Thursday, 5 March 1987

The SPEAKER (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds) took the chair at 10.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

PAYMENT OF DEPARTMENTAL ACCOUNTS

Mr KENNEDY (Leader of the Opposition)—What action has the Premier taken to ensure that his instructions for prompt payment of departmental accounts has been carried out?

Mr Fordham—Now there is a Dorothy Dix question for you!

Mr CAIN (Premier)—That is right. For the first time in this State, there has been a Government that has addressed seriously the problem of payment of accounts by departments. I am not saying it is perfect, and I never have; I recognise that we have perhaps 60, 70 or 80 years of tradition and practices to overcome.

The Government has taken a range of initiatives which have improved performance. We have issued a clear directive to departments on payment of accounts. We have required chief administrators to take personal responsibility for the payments that are made and their performance in the making of those payments.

Through the Department of Management and Budget, we have established a review on ways of improving payment procedures over the long-term. The Government received some 30-odd recommendations from the people responsible for that review. They covered such things as developing payment procedure manuals, better training and a more precise definition of staff responsibility—all the things, I suppose, that one might say ought to be good office management practices and, like all offices, large and small, fall into disuse or are not as well done as they should be.

A project team from the Treasurer's department is in the process of implementing those recommendations. They will be monitored very closely.

There has also been an acknowledged improvement in the performance of departments, generally, regarding payment—I believe that was acknowledged by the Auditor-General in his most recent report. I do not for a moment resile from the proposition that we have a long way to go, and we will continue trying. I again make the point that this is the first Government which has really tackled this issue head on.

Mr Ross-Edwards interjected.

Mr CAIN—I am saying that this is the first occasion that the Government has had the opportunity—given that we have now been in office for a period of time that has enabled us to do so—of addressing this issue in the proper way. One needs some time.

Mr Ross-Edwards interjected.

Mr CAIN—The longest they had was two and a half years. The Leader of the National Party knows how they were cut off at the socks through the misuse of the Upper House. The National Party did not give them a fair go, so the honourable gentleman should not start me on that subject.

This Government is getting a fair go from the electorate and also from the Public Service, which is determined to play its part because it wants to be involved in a better performance.
A very good Public Service exists in this State, which is deserving of support from all sections of Parliament in every possible way.

Mr Ross-Edwards interjected.

Mr CAIN—I may speak on the subject during the grievance debate.

**POLICE STAFFING AT ST KILDA**

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS (Leader of the National Party)—I wish to direct a question to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS—This is a tough question, so I suggest that the Minister be given a fair go. In fact, I believe members of the Government front bench will be interested in some of the points I make.

I refer the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to reports that the number of police officers at the St Kilda police station annexe, which covers Fitzroy Street, has been reduced from 27 to 13. I ask the Minister to review the position, particularly in view of the fact that the Minister for Public Works, whose electorate covers the area, was reported as having said that he was shocked at the situation.

Mr MATHEWS (Minister for Police and Emergency Services)—If the Leader of the National Party intends to seek an active involvement in police operations or decisions, I suggest that he applies for the position of chief commissioner, which was advertised in the press last week, but he should not come to me for a reference. I do not believe the quality of his contributions in this place on police matters indicates that he has the necessary qualifications for the job.

As the Deputy Commissioner (Operations) has made clear, the staffing of the St Kilda police annexe—like the staffing of other elements of the Police Force—is dictated by police operational requirements.

It is not appropriate that a Minister for Police and Emergency Services should involve himself in allocations of police staff, nor do I propose to do so.

**UNDER-AGE DRINKING**

Mr HILL (Warrandyte)—Will the Minister for Police and Emergency Services detail plans that have been developed for coping with the under-age drinking problem during the coming Moomba weekend?

Mr MATHEWS (Minister for Police and Emergency Services)—The Government has committed itself to doing everything within its power to ensure that the number of under-age members of our community who become involved in drinking is minimised. The greatest possible help is given to those under-age members of the community already involved in drinking and trying to give it up.

The consequences of under-age drinking, as they have been exhibited so deplorably on New Year's eve in recent years, should be adequately addressed and dealt with. Therefore, the Government has involved itself in three ways which will be applied during the current Moomba festival and especially as Moomba reaches its peak.

First, the Government has equipped the police with much more effective powers in dealing with young people who are inappropriately in possession of liquor. Now the police will be able to confiscate the liquor and they will not hesitate to do so during the current Moomba celebrations.

Secondly, the Government is working closely with the Salvation Army in ensuring that facilities are available round the Moomba sites to which young people can be taken when
they are distressed as a result of over consumption of alcohol. The centre will work more effectively on this occasion than was the case when it was first introduced last New Year’s eve.

Finally, the Government is anxious that boredom does not play a part in exacerbating the effects of overconsumption of alcohol by young people. Specially tailored entertainment is to be provided on this occasion for that purpose.

**TREASURER’S CAR TELEPHONE ACCOUNT**

Mr STOCKDALE (Brighton)—Was the Treasurer’s car telephone service recently disconnected by Telecom Australia because the honourable gentleman failed to pay the account?

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer)—The question illustrates the level of mentality of the honourable member for Brighton, who was unable to cope with WorkCare issues and the responsibility was transferred to the honourable member for Hawthorn. The honourable member for Brighton should be aware that I never pay any account like my car telephone account.

The Leader of the Opposition does not even understand that point! That is how slow he is! These accounts are paid by public servants in the normal manner.

**RANDOM BREATH TESTING OF FARMERS**

Mr HANN (Rodney)—Is the Minister for Police and Emergency Services aware of reports that police in the Wimmera district have been briefed to the effect that they will now be able to random breath test drivers on their farms? If he is aware of the briefing, will he give an assurance that no police officer will random breath test a farmer on his farm unless he or she has been involved in an accident?

Mr MATHEWS (Minister for Police and Emergency Services)—I hope the honourable member for Rodney is not suggesting that the police have in any way abused their powers of random breath testing.

Mr Hann—Not yet!

Mr MATHEWS—I deplore his implication that such an abuse might in fact take place.

The police record on the implementation of breath testing in this State has been one of the highest probity and one in which members of this House should be prepared to take great pride. The benefits to the community have been plain with the decline in the road trauma that has been seen in recent years.

I am not aware of the briefings to which the honourable member refers, but in view of the anxieties about police conduct that he has expressed I shall arrange for him to receive a suitable briefing on the matter.

**VICTORIAN–JIANGSU JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE**

Mr HARROWFIELD (Mitcham)—Can the Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources give details to the House of the steps being taken to further improve economic relations between Victoria and Jiangsu Province, our sister State in China, in particular, through the establishment of a joint economic committee involving the two Governments?

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I know how interested the honourable member for Mitcham is in the economic development between our State and China. That interest, of course, is shared by the Government because it is aware that this huge market of China is being increasingly opened up to the Western World and, thanks to the initiatives taken by both the Victorian and Australian Governments, we are to the forefront of opportunities now being pursued, not essentially by the Government, of course, but by the private sector in this State and in this country.
The strategy of the Government is twofold. First, we are building on the solid relationships that have been established with key Chinese economic organisations, the best known of which is CITIC—the China International Trust and Investment Corporation. That clearly is the most dramatic of the Chinese bodies that are now taking up investment and trade opportunities across the world.

The major initiative in the world undertaken by that corporation has been right here in Victoria with its decision to participate in the massive Portland aluminium project. CITIC has now taken the further step of establishing an Australian office with its headquarters in Melbourne. I am sure that will be a major vehicle for the promotion of economic relations between Victorian companies and China. Discussions are now under way between CITIC representatives and a number of Victorian commercial and industrial organisations.

Secondly, Victoria has established a sound regional base in China through the strengthening of our sister State relationship with Jiangsu Province and placing an economic overlay over what has been essentially a cultural and political exchange.

Honourable members would be aware that I visited Jiangsu Province late last year and opened a trade display in Nanjing at which twenty Victorian firms participated. We have been heartened by both the initial sales results and the discussions that have developed following that successful trade exhibition.

I am pleased to announce today that next week will see the first meeting of a Victorian–Jiangsu joint economic committee. This committee was established following discussions involving the Premier and Madam Gu and finalised by negotiations that I undertook last year.

The Jiangsu delegation coming to Victoria will be led by Vice Governor Chen Huanyou and will comprise twelve senior representatives from key Jiangsu organisations. The Victorian Government together with key companies from Victoria involved in trade with China, will participate in those discussions next week. I am sure future generations will recognise that as an important building block in further strengthening our ties with Jiangsu Province.

In 1985–86 Victoria's two-way trade with China totalled approximately $510 million compared with only $204 million for the same period four years earlier. Significant improvements have been made and I believe trade will increase rapidly in the years ahead. The Victorian Government is proud of the way it has been able to facilitate this important growth.

POLICE INVESTIGATIONS OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Mr CROZIER (Portland)—Following the undertaking given last week by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to provide information about police investigations, is the Minister now in a position to advise the House what departments and instrumentalities are being investigated by the Victoria Police?

Mr MATHEWS (Minister for Police and Emergency Services)—I undertook to provide the honourable member with the information that he has sought and that will be done.

BUS ACCIDENT AT BASS

Mr ERNST (Bellarine)—Can the Minister for Transport inform the House what action he has taken following the bus accident at Bass?

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I thank the honourable member for his question and I know that many members of Parliament take a significant and ongoing interest in road safety issues.

The first point that should be made is that there will be an inquiry into this tragic accident and material has been prepared by officers of the Road Traffic Authority and the
Victoria Police, who are examining aspects of the crash that need to be drawn to the attention of this inquiry.

However, there are some actions that are required, in my view, and in the view of my advisers, prior to that inquiry. One aspect that has been drawn to our attention as a result of the tragic accident is that the design of bus seats should be examined to improve uniform national safety standards.

Initial inquiries have indicated that, although the seats in the bus were state-of-the-art general purpose coach seats, in good condition and manufactured by a reputable company of great experience, there was a significant fracture of mountings, seat-back hinge failures and exposure of dangerous corners and edges by trim damage. Those matters raise questions about the criteria used for the crashworthiness of seats.

The report clearly demonstrates that work must be done to improve bus safety, particularly for long haul buses. I have now written to my Federal colleague, the Honourable Peter Morris, asking that the work of the Vehicle Standards Advisory Committee established last November, which is examining related questions, should be reported to the next Ministerial conference of State and Federal Ministers for Transport.

I am particularly concerned with seats, seat anchorage strengths, seat belts for front row passengers and drivers and rollover protection. There is an ongoing examination of the usefulness of seat belts in buses in general. However, I can indicate that preliminary advice regarding this tragic accident at Bass suggests that seat belts may well have contributed to even more trauma for the unfortunate tourists.

The Government is concerned, as I have said, about this issue and I should hope the expert committee that is examining the matter can significantly increase the speed with which its investigations are being conducted so that, in conjunction with the private bus industry, which does most of the work in this area, we can improve safety standards and avoid the results of accidents such as that at Bass.

FRAUD SQUAD'S INVESTIGATION OF TITLES OFFICE

Mr E. R. SMITH (Glen Waverley)—I ask the Minister for Property and Services: what is the reason for the Fraud Squad’s investigation of the Titles Office?

Mr McCUTCHEON (Minister for Property and Services)—I do not believe it is appropriate to make a comment at this stage. The matter was brought to my attention and I certainly confirmed the intention of the General Manager of the Titles Office to bring in the Police Force to undertake investigations into certain activities alleged to be occurring there.

The laying of charges is proceeding but I believe the matter should be left in the hands of the Police Force so that the due process can be carried out.

FOOTWEAR, CLOTHING AND TEXTILE INDUSTRIES

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley)—I refer the Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources to the proposals by the Federal Government to reduce the tariff protection being provided for the textile, clothing and footwear industries. Can the Minister indicate what action has been taken by his department and what consultation he has undertaken with his counterpart at the Federal level to determine the effects of these changes on industries in Victoria and particularly the effects on those industries in country Victoria? What are the proposals to assist them in the future?

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I have discussed with the Federal Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce the textile, clothing and footwear plan announced by the Commonwealth Government. I have voiced my concerns about some aspects of the plan but there has been overwhelming support given
to the plan by both the industries and the trade unions concerned as a genuine effort commitment, not just to hold the industries, but to provide for their regeneration in this State and in this country by the introduction of new technology and of course the maintenance, where possible, of employment levels.

However, there are some pockets of concern, one of which is the Wangaratta area and that no doubt is what has motivated the question of the honourable member for Murray Valley. I know that some proprietors within that region have sought a reassessment of the impact of the plan on their own operations. I propose to visit those operations in Wangaratta as soon as possible to discuss those concerns at first hand.

The Victorian Government—and the Premier particularly—has been assiduous in ensuring that the impact of the various options of the textile, clothing and footwear development have been given proper consideration by the Commonwealth authorities. We have argued strongly that regional measures need to be introduced to take into account the impact on certain areas in country Victoria and particularly within the northern suburbs of Melbourne where there is a considerable focus of textile, clothing and footwear industries.

I assure the honourable member that those representations are being continued with the Commonwealth authorities but I shall advise him—as I always do—when I am visiting industries within his electorate——

Mr B. J. Evans—You are the only Minister who does.

Mr FORDHAM—I have a close and abiding interest in industries in north-eastern Victoria which is shared by the local member and I shall ensure that we cover a full spectrum when I next visit his local area.

SENIOR CITIZENS WEEK

Mrs RAY (Box Hill)—Can the Premier inform the House what steps are being taken by the Government this year to recognise the contribution of senior citizens to the Victorian community?

Mr CAIN (Premier)—I am pleased to announce that again this year we will be having Senior Citizens Week. This was an initiative of our Government and one of its great success stories was to have the first Senior Citizens Week in 1983.

This year the week will begin on Sunday, 15 March and it will run through to Sunday, 22 March. The theme is, “Closing the Gap”, which we believe reflects the Government’s attitude that senior citizens have a part to play in the community.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CAIN—if honourable members will listen they might learn something. The honourable member for Gisborne may want the senior citizens in his electorate to be involved. I believe he will; he has in the past, as have all honourable members.

The theme recognises that senior citizens should not be isolated from the rest of the community whether it be as a result of age or ethnic origin and that they have a positive role to play in the community. I hope that every honourable member subscribes to that theme.

I do not believe Senior Citizens Week and what it means to those people is a good cause for cheap jibes across the Chamber. I kid you not; it has been a great success with senior citizens; it is very popular with them. So long as we are the Government, which will be for a very long time, we shall recognise the contribution that senior citizens make.

As well as all the functions, senior citizens will be able to travel free of charge on Victorian public transport on Wednesday and Thursday—18 and 19 March—during
Senior Citizens Week. That will apply to travel on any train, tram or bus in the State and to senior citizens over the age of 55 years who are not in full-time employment.

There is the capacity to be involved in the activities and there is a full week of activities: a concert at the Myer Music Bowl on Monday, 16 March; a lunchtime concert in the Fitzroy Gardens on Wednesday, 18 March and, as in previous years, there will be—and I thank the private sector for this—free admission to picture theatres, National Trust properties, the Melbourne Zoo and the National Gallery. I thank the theatre organisations for providing that concession and benefit.

There is a free Telecom line for citizens requiring information about the week, and that number is Melbourne 11622.

Senior Citizens Week has proved to be of enormous benefit and a major occasion for our senior citizens. They enjoy the week; citizens throughout the State appreciate it. I hope honourable members will be involved as much as they can be in that week.

FRAUD SQUAD INVESTIGATION OF MINISTRY OF HOUSING

Mr DICKINSON (South Barwon)—I ask the Minister for Housing: what is the reason for the Fraud Squad investigation into the Ministry of Housing?

Mr WILKES (Minister for Housing)—The Fraud Squad was invited to investigate any fraud or misgivings about the bond and relocation moneys. As all honourable members know, the Ministry hands out bonds of up to $500 for people in the private sector for private sector accommodation in flats.

It was reported to the Ministry that there was some duplication or doubling up on bond money. It was necessary to engage the services of the Fraud Squad to determine to what extent that was occurring and, having done that, what steps could be taken to prevent it from recurring.

MUNICIPAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Mr STEGGALL (Swan Hill)—Can the Minister for Local Government explain to the House why staff from his department have approached all the municipalities in the Central Highlands Province in the past few days to find out whether they require any immediate financial assistance, and will the Minister be making similar offers to other municipalities throughout Victoria?

Mr SIMMONDS (Minister for Local Government)—Currently the Local Government Department is assessing a number of applications in Victoria for assistance through Municipal Assistance Fund grants. Approximately 300 applications have been received and the amounts involved in the applications total about $9 million.

Unfortunately, only a limited number of those applications can be granted. Accordingly, though Victoria where the amount of money is not equivalent to the total being sought the applicants have been requested to ascertain whether a reduced amount would be satisfactory.

A typical project of this kind in the Latrobe Valley is a sports stadium that has been assessed as requiring additional flooring. The intention was to reduce the amount provided for the project; but in dealing with the application, it was found that one cannot build half a floor, so the department has been involved in assessing the application on that basis.

The honourable member for Mornington would be well aware that yesterday approximately $50 000 was distributed to the Briars project—

An Honourable Member—Who mucked that up?

Mr SIMMONDS—There was no muck-up. The Shire of Mornington was delighted to receive the cheque. The community of the Mornington Peninsula has now received in
total, for that project, approximately $340 000 through various Commonwealth and State sources and the Briars has been restored in a manner that has made it a great asset to the State.

In addition, the pondage area has been stocked with fauna and wild life. The ponds are being stocked with the proceeds of a previously funded project—the native fish project—which developed native fish for the streams of Victoria. The pondage is now being stocked as a result of that earlier initiative.

Therefore, in respect of applications from municipalities throughout Victoria, projects of real value and real worth are being assessed and funded on that basis.

Under the previous Government, amounts were distributed without assessment and without any indication of capacity for use. An indication of the level of funding was that small municipalities throughout Victoria received $2500 and larger ones received $12 000. In many cases, these amounts would not have paid for the toilet paper!

PETITION

The Clerk—I have received the following petition for presentation to Parliament:

Library Funding

TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the State of Victoria sheweth that the proposed cuts of $2 million to public library funding in the 1987–1988 and again in the 1988–1989 financial years will have catastrophic effects on the services provided by the already under-funded public libraries.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Government reverse this decision and return to the stated ALP, policy of 50–50 funding of public libraries—between State and local government. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Cooper (22 signatures)

It was ordered that the petition be laid on the table.

PAPERS

The following papers, pursuant to the directions of several Acts of Parliament, were laid on the table by the Clerk:

Statutory Rule under the Road Safety Act 1986—No. 24 together with documents required by S.32 of the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 to accompany the Statutory Rule—

Manufacturer's Design Circuits relating to Speed Cameras, Digitectors and Radar Devices:

(a) Circuit Diagram—Digitector Portable Speed Measuring Device.

(b) Circuit Diagrams—Kustom Falcon Hand Held RADAR.

(c) Circuit Diagrams—Kustom HR–4 Hand Held RADAR.

(d) Circuit Diagrams—Mini Quip MDR–1 Mobile RADAR.

(e) Circuit Diagram—Victoria Police Speed Camera I.D.M.S.—SAC/1.

(\(f\)) MA 5036 Low Cost Digital LED Clock/Time Module.

Town and Country Planning Act 1961:


GRIEVANCES

The SPEAKER—Order! The question is:

That grievances be noted.

I call the Premier.
Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I wish to raise two points: firstly, you have obviously been briefed by the Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources that the Premier will be speaking on the grievance debate. You were looking directly at the Premier.

I remind you, Sir, of the normal practices of this place that grievances are there for Opposition members and other members. If the Premier wishes to make a grievance contribution, he can do so in the normal way. If he wishes to use the grievance debate to make a Ministerial statement, that is in the hands of the Government; but the grievance debate is a chance for other members of this House, rather than the Premier, to lead a debate. This is against the practices laid down in *May*, which clearly indicate that the call should first go to this side of the House and I ask you, Sir, in an apolitical way, to uphold the practices of Parliament rather than recognise the Premier.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—On the same point of order, Mr Speaker, obviously the understanding of the Leader of the Opposition on the grievance debate is somewhat at fault. When one examines the history and background of the grievance debate, one finds that it is available to all honourable members. As he would recall, there are many instances of Liberal Party Ministers speaking on the grievance debate.

An Honourable Member—Name one!

Mr FORDHAM—I can well recall Premier Hamer leading the grievance debate on a number of occasions.

Mr Kennett—Name one. You are not telling the truth.

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS (Leader of the National Party)—Mr Speaker, on the same point of order; I have been in this place for twenty years and I know there is a definite tradition. During the grievance debate priority is given to honourable members on this side of the House to start. I have never known a Premier to call a grievance. I can understand a Minister making a grievance later in the day if he is unhappy. If the Premier is given time to speak on a grievance it will be too incredible for words. It has not been done before, and I challenge the Deputy Premier to produce evidence of the statement he has just made.

Mr STOCKDALE (Brighton)—On the same point of order; if the Chair is not to follow the normal convention, it would seem to me the Premier has no priority in terms of the call. The Chair should recognise the honourable member who first rises in his place. If I might offer assistance, I am in an extremely good position to see that, and it was clear that the Leader of the Opposition rose first.

Mr PLOWMAN (Evelyn)—On the same point of order; it flies in the face of the tradition of the Parliament for the Premier to lead the grievance debate. The whole purpose of the grievance debate is to allow members, particularly backbenchers and members of the Opposition, to raise grievances with the Government. It is not the Government administration—the Executive—leading grievances. It will be an absolute farce if the Premier himself—the Leader of the Executive Government against whom or with whom grievances are raised—raises a grievance.

The Deputy Premier suggested that the former Leader of the Liberal Party, Mr Hamer, led the grievance debate, and I challenge him to produce a date when that occurred. There have been many occasions over the years when grievances have been raised and Ministers have answered them in debate. For the Premier to lead the grievance debate goes against the whole tradition of the grievance debate in Parliament. To set this precedent would be an enormity against the traditions of this Parliament.

Mr LIEBERMAN (Benambra)—On the same point of order; in addition to the matters put to you, Mr Speaker, about the customs and usage of this House, the traditions of this House must be preserved and you, Sir, are in a unique position to do that.
It is also the tradition in this House that the Premier of the day, when he wishes to make a Ministerial statement, is given special recognition and privilege by cooperation and as a tradition between the parties of this Parliament. On other occasions they have always been able to accommodate and facilitate the Premier in making a Ministerial statement.

You, Mr Speaker, should bear this in mind when considering whether you will depart from the tradition of this House. In my view, you should not allow the Premier to take precedence in a grievance debate when you know that by accommodation, arrangement and sensible negotiation between the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition and the National Party, a Premier wishing to make a Ministerial statement can do so in a sitting week if he wishes. That is a factor for you to take into account, Sir.

The SPEAKER—As I see the grievance debate—and I have been here since 1967—it has been an opportunity for all members to grieve. When I was a member of the Opposition, I recall matters being raised to which Ministers immediately responded.

The Leader of the Opposition, by interjection, said that I had been briefed on two occasions. I have not been briefed on this matter. When the Deputy Premier came up to me this morning, he wished me a good morning.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! If the Leader of the Opposition has any objection to that, the opportunity of doing something is in his own hands.

As to the point of order concerning Ministerial statements raised by the honourable member for Benambra, I point out that I am not aware of what the Premier or any other honourable member will raise in the grievance debate. I gave the call to the Premier because I disagree with the point raised by the honourable member for Brighton that the Leader of the Opposition was first on his feet. Therefore, I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr KENNEDY (Leader of the Opposition)—On a further point of order, Mr Speaker, I wish to move a motion of dissent from your ruling. It is obvious, Mr Speaker, that you would be setting a new precedent—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition should be aware that he cannot do that except by notice of motion.

Mr COLEMAN (Syndal)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, it was clear that the timing for the debate was commenced when the Premier was called, before the points of order were raised by other honourable members. The grievance debate is limited by time constraints and several minutes have already been devoted to the settling of the matter of the call. However, the clock has now been reset so that the Premier is to have his full 20 minutes. It is reasonable that, as the Premier was called initially, he should be called again, but the time for his contribution to the debate should be reduced.

Mr CAIN (Premier)—Mr Speaker, I might be able to assist—

The SPEAKER—Order! I shall rule on the point of order.

Mr CAIN—May I comment on that point of order? I regret, Mr Speaker, that you have been placed in this position while carrying out your function as Speaker of this House. I do not wish to see the Speaker subject to this sort of behaviour from the Opposition while he is carrying out his duty as he sees fit.

As only 5 hours are available for the grievance debate and it is so important to the Leader of the Opposition that he speak at 11.15 a.m., let him speak.

The SPEAKER—Order! I shall rule on the point of order raised by the honourable member for Syndal. I had called the Premier, so I agree with the honourable member for Syndal and uphold his point of order. If the Premier wishes to take that call, the time for
his speech commenced at 11.9 a.m. I now understand that the Premier has conceded to
the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr CAIN—I have, Mr Speaker.

Mr KENNEDY (Leader of the Opposition)—Mr Speaker, that act of the Premier alone
is concrete proof that he has deliberately sought to use the forms of this House for his own
purposes. It was the action of the Premier that put you, Mr Speaker, in a difficult position,
not the actions of the Opposition, whose members sought and continue to seek that the
traditions and practices of this place be upheld.

If the Premier wishes to make a Ministerial statement, let him do so under normal
procedures. If the Premier wishes to respond to any matters raised by other honourable
members during the grievance debate, he is quite able to do so. However, for the Premier
to seek your recognition, Mr Speaker, to grieve on a matter against his own Government
is a recognition of abject failure and it puts at risk the forms of this House.

I genuinely want to grieve against the Government and its policies because of the threat
they currently pose to Victorian families through pressure on housing interest rates. It is
appropriate that the Opposition should be allowed to bring to the attention of the
Government the fact that its policies are applying tremendous pressure on housing interest
rates. The level of housing interest rates will be determined within four weeks from today.
Two major ingredients contribute to the level of housing interest rates: the debt and the
inflation rate of this nation and State.

Honourable members should be clear about the fact that, through his economic policies,
the Premier has put Victoria in the position where it has the worst debt of any State in
Australia. Victoria has a debt off record of $20 billion and a further debt and liabilities of
approximately $18 billion brought about by statutory authorities and other bodies.

Victoria has contributed dramatically to the massive loss of confidence in Australia by
countries and businesses overseas.

Through its taxing policies, the Government has delivered a rate of inflation in Victoria
that is higher than in any other State. Those two factors—debts and inflation—are the
major contributing factors to high housing interest rates.

This morning on a radio program I heard the honourable member for Wantirna, who is
the spokesperson for a housing interest group, call on the Government to protect those
who are currently under the threat of an upward movement in housing interest rates. I
support her in that call. However, she asked for other people to take action rather than ask
the Government to take responsible action. If the honourable member for Wantirna
wanted to be honest and responsible, she would stand up in the House and call on the
Government to make a contribution to reducing the level of housing interest rates.

The Government can do two things immediately to relieve pressure on housing interest
rates. Firstly, it can reduce its overseas borrowings. This year alone, the Government is
borrowing $3.1 billion, which is more than any other Government in Australia. That
applies increased pressure to interest rates.

Of that $3.1 billion, 60 per cent is taken up with new borrowings. When Victoria is
facing the current economic crisis, why does the Government continue to borrow more
than any other State and put further at risk the fragile economy that currently exists?

Recently, honourable members heard the Premier state that he is prepared to share with
the Federal Government the load of reducing the existing debt.

Mr Micallef—What is your policy?

Mr KENNEDY—it is obvious that the honourable member for Springvale does not
care about what is happening to the people in his electorate, those on middle and low
incomes and those whom the Labor Party said it would support. The policies of the
Government are driving them out of their homes, but the honourable member for Springvale does not care.

To help solve the problem, the Premier could say, "We recognise that housing interest rates are having a detrimental effect on families and we are going to reduce the level of Government borrowings and the existing debt". To date, honourable members have not heard one word from the Premier on reducing the level of debt.

The second immediate thing the Government can do to relieve pressure on housing interest rates is to attack inflation. The economic policies of the Government have resulted in Victoria having the highest inflation rate in Australia. The Government could easily put a check on that spiral, and the Liberal Party will do that when it is in government.

The easiest way to do that is by breaking the current nexus between inflation and State taxes and charges. Victoria's inflation rate is 10·2 per cent and this year the Government will increase taxes on petrol and beer by 10·2 per cent, and yet still expect the inflation rate to come down. Members of the Government are typical socialists; on the one hand, they argue for the interests of the community but, on the other hand, they whack it on the head.

I call on the Premier to relieve the pressure on housing interest rates by immediately breaking the nexus between the inflation rate and the level of State taxes and charges. Let us put an end to the automatic indexation of taxes and charges, which only fuels the inflationary fire. If the Government is not prepared to do that, it must accept responsibility.

Mr Micallef—Break it by how much?

Mr KENNETT—Once something is broken, it is broken. In the interests of the community, the Government should adopt a policy of no increases in taxes and charges. If that is not done, the constituents of the honourable member for Springvale—the Vietnamese, people on low and middle incomes and people the Labor Party claimed it cared about—will be driven from their homes. However, the Government does not give a damn!

Mr Micallef—They are all buying houses in Springvale!

The SPEAKER—Order! I have been given by the Government Whip a list detailing which Government members will speak during this debate. I note that the honourable member for Springvale is not on the list. If he wishes me to give him the call rather than listen to a series of interjections, I shall do so immediately after the Leader of the Opposition resumes his seat. I ask the honourable member to cease interjecting.

Mr KENNETT—The Government can attack the debt level and inflation to relieve pressure on housing interest rates, and I challenge it to do so. By the end of March, the Federal Government must decide whether it will allow interest rates to increase—the Opposition is opposed to that—or whether it will introduce another subsidy for the banks to hold down interest rates. Either way, the community will pay more.

It is not good enough to provide a further subsidy to the banks because people without mortgages will be forced to pay as well as those with mortgages. The Federal Government must realise that its economic policies of the past four years and the economic policies of this Government have been in one direction—larger borrowings, more expenditure and, ultimately, a higher inflation rate.

The Government can do anything it likes on a temporary basis, but the people of Australia want genuine tax relief and they want it in the area of housing interest rates. That relief will not be achieved unless the fundamental factors that have contributed to the pressure on interest rates are attacked.

Honourable members have heard the Minister for Housing indicate that the number of people on low and middle incomes in need of Government housing assistance has doubled in the past five years. The Minister also indicated that there is little he can do about it.
That is correct if policies are in place that force people out of their own homes or prevent them from purchasing their own homes.

Mr Kennedy—Canberra would say it is a free market.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fogarty)—Order! The Leader of the Opposition should ignore the interjection as it is out of order.

Mr KENNETT—It is not only out of order but also is totally inaccurate. What concerns me is that people like the honourable member for Bendigo West have never spoken in this House about the impact of high interest rates on their constituents. That honourable member has no relationship with his local city council; he has been completely isolated from his own electorate because he does not worry, does not care, and he does not address himself to the real issues.

The problems that face the housing market at present are very real. We all know that pressure is being applied on housing interest rates. I am sure no one in this House would want housing interest rates to increase, because there is no doubt that the provision of good housing is by far the best health service that any Government can provide.

However, if the Government is serious about relieving some of the pressure on interest rates—

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr KENNETT—Interest rates were a lot lower then than they are now, and the Minister knows it. They were much lower.

We can understand the Minister becoming upset. He knows that his Government is now pursuing policies that are failing the citizens of this State and this country.

Mr Kennedy interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! I ask the honourable member for Bendigo West to cease interjecting.

Mr KENNETT—All we want is for the Government to recognise that if it wants to provide genuine relief, it has to attack the basic economic equation that puts pressure on housing interest rates—this Government has not done that.

The Minister for Education, who was appointed to the Ministry of Housing four or five years ago and who now administers the education portfolio, should understand that housing interest rates are a reflection of economic policies and pressures in the community.

Mr Sidiropoulos interjected.

Mr KENNETT—No, those pressures are not nationwide. We saw the honourable member’s Leader do his usual Pontius Pilate act, and the honourable member wants to do it, too; he does not want to take any responsibility for what is happening to his constituents and Victorians generally.

The Victorian Government has policies that have generated the highest State debt of any State in Australia and also the highest inflation rate. Honourable members opposite want to mislead Victorians and say that Victoria is leading the economic recovery, whereas the three major economic indicators show a different picture.

I challenge the Minister for Education to tell the House, or have the Premier tell the House, what the Government is doing about it. It is not reducing but, rather, it is increasing borrowings this year to the tune of $3.1 billion, much of which will be used for recurrent expenditure and for repaying the increasing long-term debt. Pressure on interest rates remains high.
Whatever action the Federal Government decides to take at the end of this month will not provide long-term relief, security or protection for Victorians. The Federal Government may provide short-term relief, as we know, and it will do so basically for political reasons.

I suggest that if both the State and Federal Governments wish to provide short-term relief—to which I am not opposed—that relief should be accompanied by an indication that they are prepared to tackle the major problems; that means, as the Prime Minister has said on many occasions, that we must be prepared to accept a little more tough medicine. It means the Government must accept a little more tough medicine; the community should not expect to pay the price for the failures of economic policies pursued by Governments both here and at the Federal level.

The community would understand that economic times are tough. It would say, “We want to see pressure relieved on interest rates, but if it is to happen, it must happen within the Government as well. It must lower its borrowings and ensure that it brings about a reduction in the inflation levels”. The Government could do both these things, and I am not being political when I say that.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr KENNETT—But it is not being done in Victoria.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr KENNETT—Tell me where you have cut back on borrowings.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fogarty)—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will address the Chair.

Mr KENNETT—Then, Mr Deputy Speaker, you had better speak to the silver fox. The Government says that it will do one thing, and then says it cannot do so. I challenge the Minister to tell me how much of an effort is in train to reduce the borrowings of $3.1 billion in Victoria. What has the Government done to relieve pressure on inflation? Again, the Minister cannot answer because—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition is only asking the Minister to be out of order.

Mr KENNETT—I am asking him a question, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Anyway, he would not be out of order, because he is rarely in order.

It is time for Governments to stop talking and to act to introduce into the economic agenda some degree of responsibility.

The Government can no longer continue blaming the community and asking the community to make bigger and bigger sacrifices, when the Government itself does not take action to relieve pressure on the level of debt and on interest rates.

Obviously the next four weeks will be crucial for many tens of thousands of Victorian families when they will learn whether they will be required to pay higher interest rates or whether another short-term subsidy will be made available to the banks—by “short-term”, I mean it will probably be for a year and of the order of $150 million. On the surface, given all the political considerations, the second seems to be the likely alternative, that is, the Federal Government will once again introduce a subsidy to the banks. However, that will not address the problems nor provide long-term security.

Mr Sidiropoulos—It is your fault!

Mr KENNETT—Honourable members must put up with a member of Parliament in this place who is only too happy to grab $166,000 of the public’s money for his own newspaper!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fogarty)—Order! The Leader of the Opposition has 2 minutes. I suggest he returns to his grievance.
Mr KENNETT—The honourable member for Richmond is only too happy to grab money for his own purposes, regardless of the public interest. I suggest that he should be concerned—

Mr Sidiropoulos interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Richmond has used an unparliamentary term, and I suggest that he withdraw.

Mr SIDIROPOULOS (Richmond)—I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition is provoking the honourable member for Richmond.

Mr Micallef—You called him a liar!

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—Mr Deputy Speaker, I find that remark offensive. The honourable member for Springvale said I called the honourable member a liar. I did not call him a liar, and I ask the honourable member for Springvale to withdraw.

Mr MICALLEF (Springvale)—I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! Has the remark been withdrawn?

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! I suggest that the honourable member for Springvale should withdraw.

Mr Kennett—Stand up and withdraw!

Mr MICALLEF—I did!

Mr Cooper—Withdraw, you slob!

Mr MICALLEF (Springvale)—I do not know how many times you want me to withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. Do you wish me to withdraw twice? If that is the case, for the record, I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The remark used by the honourable member for Mornington earlier was unparliamentary, and he should withdraw.

Mr COOPER (Mornington)—I withdraw.

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—Since I am about to run out of time, I shall withdraw soon, too. It is time for this Government to do something practical about its policies that are applying tonnes of pressure on tens of thousands of Victorians. Regardless of what the old silver fox at the table opposite says, we are concerned—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fogarty)—Order! I find the remarks used by the Leader of the Opposition when referring to the Minister to be unparliamentary.

Mr KENNETT—I withdraw.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley)—I direct the attention of the House to the enormous crisis facing rural Victoria. Members of the National Party have been extremely vocal both in this place and in another place in expressing the grave problems faced by primary producers.

In this place, the honourable member for Lowan has spoken constantly of the plight of grain growers and other primary producers in his electorate. In another place, the National Party spokesperson on agriculture, the Honourable Bernie Dunn, has drawn the attention of the other place and of the media to the plight of the disadvantaged in the farming community of Victoria.
Farmers are leaving the land. Their desperate financial positions are forcing them to abandon their farms. The National Party is galled by the fact that State and Federal Governments have shown no respect for farmers. Governments do not recognise the crisis farmers are facing and have failed to tackle the problems effectively. They have shown absolute contempt for the rural sector in Victoria and throughout Australia.

Labor Governments have no sympathy for the agricultural sector and primary producers. Since they came to office at both State and Federal levels nothing has been done to assist the ailing primary industry. Both Governments should address the crisis with actions rather than words.

In his Speech to Parliament last week, the Governor recognised the important contribution made by the rural sector in providing export income and wealth for Victoria. His Excellency the Governor stated that 40 per cent of the wealth and export income of Victoria is created and earned by the rural sector.

Why is the rural sector in Victoria and Australia facing a crisis? One reason is the dramatic fall in prices for primary produce, especially in world export markets. Recently the actions taken by the United States of America and the European Economic Community highlighted this problem when their primary produce was dumped on world markets. This had a dramatic effect on the prices of Australian products.

Another reason for the crisis is the enormous escalation in the cost of machinery, goods and services, and labour. This has had a dramatic effect on the operation and viability of the farming community. Primary producers cannot survive with the huge interest rates they are paying on their borrowings. At present, the rates are around 20 per cent or higher. It has been estimated that 5 to 6 per cent of the high interest rates in Australia are the direct result of the Federal Government's economic policies.

High fuel costs are also exacerbating the rural crisis; 60 per cent of the cost of fuel is taken by the Federal Government in taxes and a smaller percentage is taken by the State Government.

All these factors are having a dramatic effect on primary producers who, nonetheless, are resilient people. People living in country cities and towns recognise that times are tough but they also recognise the need both to examine the crisis and to try to overcome it. These people are not sitting on their backsides; they are working desperately to fight their way through the present rural crisis.

They are looking to reducing costs and improving efficiency. The increase in costs is reflected in the lack of business activity in small country towns where they are desperately trying to make businesses profitable. Our primary producers are among the most efficient in the world but they are still trying to increase productivity no matter whether they are involved in dairy farming, grain growing, beef production, sheep or horticulture. They are trying to use that means as one way out of the present crisis.

They are also investigating and implementing alternative forms of agriculture in an attempt to increase their corner of the world and local markets. They are constantly trying to meet the demand for their products.

In June 1985 the frustrations of primary producers was borne out on the steps of Parliament House in a demonstration by 40 000 farmers and country people. At that time the Victorian Farmers and Graziers Association documented the problems facing primary producers and presented a range of recommendations to the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

The Minister said that he recognised the difficulties facing primary producers and that the Government would act quickly to assist them. That has not happened yet. In September 1985 the Minister instigated an inquiry into the rural sector and a rural economic study was produced by Professor Lloyd and released in July 1986. Few members of the Government would have read the study, which is extremely revealing and details the
grave problems facing primary producers, and also the Government action that should be
taken to overcome the present crisis.

The Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs said that submissions would be received
until November 1986 and that a positive response would be made by the Government by
February 1987. I ask whether the Minister can indicate to the House what submissions
have been received on the rural economic study and what action the Government will
take to assist primary producers in their desperate situation.

It is now 21 months since the march on Parliament House. The study was authorised
by the Government shortly thereafter, yet we still have no positive response from the
Minister. It is possible that the Government is waiting until after the Central Highlands
Province by-election because it has no positive policy about primary producers that it can
present at that by-election.

The Government has done little in response to the crisis faced by primary producers.
Its two major cost areas are rail freights and handling charges, which amount to
approximately 30 per cent of grain producers' returns. The National Party and the Victorian
Farmers Federation sought a 20 per cent reduction in rail freight charges. All grain producers
received was a 5 per cent reduction, which had very little effect on the grain producers'
situation.

No doubt inefficiencies in V/Line abound. The Government is using V/Line as a milch
cow in an attempt to achieve a higher cost recovery. V/Line is aiming at a 100 per cent
cost recovery from grain carriage compared with a 50 per cent cost recovery from the
metropolitan services. That is a gun at the heads of the people who are creating the wealth
of the nation; surely a change of attitude by the Government is warranted.

It is estimated that $1.60 of the price of every tonne of grain produced is taken from
primary producers by the Grain Elevators Board. The public authority dividend imposed
on the Grain Elevators Board should be abolished. To date, $16·5 million has been ripped
off the desperate grain producers in this State by the Victorian Government. The National
Party believes that $16·5 million, which has been taken unjustly, should be returned to
them.

I remind the House that the development of facilities for the handling of grain in this
State has not been assisted by funding from the Victorian Government in any way. All the
developments have been funded by the primary producers, the grain growers of this State.
The Government has allowed them to develop their own handling facilities throughout
Victoria.

The National Party recognises the needs of primary producers. The Labor Government
in Victoria has not responded to the desperate plight of people living in country Victoria
caused by lower returns. I recognise that these are difficult times; nevertheless, a change of
attitude by the Government is warranted.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JASPER—The honourable members for Springvale and Greensborough might
learn something by listening to people in country Victoria. The Premier went to the
country recently and he has learnt a lot. Perhaps those honourable members should do
likewise.

The National Party wants positive action from both the State and Federal Governments.
It asks for a bolstering of the strength and effectiveness of the Department of Agriculture
and Rural Affairs. The National Party supports the orderly marketing of primary products
and the immediate abolition of the public authority dividend collected from the Grain
Elevators Board.

The National Party supports the live sheep export trade. I know many Government
members are opposed to that trade. The charter of the Rural Finance Commission should
be further extended to provide funds and concessional rates to primary producers to assist
them in this crisis situation. The Rural Finance Commission has provided excellent assistance to primary producers in Victoria for a long time. An injection of further funds would allow the commission to continue its excellent work.

The Government should extend the young farmers' establishment scheme. I do not need to remind the House that the Government has taken almost $30,000 from the Victorian Young Farmers movement in the current financial year. That reveals the lack of consideration of this Government towards people living in country areas. The National Party will follow through on the matters I have mentioned because it is urgent that the Government should take action.

The Victorian Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs should make strong representations to the Federal Government for assistance in the rural crisis. The Federal Government should reduce interest rates immediately because that is the greatest single factor militating against the continued operation and stability of primary producers in Victoria.

National Party policy is totally opposed to capital gains tax, fringe benefits tax and the assets test. These factors are having a dramatic effect, not only on primary producers but also on anyone operating in business. It is also clear that taxes on fuel and agricultural machinery and parts must be reduced.

I know the Minister for Housing, who is at the table, has a genuine interest in country people and I ask him to take my comments to Cabinet, to the Premier and to anyone in Government who is interested in what is happening in country areas because, if positive action is not taken by State and Federal Governments, more and more people will be forced to leave the land.

I ask for positive assistance from the State and Federal Governments. However, I believe there will need to be a change of Government before positive assistance will be given to the desperate plight of country Victorians.

Mrs GLEESON (Thomastown)—I raise a matter that has been brought to my attention on a few occasions in the electorate I represent and has also been raised in recent weeks in the media by Sergeant Vicki Brown of the community policing squad. I refer to the practice of female circumcision. Sergeant Vicki Brown has called for an inquiry into the matter.

Because it has been raised with me, I have made inquiries about the practice and I have done considerable reading on the matter. Female circumcision is not a new practice. It has been estimated that more than 70 million women in the world have been circumcised and that thousands more are being circumcised each day.

Thousands of female circumcisions are known to be done every day. It is an old practice but, regrettably, a continuing practice. It is a matter that must be examined carefully. Sergeant Brown has said that it is child abuse according to Victorian laws.

The practice must be considered within the sensitivities of the cultural concepts. I believe to call for an inquiry into the practice is pre-empting that sensitivity. It needs to be examined from an educative point of view and authorities need to open dialogue with the ethnic communities concerned to see what can be done.

Even though it is a widespread practice in some countries, it is not practised across cultures. Only a few cultures are involved and the extent of the practice in Australia is not well known, so investigations should proceed cautiously. However, it is not the sort of practice from which the community can walk away, given that the Government has stated its concern about child abuse.

In my view female circumcision is not a practice that can be legislated against. Legislation has been introduced in other countries, particularly Great Britain and Sweden, and Norway is about to proclaim legislation. The evidence suggests that the legislation has not stopped the practice but has merely driven it underground, as occurred with abortions, or has meant that female children have been circumcised earlier in life.
I note from correspondence to both the *Age* and the *Herald* that the practice is not acceptable to certain communities within Australia. Dr Bob Montgomery has said that there are three categories of circumcision going from the mild to the extreme. It does not matter which form of female circumcision one talks about, it is an abuse of a child’s rights and is usually done without the child’s consent.

As I indicated, the practice needs to be examined within the cultural context in which it is done. Unlike other forms of child abuse, the practice is carried out because of concern by parents for their daughters, their daughters’ marriage prospects and their acceptability within the societal context of their culture. The community must consider those aspects of the matter in examining how it should handle the problem.

The practice is a children’s rights issue because no consent is involved and it traumatically assaults the child physically. The practice is against article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1959 Declaration of Children’s Rights. Nevertheless, the practice occurs, as I indicated, because of parental concern for the future of their children.

No legislation exists against this practice in Australia. Western Australia is developing policy directions on the matter and I refer the House to a discussion paper prepared by Sally Castell-McGregor of the South Australian Children’s Interests Bureau setting out policies and directives. That policy states:

Some culturally based practices such as clitorotoectomies contain elements that can be viewed as violating a child’s rights to protection from harm. To determine whether such a practice constitutes harm, three factors must be considered:

1. Does the cultural practice violate the minimum standard of care that is the right of all children?
2. Is the practice both central to the cultural value system and normal within the culture?
3. Does the practice involve unnecessary or prolonged suffering or harm to the child?

I believe the question of whether the practice is against the cultural considerations for the child is a good entree point for the Victorian Government.

Considerable criticism of the United Kingdom legislation, the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985, has been made by women’s lobby groups. These groups have produced a report on the effects of the legislation, which states:

Some of the problems created by the passing of this legislation are:

(a) the criminalisation of mothers, who may perform the operation themselves out of compassionate concern for their daughters’ future welfare and to ensure marriage within the community;

(b) the growth of a backstreet industry thriving on the confusion and fears of the affected communities; and

(c) panic caused by a lack of understanding of the Bill and its legal implications.

We also believe that legislation will be ineffective in stopping the practice which experience has taught us can only be challenged through health education.

The Australian Medical Association has taken a position on this practice. The association does not have a specific policy on female circumcision but the general secretary of the association, in a letter of 30 September 1986 to Sally Castell-McGregor, said:

While there may be occasional medical reasons for clitoridotomies, such as for malignant disease in older patients and on children with “inter-sex” problems associated with clitoral hypertrophy, there is, in the view of the Australian Medical Association, no place for ritual female circumcision—which really is of the nature of genital mutilation for traditional, non-medical reasons.

As far back as July 21st/August 2nd, 1980 the Federal Council of the Australian Medical Association resolved to advise the Director-General of Health that it condemns the practice.

Arising out of the matter being raised with Dr Blewett, the Federal Minister for Health, clitoridotomies and female circumcision were limited under the medical benefits schedule and now benefits may be payable for amputation of the clitoris where medically indicated—for instance, for cancer and for other similar diseases coming under item 6299 of the medical benefits schedule. Since that restriction applied during the years 1983–85, only 36 such claims have been made.

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Dr Blewett has stated that, although female circumcision is considered a matter of child abuse, and is therefore within the sphere of the States, he does urge, as does the Australian College of Paediatrics, a more educative approach for parents, given that the practice is not considered to be widespread but could develop with increases in immigration.

The paper suggests that welfare departments in the States and Territories prepare policy statements for the benefit of social workers and others, including health service nurses and doctors, as part of their overall training policies. That policy should address, as it does in Western Australia, the following:

1. Does the practice involve unnecessary or prolonged suffering or harm to the child.
2. Does the practice violate a child’s basic right to safety?

If the answer is yes to the above, notwithstanding that the practice is seen as “normal” by the cultural group involved, then the child’s right to safety and protection has been infringed.

I suggest that is the correct direction for the development of policy in Victoria. A good starting point to the debate could be to have consultations with the departments of community services, ethnic affairs and health so that an educative program could be developed, taken out to the cultural groups concerned and debated with those groups. That would help to provide protection for the young people affected by this practice.

Mr PESCOTT (Bennettswood)—I raise a grievance today on behalf of the Greek community in Australia. In doing so, I condemn the Minister for Ethnic Affairs for creating divisions in that community. I further condemn him for allowing his staff to pursue policies of division within the Greek community and also other communities in this State.

The policies to which I refer are symptomatic of the operations which have plagued the Ethnic Affairs Commission since its inception. For too long the commission has been like a ship without a rudder; it has had no political leadership whatever.

The Minister has failed miserably in his duty to the public and especially in his duty to the Greek community. I wish I had the time to refer to the enormous waste of money that goes on at the commission with reviews, reports, working groups, task forces and the like. There is a continual round of consultation in the commission, which is doing nothing for the ethnic community.

These committees are working almost without political direction and the Minister is relying on those committees for his direction. Between the Minister and these working committees is the Ministerial adviser, Mr Demetri Dollis, who is a political manipulator of the first order. I shall refer to him in due course.

I do not have time to go into all the difficulties that the Ethnic Affairs Commission has but if one asked the man in the street what he had received from the commission by way of service since its inception, one would find that invariably he would have received nothing.

Recently, this matter was confirmed by the review of the commission, which was carried out on behalf of the Government, and which said in effect that the people in the commission must get out into the community. Similarly, it said that the two deputy chairmen of the commission should be given some work to do because up to this time the commission has been top heavy, and it has been busy in the political game.

The commission was set up for a political purpose and it has not done enough for the people in the ethnic community. The Minister for Ethnic Affairs received a review which criticised the organisation that he set up and for which he was responsible. When he released the review he did so without making any comment on the 50 recommendations that were made to the Government.

I believe that was because the Minister was confused and embarrassed about what had been presented and this was the third of a number of instances that showed that the Minister never knows what he is doing.
Approximately eighteen months ago, a review of the translation and interpreting services in Victoria was held; it cost approximately $100,000 and when it was finished it was presented to the Minister. It is still on his desk! That money was spent by a Minister who does not know what he should do or how to form an opinion.

The first Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission was Mr Gary Sheppard. The second chairman was appointed for only a half term. One would have thought that if this man was to be chairman for any time it would have been for a full term. However, the Minister was not sure that he was the man and so the second chairman was appointed for only a half term.

The question is raised: why was the first chairman of the commission sacked? That brings me to Mr Dollis, who is the Ministerial adviser, a man who did not get on with the first chairman of the commission after they had worked together for a time.

The first chairman was a good party man but he was unable to counter the influence of Mr Dollis. Who is Mr Dollis? He is the de facto Minister. He is the man whom people working in the Ethnic Affairs Commission hate; he is the man who believes he is the heir apparent for the seat of Richmond. He is the man who has led the Minister along and is about to prove of unending value to the Minister as the "too clever by half" adviser who is responsible to a large extent for the fiasco of the Greek convention that will be held in Melbourne next week. I shall come back to that matter later.

I shall now provide the House with some details about Mr Dollis. He can be a charming man; his wife is charming also, but his activities as a manipulator of Ministers and as a political apparatchik are despicable.

I refer to an internal memorandum of the commission that I received under the Freedom of Information Act. It is a note from Mr Dollis to the chairman and to the two deputy chairmen of the commission. It states:

Please note the attached correspondence...

That is correspondence relating to the Budget programs for 1985–86—

Please note the attached correspondence from the Treasurer concerning the above.

Would you please prepare the paper requested by the Treasurer... it will need to be approved by myself...

That is very important:

... and the Minister by the 16th October.

Here is an adviser to the Minister telling the Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission and the two deputy chairmen that they must submit their work to him, for approval by him and the Minister before it can go to the Treasurer.

I have another minute which is signed by Mr Dollis and which refers to the committee for the Italian conference in 1984. Mr Dollis is explaining that the committee—and he lists who will be on the committee—

... will be chaired by myself as the Minister's adviser, ... it will consist of,

He then named the chairman, the two deputy chairmen and a number of other people in the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

Normally, in the traditions of this State, the head of a department or a commission is responsible directly to the Minister but not so in the Ethnic Affairs Commission. The politicisation of the commission through the role of the "political adviser"—let me call him, the Ministerial adviser, to give him his title—is outrageous. Here are two examples of the commission needing to submit to his chairmanship and his control. He stands between it and the Minister. I was so fascinated by the documents I obtained under the Freedom of Information Act that I sought more on this matter.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fogarty)—Order! I take it that the honourable member will table the documents?

Mr PESCOTT—Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was so taken by those documents that I made a further request relating to the meetings chaired by the Ministerial adviser and the committees that were chaired by Mr Dollis. I was then asked, "Which committee do you mean?" I said that I presumed the Minister's adviser knows which committees he has chaired.

After consultation it came back that there was only one committee and that was the Legal Interpreting Service Steering Committee. Here again was a committee that was chaired by the Minister's adviser and again he was instructing the Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, as a member of it, in what he should do. If this was the only committee that he could come up with, and I have just referred to others, how many more committees does the Ministerial adviser chair? What other interference does he make into the relationship between the chairman and the Minister?

There is another connection to Mr Dollis and that is his involvement—and the honourable member for Richmond will know about this—in the creation of the Australian Greek Media Co-operative Ltd. Members of the original cooperative included the wife and father of Mr Dollis.

It could be argued that Mr Dollis had some interest in this great enterprise, which was for the benefit of the honourable member for Richmond, but when support was needed to get this enterprise off the ground with the Minister for Labour, who do honourable members think wrote a very strong letter of support? Of course it was the Minister for Ethnic Affairs, who had been given a draft letter by his Ministerial adviser, the husband and son of two cooperative members.

Under the Freedom of Information Act I obtained a motor vehicle work sheet detailing the use of a car owned by the Ethnic Affairs Commission. It shows that in September 1984 Mr Demetri Dollis took a car away for two days. Where did he go? Such is the arrogance of the man, that he does not say where he went. He just took a car for the weekend and went to what are described as "various places". This man behaves in an extremely arrogant way in the commission and he knows that people are too frightened of losing their jobs to challenge him if he merely writes on the vehicle work sheet that he used the car to visit "various places".

With regard to the use of Government cars, the people who use them usually write on the motor vehicle work sheets that they used the car to travel to an office at Brunswick or elsewhere and back again, but not Mr Dollis. There is another motor vehicle work sheet which shows that he used a car of the commission, and where did he go? One does not know because the work sheet merely states, "2 days".

I do not believe Mr Dollis has widespread use of cars of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, but there are instances which show that this Ministerial adviser helps himself to cars of the commission but feels that he does not have to explain to the taxpayer, who pays for the cars, where he went.

When the Minister for Ethnic Affairs travelled overseas last year, who accompanied him? The Ministerial adviser went with him. Other Ministers are now also following this practice. Previously it would have been either the head of the department or the commission, who could have advised the Minister on all matters relevant to his portfolio. However, not so in this instance because two months before this trip, Mr Dollis visited Greece with the deputy secretary of the Federal Department of Community Services.

Why was a Ministerial adviser to a Victorian Government Minister given leave of absence to act as a consultant to the Federal Government and to travel to Greece with a Federal public servant? It is because Mr Dollis is a political high flyer.

Mr Micallef—Is it illegal?
Mr PESCOTT—It is not illegal to do that, nor was it illegal for Mr Dollis to have Gerry Hand, a Labor Party member of the House of Representatives, as the best man at his wedding.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PESCOTT—I make no imputation whatsoever about Mr Gerry Hand. I have met Mr Hand on a number of occasions and he is a nice fellow.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PESCOTT—The reason for the travel was that Mr Dollis sees himself interfering in Federal affairs as much as he interferes in State affairs.

Mr Micallef—Prove it!

Mr PESCOTT—I shall be able to prove it this week when it is the hope and intention of Mr Dollis that at the Greek conference the Greek Government will announce that it approves of the decision by the Federal Government to change the pension eligibility rules.

Mr Dollis is a political animal who has brought discredit to his Minister and made it difficult for his Minister to operate.

I now wish to refer to the Act that established the Ethnic Affairs Commission. Clause 13 of that Act states that the objects of the commission include the promotion of unity of ethnic groups in the community.

Next week a Greek conference will be held in Melbourne. That conference will not be attended by a large and important section of the Greek community. Why? Two years ago an Italian conference was held in Melbourne. As a result of that conference the Ethnic Affairs Commission issued a minute which stated:

Now, all of this—

That is the conference of the Italian community—

has great implications at the political level. The ability of the department to initiate discussions on matters of community concern casts the ALP Government in a highly favourable light.

Even the old, conservative, self-appointed community representatives have to go along with the current.

That document was obtained under the Freedom of Information Act from the Ethnic Affairs Commission in relation to the Italian conference. The Italian community has received absolutely nothing out of that conference.

Next week Melbourne will host the Greek conference. The United Association of Greek Communities and Parishes of Victoria has refused to participate in that conference because they know it will lead to nothing. A letter written to Mr Papandreou, the Minister of Greeks Living Abroad, states:

With this letter we wish to inform you that unfortunately, we will not be participating in the Greek-Australian Conference which is being organised in Melbourne, for this coming March.

With great regret, we believe that the said conference, in spite of vague promises and declarations of its impartiality and objective formation and form, already has all the external signs of a politically run meeting with the ulterior motive of creating insubstantial results.

In April 1986 this large and important group in the community were unable to meet Mr Papandreou when he visited Victoria because, as the representative of this group said in an open letter in the newspapers and on radio station 3EA, when representatives of the group sought to have discussions with this gentleman, a representative of the Minister’s office said that the itinerary was being run by the Greek consulate. When the representatives approached the consulate, they were told it was being run by the Minister’s office. This large and important group was given the runaround and they were so upset that they took out open advertisements in the newspapers.
The conference next week demonstrates that there are major divisions within the Victorian Greek community and those divisions lie at the feet of the current Minister.

Victoria has a Minister who has been unable to make decisions. I am pleased the Minister has now arrived in the Chamber. He knows that the Liberal Party believes it must send representatives along to attend the conference to try to show the Greek community that there are people who are prepared to work towards their well-being. The Liberal Party believes the attendance of its representatives will not mean that it endorses the policies of the Victorian Government towards the Greek community. Representatives of the Liberal Party will attend the conference to help those persons in the community who have been divided by this Minister and his adviser.

Mrs HIRSH (Wantirna)—The matter I wish to grieve about today was first brought to my attention through a very active and well regarded organisation, which I chair, called the Home Interest Association of Victoria.

It concerns the problems being faced by a group of people in the outer-urban area east of Melbourne who have recently had houses built, who have recently moved into these houses or who are still to move into them.

The difficulties they face are numerous and the resolution of these difficulties has only just been brought about since the problems they are facing have come to the attention of a number of Government departments, including the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, the Consumer Credit Legal Service, the Home Interest Association of Victoria, the Ministry of Housing, and local financial counsellors.

It has come about not in the least by the persistence and consistent work of a number of local people who have refused to sit back and take what has been done to them, who have stood up, made a fuss and are beginning to achieve some redress.

I shall go into the problems in more detail shortly but, before I do, I should like to mention one of the outcomes of the furore that has arisen as a result of what has been going on.

In the outer east, over the next few weeks, a series of seminars will take place auspiced by the Consumer Credit Legal Service and the Financial Counsellors Association of Victoria, for home buyers—both potential and actual—and also for people having a home built, for people paying off houses and for people in the rental market.

These seminars will address the problems people face. It all starts with young couples seeing advertisements in the local daily papers. The advertisements I refer to are by a real estate agent known as Homeland Real Estate. The advertisements are very attractive indeed because they offer house and land packages for a small deposit—as low as $3500—and finance is advertised as being readily available.

Young people trying to find somewhere to live are attracted to these advertisements. When they respond to them, they find that they will need an extra $2500 for legal costs so they really must start with an absolute minimum of $6000.

The buyers apply to the agent for a house and land package to be built. They apply for finance, they sign a contract for purchase of the land and they sign a contract for the building of the house. The group of houses to which I refer in the outer-eastern suburbs was built by K. D. & J. F. Chappell Administrators Pty Ltd and Keith Chappell is the principal of this company. He went overseas last night, just as the climate was becoming rather hot.

He is a registered builder with the Housing Guarantee Fund Ltd and, as such, should be considered to be a respectable competent builder. However, it would seem that this is not the case, and the problems that arose shortly after people began signing up and purchasing their land and having their houses built indicated that Keith Chappell may not be a very competent builder at all and, in fact, may not be a suitable builder to be registered with the fund.
I should like to outline some of the difficulties that people have come across when trying to buy a house and land package through Keith Chappell. The first thing that happened to a young couple that came to see me was that they were told by Homeland Real Estate that they would not receive finance for their house and land unless they saw a certain solicitor, John Feldman of Doveton, for their conveyancing. These young people, being naive—and many of the people building and buying in this area are naive and should educate themselves on the pitfalls of home buying and home building—went along with this and shortly after this time, they rang their father saying that they would need an extra $8000 for the builder. We do not know why this was needed; it was not in the contract, but he said they had to pay it.

The young people have children at school and need to move into their house; so in order to keep the building continuing, the $8000 was paid over. It has still not been ascertained exactly what the $8000 over and above the original contract was for.

Another young couple were charged an extra $1890 and they do not know why that money was required. The paperwork and receipts handed out are often in disgraceful condition. It is difficult to work out a sequence of what the charges are for and no-one is there, it would seem, to look after the interests of the home purchaser—the person wanting to buy the house. The agent, of course, acts on behalf of the vendor—that is, the people selling the land and building the house.

Because agents often have good selling techniques, young people do not realise that the agent is being paid by the vendor and is looking after the interests of the vendor.

Young couples should always go to their own solicitor. They should not use a solicitor advocated by real estate agents and that is the only way they will find that their own interests are looked after in such an important area as buying a house.

Other young couples who found that they were billed for extra money or billed for penalty rates, were always involved with a trio comprising an agent, a builder and a solicitor.

Each one is recommended by the other. Often, finance is conditional upon this trio, including the solicitor, being used. Some of the finance is within reason; some of it is partially obtained from finance companies with 20 per cent interest where people do not have sufficient money for a proper mortgage. In fact, a moral agent would never sign up people unless it was thought that they had adequate funds to build and live in their house.

Another problem is the time taken by Keith Chappell to complete a number of houses in the area. One couple was due to move in last August. They are still not in their new home. Another couple were in a rented house; the lease expired; they had to move out; they could not find another house in the area to rent; their own house had been seven months in the building and is still not ready so, at the moment, they are living in a caravan awaiting the satisfactory completion of their house—and as I said earlier, Keith Chappell went overseas last night!

The clauses in the contract that allow people recompense for the inconvenience and expense involved when the building takes far longer than originally contracted are null and void on most of these contracts because where the amount should be, the amount of "nil dollars" has been written in, and people are unable to obtain any recompense.

Another couple are driving their children 30 kilometres to school every morning and have been doing so since the beginning of February. This is because they were supposed to be living in their new house by September and they are still waiting to move in.

Mr Leigh—Mr Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

A quorum was formed.

Mrs HIRSCH—The third problem is one of shoddy buildings built by Keith Chappel, and prospective clients have been signed up by Homeland Real Estate Pty Ltd. It is causing
problems because the builder is registered with the Housing Guarantee Fund Ltd and redress should be available. There have been delays and difficulties about the builder showing up.

The proposed legislation that the Ministry of Consumer Affairs is undertaking with regard to the Housing Guarantee Fund Ltd should help prevent the problems like those that arise when a builder erects a second-rate house full of serious faults, because it takes a lot of the buyer’s time, trouble, effort and energy to try to have those problems remedied.

In the future, claims will have a limit of $40 000 as opposed to the present limit of $12 000 or $28 800, after the first year. All contracts for building will have to be in writing, including variations and prime cost items, which are two of the items that cause problems and extra bills. People do not understand this.

For example, a builder may quote a certain price for bathroom fixtures and fittings and the end cost may be much more than is quoted. This situation will be avoided in future contracts, and that sort of variance will be prevented. The purchaser will not need to submit problems in writing to the builder in order to have the Housing Guarantee Fund Ltd involved, but will be able to tell the builder verbally what is wrong and have an inspection carried out. The purchaser will be protected when the Bill becomes an Act later this year.

Some of the problems people were encountering and are still facing as a result of shoddy building include, for example, a concrete slab that did not extend to the end of the house so that the bay window had to be propped up with a brick. This was discovered after the lounge room flooded and the carpet was lifted.

In another instance the buyers are still not living in the house because the roof leaked throughout the house and had to be replaced totally.

Another purchaser was doing his own painting. He has been back to the house time and again and always finds that the new paintwork has been sandpapered, or there are fresh holes in the painted walls for no apparent reason—and that is only when he can get into the house. There is a problem of obtaining access for some people who are doing the finishing work themselves. A number of people are very handy in the work that they can do, and they prefer to do it because it keeps the cost down. However, sometimes people cannot gain access to their homes.

Last August a couple were not living in their house because the painting had not been completed. They were sick of the fact that the house was full of leaks and other problems existed. A sign was put up in the front yard that said: “Here stands a crooked house that a crooked builder built.” That attracted a lot of attention. It attracted a public meeting of 60 people, all of whom agreed with the people who were building that house. The notice disappeared when somebody from the building firm arrived. It was a good notice and very well written. The problem with the house was that if it happened to be raining one might as well be outdoors as inside. The sign was an adequate description of what was going on.

The builder told a local newspaper a few weeks ago, “Look, I am building cheap houses, so people get what they pay for.” Whether one buys a Mini Minor or a Rolls Royce, they are both cars and one should expect them to go. On that basis one should have a house built that does not have these problems. It may be a cheaper and smaller house with cheaper fixtures and fittings, but one should expect the house to keep the rain out and to have a floor under it that goes wall to wall. One should expect that the windows will fit, more or less, that the gaps are not 6 inches wide. Many of the problems are gradually being repaired, but the delays are appalling. People have to pay double rents while waiting to move into their homes.

I know of one family who have nowhere to go. They were promised access to their house, and 2 hours ago they had still not gained access. The builder has gone overseas, so I wonder whether the people are going to get access by the weekend or whether they will have to camp in the front yard, despite the fact that they own the land and own all but
$2500 worth of the house. They are unable to get into the house and were threatened with lawsuits if they attempted to break in.

A number of families over the past six or eight months have taken the step of breaking into their houses in order to gain access because the builder has been difficult to contact. The builder does not return calls and does not answer his telephone. I have at no time been able to speak to the builder personally. He has not answered any of the messages I have left or responded in any way.

I believe the builder in this case should not be registered with the Housing Guarantee Fund Ltd. His name should be taken off the list because he is not a competent or conscientious builder. We need inexpensive housing, and that housing needs to be properly built, painting, and so on, because a house is a great asset to young couples starting out. With second-rate housing there are delays, extra costs, and lack of consideration for the interests of the purchaser, and that should be taken into account.

All purchasers should find their own solicitors to do their conveyancing. They should look around to obtain quotes. There are great differences in the price of conveyancing. One should not go to the solicitor recommended by the real estate agent at the time of signing the contract. Seminars that have been organised in April through the Financial Counsellor Association and the Consumer Credit Legal Service Co-op Ltd should be of value and use to local housing consumers. It should teach them a great deal about some of the pitfalls and problems they may get into if they sign a contract on a sunny Saturday with the real estate agent.

Mr GUDGE (Hawthorn)—I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services representing the Attorney-General in another place. The matter relates to the issues surrounding the dismissal of Mr Ted Buck, the former General Manager of the Victorian Prison Industries Commission. To recap for the House some of the matters that have taken place before giving further information, it seems that the Attorney-General, for some reason known only to himself, is shy and reluctant to give that information.

The Attorney-General has sacked this man but he is not prepared to give the reasons for doing so to Parliament and to the community.

On 6 May last year an honourable member for Templestowe Province in the other place, Mr Miles, brought to the attention of that House the alleged misuse of a Government car for the personal benefit of Mr Buck.

On 4 December last year I raised a series of matters in this House about excessive entertainment bills, kickbacks and concessions to Mr Buck's friends and to the disgraceful administration of the Victorian Prison Industries Commission by the Attorney-General. I referred the House to the many shonkie activities of Mr Buck, who was later sacked by the Attorney-General, but the reasons for that sacking have not been made public.

I understand a lengthy and detailed report has been made available by the Auditor-General to the Attorney-General. It is certainly a damaging report. The Opposition wonders why nothing has been heard about it. Could it be because of the forthcoming Central Highlands Province by-election? Could it be that the revelations contained in that report will be damning not only of the activities of individuals within the commission but also of the Attorney-General's conduct and lack of willingness to sort out the issue.

If the unabridged report is made public, there will be many red faces around the State and some of them will be in Spring Street. Why is the Attorney-General keeping the report under wraps?

I am not as reticent as the Attorney-General about providing some of the reasons why Mr Buck has been dismissed, although I believe I gave sufficient reasons on 4 December 1986.

I have a memorandum from the Office of Corrections supervisor of industries to Mr David Grant, Director of Prisons, dated 13 March 1986, which states:
On October 1985 a bull belonging to Mr E. Buck, P.I.C. General Manager was transferred from his private property to Dhurringile Prison. The cost of transportation was billed to the Victorian Prison Industries Commission.

The commission owns six stud bulls at Dhurringile. Did they need to lease a further bull from Mr E. Buck?

That is a good question that should be answered. It continues:

Were contracts called for the leasing of a bull, thus allowing for private firms to tender or was the deal exclusive to Mr E. Buck’s firm?

I wonder whether a service fee was fixed for the agistment of the bull. If there was, who fixed that fee? Was it Mr Buck or somebody else?

Mr Buck is a man with an insatiable appetite for money. In October he rendered an account to the Victorian Prison Industries Commission for a $100 cartage fee, for the attention of the agricultural manager, who is another person the Attorney-General wants to name and refer to consistently in Parliament. I have not done so, but if I were cajoled sufficiently, I could provide some information on that aspect.

A second matter I wish to raise in this grievance debate is a statutory declaration, which I shall make available to the Attorney-General when I am finished dealing with it. The declaration is by Martin Travers, who is a Director of Eureka Development Pty Ltd, Level 23, 367 Collins Street, Melbourne, and states:

I, Martin Travers, a Director of Eureka Development Pty Ltd, make this sworn declaration today voluntarily and without duress as a very concerned citizen of Victoria.

I phoned Phillip Gude, M.P. on Monday the 8th of December 1986 to express my concern at the activities of the Prison Industries Commission known to me and to thereby support Mr Gude’s endeavour to bring out into the open issues which should be of concern to Victorian taxpayers.

I indicated to him that day, 8/12/86, that I had had dealings with Mr E. Buck, General Manager, Victorian Prison Industries Commission, in relation to an invention which my company had developed and patented.

Contact was made with our company, Eureka Developments Pty Ltd by Mr R. A. Aldridge, an investor of 7 Leura Grove, Hawthorn, who came in off the street without introduction.

Mr Aldridge indicated he could help us find an equity partner for our project.

This process led us to being introduced by Mr Aldridge to the Prison Industries Commission and Mr E. Buck approximately in the middle of 1985. Mr Buck indicated great interest in our proposal on behalf of the Commission.

We made detailed presentations to P.I.C. dated 5/12/86, copies attached.

Mr Buck indicated to me in December 1985 that “he had a problem with the Commonwealth Bank in Collins Street” to the extent of $50 000 and could we “fix it” we said sorry NO!

Mr Buck asked, “Could we fix it?” The declaration continues:

In March 1986 after presentations, luncheons etc. with the P.I.C., Mr Buck at a luncheon in his office on 20th March 1986 attempted to gain a personal benefit from any further transactions with our company.

Specifically he requested:

1. We restructure the company (Eureka Pty Ltd) to establish a nominated capital of several million dollars.
2. He requested $250 000 ordinary shares at a value of $1.00 each be placed in his daughter’s name.
3. He required a further 250 000 options in his own name at 1 or 2 cents each.

I was left in no doubt that the above arrangement would need to be finalised if we were to go any further with the Prison Industries Commission.

Also present apart from myself was Mr Buck’s friend and associate, Mr R. A. Aldridge.

I rejected this proposition outright.

Following that time I have had little or no further contact with Mr Buck or P.I.C., other than a cancelled appointment with Mr Buck and representative from Deposit and Investment Ltd, including Mr Peter Russell, who had we understand been previously associated with H.D.F.I. with whom Mr Aldridge had an association.

Both H.D.F.I. and Mr Russell were obviously well known to Mr Buck.
On another occasion Mr Buck referred to a possible development opportunity in Shepparton for a tourist development which had been investigated by a Mr B. Siem, a business partner, which Mr Buck claimed could be supported by the Tourism Commission.

I remind the House that Mr Siem was referred to in the grievance debate of 4 December but nothing has been heard about that from our reluctant Attorney-General. The declaration continues:

Buck wanted our company I.C.S. Financial Advisors to invest and develop the project in association with himself, Mr Siem and other unnamed people. It was not clear if he intended the Prison Industries Commission to have an involvement although he used the propriety of his position to propose the venture.

We rejected his offer.

The statutory declaration then refers to two letters dated 6 March 1986 and 5 December 1985 from the Prison Industries Commission and a submission and proposal by Eureka Development Pty Ltd dated 5 December 1985. The statutory declaration was signed by Mr Martin Travers in front of me, as a justice of the peace. For the benefit of the House I am happy to table both documents to which I have referred.

It is clear that, at the very least, criminal intent was involved. It is clear that the Attorney-General would have been well aware of those matters; if he is not, he ought to be because enough inquiries have been made. The Corporate Affairs Office has been involved. When an officer of the Corporate Affairs Office came to see me he was embarrassed that he did not have the authority to make the full investigation he wished to undertake, particularly involving bank accounts. One wonders how thorough the investigation has been.

The investigation ought to have been out in the open. There ought to have been a public inquiry. What has occurred in the Prison Industries Commission is a disgrace and it is being covered up by this incompetent, shoddy Attorney-General—this tired and busy Attorney-General who is the No. 1 contender for Premiership.

I refer the House to the grievance debate on 4 December 1986 and Mr Leonard Williams who has litigation pending with the State Government. I understand that sitting in the Prison Industries Commission's store is material left over from a severed contract with Fairlea Female Prison that would be sufficient to run up 300,000 netball skirts. This is another example of waste that has occurred because of the maladministration of the Attorney-General.

The sitting was suspended at 1.00 p.m. until 2.5 p.m.

Mr GUDGE—Before the suspension of the sitting, I was referring to Fairlea Female Prison and the expensive facilities that have been put in place by the Government to train inmates. Those facilities are grossly under utilised—they are used at less than 50 per cent of their capacity.

If honourable members excuse the pun, the buck must stop at someone's door, and that door is the Attorney-General's. We all know he is tired, overworked, testy and performing badly. It is clear that the Premier views the Attorney-General as his main rival. The Attorney-General views himself as the person to ascend to the throne because he says so at every function he attends. The Premier is clearly overloading the Attorney-General so that he cannot carry out his functions. It is understandable that the Attorney-General does not like prisons, and the worst of his efforts are being put into that part of his responsibilities.

Section 37 of the Victorian Prison Industries Commission Act states:

(1) As soon as practicable after 30 June and before 30 September in each year, the Commission shall prepare and present to the Minister a report of its operations during the year ending on the preceding 30 June accompanied by a copy of the audited statement of accounts if it has been received from the Auditor-General.

The last report issued was for 1985, and it is well and truly out of date. A report should have been presented to the Attorney-General by September last year. The Opposition
wants to know whether it was presented; if so, why, six months later, members of the Opposition still cannot obtain a printed copy of the report.

It is clear that the report has been held up for the same reason as the Auditor-General’s report has been held up—it will be a massive embarrassment to the Attorney-General and the Government.

The Auditor-General is unhappy about what is going on with prison industries and with the performance of the Attorney-General. The Corporate Affairs Office is also concerned but, as I indicated earlier, it has limited powers. There is one way that the matter can be resolved and that is by the establishment of a public inquiry.

Today I put into the system the original statutory declaration to which I referred as well as all of the attachments. I support the concept of a prison industry training system to assist people who have fallen foul of the law. There is a dichotomy of views between the responsibilities of the Office of Corrections and the Victorian Prison Industries Commission that needs to be sorted out. That could form part of the reference to the inquiry.

I shall now refer to the Department of Labour. Last year I raised a matter of public concern about certain officers in the boiler and pressure vessels section of the Department of Labour. At that time, the Minister went on record as stating that there was nothing wrong but that he would look into the allegations. I have now discovered that the Minister did not tell us everything he knew.

The Minister did not inform the House of everything that had been going on—he kept it to himself. He had undertaken a three-month review within the department and had not found anything. I shall give a couple of examples of what has been going on in the department.

I have been contacted by Hamock Engineering, Sale, which made an application to the department on 29 September 1984. The company submitted an application for approval to produce two diving decompression chambers. When a company is involving itself in an export venture, it needs quick and prompt service.

Nothing occurred for some weeks; therefore, the company contacted the agency and was told, initially, “Sorry, we have not got your application”, and then it was told that the application had turned up but that it was dated 10 December, not 29 September. The company lost the export order and some $150 000.

Three weeks ago, some two and a half years later, after the Opposition had called for the police to be involved—and, in fact, they are—a diligent police investigator found the missing application in the garage of a Mr Don Nicholls, a senior officer of the Department of Labour. Honourable members should bear in mind that the Minister’s review found nothing—not a single solitary thing.

One should note that the Minister has conducted other reviews as well, such as the review on occupational health and safety inspectors, in which he found nothing, either. Is it that, whenever there is a query about something within his department and the Minister conducts an inquiry, he finds nothing each time? Perhaps we should question the way in which the Minister conducts reviews within his own administration. We all know the culpable part he played in the Flinders Street station redevelopment scandal.

The application found by the police officer was dated 29 September, the very date on which the company said it had submitted it. Inspector Nicholls and a former employee, Mr McLeod, had a good deal going. I understand from my sources that they have milked the system of approximately $200 000.

This is the way in which they worked. If company X sought approval for something, it was told the good news and bad news story. The bad news was that if the company wanted to persist with its application, it would take a long, long time—and time is important to the business community—and so orders were often lost, as in the example I gave earlier. However, they were told that the good news was that they could have the short-term
plan—that they could pull out one of the plethora of plans and opportunities that existed in the bargain basement system, where these two gentlemen, Nicholls and McLeod, could in fact approve and accredit the particular activity.

Mr McLeod left that section and now has an accreditation station for the Australian Standards Association. Is it not interesting that Mr Nicholls was the chairman of the Australian Standards Association boiler vessels division? Therefore, Mr Nicholls and Mr McLeod had a good deal going. They kept the arrangement boiling on.

I am concerned that during the course of the Minister’s inquiry a witch-hunt was mounted against an Inspector Williams by people high up in the ranks of the department. Mr Williams’s only crime was that he would not be bribed or bullied by the Minister or any of the Minister’s lackeys.

I now refer to the case of a South Australian company called Molnak, which produced hoists Australia-wide. When the company wanted to sell them in Victoria, Mr Williams refused to allow it to do so because he was concerned about the safety of the hoists.

The truth was that Mr Williams was on the ball; those hoists were sold in Western Australia, and loss of life resulted as a direct consequence.

Mr Williams has been hounded by officers of the Department of Labour and has been put in the circular system; he is not wanted and he has been given a job somewhere in the corner so that he does not bother anyone—and has virtually been told, “We will not let you get out”.

We have been told further that police have been requested to return the computer that they had borrowed from the department for their research work. The police do not want to give it back because they have stored in it data that will, I understand, result in positive prosecutions.

The Premier talks about open government, but he and his Ministers are practising quite the opposite. It is not good enough and it is not acceptable to the Opposition.

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member’s time has expired.

Mr J. F. McGrath (Warrnambool)—During the debate on the motion for the adjournment of the sitting on Wednesday evening last week, I directed to the attention of the Minister for Education the positions for officer in charge at the Warrnambool Education Support Centre.

Unfortunately, the Minister did not listen intently to my explanation about the matter. He took quite some time answering my query—or avoiding having to answer it—and criticised the National Party and me for asking for additional resources and funding. The honourable gentleman said that we should explain from where that extra funding and resources should come.

Had the Minister been listening, he would have clearly understood that I was pointing out that the five positions already funded by the Ministry were not filled. I directed his attention to the inefficiency of the system and its inability to respond to the educational needs of students in Victoria, particularly—in this case—those students in western Victoria who use the services of the Warrnambool Education Support Centre.

Five senior positions in the administrative and consultative roles have been made available at the centre, but at present only two have been filled. Therefore, there are three vacancies.

I point out that we are not seeking additional funding or extra resources but, rather, we ask the Ministry to fill the positions that already exist within the structure to provide services to the students of western Victoria.
It is important to refer to the report, *The Government Decision on the Report of the Ministry Structures Project Team 1986* produced by the Ministry of Education. At page 3 of the report, which is signed by the Minister for Education, the following appears:

This booklet outlines the Government's response to the final report of the team.

The decisions of the Government are designed to consolidate reforms . . . and to improve our education system so that it offers a high quality education to all young Victorians.

On the following page, a statement from the Minister says that education and schools have been through a long process of change; that the decisions now taken by the Government pave the way for consolidation and stability; and that primary schools in particular need this assurance, and no further changes are proposed for them except those generally supported by teachers and parents.

At page 6 of the booklet, under the heading, "Government decisions on the Ministry Structures Project Team Report", the following appears:

In broad terms, the Government accepts:

(ix) the need to further develop education centres to deliver curriculum support and student services and to respond to priorities expressed by school communities.

The report then refers to regional officers assuming the operational responsibility for curriculum support, finance facilities and other resources. It states that education centres will be further developed throughout the regions to allow them to have the expertise needed to provide curriculum support to various schools. It refers to the delivery of services to country children. It refers also to those in the metropolitan area, but I am talking specifically about country areas. There should be increased resources.

Mrs Toner—Are you asking for more money again?

Mr J. F. McGrath—I have just explained to the House how the Minister for Education did not listen to my remarks last week, and the honourable member for Greensborough has not been listening either. Had she done so, she would have understood.

I shall repeat my explanation again for the record. I said that the Ministry has funded five positions and filled only two. It is that simple. We are asking the Ministry to fill each of the five positions that have already been made available.

The officer in charge at the Warrnambool Education Support Centre has been charged with several responsibilities. The duties and role of an officer in charge were detailed in the *Government Gazette* of 9 October. I shall not elaborate, other than to say that the position is onerous.

The officer in charge has seventeen duties and I agree with the Minister for Education that he has a big job. I am glad the Minister acknowledges that it is an important job. Obviously, the position will take one person more than the number of hours available in any one day to fulfil.

The department has not filled the position or the two other positions that remain vacant. Consultation has not taken place at this stage but the Government proposes to fill two positions with one person; it intends to combine the positions of regional educational officer and officer in charge.

Already the Minister has stated that the position is extremely important and requires a person with special abilities and expertise. In a research report in 1985 Mr David McCrae said that an applicant for the position of officer in charge should have entrepreneurial expertise, administrative and management skills, the ability to interact with people and professional and curriculum experience. The criteria are arduous.

The Ministry of Education recognises that the position is demanding because of the seventeen areas of responsibility that must be accepted by an officer in charge. The duties
of the educational officer require similar demands on time and expertise, yet a regional education officer is expected to carry out all his or her duties as well as those of the officer in charge!

If the Government is to treat the report seriously, it must act rather than use rhetoric. It must employ people in the field whom it says it will employ. The people of Warrnambool are not asking for more funds. They are asking the Government to deliver the goods that it said it would deliver.

Five senior positions need to be filled at the Warrnambool centre. The centre was established some thirteen years ago by Mr Tom Smith who is now represented on most boards that deal with the functions and operations of educational support centres throughout Victoria.

Mr Smith has been recognised as the person who got together a team in Warrnambool to structure a centre that has become a model for the State. The regional director for southwest Barwon has in many cases cited the Warrnambool centre as a tremendous example for other centres and has called it the lighthouse of educational support centres in Victoria. It is fair to say that few rays of light will emanate from the lighthouse if the position of officer in charge is not filled.

By not filling that position the Government has insulted many people in the education field, including those who have been long-time supporters of the Government and its politics. Recently a public meeting in Warrnambool was called by school communities. The meeting was addressed by a representative of the Ministry of Education and two people representing rural and urban schools who were able to detail the services that were needed.

The person who spoke on behalf of rural schools said that through the officer in charge the centre had developed a valuable link with isolated schools. Many of the schools are located a few kilometres from the centre of Warrnambool and have grave difficulties communicating with and receiving support from the education centres in Warrnambool.

These difficulties present a new principal or new teacher, who perhaps decided to move to the country to gain experience in country schools, with the onerous task of having to establish that link. Suddenly they have found themselves removed from the centre of advice.

The speaker on behalf of rural schools who has lived in the area for some years cited an example of when he first moved into the district. He said that his first contact with the Ministry of Education was through the support centre, particularly the officer in charge. That officer was able to put in train everything necessary to help someone new settle into a different environment and community and was able to help to get the school up and running.

The spokesperson for the larger schools, which some honourable members may believe have the resources to facilitate curriculum development and to provide other support services, also spoke in glowing terms about the need for the termination of the services provided by the Warrnambool Education Support Centre. Obviously, if the position is unable to be filled separate from the position of officer in charge, services will decline.

Mr Cathie—There is no money. You already have a number of positions filled. That’s it!

Mr J. F. McGrath—Had the Minister for Education listened to me the other night and to what I said earlier today he would have heard me say—

Mr Cathie—Where will you get the extra money? Are you going to raise taxes?

Mr J. F. McGrath—If the Minister will listen, I shall explain it to him again. Five positions are vacant in the Warrnambool support centre. At this stage only two have been filled. We are not calling for extra money; we are calling for the positions to be filled.
The Minister said that the positions were filled. Just after Christmas we were advised that one of the consultants from the Geelong area had resigned. Apparently he has taken on the responsibility of running an hotel. As late as Monday this week I was advised by the Ministry of Education that this person had not resigned officially. On the information I have, this person is operating an hotel. How up to date is the information in the Ministry of Education?

I call on the Government to honour its responsibilities. They were clearly outlined in the book produced by the Ministry's project team, whose recommendations are valuable. Every honourable member should support the opportunity of providing equitable education services to all students throughout the State. That is not happening at present.

The people of Warrnambool and surrounding districts are concerned and to express their concern they have convened another meeting tonight that I shall attend. They are not asking for anything extra; they are asking for equity in education and equity in the provision of the valuable service of the development of curriculum and the development of all that is needed to enhance the education of young people. That request is neither unreasonable nor unfair. The people who have chosen to live in western Victoria are merely asking for equity in education. I call on the Minister for Education to assist me in delivering to the people of Warrnambool the sort of education that they should expect.

I appreciate that the Minister has a budget within which he must work. However, it seems strange that positions that are allocated to be filled are not filled. I ask why. I am not receiving an answer.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr J. F. McGrath—The consultancy position might be filled but the positions that have been allocated to the Warrnambool support system have not been filled. Those positions are for regional officers and so on.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr J. F. McGrath—It is a poor state of affairs when the Warrnambool centre is reduced from a "lighthouse" operation—a model system for other centres—to an operation where its main operator—the officer in charge—is removed. It is like removing the captain of the ship. One cannot say that the officer in charge can be removed and the centre will operate as efficiently as it did previously.

The best analogy I could make would be to take the Minister for Education out of the Ministry of Education and say that the Ministry would operate as well as if the Minister had been present. I am sure Government members would not agree that that should be done. However, that is what is happening with the education support centre in Warrnambool. The Government is saying that the centre can deliver the goods without having an officer in charge.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr J. F. McGrath—The duties of the officer in charge were detailed by the Ministry representative at a recent public meeting at Warrnambool. A regional education officer would need to be Superman and Batman combined to undertake those duties on top of his or her own. It is impossible for one person to accept the responsibility of two jobs.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr J. F. McGrath—The Minister now asks if the people of Warrnambool will accept a compromise. A compromise would mean a lower standard of service. Why should the people of Warrnambool accept a lower standard of service when that standard of service is provided to all other schools?

I refer again to my analogy that one cannot remove the leader, the captain or the Minister from an organisation and expect that organisation to serve in the same efficient
The people of Warrnambool recognise that and I call on the Government to honour its responsibilities as enumerated in the booklet relating to the development of curriculum.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr J. F. McGrath—The Minister keeps referring to the Budget. The fact is that the people of Warrnambool have an expectation of a service that has already been established. One cannot expect them to be happy when that service is removed.

I hope some reasonable compromise can be achieved but I do not believe one person handling the two jobs of officer in charge and regional education officer is a fair compromise. I hope further consultation will eventually achieve a reasonable result so that the students and young people of western Victoria will receive the educational standard they need to carry them into the next century and perhaps be the leaders of this State.

Mrs Toner (Greensborough)—My grievance is about the prospect of approximately 24,000 people being disenfranchised during the Central Highlands Province by-election either through ignorance or apathy. It is possible that many people will not know that a by-election is being held in the area. That could lead to a distortion of the by-election result in that a candidate who did not reflect the view of the majority of constituents may be elected; it may be a candidate who reflects the view of only the majority of people who knew that the by-election was being held.

Many people are not aware that they live within the Central Highlands Province. That situation has occurred despite the best efforts of the Minister for Property and Services, despite the best efforts of the seven candidates, despite the media and despite the efforts of major and minor parties.

Indeed, the person who has done the most to publicise this important by-election is Dr Peter Radford, who, in 4 hours, made a significant impact on people's awareness of the by-election by being nominated, dumped soon thereafter and replaced with another candidate the following day.

Mr Leigh—Mr Acting Speaker, I direct attention to the state of the House.

Mr Shell—There he goes again, calling for quorums!

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ernst)—Order! That is a reflection on the Chair.

Mr Shell interjected.

Mr Richardson (Forest Hill)—On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I put it to you, Sir—

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ernst)—Order! I shall have to wait until the quorum is formed before I hear the point of order.

A quorum was formed.

Mr Richardson (Forest Hill)—On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I refer to the reflection upon the Chair made by the honourable member for Geelong, upon which you commented and which was in fact answered with another impertinence from the honourable member for Geelong. It is necessary for the dignity of the Chair to be upheld and, in the interests of the House as a whole, the honourable member for Geelong must be called upon by you to apologise to the Chair.

Mrs Toner (Greensborough)—On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Forest Hill is suggesting that you are not controlling the House, whereas you are controlling the House extremely well. The comments of the honourable member for Forest Hill are a reflection on the Chair.

Mr Leigh (Malvern)—On a further point of order, Mr Acting Speaker,—
The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ernst)—Order! There is no further point of order. Will the honourable member for Geelong withdraw his remarks?

Mr SHELL (Geelong)—It is the frustration I have of seeing the honourable member for Malvern come into the House—

The ACTING SPEAKER—Order! Will the honourable member for Geelong withdraw his remarks?

Mr SHELL—He comes into the House for 2 minutes—

The ACTING SPEAKER—Order! Will the honourable member withdraw his remarks?

Mr SHELL—I withdraw.

Mr LEIGH (Malvern)—On a further point of order, Sir, the honourable member for Geelong said he behaved in that manner because of the frustration caused by me when I am merely carrying out the Standing Orders of the Parliament.

The ACTING SPEAKER—Order! That is not a point of order; it is an explanation. I call the honourable member for Greensborough.

Mrs TONER (Greensborough)—In general elections for the Federal and State Parliaments, up to 95 per cent of people eligible to vote turn out to vote. The turnout for by-elections is significantly different. For instance, in the Nunawading Province by-election in August 1985, 88·5 per cent of people eligible to vote turned out; at the North Eastern Province by-election in 1985, 85·1 per cent of people eligible to vote turned out; in the East Yarra Province by-election in 1983, 79·4 per cent of people eligible to vote turned out; and in the Waverley Province by-election in December 1982, 87·8 per cent of people eligible to vote turned out. Those figures indicate that up to 20 per cent of people eligible to vote failed to vote during recent by-elections.

One of the problems in Upper House by-elections is that people are unsure which province they are in because many provinces do not have names that reflect the districts they cover. Many people in Whittlesea, Wandong and Hurstbridge would be surprised to learn that they reside in the Central Highlands Province.

At the last general election a total of 119 993 people were enrolled in the Central Highlands Province and of those 111 920 turned out to vote. In other words, 93·27 per cent voted at that general election or, putting it another way, 8073 people failed to take up their opportunity to vote.

I am concerned that at the coming by-election many people will not be aware that they are required to vote. I suppose one should be grateful to Dr Peter Radford for drawing the coming by-election to the attention of people residing in the Central Highlands Province.

I do not know if honourable members have read the excellent background paper on the Central Highlands Province prepared by the Parliamentary Library, but that paper points out that although the province has a country image the population centres are in the south of the province, in local government areas such as Sherbrooke, Lilydale, Healesville and Eltham. Those areas are suburban in lifestyle. Another similar region is found in the south west of the province in the areas of Whittlesea, Bulla, Romsey and Kilmore. So, despite the general impression that it is a country province, the reality is that the bulk of the people living in the province are part of the urban sprawl.

I remind the Central Highlands Province residents that those who live in areas such as Evelyn, Monbulk and Whittlesea are fortunate to have a democratic choice about who they will elect. I also remind them that they can be fined $50 if they fail to carry out their obligation to vote at the coming by-election.

Mr Kennett—What about Benalla?
Mrs TONER—More people will turn out to vote in the Benalla region than in the southern areas of the province.

Mr J. F. McGrath—Why is that?

Mrs TONER—The by-election will generate more interest in Benalla and other areas close by than in the southern area of the electorate. I am concerned about the lack of clarity in the maps that depict that region because they do not highlight that people living in the small townships on the southern fringes of the Central Highlands Province have an obligation to vote.

I again remind those people of their democratic rights. In the United States of America compulsory voting does not exist and less than 50 per cent of people eligible to vote turn out to vote. Enrolment drives are banned by legislation. Effectively the poor and the disadvantaged are often not participants in elections and do not make the important choice of who should be President of that country.

It is my sincere hope that people living in that province will take up their right to vote and perform their duty because they have a preferred candidate or, perhaps, because they know that if they do not they will be fined.

Apart from the prospect of a fine there is a good reason to participate and vote in the coming by-election. In the areas I have been canvassing I have discovered considerable confusion about politics, particularly conservative politics. Many people are disillusioned with the strife in the Federal political arena, with the Federal Liberal Leader, Mr John Howard, being constantly under threat of losing his leadership. People are also confused about the Queensland National Party's attempt to take over the Federal National Party. One can imagine the sort of gerrymander that would occur if that happened—democracy would be lost for ever.

The community will also note that the demise of Dr Peter Radford was orchestrated by the Leader of the Opposition leaking certain details to the press. It is a sad prospect to contemplate a potential coalition between the Liberal and National parties, which knife each other at every opportunity and which cannot reach agreement on the most minor issue.

The Central Highlands Province by-election provides an opportunity for people to vote for stability and sound management. People have the opportunity to vote for a Government that has vision and energy; they can vote for a leader who is consistent, well respected and trusted. They have the opportunity to vote for a competent Government.

I hope voters find the time to examine the various candidates. Mr Bernie O'Brien, the Labor candidate, and his wife Lucy, are typical of many families in the Central Highlands Province. They are a young couple with two children; they have a mortgage; and they are involved in the activities of their small community in Sassafras—the school, the kindergarten and the cricket club. Bernie O'Brien has received a warm response wherever he goes in the province.

It would be remiss of me not to indicate that all honourable members regret the retirement of Fred Grimwade. He is well known and is well loved in the Central Highlands Province. He has been forced to step aside because of ill health. I saw him in Parliament yesterday and also in the street outside and he looked quite well and I hope, having moved away from the stresses associated with Parliament, that he will enjoy good health and can share his retirement with his wife and family and travel and enjoy himself generally.

Bernie O'Brien has similar qualities to Fred Grimwade. He is a good listener and a hard worker and is a strong advocate for the needs of the ordinary person in his electorate.

I would grieve if only four-fifths of the electorate polled their votes and one-fifth missed out. That would be unfortunate and that would not be a true reflection of the electorate's view. I throw out a challenge to the people of the Central Highlands Province to have a larger turnout than has occurred for any of the previous by-elections, and to have an even
larger turnout than the numbers for the last general elections which were 93.27 per cent. I hope there will be a 100 per cent turnout. That will show that the people have carefully considered the issues and want to register their votes.

The people of the Central Highlands Province should consider what the Government has done in terms of its stability and how it compares with other Governments around Australia. I believe they have done well under the Government despite the difficult times and despite the economic difficulties on the world scene. The people in Central Highlands Province make up a fair microcosm of the whole of the State and in that capacity they can speak for all Victorians. However, they will not be reflecting the views of all Victorians unless they all vote. We can then look at the situation and say, "Yes, there was a big turnout; there were no anomalies. They were making a sensible decision".

In the weeks ahead, politicians from the Opposition, from the Government benches and from the National Party will be visiting the central highlands electorate and there will also be members of minor parties such as the Call to Australia party which is supporting Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

I believe the party which deserves the support of the people is the party which has clear policies and which leaves people in no doubt about who its leader is. It is the party that has spelt out its intentions for the year ahead—and the Governor’s Speech indicated the directions that will be taken by the Government in the coming two years. Also, people should consider the most excellent Budget that was brought down last year in a difficult time by the Government. Those are important areas that are crucial to the country and to the lifestyle of the people on the urban fringes of Melbourne. They are issues and policies for which the people should give their approval, and so it will be a most important election.

I encourage all constituents to turn out for a maximum vote and I hope the majority have the good sense to vote for Bernie O’Brien.

Mr I. W. SMITH (Polwarth)—During question time today it became obvious that the Police Force and particularly the Fraud Squad had been investigating a number of Government departments. I listened with interest to the contrasting answers given by the Minister for Property and Services and the Minister for Housing.

It was clear in the open and honest reply given by the Minister for Housing that people had been concerned with some relatively minor misdemeanours in the bond system, which is run by the Ministry of Housing to help underprivileged people. I do not believe any honourable member believed that the Minister had done anything to cover up or that he was not doing what was expected of him.

That contrasted completely with the lack of answers given by the Minister for Property and Services. It is clear there has been a gross maladministration and a dereliction of Ministerial responsibility within his Ministry. I ask that the Minister be stood aside by the Premier until a full-scale judicial inquiry investigates and reports to the House on the corruption and bribery that is taking place in the Titles Office.

I shall quote to the House from a letter dated 27 February 1987, sent to me by respected barristers and solicitors in my electorate, Larkins McCarthy and Co., referring to the situation when they wish to have a title change made at the Titles Office on behalf of a client. At this stage I shall not mention the name of the firm involved or the community organisation which owns the land because that is not the point; the point is that there is maladministration, which I shall demonstrate. The letter states:

We act for...

The name of the firm is contained in the letter. It continues:

...which is the purchaser of a property in Hesse Street, Colac...

That is the main street. It continues further:

The land is "an Old Law Title". We made enquiries to the Titles Office in June 1986 enquiring as to the likely time it would take for an application to bring the land under the Transfer of Land Act to be completed. We
explained that a re-development of the site was contemplated and that a strata title may be required. We were informed that approximately six months should be allowed as it would be given priority because of the requirement for strata subdivision.

We enclose photocopy Titles Office lodging from detailing the lodging date of the application as 14 October 1986. Unfortunately our letter requesting that the application be given priority was misplaced and was not in the Titles Office with the application.

On 21 January 1987 we telephoned the survey section who advised that the preliminary examination had not been commenced. Following that discussion the enclosed letter dated 23 January 1987 was forwarded to the Titles Office. We enclose copy letter in reply received from the Titles Office and we received a telephone call from Mr Reid at the Titles Office on 3 February advising that preliminary examination had been undertaken and the application had been forwarded to Mr Ritchie, the clerk in charge.

On 20 February we telephoned Mr Ritchie who informed us that our client's file was in a queue awaiting examination in the Registrar General's Office where 11 files were ahead of it, and in Legal Examiners where 31 files were ahead of it. He considered that it was possible that if no problems arose the application may be approved in about six months time.

That will then total in excess of one year. It continues:

He did mention that a new Act not yet proclaimed would probably come into effect at the beginning of July enabling land to be more readily brought under the Act. However, it would seem to the writer that it may be of little advantage changing the application at that date.

The contract for the purchase of the property was entered on 30 July 1986 and final settlement is due on 30 June 1987. It had been considered that twelve months would be sufficient time to prepare and have approved the application. Our client is anxious to obtain a title as soon as possible after settlement on 30 June.

Titles Office staff have been helpful and cooperative to the writer but have advised that staff ceilings within the Titles Office have caused the backlog mentioned above in respect of urgent applications. We do know for non-urgent applications it is not unusual to have to wait for some years to obtain a Transfer of Land Act Title.

If there is anything you can do to expedite the application our client would be most grateful.

Honourable members can see from that letter that, if one were a developer with an old law title and one proposed to strata title and redevelop the property, one may have to wait for twelve months or more for that matter to go through the Titles Office. That being so, there is a great temptation for developers to persuade someone in the undermanned Titles Office by way of inducement or bribe to expedite his or her particular application for transfer from the old title to the current law title so that the property can be on strata title and the developer can then begin selling.

I am sure the savings involved in an exercise like that would be clear to all honourable members. That has led to the bribery of officers within the Titles Office and that is the reason for the Fraud Squad investigation into that office.

This morning the Minister for Property and Services evaded the question. Until the Minister can give the House a full explanation of why the Titles Office is not adequately manned, there will be a cloud of suspicion. The Titles Office is not a drain on the taxpayer because stamp duty and transfer fees, title and document registrations and so on provide revenue. Why is that office undermanned and thereby exposing vulnerable officers to the sorts of bribery and corruption which the Fraud Squad is investigating?

The Minister has a lot to answer for. In the best traditions of the Westminster system, he ought to stand aside until investigations are complete. The investigation parallels the allegation that was made by the Government when in opposition in the well-known and well publicised Ministry of Housing land deals scandal.

The same factors were involved: delays, officers being bribed and accepting bribes, and what happened? The then Minister of Housing was required to stand aside. Subsequent investigations proved the Minister to have been innocent. However, the then Opposition pursued a vendetta against that gentleman to the point where he suffered such a reversal in health that he felt obliged to resign.

The Government cannot have it both ways. The standards that it set when in opposition are the standards by which it must live.
The second matter I raise in the grievance debate deals with the milk industry. It might have eluded honourable members but when the Labor Party assumed office in 1982, why did the Premier conduct a vendetta against Mr Des Cooper, Chairman of the Victorian Dairy Industry Authority, and other senior officers of that body?

The Government performed the oldest trick in the book: it created the smell of something financial going wrong in the Victorian Dairy Industry Authority. The Government left that smell hanging over Mr Cooper and senior officers for six months while an inquiry was conducted. When the inquiry was concluded a report was tabled in Parliament. Not only were Mr Cooper and the other senior officers required to spend a vast amount of their own finances to defend themselves but they were also all totally exonerated because they were people who lived by the highest ethical and moral standards in their business dealings, and they did much for the dairy industry. It might have eluded honourable members as to why such a vendetta was conducted by the Premier and his Government against Mr Cooper. Now all the facts have been revealed.

Last year the Dairy Industry (Amendment) Bill was brought before Parliament to “deregulate” the milk industry. It was pointed out by the Opposition that deregulating at the retail end was the wrong end to start. The Opposition said that if the Premier wanted to help the milk industry, he would deregulate the interstate controls on the marketing of milk and free up the archaic, unnecessary, highly restrictive and improper practices which the legislation of other Governments imposed on the most efficient dairy farmers in the world, in Victoria. However, the Premier did not start at that end; that was of no interest to him.

I shall explain why the Premier was interested in deregulating the milk industry at the retail end. On 30 April 1986 an article appeared in the Age under the headline, “Milk prices could fall by the end of the year under deregulation”. What a load of baloney! Milk prices to the consumer have not fallen. The Government is unable to indicate any location where milk is being sold to benefit the customer under these deregulation provisions; so let me look at who is benefiting.

Who is benefiting? Midland Milk Pty Ltd! Who are the principals of Midland Milk Pty Ltd? The Carruthers family! To whom is that family related? The son of the principal of Midland Milk Pty Ltd is married to the Premier’s daughter. The Premier therefore would know a lot about the effect of deregulation on the industry. The Premier could not claim he did not know what he was doing because he would receive advice over the kitchen table that a lot of honourable members would not receive on how to deregulate the industry.

The principals of Midland Milk Pty Ltd have been pursued by the Victorian Dairy Industry Authority for interstating milk, notionally, on their books. The company has been paying farmers the manufactured price of milk, which is 18 cents a litre and has had the hide to sell that milk at the wholesale price set by the Victorian Dairy Industry Authority at 32 cents a litre. The company can of course provide heavy discounts to the industry.

However, the company is not offering the discounts to the little bloke, the fellow who gets up at 6 o’clock in the morning to run a sandwich bar, a pie shop or a milk bar. Good heavens, no! It costs money to deliver milk to those little shops, which each want a 16-litre crate of milk, at a cost to the processor of $1.60. The company is not offering those people a discount because that is difficult; it is unprofitable.

To whom is the company offering the discount? The supermarkets! The company is offering the discounts to the supermarkets and yet by law the company should not be able to sell the milk at that price. The company is abusing section 92 of the Constitution, while everyone else in the milk business is playing the game, and a lame duck, the Victorian Dairy Industry Authority, has now been substituted for some of the most able marketing men whoever sat on a statutory authority in this State. I am talking of Mr Cooper and his senior officers.
The Victorian Dairy Industry Authority is now a lame duck organisation eating out of the hand of a Premier who, together with his Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, had no concept that members of his own family were going to ensure that the discounts they offered would not be passed on to the consumer. The discounts are being gobbled up by the supermarkets and are not being passed on to the consumer. When Parliament debated the Dairy Industry (Amendment) Bill the opposition parties pointed out that it was inevitable that this would happen.

I ask the Premier to ensure that the Victorian Dairy Industry Authority has everybody in the State playing by the same rules. I ask the Premier to re-examine the Dairy Industry (Amendment) Act because its effects are now obvious. Small delivery dairies are now losing their financial plum, the supermarket deliveries, which they used before to cross-subsidise deliveries to the small sandwich bars, the corner stores and so on. They are now withdrawing from delivering these small allotments of milk to the sandwich bars, corner stores and so on.

Milk will therefore be less available and, where it is available, it will be older stock and, therefore, not as nutritious. The farce of the legislation is that the only people who are benefiting from it are the relatives of the Premier! That bears close examination and it bears a statement to the House indicating that this legislation, which is a failure, will be rescinded and that the deregulation of the dairy industry will commence at the other end, that is, the end where highly efficient dairy farmers in the State can market their product Australia-wide.

Then one can tackle the next rung in the ladder and the next one and ultimately get down to deregulation at the consumer end. However, it has been proved clearly that the legislation was directed towards the wrong end, and it has not worked.

Mr REMINGTON (Melbourne)—I was interested to see the honourable member for Polwarth join the debate. It is obvious when one understands politics—and I guess a few honourable members do—that the leadership challenge is on!

If he does not move, he is gone because the present Leader will survive until the following election. He must move on 24 March. He is moving today and is showing—I was going to say “great style”—some sort of style, anyway.

The matter about which I wish to grieve is close to my heart and causes me great anger. It concerns business confidence in Victoria and Australia as a whole. The electorate of Melbourne encompasses the City of Melbourne. Melbourne is the financial heart of Australia; it is certainly the equal of New South Wales in its industrial development. Anyone involved in industry in these two capital cities knows how important it is at all times to maintain business confidence because decisions can be made by top executives only in an environment where they feel confident that they will succeed.

The House needs no reminder that the Government is now at the end of its fifth year and that when the Cain Government took office absolutely no business confidence was left in this State. As a result, the State was suffering from a malaise. People regarded the Liberal Government as a crooked Government; it was divided, it had bad leadership, it was racked by scandals, and everything was going wrong. Confidence was not there and the State was languishing.

I give credit to the Cain Government for the manner in which it set about rebuilding business confidence. I pay tribute to the Treasurer, to the Premier and to the principal Cabinet leaders, to all members of the Ministry and to the backbenchers for re-establishing an air of confidence. It began with the first Budget handed down by the Treasurer. People started to realise that the Treasurer was both an economist and a politician who knew what was good for the State of Victoria.

At all times a concerted attempt has been made by a weak and erratic Opposition to undermine that confidence, not for the benefit of Victoria but for some short-term political gain, and the Opposition has derived nothing out of it.
An example is Alcoa of Australia Ltd. When the Cain Government took office, it was a disastrous mess. It consisted of a powerline half built across the State. A major international company had no confidence in the Government and would not put its money into this State because the State was dead.

It was hard work to win back the confidence of these people and yet still hardly a week passes without members of the Opposition attempting to undermine the credibility of business projects and to damage business competence. Yet last week they were all there for the opening of the smelter. Their suits were dry-cleaned, they were wearing their Pierre Cardin ties and they were wallowing in the limelight of a successful venture of the type that they seem dedicated to destroying.

There are other examples apart from Alcoa of Australia Ltd and I refer to the scene created in this House in the past 48 hours over the question of the Chia South Yarra project. The Opposition members revelled in it. I give no credit to the honourable member for Ivanhoe for the manner in which he behaved, nor do I give credit to the honourable member for Prahran for his performance. They were led by that great orchestra leader, the Leader of the Opposition. They literally danced. They thought the whole project would collapse; they talked wildly and recklessly of the Mainline disaster that happened in Victoria in 1971.

Mr Perrin—Mr Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

A quorum was formed.

Mr REMINGTON—When I was interrupted, I was talking about how the honourable member for Ivanhoe, the Leader of the Opposition and, to his discredit, the honourable member for Prahran thought they were dancing on the grave of the South Yarra project. They likened it to the Mainline company that failed in 1971 and they revelled in it.

Never mind the problems in which Australian Guarantee Corporation Ltd were involved as to whether it would continue with the project, never mind the fact that the development would have been a disaster if the Australian Guarantee Corporation Ltd had not continued with it! The comments made by members of the Opposition during the past 48 hours have had the effect of undermining confidence in the project.

Fortunately, a free enterprise company has moved in. It is geared to take over the project. It could read the writing on the wall. The company had the confidence in itself and in the Government to see it through.

But the real challenge came from the Opposition. What happened when the Bill relating to the project was debated in October 1984? What then was the attitude of members of the Opposition to the South Yarra project? These people who want to be the purveyors of gloom and doom saw things differently then. The honourable member for Balwyn then stated:

The Opposition supports the Bill and is delighted to see this significant project for an unusual development going ahead at last.

They were effusive in their praise. The honourable member for Prahran said it was encouraging that the work had now started. The honourable member for Benambra stated:

As a former Minister for Planning and Local Government, I am pleased that the South Yarra project has progressed further under the Labor Government. I extend my congratulations to the Cain Government for continuing the South Yarra project, which was started in 1981 . . .

The project is very exciting. The Chia organisation has to be congratulated for the development of it.

The Opposition was silent the other night when the vitriol poured out against Chia. One other honourable member for whom I have a great deal of respect ought to be more careful. Politics is like a landmine and he ought to be more careful where he puts his feet and careful where he puts his words. The honourable member for Prahran attacked the project also. Back in 1984 during the second-reading debate in the Legislative Council of which at that time he was a member, he was orgasmic with delight. He stated:
I am glad to speak briefly on the Bill, as it deals with a fascinating and imaginative project, and I am pleased that it is a project that began under the former Liberal Government. By any standards the project is enormous...

At that stage, he wanted to revel in the shadow of Chia. He stated:

I have known of Mr Chia for quite a long while, from the time when he was a businessman in Bangkok...

This was when the honourable member was an executive with General Motors-Holden’s Ltd.

These are the people who are now trying to undermine confidence. What a disaster it would have been had executives of the Australian Guarantee Corporation Ltd not had the confidence to proceed and the project became a massive white elephant! The Opposition would have revelled in it! It does not want success; the last thing the Opposition can stand is success. The present Labor Government will be re-elected because it is successful.

On a lesser note, I must say that I was disappointed with the performance of the honourable member for Bennettswood today. It was character assassination and gutter politics and he should be above that. He has been in Parliament for more than two years and should understand that if he has political potential he should learn to get out of the gutter with character assassinations. Look at the job the honourable member did on Don Dunstan. Don Dunstan is a great Australian, and if the honourable member for Bennettswood could achieve just a fraction of the success of Don Dunstan in what he did for South Australia, by any standards he would be reasonably successful.

The honourable member for Bennettswood has deliberately set out to undermine the confidence of the tourist industry. Today he made a racist attack on the Ministry for Ethnic Affairs. One must not forget that 42 per cent of Victorians, or their parents, were born outside Australia. Some of the honourable member’s information was very inaccurate.

On another aspect that has drawn my anger, I refer to Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, not in his capacity as Premier of Queensland but as a man who is known to have thrown his hat in the ring and said that he is going to be the next Prime Minister of Australia. I used to be a devout member of my church but I am now an agnostic. If he succeeds I will go back to the board of the church.

I have been interested in politics for many years, since I heard Bob Menzies give his campaign speech in the late 1930s. I have always had a keen interest in politics. I have never seen a prominent Australian go overseas and denigrate his country as did Joh Bjelke-Petersen when he went to Tokyo this week. It was a disgraceful performance. He is an economic traitor to his country. It is important to have confidence in the business area. We have the Victoria project, and it is essential for the economic success of this State that the Japanese principals have confidence in Victoria and Melbourne, and that they are not wasting or placing at risk their shareholders’ funds, but Joh goes out and attacks the economic performance of Australia—it was a disgraceful performance! He attacked the Premier of Victoria about a fortnight ago and he said he would fix the strikes.

Mr LEIGH (Malvern)—Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Melbourne is not referring to the Premier of Queensland by his proper term and I believe the Speaker in this Chamber has on previous occasions ruled that when honourable members refer to Premiers of other States they should refer to them in the proper manner.

Mr REMINGTON (Melbourne)—I make it very clear that I am attacking him not in his capacity as the Queensland Premier, but as a man who has thrown his hat into the ring to become Prime Minister. If the honourable member wishes me to refer to him as the Queensland Premier, I will do so.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ernst)—I am sure that the honourable member for Melbourne will pay due respect to the Premier of Queensland.

Mr REMINGTON—I will treat him with Parliamentary respect, but public respect is an entirely different matter. I turn now to two aspects of the Queensland Premier’s performance: the Premier said that he would fix Victoria’s unions and stop the strikes.
The statistics for days lost in Queensland per 1000 employees show that, in 1985, 410 working days per 1000 were lost, and in Victoria—the heart of the trade union movement, the seat of the Trades Hall Council, where dominant industrial activity resides—the number of days lost was only 216 per 1000. That is almost 100 per cent less. This is the great man who says that he is going to fix the unions!

The latest figures to October 1986, show that the number of days lost per 1000 employees in Queensland was 217, and in Victoria only 186.

One can go through the statistics with bankruptcies. In Queensland the total figures far exceed those for the failure of small businesses in Victoria. Small businesses in Victoria for the September quarter 1985 to the September quarter 1986 showed a growth rate of 6-9 per cent, and in Queensland they were stagnant. It is a bankrupt State with zero growth.

What we are on about is confidence in business and confidence is not there with members of the Liberal Opposition. I leave it to them to make that determination. There is certainly no confidence in their Leader. The honourable member for Polwarth, like The Man from Snowy River, should be up and galloping on Tuesday after the election takes place.

I am proud to be the member for Melbourne and proud to be a citizen of Victoria. We have a great State and in all respects we have led industrial growth in our nation. The Liberal Government placed Victorians on a round of scandals, waste and mismanagement, but the present Government has achieved industrial growth. I am very proud to say that we have achieved it, even with the Queensland Premier's misinformation and illiterate comments. He runs a grave risk of being categorised by a term that all Australians know and understand—if a person does not have any credibility, they say in colloquial terms, "He is a bullshit artist".

I warn the Queensland Premier—and there are a few people opposite me who are smiling—that if he has not won that accolade now he will certainly win it shortly.

Mr Ramsay (Balwyn)—I make a plea to this House and to the Government on behalf of the families of Victoria. Many of these families are being decimated by the cost of housing in this State, and this Government can and should do something about it. I am not referring to families having special handicaps or special needs. They are not families who face the tragedy of marital breakdown; they are not families in unusual circumstances and they are not families where unemployment is a tragic and real problem; they are ordinary families. They are also special families in the sense that they live in the homes in which tomorrow's generation of Victorians are growing up.

Many of them are in the middle income bracket. They have two or three children and the mother has probably stopped work for a short period while the family is very young. She may return to part-time work as soon as possible thereafter and perhaps full-time work once the children reach secondary school.

Their reason for returning to work is that the costs these families are facing in bringing up their children are overtaking the families' ability to pay them. That applies particularly to the problems people face with mortgages and borrowings they have made in their efforts to acquire their own homes. In spite of the much vaunted economic strategy of this Government, these families are going backwards. They, above all, are carrying the cost of the Labor Government's big spending, big borrowing and inappropriate policies. Something must and should be done about it now. Only last week on 23 February a headline in the Age read:

Families spend quarter of wages on home loans:

That article referred to a report following a study by the Real Estate Institute of Australia which showed that banks are setting the home lending pace and that home loan interest costs for the average family have increased significantly over the past twelve months.
The figures for Victoria demonstrate that the average loan repayment made by families with home mortgages rose by $118 to $609 a month in 1986, which is an increase of almost 20 per cent.

However, Government authorities say that there is no chance of cheaper home loans in the foreseeable future. The Prime Minister made plaintive noises after some confusion within his own ranks and insisted that the Government still believed interest rates could fall this year. That is what the Prime Minister said after Senator Ryan had revealed in the Senate that authoritative reports that had been made available to the Federal Government were pessimistic about the chance of interest rates falling.

At the same time the State Bank spokesman said:

It is doubtful whether interest rates generally will fall sufficiently to allow a drop in mortgage rates during the first half of 1987-88 ... a revival—likely ... particularly to the extent forecast by the IPC (Indicative Planning Council for the Housing Industry) ...

The State Bank believes interest rates will not fall in the foreseeable future. A number of home loans from banks have had interest rates fixed at 13·5 per cent by the Federal Government but enormous pressure is being brought to bear on the Government to change the subsidy that it has given the banking system to maintain that level.

Twelve months ago, the State Government allowed building societies to increase their interest rates to 16 per cent. Bank interest rates for new home loans are now at 15·5 per cent, but there is considerable pressure to push that even higher. There is no relief in sight for a young family trying to pay off a mortgage and meet the interest costs on home borrowings.

A recent report by the Prices Surveillance Authority was referred to in the Sun of 28 February 1987 in an article headed “Survey finds price of staples soaring”. What goods have increased significantly in price? They include tomatoes, carrots, apples, fish, potatoes, oranges, soups, fruit juices and jam. Those items should be in every household. Fresh fruit and vegetables are an essential part of healthy living. The community should be encouraged, not discouraged, to consume such goods, yet those goods have soared in price over the past twelve months.

I now direct the attention of the House to the false impression given by the Minister for Housing twelve months ago. A March 1986 press release stated:

There will be no increase in building society interest rates at the present time, Victorian Housing Minister, Mr Frank Wilkes, announced today.

I have given full consideration to the views expressed by the societies through the Interest Rates Committee and have also taken into account the downward turn in interest rates generally, Mr Wilkes said.

I have, therefore, decided not to approve any increase in the present rate of 15·5 per cent.

However, I have discussed the matter with the Chairman of the Interest Rates Committee, Mr John Cullen, and the Registrar of Building Societies, Mr Bill Kilpatrick, with a view to having the issue reviewed in one month’s time.

The position was reviewed one month later and on 9 April 1986 the Minister made a further announcement that building society interest rates on home loans would increase by 0·5 per cent. The Minister recognised that interest rates would have to increase if building societies were to remain viable in their search for funds in what is a highly competitive marketplace.

However, the Government tried to wriggle out of that increase. In the same press release the Minister said:

... in accepting the recommendation of the Building Society Interest Rates Committee he was concerned to ensure that potential home buyers continue to have access to affordable finance.

With this in mind, building societies will aim to lend up to one-third of new loans on a low start basis. This option will actually result in lower repayments in the early years of their loan and thus enable a higher level of affordable loans to be maintained, Mr Wilkes said.
In addition, to protect existing borrowers, building societies have agreed to restructure existing loans so that there will be no increase in repayments for twelve months, during which time I anticipate a general reduction in interest rates.

Only twelve months ago the Government approved an increase in building society lending rates and made an arrangement with the societies to restructure existing loans so that monthly repayments would not increase for twelve months. That was done in the hope that interest rates would fall within twelve months.

The Minister was foolish enough to say, "I anticipate a general reduction in interest rates". That reduction has not occurred. Home borrowers are now in more trouble than ever. A person who took advantage of the Minister's offer on 9 April 1986 to have his loan restructured so that payments would not increase is now facing a double whammy: not only will his loan move to the 16 per cent rate because the twelve months are up but he will also have to pay an extra surcharge because of the restructuring; therefore, he is forced to pay more money than ever for his home loan.

The Government cannot have it both ways. It cannot pretend that interest rates will drop while it continues with its economic policies that have caused Victoria to have the highest interest rates in Australia.

I refer the House to the consistent actions of the Government since it came to office: it has borrowed and borrowed at extremely high levels. Victoria has the largest public sector debt of any State in Australia. The Department of Management and Budget has provided figures that demonstrate that the net debt of the Victorian public sector as at 30 June 1986 was $19·3 billion and the estimated cost of servicing that debt was $2·1 billion for the financial year. In spite of the enormous cost in servicing the public debt, what has the Government done? Public sector borrowing in 1986-87 is continuing at the level of $3·1 billion and 60 per cent of that borrowing involves new funds. The Government is not just rolling over the debt where some borrowing has to take place, but additional borrowing is occurring and the Government has to keep pressure on the market to obtain available funds. That is one of the significant factors in maintaining the high level of interest rates in this community.

The result is that the young families I referred to earlier are having to pay the piper for the extravagances of the Government. The Government should urgently review its policies and should reduce the high level of public borrowings that have occurred year after year since the Cain Government came to office.

The Government is perpetrating a cruel hoax on the average families of Victoria in stating that interest rates may fall in twelve months, as the Minister for Housing indicated twelve months ago. The State Bank has indicated that the rates will not fall, and the Prime Minister has now taken up the call by stating that he hopes interest rates will be eased in the next twelve months. That will not happen unless there is a significant change in public sector borrowings by both the Federal and State Governments, but the Cain Government should take the lead on behalf of Victoria.

Mr GAVIN (Coburg)—I am delighted to participate in this debate and I am delighted to see an Acting Speaker in the chair who is far more tolerant than others who occupy that place. I shall address my remarks to the leadership of the conservative parties as a result of the civil war that has broken out between the Liberal and National parties at the State and Federal levels.

Mr Hann—Mr Acting Speaker, I direct your attention to the state of the House.

A quorum was formed.

Mr GAVIN—Last week an opinion poll was conducted for the Government in the Central Highlands Province. One question asked was whether people believed leadership was important. Some 77 per cent said it was very important and 21 per cent said it was important. Therefore, 98 per cent of people believe that leadership is important.
The people were asked if they believed the leadership quarrels in the conservative parties were bad for the country, and 51 per cent said they were, while only 20 per cent regarded them as good for the country.

Because the honourable member for Rodney tried to stop me from speaking, I shall refer to the National Party. Some 28 per cent of the people polled believed the current leader of the National Party was the best leader, 12 per cent said they thought the honourable member for Benalla would be the best leader and only 3 per cent indicated they thought the honourable member for Rodney would be the best leader. The honourable member for Benalla did well—he is obviously a distinct improvement on the current Deputy Leader.

Mr LEIGH (Malvern)—Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Coburg is quoting from a document, and I ask whether he is prepared to make it available to the House.

Mr GAVIN (Coburg)—I will do that. Some 53 per cent of the people in the Central Highlands Province believe the Liberal Party should change its leader and 41 per cent believe the National Party should change its leader. With these figures I have demonstrated that leadership is important and that the people of the Central Highlands Province do not have a high regard for the leaders of the National and Liberal parties in the State and Federal Parliaments.

I relate that lack of leadership to the National Party’s performance last Thursday when it had difficulty with the first candidate it selected for the Central Highlands Province by-election. In the Age of Friday, 27 February, the Leader of the National Party stated:

There is no way you can be a socialist and be an endorsed candidate of the National Party.

Mr Leigh—Mr Acting Speaker, I direct your attention to the state of the House.

A quorum was formed.

Mr GAVIN—It is interesting that the honourable member who called for the quorum left the Chamber as soon as he did so.

I shall continue to quote the comments of the Leader of the National Party:

Our members would not tolerate someone who said publicly he was a socialist.

He also stated:

It might have been acceptable if Dr Radford had made his comment privately.

One can be a socialist and join the National Party but cannot be an endorsed candidate. One can go through the whole system but cannot speak publicly about one’s socialist beliefs; that must be done privately.

The important question that must be asked, therefore, is how many members of the National Party in this Parliament are closet socialists. Honourable members know that the honourable member for Murray Valley likes to be photographed with the Premier every time he visits his electorate, and that is copied by all members of the National Party. Most of them are getting Bob Hawke hair cuts, so their private views must be socialist.

I challenge every member of the National Party to sign a statutory declaration declaring that they are not closet socialists. That is the only way they will be believed because their Leader has stated that they can hold any view they like so long as they hold it privately. Members of the National Party are perverting the democratic process.

To launch the National Party’s campaign for the Central Highlands Province by-election, all members of the party went out to the steps at the front of Parliament House and smashed bottles of champagne over the steps leaving behind the broken glass, which is a hazard for motor vehicles.
The National Party has lost its level-headed sense of proportion in recent days because it has been entranced by the Premier of Queensland into supporting him.

When trying to pick its candidate for the Central Highlands Province by-election, the National Party first attempted to dig up someone with the Grimwade name.

In an article by Simon Clarke, which appeared in the *Age* of 28 February, the following appeared:

First, the party tried to trade on the locally well-known and respected—but liberal associated—Grimwade name.

So discussions were held with Mr Angus Grimwade, nephew of the former incumbent and son of the industrialist, Sir Andrew Grimwade. These talks were fruitless, as were those with the leader of the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association, Mr Graham Stoney, and the defeated Liberal preselection candidate, Mr Ron Little.

The National Party sent two of its members, the honourable member for Benalla and the honourable member for North Eastern Province from another place, to visit Dr Radford and to check him out. The article continued:

The two MPs reported back to party officials that they had known Dr Radford for some time and that they believed him to be a suitable choice.

I am sure Sir Joh must be wondering and concerned about the political allegiances of members of the Victorian National Party and the way in which they preselect their candidates.

I now refer to the Queensland Premier, because he has disgraced himself lately by being the first Australian in this country’s history to criticise Australia in another country. All the people in this place who say they are supporters of the Queensland Premier should state whether they believe they also should be able to criticise this country when they go overseas.

In the 1950s, the United States of America had a House of UnAmerican Activities: if there were a House of UnAustralian Activities in this country, I am sure the Queensland Premier would have to appear before it because of his performance in Tokyo.

An article that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 4 March, under a headline which is a little disrespectful to the Queensland Premier, “Tokyo Joh causes red faces all round”——

*Mr WILLIAMS* (Doncaster)—Mr Acting Speaker, I must again direct your attention to the disrespect shown by the honourable member for Coburg for the Premier of Queensland. The honourable member is clearly out of order.

*The ACTING SPEAKER* (Mr Hockley)—Order! The honourable member should refer to the Premier of Queensland by his correct title.

*Mr GAVIN* (Coburg)—I was referring to him by his correct title earlier, but I was quoting a headline from a newspaper article on this occasion. The behaviour of the Queensland Premier has been so disgraceful that I believe he should lose his knighthood as a result, because he is clearly unAustralian.

*Mr Hann* interjected.

*Mr GAVIN*—The Deputy Leader of the National Party has indicated his support for the Queensland Premier who is the first person in Australia’s history to have broken the longstanding tradition of not taking domestic brawls to overseas countries. He was speaking to reporters from the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, which has a daily circulation of nine million. He was obviously undermining Australia’s image overseas, as well as its interests and opportunities for trade.
Given that the Deputy Leader of the Victorian National Party seems to support the statements made by the Queensland Premier in Japan, I call upon all those who support the Queensland Premier in this place to indicate whether they support that honourable gentleman’s actions in Japan, which could be regarded as treacherous to the interests of Australia.

There has been a further example recently of the disgraceful performance by the Queensland Premier. He and his cohorts will not allow the Queensland members of the Federal Parliament to conduct a secret ballot on whether they wish to keep their present Leader.

In the past, National Party members of Parliament have said that only members of the extreme left do not support secret ballots. They have always said that about trade unionists. However, there is now an opportunity for members of the Federal National Party to have a secret ballot on whether they want to keep their present Leader or elect a new one, but the Queensland Premier will not allow them to do so.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr GAVIN—Obviously, members of the National Party in this Chamber do not support those duly-elected members of the Federal Parliament being able to conduct a secret ballot on the matter.

It is obvious that the National Party members in this Chamber—such as the Deputy Leader of the National Party, who has been sitting in the Chamber making disorderly interjections—have been supporting the actions of the Queensland Premier. I presume that by saying, “Hear, hear!” the Deputy Leader of the National Party is supporting the Queensland Premier’s statement criticising Australia in Japan—which is disgraceful. As I said, the Queensland Premier should lose his knighthood over it.

I now turn to Queensland’s economic performance under the leadership of the present Premier, who has held that position for nineteen years.

In an article of the Sydney Morning Herald dated 4 March, Ross Gittins stated:

But Queensland has hefty taxes and charges in... areas: liquor, gambling, property transfers and registration fees. What’s more, most charges are indexed and rise automatically.

Since 1982–83, the items officially listed as Queensland’s State taxes, fees and fines have grown by 42 per cent. In the three years to the December quarter 1986, the consumer price index for the eight capital cities rose by 22 per cent and the component of the index covering State and local government charges rose by the same amount. For Brisbane, however, the increase was 30 per cent.

Therefore, the increase has been more than one-third higher than in other States. The article continues:

But these figures don’t take into account Sir Joh’s lucrative hidden taxes, particularly the surcharge on rail freight paid by mining companies. The Utah company alone says that it paid a surcharge of $170 million last year. Sir Joh won’t reveal the total receipts from this tax, but informed estimates range from $400 to $500 million a year.

So it shouldn’t surprise you to learn that the Queensland Government’s spending has been growing strongly. It has risen by 46 per cent since 1982–83, an average growth rate of 10 per cent a year.

The article continues:

And has Sir Joh. . .

I apologise for the fact that the author did not call him by his correct title; he should have said, the “Queensland Premier”—

And has Sir Joh been balancing his Budget? Far from it. He’s had to borrow every year to cover his excess spending. The Statistician estimates that his deficit this year will be $625 million—which, on a per-head basis, is about on par with the Federal Government’s deficit.

Naturally, all this borrowing means that Queensland’s public debt is building up. Sir Joh doesn’t seem very proud of his debt—he’s the only Premier who refuses to divulge the details of his borrowing.
But the figures have been estimated by the New York investment house, Saloman Brothers. They show that Queensland's debt has been growing at a faster rate than any State's bar Western Australia.

Between December 1983 and September 1986, the number of Queensland Government employees increased by 11 per cent—the fastest growth rate for any State and more than twice the rate for the Federal Government.

The same article contains figures that show that Queensland's economic performance in other areas is also not good. It states:

Queensland has about 16 per cent of Australia's population, but last financial year it got only about 6 per cent of total foreign investment. Its share of total business investment is expected to decline to 13 per cent this year.

The Queensland economy is sick, and the outlook for the next few years is sick also.

Ross Gittins then accuses Sir Joh of mismanagement in a number of areas of deregulation. I do not have time to go through them all. The article concludes:

There are no genuine, nationalising socialists in power in Australia today. The closest we come is the self-proclaimed scourge of socialism, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

I call on the Liberal and National parties to solve their problems. Both State and Federal branches of each party should put an end to the civil war! That is what the public wants.

Mr E. R. SMITH (Glen Waverley)—I wish to grieve about three matters: the first is the establishment of a fund for the victims of the New Zealand earthquake; the second is the Government's pork-barrelling in the Central Highlands Province; and the third is the establishment of better services for the elderly.

This morning a constituent telephoned me wanting to donate money to the victims of the New Zealand earthquake disaster. He and other constituents who have contacted me today have pointed out that this year marks the fourth anniversary of the Ash Wednesday bushfires in Victoria. At the time of the bushfires the people of New Zealand contributed $500 000 to aid those victims yet now, when New Zealand has suffered a natural disaster, no fund has been established in Victoria for these victims. I call on the Premier to set up a fund to which people can contribute whatever they feel is necessary.

The man who telephoned me, Mr Basil Brearley of Glen Waverley, told me that, when he visited New Zealand four years ago at the time of our disaster, feeling for the victims of the Victorian bushfires was high. He said that Australians have always had an affinity with their New Zealand cousins and pointed to the fact that whenever a natural disaster occurs in a Third World country we are quick to send money to aid the victims, but when it comes to our cousins in New Zealand no fund is established.

My constituent suggested that money should be sent to the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr Lange, but I told him that that would be foolish and that the money should be sent via the proper Australian agencies. I would not trust Mr Lange.

The next issue with which I shall deal is the Government's pork-barrelling in the Central Highlands Province and its $8 million promise to improve bus services in the area. This will affect bus route No. 742 which normally travels from Glen Waverley railway station to Ringwood via Camelot Drive in Legend Park, which is a part of the electorate of Glen Waverley.

On the night before last a constituent of mine, Mr Richard Gilks of 43 Galahad Crescent, Glen Waverley, informed me that he was one of many people waiting at the railway station for a bus to take him home. At that time the bus timetable was: 4.30 p.m., 5.10 p.m., 5.45 p.m., 6 p.m., 6.30 p.m., and 7 p.m.

The buses that leave between 5.10 p.m. and 5.45 p.m. are packed because three peak-hour trains arrive in that period. They are extremely difficult to board. The Minister for Transport and the Government have recognised this difficulty and subsequently have
released a press statement to the effect that the Government will allocate $8 million to improve bus services in the Central Highlands Province and neighbouring areas, including my electorate.

I telephoned Ventura Bus Lines Pty Ltd to obtain information so that I could explain the problem to my constituent. When Mr Gilks had tried to board the bus he had words with the bus driver about overcrowding. The driver decided to take a head count of the passengers and the result was that Mr Gilks and another commuter were told to get off the bus. My constituent then had to telephone his wife and ask her to pick him up and he arrived home half an hour later than usual.

The Government's promise of $8 million is laughable; it does not propose to carry out its promise. The Government said that another bus service would be provided and that buses would run every 20 minutes—this service is needed badly. However, when Ventura Bus Lines Pty Ltd was notified of the proposal the company was told that it would come to fruition "some time after Easter but before Christmas"! The promise is just another example of pork-barrelling by the Government. It does not intend to honour its promise.

My third grievance is about health care for the aged. During the Address-in-Reply debate, I pointed to the fact that health care in Australia has developed without proper planning, and that this was not the fault of this or former Administrations at both Federal and State levels. This unplanned approach has resulted in many problems in delivery of health care to the aged.

The first area that needs to be carefully addressed in rectifying the problem is that of geriatric services. At present 1.6 per cent of the population is over the age of 65 years; in the next twenty years that percentage will increase by 5 per cent making a total of 2.4 million people who will be aged 65 years or more.

Health care education needs to be re-examined. Undergraduates of medicine spend 32 hours studying gerontology compared with undergraduates in the United Kingdom who spend 80 to 120 hours. In Australia there is no formal testing based on the 32 hours of tutorials, yet in the United Kingdom a formal examination is undertaken after the 80 to 120 hours of practical work. This gives Australian undergraduates no priority or commitment to this important field of medicine.

Only twenty Victorian post-graduate doctors are fully trained as geriatricians; 40 are needed urgently. In order to attract dedicated people to this field of medicine positions need to be created in public hospitals and graduates should be encouraged to obtain a Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of Physicians. This would provide postgraduates with the top clinical qualifications in gerontology.

Student nurses also do not receive adequate formal training in the field of geriatrics and there are no examinations in this area, which is the same situation as medical students. This area of nursing education needs to be upgraded. Similarly occupational therapists and physiotherapists need to receive better training in the field of geriatrics. As I understand the situation, Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences offers two courses in this field: one in rehabilitation and other in gerontology. This is a recent innovation.

General hospitals should use their acute beds to treat sick and injured geriatric patients. A revolutionary breakthrough would be the establishment of geriatric units. There are many empty beds in general hospitals so a demonstration ward with 24 to 30 beds could be used to accommodate sick people who are 65 years of age or older.

If these demonstration wards were set up, they would influence the direction taken by general hospitals and the way in which gerontology is taught. The staff could be rotated as they are at present in other specialist areas. Public debate on all aspects of geriatric care should be encouraged.

The staff of geriatric units under training at public hospitals would include not only the doctors and nurses but also the physiotherapists and occupational therapists. All other
specialist areas of public hospitals already have undergraduates rotating through the various units. Under this new system of having geriatric patients in acute beds, both undergraduate nurses and doctors would gain practical experience rather than, as at present, learning the work only through books.

The advantages of using the ordinary teaching hospitals is that the geriatric units would be part of the hospitals, as they are in places such as Cardiff in the United Kingdom where the general hospitals take on geriatric care. Public hospitals in Victoria do not have sufficient trained geriatricians; there are only twenty geriatricians in the whole State.

Geriatric units at teaching hospitals would be the recipients of much of the money that is currently being used to subsidise nursing homes. Other funds would be available to go towards dedicated areas within teaching hospitals that could train not only the doctors but also the post-graduate nurses in the care of our community in a better way than at present.

The geriatric units at teaching hospitals would become the recipients of finance for research, which is the convenient way of subsidising the postulant who is working for his or her fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. The geriatrician would also have the right to admit patients from casualty to this area of the general hospital. That is something that is not happening at the moment.

Much emphasis is being placed on the setting up of health complaints procedures. I submit a better solution would be the suggestion of geriatric service councils—a practical move that would be supported by all people working in the geriatric area. It would establish formal links with external services through the current assessment teams that are operating, although speciously, throughout Victoria. Those teams would be mobile and would have links with services such as nursing homes, geriatric rehabilitation units, geriatric hospitals and day hospitals. If properly structured, the relationship with the community support services would allow such areas as the district nursing services, meals on wheels and local councils to link in a formal way and provide a better service for the elderly. At the moment the links are too informal.

In the limited time left, I shall speak briefly about nursing home care. The number of public nursing home beds should be increased and beds in the private and voluntary sector reduced because the current $25,000-a-bed subsidy ensures that only a small percentage of the population who should be in nursing homes have that opportunity. The current system of allowing people into nursing homes should be radically reviewed. Instead of social workers or general practitioners making the recommendation to a Government doctor, a geriatrician only should have the final say on who is admitted into nursing homes.

In conclusion, proper monitoring of the clinical care in nursing homes should occur. The Government is currently considering diet, building structures, cleanliness and laundries. These are all important issues but clinical care must also be given closer scrutiny.

More hostel care should be provided. It should be rationalised so that a variety of affordable accommodation, backed up by the private sector, is available. I have spoken to the A. V. Jennings building company, which has taken the matter on board and is prepared to assist by providing a pilot scheme.

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

The question was agreed to.

WORKS AND SERVICES (ANCILLARY PROVISIONS, No. 1) BILL

For Mr JOLLY (Treasurer), Mr Fordham (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to make ancillary provisions for certain works and purposes for the financial year 1987–88.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.
PORT OF MELBOURNE AUTHORITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

For Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport), Mr Fordham (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Port of Melbourne Authority Act 1958 and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

RACING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—On behalf of the Minister for Sport and Recreation, I move:

That this Bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to provide for minor amendments to section 116HA of the Racing Act in respect of the power of the Totalizator Agency Board to provide off-course betting facilities on behalf of other States or Territories.

Expressions of interest in such a service have been received and are currently under consideration. Honourable members will, I am sure, appreciate that these expressions of interest are a tribute to the efficiency of the racing administration in this State and the efficiency of the Victorian Totalizator Agency Board.

The Bill enables greater flexibility in respect of matters that can be determined by agreement between the Victorian TAB and other States or Territories—for example, in respect of unclaimed dividends.

The Bill also makes specific provision that, should an agreement be entered into, any investments held by the Victorian TAB pursuant to the agreement would not be taken into consideration for the purposes of section 1161 (7) of the Racing Act in respect of the minimum distribution of 3·525 per cent of turnover from the TAB to the racing industry.

The Bill again demonstrates the Government’s commitment to sound economic and financial management for the people of Victoria and to utilising the resources of the State to best advantage.

I commend the Bill to the House.

On the motion of Mr REYNOLDS (Gisborne), the debate was adjourned.

It was ordered that the debate be adjourned until Tuesday, March 17.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I move:

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday, March 17.

This is a simple procedural arrangement to facilitate the next day of sitting as arranged and notified earlier.

The motion was agreed to.
GOVERNOR'S SPEECH
Address-in-Reply

The debate (adjourned from the previous day) on the motion of Mr Pope (Monbulk) for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech was resumed.

Mr Hayward (Prahran)—I join in the debate on the adoption of an Address-in-Reply and in so doing I confirm and pledge the loyalty of the residents and electors of Prahran to Her Majesty the Queen and to her representative in Victoria, His Excellency the Governor.

I wish to make some comments about the events of the last few days that concern the Chia South Yarra Project. My remarks are made in a constructive way because I believe there are lessons to be learnt from these events and from that project.

Unfortunately, the Chia South Yarra Project got off to a bad start because the Government forced the Prahran City Council into rapid agreement to the project despite the council's reservations.

The City of Prahran questioned the financial viability of the project and the intolerable traffic problems that the project will cause. The City of Prahran believed the project was an overdevelopment of what was an excellent site. If the community is to learn from these incidents and examples it should examine some of the events surrounding the project that occurred in 1983.

On 30 November 1983 the Premier, Mr Cain, summoned the subcommittee of the council and officers of the City of Prahran who were responsible for the project to his office. Also present were the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Technology at that time, Mr Cathie, the then Minister for Planning, Mr Walker, and the then Minister for Local Government, Mr Wilkes. The representatives of the City of Prahran brought with them a submission that expressed their concern and reservations about the project, the problems that would be created by increased traffic, especially in Toorak Road and Chapel Street, and resort and recreation problems. In other words, the city was concerned about that element in the planning process that requires either that sufficient open space be provided or that a sum of money be paid in lieu, so that the council is able to provide the open space.

The City of Prahran's estimate of the amount was at least $2 million, perhaps even $3 million. The Government made it quite clear to the representatives of the City of Prahran that the council would not receive that amount and that the normal formula would not be followed; instead, the council would receive $850 000, which was said to be a gratuitous payment by the developers to the city.

The Premier and the Ministers concerned made it clear to the city that it had no choice in the matter. The submission that the representatives of the City of Prahran produced was not looked at and the copy given to the then Minister for Planning, Mr Walker, was put on the table and, in fact, fell to the floor. It was made clear to the city that the Government would act if it did not fall into line. That evening, the then Mayor of the City of Prahran received a telephone call from the office of the Minister for Planning saying that the Minister had a draft Bill in his pocket and if the city would not fall into line it would be forced to do so by legislation. The Premier and the Government put a shotgun to the head of the City of Prahran and forced the council to accept the project and enter into the agreement.

As I said, I am making these remarks in a constructive way because it is important that we all learn from the situation. A pattern has developed under which the Government has been attracted by projects it believes will give the impression that Victoria and Melbourne are the go-ahead State and the go-ahead city. Ministers of the Government are always pleased to see more cranes in the sky because of the impression they create. In other words,
Ministers are attracted by the public relations benefits arising from these projects and rush into approval of them.

The classic example is the Melbourne Central Project, the Museum station site development. The Government intervened and approved the project without adequate investigation or analysis. In the process the Government has made great play of the attractive elements of the projects—the tower at the Melbourne Central Project and the so-called “little Venice” or water canal feature in the South Yarra project. As honourable members are aware from the Melbourne Central Project, those appealing aspects can be found not to be viable and disappear. One wonders whether the new developers of the South Yarra project will find the little Venice aspect viable or whether they will go to the Government and say that it is not viable. The pattern is there and the Government must learn from it because otherwise the people of Victoria, particularly the citizens of the areas concerned, will be adversely affected.

It is vital for the citizens of Prahran that the Government does not renege on the planning requirements, inadequate though they may be, that already exist with the South Yarra project. The traffic problem that will result from the project will be almost intolerable. It is becoming so already; the traffic congestion in Toorak Road and Chapel Street is considerable. It puts great pressure on local communities.

Suggestions have been made to the effect that the new developers of the project will say to the Government that the project is no longer commercially viable in its current form and that to make it commercially viable certain things must happen. For example, the new developers may say that the requirement for car parking spaces that is part of stage 1 of the project should be deferred and be part of stages 2, 3 or 4. Of course, I make the point that there is no guarantee that the other stages will be completed.

Another aspect of the project that the new developers may discuss with the Government is the mix between the residential component and the commercial component. The developers may say that the present mix is no longer commercially viable and that they want to extend the commercial component at the expense of the residential component.

Another element about which they may come to the Government may be the open space or green area, including the so-called little Venice or water canal system. They may say that that space is required for commercial development to make the project commercially viable. If the Government accedes to these requests and attempts to change the agreement that is already enshrined in legislation, it will be letting down the people in that area, because to do any of those things will put further pressures on an already fragile environment. One wonders how much consideration the Government has for these urban residential areas. One may wonder whether the Government is intent upon undermining or destroying some of the urban residential areas that are predominantly middle class. These are factors that will be carefully monitored by the Liberal Party and the City of Prahran to ensure that pressure is not placed upon those communities.

It is important to examine the situation in the broadest possible context and to realise that a pattern has developed with these projects, the Melbourne Central Project, the convention centre project and now the South Yarra project. In each case a great fanfare of public relations activity took place; the Government puts its flag to the flagpole of the project; and the Premier was photographed at the project—all giving the impression that the projects symbolise the success of the Government’s so-called economic strategy, yet in no time at all each project gets into trouble.

The reason these projects get into trouble—despite the government assertions that it was creating an environment in Victoria which gives incentives and encouragement to private enterprise and development—is because of the disastrous and costly industrial relations situation that beset these projects and the overall level of taxes and charges in the community. These are examples that give the lie to the public relations exercise that the Government has engaged in at great expense to the taxpayers.
It is shameful that a small army of people are engaged in the indoctrination of the people of Victoria at great expense to the taxpayer, with hundreds of thousands of dollars being spent on advertisements. This money could be spent to assist the people who are in real need.

Having referred to that specific project, which is an example of the problems which beset Victoria and its community, I shall now move to some general points.

There are massive changes under way in Victoria in a political, economic and industrial sense. In political terms, the people of Victoria have decided—I believe this comes up time and again—that the long arm of the State apparatus has advanced far enough into their lives and they are looking to a drawing back of that State apparatus.

This is evidenced in the world generally and in Australia and is, I believe, one of the reasons behind the extraordinary degree of instability and change on the political scene. This is certainly evident in Victoria.

People have realised that the State apparatus is not worth what they have to pay for it. They want a reduction in the financial demands of the State and they want the ability to be able to spend more of their money in the way they see fit instead of in the way that the Government sees fit. Because of excessive expenditure and borrowing, the Cain Government has placed a terrible millstone of debt around the necks of each Victorian.

Victoria has the largest public debt of any State in Australia. It is at least $20 million or approximately $5000 for every Victorian. A large proportion of each dollar of revenue that is collected by the Victorian Government each year must now be used to service this huge debt. The total annual cost of servicing this debt is at least $2 million or approximately $500 for each Victorian.

Consequently, the amount of revenue available to provide essential State services is dwindling. The drop in real spending on public hospitals is an example of this. Hospital waiting lists are rapidly increasing from 8400 at 30 June 1982 to in excess of 30 000 today.

At the same time there has been a massive administrative mismanagement of the Victorian public sector, especially in the areas of transport, health and education. This has been characterised by massive increases in administrative structures and costs.

For example, health administration has grown rapidly but the public hospitals have been starved for funds. Huge new administrative levels have been imposed upon the public transport system but train maintenance is so neglected that there is a real risk now that the wheels will fall off the trains.

The constant reorganisation of the Ministry of Education has resulted in confusion and uncertainty and the duplication of bureaucratic structures while students are not being taught vital subjects such as science and maths because of a lack of teachers.

The people of Victoria now realise that they can no longer afford this degree of waste and mismanagement in the public sector and they realise there must be a better way of doing things. In addition to the changes that are occurring in political and economic terms, massive and dramatic changes are occurring in industry in Victoria.

The main driving force in these industrial changes is the introduction of the microprocessor, which has given a new flexibility to industry. It has given a small enterprise the power of a large enterprise. In other words, a microprocessor has made it possible for small firms to do the things that in the past only large firms would do using large volume and economies of scale.

Sadly, there has been a decline in the manufacturing industry in Victoria. There has been a net loss of 417 manufacturing establishments and more than 36 000 manufacturing jobs under the Cain Government.
When one visits industry, as I do constantly—I try to visit approximately three industrial firms a week—one sees a variety of situations. Many older, mature industries are in difficulty; many are dominated by trade union officials and many are shutting their doors.

I visited the Werribee industrial area and the Laverton North industrial area on Monday of this week and a number of firms there are in deep trouble. One firm has shut its doors and another firm is shutting its doors in a few days time with a loss of approximately 30 jobs.

Mr Cathie—What about high technology?

Mr Hayward—I am moving to the high technology situation. The important thing about microprocessors is that it enables innovation and creativity, which can spark a renaissance in Victorian industry. The important thing about microprocessors is that it places a premium on entrepreneurship and individual effort. It has created a hunger for technological knowledge and skills. This rebirth, which is possible in Victorian industry, will manifest itself not only in high technology industries, such as biotechnology, but often in the traditional mature industries that use new technology to improve their products so that they can be more competitive.

In other words, we should realise that high technology can be used not only in these new rather way-out type industries—although they are important and can provide much work for the future—but also new technology, especially the microprocessor can be used to give more flexibility to the mature industries enabling them to produce high quality products at a competitive rate but in relatively small volume.

Recently I have seen a mixture of the more advanced high technology industries and the mature industries. The mature industries which used the microprocessors have shown they have the capacity to be competitive. To flourish, this new spirit of enterprise needs an environment which has various elements. Firstly, it must be an environment which is free; in other words, unfettered by intrusive Government. It must be in an environment in which competition is not distorted by Government intervention. It must have a low cost environment and not one in which Government taxes, charges and administrative requirements add to business costs.

Mr Cathie interjected.

Mr Hayward—This Government is the highest taxing Government in Australia! Victoria has the highest rate of taxes and charges on industry of any State. The level of taxes and charges is doing a great deal of harm to Victorian industry. If the Minister for Education does not agree, I shall provide him with a list of the firms in Werribee that I visited on Monday. I would suggest to the Minister that he visit those firms in Werribee next week, especially the firm which says that it will close because it cannot afford the Victorian Government's taxes and charges.

In this new era for Victorian industry the policies of the Victorian Labor Government are at best irrelevant and at worst counterproductive. The Victorian Labor Government is intrusive: is it poking its fingers into industry trying to push industrial development one way or another and its intrusion is often counter productive—as though bureaucrats with their theoretical economic strategies know better than business people!

In the business situation the Government creates uncertainties by fiddling around at the margin and favouring some firms over others with equity participation or loans, guarantees or grants and thus distorting the competitive situation. Victorian industry faces some of the highest levels of Government charges in any State and the Government's so-called reforms are amongst the most costly.

Many firms now describe the administrative burdens associated with WorkCare as a nightmare. Some relatively small firms say that they have to employ one extra person just to handle the WorkCare paperwork. All firms ask: once a person gets on WorkCare how does one ever get that person off it?
WorkCare has provided a great incentive for people not to seek rehabilitation and to stay away from work, for the simple reason that they are financially better off by staying away from work. People shop around until they find a doctor who will sign a certificate. Employers must continue to make up pay and oncosts while these people are off work.

Some of these people are off work for months or years. The firm in Werribee that I hope the Minister will visit next week has had people on its books off work for months and years and it is still paying out. It is one of the reasons why this firm is about to close its doors. The tragedy of the so-called “reform” is that it is harming the people whom it is supposed to help, that is, the workers.

The tragedy of the Government’s policies is that they are aimed at helping the workers, but the end result is that the policies harm the workers. Firms are not employing new workers because they cannot afford these burdens. Many firms have found that it is not worth the effort to try to keep going in Victoria.

For many people WorkCare has become another form of social service with many more advantages than unemployment benefits. These people prefer to be on WorkCare than to be on unemployment benefits.

The arrangements for rehabilitation are a disaster, and people in need of treatment have to wait months for the paperwork to be processed. There is little incentive for rehabilitation. WorkCare will ultimately be seen as one of the greatest blights that the Labor Party has imposed upon Victorian industry and one of the greatest harms it has inflicted upon employment.

The Government talks about creating jobs. The Government cannot create jobs unless it employs more public servants!

Mr Cathie—The Government can create the climate for growth.

Mr Hayward—The Government has created a climate that is destructive of business and jobs because of the high level of Government charges. Another destructive element is interest charges. Victorian business will never grow unless interest charges fall. They are one of the major disadvantages to business growth.

It is essential that the community adopt a fresh approach to the Government because of the major problems that Victorian industry faces. It is essential that the community realise that Government policies are at best irrelevant and at worst counterproductive and destructive to business growth in Victoria.

One of the main problems facing Victorian industry is the way the Victorian Labor Government is under the sway of trade union officials. It is well known that trade union officials have a dominant say in the formulation of the Government’s policies. Few Labor Party members of Parliament, indeed, Ministers, would deny that.

I do not want to be critical of trade union officials. I worked well with trade union officials during the time I spent in industry and I recall some of those relationships with great warmth and satisfaction.

The trouble is that trade union officials have a reactionary influence, which can hinder the new type of industrial growth and opportunities. The reason is that many of the new firms are small and operate in a very flexible manner. Often the workers in these firms are co-owners or at least shareholders.

Often the working arrangements are highly flexible with people working under a contract in a manner which suits their own convenience and that of the firm. Sometimes they work at home. In these situations trade unions have little relevance and the trade union officials become anxious that their authority and influence in industry may diminish. They therefore exert influence on the Victorian Government and try to enact legislation, regulations and administrative measures to reinforce the old concepts of conventional employment.
This can be direct, such as the attempt to force owner-drivers to adopt the status of employees and thus join a union, or it can be insidious whereby a firm will not be awarded a Government contract unless all the workers involved in the contract have employee status and are members of a union.

The close organisational links between the Labor Party and trade union officials, which I know no Labor Party member will deny, will act as a hindrance or as a brake on the ability of Victorian firms to make the most of the new opportunities ahead.

Another problem is that trade union officials sometimes act as a barrier to close and full relationships between a firm and its workers.

The next advances in creativity, innovation, productivity and quality will derive not so much from technology as from improved worker attitudes resulting from improved relationships in the workplace, including good two-way communications.

These improved relationships and communications must be two way between the firm and the workers; not three way between the firm, the trade union officials and the workers, with the trade union officials acting as intermediaries and, in some instances, as a screen. This makes the role of trade union officials again less relevant and sometimes counter productive.

Yet, through its industrial health and safety legislation and other indirect and sometimes insidious means the Victorian Labor Government has sought, time after time, to ensure that trade union officials are able to exert a disproportionate and inappropriate amount of influence in the workplace.

There is an historic change under way in Victoria, which will inevitably sweep the Government from office at the next State election.

The tragedy is that the legacy of the mismanagement, and, in particular, the huge public sector debt, will linger on. A major change will be required in the role of Government and in the way it operates to bring the State back to financial viability. The vital challenge to the next Victorian Liberal Government—

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr SEITZ (Keilor)—It gives me great pleasure to support the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech. On behalf of the electorate I represent, I wish his Excellency the Governor all the best for the future.

When I was elected to represent the electorate of Keilor in 1982, people were in a state of despair as a result of 27 years of Liberal Government rule. The former Liberal Government made promises, which it never kept. The actual delivery of goods never eventuated. Today, however, that attitude has changed. People are now believing in Government policy and seeing the results in their electorates. Because of the Cain Government's policy of community consultation, people are becoming increasingly involved in planning the future of their lives and their environment and there are many examples of this in the electorate of Keilor. The people can see, in bricks and mortar, the initiatives taken by the Government.

The Minister for Education has improved school facilities in the area. For years school councils and parents have seen only slight improvements but now improvements have been made especially to the health facilities in schools. There has been a total upgrading of cyclic maintenance, resulting in the refurbishing of toilet blocks and areas in which the teachers work. The people believe in Government policies and can see the results of them.

It took quite some time for the sceptics to see what the Cain Government policies were all about. In Broadmeadows, it took a year or so to sort out the proposals and consultations for a community health centre. Now, however, it is a fully operational service whereas before it was a little crowded hut. The people there now have air-conditioning, modern
facilities and all the necessary equipment. It is a further example of Government and
community participation and development.

The TAFE college is open and running in that area also. The previous Minister of
Education announced proposals for an institute for the west of Melbourne and, once
again, the disbelievers said it would not happen, but an institute was formed in the short
period of two years. That is a record for any Government Minister and I congratulate the
Minister on that achievement.

The Minister for Education gave that project priority because he believed, in developing
the plan for the institution, that many people would benefit from it. After difficult
negotiations involving the Federal and State Governments on the issue, 100 student places
were provided by the State Government and 200 were provided by the Federal
Government. The college commenced operating at the beginning of this school year and
it was a record for any Government—to establish a major educational institute when the
plans were not announced publicly until 1985. The project proceeded, despite Federal and
State economic constraints.

All of the places in the institute have been filled, and this demonstrates the need for
educational facilities in the area.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr SEITZ—I do not require an audience, so the honourable member for Malvern can
leave if he wishes.

A neighbourhood study was conducted on bus transport. No such transport previously
existed. The improvement in the transport services within the new estates is amazing and
the bus services are continuing to expand as new vehicles come on line. Once again, that
process is showing the positive attitudes and hope that is building up in the young people
in the area.

Previously, young people adopted the attitude that education, and particularly higher
school qualifications, were not important because they would not be able to find jobs.
Now, young people are starting to realise that if they obtain degrees or diplomas or some
form of qualification, jobs will be created for them.

The Minister for Labour wrote personally to the school leavers in the electorate I
represent asking them whether they wished to go into apprenticeships or undertake some
other form of education. He showed a personal interest in our young people. That is the
sort of commitment held by the Cain Government.

In his Speech, the Governor said that we are planning and developing in numerous
areas for a healthy economic environment in the State. The Opposition is trying to destroy
this position, and that is not to its credit because Victoria needs to be developed and need
an environment that is economically healthy. Private enterprise needs to be encouraged
in the State.

Improvements have been made and are continuing to be made within the Police Force.
I have received numerous representations regarding the need for extra helicopters in the
Police Force. Once again, that has come true. Two extra twin engine helicopters have been
provided under the Cain Labor Government and now the Police Force has increased its
manpower and also had its services and conditions improved.

Police officers in St Albans were operating in prefabricated buildings. They are now
moving into air-conditioned offices, making their working environment more comfortable.
When I visited the police station last summer, I asked the officers there how they had
managed to work under those conditions for so many years; and, of course, we will not
mention the mistake made under the previous regime of building the St Albans police
station in St Arnaud instead of St Albans where it was supposed to be.

The Cain Government has now purchased new land to establish a decent police facility
within that community. The Police have done an excellent job with the Neighbourhood
Watch scheme and also with youth education and the community policing program in the
Keilor electorate.

The public facilities in Broadmeadows are a showpiece. The Broadmeadows railway
station is of an excellent standard and we shall no doubt see an upgrading of all railway
station facilities so that they are comparable with those at the Broadmeadows railway station.

The facilities at the Broadmeadows Magistrates Court were in an appalling mess. The legal fraternity and members of the public were working in extremely bad conditions. The facilities have now been improved not only for the magistrate, the clerk of courts and the police but also for the community. There are now private interview rooms for lawyers and their clients, with the opportunity of free legal aid to assist the community.

These initiatives have demonstrated that Labor Party policies are not rhetoric; they are put into effect and the community can see the results. The results of Government and community consultation are encouraging and make me proud to be a member of the Cain Labor Government.

An increase in public housing stock is absolutely essential and is taking place. Initially, there was no public housing in Keilor but that trend has been reversed and the Ministry of Housing is now developing accommodation in this area where it is desperately needed. This is important to the people who are now able to stay with the family network, leave their children in the same schools and remain with their friends rather than being isolated in different locations.

The last point on which I wish to comment is the issue of what I call the "forgotten triangle". The forgotten triangle of my electorate is in the area of the Tullamarine and Essendon airports. The House should appreciate what I call the forgotten triangle. The previous Government forgot about the residents of that area and in the end the Federal Government built an airport there, but community services have not been considered.

Mr Leigh interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! The honourable member for Malvern is out of his place and is disorderly.

Mr SEITZ—The unfortunate part about the forgotten triangle is that it is the border of three municipalities, namely, the Shire of Bulla, and the cities of Broadmeadows and Keilor. In that part of my electorate there is a pocket where waste is dumped by Brambles Liquid Waste Disposals. The people of the community approached me to assist them in trying to remove that noxious industry from their area. There has been a long campaign to close the area.

The Government has taken up with the Minister for Planning and Environment the issue of having the industrial liquid waste dump removed. As soon as the Government indicated that the Brambles group would have to improve its operation, build a better plant and have consideration for the residents it pulled out because it did not wish to replace equipment or invest in new plant.

The Brambles company was aware that the Environment Protection Authority permit would not be extended because of the feeling amongst local residents and the indication of the Government in the proposed legislation that it has introduced which prohibits such a noxious industry close to a residential area. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works has opened a temporary plant in the area and is leasing the land from Brambles until it has the opportunity of developing a permanent site and plant.

There is a community consultative committee, and that committee is very sceptical. It refused the application when it was ignored by Brambles, and the community has joined with an advisory committee of the Board of Works, which includes the three municipalities plus a progress association. Representatives from the surrounding municipalities are also on that committee and they are looking not only at the operation of the tip site and the chemical waste area but also at the area surrounding the airports. There is a planning statement about how the land will be reinstated once the Board of Works moves out and the Brambles permit expires.

The Governor mentioned in his Speech the consciousness of the Minister for Planning and Environment that the people will have his support in the reinstatement of that land.
We are conscious, in developing the land, not only about restocking it for flora and fauna but also in other areas. The land has been desecrated but it has the potential of being an asset to the area that is close to the heart of Melbourne.

With the development of the proposed Gellibrand Hill National Park and other tourist attractions it would be only a 20-minute or half-hour's drive to the City of Melbourne. I am confident that in the years to come there will be some progress in developing those areas. This will overcome some of the old legacies to the satisfaction of the community. It is something that I, as a member of the Cain Government, will be proud to be part of.

The Victorian electorate has a stable Government. There has been a history of opposition parties in disarray, but this Government is one of cooperation within the community in meeting the needs of the area. We have very few protests outside Parliament House. In years gone by with the Liberal Government there were many protests. The Victorian community as a whole feels that it is part of this Government and that people have a say in the development of the State through the consultative processes.

The previous speaker spoke about trade union bosses having an influence on Ministers. We operate as a Government with the community, and that community has a say and an interest in any project or development. People are consulted and involved. That means when policies are made the community is considered. With that sort of process we will be here for a long time on this side of the House.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! The honourable member for Frankston South is out of his place. Is there a particular reason for that?

Mr WEIDEMAN (Frankston South)—If it is a question of my position, I point out that I am a former Minister and Executive Councillor; this is an Address-in-Reply debate and I request the indulgence of the Chair to make my remarks from the table. In my representation of the Governor and the position I hold, and being bound by his direction without summons, I request that this indulgence be granted.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—Certainly the Government has no objection to the proposed stand by the member for Frankston South.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—I accept the position that the honourable member for Frankston South seeks. It would seem to me that, if the honourable member does exercise that position, the Opposition should seat him on the front bench rather than on the back bench.

Mr WEIDEMAN (Frankston South)—Mr Acting Speaker, thank you for your confidence. I will take it up with my colleagues in the near future.

In reply to the Governor's Speech at the opening of Parliament, the constituents of Frankston South pledge loyalty to the Governor as the representative of the Queen and the Crown in this State.

In the debate so far Government members have taken the opportunity of criticising members of the Opposition for their contributions to the debate and the way they have approached it. It surprises me that, with their republican and socialist attitudes, they would even raise the issue. Those who attended the Governor's home at his request—and I was honoured to be there as a former Executive Councillor—I noticed that there were more Opposition members than Government members. In my electorate two members attended another function and commented that we were drinking champagne at our leisure and at the Governor's pleasure.

Honourable members opposite have said that the opening of the second session of the Fiftieth Parliament was a magnificent day. However, the ceremony did not attract the crowds of other Parliamentary openings. Queen's Hall had some empty seats and so did the Chamber. Perhaps some of the invitees decided not to attend.

Mr Norris—Why?
Mr WEIDEMAN—The Government must have invited the wrong people who did not wish to hear what the Governor said. My constituents took the opportunity of accepting my invitation to be present.

Mr Norris interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! The honourable member for Dandenong is out of order. He is carrying on a conversation with the honourable member for Frankston South that he should continue in the corridors.

Mr WEIDEMAN—This criticism of the Opposition is hypocritical because its members attended the ceremonies at Parliament House on Tuesday and at Government House on the Monday evening.

I was informed that at the opening of this session of Parliament a dear old lady walked up the steps of Parliament House and inquired about the ceremony. She asked whether somebody had died. She was told, “Yes, the Government has died”.

The Governor's Speech does not refer to major issues facing the State. The Budget Papers for 1986–87 refer to the two largest areas of expenditure: education and health. However, the address of the Governor refers to six or seven minor areas of importance. One wonders what the Government will do in this short sessional period.

Honourable members opposite have referred to employment ad nauseam. The honourable member for Werribee referred to truth. The honourable member for Niddrie talked about leadership. Let us have some truth and leadership!

When the Government came to office in 1982 some 96 000 people were unemployed in this State, and that represented the lowest percentage in Australia. When the Liberal Party was in government, its members stood up in this Chamber and said that Victoria had the lowest or second lowest percentage of unemployed in Australia. The Government continues to claim that it has had the lowest unemployment rate for the past 44 months. Victoria has always had the lowest or second lowest employment rate. However, since 1981–82 an additional 50 000 people have become unemployed.

Miss Callister interjected.

Mr WEIDEMAN—That has nothing to do with the figures. The honourable member should tell that to the 150 000 people who cannot obtain jobs. This is a democratic society and both sides of the political spectrum should have the opportunity of governing this State.

What a magnificent opportunity the Cain Labor Government had. When it took office Victoria had the lowest unemployment in the country. It convinced Victorians that the State had a massive debt. There was supposed to have been a $395 million deficit but after the Labor Party gained office that soon became a $6·8 million surplus. If the Government was that good, it should have saved another $400 million in the next financial year, but it did not.

The Labor Government had $6·8 million in the till, the lowest unemployment in Australia and tremendous economic development in the city. Melbourne had more cranes on building sites than any other city in Australia. Every Government authority had reserves—which were referred to as “the barrel” or the “hollow log”.

Mr Sidiropoulos interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! The honourable member for Richmond is consistently interjecting. I shall put his name on the list of speakers if he wants to make a contribution.

Mr WEIDEMAN—Thank you for your protection, Mr Acting Speaker. In 1982 the then Minister of Health, Mr Tom Roper, said that Victoria had the best health system in Australia. Now he is Minister for Transport and the wheels have fallen off the health
system. The State debt is now thousands of million of dollars. The honourable member for Ringwood stated in her contribution to the debate that WorkCare had saved the business community $500 million. If she believes that, she is a fool.

Some 80 or 90 per cent of workers compensation claims were taken from the private sector and placed into the public sector. The honourable member is referring to only 10 per cent of all claims. How can she say that the business community will profit by $500 million? That is nonsense. If the Government believes transferring the responsibility from one area to another will save money, it should go back to the drawing board and do its homework.

The honourable member for Bellarine interjects that the Government has led the way in the health field. The only way it is heading is downwards. Since 1981–82 a significant amount of money has been spent on health but what services have been provided? More than 200 000 fewer patients have been treated and some 1600 hospital beds have been closed. It is a joke for the Government to say that it has led the way in health.

I now turn to the State's electricity supply. In 1981 the Liberal Government through the State Electricity Commission had an ongoing maintenance program. The commission had funds and was a vibrant authority. Now no money is being spent on maintenance. If anything breaks down at the commission, nothing is done. Recently two transformers broke down and some $180 000 is required to replace them. It is ridiculous that the commission has no money.

Mr Smith, the Chief General Manager of the State Electricity Commission, has made big cuts and no maintenance has occurred in some metropolitan areas for six months. The Dandenong depot requires seventeen linesmen but it has not been able to place people in those jobs, yet it recently employed a nursing sister and put her in a little office to look after the health of the seventeen linesmen who are unable to be employed. I am certain that one more linesman would be better than a nursing sister in that area. The power supply will soon come to a halt. It is necessary to have an ongoing maintenance program to prevent enormous capital outlays.

Mr Norris interjected.

Mr WEIDEMAN—I fail to see why honourable members opposite find this funny. There are plenty of people on WorkCare benefits but the commission is unable to employ linesmen where they are needed.

Members of the Government spoke about leadership and broken promises. I now refer the House to broken promises made by Government leaders.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! The honourable member for Coburg has regularly been protected by the Chair, and the Chair now has to protect the honourable member for Frankston South. I ask the honourable member for Coburg to cease interjecting.

Mr WEIDEMAN—In recent days, members of the Government have been acting like jackals and have been keen to point out matters of leadership and promises. I want to know how they feel when the Premier makes mendacious statements, such as:

I am committing this Government to cut the waiting lists in half by the end of 1985. Undue waiting lists for elective surgery in public hospitals will be a thing of the past.

The Premier made that promise on 11 February 1985 in a policy speech. The Government has cut the waiting lists—it has cut them in half and then doubled them. Instead of cutting them by 50 per cent, the Government has increased them by 180 per cent. When the Labor Party came into power, the waiting list was 8000; it is now approximately 34 000. That figure represents people who are in pain and who need assistance. There are really 40 000 people on the waiting list.

Mr Gavin—Prove it!
Mr WEIDEMAN—The list for ordinary elective surgery is 34,000. However, day hospitals also have long waiting lists. For example, the Frankston Hospital has a waiting list of 350—people waiting for minor surgery, such as examination procedures and operations for ingrowing toenails. The long waiting lists in day hospitals were not helped by the nurses' strike. There are approximately 200 day hospitals in Victoria, therefore, the waiting list is approximately 40,000.

In 1985, the Premier also stated:

To reduce delays in major surgery, the Government has made an unprecedented move—public hospitals will enter into contracts with private hospitals to allow public hospital patients to be treated at private hospitals and remain covered by Medicare. The cost of this program will be around $1 million this financial year.

That has not happened. On average on any day, there are approximately 1000 empty beds in private hospitals.

On 8 May 1985, the Minister for Health stated:

On July 8th, 1985, we will announce projections for waiting list reductions as well as for the number of operations to be carried out. This will give patients a much greater degree of certainty about their operations and allow them to plan accordingly.

The truth is that more than 1500 beds in 15 major public hospitals are closed due to the shortfall in nursing staff and funding.

The Frankston Hospital, which is in the electorate I represent, has 1000 people on the waiting list. I made that known during the last State election campaign in 1985 and the then Minister for Health, the present Minister for Transport, really turned it on and called me a liar for exaggerating the figures. However, Frankston Hospital has 1000 people on the waiting list and 350 people on the day waiting list. Those figures refer only to elective surgery.

Frankston Hospital has one theatre and each surgeon is allowed a list of three in the different sessions each week. If, during the weekend, a road trauma occurs or a person who is on the waiting list and whose condition has become more acute presents himself at the casualty ward, that person will be admitted. Obviously, the more popular surgeons find that their lists must be reduced. Someone needing a bowel operation would obviously be No. 1 on a list whereas someone with a hernia would be No. 3 on a list.

I know of a 75-year-old gentleman who has presented himself to Frankston Hospital on four occasions—in October, November, January and March. On each of those occasions, he was told that he cannot have his operation. What advice does one give in that case? Does one advise the gentleman to go back to his general practitioner and ask for his surgeon to be changed to one with lesser skills or does one advise him to go into a private hospital that will cost $300 a day? Does one say, "The smart thing to do is to go home and pretend that you are sicker than what you really are and then go to the casualty ward and put on a performance. In that way, you will be admitted"?

The honourable member for Benalla referred to problems in country hospitals. I shall refer to major city hospitals. The waiting list at the Royal Melbourne Hospital is 3236 and 80 of its acute beds are closed; the Alfred Hospital has a waiting list of 3281 with 138 beds closed; and Prince Henry's Hospital has a waiting list of 1213 with 90 beds closed.

The Opposition agrees that the nurses' strike damaged the health system, but the dispute should not have been allowed to continue for 50 days. An enormous amount of work needs to be done. The Government allocated an additional $54 million for nurses' wages and now a further $50 million has been granted.

I shall now refer to the elderly. The honourable member for Glen Waverley highlighted the problems with geriatric services in Victoria. Many elderly people who require nursing care end up in public hospitals. There is a staggering number of people waiting to get into nursing accommodation. The waiting list numbers approximately 2200.
The Liberal Party has issued a statement, which I hope the Government has examined, referring to the problems in public hospitals from 1982 to the present. If one examines the figures, it appears that more money has been spent, but it has been spent on administration. Years ago, administration costs comprised approximately 5 per cent of the total cost of running a hospital. Now, with the use of computers and the appointment of assistants and additional administrative positions, the cost component for administration has increased to 15 per cent of the total cost of running a hospital. As a result, the State is now spending some $2200 million on health in this State, but the health system has treated 26 000 fewer surgical patients since 1982; 17 000 fewer in-patients; and 151 000 fewer out-patients.

In all its statements on health, the Government has made great play of the fact that it has increased spending in an attempt to hide or obscure the truth; that is, there are fewer services.

The Government had a great opportunity in 1982 to improve the system, but instead it created a monolith of 20 000 or 30 000 additional middle-management bureaucrats; and yet Victorians are receiving fewer services in the areas of health, education and so on. More money is being spent, but fewer services are being provided. The Government has certainly fouled up the great opportunity it had in 1982. Any economic analysis would demonstrate that fact.

Every mental health institution in Victoria lacks a senior administrator. I received a letter from the parents of a young man—a schizophrenic—who is in Pentridge Prison on a very serious charge. The saddening part of that case is that no real service is being provided to him.

For those who may not know about schizophrenia, it is a mental disease which is very difficult to treat. At this stage, there is no cure, and the only way in which it can be controlled is by the use of drugs. It is not like epilepsy, in which case a person is assured of getting through the rest of his life by taking some sort of medication, but research is being carried out on schizophrenia.

In many of these institutions people find themselves without the assistance of psychiatrists, especially in the major areas where perhaps 11 of the 26 senior positions remain unfilled. Therefore, they are really being left to rot, particularly in the case of this young man in Pentridge, who has been moved from one gaol to another because of his fits of rage and his quick changes in attitude. He is not receiving adequate treatment. If he is to have any hope of readjusting and being returned into the community, and his illness being controlled, vast improvements must take place in the mental health area.

To date, no Government has had a proud record in the mental health field. I know the present Government has conducted a review in recent times and, to its credit, has made some inroads, but there is a long way to go.

Prior to 1972 our hospitals were somewhat better managed, and there was certainly a different approach to management. It involved volunteers, and more doctors. Now, sessional payments are involved. Hospitals are very much places of excellence and harmonious cooperation between the health and mental care fields and administrations.

With the requirement for everything to be paid for as a result of that transition, enormous problems have been created in the administration of hospitals. I am sure everyone would agree that each hospital is like a little city within a city; therefore, almost every function that exists outside is duplicated within the hospital.

If the functions are not reviewed and a better way of managing hospitals is not found, the situation will worsen. All that has occurred so far is the provision of fewer services, and an increase in the total management of those institutions.

When the Labor Government came to power, the then Minister of Health—the present Minister for Transport—created enormous problems for the hospital boards of management
by introducing the political appointment approach, with which he did not persevere because of the poorer performances that resulted.

The Minister introduced across the board—not in specific areas—the requirement for a 1·5 per cent saving to be achieved by each institution. That created enormous problems. It is amazing that the Government paid the boards of management according to the amount they spent rather than what they saved. They were paid according to their budget and how much they spent.

There should be a system of global budgeting, which would give someone the opportunity of examining the general management approach to these matters and cutting back in certain areas, when necessary. In other words, one might get some benefit as a result of what one saves.

Often boards of management have realised that they have overspent by, say, $500 000 and that they must cut back on spending by December in the area of surgery, or by the closure of one of the wards or theatres; but, at the end of the meeting, the members have said, "We have five other accounts, one of which is $89 000 which must be spent by May. We cannot transfer that money to another account; therefore, we will spend it on putting bitumen on the car park, or spend it on lights".

The Government had a tremendous opportunity of creating a better management environment in the hospitals area. Like every other Government, it believes that it can just throw money at the problem and it will go away. Therefore, it has bulged out that middle-management area. Bureaucrats and consultants are walking around everywhere and giving advice. That area should be examined.

One has only to examine the recent figures relating to the private health system to realise that insurance has plummeted from 72 per cent to 53 per cent.

When the Government came to office in 1981–82, the Minister for Health told Victorians that they had the best health system. However, more money is now being spent on fewer services. The situation is similar to that in the railways: the wheels have completely fallen off.

In his Speech, the Governor made the comment about riding on the sheep's back. I believe the sheep is dead—that is, Victoria—and what we have now is a bit flyblown and all the maggots are living off the fat of the sheep. We must get that sheep back on its feet and get it running. The Government has had its chance, and I believe it should do something now.

On the motion of Mrs GLEESON (Thomastown), the debate was adjourned.

It was ordered that the debate be adjourned until next day.

ADJOURNMENT

Office of Director of Public Prosecutions—Sports assemblies—Region 8 diabetes education and control program—Country Fire Authority—Promotion Appeal Board—Overcrowding on school buses—Greek-Australian conference—Estate agents' commissions

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

Mr WILLIAMS (Doncaster)—I direct a matter to the attention of the Premier. I regret that he is not in the Chamber—someone should inform him that the debate on the motion for the adjournment of the sitting usually takes place at 5 p.m. on Thursdays.

I refer the Premier to his responsibilities to ensure that the Public Service Act is properly administered, particularly section 15, which states that officers and employees should be used efficiently and effectively; given proper training; protected against arbitrary action,
personal favouritism and coercion; and required to maintain proper standards of integrity, conduct and concern for the public interest.

I am most concerned that one of my constituents, Mr Philip Alfred Barry Guy, has made very serious allegations to me about his dissatisfaction with the actions of the Director of Public Prosecutions who, I understand, is Mr John Coldrey. Mr Guy is an experienced Crown law officer with an unblemished record that spans fourteen years. He believes his services are not being used efficiently and effectively, as required by the Public Service Act.

Mr Guy has not been offered the opportunity of counselling education and training to assist him to perform better, if it is alleged that he is not performing favourably in the eyes of his superiors.

Mr Guy believes he has been the subject of arbitrary action and even victimised without justification. People I know and respect speak highly of Mr Guy. His family is actively engaged in one of my local churches and they all speak highly of him.

So far as I can ascertain, Mr Guy's only sin is that he complained in writing to his chief, Mr John Coldrey, about the conduct of a drug addict who was employed in his section and was subsequently sacked. I understand that this man was not a permanent public servant but employed under a work experience scheme.

If it is a fact that Mr Guy made himself unpopular with his superiors because of this action, it is disgraceful that he should be so victimised. I understand also that someone was given a superior posting that he felt—from his experience and in other ways—should have been given to him. When he expressed his displeasure at not being appointed to the position he decided to appeal. He appealed at all levels and even to the Ombudsman but he got nowhere.

Mr Guy is a clerical officer and the ultimate insult was that he was offered a downgraded posting as a storeman. There is something wrong with the administration in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

It is a tragedy that I have to raise this matter in this place and allege that Victoria's Director of Public Prosecutions either is breaking the law or not properly administering the Public Service Act. I ask every Government party member particularly those in the Ministry, to read section 15 of the Public Service Act.

If the allegation that Mr Guy has made to me is correct, it is clear the senior prosecutions officer in this State has broken the law and has not properly administered section 15 of the Act. I want the matter investigated.

Mr Guy told me that he was prepared to have his file tabled in the Parliamentary Library, which is an indication of how little he has to fear. Mr Guy and I would be happy if the Premier did so because it would give the people of Victoria the opportunity of deciding the justness of the situation. My constituent has been treated unjustly by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr W. D. McGRATH (Lowan)—The matter I direct to the attention of the Minister for Sport and Recreation relates to the possibility of employing consultants to examine State sports assemblies. The Government established sports assemblies to advise the State Sports and Recreation Council on policy developments in sport. That system has taken a while to get off the ground but, nevertheless, it is working well in a number of country and metropolitan areas.

The Wimmera Sports Assembly is doing well in policy development and the promotion of sport. Last Thursday at a sportsman's night held at Horsham, nineteen different sports personalities from the Wimmera district received awards for their contributions to sport, and from them a male and female sports personality for 1986 was selected. Miss Kerry Tepper, the No. 1 table tennis player in the State won the sportswoman of the year and
Mr Kevin Maggee won the sportsman of the year for his achievements in motorcycle racing.

Mr Maggee would rank at the top in motorcycle and speedway sports in Australia. I wonder about the wisdom of the Minister for Sport and Recreation enlisting consultants to examine sports assemblies—if that is what he intends to do—because consultancy fees would probably be of the order of $30 000 for an evaluation of existing sports assemblies.

Existing sports assemblies are only now getting their acts together. They do not need an evaluation at this time. If the Minister for Sport and Recreation has $30 000 to spend, he should use it to establish or encourage other regions to establish sports assemblies so that a coordinated sports policy for both metropolitan and country Victoria could be presented to the State Sports Council.

I understand the Minister does seek advice from that council about sports promotion and policy development. That idea was supported by all parties when the matter was discussed in Parliament. To spend $30 000 on a feasibility study into existing sports assemblies would be a pure waste of money.

Mr NORRIS (Dandenong)—I refer the Minister for Water Resources, as the representative of the Minister for Health in another place, to the region 8 diabetes education and control program that was initiated in 1984 by the previous Minister of Health, the current Minister for Transport. That magnificent initiative has proved to be an enormous success. It is a unique program because it emphasises education and self-care techniques for diabetics.

I congratulate Lions International for providing the magnificently equipped caravan for use in the program. Also involved in the program were the International Diabetics Institute and the Doveton–Hallam Community Health Centre. The Government provided generous funding for the three-year pilot program, the aim of which was to test the health and cost benefits of a program to improve knowledge and self-care skills among people with diabetes.

The funding for the three-year program runs out in May. This is of concern not only to my constituents and constituents in other areas but also to the residents in region 8. I have received personal representations, deputations—you name it—from people who have benefited from the program. They are anxious that the benefits flow to other sufferers or potential sufferers.

I say potential sufferers because the statistics for diabetic sufferers show that a staggering number of 330,000 Australians are currently suffering from this disease. It is the fifth largest cause of death in this country. It leads to many other health problems: heart disease, strokes, blindness and circulatory problems, to name just a few. One in 50 Australians suffers from this debilitating disease and the cost to the country is an enormous $1200 million.

Diabetes is not just a debilitating disease for some people in our community, it is also a disease that affects many of our fellow countrymen and women. Of the 330,000 sufferers, 66,000 are completely dependent on insulin and 42,000 new cases are detected each year.

The wonderful aspect of this unique program in region 8 is the fact that it decreased the number of admissions of diabetes sufferers to hospitals. The total length of stay in hospitals was decreased and the cost of caring was significantly reduced. Benefits from the program have flowed to the community and not just to the sufferers themselves, who, of course, are our prime concern.

I had great pleasure in helping to publicise the campaign, which was run magnificently and headed by a world authority in diabetes, Professor Zimmet from the Southern Memorial Hospital.

I urge the Minister to ensure that funding is continued for the program and, if possible, extended. It is a project that Victorians and the Government can be proud of and it is positive and welcomed by diabetes sufferers. The program is unique. It does not cost much
money and the community has received great value from it. I also mention the significant contribution of Lions International in assisting the project.

**Mr CROZIER** (Portland)—I refer for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services the press statement in which he announced that Mr Ray Greenwood would continue as Chairman of the Country Fire Authority. If that were the long and the short of the statement, I should not be raising the matter during this debate, because Mr Greenwood enjoys the confidence of the authority among both the professionals and the volunteers in that organisation. I pay tribute to his administrative capacity and the job he has done.

As most honourable members recall—and the Minister reminded us of it in his statement—Mr Greenwood announced his retirement from that position last year and the Government appropriately sought applications for a replacement on a full-time basis. Mr Greenwood has been prevailed upon to stay on in the position in a part-time capacity. I do not have any problems with that, provided the Minister can assure me that it is an interim arrangement and that it does not foreshadow a change in the organisation.

I need hardly remind the Minister and members of the Opposition, although members of the Government may need reminding, that the Country Fire Authority, particularly the 107,000 volunteers who make up the bulk of the authority and without whom there would be no organisation, are extremely sensitive to any threats to the integrity of the organisation and certainly to any suggestion that by some mechanism or manoeuvre the status of chairman or the structure of the organisation is to be altered.

I invite the Minister to inform the House about this important matter and I seek an assurance from him that there is no intention to downgrade the status of chairman to that of a part-time chairman on a long-term basis, that it is an interim measure and that the Government will continue to seek an appropriate replacement for Mr Greenwood as a full-time Chairman of the Country Fire Authority.

**Mr HARROWFIELD** (Mitcham)—I raise a matter for the attention of the Premier in his capacity as the Minister responsible for Public Service matters, which is of fundamental importance. The matter relates to the independence and integrity of the Victorian Public Service and concerns the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

I have been made aware of a serious personnel matter within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs concerning a specific proceeding before the Promotion Appeal Board of the Public Service following the filling of a vacancy within the department.

The concern relates to an appeal in which an officer from the department who was sitting on the board took the highly unusual step of disqualifying himself as a member of that board, but the matter did not end there. Subsequently, other members of the board withdrew from the hearing of that particular case.

As a result of the personal disqualification of the officer and the subsequent withdrawals of other members of the board, the appeal was discontinued and a new board had to be constituted to deal with the appeal.

I am concerned about these matters and seek an explanation from the Premier as the Minister responsible for the Public Service why the board member disqualified himself from sitting on the board. Is the Premier aware of these withdrawals and, if so, under what circumstances did these matters occur, given the importance of preserving the independence, impartiality and integrity of the personnel processes within the public sector?

I ask the Premier to give an assurance that the independence and impartiality of the appeals process is preserved. It is highly unusual for a promotion appeal process to be abandoned in this way and it is important that the House understands the reason for that situation.
Mr COOPER (Mornington)—I direct to the attention of the Minister for Education a matter of public safety on school bus services. In and around my electorate there have been a number of instances of overcrowded school buses, which should be corrected, particularly in the three instances that have been brought to my attention.

They relate, firstly, to a bus which runs between the Mornington High School and the Mornington Technical School. Today, that bus had 84 people on it; this is a bus that is licensed by the transport authority to hold fewer than 50 people. The second matter relates to a bus that runs between Merricks and the Mornington High School and then on to Padua College at Mornington. Over the past two years this bus has carried between 68 and 73 pupils when it is licensed to carry fewer than 50 passengers.

The matter has concerned students travelling on the buses, so much so that they have written a letter to me and I understand they have also written to the Minister for Transport and to the Minister for Education.

A petition has been taken up by the students about what they regard as a dangerous situation. The third matter that was brought to my attention is that of the school bus that runs between Pearcedale and the Cranbourne High School, which also becomes overcrowded and, in the opinion of those who reported this matter to me, is a dangerous situation.

I know the Government spends a considerable sum of money on school bus services around the State and it is a difficult problem to overcome, but I am aware of an arrangement, and I can only assume it is a private arrangement, between the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Education as to the number of students who can travel on a school bus.

It appears that the licence to carry passengers bears no relationship to the numbers of students who can board a bus, under what I believe is a private arrangement. If that is the case, and it is a matter of having an arrangement as some sort of a cost saving exercise, that is a matter that needs urgent review. I do not believe any honourable member would subscribe to a situation continuing that could lead to further instances of pupils being severely injured or killed in school bus crashes.

It has become apparent to me in the time I have been a member of Parliament and through the number of complaints I have received in that time that there is cause for concern by parents and by pupils. The three instances I have cited are but the tip of the iceberg; if it is occurring in my electorate, it is occurring in other places around the State. It is a matter that requires urgent attention and action rather than rhetoric.

I ask the Minister for a response to demonstrate to all honourable members that it is a matter which will be taken seriously by the Government, and will receive urgent and prompt attention.

Mr SIDIROPOULOS (Richmond)—I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Ethnic Affairs. I was amazed to hear the honourable member for Bennettswood speaking during the grievance debate earlier today and attacking the very important Greek-Australian conference which will be held in Melbourne.

The conference will be very important because it will include participation by 200 representative groups within the Greek community, representatives of the Greek Government, who will be arriving in the middle of next week, and representatives of the Victorian Government through the Minister for Ethnic Affairs, and the Ethnic Affairs Commission. I give my full support to the conference.

Mr LEIGH (Malvern)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the debate on the motion for the adjournment of the sitting should be confined to matters of Government administration. I humbly suggest that the honourable member for Richmond is referring to the performance of the honourable member for Bennettswood, which has nothing to do with the Minister for Ethnic Affairs.
The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Richmond has been speaking for less than 1 minute and I am waiting to hear what action he wants taken by the Minister for Ethnic Affairs in respect of the remarks made by the honourable member for Bennettswood. There is no point of order.

Mr SIDIROPOULOS (Richmond)—As a person who belongs to the Greek community, I give my full support to this conference because I believe it will benefit not only the 250 000 Greek people but it will also bring close cooperation between the Greek Government and Victoria on issues of mutual concern.

Contrary to the wild allegations made by the honourable member for Bennettswood, the conference has the support of almost every Greek person in Melbourne and Victoria.

Seven working groups have been established to cover seven areas identified as the major concerns to members of the Greek communities. They have worked very hard to create rapport for the conference. Those areas are: youth, women, the aged, education issues, health and welfare issues.

I call upon the Minister for Ethnic Affairs to rectify the allegation made by the honourable member for Bennettswood because he offended not only the Government but also the 250 000 Greek-speaking Victorians.

Mr WEIDEMAN (Frankston South)—I raise with the Minister for the Arts, representing the Attorney-General, a matter involving the Real Estate Institute of Victoria bulletin of November 1986, which is headed “Commission Rates—Government Rejects Advice of Estate Agents Board.”

The bulletin states:
It is now 14 years since the last review of the scales of commissions under which agents are permitted to charge for their services.

A letter was sent to me and also to the Minister for Education from a Mr W. J. Trotter in which in part he states the following:
To clarify the point, in 1974 the average house in the City of Frankston sold for $28 900 which resulted in a commission of $1027 which equals 3·553 per cent of the purchase price. The average sale in 1985 was $68 000, resulting in a commission of $2020 which equals 2·9705 per cent of the sale price.

He points out further that the price of houses has increased by 135 per cent, yet the commission has increased by only 96·68 per cent.

I received a reply from the Attorney-General, in which the Minister stated:
Thank you for your letter of 16 December and the enclosed submission from Mr W. J. Trotter, Estate Agent, about commission payable to estate agents. I note Mr Trotter’s concerns about the rejection of the recommendations made by the Estate Agents Board about new scales of commission and the comments that I appear not to be interested in reviewing those scales.

Mr Trotter wrote back to the Minister for Education:
I read, with much interest, the response from the Attorney General. I reject totally his response. He may feel it is political dynamite to allow our industry an increase in fees—which has not happened since 1972. Ample evidence has been provided to support such increase.

He continued to Mr Cathie:
... as you know, I am a member of the A.L.P. I have supported the party to the best of my ability. On this issue however, I have had enough. I am not prepared to go hungry and/or broke whilst waving the banner.

In summary I totally reject the argument put forward by the Attorney-General and I demand action now!

He points out that he is a small businessman whose advertising costs have increased and he would desperately like to put on more staff but, although his turnover has increased, he is living on less. He is a small businessman who waved the banner for the Australian Labor Party and is going broke.
Mr CAIN (Premier)—The honourable member for Doncaster, who has had to leave the Chamber, raised a matter regarding the effect upon a Mr Guy of some provisions of the Public Service Act; in particular, section 15. I shall undertake to examine the current situation and reply to the honourable member by letter, as I said I would.

The honourable member for Mitcham raised concerns expressed by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs regarding the promotion appeals system and a recent promotion in that department.

The matter was brought to my attention in mid-October by the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Mr Walker, when he wrote to me enclosing a letter that he had received from Mr Wright, the Chief General Manager of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. He raised matters that I regard as being of some concern.

For the past five months, I have endeavoured to ascertain the facts and get to the bottom of the situation. I regard the allegations as serious and as affecting the integrity of our system—which I believe is a good one—but I have been unable to receive any cooperation from the honourable member in this place about whom certain comments were made by the chief general manager. I have no desire other than to find out the facts and so I have taken steps as the Minister responsible to see that this will not happen again, if it did happen—and I believe it did, from what I have been told.

I shall now read what Mr Wright said to the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs in a letter dated 9 October 1986:

Dear Mr Walker

I am writing to express my serious concern about approaches made by a member of Parliament to senior officers of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, regarding an appeal to be heard by the Promotions Appeal Board.

I have been advised that, early in September, the Honourable I. W. Smith, MP., made telephone contact about an appeal related to a dairy supervisor position in the department.

During the course of these conversations, Mr Smith indicated that he wanted to ensure that my nominee on the appeal board would be a person who was independent and impartial.

He also proceeded to make known his opinions on both the provisional promotee and the appellant.

One of the senior officers contacted by Mr Smith was my nominee on the appeal board. As a result of the conservation, the officer concerned disqualified himself from sitting as a member of the board that was to hear this particular appeal.

I understand as well that the other two members of the particular promotions appeal board, from outside DARA, also disqualified themselves from hearing this particular appeal. I am advised that those members had been asked, in passing, for advice on administrative matters related to this appeal (such as how an appeal should be lodged, and how a reference in support of an appellant could be made). Apparently, these matters were not regarded as significant in themselves. However, it was subsequently felt by those board members that they should stand aside from this appeal so there could be no hint of unfairness to any party.

An entirely new promotions appeal board was constituted for the appeal hearing earlier this week.

I am especially concerned about the telephone calls by Mr Smith to senior officers of my department. Trust in the integrity of the promotions appeal system is very important. This depends on a confidence amongst employees that decisions can be made without outside influence, and on the basis of a fair assessment of material which is known to the parties to the appeal.

In addition, a number of senior officers of this department are placed in a particularly difficult position because they had worked in the department during the earlier period in which Mr Smith was Minister of Agriculture.

The fact that a member of Parliament has made such representations is unfortunate. It is even more unfortunate in this case, because a former Minister for the department clearly has a special responsibility to exercise care and discretion.

I am pleased that senior officers of this department have handled this matter very responsibly and have ensured that the rights of all employees concerned have been protected.

I believe that the future integrity and independence of the promotions appeal system needs to be affirmed and supported.
I contacted the honourable member for Polwarth as a result of that matter and sought some response from him because I believed that, if he had acted as was asserted he had, on the face of it, he had sought to compromise or had in fact compromised the statutory process applying to personnel matters in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

There are considerable issues at stake. The appeal process is a very fundamental part of merit protection in the Public Service. I believe all honourable members in this House would agree with that and, as a former Minister, the honourable member should have known better. He must have understood that such an intrusion into the promotions process may be seen as a challenge to the statutory process which I feel stands between the probity and honesty of an independent and impartial Public Service and the jobbery that we do not want in this State that does exist in other places.

As I said, I wrote to the honourable member on 16 October setting out my concerns to him as I have just explained and as they are contained in the letter. I think my letter properly paraphrased Mr Wright's complaint.

In a subsequent reply the honourable member for Polwarth simply declined to comment. Given the gravity of the matter, I asked to speak with him. He agreed and we discussed it in this place. As a result of that meeting, he did not take the matter any further and I again wrote to him on 10 November setting out more details because he asked for them. I contacted the departmental office and again invited the honourable member's response. I received no reply to that letter and I wrote again on 24 November 1986. Eventually I received a reply which offered no substantive explanation or comment.

I thought I should pursue the matter further because I do not think it is the way this Parliament or members should behave. To emphasise the point again, because of the seriousness of it, I wrote a lengthy letter on 29 December asking the honourable member to advise me directly as to the correctness of the assertions.

I emphasis that a failure to resolve this matter might well leave the independence of the promotions system sullied. In reply, I experienced another stonewall operation in a letter from the honourable member for Polwarth.

These are serious matters and the honourable member is no novice in such areas. He is aware of the rules and conventions of the system. I have attempted to resolve this issue by finding out what happened and putting it right. Perhaps other honourable members might fall for the same thing because they are not aware of the rules and of the independence of the system. Perhaps it is good to air this matter so that they know what is involved; perhaps they already do.

I am concerned about the apparent determination of the honourable member for Polwarth not to be of assistance when a complaint is made about him by a chief executive officer or to make any response to it. I did not rush into raising this matter in the House but I believe I have done all I can; there was no other course left to me. I can do nothing else because the honourable member will not respond.

Given his refusal to address what I believe is a legitimate concern, I am prepared to provide copies of my correspondence to the Leader of the Opposition. It is incumbent upon him to take up the matter with the honourable member, and I believe he should do so. The Leader of the Opposition has an obligation to deal with one of his colleagues if the rules are transgressed in this way. It is a matter for the Leader of the Opposition to determine how it should be handled. It is also an opportunity for him, if he wants to, to act and not just talk, but he may choose to ignore it.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CAIN—I shall not respond to jibes from honourable members opposite except to say to the honourable member for Malvern and other honourable members who are interjecting: if they are suggesting to me that it was not my duty, having received a letter, as Minister responsible for the Act to raise this after it has been put in the way it has been put by Mr Wright and to investigate it, they make it very clear to the House why they
should never be Ministers. The catcalls of honourable members opposite are the best evidence this House could have of their incompetence and unfitness for public office.

This matter ought to be treated seriously by the Opposition. I do not say that the system is perfect, but it is the best that has been devised and has served us well over a long period. I believe the system should be upheld. While I am Minister responsible for administering the Public Service Act, I shall do all I can to protect it, and the Opposition should do the same.

I shall take the matter as far as I can, as suggested by the honourable member for Mitcham, but I am not certain that there is much I can do unless the Opposition plays its part. The Opposition has a part to play in ensuring the retention of our system.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr CAIN—In response to the honourable member for Malvern, it is not a question of hacks or anything else. If appointments that have been made are not adequate, that is as it may be. I am saying that the system should be protected so that there are as few inadequate appointments as possible. Mistakes will be made by any tribunal or body that has this power. Victoria has a system where the chief executive makes an appointment and that is his or her decision. There is also a promotions appeal board to hear the cases of those who are discontent.

That is the system and that is what I am attempting to protect. I do not say that it is perfect and that mistakes have not been made, but more mistakes will be made if steps are not taken to protect it.

Mr TREZISE (Minister for Sport and Recreation)—The honourable member for Lowan referred to sports and the way they are administered, especially with regard to sports assemblies. He mentioned the Wimmera Sports Assembly, which is in the electorate he represents. Sports star awards are conducted all over Victoria; Gippsland and the Western District have had them and I am attending one at Ballarat next week.

It is a credit to the Governments over the years that have done so much to try to develop sport not only at top level but also at the rank and file level. The Department of Sport and Recreation and I have the responsibility of reviewing the department periodically to ensure that the allocations it makes are spent in the best possible way.

Various disabled groups go their separate ways, and that should be examined with a view to coordinating the groups. There is also the matter of municipal recreation officers, which is a current problem. Many people believe the system should be updated and that the subsidy should be increased. Others believe the subsidy should not be increased but the number of municipal recreation officers around the State should be increased. Still others believe that the system should be eliminated. That is a matter for the department and me to review.

The honourable member highlighted sports assemblies, and that matter is under review. The sports assembly in the area represented by the honourable member for Lowan does a good job, but there are other areas where money could be used more efficiently. Consequently, I have called for an assessment of the situation to determine whether funding of sports assemblies should continue or be updated. An independent assessment will be referred to the department and me for my decision. I shall investigate the costs and respond to the honourable member.

Mr McCUTCHEON (Minister for Water Resources)—The honourable member for Frankston South raised a matter for reference to the Attorney-General in the other place concerning the scale of commissions for estate agents. I shall forward that matter to the Attorney-General and the honourable member will receive a response in due course.

The honourable member for Dandenong referred to the diabetes education control program. All honourable members appreciate the active interest of the honourable member for Dandenong in health and community issues.

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I understand that the Minister is sympathetic to the program, and I shall forward the matter to him for his consideration, especially the request to maintain the present funding situation.

Mr MATTHEWS (Minister for Police and Emergency Services)—I am glad to have the affirmation of the honourable member for Portland that the Opposition supports the Chairman of the Country Fire Authority, Mr Ray Greenwood. Likewise, the Government supports Mr Greenwood and, indeed, it has admiration for the job he has done.

The Government takes the attitude that the interests of the Country Fire Authority are better served by having Mr Greenwood serve in a part-time capacity than would be the case if he were lost altogether.

There is no change in the rules applied in the appointment of Mr Greenwood on a part-time basis. It is simply a recognition of the contribution that an extraordinary man can make to the well-being of the Country Fire Authority.

Mr CATHIE (Minister for Education)—The honourable member for Mornington raised an issue of public safety concerning school bus services and consequent overcrowding on services to Mornington Technical School, Mornington High School and Cranbourne High School. I assure the honourable member that there is no private arrangement between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Transport to cut costs. Safety is of paramount importance to the Ministry of Education.

For that reason we accept the view of the experts and will follow the guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Transport. If it is alleged that the guidelines are being exceeded in those cases, I shall ensure that a thorough check is made.

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Ethnic Affairs)—In reply to the honourable member for Richmond, I am concerned about the way in which this matter has been raised in the House because everyone has made a considerable effort to make the Greek-Australian conference an outstanding success. I do not need to remind honourable members of the divisions that exist in the Greek community; we have all witnessed them from time to time.

For the past twelve months I have spent considerable time speaking to representatives of the Greek communities and I am delighted to announce that approximately 200 groups will be participating in the conference. It is somewhat hypocritical for the honourable member for Bennettswood to attack the conference and then to register to attend it. Not only that, but he has also invited his colleagues, Mr Connard, Mr Guest, Mr Lea, Mr Richardson and even Mr Smith!

Mr Leigh—Which Mr Leigh?

Mr SPYKER—Both the honourable members for Malvern and Sandringham! If the honourable member for Bennettswood finds the Greek-Australian conference so obnoxious, why is he attending it?

No doubt the honourable member will attend the conference and will grovel to the people whom he now attacks. That is now the position. He has quoted one letter from an individual group—one of the hundreds in the Greek community in Victoria and Australia—that has decided not to attend the conference. I approached that group and told its representatives that I should like its members to participate in the conference. I said that even if they attended on the day of the conference, they would be welcomed.

The Prime Minister regards the conference as significant because he will be opening it. About 40 to 50 Greek members of Parliament will also attend the conference—as honourable members know, I visited Greece last year. I have spoken to both Government and Opposition members of Parliament to ensure an all-party representation at the conference.

Mr Pescott—Are they coming?

Mr SPYKER—They are coming, and as the honourable member for Richmond said, they will be arriving in Victoria some time during the week.
I understand the popularity of the honourable member for Bennettswood has gone down like a lead balloon in the Greek community. I can understand that because his South Yarra silvertail background does not go down well. Honourable members can well understand why he has no standing with the ethnic community. He has taken his frustrations out on them.

Instead of acting as I have for the past five years as Minister for Ethnic Affairs trying to do everything I can to bring the various communities together, the honourable member for Bennettswood has played a destructive and divisive role. It is no wonder that the ethnic communities are calling on the Liberal Party to bring back John Richardson as the shadow Minister for Ethnic Affairs. They said he was bad enough but at least he was better than the honourable member for Bennettswood!

I assure the honourable member and the ethnic communities, especially the Greek community, that anyone who wishes to participate in the conference is welcome. The conference will be successful because the Government has looked at its positive aspects as it did with the conference with the Italian community.

The honourable member for Bennettswood also attacked the Italian conference. One of the greatest achievements of that conference was that, on behalf of the Victorian Government, I had the pleasure of signing a reciprocal WorkCare agreement with Italy. The Victorian Government is the first in the world to do so. That was a major achievement that came out of the conference.

The attack made by the honourable member for Bennettswood on my Ministerial adviser, Mr Demetri Dollis, was most cowardly. His comments were absolutely racist. If my adviser had been Anglo-Saxon and not of Greek origin he would not have been attacked in this place. One of the comments was that Mr Gerry Hand, the Federal member for Melbourne, was at my adviser's wedding. He made it sound as though that was a criminal offence.

My adviser is on various committees and liaises between the commission and myself. I thought that was the role of Ministerial advisers. When the Federal Minister for Social Security, Mr Brian Howe, had a particular issue to deal with concerning the Greek Government, my adviser was of enormous assistance to him. I was privileged to receive correspondence from the Federal Minister stating that my adviser had such a great capacity that the Federal Government wanted him on a trip to Greece to resolve a delicate issue between the Australian and Greek Governments. Instead of praising my adviser for the excellent liaison work that he has done, the honourable member made a cowardly attack upon him in this place.

The other matter raised related to the use of motor vehicles by my department. My department is the agency within the Government that has the lowest use of taxi vouchers. Considering the liaison work that must be done with ethnic communities, it is surprising that the number of taxi vouchers used is so low. I have instructed my department that our resources must be saved as much as possible. The use of cars for official business is a much better option. I want to ensure that my department's resources are properly used.

I know the honourable member for Bennettswood does not get invited to many functions. However, I sometimes attend five or six functions in one weekend. Some evenings I receive invitations to five or six different functions. Because I am unable to attend all of these functions, I ask my personal staff or members of the commission to represent me. I consider the use of vehicles by my staff to attend functions on my behalf to be a proper use of Government resources.

The Opposition has no policy on ethnic affairs. The only policy it announced at the last election was that it would abolish the Ethnic Affairs Commission. With a policy such as that, it is no wonder the Labor Party occupies the Government benches.

The motion was agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.33 p.m. until Tuesday, March 17.
Tuesday, 17 March 1987

The SPEAKER (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds) took the chair at 2.8 p.m. and read the prayer.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

The SPEAKER—Order! I advise the House that the Minister for Transport will be delayed in attending questions without notice.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

PEGGING OF PRICES

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—Will the Minister for Consumer Affairs inform the House of the major reasons for consumer price rises in Victoria since 1982?

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Consumer Affairs)—I am delighted that the Leader of the Opposition has asked that question because it gives me the opportunity to indicate the Government's strong support for the pegging of prices as announced by the Premier earlier this week.

The community at large responsibly accepts the decision of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission on wage indexation because it understands that these are difficult times, so it is also important that manufacturers and retailers play their part by assisting in price restraint.

If the Leader of the Opposition ever bothered to visit his electorate and heard what his constituents are saying about the price increases in supermarkets—

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SPYKER—That is why the Government has taken this responsible action to ensure that Government charges—

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr RICHARDSON (Forest Hill)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Minister was asked a simple and quite specific question which was to provide the House with information on the reasons for the price rises. I draw your attention, Mr Speaker, to your direction to the House on Tuesday, 2 October 1984, in which you said in part:

In answering questions, Ministers should confine themselves to the points contained in the question.

I ask you, Sir, to direct the Minister to answer the question.

The SPEAKER—Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I ask the Minister to respond to the question.

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Consumer Affairs)—The honourable member for Forest Hill is frustrated; he is a failed Opposition spokesman for consumer affairs.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SPYKER—I can understand the anxiety of the Leader of the Opposition because the Government will be introducing a Bill shortly with regard to this matter.

Mr Kennett—Answer the question!

The SPEAKER—Order! I advise the honourable members for Malvern and Frankston South to cease interjecting.
Mr SPYKER—I am answering the question. The Government will play its part with legislation on this basket of goods and that has already been announced. The Government will also ask manufacturers, retailers and the supermarkets to play their part to ensure that people have the opportunity of buying the basic essentials of life. We are asking the whole community at this time of economic restraint to play its part.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION REGIONAL STAFF CLASSIFICATIONS

Mr HANN (Rodney)—I ask the Minister for Education whether it is a fact that the regional directors of education are to be replaced by thirteen assistant general managers. If this is true, is it also a fact that the three city assistant general managers are to be classified on level 5 in the Public Service while the five country assistant general managers are to be placed on level 4 and the five branch managers are to be placed on level 2? If this is correct, will the Minister explain the reason why there is this discrimination between city and country managers?

Mr CATHIE (Minister for Education)—The restructuring unit of the Ministry is now defining the job description for assistant general managers within the school division and that will include the assistant general managers as heads of their respective regions.

There are certainly no plans for discrimination between city regions and country regions. There will in fact be only eight regions compared with the existing twelve regions. That was clearly indicated in the Government’s report.

I cannot comment at this stage on the specific salary levels that will be determined because those matters are still under discussion and have to be discussed with all the different groups within the education community before those decisions can be finalised.

Of the eight regions, five will be in country Victoria and three will be in the city. There will be no discrimination whatsoever between country and city!

PEGGING OF PRICES

Mr SHELL (Geelong)—Can the Premier provide details to the House of the Government’s initiatives to peg prices in Victoria?

Mr CAIN (Premier)—I thank the honourable member for the question because it indicates that at least he realises, and I thought everybody in the House did, that some concern ought to be expressed for families in this State.

Mr I. W. SMITH (Polwarth)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Premier has publicly foreshadowed legislation on this matter. That has been confirmed in the answer given by the Minister for Consumer Affairs and, as such, the Premier should not answer the question by foreshadowing legislation.

The SPEAKER—Order! I cannot uphold the point of order. The House has no knowledge of any anticipated actions by the Government in respect of this matter, and so the point of order is not upheld.

Mr CAIN (Premier)—Families have borne more than their fair share of sacrifice in recent years. The growth in wages has not matched the increase in the cost of living, especially the increases in the price of goods sold in supermarkets.

The “price pegging” initiative will ensure that the overall price of a basket of groceries will not increase by more than 6 per cent in the coming twelve months.

The response of the Leader of the Opposition on this matter over the past five or six days has done a great disservice to politics in this State. I should have thought that when the Government proposed an initiative to help people meet the cost of living on their
week-to-week purchases, the initiative would have received more from the Leader of the Opposition than a call to people to break the law.

Mr Fordham—It is a disgrace!

Mr CAIN—It is a disgrace, as the Deputy Premier interjects. I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition speaks for the Liberal Party on this matter. Members of the Opposition have to make up their minds and say what they regard, individually, as their response to a call by their Leader to break the law, because that is what the Leader of the Opposition has made. He is not concerned about helping people meet the day-to-day expenses of groceries sold in supermarkets. The Leader of the Opposition has told people they ought not to pay for the things they have received, that is, the charges levied upon them. He has also said there should be a peg on all fines; just contemplate that! He is the man who talks about law and order but he has said there ought to be a ceiling on fines!

Does the Leader of the Opposition extend that proposition to no increases in fines for drug pushers who poison our young people? Is that what he is on about? The Opposition cannot have it both ways. The Leader of the Opposition made the call at a considered press conference; he issued a prepared statement telling people they ought not to do what they are required to do for services they have received.

If members of the Opposition have any guts they should all, singly or collectively, denounce that call made by the Leader of the Opposition, or do they believe it? When members of the Opposition were asked by a journalist what they thought of the statement made by the Leader of the Opposition, they said what they thought. The Leader of the Opposition accused the journalist of going out and picking off members of his party by saying that he had not consulted with them. It shows that the Leader of the Opposition leads nothing but himself. He is so obsessed about next Saturday that he will say or do anything, whether or not members of his party are behind him. He will even tell people to break the law!

The Leader of the Opposition has called for a tax strike. The Government is saying that there ought to be a capacity to put a check on prices to help people in respect of the things they buy on a regular basis.

I should have thought that the initiative would have received support from all members of Parliament. However, the Opposition is not concerned about helping people; it is not concerned about the prices people pay and it does not want to help families. It is more concerned about protecting the Leader of the Opposition and it should make up its mind as to what its policies are.

The Government has put together a package that, so far as I can tell, is opposed by only two people—the Leader of the Opposition and Andrew Hay; nobody else! There may be some who have their reservations, but the Government intends to try to make it work and it will be applauded by the people of Victoria for trying to make it work.

People are entitled to expect that their Government will help them through these difficult times. If the Opposition does not want to help, let it say so and the people will judge it accordingly.

Mr PESCOTT (Bennettswood)—I direct a question to the Minister for Consumer Affairs: as the Minister responsible for the interests of consumers in Victoria, can he inform the House as to the percentage increase in prices to consumers of Government taxes and charges, including increases in gas, electricity and water charges, since the Government came to office in 1982?

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Consumer Affairs)—I can understand the frustration of the honourable member for Bennettswood because he has produced a press release stating
that the Minister for Consumer Affairs should not get involved in consumer affairs and that the people should not take any notice of him. That is the type of individual he is!

As I stated in the House last week, honourable members know he is a South Yarra silvertail but at least he could go out and talk to the families in the electorate he represents to see what they want done about prices.

Since 1982 the Government has done everything possible to clean up the mess it inherited from the previous Liberal Government. The State was bankrupt. The Government has had to take a course of action in a number of areas and it has done everything possible to retain and restrain Government charges, keeping them to an absolute minimum.

The Government is proud of what it has done for the development of the State and for the employment level in the State and it asks the Opposition to give credit where credit is due and support the announcements made by the Government, concerning both Government charges and basket prices in the supermarkets.

Mr Richardson (Forest Hill)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Minister responsible for the interests of consumers in Victoria was asked a specific question in relation to the interests of those consumers for whom he is responsible.

I draw your attention again, to your speech to the House of Tuesday, 2 October 1984, in which you stated:

In answering questions, Ministers should confine themselves to the points contained in the question.

I ask you, Sir, to direct the Minister accordingly.

The Speaker—Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I ask the Minister not to debate the matter and to respond to the question.

Mr Spyker (Minister for Consumer Affairs)—The honourable member for Forest Hill is in desperate straits at the moment. They could not find him a job and appointed him—

The Speaker—Order! The Minister for Consumer Affairs shall not debate the subject. I ask him to come back to the point of the question.

Mr Spyker—The honourable member for Forest Hill is now the shadow member for Mentone. That is the only role left for him in his party. I can assure the honourable member for Bennettswood that the Government will do everything possible to keep taxes and charges down to a minimum. I look forward to receiving his support for the Government’s proposed legislation on the prices peg.

ABALONE LICENCES

Mr B. J. Evans (Gippsland East)—I ask the Premier, bearing in mind the comments made by his colleague that the Government is keeping statutory charges down to the absolute minimum, how he justifies an increase from $5000 to $10 000 in the cost of an abalone licence, especially in light of the fact that the abalone licence-holders at Mallacoota are paying $3000 a year to protect the fishery against poachers, a task that the Government is failing to carry out?

Mr Cain (Premier)—The honourable member for Gippsland East is well aware that people in the industry desired that there be some capacity whereby they could be assured that they had some asset that they could sell or dispose of from time to time. The consequence was that they wanted a stable industry.

They agreed to the proposal put, and my recollection is that it was the subject of legislation in the House and was supported or not opposed by any party in the House. I always understood that to be the case. The industry may well have disappeared under the previous situation, but we are not prepared to let that happen. It is a restoring industry
that requires proper supervision, and those involved in it now enjoy considerable capital assets because of the legislation—by "considerable" I mean assets in excess of $500 000. People can regard the licence as a capital asset that can be sold or disposed of after the holder's death, and I believe they support what the Government has done.

The alternative was canvassed in the House some time back and a proper decision was made. I am astonished that the Leader of the Opposition should peddle that one, and even more astonished that the honourable member for Gippsland East should peddle it. Let me make one thing clear that even the honourable member for Brighton might be able to understand; he is supposed to be the shadow Treasurer: the Government's commitment has been for no overall increase in the real tax burden on Victorians during this term.

Mr Kennett—Rubbish!

Mr CAIN—You do not understand the difference. The colleagues of the Leader of the Opposition are not going to waste any more time on him and I am not going to waste any more time on him because he is no longer relevant. He is not even considered a gentleman; he is just an irrelevance.

One statistic that highlights what I have been saying is that total tax receipts grew in the last three years of the previous Government by 29 per cent per capita in real terms in this State. The same figure when compared with the last three years of this Government is 5·2 per cent in real terms. That tells the story.

The reason is simple; the previous Government let the tax base erode in the late 1970s and early 1980s and then had to go hell for leather over its last three years, so taxes and charges went through the roof.

The present Government put a ceiling on those charges and related increases to the cost of living and economic growth. I believe the Victorian community accepts that that is a reasonable course to adopt.

The pegging of consumer prices singles out for special treatment families and their domestic budgets inside that overall restraint. Increases in charges for Government services such as water, gas, electricity and so on that affect families will be held to less than 6 per cent. The Government is concerned about the family. It wants to ensure that the family is protected by the peg on the supermarket basket. The family must be protected by the 6 per cent peg on the basket of State services provided by the Government. It is the family we are concerned about and we will continue to be concerned about it.

PEGGING OF PRICES

Miss CALLISTER (Morwell)—Can the Minister for Labour outline to the House specific steps that are being taken by his and other Government departments to ensure that the price of a basic basket of goods is pegged?

Mr Kennett interjected.

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—It is interesting to hear the Leader of the Opposition leaping into the charge again, as he has done so far in this campaign. The only two people to oppose the Government's proposal to peg supermarket prices in Victoria are Mr Andrew Hay and the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition—this comic figure, this political Pagliacci—who has slapsticked his way around the State this week and has been given the credit for introducing vaudeville politics—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Minister for Labour is out of order. If he intends to debate the matter, I shall call him at the appropriate time.

Mr CRABB—It is easy to be cynical and to grin and sneer while sitting on the corner benches. The fact is that it is hard work achieving worthwhile measures for Victorian families, but that is what the Government is doing. The Government has established its price peg program in cooperation with retailers and manufacturers.
Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CRABB—Yes, we have, without qualification or equivocation. The Government has established a telephone system that will operate within the Ministry of my colleague, the Minister for Consumer Affairs. The Government established a list of 170 basic grocery items forming the most popular supermarket purchases and it has today communicated that list to both manufacturers and retailers. The list will be published later in the week. The Government surveyed the prices of those items on 6 March, the date the prices program commenced.

The Government met the retailers last week and has arranged to meet the manufacturers on Friday, at their request. The Government has already had discussions with individual manufacturers, as it did with individual retailers.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CRABB—I shall deal with any issue involving proposed legislation when that stage is reached. Mr Speaker, I am certain that I would be out of order in discussing proposed legislation during question time.

I am amazed at the Opposition's great interest in the views of manufacturers and retailers. All manufacturers and retailers are supportive of the Government's prices campaign. I issue a challenge to members of the opposition parties to tell me who is not supportive of it. Which manufacturer or retailer in Victoria wants to stay out of this campaign?

The reality is that every last one of them wants to be part of the campaign. It is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition is left standing out on a limb with his great big mouth wide open the way it usually is!

There is a real problem because, having spent all of one night at the wholesale fruit and vegetable market, the Leader of the Opposition did not notice that the prices were increasing and that the people were worried about that. He spent a whole night at the market and did not come out one bit wiser than he was when he went in. The Government's prices peg program is proceeding with all urgency and is being implemented for the benefit of the people of this State.

Mr GUDE (Hawthorn)—I ask the Minister for Consumer Affairs what agreement has been reached with producers, processors, manufacturers, transporters and importers to ensure that the price of the supply of goods to retailers during the next twelve months does not exceed the Government's promise of 6 per cent.

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Consumer Affairs)—The honourable member for Hawthorn is obviously a slow learner. He should be aware of the Premier's announcement that the Minister for Labour is the Minister responsible for the question the honourable member just asked. In that case, I suggest that he redirect the question.

THIRD-PARTY INSURANCE

Dr COGHILL (Werribee)—I ask the Treasurer to inform the House how the Government intends to keep its commitment to limit increases in charges in the Government service basket to 6 per cent having regard to the Transport Accident Act which provides that third-party insurance premiums will increase according to the consumer price index on 1 July this year.

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer)—I thank the honourable member for his question because it gives me the opportunity of trying to enlighten the Leader of the Opposition who is grossly ignorant about these matters. Honourable members have seen him change his word daily; in the morning he invites people not to pay their taxation bills while in the afternoon he gives that idea away. That is typical of the Liberal Party in this State. I hope the Leader of
the Opposition will keep his mouth closed for once and his mind open; that seems to be his basic problem.

The Government has taken a serious approach to restraining increases in taxes and charges in the State. In respect of the prices peg issue, the Government has given a clear undertaking that a basket of essential Government services will be restricted to an increase of no more than 6 per cent for the total basket. The increase in the cost of the basket will be restricted to 6 per cent over the next twelve months. All honourable members, including the honourable member for Brighton—I am not sure what the Leader of the Opposition thinks—believe third-party insurance premiums should be fully funded, and that is clearly enunciated in law. That means that third-party insurance premiums will increase by the full impact of the increase in the consumer price index. There will be no real increase over a ten-year period.

When one considers the total impact of the consumer price index on third-party premiums, one finds that the average increase for the rest of the Government service basket must be only 5·4 per cent. That is the degree of constraint to which the Government is committed.

I remind honourable members that the Government is not dealing with abalone licences or highly profitable areas where, for industry reasons, it is necessary to go through certain processes. The total Government service basket deals with essential items provided by the Government such as gas, electricity, water, motor transport charges, urban transport fees and rental for public housing.

The cost of the basket will increase by less than 6 per cent during the next twelve months. When third-party insurance premiums are excluded, the other items in the basket will increase by only 5·4 per cent.

I shall now compare the Government's exercise of constraint with the position taken by the Liberal Party. When the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Housing in the previous Liberal Administration——

Mr DELZOPPO (Narracan)—Mr Speaker, on a point of order, I direct to your attention Standing Order No. 127. I believe the honourable gentleman is debating the question and should be brought back to order.

The SPEAKER—Order! I uphold the point of order and ask the Treasurer to return to the question before the Chair.

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer)—Mr Speaker, I am dealing with the basket of Government services which will not increase by more than 6 per cent. I emphasise that those items are essential services. In 1981-82 the previous Liberal Government pegged increases in Government charges and fees to 12·5 per cent; that should be compared with this Government's basket guideline of 6 per cent.

The Liberal Party changes its word every day! Australia has only one Liberal Party Government, which did not make a commitment like that made by the Victorian Government on taxes and charges. The Tasmanian Liberal Government increased payroll tax; members of the Opposition do not like to hear that.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr RICHARDSON (Forest Hill)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Treasurer is blatantly ignoring the direction given by the Chair a moment ago. Furthermore, he is embarking on a discussion of irrelevancies about the affairs of another State. I urge you, Sir, to bring this senior Minister back into line.

The SPEAKER—Order! I uphold the point of order and ask the Treasurer to respond to the question.

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer)—Again, I emphasise that the basket contains essential Government services. In view of the increase in third-party premiums caused by legislation
endorsed by all parties, on average, the other services in the basket will increase by no more than 5.4 per cent in the next twelve months. That indicates the dramatic constraint being adhered to by the Government.

PEGGING OF PRICES

Mr RICHARDSON (Forest Hill)—I ask the Minister for Consumer Affairs how many public servants will be diverted from normal duties or, alternatively, how many additional employees will be required, and at what cost, to establish the base prices of consumer items and to monitor price changes to support the Government's promise to confine price rises to 6 per cent?

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Consumer Affairs)—I am delighted with the question which enables me again to demonstrate what a competent Government Victoria has in giving this program top priority and funding it within existing resources.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley)—If the proposed price pegging legislation is so urgent that it needs to be rushed through Parliament, can the Premier explain why it was not included in the Governor's Speech when he addressed the Legislative Council more than three weeks ago?

Mr CAIN (Premier)—If the honourable member for Murray Valley had taken notice of what I said when I made the announcement, he would have learned—because I emphasised it—that the Government had been considering this matter for some time.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CAIN—I shall not attempt to shout over that noise. I am tired of it. I shall wait until the noise ceases.

The SPEAKER—Order! Will the Premier resume his seat? The Leader of the Opposition used an expression in the form of an interjection that I find offensive. I ask him to withdraw the expression that the Premier was not telling the truth.

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—I withdraw if you find it offensive, Mr Speaker.

Mr CAIN (Premier)—When I made the announcement, I made it clear that the Government had been considering this issue for some time.

Mr Kennett—Tell us the truth!

Mr CAIN—The Government has been concerned for some time about the pressure on the standard of living of Victorians. I said the Government was awaiting the outcome of the national wage case.

Mr Kennett—Tell the truth!

Mr Fordham—The Leader of the Opposition is desperate.

Mr CAIN—I have heard the Leader of the Opposition sounding desperate on many occasions. I have heard him mouthing off many times. However, the back and middle benches—even the front benches—opposite must be heartily sick of him, Mr Speaker. I do not know how they put up with him. Day after day, week after week he says the same thing. He does not have an original thought in his head.

I was concerned about the consequences of the national wage case on a number of issues and that some considerations in the case would lead to uncertain outcomes for the coming twelve months. That was a consideration in determining the way the package was put together.

The package reflects the need for restraint on all sides, at the same time having a reserve of power in the case—albeit the unlikely case—that some retailer or manufacturer makes
it too hot. I do not believe that will occur because the Minister for Labour and the other Ministers concerned have done a remarkable job in obtaining the concurrence, support and involvement of the manufacturing and retail industries on this issue.

As I said before, manufacturers and retailers want to be part of this package although there may be an incident where one manufacturer or retailer finds it too hot. That is what the proposed legislation is designed to control.

I assure the honourable member for Murray Valley that any decision about the final form of this package was not made until a short time ago. Unlike the Liberal Party—I am not sure about the National Party; I shall wait and see what it does later in the day—or unlike the Leader of Opposition, the Government is concerned about helping families.

Mr Hann interjected.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Deputy Leader of the National Party has used an unparliamentary expression. I ask him to withdraw.

Mr Hann (Rodney)—I withdraw.

Mr Cain (Premier)—The honourable member for Rodney is obsessed about the prostitution legislation. What that has to do with the price of commodities, I do not know. Maybe he does!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Cain—This topic is bringing out the worst on all sides of the House, Mr Speaker.

Mr Kennett—Well, sit down.

Mr Cain—The kind of comments that I am now hearing from the opposite side are similar to those I hear out in the streets in all of those parts the honourable member wants to talk about, not in Parliament, Mr Speaker. It is astonishing. The Government is concerned with helping families and helping people.

Mr Hann interjected.

Mr Cain—I do not know who leads the National Party. I looked at the brochure, and Joh is on it, not the Leader of the National Party. What is wrong with the National Party? Joh is pictured on the brochure, not Mr Ross-Edwards.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! I ask the Premier not to debate the matter and I ask the honourable member for Mildura to cease interjecting. We had a quieter time the other week.

Mr Cain—The question came from a member of the——

Mr Jasper interjected.

The SPEAKER—Order! I warn the honourable member for Murray Valley that if he interjects again I will take action against him.

Mr Cain—I do not know whether the honourable member for Murray Valley is a member of the Sinkers party or a member of the Joh party.

Mr Kennett (Leader of the Opposition)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, you have already ruled once on this matter. The Premier is debating a brochure which has no relevance to the question asked. I ask you, Sir, to ensure that the Premier comes back to the question in hand.

The SPEAKER—Order! I do not believe the Premier was debating the matter. He was holding the brochure. I do not uphold the point of order and I ask the Premier to respond to the question.
Mr CAIN (Premier)—The only other point I wanted to make is that the proposed legislation is a very small ingredient in the overall package. It is important that the package be complete, but this package relies basically upon the support and the concurrence of all those who are to be part of it—the retailers and the manufacturers.

I hope the proposed legislation will have the support of the National Party to ensure that it receives a speedy passage through Parliament.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Mr SIDIROPOULOS (Richmond)—Will the Treasurer give details of recent commercial activity in Melbourne and its effect on the State’s economic development?

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer)—As all honourable members will be aware, there is a new sense of confidence in Victoria so far as economic matters are concerned. Some of the more economically literate members of the Opposition may have read the *Australian Financial Review* today which clearly indicates that there is evidence in Victoria that Melbourne is going through a substantial property boom. It is saying that in 1987 there is a surge in property development in Victoria.

In fact, the *Australian Financial Review* not only led with the front page on this particular matter, but also in the detail of the paper it contained another article relating to the property boom in this State.

It is obviously a very important issue because it creates jobs in Victoria and it is one of the reasons why Victoria has the lowest unemployment rate. It is also one of the reasons why, for 45 months in a row, Victoria has had the lowest unemployment rate of any State in Australia.

I shall examine the significance of that evidence. It was based on research by an organisation called Cityscope which states that over the next year we will see a building and development rush amounting to $1400 million in Melbourne. In the first two months of 1987, which are generally regarded as months with a low level of activity, there was an expenditure of $100 million on property development in Melbourne. That is an incredible record.

I emphasise that that is not the only source of optimism and commitment to private investment in this State. The real estate company, Jones Lang Wootton, recently provided the investment mission from Japan with details of the position in Melbourne and Victoria. The company provided an overview of the property market in this State. It referred not only to the excellent conditions in Victoria, but also referred specifically to the positive, aggressive approach adopted by the State Government to further economic development in this State. The company also recognised, and the Leader of the Opposition should take notice of this, in explaining to the Japanese mission that the private sector is now more active than in any period over the past ten years.

Private investment is taking place in Victoria at unprecedented levels. I am confident that, because of that private investment, Victoria will continue to have the lowest unemployment rate of any State in Australia.

GROCERY PRICES BILL

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—I desire to indicate to you, Mr Speaker, that there is a matter of extreme urgency that I wish to place before the House regarding the control of grocery item prices.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Minister is in order under Standing Order No. 164.

Mr KENNETH (Leader of the Opposition)—On a point of order, I seek clarification on whether the Minister at this stage is seeking your acceptance of the procedure, Mr Speaker, or whether he will now argue the matter before the House. If he intends to argue the
matter, I ask that I be heard. If that is the Minister’s total submission, I am prepared to address the House now.

The SPEAKER—Order! As I understand it, the Minister for Labour is seeking my acceptance of the procedure under Standing Order No. 164. If he wishes to address me on the urgency of it, I shall hear limited argument from both sides of the House.

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—As all honourable members know, the Government has entered into cooperative arrangements with retailers and manufacturers to hold the aggregate prices on a basket of basic grocery items to an increase of 6 per cent within the next twelve months. The base date for the twelve-month period is 6 March, which was a week ago last Friday.

It is necessary that, in any arrangement like this, the measure be made retrospective. One cannot introduce a price peg prospectively because one stands the risk of someone jumping the gun. Therefore, any such matters are made retrospective.

It is necessary for the Government to introduce proposed legislation that is important to the success of the price-pegging program. It was not possible for the Government to introduce the measure prior to the national wage case last week, so the Government has introduced the measure with all possible expedition. It is important to the success of the program that legislative support be given to it for it to be passed through Parliament with all possible speed, since the campaign has, inevitably, a retrospective quality to it.

Provisions under Standing Order No. 164 enable the House to deal with a matter such as this, being an urgent matter, with all possible expedition. I understand these provisions were used as recently as May 1977. Therefore, I request that I be given permission, under Standing Order No. 164, to introduce the Bill with urgency.

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—Standing Order No. 164 states:

Bills of an urgent nature may be passed with unusual expedition through their several stages.

I put it to you, Mr Speaker, that the Bill is not of an urgent nature and, further, that if it is to proceed in the way the Minister for Labour has outlined it would defy the proper procedures and democratic processes of this Parliament. It also represents a massive fraud on the people of Victoria. If anything, it clearly proves why Parliament should have a system of checks and balances.

I shall argue the urgency aspect. The Government has had the opportunity of giving notice of the proposed legislation during the two weeks in which Parliament has already sat this year. There has been no indication of the Bill being an urgent matter, and no notice has been given that the Bill would be introduced. Under most tests of urgency, on that issue alone, the Government fails and should fail to gain your favoured decision, Mr Speaker, on this matter. If what the Premier said was truthful, namely, that the Government has been considering the measure since November last year, it had two weeks in which to indicate that the measure would be introduced, but it failed to do so.

Secondly, as was already indicated, if the Government had been serious about the measure—although not necessarily having settled the complete details—one would have thought that there would have been an indication in the Governor’s Speech that the Bill was coming. No reference whatsoever was made.

Further, on the question of the urgency of the proposed legislation, it was only late last week that the Government first instructed Parliamentary Counsel to draft the measure. Again, if the Government had been serious and honest and if it had been discussing this matter since last November, one should have thought that Parliamentary Counsel would have been briefed before the end of last week. That is another reason why the proposed legislation should not be considered urgent and Standing Order No. 164 therefore fails.

This Parliament belongs to the people of Victoria. Parliament—and this Government in particular, for some reason—has always prided itself on consultation with groups who
will be affected by proposed legislation. I emphasise today that these specific groups have not been consulted by the Government.

The Liberal Party has received submissions on this issue which I shall read into the record at a later stage. For example, a submission has been received from grocery manufacturers. The Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources should not, by interjection, prejudge these submissions.

The SPEAKER—Order! I advise the Leader of the Opposition and any honourable member who wishes to address the Chair on this subject that I have already decided, as is my entitlement, that there is limited debate on this matter. I do not intend to allow material to be read into the record, nor do I intend to allow cross exchanges to extend the limit of the debate.

Mr KENNEDT—I was addressing the argument of urgency and I said specifically that I did not want to read material into the record at this stage, but I have received letters and telegrams from many employer groups who will be affected by the proposed legislation and whom one would think would have been consulted but even the grocery manufacturers are not meeting the Government until Friday.

Good and responsible Parliamentary measures cannot be taken unless the Government of the day at least consults with bodies affected by proposed legislation. At present there are plans for the Government to meet some of those bodies. Therefore, Mr Speaker, I put it to you that the Bill is not urgent and that affairs will not change dramatically in the next week or in the next two weeks but that time will allow the Government to ensure that the proposed legislation is a responsible measure.

Further, the Federal Minister who is responsible for prices has been quoted as saying that, in fact, prices have been extraordinarily consistent.

Mr Crabb—What has that got to do with it?

Mr KENNEDT—It illustrates that there is no special urgency. I reiterate that the Federal Minister has stated that prices have been extraordinarily consistent. Mr Speaker, I put it to you on this specific occasion when you are being asked to rule on Standing Order No. 164 that there is no specific urgency on this Bill.

I could debate this matter at length, but I shall not. It is all very well for the Premier and other Government party members to laugh but I submit that, if the Parliament is to make any meaningful contribution to the people who elected members of Parliament to deliberate on their behalf, the Bill should not be declared urgent. If the Bill is declared urgent and debate on it proceeds today without the Opposition having seen the Bill and without community groups having seen the Bill, Parliament will be acting irresponsibly, and that is not the purpose of Parliament.

Parliament is not simply a rubber stamp for the Government of the day; Parliament, as an institution, should ensure that all honourable members contribute towards initiating legislation where it is necessary to improve the circumstances of the community.

I rest my case. Standing Order No. 164 in all fairness cannot be applied in this instance because it goes against the very intent of May. It goes against the very intent of Parliamentary democratic systems. If Standing Order No. 164 is applied and the Bill is dealt with immediately, there is no democracy. There will be no democracy for the groups affected by the proposed measure because they will not have the opportunity of making a contribution to it. There will be no democracy if the Opposition is not able to responsibly examine proposed legislation and then comment on it.

I ask you, Mr Speaker, to preserve the long heritage that you administer as Speaker and ensure that the House is not a rubber stamp, so that an important item of proposed legislation can be given the due consideration that it deserves.
Mr B. J. EVANS (Gippsland East)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Standing Order No. 164 refers to Bills before the House. I submit that no Bill is before the House at this time. During question time, Mr Speaker, you commented that the Chair had no knowledge of a Bill of this nature being before the House. The Minister for Labour has not introduced a Bill or given notice of the introduction of a Bill and, therefore, it is not correct for the Minister to introduce a Bill of this nature.

If the Minister chooses to introduce the Bill in the normal way, he can exercise those rights as indicated in Standing Order No. 164 so that the Bill can be dealt with expeditiously, but the Minister cannot short-circuit the normal procedure of giving notice and then introducing the Bill.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I suggest that the honourable member for Gippsland East examine past precedents on this issue. The two most recent precedents were in 1951 and 1977. On both occasions exactly the same procedure was pursued then as is occurring now.

The Minister for Labour is required to seek the concurrence of the Chair to move for the Bill initiating procedure and before doing so Standing Order No. 164 is the method whereby, if he receives the Chair’s agreement on the principle of urgency, the Minister can then move for the introduction, first reading and second reading of the Bill.

Mr RICHARDSON (Forest Hill)—On the same point of order, Standing Order No. 164 refers precisely to the procedure which will be followed after the normal introduction of the proposed legislation.

The honourable member for Gippsland East is correct, and I support the point of order that he raises. The key words of Standing Order No. 164 are the four final words, “through their several stages”. The Standing Order does not provide for some easy fast track method which ignores the procedures of Parliament. It does not provide the Government of the day with an opportunity to use Parliament as a rubber stamp or as a plaything. That is precisely what the Minister for Labour wants to do.

Standing Order No. 164 provides quite specifically for proposed legislation to proceed through its several stages and, once the Bill has been introduced, it is the expedition with which it proceeds through those stages that is under consideration. The Bill must be introduced in the normal way and then Standing Order No. 164 applies, but the Standing Order still provides that the precise stages of the passage of the proposed legislation must be observed.

The SPEAKER—Order! What the Minister for Labour is essentially attempting to do is to dispense with the normal procedures of the introduction of a Bill and, therefore, I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr HANN (Rodney)—The National Party strongly opposes this procedure. It is nonsense for the Government to suggest that the Bill is urgent. Only on three other occasions since the start of the century has a Government indicated that proposed legislation is so urgent that it must be rushed through Parliament on the same day, which is what the Minister for Labour wants to do.

The proposed legislation was not referred to in the Governor’s Speech delivered only three weeks ago. It was not important enough at that stage for the Governor to make even one small reference to it! Yet, in the third week of this sessional period the Government is suggesting that this is an issue of equal importance to only three other issues this century.

The proposed legislation was initiated by the Labor Party’s campaign committee for Central Highlands Province last week and put forward as the solution to all of the economic ills, of which the Minister for Labour is well aware. Victoria is the inflation State of Australia and has consistently remained in that position for quite some time now, largely because of Government charges.
With regard to proposed legislation of such importance, it is customary to have a two-week adjournment. It is necessary for the opposition parties to consult with consumer groups, employers, industry representatives and other groups affected by the proposed legislation. There has been no opportunity to do that, and the Government does not propose to give anyone the opportunity.

The Government has distributed a draft document, which is supposedly a draft Bill. The draft lacks any detail. It makes little reference to much of the rhetoric that was used by the Minister for Labour and the Premier in the press last week.

The National Party believes the Government's action is nothing but a nonsense. The Government should allow ample time for proper consultation and consideration on the Bill if it is serious in its intention to effect some sort of price control in the State. The National Party totally rejects the suggestion that this is an urgent piece of proposed legislation.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—In accordance with your directions, Mr Speaker, I shall speak briefly on the issue of urgency. The Minister for Labour outlined the circumstances under which the proposed legislation has arisen. At the outset I support the remarks made by the Premier, that the issue has been under close consideration by the Government. I take umbrage at suggestions that I am telling anything other than the truth.

As alluded to by both the Premier and the Minister for Labour, the key trigger in the Government's determination to bring forward the proposed legislation was the national wage case decision last week. I know that Government Ministers read that decision with great care and concern.

As a result of the national wage case decision, the community is being called upon to exercise considerable restraint in the months and years ahead. A new wage structure is being implemented in this country. The community will have to exercise restraint if the Australian economy is to be regenerated in the way that all honourable members would wish.

Arising from the national wage case decision, the Government took the view that, for its part, it had to peg Government taxes and charges and grocery prices. As a result of the national wage case decision it has become imperative that Governments across Australia should act. The Government believes its proposal to peg prices will be widely applauded.

The Government is not defying Parliamentary procedure. The Bill will still require to be passed by both Houses of Parliament before it becomes law. No-one is suggesting that that is not the case. My colleague has explained that that decision was made in cooperation with many sectors of the community that are directly involved. Obviously the legislative form, which covers a small section of the overall Government package, should be brought into effect as quickly as possible.

Finally, if members of the Opposition doubt that this matter is urgent, that this debate should not go ahead as expeditiously as possible, I suggest they visit a supermarket in their electorates.

Mr LIEBERMAN (Benambra)—On the question of urgency, the Government has to make out a case to satisfy you, Mr Speaker, and to enable you to rule on it and give the Government this extraordinary right—one that would override the normal principles of a democracy. The Government has not made out a case to you or anyone in the House that would prejudice the Government's intentions if it gave reasonable notice and facilitated reasonable debate so the community will know what it is about and so consultation can take place.

The Minister for Labour put forward a case which is self defeating. He informed you, Mr Speaker, that the proposed legislation contains a retrospective clause making it law, if the Bill is passed, as from a date earlier this month. That in itself should indicate that the
Government is proposing a law that will have effect—notwithstanding that Parliament has not debated the Bill and has not passed it.

The Government has to demonstrate that if it does not allow the proposed legislation to go through the normal processes, it will have no effect.

The Government is on record as saying publicly that it will not proclaim the proposed legislation. What it is doing is using you, Mr Speaker, your unique office and this Parliament to politicise a question in order to gain some advantage for a by-election; that is patently obvious.

It is for you, Mr Speaker, to protect the House. If you do not do so, no-one else can. You must protect the people of Victoria and insist that the question of urgency is allowed to be used only where a case is made out.

The Australian Government over the past few years has passed retrospective legislation with regard to taxation. The laws pertaining to capital gains were the subject of Ministerial statements by the Treasurer and the Prime Minister six or eight months before the proposed legislation was introduced into Parliament, yet the debate and enactment was deemed to operate from the date of the Treasurer's statement.

That is ample precedent for you, Mr Speaker, to turn to the Minister for Labour and say, “You have just told me that the law is retrospective to an earlier date this month. On that basis you have already provided for the particular purpose the Government wants to achieve and you are denied the right to have passed an urgent motion that will deny the people of Victoria, if they allow it, the opportunity for scrutiny”.

Mr CAIN (Premier)—I have tried to listen carefully to the speakers despite the interjections opposite, and I have not yet heard any reason why the Opposition would not support the Government. Two things are very clear, the first being that, as the Minister for Labour said, this whole package relies on there being a trigger date of 6 March. It is desired that the whole package should be put together and finalised as near as possible to that date, for obvious reasons.

I make it clear to the House that the contents of the package have been under consideration for a long period of time.

Mr Kennett—Oh, yeah.

Mr CAIN—The Leader of the Opposition says, “Oh, yeah”. The only response I have to that is one of contempt.

Mr Kennett—Prove it.

Mr CAIN—It is one of contempt when you talk like that.

Mr Kennett—Your integrity.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! I advise the honourable member for Malvern that I have given him his last warning. The next time I will name him.

Mr CAIN—Unlike the Opposition and the National Party, the Government gave careful consideration to how it could help people in the prices area. The Government did not jump over the top like the Leader of the Opposition does on so many occasions; it tried to think through the best way to approach the problem. Legislation was one of the components that was considered for the best approach and it became part of the package when the Government finally knew what it was confronted with by the national wage case.

The Government was looking for a cooperative scheme of the kind it is now introducing. From the advice the Government has received, there may be occasions, although they will be rare, when a manufacturer or a retailer will not play the game. However, I believe
almost all of them will at all times. The proposed legislation is a reserve power, but it is an important part of the overall package to provide the protection that people want.

I do not know what the Opposition and the National Party are concerned about as it is a fairly simple piece of proposed legislation. Both parties have been sent copies of the Bill, and if they want time to think about the issue before the second-reading debate proceeds, the Leader of the House has indicated that that will be considered.

It is not difficult or complicated to understand what the proposed legislation is about. It is a simple mechanism for providing in the extreme case the capacity to make a declaration and provide a check. What the Government is doing should be supported and not derided.

Mr Kennett—What is the urgency?

Mr CAIN—The urgency is that 6 March is the benchmark that firms must observe. It is necessary that the package be put together in a reasonable time from that date.

Mr Brown—Why 6 March?

Mr CAIN—I do not know what goes around in the heads of members of the Opposition. It was necessary to fix a date prior to the declared public announcement—that should be obvious. The date may just as easily have been 5 March or 7 March.

The date has been fixed and I do not know what the shyness is about in acknowledging what the package contains. What are members of the Opposition troubled about? Do they not want to see a set of proposals put into effect that will help people? Are they troubled by the notion that people will have some predictability and certainty about the prices they must pay over the next twelve months? Do they not want to help families? Are they not worried about what families must pay for food in grocery stores over the coming months?

The reason for the importance of knowing the details of the national wage case before a final decision was made should be apparent. I hope it is understood by all honourable members that the outcomes of national wage cases are uncertain. Some wage earners may receive increases of as much as 9 per cent in various forms while some may receive only 2·5 per cent. That is why a package needed to be put together above all national wage case decisions to protect people over the next twelve months.

As the Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources indicated, a new wage structure is in place. The Government will continue to support the centralised wage fixing system. The Opposition is divided about that, as it is about so many other issues. The Government believes the centralised wage fixing system has been the salvation of this country over the past four and a half years. However, because of discounting it has had the consequence of ensuring that, over the past three and a half to four years, people have not received consumer price index adjustments in full, and they have copped that. The Government believes they are entitled to see restraint on the part of those who supply the goods the people buy. That is what the package is about, and the Opposition should support it.

The SPEAKER—Order! I advise the House as I did when this matter first came to light—

Mr Stockdale interjected.

The SPEAKER—Order! If the honourable member for Brighton wishes to test the authority of the Chair, I shall deal with him. As I indicated, I am prepared to hear limited debate but not endless or tedious debate on whether the matter is urgent.

Mr RAMSAY (Balwyn)—When a Government comes into this Chamber and asks the Chair to exercise its authority under Standing Order No. 164 to treat a Bill, yet to be seen by this House, as a matter of extreme urgency, it is incumbent on that Government to give you, Sir, good, sound and imperative reasons why this proposed legislation should not be permitted to go through the normal procedures of the House.
The Government has failed to do that. The Minister for Labour, the Deputy Premier and the Premier have failed. Not one of them has put forward to this House convincing reasons why this extraordinary step should be taken under Standing Order No. 164.

The honourable member for Benambra pointed out that the Minister for Labour has already advised the House that the proposed legislation contains a trigger date—a date of operation—of 6 March. That trigger date is fixed so that the urgency for the passage of the Bill falls away. If the effective date was to be the date of proclamation of the proposed legislation, the Minister for Labour would have made out his case. However, he has not made out his case.

The Premier stated that it was desirable to put this package together as near as practicable to the date of operation, for obvious reasons. It is no argument to claim that the case does not have to be argued because the reasons are obvious. The Premier said, "... as near as practicable to the date for obvious reasons". I submit that the Bill does not need to be passed close to that date because the community knows that 6 March 1987 will be the effective date, whether this proposed legislation is debated this week, next week or the following week.

No case has been put to you, Mr Speaker, by the Government that if this proposed legislation is not carried this week it will affect the announced intention of the Government one way or the other. The Premier's action in arguing that there are obvious reasons why it has to be done quickly—which for obvious reasons he has not spelt out—has shown that he is prepared to trample over the normal procedures of debate in this House. For that reason alone, you should not submit to this request from the Minister for Labour.

Finally, at question time today the Minister for Labour indicated to the House that he would be having further discussions on Friday with one of the major industry groups involved—I believe it was the grocers. If the Bill were passed urgently, the Minister would go to those discussions with this important group saying to him that as the legislation was already in place anything the Minister had to say was irrelevant. If he were a genuine Minister for Labour and if he genuinely had the concerns of the community at heart, he would have wanted to ensure that he had held those discussions before the debate on the measure proceeded in this House.

You, Mr Speaker, should not uphold the Government's request under Standing Order No. 164. Instead you should allow the debating procedures of this House to continue in the normal fashion.

Mr RICHARDSON (Forest Hill)—Mr Speaker, the decision with which you are faced and which you will have to announce in a short time is one of the most onerous and responsible decisions you will have been called upon to make in the years you have occupied your important office. It is an unusual course to be taken by the Government and it is a decision that rests solely with the Speaker.

The action to be taken in response to the request has nothing to do with government or opposition, with the respective numbers or with political parties; it is a decision of the Speaker whose responsibility it is to uphold the traditions and responsibilities of Parliament.

The only matter you must consider, Mr Speaker, is the question of urgency. You have to be satisfied that the Government, through the Minister, has made an undeniable case of urgency; that the Minister has presented to you, Sir, a set of facts that convince you, beyond any doubt whatever, that there is no course for him to follow other than the course he has proposed. He has to prove the urgency of the matter and prove that the course he proposes is the only possible course.

I put it to you, Mr Speaker, that the Minister for Labour has failed to do both of those things. He has failed, and successive honourable members on the Government side of the House have failed, to provide you with convincing proof of urgency and of the lack of any alternative course. The lack of urgency is demonstrated by the fact that the Premier has himself admitted that the proposal has been under consideration since November. It has
been further admitted that the measure will probably not even be proclaimed. It has been further admitted that the Bill has not been presented in other than rough draft form to the Opposition.

The matter of urgency has not been answered adequately and convincingly enough for you, Mr Speaker, to decide to allow the unique course of action that is required by the request of the Minister. You are the guardian of this Parliament and it is you who must be convinced by argument and proof that the only course available to the Minister and the Government is the one that is proposed. I put it to you that you have not been presented with convincing argument of urgency or of the absence of any alternative and, in that situation, I suggest that the cogent arguments that have been put forward, particularly by the honourable member for Benambra, the Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Balwyn, are far more convincing than the arguments that have been presented by the Minister for Labour and his colleagues.

The SPEAKER—Order! There is no motion before the Chair. I do not intend to allow the debate along the narrow lines to which the debate is restricted to go on endlessly. I shall call the honourable member for Mildura, who will be the last speaker I intend to call.

Mr WHITING (Mildura)—This is an important matter because history has proved the cases of this kind that have occurred in the past to have been of considerable importance to the people of Victoria. In 1923—

Mr Fordham interjected.

Mr WHITING—I take it the Deputy Premier has not read the 1923 case, otherwise he would know about it. The procedure was used in 1923, as recorded at page 1833 of *Hansard* Volume No. 165 of 7 November 1923, to deal with the police strike. The then Premier, Mr Lawson, stated:

... there has been in the city a state bordering on civil commotion. The effect of the betrayal of the trust of certain members of the Police Force has been to let loose in this community a lawless element, men have been killed, shops looted, property stolen, and the life and liberty of the people gravely menaced.

Why should one move away from the principal of democracy that this Parliament is supposed to uphold?

You, Mr Speaker, would be the first to agree that the minority should be protected. The Opposition and the public of Victoria are, in effect, a minority in this case. In the 1923 case, the Speaker, Sir John Mackey, upheld the point that, because of the seriousness of the police strike at the time, legislation should be passed through Parliament expeditiously so that citizens of the community could be appointed as police to protect the community.

I now refer to *Hansard* Volume No. 237 of 16 October 1951, in which the Speaker, Sir Archie Michaelis, was in the Chair. The matter at issue was the chairmanship of the Egg and Egg Pulp Marketing Board. It was believed by the Premier at the time, Mr J. G. B. McDonald, that there should be a recision of the appointment of a particular person as chairman of the board and that that person should be replaced by somebody else. I have not read the details of the reasons for that move, but it is obviously related to consumers and consumers' rights, in which Government members are interested. Eggs are a basic item of consumption for family people, about whom the Premier was speaking.

The third occasion on which this procedure was used related to the Newport power station when Mr Speaker Wheeler ruled that Standing Order No. 164 could be used. To my knowledge, those are the only three occasions when this Parliament has resorted to the use of that Standing Order, and all of them were of major importance to this State.

In this situation the Premier claims that the Government has been thinking about the proposed legislation for six months in an attempt to restrict the increases in prices of goods in supermarkets and the like. I suspect that it was because of the event that will take place on Saturday, 21 March that last Thursday or Friday the Government suddenly announced the need to pass proposed legislation through Parliament this week. I believe
the case the Government is putting to cover the situation with which we are confronted at present pales into insignificance compared with the situations that existed in the three occasions I have outlined when Standing Order No. 164 has been implemented.

I believe you, Mr Speaker, as a Speaker of great renown in this State, will go down in history if you do not allow the use of this Standing Order and thus preserve the rights of the little people in the State, so that they may be grateful for your intervention to prevent proposed legislation being passed through Parliament with undue haste.

The SPEAKER—Order! The precedents suggest that the Speaker accepts the pleas of urgency and permits the Minister forthwith to move the introduction of the Bill—they are the three precedents that have been highlighted by the honourable member for Mildura, one during my period in this House in 1977. The House has not seen or heard of the contents of the Bill. Therefore, I need to take note of what the Minister for Labour, the Premier and the Deputy Premier have said in respect of urgency.

Honourable members of the opposition parties have said that this matter is not urgent, and I have weighed that up also.

Mr Kennett interjected.

The SPEAKER—Order! I understood that they had seen the Bill. The House was advised that copies of the Bill had been provided.

Mr Kennett interjected.

The SPEAKER—Order! I am advising what I heard from the chair.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! As to the instructions regarding the framing of the Bill to the Parliamentary Counsel, I have no knowledge of that, so I discount it. Political events occurring in the past or in the future are not my concern in making a ruling on this matter.

The honourable member for Forest Hill claims that the procedure is unique. I do not believe it is in that category. It is a rarely used procedure, but it has been used in the past and, therefore, I am prepared to accept the procedure as being perfectly legitimate.

The honourable member for Mildura directed my attention to the details of the three matters that were before the House in 1923, 1951 and 1977. He also directed my attention to protecting the rights of the minority. I intend to do that, whether it be in this House or whether it is within my powers to do so outside the House, but I do not accept that I should dismiss the claim to urgency as is being suggested by the opposition parties solely on that basis.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! On the face of the Minister's statement that the Bill that he wishes to introduce is of an urgent nature, I accept that advice given to the House.

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—I move:

That I have leave to bring in a Bill to make provision for the regulation of grocery prices and for other purposes.

The House divided on the motion (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds in the chair).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ayes</th>
<th>Noes</th>
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</table>

Majority for the motion 10

AYES

Mr Andrianopoulos
Mr Cain
Miss Callister

NOES

Mr Brown
Mr Coleman
Mr Cooper
Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—I move:

That this Bill be now read a first time.

The House divided on the motion (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds in the chair).

Ayes ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... 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The Bill was read a first time.

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—I move:

That the Bill be printed.

The House divided on the motion (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds in the chair).

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<tr>
<th>Ayes</th>
<th>46</th>
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<td>Noes</td>
<td>36</td>
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Majority for the motion 10

AYES
Mr Andrianopoulos
Mr Cain
Miss Callister
Mr Cathie
Dr Coghill
Mr Crabb
Mr Culpin
Mr Cunningham
Mr Ernst
Mr Fogarty
Mr Fordham

NOES
Mr Brown
Mr Coleman
Mr Cooper
Mr Crozier
Mr Delzoppo
Mr Dickinson
Mr Evans
Mr Evans
Mr Evans
Mr Gude
Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—I move:

That this Bill be read a second time forthwith.

The House divided on the motion (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds in the chair).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Mr Cunningham</td>
<td>Mr Evans</td>
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<td>Mr Ernst</td>
<td>(Ballarat North)</td>
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<td>Mr Fogarty</td>
<td>Mr Gude</td>
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<td>Mr Fordham</td>
<td>Mr Hann</td>
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<td>Mr Gavin</td>
<td>Mr Hayward</td>
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<td>Mr Harrowfield</td>
<td>Mr Jasper</td>
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<td>Mrs Hill</td>
<td>Mr John</td>
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<td>Mr Hill</td>
<td>Mr Kennett</td>
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<td>Mrs Hirsh</td>
<td>Mr Lea</td>
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AYES

NOES

Mr Andrianopoulos
Mr Cain
Miss Callister
Mr Cathie
Dr Coghil
Mr Crabb
Mr Culpin
Mr Cunningham
Mr Ernst
Mr Fogarty
Mr Fordham
Mr Gavin
Mr Harrowfield
Mrs Hill
Mr Hill
Mrs Hirsh

Mr Brown
Mr Cooper
Mr Crozier
Mr Delzoppo
Mr Dickinson
Mr Evans
Mr Evans
Mr Evans
Mr Gude
Mr Hann
Mr Hayward
Mr Jasper
Mr John
Mr Kennett
Mr Lea
Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—I move:

That this Bill be now read a second time.

This may well be the most important Bill to be considered by this House in many years.

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Minister should wait until the Bill has been fully distributed before beginning the second-reading speech.

The SPEAKER—Order! There is no point of order. I called on the Minister for Labour.

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—The Bill provides a power to control certain grocery prices. It provides the legislative back-up for the Government's program to peg the prices of a basket of Government household services and the prices of a basket of the most commonly purchased supermarket items to no more than a 6 per cent increase over the next year. This program will be called the "prices peg".

The Government is introducing the Bill as a matter of urgency following last week's national wage case decision. Despite Victoria's strong record of economic growth and success in job creation, Australia is going through difficult economic times as a result of our poor terms of trade. The traditional sources of much of our national export income—the resources and farming industries—have been severely hit by low world commodity prices and by the protectionist agricultural policies of some of our major trading partners.

To overcome these problems and redress the balance of trade difficulties, Australia must improve its productivity and international competitiveness. To do this we must boost our exports of manufactured goods and replace goods which we currently import with Australian made goods.
To achieve this will require a commitment from all sectors of the community to work together for the common good. This philosophy is reflected in the national wage case decision which moves away from indexation of wages to a two-tiered wage fixing system. Under the new national wage system all workers will receive a $10 a week first tier rise immediately and up to 4 per cent in a second tier negotiated on the basis of productivity improvements.

Clearly there is a duty on the Government to act to ensure this decision is not merely followed by erosion of the spending power of Victorians, particularly those with families to support. The commitment to restraint must be shared across the board in an equitable way as we all must contribute to overcoming our external trade problems.

To prevent the erosion of consumers' purchasing power, wage restraint must be matched by price restraint. By introducing the prices peg, the Government will ensure price stability for basic necessities and ensure that items in the normal household grocery basket stay within the financial reach of all Victorians. To date, the burden of restraint has fallen most heavily on wage earners. In recent years they have suffered a reduction in real wages as a necessary result of recent national wage case decisions. It is time that others in the community took up their share of the burden of restraint. Nowhere is this more necessary than in the area of prices and, in particular, the prices of basic food and grocery items.

The prices peg is a campaign to target a range of grocery items and State Government charges which form part of maintaining a reasonable standard of living. This campaign will contain the cost increases of these items at a level below 6 per cent for the next twelve months.

The supermarket prices peg “basket” will include about 170 of the top selling grocery items bought by Victorians every day. The basket will include ordinary household goods such as breakfast cereals, bread, butter, cheese, soap powders and pet food.

The Government has discussed the prices peg campaign with major manufacturers and retailers in the grocery industry and we will release the list of prices peg items shortly after these groups have had a further chance to comment.

The Government believes the industry will find the campaign manageable and is encouraged by the support and commitment being made by business to see the scheme work. The campaign is not aimed at the small operator such as the corner milk bar or the convenience stores. But it will apply to the retail area where the biggest sales of food and groceries are made—the major supermarket chains.

The Government is expecting and is confident of cooperation from industry, but it is necessary for the Government to have back-up legislation to be used in the event that excessive price rises, without adequate justification, undermine the prices peg.

I shall now turn to the main features of the Bill. It will apply only to shops that employ twenty or more persons. In this respect, I draw attention to clause 3 (2) which sets out the criteria for the application of the measure. This provision is drawn from the Shop Trading Bill which is currently before the House.

Clauses 4, 5 and 6 are the main components. They provide collectively for the Governor in Council to act to declare the price of a basic grocery item to be a regulated price as well as the maximum price for which a basic grocery item may be sold by retailers covered by the Act.

The provisions allow prices to be fixed for manufacturers, producers, wholesalers and retail shops to which the Act applies. It may well be necessary to fix prices in one or all of these areas depending upon the economic circumstances and consideration of the public interest.

Clause 6 sets out the penalty for selling a basic grocery item above the maximum price declared if such maximum price is declared. The penalties are in line with the Fuel Prices
Regulation Act, which performs a function broadly similar to that which is proposed in the Bill.

Clause 10 is a sunset provision which provides for the legislation to operate for only twelve months from the date upon which it receives the Royal assent.

The remaining provisions of the Bill are basically machinery matters to support the main clauses. I refer honourable members to the clause notes attached to the Bill.

This is landmark legislation. The Government is determined that its prices peg program will succeed. The Government has consistently, through its discussions with industry on establishing the prices, indicated that the core of the prices peg program is cooperative and that the Government will not be introducing regulatory or legislative mechanisms with regard to the maintenance of that basket below 6 per cent overall.

However, it has consistently maintained, in its discussions, that it will give legislative form to the Government’s reserve power under the Constitution to control prices, should there be any flagrant breach of the cooperative agreement that it has collectively entered into.

In response to that view, the grocery manufacturers and retailers have indicated that they do not believe it is necessary and that everyone will abide by the cooperative agreement. However, they have indicated an acceptance of the Government’s right to legislate such reserve powers.

**Mr Kennett**—Rubbish!

**Mr CRABB**—“Rubbish” is exactly what comes out of the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition more often than not!

Therefore, I believe both manufacturers involved in this industry and the community at large accept that it is reasonable for the Government to have a reserve power to deal with any circumstances that may occur if the cooperative agreement that has been entered into is infringed in any way.

I commend the Bill to the House.

On the motion of Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition), the debate was adjourned.

**Mr CRABB** (Minister for Labour)—I move:

That the debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

**Mr KENNETT** (Leader of the Opposition)—On the question of time, Mr Speaker, the proposed legislation has now been officially introduced into the Parliament of Victoria after all the hoo-ha that has preceded it in the media. It is unacceptable that the Government should now attempt to push through this measure and to recommence debate within 24 hours.

As I sit here, I am receiving even more telexes from Mr Ken Macdonald, the Executive Director of the Retail Traders Association of Victoria, who concludes:

*We have now asked the Premier for consultation . . .*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Leader of the Opposition is well aware that the debate on the question of time is narrow. I do not intend to allow the debate to get out of hand on this subject through reading into the record the contents of telexes and telegrams.

**Mr KENNETT**—Mr Speaker, I am attempting to inform you that some people who this Minister said have agreed with the Bill disagree with it and are desperately asking for time to meet and discuss the contents of the measure with the Government and the Opposition. The documents in my hand are only two that I have received since the House commenced sitting at 2 p.m. today. I have received almost a dozen submissions from organisations affected by the Bill which believe they have been misled by the Government
and ask that time be given—in some cases for initial consultations and, more importantly, in other cases for further discussions to take place.

The Deputy Premier would recognise that the Bill follows a draft measure that the Government forwarded to the Opposition yesterday. It will not take long for the Opposition to determine whether those documents are the same. However, it will take longer, with normal Parliamentary duties, to consult widely, particularly as some grocery manufacturers are headquartered in Sydney, in order to do this Bill the justice that it deserves.

I suggest to the House that one of the urgent reasons why the Government is pushing through the Bill is that a letter dated 14 March has been sent by the Premier to 120,000 citizens—

Mr Fordham—On the Bill!

Mr KENNETT—I am speaking on the Bill. The Government must argue why it considers the Bill to be urgent.

The SPEAKER—Order! I have already advised the House and the Leader of the Opposition that the debate on the question of time is narrow. I do not intend to allow the debate to get out of hand by honourable members referring to political events that have occurred outside the House.

Mr KENNETT—Mr Speaker, it was not I but the Deputy Premier who interjected, and I suggest that members of the Government should be called to order.

I suggest to the House that the Opposition and the community need greater time to consider the Bill. I further suggest that the Government is refusing reasonable time to discuss the Bill because the Premier has issued a letter that falsely represents the current position of the proposed legislation. Parliament should not be used in that way to back up claims made publicly.

Honourable members should be given the opportunity of discussing this measure in the proper course and under the normal practices of this Chamber, which involve a two-week adjournment, by agreement, for most measures and one week for others, but with more time to be given if required.

It is not good enough for the Government today to introduce a Bill under Standing Order No. 164 and to argue that the debate should proceed within 24 hours while the Opposition is receiving many submissions associated with the workings of the proposed legislation. A massive fraud is being perpetrated on Victorians and is being backed up by the action of the Government on the proposed legislation.

I call on the Deputy Premier and the Government to recognise the types of claims the Deputy Premier made when in opposition a few years ago; he argued for more time on every Bill that was introduced. I refer the House to the 1977 example raised earlier, when the then Opposition desperately wanted more time to discuss proposed legislation.

This measure is important because it does not address many issues that should be contained within it. Furthermore, it is being pushed through Parliament for all the wrong reasons. Prior to other public events in the past, the Government has misled or fraudulently produced information. The Opposition is being requested today to assist in pushing through the Bill by agreeing to the adjournment of the debate until tomorrow simply because claims have been made outside Parliament that are not backed up by the factual submissions the Opposition is receiving from those affected by the measure.

If the Government wants to pork barrel its way through life, so be it. However, the Opposition takes the responsible position that this measure must be considered after consultation and within the fullness of the submissions it has received from community groups.

Therefore, I move:
That the word “tomorrow” be omitted with the view of inserting in place thereof the expression “Tuesday, March 31”.

Mr HANN (Rodney)—This has been a fascinating debate this afternoon because the Minister for Labour espoused the reasons why he believed this was an urgent measure and why it should be rushed through Parliament. However, only a short time ago he said that the Government had discussed the measure with representatives of the grocery supermarkets and manufacturers and that agreement had been reached with them. He informed the House that they had indicated their cooperation and he said that the measure was really only an enabling Bill to secure the Government’s position.

It is obvious that there is no urgency at all. If the Government believes this measure is so important, I challenge it to adopt a bipartisan approach and to enter into meaningful negotiations with the Liberal and National parties. The opposition parties also recognise the need for price constraint.

However, it is important that the proposed legislation be given much greater thought and that it include greater detail. I throw out that challenge to the Deputy Premier because, as stated by the Leader of the Opposition, there needs to be much greater detail contained in the measure. This is a political exercise. The Deputy Premier and the Minister should admit publicly that it is a piece of nonsense and was put forward by a campaign committee—

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Deputy Leader of the National Party recognises that the debate on time is narrow and I ask him to return to the question of time.

Mr HANN—The Minister has stated the reasons why the Bill is not urgent. The National Party believes time should be available for all concerned Victorians to consider its ramifications.

Mr Simpson interjected.

Mr HANN—I understand that the honourable member for Niddrie shows no concern at all for anyone other than the few honourable members surrounding him. The National Party represents people from all over Victoria and it is important that rural Victorians consider all pieces of proposed legislation. For those reasons, the National Party supports the Opposition.

Mr LIEBERMAN (Benambra)—On the question of time, Mr Speaker, I support the call by the Opposition for an adjournment of the debate for two weeks. This Bill is important to me especially as I represent a Victorian electorate that borders New South Wales.

The Government is proposing that the new law shall apply not only to manufacturers but also to producers—that could mean farmers. The Minister for Labour stated in his second-reading speech that the farming industries have been severely hit by low commodity prices and are facing a crisis. I want time to consult with the farming community and producers about the proposed legislation because of its implications.

Retailers in north-east Victoria may well sell grocery items that are obtained from New South Wales or other States. The proposed legislation could put them out of business because their suppliers and wholesalers are from another State. I need more time to consult on the Bill and beg of you, Sir, to provide that time.

The proposed legislation may well infringe section 92 of the Commonwealth Constitution because it appears purportedly to attempt to control the interchange of trade and commerce between two States. On that basis, I suggest the Government also needs more time—and certainly Her Majesty’s Opposition needs more time—to obtain counsel from constitutional lawyers on this important point.

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—On the question of time, Mr Speaker, the Government is giving the opposition parties more time. It would have been possible to
proceed forthwith with the proposed legislation but on the basis of the passionate pleas by honourable members for more time it seems that a day would be enough time for consultation on this simple piece of legislation.

The Bill is simple and is enabling legislation. The opposition parties should have the capacity now to discuss the measure with whomever they wish. Another important factor in the Government's decision to defer the debate on the Bill until tomorrow is that the Leader of the Opposition did not inform the rest of the Liberal Party about the draft Bill—for reasons that are beyond me and despite the fact that the Government gave him a copy of the proposed legislation yesterday.

Although the Leader of the Opposition is not prepared to provide his backbench members with adequate time to consider the proposed legislation, the Government will give honourable members time to discuss it by deferring the rest of the debate until tomorrow, but tomorrow will be long enough. The proposed legislation is simple.

The arguments about whether the measure should be supported are arguments of principle. If the Opposition holds the principle that it does not wish to see the State involved in the prices issue, it can decide that without any argument. If it wishes to support the Government in assisting families to improve their standards of living, it will decide to support the proposed legislation quickly. It is reasonable for the Government to defer the debate until tomorrow.

Mr STOCKDALE (Brighton)—In making a decision on time, I put it to the Chair that it is important to consider what Parliament is doing; it is dealing with proposed legislation that the Government has introduced as vital and in the interests of all Victorians.

Honourable members do not attend Parliament to represent ourselves; we speak on behalf of electorates for which we are responsible and to which we are accountable every four years. It is beholden on us to consult with our constituents on important matters brought before Parliament.

In reality the Bill before the House was introduced only this afternoon. No opportunity was provided for circulating copies of the proposed legislation in electorates or anywhere else. If the Bill is passed tomorrow, honourable members will not have had any opportunity of effectively consulting with their electorates for which they are responsible and to which they are accountable.

What are the tests that should be applied in deciding whether it is appropriate to proceed with the measure on less than 24 hours' notice? Firstly, is it purely a routine piece of legislation? If so, a strong case could be made for the adjournment of the debate for 24 hours being long enough. If that were the case the measure would be familiar to the House and the community and would not require effective communication with the electorates. The Bill is not even held out on that basis, so it does not pass the test of being merely a routine piece of legislation.

Secondly, is the community aware of the terms of the proposed legislation? Whether a copy of the Bill was made available to the Leader of the Opposition yesterday or whether other honourable members saw it yesterday, the fact remains that the first opportunity any member of the community had of being aware of the terms of the proposed legislation was when it was introduced in Parliament today or, more accurately, when an honourable member has the opportunity of consulting with his or her constituents, as the Government should have done.

Thirdly, if there is some urgent social evil that cannot be dealt with other than by the urgent passage of the Bill, is there some power contained in the proposed legislation the exercise of which is necessary in the public interest? It is not suggested that that is the basis on which the Bill was introduced. The Minister for Labour is proposing a reserve power for the Government pending negotiation with the people who are to give effect to the Government's scheme. Honourable members have been informed that the negotiations with some of the most important people involved are to commence on Friday.
Honourable members have not only had the Minister's view but also the Minister for Consumer Affairs said on the radio last week that the Government did not intend to proclaim the proposed legislation. In this morning's Australian Financial Review, the Premier——

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Brighton has strictly adhered to my ruling on the question of time but now he is starting to stray away. I ask the honourable member to return to the matter before the Chair and to conclude his remarks on the question of time.

Mr STOCKDALE—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am trying to illustrate that the Bill does not seek some emergency power required by the Government at present to exercise on the basis of an important public requirement.

Fourthly, are there changing circumstances? Evidence has not been presented to the Chair that there is any circumstance that is likely to change in the application of a basket concept from 6 March if the Bill is debated in two weeks or tomorrow. If the voluntary restraint fails, it will not fail tomorrow, the next day or even on Friday when the negotiations are to commence; the concept can be assessed only over time.

In reality, the whole basket approach is inconsistent with the basis of the Government advancing the urgency of this reserve power. The arguments of the Opposition will not defeat the Government on this issue but ought to cause you, Mr Speaker, to uphold the request of the Leader of the Opposition; the arguments advanced by the Government today and in the media since this stunt began a week ago will defeat the measure.

The SPEAKER—Order! I should advise the honourable member for Brighton that the matter before the Chair is a motion over which I have no jurisdiction.

Mr GUDE (Hawthorn)—On the question of time, Mr Speaker, on the one hand the Government has said that the proposed legislation is major and on the other hand the Minister for Labour has said that the legislative change is simple and honourable members need only one day to consider it. If one had nothing else to do, perhaps one could consider simple Bills introduced by simple Ministers. The Government has shown abject failure in consulting with the people most affected by the proposed legislation, people who earn their incomes and livelihood from and offer jobs to people in the businesses that will be directly affected by the proposed legislation.

The Leader of the Opposition has already stated that members of the Opposition have received numerous representations from organisations expressing concern that the Minister for Labour and the Government have failed to consult them. Many have suggested that they have been duped, that a "smartie" has been put over them. They resent that as do the Opposition and the people of the State.

There is no way that the producers can be consulted in 24 hours because they are spread out all over the State. Indeed, their representative voice is located in New South Wales, not Victoria. Have they been consulted? The answer is: "Of course not". The fact is that it is a cheap political stunt. It prostitutes the proceedings of this Parliament.

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member is out of order and I ask him to come back directly to the question: the question is the matter of time.

Mr GUDE—On the matter of time, the fact is that by any reasonable judgment or standard the adjournment of the debate for one day on a Bill that is being put forward as such a major piece of proposed legislation is an abject disgrace.

Further, the Government has been blowing its bags over the proposed legislation to the community. In many ways the proposed legislation is being pushed on simply and solely as a consequence of the Government's pre-emptive statements; statements it should never have made; statements it had no right to make; and statements it made without consulting the ordinary people—the voters.
The honourable member for Brighton mentioned a key point earlier in the debate. The Minister for Consumer Affairs said, on two radio stations, that the proposed legislation is not to be proclaimed. If it is not to be proclaimed, what is the urgency? What is the reason for the Government's indecent haste?

I support the Leader of the Opposition and those speakers who have supported an extension of time. There should be an adjournment of the debate for two weeks. I ask the House to completely reject the Government's call for an adjournment period of one day.

The House divided on the question that the word proposed by Mr Kennett to be omitted stand part of the motion (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds in the chair).

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The motion was agreed to, and the debate was adjourned until next day.

PETITIONS

The Clerk—I have received the following petitions for presentation to Parliament:

Library funding

TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the State of Victoria sheweth that the proposed cuts of $2 million to public library funding in the 1987-1988 and again in the 1988-89 financial years will have catastrophic effects on the services provided by the already under-funded public libraries.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Government reverse this decision and return to the stated ALP policy of 50/50 funding of public libraries between State and local government.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Dr Wells (2567 signatures)

Duck hunting season

TO THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF VICTORIA IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED:

This the petition of the undersigned electors of the State of Victoria shows that we are concerned at the proposal by the Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands to delay the opening of the 1987 wild duck hunting season for reasons which are not valid ecological or humane considerations and accordingly we ask the Parliament for the traditional opening time of dawn on the last Saturday of February unless environmental considerations intervene.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Austin (4020 signatures) and Mr Hann (3941 signatures)

It was ordered that the petitions be laid on the table.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I move:

That there be presented to this House a copy of Administrative Arrangements Orders Nos 47 and 48 of 1986, and 49, 50 and 51 of 1987.

The motion was agreed to.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources) presented the orders in compliance with the foregoing order.

It was ordered that the orders be laid on the table.

PAPERS

The following papers, pursuant to the directions of several Acts of Parliament, were laid on the table by the Clerk:


Education Act 1958—Resumption of land at Hallam—Certificate of the Minister for Education.

Educational Administration Institute—Report for the year 1985-86.

National Gallery of Victoria—Report for the year 1985-86.

Poultry Farmer Licensing Review Committee—Report for the year 1985-86.

Business Franchise Acts (Amendment) Bill

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer), pursuant to Standing Order No. 169 (b), moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Business Franchise Acts and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

APPROPRIATION MESSAGES

The SPEAKER announced that he had received messages from His Excellency the Governor recommending that appropriations be made from the Consolidated Fund for the purposes of the following Bills:

Planning Appeals (Amendment) Bill
Judicial Salaries Bill

SUPPLY (1987–88, No. 1) BILL

The SPEAKER announced the presentation of a message from His Excellency the Governor recommending that an appropriation be made from the Consolidated Fund for the purposes of the Supply (1987–88, No. 1) Bill.

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer), pursuant to Standing Order No. 169 (a), moved for leave to bring in a Bill to make interim provision for the appropriation of moneys out of the
Consolidated Fund for the recurrent services and for certain works and purposes for the financial year 1987–88.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer)—I move:

That this Bill be now read a second time.

The annual Appropriation Bill with respect to any particular financial year is not introduced into Parliament until some time after the beginning of that financial year. It is therefore necessary for the Government of the day to seek Parliamentary authorisation of spending for the ongoing programs of Government from the beginning of the financial year on 1 July until the time when the Appropriation Bill is passed. In 1987–88 the Victorian Government intends to introduce the Appropriation Bill during August in order to make the strategies and policies reflected in that Bill effective for as much of the financial year as possible. This decision is predicated on a May Premiers Conference and Loan Council—the Commonwealth Government has announced a 25 May 1987 date for those meetings.

The Supply period will extend for up to four months. No new policies are introduced during this time. Honourable members can obtain more detailed information about the ongoing programs to which spending will be applied in this Supply period in the 1986–87 Appropriation Act and supporting Budget Papers.

The 1987–88 Supply Bill provides for payments out of the Consolidated Fund for the recurrent and works and services expenditure requirements of Budget sector agencies, in so far as they depend on Appropriation, for the first four months of the financial year. The Supply Bill will lapse when the 1987–88 Appropriation Bill is passed by both Houses.

Consistent with program budgeting principles, and following the form of the presentation of Appropriation legislation since 1984–85, the 1987–88 Supply provisions for both recurrent expenditure and works and services expenditure of Ministries have been made on a program basis.

The amount of Supply sought in this Bill is $3,325,380,000. This consists of $2,632,910,000 for recurrent expenditure and $692,470,000 for works and services expenditure. The individual amounts for each program are shown in the table to clause 4 of the Bill.

With respect to recurrent expenditure, the amounts have been calculated on the basis of existing operating cost levels, including subsidies and salary and wage rate levels as at 2 March 1987, and are the amounts estimated to be required to meet payments for these services during the period 1 July to 31 October 1987. These amounts are set out in the relevant column in the table to clause 4 of the Bill.

Honourable members should note that it has not been possible to incorporate in the Bill the impact of the national wage decision of 10 March 1987.

The implementation of the 10 March 1987 national wage decision through the appropriate wage fixing tribunals and any other wage awards handed down after 2 March 1987 which affect expenditure during the Supply period, will be met through the provisions contained in clause 4 under well established arrangements. This clause provides the necessary appropriation authority to allow Supply amounts for recurrent expenditure to be adjusted to meet the cost of such wage awards.

Honourable members would be aware that, in the 1986–87 Appropriation Act, the Government made allowance in its recurrent expenditure estimates for a 1.5 per cent productivity improvement factor in the programs of Budget sector agencies. This initiative complements many other economic and financial management reforms adopted by the Government since 1982. The 1.5 per cent per annum productivity improvement has been allowed for in the Supply provisions contained in this Bill.
With respect to works and services expenditure, the total amount sought will enable the Government to continue its works program during the first four months of the 1987-88 financial year. It is composed of the individual amounts shown in the relevant column in the table to clause 4 of the Bill. These amounts represent the cash flow which it is estimated will be required during the Supply period to enable the Government to continue funding approved projects and those on going works activities such as maintenance of physical assets in which agencies are involved from year to year.

Clause 5 of the Bill allows the Treasurer to transfer funds from a program where Supply provisions are more than sufficient to another program within the same portfolio where Supply provisions prove to be deficient. This provision applies to both recurrent expenditure and works and services expenditure, and is similar to the provision contained in the Appropriation Act. However, it does not allow the Treasurer to transfer provisions provided in the Bill between recurrent and works and services expenditure.

The total amount for each agency cannot be altered by the Treasurer, only the proportions assigned to each program. In addition, honourable members are reminded that the Treasurer is required to report back to Parliament in all cases where the authority is exercised. It should be emphasised that this provision is meant to be exercised only on a limited basis and where such transfers would be consistent with the achievement of program objectives of the relevant Ministry.

An explanatory memorandum to the Bill has been prepared in a form similar to that provided in the past. The information provided in that memorandum is to aid honourable members in their consideration of the Bill. It indicates, for example, reasons why particular Supply provisions vary significantly from the provisions which would be expected on a pro-rata basis for the four month period which this Bill covers.

The 1987-88 Supply Bill is similar in format to the 1986-87 Supply Bill in that certain non-specific appropriation matters, mainly related to capital expenditure in the Ministry of Water Resources and the Rural Water Commission, but also including one section relating to Education, are not included. Instead, they are provided for in the Works and Services (Ancillary Provisions, No. 1) Bill 1987, which will be introduced shortly.

I commend the Bill to the House.

On the motion of Mr STOCKDALE (Brighton), the debate was adjourned.

It was ordered that the debate be adjourned until Tuesday, March 24.

WORKS AND SERVICES (ANCILLARY PROVISIONS, No. 1) BILL

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer)—I move:

That this Bill be now read a second time.

The Bill provides for non-specific appropriation matters, mainly related to works and services expenditure in the Ministry of Water Resources and the Rural Water Commission, but also including one section related to education.

It is appropriate that the Bill and the Supply Bill be debated jointly to facilitate consideration of the matters contained in them and joint debate will, therefore, be proposed. Honourable members will be aware that the provisions covering matters related to appropriations included in the Bill were included in Supply and Appropriation Bills before 1986-87, which meant that such provisions were considered during the debate on the Supply and Appropriation Bills. Technically, these non-specific appropriation matters are more properly handled in a separate Bill. I commend the Bill to the House.

On the motion of Mr STOCKDALE (Brighton), the debate was adjourned.

It was ordered that the debate be adjourned until Tuesday, March 24.
PORT OF MELBOURNE AUTHORITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I move:

That this Bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the Port of Melbourne Authority Act 1958 to include a member on the authority board who represents Western Port interests.

Currently, the Port of Melbourne Authority has six members including representatives of shipowners, exporters, importers, primary producers and the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

This membership was designed to meet the needs of the authority while it was responsible only for the port of Melbourne. It is necessary to augment the membership now that the authority has assumed responsibility for Western Port, following the integration of the ports and harbors division of the Ministry of Transport with the Port of Melbourne Authority, Port of Geelong Authority and the Port of Portland Authority.

Western Port was established in 1966 as a major deepwater port and has since developed into one of the largest bulk ports in Australia. It is the second largest port in Victoria.

With its unique combination of deep sheltered water and adjacent large areas of relatively undeveloped flat land, its close proximity to Melbourne and its location in relation to offshore oil wells, Western Port will play an increasingly significant role in the future development of Victoria and the nation. Rapid changes in the economics and technology of both shipping and cargo handling have seen both bulk trades and containerisation move to locations where extensive waterside land and deepwater are available. There are very few locations in Australia with these assets. Western Port is one of them.

Having regard to the significance of Western Port, it is important that interests in the Western Port area be represented on the Port of Melbourne Authority.

On 31 October 1986, I announced the formation of the Western Port Advisory Committee and proposed the appointment of a new member of the Port of Melbourne Authority to represent the interests of Western Port. This was subsequently provided for in the Port Authorities (Amendment) Bill 1986 introduced in the spring sittings. On 5 December 1986, the Bill was amended in another place, following an amendment proposed by the Opposition, to delete the provision in the Bill for an additional member of the Port of Melbourne Authority.

At the time, the only reason given by the Opposition for rejecting the proposal for an additional member to represent Western Port interests was that it represented a move away from the traditional method of selecting members of the authority from particular sectors of the Victorian economy, to selecting them from a particular region.

Although the so-called traditional method may have been appropriate when the Port of Melbourne Authority was—in fact it was the Port of Melbourne interests who comprised the authority—responsible only for the Port of Melbourne, this is no longer the case with the increased responsibilities of that authority. I commend the Bill to the House.

On the motion of Mr BROWN (Gippsland West), the debate was adjourned.

It was ordered that the debate be adjourned until Tuesday, March 31.

HEALTH SERVICES (CONCILIATION AND REVIEW) BILL

The debate (adjourned from March 4) on the motion of Mr Roper (Minister for Transport) for the second reading of this Bill was resumed.

Mr WHITING (Mildura)—The Bill seeks to provide more opportunities for users of health services to complain about the providers of health services, should those users
believe they have been disadvantaged or treated in an unsatisfactory manner. Such complaints will be investigated by either the proposed Health Services Commissioner or by an appointed conciliator.

Although the National Party believes some mechanism should be available to provide a forum in which complaints can be aired, the National Party is concerned at some aspects of the Bill. During the last sessional period the Government circulated a draft Bill. A number of health providers and users foresaw a number of difficulties in the draconian measures included in that draft Bill. Concern was expressed to both the Minister for Health and the group that was established to draw up the proposed legislation.

This Bill is more suited to meeting the problems that arise in this matter from time to time. Some health providers who act to the best of their abilities for the good of the community find it difficult to understand that some people should have a complaint against them without first wishing to discuss that complaint. The honourable member for Frankston South adequately covered that aspect in his contribution to the debate.

Many people hold the general medical practitioner, especially the specialist, in awe because they believe such a person has so much more knowledge than they do and they do not find it easy to discuss their problems. Some medical practitioners have what is referred to as an unfortunate bedside manner and it is difficult for patients to discuss their problems with them.

Having done a certain amount of research into the Bill, I believe part of the answer must lie in strengthening the provisions covering the various registration boards so that they can provide penalties in between either taking no action or in cancelling the registration of a medical practitioner. In that instance, a practitioner must be found guilty of infamous conduct. Such a finding is rare and registration boards have no other penalty available other than deregistering a practitioner. A board may reprimand a person who is registered under the powers of that board but has no action available other than deregistration if that person performed a service that is not up to a standard expected by the community. Such a board is at a loss to be able to assist in those circumstances.

At present a review of various registration boards is under way. If the recommendations of that review were available to the Government it might be possible for the problem I have enunciated to be overcome a little more easily. Unfortunately, the review is still under way, so it is not possible to have the benefit of the recommendations of the review committee.

The Bill will have a life of three years. The National Party supports the insertion of the sunset provision so that three years after the Bill comes into operation, its provisions will be reviewed.

The National Party is concerned at the functions of the conciliators. It is to be hoped that such persons are experienced in law or at least have some experience apart from being good communicators.

All too often we find that the conciliation and arbitration process in this State goes through the motions of endeavouring to reach agreement between disgruntled parties. Often parties on both sides of the disagreement come away dissatisfied with the result.

That may not necessarily be a criticism of the conciliator concerned, but it is certainly the system we are adopting at present and it is becoming more prevalent in any area one would like to go to. One sees a conciliation type process where the two antagonists are brought together and, hopefully, some kind of agreement is reached whereby they do not take the matter any further, and that is all there is to it.

That system is highly unsatisfactory. The National Party will be watching that section of the legislation, because even in the highly vaunted area of family law one finds that in most cases the legal representatives of both parties get together outside the court and come
to some agreement. They take that back into the court to the presiding judge, and the agreement is eventually accepted.

Because of the partial ignorance of the parties concerned, it is easier in those areas for the legal representatives to come to some arrangement between themselves that may be totally unsatisfactory to either one of the parties, yet they will go to the Family Court and say that the parties have reached agreement. They may well have technically reached agreement, but they certainly have not been satisfied with the result of the conciliatory procedure.

Another issue the National Party has concern about is the Health Services Review Council. The council appointed by the Minister, is to consist of nine persons. The Bill provides in clause 12 that:

The members of the Council must include—

(a) three persons who, in the Minister's opinion, have experience of and are able to express the interests of providers; and

(b) three persons who, in the Minister's opinion, have experience of and are able to express the interests of users;

That is all very well, but then it goes on to state:

(c) three persons who, in the Minister's opinion, are not affiliated with any professional association for users or providers or any association which acts as a representative, advocate or advisor for providers or users.

Those people will supposedly be neutral, but it appears they have been neutered. There is no way they would have an opinion at all and, consequently, the Health Services Review Council is to report to the Minister on matters concerning the commissioner, and that is a very important task.

I do not think it is necessary to have a council of nine members to report on the activities of the commissioner, but the council will also advise on the health complaints system and other matters referred to it by health service providers or by complainants.

That is an unnecessary duplication. It may well be that in time there will be a need for such a review council, but at this stage it would be a cost the community, particularly in the health field, should not have to bear. Health services in this State are in a parlous condition. We have long waiting lists for surgery—in the order of 25 000 to 30 000.

Mr Weideman—It is nearly 40 000.

Mr WHITING—It is increasing. That is an indictment of the way in which the Government has used the available funds of this State for health service purposes, and there has been no improvement since the Government took office. The situation has become worse. It is not because there are more people in the community; it is obviously the system that is not working and the Health Services Review Council will not improve that situation one iota.

That council may well report to the Minister, but unless the Minister can gain a greater slice of the budget allocation that situation is not going to improve.

I am concerned about clause 13 (7), dealing with the procedures of the Health Services Review Council. It states:

If three or more members of the Council disagree with a majority of the Council on any decision providing advice to the Minister, they may require—

(a) that their view be recorded and reasons; and

(b) that their view and reasons accompany any presentation of the decision to the Minister.

In any democratic organisation or body such as this, if one member believes that he or she has a difference of opinion with the majority of the council, it should be possible for that person to submit a minority report. That is what that provision relates to.
Certainly, in every situation of which I am aware, the right of a member of a body to submit a minority report, express a view, even in Parliament, or have a vote recorded is paramount in the democratic process.

I have grave doubts about the necessity for three or four members of the council to disagree before their views can be aired in their report to the Minister. I hope in another place amendments will be made that alter this situation.

The comment has been made that this proposed legislation is in plain English. Certainly it is phrased in non-legal terms, but clause 14 (2) states:

The Commissioner must, if asked by the Council, report to the Council or any matter relating to the operations of the Commissioner under this Act.

I am not sure what that means. I hope somebody within the Health Services Review Council knows what it means. I appears to be vague.

I refer to the functions of the conciliator, and I am concerned about the provisions of clause 10 (6), which states:

The conciliator must make reports to the Commissioner upon the progress and results of the conciliation process and in those reports—

(a) must include details of any agreement reached; and
(b) if no agreement has been reached, may either—

(i) make no recommendation; or
(ii) recommend that the Commissioner should not investigate the matter—but may not make any other recommendation.

I appears where an agreement has not been reached the conciliator has two options; one is to make no recommendation and the other is to recommend that the commissioner should not investigate the matter. They are not adequate options to present to the conciliator because if he makes no recommendation legal action may be taken, or the commissioner may investigate the matter in his own right.

Under the second option, the conciliator can only recommend that the Health Services Commissioner should not investigate the matter. Clause 20 (9) states:

If a conciliator recommends that a complaint should not proceed to investigation, the Commissioner must not—

(a) investigate the complaint; or
(b) refer it again for conciliation; or
(c) deal with it in any other way authorised by this Act—

unless asked to do so by the person who made the complaint.

That creates the ridiculous situation of a person making a complaint being referred to the conciliator, the conciliator recommending to the commissioner that he not investigate the matter, and the matter being referred back to the complainant who again asks for the matter to be investigated. If that is not a gross waste of time and money, I do not know what is. The average person who reads that clause would have great difficulty in understanding his or her rights and, therefore, would be placed in a difficult position. The clause is not straightforward.

Clause 20 (14) states:

Evidence of anything said or admitted during the conciliation process—

(a) is not admissible in proceedings before a court or tribunal; and
(b) cannot be used by the Commissioner as a ground for exercising a power of investigation or inquiry.

I am certain that members of the public and members of the medical profession and other health service providers will be extremely nervous about what they say or admit during the conciliation process.
I have received a letter from Mr Kevin Chambers, the President of the Mildura Base Hospital Staff Group. The letter is dated 4 March and states that Mr Chambers believes the various medical defence unions, to which all directors subscribe, would be highly alarmed at taking on a case where a medical practitioner had been before a conciliator and made certain admissions, as that may take away any defence the practitioner may have in legal proceedings established after that stage.

It is possible that, although medical practitioners pay premiums to such protection societies so that they will defend them when legal proceedings are undertaken, the organisations may claim that a medical practitioner made certain admissions about a case and, therefore, not support the practitioner in any litigation. That would be an extremely serious situation for a medical practitioner.

It appears that communications entered into during the conciliation process are supposed to be private. I do not know whether they are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. If that is not the case, any proceedings, discussions or working notes that have been taken during the conciliation process could be obtained by use of the Freedom of Information Act and used in subsequent litigation that may take place. That is of grave concern, and an amendment may be necessary to protect people who may have committed themselves during the conciliation process.

In his letter, Mr Chambers referred to the fact that the Health Services Review Council is a duplication of services. He pointed out that there are at least five avenues of complaint against a medical practitioner—the Medical Board of Victoria, the hospital board, members of Parliament, the Ombudsman, and individual legal advisers. Complainants certainly have some avenue for complaint.

Mr Chambers also referred to costs. The members of the council will probably be paid an attendance fee of approximately $50 for a half-day sitting. If the council sat bimonthly, an amount of more than $4000 a year would be paid to the nine members, and that does not include administrative overhead costs.

Mr Chambers stated in his letter that it appears that the council will be ongoing and will simply be another expanding bureaucracy. In the present economic climate, he believes that is something we do not need.

More investigation will have to be done into the proposed legislation. I have some difficulty in deciding what action may take place under clause 22 (6), which states:

Within 14 days after deciding whether or not a complaint is justified the Commissioner must give written notice of the decision (including the reasons for the decision and any action which the Commissioner considers ought to be taken to remedy the complaint) to the user and the provider.

Clause 22 (9) states:

Within 45 days after a person receives notice under sub-section (6), or before the end of any extension of time granted by the Commissioner, the person must report in writing to the Commissioner about what action the person has taken upon the complaint.

There is a penalty of ten penalty units for failing to advise the commissioner in writing of what action has taken place. I am not certain what is intended, but I presume that either the complainant or the provider must report to the commissioner within 45 days about what action has taken place.

The average complainant would expect that, having lodged a complaint, it would then be up to the commissioner or conciliator to continue with the complaint until some decision had been taken on whether a complaint will proceed.

Taken the other way around, the health provider would need to indicate what action it had taken but it could claim that no guidelines existed for that action.

If the conciliator failed to reach agreement with the health provider and the commissioner had not within 45 days carried out some sort of investigation, a person could believe that
he or she had complied with the requirements of the proposed legislation by being interviewed by the commissioner or the conciliator. It is unclear to whom that provision refers and what action that person must take in those circumstances.

Clause 26 provides that the commissioner cannot exercise any power to compel attendance or call for evidence or documents while a complaint is being dealt with by a conciliator. That is fair enough, because confusion already exists with this Bill without having the commissioner carrying on investigations while the conciliator is endeavouring to reach agreement between the two parties.

It is desirable that the provisions of clause 27, relating to a warrant being issued by a magistrate for inspection or entry of premises, be included in the Bill. The clause provides that the application for a warrant must be in writing, must set out the grounds for seeking the warrant, must describe the premises which are to be entered and must give a general description of the class of persons living at the premises whom it is proposed to examine. The magistrate may require the commissioner to give more information about an application for a warrant. That ensures reasonable safeguards for entry and inspection of premises or persons concerned.

The other provisions of clause 27 are in line with normal police entry procedures and the National Party has no concern with their inclusion in the Bill.

I hope the Government will agree to amendments while the Bill is between here and another place, otherwise the National Party will reserve its right to either oppose provisions of the Bill or to suggest amendments in another place that will ensure that persons who use health services in this State fully understand that the aim of the Bill is to help people with their complaints without providing a vexatious or litigious situation which will place greater strains on the medical fraternity or other health providers.

As I stated at the outset, the need exists for a complaints procedure, other than legal action, for people who feel they have been wronged. Legal action is probably the only sufficient remedy available to people at present. However, legal action is highly costly and presents a frightening situation for people who do not understand the workings of the law. For that reason, people are often loathe to take the first step in the legal process to resolve complaints.

Apart from the legal system, the only other avenue available to people is to discuss the complaint with the health service provider concerned. If people do not feel confident to take that action, some provision, such as is provided by the Bill, is necessary. However, it must be provided in a much better form. I trust that the Bill can be improved while it is between here and another place.

Mrs SETCHES (Ringwood)—I add my support to the Bill. It is the culmination of a process of consultation undertaken by many people over a long period. The history of the Bill is that in 1982 the then Minister of Health, the present Minister for Transport, referred for investigation by the Social Development Committee, a complaints mechanism whereby the health consumers could be given better health services.

The purpose of the Bill is to provide an independent and accessible review mechanism for users of the health services, to provide means for reviewing and improving the quality of health services and to set out the functions and powers of the Health Services Commissioner and the office surrounding the commissioner. It is important that the position of Health Services Commissioner is seen by both consumers and providers to be fair, independent and effective.
The Social Development Committee held an inquiry between 1982 and 1984 and conducted hearings throughout Victoria, received submissions and ran a three-day phone-in. The response to the phone-in was interesting. In three days it attracted a staggering 823 calls. The break-up of those calls is a worthwhile exercise because 55 per cent of callers did not lodge a complaint with the service or provider or his or her organisation because they did not expect to get anywhere; they had very low expectations of action following the placing of a complaint. They were too frightened to take on the health service provider because of the unequal power relationship they felt existed between a patient and the provider of the health service, be it a doctor, another professional person or a hospital or nursing home.

The major point is that those callers did not know where to make a complaint or how to go about it. Victoria had never had an established mechanism that was known to be available to health service users to enable them to make a complaint.

The phone-in and the Social Development Committee inquiry also found that 82 per cent of the institutions and persons about which complaints were made never explained to a person how he or she should go about making a complaint. The service provider would absorb the complaint and would not provide any further information about how that complaint might be followed up. It is staggering that 82 per cent of the institutions did not provide further information.

In addition, 81 per cent of the people who complained were not satisfied with the results of the complaint. They were fobbed off or the complaint was trivialised or sidetracked because no established complaint mechanism was provided within the State, a fact which discouraged them even further. Of the 81 per cent who were not satisfied, 30 per cent took their complaints to a higher authority but were still dissatisfied with the handling of the complaint. They found that the authorities were too slow, lacked power, were biased, were lacking in independence, were too expensive or were generally unreceptive.

The Parliamentary Social Development Committee had no difficulty finding ample evidence of sufficient numbers of complaints and disquiet to justify the establishment of a health complaints authority. That was established early in the inquiry. The committee also recommended a four-part package of reform; the establishment of local complaints officers in all public health agencies; the establishment of a health complaints telephone advisory service; a review of registration boards; and the establishment of an independent health complaints office.

In June 1986 the Health Issues Centre, a health consumer group, circulated a summary of the proposed health services complaints Bill, to which it received more than 50 responses from individuals and groups. The finding of the phone-in of the Social Development Committee indicated that users feared complaining directly to service providers. They were uncertain about who to approach and how to make a complaint. That was the most common difficulty faced by people in trying to complain about a health service provider or the health service itself.

There was perceived to be a lack of independence among the individuals and organisations that are known to handle complaints with the appealing body often being the same as the body providing the service. There was seen to be a lack of independence of and accessibility to registration boards, the boards which register professionals and have some powers over the conduct of those professionals in licensing them to practise their various specialties.

It was also found that non-English speaking people were particularly disadvantaged in making complaints. This was especially so for those with mental illnesses and residents of nursing homes and special accommodation houses who were doubly disadvantaged by virtue of their position in society and their lack of advocacy avenues.

As the honourable member for Mildura said, the major deterrent against people making complaints is the cost of the legal system, which is about the only avenue that existed prior
to the setting up of the complaint mechanisms, for which this Bill will create the final component.

It is essential that the health services commissioner and the conciliator be given adequate powers so that the commissioner can obtain information to follow up an investigation in a positive and proper way and be able to obtain from all parties the information necessary to enable him to make a decision about the matter. Power is provided in the Bill for the commissioner to decide whether representations need to be made on behalf of the person or service against whom the complaint is made.

It is important that the mechanisms are seen by consumers and providers alike to be independent and efficient. All honourable members have received complaints by constituents against a range of medical providers and services. As members of Parliament we have made representations through various channels to various bodies on behalf of those constituents. I should be surprised if many honourable members from either side of the House have had satisfactory outcomes to the representations they have made on behalf of their constituents.

They will have come up against a reasonably high and thick blank wall in trying to have some of the serious complaints investigated and some redress provided—I do not mean financial redress in all cases, but some sort of social redress in the way in which health service providers treat patients and people who have been under their care or within institutions.

Honourable members should not lose sight of the reason why the Bill has been introduced. It is the result of considerable consultation and it has been introduced to ensure that health service providers are encouraged, and in some cases directed, to take note of the concerns of health consumers. I understand that some of the complaints are extremely complex. They are also worrying and involve weighty and personal matters that may have to be aired. Parliament must understand the reasons behind the provisions.

I shall refer to some case histories of health complaints involving my constituents. It has been necessary for me to make anonymous the people, services and doctors involved so that I can discuss the matters and their complexity to indicate the types of matters with which the commissioner may have to deal.

The first case came to my attention in the tenth month of 1986, although it had been continuing for a long time prior to that. Mrs O's son of 23 years of age was involved in a car accident in January of that year. He was admitted to hospital A, where he developed golden staph. He was in hospital for approximately five weeks and had six pins placed in his left leg. His mother noticed seepage from the pins. Mrs O asked the nursing sister what it was and she replied that there was nothing to worry about and that it is only natural for seepage to occur.

The son was taken home on a Saturday and on the following Monday she took him to her own doctor, a local doctor, who telephoned the son's specialist who said that they were to take the son to hospital B, which she did. He had tests on Tuesday and on Wednesday he was taken to a private room because of golden staph. He was kept there for approximately one week and then taken home.

One evening approximately thirteen weeks later, Mrs O came home from work about midnight. Her son was in severe pain. She rang the hospital casualty department and was advised that she should bring him straight in. The doctor who examined the son said that the pins had been in for so long that poison had developed. He gave him an injection and rang the specialist. He was admitted to hospital A and the next day he was operated on to have the pins removed and the leg put in plaster.

The plaster was taken off at hospital A. Swabs were taken. He had three tests and came out all clear; that is, the golden staph had cleared up.
The son was in need of a plate in his leg. A small plaster was applied, until he was admitted again to hospital B, which was a private hospital.

The accident occurred in January, yet it was not until July of the same year that he was told he would be admitted on 3 August—after he had been ill for more than eight months—for a bone graft and a plate to be placed in that same leg. In August, the bone graft was done. In nineteen days he was home for one week only.

Mrs O said that the leg had started to smell and there was some bleeding. On the Friday, Mrs O telephoned the specialist. The son was to be taken back to hospital B—which, as I said, was a private hospital—on the following Monday morning. He was put into the plaster room. Mrs O understood that the plaster would be taken off, but it was not so; he went back home the following morning.

Mrs O rang the specialist's office and told the nurse that her son was in pain and the wound was smelling quite badly. Dr I, a new specialist, telephoned hospital B to have the plaster taken off, but hospital B refused to take him because he had golden staph.

The son was taken by ambulance to the specialist's surgery because neither hospital A nor hospital B would accept him. Therefore, he was taken to the specialist's surgery in Collins Street for treatment. That is where this quite sick man, whose leg looked like it might have to be amputated, was deposited—on the specialist's couch in Collins Street.

Mrs O contacted my office, at which time she was quite beside herself as to what she should do. I conducted some inquiries in an unofficial capacity—because of the complications of private practice and of the golden staph. I was finally able to have the patient placed in a hospital which, by its history and the procedures it has adopted, has been able to handle golden staph.

That man came extremely close to losing his leg, but he was unable to obtain proper information from the local doctor, specialist A, specialist B, hospital A, and hospital B.

Therefore, the powers that are required by the Health Services Commissioner and the conciliator must be clearly stated, so that the information can be obtained to assist this person to bring his health complaint to a proper, logical and helpful end for him. The patient is 23 years old, and will probably never walk properly again.

I refer to another case in which death actually occurred. One must take note of what occurs because of the wide ranging definition in this Bill of what is a hospital service or a provider. Certainly, ambulance services are also providers.

Problems can be caused just because insufficient information is made available to the ambulance officer about what he ought to do upon reaching the site of the call. I refer to another case that occurred in my electorate. In September 1985 at 7 a.m., a call was made by a 24-year-old man suffering an asthma attack. He was able to telephone for an ambulance and collapsed near the phone.

The ambulance arrived very promptly. In fact, the ambulance drivers walked around the house, knocked on the doors and windows, tried the front door and found it unlocked. However, they felt they could not enter a house where there was no-one to greet them. They called out, and then left the scene.

Consequently, the man lay there and died. He was found at the end of the day by his younger sister. The mother had to go to great lengths to obtain some resolution of the situation. Of course, nothing could be done for her son—he was dead. However, perhaps something can be done in the future so that procedures exist which set down circumstances under which ambulance officers may or may not enter houses.

The family was unable to get much response from the local ambulance people, Health Department Victoria and a range of other people, until I was able to intercede and attempt to get to the bottom of the problem.
Another case that ought to be taken into consideration is that of a chronically ill person who may be on workers compensation or entitled to make a claim to the Transport Accident Commission. That person may have indeterminate and multiple symptoms, such as severe back pain, sore feet, sore neck, stiff shoulders and hands, respiration trouble, stinging eyes and headaches. That is an onerous set of symptoms.

However, when a person goes from doctor to doctor to try to obtain some sort of relief from these multiple symptoms and has perhaps been diagnosed as having rheumatoid arthritis or spondylitis, which does not show up very early in the life of the disease, one finds that doctors continually believe that someone suffering from such symptoms should be referred to a private psychiatric practitioner who practises in a psychiatric hospital.

In the particular case to which I refer—which is documented on page after page—the doctor convinced the patient that he should go to a private hospital for a day, receive just a little jab in the hand, an intravenous injection of a drug which would allow him to speak freely while under the influence of the drug.

When the patient reluctantly agreed to undertake this treatment, after being advised over three months that that was probably the only thing that would help him, he went to the private hospital at 8.45 a.m. and was given an injection in the arm. He was told he would be under for only approximately 40 minutes. He awoke at 12.40 p.m., extremely groggy and wondering what would happen to him.

At about 1.30 p.m., a nurse came in and was very surprised to find him awake. She said to him, “It is all over. You spoke very freely and we were very interested in what you had to say”.

The person to whom I refer believes he was not fully informed about what would occur and that his consent was not really obtained for undertaking that treatment.

He went home and spent almost 24 hours in bed sleeping off the effects of the drug. He had dreadful headaches until the following Tuesday and was not free from the effects of the drug for quite some time. When he complained about it, the doctor said, “I believe I informed you of the effects of that treatment”. However, because he had taken notes, the patient was quite sure that he had not been informed of the effects of that drug. He was concerned that for 4 hours he was not in control of his faculties while under the influence of the drug.

I can refer honourable members to cases of elderly patients in nursing homes who are under the care of a doctor who has not noticed at all that they have a blood clot in the leg, even though the swelling is the size of a baseball.

I can refer to cases of elderly patients who are continually suffering from diarrhoea; and also to the controversial case, which was publicised in the press twelve months ago, of nursing homes that were not providing as good a service as they should, until the excellent group from Health Department Victoria began conducting inspections. There was even the case of gangrene among elderly people in nursing homes.

Honourable members must not forget that the purpose of the Bill is to protect the rights of health consumers to the highest degree possible, without making things more onerous and difficult for everybody in the community.

I am pleased that the degree of consultation that has occurred over the past five years and especially over the past few months has allayed the fears of many health professionals in relation to the Bill. I understand that, although the health professionals' associations have perhaps not given it their blessing, they have dramatically softened their view and have decided not to oppose the measure but rather to see it as the positive measure that the Government knew it would be.

I exhort all parties and all honourable members to support the Bill, which will be for the betterment of health consumers and patients in this State.
Mr LIEBERMAN (Benambra)—As you know, Sir, the Opposition proposes to allow comments and input from other people while the Bill is between here and another place, before deciding its final attitude to the measure. In general terms, as has been indicated, the Bill appears to satisfy most of the concerns that have been expressed by people from all walks of life about the first draft that was circulated, and that is certainly welcome.

The Opposition regards the Bill as unfortunate in the sense that it illustrates the disease that is afflicting the health service in this State. It is a sorry day for Victoria when our health services are under such extreme pressure that providers and users are thrown together in an atmosphere of tension, crisis and reduced morale so that the potential for conflict, misunderstanding and mistakes is heightened. That is manifest in our health system. Over the past five years we have witnessed extraordinary industrial disputation—a record number of strikes; the first ever doctors’ strike; stop-work meetings, protests and work bans by the resident medical officers; union demarcation disputes with people saying, “It is my job, not your job; don’t you dare do this,” and that sort of nonsense in the wards in front of sick people; and the tragic seven-week nurses’ strike. Those events have engendered an atmosphere of volatility and danger to people who are involved in the health system; users who are being treated by people who are emotionally and understandably involved in conflict with their fellow workers; medical people who normally have to work closely as a team and are involved in conflict. Obviously the potential for error is heightened. As a result of that tension and conflict, misunderstandings and further conflict result, and so it goes on. It is like quicksand.

Apparently we have to see the need for legislation to provide a new commission at taxpayers’ expense, with staff, a council and all of those sorts of things. I as a former member and president of a public hospital board see this as being very sad. Further, the volunteers who have helped to make our health services great, and who are still involved, are finding it damned hard to continue to be volunteers in the face of that most undesirable and unacceptable atmosphere. I hope reason will soon prevail and that people who are in conflict in the health system, who want better conditions, better wages and better career structures—none of which I oppose—can find a better way of resolving their differences than the ways they have chosen recently. People who are in need of operations—some of them have even been prepped pre-operation for general anaesthetic—have been sent home because they were not able to have their operations; children, old people, many who are sick and tired of being put in this position.

Now we have a Health Services Conciliation and Review Bill that is designed to provide rules and regulations which frankly in another environment over the years in Victoria would not have been needed. The solutions would have been achieved by commonsense, goodwill and teamwork; I acknowledge that the result might not have been achieved justly in all cases because there has always been the problem of appealing from Caesar to Caesár. Nevertheless, the system worked fairly well, but apparently it no longer works and we need these laws. We need a bureaucracy and a commissioner—a commissioner, of all things!—who can find a better way of resolving their differences than the ways they have chosen recently. People who are in need of operations—some of them have even been prepped pre-operation for general anaesthetic—have been sent home because they were not able to have their operations; children, old people, many who are sick and tired of being put in this position.

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There is also the unknown. I see in the definition of “health services” a paragraph (I) which provides that:

“Health service” includes ... a service prescribed as a health service for the purposes of this Act ...

No criteria are set out. That means that anyone, by regulation, could be brought within the operation of the measure even though, on normal tests, he would not be regarded as a person who delivered health services. But there it is; that is the current environment in this State; we now need legislation. What a sad day for Victoria, for the people involved and for the team of whom we have been so proud; a team that has provided good health services in our State for many years.
While the Bill is between here and another place, I hope the Minister at the table will take up my next comment with his colleague, the Honourable David White. It is not clear whether the Bill enables the family of a deceased former user of health services to have a commissioner or a conciliator brought in. In my electorate a family came to see me on behalf of their deceased mother, complaining about the treatment their mother had received in a hospital. It occurs to me as I read the Bill that it is not clear whether a family may complain on behalf of a deceased user. The matter needs clarification and, if necessary, an amendment. Many people have been buried in this State whose families have expressed concern about the treatment their relative received. The Bill needs to make it clear that relatives can have a matter investigated, even though the "user" is deceased.

Concern has also been expressed that, because health providers in this State are also subject to boards with disciplinary powers, which can suspend or even take away the practice of a medical provider, the Bill introduces a double jeopardy situation. That matter also needs clarification. A health provider can be the subject of complaint by a user and can be investigated by the commissioner or a conciliator; and it may well be that that practitioner is being investigated at the same time by the licensing board that controls his right to practise. That indicates to me an undesirable situation of double jeopardy, and I hope the Government and the Minister will consider that aspect while the Bill is between here and another place.

Clause 16 of the Bill sets out what may be included in a complaint by a health service user. That gives the first definitive statement of the commissioner’s powers and the matters he can investigate.

The Bill provides for complaints made by the user to the commissioner about unreasonable actions. The word “unreasonable” seems to introduce a new law in our State.

I am familiar with the word “negligence”, I am familiar with words describing a breach of duty and a lack of skill and so forth, but this is the first time that I have noticed the use of the word “unreasonable”.

The Bill provides for the commissioner to investigate unreasonable actions by health providers. That is a new law; I wonder what “unreasonable” means because it can have a broad meaning.

Is it an action or a failure to act that goes beyond negligence or is it less than negligence? I raise these questions in the hope that the debate in another place will provide answers to this question.

I was troubled also by clause 23 which provides that the commissioner, in the process of dealing with a complaint from a user about an unreasonable action by the health provider, must stop dealing with an issue raised in a complaint if the commissioner becomes aware that proceedings relating to that specific issue have begun before an industrial tribunal.

I shall give honourable members a hypothetical case of what that may mean. Disputes are occurring in our public hospitals; nurses are refusing to work and not allowing doctors to operate on patients to relieve pain. A user who needs an operation urgently to relieve pain, to avoid thrombosis or gangrene, may complain to the commissioner saying, “I have got to have the operation but I can’t have it because the providers”, in this case the nurses in a particular hospital, “have put work bans on operations and they have therefore acted unreasonably to stop me receiving treatment”.

The commissioner in investigating that valid complaint is prevented, apparently, from proceeding with his duty if the issue involving the work bans and the practices of the nurses is before the industrial commission.
However, the industrial commission, so far as I know, is a wage and working conditions tribunal and has nothing whatsoever to do with the standard of care, whether reasonable or otherwise, provided to patients in public hospitals. The user in this circumstance is left with no remedy. The industrial commission deals with wages and conditions and the commissioner is deprived of his jurisdiction simply because the matter is before an industrial tribunal.

I suggest this is unreasonable and unacceptable and it ought to be looked at urgently by the Government. The commissioner should not be deprived of the right to investigate allegations of unreasonableness which may put a person's life at risk or put that person in the position where he or she cannot get relief from extreme pain because a party is locked in mortal combat in the industrial court. We should ask ourselves why this Bill should not be severely reviewed.

I have mentioned a few points to indicate why the Bill needs further review. The debate on the Bill will conclude here tonight and the Bill will then go to another place but there is still a lot of work to be done on it. I remind honourable members that, after five years of Labor administration, our health services are now faced with an awful prospect. I detect that the National Party has much the same view as I have but, reluctantly, we will have to accept this new law because of the environment that has been created; because of the tension, the problems, the loss of morale, the destruction of the team and so forth engendered by an incompetent Government which is ruining Victoria's health services.

This Bill is putting people in the position of "them" and "us". There is so much conflict that the situation makes me sick; I feel like vomiting when I hear about the people of Victoria who pay enormous taxes for health care and cannot get it. There are approximately 35 000 people on the waiting list for elective surgery who cannot have their operations.

How long do we have to go on? Now we have to have a commissioner to examine all these things and we must support the Bill because there is ample evidence that the system cannot cope and probably does need a commissioner because the situation is out of control. With another few months of this direction and administration by the Government there will be nothing left of Victoria's health system.

The commissioner will have the responsibility of deciding what is a good health insurance scheme because the Bill also gives him authority to consider the development of good health insurance schemes. That is a Commonwealth matter, as the Minister for Transport, who represents the Minister for Health in this place, knows.

I do not deny that the State has a vital interest in the provision of health care insurance, but it is fascinating that the commissioner will become involved in that. I have a suspicion, having observed the growth of qangos and authorities, that five years down the track there will be a new commission to look at health insurance. There is already a Commonwealth commission and there are State committees looking at Commonwealth actions; private funds are doing their own thing as well. This is a recipe for chaos.

I shall be watching closely the debate in the Upper House when I hope the Minister will respond to these matters in full and resolve these issues. It is about time that the volunteers in the health system of Victoria were given more support and encouragement by the Government and that the Government acted to end the conflict, the industrial turmoil and anarchy that exists.

The sitting was suspended at 6.28 p.m. until 8.4 p.m.

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I should like to thank honourable members who have taken part in the debate—the honourable members for Frankston, Mildura, Benambra and Ringwood. The debate has been useful and it shows the value of the extensive process of consultation both with the outside community and inside Parliament.

The Bill had its origins, in my experience and that of other honourable members, in the 1970s and early 1980s when people came forward with complaints but had no effective
way through Government or other agencies of dealing with them. Therefore, the
Government proposed a system of health service complaints review as part of its 1982
election policy. That subsequently resulted in a reference to the Parliamentary Social
Development Committee, which carried out the major inquiry and reached a considerable
level of agreement across the three parties.

Former members of this place, such as Walter Jona, contributed substantially to the
Bill. I commend him in particular and other honourable members who worked hard on
this idea.

One can hardly claim that it has been a matter of hasty legislation. One may complain,
as the honourable member for Mildura did, that some potential problems exist but that is
one of the reasons why the Bill, which involves a new concept, contains a three-year sunset
clause—so that the Government can learn about its most effective operation and, Parliament,
in a cross-party fashion, can resolve any problems that occur. I certainly hope
that cross-party participation will continue in the future.

A number of matters were raised during the second-reading debate, which I should like
to address briefly: the honourable member for Benambra suggested that the commissioner
may become involved in matters of health insurance. I assure the honourable member
that there has been a misunderstanding. The words are “health assurance”, which is
somewhat different from “health insurance”.

Mr Lieberman—They are not defined in the Bill!
Mr ROPER—“Assurance” is a technical term used to deal with the quality of care
rather than the method of payment for that care.
Mr Lieberman—That needs to be defined in the Bill!
Mr ROPER—Other honourable members raised the point that the Bill could lead to
increased litigation. Certainly, that is not the intent of the Government and it was not the
intent of the Social Development Committee. Indeed, the Government hopes the Bill will
avoid the huge problem that has beset American medicine, in particular, resulting in a
flood of litigation making the practice of good medicine or the practice of other health
services difficult because of the risk of litigation if, as does occur in these kinds of disciplines,
something does not go perfectly to plan.

The honourable member for Mildura raised questions about the Medical Board of
Victoria and about the fact that it and other boards did not have flexible penalties available
to them. I assure the honourable member that a significant increase in the flexibility of
these penalties has occurred over the years. I can recall introducing at least three Medical
Board of Victoria amendments, in each case at the request of the Medical Board of
Victoria to assist it in carrying out its functions.

The review of boards, which is currently nearing conclusion, will further assist those
professional registration bodies. One of the key aspects of the Bill is that it ensures that
where various people are carrying out their statutory or other obligations, or organisations
are carrying them out, there is no duplication. A number of honourable members have
expressed their concern about potential duplication in this area.

The Bill has been introduced to remove, so far as is possible, the duplication existing at
present, whereby if a registration board has certain matters before it the matters are
properly dealt with rather than two or three inquiries being conducted at the same time.

The Government and I hope the Health Services Commissioner, the Health Services
Review Council, the registration boards and the professional organisations will work
closely together. I refer to the professional associations in particular because they have
had some concern about patient care, just as other people have had concern.

The honourable member for Mildura stated that medical or other health service
associations could establish defence funds, which is a problem the Government hopes to
overcome. The idea behind the Bill is that the legal option is the worst option for individuals or families to take and that there are other ways of dealing with problems. That also pits the finances of the practitioner against those of the user, and honourable members would recognise the experience in the United States of America has been disastrous.

The last thing Australians would wish to see in their newspapers would be advertisements asking people to bring forward their medical complaints so that the lawyer can split his fees with the client against the practitioner.

The honourable member for Mildura referred to clause 13 (7), which provides for three or more persons on the council disagreeing with a majority, and I shall take up that matter with my colleague in the other place and will provide information to the honourable member.

The honourable member also referred to clause 20 (6) and (9), but I believe those provisions are straightforward. However, I cannot say that for clause 22, particularly the way in which clause 22 (9) is set out. It appears from that provision that the complainant may also have to signify that the complaint should proceed.

There are a number of reasons for reconsidering that clause. I do not suggest that it will automatically be amended but I am certain the Minister for Health will address that problem and have the provision written in a much clearer form. The aim of the Bill is for the ordinary person to understand it; it is not just for those with considerable technical expertise.

A number of honourable members referred to access to information. A specific provision in the Bill will ensure that the material given to the conciliator does not become a matter for freedom of information legislation. I direct the attention of honourable members to clause 32 (6), which specifically overcomes that problem.

The question of whether a family or another person could raise matters on behalf of a deceased was also raised. That is a difficult area because during the grieving stage families can momentarily become unhinged in their grief.

Clause 15 (3) refers to the commissioner having a discretion to recognise a representative of the complainant. It is the Government's intention that that will be used sensitively, when necessary, except for the exemption in clause 19 (3) when complaints are more than twelve months old. I can assure the House that most complaints occur quickly rather than being brought forward over a long time.

If there are ways in which the measure can be improved once it has been enacted, the Government is prepared to make any necessary amendment before three years have expired. Because of the work done by members of all political parties, the professional organisations and community groups this Bill will be a major step forward. It will assist in overcoming the numerous problems of which I became aware as a local member, as the shadow Minister of Health and as Minister of Health and with which every honourable member would have had experience at least once during his or her career. While the Bill is between here and another place I shall take up the matters raised by honourable members.

I commend the Bill to the House.

The motion was agreed to.

Clause 1

Mr WILLIAMS (Doncaster)—I support the aims and purposes of the Bill. I had the privilege of serving on the Social Development Committee chaired by the Honourable Walter Jona and I am well aware of the flack that he and I received from our own party. I trust the Minister will pardon me for a moment in speaking against the objections raised by certain interest groups.
I supported the report of the Social Development Committee and played some part in the peacemaking that followed it. It is my belief that in a democracy and particularly in the provision of health services, which are primarily provided by the public sector with the aid of professional people—some of whom operate as if they are in the marketplace—justice not only has to be done but also has to be seen to be done.

Most health care providers do observe the highest qualities that were inculcated into them by the great philosophers and it is unfortunate that others place too much attention on the pursuit of the dollar.

As part of the survey and investigations of the Social Development Committee, a three-day phone-in was conducted and the telephones rang constantly. Some 823 in-depth interviews were recorded from that phone-in. The committee was limited by its budget but many people would not have been aware of the survey and others, particularly pensioners, would not have had access to telephones.

The percentage of people expressing major concerns fully justifies the introduction of the Bill. The committee found that 28 per cent of those people complained about the inadequate level of care; 25 per cent complained about the unsatisfactory attitude or behaviour of the doctor, nurse or other health care professional; 21 per cent had doubts about the competence of the parties treating them; and 12 per cent complained about the communication they received from the doctor or other health care provider.

The committee found that 9 per cent of the witnesses were concerned about the delay in obtaining health services. They were concerned about doctors who did not turn up in time and so on. It also found that 7 per cent were concerned that they found themselves on tenterhooks awaiting the results of their diagnoses. A good, caring doctor should be able to inform the patient of the problems and not put the patient through a costly rigmarole that is often undertaken by some entrepreneurs.

Only recently, for example, a gentleman got in on this act and informed us about a worldwide communication network. Why can this gentleman not adopt the role of an ordinary family doctor and inform his patients what is wrong with them instead of trying to enjoy the best of both socialism and private enterprise? I am pleased for the sake of the medical profession that the rogues and crooks are few and far between.

Only 4 per cent of the witnesses before the Social Development Committee complained that health care professionals had acted fraudulently and illegally. Regrettably, complaints were received about people having to wait too long to obtain reports, especially those through the old workers compensation scheme and the present WorkCare scheme.

Unfortunately, 2 per cent complained about inadequate locum services and this is probably to be expected in these days when doctors seem to be overloaded with work. That aspect represented about two-thirds of all complaints; about one-third of complaints covered a wide spectrum, none of which amounted to more than 1 per cent in themselves.

The Bill will go a long way to ensuring that patients are more aware of the reasons for inadequate health care. This is part and parcel of the ballooning health bill which represents 8·5 per cent of the country's gross national product. Soon that will represent 10 per cent and no Cain, Kennett or any other Government will reduce that percentage.

No future Government will last any longer than the four-year period of Parliament if it tries to tinker with health care. This will be a direct result of the AIDS virus and other health problems. The health care bill will rise in this State and country. There will be more and more queues and complaints and the politicians will play more ducks and drakes with the limited funds that will be available to them. It will become more important to explain to people why they cannot obtain health care and why there is a lack of doctors and nurses and apparatus that costs millions of dollars such as that used to dissolve kidney stones without an operation. That is curative health care.
Above all the health sector will invest more money in the area of preventative medicine. Far too much money is being spent on people who are at the end of their lives—soon that section of the community will include me—rather than spending money on educating people who are beginning their lives. Young people should be educated about keeping away from tobacco, excess fatty foods and recklessness on the roads. This area of health care is costing the community 10 per cent of the gross national product.

Much money is spent because people do not know how to live proper and sensible lives. More money from the health budget should be spent on preventative health care.

The complaints tribunal proposed in the Bill will try to reduce the undesirable factors that cause people to complain about health care. It is most regrettable that approximately 2000 hospital beds are lying unused because of a lack of nurses, poor coordination and inadequate funding.

Patients needing urgent health care can no longer be guaranteed treatment. When these people complain to the tribunal in future they should be bluntly told why they cannot be treated properly. The problem addressed in this Bill is not all one way for the Government. People should be grateful that a mechanism exists for them to complain. Not all the fault lies with doctors and nurses; a lot of the fault lies with the allocation of public money.

It is deplorable that nurses and doctors can be rude to patients and can be uncaring. This aspect of their training must be upgraded and mechanisms must be put in train to discipline health professionals who act improperly.

The Social Development Committee was given evidence that the principal Act is still far from satisfactory and provides inadequate means to discipline doctors. The Act should be amended so that a host of less than serious abuses of the system can be settled with fines rather than by suspending people from the medical field. That is a serious step and could inhibit a small number of doctors who may face disciplinary action for minor offences.

I am disappointed that the latest Medical Board of Victoria report is not available. There is an unnecessary delay in providing information. A few years ago only one doctor each year would be reported for unprofessional behaviour, but the latest report indicates that as many as five can be reported in one year. I suspect there are more now. The evidence given to the Social Development Committee highlighted the fact that many more doctors, nurses and medical professionals should be hauled before the Medical Board of Victoria.

I do not want these people's livelihoods taken away from them by being expelled from their professions, but less severe penalties could be imposed on them to show that they cannot get away with what they have done in the past.

I find it incomprehensible that 21 per cent of patients should question the competence of the doctor or health carer. Again training and professional development courses may need to be upgraded. I am most disappointed to learn that many of the doctors stop their training once they obtain their degrees. It is about time Health Department Victoria or the Minister for Health tried to improve post-graduate training.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN (Mr Ernst)—Order! The honourable member for Doncaster should address the Chair.

Mr WILLIAMS—I shall do so with great pleasure, Mr Acting Chairman, because you understand a great deal of what I am saying because you also heard evidence that was given to the Social Development Committee. Time and again you listened to evidence that professionals have not had the education, background and training that is needed to become good, caring family doctors.

Poor communication by highly educated doctors is inexcusable but obviously it does occur, especially with those handicapped by poor education or language difficulties. It is time better training was provided in the migrant communities. Nearly 60 per cent of non-
English speaking migrants or their representatives who gave evidence to the committee had occasion to express unhappiness about the service provided by doctors.

In evidence many migrants said that doctors appeared reluctant to discuss in any depth the nature or outcome of a particular affliction. Unfortunately, migrant patients are unsure about how to lodge a formal complaint and are fearful of repercussions that might affect future doctor/patient relationships. I hope the proposed tribunal will take care to ensure that migrants are able to complain about rudeness, misdiagnosis or any other weakness in our Australian health system.

The complaints authority should be extremely careful to dispel any impression that there is no value in complaining to the new authority that is being set up. It is its job to encourage complaints, particularly by the migrant community, because if we are to have a decent democracy, as I said before, justice must not only be done in our system, but also it must be seen to be done.

The people in charge of this system should be extremely well versed in the physical, social, psychological and financial vulnerability of the many who need health care. That applies to non-migrants as well as migrants. I repeat what I said before, that delays in ambulances coming to people’s homes and in doctors providing services should always be investigated by a complaints tribunal if only to avoid repetition and to avoid the lifelong resentment of the family of a patient who may have died on the way to hospital or died shortly after arrival because of those factors.

These are important points that this tribunal should want taken care of. No-one in his right mind will say that health care professionals are all crooks or that patients are all idiots. The overwhelming number of doctors are decent caring people and I am sure the overwhelming majority of patients are able to care for themselves.

However, this society has every reason to expect from its health system quality and considerate care, information about treatment and services and participation in decision making. I am now part of a committee, as you are, Mr Acting Chairman, where participation in decision making is probably the most important aspect of the recommendations that a committee will be making.

Above all, patients need informed choice and the right to refuse treatment. Again, Mr Acting Chairman, as you and I well know, we will shortly face hot water from some sections of the community over the right to refuse treatment. I tell members of Parliament now, so far as I am concerned, if it is vital to the interests and particularly the right of a person to die peacefully, that person should have the right to refuse treatment.

The complaints system must complement existing procedures and, above all, it has to be conciliatory. We do not want an aggressive bureaucracy that will intimidate health care professionals who, by and large, in the majority of cases are doing the right thing by their patients. I ask them to play their part if the system is to work properly.

We cannot afford to allow health professionals to sabotage the work of this machinery, to be wilful and insubordinate and refuse to cooperate. I show sympathy for them if they do not want clerks or policemen looking through records or entering their surgeries. There is no need to intrude on patient privacy. I hope the Minister will pass on the word that we want the best people in this tribunal. We do not want anyone who thinks he or she is a little Hitler, because such a person will wreck the whole system and do great damage.

There is nothing worse than misunderstood advice. Doctors can go back to the days of the wizard Merlin; in his day, the old masters of the occult treated people through their secret remedies, which a lot of doctors might have well learned to do. The modern doctors know nothing about the human mind and soul.

I also regret that, in the face of complaints, too often the doctors, in particular, close ranks, especially before a workers compensation hearing. I refer to cases when one has doctors and lawyers on one side telling one story and doctors and lawyers on the other
side telling another story. Who pays? The answer is: the employer who pays the workers compensation premiums and those who pay the motor vehicle insurance premiums.

I want complaints from those tribunals brought before this tribunal so as to reduce our insurance claims and premiums. That is what it is all about. It is not against clamping down on those who try to do the right thing. The investigation system is stacked against those who lack the skills, the confidence, the possession of English or the physical or mental abilities to effectively lodge complaints. I support the Bill and make no apologies to anyone for doing so.

The clause was agreed to, as were clauses 2 to 11.

Clause 12

Mr WEIDEMAN (Frankston South)—This clause deals with the Health Services Review Council, to which the honourable member for Mildura referred. The clause states that:

(2) The Council consists of nine persons appointed by the Minister.

(3) The members of the Council must include—

(a) three persons who, in the Minister's opinion, have experience of and are able to express the interests of providers; and

(b) three persons who, in the Minister's opinion, have experience of and are able to express the interests of users; and

(c) three persons who, in the Minister's opinion, are not affiliated with any professional association for users or providers or any association which acts as a representative, advocate or adviser for providers or users.

It seems to me that it would be difficult to find nine persons to represent correctly those areas. Most people are users, providers and involved in health care to some degree. Obviously persons appointed to the council are there to act in the public interest. I do not think it matters whether one is speaking about a doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, butcher, baker or chiropractor; the person appointed to serve on such a committee would realise that he or she is there for the benefit of the public because of a special knowledge or experience in health care and to relate his or her experiences to the council and perform valuable work.

As one who has served on disciplinary committees in judging one's colleagues, I have found that the axiom "There but for the grace of God go I," applies. It is better to be judged by one's peers who have had experience in a similar situation. Parliamentarians would prefer to be judged by other Parliamentarians rather than by a group of twelve people selected from, for instance, out in the street.

I put that view forward with respect to the Health Review Council. I do not know how often that particular council met, but we did not see much work come out of that council.

Mr Roper—That is why we abolished it.

Mr WEIDEMAN—Basically the council did not seem to provide much result from the efforts put into it. I hope the Health Services Review Council, if properly constituted, will perform valuable work and advise the commissioner in this area.

This is a difficult area of consumer affairs. As one who has had a long experience in the field, I recognise that people are their own worst enemies and that people, particularly in situations of health services and care, listen only to what they want to be told or want to hear.

Other honourable members have noted that circumstances have occurred where a patient has actually written down what a doctor has said. In one way, I am glad that a patient will take that action. However, I hope the situation is never reached where health providers will need to have a third person present on each occasion to take notes and to give written reports of consultations. That will add enormously to the cost of health care. I raise these issues for the Minister's consideration.
The clause was agreed to, as were clauses 13 to 18.

Clause 19

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I move:

1. Clause 19, line 23, after "Tribunal" insert "or an industrial tribunal".
2. Clause 19, line 26, after "Tribunal" insert "industrial tribunal".

Among other things, clause 19 requires the Health Services Commissioner to reject a complaint to the extent that the issue has been determined already either by a court or by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or the registration board. Honourable members will recall that in the second-reading debate much was made of the need to avoid duplication in these areas.

The effect of the amendment is also to require a complaint to be rejected if the issue has been determined by an industrial tribunal—that is, any of the bodies listed in the definition in clause 3 (1). The amendments are designed to complement clause 23 (1) (b), which acts to prevent the commissioner from dealing with an issue raised in a complaint if proceedings relating to that issue have begun before an industrial tribunal. This was clearly seen when the drafting of clause 23 was being prepared but, by omission, was overlooked in respect of clause 19. The amendments overcome that problem.

The basic aim of the amendments, as in the general clause, is to ensure that in effect people are not shopping around among tribunals and commissioners but rather go to where they can get the most effective result. Certainly, for many of these matters, it will be to the appropriate body and the appropriate body they should go to to receive a fair and reasonable hearing of their matters is one of the very important pieces of advice that people will receive.

The amendments were agreed to, and the clause, as amended, was adopted, as were clauses 20 and 21.

Clause 22

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I move:

3. Clause 22, page 16, line 12, omit "(8)" and insert "(9)".

This is a drafting correction.

The amendment was agreed to, and the clause, as amended, was adopted.

Clause 23

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I move:

4. Clause 23, line 23, omit "begun" and insert "been initiated".

As mentioned in relation to amendments Nos 1 and 2, clause 23 (1) (b) precludes the commissioner from dealing with a complaint if proceedings relating to the issue "have begun" before an industrial tribunal. A legal doubt has been expressed as to whether the expression "have begun" means the time proceedings were actually taken at the tribunal or the commencement of formal hearings. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the former is the intended interpretation—that is, it is the time the proceedings were actually initiated rather than the commencement of a formal hearing. This is a fairly common problem and one that the amendment tidies.

The amendment was agreed to, and the clause, as amended, was adopted, as were clauses 24 to 31.

Clause 32

Mr WHITING (Mildura)—The clause contains definitions, including the definition of "confidential information". It states merely that "confidential information" means information gained because of a person's position. The clause then defines "position".
I am intrigued at the Minister's comment that there is an adequate safeguard to ensure that information used during the conciliation process may not be made available under the Freedom of Information Act, but I am still concerned that subclause (6) states:

"A document which contains confidential information gained during conciliation proceedings under this Act is an exempt document within the meaning of section 33 of the Freedom of Information Act".

I referred earlier in the second-reading debate to the fact that working notes and similar notes may not be considered as a document for these purposes and, therefore, may not be considered to be confidential information obtained by a commissioner or a conciliator or by any other person listed in that category. I believe if a representative of a complainant asked for information under the Freedom of Information Act it would have to be provided because this clause does not prevent that happening.

I believe there are still some dangers that those people against whom complaints have been alleged could be placed in jeopardy if legal proceedings were taken subsequently. Some amendment should be made to subclause (6) to ensure that any information gained during a conciliator's or commissioner's investigation of a particular claim is not able to be made available under the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I have listened very carefully to the honourable member for Mildura. Certainly, it is not the intention of the Government that the type of information about which he is concerned should become available under the Freedom of Information Act. On advice received, the Government believes the matter is covered adequately. I shall have the matter checked further by people who are expert in freedom of information proceedings to ensure that the wishes of not only the honourable member for Mildura but also other honourable members are put into effect.

The clause was agreed to.

Clause 33

Mr WEIDEMAN (Frankston South)—I ask the Minister to clarify the clause while the Bill is between here and another place. The clause states:

Within the prescribed time after the end of each financial year a prescribed provider or a provider that is a member of a prescribed class of providers must give to the Commissioner a return in the form prescribed for providers of that class concerning complaints received and action taken by the provider during the financial year.

Clause 33 is written in clear English and I believe I know what it means: that a person who has some complaints must provide information to the commissioner at the end of each financial year. The definition clause contains definitions on "provider" and "registered provider". As a person who has assisted the Government in providing information, I ask the Minister for Transport to ensure clear and adequate information is provided to providers so they may provide accurate information.

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—The preparation of a clause such as this is not easy. The word "provider" is used four times and there are four separate uses of the word "prescribed", which makes it a complicated clause.

The intention of the clause is clear, but it may be that further thought should be given to how the clause is to be put into effect rather than the rewording of it, because the clause does need to set out how each class of provider is to provide information.

I will make sure that the Minister is aware of the concern expressed by the honourable member for Frankston South and the complex nature of prescribed provider or provider.

The clause was agreed to, as were the remaining clauses and the schedule.

The Bill was reported to the House with amendments, and passed through its remaining stages.
ANZAC DAY (AMENDMENT) BILL

This Bill was received from the Council and, on the motion of Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour), was read a first time.

CRIMES (GRAND JURIES) BILL

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Council transmitting the following resolution with which they desired the concurrence of the Assembly:

That the proposals contained in the Crimes (Grand Juries) Bill be referred to the Legal and Constitutional Committee for inquiry, consideration and report within three months.

It was ordered that the message be taken into consideration next day.

EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

The debate (adjourned from February 25) on the motion of Mr Fordham (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources) for the second reading of this Bill was resumed.

Mr RAMSAY (Balwyn)—The Bill makes minor amendments to the Extractive Industries Act. It was introduced as a Privilege Bill in accordance with the long traditions of the Westminster system, that the House introduces a piece of legislation ahead of consideration of the Governor's Speech opening Parliament, emphasising the independence that the Houses of Parliament have from the Crown.

It has been a long tradition of Parliament that the Privilege Bill should, as a rule, be a matter of minor consequence and this Bill maintains that tradition. The amendments being made are lacking in real significance, although they are technically important and should be made to improve and update the existing Act.

The Minister indicated that there were four matters worthy of highlighting. The first matter was the removal of discriminatory language, in keeping with the move in legislation that there should not be discrimination against women, in particular, or discrimination on other grounds. Secondly, the Minister suggested that the Bill reflected a number of Government changes that occurred since the Bill was last amended. Thirdly, the Minister suggested that the Bill clarifies some anomalies in the legislation that had arisen because of conflict in interpretation of previous amendments. Fourthly, the Bill clarifies an existing provision to prevent any applicant having to advertise under both the Extractive Industries Act and the Town and Country Planning Act, which had been the situation in recent years.

I sympathise with the Minister that these matters were ones that had to be highlighted. The removal of discriminatory language, which the Minister said was important, refers to the regulation making section of the principal Act, section 19, where a power was given to the Government to make regulations regarding the minimum age at which boys may be employed in quarries and the keeping by quarry owners of a register of boys so employed. The Government now proposes that the word “boys” should be removed and the word “persons” instituted in place thereof.

One can understand the Government’s intention in this matter in saying, “We no longer want to discriminate on the grounds of sex so far as employment is concerned, and if it is good enough for boys to work in quarries, girls should be permitted to do so, if they so desire”. However, in making this change the Government has inadvertently done something that perhaps it did not intend doing. The existing Act concerns the minimum age at which boys may be employed in quarries. “Boys” by definition are males of a tender age; they are junior males. In substituting the word “persons” for “boys”, Parliament is now referring to all persons. The minimum age at which persons may be employed in quarries is something about which the Government, if it sees fit, can make regulations.

In other words, the Government could make regulations to permit the employment of adults under a certain age in quarries. I do not suggest that it is likely to do that, but, in
following through the desire to remove discriminatory language from legislation, it has introduced a completely different concept. As the age at which persons could be employed in quarries is determined by industrial awards, it may well have been wise of the Government, rather than make this somewhat pedantic fuss about removing the word “boys” and substituting the word “persons”, if it had simply removed the entire regulation making power concerning the minimum age of persons employed in quarries because the matter is covered by industrial awards affecting employment in that particular area.

Some of the machinery amendments to reflect a number of Government changes to a number of departments and agencies are long overdue. It is simply a matter of ensuring that the expressions in the Act refer to the appropriate Minister of the appropriate department where there has been a name change. This sort of change is needed. It would have been more appropriate at the time of the name change for the appropriate amendments to have been made to the Extractive Industries Act rather than now, but as they have not been made, it is sensible that they should be made.

With regard to clarifying the position of applicants for licences, in some ways this is a reflection upon the inadequacy of the amendments that were introduced by the Government a year or two ago. The fact that those amendments led to confusion in the industry rather than clarification is a reflection on the quality of those amendments, and it is necessary and proper that that position should be rectified.

Finally, the proposal to simplify the advertising procedures with regard to applicants for extractive industry licences should be applauded by the House. It is senseless that the person seeking a licence should be required to advertise not once but twice simply because of the different requirements that exist in the Extractive Industries Act and the Town and Country Planning Act.

The amendments in all are not of great consequence. In supporting the passage of the Bill, I note that the Extractive Industries Act has not been reprinted since 1975. Since that date there have been amendments to the Act on thirteen separate occasions; in 1976; 1980; 1982; 1983; 1984 and 1986. There were four direct amending Bills to the Act and nine amendments made indirectly to the Act. It is a mammoth and almost impossible task for anyone to find his or her way through that Act. I ask the Government, as a matter of urgency, to have the Act reprinted and made available to the industry so that those engaged in extractive industries in Victoria know the ground rules for their activities unambiguously and simply.

Mr B. J. EVANS (Gippsland East)—The honourable member for Balwyn dealt effectively with the provisions of this relatively minor Bill, which was introduced as a privilege Bill at the commencement of this sessional period. It is pointless to reiterate the comments made by the honourable member. The National Party agrees completely with the views he expressed and supports the proposed legislation.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I thank the spokesmen for the opposition parties for their comments on the Bill. The honourable member for Balwyn went into some detail on the various aspects of the Bill, which were referred to in the second-reading speech. I commend him for his research and for his obvious interest in what I believe to be important proposed legislation. It is not earth-shattering in the sense of having an impact on the wider community but it is very important to those involved in extractive industries in the State.

The honourable member for Balwyn referred to the regulation-making powers concerning young persons. Those provisions were retained at the request of the industry. The honourable member also referred to the number of amendments made to the original Act over a number of years. The Government has taken the view that, following the passage of the Bill, a major reprinting of the Act will be initiated. The industry will then have an Act of which I know it is proud.

Since the Labor Party gained office the industries have cooperated in reforming and correcting a number of very real problems. Many people overlook the important role that
extractive industries play in so many sectors of the Victorian economy. The Government 
looks forward to the Bill proceeding through both Houses as quickly as possible.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was read a second time, and passed through its remaining stages.

VICTORIA GRANTS COMMISSION (AMENDMENT) BILL

The debate (adjourned from February 26) on the motion of Mr Simmonds (Minister for 
Local Government) for the second reading of this Bill was resumed.

Mr COOPER (Mornington)—The purpose of the Victoria Grants Commission 
(Amendment) Bill 1987 is to change the allocation formula to bring it into line with the 
Commonwealth Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1986. The changes that 
will occur in the distribution of grants in Victoria and the changes that will be made to the 
Victoria Grants Commission Act will mean that the as-of-right entitlement of local 
government will diminish from the present 40 per cent of the total amount that comes 
from the Commonwealth to the State to 30 per cent of that total.

As-of-right entitlement will apply only to population, and not to population and area of 
municipalities as it does at present. The remaining 70 per cent of the total sum is to be 
allocated with a far greater emphasis on expenditure needs and disabilities.

The assessment based on the difference in the capacity of the municipalities to raise 
revenue will be heavily diminished. In addition, the proposed legislation will require the 
details of the determination by the Victoria Grants Commission to be sent to the relevant 
Commonwealth Minister before it is made available to the Treasurer, all members of 
Parliament and every council. In other words, the Commonwealth Minister receives first 
notice of what has happened, even before the Treasurer of this State, before members of 
Parliament in Victoria and before the recipient councils.

The proposed legislation will enable the commissioners who are to be appointed to be 
people who have had an association with local government, rather than continuing the 
present requirement that commissioners must have a knowledge or understanding of local 
government.

Lastly, the Bill requires the Victoria Grants Commission to produce, in its words, at 
least once in every three years details of the methods used in determining allocations. The 
Commonwealth legislation to which I referred, which is the Local Government (Financial 
Assistance) Act 1986, not only changes the allocation formula but also for the first time 
includes the Northern Territory as a recipient of money.

It changes the apportionment to the States and, of course, now the Northern Territory, 
to a population-based share from the present system of percentage shares that has existed 
since 1977. It also guarantees increases in real terms for the total sum to be provided to the 
States for 1986–87 and 1987–88. As we all know, the grant has been made for 1986–87 
and it did, in fact, do that.

It is of import and interest to local government in this State—and should be to the 
members of Parliament—that recent statements by Senator Peter Walsh, Federal Minister 
for Finance, have now thrown that guarantee, that third part of the Local Government 
(Financial Assistance) Act 1986, into doubt. It is part of the proposed legislation that 
guarantees increases in real terms for the total sum to be provided.

The 1987–88 year—which is the second part of the two-year guarantee that was given 
by the Commonwealth in the proposed legislation—is now under real threat because of the 
statements that have been made by Senator Walsh. What he said, in effect, was that in 
real terms increases will not occur; that local government throughout the country may be 
very lucky to get as much in actual dollars, and, as for increases in real terms, that is 
definitely not on.
That is what Senator Walsh told deputations from this State to Canberra in recent weeks. It is now clear that there is a strong possibility of further legislation at a Commonwealth level to cancel out that guarantee for 1987–88. That would also affect any grants for future years.

We may be dealing tonight with a Bill that is a slave to Commonwealth legislation that could be changed dramatically either in this sessional period of the Commonwealth Parliament or very early in the spring sessional period—that is, if the statements of Senator Walsh have any credibility or power and are to be taken seriously. As he is the Federal Minister for Finance, I suggest that local government, not only in this State but also throughout the country, should take what Senator Walsh says seriously.

It will be a severe blow to councils in this State if Senator Walsh’s threats come to pass. Local government’s reasonable share of personal income tax is under threat because of Senator Walsh’s statements. The proposed legislation can therefore be seen by the councils in Victoria as a forerunner of heavy fiscal attrition measures that will be felt throughout the States and in local communities.

An editorial in the January 1987 edition of the *Australian Municipal Journal* editorial was headed, “Who will tell the losers and when?” I shall quote a few paragraphs of that editorial, because it has a great deal of relevance to the matters under consideration by this Parliament. It states:

According to the chairman of the Victoria Grants Commission councils should be in a position to comment on principles to be applied to Commonwealth revenue sharing grants without seeing the arithmetic of how these principles will be applied.

It goes on to say:

The principles of general revenue sharing and the consequent formula which dictates the annual allocation of Commonwealth grants to local government by the Victoria Grants Commission have never been well understood by most councillors and officers.

The Victoria Grants Commission is regarded by other states as having the most sophisticated approach in Australia to the distribution of general revenue grants. While it is reassuring to know that Victoria’s system is admired by others, too few of us fully understand how it works.

There is big money involved. Last year $585 million in Australia, $148 million within Victoria. Victoria’s share of national funds will rise from 25·21% in 1986–87 to 26·4% in 1988–89.

As I have just mentioned, that 26·4 per cent is now under threat. It is not guaranteed that we will receive that 26·4 per cent in Victoria.

The report goes on to talk about the Municipal Association of Victoria commissioning Mr Brian Haratsis to examine the implications of the proposal. Mr Haratsis identified four likely areas:

- a larger number of municipalities will receive the minimum as-of-right entitlement
- a number of municipalities with relatively high valuation levels will score negatively in terms of revenue disabilities
- relatively small homogeneous municipalities with low expenditure needs for disadvantaged groups are likely to be losers.
- those developing fringe municipalities with a relatively low revenue component and high expenditure needs are likely to be winners.

The editorial goes on to say:

The Victoria Grants Commission has not given any analysis of the likely “before” and “after” effects for each municipality. It issued an esoteric discussion paper largely on the “balanced budget” method and held several meetings with councils late in the year. In effect, councils were expected to appraise the results of the principles with minimal guidance from the Grants Commission.

If councils are expected to engage in meaningful consultation with the Grants Commission as anticipated under the Commonwealth Act, then they ought to see the practical consequences of the principles.
This was done in Western Australia and should not be beyond the wit of the sophisticated Victoria Grants Commission. In Victoria the MAV has largely had to undertake this role.

The main problem in all this is; who will tell the losers and when will they be told? The Grants Commission fears that telling them early could lead to an immature response by those councils.

The MAV, on the other hand, would like to take the more optimistic view that those councils would be mature enough to cope with bad news and try to understand it.

The MAV has put a case along these lines to the Minister for Local Government. Hopefully, we will see greater attempts to de-mystify the Victoria Grants Commission process, particularly in its dealings with individual councils.

That editorial strikes at the very heart of the Commonwealth legislation which has resulted in this Bill.

No doubt exists that the statement made in the editorial that councils in this State are being kept and have been kept for many years in the "mushroom club" by the Victoria Grants Commission is true. It is also true that the way the system works has been a closely guarded secret and nothing has been done to try to overcome that. Now that changes are being made to the Victoria Grants Commission Act 1976, lip-service is being paid to the question of consultation.

Some meetings have been held between groups of councils and the Victoria Grants Commission, but none of those councils has come out any wiser. When one considers the annual reports of the commission, one can understand why people do not know what is going on. After all, honourable members are talking about the money of the taxpayers of this State and country going back to local government; it is their money and it is coming back from the Commonwealth to the people who contributed it.

There is a reasonable expectation by people in the community that they should at least know how the money is being distributed. However, that expectation is not fulfilled either orally by the commission or in its annual reports. It does not try to make life easy for those people who have an interest in the matter.

In the 1986 annual report of the Victoria Grants Commission—which is the last available report—a heading, "Horizontal equalisation", appears, which would make the eyes of most people start to water. Paragraph 2.7 states:

It is referring to the new requirement of the Commonwealth—

... in order to conform with the new requirement, would be to change the standard for comparisons of revenue raising capacity from an arithmetic average (mean) of the top 25 per cent of municipalities, to an arithmetic average for the State as a whole. However, this change could have a significant effect on the pattern of allocations. It will reduce the standard used to assess relative capacity to raise revenue and thus reduce allowances for differences in revenue raising capacity. There will be more (and larger) negative values for the revenue component and the positive values will be smaller than under the current methodology. Overall, allowances for revenue raising capacity will be of less significance in determining the allocations than hitherto and more emphasis will be placed on expenditure needs and disabilities.

It goes on to state:

Municipalities whose allocations under the previous methodology were largely determined by the revenue component will find their allocations reduced.

Paragraph 2.10 states:

Of course, a concomitant of the decrease in the allocations for some municipalities is an increase in the allocations for others. The type of municipality most likely to benefit is one that has high expenditure needs and disabilities, coupled with positive revenue raising needs because of below standard capacity to raise revenue.

That is all terrific and it possibly means a lot to people who are skilled in economics and in understanding that type of phraseology. However, as the editorial in the Australian Municipal Journal states, it does not mean much to most people. It certainly does not
mean a great deal to the people in the street who believe the rhetoric of Federal Ministers that a fair share of funding is being returned to the States for distribution to councils.

If one cuts through the verbiage, those statements show that there will be a significant change in the allocation pattern for funds. Very few councils have any idea of the implications it will have on their prospects for funding. They have not been told in simple language how the new funding formula will affect them. They have no idea and those people who make assumptions about how it may be done are guessing. Nobody knows and neither the Government nor the Victoria Grants Commission is telling them.

We can guess that most, if not all, of the less populous but large in area rural municipalities will receive less money. That appears to be generally accepted. However, it is still a guess. We can also guess that the larger metropolitan councils, such as Waverley and Camberwell, will probably receive less. Again, that is a guess.

It would appear that the fringe metropolitan municipalities, such as Mornington, Werribee, Lilydale and possibly Whittlesea, may receive more. As the growth municipalities in the fringe areas of Melbourne, it appears that they may benefit from the proposed legislation. However, no-one is certain. I do not know whether any of the councils know what is happening; most of them claim they do not. Most of them claim that they have been ignored; they have been asking questions but have not received any answers.

There is no doubt that local government throughout the State is extremely concerned about its financial future, so far as its share of personal income tax is concerned, and it is worried about the failure by the Government to properly consult with it. That failure shows once again that neither the Minister for Local Government nor the Government has the best interests of local government at heart. It is no wonder that local councils continue to worry about these matters.

The Bill has the potential of creating a Victoria Grants Commission that can be used as a weapon to force certain councils to their financial knees, and that matter must be addressed by the Minister. That issue must be put to rest because it is a worry to many councils around the State, especially in rural Victoria.

When there is a proposed change to the formula where there will be winners and losers, councils will see that change as a weapon that can be used against them. The Bill changes the formula so that 70 per cent of the total funds will be distributed on a basis which no-one knows anything about. Some 30 per cent will be distributed on the basis of population, but 70 per cent of the total funds will be distributed under a formula, the details of which are unknown to almost every council or council officer in this State.

As I indicated previously, we can make guesses; however, no details have been given and no effort has been made to make them available. With the performance of the Government with regard to plans for council amalgamations fresh in the minds of most councils and communities around the State, it is no wonder that those councils and communities are worried about the possible ramifications of the Bill.

The councils want to know that they will not be put to the wall because of this change in the formula and they want some guarantees and assurances. They have not had any reasonable consultation on this Bill, and that is an absolute disgrace. Their fears are further exacerbated when one reads about some of the changes to be made to the requirements for members of the Victoria Grants Commission.

Previously a commissioner had to have a knowledge and understanding of local government. The changes now being implemented require the commissioner to have had an association with local government. If one goes down to council chambers once a year, I am curious to know whether that constitutes an association with local government. I suppose it does! I suppose if one puts out one’s garbage bin each week and the council truck collects it that one has an association with the council!
What does "have an association with local government" mean? It would appear that the present requirement of having to have a knowledge and understanding of local government is a bit limiting on the Government. After all, it must be getting difficult to find a party hack with a knowledge and understanding of local government. Therefore, the Government has decided to find someone who has an association with local government. That makes it easier for a hack to do the job. That shows that local government has much to worry about.

It does not seem to be too onerous a requirement for a commissioner, one of three people who will be distributing vast sums of taxpayers' money to councils, to have a knowledge and understanding of local government. It does not seem to be too onerous, even for this Government, to find a person who could be regarded as independent and with some degree of knowledge about local councils and that that person would not be put to the wall or would not be screwed—to use modern terminology.

However, the formula is being changed and that change will mean that 70 per cent of the total money that comes from Canberra to Victoria for distribution to local councils will be in the hands of three people. Nobody in local government knows how those three people will distribute that money. Nobody knows the basis on which it will be distributed. It is a well kept secret between the three commissioners.

Now the Government wants to change the basic requirement for appointment of these three commissioners from being people who have a knowledge and understanding of local government to people who have had an association with local government.

If one is to understand why people are becoming a little nervous about this Government and its dealings with local government, one needs to consider only that scenario to find the answer. Many councils in Victoria are concerned. It is no small amount of money involved; it is a vast amount of taxpayers' money. Changes are occurring and no explanation is being given for those changes. That matter needs to be questioned, and, more importantly, the answer must be given in an open, reasonable and a proper consultative way to councils. That has not been done; councils have been ignored. As I said earlier, councils have been kept in the mushroom club. That is a disgrace.

The State Government failed to negotiate on the Commonwealth legislation when it was introduced last year. If the State Government had had its wits about it and had negotiated with the Commonwealth when it was considering the legislation, Parliament would not need to debate the Bill now before the House.

There seems to be general and broad agreement that the distribution of personal income tax grants in this State is the best system of any State in the Commonwealth. That has been so since the grants were first made available in 1977. Most councils would agree that the distribution has been, to all intents and purposes, reasonable. If that argument had been put to the Commonwealth, it would not have been able to come up with any reasonable argument to the contrary.

The changes are unnecessary for Victoria. I cannot answer for other States but the change in formula is unnecessary in that it should not have applied to Victoria. The Government has failed to protect councils from the financial effects that will flow. There will no doubt be some big losers in this game that is being played with the changing of the formula. There will be some big winners, too, but for every winner there will be at least one and probably more losers.

The Government should go out and talk to the losers. It knows who they are. If the Minister for Local Government does not know who they are, he can get that information from the Chairman of the Victoria Grants Commission. He should ring him some time and have a chat. I can tell the Minister his name if he really wants to know!

The Minister should go to the councils, tell them what will happen, and the reasons why and attempt to work out a method for easing the financial pain. However, that has not been done. Those councils will be the big losers. They are in the mushroom club. They
have been kept at bay and have been waiting while the time bomb ticks, a time bomb that will eventually bring bad news to them some time between now and October of this year.

The Government has shown itself to be the slave of the Commonwealth by agreeing to its changes without a flicker of a fight. The amazing thing is that the money concerned is not Commonwealth money; it is the personal income tax contributions of the people of Victoria that is being returned to them under an agreement that provides for a share to go to local councils.

The Government is not even attempting to fight the Commonwealth on this matter. The Commonwealth will not honour the second part of the agreement under its 1986 Act. The Federal Minister for Finance, Senator Walsh, has proclaimed to councillors who have gone to Canberra to see him that they have no chance of having the second part of the agreement honoured for the coming financial year. We have heard nothing about it from the State Minister for Local Government. He is sitting mute and hoping that no-one pays any attention. It is up to individual councils or groups of councils to defend themselves from this further attack on their proper share of personal income tax contributions because the Minister has done nothing for them. If he has, it has not been noticeable.

The Hawke Government's performance on the distribution of a share of personal income tax collections to local council has been nothing short of a disgrace. It has broken its promises and is determined to continue along that path by breaking even more promises between now and the end of this year.

Finally, the major point of this Government's performance is that it has failed to acquaint councils with the facts. It is asking them to trust the Government and to sign a blank cheque. The Government is presenting councils with the Bill but is refusing to tell them the means by which money will be distributed to councils. The only thing that the Government has told the councils is that their as-of-right entitlement has changed from 40 per cent to 30 per cent and that the part that will be distributed under the balance of the formula has risen to 70 per cent. However, the Government will not say how that will be distributed; all it says is that it should be trusted to do the right thing.

No reasonable council can trust the Government because its performance, particularly since March 1985, has been nothing short of a disgrace. Local government is saying that it wants the facts. It wants to know what is going on before the proposed legislation passes through Parliament. It does not want to know after the game is over, and it wants to be able to make its points through its elected representatives in Parliament. It wants to be able to make those points with the facts at its fingertips.

The Government has a responsibility to make those facts available to local government while the Bill is between here and the Legislative Council. The Government has failed, once again, to consult meaningfully and properly with local government. It is another reaffirmation of its failure towards local government and local communities throughout the State. The Government has a well documented set of failures since March 1985 under the Minister for Local Government. In this case, it can be resurrected.

If the Minister has the best interests of local government and the State at heart, he will make available to councils that will be affected at least the basic information. There is no screaming rush. I understand the Minister will say that he wants the Bill to be passed in this sessional period, and that point is appreciated. I understand the reasons why he would say that, but the last sitting week commences on 28 April, which will also be the last sitting week of the Upper House, so there is time between now and then for meaningful consultation to take place. There is time for the Government to reveal the truth to local councils. It is time for the Government to show whether it is fair dinkum. If it is not fair dinkum, it will continue to push the Bill through Parliament, shove it on to the Upper House and hope that it will get cooperation from the Opposition.

The Opposition will be considering whatever assurances it can get from the Minister on this matter and will make up its mind whether it will be cooperative in the Upper House
because local government is telling the Opposition that it wants the facts, and the Opposition is telling the Minister that he now has the opportunity to provide the facts, and strongly suggests that he do so.

In conclusion, I shall make a few points on the likely outcomes of the proposed legislation. There may be a situation—I emphasise that this is guesswork—where the category 3 councils are the big winners from the change in formula. The 23 category 3 councils are the Shire of Ballarat, the Shire of Bellarine, the City of Berwick, the Shire of Bulla, the Shire of Corio, the Shire of Cranbourne, the Shire of Eltham, the Shire of Flinders, the Shire of Hastings, the Shire of Lillydale, the Shire of Melton, the Shire of Mildura, the Shire of Mornington, the Shire of Morwell, the Shire of Pakenham, the Shire of Rodney, the Shire of Seymour, the Shire of Sherbrooke, the City of South Barwon, the Shire of Strathfieldsaye, the Shire of Warragul, the Shire of Werribee and the Shire of Whittlesea.

On the basis of what one is able to glean from the Victoria Grants Commission reports, it appears that most of those councils could be the big winners of the lottery being conducted by the Commonwealth and State Governments. Of the other four categories, it appears that possibly half will be winners and half will be losers. There appears to be no doubt in the minds of educated people that about 20 to 30 councils will go on to the minimum allocation list, and that is a significant increase. The small councils with low expenditure needs are likely to be the losers. Councils such as those of the Borough of Sebastopol and the Borough of Eaglehawk are the likely losers. I am sure honourable members who represent those municipalities will find that of considerable interest.

I am surprised that the honourable members for Bendigo West and Ballarat South are not present in the Chamber and involved in this debate, asking the same questions, because the boroughs of Sebastopol and Eaglehawk will not be pleased with their allocations from the Victoria Grants Commission when the new formula is put into place.

Mr A. T. Evans—The Government is deliberately trying to get rid of them.

Mr COOPER—The honourable member for Ballarat North is quite right in saying that that is the plan. That is what councils are concerned about. They are concerned about this method of fiscal attrition being used against them to send them to the wall and force them to amalgamate or go out of business completely. That will remain a worry until the Minister or someone else from the Government gives serious assurances to indicate that that will not occur and that those councils will not be the losers.

Larger councils will be able to buffer the loss more easily. Councils such as those of Doncaster and Templestowe, Waverley, Essendon and Melbourne have the financial wherewithal to be able to buffer the likely effects the proposal will have on their municipalities. However, small rural councils, such as the boroughs of Sebastopol and Eaglehawk, do not have that capacity, and that is why they are concerned.

The Bill has not been subjected to adequate consultation. Councils around the State have expressed concern and it is up to the Government to do something about it. Having regard to the implications for councils, which will flow on to local communities, that consultation should occur immediately. The Government should delay further consideration of the Bill until at least the last sitting week of this sessional period. It can then do the job that should have been done months ago—that is, to consult adequately with all councils and properly explain the implications of the Bill. If the Government fails to do so, as it has done on many occasions, it will once again show itself to be the abject failure the Opposition believes it to be in negotiations and dealings with local government.

The Bill is tremendously important to the future of local government in this State. It is clear that Victoria must now deal with Commonwealth legislation that it should not have had to deal with if the Government had been on the ball and if it had done its job properly. The fact that it failed to do its job properly in 1986 has created the situation in which honourable members must deal with the proposed legislation now. That is an unfortunate fact of life. However, the Bill should at least be dealt with in an open and educated
environment, not the environment that the Government has allowed to develop in many
councils over many months. It has known what will happen to councils and municipalities
around the State but it has failed to tell them.

The Government has a responsibility to do its job of telling local government what is
going on so that councils can make the appropriate responses to the honourable members
who represent them in this place before the Bill receives final approval. I urge the Minister
and the Government to play fair dinkum with local government and to do the right thing.
If that is done, at least the debate in the Upper House may address the real issues and
problems that will be faced by individual councils and consideration can be given to
easing the financial pain that those councils may experience during the implementation of
the change of formula.

I do make that plea to the Minister, and I hope he will accept it in the spirit in which it
is delivered; that is, a spirit of goodwill towards local government, which is something that
I believe this Government desperately needs to adopt because its performance since
March 1985 has been abysmal.

The Government needs to pick up its game to a large extent between now and the next
election, when the Liberal Party will take over, at which time I know local government
will feel more relaxed when dealing with the Government of the day.

Mr STEGGALL (Swan Hill)—This Bill results from the enactment of the Local
couple of changes, such as the gender neutral language sections, the Bill is virtually
inserting into the Victoria Grants Commission Act the major sections of the
Commonwealth Act relating to the allocation of funds to municipalities.

Most of the Bill is worded exactly as is the Commonwealth Act, and the subsequent
amendment to the Commonwealth Act now allows for a similar measure in Victoria.

It is rather a pity that we have been caught up in this situation. I shall try to explain to
the House the situation as I see it. The Act that was passed by the Federal Parliament—
supported by all sides of the Federal Parliament, I might add—was drawn up, debated and
passed by people who are a long way away from local government and do not understand
exactly what will be the ramifications of their actions.

Unfortunately, honourable members do not have very much choice in regard to this
Bill. For example, I would dearly love—and my heart tells me that I should—to vote
against many of the provisions of the Bill, which are wrong for local government in this
State. I appreciate that it is rather senseless to vote against them; the Government has
accepted the provisions of the Federal legislation and, through this Bill, wishes to put
them into practice in Victoria.

The honourable member for Mornington mentioned the lack of fight by the Victorian
Government, as it would seem, in trying to influence the formulation of the measure to
protect some of the principles that have existed over the years for the allocation to local
government of 2 per cent of personal income tax for distribution throughout Australia.

However, a few other aspects of the Federal legislation annoy me, one of which is that
it forces each State to put forward guidelines to the Federal Minister for Local Government
and Administrative Services for his approval before the State's grants commission can
allocate any money. Once those guidelines are forwarded to the Federal Minister, that
honourable gentleman has the power to amend them, reject them and even, if he so wishes,
to formulate new ones and impose them on the States.

Those powers and those guidelines are the most important aspects relating to this Bill.
Honourable members have not seen the guidelines; they do not have them. The Bill does
not make it essential for the guidelines to be produced, and we must trust that our State,
through the Local Government Commission, will draw up suitable local government
guidelines and principles for the allocation of funds. I doubt whether honourable members
will ever see the guidelines. With a little luck, I suppose they might be contained in next year's Victoria Grants Commission report.

A list of some nine principles were circulated and talked about in local government throughout Victoria. I do not know what stage has been reached with those. I believe one or two have been added to the list and a couple have been changed.

I should hope that the Minister for Local Government, in the sense of fair play and honesty, might—just this once—assist Parliament by notifying honourable members and, through us, also local government, just what guidelines and principles Victoria is submitting to the Commonwealth for the allocation of money. I hope the Minister will let Parliament know during tonight's debate. It might be a tall order, as I did not put the question on notice for the Minister. Also, of course, there is no requirement under the Victorian legislation for that information to be made available.

The Victoria Grants Commission Act was set up in 1976 and was reasonably clear in regard to the principles to be applied. The way in which the final figures were arrived at for Victoria Grants Commission allocations has always been a mystery to local government. I can assure the Minister that, after tonight's debate and after the measure is passed, that confusion will be even greater.

The Bill omits from the principal Act quite a few sections that contain some explanations. Of course, the as-of-right entitlement amendment comes directly from the Federal legislation. The Bill will also cut down the percentage of the allocation to 30 per cent of the funds. Of course, the other 70 per cent of the funds will now be distributed on the basis of what is called horizontal equalisation.

Horizontal equalisation obviously means a lot to some academics in the financial field, but it does not mean a great deal to anyone else. I am sorry that honourable members are being asked tonight to debate a Bill such as this and are literally being forced to pass it because it is an imposition placed on them by the Federal Parliament. They are being asked to pass proposed legislation, the meaning of which no-one in this Chamber understands.

I hope I will not confuse anyone tonight when I refer to some of the explanations that have been given. Section 11 of the principal Act is to be omitted. That section states:

The Minister shall as soon as possible in each financial year advise the Commission of the total funds proposed to be made available for allocation to municipalities in that financial year.

That section is going out the door. I am advised that the commission usually tells the Minister the allocation anyway. It seems that the Minister actually has no way of knowing the total amount of money to be split up by the commission.

Section 12 (2) provides:

The amount so determined in respect of each municipality shall not be less than the "As-of-Right Entitlement" of the municipality.

That comes out and is to be replaced by:

(2) The amount to be allocated to each municipality must not be less than the "As-of-Right Entitlement" of the municipality.

There is a slight difference. As honourable members will recall, the as-of-right entitlement comes down, so we are possibly looking at a considerable decrease. Last year only two councils were given the as-of-right entitlement—the shires of Rosedale and Walpeup. It will be interesting to see how they fare under horizontal equalisation.

Section 12 (3) is also being repealed. It provides:

In making a determination pursuant to sub-section (1) the Commission shall consider—

(a) the special needs and disabilities of the particular municipality;

(b) the effort made by the municipality to function effectively and provide reasonable services; and
One then holds one's breath. What is to be inserted?

The key clause to the whole matter is clause 10 of the Bill, and I want everyone listening to this gripping speech to try to comprehend the meaning of this clause, which is the basis for the whole of this operation:

(3) In making a determination the Commission must have regard to the objective of ensuring that the allocation of funds for local government purposes is made, as far as practicable, on a full horizontal equalisation basis, being a basis that ensures that each municipality in the State is able to function, by reasonable effort, at a standard not lower than the average standard of other municipalities in the State, and that takes account of differences in the expenditure required by those municipalities in the performance of their functions and in the capacity of those municipalities to raise revenue.

That also happens to be one sentence.

Mr Simmonds—That is what your mob voted for.

Mr STEGGALL—I am not madly impressed by that, either.

Having due regard to the fact that allocations to municipal councils are to be based on horizontal equalisation, I find it strange that the Minister then decided to leave in section 14 of the Act. Section 14 (1) provides:

The Minister may on his own motion or at the request of the Commission make written submissions to the Commission as to any factors which appear to the Minister to be of special significance in relation to all or any municipalities in the relevant financial year.

The minute he does that, the horizontal equalisation basis will be lost.

As I said, I am amazed that the Minister has left that provision in place. It fitted well into the 1976 Act although I do not know whether the Minister has ever actually used that section. I know that the Victoria Grants Commission has many times used the old section 12 for the special needs base and the special requirements. All of that now goes out the door and we go back to horizontal equalisation, which should be understandable to everyone. Everyone should know exactly what that means because that is what the Bill is all about.

One council that I represent is the Shire of Wycheproof in the Sea Lake region. It is a sizeable shire so its area component is left but, over the past two years, because of the financial crisis in the Mallee, it has not increased its rates at all. In the eyes of someone sitting in Melbourne, it may have the financial ability to raise more rate revenue because its rates should be slipping a little behind, in comparison with those of other shires. However, it responds to local needs and special problems, which could have been met under the special needs provisions of the old Act. I wonder whether it will be put at any disadvantage as a result. I am assured by some members of the commission that it will not be; that full horizontal equalisation will pick it up because full horizontal equalisation has to be on “a basis that ensures that each municipality in the State is able to function, by reasonable effort, at a standard not lower than the average”. If one takes that at its literal meaning and nothing can be lower than the average, how is it possible to strike an average? I should like to help people to understand the situation, because it is a very confusing statement.

I was about to refer to the city of Richmond but it has not yet got a council, so I suppose one cannot speak about it.

In a letter from the Department of Local Government and Administrative Services, Canberra, to the Shire Secretary of the Shire of Gordon, who queried the definition of “a disadvantaged council” an interesting point is made:

You query the definition of a disadvantaged council. As you have already noted, the principal objective of the new program is to provide financial assistance to those local governing bodies who are most disadvantaged with respect to their ability to raise revenue and provide services. The act does not provide any further elaboration on
the meaning of disadvantage, as it is the responsibility of the State Local Government Grants Commissions to assess the degree of relative disadvantage between councils. This will undoubtedly involve assessments of the capacity of a council to raise revenue as compared to an average capacity, balanced against a council's services and the relative disabilities in providing these services.

The letter is signed by the assistant secretary, whose name I cannot pronounce.

Mention is also made in the Federal Act of the need for consultation to inform municipalities as to the guidelines. The Minister gave that job to the Victoria Grants Commission. That was probably the right and proper thing to do because I think the only person who has any idea of how this works is the chairman of the commission.

In a letter to all town clerks and shire secretaries, the commission says:

The consequences of these legislative changes—

That is, the legislative changes from the Commonwealth Act—

... each State is required to submit to the Commonwealth, not later than 1 July 1987, the principles that the State's Grants Commission proposes to use in determining future general revenue grant allocations. In formulating these principles it is a requirement to have had consultations with "a body or bodies representative of local government in the State".

The commission set about doing that.

I do not think anyone denies that there will be a lot of losers. Mainly, of course, they will be country municipalities and some of the small boroughs.

The Borough of Eaglehawk will be included in this category. It has been admitted that a number of municipalities will have substantially smaller allocations and that there will be a three-year phasing-in period. The cutback will be taken over three years—which is the only proper way to do it—so that local government areas will not be cut to ribbons in one year.

The Federal politicians knew that cutbacks in funding for councils in various areas would be the result of the Bill.

The as-of-right entitlements is one matter that hurts many people throughout local government, mainly those in rural shires and some of the smaller boroughs. When people wanted to know what the as-of-right changes were going to be, the honourable member for North Eastern Province, Mr David Evans, wrote to the Minister and asked him that question. His response was:

The new Commonwealth legislation provides that the minimum or as-of-right entitlements be calculated solely on the basis of population. The decision to delete from the legislation the option to take account of other factors such as area, sparsity, etc., was taken by the Commonwealth and was ratified, in the legislation, by the Commonwealth Parliament with little or no dissent by Opposition parties. Clearly, the Victoria Grants Commission has no option but to observe the Commonwealth's requirements as laid down in the legislation.

The Minister previously mentioned the fact that all parties in Canberra supported the legislation and that is true. However, this indicates how removed Federal members of Parliament are from local government in their dealing with the Victoria Grants Commission Bill.

I am not happy that the legislation was passed unanimously by the Federal Parliament and that it will be passed by this House, because there has not been much input on the part of the State; all the initiatives have come from the Federal Government. Because of the lack of input by the State Parliament when the Bill was prepared, the present situation exists. We do not have a choice.

There are many sections of the Bill which I do not like and I know will disadvantage many of the people I represent. Rural shires throughout the State are being cut back on their road-funding programs and in other areas and this is taking its toll on the small shires.
The Minister and the Labor Party are aware of the situation and they are also aware that by exposing this weakness of the smaller rural shires they may be able to achieve their dream of the amalgamation of councils.

The Bill will assist the Government in that desire and I am sorry not to be opposing the proposed legislation. To oppose it would be fruitless because Parliament is in a situation where it must pass a section of the Federal Act to get the Federal money distributed throughout local government in this State. It is with regret that the National Party supports the proposed legislation.

Mr WILLIAMS (Doncaster)—This is an important Bill for the people I represent in the City of Doncaster and Templestowe because I believe my constituents will be badly dealt with. If I read it correctly, the so-called disadvantaged councils will get a bigger share of the cake at the expense of the rest of the councils, which by some formula that I cannot understand, are deemed to be prosperous.

The City of Doncaster and Templestowe faces enormous problems because of its rapid growth. There has been dramatic growth over the past three years, particularly in the eastern part of my electorate, being East Doncaster and Donvale. This area has an above average number of young families who are struggling with the problems of bringing up growing families and, unfortunately, because of the shortage of Commonwealth, State and local government funding, it is deplorably short of all the facilities it needs such as kindergartens, schools, family care centres and so forth.

The city has been conned by both the State and Federal Governments into providing a child care centre, a nursing home, recreation centres, libraries and other facilities, all of which the council has had to establish by borrowing millions of dollars on which it is now paying interest.

The Commonwealth Government, particularly, has welshed on its responsibility; it has cut back the special purposes grant. I do not know what my Federal colleagues were on about, particularly those Victorian Federal members of Parliament because, if they were doing their duty, there is no way that this Bill should have got through the Senate.

We, in Victoria, have a problem in the outer eastern and outer fringe suburbs of Melbourne because considerable difficulty has been created in municipalities that cannot cope with the rearrangement of funding that is predicated by the Bill.

Doncaster and Templestowe alone should spend $5 million a year on its local roads. It could gobble up to $1.75 million being allocated to it under the new formula to be spent on all its responsibilities. Funding for its roads this year will be a mere $419,000 but, in real terms, the city should be getting approximately $600,000 to cope with the situation.

The overall income of the municipality is becoming more and more dependent on Commonwealth and State grants. The latest figures available to me for 1984-85 indicate that Government grants amounted to 20 per cent of funding compared with rates of 42 per cent.

The allocation of revenue is important. Twenty-two per cent is allocated to roads, 10 per cent to garbage and other economic services, 15.5 per cent to recreation and culture, 15 per cent to general administration, 10 per cent to health and welfare and 11 per cent to community amenities.

I used to be a municipal councillor; I was a roads and garbage man. I could not be bothered with all these other recreation and culture activities and the community amenities, parks and gardens that now seem to be part of modern local government. Again, municipalities have been lured into this situation only because they thought they would receive more and more handouts from the State and Commonwealth. As a "roads" man I categorically state that, so far as I am concerned, road funding will remain separate from these new fangled road formulas that are to be inflicted upon us.
The decline in Federal and State funding from municipal local roads is a national disgrace. Municipal spending on roads is generally equal to and sometimes greater than Federal or State funding on local roads. The Federal and State Governments absorb more than 60 per cent of the price of petrol. The Federal allocation of more than $1 billion of fuel excise to consolidated revenue should be reduced drastically in light of the appalling condition of our roads. Less than 18 per cent of the revenue collected by the Commonwealth in fuel taxes is returned to the States in road funds. Victorian motorists contribute more than 24 per cent of the revenue, of which only $160 million or 70 per cent of the total is allocated to the States.

Victorian motorists receive back less than 15 cents in the dollar of petrol tax. In the City of Doncaster and Templestowe, residents pay approximately $30 million a year in petrol tax and they receive back a miserable five cents in the dollar. Victoria has the lowest reimbursement of petrol tax per vehicle of any State. The Northern Territory receives $424 per vehicle. Tasmania $140, Western Australia $118, New South Wales $88——

Mr SIMMONDS (Minister for Local Government)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the honourable member has researched his speech and is speaking substantially about taxing in respect of road costs. I suggest that the Bill deals with the Victoria Grants Commission and a process relating to the activities of the commission cannot be extended to cover the question of tax associated with petrol levies and road transport.

The SPEAKER—Order! I uphold the point of order. The honourable member for Doncaster is taking the debate too wide. I ask him to come back to the Bill before the House. I do not intend to restrict him but I suggest that he tighten himself down to the Bill before the House.

Mr WILLIAMS (Doncaster)—With respect, Mr Speaker, I am trying to explain to the House how I have been let down by my colleagues in Canberra who ought to have been pointing out—in their own party room and elsewhere—the disabilities of people in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. For example, in the Central Highlands Province, the people are——

The SPEAKER—Order! I do not intend to prolong the point of order process. I accept that the honourable member for Doncaster is attempting to point out how he has been let down by his colleagues in Canberra and I have accepted that but I suggest now that he come back to the Bill before the House.

Mr WILLIAMS—It is a complex Bill. It will force readjustments on municipalities, as the honourable member for Mornington pointed out. The City of Doncaster and Templestowe will have to make up a deficit of approximately $400,000, increasing its own revenues to make up the loss of reimbursement from the Commonwealth.

The honourable member for Monbulk, who happens to be the local government guru in this place, has warned us that municipal rating will be used as the basis for implementing Labor's social justice strategy. It is the policy of the Government to change the rating system so that instead of rating on site value, as happens in Doncaster and Templestowe, it will rate on improvements.

Therefore, the Labor Party and the Cain Government will seek their rates by the back door. They will tax the people of Doncaster and Templestowe on their improvements. It is a double jeopardy. These people are suffering great disability by the over-rapid growth in the area. These people are mortgaged up to the hilt, they have deficient public services, their Commonwealth grants will be cut back and now their rates will be increased to pay for Labor's social justice strategy because they are going to change——

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Doncaster has been given a fair deal of latitude in debating the Bill and I suggest he exercise restraint from this point onwards.
Mr WILLIAMS—I presume that you, Mr Speaker, will allow me to make a submission to you on the basis of a submission made by the Municipal Association of Victoria to the Victorian Government.

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member is in order if he uses some restraint in the extent to which he wishes to use the material he has.

Mr WILLIAMS—The document clearly talks about disabilities that are vital for the purposes of the Bill. This is what the document says:

Disabilities relate to relative deficiencies in local council’s revenue-raising capacity and to relatively high costs in service provision, where these latter are beyond the control of the council.

That is exactly the situation.

Mr SIMMONDS (Minister for Local Government)—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I desire to ask the honourable member for Doncaster whether he can identify the document and whether he is prepared to make it available.

The SPEAKER—Order! Is the honourable member for Doncaster prepared to identify the document?

Mr WILLIAMS (Doncaster)—I will be happy to oblige. I am quoting from a green document—which is very applicable on St Patrick’s Day—entitled, “Principles for the Distribution of Commonwealth General Purpose Grants to Victorian Local Government: a submission to the Victorian Government prepared in conjunction with Mr Brian Haratsis, USE Consultants”. It is dated February 1987.

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member has identified the document. Will he make it available to the House?

Mr WILLIAMS—I will certainly make it available to the House. The document points out that high costs due to demographic or physical characteristics of the local government area are regarded as disabilities; high costs due to inefficiency are not. Does that mean that we will have amalgamation by the back door? I do not mind if it is in some of these Labor councils like Collingwood, Fitzroy, Oakleigh and Sunshine; but is that what the Minister is trying to do in the areas I represent?

I should like to give the Minister some advice: if he wants to push amalgamation on the basis of these formulas, if he wants to start starving Labor councils to force them into amalgamation—

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Doncaster is a skilled debater. I have listened to him in this House for many years, but I cannot ascertain how what he is describing now is related to the Bill. If he can amalgamate or marry what he is talking about with the Bill now being debated, I shall hear him.

Mr WILLIAMS—Mr Speaker, I am attempting to explain to you and to the House the serious weaknesses in the Bill. It is my humble opinion—I may have a suspicious mind—that there is far more to this Bill than appears on the surface. It is not a Bill that rearranges only financing. It is not just a handout from Big Brother in Canberra.

The Bill is a means of changing the whole financial structure of local government in Victoria. That is what I am attempting to put to the House and that is why I am so hostile towards the Bill and towards my Federal colleagues.

What will this Parliament do if the Bill is thrown out in the other place? We will then be in political hot water because it will be said that we are denying easy money to local government. I advise local government that it will pay a heavy price for its naivety in accepting the Bill.

I hope not too much damage is done before Liberal Governments are returned in Canberra and in this State. The whole purpose of the Bill can then be repudiated and Victorian local government will have a decent reimbursement Bill that ensures that Victoria
receives money for roads and not for social justice priorities that are the obsession of Labor Party Governments in Canberra and in Victoria.

Mr SIMMONDS (Minister for Local Government)—I thank honourable members for their contributions to the debate. Perhaps I should take the last speaker first and advise the honourable member for Doncaster that a failure to pass the Bill would mean that the Victorian allocation would be provided in conformity with Federal legislation. The Bill ensures that Victoria has compatible legislation with the Commonwealth for arrangements that have been made for the distribution of $148 million this financial year and in accordance with the formula that has been agreed to by the Federal Parliament.

Mr Steggall—Which is wrong!

Mr SIMMONDS—I am not sure which element of the National Party is represented by the honourable member for Swan Hill. Perhaps he can advise honourable members! I know he is concerned about the direction from the north but I do not know whether it is from Canberra or from Queensland. The honourable member has some conflicts to resolve in sorting out to whom he is responsible when putting arguments in this Chamber on behalf of the National Party.

I understand his dilemma because my experience in Victoria over the past few weeks has been that the Victoria Grants Commission is held in high esteem. All but 27 councils have indicated that they are totally in agreement with the proposition that the increased allocation in Victoria, which is now available on a changed formula, will be used for the benefit of local government. Municipalities appreciate the consultation that is taking place with the Victoria Grants Commission. From touring the State I have discovered that municipal councillors and officers have not raised any objection to the proposed legislation.

I am surprised that the honourable member for Swan Hill is concerned about a definition that was readily accepted in Canberra by his National Party colleagues.

Mr Williams interjected.

Mr SIMMONDS—The Liberal Party also supported the Federal legislation. The passage of the Bill is desirable so that Victorian legislation can be put in place.

As to suggestions that the Bill will disburse the Federal allocation on a less than just formula, a formula that allegedly will disadvantage some municipalities and advantage others—

Mr Steggall—Will it?

Mr SIMMONDS—If one is applying a formula to municipalities with population shifts and various industry changes, by its very nature a different result will be produced.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr SIMMONDS—If the honourable member for Mornington were in government and has his way, a Liberal Government would interfere with that formula and would manipulate it to coincide with its political philosophies and would obtain a different result. The Labor Government does not apply that approach to local government in Victoria. The Victoria Grants Commission is respected for its activities and work and its methodology, by and large, is accepted.

Mr Steggall—Why change it?

Mr SIMMONDS—The distribution of Federal funds is involved and the new formula, which has been agreed to by the Federal and State Governments, will be available through a new process that will be prescribed in the legislation which will enable it to be carried out. There is no intention of doing other than carrying out a process that is set out in the Federal legislation and which allows the Victorian formula to apply. The process is clearly laid out for people who are concerned about the definition. The definition allows for
consultation to occur. The principles will be put in place in due course after the announcement of the result.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was read a second time, and passed through its remaining stages.

ADJOURNMENT

Youth publications—Temporary buildings at St Helena Post-Primary School—Driver licence tests—Victorian High Schools Sports Association—Resurfacing of A. C. Robertson field athletics track—Rental and bond assistance—Wimmera Employment Promotions

Mr SIMMONDS (Minister for Local Government)—I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

Mr WEIDEMAN (Frankston South)—I bring to the attention of the Minister for Education or the Minister for Police and Emergency Services or the Minister for Local Government, who is at the table, a number of publications that have been produced in our community. The first is Where You Stand, which is not recommended for people over eighteen years of age. I compare that with another publication, You, Me and Frankston, which is produced by the City of Frankston.

Honourable members recognise the many problems facing our community involving sexually transmitted diseases such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome and others, and are aware that there has been recent discussion in our newspapers about young people, particularly, being in danger of coming into contact with AIDS carriers and about the likelihood of there being a dramatic increase in the number of sufferers in the future.

Where You Stand was produced by the Fitzroy Legal Service and was sold for $2.50 or given away. It was funded by the Youth Affairs Bureau last year and an International Youth Year grant. The publication was given out at schools and in various electorates. It was also provided to the Frankston City Council, where it drew the following comments from the council's community services manager:

I feel sure that we hold similar views to yours on this publication. We don't hold it in high regard and the copies sent to this department for circulation have been filed in the cylindrical filing cabinet.

We take exception to many chapters and aspects of the publication but particularly the chapter "On the Street". It is unfortunately typical of the "youth rights/advocacy" approach typical of so many involved with young people. The information is not necessarily inaccurate, it is naive and biased and the graphic content portrays police as threatening, aggressive, brutal and confronting and the young person as innocent (totally) and the victim.

Our approach with this section in "You, Me and Frankston", for example, was written with the police and we believe is more useful information to young people.

The letter also comments on the section that deals with knives and weapons. Michael Barnard also raised these issues covered in the publication, Where You Stand, in an article in the Age.

Recently two single mothers who had children aged between fourteen and sixteen years approached me in my office about this publication. They said that the magazine and other issues were provided to the students through schools and youth organisations. The booklets encouraged these children to leave home. The mothers are now approaching their local members of Parliament for assistance. It is difficult to give them advice when the publications inform the children that they can leave home at the age of sixteen years and apply for the dole.

Apparently the children are told, so long as they have a way of supporting themselves either through a job or the dole, they can stay away from home. It is a shame that families are being ripped apart by this type of publication and the promotion of it.
In the article by Michael Barnard he explains that his son obtained the booklet from an eastern suburbs school. He said the booklets gave advice on sexual activity and posed such questions as: how old do you have to be to have sex with someone? The booklet said that one had to be over the age of ten years but it depended on how old the other person was.

The booklets also detailed information on lesbian and homosexual relationships. Not one word in the publication was written about venereal disease or AIDS, which are now posing serious problems in the community. It is estimated that between now and the year 2000, 40 million people will die from these diseases.

I shall make these publications available to honourable members. The publication, *You, Me and Frankston*, should be provided to school children but the publication, *Where You Stand*, is not suitable for circulation to students because it highlights many unacceptable practices.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

**Mrs TONER** (Greensborough)—I direct to the attention of the Minister for Education the need for a primary school in the Glen Katherine area of the electorate I represent. I wish to thank the Minister for the permanent facilities provided at the St Helena Post-Primary School which are the best in Australia. The first-class facilities at the school are the result of the Government's response to the school and community input.

The situation now is that the school has been left with temporary classrooms, administration blocks, covered walkways, toilet blocks and library facilities that were provided while the schoolchildren were waiting for the completion of the new school buildings. Now that that work has been completed the former post-primary school complex has been vacated.

To the east of the school is the overcrowded Eltham North Primary School which has an enrolment of approximately 440 children and a site of approximately three and a half acres. To the west is the Greenhills Primary School which has an enrolment of approximately 500 children and a site of about 5 acres.

My suggestion is that the temporary facilities from the St Helena school could be relocated to other schools, or alternatively, they could remain on site to accommodate the first intake of the Glen Katherine Primary School, which was initially promised for this year. This could be achieved at minimal cost and would effectively relieve the pressure on the Eltham North Primary School and the Greenhills Primary School.

Those in the region have suggested that sufficient modular units could be retained on the site of the school to establish a functioning primary school with students drawn from the present catchments of both the Eltham North and Greenhills schools.

The present catchment at the Eltham North Primary School has the potential for 1700 residential allotments. That figure is comprised of 835 development allotments, and 332 allotments are contained in estates in the early stages of development. The land that is soon to be developed will generate an additional 533 allotments.

The Greenhills Primary School has a total of 1370 development allotments but the plans for subdivision contain an additional 1100 allotments and additional parcels of subdivisible land that may add a further 200 to 300 allotments to the total previously mentioned.

Sufficient modular units should be retained on site at St Helena Post-Primary School to establish a functioning primary school to cope with the initial intake of students for the Glen Katherine school. The students could be drawn from the schools that I have mentioned.

Last week I attended a meeting of approximately 140 parents from the area that I have described who wish to retain the temporary buildings currently on site and wish their
children to begin at a new school to be established on 1 July. The parents have established a committee that has met with me at my office. It believes a basis for a new school exists and the figures support its development.

Mr BROWN (Gippsland West)—The matter I direct to the attention of the Minister for Transport refers to the procurement of a driver's licence in Victoria. On many occasions the Minister has highlighted in this House, especially during the debate on the Road Safety Bill, which was passed late last year, the necessity for people—particularly young people—to pass a test to obtain a driver's licence.

The test was carried out under close scrutiny to ensure that the applicant was competent to drive a motor car and to ensure that he or she knew the road laws in this State. That was admirable and the Opposition supported those requirements.

In years gone by, people fronted up at the local police station to undergo a driving test. They were put through a practical test with a licensed driver sitting beside them. They had to demonstrate to the officer that they could handle a motor vehicle.

In the Melbourne metropolitan area the driving test is now not being conducted by a police officer but by an officer of the Road Traffic Authority. In the main in rural Victoria the test is conducted by police officers because few Road Traffic Authority officers are available.

Periodically the Road Traffic Authority sends out a new questionnaire relevant to the information a driving licence applicant must know. I shall quote from the latest questionnaire which is headed, "Knowledge Test 3 Question Paper", and carries the serial number 052. It is the English version and it sets out multiple answer questions.

At present the test is not in the form of an interview with an officer who assesses one's road knowledge. The current practice is that the officer passes over the counter to an applicant a form that asks numerous questions. For example:

What is the minimum age at which you can get a driver licence?
A. 16 years.
B. 17 years.
C. 18 years.

Remarkably, on the latest form that has been distributed Statewide, there is an asterisk next to the correct answer. There is not just an asterisk next to the one correct answer, but there is an asterisk in each of the boxes that correctly answers all the questions on that form.

Therefore, we have the outrageous situation in this State here and now where one fronts up for a licence and it is not a matter of the officer to querying one's knowledge, one merely has to place a tick where the asterisk indicates and one is given a licence. That is how it is. When I received my driver's licence I had to know what the answers were. However, all one has to do now is follow the asterisks.

Honourable members know that gross incompetence is evident within many Government departments, particularly since this Government came to power. Honourable members know there has been gross incompetence displayed in the Road Traffic Authority in recent years but this one would have to beat all in the past five years. The Opposition wishes to know how many of these forms have been distributed. Were there hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands? What will be the cost to the taxpayer relative to this latest example of gross incompetence? All these forms will have to be shredded and reprinted. How many people submitted for drivers' licences and obtained licences using this "Please tick here" form rather than having to prove that they knew the laws of the land relative to driving tests?

Obviously it would be easier if the Government just posted out drivers' licences on request. It would save a lot of problems. The fact of the matter is that with the present
system the Government may as well do it that way because the gross incompetence is so evident it is a sick joke.

Mr Jasper (Murray Valley)—I refer the Minister for Education to a letter dated 4 March 1987 from the Victorian High Schools Sports Association to all principals, sports coordinators and interested staff. The letter advised that there would not be an all high swimming and springboard diving championship in 1987. The reason for not holding the championships as detailed in the letter was the action taken by the Ministry to cut back the number of seconded staff available to the sports association by 2·8 personnel from 1 January 1987.

The letter stated that the Ministry advised the association of this fact only in late December and, despite hastily arranged meetings with representatives of the Ministry and other representations, the Ministry decided it would not change the recommendation that had been made to reduce the staff by 2·8 personnel.

Letters of protest from many areas were sent to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, various Ministers in the Victorian and Federal Parliaments and other members of Parliament. Apparently the Ministry indicated that it would endorse the decision. Some changes were made so far as the association was concerned, and the group secretary positions which formerly had a 0·2 time allowance were cut back to 0·1 positions and the association then had to determine what it would do to reduce the workload.

It was decided that the staff would look to the group and zone sports to conduct this event. The Ministry directed that one association be formed with the technical schools and that this be given a priority. All this means is that the secretary and assistant secretary will not be able to run the all high swimming and springboard diving championships as they do not have the necessary staff.

I bring the matter to the attention of the House because it appears that the Statewide championship which has been conducted by the sports association over a long period will cease and the people who have been training for a long time in a particular sporting activity will not be able to compete at a State level.

The matter was brought to my attention by the Rutherglen High School which is affected in many ways. For instance, that school has many students who have been training for a number of weeks and competing locally and in regular sports competitions within the area. They will now not be able to compete at the championships. These students want to pursue excellence and attain the highest standard of competition possible which they have normally been able to do annually.

The Rutherglen High School this year has the best swimming team ever and believes its swimmers would have competed extremely well. Added to that, the school has one extremely good swimmer, Janine Miller, who is a nationally ranked swimmer. She needs the all high swimming championship results to facilitate entry into the Australian Institute of Sport or some other physical education courses. I ask the Minister to review the decision made and consider providing additional staff to the Victorian High Schools Sports Association so that it can provide the service to enable the competition at a State level to be run in swimming, diving and other sports.

Mrs Setches (Ringwood)—I direct the Minister for Local Government to a matter that requires some attention in my electorate. It concerns the resurfacing of the athletics track at the A. C. Robertson field athletics track at Proclamation Park in the City of Ringwood.

The City of Ringwood made application under the municipal assistance scheme in 1986–87 for a grant of $35 000, which is half the cost of resurfacing this widely used athletics track. The Reslite surface has started to break down and is becoming unsuitable for the type of competition that has taken place on this track in the past.
The Ringwood council has already paid more than $2000 for some sort of repair to the track to make it safe for users in the interim. I have spoken with the deputy city engineer, Brian Gilpin, and have some evidence of the use of the track that is made by people in the electorate, particularly by the Ringwood Athletic Club Inc. That club has been around for 25 years and has been using the all-weather track at the A. C. Robertson field. Over the years the club has had many members selected to represent Victoria at an international level and at a national level, as well as representing Australia at the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games. The Ringwood Athletic Club has won gold medals at the world disabled Olympics in Amsterdam and championships for the blind in Wellington. It has also won an award for an outstanding junior Aboriginal athlete in Australia. The information I have imparted to Parliament was provided by Mr C. D. Hogarth, President of the Ringwood Athletic Club, to Mr Gilpin, the deputy city engineer, to provide some sort of information to the Minister in making some sort of allocation of these funds under the municipal assistance scheme.

I also have some information from the Ringwood Little Athletic Centre which has been operating since 1969 and has used the A. C. Robertson field athletics track for quite a long time. In fact the Ringwood centre has been a happy and progressive centre with emphasis being placed on the four “Fs”—family, fun, fitness and friendship.

The idea of the first three “Fs” was taken up by the Victorian Little Athletics Association as its motto. In its use of Proclamation Park for its functions during the year, the Ringwood Little Athletic Centre has promoted athletic sports among young people in the Ringwood district. The centre also founded the Proclamation Park Walkers Club to cater for children with special interests in walking who wished to learn and train in this difficult branch of athletics. The centre has made use of this very good facility over a long time. I ask the Minister to make special provision in his allocation of municipal assistance funding to provide for the reconstruction of the A. C. Robertson field athletics track at Proclamation Park, Ringwood.

Mr E. R. SMITH (Glen Waverley)—I refer to the Minister for Housing a letter that I received from a constituent who is in the real estate business complaining about the scandalous ease of obtaining Government bond and rental assistance for rental accommodation. Mrs Gwen Nixon of 4 Narla Court, Glen Waverley, wrote of a recent case which she says is typical of what is happening continually. Because of the extreme difficulty people have in trying to obtain housing loans, they go into rental accommodation and the ease with which they are able to obtain assistance is unbelievable. Mrs Nixon wrote:

For instance, recently a lady (divorced) with a child came into our office, we accepted them as tenants. The mother then got a letter from our office accepting them as tenants, then made an appointment with the Ministry of Housing. After this one appointment she came back with two cheques, one for the first month’s rent, the other for the bond.

Assuming the weekly rent is $125, that four weeks’ rent is $500. That is one cheque for the rental, and the second cheque is for the bond, for $500; the total was $1000. Of course, the bond money does not need to be repaid by the person receiving assistance. Mrs Nixon states that this is not the only instance and that other cases are occurring all the time. Because of the extreme difficulty people have in trying to obtain housing loans, they go into rental accommodation and the ease with which they are able to obtain assistance is unbelievable. Mrs Nixon stated:

I feel that our money (the taxpayer) is paying for all this expense.

I prefer not to use our business name or the tenant’s name.

This assistance should be provided to people who are in genuine need and I am sure that the Minister for Housing will agree that there are many people—and in his response he will probably be able to state the number of people—who have no hardship and no real need but who are ripping off the system. I should like to learn from the Minister that some effort is being made to control this scandalous state of affairs.
I have also heard from Mrs Nixon of other cases of people who obtain rental assistance and go into flats for one month and then decide that they cannot afford the rental, and they then go through the same procedure, sometimes using different names, to obtain further assistance. I am sure that the Minister for Housing will agree that this is outrageous and I should like his response to this matter. The screening process is obviously at fault. A stringent check should be made on the history of people applying for assistance. I should like to know from the Minister what is happening to correct the rip off, how much it is costing and what he estimates would be the wasteful cost through false claims and the genuine cost. This is a very serious matter which the Minister must address quickly.

Mr W. D. McGrath (Lowan)—I address an issue to the Minister for Labour or, in his absence, the Minister Assisting the Minister for Labour. Today, the Minister for Labour will have received a facsimile document from Wimmera Employment Promotions asking about the continuation of its funding. The executive of Wimmera Employment Promotions considers its financial position to be critical. It has been receiving funding from the Department of Labour over the past two or three years. However, the guidelines for assistance have been changed, which has seriously affected this body's funding.

As a result, staff at the employment centre will be stood down and commencement of the community employment program tourist development project will be delayed—and the Government makes great play of its desire to extend tourist promotion in the State. The indecision on funding threatens the viability of the group apprenticeship scheme and other community projects associated with Wimmera Employment Promotions.

This is a matter of urgency and I request the Minister to take action. The Minister for Labour decided to change the direction of funding at a late stage. Wimmera Employment Promotions believes it can accommodate the change of direction as instructed by the Minister but it cannot do so immediately. It is like asking a wheat farmer to change direction and run sheep instead; one needs some time to bring about the change.

Wimmera Employment Promotions would like a six-month period in which to change and to come within the guidelines laid down by the Minister. It is hoping to accommodate the guidelines. It has done an excellent job to date. It has made valuable contributions, particularly in establishing a business data base that is available to anyone pursuing a new business venture. The change of direction instructed by the Minister has been given at short notice and Wimmera Employment Promotions has not had time to put in place its plans as suggested by the guidelines. I ask the Minister to take action because Wimmera Employment Promotions is doing valuable work in creating jobs and opportunities and it should be able to continue in the wider scope of the Wimmera.

Mr Simmonds (Minister for Local Government)—The honourable member for Ringwood raised the question of municipal assistance funding and sought support for an application by the City of Ringwood for resurfacing of an athletics track. Allocations are almost completed and the honourable member will be aware that the amount of money this year is the same as has been available for the past ten to twelve years.

For those honourable members who are interested, the allocations in rural Victoria are almost two-thirds of the funds available and the participating rate of municipalities is 33 municipalities in non-metropolitan Victoria and twelve in metropolitan Victoria, which is an indication of a continuing bias in favour of the rural sector and reflects the first-class submissions that were received by municipalities such as Mildura, Dimboola and Swan Hill.

For those honourable members interested, the allocations so far have been disbursed throughout Victoria mainly for facilities similar to those described by the honourable member for Ringwood. For example, the City of Mildura was provided with a grant of $40 000 for women's sport to supply lighting and additional netball courts. This was well received by the City of Mildura. Similarly, the grant made to the Shire of Morwell to replace a sporting complex in that municipality was well received.
Before I respond to the honourable member for Ringwood, I inform the House that $24,000 was granted to the Shire of Warragul for a steel shed to provide accommodation for disabled persons engaged in equestrian activities with the support of the local agricultural society. In visiting the facility last week, I was most impressed at the value obtained from that grant and the contribution of all people concerned.

In metropolitan municipalities, swimming facilities for disabled persons were provided in the City of Heidelberg with a grant of $40,000. It enables disabled people to enjoy the same activity as those less disadvantaged.

The City of Camberwell received $25,000 for an unemployed self-help scheme. These allocations have been well received by local government. The honourable member for Ringwood has raised with me the approach made by the City of Ringwood for funding of the A. C. Robertson field athletic track and an application has been received for funding of $35,000. The department has received requests for grants totalling $9 million in almost 300 individual applications from various municipalities. Many municipalities were contacted to see if reduced funding could be properly utilised. I inform the honourable member that the department has had consultations with the City of Ringwood which have resulted in that city’s acceptance of a reduced allocation of $20,000 and I formally announce the funding for that athletic track.

The honourable member for Gippsland West raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport. I have no doubt that the Minister will be interested to hear of the inquiry that has been raised.

Mr CATHIE (Minister for Education)—The honourable member for Frankston South indicated two publications designed to give advice to young people in the community. The first publication, *Where You Stand* prepared by the Fitzroy Legal Service, was said by the honourable member to be negative and divisive for the community. The second publication, *You, Me and Frankston*, a joint publication between the Frankston council and the police, provided a person’s guide to living and deals honestly with sexually transmitted diseases. The acquired immune deficiency syndrome is not something that can be swept under the table, but has to be faced and become part of the curriculum in our secondary schools, in particular. I will shortly be announcing a major program by the Government to deal with that issue.

The honourable member for Greensborough raised the need for a primary school at Glen Katherine at a shared site with the St Helena Post-Primary School. Current planning has been on the basis of a need for a new school to be built there over the next two or three years. The department is aware that members of that community are seeking to have the school opened early in July in relocatables, which could be left on the site once the permanent buildings of St Helena Post-Primary School have been completed. The department will examine the pressure of demand in primary school enrolments in both Eltham North and Greenhills to see if they are coping satisfactorily or whether, because indications of stronger demand exist, the department needs to review the timetable.

I am prepared to examine whether there is sufficient demand to proceed more quickly with the establishment of the Glen Katherine Primary School.

The honourable member for Murray Valley indicated a decision made by the appropriate sporting association not to hold the all high schools swimming sporting event this year which, he claimed, was the result of cutbacks of seconded staff to the appropriate association. There is no doubt that there have been cutbacks particularly in consultancy areas within the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has a Budget target to meet, as have other Government departments, and it is proof of its record in being able to achieve the target levels being set by the Government. The department made a deliberate decision that the cutbacks should occur in those areas that would not involve schools themselves or current programs running within those schools. I am prepared to review the current position and to try to establish why, within the basis of resources that have been allocated for the
development of sport within our secondary schools, it is impossible to hold the all high schools swimming and diving sporting events.

Mr WILKES (Minister for Housing)—The honourable member for Glen Waverley raised the matter of bond and relocation money. The bond and relocation scheme is funded under the State housing agreement using Federal money to assist people in the private sector, and I stress, “the private sector” as distinct from the public sector. It has enabled persons to relocate themselves in private rental accommodation where they would not have had the opportunity to do so had the scheme not been put in place.

As I pointed out in the House a fortnight ago, some persons were prepared to misrepresent themselves in obtaining money under the scheme, to the extent that the Ministry of Housing made a referral to the Fraud Squad and that squad conducted an investigation and certain prosecutions took place.

The Fraud Squad advised the Ministry of systems that could be put in place that would help to alleviate that unscrupulous practice. I point out that it is not a scandalous practice regarding the Ministry or the Government, but it is scandalous for those people who have attempted to misrepresent themselves in their attempt to obtain bond money on two or more occasions.

I am pleased to advise the House that the systems that the Ministry has put in place have, in my opinion, gone a long way towards preventing this recurring. One thing is certain: if there are persons in the world who wish to defraud the public and the Government, it does not matter how careful the Ministry or the system that is put in place is, there will always be some fraud or abuse of that system. However, it is the Ministry’s intention to minimise this fraud and prevent it from happening so that people who genuinely want assistance under the bond and relocation scheme can be assisted. The scheme has been most successful and the misappropriation of that fund has not been of scandalous proportions, but it has been of some concern to the Ministry. Because of the new systems that have been put in place, the Ministry is confident that it can stamp out this practice.

Mr WALSH (Minister Assisting the Minister for Labour)—The honourable member for Lowan raised a matter concerning the continued funding for Wimmera Employment Promotions. He said that that organisation had had funding for the past three years and that it has developed programs that it believes it cannot proceed with.

The matter concerns a tourist development project. Group apprenticeships could be affected as well as other developments in which this organisation’s programs are involved.

As honourable members know, the department has changed direction in funding and, if I understand correctly what the honourable member has said, the organisation is prepared to go along with the change of direction but it needs some time to make those changes.

It appears that the honourable member for Lowan supports funding for this organisation and I shall bring the matter to the attention of the Minister for Labour and pass on the honourable member’s comments. No doubt the Minister will contact the honourable member and inform him of the outcome.

The motion was agreed to.

The House adjourned at 11.21 p.m.
Wednesday, 18 March 1987

The SPEAKER (the Hon. C. T. Edmunds) took the chair at 2.5 p.m. and read the prayer.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

BUS SERVICES IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS PROVINCE

Mr BROWN (Gippsland West)—I direct a question to the Minister for Transport. Is it a fact that the Minister's personal staff contacted 42 Labor Party members of Parliament requesting them to ring Access Age to congratulate the Minister on the new bus services in Central Highlands Province, but that the members concerned and the Age staff thought it was so unimportant that none of them took any action?

The SPEAKER—Order! The last part of the question is out of order.

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—I am not sure whether or not that occurred, but the Government makes no bones about the fact that the outer suburban bus service expansion is extremely important. Opposition members will be aware that for years there have been calls for additional bus services in the outer suburban areas of Melbourne and additional services in country Victoria as well. What has subsequently occurred has had considerable support.

I recall an article that appeared in a Broadmeadows newspaper, thanking the Government for the services with which people are now being provided—services which they never had before. The Government is of the view that those services should continue to expand. I am sure most Opposition members have called upon us at various times to increase services, and the Government will continue to do so.

PLUMBERS AND GASFITTERS EMPLOYEES UNION OF AUSTRALIA

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS (Leader of the National Party)—Is the Minister for Labour aware that bans imposed by the Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees Union of Australia are still in force on several major projects in Victoria? If so, will the Minister advise the House what steps are being taken to resolve this serious problem?

Mr CRABB (Minister for Labour)—As honourable members are aware, the Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees Union of Australia has been conducting a long-running campaign to achieve wage increases outside the wage indexation system which goes back to last year's national wage decision. The campaign has ebbed and flowed over that period and the majority of industrial disputation in Victoria has ceased, although bans have been retained on some projects that have been held up for a long period.

Negotiations between the National Builders and the Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees Union, which have been carried out in Sydney, have been proceeding. Some progress has been made in recent weeks and, as a result, a fair number of bans have been lifted. Officers of my department are continuing to work on having the bans lifted as soon as possible.

SPORT IN VICTORIA

Mr NORRIS (Dandenong)—Will the Premier advise the House of steps the Government is taking to ensure that the State of Victoria retains its position as the leading sporting State in the Commonwealth?

Mr CAIN (Premier)—Steps are being taken and were taken last December with the release of a discussion paper and brochure entitled Victoria—Playing to Win. The aim of
the brochure is to play a part in the economic strategy to enable Victoria to capitalise on its great sporting assets and traditions. One of the great traditions enjoyed in the State at present is under threat, if one is to believe and understand reports that have been current today, and I refer to the Channel HSV7 World of Sport program which I am concerned to learn may be axed.

Another classic television sports program is also under threat, I am told—the program known as League Teams that stars Louis, Robert and John. I believe this has become a great tradition in the State; it is enjoyed by many thousands of viewers. I believe it is important to Victorians, and I took the trouble a short while ago to speak to key people at the John Fairfax organisation. So far as I can ascertain, it may well be that a decision has not been made on these matters, but I made it clear that there would be deep disappointment and anger if Victorians were to lose those wonderful programs that have meant so much to them.

If the Leader of the Opposition, who is interjecting, believes football is pathetic, we do not agree. Football is part of this State’s tradition; it is part of its sporting life and it is very important.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CAIN—Sport is a very important part of this State’s life. It is an industry in this State and I believe the Government ought to be concerned about it. This Government will be concerned about it and will do what it can to protect all those sources of information about sport.

I believe the people of Victoria are entitled to expect the traditional programs of that kind that recognise what this State is about and recognise its traditions. They ought not to be switched on and off by a head office located in Sydney which treats this State as a branch office. If members of the Opposition do not think this is important, they should go out and talk to people.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CAIN—If members of the Opposition do not believe that this State has an industry in sport, they are short-sighted. The Government assists the industry through radio, television and newspaper outlets that nurture it. I want those outlets which support the traditions of this State to be supported by all sections of the public.

I believe it is time it is made very clear that Victorian television means something to Victorians and that it should be retained.

BUS SERVICES IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS PROVINCE

Mr DELZOPPO (Narracan)—I ask the Minister for Transport: is it a fact that the bus service from Upwey railway station to St Joseph’s School at Ferntree Gully was introduced on 28 February for the Central Highlands Province by-election, carried no passengers in its first week of operation, has averaged one passenger a day since and will be closed down after the by-election?

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—Over the past few months services have expanded in the electorates of the honourable members for Doncaster, Broadmeadows and Werribee, in response to requests from people in the Dandenongs/Knox area.

I can recall a petition that was taken up by local people connected with a school in that area, but I do not know whether it was the particular service referred to by the honourable member, which called for additional capacity in that area. Frequently, in response to those calls, a bus is put on and, over time, it works.

Honourable members should examine what has occurred in the patronage of the public transport system over the past five years. The number of patrons using country services has increased from three million to five million in that five-year period. It has reached the
The suburban passenger service lost passengers over many years until my colleague, the Minister for Labour, then the Minister of Transport, introduced new services. The result of those new services being introduced throughout Victoria, but particularly in Melbourne, has been an increase of 10 per cent in patronage, and the constant decline of patronage that has occurred in the past is being eliminated.

Some services that are introduced meet a market requirement while others are found not to meet a market requirement. As honourable members opposite would know, constant change takes place in the requirements and, indeed, every one of the regional studies that has been done has produced significant variation.

I will be interested to see what the loadings are on the various services that have been introduced in the past month and I will not only provide the honourable member with the details of additional passengers being carried because of those changes, but will also advise the House.

GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

Mr HANN (Rodney)—Can the Minister for Education advise the House whether the Ministerial advisory committee on gifted and talented children will be retained or abolished within the Ministry; and if it is abolished, who will be responsible for those children within the Ministry of Education?

Mr CATHIE (Minister for Education)—I can assure the honourable member that there is no Government plan or proposal to abolish the gifted children’s program. I have been a great believer in excellence and in promoting excellence throughout Government schools, and that is what the Government will continue to do.

The Ministry currently has a number of programs within the gifted children’s task force. One such program is at University High School where the gifted children enrolled in that program are able to complete their six years of secondary education within four years. The Ministry is currently undertaking an evaluation of that program but, because of its very nature, one has to allow it to run its full four years before one can either evaluate or successfully monitor the results of that program. The information I have at this stage is that it is a successful program. Whether the committee is the appropriate body to handle these programs is a matter that is being discussed within the Ministry structures project team, but no decision has been made.

JIANGSU DELEGATION VISIT TO VICTORIA

Mr GAVIN (Coburg)—Can the Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources outline the significance of the Jiangsu economic and goodwill delegation’s visit to Victoria this week and the outcome of the mission?

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I thank the honourable member for Coburg for his question, and I know of his interest, following his trip together with a number of colleagues to Jiangsu last year.

The Government was pleased to host a delegation from Jiangsu in Victoria over the past week. This week’s discussions have demonstrated the commitment on the part of both the Victorian Government and the Jiangsu authorities to ensuring that the future emphasis of our relationship is oriented towards trade and development of economic relations between enterprises in our two parts of the world.

The Government, as I hope all honourable members are aware, has made enormous efforts to strengthen those economic relations between China and Victoria and, of course,
the rest of the country. China’s markets are now opening up to the wider world, and Australia, but particularly Victoria because of its sister-State relationship, is well poised to take advantage of that opening.

A joint memorandum was signed by me late yesterday arising from discussions over the past week as well as from visits by the Jiangsu authorities, the Jiangsu economic and goodwill delegation and the Jiangsu Planning and Economic Commission to many Victorian firms. I express my appreciation to those Victorian companies which made their time and resources available to explore avenues of cooperation between Jiangsu and Victoria.

Arising from that, the communiqué has outlined a number of areas where there are now to be detailed studies of specific projects for cooperation to the mutual benefit of both sides, and I will name a few examples.

First of all, there is a planned aluminium manufacturing plant in Jiangsu and the operators of the Portland aluminium smelter will be visiting Jiangsu next month to hold discussions on the potential for aluminium can making, using material developed from the Portland aluminium smelter.

A second example is the commercial potential for the production and marketing of plants by the biotechnology firm Calgene Pacific, given significant prominence in the Government’s technology statement issued in July of last year. The company is clearly to the forefront in the world with certain areas of plant biotechnology and it has been invited to Jiangsu to put those proposals into practice.

Similarly, food processing projects, including tea, potatoes, pet food and dairy products, have been outlined. A letter of intent was signed with the China Food Group—a group of food processing companies based here in Victoria—and a successful visit to Ballarat took place where the group met with a number of companies associated with the group in order to develop a concrete proposal for harnessing Victorian products, for the benefit of the people in both Jiangsu and Victoria.

Similarly, the Victorian Overseas Projects Corporation has been successful in working in conjunction with the Road Traffic Authority in the application of the computerised traffic signalling equipment developed in Victoria and known as the SCRAM system, and many countries in South-East Asia are also involved. Much interest has been expressed by Jiangsu as to its application in their capital city of Nanjing.

These are a few examples of the progress that has been made. I repeat my thanks to those Victorian companies that have moved wholeheartedly behind the Victorian Government’s initiative in this regard. Victoria has been recognised both in Australia and China as being to the forefront of establishing the economic relations between relevant parts of China and Australia. The work now being undertaken will reap enormous benefits for Victorian enterprises in the years to come.

INCREASE IN MOTOR VEHICLE CHARGES

Mr PERRIN (Bulleen)—I ask the Minister for Transport to give the House an assurance that motor registration, third-party insurance and drivers’ licence fees issued in the next twelve months will not exceed an increase of 6 per cent over the charges of the past year.

Mr ROPER (Minister for Transport)—Let me make clear, as the Treasurer and the Premier have made clear, that the Government has a commitment to ensuring that the basket of charges that has been described to Parliament will not increase by more than 6 per cent, and in the areas of my responsibility that covers the charges mentioned by the honourable member, as well as urban transport fares.

Some time ago a decision was made as part of proposed legislation to amend the Road Safety Act and a regulation was introduced to increase drivers’ licence fees. I take that as another example of how serious the Government is about the undertakings that have been
given. As honourable members would be aware, the arrangement provided for a discount fee for people paying for a six-year licence. When the Cain Labor Government came to office the annual fee was $10 but that was discounted to $54 for six years.

The Government decided to increase that amount to $60 last year as part of numerous amendments to the Road Safety Act. It was actually a revenue neutral decision because at the same time the Government agreed to the requests of honourable members to do away with the extra fee motorcyclists had to pay. Previously motorcyclists were forced to pay for two licences. The various decisions provided no increased revenue for the Government.

When the Government was considering the 6 per cent basket, attention was drawn to the fact that one of the charges—the driver's licence fee—was to increase by some 11 per cent. As an indication of the serious intentions of the Government, it was decided that that regulation would be repealed and that the increase be only from $54 to $57, which is a 6 per cent increase. The 150 people who have already paid that increased fee under the existing regulation—and many people pay for their licences in advance—will receive refunds of the additional moneys they have paid.

The Government is serious about the matter and its action will result in a reduction in Government revenue. The Government is determined to provide the benefits to motorcyclists that Liberal Governments never considered in the time they collected the two licence fees.

I am delighted to inform the House that a charge that has already been levied and collected will now be reduced.

**ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME**

Mrs Hill (Frankston North)—Is the Minister for Education aware of recent media reports about the risk of teenage school children contracting the acquired immune deficiency syndrome? If so, can he advise the House of the measures that he is taking to ensure that students understand and are protected from the risk of contracting AIDS?

Mr Cathie (Minister for Education)—AIDS is a major health issue confronting our community and teenagers are increasingly at risk. The Government is taking steps to ensure that students, especially senior post-primary students, are aware of the risks and how best to protect themselves from the disease.

The Government is taking a two-pronged approach to the problem—firstly, by considering the curriculum. Curriculum should be an important part of human and health relations. For that reason, the Ministry of Education in conjunction with Health Department Victoria has prepared a booklet on prevention education in the field of sexually transmitted diseases.

That booklet takes the form of a package of materials that is available to the practising classroom teacher to choose whatever set of materials the teacher feels is appropriate, firstly, for the total policy of the school and, secondly, for what is appropriate to the particular class.

In the presentation of that material within the curriculum, AIDS is referred to but is not especially highlighted. In other words, it is dealt with in the general context of sexually transmitted diseases, the aim being to encourage the use of prevention strategies by individuals within the community. Those materials are to be used in the development of curriculum frameworks for health education within both Government and non-Government schools.

The issue is dealt with in the context of information, relationships, communication and decision making. The materials attempt to provide accurate information to students to reinforce facts rather than myths and to reduce fear and stigma in the community for those unfortunate people who have contracted the disease so that a more helpful and
caring relationship is encouraged than the old attitude of treating a particular group of
diseased people as lepers to be separated from their community.

The materials are aimed at encouraging a more critical evaluation of attitudes and
values both by the individual and within the community as a whole. Those materials have
already been tried in a group of high schools and independent schools in Victoria. They
have been approved by the Ministry and they will be officially launched in the future by
the Minister for Health and me.

They are pitched to Years 9 to 12, the senior years of post-primary education, and the
emphasis is on materials from which the Government believes the teachers can choose
what is appropriate for each particular class.

The Government is also developing a comprehensive policy framework. This is again
being done in conjunction with Health Department Victoria. That policy will be a pacesetter
for Australian education today. It will involve advice on the illness, the risks and the
issues of rights and confidentiality.

By moving in this direction, the Government is facing up to a serious health issue within
the community in a constructive, positive and progressive way.

**MOTOR VEHICLE SALES**

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley)—I refer the Minister for Industry, Technology and
Resources to the huge reduction in new car sales throughout Australia, a 23.8 per cent
drop in car sales in 1986 compared with 1985 and the worst sales for the past fourteen
years. What action is the Minister taking to overcome this disastrous situation facing the
motor industry in Victoria? Further, what action is he taking to make representations to
the Federal Government?

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—Certainly I view
with concern the downturn in motor vehicle sales over recent times. By the same token,
however, one must also recognise that that downturn has been from a record position. I
think the honourable member for Murray Valley would realise that the 1985 figures, for
example, were extraordinarily high.

I discussed this matter only last week with my colleague, Senator Button, the Federal
Minister who is overseeing the implementation of the car plan in Australia, and I know
that he and his colleagues are highly conscious of the important role that the motor vehicle
industry plays in Australia and particularly in Victoria. It is one of the major industries in
this State.

I have also discussed the matter with many representatives from the motor vehicle
industry and I am very pleased to say that much of the pessimism and many of the stupid
statements that have been made about the future of the motor vehicle industry in Victoria
are not shared by industry leaders.

I cite as an example the demonstration given by the significant capital investment being
made at this very time by most of the major vehicle companies now involved in the
industry in Victoria. Only as recently as last week I had the opportunity of visiting the
Toyota plant, and Toyota has invested $100 million in two major plants in this State—
one at Altona and one at Port Melbourne. Only the day before, my Federal colleague,
Senator Button, opened a new Nissan plant. These are all investments being made in
Victoria. The Ford Motor Co. of Australia Ltd is spending millions of dollars in upgrading
its plant to make sure that new technological processes are available to this vitally important
industry.

The Government believes the motor vehicle industry has a most important future in
Victoria and we are confident that the investment plans now being formulated and put
into practice by the industry are well founded and that Victoria is not now merely being
seen as the home of the motor vehicle production industry in Australia but is also taking
part in the export boom. A significant export boom has developed with motor vehicle parts being exported from Victoria to Europe, Japan and the United States of America. The component manufacturers are also reaping the benefits of those export initiatives.

In response to the question from the honourable member for Murray Valley, which I very much appreciate, I look forward to an upturn in sales of motor vehicles in Victoria and Australia and have no doubt that that will happen over the next twelve months, but, looking beyond that, we see a future for the industry in this State as a major supplier for the world trade.

PETITIONS

The Clerk—I have received the following petitions for presentation to Parliament:

Land tax

TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the State of Victoria sheweth that:

Land tax has become an increasing burden on residents and could force many people to sell their homes.

Your petitioners therefore pray that: the family home be made exempt from land tax.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Stockdale (48 signatures)

Library funding

TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the State of Victoria sheweth that the proposed cuts of $2 million to public library funding in the 1987-1988 and again in the 1988-1989 financial years will have catastrophic effects on the services provided by the already under-funded public libraries.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Government reverse this decision and return to the stated ALP policy of 50-50 funding of public libraries between State and local government

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mrs Hill (15 signatures) and Mr Brown (1088 signatures)

Meat trading hours

THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER, MR C. T. EDMUNDS, MP, AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA ASSEMBLED:

The petition of the undersigned citizens of Australia respectfully showeth:

The concern of the members of the Meat and Allied Trades Federation of Australia (Victorian Division) and residents of Moorabbin at the possible extension of trading hours for retail butcher shops in Victoria beyond the hours presently prescribed by the Labour and Industry Act 1958, as amended, as such action would increase costs, aggravate inflation and unemployment in the retail butchering industry; discriminate against labour intensive small firms employing full-time skilled employees in favour of giant self-service retail chains mainly employing junior staff at casual rates and would not be in the best interests of the community.

We respectfully submit that any extension of trading hours would seriously impact the "quality of life" of the small business owner manager and the "quality of work life" of employees of small and independent firms.

We respectfully urge all members of Parliament to support an amendment to the Shop Trading Act 1986 to maintain the status quo.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mrs Setches (2605 signatures) and Mr Hill (49 signatures)

It was ordered that the petitions be laid on the table.
PAPERS

The following papers, pursuant to the directions of an Act of Parliament, were laid on the table by the Clerk:

Statutory Rules under the Public Service Act 1974—P.S.D. Nos 2, 5, 6, 7, 8.

NATIONAL PARKS (DANDENONG RANGES) BILL

Mr CATHIE (Minister for Education) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the National Parks Act 1975 to provide for the Dandenong Ranges National Park and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS (BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS) BILL

Mr WALSH (Minister for Public Works) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to provide for public holidays on 25 and 26 January 1988 and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

COAL MINES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Coal Mines Act 1958, to repeal the State Coal Mines (Winding Up) Act 1968 and the State Coal Mine Industrial Tribunal Act 1932 and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

WATER ACTS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Mr McCUTCHEON (Minister for Water Resources) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Water Act 1958 to provide for temporary transfers of water rights, to postpone the expiry of the Water and Sewerage Authorities (Restructuring) Act 1983, and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

CHATTEL SECURITIES BILL

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Consumer Affairs) moved for leave to bring in a Bill relating to chattel securities, to repeal the Chattel Securities Act 1981 and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

HOUSING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Mr WILKES (Minister for Housing) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Housing Act 1983 and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.
The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

**TAXATION (RECIproCAL POWERS) BILL**

Mr JOLLY (Treasurer) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to make provision for the reciprocal enforcement of taxation laws and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

**GROCERY PRICES BILL**

The Order of the Day for the resumption of the debate on the motion for the second reading of this Bill was read.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I declare this Bill to be an urgent Bill, and I move:

That this Bill be considered an urgent Bill.

Approval of the motion being put was indicated by the required number of members rising in their places, as specified in Standing Order No. 105 (a).

The motion was agreed to.

Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I move:

That the time allotted in connection with the Bill be as follows:

for the remaining stages of the Bill until 5.30 p.m. this day.

Mr Kennett interjected.

Mr FORDHAM—In response to the hyena opposite, the Government outlined yesterday when introducing this measure both its significance and its urgency for consideration by Parliament.

Mr Kennett interjected.

Mr FORDHAM—The inane interjections from this fool opposite are sickening. It is no wonder——

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MACLELLAN (Berwick)—I have been attempting to raise with you, Mr Speaker, a point of order that the Deputy Premier has been making imputations regarding a member of the Opposition, contrary to Standing Orders. I submit that such imputations are not allowable in the House.

The SPEAKER—Order! I am not aware of the imputations to which the honourable member is referring and I ask him to detail them.

Mr MACLELLAN—Would the word “hyena” be sufficient for you, Sir?

The SPEAKER—Order! I did not hear the word “hyena” or the word “fool” directed to any particular member. If the honourable member for Berwick believes an imputation along those lines has been made against an honourable member I shall hear him.

Mr MACLELLAN—The imputation was made and it was made by the Deputy Premier—and the Deputy Premier acknowledges by his gesture that he made it about the Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER—Order! I uphold the point of order and I ask the Deputy Premier to withdraw the expression “hyena”.
Mr FORDHAM (Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources)—I am not sure with which Standing Order I am acting in accordance, but, in deference to your request, Mr Speaker, of course I shall withdraw the word.

The comments and attitude of the Leader of the Opposition since this matter first came to light demonstrate that all kinds of descriptions are certainly most apt for his extraordinarily negative response to what really is an urgent piece of proposed legislation. I believe the time allotted will allow members of the Opposition to indicate their views on what was properly described by my colleague yesterday as a simple matter of principle on which this Government is prepared to introduce proposed legislation. The Government looks forward with interest to the response of the Opposition and, indeed, the response of the National Party to this Bill. The Government similarly looks forward to the response of the electorate.

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—The Opposition does not intend to debate the question of time at length. Obviously the Government is not prepared to place the proposed legislation under scrutiny by Parliament. For the Opposition to use up valuable time debating the time allotted for debate of the proposed legislation would be to deprive the Victorian people of a very scarce opportunity for discussing the proposed legislation. Suffice it to say we have a set of double standards where, for the fourth time this century, Standing Order No. 164 has been used. The Government did not proceed with the proposed legislation yesterday. The Government has said that it will not proclaim the legislation.

Mr Fordham—We did not.

Mr KENNETT—That is what the Premier has said and what others have said. It is what the Minister for Consumer Affairs has said. It is also true to say that every time the Opposition in any way gets under the skin of the Government it resorts to personal abuse. The Opposition will adhere to the issues concerning the proposed legislation and will leave the gutter tactics to the Government.

Mr HANN (Rodney)—I do not intend to prolong this debate, either. I should like just to express my disappointment that the Leader of the House did not see fit to discuss this matter with me or with the Leader of the Opposition, as Leaders in this House. I should have thought it would have been a natural courtesy to discuss this matter and the proposed time to be allocated for the second reading of the Bill and the Committee stage, if any.

However, the Deputy Premier has decided, for some reason unknown to me, that he is not prepared to discuss the matter with me. That is a matter of regret, and I just say that the Bill is a nonsense.

The motion was agreed to.

The debate (adjourned from the previous day) on the motion of Mr Crabb (Minister for Labour) for the second reading of this Bill was resumed.

Mr KENNETT (Leader of the Opposition)—This Bill is a fine example of the naked hypocrisy and dishonesty of the Cain Government. It is a clear example of the desperate position that some men have got into who now lead a very desperate Government.

The Government is now motivated by only one factor, and that is a craving for electoral support at Saturday’s Central Highlands Province by-election. There is no doubt that senior Ministers of the Government have shown themselves and their Government to be fraudulent and morally corrupt.

This Government is prepared to introduce impractical legislation and spend the public’s money in a desperate bid to minimise its electoral loss on Saturday.

It is important, when one considers the circumstances surrounding the introduction of the Bill, that one considers the electoral performance of the Government at the Nunawading by-election in 1985, and now the forthcoming by-election.
In 1985 the Premier, of his own volition, did a secret and grubby deal with the democrats in order to shore up his own electoral support in this State and to win control of the Upper House. He changed at whim his and his party’s position on the Upper House.

That grubby dealing was not rewarded with the electoral success that the Premier sought at the election in 1985. At the Nunawading by-election, the Labor Party in this State fraudulently—and knowing it to be fraudulent—proceeded to print how-to-vote cards for distribution to electors.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition is using rhetoric.

Mr KENNETT—I beg your pardon?

The SPEAKER—Order! He is using rhetoric that is not related to the Bill before the House in any shape or form. I ask him to address the House on the Bill that is now being debated.

Mr KENNETT—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, we are talking about the motivation for this Bill at this time, and that is part of the consideration of this Parliament. If the Government is prepared to throw abuse and get away with it, surely, Sir, the Opposition has the right to debate the matters that have motivated the Government to introduce this measure in the first place and also the hypocrisy of the Bill itself.

I suggest to you, Mr Speaker, that in the debate on this Bill it is extremely important that honourable members analyse the fact that this Government—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition is making a personal explanation. He has come nowhere near raising a point of order. I rule him out of order. I ask him to debate the Bill now before the House, which does not give him the opportunity of canvassing matters that are not contained within the Bill.

Mr KENNETT—Mr Speaker, let me just refer to the Government’s activities at previous elections, which are now on the public record, and let me ask: why is this Bill being rushed through in this way? Through this Bill, the Government is once again deliberately misleading the people of this State for one reason only, that is, to gain electoral support for the by-election on Saturday.

I shall deal with this Bill under several headings: firstly, the motivation for the timing; secondly, the content of the Bill; thirdly, the way in which the Government should be addressing the problem of price increases; and, fourthly, the options that are open to this House, the Parliament and, obviously, the Liberal Party.

Many areas of the proposed legislation provide massive proof that the Government’s price pegging Bill is nothing more than a political stunt designed to mislead the people into voting for the Labor Party in Saturday’s Central Highlands by-election. This is proved in several areas.

Firstly, there has been incomplete consultation, and I shall return to that. Secondly, a letter which talks about this Bill was sent to every voter in Saturday’s by-election from the Premier of this State. In fact, during question time, I received a note of complaint from one constituent who is very angry that members of his household received eight separate letters from the Premier attempting to buy their votes—and those eight votes have now been very truly secured in the Liberal Party’s pockets.

Thirdly, I want to refer to the comments made by the Federal Minister for Science, Mr Barry Jones—Inspector Clouseau. Fourthly, I should like to prove the point that this is nothing more than a political stunt, and illustrate that this measure does not apply controls and restraints on the Government itself. Fifthly, if this were a genuine piece of proposed legislation, and if it were thought of last year, it would have been mentioned in the Governor’s Speech—but it was not.

Honourable members have heard from the Premier in this House, and also from the Minister who is now responsible for the passage of the Bill, the Minister for Labour, that
manufacturers and grocers have been offering their support for the Bill. That is clearly not the case. The Minister for Labour, the Premier and, of course, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, have misled the public in that regard.

I should like to read into the record some of the letters that the Liberal Party has received, such as that from the Grocery Manufacturers of Australia Ltd, which states:

Dear Mr Kennett

GROCERY PRICES ACT OF 1987

I understand that the Victorian Government has sought the Opposition's agreement to proceed forthwith and pass the above legislation in both Houses of Parliament.

I implore you and the Opposition, in the interests of good Government, to ensure that ample time is given to allow my sector of the Industry to properly consider the ramifications of this Bill for an Act.

We are not even meeting the Government on this issue until Friday, 20 March and therefore need at least two weeks from that date to properly consider legislation as far reaching as this will be for our industry.

As you know the turnover in this industry is some $20 billion annually and we employ between our members almost 200 000 people.

Kind regards
Your sincerely

BERNARD HOLT
Executive Director

That major industry group based in New South Wales, where most of our grocery lines are produced, has not even had any consultation with this Government!

The Liberal Party also received a letter from the Retail Traders' Association of Victoria, with which—as honourable members may recall—the Minister for Labour held a press conference last Friday. The letter states:

Dear Mr Kennett,

Thank you for providing us with a Draft Copy of the Grocery Prices Bill 1987.

In other words, as late as Monday last the Government had not even given a copy of the Bill to the industry groups that it sought to regulate and control. The letter continues:

We are shocked by its vagueness such as "regard to economic circumstances and the public interest", "excessive" and "grocery items".

The draft Bill is discriminatory against supermarkets who already provide the cheapest food prices in the State.

Our co-operation with the Government in attempting to restrain manufacturers prices to a maximum 6 per cent on the shelf was voluntary. The proposed Bill does nothing to develop that co-operative bid to help Victoria's customers.

The Bill should be deferred for careful consideration and substantial clarification in the best interests of all concerned.

Where does that leave the Minister? I shall go on. In a letter dated 17 March, Mr Trevor Herd, General Manager of Woolworths (Victoria) Ltd, stated:

I strongly urge that the proposed Grocery Prices Bill be deferred for further serious consideration.

It contradicts the Minister's statement that further discussions would be held following his request for voluntary co-operation by retailers, manufacturers and government in an endeavour to restrain price increases.

The suggested powers in the Bill are excessive and not necessary. Its terms are loose and vague.

The Bill gives the Government unnecessary sweeping powers to interfere in the marketplace with manufacturers, producers, wholesalers and retailers in an area where major chains and large food stores already provide the lowest food prices in the State.

I could go on to quote the letters received from Mr B. E. Quinn, the Managing Director of Coles Myer Ltd, the Australian Chamber of Manufactures; from Mr Ian Spicer of the Victorian Employers Federation; from Mr Leon Kurop, the Managing Director of SSW...
Supermarkets Pty Ltd; and from Mr David C. Jones, Executive Director of the State Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Victoria).

In other words, the Bill has not resulted from consultation or consideration. It has been introduced for political considerations only.

The second motivation for the Bill at this time and for the way in which the Government is attempting to deal with it is the Premier's letter of 14 March to every voter in the Central Highlands Province. At page 2 it refers to the Bill and says:

The "Prices Peg" system has had a positive response from manufacturers and retailers in the grocery industry. We expect continuing co-operation, but we are ready to use legislation if there is any deliberate undermining of the Government's "Prices Peg" campaign.

What is contained in that letter is a lie. There has not been a positive response, and that is indicated by the correspondence that I have just read to the House. For the Premier to say that there has been a positive response is a deliberate attempt to mislead the people to whom the letter was addressed.

The letter goes on to say:

As I made clear at the launch of the "Prices Peg" campaign my Government is prepared to face the same scrutiny as the private sector by placing key Government household charges in a 6% basket.

Again, the Bill contains no commitment that is binding on the Government and, importantly, if one wants to keep prices down, one vital area to tackle is that of Government taxes and charges and business charges which push prices up even further; but the Premier makes no commitment that his Government will act to ensure that business costs are kept down in an effort to control prices. Again, the motivation is not good government or concern for the people of Victoria; it is the by-election on Saturday.

I refer now to comments made by the Honourable Barry Jones, a former member of this House, who is now the Minister responsible for the Federal Government's activities in the price monitoring area. Last Sunday Mr Jones cast doubt on the need for the prices initiative by disputing that food prices had increased as a proportion of family income. He said:

If you take food prices, there's been an extraordinary consistency.

Mr Jones said that the cost of food as a percentage of total income had been 19.7 per cent in 1979-80, 14.9 per cent in the last year of the Fraser Government and is now down around 14.5 per cent. In other words, the Federal Government's own Minister and a former member of this House has said that, since 1979-80, as a percentage of total income, the cost of food has dropped and is continuing to drop.

Mr Jones went on to say:

I know that when people look at absolute figures week by week, they say, "Oh look, I'm paying ten cents, fifteen cents, thirty cents more than I was a month ago"; but in fact as a proportion of total income it's really been remarkably stable.

In that environment, what is the urgency? What is the motivation? It is not good government; it is not in the interests of the people of this State; it is political.

The fourth reason why I pose the question concerning the motivation for the Bill is that nothing in the Bill binds the Government. John Cain says, "Trust me. I will not lift taxes and charges in some areas above 6 per cent." But what is the Premier's word worth? Before the last election he said that Government taxes and charges would not rise by more than the movement in the consumer price index, but since Christmas Victorians have seen the cost of health cover rise by 20 per cent, and third-party insurance on trucks has risen from $175 to $400; people in Lilydale have seen their third-party insurance cost rise, because of changes in the zoning, from $162 to $260, an increase of 98 per cent. That is nothing to do with the Opposition's contribution. It was all done by the Government, and nothing in the Bill binds the Government.
Yet another reason why I say that the community has been misled is the fact that the Government has argued in the past week and a half that it has been considering this Bill since November last year. I question that: in fact, I challenge the Government to prove it. After the recent proroguing of Parliament, we had the Governor's Speech on the opening of the new Parliamentary session, a speech written by the Government of this State. The poor Governor was put in an awful position, having to read that terrible diatribe. If the Government were serious about trying to control prices and about considering the public of Victoria, one would think there would have been mention of that in the Governor's Speech, but there was not one word of it. The Government is lying through its teeth.

Another incident that bears out that the Grocery Prices Bill is nothing more than, “It seemed like a good idea at the time,” can be gleaned from a Herald report of 4 February 1987 which said:

Government action over rising consumer prices is one of the major issues to be addressed in 1987, according to the acting Premier, Mr Fordham.

Mr Fordham said he expected the Federal Government—which was given constitutional price control powers by the states—to talk to the State Government on how the problem was to be tackled.

Mr Fordham warned there was no panacea to rising prices and ruled out interventionist price controls as difficult and impractical.

On 4 February the Deputy Premier was saying that the Government had ruled out interventionist price control as difficult and impractical yet now, in the middle of March, because it suddenly seemed like a good idea at the time, the Government has introduced a Bill that seeks to intervene, interfere and artificially try to protect. It simply will not do; and I accuse the Government of gross hypocrisy and dishonesty in the way in which it has presented itself on this Bill.

I turn now to the contents of the Bill and the reason why the Bill itself is unacceptable. It is true that every member of the community is concerned about prices. We in the Opposition are concerned about prices, but one must be serious and recognise that, in order to ensure that prices are reduced or stabilised, it is necessary to attack the source from which price increases are motivated, that is, the activities of Government, especially Government taxes and charges and economic management.

Three factors are extremely important. The first of those is the debt of a community and its interest repayments; the second is the all-important inflationary spiral. It is true that Victoria has the biggest debt of any State in Australia, and that has been generated by the Cain Government. Victoria now has a debt of $20 million and, despite the fact that this State is substantially in debt, the Government this year is borrowing a further $3.1 billion. Our interest repayments are therefore close to $2 billion. That figure reflects almost 20 per cent of Victoria’s total Budget figure going to pay off the State debt. In other words, we are putting this State to ever-increasing debt responsibility.

It is also a matter of regret and of public record that Victoria has the highest inflation rate of any State in Australia. One reason why that has occurred is that the Government has adopted a policy of automatically indexing taxes and charges. That means that, with an inflation level of 10.2 per cent, as Victoria has, we are in the position that every six months all Government taxes and charges are automatically indexed to rise by at least half of the annual inflation rate; and that continues to add fuel to the inflation fire.

In other words, this State has the highest debt; it has the highest inflation rate and its citizens pay more taxes than any other State in Australia, and they are being asked by the Government, which created that position, to ensure the control of prices. That is the height of hypocrisy!

In fact, the Government is saying to some groups, because of the by-election, “Hold your price increases down, but the Government is not going to hold its prices down”. That is not reality.
The proposed legislation does not contain a schedule in terms of a basket of goods and services. The Bill in real terms gives to the Minister extraordinary new and tough powers. He has the power and authority to control all prices, not just the basket of products, but nowhere in the proposed legislation is the Government bound to any provision.

The proposed legislation is particularly bureaucratic and an army of bureaucrats will be needed to put the Bill in place. On page 3, clause 7 states:

Notification of prices and changes in prices.

An occupier of a shop to which this Act applies must, in accordance with the regulations notify the Minister of the price, or a change in the price, of a basic grocery item sold in the shop in relation to which a regulated price has been declared under section 5.

In other words, any movement in the price being more than 6 per cent increase must be notified to the Minister. That is a stupid provision and ultimately it will cost the people of Victoria more to administer this socialistic policy than any benefits that will be gained through its implementations.

I put it to the House that in the basket of goods to which the Government refers the majority of items are produced interstate. We have no control over what happens in the manufacturing input costs on those goods which are manufactured interstate and then shipped to Victoria, and yet the Government is planning to control prices.

If we try to control prices and the retailers cannot afford to sell the products, Victorians will be denied the products. There are a number of products for which prices have fallen. One example of that—I believe many Labor Party members would use more of it than honourable members on this side of the House—is toilet paper. Toilet paper over the past year has dropped in price by 14.5 per cent.

Mr Remington interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! This is an urgent matter and it should be treated as such.

Mr KENNETT—If the honourable member wants to interrupt I shall——

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to return to this important debate.

Mr KENNETT—Toilet paper is a good example of a product which, in the past year, has dropped in price by 14.5 per cent. If this proposed legislation is passed, it will virtually remove effective competition and allow toilet paper along with a lot of other products in the basket to be increased in price.

There is only one State in Australia that tried price control and the Minister might know what State it was. It was South Australia. An article in the Canberra Times on 18 January 1980 stated:

But a Victorian Government investigation in 1976, when that State was considering the introduction of price control, found it was "an ineffective way to hold back prices" and that some controlled prices in Adelaide were higher than uncontrolled Melbourne prices.

One reason, it was suggested, was that all firms tended to charge the maximum price allowed by the Prices Commissioner.

The Minister does not have a clue about what will happen; it will be that the consumers of this State will have to pay higher prices on the listed basket of goods. Therefore, it is absolute folly to come into this House with a Bill such as this.

Another matter provided for in the Bill is that of fines. The fines are ridiculously high, being $5000 or $10 000 for a retailer who might make an error of judgment. It does not deal with products that are manufactured or produced interstate.
I ask the House: when the Minister goes around looking for the products that he will promote and he advises consumers to buy those products, what will he do if the Victorian product is dearer than one from elsewhere?

Recently, Californian citrus fruit has been a matter of concern. What will happen tomorrow if the price of Californian citrus fruit is less than the Victorian produced fruit? Will the Minister say, "Go out and buy the imported citrus fruit because it is cheaper" or will the Minister tell the people to buy Victorian?

What a pack of hypocrites! The Government has not thought the proposed legislation through. What about quality? Are consumers to be advised to buy cheaper without concern for quality? Who will do the work? Will it be the Minister for Labour, the $10 billion man, the man who in one fell swoop introduced an administrative scheme into the transport system that cost Victorians $99 million! The proposed legislation is totally unacceptable.

Mr Gavin—It is not price control!

Mr KENNETT—I shall not worry about the honourable member for Coburg, but let me get back to the basket of goods. No price control legislation has ever worked anywhere in the world, particularly if it is selectively applied.

If the Government came into the House and said, "We want to control prices; we want to break the inflation spiral", which at the moment is running at 10 per cent, "and we will take the lead and there will be no rise in Government taxes or charges of more than 6 per cent", then the Government would be justified in applying it to other areas. However, it can only work if this is done in other States and at the Federal level, and then it cannot unfortunately cover a product such as coffee because that is an imported product. If the coffee crops fail in Brazil and the price goes through the roof, will the Government deny Victorians the right to coffee or will it make an exception?

What will happen about other products? Will the Government deny the people the right to other products? Will it make exemptions?

The Bill does not apply restraint on the Government. It does not go any distance in protecting the interests of the community from higher prices.

The prices charged for products in supermarkets are exceptionally competitive. Of course there are variations from day to day and from week to week which are often related to supply and demand but, as the inquiry showed in 1976, if the Government tries to control prices, ultimately we will all be paying more.

We say that there are two major issues involved. One is the philosophical argument as to whether one believes in price control. If one does believe in price control, one does what the Government is doing, but doing totally incorrectly. If one disagrees with the Opposition on price control, one admits that this Bill cannot work and one goes back to applying basic market forces. Secondly, the Government should take the lead and apply the "do as I do" principle rather than the "do as I say" principle.

We have been arguing for a number of days now that this legislation must impose controls on the Government itself. It will impose nothing. Already we have seen massive increases in taxes and charges imposed by the Government even since this announcement was made, and the hypocrisy of the Government is very well articulated.

The Government states that it is motivated in the cause of the interests of people.

Over the past three weeks I have spoken to perhaps more Victorian citizens than any other politician here, whether it be in rural Victoria, in Melbourne, Monbulk or Lilydale. What the people are talking about, and what are eroding their standards of living more than anything else, are the increases in their Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works rates, their State Electricity Commission rates, their gas accounts, their local government rates, their land tax and the fear of the new water tax. There is also, of course, the increase in third-party insurance rates.
Mr Acting Speaker, you and I both know what is hurting people at the moment; it is not just the prices that they pay in a supermarket, but predominantly it is the charges levied by the Government. The Government has not addressed that aspect at all. In particular, the Government has not addressed the problem of taxes and charges, fines and fees on business.

Looking at the Government’s package again, the so-called basket, one sees that it refers to 150 items, mainly directed towards the household, and most of them are small items. Cigarettes, alcohol and petrol have not been included in that package. Why have they not been included? It is because they are the areas from which the Government receives most of its revenue.

What about petrol? What contributes to the level of petrol prices in this State? The cost of transportation is one that involves petrol, and how does one think that this Government has addressed the cost of petrol? It has not done so at all. In fact, there has been only one occasion when the Government introduced a price control mechanism, and that was in 1982 when it controlled the price of petrol. The Premier promised to reduce the price of petrol, but what the Government did was to set an upper limit. That upper limit meant that the price of approximately 35 cents a litre was pushed up to 59·9 cents a litre. Once this control is introduced, invariably all it ever does is move upwards and this does not allow real competition within the marketplace. This is an absolute farce.

Let me tell the House something else I heard today: when Michael Schildberger was interviewing the Minister for Labour and me, the Minister indicated that tomorrow the Government is about to start a campaign to educate the public as to the value of this price-pegging mechanism. In other words, two days before a by-election, your money and mine is going to be spent on more Government advertisements to tell the public what a marvellous man the Premier is, in order to buy votes. What a misuse of public money! The Bill is being pushed through Parliament in a week. Tomorrow our money is going to be used to promote this piece of legislation. There could not be a more cynical exercise in this House to the public than this exercise.

As I said earlier, the Government did something like this before the 1985 election—it fraudulently printed tickets before or during the Nunawading by-election campaign—and now it is doing it again today. The Government is fraudulently using the goodwill of the people of Victoria to buy cheap votes.

What will happen next Saturday, I hope, is that the people of Victoria will have the opportunity of taking this measure on board and making a considered decision. They will have to decide whether they want to vote for a misleading, dishonest Government; whether they will vote for honesty, or whether they will say that they realise that if prices are to be controlled, the size, cost and function of government must be reduced. Any Government that argues that it is trying to make a lifestyle better by trying to control prices without controlling taxes and charges does not deserve my vote.

What will happen on Saturday is that there will be an overwhelming vote for the Liberal Party and for the Liberal Party’s candidate. The public will no longer be bought off with the corruptness and dishonesty and tactics of the Government.

Turning to the options that we have in addressing the legislation, I point out that earlier I outlined that I would not have a bar of the proposed legislation, and we had an opportunity of saying publicly last week that we would seek amendments to it. We had the opportunity of saying categorically that we would defeat the legislation.

Let me indicate first that my colleague, the Leader of the National Party, will put his case in a moment, but I have in my possession one of the National Party's news releases. That press release announces that;

The National Party today gave the State Government the chance to secure parliamentary approval for the Grocery Prices Bill.

The National Party today decided to vote for the legislation.
There are expressions of concern within the press release which the Leader of the National Party will address.

Mr Crabb interjected.

Mr KENNETT—Here comes the $90 million man; “Give me a dollar and I will blow it.” The Minister is our new consumers’ friend.

What worries the Liberal Party about the National Party’s position is simply that under the proposed legislation the Government may declare that manufacturers, producers, persons carrying on a wholesale business in Victoria and shops in Victoria—that is, retailers generally—all come under the control of the Minister. In other words, producers and everyone else will be put under the control of the Government if the legislation is passed. It looks as though it will be.

I have to say that the Liberal Party made its decision before the National Party’s position became known. I am disturbed and disappointed that our colleagues representing private enterprise have seen fit to allow the Government potentially to pass legislation that will lead to price control. It is without a doubt a cop-out. A woman cannot be a little pregnant and one cannot have a little bit of socialism in one’s blood; a person is either for this sort of control or against it.

What we are seeing now, with the potential effect of this proposed legislation, is that the National Party has sold out manufacturers, producers and, unfortunately, sold out the private enterprise ethic, and for what reason I do not know.

Certainly this has not been a good by-election campaign for the National Party, having originally appointed a democratic socialist to its ranks as the party’s candidate. I have to say that this IS the wrong way to finish a campaign because if we are serious about private enterprise we cannot allow this to happen.

Let me indicate the Liberal Party’s three options. The Opposition has indicated that under no circumstances will it accept price control.

Mr Micallef—Why?

Mr KENNETT—Because where it has been tested anywhere in the world, it has not worked. Price control should not be done by legislation and should be done only by Government with regard to charges imposed on others by the Government. This Government is not showing constraint. Therefore, the Opposition has considered moving an amendment to the proposed legislation and it has prepared a reasoned amendment.

I have thought about the Bill and discussed it with my colleagues in the short time available and the Opposition has decided not to try to amend it. To do so would be to indicate that the Opposition supports the concept of price control.

Mr Ross-Edwards—You can improve it.

Mr KENNETT—It cannot be improved. The only way to amend the Bill to make it effective is to argue that all Government taxes, charges, prices and fees be part of the measure. That will not happen as this Government will not impose it on itself. If the Bill is amended, it will tacitly give support to price control in the most ineffectual way possible. It will impose costs on the community greater than the relief the Government believes will be provided.

By deciding not to try to amend the Bill, the Opposition is faced with the third option, which is to vote against the measure at every stage, and that is what the Liberal Party intends to do. The Opposition is prepared to wear any of the political flack that the Government may try to throw at it during the next couple of days before the by-election, just as it is prepared to cop any flack the Government may throw after the by-election.

It has been put to me by a number of people that the Liberal Party is running a risk by not supporting what will be seen by many to be a good piece of proposed legislation. It is
not a good measure, but I can understand why some people in the community believe the Bill will achieve something. However, as politicians, we must ask ourselves whether we will vote on specific issues simply to secure votes for the wrong reason or whether we will act responsibly even if that may cost some votes.

The Liberal Party and I would rather risk losing some votes on Saturday than do something that is irresponsible. We would rather not win votes by doing something we know is wrong. The Liberal Party does not want to act irresponsibly by taking part in a cynical, vote-buying exercise.

Mr Remington—You will go down 14 per cent!

Mr KENNETT—How many charges were levelled against you?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fogarty)—Order! I remind honourable members that this debate arises from an urgency motion. I do not appreciate the remarks just made by the Leader of the Opposition and I ask him to withdraw. Such remarks do not become him.

Mr KENNETT—I withdraw my comments, and remind the House that he who casts the first stone should be extremely careful. Honourable members should be sure about one thing.

Mr Simpson—Read what the Herald said about your mouth.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Niddrie is out of his place and should resume his seat if he wants to interject.

Mr KENNETT—Around Australia and Victoria the public is demanding of their political representatives restraint and an acceptance of responsibility. In political life it is easy to embark on exercises that may be of short-term political value but which are irresponsible in the long-term because of their impact on the community. The Bill is irresponsible in both the short and long term.

The measure is not matched by any legislation in any other State; therefore, it immediately excludes products produced in other States. The Bill does not apply to the Government and it will lead to a massive bureaucracy.

The public is demanding a political party that is prepared to say it as it is and be honest in its representation of Victorians. It is easy to bow to pressure; it is stronger and more responsible to fight this type of proposed legislation based on the reasons I have given today.

The Liberal Party opposes price control and will oppose the Bill because there has been no consultation, because major groups have been excluded, because the Government is not included and because it will give rise to a massive bureaucracy. The Bill will achieve nothing but higher prices. The Opposition will continue to oppose the proposed legislation in this House and in the other place.

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS (Leader of the National Party)—The proposed legislation is a cynical exercise by the Government and it is not a coincidence that it was introduced to the House on the eve of the by-election for Central Highlands Province.

As honourable members know, approximately two weeks ago an accord was reached between the Government and the supermarket chains. It was a sensible agreement and its general principles are included in the Bill. However, the supermarket chains were under the impression that the accord would be carried through and that proposed legislation would not follow. For its own reasons, the Government has decided to introduce this Bill in a great hurry. I believe the Bill has been introduced only because of the by-election to be held on Saturday.
There is a real reason why prices in Victoria should stop rising at the rate at which they currently are. Melbourne is the inflation capital of Australia; that is a sad statement, but it is true. One of the causes for that is the Government's taxes and charges.

Wage earners and pensioners throughout the community have high hopes that this move by the Government will do something to alleviate the desperate position in which so many people find themselves.

To some degree wages and pensions are pegged but those who receive them are finding that their spending power is being eroded week after week and month after month. Honourable members who keep in touch with their electorates know only too well the extremely desperate plight faced by so many housewives who have the economic responsibility for their families and who have to do the weekly shopping. Week after week I receive complaints from housewives—no doubt all honourable members receive similar complaints—that their money is going nowhere and that prices in the supermarkets are rising at an unreasonable rate. That is the current view.

It is all very well for some honourable members to quote figures that demonstrate that some items have remained at much the same price but the prices of other items have spiralled. The ordinary Victorian is facing a difficult and desperate situation in trying to maintain a decent standard of living.

As the Leader of the Opposition has said, historically price control has worked to only a limited degree and on a comparatively short-term basis. The purpose of using price control is to try to steady the rate of inflation while the chain is being broken. It is hoped that it will do some good. Price control is never a perfect answer.

Those who are old enough to remember something about the price control that was implemented during the second world war and just after would also remember that it created a bureaucratic mess. As the business world becomes more sophisticated, the greater the problem of controlling prices becomes.

I note that the proposed legislation contains a sunset clause. The measure will become invalid after twelve months. I commend the Government for inserting this provision because one can certainly not see further ahead than twelve months—if anything, twelve months is perhaps a bit long. On balance, I agree that that period is appropriate, if there is to be any price control.

Like the Liberal Party, the National Party is faced with the difficult decision of how to vote on the proposed legislation. The conservative parties do not normally support a price control and would normally not want to have a bar of it. I believe that most members of the Labor Party also do not really want price control.

Mr Crabb—Yes they do!

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS—I do not think so; it is a bureaucratic problem. The Minister for Labour, who has responsibility for the proposed legislation, will suffer tremendous headaches because of this measure before it is over. The honourable gentleman realises that problem.

Honourable members should remember this: in March 1987 public opinion is very much in favour of the Government intervening to try to bring some stability into food pricing. What the Government can do is another matter.

Of all the factors that affect the cost of living, the price of petrol has perhaps the greatest influence. I have had meeting after meeting with petrol companies and I still do not understand how the price of petrol is arrived at. It has never been explained to me how the price of petrol can vary so widely throughout Victoria.

Petrol pricing is incredible! Initially I thought I had the problem because I could not understand how it worked; so I brought different groups of honourable members into my office to listen to the explanation. No-one has been able to explain the reasons for some of
the variations in the price of petrol. I am aware of the fact that petrol is transported from other States to Victoria and from country to country but, in the end, everyone is confused trying to understand how it works.

The Government must play its part in the proposed price pegging. It must freeze Government taxes and charges. This is absolutely essential if the chain, about which I spoke a few minutes ago, is to be broken. This freeze must be passed on to Government instrumentalities and public authorities, especially the State Electricity Commission, the Gas and Fuel Corporation, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and municipalities. Those charges are perhaps hurting the consumers more than supermarket prices.

I refer in particular to the effect Government taxes and charges have on minimum wage earners. Those charges are increasing enormously and are hurting the consumers most. I know the Government has a problem balancing its Budget but unless it puts a check on Government taxes and charges, the inflation rate will continue to rise in the City of Melbourne and in Victoria.

It will not be possible for me to successfully move a number of amendments but I thank the Minister for Labour for agreeing to two amendments that I believe will improve the proposed legislation. In general terms, in clause 5 the National Party will move to have "primary producers" excluded. It will leave "producers" and exclude the word "primary" because of the obvious problems faced by primary producers due to seasonal fluctuations, shortages and surpluses that are involved in this industry.

The National Party will also move to have included in clause 4 after line 23:

The Minister shall cause a copy of a declaration under subsection (1) to be placed before each House of Parliament within seven sitting days of that House after the making of that declaration.

Then the measure will include commonsense declarations. I thank the Government for the cooperation it promised during the debate.

The National Party will support the Bill for the following reasons: it does not believe the measure is good. There will be many problems attached to it but the Victorian public wants this measure now. The public is unfortunately not aware of the problems that were faced during the second world war era. The Bill will be of some limited use in the short term. It will not do any harm.

That consideration is extremely important when one must vote on a piece of legislation with which one is not entirely happy. If it is considered that a piece of proposed legislation will damage the State, one has an obligation to oppose it. If proposed legislation can do some good—I hope this Bill will do some good—the Government should be given the opportunity of implementing it.

The Government will be put to the test with this measure. The National Party is saying, "Go out and do what you are claiming you can do and we will see what happens!"

In a situation like this, it is not the role of the Opposition to frustrate the Government. If it were to do so, the public and the Government would accuse the Opposition of not letting the Government attempt to control prices. The Government will say that the reactionaries on the Opposition side of the House did not want to give the Labor Party a go.

Mr Perrin—You don't need the proposed legislation.

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS—I agree, but the National Party will give the Government a go. The Government is asking for only twelve months because the Bill contains a sunset clause. The Minister for Labour and the Government will have their reputations on the line and it will be up to them to produce a result. That is fair.

It is easy to say, "No," and to throw the measure out but instead the opposition parties will monitor the progress of the proposed legislation. If the Government makes a mess of
it, we will be its greatest critics. We will not be accused of stopping the Government from governing.

It is regrettable that the Liberal Party has decided not to propose any amendment to the Bill. It does not matter how bad a Bill might be; if it is to be passed, one has an obligation to make the measure better.

Mr Kennett—It doesn't need to go through.

Mr ROSS-EDWARDS—Why not combine the talents of the Liberal Party with those of the National Party to consider the measure and seek to improve it? It may be easier to do nothing, but the Opposition should think about improving the Bill. The National Party considered moving a reasoned amendment but decided that would not be of much advantage, but specific amendments could help significantly. At least the National Party has done that.

Perhaps the best effect of the proposed legislation will be to highlight to the Government and the people of Victoria how bad the inflation problem in this State is. It will attract Government attention and, I hope, Government action and encourage the Government to take steps in future to restrain increases in Government taxes and charges for electricity, gas and water, over which the Government has control. It is in the Government's hands. I do not like the proposed legislation, nor does my party, but the Government has been elected and it has a major problem on its hands. This is one way it is having a go at solving the problem, and the National Party will let it have a go.

Mr SPYKER (Minister for Consumer Affairs)—This Bill is one of the most important measures that has been introduced since I entered Parliament in 1979. The proposed legislation has the support of all four million Victorians, except two, those two being the Leader of the Opposition and Andrew Hay. They are the only ones to have indicated opposition to the proposed legislation.

A local newspaper in my electorate conducted a survey at a local supermarket to establish what people think about the Bill. The result was 100 per cent support—not one person said that the measure should not be supported or that it should not be given a go. The Liberal Party has seriously misread the electorate. The electorate wants to control prices in supermarkets. People shopping in supermarkets are shocked at the weekly increases in prices.

The Government is acting to respond to the demands of the community. The introduction of the Bill has nothing to do with the coming by-election. It is related to the national wage case. The Government was asking workers to exercise restraint by not making excessive wage demands but, because of the economic situation, their standard of living was being reduced. The same situation applied to people on fixed incomes and pensions. The Government is asking people around the State to make a small sacrifice and to exercise restraint.

The Government has also made it clear that Government rents and water, gas and electricity charges are included in the Government basket, as they are charges that hit consumers and manufacturers. In other Government areas the Government will do everything possible to keep increases to an absolute minimum.

The Government wants to ensure that public confidence is restored because the public feels that it has been forced to make sacrifices as a result of the problems that have arisen in Australia. The Government can demonstrate that it can restore public confidence, which will go a long way towards improving the Victorian economy.

The Leader of the Opposition said that no agreement has been reached. I have a list of the 170 items on which agreement has been reached between the Government, manufacturers and retailers, and the list will be published tomorrow.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! I suggest that the meeting being held on the Opposition benches ceases.
Mr Kennett—We have reached an agreement!

Mr SPYKER—I should have thought that on a critically important issue such as this, Parliament would come to an agreement in the interests of all Victorians.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the price of toilet paper. He knows what he does to the Government, and he will understand that Government members have to use a lot more toilet paper than the Opposition because of his activities. I shall quote from Choice magazine, which clearly indicates that the actual increase in the price of toilet paper in 1985–86 was 41.5 per cent. The Leader of the Opposition had claimed that the cost of toilet paper had decreased. He also quoted a Herald article. I shall also quote from the Herald. The editorial of Friday, 13 March 1987 under the heading, “That mouth” stated:

There are two inevitabilities about Jeffrey Gibb Kennett. The first is that if he sees a chance to grab the headlines, he’ll seize it. And, second, he’ll make a fool of himself in the process. Both of these traits were on show again yesterday.

Mr Kennett thought there was mileage in the Premier’s plan to limit price rises for many retail goods to a maximum of six per cent in the next twelve months. He urged Victorians not to pay any Government bill for such essentials as gas and electricity which had increased more than six per cent over the previous one.

That is what the Leader of the Opposition, as an alternative Premier of this State and Leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition, said.

The ACTING SPEAKER—Order! Will the Minister please identify the author of the article?

Mr SPYKER—I am quoting the Herald editorial of 13 March; there is no author of Herald editorials. I am happy to table the document.

My concern is that the alternative Premier is advocating anarchy in this State, seeking to bring down democracy and advocating that people do not behave responsibly. The editorial went on to say:

This was unacceptable nonsense, and Mr Kennett’s usual trivialising of an important issue. Rather than withholding money legally owed, voters may be better served by withholding votes from Mr Kennett, in the unlikely event that he’s still leader of anything when the next election comes around.

I suggest that people in the Central Highlands Province read that editorial. Even the Herald is suggesting to the Liberal Party that the Leader of the Opposition ought to be removed from his position as Leader when the next party meeting takes place on Tuesday. Government members are willing to enter the Liberal Party rooms on Tuesday to vote for Jeff Kennett to make sure he remains in his position as Leader because he is our greatest asset.

Mr Simpson—We should enshrine him in legislation!

The ACTING SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Niddrie is out of his place and out of order. The Minister does not need any coaxing from the honourable member; he is quite capable.

Mr SPYKER—The Leader of the Opposition also referred to imported oranges, and went off on a tangent from that point. He has obviously not read the Bill, because if he had he would realise that it exempts fruit and vegetables. All the Government is doing is establishing an information line that will alert consumers to the best buy in fruit and vegetables, and this will assist consumers with their budgeting and assist in keeping prices down. The Leader of the Opposition also mentioned beer, cigarette and petrol prices. He should realise that they are controlled by the Federal Prices Surveillance Authority, over which the State has no control.

The Leader of the Opposition stated that he had received telegrams and telexes from retailers and manufacturers. He claims that they oppose the measure to effect price pegging. However, the Government has the support of retailers and manufacturers in its price
pegging campaign. Consultation has taken place with retailers and manufacturers and further meetings will formalise the agreement reached. The Government is committed to trying to keep the prices of essential household goods to increases of no more than 6 per cent. This will be of great assistance to consumers. Also, by restricting key Government charges to increases of no more than 6 per cent, businesses will be assisted.

The Leader of the Opposition stated that he believes prices are not rising, and I suggest to both the Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Brighton, who is interjecting, that they go into supermarkets and talk to consumers. They will know that their views are not supported by consumers. The honourable member for Brighton could not get one constituent to support his views. One can understand the frustration and the mess the Opposition is in now because members of the Opposition do not have any confidence in their Leader. The only reason that they cannot get their act together on this Bill is that they are opposing the measure just for the sake of opposing it. They have not been able to get public support.

The public wants this Bill. The public understands what the prices in supermarkets are and the public is demanding that the Government elected by the people of Victoria should move towards doing something about it. The Government will do something about it. Nothing will be achieved by being negative on this issue and the Opposition should support the campaign to ensure that confidence in this State and nation is lifted as quickly as possible. Whenever one has the opportunity of travelling overseas, one learns that overseas people think of Australians as a great nation of people. To see the Victorian Opposition trying to wreck this country is deplorable.

I suggest that members of the Opposition go out and talk to elderly citizens and to pensioner clubs and try to convince them that prices of goods in supermarkets are not hurting people. Members of the Opposition live in fairyland—it is extraordinary. The Government understands these issues and has addressed the problem with its price pegging initiative. It is not price control, and I do not know how many times I will have to say that—prices will be pegged. The Government understands, as the Leader of the National Party outlined, the difficulty in applying price control because of the problems that will be created in the marketplace. The Government is asking for price pegging and a show of price restraint.

The prices of about 170 items will be published in the media tomorrow. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs has set up a telephone information service of ten lines. The interjections of the honourable member for Brighton demonstrate the negative attitude of the Opposition. Even if the Opposition does have reservations about the proposed legislation, we have to give it a go. The public is demanding that the Government take action. Tomorrow, people wishing to seek information about which goods are in the price peg basket will be able to telephone the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. They will be able to report any discrepancy in prices.

I again announce my pleasure in being part of the Cain Labor Government and associated with this Bill. Since I have been a member of Parliament it is the most important legislative measure I have seen. I am confident that other States are looking at it very closely and I am sure that their constituencies will put the same pressure on them to ensure that everything is done to restrain supermarket prices.

As honourable members will be aware, these costs are an added burden on a family's budget. It is families whom the Government is thinking about very carefully and, although the Liberal Party sometimes tries to maintain that it represents families, its claims are not supported by its opposition to legislative measures that the Government has initiated in this Parliament. Over a number of years the Opposition has opposed every aspect that assists families. This Bill will assist families to manage their budgets and to make their dollars go further.

One of my constituents came to my electorate office this morning. She is a widow and has two children. Her income is $180 net a week. Her rent is $110 a week. The Opposition
is expecting a family like that, which has $70 a week to live on, to manage without price restraint. Members of the Opposition will not understand this as most of them have never done an honest day's work in their lives. How would they know a family's struggle in this State? The Government understands families in Victoria. The Government has had demonstrable support from all Victorians on this Bill. They want it to work. They want the Government's support for it.

If members of the Opposition had any brains at all they would support the measure. It is an important initiative. I reiterate that the Government has the full support of retailers and the public. The only two people who do not support the Bill are Andrew Hay and the Leader of the Opposition—and I guess that the honourable member for Burwood will not be Leader of the Opposition after the next Liberal Party meeting on Tuesday.

Mr AUSTIN (Ripon)—The Minister for Consumer Affairs gave a remarkable speech. He stated that the Grocery Prices Bill is the most supported Bill to come before the House. It is an extraordinary measure. If it does what it says it will do and what the Minister for Consumer Affairs and the Minister for Labour think it will do, that will be in its favour, but the more one examines the Bill the more of a joke it becomes.

The Bill is being rushed through the House. The debate today has been restricted to the period from 2.45 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., yet this is a Bill that the Minister for Consumer Affairs believes to be the most important legislative measure that he has seen. If that is the case, it is an even greater insult not only to members of Parliament but also to the people of Victoria—those who will be greatly affected by it. I do not believe anyone in his right mind would suggest that the measure has not got more to do with the Central Highlands Province by-election than it has to do with the control of prices for commodities in the State. It is the most badly drafted legislative measure that I have seen. It is a political football for the Government to play with to shore up a disappearing vote for the Labor Party in the Central Highlands Province by-election which is only a few days away.

Earlier, the Leader of the National Party said that he will be supporting the amendments proposed to be moved by the Government, which were initiated by the National Party. I am disappointed that the Liberal Party has not been given a copy of the proposed amendments. I understand they are amendments which were suggested by the National Party and which the Government has accepted and adopted, which is another indication of the problems that the Government faces when it rushes into introducing a Bill quickly and wants to have it rushed through the House.

It was alleged that industry leaders had agreed to the amendments that were decided upon this morning but they had not had time to examine the Bill and the amendments and the full extent of the proposals on their industries and those whom they represent. They have now expressed to me their change of view.

It is an example of how the proposed legislation, by being rushed through Parliament in this way, will be detrimental to so many people.

The Liberal Party may have supported some control or pegging, as the Minister for Consumer Affairs has described it, if it had been done properly and if the Government were prepared to include Government taxes and charges in the Bill. It is ludicrous for people to think that the Government is doing something useful or worthwhile by trying to control prices if the ever-escalating Government taxes and charges are not included in the proposed legislation. It is an admission by the Government that its own economic policies which the Premier, the Treasurer and other Ministers have strutted for years in government are not succeeding. These economic policies have broken down because of the huge increases, not just in the taxes and charges imposed by government, but because Victoria has the highest taxes of any State in Australia, the highest charges, borrowings at a high level, a huge debt and inflation running out of control. To try to correct that situation the Government is penalising producers and manufacturers and is imposing ceilings that it is not prepared to put on itself.
The proposed legislation gives the Government power to peg prices of the products of producers and the Government has said that over the past few days it has had consultations with manufacturers and retailers. I have been told that those consultations have been brief, mostly on the telephone and have not really covered all those people who are concerned about the proposed legislation. The Government has not consulted with primary producers, which has been borne out to me clearly today.

Honourable members are well aware that the dairy industry has been through and is still going through difficult economic times and that it is struggling to lift itself from the economic difficulties that have been around for a number of years. Over the past eighteen months milk prices have increased by 3·3 per cent and during that same period the consumer price index has gone up by 12 per cent. It makes the inclusion of dairy products in the list of items—they are listed in the Herald today—a most serious matter.

The Liberal Party has had discussions with the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria, which is most concerned at the proposed legislation and considers it a joke. However, that organisation believes it could have serious repercussions for the dairy industry. If honourable members examine the basket of items reproduced in the Herald today they will see an item called “Ski” which is a real fruit strawberry yoghurt. It is a product of a dairyfarmer cooperative in New South Wales. No-one can prevent that product from New South Wales being increased by 8 or 10 per cent or any other percentage increase, but it is in the basket of grocery items and, therefore, if it does increase by that amount it will put pressure on Victorian produced products.

The list also includes Western Star butter. That has been pegged and so it cannot go up beyond 6 per cent. Other similar products are not included. A Devondale product produced by Murray Goulburn Co-Op. Co. Ltd can run free in the marketplace. The Government’s excuse for that is that if one item is pegged, then the other item would have to keep in line with it, but if honourable members move around the supermarkets today they will find similar products with different prices. That argument does not hold water in the marketplace. Any person can go through supermarkets across Melbourne and find the same products at different prices.

The inclusion of dairy products within the basket of grocery items could have serious repercussions on the Kerin plan, which is just starting to work. There has already been a slight firming of dairy product prices on the international market, so any move to hold prices down among dairy products flies in the face of the Federal Government’s marketing plan.

Now that the organisation which is responsible for the dairy industry has had a few more hours to examine the proposed legislation, it has come to a different view to that expressed to the Minister and the Government. It is deplorable that the Bill is being rushed through without those people who are in major areas of responsibility having sufficient time to properly discuss it with their own organisation.

Fresh vegetables are not included in the basket of grocery items, but apparently the Minister’s representatives are going to stand out in the marketplace and examine the prices of various commodities, whether they be vegetable or fruit, and then make recommendations about what the housewife should or should not purchase.

The only reason some vegetable or fruit growers are able to obtain a margin on their produce is because they can take advantage of market shortages and seasonal conditions. As an ex-pea grower who operated in the old Victoria Market, the only time I, as a producer, would obtain a reasonable return would be when there was either a shortage in the marketplace or cool seasonal conditions and the product was in demand by the consumer. To interfere in that area will mean that many producers will decide to go into other activities.

Many frozen vegetables are included in the basket of grocery items. Honourable members should understand that Victoria is the major processor of frozen vegetables in Australia.
and that recent prices have been extremely low. Over one-third of the national processing establishment is situated in Victoria. The industry employed half the total people employed nationally, and has more than half the turnover. Victoria has a large tomato processing industry, producing more than 80 per cent of all tomatoes produced in Australia. People engaged in that industry have become concerned about the effect of the proposed legislation because of what could happen with interstate produce.

The citrus industry is the other group that has been in touch with the Opposition over the past couple of days. It is extremely concerned at the ramifications of the Bill. It reminds me that 1986 was the worst year for citrus growers for a long time.

Mr Remington—They are not even in the Bill!

Mr AUSTIN—That interjection really demonstrates the complete ignorance of Government members as to what the Bill does. If Mr Remington takes a close look at the basket he will find that fruit juices are included, and that is what the citrus growers are concerned about.

The worst year that the citrus growing and processing industry has seen for over a decade was 1986. The reason was a collapse in world prices, and growers’ returns have been hit hard. They are well below the cost of production. The problems of the citrus industry were put to the Industries Assistance Commission, and the Government decided that an adjustment would be made in tariff arrangements to help compensate for the problem. In addition, because of the difficulties it was going through, the industry won a dumping decision recently against Brazil.

The results of that low return have been reflected in orange juice prices and the results have been accentuated by the Federal Government’s Budget decision last year to place a 10 per cent sales tax on fruit juice products.

The Treasurer intended that that be passed on to the consumer but, because of the depressed price of citrus to the citrus juice market, in most cases that tax has been borne by the industry which, in the end, means the grower.

As with the dairy product export industry, the current indication is that 1987 might produce a slightly better market situation for citrus growers, but unless they are able to take advantage of these higher returns, serious economic damage will be done to the industry.

Today, I have had faced to me a request from the citrus industry that the Bill be delayed because it is concerned about the effect of the measure. Citrus growers are aware that it is important not to increase the price to the consumer to an unjustified level because they know better than the Government knows that that would bring consumer resistance.

Nevertheless, it is unfair for the industry to be pegged to a 6 per cent increase level because of the history of the past few years. The citrus industry is saying to the Government that citrus products should be exempt from the Bill.

Because of the nature of the debate and the fact that we have only 1 hour and 6 minutes left, I will not continue, on behalf of the primary producers and the many other industries that will be affected, except to say it is a disgrace and a disaster that the Government, which has had plenty of time in the past and will have plenty of time in the future to introduce a Bill of this nature if it so wishes, and allow proper debate on it, has allowed only a few hours of debate on something of supreme importance not just to the consumers of the State but also, in particular, to producers who are battling to survive.

Mr POPE (Monbulk)—It has been said today in debate, and indeed in media coverage, that the issue of the Grocery Prices Bill is something of a cynical exercise. Given that the average family, which is under wages and salaries, received a 2.3 per cent increase in wages last year and yet prices of grocery type items increased from anywhere between 7.5 per cent and 10 per cent, it would appear ridiculous to suggest that this is a cynical exercise.
Is it a cynical exercise to help ordinary families throughout Victoria, to assure them of a maximum price increase of only 6 per cent on 170 of the major popular items and to complement that with a Government basket?

I have spoken to many families in the past few weeks, especially around supermarkets, and they do not see it as a cynical exercise to know that they would have a maximum of only a 6 per cent increase in the next twelve months on their major grocery items. These people do not see that the $10 a week they have just received in the national wage case or the 2.3 per cent increase will be eroded because of spiralling prices; they see positive action taken by the Government, supported, as we found out today, by the National Party.

A number of figures have been bandied about concerning the increase in grocery prices in the past twelve months. I have been able to extract some figures to show that the increase is certainly well in excess of the wage increases that occurred last year.

Choice magazine produces two “baskets” every June or July in its magazine and the one for the 1985–86 financial year indicated that the supermarket basket, on its cheapest home brands, increased in price by 10 per cent in Melbourne. That figure is taken on 40 grocery items included in the 170 items to which the Government refers.

In the area of the brand name basket, the increase was 7.6 per cent. Bearing in mind the wage and salary increase of less than that figure, one does not have to think very hard to see why the people out in the community believe their living standards have not improved with respect to prices.

Therefore, with the prices pegged, the Government is ensuring that these people’s standard of living will not be further eroded. The Knox Prices Action Group, of which I am the President, produced a figure for 1985–86, for 46 grocery items—which were similar to the Choice basket—and this figure showed a 7.5 per cent increase. The group has just finished its survey for the March quarter—from the second week of March 1986 to the second week of March 1987—and it found that for the 46 grocery items, not including meat, fruit and vegetables, the increase was 7.5 per cent, which is in line with the Choice figure.

With the consumer price index and specifically the food group component which includes fruit and vegetables, from December 1985 to December 1986 there was an 8.9 per cent increase.

At the end of February the Herald published a list indicating a 10.2 per cent increase but, once again, that included fruit and vegetables; so there is a 7.5 to 10 per cent increase in grocery items with the basket of 170 items.

For the next twelve months the Government will ensure that there is only a 6 per cent increase. Consumers have received a $10 increase from the national wage case, which probably equates to around a 2 per cent increase with a possibility of two further increases later in the year, totalling 4 per cent. This therefore equates to the 6 per cent, which is the final decision of the commission.

The Government is telling the average family that it will not allow a further erosion of the family’s living standards or a situation where the family dollar will not go as far as it used to. That is what has been occurring in recent years and the Government will arrest that trend. This action by the Government is exactly the opposite to a cynical exercise. It is reacting to a problem out in the community.

I congratulate the Premier, the Minister for Labour and the Government for taking this step. I also congratulate the National Party for supporting the Bill. Members of the National Party understand that the price of groceries is an important issue and that members of the community feel strongly about it. Irrespective of the forthcoming by-election, the Bill provides for a twelve-month peg of certain consumer goods and contains a sunset provision. The Government has reacted to an obvious need to increase the living standards of Victorians.
We have not just had a cynical reaction, as did the closet Leader of the Opposition, Mr Andrew Hay. Mr Hay made a blatant threat against the conservative parties in this State. When the measure was announced on Channel HSV7, Mr Hay said he would be lobbying the conservative parties in the Upper House to ensure that the measure will not proceed. Andrew Hay does not believe in the prices restraint mechanism the Government wants to put into place; he does not believe the Government should take any action.

At the same time, Mr Hay believes there should not be any increase in wages and salaries. He believes there should be a further decline in the living standards of every Victorian family. The Government and the National Party do not believe Mr Hay. Only one person believes what Mr Hay has said—the Victorian Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition is the only person who has espoused the same rhetoric that Mr Hay has put to the community. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition gave some instances today of why he did not believe the Bill would work. Perhaps amendments will be considered at a later stage to address the problems and concerns he has raised. At least the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was not negative about the Bill. He criticised the measure and said that it would not work in certain areas, but only two people in Victoria—the Leader of the Opposition and Andrew Hay, who said he would lobby the Victorian conservative parties——

Mr Gude interjected.

Mr POPE—Andrew Hay said that on Channel HSV7; it is on the public record. The reality is that Mr Hay's lobbying has been successful only with the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Delzoppo—Mr Acting Speaker, this is a fascinating speech, but I direct your attention to the state of the House.

A quorum was formed.

Mr POPE—I thank the honourable member for Narracan for waking up after lying down on the back bench and bringing a few of his colleagues into the Chamber. The only effect Andrew Hay has had in lobbying the conservative parties is that he has the Leader of the Opposition on side. The Leader of the Opposition obviously took his direction from Andrew Hay, and honourable members heard his speech today. It is fortunate that Andrew Hay has not had any effect on members of the National Party.

The Leader of the Opposition was asked by the Minister for Labour and Michael Schildberger on 3LO today whether he believes in a prices peg. The Leader of the Opposition said that he does not believe in price control. He was asked whether he believed in helping the average family in Victoria but he would not answer the question. All Victorians who listened to 3LO today would understand that Andrew Hay has the Leader of the Opposition in the right frame of mind to oppose anything that will help Victorian families.

It is a different story when one considers how Andrew Hay wants to control wages and salaries. He wants to ensure that no increase occurs. Mr Hay wants to deregulate the labour market and to decrease wages and salaries and put Victorian families into deeper trouble.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned some products today and asked what can be done about the prices of products that had decreased significantly over the past twelve months. The Leader of the Opposition, following his economic constipation, referred to toilet rolls and the 14 per cent decrease in price they experienced over the past twelve months.

Again the Leader of the Opposition has his facts wrong. The Minister for Consumer Affairs referred to the Choice article, which stated that the price of toilet rolls had increased by 41·5 per cent over the past financial year.

I shall quote some figures that concern Victorian consumers. In the recently completed March survey of the Knox Prices Action Group, Nescafe was found to have increased by
29.3 per cent; baked beans by 21.5 per cent; marmalade by 28.8 per cent; corn flakes by 18.5 per cent; toilet rolls by 19 per cent, not a decrease of 14 per cent; Gravox by 14 per cent; Kraft cheddar by 11 per cent; Carnation milk by 17.8 per cent; self-raising flour by 14.8 per cent; tomato sauce by 11.5 per cent; and strawberry jam by 25 per cent.

Those are not luxury items; they are items that every householder would purchase week in, week out. The 170 items that have been given to the Government by the major supermarket chains are the most popular lines purchased by consumers. They are items not bought by the South Yarra silvertails but by every ordinary Victorian householder.

The Government wants to ensure that people obtain value for their dollar. Over the next twelve months individual product prices will increase by more than 6 per cent. It has been made clear that the Government is interested in the entire basket of 170 items not increasing by more than 6 per cent over twelve months.

If excessive increases occur, as stated by the Minister for Labour in his second-reading speech, where there is no adequate justification for such increases, they will be closely examined by the Government and action may result. It is imperative to have legislation in place to ensure that, if there are hiccups involving people not complying, something can be done. The public would view cynically any Government that introduced such a program on the basis of voluntary restraint. Legislation must be in place for the program to succeed.

The National Party obviously believes the Government has taken the right step, if one considers today's speech by the Leader of the National Party. The National Party believes the public would be cynical if the legislation were not in place.

Mr Williams—Mr Acting Speaker, I direct your attention to the state of the House.

A quorum was formed.

Mr POPE—It is a pity that only two members of the Liberal Party are in the Chamber. Opposition members went to enormous lengths to say in the media what a disastrous step the introduction of the Bill would be and how they would oppose it. However, two Opposition members only are in this place listening to the debate on the Bill. It is typical of their concern for the ordinary families of Victoria.

Mr WILLIAMS (Doncaster)—On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I do not think the presence of members of the Liberal Party has anything to do with the Bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! There is no point of order.

Mr POPE (Monbulk)—I thank the honourable member for Doncaster for assisting me on that point. I do not have much more to say because, as has been pointed out, this is a short Bill, with direct provisions and it is simple enough for everyone on both sides of the House to understand and, indeed, one would hope, agree to its passage.

It is unfortunate that the Liberal Party in Victoria has no concern for the ordinary family and does not recognise the need for price restraint or the need to increase the living standards of ordinary Victorians. It takes a position that is directed by the faceless man, Mr Andrew Hay, who is not even a member of this Parliament but directs the Leader of the Opposition in what stand he should adopt on proposed legislation. It is a disgrace that that is allowed to occur. I commend the National Party for supporting the Bill and I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr STOCKDALE (Brighton)—It is obvious that the honourable member for Monbulk stands on his record. Therefore, one should examine that record. The last time he got up on his hind legs in this place to attack a member of the Liberal Party, he was found to have no justification. On this occasion, he will be proven in two respects to have no support for the views he has articulated in this House.

Firstly, his arguments will be demonstrated to be completely futile in that the Bill will be shown to be nothing more than a stunt. Secondly, the cynical, political objectives he
and the Government pursue will clearly be rejected by the Victorian people at the next opportunity, which is the Central Highlands Province by-election to be held next Saturday.

Mr Andrew Hay has twice performed a national service to this country. Firstly, he exposed the improper, dishonest and perhaps illegal actions of the Whitlam Government and played a pivotal part in bringing down that Government. Secondly, in more recent times, he has highlighted the serious economic problems that the failed policies of Labor Governments have brought to Australia.

However, to recognise his personal contributions is still to utterly reject the scurrilous allegations made by the honourable member for Monbulk. The Liberal Party requires no outside instruction to know that history proves that price controls by Governments—invariably the weapon of failed socialist Governments—do not work, that they have adverse consequences and are counter-productive of their objectives.

The Liberal Party requires no instruction on that matter and it and its Leader stand true to the principles that this great party has supported and which, over the years, have given Australia one of the highest standards of living in the history of mankind.

The Bill is nothing but a political stunt conceived in panic.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kirkwood)—Order! The Hansard reporters must find it difficult to hear what is being said with the uproar coming from the Government benches.

Mr STOCKDALE—I can understand that uproar, Mr Acting Speaker. It is because of the Government’s sensitivity to the cold harsh light of truth shining on the manipulative actions of this cynical and failed Government.

The Bill is a political stunt, conceived in panic, brought forward on a farrago of lies and, according to the Minister for Labour on the radio this morning, to be further advanced by false advertising. Cynical party political advertisements will be introduced at the expense of taxpayers over the next few days.

This is a cynical exercise because it is an attempt to divert the attention of the community from the failures of the Labor Government. Under the Cain Government, Melbourne has become the inflation capital of Australia. This Government’s greatest achievement is that it has produced the highest inflation rate in a country which is burdened with socialist Governments and which has an inflation rate many times that of its trade competitors.

Notwithstanding the staunch opposition from Canberra, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales, this Government has exceeded all the other socialist Governments and burdened the people of Victoria with the highest increase in the cost of living in this country over the past twelve months. That increase is 10-2 per cent, a savage erosion of the living standards of ordinary people in this State.

The Government has saddled Victorians with high interest rates because of its ridiculous squandering of public money. Its borrowing to pay the interest on irresponsible borrowings of past years has crowded out private sector investment and led to the highest inflation rate in this country since the great depression.

Those high inflation rates will cause the rejection of the Labor Government at the by-election on Saturday and the Labor Government will be rejected at the next Federal election—whenever it is held—and at the next State election.

The Government, so much beloved of the indexation of taxes and charges over the whole five sorry years it has been in government, has burdened the Victorian community with increases in taxes and charges which stand at almost double the inflation rate. Those taxes and charges that Victorians pay through their gas, electricity and water bills—in fact, everything they do—are increasing at double the rate of inflation.

Mr Norris interjected.