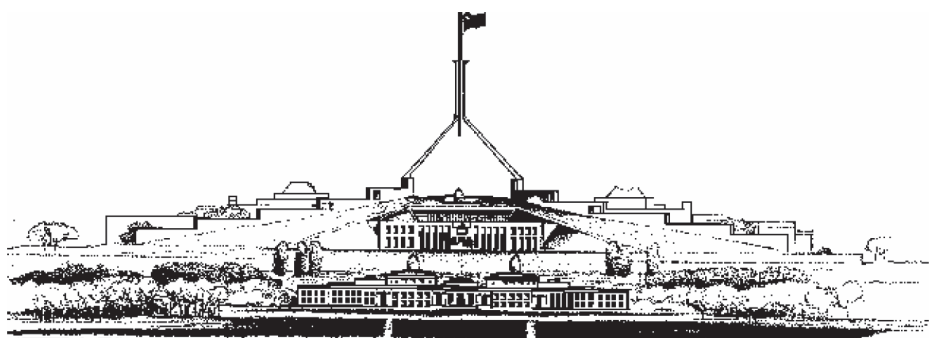




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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especially by the families which exist, as they have done for generations, on seasonal work.

When I first submitted this scheme, after talking to the Minister for Social Services about it, I was told that the weather would beat us. What ridiculous nonsense. We may get our 52 inches of rain a year but we get practically all of it within 3 weeks, and throughout the whole of the monsoonal area the weather would not represent any great disadvantage. One big employer said that a man's output of work is less in the summer months in the north than it is during the winter months and that therefore my scheme would not be profitable. What a lot of nonsense. This man already employs men for the whole year. This sort of talk is ridiculous rubbish. I think this proposal could be very well looked at without any harm to the country or without anybody losing any skin off his nose or hair off his chest. I am sure that if the three suggestions I have made were looked at we could find a solution which would be very profitable for this country.

Mr COLLARD (Kalgoorlie) [9.42]—I was interested to hear the honourable member for Herbert (Mr Bonnett) attacking the Government for allowing unemployment to become rife in Queensland, but I think perhaps this is a matter that would have been better dealt with during the debate on the estimates for the Department of Labour and National Service. In addressing myself to the estimates of the Department of Social Services I take the opportunity of expressing my appreciation to the previous Minister and also to the officers of the Department in Perth for the rather prompt and effective action taken in relation to my suggestion that officers of the Department should visit the country towns of Kalgoorlie and Geraldton, and perhaps smaller country centres, to make themselves available to people seeking information or advice as to entitlements, or obstacles in the way of pensions, or other matters covered by the Social Services Act. I am pleased to say that officers of the Department have now visited Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and Boulder this year, and while I have not received any official report I understand that a fairly substantial number of people—in fact, more than were expected—took advantage of the visits to sort out some

of their difficulties or queries. No doubt it was a fairly useful exercise all round, both for the Department and for the people concerned. I assure the Minister for Social Services (Mr Wentworth) that not only the visits themselves but also the courtesy and assistance of the officers concerned were very much appreciated by the people who called on them and also by me. I trust that until such time as officers of the Department are permanently stationed in both Kalgoorlie and Geraldton—and I hope this will not be too far in the future—these visits will continue and that visits will be made to the smaller towns as well.

On the subject of stationing permanent officers in Kalgoorlie and Geraldton, from my own experience I am quite certain the officers would find their time fully occupied in looking after the requirements of the people and the affairs of their Department, not only in Kalgoorlie and Geraldton but also in other centres nearby. In fact I think that it would not be very long before they found they required some assistance. They might also require a typist each, and I suggest that this would be a very good thing. Better services would be available to the people and we would be taking a positive step in the direction of decentralisation.

I do not know whether any investigation has been made of the need for having permanent officers in the centres I have mentioned, but if there has been one even as recently as 3 or 4 years ago and the appointment of such officers was not considered to be justified then, I want to point out that the situation is different now, not only because of the growth of the district but also because the Minister for Social Services is now also Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs. I realise that there are many aspects of Aboriginal affairs which do not come within the scope of the Social Services Act, but by the same token there are many which do, and, as the Minister would know, there are quite large numbers of Aborigines in and around Kalgoorlie, many of whom, I feel, could be assisted by an officer of this Department on social service matters. There are also some Aborigines around Geraldton but in nothing like the same numbers as on the goldfields.

There has not been very much change recently in the entitlements of Aborigines under the Social Services Act. I refer to the machinery rather than to the benefits. If the appointment of a Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs was a genuine attempt on the part of the Government to improve the standards of the Aborigines—and I think this was certainly the intention of the Minister, and it is a great pity that Cabinet apparently takes delight in spiking his guns—I am sure that the Minister will find there are several areas within the field of social services in which Aborigines should be given a fairer deal, and that an officer of the Department, on the spot, so to speak, could help them considerably. I do not think it is necessary for me to spell out the areas in which assistance could be given, because I think the Minister would know them, but I direct particular attention to the unemployment and sickness benefits provisions of the Act. We now have officers in Kalgoorlie and Geraldton dealing with problems of unemployment and sickness benefits, and they are fully occupied with this task. But the point I make is that no Aboriginal, or for that matter any other person, may receive an unemployment or sickness benefit unless he or she suffers economic loss from unemployment or sickness. In this respect the Aboriginal should be given different treatment. I do not have any airy fairy ideas about Aborigines and work. I am well aware that many of them will not look for work—that many do not want to work—but I do not think that in most circumstances they should be blamed, criticised or abused for their attitude towards work. This is a natural attitude for them to adopt, particularly those whom we describe as bush natives. In fact, it is wrong to say that the bush native will not work; he just does not know how to work and he sees no reason to work. I am not concerned with this category of Aboriginal, because I do not think that these people can be dealt with adequately under the unemployment benefit provisions of the Social Services Act. Even if these people were willing to learn a job, and registered for employment, few of them would be given work. So I do not have any airy fairy ideas about that matter either.

However, there are a number of Aborigines who do work. They are happy in employment and they want to continue to

work, but they receive only a very small wage in return for their labour. If they were to fall sick or to become unemployed they would be denied unemployment relief payments even if they registered for employment and applied for the unemployment benefit. In a number of cases if those people were paid the full unemployment benefit, meagre as it is, they would be better off than if they were working, but I see no reason why that state of affairs should be an obstacle to their obtaining the full unemployment benefit. It should not be a case of whether they are better off in receipt of the unemployment benefit but rather a case of whether they are being properly paid when in employment. We are denying the unemployment or sickness benefit to people whose standards we claim should be raised. We are denying to them any opportunity to raise their standards. Our action is a declaration that, notwithstanding their willingness to work, these people are not worthy of the benefit. Our action shows a complete lack of concern for these people and a complete lack of any desire to see that they receive justice. Something should be done to help these people where the Act permits account to be had of the circumstances to which I have referred. It is in this sphere that an officer of the Department of Social Services, working on the spot, could help considerably. If an Aboriginal or anybody else is being paid less than the appropriate rate for the work he is doing and if that work is not covered by an award, often a State's Shops and Factories Act or some other piece of legislation or a determination could be taken as a guide to decide what is a reasonable wage. If that person, be he an Aboriginal or somebody else, becomes unemployed or sick, he should be as entitled to register for employment and to receive the benefit as if he were receiving the correct rate of pay. This is only just and proper. I know that officers of the State Department of Native Welfare and many mission and station people are doing a good job in helping the Aborigines, but many are still not receiving their proper entitlement, simply because they are ignorant of their proper entitlement and do not know how to go about getting it. In this sphere again an officer of the Department of Social Services could do quite a bit of good.

Another matter to which I would like to refer was brought to my attention earlier this year. It concerns a girl who had finished schooling and had to wait 3 or 4 months before she could enter a teachers training college. She registered for employment but she was told that she did not qualify for the unemployment benefit notwithstanding that she was more than 16 years of age and work could not be found for her. I made some inquiries in the matter and was informed that she did not qualify for the unemployment benefit because she had not previously worked—in other words, because she was not suffering any economic loss. She could hardly work while attending school—I do not think anybody would expect her to do so. When she left school she could not obtain a job, one reason undoubtedly being because she could not have continued in a job for more than 3 or 4 months before entering teachers training college. She was fortunate in being able to stay with her parents. At what stage does a person over the age of 16 years, who has not worked before and who cannot obtain work, become eligible for the unemployment benefit or some special benefit? Many Aborigines must be in this position. Quite a number of Aborigines who reach the age of 16 years cannot find work. They would be in a position similar to that of the girl to whom I have referred. I cannot see any reason why a person who genuinely wants to work but who cannot find work should be denied the unemployment benefit simply because he or she has never been a member of the work force. If this is the situation, and I understand it is, I urge the Minister to look into the matter and do something to remedy it.

I turn now to repatriation. Under the Seamen's War Pensions and Allowances Act a seaman who served in the Merchant Navy in a war zone and who is now receiving a pension for injuries received during war service has no right of appeal to a tribunal. If he is not satisfied with the decision of the pensions committee all he can do is go to the Commissioner, who may affirm, vary or annul the determination or assessment of the Committee. This is a very unsatisfactory and unjust situation. It is completely wrong that any man who served in any capacity in any war zone should be denied the right of appeal to a tribunal. I was surprised—indeed, I was shocked—to find that when

this state of affairs was pointed out recently in the House the Government failed to take any steps to rectify the situation when the legislation went before another place. To my knowledge there was nothing to prevent the Government taking such action. But even if there was an obstacle to any action being taken at that stage, at least the Government could have given an assurance that the legislation would be amended in the appropriate manner as soon as possible. In an attempt to rectify the situation and allow these men the right of appeal the Opposition moved an amendment to the legislation when it was before this House, but the amendment was ruled out of order. When the legislation went before another place the same sort of thing happened. For the life of me I cannot see why the Government should refuse to this body of men the right of appeal to a tribunal. They were always subject to air attack. They were as likely to buy it as were the rest of us in the Services, whether we were in the Army, the Navy or the Air Force. While these men had the same chance of being killed as did anybody else in a war zone, after the war they received treatment in relation to injuries copped during the blue different from that accorded to ex-servicemen. I ask the Minister to consider this matter. I ask him to urge the Minister for Repatriation (Senator McKellar) to introduce legislation this session in order to rectify the injustices to which I have referred. If this matter is not dealt with now a further 12 months will elapse before the legislation again comes before the Parliament, unless there is an early election, in which case the Labor Party will become the government, and then the matter will be dealt with immediately.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN (Mr Fox)—Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr CALDER (Northern Territory) [9.58]—I make an urgent plea on behalf of pensioners residing in the north. My major concern is for pensioners residing in the Northern Territory, but anywhere in the north of this continent is a far more expensive place to live than down east, as we say—anywhere east of Oodnadatta or south of Cloncurry but certainly in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or similar places. I referred to this matter in my speech on the Budget. Obviously if one lives 2,000 miles