



EMBARGO: 7.00 p.m.

PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

A sad and deplorable situation was exposed during this past week in the Parliament by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Ian Viner. For some months now, the Commonwealth Government has been engaged in patient negotiations with the Northern Land Council, an elected body representing a large section of the Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory.

The negotiations have been related to the social and environmental impact of uranium development in the Northern Territory. They have also related to the size of the royalties which the Aboriginals will receive from the mining of these deposits comprising about one-fifth of the world's known reserves of high-grade uranium ore.

The Government's decision to go ahead with the development of these deposits was reached after long and painstaking consideration - initially by Mr Justice Fox, who spent two years inquiring into every aspect of the matter, and then by the Government. Our responsibilities in this matter were both national and in an energy-short world, international. The decision was to go ahead.

The negotiations with the Northern Land Council have not been about whether or not there should be uranium mining. They have been about the terms and conditions under which the uranium deposits in the Northern Territory will be developed, and about the direct financial benefit to the Aboriginals of Arnhem Land and the Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Aboriginals have been fortunate to have as their spokesman and Council Chairman during this period a young and capable leader who can speak for his people, and who is nobody's pawn. Galarrwuy Yunupingu has shown himself to me as a man as much at ease negotiating over the table as he is in the bush, and as a man thoroughly able to grasp the implications of the Territory's uranium riches, both as an Australian and as an Aboriginal.

As a result, and as Ian Viner told the House during the past week, he has become the target of a small group of zealots. They pretend to have Aboriginal interests at heart, but in fact seek to use the Aboriginal community to achieve a different goal, and one which does not serve the Aboriginal interests at all - the prevention of uranium development in Australia.

The Labor Party has spread a web of intrigue in the north. The Labor Party involvement has been designed to frustrate the negotiations with the Aboriginals and to destroy the credibility of their representative body, the Northern Land Council, and the credibility of its spokesman, Galarrwuy Yunupingu.

It is not too difficult to guess at the motive. The intriguers do not want men on the scene whom they cannot manipulate and use for their own purposes. The Labor Party spokesman on Aboriginal Affairs, Dr Doug Everingham, set out the position very clearly in a letter he wrote to Galarrwuy Yunupingu last month when the push against him was at its strongest - indeed, on the very day of the attempted coup.

The thrust of Dr Everingham's letter seems to have been to accustom Galarrwuy Yunupingu to losing his position as his people's able and eloquent spokesman. His opening sentences, however, contain a most telling admission, and I quote:

"I can understand your feelings that the ALP may be using Aboriginals for their own vested interests," Dr Everingham wrote to Galarrwuy Yunupingu. I quote again:

"It is true that some people, most of them on the Labor side of politics, care more about stopping uranium mining and changing the Government in Darwin or Canberra than they do about Aboriginals or land rights."

Well, that is certainly true, and those people have been plotting, intriguing, whispering and conniving amongst the Aboriginals of the Northern Territory. This is despite the decision the Council reached last month that Aboriginals should reach their own decision without the dubious benefit of their self-proclaimed friends.

What has happened here is that a group of political activists tried, and failed, to stir up opposition in the community against the development of Australia's uranium deposits. Having been rejected by the trade unions, and by the community at large, they have turned on the Aboriginals of Arnhem Land in a final and desperate bid. We have seen the spectacle of high-powered hatchet men operating on the Aboriginal people to achieve their own aims at the expense of the Aborigines, and at the expense of all Australians.

Their actions have been disgraceful. From the time the Government made its decision in August last year, it has carried out, and will continue to carry out, its obligations to environmental interests and to Aboriginal interests. We will soon be considering our next steps in this matter.