



Wilfred Bert Bonde

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr BONDE (Braddon) – It gives me much pleasure to speak in this debate. I thought when I came here I knew a little about agriculture, but during the past fifteen or twenty minutes I have been absolutely humbled by the knowledge and ability of the member for Lyons. The only problem is that he has handled a different bull to the one I have been handling.

Government members laughing.

Mr BONDE – I would like to express some of my concerns as a member of this House and comment on some of the areas of interest I have. I would also like to express my intention to pursue solutions to the problems in these areas.

The first area of concern is the dilemma of our productive industries and particularly our agricultural industry. We have heard a great deal about it tonight but it will not hurt to hear some more. The members of this House have no doubt heard much rhetoric about this industry, but I wonder if they really understand the drop in net trading terms of the various commodities. In order that they are able to understand – and I ask the member for Lyons to pay careful attention to this because he obviously does not know anything about it – the drop in prices in terms of the comparison between those prices of, say, 30 years ago compared to the basic wage, when there was a conservative government in power in the Federal sphere, and the comparison with the wages of today, I remind members that 30 years ago a 48-hour week was the order of the day – again under a conservative government – and, of course, there is a 40-hour week today. Further to that, when a worker went to work 30 years ago, he went to work rather than for the appearance money which some people are lucky enough to collect today.

I also remind members that the agricultural industry is our major industry contributing some 47 per cent of our net wealth. Farm labourers 30 years ago – and the member for Lyons will identify with this – were paid £13 per week for 48 hours. Incidentally, I identify with it too because I was paid the same salary. Farmers were paid approximately £8 for a prime lamb and sometimes up to £12 for an early lamb. This meant that the farmer had to sell only one and a half lambs to pay for one labour unit for the week as compared to a lamb price of approximately \$15 and a wage of around \$280 for a 40-hour week today. That means the farmer of today would have to sell nineteen lambs to pay the wages for one man for one week. That is an increase in the volume of product to be sold of some 1 200 per cent. That will give members some idea of the drop, in trading terms, in the lamb industry.

A similar position exists in the dairy industry where 30 years ago butterfat was 5 shillings a pound. Wages were £13 a week which meant 26 pounds, or 12 kilo, of butterfat had to be sold to pay one wage for one week. Today it would be necessary to sell approximately 96 kilos of butterfat to pay that wage for a shorter week. That is an increase of 800 per cent needed to pay the wages for one week. Is it any wonder that dairy farmers in this State are feeling the pinch?

Take peas for instance. Thirty years ago peas were sixpence a pound which meant that a farmer had to produce 520 pounds, or 250 kilos, to pay a week's wages. Now he would have to produce 1 400 kilos to pay the same week's wages, an increase of 650 per cent. The same can be said for almost any vegetable grown for processing in this State and in fact throughout Australia. We have seen the farmer's share of the consumer dollar drop from 33 per cent 30 years ago to less than 10 per cent today.

Members will note that I have drawn a comparison on wages paid for farm labour but of course if we compare the prices of today with urban wages the position is much worse. A mechanic would cost nearly 2 lambs per hour whereas 30 years ago a horse farrier – which is probably more appropriate – would earn only 1.5 lambs per week and a mechanic would earn no more.

I think these illustrations demonstrate the tremendous benefits the rest of the community has received for the losses in trading terms of the primary producers of this country. It is only their tremendous ability to increase their efficiency and their capacity to work which has kept them solvent at all. Every increase in efficiency has been gobbled up by a community which has always ridden on the farmers' backs and is now riding them into the soil they manage and till. If members consider carefully what I have said they will see that it is quite hypocritical for this community to respond to pleas for a fair go for farmers with advice to become more efficient. These people have increased their efficiency by approximately 600 per cent more than the rest of the community over the past 30 years, as indicated by the terms of trade I have outlined tonight.

I am amazed and horrified at the apparent lack of understanding of the primary industry of a speaker in this House yesterday. I am amazed that a person could live in this State and know so little about its major industry and I am horrified that the same person is the shadow minister for primary industry and has expressed an aspiration to be Premier of this State in years to come. Does he not know that most farmers in this State have earned their farms the hard way and still owe quite substantial sums of money on these properties? I realise he is one of these gentleman farmers he speaks about but I would have thought he would have known better than to make the remarks he did.

Thinking farmers in this State vote Liberal because they recognise that the Australian Labor Party is an urban-based, anti-rule, union-controlled, socialist party which sees the farmers and small businessmen of Australia as capitalists, as was mentioned yesterday – probably at this stage they would be 20 per cent capitalists not 2 shilling capitalists, as was quoted yesterday – and it will do all it can to destroy them.

I am amused at the claims made yesterday that all initiatives of the Labor Party benefit farmers. I noted with interest that no mention was made of disadvantages to farmers as the result of Labor Party policy in the Federal arena. For instance, no mention was

made of the removal of all the compensation to farmers – not subsidies but compensation – for disadvantage suffered as a result of tariff protection for the manufacturing sector of this country on input costs such as butterfat and superphosphate bounties. These were taken off by a Labor government in 1972 in spite of the world trends with regard to protection for primary industry and in spite of the impost of tariff protection at that time.

During the 1975 depression in rural Australia the only response to farmers' pleas to the Labor Party of the day for assistance was for the big white chief to inform them that they had never had it so good. That was an extremely callous thing to say at a time when farm gate prices had fallen over 50 per cent – and in some cases 80 per cent – leaving many farmers facing financial ruin. At that time we heard a great deal about the so-called Pitt Street farmer and we have heard more about him tonight. I have never listened to such rubbish in all my life as was stated tonight and as is stated on every occasion that the Labor Party is in power and farmers get into trouble. It is the greatest red herring of all time. It was claimed the Pitt Street farmer was responsible in part at least for the problem as he caused an oversupply of product and was therefore enemy number one to all farmers. That same proposition has been put today. It is as much a fabrication today as it was in the mid 1970s.

The fact of the matter is that the Labor Party's policies depend on some sector of the community's working for nothing so that it can provide something for nothing to other sectors of the community and thereby win their votes. The community has a vested interest in an oversupply of a primary industry raw material, particularly the agricultural products, because the law of supply and demand forces the prices down. At the same time the input or production costs at best remain stable and in most cases increase at a rate which bears no relation to the state of the economy of the industry in which they are used. The same goes for the cost ex-farm, such as processing, transport and marketing. The only loser in the whole deal is the farmer who produces the oversupply. The result of this is that there is no money going into the maintenance of the agricultural industry at that time.

I believe the Pitt Street farmer provides a much-needed market for rural property at this time of downturn, not to mention the very considerable sums of money some of the smarter farmers manage to extract from them in their day-to-day trading. This money at least goes into the productive industry in the country rather than into unproductive bricks and mortar in the city. For that reason, I see the latest tax provisions of the present Labor Government as discriminating once again against the rural industry in this country. If one is a businessman with diverse interests in the city, some losing money and some making money, he would count his losses against the gains and be taxed accordingly. But if he wants to have agriculture as part of his business he would count only part of those losses against the gains. The same would go for all off-farm income.

One of the biggest problems facing farmers is the high interest rates which prevail today. This again is the fault of the Federal Labor Government and its financial mismanagement. It has been involved in the greatest spending spree of all time, and again the farmers and the small business people are paying the cost. They are the only people in this community still silly enough to work for the fun of it and allow all the costs to be passed on to them.

I conclude this section of my speech on the motion for the Address-in-Reply by saying to the members of this House, ‘Do not look to farmers and small business to help you out any further. You have eaten all the meat off their bones over the past few years and you are now well into the skeleton’.

In passing might I mention, because the member for Lyons has made so much of the Closer Economic Relations Agreement and tariff protection, that it is all very well to point out who did what but the fact of the matter is that the Labor Government has made no effort at all to do anything about the state of affairs today. It is not enough to say, ‘Somebody else is to blame so therefore we can let these people perish and do nothing about it’. It is an indication of the callous disregard of the Labor Party for the welfare of the rural community.

I would like to mention briefly other concerns I have. One is the question of community standards. In my opinion, we should get back to the old-fashioned standards where a worker was prepared to do a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay. Many people in this community have always done just that but unfortunately there are too many people holding down jobs in key positions who do not work and do not intend to work at a reasonable pace or with reasonable productivity. This is making the cost of operating business in Australia non-competitive and forcing industry to look elsewhere in the world, taking jobs with it. If we are ever to get back to anywhere near full employment we must ensure that industry is allowed to prosper and compete on both Australian and overseas markets. We cannot continue to buy more than we sell and survive.

I would like to mention law and order. I am appalled at the attitude to law and order of some of the residents of this country. The rule of law is that no person should interfere with the rights and privileges of others. The rights and privileges of those ‘others’ apply to us all and they are established by democratic process, having in mind the needs of a group of people living and working together – and I happen to believe it is the fairest process in the world. I object most strongly to those people who step outside the law and try to get their own way after they have been beaten by the majority, and I am particularly disgusted at the antics of the member for Denison, Dr Brown, and at the part he has played from time to time. He comes into this House and affirms his intention to obey and uphold the law in this State but not only in this session but on previous occasions he has been seen publicly to break the law and incite others to do the same. In passing, I would like to mention that I am intrigued at the attitude of conservationists. I have yet to see a conservationist who is about to lose his job because of the principles he has about conservation. It is always somebody else’s job that is on the line, never his. I for one would be very slow to drag somebody out from underneath earthmoving equipment if he were to lie down underneath it. I believe any person, with or without a claim to a cause, who breaks the law and obstructs police should be arrested without warrant and, if bailed, he should certainly be prevented, as a condition of the bail, from renewing the obstruction or the offence. This applies to the normal course of events. It seems to me that it is not quite cricket if, because a person has a banner held up above his head, he can do whatever he likes whenever he likes.

I would like to address the problem of crime in this community. I believe there is a connection between crime and the media, particularly television videos. I believe we are allowing young minds in this country to be affected by the horrific and degrading

acts on television videos. We must not forget that many children in this community have no parental guidance or examples set and they are most vulnerable to influence by this rot we call entertainment. I would like to see studies done in this State to ascertain what link there is between the two.

In closing, I would like to register my amazement at the mighty working man's Party on the opposite side of the House. I cannot see any member on that side of the House who has ever got his hands dirty or knows anything about real work. The Leader of the Opposition gave this side of the House some advice the other day. 'Wake up', he said. I say to him, 'You wake up. Get down to the grassroots level of the working man and represent those you have tricked into voting for you'.

Debate adjourned.