

Mr JOHN (Bendigo East) - Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election for a second term to the important office you hold. The task requires objectivity and independence of judgment. Obviously you showed these qualities in the last Parliament and this has ensured your re-election.

I also thank honourable members from all sides of the House for the courtesy they have shown me as a new member in this place. As they would appreciate, it is a pretty daunting experience to be a new member of Parliament.

It is an honour for me to represent the new electorate of Bendigo East in this, the 50th Parliament, in the year of Victoria's 150th anniversary. The new electorate of Bendigo East encompasses a vast part of the central business district of Bendigo and its major residential areas. It also encompasses many important country centres such as Mitiamo, Bridgewater, Serpentine and Heathcote. I am cognizant of the responsibility that has been given to me and I shall work extremely hard to represent all the people in the new electorate of Bendigo East.

Bendigo is a product of gold. Some 103 continuous and successful years of gold mining in our city culminated in 1954 with the closure of the last gold mine. During that time the city prospered and developed, but now it is facing difficulties. Today the electorate is often overlooked by the people of the metropolitan area, the Government and political parties based in the metropolitan area. The electorate, as well as other parts of the country, has often been overlooked.

Our economy is flagging, wealth is limited and the dry inland soil around Bendigo is no match for the richer soils of the Western District and other more fertile parts of Victoria. The prosperity of the electorate lies in Government and semi-Government industries and in secondary industries. The electorate contains the Commonwealth Ordnance Factory, the railway workshops, the Mayfair Ham and Bacon Co. and several important textile firms, all of which are large employers.

Shopkeepers in the electorate are struggling and service industries are in some difficulty. Manufacturers have been left in a bad way because of the withdrawal of pay-roll tax rebates which were most important to Victorian country manufacturers. The uncertainty and the lack of adequate financial assistance to decentralized industries in the district has had a depressing effect on the manufacturing community.

Bendigo has vast tourist potential, but this potential cannot be realized while we have an inequitable wage fixation system and the existing rigid wage structure. The tourist industry will not develop to its full potential as long as employers must pay penalty rates and 17.5 per cent holiday loadings. In Bendigo, as in most parts of Victoria and Australia, we have institutionalized employment. This has resulted in nearly one-tenth of the work force in the electorate of Bendigo East, in Victoria and in the country being unemployed, and this will probably remain so permanently unless remedial action is taken.

The use of selective statistics and superficial job creation schemes will not disguise the truth. The truth is extremely depressing for young people. The important question in Victoria and Australia today is whether the Government is master of the people or whether the people are master of the State. Honourable members should think about that. This applies particularly to the trade union movement. The trade union movement was born of the desire to prevent exploitation of the worker. It was born of the desire to seek fair wages for the worker. Now the pendulum has swung too far. We have reached an absurd situation where some unions believe they can run this country.

In some industries one cannot work unless one is a member of a union. Where is the democracy in that proposition? I know of cases where employers have been forced to sack workers because they refused to belong to unions. Employees will walk off jobs for the flimsiest of reasons at a time when we really need their productivity to lift Victoria out of its present difficult situation.

Increasing wage pressure from the trade union movement has gone beyond the capacity of the economy to pay. Nearly one-tenth of the nation's population will remain unemployed while this selfishness continues. We have reached a situation where the tail is wagging the dog.

I enter Parliament with a goal and a vision for a just, prosperous and free society. When I leave I hope I will have contributed to the welfare of our children and our children's children. I do not want change for the sake of change. I want change only where I know it will be for the better. I want our children to prize the rights of the individual over the rights of the State. My commitment is to traditional conservative values blended with new hope and new vision for Victoria.

I seek a State where our children are encouraged to work and to be rewarded for their efforts; where they are encouraged to pursue excellence in all things; where they will grow up appreciating the value of individual initiative and where they will acclaim the value of the free enterprise system as the best means to create the wealth in the State to pay for educational and welfare needs. I seek a State where all children regardless of their social, economic and racial backgrounds, receive a proper and a sound education. I see that as providing the social mobility that is so necessary in a just society.

Victoria is rich in natural resources. It has large areas of fertile land. It has a comparatively small population. We live in the South East Asian-South Pacific region, the fastest growing economic region in the world. Victoria has no serious racial problems compared with places like South Africa or India. Victoria has the capacity to produce large and vast quantities of surplus foods. It can produce the best natural fibre in the world, wool.

Victoria ought to be the lucky State in the lucky country, but it is not. Unfortunately we have been conditioned for a number of years to accept the philosophy of, "Leave it to the Government". We have lost the ethic of the pioneers, "Leave it to me, I will do it". Honourable members should contrast those two ethics. The image of the lucky country is fading fast.

We have seen the dollar slide. We have seen the public debt grow markedly-in fact, by more than 50 per cent-during the past two years. The cost of servicing this debt is ever increasing. Our children and their children will have to pay the penalty and, ultimately, will have to repay the money. The cost of servicing that debt is further increased by the plunging dollar.

I am proud to be a member of Parliament and a member of a very good team. The Liberal Party is in opposition but the strength of any democracy is in the strength and quality of its Opposition. There is considerable talent on the Opposition benches. I look forward to the many challenges which lie ahead for both me and the Liberal Party. I shall conclude with a quotation from James Freeman Clarke:

A politician thinks of the next election and a statesman thinks of the next generation.

I would ask honourable members to consider these words carefully in their future deliberations in this Parliament.