

What is the whole object of a bounty or a tariff or a subsidy? It is to help a person or an industry when there is need to give help. But surely you will not continue to give that help after the problems have been overcome.

Have our problems in farming areas been overcome? Farming is one of the greatest gambles of all time. When one avenue of assistance is plugged another appears. I would be the last to say that the new-land farmers—those developing new areas—do not require assistance.

The SPEAKER: The honourable member has three minutes.

Mr McIVER: At the moment I am in the throes of liaising with the Federal Minister in Canberra to obtain subsidies for farmers in my electorate. I am positive they deserve it. But to accept it in its full concept, and to give it to every Tom, Dick, and Harry because they happen to be in the rural areas is, to my way of thinking, ludicrous; it all depends on circumstances.

What greater example can we have than the Minister for Agriculture himself? Evidently he does not need this assistance, because he does not even want an increase in his salary. Let us, for example, consider the situation of a very viable farm such as the Minister for Agriculture has; and all good luck to him, because undoubtedly he has worked extremely hard to make his farm viable.

Mr McPharlin: The first 40 years are the hardest.

Mr McIVER: But in all fairness I ask the Minister for Agriculture whether he honestly believes he should receive this subsidy, particularly when one considers the salary he receives plus the income he obtains from his farm.

Mr McPharlin: Salaries have nothing to do with a farm.

Mr Jamieson: Of course they have.

Mr McIVER: My time is running out so I will conclude my remarks.

Sir Charles Court: It is quite obvious you do not want to be the member for Avon after the next election.

Mr McIVER: The Premier said that on the last occasion, as did his deputy leader. They said the seat had been given to them on a plate, but I am still here.

For the reasons I have put forward I say to the members sitting opposite, "Do not get too comfortable in those seats because we will be back there in 1977."

**MR COWAN** (Merredin-Yilgarn) [8.19 p.m.]: Before I introduce the topic of my maiden speech I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on your appointment to the position of Speaker in this Twenty-eighth Parliament. I also wish to thank the voters of my

electorate for the confidence they had in me at the election, and I would certainly hope that after I have served my three-year term it can be said that that confidence was not misplaced.

I feel, too, that now is the proper time to pay a tribute to the previous member for Merredin-Yilgarn, Mr Jim Brown. During his term as member for the district he earned a reputation for being a tireless worker who had the problems of his electorate at heart. Unfortunately for him, however, electoral boundaries were redistributed in a manner that was unfavourable to his party, and there were also Federal political decisions which were unfavourable to the rural people, and this, I think, cost him his seat.

The subject I have chosen to speak on is education in the non-urban areas. We have seen many changes in education in the last decade. There have been changes in the standards of education; changes in policy, changes in methods of learning, and changes in methods of teaching. There have also been changes in the facilities we generally associate with education.

I would like to talk mainly of education in the country areas and discuss the trends that are developing there. As the member for Avon said, we have in the country areas a trend towards regionalism. I would like to examine this aspect and the effects it has had; together with the fact that the Education Department has recognised that not all country students wish to take on an academic career; and for this I commend the Education Department. There are quite a number of non-academic careers that country children wish to take up after leaving school. In the country areas prevocational courses for country students have been established together with agricultural wings for students who wish to turn to farming. These are all good, but I feel I must be critical, because I do not think we have gone far enough.

As an example I will refer to the regional high school in my electorate of Merredin. Here we find that one of the prevocational courses has been set up in an ordinary classroom, and this makes it difficult for asthmatics to take a woodwork course because of the wood dust that accumulates in the classroom. It is very poor indeed when education is undergoing this great change that a small matter like this should prevent children from taking a prevocational course.

Agricultural wings are also good in the case of students who are returning to the farm. They attend the agricultural wings for two years and at the end of that time receive a certificate of agriculture. But for a person who wishes to take up an off-farm career in agriculture that certificate of agriculture is useless, because it is not recognised by tertiary institutions.

In other words, if a student wishes to attend a tertiary institution such as Muresk or the university, with a view to obtaining a degree in agriculture, he would have to return and complete his academic course somewhere else. It is not possible for him to proceed from the agricultural wing to tertiary education.

Despite all these changes there has been one thing that is still common in the country areas and that is the low retention rate of students in senior high schools in comparison with those in the city schools. This is recognised in the Karmel report and is also dealt with in the green paper on rural policies which has just been published.

One of the reasons given for this lower retention rate in the country areas is the lack of boarding facilities. Boarding facilities are very poor indeed. I thought this might be a good subject to investigate and after having had a look at it I discovered that most students, when they are sent to regional centres for their fourth and fifth years, have to board privately or stay at hostels, if they are part of the 20 or 25 per cent of students who are not within daily commuting distance of these regional centres.

Accordingly I thought I would ask the Parliamentary Librarian to provide me with some statistical data on hostels, and the answer I received was that there was no statistical data available. Fortunately the Education Department sent me some information, and I was also able to procure the Act which established the country hostels, and from that I have come up with the data that most senior high schools in country areas have hostels; there are 15 in the country and they house 1180 students.

As I have said, between 20 and 25 per cent of country students are not within daily commuting distance of those senior high schools. The distance between regional senior high schools varies, but it is generally between 100 and 150 miles.

The Act under which the country high school hostels were established is the Country High School Hostels Authority Act which was passed in 1960. The authority consists of six members, three of whom are nominees of the Minister for Education, one a nominee of the Treasurer, and two are representatives of bodies that have had experience of hostels. In this case one is an Anglican Bishop and the other a person from the Country Women's Association. The authority has only one other officer attached to it from the Education Department and he acts as the secretary.

The authority is able to delegate responsibility to committees, and this it does. It delegates the responsibility of the management of hostels to the various local committees of management. On these committees we discover that the hostel warden and the headmaster of the senior high

school to which the hostel is attached usually sit *ex officio*. The authority is able to borrow money to build hostels provided the annual repayment of principal and interest on the money which has been borrowed does not exceed \$500 000. I am not sure, however, whether that is the exact figure.

My interpretation of the authority's function is that it is there to assist the Minister for Education in formulating policy, after which it assumes the responsibility to see that the policy is implemented.

I feel there are three problems we can identify with hostels. Firstly, there is a lack of facilities, and the inability to utilise fully the existing facilities; secondly, there is the lack of trained advisory staff; and, thirdly, there is the cost of hostels to parents. This cost was also brought to the notice of the House by the member for Avon who spoke before I did.

Let us consider the lack of facilities and the inability to use the existing facilities, and here I am critical of the authority established to provide the hostels in the country. Because most hostels are fully booked—I say most because there are some which are not—and because there are some very poor buildings in the hostels, we have situations where, because of the congestion, students cannot open their cupboard doors. We also have a situation where students carry out their work in shaded areas; they do not get direct access to light.

These are matters for which I feel the authority is responsible and, had the members of the authority had the necessary expertise, these problems would have been foreseen and the architect would not have been permitted to continue with the buildings in question.

I also believe there is a lack of liaison between the individual committees of management because in three hostels where new wings have been previously built—one in Merredin, one in Narrogin, and the third in Albany—we find the same problems occur. These new hostel wings were built at times apart and yet we find nobody was told of the problems in the initial buildings before the other hostels were completed.

It seems to me there is a great lack of liaison between the authority and the committees of management to whom it has delegated the responsibility to look after these hostels. I feel the authority can be charged with being rather ineffective. If one wishes to charge a group with something one must come up with a solution. I would suggest the authority appoint an executive officer from the Education Department, and that it also engage a liaison officer to work much more closely with the individual committees of management.

The second of the three problems is the lack of administrative and supervisory staff. Because of the very high turnover of

staff in hostels it seems strange to me that in this great system of ours, where education is becoming more and more important, staff for hostels has been totally overlooked. I tried to find out the qualifications necessary before a person was eligible to staff a hostel and I discovered that there was none. I think it is about time a tertiary institution commenced a course of hostel administration for the benefit of students, teachers, or any other person who wished to go to the country and undertake this type of work. Then, at least, those who have to engage staff would have some criteria on which to judge the applicants, and the applicants would also know the problems associated with hostel work, and how to solve them.

The third point is the cost to parents. Two subsidies are handed out to parents of students attending hostels. The first is a State Government subsidy of \$3 per student per week and, of course, the second is the Commonwealth living-away-from-home allowance amounting to \$350 per annum. Subject to a means test a further claim can be made for an additional \$650 but I do not know of anybody who has been able to claim that full amount. However, the subsidy of \$3 per week and \$350 per annum have brought the hostels within reach of the parents who wish to send their children away to school.

Another interesting aspect of hostels is that they are not exempt from sales tax. The Education Department and all schools are exempt from sales tax, whether the schools are private or public. Private schools have boarding houses and I am sure they would be subject to sales tax exemption. However, as I have said, hostels are not exempt and I think this matter should be looked into. I believe we should criticise, to some extent, the Country High School Hostels Authority for not bringing this matter to the attention of the Education Department.

To summarise the situation, it is my belief there is a changing attitude towards education in country areas. Farming, the same as most industries, is becoming capital intensive. The trend towards regions has meant a decline in the growth rate of population in the country. It is recognised by people living in country areas that education brings about better off-farm job opportunities, or better business management on the farms.

The Education Department has worked very hard to provide equality of opportunity in education in country areas and yet we have one aspect where country students cannot avail themselves of an opportunity. I refer to the hostels and I would like this Government to examine the problem closely and do something about it.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your tolerance. This is the first time I have ever had to speak to a group of people

other than a football team and I imagine the language I have used to football teams would not be printable and would not be acceptable in this House.

**MR BARNETT** (Rockingham) [8.34 p.m.]: I wish to take this opportunity to thank the people of Rockingham for expressing sufficient confidence in me to send me here as their representative. Because this is my first speech in the House I stand here with considerable fear and trepidation—which I believe has been the case with other members who have made maiden speeches here. When I mentioned my fears to a colleague he said—without in any way being derogatory to the Premier—

There have been many great people in this Parliament and some small ones too, some of them have even been called, "Sir"; but I never met one of them so big that his feet did not touch the ground.

It seems that at least we all have something in common and we all start off on the same footing. I can assure my constituents that they have a member of Parliament who is at all times available to give his undivided attention for the benefit of the electorate.

I would like to take the opportunity to extend my thanks to the staff of Parliament House without whose courtesy and help my first months here would have been considerably harder.

It is my duty to my constituents to outline briefly to the House some of the issues which currently concern the people of the Rockingham electorate. I understand that at this stage I should not be contentous in my remarks, because this is my maiden speech, and I will follow that advice.

Some 60 to 70 per cent of the residents of Rockingham are migrants, a large number of them being British migrants. Whilst I agree that these people have made a wise choice in coming to this great country of ours they, nonetheless, had far better educational facilities in the land of their birth than this State Government is apparently prepared to give them.

The Rockingham High School was built as a three-year high school but it now operates as a four-year high school. Students are forced to work in terribly overcrowded conditions; in fact, so bad, is the position that those children are forced to use laboratories and the library as classrooms. I think members on the Government benches will agree that to place students in such overcrowded conditions will have nothing but detrimental effects on their studies.

Next year the Rockingham High School will become a five-year high school. Conservative estimates reveal that a minimum of 450 new students will be enrolled but a new upper school block will not be constructed.