

Mr. HOLDING: I do not know what one needs to convince the Minister of Labour and Industry. There has been a public admission by the Premier that the document was handed to the Chief Secretary; he supports the view of the chairman of the committee and is aware of the obligations that exist under the statute. The document was not tabled or made public until after the election. There was a considerable lag of time, and honorable members are entitled to learn from the Premier the cause of the delay. When it was suggested to the Premier that this was a matter of some seriousness, the best the honorable gentleman could say was that he would have a look at it.

The simple issue is this: When a statute as important as this has been so grievously disregarded, before the report was tabled the Premier should have sought an explanation for the delay, and when the report was tabled an explanation and an apology should have been given to the House. That is the least that honorable members are entitled to expect.

I put the House on notice now that this issue is not going to lie dormant. We would not be discharging our obligations to the Parliament and to the people of this State if we sat back and took the cavalier attitude of some of the new members on the back benches who are still wet behind the ears and believe any action by a Minister can be condoned and pardoned. If the Premier does not want to give the explanation there are processes that this Parliament can invoke, and we will seek to have them invoked, to have the former Chief Secretary brought back to this Parliament so that he can explain. There might be a simple explanation. Knowing the former Chief Secretary, I can imagine it could well be a simple explanation. That is the standard we are establishing and I hope the Premier and the relevant Minister will seek to provide an explanation to the House and to the people of this State as quickly

as possible. The report that now has been tabled is not only nine months late, but another report is now due which is going to state that there will be another 15 per cent increase.

This Parliament will be guilty of a serious dereliction of its duty if it allows these imposts to be charged by regulation to the motorists of this State without a proper scrutiny and a proper examination by the Parliament. The Opposition will be demanding that examination, and will be demanding that scrutiny. These charges are excessive and do not have to be imposed. These excessive charges can be avoided by the reconstruction and total reorganization of the State Insurance Office. I do not want to get into that area tonight, and the Opposition will be raising that matter in detail in the very near future.

The point of my remarks is that there has been a very serious dereliction of duty. An answer is due to this Parliament, and members of the Opposition propose to get that answer. We want it quickly because it concerns serious increases in costs to every motor car user in this State. The Opposition is not going to sit back and wait for the Premier at his convenience to provide a further explanation while the former Chief Secretary gets on an aeroplane, flies to England and commences his important duties there as Agent-General, which means there is no way in which he can possibly interrupt the important round of social engagements which will confront him in order to provide an explanation to this Parliament. The Premier can explain, the responsible Minister can explain or the former Chief Secretary, Mr. Rossiter, can be called here to explain, but an explanation is due. It will be demanded and, in the interests of the good government of this State, the sooner it is presented to the House the better.

Mr. McARTHUR (Ringwood): Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I begin my address I would like to ask you to pass on my congratulations

to Mr. Speaker on his recent re-election to his respected and important position in this Parliamentary system.

The seat of Ringwood which I represent is made up of the subdivisions of South Croydon, Ringwood, and Heathmont. Actually it is a new electorate under an old name. Half of it was the former Monbulk electorate, and the other half the old Ringwood electorate. These two areas were represented impeccably by Mr. Borthwick, the present member for Monbulk and Minister for Conservation, and Mr. Lacy, the present member for Warrandyte. On behalf of the constituents of these areas I wish to thank both gentlemen for their good work in the past.

Over the past few weeks I have listened with pleasure and interest to the maiden speeches of other new members in the House. Most seemed to label and identify their electorates, whether it be urban, industrial, or rural. I think I will do the same. Ringwood could be described as a family residential electorate. It is a commuter electorate. The vast majority of working adults travel daily to and from the city. My experience since being a candidate, and then member, has shown that the majority of inquiries and issues involve education. As far as education is concerned I believe that Ringwood has been well served by the policies of this Government. This year alone saw the opening of three brand new schools. I shall just touch on health for a moment. This year will see the opening of the Maroondah public hospital to serve the outer eastern suburbs.

Ringwood is an electorate which is responsive to a Government that caters for its aspirations for family living—it is a family electorate with a social conscience. Generally, I believe the electors of Ringwood want a balanced social welfare programme, but at the same time they insist on the right of the individual to aspire to wherever his initiative and hard work will take him.

His Excellency, the Governor, in his Address to Parliament some weeks ago made prominent mention of the Government's intention to provide for the establishment of a Small Business Corporation to help small businesses with advice on management and finance. I note that the honorable member for Burwood in his opening speech also commended it. Let me also echo those words, and say that I am tremendously enthusiastic about the establishment of a Small Business Corporation. For too long small business has been the area of private enterprise which has suffered through any marginal fluctuation in the economy. But just as I embrace it and encourage it with great enthusiasm, I would also say that it is the responsibility of business to "grasp the nettle" and give value for money. It has become blatantly obvious to the public at large, to the consumers, that in the past decade this just does not exist. There seems to be in the minds of some sections of business the idea that they have some sort of immunity from any type of failure because they come under the all-embracing umbrella of private enterprise. There seems to be in some sections of business a reluctance and lack in the pursuit of excellence and quality in their everyday dealings.

Unfortunately there are some sections of business who feel it is slightly naïve to give value and good service. They look at the short term. Some of them are quite willing to squeeze the consumer as hard as the market will stand. Fortunately in the long term most of these are weeded out. One thing I feel certain of is that the business which pursues excellence and quality and gives value for money will prevail in the long term. Just as I strongly commend this Government's initiatives in taking steps towards helping and advising small businesses, I strongly believe these businesses have got to take a step towards us and meet the Government at least part of the way. I have no doubt whatsoever that generally the calibre of man in small business will

respond enthusiastically to any challenge that we as a Government may set him.

I now move on to local government and the Australian Assistance Plan. As a member of local government I was aware of the alarm in many municipal circles caused by the introduction of the Australian Assistance Plan by the previous Federal Government. There is no doubt that on the surface, if you did not dig too deeply, the concept had a bit going for it. Here was the opportunity for the community to participate in the distribution of money throughout their areas or regions. In my case the Australian Assistance Plan covered nine municipalities in the outer eastern region. A significant number of these councils were apprehensive as to the long-term effects of the plan. They believed, as I did, that here was the first move to create a climate which would eventually lead to the amalgamation of local councils, and their replacement by regions—very conveniently exactly the same size as the Australian Assistance Plan regions. The fear was there in local government in the outer eastern suburbs in 1974 and 1975, and I believe it was one of the strongest weapons used against the previous Federal Government in last year's election.

Local government made no secret of the fact that it was worried, and the message certainly got across. People became aware that the organizational set up of the Australian Assistance Plan regions, with their *ad hoc*, loosely constituted groups were simply not accountable for their actions. This is something the voter wants to have some control over. Federal, State and local government decision makers are accountable every three years at the ballot-box, but those in the Australian Assistance Plan regional councils were completely immune, even from the press.

I am the first to admit that the Australian Assistance Plan has been of benefit in some specific areas so I am not in agreement with its demolition

—rather the drawing of any savage teeth which may constitute a future danger to the present three-tier system of government.

I will just briefly quote a small part of the Liberal Party's policy on federalism to indicate how this plan poses a danger. It hits the nail right on the head. I quote—

Artificial regions will not be forced on local authorities from Canberra. Local bodies will be free to establish formal or informal groupings from time to time for particular functional purposes, but regions will not be used by the Commonwealth as centralist instruments to bypass the States, to amalgamate areas, or to impose Commonwealth policies.

I am reminded of a statement last year by one of my colleagues when referring to some of the money given out under the Australian Assistance Plan, and I recall the honorable member for Warrandyte saying something similar on this subject last week—I believe the statement hits the nail right on the head. He said that in his opinion all too often Australian Assistance Plan money was being provided for middle-class diversions; in other words some of those benefiting needed it least.

It is my belief that if the Australian Assistance Plan had taken the course planned for it by the previous Federal Government, we would soon have seen a climate develop for regionalization of municipalities, and then the steady weakening of States' rights to the point of uselessness. Sooner or later, the accumulation of power in a central government leads to a loss of freedom. Once power is concentrated, even for worth-while purposes, it is all there in one package, where it can be seized by those who may not be worthwhile in its use.

If power is spread out and diffused this cannot happen so easily. We should be grateful that our founding fathers in the years prior to 1901 carefully studied the Federal set-up of the United States of America, and carefully divided power. We should always be aware that the traditional

Federal-State relationship starts with a general presumption in favour of State and individual rights.

I am not an historian, but through my reading I know of scarcely a single instance in history where the dictatorial centralization of power has been compatible with individual freedoms. A fundamental fact remains with us at all times. The Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government. That will never change, and it will be remembered in the future whenever it counts. Of course, one of the steps in the long-term plan to weaken States' rights is in my belief the motion last week to abolish the Legislative Council, which I will call the other place in future. This can only be described as an act of political cynicism. Although I concede that in the long term the Opposition wants to see the demise of our Upper House, I can only view the motion of last week as being a cynical token gesture.

I feel the general impression and belief prevailing at the moment is that the Opposition would not have dreamed of moving for the abolition of the other place if it thought there was the slightest chance of its being successful. This is why the term "political cynicism", I believe, is apt. We are told that this is the first time in twenty years there has been such a motion. After the resounding Government victory at the polls on 20th March, here was the perfect opportunity for the Opposition members to get a lot of press mileage and publicity, without really having to risk the abolition of their seats.

It would be hard to convince many people that the Opposition members of the Upper House were so altruistic that they got themselves elected just so that they could wipe themselves out like a kamikaze suicide squad. So far as I am concerned, this just will not wear.

It has been very fashionable recently to knock the Upper House or Legislative Council, but despite criti-

cism I firmly believe the Upper House has an important role to play in our Parliamentary system. It is still the main safety valve on legislation. In my opinion its existence virtually guarantees to prevent the intrusion of any form of legislative anarchy in our Victorian Parliamentary system. I believe that if by a chance in a million it suddenly looked as though the abolition motion could be successful, we would see the greatest retreat in political history—it would be like the charge of the Light Brigade in reverse. I have great confidence in the continuation of our present three-tier system of government, and more particularly the continued existence of the two-House system in the Parliament of Victoria.

Once again, I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to pass on my congratulations to Mr. Speaker and to express my loyalty to His Excellency the Governor and Her Majesty the Queen.

**Mr. McINNES** (Gippsland South): I express the traditional loyalty of the electors of Gippsland South to Her Majesty the Queen and the monarchy system. In doing so, I stress that at this stage a large number of Her Majesty's subjects in my electorate are seriously handicapped. I make no apology for covering some of the ground that has been so well covered by my colleagues, the honorable members for Rodney and Gippsland East, because they have put the position of the people who are so disadvantaged at this moment squarely and fairly before this Parliament. I make no apology for restating the situation facing primary industries in Victoria at present as it is a most serious issue which ought to concern each and every member of this Parliament, and not only Government members.

Recently, at a meeting, similar to so many meetings which have been held throughout country Victoria, at Drouin the farming population who have borne the problem so willingly