

The Hon. B. T. PULLEN (Melbourne Province) - I welcome this opportunity to introduce myself to the House and to give honourable members some indication of my views.

Firstly, I consider myself particularly fortunate to enter this House at a time when there is a Labor Government in office. It is a fact that there have been many hard working Labor members before me who have not had an opportunity of doing that.

A couple of days ago I reviewed some of the reasons that I saw as leading to my taking a place in public life and it seemed to me that there were two considerations that have influenced me in the course of that movement.

The first step along the path is one that many have followed. It is a progression from local community involvement, including local government, to considering the larger issues and the realization that they can only be resolved at policy level by the highest House of Parliament.

In my case I was very influenced by an event that occurred in Fitzroy in 1969 when the Housing Commission decided to undertake the reclamation of an area near Brooks Crescent, North Fitzroy. That was an area of nearly 15.5 acres and as many honourable members would recall, the proposal covered the total block with all the houses being demolished and high-rise towers being built to replace them.

There had been many acts of opposition to this policy of the Housing Commission - I might add that it was also the policy of the then Liberal Government - but Brooks Crescent was probably the first time that residents became very organized and we saw the beginning of what was one of the most harrowing and disastrous struggles against Government policy by people affected at the community level.

I became involved initially because I lived near the area and I became involved with the people who were directly affected and I had to consider, for the first time, why Government intervention was occurring and why it was actually, in this way, affecting the people who I considered were quite settled and who did not in any way want to have their houses demolished.

I remember clearly one day going with a friend, a Mr Alan Jordan, a sociologist and resident of Fitzroy, and spending a whole day talking to people in the area, who, in large part were migrants and pensioners. At the end of the day both he and I came away with the acute feeling of outrage at the policy of displacing people, an act we could see no good in. The very people who were meant to be assisted by the policy of the Housing Commission were the sorts of people who were living in those houses at the time. Apparently other people felt the same because support for the residents' group-as honourable members who were members of the Parliament at the time will recall-grew to great proportions. The Housing Commission and its political support were determined in its policies and a process of attrition continued. Houses were demolished. Roofs were removed and houses were vacated and demolished irrespective of quality.

The rest of the story is history. An alliance was formed with shoe manufacturers in the area, partly due to the creative attitude of Mr Norm Yarr, the Accountant Manager of the Porter shoe company who did not live in the area but who lived in Doncaster. His exposure to the situation had transcended his views of life and with no personal gain he assisted the residents with advice and help.

Eventually there was a court case and a Supreme Court injunction was served on the

commission. Finally the matter was resolved by intervention of the Premier and a joint planning committee was established to develop the area with infill units. The original plans were abandoned and the development was completed as it is today. It is ironic that it is an attractive development that the commission proudly shows visitors. It can be found in the commission's brochures as an example of one of the better developments. Because people's memories are short - and in a positive sense we do not want to dwell on that - I do not mind them doing that.

There is an interesting sequel to the story but I will come to that later. The second event that influenced me was much more traumatic. I refer to the planning and construction of the F19 Freeway into the municipalities of Collingwood and Fitzroy. The reaction of the residents and the level of opposition to the freeway was at that time unprecedented in Melbourne. I do not think anyone who put forward submissions and argued against the way the Government was acting at that time could have foreseen the situation that up to 600 police would be occupying Alexandra Parade and residents-ordinary people-being roughly and forcibly manhandled.

The issue was poorly reported in the press at the time. I am struck by the difference in the way that was handled and the handling of the Vietnam demonstrations in America by a reputable newspaper, the Washington Post, which is famous for its treatment of the Watergate scandal. I remember reading that the editors of the Washington Post, at the time of Vietnam demonstrations in America, took the trouble to have their reporters carry out independent and objective sampling and surveys of who was concerned in the action. These reporters came away with the view that it was a very broad and responsible section in the American community and accordingly adjusted their reporting of it.

In the case of the confrontation in Alexandra Parade, unfortunately for the residents and councillors involved, mostly it was reported in terms of the conflict and the sight of mayors being removed and similar action being taken.

I use these examples to illustrate that I saw at the time a series of unplanned ad hoc interventions in the area in which I reside in the inner area of Melbourne. It seemed to me there had to be a better way of tackling the problem.

I joined the Labor Party and became more and more involved in addressing myself to policy issues - a role involving urban areas-and trying to work with others to develop policies that, through a Labor Government, could eliminate some of these problems of intervention.

There is a case in point about the issue of the freeway. Although it was completed to the point where it enters Fitzroy and Collingwood, the problems have not gone away. In fact, a lot of the responsibility for monitoring and taking action on the effects of traffic has been left to the municipalities. I look forward to changes being made by the Labor Government. I will give my attention to discussing that matter with the Minister of Transport. I seek leave of the House to incorporate in Hansard two tables relating to the current monitoring.

The PRESIDENT (the Hon. F. S. Grimwade) - I advise honourable members that the honourable member has discussed this matter with me and it is in order.

Leave was granted, and the tables were as follows:

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The Hon. B. T. PULLEN - I use these tables as an illustration. The two councils of Fitzroy and Collingwood have employed an environmental engineer to monitor the lead levels in Alexandra

Parade, Hoddle Street and other areas. The two tables relate to recent monitoring from September 1981 to March 1982 in Alexandra Parade, Collingwood.

The first table shows the monthly average in terms of lead in air measurements ranging from a maximum of 7.3 microgrammes per cubic metre to a minimum of 4.6 microgrammes per cubic metre and an average of 6.8 microgrammes per cubic metre.

The second table is a schedule attached to the draft State Environmental Protection Policy of the Environment Protection Authority. It shows that the acceptable level of lead in air for a 30-day average, which is equivalent to the monthly average, is 1.5.

One can see that at the moment anyone occupying or breathing air in Alexandra Parade is breathing air that contains approximately four to five times the recommended acceptable level. It is in fact worse than that because these figures are calculated on a 24-hour basis. They do not take account of peak periods. If one were to have figures for the peak periods when the traffic is densest one could expect the figures to be considerably higher.

The other strand I want to take up is related to my work and career for some twenty years in the public sector in this country both as a civil engineer working on projects of various kinds and as an administrator. In that area I have often had to carry out programmes developed by Governments and it has struck me very forcibly how important the link is between effective machinery to carry out those actions and the development of effective policies at Government level. Therefore, I have been drawn by that consideration and particularly by working in such areas as the Australian Assistance Plan and the area improvement programme, programmes of the Whitlam Government which devolved resource programmes at a community level to see how creative Government administration can be and how effective public servants can be in working in those areas if they have Government support.

I suppose a contrast is the negative attitude to the public sector and the workers in that sector by the present conservative Federal Government. This leads me to what I want to put forward as the central point of my remarks. The Australian people - are acutely suffering at the moment from the monetarist policies of the Fraser Government.

As has been said, monetarism is not just a theory of inflation. It is the proposition that fiscal policy is useless, that economic management is counterproductive, that unemployment is voluntary and that economic welfare is maximized by giving the utmost freedom to market forces. These propositions are embedded in a political and economic philosophy profoundly hostile to the public sectors. It is market capitalism par excellence. There is a pressing need to implement an alternative economic strategy in this country to give expression to social values. To be successful, such a policy must involve a degree of planned economic expansion based on producing goods of social worth and acceptance to the community, Without such policies, the prospects of providing higher levels of employment, raising living standards and improving public services will be severely limited.

To my mind, as an example, the Labor Government's housing programme points clearly in the right direction. That housing programme, as presented in the election campaign, is an integrated package that rests on three legs. Firstly, it is an economic strategy to inject resources into the housing industry. The Victorian building industry is, as honourable members are aware already, acutely depressed. By several criteria, it deserves to be supported. Compared with many other areas, it is labour-intensive; it is a diverse and relatively efficient industry which is largely

Australian-owned. There is ample evidence that, by a multiplier effect, activity in the area of construction generates significant economic activity and employment in other areas through a demand for goods and materials.

Secondly, the product of the housing industry is socially worth while. It is not a nasty industry; it does not pollute or provide goods whose social value must be questioned. It provides the type of production that is wanted. Housing is essential to all people and is an important element in their lives.

Thirdly, and importantly, the mechanism proposed in the Labor package involves a high degree of involvement by the consumers of housing through the fostering of rental co-operatives similar to the Fitzroy Collingwood Rental Co-operative and by encouraging local councils to be involved in the provision and management of housing. An important area of this is the participation and fostering of community development in existing high-rise estates.

Clearly, more resources need to be allocated to those estates, but those resources can be incorrectly directed unless residents on those estates are involved in setting the priorities and making the decisions rather than the decisions being made by bureaucratic fiat.

However, despite what I believe will be the success of these housing measures at State level, I am not hopeful that a Federal Government which has a record of massively reducing housing funds in real terms and which has recently removed any focus for housing issues at Commonwealth level by demolishing the Department of Housing and Construction and splitting the responsibility for housing into three areas so that it now has no clear Cabinet representation will provide the central support and leadership that are required.

Three years ago, my colleague, Mr Evan Walker, in his maiden speech, looked forward prophetically to a Victorian Labor Government. I look forward to an Australian Labor Government that will permit co-ordinated action at Federal and State levels rather than producing a spectacle of political disbursement that was witnessed at the last Premiers Conference.

In closing, I return to the story Of Brooks Crescent. On Saturday I attended a meeting at St Luke's parish with some of the residents who had struggled to save their homes there more than ten years ago. The purpose of the meeting was unusual. One strange benefit of community action at this level is that people, who perhaps would not have met, have come together in a strange way to achieve a benefit that cuts across all barriers of age, nationality and so on and they have developed strong friendships during those years of struggle against the Housing Commission. This time, the coming together to which I was invited was interesting because the purpose was to dispose of a small amount of money that had been left over and kept in an account guarded by a pensioner in the area all through the campaign; she had been concerned about being responsible for this money and wanted to use it. The people decided to seek permission from residents-now new residents as well as old-and the council to erect a plaque in Brooks Crescent to commemorate their struggle.

Before describing the text on the plaque, I point out that, when the Housing Commission of Victoria sent out the original reclamation notices in 1969, it thoughtfully included an Italian translation, and I suppose that was pioneering work at the time. By some chance-and I apologize to my colleague, Giovanni Sgro -the phrase "Fare buon viso a Cattiva Sorte" was used. That expression can be translated as "Smile to your bad luck", an embarrassing gaffe pointed out by Italian residents at this time. The text on the plaque is to read:

This stone is to commemorate the fight and suffering of the residents of the Brooks Crescent area which led to the end of block clearance and high rise development by the Housing Commission.

What is here today shows what improvement was achieved by organized effort.

They said "Smile to your bad luck" because they thought we had no chance.

We fought and we won.

North Fitzroy Residents Action Committee and the Brooks Crescent Improvement Committee
1970-1982.

The point is that these residents, in their own way, transcended their individual causes and, in doing so, made an important contribution to the future of public housing in Melbourne - perhaps an immeasurably greater contribution than the town planners, engineers and other professionals who had been working in that area at the time and failing. I honour their efforts.