

MAIDEN SPEECHES OF MEMBERS

The Hon. E. H. WALKER (Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs) (*By leave*)—Mr President, the House has had the pleasure today of welcoming certain new members of the House, and for four of those honourable members it is the first time that they have been able to sit in the House. It has been the custom in recent years that, on the first day of meeting of the new Parliament when a swearing in occurs, a motion is moved suited to having those honourable members new in the House heard by the House. It is with that in mind that I have pleasure in moving, by leave:

That this House takes note of the issues raised by newly elected members.

The Hon. M. A. LYSTER (Chelsea Province)—I begin by congratulating you, Mr President, on your election to that position. From my knowledge of your attitudes and practices of past years, I believe you will exercise your duties with equity and honesty at all times and with sincere concern to preserve all that is good in the democratic process. I look forward to serving in the Chamber under your competent guidance and direction.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, the Honourable Eric Kent. It was obvious from the sentiments expressed on his last day in this place that many honourable members share an appreciation of Eric as a gentle man and a true socialist. All have learned from his quiet wisdom and total honesty. I hope I may emulate his steadfast adherence to firmly held principles in the face of opposition.

I thank the electors of Chelsea Province for their continuing confidence in the Australian Labor Party. I am honoured to represent a great party which draws support from such a broad spectrum of society. Any political party which seeks to articulate views on society and its structures should be representative of that community. It should allow for free and open discussion and genuine participation in the decision-making processes.

The Australian Labor Party, of all parties in this country, surely comes closest to achieving this, difficult and controversial as it may seem at times. It is unfortunate that others choose to interpret these processes as symptoms of friction. It would be a sad reflection on our belief in democracy if dictatorship and, therefore, lack of dissent, were to become a preferred option.

Mr President, as you well know, members of the Australian Labor Party share a belief that the community can offer a better life to its members, particularly to those denied access to the rights, security and opportunities enjoyed by others.

The emphasis of the first Cain Government on efficiency and on modern financial management was not an end in itself. Having achieved a large measure of economic reform and growth, the Government now continues its major thrust in the areas of social development and justice. May the initiatives of the Government be a reward to members of the Labor Party who have worked with dedication and commitment to bring social change to fruition.

I offer special thanks to members in the Chelsea Province and to the candidates and campaign committees in the four Legislative Assembly seats involved. I make particular mention of Geoff Holland who campaigned so well, albeit unsuccessfully, for the seat of Frankston South.

Chelsea Province, which extends along Port Phillip Bay from Moorabbin to the City of Frankston, is comprised of several communities which have grown considerably over the past fifteen years. In addition to the older, established residents, there are young people many of whom are struggling to create secure lives for themselves and for their families. We hear much of the plight of people in the western suburbs, but as my colleague, Mr Sandon, has revealed in recent times, for an inordinate number of residents in the province, inadequate disposable income, high rental costs, unemployment and reliance on social security benefits contribute to a most insecure and precarious lifestyle.

I commend the Government for its anti-poverty strategy which will begin to address these problems. Together with initiatives such as increased spending on public housing, it demonstrates a commitment to ensure the rights of all Victorians, not just those who are organized and politically powerful.

Among those who have been denied access to political power until recently are the disabled people in our community. Their situation changed with the prompt acceptance and implementation of the report of the Ministerial Review of Education Services for the Disabled. Appropriate resources have been made available to assist the integration of disabled students into mainstream schooling. There were apprehensions from teachers and parents—quite understandable apprehensions—given the lack of prior contact with the disabled.

Concerns that integration would add to the already significant burden and stress of class-room teaching have been alleviated by the provision of resources—and I refer to integration teachers and aides—by in-service training and by support in the creation of an appropriately demanding environment.

It is to the credit of school communities that the advantages of integration are already being seen. There is a reversal of negative attitudes and an acknowledgment of the positive effects on both disabled and non-disabled children. To their credit, teachers have heightened their appreciation of individual differences. All children will benefit from a greater consideration of their individual rates and patterns of learning.

Allied to this principle is the whole philosophy of the process known as deinstitutionalization, that is, a rejection of the unnecessary admission of patients to and long-term incarceration in institutions, the development of appropriate community-based alternatives and the maintenance and improvement of conditions, care and treatment for those who need protective care in an humane setting.

It is unfortunate that the principle is expressed by a negative term which suggests that the primary goal is to expel clients from buildings. Surely it would be preferable to use a positive term to refer to the normalization of care and services for physically and mentally disabled persons.

The recent announcement of the transfer of services for the intellectually disabled from the Health Commission to the Department of Community Services indicates an intention to provide the least restrictive environment for each person. Proposed legislation on guardianship, services for the intellectually disabled and the Mental Health Bill reinforce that intention.

Unlike some processes undertaken elsewhere, the normalization process should not involve a precipitous exodus of unprepared clients without appropriate and accessible support and services. A ten-year plan for normalization should ensure that a range of options to institutional care is available. The move to normalization is the logical consequence of changes and developments in several areas.

The development of effective medication therapy and evidence of the capacity of community-based services to provide support, treatment and rehabilitation came at a time when the public became aware of the atrocious living and working conditions in some of the State's institutions.

Together with the moral, ethical and humanitarian argument was the fiscal claim that deinstitutionalization could save as much as 80 per cent of average annual per patient costs in large public institutions. The latter argument should be rejected. Financial expediency should not be the basis for undertaking such a program.

If savings are made in any area due to more effective rehabilitation, for example, that would be a bonus, not a rationale. Costs will be transferred and, indeed, increased to ensure a range of appropriate options. This involves the provision of supervised hostels,

halfway houses, group houses, rehabilitation services, foster care placements and activity centres.

Ideally, the care would incorporate a 24-hour crisis service, the involvement of the patient, relatives or care givers, constant attention by one team, and efficient co-ordination of services and agencies. Such extensive and ongoing service is labour intensive and cannot be regarded as a cheap alternative.

Where return to family care is appropriate, there must be an appreciation of the total cost to the family unit. In deinstitutionalizing a patient, we must ensure we are not institutionalizing the role of female relatives as permanent, unpaid care providers. The emotional stress of providing constant care can sap the most willing parents.

To relieve that pressure, part of the support structure must be the provision of temporary or respite care accommodation, such as that proposed by the Nepean Centre for the Physically Disabled, which is located in Seaford. Such facilities allow for physical rest, holidays, sickness and emergencies, simply to ensure the survival of the family.

Access to home help services has improved significantly over recent years and is of particular assistance to those who wish to live independently. For those people, the provision of appropriate aids and occasional or regular attendant care enable them to live full and productive lives in the community.

On the subject of technical aids for the disabled, I stress the need for co-ordination and clarification of services offered by the Federal Program of Aids for Disabled People, public hospitals, the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In Victoria, we are fortunate to have engineers and technicians who work closely with disabled people to develop appropriate technical aids for independent living. Co-ordination and support for research and development in this area is required. Given Victoria's excellent achievements in developing sophisticated technology, not only would the disabled benefit from such work but also a significant contribution could be made to the economy of the State.

The establishment of the Office of Intellectual Disability Services should ensure that reforms in this State do not repeat mistakes made in some other places. Decentralized community-based health services must be efficiently designed, co-ordinated and integrated. Public acceptance of mental health centres must be addressed. The whole question of community education must also be addressed.

It is my hope that this office will ensure that clients, host communities, planners, mental health professionals and other workers will contribute their experience and expertise to ensure the successful implementation of the normalization process in the interests of improved care and support for those in need.

Although I have spoken on just part of the social justice strategy of the Government, similar principles apply in other areas of major concern. The Government has earned the confidence of the people of Victoria; it has a clear mandate to implement its policies. Interference with that would constitute an abuse of the wishes of the people and of the democratic process.

In conclusion, I offer sincere thanks to my family—my parents, my husband and my sons, Simon and Benjamin. Without their constant support, tolerance and understanding I could not have considered a career such as this.

I wish all women and girls could enjoy such a supportive environment. I look forward to my term as a member of the Legislative Council. I commend the initiatives and proposals of the Government and I will be pleased to be involved in their efficient implementations. I thank the House for its courtesy.