

Anybody who contemplates going into agriculture in the light of the attitude adopted by the Arbitration Commission and by governments of all political flavours, has to be weak in the head.

A situation is being reached where people engaged in agriculture are degenerating into a peasant class in this country, the same as in overseas countries. The farmers in this country are having to compete with the production of these people who are virtually on a peasant standard, particularly in many parts of the world.

This should concern the Treasurer of this State. I am hoping he will respond in due course and study the point of view I am putting forward. This fundamental principle has to be accepted, that if the wage earners and salary earners of this country wish to share in the prosperity of the country when times are good, they must share in the downturn when times are not so good. Unless some system can be devised to bring that into effect, then we are heading for financial disaster and everyone in this country will find that his standard of living will decline substantially. This will be because we will not be earning the foreign exchange that is necessary to maintain the standard of living that has been earned for us by primary producers principally. It was from primary production in the 1960s and 1970s that tremendous sums of foreign exchange were earned that enabled high wages to be paid, that enabled people to buy commodities and consumer items from overseas countries which this country could not produce for itself, and that made our standard of living one of the highest in the world.

One of the reasons why our standard of living is slipping back is because the important role of agriculture is being neglected in the total economy of the country. I hope that the Treasurer of this State will study the comments I have made and take up the matter with his Federal counterparts. I hope there will be a change in the attitude of governments and that at long last there will be a true understanding of the significant role of primary producers in the prosperity that this country enjoys.

Mr MICALLEF (Springvale)—I wish, first of all, to thank the staff and the members of this House for helping me to make the transition to Parliament; it is different.

The Springvale by-election has demonstrated to the people of Victoria that the Cain Government is at a very popular ebb. The Springvale by-election has given a clear mandate to the Cain Government to continue the way it is going. The result was a magnificent win and showed for the third time in less than twelve months that the Opposition has little credibility in the electorate. Each time the Labor Party has gone to the electorate in a by-election the result has improved.

The Springvale by-election came about as a result of the sudden death of Kevin King and, from a personal point of view, it is a sad way to come into Parliament. The work that Kevin King did in the electorate came out clearly in the campaign. The standing of Kevin King as a person was extremely high in the electorate, and I acknowledge the work that Kevin did.

I am very proud of the people of Springvale and thank them for the confidence they have shown in me. I would like to thank Kevin's family for their support, and also Peter Batchelor, an organizer for the Australian Labor Party, for the way in which he directed the campaign. The party activists in the Springvale area rallied behind us magnificently.

It used to be said that by-elections went against governments. The Labor Party is changing that rule. Victoria has changed this concept remarkably. The Government has won its third by-election and increased its vote each time. This illustrates that people were fed up with 27 years of conservative government. The honourable member can laugh; the results are on the board.

The electorate of Springvale is a diverse electorate. It is a good electorate from which to obtain a sample of how the community is thinking. The top half of the electorate, Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill, is a newer area and it has the problems of newer areas.

The area has had 27 years of nothing. All previous governments did was to put a football ground in the middle of it and they did not even bother servicing it, providing transport and so on. They just left the area to develop without any proper planning. The present Government is now working on picking up the pieces.

The southern end of the electorate contains the City of Springvale itself, which is

an established area with an industrial base. The concerns of the people of that area that came out during the election campaign were the concerns on which we concentrated and the policies to deal with those problems are the policies being pursued. We are trying to do something about the massive unemployment in the area that we inherited as a result of 27 years of conservative government in this State and the policies of the Federal Fraser Government. We are also trying to pick up the pieces in that area.

There are approximately 2000 young unemployed people in Springvale and that is a disgusting situation. Obviously, unemployment creates all sorts of associated problems. Unemployed people have great difficulty in obtaining decent housing because the social service benefits they receive do not give them adequate living standards.

The electorate of Springvale is extremely cosmopolitan. It has large Italian, Yugoslav, Greek, Vietnamese and South American communities, as well as many other smaller ethnic groups. The social problems suffered by those communities are enormous. It is obvious that people who are trying to settle down in a new environment, a new country, with different cultural ties bear the brunt of any economic recession. The queue at the Springvale legal aid service clearly illustrates the problems.

I shall now explain to honourable members some of my background. I was born in Australia of Maltese parents and the Maltese community tells me I am the first person of Maltese extraction to be elected to Parliament. I am proud to have that honour. I worked in industry for some twenty years and became a shop-floor delegate for the Amalgamated Metalworkers and Shipwrights Union. I am sure this information will create a little interest in the House and honourable members will remind me of it in the future. I expect this. I am proud to have been associated with Australia's largest union, which develops people particularly well. As is reflected in this House, it develops one's social conscience.

After working as a shop-steward and representing many diverse groups, I developed an interest in occupational health, and was appointed as an occupational health and safety officer with the AMWSU. I became the first full-time occupational health officer employed by a union in Australia. That was

three and a half years ago. I helped to evaluate the occupational health programme for the union and in the development of the Labor Party policy in this area, as well as promoting occupational health throughout the community. If I had the time, I could tell honourable members about the things I had to do to try to overcome the bungling that took place during that 27 years of conservative rule in this State. There are 27 Acts covering occupational health and safety in this State. It is an absolute mess!

I will quote some figures given by Mr Macphree, the former Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations in the Fraser Government. He said that industrial accidents cost at least \$4 billion a year and 7 million working days are lost each year. That is a conservative estimate. One can imagine the tremendous drain on the community that that represents. I can never understand why conservative Governments attack only the loss of time due to industrial dispute when the loss of time due to occupational injury and disease is far greater. I can never comprehend the hypocrisy of conservative Governments in placing all the emphasis on the statistics relating to industrial disputes.

Speaking of statistics, it is to the shame of the former Liberal Government that statistics on industrial injury and disease ceased being collected in 1974. They were collected from insurance companies and did not reflect the actual situation, so the Government stopped collecting them. Later this year it is hoped that legislation will be introduced to clean up the mess in this area that is the legacy of those 27 years of Liberal Government.

I should also like to be involved in some changes to the Workers Compensation Act. A disgusting situation exists at present with workers waiting for up to two years for their claims to be heard and being forced to live on social services, despite the fact that they have legitimate claims to workers compensation benefits. It is ironic that about 99 per cent of cases are decided in favour of the claimants once they reach the board. Obviously, insurance companies are receiving a windfall on the short-term money market. I should like to see some immediate changes to the Act to ensure that workers are adequately compensated when they are injured or become ill because of their work.

In South Australia, liability is determined within fourteen days. It would not be such a radical step to introduce similar provisions in Victoria. Obviously, the worst effects of the existing legislation are felt by migrants and workers who are not organized, workers in industries that are not unionized. The moment those people are injured, they face problems. I read with interest the proposal to legislate to ensure that one month's notice is given when people are being put off, because one only has to look at the present situation in industry to see that many people are put off because they have suffered some sort of injury or are beginning to slow down on the working line. They get the sack. Many workers are afraid to claim workers compensation because, immediately they fill out a form, that is it, they are out the door. That is disgusting. Many European countries have legislation prohibiting the sacking of workers in that situation. It is time Victoria moved into the twentieth century in that field.

Mr SALTMARSH (Wantirna)—Firstly, I congratulate the honourable member for Springvale on his election and wish him well in his work. I apologize for having interjected briefly when he was speaking, but he was presenting such a glowing picture of what he had achieved that I wondered why he was prepared to grieve.

The matter of concern I want to raise in this grievance debate affects some 1 500 voluntary workers throughout the State. It is a matter that has a great impact on the effectiveness of an alternative to prison sentences in Victoria—probation. For a number of years, I was an honorary probation officer, so I have a detailed understanding of the work they do. I applaud the work honorary probation officers have done and I hope the tasks they are undertaking on behalf of the community and the State at this time will be continued and that their work will be enhanced rather than their having all their hopes and aspirations dashed, as has happened recently because of announcements made by the present Government.

For many years, grave concern was expressed about the organization and administration of probation services in Victoria, so much so that, some time ago, considerable action was undertaken by the probation

officers, in conjunction with the Department of Community Welfare Services. A number of working parties were established and widespread community consultations were organized to establish a basis for a more effective probation system.

The outcome of that was widespread discussion and community consultation was the formulation, in 1981, of what is now known as the community-based probation system. In essence, this was a new partnership arrangement, which was entered into between the Department of Community Welfare Services, and the Probation Officers Association of Victoria. The arrangement provided that certain administrative resources would be made available through the Department of Community Welfare Services, and that some assistance would be provided to enable the Probation Officers Association of Victoria to have, on a regional basis, effective administration so that recruitment and training of volunteers could take place. It was agreed that probationers would be allocated to probation officers in places where special resources are needed to supervise the more difficult probation cases and that that would be undertaken by the Department of Community Welfare Services.

The community-based programme was established on a five-year basis and, after two and a half years of the programme operating in the regions of this State, an outstanding service was established. However, because of the concern being expressed, particularly by probation officers, that there were some 1000 or more unallocated probationers in this State, the Probation Officers Association of Victoria accepted the responsibility of commencing negotiations and consultations with the Minister for Community Welfare Services, to establish ways for improving this service still further.

It was accepted that, in a number of regions where the service had been operating well, there was virtually no waiting time for the allocation of probation officers to probationers. In the regions where this good arrangement was not operating, it was clear there were grave problems. Because there were some 1100 or so unallocated probation cases, the courts throughout those regions lost a great deal of confidence in the