

Holmesglen Constructions, is my brother. If that is so, it is the first I have heard of it. That statement also appeared in a newspaper called the *Labor Star* on 17 September 1979. The Mr Hauser referred to is not my brother. He is not a close relative of mine. It would have been easy for Mr Cathie to check the veracity of that statement with me. The statement is palpably untrue and fraudulent. Mr Cathie, therefore, stands exposed as a fraud.

The sitting was suspended at 6.30 p.m. until 8.4 p.m.

MAIDEN SPEECHES OF MEMBERS

The debate (adjourned from September 18) was resumed on the motion of the Hon. A. J. Hunt (Minister of Education) —

That issues raised by new members be duly noted and referred to appropriate Ministers for consideration.

The Hon. JOAN COXSEGE (Melbourne West Province)—Mr President, at the beginning of this session of Parliament, a couple of members in this House—I believe you were one of them—started off by tracing their ancestry using the family name handed down to them by their forefathers to show how they, in a later generation, are linked to the early beginnings of this State. I might like to do the same thing because my family can also be traced back to the pioneering days of Australia but then I have a problem. Women everywhere change their names every generation because the name is carried through the male line. We swop our father's name for our husband's name. This has meant that the vital contribution made by our mothers, our grandmothers and our great grandmothers has been, and still is, largely ignored.

After all, it has taken this Parliament some 140 years to elect women to the Upper House, despite this contribution. However, at least I can say that both my parents' families were battlers who lived all their lives in Kensington and so I spent much of my youth there. I therefore feel reasonably able to represent an area such as the Melbourne West Province which is mainly working class.

My work in this House will be mostly concerned with representing the people whose need is greatest and these will obviously include industrial workers, Australian and foreign born, and women. The problems affecting these people are not new to me. Amongst other areas of involvement I have been active for many years in both the women's and the organized working-class movements. Acting militantly, one makes many friends and, inevitably, one makes quite a few enemies as well. I am standing here tonight because of my friends and despite my enemies.

The campaign which preceded my election was almost unprecedented in its ferocity but one positive aspect of this campaign of misrepresentation aimed at preventing my election to this august body was that policy matters were raised and discussed. As a result, I stand here tonight with the knowledge that I have the endorsement of the electorate of Melbourne West Province, not just as a passive Australian Labor Party member but as one whose vigorous pursuit of Australian Labor Party policies is known and accepted. I therefore intend to push these policies with the same vigour as I have in the past.

I should like now to discuss the way in which I see my electorate in the light of these policies. Like most provinces, it covers a large area. Its people, at least one-third of whom were born overseas, tend to suffer a greater degree of discrimination than many of those from other areas. The Yarra River cuts through Melbourne almost in the nature of a moat separating people not just geographically but socially in a very real sense. Even the geography is telling. If one travels 17 kilometres east from the Melbourne General Post Office, one arrives in a sanctuary of bellbirds in the centre of the prosperous Blackburn area. But, 17 kilometres west leaves one in a factories and explosives reserve in Deer Park.

The people in the area I represent, not only experience gross inequalities in their environment, but are also further hampered by an economic crisis and by the deliberate policies of anti-working-class Liberal Governments at both State

and Federal levels. It would be fair to say that the west, to a great extent, was the industrial foundation of Victoria. The Sunshine harvester, for a time, set world standards in agricultural machinery. The prosperity which we still have in Australia is built not only on the efforts of our early settlers and workers but also on the efforts of present-day workers in industry and commerce.

It is fashionable for conservative politicians and the media to attack workers as greedy people who are only concerned with their pay packets. Even if this were true, it would only put workers in the same league as most politicians, doctors, lawyers and businessmen, to name but a few. But, compared with the latter groups, workers have not had much to show in their pay packets in recent years. Many are receiving sums which are quite insufficient to maintain a family, but I shall say more about that later.

I now want to give the House some figures regarding the workers who, according to some people, are forever on strike. I want to show up this anti-union propaganda for what it is worth. I will start with a few facts from *Rydges*, which I am sure honorable members will agree could hardly be described as a left-wing journal. According to a recent article dealing with time lost at work, industrial disputes barely rate as a cause. As a percentage of total absences, disputes account for only 5.5 per cent or one day for every nineteen lost through various sicknesses and industrial accidents, many of which are avoidable. These account for 58 per cent or ten times the amount lost through strikes. Of course, I would not expect employers to be impartial in assessing the importance of time lost through strikes, but let us look at the lamentable record of this Parliament in this respect.

For many years we have had one repressive law after another passed to deny workers the right to strike. There is the Essential Services Act, the Essential Services (Right to Work) Act, the State Electricity Commission (Newport Power Station) Act and the Vital State Projects Act. Loss of working time was supposed to be the reason for passing these laws but the only law

The Hon. J. M. Coxsedge.

dealing with industrial accidents, which create a far greater loss of production than strikes, is the workers compensation legislation which will be debated during this sessional period.

Strangely, this new law does not provide gaol sentences for employers who are responsible for loss of working time by maiming their workers through greed and neglect. In fact, 6.3 per cent of time lost in Australian industry is lost through industrial accidents. This receives no publicity. This figure does not take into account those workers who are killed on the job, die as a result of their work, or who are so seriously injured that they never return to work.

I repeat: This Government does not help to create hysterical headlines about these matters because the solution could eat into private profits. On the contrary, in many cases it will deny injured workers even the miserable pittance which they have been receiving up to date.

Let us look at the figures again. For the whole of Australia, time lost through strikes is 0.25 per cent or a little over one day for every two working years; but, given the present unemployment rate, time lost through unemployment is 30 times as high as that lost through industrial disputes. Adding the figure for the total work absences with time lost through unemployment, strikes lose only 1 day compared with 50 days. The constant union bashing by the press and the Parliament is therefore a strategy of deliberate lies to conceal the very real problems facing the people of Australia and nowhere are these problems greater than in the province of Melbourne West.

Directly or indirectly, most people in the western suburbs of Melbourne depend on the manufacturing industry. Certainly, most job opportunities for school leavers are traditionally found in manufacturing. Since 1974, 231 000 jobs have disappeared from the Australian manufacturing scene. As well as that, an estimated 160 000 jobs have not been created, making a total of approximately 400 000 jobs lost in manufacturing alone. This affects Melbourne West Province far more than many other areas. For instance, unemployment in Waverley was, according to

the January 1979 figure, 2.5 per cent. In Sunshine, which is situated in the centre of Melbourne West Province, the rate was approximately 9.5 per cent, nearly four times as high.

I should like to say a few words about attitudes to the unemployed. Even though unemployment is not of their making, the unemployed are frequently subject to abuse. There is still a prevalent attitude at all levels of society that the unemployed are so-called "bludging" loafing drop-outs. This is simply not true of the majority of unemployed. It cannot be said strongly enough: The unemployed are victims; they are not criminals.

According to a pamphlet recently released by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace:

Many surveys, studies and reports including some by Government departments, have found that the proportion of unemployed people who can be considered "dole bludgers" or "work shy" is minimal.

Yet the unemployed are still portrayed in these terms, even by those who should know the real situation. Indeed the very word "dole" should not be used to describe benefits which in this country are a right.

But even for many people who have a job, life is hardly a bed of roses.

The western suburbs are the home of many industries which employ mainly migrant workers, including many women, who are poorly educated and unskilled and who are paid well below the average wage. In any case, this so-called average wage is a myth created by averaging a few very high incomes with a large number of low incomes.

Figures published a year ago show that 70 per cent of all male workers received less than the average weekly wage of \$205 gross. The average for both men and women was \$180, but more than half of all workers earned less than \$170. Women workers, many supporting families, averaged only \$136 a week, because the majority of them had the lowest paid jobs with the lowest social status. One-sixth of all workers earned less than \$100 a week.

Not only are workers being ripped off by low wages, but on a percentage basis they pay far higher tax than the

rich. There are no family trusts for them, no executive perks. Pay-as-you-earn taxation gives them no allowance for travelling costs or other expenses which are part of the job. Working women who have to pay to have their children minded do not get 1 cent of tax relief.

Worse still, according to Peter Holingworth of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, these groups consistently pay more for the goods they buy. They simply do not have access to the choices open to cash buyers. Anyone looking at so-called workers' car yards can quickly see how anyone buying these bombs will have to remain working for the rest of their lives just to keep up the payments and repair costs.

The western suburbs require more support through social services, but for every \$1 in tax the Australian worker has been receiving less each year in the form of the social wage, that is the Government's contribution in social benefits. From June 1976 to June 1979, the real value of the social wage has been reduced by about \$4 billion, or \$1250 for the average family.

Many initiatives in the western suburbs started under the Australian Assistance Plan are now either defunct or under threat. There is also no extra provision of services for the growing numbers of unemployed young people. But I have no doubt that extra police would be provided if these young people proved to be a so-called problem.

In my speech, so far, I have given mainly facts and figures. First and foremost, I see my job as looking after people. As somebody once said, even if money does not bring happiness, at least it provides for a choice of misery. People living under depressed conditions have far fewer choices. The sum total of low incomes, unemployment, high tax, and inadequate services leaves many people in a state of stress. Any area has its share of people who are healthy and reasonably happy. There are many community activities and a lot of spirit and initiative among many people.

But even if the percentage of unhappy people were smaller than it is, it would not be negligible. Even if the unemployment rate were to halve, the remaining 4 per cent of unemployed would still be 100 per cent unemployed from their points of view. In a society where people's dignity depends on having employment, the impact of unemployment on a person's mental state can be shattering. There is no use projecting a halving of the unemployment rate. The way things are going, we can expect unemployment to increase year by year.

The Federal Government's insistence on building up the minerals industry, particularly the uranium sector, will bring substantial earnings to only a few mining companies. At the same time, the money earned from industrial countries like Japan by way of foreign exchange will have to be spent on manufactured goods. This will have a catastrophic impact on Australia's already ailing manufacturing industry. Not only will the cake get smaller, the slice of it going to workers will continue to diminish. The 2000 richest Australians own as much as the poorest 2.25 million and, since 1974, the relative share going to the rich and the powerful has steadily increased. As the recession worsens, it will not be the rich who will be most affected.

The major difference between this crisis and the great depression of the 1930s is that no one now sees prosperity as being just around the corner. The outlook is grim for the people, and particularly grim for the people of the western suburbs. I believe the only answer lies in changing from the Capitalist rat race to a co-operative Socialist society. Such a society can be achieved only as the result of people's own experiences and struggles. In the meantime, however, I intend to work to the best of my ability for the people caught up in the present system and, in particular, for those in the electorate I represent.

I am well aware that there are hard and bitter times ahead, but so long as I am a member of this House I intend

The Hon. J. M. Coxsedge

that it shall not remain the sole preserve of the comfortable and the privileged. I shall do my best to ensure that the well-fed members of this establishment are disturbed by having to listen to the voices of the exploited and the underprivileged.

The Hon. A. J. HUNT (Minister of Education)—In moving this motion, I acknowledged that it was unusual and innovative. I welcomed the new members of the House and indicated that each one of them, in his or her own way, would have a contribution to make to the proceedings of the House. I am sure that honorable members have not been disappointed by the results of the motion.

All members who have spoken were selected by their parties and elected by their constituents because of some special aptitudes and qualities which they were able to bring to this House. They come from different backgrounds and all of them bring new perspectives.

The older members of this House have listened with interest to the contributions made by the new members. I am sure that every new member realizes that he or she might, on another occasion, be challenged or replied to but that pleasure is yet in store. Honorable members certainly do not seek to take away from an occasion so important to them and their families and friends by responding to any of them during their maiden speech.

I direct my next remarks particularly to the Leaders of non-Government parties because, in the view of the Government, this form of motion has filled a void which has existed in the Council for a long time. It is a void that relates not only to the new members of this House but also to an opportunity that exists in another place to deal with particular issues of concern to members generally and which does not exist here except when the Address-in-Reply, Supply or Budget debates are under consideration.

As a result of the experience of this motion, I indicate that the Government intends, as a matter of course,