

that, once more, it becomes the main spring to this new period of growth.

We in Western Australia are most fortunate in another area. We have one of the most successful systems of parliamentary democracy in the world today. Each of us can claim a greater degree of political, economic, social, and religious freedom than citizens in almost any other country of the world. Our freedom seems so secure that it is well for us to remember that, even at this very time in other parts of the world in other countries which are less fortunate with their political systems, men and women are being tortured and are dying in an attempt to win or defend the basic rights which we in this country take so much for granted.

If we do not value our basic rights sufficiently, they will slowly but surely be eroded by those forces whose objective is to replace our current political system with that of a totally alien political philosophy. It is interesting to see how attempts are made to bring about such change in other parts of the world. The steps seem relatively clear: firstly, the objective seems to be to bring about economic disruption and a debasement of the rule of law. The next step appears to be the promotion of antagonism and hatred between different sections of the community. This is then fuelled through the action of urban terrorism. This process is supposed to, and in fact sometimes does, lead to a situation of such instability that revolution takes place and an all-controlling totalitarian Government replaces the previous system. In doing so, it exerts such strength of control that it removes virtually individual freedom.

Our principal protection against such a downhill slide—the most effective guarantee which will allow us to retain our present degree of freedom—is the repute and stature of this Parliament. The laws passed by this House represent a framework of guarantees. They guarantee the rights of every individual within our community. Therefore, no section of our society should seek to set itself above the law, either through its economic power or as a result of racial or religious origins. If such an attempt is made, the section of society concerned seeks to set itself apart from the rest of the community and, in doing so, it seeks privilege, not equality. Any achievement of such privilege is contrary to the democratic freedom of the whole community. In addition, it provides the basis for dissension and hatred, the fuels of revolution and human misery.

However, Sir, it is interesting to note that many of those who protest about alleged injustice and inequality also profess a political philosophy which, where it has been put into practice

elsewhere in this world, has produced totalitarian and repressive regimes whose citizens are virtually devoid of all human rights and freedom.

We should be very careful of the superficial persuasiveness of such wolves in sheep's clothing. We must be very careful that, in grasping for that little bit more, we do not stand to lose most, or all, of what we have now.

It is the responsibility of this Parliament in representing the people of Western Australia to ensure that we progress through the 1980s on the strong foundation that we now have and, through leadership and good government, achieve for this State the true potential which lies before us.

[Applause.]

MR BRIDGE (Kimberley) [3.01 p.m.]: Before proceeding to take part in this Address-in-Reply debate, Mr Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to express to you personally my congratulations on your being re-elected to the very high office that you hold.

On the first day of Parliament I was told that it was the first time for a very long time that a ballot was used for the purpose of determining the position of speakership. Having gone through that ballot so successfully is evidence and a source of satisfaction to you to know that the House indeed holds you in high esteem. The House has accorded you its confidence.

I would also like to thank other members of this Parliament most sincerely. When I first came to this Parliament I was met by a great number of people from all parties and the warmth and kindness that has been extended to me on the few days I have been here is something I shall remember for a long time.

It is not an easy task for a bushman who comes to town and to a place such as this and suddenly finds the surroundings unfamiliar. It was indeed a great satisfaction and a comfort for me to have such friendly people greeting me as has taken place over the last few days.

I also extend my appreciation and thanks to the staff of this House. Again, like other members of Parliament I have had a great deal of support and encouragement from all members of the staff in this House, particularly the gentlemen at the front entrance. They have always been kind to me and given me assurance, especially when I came into this place for the first time. I appreciate the support and encouragement which has been extended to me by all the members in this House.

I would also like to thank my wife for the support and encouragement given to me through

the many difficult times I experienced in reaching this place.

Last, but not least, I wish to mention the members of the electorate of Kimberley. It is the place in which my thoughts are at the moment and I wish to extend to my electorate and the people there my sincere thanks and appreciation for the tremendous dedication and support given to me over the many hard times I went through in attempting to become a member of Parliament.

However, having made it to this House I stand here with a great deal of satisfaction, and the support of my electorate was a great encouragement to me.

As the first Aboriginal member of the Houses of Parliament in Western Australia it is important that I should reflect upon some of the matters that unfolded over the days that led up to my ultimate success and entry to Parliament. I think it is essential that I do that, particularly in the light of some of the events I have had the misfortune to have been associated with. I think it is important that the facts are presented. This Parliament would be very much better off if I could clear up a few points.

I was stunned a couple of years ago when I saw before my own eyes some of the incidents which I will highlight now. In highlighting these points I wish to show that there are some people in our society who face certain hardships.

My first example is of an aged man who walked into one of the polling centres in the Kimberley for the purpose of exercising what he considered to be a vote in that election. Having arrived there, he was confronted with a barrage of questions, one being, "How old are you?" Not understanding the terminology in the Statute book which states affirmative or otherwise, he said he was an old man rather than answering the question. He was immediately ejected from the polling centre and told to go home.

There was another occasion where several people broke down and cried in the polling centres because of the pressures placed on them. Another case, one which has been documented a number of times—the Turkey Creek incident—was where people actually waded a flooded river in their attempt to vote. Having waded across the creek, despite the fact it was running chest high which indicates the flow was strong, they were not given any assistance to vote and as a consequence a large number of informal votes were recorded.

We have heard today a number of comments about the irresponsibility and illiteracy of many of these people. Despite all these problems, these people want their true thoughts known. These

people faced two elections and had to go before a Court of Disputed Returns and give evidence. They were subjected to a considerable amount of harassment by way of cross-examination. However, they pursued the whole process with bravery and considerable dignity to the point where at the end, at the last election, they went to the polling booths on their own to cast a valid vote.

Members would have read about those people who chose not to go to the polling centre and applied for a postal vote, only to find they were carted away in a paddy wagon to explain the reason for their application. Perhaps that matter is something we can debate on some future occasion.

Having highlighted those points, there could perhaps be the response from a number of people who would say that I am discussing generally the happenings with Aboriginal people who in the main are illiterate.

Just in case that is the general view held by people, I would like to mention a couple of things I have personally encountered on my road towards this House of Parliament.

It would be a rare occasion if anywhere in Australia people would say that Ernie Bridge is one of those illiterate people. I do not think that is the general view of myself. Certainly the friendship and support I have received from people would discount that view.

About 20 years ago when I first became a member of the Halls Creek Shire Council a comment was made about me, and I wish to mention it because it demonstrates some of the feelings that existed then and still exist today. This comment illustrates the sort of attitudes which prevail. It was said then that the Halls Creek Shire Council had been a very good shire council but it was now going to be bad. The reason given was that there was "a boong" sitting in the chair.

Some time after there was an attempt to try to obtain an extract of my birth certificate because I was a part-Aboriginal—as it was termed. The purpose was to see if, from the extract of my birth certificate, it could be proven in some way that I was ineligible to be president of the shire council.

There was another occasion more recently concerning a very dear friend of mine, the late Mr C. L. McBeath, who was very well known to members of the Government and members of the Opposition—and he was a very close friend of my grandfather, my father, and my immediate family—and who during the course of the last couple of years took it upon himself to assist me

electorally. While he was assisting me he was approached in front of his home and actually told that he ought to remove from his car a sticker displaying a photograph of me and stating that Ernie Bridge was the ALP candidate for Kimberley. This occurred six months after the election. It is ironical because today, six months after the election, I see stickers of a similar nature still attached to cars. Yet, my friend was almost forcibly required to remove the sticker from his car. So it will be seen that during the years I have been in public life, and treading the path towards this House, it has not been an entirely easy process.

When we hear comments such as those we have heard during the last couple of days, about the plight of certain people in our society, it is important to address ourselves to the problems and difficult times faced by those people. I was rather interested in a comment made recently at a Liberal Party conference by Senator Chaney, a Liberal Minister in the Federal Parliament. I quote the comments of Senator Chaney as follows—

Statistics showed that the people most in want were the aborigines.

They had the highest death rate and a much higher infant-mortality rate, their unemployment rate was at least four times that of the general population, they suffered ill health much more and they were the least well housed.

Aboriginal people were the most deprived in Australia.

During the last couple of days I have sat in this place and listened and observed closely the comments of certain members. In the main, I have been quite concerned with what I have heard. Of all the places in our society I believe this is the one place where there should be a degree of honesty and a demonstration of conscience which are so important. We should discharge that responsibility not only to ourselves, but also to the electors who put us here. In that context, I was quite amazed with the comment I heard that the culture of Aboriginal people had been abandoned some 30-odd years ago.

I would like to quote from a report recently handed to me by Dr Kevin O'Dea. The doctor's comments were as follows—

I personally learnt an enormous amount from them concerning their traditional foods and the methods used in their preparation. I found them patient and thorough teachers—delighted to be able to share their knowledge in this way.

And this is a thought which the Minister for Cultural Affairs probably could digest very closely. To continue—

I was surprised at how much many of the young people knew about their traditional culture and lifestyle—and how important they considered it to be. Nevertheless detailed knowledge of traditional life does seem to rest more with the older Aborigines.

Dr Kevin O'Dea went on to say—

In the bush environment all the aborigines appeared relaxed and happy. The demands of hunting and gathering kept them busy and seemed to give them a great deal of satisfaction.

We have heard comments that Aboriginal people, in the main, do a considerable amount of drinking and play a lot of card games, and one could easily get the impression that apart from those exercises they do very little else.

At a time when probably it is more important than it ever was previously for this Parliament to adopt and stick rigidly to the Aboriginal understanding of the "live and let live" concept it is sad to hear some of the comments made in this place. It is not true to say that some of the things that it is alleged have happened have, in fact, happened. It stands to reason that if those events were happening, in the way stated in this House, it is very unlikely that the families concerned would survive, let alone carry on in the way claimed. However, they are surviving effectively and in many instances they are rearing large families.

It is very important—absolutely important—that we stick to reality in the statements we make in this House, and that we be very careful with regard to facts. It does not matter really what we think about certain things; what we actually say has to be understood when it is reported. There is nothing worse than making non-factual statements, and having them reported.

We as members of Parliament, and as leaders in our society, should not make public statements without doing sufficient homework. Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I urge members of this Parliament, in the days to come, to give very serious regard to what I have said.

There is much talk about the way Aboriginal people perform, and their inability to accept responsibility, and that kind of thing. A fundamental way of looking at the lifestyle of Aboriginal people is to remember that opportunity brings with it responsibility. At the

moment, the opportunities which the Aboriginal people want are not available.

Unemployment is a problem of enormous magnitude. I appreciate that the problem does not apply only to Aboriginal people, but it is a greater problem in areas where there is a large Aboriginal population, such as in the Kimberley. It is a problem which shire councils and local government, in the past, have faced and have not tried to run away from. They have attempted very seriously to do something about it. Unfortunately, there has not been a great deal of success. I will quote again from the remarks of Dr Kevin O'Dea as follows—

My overall impression was that many of the problems of fringe-dwelling aborigines stem from boredom and lack of a sense of purpose.

The extremely high level of unemployment among young aborigines is a serious problem. Many of the people I was closely associated with expressed a desire to work—but opportunities are almost non-existent. This problem seems to be particularly acute among young women.

If a formula could be devised to describe their present fringe-dwelling situation it would go something like this—

Unemployment = boredom = drinking
 = not enough money to spend on nutritious food = malnutrition (in the sense of poor diet rather than not enough calories) = heightened susceptibility to infection and a range of other diseases.

Quite clearly, we all have a very real responsibility to do something to alleviate the problem which exists not just among the Aboriginal people in the Kimberley but indeed throughout the whole of society.

When we speak about Aborigines and unemployment, I must comment on one matter. There is a tendency for people to say, "Well, they don't want to work anyway, so why worry about creating job opportunities for them?" The point is, that just is not true, and I will illustrate why. From 1973 to 1975 a couple of schemes funded by the Federal Government of the day were operating; namely, the RED scheme and the special work scheme. At that time at Halls Creek alone 92 people were gainfully employed with the shire council and the number unemployed was six. Some time after the schemes were terminated, the position reversed to the point where 170 people were unemployed and 10 were employed. That illustrates that when an opportunity is created

and provided for people to be engaged in meaningful work, it will be accepted.

I will take the matter of the responsibility—or, as some people term it, the irresponsibility—of Aborigines a little further. I believe they have great difficulty in winning, no matter where or under what circumstances. For instance, the Noonkanbah community attempted to do three things: firstly, to get away from the social problems at Fitzroy Crossing; secondly, to re-establish themselves as a base structure and an entity; and, thirdly, to operate the property as a pastoral enterprise. Those were the fundamental and important objectives of that particular community when it set out to go to Noonkanbah.

Let us have a look at what has happened to the community at Noonkanbah. They have been told that they do terrible things, that they breach the law, that they are unreasonable almost to the point of being bizarre, and in effect that unless they change their attitude they face the prospect of being arrested and so on. That is the kind of difficulty confronting those people. Yet, we have always said the very thing they ought to be doing is establishing themselves in such a community. I think society should reflect on its condemnation and attacking of people who are in the fringe-dwelling situation. As I see it, it would not take much more for those people to give up and perhaps go back into town and drink. What are the alternatives for people of that kind when they are faced with those circumstances?

However, amid all those pressures going back as long as about three years ago, in the main they have stood positively and responsibly and have tried to come to grips with the problem and explain what is happening at Noonkanbah. Instead of being ridiculed by a large section of society, as is the case, they should be applauded for the noble way they have been going about trying to get across to the community at large a realisation and understanding that something is very precious and important to them and they are very fearful about the loss of it. All they are saying is, "Please understand us."

I was very interested to hear the proposal put forward by the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Senator Chaney) for a formula or some kind of mechanism to resolve problems and difficulties such as those which have arisen in the Noonkanbah dispute. Senator Chaney has come under a degree of criticism from certain members of this House, but I want to say I am one who supports his attempts 100 per cent, because he has a positive attitude towards the situation, which is very complex and needs to be looked at

objectively. At the moment, we do not have the mechanism which is required, as has been proved.

Despite the good intentions of legislation such as the Aboriginal Heritage Act, it has not been able to stand up to the complex situation at Noonkanbah. I believe it has been used quite wrongly.

The Minister for Cultural Affairs has spoken about the build-up of pressure in the Northern Territory. I do not dispute that what he has said is true, but I think it stands to reason that, when there emerges an Act of Parliament such as the one applying in the Northern Territory which gives a section of society certain opportunities to achieve success or progress, human nature itself will inevitably ensure there is a reaction, particularly in areas where it is seen by many people as a threat to those who have a vested interest. But I believe it is important that, despite that kind of reaction, we face up to the inevitable changes. I often quote some words from a song I sing occasionally, which I think have a ring of truth; that is, "There are some things a man can't fight." The quicker we acknowledge it and work towards that goal, the quicker we will reach the point where fewer people in our society are threatened with dislocation and so on.

Many people say the Aborigines want land rights and Europeans are thereby threatened. That is true, but if we look at the matter objectively and do not see it as a concession beyond some form of equity, where is the danger in it? The whole purpose of our planning structure should be to give people the opportunity to achieve equity, not to keep some as disadvantaged people. The Aboriginal people in the main have been disadvantaged, and I am sure no member here would dispute that.

As a matter of fact, it is interesting to note that 24 years ago the Minister for Cultural Affairs had to draw attention to the apparently noble proposition that it was possible Aboriginal mothers could show affection for their children. In other words, until then some Aboriginal people were not even considered to be human beings because they were not thought to be capable of showing affection for their children. Those were the words of the Minister for Cultural Affairs about 24 years ago. It is rather a tragedy that people have to be told something like that.

Having made those comments, I will proceed to other matters which affect directly the electorate of Kimberley. I have heard comments about the provision of health services in Western Australia. There are those who say that the provision of health services in Western Australia is fairly

satisfactory and that we ought not to worry greatly about the criticisms being made. I differ from these opinions. There are areas of Western Australia where the health situation is appalling. Although I acknowledge that the Government has faced up to its responsibilities, and indeed, in some instances it has recognised that the health problems are serious, a great deal still remains to be accomplished.

Let us look at some of the statistics. The incidence of diabetes in the Australian population is about 2 to 3 per cent, but it is often 10 times as great amongst the fringe dwellers and the urban Aboriginal communities. Diabetes is associated with a number of other conditions including heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, and poor wound healing.

A survey has been conducted in the Kimberley by Bastion, an organisation with which Dr Kevin O'Dea is associated. This survey revealed that the incidence of diabetes amongst Aborigines over the age of 21 years is between 15 and 20 per cent.

I would like to draw to the attention of members of this House the situation presently existing at the Derby Regional Hospital. The hospital has a modern up-to-date operating theatre, and an outstanding surgeon, but it is rather frightening to go into the general ward of this hospital.

A large percentage of the patients of the Derby Regional Hospital are accommodated in the corridor of the general ward. Certainly such a situation should not be tolerated.

The Cundelee Reserve is an example of another appalling situation. I do not think I would be exaggerating if I were to say that a wild pig would almost suffer a heart attack if it were asked to live at the Cundelee Mission. That analogy will show members how disgraceful conditions are there.

We must consider the overall picture. There is a great need for the establishment of a tropical medicine centre in the Kimberley. Peculiar conditions exist in the tropical parts of Australia, and the needs of the residents could best be served by the location of such a centre there.

I would like to make it clear that I am not, in the main, criticising the work of those involved in the health field in the region. I believe they do a very good job, but the services provided are purely of a palliative nature, and the problems will remain unless they are treated more seriously.

The Kimberley region has faced a terrible battering through constant increases in the cost of living. Fuel prices are increasing with monotonous regularity, and this is having a devastating effect

on local businesses. The price rise in aviation fuel is reflected in high air fares, and we must question how long the light aircraft industry can survive.

It is interesting that as long ago as 1924 the member for Kimberley spoke in this House of the need for cheaper air fares to help overcome the problems of isolation in the Kimberley, and yet here today, in 1980, the problem remains—indeed the problem is largely unchanged.

The Government must consider seriously the possibility of greater help for the pastoral industry. Probably this statement would apply to the State as a whole, but today I will refer to the pastoral industry in the Kimberley area in particular. It is beyond dispute that this is the most important industry in the Kimberley, and it will continue to hold this position despite the comments we hear at regular intervals about the value of mineral exploration, ore discoveries, and the like. The pastoral industry has stood the test of time pretty well, particularly in the light of all the difficulties it has faced. We must pay more attention to this industry for, in my opinion, it will remain the backbone of the Kimberley for a long time to come.

I have been interested in the pastoral industry all my life, and over the last 21 years I have seen many changes unfold. In many cases the man operating a small property as a family unit has been squeezed out of the industry. Over that period some 15 or 20 small properties have been phased out.

The recent rental appraisals were a severe blow to many pastoral people in the north. The rental on some of the properties in North Kimberley was increased by as much as 100 per cent. A new rental structure basis was established by the Government, and it applied to all pastoral properties. This appeared to be a fair decision, but some of the properties in North Kimberley do not enjoy the same proportion of usable land as do other properties. For instance, the properties in North Kimberley do not have as much river frontage and so people operating these properties have more problems. However, they were required to face up to the same rental increase as those operating properties with good river frontages. This is a very unfair situation.

Isolation is still our greatest companion in the Kimberley—a companion that has been with us since the area was first settled. No doubt it will be with us for a long time yet. It is important for any Government to cut down on the degree of isolation.

Members may query my statement when I say to this House that I believe the people of the Kimberley are more isolated today than they were five or 10 years ago. However, I believe this statement to be true.

If anyone were to visit the people in the area to ask them about their ability to travel south and their ability to communicate with other people of the area, he would discover that the people believe they are facing more difficulties now than in the past. I believe that other members representing country electorates will agree with my comments.

We really must face up to this problem. I do not say that I know the answer to it, but at least we must make a positive and direct attack on spiralling costs in remote areas. Certainly the Kimberley has all the wonderful things people talk about, such as the climate, the sun, and the wonderful scenery. However, these things do not mean much when one is faced constantly with cost increases so that it becomes difficult to survive. Incentives play a very important part in attracting people to the north, and when the incentives are eroded, such places become less attractive.

Without a doubt, communication has been one of the great concerns of my electorate in the last few years. I would be absolutely correct in saying it is the greatest ramshackle system imaginable; I do not think I could go much further than that in respect of its description. The delays and difficulties one experiences in communicating with the outside world are well known to most people, but at the same time it is a matter of great concern to the people of the north.

We have other industries that could easily be supported—and I believe should be supported—to enable greater expansion. Tourism is one such industry. Again, for some years now both Labor Governments and Liberal coalition Governments have indicated there is a need for the expansion of tourism in the north, but so far we have not made the progress which I think is available to us. There are some wonderful places in the north that are still untapped in terms of tourism. Mind you, Sir, the Federal Government has not assisted us with its fuel pricing policy, because it has really lessened the ability of caravan tourists to travel to the north.

I enter this House recognising that I have a responsibility to all members of the electorate; in other words, I guess it is fair to say that I enter this House clearly wearing two hats. The Aboriginal people of the Kimberley are looking to me to project into this House an understanding of their problems and an understanding of their

needs; they are looking to me to try to get the House to recognise their problems. However, just as I am committed to doing that, I fully appreciate that the Caucasian people of the Kimberley similarly expect from me that kind of representation.

I make it clear to the House that I will do the best I can in the days to come to satisfy the people who have elected me to this position.

As Parliament commences a new term, I see before us a number of challenging tasks which this Chamber will be required to face up to with great responsibility; but above all, it must be faced up to in a very honest way—that is absolutely essential. The electors of Kimberley are not likely to demand or expect miracles, but they do expect that Parliament will address itself to their concern in what I believe should be a fair-dinkum way.

[Applause.]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Clarko): The Speaker has requested me to read to the House the following message which he has written—

I understand it is the desire of members that the replies to questions on notice today should be handed in, rather than answered orally.

I shall call upon each Minister in turn to hand in his or her replies. At this time the Minister should indicate whether the postponement of any question is required and also indicate what papers, if any, are being presented for tabling.

MR E. T. EVANS (Kalgoorlie) [3.43 p.m.]: As I rise to speak in this debate, if I speak a little loudly it is to speak over the thumping of my heart. I am extremely nervous. Many members on this side of the House have told me that they were nervous when they delivered their maiden speech; in fact, I believe it is a tradition that a member be nervous when delivering his maiden speech, and I would not like to break a tradition.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Speaker, in his absence, on being elected to that high office once again. As other members have said, I have no doubt he will act in an impartial and competent manner.

I would like to pay the highest possible tribute to my predecessor (Mr Tom Evans). He was first elected to this House in 1956 and represented Kalgoorlie with the utmost distinction until retiring of his own accord prior to the 1980 election. Not only was he a popular, well-known, and respected figure in Kalgoorlie and one of the great parliamentarians on this side of the House

since the war, but also he rose to great heights in the Parliament. Many members will well recall that he held the portfolios of Attorney General, Treasurer, and Minister for Education in the Tonkin Government.

Mr McIver: Hear, hear!

Mr E. T. EVANS: Indeed, he has left me a very hard act to follow. I would like to offer my thanks to the people of Kalgoorlie for giving me the honour of representing them and following in Tom's footsteps. I assure the people of Kalgoorlie that although they have got another Evans—another "Good 'eavens, not another Evans"—they have also got a full-time, conscientious politician available to them at any time.

Along with the previous speaker, I would like to thank the staff of Parliament House. Unless one is a country member, I do not think one can really appreciate just what the staff do. No-one has been lost more times than I have when walking around the corridors; I have said, "Good day" to the same fellow three times after walking in and out of the same door on several occasions! I thank every member of the staff of Parliament House for their assistance.

I would really like now to speak about my electorate. The electorate of Kalgoorlie not only sits on the famous Golden Mile, but also it is the centre of one of the richest mineral provinces in the world.

At the moment in Kalgoorlie there is an air of optimism which is higher than I can remember in my life; and I was born in the area and have lived there since 1939. My grandfather arrived at Kalgoorlie six months after Paddy Hannan, so I feel qualified to talk about Kalgoorlie, its prospects, its potential, its hopes, and some of its problems.

As I said, we have high optimism in Kalgoorlie. We now have a gold price approaching \$600 an ounce. Three or four years ago I would have been laughed out of town had I said in Hannan Street that the price would reach \$500 an ounce. Many people are now saying they knew the price would go that high, but at the time I did not think it would. However, the price is up there, and this has caused the tremendous potential and development in the area.

I would like to take this opportunity to bore you, Mr Deputy Speaker, with a few figures, because they are very important to my electorate. The Golden Mile is in the process of being redeveloped. Kalgoorlie Mining Associates, a consortium consisting of Kalgoorlie Lake View Pty. Ltd., Homestake Gold of America, and