

The Hon. P. D. BLOCK: Does Mr. McDonald mean as Mr. Landeryou suggested? I shall not go further into that aspect because Mr. Landeryou has not yet made his maiden speech.

If I had been a member of this Parliament or a member of the Government party when the supermarkets were driving the corner store out of the business, I would have turned heaven and earth to try to find some way of preventing that from happening. We are not living in a better society today because the little person or the small businessman who used to give personalized service, who used to reach up for goods and know where everything was in his store, who used to know his customers by name and who used to give personal advice and service, has been driven out of business.

Is it proposed by members of the Opposition that the small businessman in our community should be ignored? I suggest that is arrant nonsense. They do not believe that and they probably do not want it. I sympathize with them.

As I said the Bill should pass on the condition that a full-scale inquiry is set up. Conditions have changed. Today it is true to say that 66 per cent of the people drink at home. Only 33 per cent of the people tend to buy in bulk and purchase beer across the counter. It is good that conditions have changed.

The Hon. D. G. ELLIOT: Mr. Block is wrong. Sixty-six per cent of the beer sold is packaged beer bought by people who have had a few "snorts" at the local.

The Hon. P. D. BLOCK: That is exactly the point I wanted to make. Is the interjection a prelude to a contribution Mr. Elliot will make to the debate?

I conclude by saying that a major decision must be made on this issue. Members of the Government party support the concept of bringing pro-

ducts as cheaply as possible to the people, but not if it means forcing small businesses to go to the wall, reducing the number of outlets, lowering the standard of service, and returning to less-than-humane methods of indulging in the habit of drinking alcohol and reverting to the time which not one member of this Parliament would genuinely want. I commend the Government on the measure and I support the Bill. An enormous amount of material has been made available on a level where little honesty has so far prevailed. At least the Government in this case has taken an extremely courageous and firm stand, which I support.

The sitting was suspended at 6.22 p.m. until 8.4 p.m.

The Hon. W. A. LANDERYOU (Doutta Galla Province): Mr. President, before I examine the actual workings of this quite extraordinary Bill, I should like to consider the motive for its introduction into this House. According to Government spokesmen, the Bill is necessary because the jobs of people employed in the liquor industry are at risk. Allegedly to prevent unemployment this Government is introducing a measure which prescribes a minimum price for packaged beer. If the Government were in fact genuinely concerned at the prospect of people within the industry losing their jobs, the Bill would have the unanimous support of this side of the House; the Labor Party has always fought for full employment. Unlike the Conservative parties in this country, the Labor Party has never considered the deliberate creation of a pool of unemployed as an acceptable economic weapon. It has always maintained that one of the fundamental rights of any individual is the right to a job.

This Government would have us believe that it is motivated by concern for the 40,000 people in this industry who are employed. Let us make a cursory examination of the deplorable record of this Government

in its indifference to the rights of people who are employed in the industry. Any Government that was genuinely concerned with the welfare of employees would hardly have ignored the 5,000 complaints made during the past ten years by members of the Professional Musicians Union of Australia employed in the liquor industry about breaches of contracts of employment, underpayment and non-performance of contract by employers. It would hardly have ignored the decade-old request by the Professional Musicians Union for the registration of the age of people employed in hotels. Would a Government that was really concerned about the welfare of the stricken rural sector of the community virtually ignore since May, certainly since my life in this House, a motion about the economic crisis in primary industry? Would a Premier who was truly concerned about employment challenge the legality of the Regional Employment Development Scheme which provided much needed employment on so many valuable community and, in particular, country projects?

Only weeks before the Federal Budget was brought down, to provide employment, this Government called for increased Federal spending in the precise areas of housing, road construction and public works. When it came to the crunch this same Government meekly caved in and allowed the national Government to slash spending in all those areas without so much as a whimper of protest. Yet this same Government wants this House to believe it is introducing this unprecedented Bill because it is concerned at the prospect of unemployment in the liquor industry. What arrant hypocrisy! Here is a Government which, in trying to defend its decision to introduce a minimum price for packaged beer, raises the spectre of unemployment in the liquor industry and at the same time conspires with others to create a level of unemployment which is unprecedented in the history of this country.

The Hon. W. A. Landeryou.

If this Government is genuinely concerned about the level of unemployment within our society and our State let it show some real signs of that concern. The Labor Party would welcome any legislation which the Government brought forward that would provide jobs for the thousands of young people who are currently unemployed, or any measure that would alleviate the desperate job shortage within the rural sections of the community. The Labor Party would welcome any moves to reverse the alarming trend in unemployment.

However, this Bill is not about unemployment and it is not about employment; it is about increasing the price of beer to consumers of Victoria by at least \$2 a dozen bottles. The measure is a nasty, ill-conceived piece of legislation that has been thrust upon the Government by a few high-powered pressure groups. It is a classical example of the over-kill. I am the first to concede that a problem of unfair competition exists in the liquor industry. Indeed the Labor Party's fairly lengthy, exhaustive inquiry conceded that point. Hoteliers, licensed grocers and licensed retailers were justifiably upset by others who had been licensed by the Liquor Control Commission and who were selling beer at a loss, in some instances making up that loss with profits on other commodities. Obviously something had to be done to stop beer from being sold as a loss leader but the matter could have been more rationally tackled. It could have been tackled more realistically than by this blanket approach by a Government that purports publicly to believe in free enterprise.

Several options were open to the Government, some of which have already been canvassed in another place. The Government had the option of reducing or amending the 8 per cent licensing fee. It had the option of considering a number of other areas where temporary immediate relief could have been given to those people whom this Bill purports

to protect. It would have been quite possible to ensure that the Liquor Control Commission stopped the sale of beer at a loss. Anybody who has appeared before the licensing commission, as I have, knows the type of power the commission has when it grants licences to would-be licensees. Doubtless such a proposal would create administrative complications, but as Mr. Galbally has pointed out tonight, it would be less difficult to police than the present Bill.

The one certain result of this Bill will be absolute confusion. It is complete hypocrisy for the Government to suggest that it intends to introduce into this almost unique system of anarchy that exists within the liquor industry some form of planning, some form of rationale, by basing the price of beer not on a minimum price but indeed on a legal maximum which, if not observed, carries a penalty of \$500.

The Government has claimed in this House and elsewhere that all it is seeking is fair and equitable competition. All honorable members know about this Government's idea of fairness and equity in electoral boundaries. With 6 per cent more of the total vote than the Australian Labor Party in Victoria the rigged boundaries produced 300 per cent more of the seats for the Government than for this side of the House.

Those who claim to be the Government of Victoria or anywhere else should first trust the people. They should trust the people to elect them fairly and on equitable boundaries. How can members of the Government expect to be treated with respect or that the decisions made within the party room will be treated with respect if democracy does not exist and the Government survives only by virtue of a rigged electoral system? If the people do not equitably elect the law-makers, if the law-makers do not trust the people who elect them, by what standard of morality are the people expected to obey laws that are undemocratically

made? The Government's morality in asserting fair competition for the liquor industry is just as hypocritical as its approach to electoral justice. But of all the options that were available to the Government, the one that was chosen was the least compatible with the alleged professed philosophy of the Government—private enterprise, or until recent times when the phrase became tarnished, free enterprise.

In taking away from the publican, as is proposed, the right to set a price for his product, the Bill will make compulsory a set level of profit, regardless of the wishes of the publican or the consumer. At least Ned Kelly had the decency to wear a mask! The Government is now unmasked and its real policy is naked before us. This Bill eliminates freedom and it eliminates enterprise. Perhaps the Government has given the words a new definition or perhaps it has really unveiled its true beliefs or the true beliefs of the majority of members of the Liberal Party—freedom to plunder the purse of the buyer, to prevent the drinker who prefers to do so, from drinking in the safety and sanctity of his home. The Liquor Control Commission already has the power to interpret and implement what the Government claims to be its policy.

If not, why, since the introduction of the existing legislation, have Government spokesmen referred to orderly marketing? It is quite possible for the issuing authority, the Liquor Control Commission, to prevent supermarkets and other outlets, including wholesalers and those whom we have been told sell beer from the backs of trucks, from unfairly competing in the market place. It is possible for the commission to prevent them from selling beer at a loss and making up the difference on the sale of other commodities, as some of the supermarkets have perhaps been doing. That is all within the capacity of the commission by the transfer of licences or the creation of new

licences; any person who, like myself, has been before the commission seeking a licence knows those things are within the power of the commission. Indeed, its stipulations vary considerably when granting licences.

There would be no objection from the Labor Party if the Government's intention was simply to eliminate unfair competition. No one expects people to survive in the commercial world facing unfair competition and the Labor Party certainly does not advocate such a situation. Members of the Labor Party recognize the extremely valuable role played by the Liquor Control Commission. It has been unpleasant to hear certain members from the other side of the House aiming their barbs by way of interjection at my colleague, Mr. Elliot, but he, like myself, firmly believes that the price of beer can be set in the market place in much the same way as is done with any other commodity, provided that there is fair competition.

Members of the Opposition acknowledge quite freely that of all the eastern States of Australia, Victoria undoubtedly has the best hotels, because of the attention paid by the commission to the obligations imposed on it by this Parliament. Hotel facilities are better and the hotels themselves are more comfortable and are better equipped to serve the consumer.

This measure is nothing more than a threadbare, belated admission by the Government that its policies have created unfair competition for hotelkeepers. Was it possible to create a fair competition situation through the Phillips Royal Commission? Was it possible through the 1968 legislation without slavishly following the Australian Hotels Association recommended prices? Has the price fixing of beer operated in Victoria anyway? This is merely a belated admission by a Government which really wanted to achieve fair competition long ago but has only

now tried to do so. We do not need Draconian legislation imposing an across-the-board minimum price.

Most of the stupid planning which has created the big beer barns and forced the creation of larger and larger hotels in Victoria, necessitating the involvement of yet greater amounts of capital, has come about because of the Government's own policies which have insisted that this be done, in direct contradiction of the showcase platform position it has adopted regarding the drinking driver. It has encouraged the building of larger hotels, forced people to drive to them to drink or to be entertained and at the same time created the showcase revenue raiser of the .05 legislation.

This proposed legislation is quite preposterous because it authorizes the establishment of a minimum price justified, it would have us believe, by the Government's concern for the public. I quote the words of the Minister—

Having had a taste of discount beer, if they continue to drink it it will not be long before they will not be able to buy beer.

Can there be anyone in this House, apart from the Minister who said it, who believes that? What an absurd assertion for a Minister of the Crown to make. It comes from a Government with a deplorable record for concern about consumers. It has pretended, on the one hand, to be concerned about employees in the hotel industry and, on the other hand, to be concerned about consumers.

What has this Government done for consumers? It has opposed price control. It has consistently refused to set a maximum price for a whole range of essential consumer goods. It has allowed land speculators to continue making exorbitant profits and ignored the reports dealing with consumer affairs. Yet it expects the people of this State to believe its decision to fix a minimum price for beer arises from its concern for the consumers of Victoria.

I believe the Government has been stampeded into introducing a hasty, ill-conceived and poorly thought-out Bill. Earlier tonight members saw the spectacle of two Ministers of the Crown racing from this Chamber to check their law books following Mr. Galbally's speech. The Government, even within itself, has recognized how hasty and ill-conceived this proposal is and has already backed down in the face of widespread public opinion, yet it justifies its position by saying that this proposal is only a temporary one and that what it is really all about is putting a finger in the dyke and that once the inquiry has been conducted—yet another inquiry—it will then have the permanent solution. Did it have it in 1968? This House has seen ample evidence of temporary legislation.

The Minister, in moving the proposal, suggested that it would have a life of only twelve months, a need to exist for only twelve months. I remind honorable members that during the first world war the Victorian Government introduced temporary legislation forcing hotels to close at 6 p.m., yet it was 48 years later, 1965, when that temporary legislation was repealed. Temporary legislation has the unfortunate tendency to become very permanent.

There is no need to rush this Bill through the Parliament. The Government should honestly admit to the public and to the House that it has made a mistake. The market forces can, with the elimination of unfair competition, set the price for packaged beer and the Government should withdraw the Bill and allow the market to set the price.

Mr. President, you prefaced these remarks by indicating that this was my first formal contribution to the deliberations of the House. In acknowledging my gratitude to honorable members for their patience and their traditional courtesy it would be remiss of me not to also, in due humility, acknowledge my pride

in being chosen as their first representative by those people who comprise the large and troubled slice of this State included in the new province of Dousta Galla. More than any other it is a province which deserves adequate and competent representation.

For Parliament, in my view, to survive as an institution of relevance and of meaning, the needs and aspirations of people like those who comprise my electorate, Dousta Galla, must be given greater consideration by Government, regardless of political complexion. I trust that the future will amply demonstrate that I am capable of living up to both its demands and the rightful expectations of those who live within that electorate.

The Hon. HADDON STOREY (Attorney-General): I am sure all honorable members agree with the views expressed by Mr. Landeryou about the role of members of Parliament in this House. In debating this Bill, it is important that honorable members be sure that they present to the House and to the people who take note of these debates the facts as they truly are, and that they present, not by rhetoric but by proper analysis and research, the position which has led the Government to introduce this measure.

We have heard from the Chief Secretary that it is the desire of the Government to enable fair and proper competition in this field which has led to the introduction of the Bill. Mr. Landeryou said that something had to be done to prevent beer from being sold as a loss leader, but he did not present, nor did his Leader, any credible alternatives to what the Government has proposed as a step on the way to investigating the whole industry.

Mr. Landeryou acknowledged that it is necessary at times to take steps to enable free competition to take place. Under the Trade Practices Act it is sometimes necessary to control