

Mr COOPER (Mornington) - Mr Speaker, I join with other honourable members in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the office of Speaker.

I wish to acknowledge the privilege I have in representing the new electorate of Mornington, I have been involved in many community activities in the area during that period and, therefore, the House will understand why my affection for my electorate is strong.

Although the electorate itself has new boundaries, the name "Mornington" is not new in this House. In 1859, in the second Parliament of the State, the electorate of Mornington was first represented by Mr William Lyall. Since that time, although with various boundary changes, the Mornington electorate has had as members some highly distinguished and well-known representatives. Many honourable members will be familiar with the names of Alfred Downward, Herbert Downward, Alfred Kirton, William Leggatt and Roberts Dunstan. All of these gentlemen served the State and their electorate with distinction and along with five other representatives dating back to 1859, have ensured that the electorate I now represent has had a significant voice in this House.

In recent times, the name "Mornington" has been missing from the roll call of Parliament but, following the redistribution, it has re-emerged. The new seat incorporates the areas of Langwarrin, Pearcedale, Baxter, Somerville, Tyabb, Hastings, Crib Point, French Island, Bittern, Moorooduc and Mount Eliza, as well as Mornington itself.

The Mornington electorate comprises 910 square kilometres and is part of one of the most delightful areas of Australia, the Mornington Peninsula.

The electorate is made up from part of the former electorate of Westernport and from part of the previous electorate of Dromana. I take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, of thanking the honourable member for Gippsland West for his hard work and dedication to the people I now represent from his electorate. He is respected throughout the peninsula and Gippsland as a person of integrity. I am delighted to be one of his colleagues in this House.

It is a matter of regret for me to have to advise the House that for the past three years the Mornington Peninsula has been sadly neglected by the Government in a number of important respects. Promises made to the people of the peninsula have not been kept and they feel cheated and deserted.

The Mornington electorate is part of a region which has the highest number of unemployed people in Victoria and the third highest number of unemployed in Australia. This can hardly be a matter of pride to the Government, yet virtually nothing has been done to try to correct it.

Job creation in the Mornington electorate is a sick joke. We have seen short-term "Mickey Mouse" jobs beaten up with taxpayers' funds and then the people who have been engaged on those jobs being tossed back on the unemployment scrap heap. Real jobs can be created in areas like the peninsula if the Government is prepared to think laterally and to make brave decisions. It is a matter for regret that the present Government does not seem to be prepared to take such decisions and has hog-tied itself into a philosophical position where lateral thinking on this important subject is impossible.

The transport needs of the Mornington Peninsula have been similarly ignored and the return of the train service to Stony Point, for which I congratulate the Government, has been more than

offset by the appalling public transport shambles elsewhere.

No public transport services exist to carry people across the peninsula and even the most basic consumer research will reveal that existing bus routes fail to service local communities as adequately as they should. The elderly, and the young in particular, are severely disadvantaged by the present system and, despite vigorous protests by individuals and groups, the situation has not been improved. Although a review of public transport facilities is about to commence, some crying and very obvious needs that can be instituted at little expense, have been ignored. It is little wonder that the public are upset and consider that they are being neglected.

I draw to the attention of the Government the condition of some schools in the Mornington electorate which need urgent attention. Whilst I am aware of some last minute election pledges to carry out work on some of these schools, and I shall be pursuing those promises from this moment on, no commitment has been made to keep up with the ongoing needs of schools in my electorate. The Pearcedale Primary School, the Bittern Primary School and the Baxter Primary School are just three establishments in genuine and desperate need of work. The Government should be aware of other pressing needs that schools have in my electorate such as the totally inadequate library facilities at the Mount Eliza Primary School. Sympathetic hearings and rousing rhetoric are no substitute for adequate premises in which children can receive a proper education.

In each of the schools I have mentioned, the needs are obvious and the pupils are suffering. I trust that action will now occur to remedy the deficiencies, without the school communities being forced to resort again to having to embarrass the Government publicly into action.

In negotiating with the Education Department over more than a decade, my experience has been that the department reacts to extreme pressures and rarely seems to initiate action before the pressures start.

I urge the Government to implement effective forward planning mechanisms that will give all communities a reasonable forecast of when new facilities, or improvements to existing facilities, will take place. The present system simply does not work.

The people of the Mornington electorate should not be penalized because they choose not to live in metropolitan Melbourne. As things stand today, the Government is imposing an extra financial burden on the people of my electorate and I will continually point out the details of these matters until the Government recognizes the effect of its actions and gives the peninsula a fair deal.

For the past thirteen years I have had the pleasure of serving as a councillor on the Shire of Mornington. Local government commenced in Mornington 114 years ago and serving on its council gives one a real sense of history and a deep appreciation of what local government in Victoria really means. Local government in this State is a unique institution because in every instance our municipalities have been created as a result of community demands. In other States, local government has, in most instances, been imposed on communities and as a result there is not the same depth of feeling for the local council as there is in Victoria.

The recent moves of the Government, which have decimated the Local Government Department and seen a change in staff levels from 280 down to 80, are disturbing to all who really believe in the institution of local government.

The people of Victoria, the dedicated voluntary councillors and the numerous local government employees throughout this State, deserve better than the vote of no confidence in local government that we are now seeing by the Government. Local government should be aided, not attacked. It should be protected, not persecuted. It should be encouraged, not emasculated. An attack of real significance is being mounted in Canberra against local government funding. Recent reports indicate that the Federal Government intends to cut heavily into local government funding to such an extent that Victoria's municipalities will lose at least \$13 million this coming year. If that loss occurs, the effect on councils in Victoria will be enormous. I am informed that the City of Box Hill will lose \$120 000 and that the City of Nunawading will lose \$150 000. This will affect services to their ratepayers and employees' jobs, or a combination of both. The cut of \$13 million could mean the loss of at least 500 jobs throughout Victoria, so the situation is extremely serious.

The Federal Labor Government of Mr Whitlam was the first to affirm strongly its faith in local government and to ensure that councils receive as a right a share of personal income tax revenue.

This stance was widely applauded throughout Australia and when the Fraser Government was elected in 1975 it reaffirmed and, indeed, expanded the status of local government.

The savage and unwarranted attack on local government by the present Commonwealth Government must be resisted by all sectors of the political spectrum. I assure the Government and the Minister that I and my party will work with them to endeavour to stop this proposed breach of faith by the Commonwealth Government. I call on the Government immediately to protest at this move and not to delay any action it may take until the decisions have been finalized and all is lost.

I conclude by once again thanking the people of the electorate I represent for placing their trust in me and I promise that I will do everything I am able to do to ensure that they are represented energetically and, I hope, intelligently. I thank the Liberal Party for the honour it has given me in selecting me as its candidate for the seat of Mornington. I extend my gratitude to the members of my campaign committee, under the excellent leadership of Mr Alan Caton and Mrs Judith Horman, for the tremendous job they did, actively aided by more than 100 people of many political persuasions, including all those represented in this House. We achieved together a significant victory. I also thank the House for the courtesy it has shown me on this occasion.