

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH**Address-in-Reply**

The SPEAKER (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds)—I have the honour to report that the House this day attended His Excellency the Governor in the Legislative Council Chamber when His Excellency was pleased to make a Speech to both Houses of Parliament of which, for greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy. As the Speech is printed, and copies are in the hands of honourable members, it will not be necessary for me to read it.

The sitting was suspended at 6.11 p.m. until 8.3 p.m.

Mr McCUTCHEON (St Kilda)—I move:

That the following Address-in-Reply to the Speech of His Excellency the Governor to both Houses of the Parliament be agreed to by this House—

YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, the Legislative Assembly of Victoria, assembled in Parliament, wish to express our loyalty to our Sovereign, and to thank your Excellency for the Speech which you have made to the Parliament.

It is an honour for me to be asked to move the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-Reply. I understand that this motion is traditionally moved and seconded by new members. On this occasion, because of the special significance that it has had for my party and my colleagues, I am deeply honoured.

The election of 3 April saw the highest vote recorded by any political party since 1917. The Government has a resounding seventeen-seat majority in this House. Rarely has a Government in this State been returned with a majority of this size, so the present Government can proceed to its business with the assurance, support and goodwill of the people of this State.

I acknowledge the Speech by His Excellency. It represents the views of the Government and indicates the programme that this House will implement during the autumn sessional period. It was His Excellency's first opening of Parliament and I express good wishes to His Excellency and Lady Murray and express the hope that they will have a successful term in the service of the people of Victoria.

To you, Mr Speaker, I extend my personal congratulations. I wish you well and know that you will discharge your responsibilities with distinction and with the impartiality that befits the office of Speaker.

One of the first impressions gained in this Parliament on a day of this type is that of the traditions of this institution. There is a place for tradition, but one must also recognize that tradition can overwhelm, bind and constrict. I also believe in change and in the need for change. The new Government is committed to policies and programmes that will bring about important changes. In the course of governing it will have to make choices that will involve retaining those traditions that have served the community well. At the same time, it will have to modify and on occasions abandon some traditions, if they no longer serve the community's goals. If Parliament is to be the place where the common life of the people is ordered, this process of adaptation and modification will certainly continue.

I was pleased that the Premier acted so promptly in relation to one long-standing tradition in this community. In this day and age, it is no longer acceptable to define areas for men and women at racing clubs and other public places by means of a white line painted on the ground. Some public organizations have a long tradition of segregation but, in today's terms, segregation of this sort has been evaluated and found wanting. Nevertheless, it has been allowed to remain because no Government has made the simple move required to achieve a very necessary change until this time. So far as the responsibility of Government is concerned, distinctions of that sort in those places where it has jurisdiction should not be tolerated.

This Government will adopt a different approach to the people. The new Government will not acknowledge elites. It will serve the interests of all Victorians and, where interests are in conflict, those interests will be resolved for the benefit of the many and especially in the interests of those in greatest need.

This Labor Government will raise the community's sights and will increase its awareness of the needs of individuals. The Labor Government's philosophy is not a free enterprise philosophy which allows the few to make headway at the expense of the many. It is a much more difficult and demanding task to be committed to equality of opportunity for all; to be committed to open government; to be committed to freedom of information, to the devolution of power and decision-making, and this should be seen in sharp contrast to the elitism and patronage systems of the previous Government.

A Labor Government will respond to people and their needs. The test of a Government's compassion is perhaps the acid test—the test that will give a pointer to the likely survival of this system of government in future generations. Today we face the pressing issues of unemployment and poverty. As a community we are becoming immune to the desperate plight of others.

The report of the Victorian Emergency Relief Committee published in March carries a stark message. It points to the fact that nearly half a million Australians are unemployed, and, when added to what has been termed as the hidden unemployed, the figure is estimated to be closer to 1 million—certainly in excess of 900 000. Some 240 000 of those unemployed and hidden unemployed are Victorians.

Secondly, as the report says:

Even by the most austere measures, somewhere between 1 million and 2 million Australians are poor. They do not have enough to live on. All this in a rich country where income per head of population is amongst the highest in the world.

The Salvation Army was reported in the last week as saying that the level of demand for welfare assistance in Victoria is the heaviest for 50 years—that is to say, the worst since the days of the great depression.

The fact is that poverty and unemployment are in the first place Federal Government issues, and present Federal Government policies are a major cause of the levels of poverty and unemployment. Further, the report claims that the Federal Government has failed

in its constitutional role of providing an adequate income for all Australians and has failed to create a healthy, stable and equitable society. It is clearly also a major concern of the new Government in this State to take what action it can to alleviate the obvious distress of so many Victorians.

The Government's programme of community welfare services will be taxed to the limit. At the same time it will have the responsibility of drawing public attention to the failure of the Federal Government to discharge its responsibilities. The Victorian Government will also press the Federal Government for change as a matter of urgency. Priority must also be placed on the work of the task force to be set up by the Minister for Community Welfare Services announced by His Excellency this afternoon.

One further area that impinges directly on the poor and the unemployed is that of public sector housing. There are ever-increasing numbers of people who cannot afford home ownership. They have to rent accommodation, and currently private sector rents are higher than they can afford. Furthermore, insufficient rental housing is available in the public sector.

The Green Paper on housing stated that some 100 000 households in Victoria were in need of housing assistance. That was the figure in 1980. It could well be higher now in 1982. The Green Paper suggested that a target for Government of 3600 houses and flats per year should be set if any significant impact should be made on this housing situation.

The previous Government had an appalling record in which it had sold more than 50 per cent of its public housing stock over the years. It only recently moved to halt those sales. It also had the lowest *per capita* expenditure of any State on public housing. Coupled with the savage cuts by the Federal Government to the public housing sector through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, this has meant that the prospect for achieving any improvement in Victoria has been forlorn.

The new Government has allocated more than \$70 million from the Victorian Development Fund to the housing budget. It has set a target of 2500 houses and flats, which is based on the funds it can allocate from the State and on those it can predict will come from Canberra. If the growing criticism of the Federal Government's low housing allocations leads to more funds being provided, these will be added to the funds already earmarked for this purpose.

Other aspects of Labor housing policy are to encourage innovative housing programmes, including more co-operative housing associations, more tenant participation in management and more housing for special groups in need. The housing issue particularly illustrates an area in which something effective can be done by a Government with compassion.

Accountability is an issue that is growing in importance as the business of government has expanded in size and complexity. Accountability applies not only to politicians; it applies also to the public sector, the Ministries and departments of Government and to the many thousands of public bodies and authorities in this State.

The work of the Public Bodies Review Committee since March 1980 has been of much importance in this regard. The former chairman of that committee said recently:

Few people, least of all members of the Liberal Government, realized that the formation of the innocuously titled innocuously introduced Public Bodies Review Committee would change for ever the nature of political debate in Victoria.

That was a strong comment when one considers that the work of this committee has been largely to examine the accountability of the State's public bodies.

The committee has been responsible for the first efforts to report critically on the main features of Victoria's public bodies and public sector management. During the course of its work it has drawn the attention of honourable members to gross deficiencies in the management of this State's scarce public resources. It has also emphasized the importance of sound economic

Mr McCutcheon

management as a requirement of good Government. Many of the measures that the new Government will seek to implement are the result of experience gained in the work of this committee.

I have spent seven years as a member of one of the State's largest public bodies, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. Along with many others I have been critical of the accountability of this body which is a rating authority that spends nearly \$300 million each year. Prior to the changes made to the board in 1978, the 54-member board was structured in a way that made it very difficult for board members even to know about the many decisions for which they were, in law, responsible. After 1978, in an amended board, the seven members were in a position to gain a much more comprehensive view of their responsibilities, but in many ways this new smaller board was less accountable to the rate-payers than the previous board.

In improving the processes of Government accountability, that is reporting and demonstrating that responsible management on behalf of the people has been carried out, many new methods and measures will need to be introduced. The public basically wants to know that its dollar is being wisely spent, that there are proper means of reviewing expenditure, that Government programmes are being assessed and measured in dollar value, that the means of undertaking Government and public sector programmes are up to date, efficiently planned and effectively monitored.

Until very recent times this has not been the case. It is only now that attention is being focused on Government efficiency, on Government departmental and authority budgetary processes, efficiency audits and other means to ensure an effective Public Service and Government process.

His Excellency outlined that legislation would be introduced to cover freedom of information, and Labor in Government is committed to making that Government more open. Many of its programmes will encourage the shift of

decision-making power to regions and areas closer to those who will have to live with the decisions.

For many people Government and the bureaucracy are remote and aloof. A concern of the Government will be to bridge the gulf between people and the bureaucracy. A critical area will be that in which the Government consults with the community. It is obvious that the Labor Government places a high priority on consultation and on participation in decision-making. Important lessons are to be learned from the experience of previous Governments. A classic example of an attempt at Government community consultation was tenancy law reform. Under pressure at the 1976 election, the former Government agreed to reform tenancy law. After the election, a community committee was set up with the then Minister's approval and that committee worked for three years to produce a report and recommendations. The Government then prepared a Bill which included many but not all of the chief recommendations of the community committee. During the introduction of the Bill into Parliament, the Government was lobbied by interests outside the community committee which led to the Bill being dropped and a new Bill being drafted with significant changes and concessions to the lobby groups.

The Government failed to consult with the community committee about these changes. It departed from the consultative process that it had commenced. It moved in response to pressure from those who had its ear. The second Bill led to a protest boycott of Government consultations by many community groups.

Finally, when yet another Bill was introduced into Parliament, which differed again from the second Bill, the Government made little allowance for debate and amendment to the Bill in its course through the Parliament. What could have been an important pilot project for consultation on an important community issue—tenancy law reform—degenerated into a process where the expectations of the participants were finally dashed.

Much work has been done in assessing that pilot project to try to identify what steps should be followed for any future Government community consultation. It is clear that each step in the process should be stated clearly and agreement reached before it is commenced so that false expectations are not raised and the process of consultation does not end in disillusionment.

The new Government is committed to making the process of government more acceptable, more understandable and more open to the people. I am critical of the consultative performance of the former Government. It listened to its friends; clearly some sections of the community had access to that Government and enjoyed a privileged position of influence. In contrast, although given an opportunity of putting their views, other groups and sections of the community seldom received satisfaction from that Government.

For twenty years, I have been a member of many community groups that have sought to put their cases to the Government. Time and again, I have experienced the frustration of being rejected because only rarely did the groups to which I belonged obtain any positive response.

I have been a member of many deputations—as a city councillor and as a member of school councils and various community groups interested in housing issues, traffic and transport, freeway impacts, the environment and many other matters. It is not possible to conclude, and I cannot accept, that all the issues that were brought before the former Government were wrong, unacceptable or unwise. On the majority of occasions, these issues were people issues but the Government of the day had placed its priorities elsewhere. I am proud to be part of a Government party whose concerns and priorities are for and with the people.

I have the honour of representing the electorate of St. Kilda. Many issues to which the new Government is giving its attention are issues of my constituents. Unemployment, tenancy reform, public transport, poverty, housing, education and health—all are important to the

people in the electorate that I represent. St Kilda comprises a wide cross-section of Victorian society and I am proud to be able to represent them in Parliament. I thank them for placing their confidence in me so clearly at the recent poll. I hope to serve the electorate energetically and represent my constituents effectively in Parliament.

Mrs RAY (Box Hill)—I am honoured to second the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Speech of His Excellency the Governor. It is an honour, not only for me, but also for the people of Box Hill whom I am pleased to represent in this House. I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on attaining the important office you hold in this place and, on behalf of the people of Box Hill, I wish His Excellency Rear-Admiral Sir Brian Murray and Lady Murray a long and happy association with Parliament and the people of Victoria.

The Labor Party comes to Government in Victoria with few people in the electorate having any clear memory of life under a State Labor Government. Historically, in Australia, the Labor Party has been called to govern in times of hardship and disenchantment. It has traditionally stood alongside those who are the victims of injustice. In 1949 the Labor Party was described by Ben Chifley as protecting those who are helpless and without hope. He referred to this objective as "the light on the hill to which our eyes are always turned and to which our efforts are always directed". That social justice remains a strong tenet of Labor Party philosophy was indicated in the legislation outlined in the Governor's Speech—concern for those 118 700 people unemployed in Victoria as at the end of March, of whom about 29 500 are under the age of 21 years. Of those people a disproportionately high number are young women. The Labor Party is concerned at the failure of the Federal Government to assume responsibility for the provision of income security for those on low incomes and concerned for the 750 000 households in rental accommodation that are affected by laws that do not give tenants adequate protection.

The Government has concrete programmes to match these concerns and with sound financial management will carry them out for the benefit of all Victorians. The Labor Party in Victoria, as elsewhere in Australia, grew out of the realization that the only way of securing justice for the working class was through representation and legislation in Parliament. Thus, as early as 1859 the Political Labor League was formed, although it was not until 1891 that a Labor candidate won a seat. That was at a Collingwood by-election.

For today's purposes, a significant date in Victorian ALP history is 1917. That was the occasion of the election of the first John Cain to the Victorian Parliament. He was Premier for two years between 1945 and 1947 and for three years between 1952 and 1955. In that period the Labor Government, although troubled by divisions that led to the Australian Labor Party/Democratic Labor Party split, had an impressive record of achievement, which this Government inherits across a generation gap.

In two areas, namely, electoral reform and workers' protection, the present Cain Government will be building on the work of the last Cain Government. The 1952 election was fought on the issue of electoral reform. The ensuing Cain Government acted to ameliorate the gross electoral distortion that operated in favour of people with rural acres at the expense of metropolitan people. The present Government is committed to the long overdue completion of this process of reform. The Government will be legislating for a one vote, one value system.

A second major achievement of the Government of John Cain senior was the development of Victoria's workers compensation system, which the Labor movement has had to defend in recent times. The present Government intends to build upon that system by initiating a complementary system for the prevention of industrial accidents and the promotion of industrial health. Now, in 1982, the Labor Party has gained Government with an impressive majority. It is the greatest popular mandate in Victoria for more than 60 years.