it certainly was not built for parliamentarians. All of us have families and a large continent such as ours presents transport difficulties. I feel that we should give serious consideration to changing the sitting hours of the Parliament and that we should sit for longer periods during the year. I personally resent sitting after about 10 p.m. or 10.30 p.m. Like most of us, I am endowed with reasonable health but I find that the day becomes tedious at about that hour and I feel that we cannot possibly carry out our duties properly. I believe that we observe the present hours to meet the administrative convenience of the Cabinet and that we are conducting the legislative discussion and consultative processes of this Parliament during whatever time is left after the Ministry has dealt with its files. I do not think that we spend enough time on legislation. I feel that the answer to this is in the committee system.

I was a member of the Select Committee on Grievances of Yirrkala Aborigines about 3 or 4 years ago and there were three or four members from each side of the chamber on the Committee. We started from different ends of the solar system, the stellar system or the political system in our views but after consideration we arrived at the same conclusions. One of the interesting features to me was the fact that as soon as one of the members of that Committee became the Minister for Territories—I refer to the honourable member for McPherson (Mr Barnes)—he became the private possession of his Department. Although he had signed a recommendation late in 1963 that there should be a standing committee on aborigines, in early 1964 when we approached him as the Minister for Territories regarding the proposed committee he said that we did not need it now as we had a department to handle the matter. Why did he have more faith in his Department than he had in his colleagues? In that way we were removed again from the field of decision, the field of consultation, and the Minister became the public relations officer for his Department.

We have plenty of evidence in this Parliament on how committees can work. I think that the Public Accounts Committee functions smoothly and I think the Public Works Committee functions smoothly. Perhaps those two Committees should do a little more, but there are limits to what people can do. I believe that there could be countless more committees. There are lots of fields in which Ministers, if they have any faith in this institution, could call upon members of Parliament for assistance. Take the integration of the Services for example. It is not a controversial political issue but it is something to which members of this Parliament could turn their attention. Then there are certain developments in the field of education, such as the national matriculation standard, which we could examine. There are plenty of opportunities to consider matters free of the ordinary biases that are created by ordinary departmental procedures. I believe that we must change to fit into the important, democratic and literate society that we represent. As I say, I am not too sure what these changes will mean but I do believe our standing orders have to be made more flexible so that more members from the back benches on both sides of the House can play a part. This is probably step one. Secondly, the hours of sitting have to be rationalised in the interests of the health of the people concerned. Thirdly, the resources behind the Parliament—the Library, the secretarial typing service and so on—have to be adequate to meet the task that each one of us is required to perform.

I hope that honourable members from both sides of the House will remember that this Parliament is probably one of the most effective democratic institutions in the world if it is made to work properly and that Australia is a stable, secure society. This is one of the places in which experimental development in parliamentary work can be carried out without fear of damaging the administrative and political system of the nation.

Progress reported.

Sitting suspended from 5.59 to 8 p.m.

ABORIGINALS—GOVERNMENT POLICY

Ministerial Statement

Mr HAROLD HOLT (Higgins—Prime Minister)—by leave—Mr Speaker, I wish to inform the House of certain decisions that the Commonwealth Government has taken in respect of Aboriginals following the referendum in May of this year and subsequent discussions with the States.
Before doing so, may I briefly remind honourable members of the two changes that have been made in the Constitution and the reasons for them?

Section 127 of the Constitution has been repealed. This section provided that, in reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, Aboriginal natives should not be counted. The framers of the Constitution had, as their principal reason for including this section in the Constitution, the practical difficulty of counting the Aboriginal population at that time. In 1900 this was a very substantial problem. Today, however, the facilities for including Aboriginals in a census are greater and the need for the section no longer exists. This was the first change.

The second change has been the deletion of the words 'other than the aboriginal race in any State' from paragraph xxvi of section 51. Section 51 (xxvi) of the Constitution formerly read:

'The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:

(xxvi) The people of any race, other than the Aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.'

This part of the Constitution had been framed as a protection for Aboriginals but a belief had developed that it was discriminatory and, while the Government considered this to be erroneous, the belief persisted.

It was felt therefore that the words in question should be removed and this has now been done. One effect of omitting the words has been to confer upon the Commonwealth a power to make special laws for the people of the Aboriginal race in any State if the Parliament considers it desirable or necessary. This is what we call a concurrent legislative power. In other words, it is now possible for the Commonwealth Parliament to legislate, but it does not mean that the States automatically lose their existing powers. There has been, and there is, no intention on the part of the Commonwealth that authority should be, as it were, wrested from the States.

The public voted overwhelmingly in support of these changes and the Government took steps to recognise the implications of that vote. In my second reading speech on the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) Bill 1967 on 1st March of this year, I said that, if proposals relating to Aboriginals were approved, the Government 'would regard it as desirable to hold discussions with the States to secure the widest measure of agreement with respect of Aboriginal advancement'.

Commonwealth and State Ministers directly concerned with Aboriginal affairs met in Perth on 21st July for their normal biennial meeting. My colleague, the Minister for Territories (Mr Barnes), represented the Commonwealth Government. A wide ranging discussion took place on policy and administrative matters relating to Aboriginals. There was a general agreement among the States on their relationship with the Commonwealth in these matters and there will be, of course, further consultations in the future. A report on the meeting recently held will be made to the House by my colleague, the Minister for Territories, I believe at the conclusion of what I now have to say.

I would stress at this point that, while the Commonwealth Parliament is now in a position to make laws and to prevail should a conflict arise with the States, the Commonwealth does not seek to intrude unnecessarily in this field, or into areas of activity currently being dealt with by the States. There is a big variation in circumstances and needs of Aboriginals in the different States, as all honourable members who have made a study of this matter, will readily agree. For this reason, administration has to be on a regional—or State—basis if it is to be effective. This is the only practical way of ensuring that Aboriginals receive direct attention and assistance.

The Government believes that the needs of Aboriginals should continue to be kept in their true perspective as predominantly social problems and not magnified or misrepresented to suggest that the problems are racial. The Government also believes that it is not right to say that the Commonwealth and the States have done little in the past for Aboriginals. A great deal has been done by Australian governments in recent years and I will say more on this point later.
The prime function of the Commonwealth, in the light of these changes to the Constitution, will be to carry out a policy co-ordinating role. The Commonwealth will not assume the responsibility for administration which is largely with the States, except in those areas like the Northern Territory where we already have a direct commitment. There will be a significant advantage in policy co-ordination and this should facilitate the sharing of experience by the Commonwealth and the States in the interests of our Aboriginal citizens. It will also allow us to keep the Aboriginal question properly in its perspective in our international relationships.

To achieve this objective, the Government proposes to establish an Office of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra. Its task will be to co-ordinate policy and to provide the machinery necessary for joint consultations as the need arises with the States and with relevant Commonwealth departments. The new Office will draw on the experience of the Department of Territories and have its assistance in any administrative support which may be needed. The Office itself, however, will come within the Prime Minister's Department. It will thus come under my own administration and have a central status as the Commonwealth agency co-ordinating policy affecting Aboriginals. This arrangement will facilitate communication between the Premiers of the States and myself on Aboriginal matters, and further it will provide a special avenue of communication with the Government by Aboriginals themselves or by organisations representing them.

The Commonwealth will make appropriate financial provision required by the policies and particular decisions adopted in the future by the Commonwealth either on its own initiative or arising out of Commonwealth and State consultation. We will also continue the present practice of making financial provision for Aboriginal advancement through its Departments of Territories and Interior where our direct responsibilities are concerned and to the States in the general context of Commonwealth-State financial arrangements. Through the Department of Health we will conduct special health surveys and campaigns among Aboriginals, as we have in the past, in co-operation with the States. We will continue to finance the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies through the Department of Education and Science. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs will be able to exercise a valuable co-ordinating role in all these matters. These Government activities, Commonwealth and State, have been strongly and effectively supported by church missions and by many voluntary organisations throughout Australia. This devoted work, I am confident, will continue.

The Commonwealth has already done much in its own right to advance the welfare of the Aboriginals as members of the Australian community. I pay tribute to the States for what they have done in their own fields. At the same time, I commend to your notice the work and results achieved by our own Department of Territories which, for a number of years now, has accepted tasks beyond the normal limits of its responsibilities in Aboriginal welfare.

The Government long ago established a policy of assimilation as the proper policy for Aboriginals. At a conference of Ministers in 1965, the definition of assimilation was revised to read as follows:

The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal decent will choose—

I emphasise the words 'will choose':

to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community—enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibility and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians. Any special measures taken are regarded as temporary measures, not based on race, but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance, and to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their social, economic and political advantage.

The word 'assimilation' is often misunderstood. There is nothing mandatory or arbitrary about it and it does not mean interbreeding with the avowed objective of eventually eliminating the Aboriginal physical features or Aboriginal culture. It may be that this will happen but if it does it is a matter of individual decision and not of policy. Assimilation means that the Aboriginals can be similar to other citizens, not, of course, in looks, but with regard to all the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. Our aim is to help the Aboriginals to become an integral part of our Australian community life.
The Aboriginal population in Australia is increasing and some forecasts suggest that the number might double by the end of the century. The Aboriginal population in Australia is now a little over 130,000. It is made up of 44,600 full blooded Aboriginals, 77,500 part Aboriginals and 8,000 Torres Strait Islanders. There is, as honourable members know, the widest range of social levels in our Aboriginal population. There are nomads—a few only now—living an utterly primitive life remote from civilisation. There are some living a tribal existence and some living an urban existence. There are others at all stages of advancement between this and full participation in the life of the wider Australian community as fully assimilated citizens. It is wrong perhaps to put a money value on what we are doing for Aboriginals but at least some figures will give evidence that what we are doing is increasing in scale. Last year the Commonwealth and the States spent $21m specifically on Aboriginal advancement and this year the figure will be higher. Our own figure is significantly higher and we await the States Budget provisions, but we know they will be higher. In 1944 Australian Governments were spending just under $500,000, so there has been a very big and important increase in expenditure—from less than $500,000 to $21m.

The Commonwealth has already provided $4,500,000 for Aboriginal advancement this year—a 27% increase on expenditure last year. There are other less visible areas of Government assistance to Aboriginals because, as citizens, they benefit in the normal way like other Australians from the services provided by various Government Departments.

In the last few years the Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory legislatures have been active in progressively removing all discriminatory legislation from the relevant Acts of Commonwealth and State Parliaments and, therefore, direct benefits are not as readily identifiable as they were in the past.

It is sometimes thought that the bulk of the problems arising in connection with Aboriginals will disappear provided money is made available on a large scale. This approach does not sufficiently recognise the fact that many of the problems are psychological and social in character and that the expenditure of money that is not directed to solutions based on assured practical foundations will not resolve, but may accentuate, some of the problems.

Assimilation as we have defined it is two-way, requiring adjustment in outlook and a sympathetic understanding on the part of citizens both of European and Aboriginal race in the community. In the legal and formal sense none of the opportunities open to Australians generally are closed to Aboriginals. What is needed in many cases is help which will equip the Aboriginal, by education and in every possible way, and in their outlook, to avail themselves of these opportunities. To attain our goal, patience, persistence and understanding are essential. What we are doing will not mean that Aboriginals, as citizens, will lose their identity, their pride of race and their culture. It will mean that, through successive generations, cultural adjustments will take place—as they do in every society the world over—and that our Aboriginals will grow, without any enforced transition, into the national environment in which they live.

**ABORIGINAL WELFARE**

**Ministerial Statement**

Mr BARNES (McPherson—Minister for Territories)—by leave—The Prime Minister (Mr Harold Holt) has stated the Government's intentions regarding the Commonwealth's participation in Aboriginal affairs. He mentioned the conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers responsible for Aboriginal welfare, held in Perth on 21st July under the chairmanship of the Hon. E. H. M. Lewis, MLA, Minister for Native Welfare in Western Australia. With the concurrence of honourable members I incorporate in Hansard the following statement which gives in some detail an account of the proceedings of the conference.

A conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs was held in Perth on 21st July under the chairmanship of the Honourable E. H. M. Lewis, M.L.A., Minister for Native Welfare in Western Australia. A list of those present is attached to this statement.
The Perth conference had before it the Prime Minister’s statement in the second reading speech on the Constitution (Aboriginals) Alteration Bill that if the referendum were successful, the Commonwealth would regard it as desirable to hold discussions with the States to secure the widest measure of agreement with respect to Aboriginal advancement. The State Ministers formulated a common approach by the States for consideration by the Commonwealth. This reads as follows:

1. As a consequence of the referendum result, Aboriginal affairs should now be seen as having been expanded into a joint Commonwealth-State responsibility; the problems of the Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal people from State to State and within each State are, however, so diverse that for so long as can be seen the interests of Aborigines and part-Aborigines will be best served when some agencies are maintained by State authorities within the context of overall policies as agreed between the States and Commonwealth.

2. This conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers be reconstituted as the Australian Aboriginal Affairs Council to meet at least annually and that there be a Standing Committee of officers to meet as necessary.

3. The Commonwealth be requested to establish a small permanent secretariat to service the Council and the Standing Committee.

4. Each State to formulate an overall programme of priority measures related to specific advancement targets, with each State undertaking consultation with representative Aborigines to the fullest extent appropriate. Such programmes should be prepared as soon as possible and then discussed at a special meeting of the Australian Aboriginal Affairs Council with a view to the formulation of a joint Commonwealth-State programme for advancing the welfare of Australian Aborigines and part-Aborigines.

I agreed to convey the views of State Ministers to the Commonwealth Government. The statement that has just been made by the Prime Minister has indicated the action which the Commonwealth proposes to take. The conference at Perth made a review of Aboriginal affairs throughout Australia. Some of the progress noted by those participating in the Perth conference was as follows:

Legislative changes to remove discriminatory and protective provisions applicable to Aborigines by reasons of their race are virtually complete.

In 1966-67 Australian Governments spent almost $15,000,000 directly on Aboriginal welfare. When another $5,000,000 or $6,000,000 is added to allow for the costs incurred by Education, Health, Housing and Social Service Departments in relation to Aborigines, it appears that some $21,000,000 annually is being expended on Aboriginal advancement.

Efforts are continuing to expand and train welfare staffs. Throughout Australia there is now 1 full-time member of Government and mission staffs to every 70 Aborigines and part-Aborigines.

Special housing programmes are being extended, both by construction by welfare authorities and an increasing number through normal community housing schemes.

Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal children are responding to encouragement to stay at school longer.

Greater emphasis is being placed on vocational training and employment opportunities and on advice and assistance in family living where required to help families to make the difficult transition from ‘fringe dwelling’ to life as part of the community.

More staff, more money, new institutions and programmes can only go part of the way towards resolving all the varied problems in this field. Acceptance of Aborigines and part-Aborigines on the part of the community and personal encouragement to them are needed. Response by the Aboriginal people themselves is another essential element of real progress. The efforts of all three, the Aboriginal people, the community and Governments need to be welded together if we are to have a satisfactory result. Ministers at the Perth conference considered that there were hopeful signs in respect of all three elements. They believed that it was not realistic to think that the social changes involved could be made in a short space of time. Continued and accelerated progress was the requirement and is in prospect.

No change was made at the Perth conference to the common objective of assimilation accepted by all Australian Governments since 1951. The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community—enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians. The Conference went a considerable distance in formulating agreed policy statements in a number of fields. These are covered under the main headings below.

Training and Employment: Conference recognised the key importance of adequate training and employment opportunities for the advancement of Aborigines and supported special programmes to these ends where existing programmes had not been fully effective. Ministers considered that advancement in other fields needs to be matched by the economic advancement of Aborigines. In remote areas real problems are being encountered in providing suitable or enough employment opportunities for Aborigines and it is not easy for the Aborigines to move or adjust to areas of greater opportunity. It was agreed that more work is needed to assess employment potentials and stimulate employment opportunities.

Conference supported equality under awards and equality of wages and employment conditions for Aborigines and would regard it as proper for welfare administrations where necessary to take an active role in assisting Aborigines to obtain those conditions. In many cases there will be a need for the welfare administration to advise young people on job opportunities, assist them in obtaining proper placement and keep in touch with them when they have been placed. It was
agreed that employment conditions appropriate to normal industry should not necessarily apply to areas where Aborigines are in a training or relief situation.

Business Undertakings: Conference recognised that the advancement of Aborigines should be considered not only in terms of their becoming wage and salary earners in the community, but also in their taking up avenues of self-employment or business undertakings. These developments should be fostered wherever possible. Conference drew attention to the value of the continuing development of individual business and corporate enterprises conducted by Aborigines and affirmed that the further development of such projects would continue to be encouraged by advice and financial assistance where appropriate. As well as special arrangements, such enterprises have access to the normal banking and financial arrangements and where applicable, incentives for industrial development.

Land Matters: Ministers noted that considerable attention had been devoted to the question of 'land rights' for Aborigines during the referendum campaign. A major concern appeared to be that Aborigines should have the opportunity to own or lease land on reserves and they should be given assistance to establish themselves on the land.

To make more effective use of Reserve lands South Australia has recently established an Aboriginal Lands Trust consisting wholly of Aboriginal members ‘to sell, lease, mortgage or otherwise deal with’ lands vested in it. Legislation providing for the lease of land in Aboriginal reserves to Aboriginal co-operative societies and predominantly Aboriginal companies and the creation of an Aboriginal Reserves Land Board with an Aboriginal majority is currently being considered by the Legislative Council for the Northern Territory. Aborigines in the Northern Territory can already obtain leases on Reserves or elsewhere by the normal processes or leases outside Reserves of up to 160 acres. In the legislation referred to it is proposed that the latter provision be retained but without limitation of area.

In Queensland any Aboriginal can own or hold land in his own right or obtain leases in Aboriginal Reserves. Many do. In Western Australia assistance is provided to suitable applicants in establishing farms. Two applications have been granted in respect of reserves set aside for land settlement.

Conference recognised that in some States and the Northern Territory Aboriginal reserve land constitutes a resource for advancing Aborigines and supported measures to make effective use of this resource. The actual measures to be taken would vary according to local land law and potential usage, and the views of the local legislation and the Aboriginal people. Such proposals should not, however, restrict other developments, e.g., by mining, forestry or other industries which could be of considerable direct and indirect benefit to the Aborigines by providing them with employment opportunities, the opportunity to benefit from improved community facilities and to participate in wider community affairs.

Advancement of Women: In many Aboriginal communities which are still traditionally oriented in varying degrees women have an inferior status resulting from systems of marriage promise, marriage at puberty and polygamous unions. Other factors which may retard their well being and social advancement are early child-bearing and frequent births together with lack of or inability to make use of infant welfare services. Even when traditional influences have been largely put aside, Aboriginal women still face difficulties because of education and social handicaps in following careers or adjusting to a modern home environment.

Remedial measures include education, social training especially in home management, participation in community social activities and, where sought by the individual person or family concerned, the availability of family planning advice and facilities. Conference supported balanced programmes for advancing the status of Aboriginal women to be formulated within the framework of overall programmes.

Aboriginal Culture: Traditional Aboriginal culture was inextricably bound up with religion, kinship and areas of ritual or sacred significance. Much of it has inevitably been lost or set aside by necessary adjustments to a new or settled way of life.

Conference recognised the value to Aborigines and to the enrichment of Australian cultural life of encouraging pride and participation in elements of traditional Aboriginal culture in such forms as legend, music, dance and art. It is not the policy of welfare administrations to seek to destroy such cultural elements, but to encourage them, in promoting the advancement of Aborigines in the general community.

Consultation with Aborigines: Ministers noted that there appeared to be some misconception that Aboriginal affairs administrations tended to act without consulting Aborigines and part-Aborigines or without regard for their views.

Conference re-affirmed that Aborigines and part-Aborigines should be consulted at all levels in formulating and carrying out policies for their advancement. The need for and value of such consultation has been recognised for some time past and a number of measures taken to obtain it. For example in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, Aborigines are members of the welfare boards. The Aboriginal Lands Trust in South Australia is wholly composed of Aborigines. In Queensland and South Australia, councils have been established by law for the management of Aboriginal affairs in particular areas. In all States and the Northern Territory Aborigines participate in councils and committees concerned with advising on and managing Aboriginal affairs at various levels.

Entry on to Reserves: Conference agreed that in the interests of the Aboriginal people in those States and the Northern Territory where there are still congregations of Aborigines on reserves a form of permit system should be retained until such time as their communities through their own Councils can handle this matter or until such time as permits are no longer necessary. Conference noted the increasing burden being placed on Aboriginal communities in remote areas by research work and by the demands of commercial
T.V. and film units and suggested that while the permit system is retained the views of Aboriginal communities should be sought.

The Conference noted developments in a number of other fields.

Education: Greatly intensified efforts have been made in recent years to provide full educational opportunities for Aborigines. Increasing provision is being made for pre-schools and adult education. Special note was made of the increasing number of Aboriginal and part-Aborigines progressing to secondary education and staying at school longer. Authoritative figures to document this progress are not available because more and more Aboriginal children are merging with the general educational stream and are not counted separately. Where necessary special schools have been established to ensure that Aborigines have equal opportunities. All administrations have programmes for financial assistance or bursaries for this purpose. It was clear to Ministers that no Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal child had to forego educational opportunities because of his family's financial position.

Housing: Ministers drew attention to factors apart from finance which were important in the resolution of Aboriginal housing problems. These include the capacity of the Aborigines themselves to manage a new housing situation and the acceptance of Aboriginal housing by the community. Precipitate action to locate Aborigines in houses for which they are not suited or in areas where undue social stresses can occur might do damage to long-term programmes. Many part-Aborigines and Aborigines can be provided for by normal Housing Commission programmes, or by normal home-financing schemes. Although sometimes unavoidable, it is generally undesirable that they should be grouped in houses which are designated as Aboriginal housing. For those unaccustomed to the concept of modern housing or its use, transitional-type housing is needed to enable progress from stage to stage. In both cases it is necessary to provide suitable housing adapted to the Aborigines' stage of development and capacity to pay.

For both Aborigines and part-Aborigines special assistance from welfare authorities and agencies is frequently necessary to enable them to adjust satisfactorily to a new environment. This could involve ensuring that they understand their new obligations and supporting them when in difficulties. Conference noted that considerable expenditure on housing for Aborigines and part-Aborigines by Aboriginal welfare authorities totalling $6,294,000 in the last 5 years and that in addition, houses allotted to Aborigines by the various State and Territory housing authorities were in excess of 1,000.

Social Services: Conference noted the considerable advance made in recent years in paying pensions direct to Aborigines rather than through some other person or authority on behalf of the pensioner. The process was almost complete in South Australia and Queensland and there was a distinct trend towards direct payment in other areas. Pensioners in New South Wales and Victoria have received their pensions direct since 1960. The position is kept under review by the Department of Social Services with the object of hastening the transition to direct payment wherever practicable.

Publicity: Conference noted the considerable amount of publicity material including films prepared and distributed by the Commonwealth and in particular the new publication 'The Australian Aborigines' which gives a concise account of the efforts of governments and progress achieved in Aboriginal advancement throughout Australia. Conference expressed appreciation to the Department of Territories for the preparation of this material and acknowledged the value of its impact in Australia and overseas.

Missions and Voluntary Organisations: Conference acknowledged the considerable contribution of Christian missions to Aboriginal advancement over the years. It re-affirmed its recognition of the assistance which can be given by voluntary organisations which have a record of genuine interest in and understanding Aboriginal advancement. It looked forward to continued co-operation from such organisations in the advancement of Aborigines and part-Aborigines and in adding to the community's understanding of these matters.

Training of Staff: Ministers noted that the one-year course for patrol officers at the Australian School of Pacific Administration was successful in training field officers and that South Australia had participated in the course and expressed its appreciation of the opportunity to do so. Conference took note of plans to extend the course to two years to provide further training in case and group work.

Central Australian Reserves: Ministers noted that it was proposed to include Aboriginal observers at future meetings of the Central Reserves Committee composed of representatives from Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. They noted that the Committee considered there was a need for research into the migratory trends of Aborigines in the Central Reserves area.

To those who work in this very difficult field it has been apparent for some time now that one of their major tasks is to inform the public better of what is being done and attempted in Aboriginal affairs. This statement will be one of the ways of doing this. It is part of this process of informing the public that Governments should be credited with what they have done. This Conference has also made a valuable contribution in encouraging a review of what further remains to be done.

When we direct our minds to future programmes we must constantly have before us that the well-being and interests of individuals and families are at stake. There is at the present time a great desire for dramatic, immediate solutions to the remaining problems. Much more has been achieved than is realised. The situation now is incomparably better than it was 10, or 15 years ago, in terms of money and resources being employed and in terms of opportunities open to the Aboriginal people. Of course success is achieved when Aboriginal people live in the community without attracting any notice as a 'problem'. Thus the
The remaining problems are.

Little real hope lies in dramatic, immediate solutions. Social and human problems are involved that require time as well as money, staff and effort. Certainly much more needs to be done to help the Aboriginal people, both by Governments and by sympathetic, practical help from community organisations and individuals. We can be confident that this will be forthcoming.

Commonwealth: The Hon. C. E. Barnes, M.P., Minister for Territories.

New South Wales: The Hon. E. A. Willis, M.L.A., Chief Secretary, Minister of Labour and Industry and Minister for Tourist Activities.


Mr BEAZLEY (Fremantle)—by leave—

There are two reasons why appreciation should be expressed about the Prime Minister (Mr Harold Holt) in relation to Aboriginals. The first is that early in his career as Prime Minister he was prepared to seek an amendment of the Constitution on an issue more significant than that which his predecessor was prepared to consider. After years of requests for amendment of section 51 (xxvi) he accepted the challenge immediately and it is now amended. The second is that he is now moving to some new Commonwealth action on behalf of Aboriginals. It marks a noteworthy advance that a statement on Aboriginal policy has been delivered at the Prime Ministerial level. What we in the Opposition had hoped for was that responsibility for the affairs of the Aboriginal people would have been vested in the Prime Minister through a Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs held by the Prime Minister as one of his responsibilities. In this way, with the first member of the Government giving his mind to their affairs, steps might be taken to remedy the years that the locust has eaten. It had also been our wish that a standing committee of the Parliament might have been set up to study their needs and concern itself with their disabilities. The body the Prime Minister proposes is therefore welcome but disappointing from our point of view and its inadequacy, we feel, will be proven in time.

The first thing to be said about the Aboriginal people is that they are poor. Most of them are desperately poor. This may not be a racial statement but it is certainly a social statement and it seems to me to be a fact. There are probably 106,000 of them—43,000 Aboriginals and 63,000 part-Aboriginals. It would be gratifying to be able to say that this poverty is only among those living in remote areas. This remoteness does account for some poverty in that there is no development there, but they are poor almost wherever they are. Second, where development does take place in a remote area it is the immediate assumption of State and federal governments that a white population must be attracted immediately, housed immediately, provided with amenities immediately and paid district disability loadings in addition to ordinary wages. It is also often the assumption that the natives can shift. The Yirrkala inquiry was occasioned by the excision of land from a reserve, by the intention to create a white occupied town, and by the undefined rights, status and fate of the resident Aboriginal population. This is honestly typical of our history.

Thirdly, we flinch from facing the fact that their employment opportunities at the present time are diminishing. The cattle industry has always been an employer of Aborigines, but changes in the working of pastoral properties are steadily reducing the need for a large labour force in that industry. As the demand for stockmen decreases more and more Aboriginal youths will become dispirited and disillusioned unless remedial action is taken. Where Aborigines live on the fringes of towns, in the cities or in the north, their needs for vocational training are great and the policies of complacency pursued by Australian governments in the past are simply going to generate purposelessness, despair and passivity, or else a socially explosive atmosphere among them. We want an effective vocational effort. Can we give our minds to creating job opportunities for them, or are they to be increasingly unwanted and inefficient hangers-on in primary industries, increasingly resented in country towns? The drift is that way.

In many areas there is no acquisition of real skill in the use of oral and written
English; no ability to read with understanding where there is some ability to read; no working knowledge of numbers and number concepts; no intelligent effort by education departments to provide specialist and remedial education for their special disabilities. They are, therefore, educationally underprivileged. As a consequence they are vocationally handicapped. They lack the flexibility to change jobs when they have a diminishing foothold in employment in primary industry. Do we have the belief that after a special effort at education and training they can emerge as an effective kind of worker? We have no right to reject that hypothesis because we have not made the special effort.

The Aboriginal population at present is an underprivileged, underfed, underpaid, untrained labour force, increasing in numbers and not closely considered. While we enthuse about the development of our natural resources we make no real effort to draw this force into the process of development. We are allowing social dynamite to accumulate. It is impossible to make Aborigines who are simply devoid of European background and incentives act as if they had European background and incentives. Hence the malignant short-cuts proposed sometimes by country justices of the peace in Western Australia who demand from their benches the right to flog. Hence the missionaries who forget the limitations of the authority they have in their vocation and do flog. They would not as parish clergy in a European community assume the authority they have in their vocation and do flog. They are, therefore, educationally underprivileged. They lack the flexibility to change jobs when they have a diminishing foothold in employment in primary industry. Do we have the belief that after a special effort at education and training they can emerge as an effective kind of worker? We have no right to reject that hypothesis because we have not made the special effort.

Aborigines often live in country which is not suitable for much diversity in land use; hence employment opportunities are limited. Elsewhere many are employed on seasonal work. I am leaving aside the Aborigines who live in regions of minimal contact with Europeans. Fay Gale in her study of Aborigines in South Australia suggests that where circumstances lead Aborigines to become independent and self-reliant they are socially more acceptable. There are still areas where the Aboriginal people are traditionally-oriented in their life—in the Warburton Range; in the Rawlinson Range; at Jigalong and at Balgo in Western Australia; in the Mount Davies area of South Australia; at Haasts Bluff, Areyonga, Papunya, Yuendumu, Hooker Creek, Oenpelli, Goulburn Island, Maningreda, Milingimbi, Elcho Island, and Yirrkala in the Northern Territory. New South Wales and Victoria have no traditionally-oriented people. Queensland possibly has not. Their total is only some 7,500 out of 106,000. It is clearly necessary to make the effort to avoid the mistakes of the past with these people. The thing we need to avoid at all costs is what we have always done—the reducing of the Aboriginal people to purposelessness. In the words of the anthropologist Professor R. M. Berndt:

The religion of an indigenous native group which has had little or no alien contacts is a living faith, something quite inseparable from the pattern of everyday life and thought. The religion of this people has grown out of a particular material and spiritual requirement in such a way that it is a very real and important aspect of each person’s life. There is no sharp demarcation between the secular and the sacred.

It is this which we always shatter. Their art, their myths, their dances, their song series, their rites and ceremonies all made their place in the universe intelligible. They have always been approached with an utter lack of respect, envisaged either as labour to be useful to someone else or nuisances to be moved on. They have always been planned for or not planned for without being consulted. Let us be clear on one thing. I make no plea for sentimentality. But any policy not founded on the recognition that we owe them some restitution will be a false policy. I am not talking about handouts when I say we do owe them a generosity of approach that we have never exhibited, generally speaking, in our history. We also need to get over our assumption that their culture and thought are worthless.

We also need to beware of the smooth quotation of expenditure statistics. It is possible to spend a lot of money on the housing of Europeans at a government or mission settlement and to quote this as Aboriginal welfare. Sometimes, where the settlement represents a concentration of Aboriginal population with inadequate hygienic preparation, the concentration of population involves an increase in mortality statistics and an intensification of the spread of disease. Tuberculosis and leprosy
did not spread in the nomadic state. We also need to beware of imputed educational expenditures relating to Aborigines. It may be fair enough to say that if one-quarter of a class is Aboriginal, one-quarter of the teacher's salary may be attributed to Aboriginal expenditure. Very often, however, there is no effort to adapt teaching to their special educational needs.

We want as definite objectives the drastic reduction of neo-natal, infant and child mortality, an end to yaws, hookworm, tuberculosis and leprosy. We want these as declared objectives within a definite period of time. We want the recruitment of the medical staff to do the job. We want an Aboriginal voice to be heard in their own affairs. No more plans for them without consultation, in effect. Can the Commonwealth, in taking action, start afresh? Today the residual Aboriginal group is hyper-sensitive, hyper-suspicious and united to some extent in a distrust of the whites. We have richly earned that distrust. Can the Commonwealth, first and foremost, set out to deserve trust? The Prime Minister has suggested Commonwealth co-ordinating action. The Australian people have not voted for the same old policy as before. There is a need for a new survey of needs and a new approach.

Mr Grahame (North Sydney)—I present the third report of the Printing Committee.

Mr Wentworth—I rise to order, Mr Speaker. The motion of the Prime Minister (Mr Harold Holt) that the paper be noted has not yet been put to the House.

Mr Speaker—Order! The Prime Minister did not formally move such a motion. There is no motion before the House.

Mr Wentworth—Am I entitled to move that the paper presented by the Prime Minister be noted?

Mr Speaker—No. That can be done immediately only by a Minister.

Mr Wentworth—I heard him say that he was moving that the paper be noted.

Mr Speaker—The Prime Minister did not formally move such a motion. Nor was it asked for; nor was the adjournment of the debate sought by the Opposition. After the Prime Minister had presented the paper, a statement was made by the Minister for Territories by leave and that was followed by a statement made, by leave, by the honourable member for Fremantle. There was no motion before the Chair and there is none now. The Clerk has called on the next order of the day.

Mr Wentworth—I ask for leave to speak to the paper.

Mr Speaker—Order! The honourable member will resume his seat.

Mr Wentworth—I ask for leave of the House—

Mr Speaker—Order! The next business has been called on. The honourable member will resume his seat.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 1967-68

In Committee

Consideration resumed (vide page 972). Second Schedule.

Parliament

Proposed expenditure, $3,940,000.

Mr Connor (Cunningham) [8.32]—Mr Chairman, today we in this Parliament function under a Constitution which is literally a compromise between parochial rivalries and jealousies of the States and which was finally hammered out by the fathers of the Constitution after some 50 years of Convention meetings. We operate under a transitional form of government that was devised for colonial territories or conquered nations. The Australian Constitution is the most archaic and the least amended in the world. It was framed by members of State parliaments. May we have some order, Sir?

The Chairman (Mr Lucock)—Order! I suggest that the Leader of the House and the honorable member for Mackellar might have their conversation outside the chamber.

Mr Snedden—I apologise, Sir.

Mr Connor—Thank you, Mr Chairman. Our Constitution was framed by members of State parliaments in the 1890s on the United States model of the 1780s. The American model has been altered more often, more extensively and more recently.