

[22 June 1993.]

HON N.D. GRIFFITHS (East Metropolitan) [7.58 pm]: Mr Deputy President, I congratulate you on your election to the position of Chairman of Committees and Deputy President; and, in his absence, I also congratulate the President on his re-election. I have two things in common with the President: First, my surname, and second, an affliction. I trust that members will bear with me.

I am indebted to the voters of the East Metropolitan Region, many individuals and the Australian Labor Party for being a member of this House. My debt is greatest to my family: My wife, Rhonda, and my four sons, Stephen, Paul, Thomas and James. My parents have been generous in their support of me. They have, I trust, instilled in me the proposition that the purpose of public office is to serve the community. I have the honour of having as a predecessor Hon Fred Evan McKenzie, who represented the people with distinction for 16 years in this House. He stood and stands for many things which are important. When he gave his word he always kept it and he set a high standard.

Hon Peter Foss: Hear, hear!

Hon N.D. GRIFFITHS: Hon Fred McKenzie was and is a champion of our railway system. In his maiden speech he spoke about the relevance of public transport and the railway system in general. He foreshadowed the electrification of the suburban railway system and the northern suburbs railway line. Those matters were fundamental to the people of Western Australia. They involved greater economic efficiency, greater overall comfort and the fostering of a better physical environment. In February 1993 all seemed well for our rail system. The Lawrence Government had approved in principle the spending of \$27m over four years for a major upgrading of the Midland Workshops. The northern suburbs line was operating, new trains were being used and the National Rail Corporation was on the horizon. The story gets better.

The Liberal and National Parties, then the Opposition coalition, promised with particular relevance to Midland to re-equip the workshops, which employed 850 people - they could not even get their numbers right then - to guarantee the long term future of the workshops, to co-locate an institute of heavy engineering at the workshops, and to invite the private sector to co-locate at the workshops site to make them into a world class facility. When the people of Swan Hills went to the polls on 6 February 1993 the Midland Workshops faced a very rosy future. They were not to know what was about to happen. In secret, a plan was considered to breach a solemn promise. After leaky performances which have already come to characterise the Court-Cowan Government, Hon Eric Charlton formally announced the breach of faith on 27 April 1993. That breach of faith was kept from backbench Government members. Like all guilty secrets it had to seep out. The people of the East Metropolitan Region, in particular the people of Midland, were poorly served in the Cabinet room. They were entitled to expect more of their local representative; their expectations were dashed.

I look forward to hearing Hon Peter Foss account for his actions in this matter. The decision to close the Midland Workshops was ideological and taken without proper economic appreciation and social responsibility. The decision stems from a lack of appreciation of the role of the public sector. The public sector is important to the development and maintenance of Australian civilisation. It plays a role in meeting economic development and enhancing the environment, making Australia a better place. Public investment and infrastructure is essential to economic growth. It contributes to productivity and provides a vital role in economic restructuring through services to industry. It deals with market failure in strategic areas. It assists in ensuring Australian ownership of important national assets. It dilutes concentration of economic power in the hands of private interests, and it ensures that essential services are publicly accountable and available at affordable prices to all Australians, regardless of where they live, particularly to low income and disadvantaged people.

In declaring war on the public sector as the Court-Cowan Government has done through the infamous Midland Workshops decision and other similar decisions, the Government has callously disregarded the adverse impact on more disadvantaged people in our society, through significant losses of employment and working conditions, and has opened itself to the disposal of public assets at undervalued prices. It has lent itself to assisting further concentration of economic power. The likelihood exists of increased foreign ownership and control. A viable public sector with viable operations such as that of the Midland Workshops is essential to the good government of Western Australia.

The Court-Cowan Government is the prisoner of a philosophy which misunderstands Australia and misreads Australian history; it downgrades Australia. The Government advances the view that the mix of institutions and

practices uniquely Australian has caused a deterioration in our relative prosperity. The negative view they espouse - upheld by Dr Hewson and his ilk - is that in the 1880s Australia was the most prosperous country in the world and in the early years of this century we somehow or other got it wrong. It is true that in the early 1880s Australia was relatively prosperous. It was the beneficiary of high prices for commodities which were produced more efficiently and profitably than they could be by its rivals because of advantages peculiar to Australia. The community got its land cheaply from the Aborigines, and Australia had abundant mineral resources.

Australia was the beneficiary of support from Britain. It was part of a very successful trading bloc. It was a high wage economy, had significant public enterprise involvement and received substantial capital inflow. The world of the 1880s ended in the 1890s. The market got it wrong. Australia was an open economy. The world capital was withdrawn and commodity prices crashed. In the 1890s the predecessors of the Court-Cowan Government sought to prop up their misplaced view of the world by reducing labour costs. Out of the misery of the 1890s arose a unique Australian civilisation; a civilisation based on protective measures, a regulation of trade with a tariff, a system of industrial arbitration and control over immigration.

Those measures did not end the openness of the Australian economy, which continued and continues to be dependent on commodities and capital inflow. The economic difficulties that visit upon Australia with regularity, as they are visited on most countries, are not the result of the civilising aspects of the early years of this century being carried on, but of the openness of the economy against which there is no real protection. When economic difficulties have been faced it has been the practice of so-called conservatives to rubbish Australia and to suggest that the solution is to lower the living standards of Australians. They do not like that which is uniquely Australian and seek to subvert it at every opportunity. I support Australian civilisation and with my colleagues will do all I can to defend its values from the attacks of the barbarians who would try to subvert it.

Australian civilisation is based on parliamentary democracy. Citizens have rights and obligations. Democracy is undermined if citizens do not exercise their rights. Similarly, it is undermined if citizens do not exercise their obligations. Any move from compulsory voting is wrong. I am sure members have heard this before, but to be democratic Parliaments should be elected on the principle of one-vote-one-value. This House is not democratically elected. The Parliament, as a whole, is not democratically elected.

The Western Australian Electoral Commission reports that at the last State election the Agricultural Region had 85 373 electors and returned five members to this House; that is, 17 075 electors per member. The Mining and Pastoral Region had 65 114 electors and returned five members; that is, 13 023 electors per member. The South West Region had 118 658 electors and returned seven members; that is, 16 951 electors per member. The East Metropolitan Region, a region of great significance which is more than ably represented, had 215 029 electors and returned five members; that is, 43 006 electors per member. The North Metropolitan Region had 309 997 electors and returned seven members; that is, 44 285 electors per member. The South Metropolitan Region had 222 579 electors and returned five members; that is, 44 516 electors per member. This House is not democratic and the lack of democracy is a serious stain on our system. The maintenance of this serious stain offends. It undermines public confidence and the integrity of the political system. If Parliament is more representative of the people - if it is more democratic - then it is less likely to accept callous, unrepresentative and dishonest decisions such as the closure of the Midland Workshops. The essence of the performance of a democratic system is in its capacity to enhance the happiness of those who live within its jurisdiction. This is an Australian view. It requires Governments to be concerned with the needy, not the greedy. The Labor Party supports this view. It supports Lazarus, not Dives. There is no such thing as a free lunch - someone pays; and there is no such thing as a free market, because someone pays. In a democratic society no-one should be given complete freedom to pursue his own material wellbeing.

A civilised Australian approach would welcome the Mabo decision, and there is nothing sinister about it. It simply puts paid to the proposition that the country was not uninhabited prior to 1788. It provides for Aboriginal so-called native title, consistent with the rulings of other common law jurisdictions. It is disappointing that some people find this objectionable. We cannot learn from history by ignoring it. The Mabo decision does provide a significant opportunity to enhance justice for Aboriginal people in areas of concern.

In recent decades Australian civilisation has changed for the better. The role of women is now acknowledged and was enhanced in this State immeasurably between 1983 and 1993. The feminist approach which promotes the equality of male and female is fundamental to civilised Australian Government, including Western Australian Government.

The family is the basic building block of our society. It is essential for the nurturing of children. A need exists for family law to be applied to common law marriages which are now called by many people de facto relationships. The common law is an inadequate vehicle for the resolution of property disputes involving people who, at common law, are husband and wife. Common law is expensive and often fails to protect those who need protection. This matter has been extensively canvassed and legislation at a State level should be introduced with minimal delay. The medium term objective should be a uniform family law throughout Australia dealing with all families, irrespective of how they come into being.

A high standard of community health is vital to all Australians. Health is not a luxury. No system devised by human beings is perfect. However, the Medicare system is a substantial success in providing for the health needs of Western Australians. This system is based on the principle of health being a community obligation. It is a proper public enterprise involvement rather than a laissez faire type approach such as that in the United States, which adopts the rule that a person can receive health care if he pays for it, otherwise he runs the risk of missing out. I am concerned that changes to the health system may be in the interests of the greedy rather than the needy. Devolution is dangerous and the market does get it wrong.

Our obligations to education are similar to our obligations to health. Australian civilisation provides that our education systems should cater for people to have the opportunity to fulfil their capacities. As in health, more than in other areas, a trickle down elitist approach does not work. Education, like health, is about a need - it is not about having it if one pays for it, something to which the Australian people gave short shrift on 13 March 1993. Here again devolution is dangerous.

Our civilised approach to employment was also expressed in the people's verdict on 13 March 1993. It is a fundamental obligation of each Australian Government to maximise employment opportunities in jobs which provide for a civilised standard of living. Australia is not a peasant society and it is not a coolie society. Australians demand, and are entitled to, decent remuneration. People in Australia and outside Australia who strive to promote their own economic wellbeing by pushing Australians down have got it wrong. The road to prosperity is not about lowering the standard of living of Australians. For example, there is no point being a small business proprietor in Western Australia if one's major market, the working Australian, does not have the wherewithal to pay for the goods or services one proposes to sell.

Fundamental to the maintenance and betterment of income and conditions of work is a strong union movement with a specialised system of conciliation and arbitration. The common law is an inadequate system for dealing with disputes between employers and employees. There is no liberty to contract where bargaining power is not equal. The real world demands a strong trade union movement. A strong trade union movement is a cornerstone of Australian civilisation and it should not be under the sorts of threats that those opposite are making.

The East Metropolitan Region is environmentally significant. Many of its people regularly look at the city from the hills and see a polluted city and suburbs. A greater use of public transport, particularly electrified rail systems, will go a long way to limiting the haze. Again, the Midland Workshops decision will inhibit the promotion and maintenance of increased public rail transport. Rail transport is important to those who do not live in or near the greater metropolitan area. Too often those who reside in country Western Australia are forgotten. The fact of their existence is often raised only when some politician seeks to divide Western Australians. A sense of greater community obligation is important to country people. Primary producers are affected greatly by weather and the terms of trade. Australia's terms of trade have been heading south since the 1950s and reached a state of near collapse in the 1980s. The wider community of Western Australia and Australia can and should contribute to the wellbeing of people in the country. It is a nonsense that Australia, with a current oversupply of labour, particularly unskilled labour, does not for example increase textile production. Processing in Australia of Australian primary produce is one of the ways forward. Our primary manufacturing and service sectors should work together.

There is no good future in conflict. To promote division between the people living in Western Australia and between Western Australians and the people living in other States of Australia is to do a disservice to all concerned. Since the State election members of the incoming Government have carped on the proposition that we who are Western Australians are somehow different from other Australians - that somehow or other the world is different when the Nullarbor is crossed. This view has become more strident following the democratic decision of the Australian people on 13 March 1993. In the mid-1970s there were those who unsuccessfully dreamt of the secession movement of the 1930s. There is no point in engaging in further fantasies of that nature. Like Fightback, it is backward stuff. It is disloyal to the country; it is disloyal to the people who make up the

country; it is un-Western Australian; and it is un-Australian. Western Australia is a State within the Federation of Australia. Many of its inhabitants come from overseas and from other parts of Australia. To engage in strident parochialism is stupid. It is true that we contribute significantly to the country's export performance as a whole. Equally it is true that the country as a whole contributes significantly to the infrastructure which enables the exports to take place and to the services that we enjoy. I am proud to be a Western Australian, but I am proud to be an Australian first. It is with great pleasure that I support the motion.

[Applause.]