection of 6 or 8 blocks at least - and it may be more than that - of 6 storey flats. I discussed this matter with somebody concerned with town planning in the Darwin Reconstruction Commission and they claimed that, because they had authority to approve the erection of a building, they could change the town plan that way. Of course that is nonsense. They could, in a negative way, prevent anything being erected which was within the existing town plan but they cannot extend the power to approve the erection of a building against the town plan itself.

This is the sort of nonsense the Darwin Reconstruction Commission is now committing in order to hang on to the authority which it claims to have to do some town planning in the city of Darwin. Let us face it, the Darwin Reconstruction Commission has no power, none whatever, to do any town planning in the city of Darwin. It has power only to approve or disapprove of the erection of a building of a particular type.

I would like to go on to discuss the merits of the proposal which they have made with respect to the Beagle Street area, but I do not think time will permit. However, I would like to bring to the attention of honourable members and the public generally a further piece of monumental stupidity which the Darwin Reconstruction Commission and the Town Planning Board between them have committed. I am the executor of Eric Izod's estate. Eric Izod owned a piece of land on the Esplanade in Darwin which is next door to the present Naval Headquarters. That piece of land has been sold under a contract which is conditional upon the use of the land being rezoned for general business purposes. The buyers under the contract of sale approached, in my name, the Darwin Reconstruction Commission and the Town Planning Board simultaneously for permission to erect a business building which would require rezoning of the land to a general business zone.

The town planning section of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission, sitting with the members of the Town Planning Board, considered this application and said that it would allow the erection of the building. Then, so help me, the Town Planning Board went away and sat down on its own and refused to change the zoning.

Thus, we have a most ridiculous situation - it cannot be Catch 22; it has got to be Catch 23 surely. We have the ridiculous situation that the Darwin Reconstruction Commission town planning people, sitting with the Darwin Town Planning Board, have approved
of the erection of that building and the Town Planning Board has said that the land cannot be used for any purpose except residential A.

How silly can you get? What sort of a ridiculous situation have we been reduced to under governmental authority? The honourable member for Fannie Bay is a member of the DRC and I will ask him to have a look at this situation, to find out just exactly what is going on in the town planning section of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission and to instruct them that the Darwin Reconstruction Commission's operation in town planning never even started. They have not started, they cannot be used, and the continued employment of staff for town planning in the Darwin Reconstruction Commission is a complete waste of public money.

Mr. DONDAS: I rise to make some brief remarks about the 14th Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association that the honourable member for Ludmilla and myself attended with our Serjeant-at-Arms. The agenda items for the conference were vast and varied and one particular agenda item was "Aid". This was discussed mainly by the delegates from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Western Samoa and the Gilbert Islands and they directed their aid questions towards Australia and New Zealand. There was one gentleman there whose name was Sir Albert Henry and he was the Premier of the Cook Islands. Sir Albert Henry was deploring the lack of aid that the Cook Islands were receiving and mentioned that they were unable to build a new powerhouse. We are having powerhouse problems in Darwin, so that was not anything new to me. He attacked the New Zealand Government constantly for the whole 15 minutes that he was allowed to speak.

I was fortunate enough to take part in the conference but the thing that struck me about the speech that Sir Albert Henry made was that he was worried about going to the polls this year. He had promised the Cook Islands that he was going to obtain aid from New Zealand or Australia to build a new powerhouse. He had fallen down on his promise because he was unable to obtain the aid. He has probably got more relax-tions in the Parliament of the Cook Islands than anywhere else in the world so his position in the Cook Islands is very secure. Nevertheless, he was concerned that, because he was unable to obtain the aid from either Australia or New Zealand, he was letting the Cook Islands down.

Finally, it was my turn to speak and I jumped to my feet and assured Sir Albert Henry that members of this Legislative Assembly were also having problems, especially those in the Darwin area. I told him that we were having power disputes, power breakdowns, turbine breakdowns, that our telephones were running hot every time the power went out and our electors were ringing us up and asking what we were doing about it. I said we also were worried about an election.

Mr. Withnall: Water or power?

Mr. DONDAS: Water and power. Everybody seems to be having problems, but we seem to single out Darwin and keep on saying, "What kind of place are we living in? We have terrible water and we have no power". Everybody seems to get very excited. But I am saying that there are other parts of the country that are experiencing a lot of problems with their water supply and with their power supply. We should maybe take a stand now and have a little bit of patience and work towards a goal within the next 2 or 3 years to overcome the problems we are faced with now.

Mr. Withnall: You have given in.

Mr. DONDAS: I have not given in.

There was a delegate from Fiji and he was the mayor of Ba. Whilst he was on his feet he told a joke about a cyclone in his area during which a goat was killed. The parish priest came along to the mayor and said, "Mr Mayor, I have a dead goat; I am giving it to you for disposal". The mayor said to the parish
priest, "That is not my job; you are the priest and it is your job to bury the goat". The parish priest replied: "Yes, I will bury the goat but I am inviting the next of kin".

Mr Ryan: Ha, ha!

Mr DONDAS: I am glad you saw the point.

The conference itself was carried out in a very friendly manner and both the honourable member for Ludmilla and myself as well as our Serjeant-at-Arms enjoyed our stay. The South Australian branch of the CPA made every endeavour to make sure that we were happy and content.

I asked a question earlier of the Cabinet Member for Education and Planning: "Why was the airconditioning in government offices left on over the weekend?" I did not really hear his reply because it was a little bit waffled, maybe because of the new seating arrangements or he was not quite clear in his pronunciation, but he said that they did not have anybody to go around and turn the things off. We sit out there in the northern suburbs and there is not a day or a weekend goes by when we do not have the power go off for an hour or 2 hours.

Mr Perron: Rubbish!

Mr DONDAS: Rubbish!

Mr DONDAS: I challenge the honourable member outside the House to prove that statement, Mr Speaker. I will not go into it now because there is no way in the world that he could win that argument and I would only be wasting every member's time here.

I am saying that while we have government offices here in town, Block 1, Block 2, Block 8, Block 5, Block 6 with power on at the weekend, there are people out in the northern suburbs who maybe could have power if it was turned off in town. On Friday night, they knock off at 4.21. On Saturday and Sunday there are something like 52 hours with power on in town and we have power off out there for 2 hours because they are shedding. You do not get this in Katherine, Mr Speaker, but we get it in the northern suburbs. In the northern suburbs we have 20,000 people. The Cabinet Member says, "Rubbish". I would like him to come out to the northern suburbs and spend 48 hours and see what the residents of the northern suburbs go through.

A lady rang me up from Howard Springs the other day. Over a 30 hour period she had only had 10 hours of power. That appeared in the NT News on Thursday. Her name is Mrs Harris. She rang me up and she was quite irate. She said, "Our power has been off. We have had 10 hours of power in 30 hours. We have food in the fridge and I have got a baby to feed. What can you do about it?" I told her there was nothing very much I could do except ring Bishop Street and ask what the problem was. Mrs Harris said, "I can do that, I can find out the information". She was quite irate and she hung up. I was quite disturbed. I did not have a chance to find out where Mrs Harris lived in Howard Springs and what the story was, but nevertheless I rang Mr Redmond, the Director of Works, and said, "Look, this is a phone call that I have had, what can you do about it?" Eventually, about a half hour later, I got another phone call from somebody else, from the ESU or Bishop Street, and I think that Mrs Harris' problem was finally organised. But what I am trying to say is that if we are going to waste power in the city areas then we should not have any shedding out in the northern suburbs.

Another area of concern I have is that the ESU and the day labour force have an argument. I feel for them because there have been some people in the day labour organisation who have been employed here for 5, 10 or 15 years. They are asking for accommodation. That is not too much to ask when you consider that these bobs who come up from Canberra or Sydney and are going to be here for only 2 years have everything laid on. They do not want to be part of our community, but they are coming up here and are going to work up here for a couple of years; they are going to save a few bob and then buzz off. But we have had people working in the day labour force for 5 and 10 years and they do not get any consideration as far as accommodation is concerned. I
feel that they have every justification to take the action they are taking. However, now we have something like $9.5m worth of homes sitting vacant in the northern suburbs and we have had people living in cyclone-damaged houses and in caravans or demountables for 18 months. Their Christmas wish for 1976 was to get into a house. Some people had over 40 points and they were high on the priority list to move into accommodation for Christmas, but because of this dispute they were unable to and they were forced to face another Christmas in the old caravan or the old demountable or even under the old wet floor boards.

You would not stand for it, Mr Speaker, and I would not stand for it, but nevertheless these people have no alternative. They are faced with the situation whereby they must stay in that accommodation. They cannot afford to pay $60 a week for a flat or $90 per week for a house, and they are just not available. This dispute should have been settled well and truly by now. We ask questions of various Cabinet Members about what is happening but nobody seems to know. It is about time somebody got up off his backside and made some decision so that those 240 or 250 homes can be connected up and people can move out of substandard accommodation and into good accommodation.

Mr POLLOCK: I have 2 matters that I want to raise today. The first concerns the sewerage farm situation at Alice Springs. We had planned this year to spend $105,000 for additional pondage. Tenders were to be called a month or so ago and work was to be done this financial year. The problem of pumping the excess sewage or letting it flow over into the swamp from down the creek would have been overcome. Some thinking people decided that it would be possible to use the excess water in a lucerne growing project on land beside the sewage pond area and thus save the expenditure of some of this $105,000. However, nobody seems to want to make up his mind about the matter; decisions are still to be made on the matter. The Minister wrote that he has departmental fellows looking into this. The $105,000 is not being spent on the pond and no decision is being made in relation to the lucerne growing. An end result will be that no money at all will be spent and the swamp will be added to considerably with sewage waste breeding more mosquitoes. It is time that those responsible took some firm action to overcome the problem. It is a problem that is on-going as the town of Alice Springs grows. There will be an increased amount of sewage and waste water to be disposed of.

The other matter I wanted to refer to concerns the Australian Broadcasting Commission services to the Northern Territory. Members will recall that last year I alluded to this matter and said that I had called on the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, Mr Robinson, to institute an inquiry into a number of aspects of the service in the Northern Territory. The Minister replied saying that he did not really consider an inquiry necessary, but he did advise, quoting his letter: "Again I must emphasise that the commission and the Government are aware of the deficiencies in the service provided by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in the Northern Territory. As soon as resources permit, I expect that the commission will quickly move to improve the situation". They are moving quickly to improve the situation because for the last 18 months or so the position of talks officer here in Darwin to service the whole Northern Territory has been vacant, and nothing has been done, as far as I can see, about replacing that officer or improving the service. We have 2 rural officers here at the ABC who provide the service for the whole of the Northern Territory; one is about to go on 3 months' leave, and as soon as he comes back, the second one goes on 4 months' leave. So, effectively, for 7 months there will be one rural officer instead of the 2 who are needed to provide a service to the rural community of the Northern Territory, and still no talks officer to provide a service which Territorians are entitled to in relation to their community affairs.

I hope that the new chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission will take some positive action to remedy the situation which the Government admits exists, that the service provided by
ABC radio and television to the Northern Territory is quite unsatisfactory and needs improvement. One would hope that this will be forthcoming in the immediate future.

Mr BALLANTYNE: I rise in this adjournment debate to convey to the House a few things which are affecting my electorate, but before doing so, I would like to pay tribute to you, Mr Speaker, and your staff for the work that has been done on the Assembly Chamber.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr BALLANTYNE: I have watched the progress over the last few weeks and I think there has been a magnificent effort put in by the workmen who did the job. It was really an eye-opener to me when I saw it and I would like to convey my thanks, and I am sure everyone here, by the "hear, hear s", would wish to say the same thing.

My first subject today is one of maintenance of schools in the Northern Territory. I am sure that every member has problems with the same thing in his electorate. It is a continuing problem and I do not know why it is. Malcolm Fraser said in 1975 that we were going to have better management to tighten up the economy and he would manage the money and the nation's affairs in the best possible way. I know he is not a miracle-man to wave a wand, but somewhere along the line in the government departments there are people, I would say, who deliberately try to sabotage the system. I refer, as did the honourable member for Gillen today, to payment to contractors who take out government contracts to do certain works of maintenance; I am sure that somewhere along the line there is a deliberate sabotage effort to cause chaos, not only to the department itself but to the people who are called in to do jobs.

I mention this because I happen to know one of the contractors in Nhulunbuy and I recently asked him how business was. He said, "I have been doing a bit of contract work for the Government, repairing schools". Some of the maintenance work there had built up, so they got him to do a certain job. He said he was not going to take on another one because he would go broke; he was not being paid.

I do not know why, when you take out a contract, you cannot get paid for it. We buy something, we buy a car, we buy household goods, we buy a house, we have a commitment and we have to pay. Somehow or other within the government service it is always computer problems: "The program broke down". They have the most sophisticated equipment you can buy anywhere. I have seen some of the equipment and I happen to be a little bit knowledgeable in this field - but for some reason or other they cannot pay their bills. You cannot tell me that they have not got the money, that is a lot of nonsense because the money is available. A contract has been taken out and it has been fulfilled by the contractors but for some reason or another, when they come around to getting paid for the job, there is no money available or the department is still processing it.

I just thought that I would draw your attention to that because I know how the member for Gillen and the member for Stuart feel about these things. I am sure that all the other members of this Assembly have the same problems. I do not know why. Management has grown this day from one foot wide to a kilometre wide. I am sure that in management today there is chaos. I only know one thing about management: when you pay something for goods you receive them and if you are not happy with the goods you return them or you come to some understanding.

There seems to be a different system of operating the programs for the maintenance of schools than when I was in the industry. There is no preventive maintenance scheme. A plan can be drawn up for every school, for every building, the same as this building here, where you have a monthly check up; inspectors come around and check up on these things and find out whether the taps are leaking or whether there is a blind broken or a window catch not operating. It seems to me that they wait until everything happens at once. A perfect example of this exists at the
Dhupuma College just out of Nhulunbuy. I went out there the other day and I was absolutely appalled at what I saw. I had been out there before but they had not been pointing these things out to me. They said they were having trouble getting this done and getting that done. There was a young chap kill­ed out there last year. He was electro­cuted. He plugged into a general pur­pose outlet; he went up on the roof, grabbed hold of an electric drill on an iron roof and was electrocuted. I went out there the other day and that same general purpose outlet still had a safety tag on it. I do not know whether it had been checked. Through somebody I know, I tried to get it fixed up and I believe they have checked it out. Those are the sorts of things that really worry me.

There was $15,000 spent checking up on the electrical system out there. The principal told me that the security lights did not work after they had spent the $15,000. Surely they were working before. I could go out there with 2 or 3 people and I would have that thing operating in an afternoon but, for some reason or another, they bring up all these stories that they have not got the money. I am sure that a lot of the trouble is that the work­ers have not got the tradesmanship behind them. I am worried about the people who are doing these jobs. There were 2 driers and one brand new industrial washing machine sitting out in the weather; they have been there for 2 years in a crate. I guarantee that if you took those units out of the boxes you would have to spend something like $2,000 or $3,000 to get the machines to operate because they will probably be full of water and rusted out. These are the sorts of things that I worry about.

I bring this to the attention of the Assembly because, somewhere along the line, I am sure that there is sabotage going on. I only hope that some sense will reign in regard to the planning of the maintenance of schools and govern­ment buildings and that the proper people will be given the money to do it in a more methodical way than it has been done in the past. I could go to every place in the Territory and find all sorts of problems with buildings because people are too lazy to do the job or they leave it go to next day or they say they have not got enough money. I do not believe that. I just bring that to members' attention because I know that it concerns all of us.

Today I asked the Executive Cabinet Member for Law about a police boat. This is one of these things that go on and on and on. There will come a time when I might have to report to this Assembly that someone has drowned in a boating accident because there was no police boat at Nhulunbuy. I was told I should check with the company out there. I do not know what the company has to do with it; I asked about a police boat. However, I will find that out and will probably trace it. They may be playing a little game with me and will say: "When you get there, you will probably find that there is a boat". I only hope, when they do buy a boat, that it is seaworthy because we have pretty high seas out there at times. We do not want a little motor boat to putt putt around in the har­bour; we want something to go out to sea in case of emergency. We want to have it equipped with the proper emerg­ency gear and also a spare outboard engine.

I asked a question in this House last year about the surroundings of the government buildings in Mitchell Street. I see that some work has been carried out but I was told that it was supposed to be finished in November last year. We are now into the month of March and that work is still not com­pleted. I do not know who is doing the job. It seems to me that they are doing the job quite methodically, but the time they have taken to do it astounds me.

A member: What about the cost, $110,000?

Mr BALLANTYNE: I am no gardener and I am no landscaper, but that job has taken so far something like 9 months. I do not know who was organising it; I think it was the DRC but I do not know who the officer in charge was. I am glad that I am not working in private enterprise with him because, manage­ment-wise, he has a lot to learn.
I asked the Cabinet Member for Transport privately about Aboriginal people who work in industry in isolated areas. Some of them are sometimes held back in their employment because they have not got the educational background, they cannot read or write. It was drawn to my attention recently that one Aboriginal lad had let his licence expire; he had a C class licence. Now, the licence has expired and he cannot pass the test because he is unable to read the questions that are asked for that C class licence. I believe he got the C class licence in the early days when the regulations were not as tough. I only hope that we could give some consideration to the Aboriginal people in the isolated areas. Perhaps we might be able to do it through the Administrator's Council and give them, say, a restricted licence, a licence to operate in a certain area, not in the towns or townships but in an outback area where you do not have the same problems — you have not got road signs and lights and all that sort of thing.

It is a problem that concerns me and I only hope that other members will discuss this with me because I am sure that we may be able to help the Aboriginals in their employment. Driving vehicles is something that they can do quite capably. But you have got to pass all sorts of quiz tests these days. They seem to be in the C class licence test particularly, and these people are just unable to read or write. There have been language papers put out for the Aboriginals but they cannot even read their own language. They know their own language to speak it but they cannot read it and they cannot write it. I only hope that we can in some way try to rehabilitate some of the Aboriginal people in this way.

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, as the honourable member for Nhulunbuy has remarked, in the last 3 or 4 weeks a remarkable transformation of this Chamber has been accomplished. I am greatly impressed, and I know most members are also, by the vastly improved appearance of the Chamber and the provision of better facilities. It is my intention to write a congratulatory letter to the Director of Construction, Mr George Redmond, with particular reference to the efforts exerted for the successful completion of the job by Mr Mackenzie, Assistant Associate Director, General Works, and the Chief Designer, General Works, Mr Drewes. The cooperation from all sections of the Department of Construction and the contractors involved in the work was excellent.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.