

The Hon. R. S. de FEGELY (Ballarat Province) - My first duty is to support the mover and seconder of the motion and to thank His Excellency the Governor, Sir Brian Murray, for the clear and concise manner in which he spelt out the policies of the Government for all those who were present. I express my appreciation of the work performed by Sir Brian and Lady Murray for the people of Victoria. They have always made themselves available to the people and I thank them for that and for the gracious manner in which they carry out their duties.

I pledge my support and loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen. As a member of this House, I have a responsibility to act on her behalf wherever I go and in whatever I do. As a member of Parliament, I pledge my support.

I stand in this Chamber, for the first time, conscious of the honour that has been bestowed on me by the people of Ballarat Province. I am aware of the responsibility I have to represent not only the people of that province but also the people of Victoria.

I am saddened that my predecessor, Mr Clive Bubb, who served this Parliament well for six years, both as a member and as a shadow Minister, was unsuccessful in his bid to gain a seat in the other place. Clive is a man of obvious ability; his honesty and integrity are above question. His knowledge in the field of industrial relations-an extremely troubled field in today's world-is equal to that of anyone in Parliament and it is a shame that he was not given the opportunity of making a further contribution in that field.

I shall inform members of the House about Ballarat Province. It covers an area of 19,544 square kilometres centred around the City of Ballarat, which has a population of approximately 68,000 people. The province encompasses the Legislative Assembly electorates of Ripon, Ballarat North, Ballarat South and Gisborne. It is largely an agricultural area.

The area was founded by settlers moving through the country with their sheep and cattle. Gold was discovered during the 1850s, which caused a tremendous influx of people into the area and a population explosion occurred in Ballarat, Stawell and throughout the Maryborough district.

The gold days are well recorded at Sovereign Hill, Ballarat, which is an excellent and successful historical town created as a replica of the gold mining days. It is a true portrayal of a mining town of that era and its people. If any honourable member has not paid a visit to Sovereign Hill, I suggest he makes the trip as it is well worth while.

Gold mining in the area is not dead. It has been resumed at Stawell by the Western Mining Corporation Ltd which began operations at its Magdala mine and the company poured its first gold ingots in September last year.

The province is essentially an agricultural area. It boasts some of the best farming land in Victoria and also contains some of the beautiful wheat growing areas of the Wimmera.

Mr Hallam has already mentioned the agricultural side and what is produced in the Western District of Victoria. However, the district also consists of some of the best wool growing country in Australia; it produces fat lambs, beef, cereals, horticultural products, dairy products and timber and one-quarter of the State's vineyards are situated in the province. Most honourable members will be aware of the champagne cellars of Great Western and of the wine growing areas of Avoca, Ararat, Ballarat and Kyneton. The production of wine will not only assist the State's resources but will also assist the expansion of tourism throughout the region.

Approximately 30 per cent of Victorians live in rural areas. They make a significant contribution towards the wealth of the State. However, a good deal of apathy exists within the community as well as a lack of understanding by Governments of the importance of agriculture to the State and the Australian economy generally.

Primary industry produces more than 90 per cent of the export earnings or real wealth of this country. Approximately 45 per cent of export earnings come from agriculture. Of that figure, Victoria contributes approximately \$3200 million towards the economy, which is 21 per cent of Australia's total agricultural production. Victoria is the second highest producer of agricultural products in Australia.

Governments and the public often fail to recognize the contribution made by agriculture to employment in Victoria. Many metropolitan workers would not have jobs if it were not for the handling, transport, processing, manufacturing, servicing, banking and insurance industries that the production of agricultural products requires.

Export earnings have had a direct bearing on the standard of living in Australia—once first in the world, now in sixteenth or seventeenth position and rapidly declining. The well-being of Australians is dependent on a healthy and profitable primary industry. With the agricultural industry currently at a crisis point, Governments must ensure that prosperity is returned to those areas.

Regrettably, I did not hear any mention of agriculture, apart from a passing word, in the policies enunciated in the Governor's Speech. Honourable members have recently witnessed a running down of the staff of the Department of Agriculture. Cutbacks in funding for agriculture have taken place while the Public Service has been growing dramatically. A number of my friends who live in the province I represent have expressed concern that there is no longer one Minister solely responsible for agricultural matters. The Minister responsible for agriculture is also responsible for other portfolios. The Leader of the House has undertaken the job. I do not wish to suggest that the honourable gentleman is not capable of doing it, because he certainly is a capable man, but concern has been expressed within the province I represent that it is too much for one man to administer and do justice to all the portfolios that the Leader of the House has undertaken.

The Government must understand that those producing for the export market are not in a position to pass on the costs of production or to absorb costs thrust upon them which too often take no account of profitability. Primary industry is particularly vulnerable in this area even though great gains have been made in efficiency and productivity. There can be only a decline in agriculture and its associated country industries if those involved are continually saddled with soaring fuel and freight costs, increases in Government taxes and charges and escalating costs of power and communications, all of which affect competitiveness while market commodity prices are diminishing at the same time.

Ballarat and Maryborough are two of the major cities in the province I represent. They have been established with strong industrial bases. Although that has served them well in the past, both cities are currently under extreme pressure.

The high levels of unemployment in both these centres—approximately 15 per cent, with youth unemployment up to 45 per cent—are among the highest in Australia and show that decentralized industry, in today's high cost world, is facing grave difficulties. I agree with Mr Hallam that the phasing out of decentralization incentives, which were put in place by a previous Liberal

Government, is already having an effect in areas such as Ballarat and Maryborough where the economies of some firms have been so delicately balanced that those firms now have to retrench staff. If people are to continue in employment in country areas, Government must be sympathetic to decentralized industry, to be fair to all and not just look after a select few.

A number of growth areas exist within Ballarat Province. Areas closer to Melbourne, such as Sunbury, Riddell, Gisborne and Bacchus Marsh, are growing quite dramatically and this, of course, brings new development, especially in the form of building. An influx of this nature has a terrific impetus on the economics of those towns, most of which are thriving. However, it also brings about certain problems with accommodation. The price of land and rental housing becomes dearer. The people who can least afford these increases are probably the most affected. Pensioners and people who have retired and are on fixed incomes often find that they have difficulty in paying their rates.

The Government must be aware of these changes and must assist municipalities in that regard. It should not keep increasing the cost of local government by imposing more and more regulations, by increasing quantities of paper work and hiving off Government responsibilities for councils to administer.

Some concern exists that rural areas are losing some of their essential services. People are having to travel long distances, with the high cost of fuel, to attend hospitals and nursing homes or to answer a legal charge because the local court house has been closed. Many people are concerned about the regionalization and centralization of many of these services. We must be careful not to assess these matters purely on economic grounds and forget the humanitarian element that is so important. Many of the smaller communities in the bush are withering because the services are being taken away. Many of these communities have ageing populations because the younger people have left the area and also because people are choosing to retire to these country areas where the land is cheaper and because they are nice places in which to live.

While I am on that subject, I mention briefly the disastrous fires that occurred in the Avoca and Maryborough districts. I was disappointed that the State Government did not see fit to declare those districts as disaster areas and so effect a State-wide appeal. Fire destroyed 56 000 hectares of grassland and scrub, 101 houses, 35000 sheep, 300 cattle and 1500 kilometres of fencing, but fortunately only one life was lost. I could not believe that that did not constitute a disaster. Perhaps in hindsight the Government may have thought differently. Some people in those areas lost everything they owned. They lost their livelihoods and they are still sitting on blackened soil with burnt fences and burnt buildings. When the rains do come - and it is hoped that pastures will re-establish - the farmers will take many years to recover from that disaster.

I mention briefly the work of the Country Fire Authority and the volunteers who performed such a marvellous job under very difficult conditions and in difficult country terrain. I have been a fire-fighting volunteer for some 30 years so I do know a bit about it. I hope the proposal of integrating the fire services has been thoroughly put to rest because if it has not, it will spell the end of the Country Fire Authority, a unique volunteer fire organization which has served this country well.

To sum up, we must have a realization that city and country are interdependent upon each other, one complementing the other and one needing the other to survive. We must close the gaps that unfortunately appear to be widening between these groups.

Victoria has a highly efficient agricultural sector that produces cheap food. It has the capability to

produce for world markets. However, the high cost involved with agricultural products occurs after the products leave the farm gate because of high handling and freight costs and sometimes inefficient and unreliable services at the waterfront. Regrettably, this has gained Australia a reputation of being an unreliable supplier in world trade circles. Traditional industries exist in the province I represent, but I would like to see industry starting up in the newer areas of high technology. Surely this is the way of the future.

The Ballarat College of Advanced Education and the Ballarat School of Mines and Industries are located in Ballarat. Those institutions can train people at student, tertiary and TAFE levels. However, industry is needed in Ballarat to employ and train those people. I hope the Government will endeavour to assist by encouraging the establishment of some high technology industry in areas such as Ballarat.

Tourism has a big future in the area. It is envisaged that places such as the gorge country around Bacchus Marsh, the spa country based at Daylesford, gold-mining towns, the Grampians, the wine-growing areas and Sovereign Hill will provide a thriving tourist industry in Ballarat Province for the future.

Mr President, to conclude on a lighter note, I commend the Government for a decision it made—and I have been perhaps a little negative in some of the things I have said tonight—but the Government's choice of marquees erected on the lawns of Parliament House and the colours chosen were absolutely superb.

Rural Victoria has a future. Ballarat Province will continue to make a large contribution to the well-being of this State provided that the Government assists it by getting off the backs of country people and allows them to do their own thing. I hope to play some part in bringing that about.