

The Hon. E. H. WALKER (Melbourne Province) - -Mr President, I begin by offering you my congratulations on your election to the presidency of the Legislative Council. I am sure you will maintain the traditions of fairness and impartiality so ably exhibited by your predecessor.

I point out that I believe history will offer you an unexpected and special niche. I predict that you will be the last member of the party to which you belong to hold that position. That comment is not meant in any way to reflect on your capacity or character - I merely refer to the likelihood that you will be replaced by a member from the Opposition side of the Chamber and that there will be the subsequent establishment of a unicameral system of government in this State. I support the Labor Party in its belief that a two-House Parliament is unnecessary for Victoria. Meanwhile, I wish you well and congratulate you on your elevation to the highest office the House can bestow.

I draw attention to the changed nature of the Labor Party's representation in the Legislative Council as from today. I am proud to be a member of a team that, for the first time, includes a woman. The representation of women in this House has long been overdue and it is still nominal. I look forward to the day when there is a reasonable representation of women in this Chamber.

I also draw attention to the representation of the largest ethnic minority in our community, the Italian community. I refer to the Honorable G. A. Sgro and I welcome him into the Labor ranks in the Legislative Council. Mr Sgro represents a large group in the community, as does the honorable member for Richmond in another place, who acts as a representative of the Greek community. These representations are also nominal and I hope they grow in the future.

Members of the Labor Party in this Chamber represent a wide range of groups, including farmers, skilled tradesmen, academics, union officials and professionals. This team reflects the breadth of the party and I believe reflects the breadth of community interests at large.

Mr President, this morning you made reference of an historic kind. On Wednesday 27 June 1917, the Honorable W. L. Baillieu, a Minister in this House moved "that this House place on record its deep sense of the loss it has sustained through the death of the Honorable Robert Beckett, one of the members for the East Yarra Province". In speaking to the motion he said:

We all remember well the frank and obvious honesty with which he dealt with all subjects that came before this House.

The motion was seconded by the Honorable W. S. Manifold who said:

I think I can say without any fear of question that we have lost the most useful and best member that we have had in this House for many years.

Many honorable members spoke, including the Honorable J. P. Jones, who was at the time the Leader of the Opposition. In concluding his comments the Honorable W. C. Angliss said:

To have been acquainted with Robert Beckett tended to make one a better man.

In that same year, two other obituaries occurred in the newspapers of the day in this city, for two men of widely differing age but both bearing the same name-Henry Walker. The older man was 81 years of age. He had arrived at the Port Phillip Colony in 1840, aged four, with his father, who was a blacksmith. As you will realize, Mr President, both the Colony and the boy were the same age-four years. His father acquired a piece of land at the corner of Bourke Street and Elizabeth Street, which now of course houses that magnificent building, the General Post Office, and he

began shoeing horses from a tent. In later years the family moved to Port Albert and then to Heyfield, shoeing horses used in the great gold trade at Walhalla in the 1850s and 1860s. The boy, in his turn, learned his father's trade, as did his son and his grandson. In later years the family practised the blacksmithing trade in Collingwood and Mitcham.

The third person whose obituary appeared in that same year, 1917, was just eighteen years old. His name was Henry Ivanhoe Walker, and he was killed in action in France in the first world war, as were so many other young men from this city. He was Henry Walker's older grandson. From all reports he was a talented and gentle young man. He, too, learned the family trade, but had, in addition, shown real aptitude as a scholar and a musician.

I mention these three men, who coincidentally died in the same year, to make one or two simple points. Each in his own way played an ordinary, yet significant, role in serving his State and his country. Each was a simple God-fearing member of the community. One was a true pioneer and a skilled tradesman. One became a respected leader in the community and a member of this House, and one died fighting to defend, for our society, the values he held in respect. To me, these three stand as symbols of the kind of society in which the values of unselfish hard work and genuine service are held uppermost. I celebrate those same values today and consider it a privilege to follow them and to work within the same community they helped build.

Sir, you will gather that I refer to certain of my forebears. Robert Beckett was my great-uncle, Henry Walker was my great-grandfather, and Henry Ivanhoe Walker was my father's brother. I pay tribute to them today, not because they were wealthy, powerful or famous, but because, like most of our forebears, whether in this country or elsewhere, they were workers. They cared about building a fair and just society.

I have inherited this Legislative Council seat from a man who will long be remembered by his colleagues in this House and elsewhere, not just because he is one of our most loved and best known media personalities, and one of the most colourful and most generous citizens this city has had, but because of his sincere and caring contributions to debates in this House, to the work of the Parliament and, in particular, to his own personal work in his own electorate.

It has been my privilege to sit in the gallery of this Chamber on many occasions, particularly during the most recent sittings, and I count it as a special privilege to have been present the day the House paid tribute to its most senior colleague, the Honorable Jack Galbally - a man for whom I hold the greatest admiration. I was particularly moved on that day by comments made by the Honorable Doug Elliot about his old friend, then, a few days later, to hear the genuinely affectionate tribute paid by members on both sides of the House to Doug Elliot himself, and to hear his response. These will remain memorable occasions for me.

This is the first public chance I have had to make reference to the most generous and dignified way in which Doug Elliot has handed me the reins and welcomed me as his successor in Melbourne Province. He is a big man in every way, and I can only say, in words I have heard him use, "Doug Elliot, I salute you".

I should apologize for the rather disjointed nature of my comments today but I do want to make a few comments about my profession. I believe I am the first member of my profession to be elected to this House. On doing a little research, I found that for a short period a Mr Robert Hamilton, an architect, represented the Liberal Party, or its predecessor at the time, as the honorable member for Toorak in another place in the 1940s.

I pay tribute to my professional colleagues, past and present, and to the immense contribution that they, collectively, have made to the development and enrichment of this State over many years. We have a magnificently built heritage in this city and we must work harder to maintain it. It is a pity that more members of this profession have not opted to take a role in the legislature, as I believe the way in which architects and planners and engineers are trained to think would be of great benefit to it. I refer specifically to a more creative, constructive, inclusive approach to problem-solving than is evident in certain other of the well-known professions.

For example, it seems to me that the legal and medical professions deal with people when they are in trouble or sick, as of course they should, and their main efforts are aimed at corrective treatment on a one-to-one basis. The designing professions deal with people who are well, optimistic, and looking to build for the future. They are used to working with many others in team fashion over long periods, maintaining a common, constructive goal. They are given less to debate and more to action. I must add, they are more visual than verbal, and I am sorry it is not possible to show slides or use drawings here, because I would be better at that.

I regret that the necessary compromises and conflicts of party politics have dissuaded members of the construction industry and the designing professions from entering Parliament, and I trust that in years to come that lack will be corrected. Meanwhile, I am pleased and honoured to act as their representative.

I pay particular tribute today to the architects of this magnificent Chamber, a partnership of two men, Messrs Knight and Kerr, who were, at the time they designed this building, aged respectively 32 and 28 years-very young men. They had the building built in eleven months -this Chamber and its pair, the Legislative Assembly Chamber. It is as fine an example of mid-nineteenth-century State architecture as will be found anywhere, and I give credit to them. The Colony at the time was just 21 years old. It was a supreme achievement. My only regret-is that the institution which it houses still reflects a nineteenth-century nature.

It is customary for honorable members in their initial speeches to offer some insight into their own commitments and motivations, to reflect on the great issues and to offer some sense of preferred direction. I do not intend to attempt such a task at length, but I begin by committing myself to the principles of social equity and social justice upon which the Labor Party is and always has been based.

I wholeheartedly support the fight to maintain the great freedoms-freedom of speech, freedom of education, freedom of assembly, freedom of organization and freedom of religion; a fight which has pitted the Labor movement, with its egalitarian base, against the powerful forces of capitalism and conservatism in this country for nearly a century - a fight which is just as necessary and critical today as it has ever been.

I am personally committed to working for a radical redistribution of wealth and power in this society for both ideological and practical reasons. We are facing unprecedented problems at international, national, State and local levels; problems of unemployment, of social dislocation, of fuel and energy shortages, of inadequate education, of industrial injustice and of degeneration of the moral fabric of society.

We are on the verge of the kinds of social and economic crises that will stretch the capacities of our democratic institutions to the limit. Much of that work will be undertaken at State level. We cannot afford the gross inequities of conservative Government and elitist principles any longer.

There is no health left within the governing monopolies which have brought us to this point. There is a rapidly growing awareness of this within the ranks of the community at large and even within the ranks of the traditionally powerful. Self-indulgent conservatism is too costly; we cannot afford it any longer.

I come to this House as one of two Labor members chosen by the party and by the people to represent Melbourne Province. I deem it a great honour and privilege to be so chosen and to share the role with my colleague, the Honorable Ivan Trayling. Melbourne Province is the heart of the State of Victoria; it encompasses the City of Melbourne and the complete ring of inner suburbs. It reflects the extremes in our society; great: wealth and its associated commercial, and cultural development, and abject poverty and its physical reflections. This province houses the State's great institutions of justice, Government and the Public Service; it is a Labor province and will always remain so. It incorporates two of the nation's largest and most prestigious tertiary education institutions; I refer to the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and to the University of Melbourne. I have been involved with both, but more particularly in recent years with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, whose founder, the Honorable Francis Ormond, was a member of this House a century ago.

If I may digress for a moment, I should like to make a comment about the foundation of that institution because it reflects the kinds of co-operation that can occur when creative people have initiative. Francis Ormond made a suggestion at a Scotch College speech night in 1882 that a working men's college should be founded. It is not surprising that he did not receive much support from his audience at the time. He said he would give five thousand pounds if the community would match that amount to establish such an institute.

Years passed and nothing much happened. It was not until the Trades Hall Council saw the wisdom of the vision of Francis Ormond and levied its members one shilling a week each that the money was matched and the Working Men's College was able to be built and to open its doors in 1887 with something like 600 students. That institution has gone on from the Working Men's College to the Melbourne Technical College to the Royal Melbourne Technical College and now to the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, with which about 26 000 people-students and staff-are associated. It is the largest tertiary and TAFE institution in this country, and I celebrate the fact that it was founded with the help of working people who were willing to put their money behind it.

This province is the heart of the State's and the nation's commerce and industry, and it houses the nation's great worker representative organization, the Australian Council of Trade Unions. The province incorporates the State's great shipping and rail terminals, the headquarters of the State's large media outlets - the dailies and television demands -and its renowned cultural institutions - the National Gallery, the State Public Library and museum, to say nothing of its theatre, opera, ballet and musical heritage.

We bask in a well-deserved reputation as one of the world's most beautiful nineteenth century cities. We enjoy individual public buildings of great elegance such as the one we are in, and city street-scapes of the Victorian era unrivalled anywhere. Some of these are under threat at the moment, but I expect that an increased awareness within the community that is evident now will resolve some of these problems.

At a different level, Melbourne Province is home to no fewer than eight of the twelve Victorian Football League clubs-it makes life hard deciding which one to join-and offers a wide spread of

venues for sporting and athletic pursuits, symbolized by, one of the great sporting arenas of the world, the Melbourne Cricket Ground. One could say a great deal more, since this seat encompasses so much of which we can all be justly proud, but there is another side to the story.

Melbourne Province also encompasses some of the community's worst examples of social dislocation, of human degradation and economic injustice. Amidst the symbols of wealth and privilege which surround us are areas of grinding poverty, of real housing shortage, of derelict school facilities, of high levels of pollution and frightening levels of unemployment. This society and in particular this Government must accept the responsibility for the gross social and economic inequities which we now suffer and which are getting worse.

Who of the members on the Government benches could justify, for instance, the differences in future prospects between the disadvantaged migrant ten-year-old at Victoria Park Primary School and his counterpart at Melbourne Grammar School? Both institutions are publicly funded, both students are Australians, and both schools are in my electorate. Who of those members could begin to justify the difference in access to legal representation and so-called justice between the unemployed Aboriginal seeking legal aid in Fitzroy and, say, the board chairman of a major city company lunching with his personal Queen's Counsel at a city club? Both are Australians, both have inalienable rights; only one has any real power, and our institutions of law enforcement will not treat them equally.

Who of the Government members can justify massive capital expenditures in recent years on projects of very doubtful need: uneconomic bridges - and I refer to the West Gate Bridge; ill-conceived freeways - and I refer specifically to Freeway F19; grandiose cultural complexes - and I refer to the Arts Centre; and unnecessary undergrounds - I refer to the Melbourne underground rail loop? Who can justify the estimate of \$1000 million spent in excess on these projects, and I do not mean the total amount of money that has been spent; I mean the amount of money that could have been saved and still allowed the required facility to be completed? I also suggest that the money spent on the underground rail loop could have been better spent on building a rapid transit link from Melbourne to Dandenong and perhaps another in the other direction. That would have cost less and been more useful because we would not have needed freeways centering on the city; it would have moved traffic to the extent that freeways in the metropolitan area would not have been necessary.

Of course we want an art gallery, but \$15 million built us a brilliant art gallery; \$200 million has already been poured into a mud hole south of the Yarra, and that is gross irresponsibility. Who can justify the unnecessary expenditure - and it is a conservative estimate - of \$1000 million, when waiting lists for simple rental housing remain at unconscionably high levels and the net stock of such housing owned by the State is actually reducing?

Housing is a critical problem in Melbourne Province, and I pay tribute in passing to those groups such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Collingwood-Fitzroy Rental Housing Association, which have worked hard to gain what little assistance they can from this Government. I could say a great deal more about the problems and issues that we must face within my province and within the State generally. Suffice it to say that, although I accept my role as representative of all those who live within Melbourne Province, I shall be working principally with those who are without power, whose needs are great, and whose lot has been worsened by years of neglect by the Government. But the real work for change cannot be undertaken until the party to which I belong takes its rightful place as the party of Government in Victoria. I look

forward to that day, and claim as my main goal in this place the electoral success of the Australian Labor Party. I thank the House for its attention and look forward to working amongst my colleagues in the years to come.