

been a tremendous catalyst for community development. It has given the advice, encouragement and drive needed. I have attended meetings in the eastern suburbs and been tremendously impressed by what is being accomplished with limited resources. Thousands of individuals are now involved in programmes started by Access. They are providing coffee shops, half-way houses, recreation groups, and study groups. In all the fields of community welfare, people are actually doing things. This is a prime example of the qualities which conservatives hold dear—initiative, enthusiasm and energy—not used in pursuit of personal gain, personal power or personal influence, but in pursuit of the common good. If the Australian Government eliminates the Access groups, and many fear it will, it will have committed an act of calumny on every Australian.

The challenge before us is the increasing remoteness of ordinary people from the instruments which control their everyday lives. The challenge must be met with courage—not flag-waving courage, but the courage to refuse to tolerate inadequate services, accept shoddy goods, pay extortionate prices, be tied up by red tape, or be lulled into apathy by reactionary politicians. The quiet courage of individual citizens is needed to ensure that their views are effectively represented whenever their welfare is involved. Members supporting the Government are often vociferous in support of compulsory secret ballots in trade union elections. What about compulsory secret ballots for the election of directors of public companies, for the trustees of superannuation funds or for the boards of life assurance companies? The people who pay Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works rates should have a direct say in the board's decisions. The same applies to the Country Roads Board, the State Electricity Commission and every other instrumentality. What this State needs is leadership which will recognize this

need of the people, accept this challenge and take determined action directed towards a truly representative and involved society.

Mr. LIEBERMAN (Benambra): It is indeed a privilege for me—the first member of the Liberal Party to represent the electors of Benambra for more than twenty years—to express to you, Mr. Speaker, the best wishes of the people of Benambra on your re-election to the high office you occupy, and also to express to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. the loyalty of her subjects in Benambra. I can testify to the fact that the making of a maiden speech is an ordeal. However, as I walked to the House tonight, I looked to the heavens for some inspiration. It started to rain and I realized that the drought had broken. If that is all that the member for Benambra can contribute to Victoria, perhaps he has done his duty tonight.

I was pleased to note that on three occasions His Excellency the Governor, in his Speech, referred to projects of great impact to Australia and Victoria. Those projects are being undertaken in my electorate. I refer, of course, to the natural gas pipeline which will soon reach Albury-Wodonga and provide a further impetus to the strength of country Victoria and Australia, and to the important Dartmouth dam project which is well under way. Its construction will contribute to the security of Australia and to the betterment of the people.

It will be recalled that His Excellency reaffirmed the Government's dedication to the Albury-Wodonga project. As the member for Benambra it is only fitting that I should refer in my maiden speech to this great national project. With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I should like to go through the pages of history, although not too far back, and refer to some of the sequence of events which led up to the present Albury-Wodonga project. It was an historic

day for Australia and Victoria on 25th January, 1973, when the then Prime Minister, the Premier of Victoria, Mr. Hamer, the Premier of New South Wales—at that time it was Sir Robert Askin—and other State Ministers, including the Honorable Murray Byrne, met in Albury-Wodonga and announced plans for one of the most important and far-reaching projects ever envisaged in this country. That, of course, was the Albury-Wodonga growth project. For the first time in the history of the nation the Commonwealth and the States crossed borders and made agreements. I understand that the first conference after Federation on decentralization occurred in 1901 and was adjourned. The next meeting was in 1923. Therefore, this agreement was extremely significant. What was more wonderful than anything else was that all political parties were involved. It was probably one of the most important joint activities ever proposed by three Governments in the history of Federation. During the years leading up to the event and since, public opinion in Australia has shown increasing concern at the economic and social disadvantages of the excessive concentration of population in the capital cities.

New members of this House from both sides have referred to the problems of Melbourne's transportation system. I am sure it will be agreed that what I am saying is being borne out even at this moment. With your leave, Mr. Speaker, I should like to quote some extracts from some speeches by leaders in both the Federal sphere and this Parliament.

Mr. Snedden, who was then Leader of the Opposition in the Commonwealth Parliament, spoke on the Albury-Wodonga Development Bill which had been presented by Mr. Uren and supported by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam. On 29th November, 1973, he said—

I welcome all four of these Bills. They will be supported by the Opposition. The initiatives in these Bills set out to relieve the

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pressure on the ever-sprawling maritime conurbations. In over-simple terms, the major cities are growing too large and therefore there must be active intervention to regionalize development.

He went on to speak on some passages in the Bill and then said—

All parties take the view that this scheme should be developed. Some differences of attitude may emerge over time, but we welcome the continuation of that initiative. The fact is that this legislation exists and we must go ahead on the basis of that legislation in the national interest.

Mr. Snedden concluded by saying—

I applaud the evidence of Federal and State co-operation. The Bill sets the guidelines for one of our most worth-while projects undertaken in 1972.

It does not need me to remind the House that the then Federal Opposition, for which Mr. Snedden spoke, is now the Government of Australia. I also pay tribute to the support given to this legislation by the Opposition in this House and, in doing so, I quote in part from a speech by the Leader of the Opposition on 11th December, 1973, when the honorable member spoke in support of the Wodonga Area Land Acquisition Bill. He said—

This measure has the support of the Opposition, which shares the views expressed not only by the Premier of Victoria but by the Prime Minister. The concept of Albury-Wodonga is one of the most exciting projects ever undertaken by Governments in the history of the Commonwealth. It shows what can be accomplished in the spirit of co-operative federalism.

The Premier, who I think deserves the credit for the initiatives taken in bringing about this legislation, when explaining the Bill on 21st November, 1973, said—

The project is unique, and the decision of the three Governments to implement such a decentralization policy is undoubtedly the most significant taken so far in Australian history.

The Premier then developed some points in the Bill and said—

This proposal for conjoint action by the Commonwealth and two State Governments to create an attractive urban environment for some 300,000 people has no parallel. The Albury-Wodonga area has an excellent climate and is within easy reach of natural recreational facilities. It is situated on the

main Melbourne to Sydney communication link and has the benefit of quick access to the large markets of these seaboard cities.

The legislation was also supported by the then member for Benambra, Mr. Tom Mitchell, and the then member for Murray Valley, Mr. Bill Baxter.

On behalf of the electors of Benambra, I pay tribute to Mr. Mitchell for the service which he gave to Victoria and his electorate. I can assure this House that he is held in very high regard by the people of Benambra. Mr. Baxter, who supported Mr. Mitchell and spoke for the National Party, in my view contributed very ably to the debate and to the formation of the policies which became enshrined in the legislation.

That brings us to 1976. Effective action to influence the distribution of population to the advantage of the nation and the quality of urban life is more essential today than perhaps three years ago. Albury-Wodonga can demonstrate, world wide, a pilot decentralization scheme of great quality which would be a credit to Australia. It should be regarded as a contribution to the total urban pattern of the future Australia.

If funding of the project does not continue, the long-term cost to the taxpayer of housing Australia's growing population could be enormous. The need for the programme has not been altered by the Australian population predictions based on those contained in the Borrie report. The programme was based on predictions very similar to the findings in the Borrie report.

If funding for the next stage of the project were concentrated on the commencement of works at Albury-Wodonga and the provision of incentives for private companies to move into the centre, this would create more job opportunities and encourage investment, which are two of the top priorities of any Government in Australia at the moment. The future interests of the nation must be taken into account.

What are the reasons for keeping this project going? One is the sheer need to slow down the uncontrolled growth of Sydney and Melbourne. The idea that concentrated decentralization is more effective than a piecemeal dispersal of the resources available is beyond dispute. The need for serious and comprehensive planning to achieve a successful new city in Australia is more paramount today than ever before. Further, national security must ever be a consideration. The advantage in costs that favours growth in smaller cities against unlimited expansion in big cities has been well established.

As the member for Benambra, I am naturally concerned that no clear statement of Federal policy on the Albury-Wodonga development has yet been made. A positive statement of intent by the Federal authorities is needed. The general need for economy in public spending is accepted by all well-meaning Australians, but when this is likely to destroy the painstakingly accumulated impetus and confidence which goes into such an important and long-term enterprise as the building of a new city, the short-term savings of the present might well be counter-productive.

A significant and abrupt hiatus in the complex processes now under way would severely strain the public and private enterprise confidence that is indispensable to their progress.

The people of Albury-Wodonga were asked to accept a new way of life in that community. Many were asked to give up their land to the Governments of Victoria and New South Wales so that the project could proceed. Proving their basic worth, the people went along with it. There was some unhappiness and quite a deal of public concern expressed at the time but, true to their calibre, the people have adapted and have accepted that in many cases they must leave farms which their pioneer grandparents had established.

They have done this because they were asked to do so by the three Governments in the interests of a better Australia and a better State.

Honorable members will appreciate that, as the member for Benambra, it is important that I should inform this House that those people who were asked to give up so much and are still willing to proceed with the project should not be let down. A substantial number of people in Albury-Wodonga could find themselves on the dole, and the Federal Government will have lost a good opportunity to promote the investment-led recovery of the economy that it is looking for. What has happened in the past three years in Albury-Wodonga has proved the worth of the region. The Albury-Wodonga regional economy has performed better than the national economy as a whole and the percentage of its work force in manufacturing is greater than the national average. That is the type of estate where the seed of a successful new city for Australia has been planted. That seed must be allowed to grow.

I also direct the attention of the House to the important contribution made by Benambra to the primary production of Australia. Benambra is an area which contributes in produce a large proportion of Victoria's and, of course, Australia's production.

The plight of the rural sector of the economy is posing the greatest threat to Australia's prosperity. Yet this is not recognized by most Australians. Rural produce remains Australia's largest export income earner. When export earnings are hit, Australia's prosperity as a whole is threatened. Loss of income just does not stop at the farm gate. The Australian people must learn this; they must be told this as a matter of urgency. The flow passes the farm gate into country towns and, farther along the line, there is a decline in sales of the metropolitan producers who supply many manufactured products that country people require.

Mr. Lieberman.

This is a time when we are particularly concerned to create a revival of consumer demand to lift our economy back on to its feet. Thus, a crisis in the rural sector affects us all. We must strive for wider recognition of this problem and acceptance by all Australians of the fact that our nation can remain strong only if we are a united people who recognize the partnership between country and city. As it is our wish that city people should be fairly rewarded for their work and capital investment, so also should our farmers receive a fair return.

Mr. CAIN (Bundoora): Mr. Speaker, may I first say how much I have valued the opportunity to sit on this back bench in comparative peace and quiet during the first four or five days of this session and to observe the processes of this House. It is true that I would have enjoyed that experience more had I more colleagues to my right and left, both physically and philosophically.

I found the meetings which you, Mr. Speaker, arranged in co-operation with the Clerk last week to be of enormous benefit to me in endeavouring to understand the processes of this place. I am sure that other new members also received satisfaction from them. My sitting here for these first four or five days has given me the opportunity to hear the maiden speeches of a number of honorable members and I congratulate them on their contributions. I am sure that, like me, they have been impressed with the processes of this House and in seeing how the laws of this State are made in the efficient way in which they are.

I suspect that a number of newer members—I do not think this applies to any of the older members—believe that, when the courts of this State are cast in the role of interpreting and enforcing the laws which we make, and also our common law, the processes are just as smooth and efficient. Nothing could be further from the