



## Legislative Council

1/09/76

### GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS IN REPLY

#### Fifth Day's Debate

#### Extract

**The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT** [5.46]: It is my privilege this evening to be the first speaker who is in the position to congratulate the Hon. Delcia Kite on her maiden speech. At the conclusion of yesterday's proceeding we shared some of, our anxieties about the ordeal that was ahead of us. The Hon. Delcia Kite can rest assured that she accomplished her task with great skill and to the admiration of those assembled here this evening go I could take exception to but a single expression, and that was her view that it was ironical that a descendant of one who participated in the great shearers' strike should now be sitting in this House. It would not be contested anywhere that the event to which she referred was of such momentous importance to our way of life in Australia .that it would be ironical if a descendent of those lusty people who were involved were not among the members of the Legislative Council. I am sure that my colleagues on this side of the House would agree with me in that respect. We have in this House today in the person of the Hon. J. R. Johnson a man who has spent a lifetime with the Australian Workers' Union and I am sure we are all looking forward to the tremendous contribution that he will make to our deliberations in the light of his experience.

I am conscious also that in speaking this evening I am able to do so only as a result of the death of the late Thomas Patrick Gleeson. I am sure that proper recognition of his exemplary life will have been recorded in the proceedings of the House. He was described to me by a friend in rich but succinct language as a man of the soil, implying a character shaped by complete harmony with nature and living things and dedicated to the production of goods essential for the sustenance of mankind. The salient points of a life full of community service and leadership were his practical contribution to the wheat industry, including presidency of the Wheat- growers Union in 1944-45 and his term in the Legislative Council from 1946 until his death on 25th November last year. In this House he was distinguished by a courageous and uncompromising attitude to matters of principle, together with a generous and fair-minded approach to all with whom he came in contact.

I am quite aware that my meagre talents alone might seem to be insufficient to qualify me for admission to this place. I cannot refer to the accumulated wisdom of any section of the trade-union movement or to that tremendous experience which I concede freely is the property of those who have worked up from the lowest ranks to leadership in their particular fields. Neither am I able to speak with authority on behalf of producer organizations or industry groups, which also are represented in this Chamber.

I am grateful to my colleagues who pursued my nomination and ultimate election to this Chamber. They are aware of the fact that I reside in part of a vast area of northwestern New South Wales that is otherwise unrepresented here. Perhaps they sought to bring into the debates here one with a first-hand knowledge of a great, important region of this State—and I certainly hope to be able to do that. To that extent I believe the honour bestowed on me by my election to the Legislative Council devolves largely on the citizens of that area. I am delighted to say that my brief experience of the Legislative Council has been such that on no occasion have I felt it necessary to apologize for the fact that I have no greater qualifications for the position other than that I am an ordinary man.

I have come to realize that in their contributions to the debates here, most honourable members speak as practical men and women who work in the community at various levels of responsibility and administration. To that extent I think that the contribution of any ordinary woman or man would be equally welcome. However, it is proper that we should observe that the proceedings in this Chamber are carried out in a dignified manner. As a result of the co-operation of honourable members on both sides of the Chamber, a high standard of decorum is observed at all times. That high standard is appropriate to this Chamber, a place in which the course of our democratic free government in Australia was forged. It is rather remarkable to reflect that the building in which we meet was destined originally to be a prefabricated church on the goldfields. Such is the nature of Australian life.

In maintaining the high standard of decorum and dignity observed here a great deal of credit devolves on the officers of the House. Mr President, you have brought to the high office you occupy an unchallenged reputation that is respected both here and outside this Parliament by all sections of the community. It goes without saying that you have discharged your duties with a sense of probity and with a high standard of impartiality and dignity. I pay tribute to the Chairman of Committees and the Temporary Chairmen of Committees on both sides of the House. I compliment them on their contribution to the proceedings of this Chamber. I compliment, also, the Clerk of the Parliaments, the Clerk Assistant, the Usher of the Black Rod, and the other servants of the Parliament without whose dedicated efforts our deliberations would be totally meaningless and quite inert. I appreciate the wonderful contribution that these people make to the parliamentary institution.

I propose now to deal with the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply. In doing so, I can do no better than echo the words of the Hon. H. J. McPherson who drew our attention to the wording of the motion. I adopt the sentiments expressed by the honourable member, who reminded us that we affirm our complete loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen and assure His Excellency the Governor that we will give serious consideration to the measures that come before us. We promise also to do all in our power to act in the best interests of the people of New South Wales.

One's reaction to the programme and policy enunciated in His Excellency's Speech is conditioned by one's background and philosophy. I can trace back my stirrings of political awareness to my youth, when relatives from the country came to stay with my family. At that time we were living in the city. My relatives were seeking medical advice for one of their children who apparently had difficulty in learning to speak. I can remember vividly the anguish they suffered when they came face to face with the diagnosis that their child was deaf. At that time I observed that, though their situation would have been difficult for anyone to face up to, it was particularly difficult for them because they were not in their own home. When they had difficult decisions to make they were not able to retire to the comfort and security of their own home to consider their position; they were staying with my family. However, we did our best to make the atmosphere as normal as possible. I realized at the time the great problems that they faced; it was obvious that they affected them greatly.

My philosophy on politics is that people should not be inconvenienced by wishing to live in rural areas of this country; they should not be handicapped in their enjoyment of life any more than other members of the community. I was delighted on 17th August to hear a segment of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's programme "Country Hour". On that programme the Minister for Decentralisation and Development and Minister for Primary Industries was asked a question concerning his principal aims during his ministry. He said he hoped to be instrumental in bringing about improvement in the living standards of country people. I heartily congratulate the Minister on adopting this goal, to which I also aspire.

I was pleased to hear His Excellency say in his Speech that the Government recognizes the fundamental importance of rural industry in the economy and seeks to promote balanced development of the whole community, wherever people live. It is obvious that great efforts have been made since the early days to modify the isolation and loneliness experienced in the bush and to reduce the deprivations of a remote existence. One only has to recall the conditions which evoked Henry Lawson's immortal sketches to realize that progress has been made. In his inimitable way, Lawson captured the atmosphere of the small northwest township of Hungerford in the following laconic description:

One of the hungriest roads in New South Wales runs to within a couple of miles of Hungerford and stops there, then you strike through the scrub to the town.

They say that a past ministry commenced to clear the road from Bourke under the impression that Hungerford was an important place, and went on with the blindness peculiar to governments till they got within two miles of the town. Then they ran out of rum and rations. Strange to relate that government was never missed.

The country looks as though a great ash-heap had been spread out there and mulga scrub and firewood planted—and neglected. The country looks as bad for a hundred miles around Hungerford and beyond that it gets worse—a blasted barren wilderness that doesn't even howl. If it howled it would be a relief.

I believe that Burke and Wills found Hungerford and it's a pity they did.

There is another part of that wonderful story that is worth recalling to the minds of aspiring politicians—and it may be of interest to the more senior members here. In referring to the border disputes that were experienced in Hungerford in those days, Henry Lawson said:

At least, I believe that's how it is, though the man who told me might have been a liar. Another man said he was a liar, but then *he* might have been a liar himself—a third person said he was one. I heard that there was a fight over it, but the man who told me about the fight might not have been telling the truth.

I wonder sometimes whether Henry Lawson was telling the truth.

One of the civilizing forces to burst on the scene at Hungerford in future years was the New South Wales Bush Nursing Association with the opening of a centre in 1925. Apparently, despite the cheerless landscape, the citizens of the town and district were responsible enough and compassionate enough to fulfill the prerequisites of self help laid down by the association. I am familiar with this renowned organization from my thirteen years as president of the Quambone centre, but for a number of reasons I remind honourable members of its well-known name. First, the organization epitomized my philosophy on the need for improvement in the standard of living of country people which I hope to convey to this House. Second, despite Henry Lawson's lack of faith in politicians, I point out that the New South Wales Government was active in supporting the organization from its inception in 1911.

The first centre was established at Jindabyne with Mr G. T. C. Miller, M.L.A. as one of its patrons and in the same year the central organization, founded by Lady Dudley, received a handsome subsidy of £100 from the Government. This support continued through the years until in January, 1975, the work of the association was taken over by the Health Commission of New South Wales. This clearly establishes the role government can, and should, play in improving the living standards of people in isolated communities.

Third, and most important, though the Bush Nursing Association is gone, the work and the need go on. In August, 1975, the rural health working party of the Hospitals and Health Commission published a report of a seminar on rural health services at which it was established that although the medical nature of health problems were fairly uniform throughout the nation, the difficulties in obtaining treatment and relief were exacerbated by factors relating to geographic isolation. These fell into six main problem areas. The first was transport, and I quote from just one of the conclusions on this subject. I think it sums up the whole of their findings on this point. The seminar recommends that financial assistance be granted towards travel and accommodation costs of patients referred for specialist care. Obviously, there are a lot of other subjects, but this just brings out one in which country people can be disadvantaged, and I believe the present Government, and certainly this Chamber, would be sympathetic to the problems that people experience. If a person in an isolated area is referred for specialist care in Sydney the costs of accommodation—and perhaps having the children looked after back at home while one of the parents comes down to see to the needs of the other parent who is in hospital—are crippling and a daunting experience for those who go through more than the ordinary common illnesses.

Another topic was manpower, and it was observed by this seminar that health manpower deficiencies constitute one of the most serious health care problems in most rural and remote areas of Australia. I know from my own experience where the ratio of patients to doctors exceeds 6 000 persons to one medical officer in country areas of New South Wales. When this is compounded with the sort of distances travelled and the problems peculiar to organizing one's life around country living, the problems that the shortage of trained medical staff in the country engender become apparent.

The seminar recommended that assistance should be provided with regular recreation and study leave by provision of locums and relieving staff from a regional central pool. Obviously, there are difficulties that are simply not a matter of voting money to overcome them. There is the resistance of the professional 'group to going' out to live in these areas. These are things that will exercise the mind of people involved in the delivery of health care services at the present time, and I hope that we shall hear some proposals in the not-too-far-distant future which will do something to mitigate this problem.

It was also recommended on the subject of manpower—and I think this is very relevant to the observations I made about the nursing association—that there should be an extension of the role of the nurse in rural areas to stimulate the nurse's professional interest and to compensate to some extent for the shortage of doctors. I heartily agree with that. In most cases the body of nurses as a profession have proved themselves to be most responsible persons who could take a much greater part in the delivery of health services throughout New South Wales, particularly in country areas.

Another subject that was covered by the seminar was aboriginal health. Obviously, that is a subject that requires expert knowledge, of which I am not in possession. However, as one who lives in an area in which there are a great number of aborigines, I am sympathetic towards the problems they experience. The rural committee in its report recommended:

Whilst acknowledging the many factors contributing to the situation and the unique difficulties in attempting to effect the wide range of proposed solutions, participants felt immediate remedial action to be necessary.

It further recommended a comprehensive programme to improve the socio-economic structure of aboriginal groups and communities, and aimed at reducing environmental health hazards such as those associated with poor housing, poor sanitation and diet. These were telling conclusions from the seminar.

The three remaining topics mentioned in this canvass of the problems of rural health were training of staff, organization of rural health services and consumer participation, in respect of which the committee referred to the need for the receivers of health services to be in communication with those planning for the delivery of them. I agree with all of these topics and recommend them to the Government for consideration, but in the context of the speech that I am making this evening it would be impossible to canvass thoroughly the full gamut of subjects. I shall close, on the subject of rural health by saying that I shall be eagerly awaiting and strongly supporting measures to help in this problem, guided personally by the ideals of the bush nursing movement.

Transport facilities can be taken out of the context of rural health care and I should like to address some remarks to the problems confronting rural people, as distinct from metropolitan transport problems, which have been covered by other honourable members earlier in this debate. Though transport is of universal significance, I call to mind with considerable anxiety the discussion of the Coonamble shire council, of which I am a member, when we reviewed our main, trunk and tourist road programmes for the future. I regret to inform the House that on our present projections it appears it will take eighty-five years to rebuild and seal these important priority roads in our shire. During the period from 1962 to 1972—I choose that period because it relates to my election to the council—we reconstructed approximately one-third of the length of these roads. So it is with considerable interest that we observe that, with the increase in the costs of doing this work and a reduction in our allocation for main roads, we are left with approximately \$80,000 a year and the total bill ahead of us for these roads is in the order of \$7 million. If my arithmetic is correct, eighty-five years would be reasonable for the completion of our programme. I need hardly remind honourable members that in today's climate an expectation to live on a road which can be rendered untrafficable by wet weather is to suffer considerable disadvantage in social fulfilment, education, economic activity, as well as health care which I have already mentioned, and virtually all factors affecting the quality of life.

Of these factors, the area in which rural isolation is most keenly felt, certainly by parents, is education. Successive governments have striven to provide essential ingredients for education on the universal entitlement basis. Again, as with health services, the problems engendered by geographic isolation remain. This was forcefully illustrated at the recent conference of the Isolated Children's and Parents' Association in Broken Hill. I freely acknowledge the Hon. L. D. Serisier's question, which was unanswered, relating to the granting by the federal Labor Government of the isolated children and parents allowance. I give unqualified praise to any government that recognizes the needs of these people in that way, and I am sure my colleagues will also.

Honourable members will be aware that in the matter of deductibility of education expenses, it is mandatory for a taxpayer to show as part of his income the amount of money received by way of children's assistance. I regret that for most parents this is tantamount to giving with one hand and taking away with the other. At that conference, where parents aired their grievances, it became clear that they were experiencing unbelievable difficulties in educating their children. Some of them were beyond the reach of the School of the Air and had no mail services. This must be unbelievable to

people in the city. The correspondence education of their children was conducted on a monthly pick-up basis, or even at longer intervals, by the parents driving to the nearest post office, perhaps hundreds of miles away. Thousands of parents in remote areas face the problem of bringing up and educating their children. They are not in the outback and semi-arid area alone; some of them are in river valleys and pockets along the coast where one would not normally expect to find isolation.

The television programme "Four Corners" of 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1973, gave publicity to a recent survey of the educational standards attained at an intermediate high school in a township adjacent to the centre in which I live. It revealed a disturbingly low intelligence quotient and low scholastic expectation among the students. It was noticed also that these disabilities permeated the whole community. This situation can be related to the rather shocking picture of rural unemployment facing young people.

In the field of education I envisage a great public debate emerging as to the quality of our education programme as distinct from the quantity of resources available, and I shall carefully watch the progress of this debate within the profession as well as in the community at large and endeavour to relate the initiatives to the particular needs of the isolated children. May I make clear at this point that I do not think that country people are a more deserving group than any other or that the problems that I am describing have no existence or counterpart in the great metropolitan centres but simply that I am familiar with the rural connotations of these problems and I certainly shall be as sympathetic to any city aspect of these problems of which honourable members acquaint the House.

In the same way I might say that, like all responsible citizens of this State, I was deeply moved by the Henderson inquiry into poverty, and the terrible picture that it painted of life in the city for the economically deprived. However, I was increasingly disturbed by the subsidiary inquiry into rural poverty. This inquiry confirmed my belief that on a *per capita* basis, impoverished people were more/concentrated in the country towns and particularly in the villages. According to the commissioner's statistics of non-self-employed persons' income characteristics, of approximately 400 000 income units below the poverty line, 142000 were living in rural areas. In view of the imbalance of population, with large numbers of people living in the metropolitan areas, these figures should make people think of the problems affecting rural areas. In this report the following reason was advanced:

One of the main causes of low incomes in rural areas is the nature of demand for labour. In general, rural areas have markedly lower employment opportunities compared with non-rural and particularly metropolitan areas. They are characterised by a low level of demand for labour and a limited range of vacancies. Structural change is rapid in agriculture, involving displacement of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. There are fewer opportunities for women to work in part-time or full-time jobs.

The labour force has a lower level of education, training and skills. Its members are restricted from entering other labour markets in different locations by distance and lack of transport. Mobility of the labour force is further restricted in that, in a rural area with declining population and poor employment opportunities, it is difficult to sell a house at a high enough price to enable the seller to buy one in an area with good employment prospects.

Miners who have settled in Cobar now have tremendous problems in finding work. They live hundreds of miles away from similar employment. It is virtually impossible for them to sell their house in Cobar at the moment and to move away to another centre. Factors such as this should be considered by people involved in devising schemes for the relief of hardships occasioned by unemployment. The report continues:

Government policies needed to prevent and alleviate poverty among working and unemployed poor people in rural areas are those which redistribute opportunities away from metropolitan areas. These include:

- (1) Relocation of industry.
- (2) Rural employment schemes.
- (3) Retraining and possible relocation of rural workers, and

(4) Increasing educational opportunities for rural youth, in some cases close to their homes.

The incidence of poverty amongst farmers was also thoroughly investigated. The findings bear repetition. In a table of farm income units below the poverty line on a national basis it was 'shown that 12.8 percent or 30800 were below the poverty line. The real meaning of these statistics is more graphically brought to mind in the following quotation from the Musgrave *et cd* research report to the commission based on a survey in 1973 of farms on the North Coast of this State producing less than 2 700 kgs butterfat per annum, which described about 30 per cent of all dairy farmers in the region. I quote:

The situation .... is obviously serious. Most of the households had less than \$2,000 to meet their needs for a year. This was reflected in a poor standard of housing and a sub-standard diet in many cases. The linoleum in most houses had lost its pattern and it was often difficult to distinguish the colour of the paintwork. One cream producer with five dependent children claimed that his family lived mainly off fried onions. He said that he couldn't remember the last time they had eaten steak or bacon and that the only meat they could afford was pork bones.

I observe at this point that the statistics were prepared in 1973. It is significant that at that time the Hon. J. R. Hallam in his maiden speech spoke in rosy terms, to say the least, of the prospects in the rural industries generally. He commented that perhaps the canning-fruit industry alone was not facing buoyant conditions. I say this not to start an argument with the honourable gentlemen but simply to illustrate that the figures quoted for an industry can be misleading. It is the duty of those involved in public office to be mindful at all times of the lot and the plight of individuals who live within the ambit of these all-glorious statistics that roll out from time to time from those who are charged with the duty of preparing them. I am sure that no industry leader or anyone else speaking on behalf of the rural industries at that stage would have disagreed with the sentiments expressed by the Hon. J. R. Hallam.

However, the picture of poverty that I have described was amply in evidence in this region, and if one goes further into the report one will find stark poverty among farmers in all sorts of situations and in industries which, basically, have better' than-average market prospects. The hard of Grenfell whom I quoted earlier drew a great distinction between hard times in the city and in the bush in the following lines:

The idea of sleeping out might be nothing to bushmen, not even an idea; but 'dossing out' in the city and 'camping' in the bush are two very different things.

Regrettably, if any distinction can be made today, it is in the reverse order. The personal experience of poverty is equally bad in either situation and contains the same elements consisting of a lack of the vital resources for life, together with a crushing depression of will and self assurance, and a syndrome of withdrawal from society and physical and social isolation akin to imprisonment.

The particular difficulty in the country relates to the lack of facilities for rendering help and the absence of the familiar organizations whose work in the cities is such a blessing to the unfortunate people in need. At the village level, with which I am familiar, this is particularly so when, for purely logistic reasons, contact with government welfare agencies, with the St Vincent de Paul Society, with the Salvation Army, or with any other organization working in this field, becomes unlikely. In fact, the agent of some form of help might well be the local policeman and, for obvious reasons, for many people there could be some stigma in approaching him. Perhaps they have had business of a different nature with the policeman at an earlier time and find it hard to call upon him for help. This is a matter that requires: attention by those who are concerned with social welfare. Regrettably, in many cases., the victim is simply left to stew in his own juices. I hope that in future more attention will be paid to the operation of geographic isolation on what is an unacceptable social disease.

This highly significant inquiry, of, which I am sure all honourable members are ware obviously describes the unfortunate people at the opposite end of the financial spectrum to that described the other day by the Hon. J. P. Ducker as being occupied by the 'well-heeled'. For those 'who are down ait heel or down on their uppers—and I pause to reflect that these terms have lingered on from the time when the universal method of the really poor to get from place to place was walking—the concern expressed by His Excellency

about the current levels of unemployment are, I hope,' harbingers of practical measures to alleviate the suffering of those concerned.

Following His Excellency's Speech, I read with interest a press report of an address by Mr P.E.Kirby, first assistant secretary of the Commonwealth 'Department of Employment and Industrial Relations to the First National Conference on Technical and Further Education. It was said that he informed the conference that 40 per cent of persons unemployed in the Commonwealth are under-20 years of age. Other honourable members have alluded to statistics of that nature, or to statistics that parallel them. He is reported as having said that the rate for this group is four times that revealed for those over 20 years of age. The under-20's group faced a situation in which there were thirty-five registered unemployed for each vacancy. What is also highly significant is the fact revealed by Mr Kirby when he said:

The national ratio, however, discloses the fact that the ratio in different areas varies from 35 to 1 to such alarming ratios as much as 600 to 1 for unskilled junior males in non-metropolitan areas.

In such a situation I was somewhat disappointed not to see in His Excellency's Speech a reference to the electrification of the Western Division. The words included in the Speech by His Excellency's advisers were these:

Consideration is being given to ways and means of extending power supplies to rural properties in the Western Division, not at present provided with electricity.

I invite attention to a statement made by the former Minister for Mines and Minister for Energy on 21st April this year in which he foreshadowed the completion of rural electrification in New South Wales. The Minister referred particularly to -the importance of this scheme for taking up the slack in unemployment in the Cobar and Bourke shires which was then, and still is, particularly vexatious. The Minister spoke of the Government's belief that of 7 000 farms still to be connected to the power supply, 4 000 could be connected fairly quickly, and the remainder could be connected over the next three years with the exception, perhaps, of a few which, for logistic reasons, it was not feasible to provide with electricity. The statement said that provision had been made for up to \$500 annually to be made available to persons in that situation to assist with generating plants on the farm.

The importance of that initiative was not simply in the provision of electricity, which is so vital to the maintenance of a modern standard of living, but in that it offered instantly a way of giving county councils operating in that area a means by which the on-line work, which is fairly labour intensive, could be started almost immediately. I shall watch with great interest to see whether the investigation and consideration mentioned by His Excellency are speedily concluded and whether the work is undertaken soon. If it is, it will be hailed both by those who are hoping to get employment and also by those who are waiting for the lights to be turned on.

I have chosen to speak on these topics, not with the purpose of covering each subject exhaustively, but to try to acquaint honourable members with my attitudes, to indicate some of the areas where I hope progress can be made in the life of this Parliament, and to indicate my belief that the welfare of the individual, irrespective of his geographic situation, is pre-eminently important.

As a new member with but a finger's touch to the lamp that honourable members have held high over the years, may I assure the House that I shall strive unswervingly to uphold our system of universal justice and to do my utmost to safeguard the free, popular democracy that is our priceless heritage, of which, I am sure, we are custodians indeed.