

I thank honorable members whom I have met since I became a member of this House, and who have welcomed me here, offered me some encouragement and wished me well. In closing I mention one person, the late Jack Tripovich. I found him to be a most helpful and welcome person when I first came here. His was the general attitude of the members of this House. I look forward to working in this House with members on both sides and most certainly with members of my party, the National Party, for the good of Victoria.

The Hon. N. F. STACEY (Chelsea Province): Tonight it seems that I am the third of a trio of maidens, although I am reliably informed that it will soon be a quartet. I am encouraged by the unanimity of views expressed on this Bill and encouraged by the reception given to earlier members of this choir. I feel I shall not be able to emulate the quality of the tune of my colleagues but I sincerely add to the chorus my congratulations to you, Mr. President, upon your election to the chair of this House.

This Bill recognizes the vital part played by local government in the provision of services and assistance to people at the community level. It should be remembered that history teaches us that democratic government began at the village level. The Saxon conquest of England saw the beginnings of our form of government. Local and national affairs in early England were not relegated to a favoured few but were settled in the councils of the people at their several moots or meetings.

The Norman conquest produced an oppressive central government which developed the feudal system of land tenure involving an economic subjugation of the common people. This was opposed to the concept of local administration based on local franchise.

We who, like our colleagues in local government, are elected on a local franchise are aware that the enactment by the Legislative Council of

New South Wales in August, 1842, of the Melbourne Municipal Corporation Act established local government in this State as the predecessor of this sovereign State. It is interesting to note that one motivating force for the Corporation of Melbourne was the establishment by La Trobe of a Board of Health, following the arrival of the ship *Salsette* in January, 1841, bearing the disease typhoid. On this ship was John Charles King, who, at the age of 25 years was, in December, 1842, appointed the first Town Clerk of Melbourne. King was briefly a member of this Parliament in 1859 and Commissioner of Public Works.

This Bill had its beginnings in the Liberal Party policy of September, 1975. This was a fundamental outline of the policy of federalism. Although this Bill is concerned primarily with finance, it is the philosophy of federalism which we believe will be of even greater consequence for the people of this State and this country in the years ahead.

The drive for centralist government and domination of the people which began with the Norman conquest reached its peak in Canberra Government just twelve months ago. The trend of government today recognizes not the three tiers or layers of government, but the three spheres of government. Spheres cannot be stacked one on top of each other but exist as separate forms joined together with the common purpose of protecting and enriching the life of all citizens. This Bill provides a means of equitably sharing out a portion of national income tax receipts to permit local government to perform those functions which it is best placed to administer.

This new recognition of the function of local government is of recent origin. The Federal Constitution makes no reference to local government. This State constituted a Local Government Department in 1958—less than twenty years ago. Local authorities are creatures of State legislation. Local government has been defined as government by

popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district, and vested with powers to make by-laws for their guidance. This Parliament has charged local government with these duties and vested it with powers in matters concerning the inhabitants. For the first time this Bill returns to local government as a right some of the funds from the taxpayers who are inhabitants but may not be directly ratepayers.

The range of activities undertaken by local government is wide. It includes the provision of sport, recreation and leisure facilities, health services, town planning, family welfare and business undertakings. Particularly during the past twenty years increasing demands have been made by the inhabitants upon local government, demands which, as this legislation recognizes, cannot, in justice, be funded by the ratepayers, but are properly a charge upon the income tax paid by all.

This new era into which local government is moving is bound to bring added responsibilities to the elected councillor who has the dual task of policymaker and administrator. By statute the only delegation of power given to councils is to council committees. During the past nine years as a councillor of the City of Chelsea, I have experienced these increased pressures and demands. I am sure that my grandfather, G. E. Hodgins, past President of the Shire of Frankston and Hastings, also felt the demands of his task 40 years ago, as did, I suppose, my great-grandfather, H. H. Peddle, President of the Shire of Mornington nearly 100 years ago.

I know that many honorable members have also personally experienced the demands put upon a municipal councillor who performs in an honorary capacity for the benefit of his town or city, as you have, Mr. President. I pay a sincere tribute to these councillors, both men and women, in

The Hon. N. F. Stacey.

some 211 municipalities throughout Victoria. This Bill gives them the wherewithal to continue their task.

This Bill is a consequence of a series of Premiers Conferences held in the early part of this year which provided the fiscal basis for federalism. I pay tribute to the Premier of this State, a former Minister for Local Government, for his efforts on behalf of municipalities and for the future benefits which will flow to residents throughout Victoria. I also acknowledge the important part played by our colleague, the present Minister for Local Government, the Honorable Alan Hunt, with whom I have the privilege of sharing the responsibility of representing the new province of Chelsea.

The six municipalities which are included within the boundaries of Chelsea Province are delighted by the speedy and effective manner with which the Victoria Grants Commission has been established. I speak of the cities of Berwick, Chelsea, Dandenong, Frankston, Mordialloc and Springvale which, in August, were allocated a total of just under \$2 million by the Interim Grants Commission. Each of those cities is fortunate to have a town clerk of outstanding ability. They, together with their officers, will make recommendations which shall be determined by the 66 elected councillors who, acting with responsibility to their ratepayers and the needs of the municipality, will implement projects of value to all 275,000 citizens.

Mr. Evans, in his able remarks, mentioned grants to country areas. I believe the Interim Grants Commission made special provision for country areas that were suffering the effects of drought.

The Bill before the House seeks the appointment of three commissioners. As other speakers have done tonight, I welcome the inclusion of the condition that two members will be experienced in local government affairs. Last May I was fortunate to attend the bi-annual conference of the Institute of Municipal Administration held in Canberra. This was

attended by town clerks and councillors from all States of the Commonwealth. One could not be but impressed by the quality and integrity of these men and women who are engaged both professionally and in honorary capacities. In the course of this conference, the Honorable Phillip Lynch, the Federal Treasurer, announced that the sum of \$140 million would be available to State grants commissions. This figure represents some 1.52 per cent of income tax collections for the year just past.

The Local Government Association of Australia had been seeking an allocation of 2 per cent. Generally the conference was delighted with the announced minimum percentage which provides Victoria with \$35.4 million this year. The provision of a fixed percentage of income tax has been an objective of the Municipal Association of Victoria for some time. Recent presidents of that organization, such as Mr. S. A. Hawken and Councillor W. Thwaites, are two men known to me who have actively worked towards this goal on behalf of local government throughout Australia.

Local government has a good record in this State of working in co-operation. Many municipalities have together formed regional libraries which have added greatly to the enjoyment and education of citizens. Prior to this there was the development of weights and measures unions and waterworks and drainage trusts. Presently work is proceeding within the metropolitan area upon regional waste disposal organizations. Within and beyond Chelsea Province the Dandenong Valley Authority has achieved recognition for its work in flood mitigation and drainage.

These organizations are examples of co-operation between municipalities to achieve particular objectives which reach over city boundaries. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, a creation of this Parliament, is a recognition of the

regional character of some of the activities of local government. Past Parliaments have, by statute, given responsibility to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. Parliaments have also taken away responsibilities. The most recent example is the responsibility for freeways, which was passed to the Country Roads Board.

The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works is an expression of co-operation between the metropolitan local government municipalities to administer some regional responsibilities of local government. Staff employed by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works are amongst the best in Australia. Their record in the construction of the south-eastern purification plant within Chelsea Province ranks with recent similar developments anywhere in the world. The huge task of producing the Metropolitan Planning Scheme required and obtained the abilities of the most knowledgeable men. It is noteworthy that effective planning requires continuous input of community needs and expectations. Those who would criticize the elected commissioner system of the board neglect the value of these men who represent and provide community and local knowledge. It is my view that those who criticize the 54 elected commissioners run the danger of criticizing the system that produces 121 elected Parliamentarians or more than 2,200 elected councillors within the State. These joint activities of local government carried out by agreement, or legislation, are themselves recognition by municipal authorities that some activities are better performed on a group or regional basis.

Pigeon holes throughout Australia are littered with commissioned reports on local government. Since 1965 each State, with the exception of Queensland, has ordered a total of nine inquiries, which in part, or whole, have investigated municipal boundaries. The recent United Kingdom experience makes an interesting case

study in the relocation of municipal boundaries. It had been argued there, as it has been here, that small authorities were not efficient; that they did not produce the best in either efficiency, councillors or staff; that bigger must be better.

It can now be clearly stated that the new United Kingdom system has not saved any money at all. Indeed, why should it? There are still just as many people wanting the same personal services. Local government is a labour intensive industry. Boundaries do not really alter the numbers of personnel needed to deliver the services. Sir Stanley Holmes, Chief Executive of Merseyside County Council, a super town clerk of a municipality with 1.5 million people, speaking at the conference in Canberra of which I spoke earlier, said that he was left with the impression that the management consultants who structured these super-councils had, "found democracy an obstacle to efficient management". Democracy is a live and personal thing which is reflected in council elections. Sir Stanley Holmes also said—

I have always taken the view that the task of the local authority and its elected members is to find the balance between sewers and symphonies.

In council elections this is the choice of the voter. Once elected the councillor should be readily available so that Mr. Brown can be protected from bureaucracy and centralized power. I cannot justify the aggregation of municipal areas solely on the ground of economy, if the cost is the sacrifice of this basic form of democracy.

The formula under which funds are to be disbursed by the Grants Commission established by this Bill strengthens the capacity of those municipalities which have particular needs and disadvantages. This important section will, over the years, ensure, strengthen and promote local government throughout Victoria. On the ground of equity to all residents of Victoria, on the basis of my faith in the ability of councillors and their

officers, and upon the worth of this grass-roots of democracy, I support the Bill.

Having provided funds to local government on the as-of-right basis, we must now turn our attention to ensuring that the functions which are best delivered at the local level are so provided. The Minister for Local Government has recently announced the establishment of an inquiry which will undertake a review of the principles, operations and functions of local government as it presently operates under an Act which is the result of more than 100 years of accumulated legislation by this Parliament.

In conclusion, I thank all honorable members for the courtesy extended to me, both during this, my maiden speech, and since commencing membership of this House. I trust that henceforth I will be able to make a worth-while contribution to the debates of this House and that I will effectively represent all the people of Chelsea Province. I support the Bill and value its effects and consequences.

The Hon. D. M. SALTMARSH
(Waverley Province) : Mr. President, although the hour is late and perhaps you are tired by having to give so close attention to the trio who have preceded me, as a final leg of the barber shop quartet I hope it will not be too difficult to listen to the few comments that I have to make on what I believe is a most important Bill.

It is an honour to speak tonight as the recently elected member for the province of Waverley. I believe that because of my experience gained through working in local government for the past six years as a social planner, and as an administrator of a diverse social development department, I should have some relevant experience to contribute to this debate. I support this very small yet most important Bill, affecting as it