

Your Excellency for the Speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

THE HON. N. McNEILL (Lower West) [7.55 p.m.]: Mr. President, in speaking on the Address-in-Reply debate I first wish to associate myself with the affirmation of loyalty which was so ably moved by Mr. House when he moved a motion in reply to the Speech with which His Excellency opened Parliament. I should like to congratulate the honourable member on his first speech in this Chamber, for he, like me, is a new member.

I also wish to express my pleasure at being elected as a member of this Chamber and I hope, with your indulgence, Sir, and that of other members, I will be able to make some contribution in this place worthy of the electors of the Lower West Province. At least I have the advantage not only of representing a great electorate but also of benefiting from the line of succession, in part, from The Hon. Jim Murray and, in addition, of being associated with a colleague who has proved his capacity for representation by his recent elevation to the Ministry. I should like to congratulate the honourable member in that regard.

I am particularly pleased that in being here I join other members who have over many years, and in their own various selected ways, contributed to the governing of Western Australia. My ventures into political life have not always followed a predictable course, but at least one can claim, I think, that they provided some useful, if not valuable, experience; and perhaps because of the various associated circumstances they are still leaving some little bits and pieces in their wake. However, in view of those experiences I feel, as one—one of a small band; and perhaps to be a little more up to date, one of a small group—who has appeared rather briefly in Canberra, and who has reappeared on the local stage, I would be failing in my responsibilities if I did not refer to a situation which has caused me, and I know other people, no small amount of concern for some considerable time—I refer to a subject which, perhaps, the angels would fear to raise; namely, Federal-State relations.

The electorate I represent, together with The Hon. G. C. MacKinnon, is already established as a most prosperous one, one in which the development of its industries—and they are many; a great many indeed—has reached a high level. Its output in terms of dairy products, for instance, and farm products generally—meat, vegetables, fruit, and the like—can, I believe, be reckoned in terms of millions. Add to this the output of timber—at present enjoying a considerable boom—and mineral production, which is not inconsiderable, and, what is perhaps the

mightiest of all, the product of labour in all its forms in the major industries—that is, in the secondary and in the service industries—and we have a position which probably could not be equalled outside the metropolitan area of this State.

All of this has enabled community development of an extremely high order which could well be the envy of a great many other areas in this State. As I say, much has happened in this area; in fact, so much has happened that I believe if given an opportunity of having a peep into the future, we would fail, for want of adequate words, to describe faithfully what could be the destiny of that region. What agricultural production as yet remains untapped? What could be the eventual development of the port of Bunbury if in the years to come it is to serve faithfully the major industries of its hinterland?

I refer only to those two in general observation at this time, because I know that members with their detailed knowledge of their own provinces will, upon due reflection, agree that what I say is right in respect of the Lower West Province, and would be right also if it were applied to all other provinces in this State. It would be right, and I think this will be conceded, because we have a great faith in Western Australia. I am sure we have a great faith in this State. If we did not believe in this I am sure members would not be present in this Chamber.

If we are to achieve the success I mentioned, that achievement, depending on the circumstances, can be rapid or slow; and perhaps like a former and most worthy representative of a part of my area many years ago—Sir John Forrest—I believe the fulfilment of so many aspirations can be achieved through the successful operation of a Federal system, a national partnership, which Mr. Wise referred to earlier in this House—a Federal system which Sir John Forrest in his day played no small part in establishing.

If I may refer to those times, not the least of the motives behind federation was the desire of the States at that time for protection, firstly from overseas influences—whether it was from military or economic circumstances—and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, from other States in terms of their commercial interests. Under no circumstances was the Commonwealth to become a dominant partner in Federation; and, in the minds of those who framed the Constitution, the rights of the States were to be protected.

One of the weapons that was perhaps forged by the founders and which has since turned out to be a most effective weapon in establishing the paramount position of the Commonwealth has been the Constitution itself in one way, because a legal document does not have ready adaptability

in cases of future needs and cannot necessarily meet the future needs which may not at all times be anticipated. This is so in another way because almost invariably, and by virtue of its position, the Commonwealth may attempt to exploit the Constitution for its own ends, whatever they may be; and the onus then remains on the State or States to challenge the validity. That has happened on numerous occasions.

I suggest it depends upon one's point of view whether this is a good or a bad thing. No doubt the Commonwealth is at all times charged with doing those things which are in the national interest. One must always remember that despite the most sincere desire on the part of the founders and framers of the Constitution to ensure the so-called sovereignty of the States—or more correctly the rights of the States—it was equally their intention that away and above State boundaries we should be one people with one destiny—in every sense a united Australian people.

I take the opportunity at this stage of referring to a recent statement of another great Australian, in my view, the Minister for External Affairs, in which he said—

One of the chief problems that faced our federation at the outset—and indeed this problem faces all federations at the moment when a federal constitution is achieved—was to evolve into a nation with a national spirit, a full national loyalty and a national outlook. We do not achieve this if we continue to think of ourselves, not as a nation, but as six islands joined by a few strings of legal terminology. We do not achieve this if we think of a Federal Government not as national Government but just as another government among many. We do not achieve this so long as we give most of our political time to talking about State rights and not enough time to thinking about national opportunities and national responsibilities.

I would say this applies equally whether one is a State politician or a State's politician in Canberra. Perhaps it is paradoxical. The founders did not want a union—a complete union. This was far from the desire of most of them, and few people today seem to be unificationists; yet today more control is being exercised by the Commonwealth to the extent that the States are becoming to a greater or lesser degree simply agencies of a central Government, of which we have already heard this session.

May I say that the States in many instances are not unwilling parties to this process. It is possible that it is sheer inevitability, but certainly some historians and constitutional lawyers would suggest that Federation is only a preparation for a unified Government. Maybe it is, after all, just another expression of the need

for State protection, because of our physical or economic circumstances, from the domination of better endowed States.

Why else does Western Australia support the principle of uniform taxation? Why does Western Australia favour in principle, or in general terms, the financial agreement between the Commonwealth and the States, the system of financial assistance grants, and so on? The answer is, clearly, it does so because under the arrangements Western Australia does receive a treatment not necessarily enjoyed by other States. Western Australia does enjoy a Commonwealth-imposed protection—a protection which it receives in the terms of the Constitution to which I have already referred.

It is far from my purpose in this place to stand alongside the Commonwealth. I have been a Western Australian for far longer than ever I was associated with Canberra. I have no intention whatever of placing myself alongside the Commonwealth in these matters, or alongside the views expressed by certain individual Ministers in any of the current controversies. I do say, however, that we cannot have it both ways. We cannot embrace and enjoy the protection and treatment we receive, and at the same time denounce the central Government for failing us in our hour of need, so to speak.

What in actual fact is happening is that while we apparently support a Federal system with the benefits it confers upon us, we are liable to play right into the hands of the unificationists. This is the whole crux of the matter. We are liable to play into the hands of those who would change the financial arrangements, and we do so by our own unwillingness to accept the very essence and expression of a Federal system working in our favour.

Too often do I read in the Press, or hear quite outside political circles, the viewpoint, almost, that the Commonwealth is intentionally neglecting Western Australia; or, by implication, that it is bent upon our destruction; or even that our elected senators and members of Parliament cease to be Western Australians once they join the Commonwealth Parliament. I do agree that some are under a disadvantage in the party they represent, but I do believe that all of them are Western Australians first and foremost, and that they play their part in this capacity and hope for the co-operation of their colleagues in this and in other States.

To illustrate this point I would like to quote from the Commonwealth Budget papers of 1964, and in particular from the White Paper dealing with the Commonwealth payments to or for the States. In this Budget paper of 1964 we find that Western Australia received total general revenue grants of £43,800,000 compared with South Australia's £39,000,000, Queensland's £50,000,000, New South Wales'

£115,000,000, and Victoria's £85,000,000. The total payments include specific purposes funds of £69,200,000 for Western Australia, compared with £55,000,000 for South Australia, £76,000,000 for Queensland, £157,000,000 for New South Wales, and £113,000,000 for Victoria.

These are, I think, fairly striking, but they are more striking in my view if they are calculated on a population basis. On this basis they work out to Victoria receiving £36 per head of population; New South Wales £37 per head of population; Queensland £47 per head of population; South Australia £53 per head of population, and Western Australia £86 per head of population. The estimated total Commonwealth commitment on special State projects beyond 1963-64 is as follows:—

New South Wales £17,300,000;
Queensland £12,800,000;
South Australia £21,900,000;
Tasmania £2,300,000;
Western Australia £45,800,000.

Western Australia's figure is twice as much as that of any other State. I suggest these figures adequately illustrate the point I wish to make, which may be contrary to the thoughts that some members have in mind.

The point I wish to make is that we can receive recognition of our disabilities by the presentation of well substantiated facts, and by the insistence through co-operative methods that Western Australian resources are a national asset and should be viewed in that light. There is in my view a great need for pride in one's State, but no room for parochialism. There is the need for State solvency in a Commonwealth, but no place, surely, for subjecting this to the petty party or personal aspirations at a national level.

There remain great problems in development as it affects agriculture, industry, and the community generally in the Lower West Province; and it is my belief that these problems can best be overcome—in fact can only be overcome in these days of financial arrangements, and so on—by mutual co-operation with the Federal system, and by continued good government in this State—and it is good government—in conjunction with an effectively operating and satisfactory Federal system.

Debate adjourned, on motion by The Hon. W. F. Willesee.

House adjourned at 8.15 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, the 4th August, 1965

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