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**The CDEP scheme: a census-based
analysis of the labour market status
of participants in 1986**

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ABSTRACT

The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme was established in 1977 primarily as an income support and community development program for remote Aboriginal communities. Since the launch of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) in 1987, it has expanded its objectives and is now also regarded as an employment program. Under the scheme, members of participating communities forego individual access to social security entitlements. Amounts broadly equivalent to these entitlements are paid as block grants to communities which are then utilised as a wages pool to provide part-time employment.

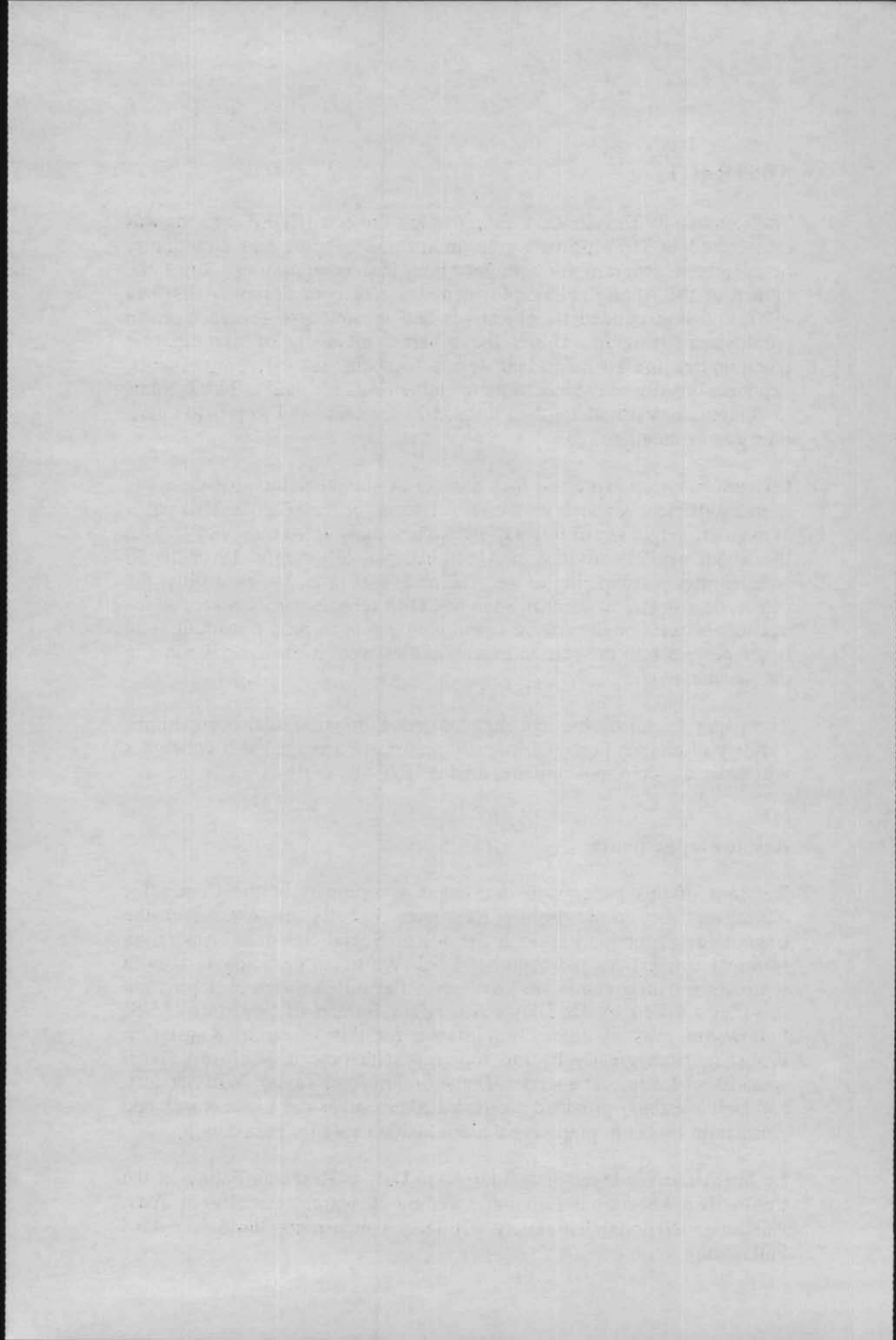
Concern has been expressed by a number of commentators that there has been insufficient research on the effectiveness of the scheme. This paper attempts to begin to fill this gap by documenting from the 1986 Census the labour market activities of Aboriginal people living at 19 of the 38 communities participating in the scheme at that time. Unfortunately, the census does not allow identification of CDEP scheme participants, and the analysis is based on the crucial assumption that most people working 0-24 hours per week in the selected communities were in fact participants in the scheme.

The paper examines the age, income, educational status, occupations, industry of employment and industry sector of participants. It concludes with a discussion of policy issues arising from this analysis.

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The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme was established in 1977 by the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), primarily as an income support and community development program for Aboriginal Australians residing in discrete communities in remote regions.¹ Since March 1990 it has been administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The main feature of the scheme is that participating communities are provided with a block grant closely equivalent to the social security entitlements of their unemployed members to utilise as a wages pool. Participation in the scheme precludes access to unemployment benefits (since 1 July 1991, Job Search or Newstart Allowances). Participating communities are also provided with additional resources to meet wages on-costs (like workers compensation insurance) and the purchase of equipment.

The CDEP scheme's early historical development has been outlined in some detail by Sanders (1988). Its fundamental character changed somewhat in 1987 as it became a central element of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) (Australian Government 1987). Since that time the scheme's goals have been increasingly associated with the AEDP's objectives of employment and income equality for Aboriginal Australians (Altman and Sanders 1991). It has also expanded rapidly to non-remote, non-discrete communities. In 1985-86, the scheme operated in 38 communities with 4,000 participating workers and a total cost of \$27.2 million; in 1987-88, it operated in 92 communities with 7,600 workers at an unadjusted cost of \$65.5 million. By 1991-92, the scheme was operating in 168 communities with 18,000 participants or workers (ATSIC 1992: 20) at a total cost of \$195 million. It is estimated that in the current financial year the scheme will again expand to 175 communities, with 20,000 participants costing \$235 million, primarily as a result of implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Commonwealth of Australia 1991). The scheme is currently ATSIC's most important single program, accounting for about 32 per cent of total agency expenditure. It has been estimated that participants in the scheme account for a significant 25 per cent of the estimated Aboriginal labour force in 1991 (Altman and Daly 1992). The scheme's objectives have widened somewhat in the post-AEDP years, and it is now also regarded as an employment program (CDEP Working Party 1990: 8).²

A number of commentators have expressed concern that there has been insufficient research on the effectiveness of the scheme at the community level. Such concern has generally been a post-AEDP phenomenon raised in a number of contexts.³ This paper attempts to fill some of the gaps by documenting from the 1986 Census the labour market activities and some characteristics of Aboriginal people living in 19 selected communities which were participating in the scheme at that time. This census-based

approach is historical and speculative. It is important to note that in 1986, prior to the launch of the AEDP, the scheme was limited to remote communities. It had a close nexus with the unemployment benefit entitlements of participants, and while a 20 per cent on-costs component was paid, the CDEP Support Program did not exist. In the absence of any statistical material on the characteristics of CDEP scheme participants, we seek to indirectly identify these people in the Aboriginal population sub-file. Such an approach has been facilitated by the access of one of the authors (Daly) to the full Aboriginal population sub-file as an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Fellow.

As will become apparent, even this approach faces conceptual and methodological difficulties, the greatest being that CDEP scheme participants are not specifically identified in the census. Our analysis is based on the crucial assumption that most persons working 0-24 hours per week in the communities selected were participants in the scheme. This assumption is problematic on two counts. First, there are other non-CDEP scheme part-time workers in communities. Second, some participants in the CDEP scheme appear to have been classified as 'unemployed' or 'not in the labour force' in the census. Notwithstanding these provisos, we believe that this exercise provides a first step in generating some quantitative data on some labour market characteristics of employed persons in communities participating in the CDEP scheme.⁴ As we will demonstrate in our concluding discussion, our findings, even though based on quantitative data that cannot exactly isolate CDEP scheme participants, nevertheless generate some interesting policy questions.

Methodology

The attempt to generate data on individual participants in the CDEP scheme from the 1986 Census faced a number of major conceptual and sampling issues.

Conceptual issues

The CDEP scheme poses particular problems for labour market analysis because its participants do not fit neatly into the classification system based on typical patterns of labour market behaviour in the wider community, as used by ABS. In 1986, the remote area census form did not include a specific question on CDEP scheme participation.⁵ It included the following questions on labour market status:

'Question 30: Did this person have a paid job last week?'

'Question 31: Did this person look for work at any time during the last four weeks?'

People were classified as employed or unemployed on the basis of their answers to these questions and were assigned to the residual group 'not in the labour force' if they were neither employed nor unemployed.

Participants in the CDEP scheme could be assigned in the census to any of these categories. They may have been working part-time on a community project, looking for work, or engaged in activities (like child care, hunting and gathering, or attending ceremonies) recognised as legitimate for CDEP scheme purposes, but which might not be considered as a 'paid job' when participants are completing the census form. An end result of the wide-ranging CDEP scheme goals of income support, community development and employment generation for Aboriginal people and the somewhat restricted definitions of employment and unemployment used in the census is that the labour market status of participants is especially difficult to classify (see Smith 1991).

Further evidence of the difficulties faced in assessing the activities of CDEP participants comes from the ABS Survey of Employment and Earnings. The data for this survey come from employers throughout Australia. A comparison of employment figures collected for this survey with numbers included in the CDEP scheme in 30 communities in the Northern Territory showed that in a given pay period only a fraction (13 per cent) of CDEP scheme participants were reported as employees by employers. The ABS study made no attempt to account for the activities of the remaining CDEP participants in these communities.⁶

Identifying participants in 1986

The paucity of accurate historical data on participants in the CDEP scheme became acutely obvious to us as we sought to identify both the communities and the number of individuals participating in the scheme at the time of the 1986 Census. A number of problems quickly became apparent. At the time there was no centralised database on participants in the scheme. This is a problem that has been highlighted in past reviews of the scheme (Department of Aboriginal Affairs 1986b; CDEP Working Party 1990) and by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) on a number of occasions (see ANAO 1990, 1992). This issue is still not resolved and is currently being partially addressed by ATSIC in a year-long survey of communities participating in the scheme to be conducted in 1992-93 ('CDEP Census', *The Regional Councillor*, October 1992). Historical data on participants exist in file material held at ATSIC Regional Offices, but most would now be archived, and a major search would be needed to accurately enumerate scheme participants in 1986.

Part of the problem in generating accurate data is definitional. First, despite the appearance of the term 'community' in the scheme's name, this term has never been rigorously defined, nor can it be (Smith 1989;

Altman 1990). Hence, for example the DAA Annual Report for 1985-86 (the financial year corresponding most closely to the 1986 Census) notes that the CDEP scheme operated in 38 'communities' and 'groups of outstations' (DAA 1986a: 52). Groups of outstations invariably constitute a number of distinct satellite communities. Second, the term 'participant' has also never been defined. In particular, participants sometimes refer to CDEP scheme workers and at other times to workers and their dependents. This ambiguity is partly due to the fact that a community's block CDEP entitlement was calculated on the basis of the unemployment benefit entitlements of participants and their dependents. A final problem is that there is enormous variation in the names used for participating communities and groups of outstations and in the supposed dates that these communities began participating in the scheme.⁷

Despite these problems, there is a degree of consistency between two historical data sources available to us: the DAA 1985-86 Annual Report lists 38 participating communities and estimates that 8,000 workers and their dependents were involved (DAA 1986a: 52), whereas the report of the National Review of Community Development Employment Projects (DAA 1986b) refers to 38 communities (but only lists 36) and 7,899 participants. Other sources, like Sanders (1988: 33) and the CDEP Working Party (1990: 12), indicate that there were 38 communities and 4,000 workers participating in the scheme in 1985-86.

Sample selection and features of the database

The purpose of this paper is to use 1986 Census data for a select sample of communities participating in the CDEP scheme to provide a description, within the limitations of the data, of the activities of participants who were classified as employed in the labour market. Using various sources we were able to identify 38 named communities or groups of outstations (normally a named outstation resource centre) participating in the scheme in 1986. In ordering information from the Aboriginal population sub-file, it was important to earmark ABS Collection Districts (CDs) that were entirely composed of communities known to be participating in the CDEP scheme. This requirement reduced the numbers in our database to 19 CDs, or 50 per cent of the total participating in the scheme. The communities chosen were located in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (the only States/Territory participating in the scheme at that time).⁸ There are some minor geographic anomalies in our selection: our sample included all four CDEP communities in the Northern Territory, 50 per cent of communities in Western Australia (nine out of 18) and in Queensland (four out of eight), but only 25 per cent of communities in South Australia (two out of eight). Furthermore, while four islands in the Torres Strait (Saibai, Yorke, Darnley and Dauan) were participating in the scheme in 1986, these were not included as islands and did not

constitute distinct CDs. It is possible that Torres Strait Islanders were under-represented in our sample.⁹ We again emphasise that communities were chosen in our sample principally because they could be identified separately in the census.

It is important to recognise, though, that while participation in the CDEP scheme precludes access to unemployment benefits (now Job Search and Newstart Allowances) for all members of the community, it does not preclude access to full-time award positions. Hence, in the sample of communities selected there are Aboriginal people in full-time employment (35 hours plus), as well as Aboriginal people working part-time (0-24 hours and 25-34 hours). The description presented below offers a picture of labour market conditions in these communities which may provide an initial benchmark for more detailed future studies of the CDEP scheme.

As already stated, the census does not include a specific question on CDEP scheme participation, so in the following analysis we have assumed that all people working between zero and 24 hours per week were CDEP scheme participants. As this category will also include some non-CDEP scheme part-time work, the percentages presented below should be taken as a maximum estimate of CDEP scheme employment. On the other hand, it is very evident, even from the sketchy historical data available, that some CDEP scheme participants have been included among the unemployed and those not in the labour force. We estimate that there were roughly 2,000 CDEP scheme workers in the communities sampled. Yet the tables we derived from the Aboriginal population sub-file indicate somewhat paradoxically that only 30 per cent of this number were enumerated as working 0-24 hours per week.¹⁰ This inability to locate a significant proportion of participants is due in part to an inexact correlation between 'communities' participating in the scheme and census CD boundaries.¹¹ It could also reflect the classification of CDEP scheme participants as unemployed, not in the labour force or in the labour force status not stated category.

General findings

The data from the sample of communities were generated from the Aboriginal population sub-file in aggregate raw form. These raw data were then entered onto a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel and are presented here in aggregate percentage terms only. In the sample communities at the time of the 1986 Census, 21 per cent of the working-age population was engaged in full-time work (35 or more hours per week). Almost three-quarters of these were male and a quarter female. A second group, 9 per cent of the working-age population, worked between

25 and 34 hours per week. These two groups could be thought of as part of the labour force, as conventionally defined. Fifteen per cent of the working-age population spent zero to 24 hours a week at work and will be treated here as CDEP scheme participants. Sixty-one per cent of these jobs were held by men and 39 per cent by women. The remaining 55 per cent of the working-age population was either unemployed or considered to be outside the labour force in the week prior to the census.¹² The wording of the employment question suggests that the classification to employment or some other category, of CDEP scheme participants who were working in full-time blocks of, for example, one week in four, would depend on the timing of the census within the working cycle. These results suggest that some people in these communities participating in the CDEP scheme did not think of themselves as being employed, even if they were engaged in activities which would be considered as appropriate within the scheme's guidelines. This could partly reflect knowledge about the nexus between the CDEP scheme and unemployment benefits (Sanders 1988). Alternatively, collectors filling out remote area census forms may have judged CDEP scheme participants as outside the labour force.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of labour force status by age category for each sex and the total working-age population in these communities. Employment rates for each of the age categories were substantially higher for men than for women. Among the prime working-age men, those aged 25 to 49 years, 70.8 per cent were in employment, although almost a third of these were in CDEP-type employment of less than 24 hours per week. This share was larger than for any other age category. These figures suggest that CDEP scheme employment was not used chiefly by the young as a training experience which opened opportunities for full-time employment at an older age. The scheme was used by men of all ages.

Unemployment, as reported in the census, was lower in these communities than for the male Aboriginal working-age population in general, 6.1 per cent of the male population (10 per cent of the workforce), compared with a third of the male Aboriginal workforce in general (Ross 1990). Unemployment and being outside the labour force are not such clearly defined categories in these areas where there are few labour market opportunities. A similar proportion of about a third of men were reported to be outside the labour force in these communities as found in the total male Aboriginal working-age population. This share was higher in particular age groups. About half of young men aged 15-19 years and half of older people aged 50-64 years were outside the labour force.

Table 1. Age distribution by labour force status of Aboriginal people in sample CDEP scheme communities, 1986.^a

Labour force status	15-19 (%)	20-24 (%)	Age 25-49 (%)	50-64 (%)	total (%)
Total population in sample					
0-24 hours/week	12.5	14.1	18.4	10.1	15.4
25-34 hours/week	8.8	9.9	9.7	4.3	8.9
35 hours and over/week	12.9	20.0	25.8	15.1	20.7
Total employed	34.2	44.1	53.9	29.5	45.1
Unemployed	5.8	6.4	5.4	2.7	5.4
Not in the labour force	60.0	49.4	40.6	67.7	49.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	792	714	1,818	437	3,761
Males in sample					
Employed					
0-24 hours/week	14.6	16.8	21.7	15.1	18.6
25-34 hours/week	11.3	12.3	10.9	5.5	10.7
35 hours and over/week	16.9	29.1	38.2	26.1	30.8
Total employed	42.8	58.1	70.8	46.7	60.1
Unemployed	6.1	8.4	5.8	3.5	6.1
Not in the labour force	51.1	33.5	23.4	49.7	33.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	391	358	945	199	1,893
Females in sample					
Employed					
0-24 hours/week	10.5	11.5	14.9	5.9	12.2
25-34 hours/week	6.5	7.6	8.4	3.4	7.2
35 hours and over/week	9.0	11.0	12.4	5.9	10.5
Total employed	25.9	30.1	35.6	15.1	29.9
Unemployed	5.5	4.5	5.0	2.1	4.7
Not in the labour force	68.6	65.4	59.3	82.8	65.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	401	356	873	238	1,868

a. Those not stating their labour force status were excluded from the table. There were 202 such people in the sampled communities, 137 men and 65 women.

Source: Special tabulations from the 1986 Census Aboriginal population sub-file.

Women were much less likely to be in employment than men. Only 30 per cent of the working-age women in these 19 communities were employed. Twelve per cent of them were in CDEP-type employment of 0-24 hours per week. ATSIC holds no records of the gender breakdown for CDEP participants in 1986, but evidence from the CDEP Working Party (1990: 47-50) suggests that women tend to be under-represented in the scheme. The evidence presented here is consistent with this view that a smaller number of women than men participated in the scheme. However, it should be noted that in terms of those women in employment, CDEP-type employment was more important than for men; about 40 per cent of employment fell into this part-time bracket. This category probably includes some non-CDEP scheme part-time work.

Table 2. Income distribution by labour force status of Aboriginal people in sample communities, 1986.^a

	Q1 ^b	Median ^b (\$)	Q3 ^b
Employed			
0-24 hours/week	4,856	6,606	10,010
25-34 hours/week	6,348	8,000	10,524
35 + hours/week	9,674	12,452	15,298
Total employed	6,389	9,677	13,277
Unemployed	2,000	5,164	7,725
Not in the labour force	0	4,157	6,739
Total	3,477	6,551	10,622

a. Those not stating their income or labour force status are omitted from this table.

b. Q1, the first quartile shows the income level which divides the income distribution so that 25 per cent of individuals had incomes below this level and 75 per cent above this level. The median divides the income distribution in half and Q3, the third quartile, divides the income distribution so that 75 per cent of individuals had an income below this level and 25 per cent above.

Source: Special tabulations from the 1986 Census Aboriginal population sub-file.

Table 2 presents evidence on the relationship between labour market status and income in these communities. The median income for these Aboriginal people was very similar to that of the Aboriginal population as a whole, but 68 per cent of the median income for the total Australian population (Treadgold 1988). The results show a similar pattern to those reported by Treadgold for the total Aboriginal population. Employment was associated with higher incomes and those in full-time employment had median cash incomes three times greater than the value of those not in the labour force.

According to the scheme's guidelines, those in CDEP employment are paid an amount approximating their welfare entitlement. The fact that the median income of those working 0-24 hours per week was only 28 per cent higher than the median income of those who were counted as unemployed suggests that these people were CDEP scheme participants. This is especially so because some communities distinguish between CDEP scheme participants who receive income support, but do not work, and those who work for wages. For example, Altman has observed that at some communities visited, like Ernabella, outstation residents were paid a weekly CDEP 'income support' allocation that was lower than township-based CDEP 'wages'. The data also show that people participating in the CDEP scheme, either employed 0-24 hours per week or classified as unemployed, had median incomes about half of those of the Aboriginal people in full-time employment.

The remaining tables focus on the Aboriginal people at sample communities who were classified as employed. Tables 3 and 4 present data on the educational attainment of the workforce in these communities. They show that those in full-time employment were more highly educated than those in CDEP-type employment. Among those working 0-24 hours per week, 9.5 per cent had not been to school compared with 5.4 per cent of full-time workers. Of those working 0-24 hours per week, 12.3 per cent had left school before the age of 13, and only 12.5 per cent had stayed on at school after the age of 16. This compared with 3.3 per cent of full-time workers who had left school before the age of 13 and 16.1 per cent who had stayed at school after the age of 16.

Table 3. Age on leaving school by hours of work for employed Aboriginal people in sample communities, 1986.^a

Age on leaving school	Hours of work		
	0-24 (%)	25-34 (%)	35+ (%)
No schooling	9.3	6.5	5.4
Less than 13	12.3	3.2	3.3
13-16	65.0	78.0	75.0
17-18	10.1	11.2	14.4
19+	2.4	1.1	1.7
Still at school	0.8	0.0	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

a. Those not stating their age on leaving school or labour force status are omitted.

Source: Special tabulations from the 1986 Census Aboriginal population sub-file.

Table 4 presents further data on educational attainment. The majority of workers in these communities, regardless of hours of work, had no qualifications. There was little difference between the groups in proportion with university qualifications, but a much larger percentage of full-time workers had a post-secondary qualification (trade or other certificate) than those working 0-24 hours per week; 12.3 per cent compared with 3.5 per cent. This suggests that formal qualifications rather than participation in the CDEP scheme might provide the means to gain full-time employment. However, in many remote communities, employment opportunities are limited, which, in turn, implies that the more educated will get the jobs available.

Table 4. Qualifications by hours of work for Aboriginal people in sample communities, 1986.^a

	Hours of work		
	0-24 (%)	25-34 (%)	35+ (%)
Qualifications			
University	1.2	0.8	1.8
Post-secondary	3.5	4.8	12.3
Total with qualifications	4.7	5.7	14.1
No qualifications	95.3	94.3	85.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

a. Those not stating their qualifications or labour force status are omitted from this table.

Source: Special tabulations from the 1986 Census Aboriginal population sub-file.

These data on educational attainment suggest that the types of employment available to those working 0-24 hours a week differ in kind from the full-time work recorded in the communities. Tables 5, 6 and 7 provide further evidence of differences. Table 5 presents data on the occupational status of employed Aboriginal people in these communities. A much larger proportion of those working 0-24 hours a week were classified as labourers than amongst full-time workers; 62 per cent compared with 49 per cent. A much smaller percentage of CDEP scheme employment was found at the more skilled end of the occupational spectrum. Eight per cent of those employed 0-24 hours a week were in the groups managers and administrators, professionals and para-professionals compared with 14 per cent of those in full-time work.¹³

This is, of course, partly a function of the part-time nature of work available under the CDEP scheme.

The final column of the table presents for comparison the occupational distribution of the whole of the employed Aboriginal population. While the proportion of Aboriginal people in these communities who were employed in more highly skilled occupations, (managers and administrators, professionals and para-professionals) was similar to that amongst the wider Aboriginal population, a smaller proportion were in the middle-ranking clerical and trade occupations and a larger proportion were in labouring jobs. So even in comparison with the Aboriginal population as a whole, which is more concentrated in the less skilled occupations than the Australian population in general, the Aboriginal people in the sample communities were concentrated in relatively unskilled occupations.¹⁴

Table 6 presents data on the industry of employment. The striking feature of this table is the narrow range of industries offering employment opportunities in these communities. Ninety per cent of employment was in two industries, public administration and community services. The proportion was even higher among those working 0-24 hours per week.

Table 5. Occupation of employed Aboriginal people (15-64 years) in sample communities and in the total Aboriginal population, 1986.^a

	Sample communities				Aboriginal population (%)
	0-24 hrs (%)	25-34 hrs (%)	35+ (%)	total (%)	
Managers and administrators	1.5	2.5	3.2	2.5	3.5
Professionals	2.6	4.3	5.5	4.4	5.3
Para-professionals	3.5	12.6	5.6	6.3	6.3
Tradespersons	10.0	9.0	14.2	11.9	14.5
Clerks	7.0	14.0	11.1	10.4	16.6
Salespersons, etc.	10.4	8.6	6.2	8.0	8.5
Plant and machine operators and drivers	3.3	0.7	5.8	4.0	11.0
Labourers	61.7	48.2	48.5	52.6	34.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

a. Those not stating their occupation or labour force status are omitted from this table.

Source: Special tabulations from the 1986 Census Aboriginal population sub-file.

Table 6. Industry of employed Aboriginal people (15-64 years) in sample communities and total Aboriginal population, 1986.^a

	Sample communities				Aboriginal population (%)
	0-24 hrs (%)	25-34 hrs (%)	35+ (%)	total (%)	
Agriculture	1.5	2.3	3.1	2.4	8.1
Mining	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.2	1.9
Manufacturing	0.4	0.7	0.9	0.7	9.8
Electricity, gas, water	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.2	1.7
Construction	0.7	1.3	2.2	1.6	7.0
Wholesale, retail trade	2.7	6.0	3.8	3.9	10.5
Transport, storage	0.0	0.7	0.3	0.2	7.2
Communications	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7
Finance, property etc.	0.0	1.7	0.7	0.6	4.0
Public administration	24.5	11.4	24.0	21.9	13.1
Community services	69.8	75.8	63.3	67.8	29.4
Recreation, personal serv.	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.5	5.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

a. Those not stating their industry or labour force status are omitted from this table.

Source: Special tabulations from the 1986 Census Aboriginal population sub-file.

Table 7. Industry sector of employed Aboriginal people in sample communities, 1986.^a

	Hours of work, sample communities				Aboriginal population (%)
	0-24 (%)	25-34 (%)	35+ (%)	total (%)	
Government					
Australian	0.0	2.4	2.8	1.8	10.1
State	11.3	13.7	31.0	21.0	25.0
Local	24.4	10.6	22.4	20.9	7.4
Private	64.3	73.3	43.9	56.3	57.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

a. Those not stating their industry sector or labour force status are omitted from this table.

Source: Special tabulations from the 1986 Census Aboriginal population sub-file.

For this group 94 per cent of employment was in these two industries. The final column of Table 6 enables a comparison between the employment distribution across industries in these communities and for Aboriginal people in general. This comparison emphasises further the limited range of industries offering employment in these remote communities. The publicly-funded industries of public administration and community services were twice as important as employers in these communities as for the Aboriginal population as a whole.

The importance of the public sector is not immediately apparent by the data presented in Table 7 which shows the breakdown of employment according to a government/private sector split. This apparent anomaly requires explanation. The major industry of employment within the private sector was community services. Most of this is employment is provided via Aboriginal organisations that are classified as private sector employers because they are not government. They are, however, publicly funded. This table provides some quantitative evidence that many participants in the CDEP scheme are classified in the census as being in private, rather than government sector, employment (see Daly 1992a). CDEP scheme employment was more heavily concentrated in local government and private sector agencies (that is, Aboriginal organisations and community councils) than was full-time employment. State government employment accounted for almost a third of full-time employment, a much larger share than among part-time (CDEP scheme) employees. This ambiguity will only be clarified in future censuses if an additional category, that is not private or government sector, becomes an option. As the data in Table 7 demonstrates, it is an anomaly that extends to statistical information about the entire Aboriginal population (see Altman and Daly 1992).

Policy implications

Despite our reservations about using available census data to assess the labour force characteristics of CDEP scheme participants, this paper has provided some quantitative data, albeit as an aggregate for the 19 selected communities. The paper is replete with policy implications, many of which will warrant further investigation when 1991 Census data become available in 1993. We emphasise that our analysis concentrates on the CDEP scheme as a labour market program, rather than as income support or as a means of enhancing community development. This emphasis is primarily influenced by the fact that available data from the census provides no means to investigate the community development or income support goals of the scheme.¹⁵ The emphasis does accord, though, with the broad policy shift, under the AEDP, to viewing of the scheme as a labour market program.

The most fundamental policy implication of our analysis is that a mechanism to enable identification of CDEP scheme participants in official statistics is needed. The obvious way that such data could be generated is for a question on CDEP scheme participation to be included in the five-yearly census, as existing questions make it extremely difficult to identify CDEP scheme participants. As noted earlier, the scheme is set to expand again from 1992 as part of the Commonwealth's response to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. This means that the scheme will continue to account for a substantial part of part-time Aboriginal employment at the time of the 1996 Census. A separate and specific question on CDEP scheme participation would assist to overcome data problems such as those faced in this paper. An alternative, second-best option, would be for ABS to develop clearer guidelines that would allow CDEP scheme participants to be consistently placed in existing census options. However, this latter option will not overcome problems associated with the inappropriateness of census questions on employment and unemployment to CDEP scheme participants.

The fact that we found 11 per cent of the labour force at sampled communities classified as unemployed contradicts conventional views that all participants are classified as employed (see Altman and Daly 1992). There is no doubt that CDEP scheme participants are not eligible to register as unemployed with the Commonwealth Employment Service. Discussions with ABS staff have usually indicated that CDEP scheme participants (especially in the Northern Territory) would be classified as employed part-time. It is of some surprise then that a proportion of the working-age population in the sample were classified as unemployed, primarily because the availability of CDEP scheme employment opportunities is meant to provide part-time work and preclude such a possibility. Nevertheless, this level of 'unemployment' is significantly lower than the Australia-wide average for Aboriginal people that was 35 per cent in 1986.

If this finding is replicated in the 1991 Census, it will have significant implications for the forthcoming review of the AEDP. The rapid expansion of the scheme since 1986 will provide statistical evidence of an improvement in the overall employment situation of Aboriginal people, despite the overall stagnation of the labour market in the inter-censal period. It is of great concern that when 1991 Census data are analysed, constraints identical to those encountered here will again be encountered. This is despite the fact that strong representation was made to both ATSIC and ABS by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, prior to the undertaking of the 1991 Census, for an attempt to be made to differentiate CDEP scheme participants from other part-time employed persons at the data processing stage. Any analysis of 1991 Census data

will again need to isolate CDs known to be made up of CDEP scheme-only communities and to assume that the majority of part-time workers are scheme participants. The negative potential of this problem of identification will be exacerbated by the inter-censal growth of the program: by August 1991, the scheme was operating at 168 communities with an estimated 18,000 workers, accounting for up to 25 per cent of the Aboriginal labour force.

A related AEDP goal that is often overlooked is the quest for income equality between Aboriginal and other Australians. The data here provide unsurprising evidence that those who work 0-24 hours (whether on the CDEP scheme or not) earn significantly less than those working full-time (35 hours plus). While Aboriginal people continue to participate in the scheme, income equality goals will not be attained (Altman and Sanders 1991: 521). This problem could be greater than the census indicates because income data collected emphasise money income, and do not take into account that people in full-time award positions receive a range of future benefits that are not available to CDEP scheme workers. Perhaps the most contentious at present are payments that are not made under the Superannuation Guarantee Charge legislation passed in June 1992. The implication of this oversight is that a person can work in the CDEP scheme for many years, but receive no employer superannuation contributions. A similar possibility exists with long-service leave entitlements and other award benefits (see Smith 1990). This was not a pressing issue in the past as absence of awards was common for Aboriginal organisations generally. Recently, and especially in the 1992-93 budget context, ATSIC has moved to extend awards to Aboriginal organisations ('Industrial relations award coverage', *The ATSIC Reporter*, September 1992). This development makes the CDEP scheme appear anomalous and again raises the recurring issue of whether the CDEP scheme is a labour market program, community development scheme or just income support.

The data here lend some empirical support to another policy issue that has been raised in relation to the CDEP scheme, but has remained largely untested: does the scheme operate as a substitution funding regime? (see Altman and Sanders 1991: 520-1). The fact that over 90 per cent of assumed CDEP scheme employment was in the two industries, public administration and community services, certainly lends support to the view that this Commonwealth scheme is financing community service functions that are the functional responsibilities of State and local governments. This finding is reinforced by information on industry sector, although it is assumed that a great deal of CDEP scheme community service employment in the private sector is, in fact, for Aboriginal organisations and councils that fulfil local government-type functions.

The evidence presented here paints a picture of a very restricted range of employment options in those communities participating in the scheme in 1986. Even within these narrow labour markets, there is some evidence of differences in the types of employment available on a part-time compared with a full-time basis. Although most work remained relatively unskilled, even for those working full-time, the more highly skilled jobs were invariably held by full-time, rather than part-time, workers. This supports the view that the CDEP scheme has the potential to create overwhelmingly secondary labour markets at participating communities. There are, however, two alternate views about such a development. On the one hand, it could be argued that the part-time employment opportunities provided by the scheme are preferable to no employment. On the other hand, the data do not suggest that participation in the scheme performs a function similar to an apprenticeship or training scheme in preparing young people for full-time work, as participants came from all age groups. Hence, there is a real possibility that while Aboriginal people continue to participate in the CDEP scheme they will remain in part-time poorly paid jobs. This situation could be modified if participation in the scheme were actively linked to further education and training and additional full-time employment were available. Unfortunately, such options are not readily available in most rural and remote communities where the scheme operates, although the expansion of the scheme to urban areas raises such possibilities.

The CDEP scheme is a special type of labour market program because it has been established primarily in remote communities that lack active labour markets. The methods for evaluating labour market programs, even of a mainstream variety, are extremely complex and rarely undertaken in a rigorous manner in Australia (see Daly (1992b) for a comparison with evaluations undertaken in the United States). But the complexity of the scheme, especially in terms of its unresolved multiple objectives (Altman 1990; CDEP Working Party 1990), will not, in our opinion, insulate the scheme from future more rigorous evaluation. The reason for this possible increased scrutiny in the future is linked to a combination of broad changes in the Australian social policy environment and the Aboriginal affairs policy shift to emphasise the scheme as a labour market, rather than income support program without adequate consideration of the implications of such a policy shift. Despite the recommendations of various reviews and reports referred to earlier, there has been limited government commitment to rigorously collect information on outcomes (in all their diversity) of the scheme. The consultancy currently being undertaken by Deloitte Ross Tohmatsu and ATSIC's survey of all CDEP scheme communities will only be laying the groundwork for future evaluation owing to an absence of baseline data.

Reluctance to collect data on outcomes may have been justifiable in the past when the CDEP scheme was regarded as an alternative means to provide 'UB-equivalent' income support to participants. But in the early 1990s the social welfare policy environment has changed considerably, despite the current recession. In particular, Australia now has an Active Employment Strategy, and increasingly rigorous requirements to train and seek employment when under Job Search or Newstart Allowances (Altman 1992a). Interestingly, this Active Employment Strategy is running into identical problems experienced by the CDEP scheme over the past decade and a half. In remote areas lacking active labour markets, it is extremely difficult to link training with full-time employment opportunities, especially in the private sector. Guidelines for these two programs have already been modified to reflect this reality.

Under the AEDP, the marginal benefits of the CDEP scheme have been increased to the extent that participating communities receive a 20 per cent on-costs component above social security entitlements and have potential access to the CDEP Support program that can provide an additional 20 per cent for the purchase of equipment. These marginal benefits are only available to Aboriginal communities participating in the scheme and during the current recession might be welcome in non-Aboriginal rural communities with comparable levels of unemployment. Under these circumstances, there might be growing pressure on ATSIC to demonstrate that the CDEP scheme is generating positive employment outcomes. This is especially the case in those communities that have participated in the scheme since the late 1970s, a time frame that is unimaginable for other labour market programs. It is imperative, under these circumstances, that data from the 1996 Census, from earlier Labour Force Surveys with an Aboriginal identifier (Daly 1992a) and from the proposed national survey of the Aboriginal population (Altman 1992b), clearly identify the characteristics of participants in this scheme. It is equally important that the objectives of the CDEP scheme in different labour market situations are redefined in policy realistic terms. There may be little point in continuing to define the scheme as a labour market program in rural and remote situations that lack active labour markets. But there might be a very strong case for defending the scheme as a cost-effective means of providing part-time employment, as community development, in such situations.

Notes

1. The terms 'Aborigines' and 'Aboriginal' are used throughout this paper as an abbreviation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.
2. The CDEP scheme is referred to as a Commonwealth-funded employment program in legislation (*Social Security Amendment (No. 3) Act 1991*) passed in November 1991.

3. Examples include Altman and Taylor (1989), CDEP Working Party (1990), Altman (1990), Altman and Sanders (1991) and Ross (1991). There is a growing literature on the scheme that incorporates community and commentators' evaluations of the scheme, including Bonner (1988), Moizo (1990), Morony (1991), Smith et al. (1990) and Arthur (1991).
4. The absence of research is being partially redressed by ATSIC engaging a management consultancy company, Deloitte Ross Tohmatsu, to undertake a study of the social and economic impacts of the scheme in 20 communities. However, this study is focusing on contemporary issues. The analysis here will provide a partial supplement to that study by providing broad historical information on CDEP scheme participants. More importantly, it will allow some limited comparison between 1986 and 1991 Census data when final data from the latest census become available in 1993.
5. The questions reported here are taken from the remote area census form which is filled in by interview rather than from the standard census form. The remote area form was the one which was used at all the communities participating in the CDEP scheme, except those in Queensland, in 1986. The wording of the relevant questions differed slightly between the two forms. The standard form included the following questions concerning labour force status: 'Last week, did the person have a full-time or part-time job of any kind?' (question 26), and 'Did the person actively look for work at any time during the last four weeks?' (question 27). For a fuller discussion of the methods of census collection in remote areas see Taylor (1992a).
6. Correspondence from Daniel Aherne, Employment and Earnings Section, ABS dated 22 September 1992.
7. There is a degree of dynamism in participation in the scheme. Some communities, like Milingimbi, withdrew from the scheme, while more and more have joined. There has also been some splintering as outstation communities and new outstation resource centres have been established.
8. The communities selected with alternative names in brackets were as follows: in the Northern Territory, Barunga (Bamyili), Galiwinku (Elcho Island), Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella) and Yirrkala; in South Australia, Ernabella (Pukatja) and Yalata; in Western Australia, Wiluna (Ngangganawili), Warburton, Oombulgarri, Kalumburu, Jigalong, Balgo (Wirrimanu), Cundalee/Coonan (Upurl Upurlila), Lombadina and Beagle Bay; and in Queensland, Weipa South, Doomadgee, Aurukun and Mornington Island.
9. See Arthur (1991) for a detailed discussion of the operation of the CDEP scheme in the Torres Strait.
10. An obvious problem with our census-based approach with its focus on one point in time was that some CDEP scheme participants may have been enumerated elsewhere, while other non-CDEP scheme participants may have been at the sampled communities. Similarly, the social universe of CDEP scheme participants may have been wider than the ABS CD boundary, resulting in some participants residing outside the sampled CD. This possibility was minimised by the focus on Aboriginal townships rather than outstations in our sample. The conduct of the 1986 Census coincided with seasonal high mobility for Aboriginal people in northern Australia.
11. We assumed that as we covered half the communities participating in the scheme this also covered half the participants. However, some communities like Ernabella extended the scheme to outstations that were in a different CD from the township.

12. This proportion compares with 67 per cent for the total Aboriginal working-age population who were not in employment.
13. There is a possibility that this divergence may have altered somewhat owing to a change in policy direction after the launch of the AEDP and the inclusion of a further objective that sought the development of skills in management, supervision and specific job-related areas, especially those that enhanced CDEP participants' opportunities for gaining other (full-time award) local employment or developing commercially viable enterprises (CDEP Working Party 1990: 7; ATSIC 1991: 5).
14. See Taylor (1992b) for a fuller discussion of the occupational status of employed Aboriginal people in 1986.
15. Such investigation will require detailed case study and prolonged fieldwork for the former and data on sources of income for the latter (Altman and Smith 1992).

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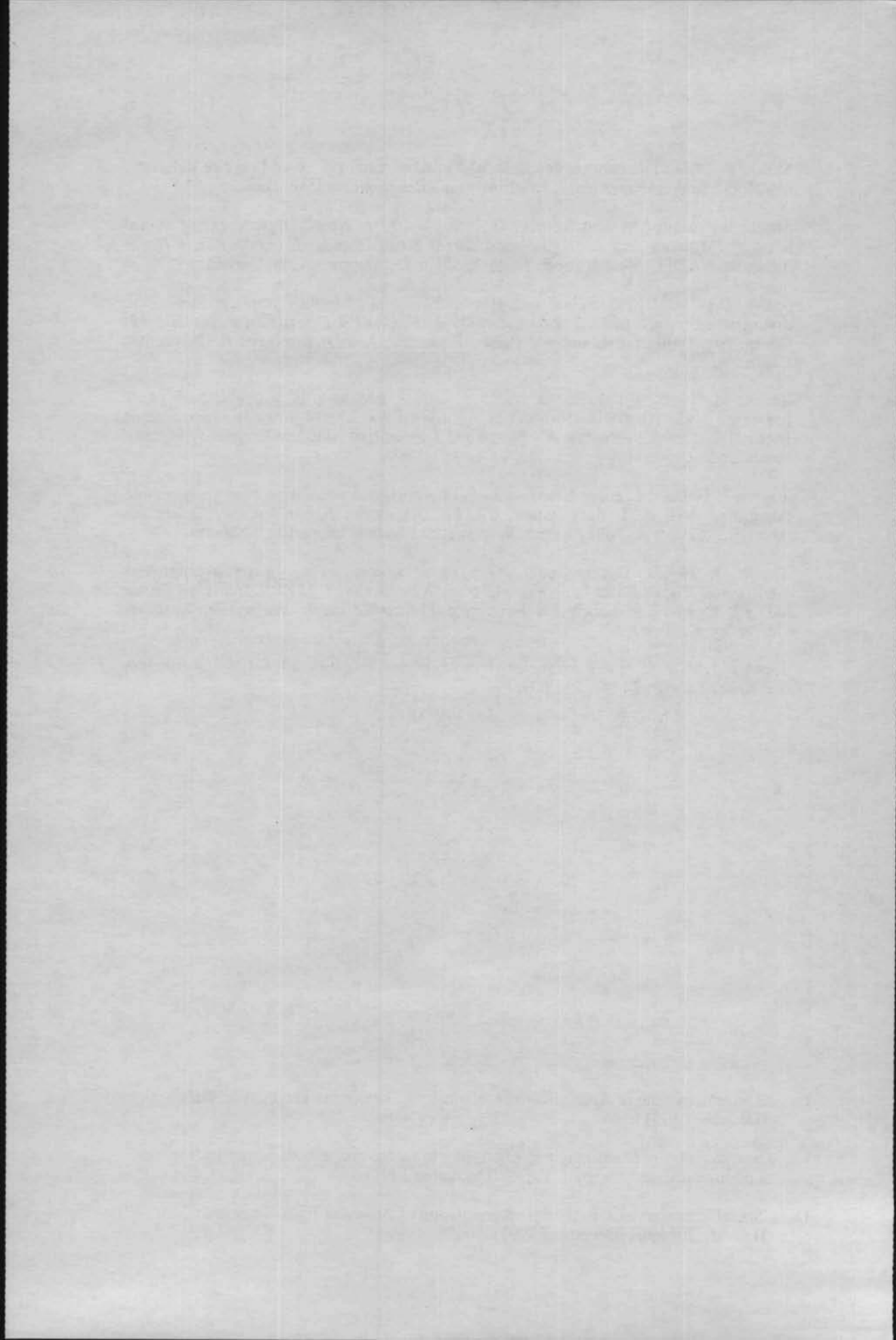
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