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Title:

ALP Broadcast, 5KA, 7.15pm: Migration and Employment

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A. L. P. BROADCAST, FRIDAY, JANUARY 30TH, 1959, 5KA. 7.15 P.M.

MR D. A. DUNSTAN, M. P., MEMBER FOR NORWOOD.

MIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT.

Good evening, listeners:- For some considerable time now prominence has been given to the various aspects of migration policy. Most people, I think, will agree that our population should be augmented by immigration as well as by natural increase; and I take this opportunity to state that the Labor Party is in favour of bringing into this country as many suitable migrants as we are able to accommodate. I emphasize this fact because in some quarters it has been alleged that we are opposed to migration and that we are opposed to it purely on the ground that it could result in the reduction in wages and living standards of our own workmen. We are naturally concerned about such matters, but we are equally concerned about the failure of the ~~Commonwealth~~ ^{Federal} Government - and the Government of this State especially - to make adequate provision for employment, housing and other services not only for our own growing population but also for the people who are being brought into the country.

Of course, the Federal L. C. P. Government is chiefly to blame for the unsatisfactory position that has developed in this connection. That Government has been in office for over nine years, during which it has exercised its power to determine migration policy, but its policy seems to have been confined to the mere processes of bringing migrants into Australia, with little or no consideration of the problems of their absorption. The Federal Government is quite content to think merely in terms of how many migrants it brings out, leaving to the State Governments the responsibility of providing employment, etc. On the other hand, we believe that migration policy should not be determined independently of the problems that inevitably arise from a rapid increase in population; and, as you know, the increase that has taken place during the last ten years has been unprecedented, and the population is likely to increase at a faster rate in the immediate future. Moreover, it is fairly obvious that our own State Government is the least qualified to discharge the responsibility which the Fed-

eral Government has placed upon it. We have been repeatedly reminded that the rate at which the population of South Australia is increasing exceeds that of any of the other States, as if that were the only criterion; but I think you will agree that it merely emphasizes the need for special efforts to promote the development of the State to meet the increased demands resulting from that fact. What we need is a comprehensive, over-all plan, but that is the last thing we can expect from the Playford Government.

It is doubtful whether the Playford Government has ever contemplated making a bona fide response to the challenge of rapidly increasing population. In education, for example, it has, during the last few years, made frantic efforts to repair the damage that its own inaction brought about. Several years ago it knew - or should have known - what the position would be now, but it had no plan - it merely patched up where it thought the situation was worse than elsewhere. Having neglected the matter for so long, it found itself beset with difficulties which it would have avoided if it had exerc-

ised reasonable foresight ten or twelve years ago. Its natural tendency to do the wrong thing has been further aggravated by the policy it has since followed of building larger and larger schools. Everyone knows that a school should not be more than a certain size - when it grows too big it cannot be efficiently managed or supervised. But, of course, the Playford Government is not so much interested in promoting public education as in making sure the public receives the impression that the Government is doing the best thing possible for education. As a matter of fact, the Government is relying on the hope that people will not notice the extravagance ~~anomaly~~ involved in spending £500,000 the educational anomaly of on one school and contemplating an enrolment of 1,800 pupils.

What I have been discussing is only one aspect of the Government's method of approach to the problems of our rapidly increasing population. The provision of schools has gravitated into the same category as most other activities of the Government - so long as an individual project is a big one and will cost a large sum - usually

much more than the original estimate, incidentally - the Playford Government apparently thinks it has the answer to any problem; but I sincerely hope that the people will not much longer be deceived in this way

The tendency to cram as many pupils as possible in large schools is consistent with the Premier's deliberate policy of concentrating population in the metropolitan area. Indeed, under the pretence of providing employment for new and old Australians in this State, he has encouraged the establishment of industries in the metropolitan area, thereby compelling people to live in that area. The parallel policy of encouraging the aggregation of land in the country has also compelled many who do not own land there to gravitate to the metropolitan area in search of employment. Under the guiding hand of the Premier, the number of landholders in the country, instead of increasing more or less in proportion to the increase in total population, has even declined; and the proportion of people who may be classified as employees among the country population has decreased alarmingly. All this would be bad enough, of course, if our total population were not

increasing as rapidly as it is; but it is serious in view of the actual facts.

The concentration of population in the metropolitan area has created tremendous problems in that area. We have referred to these problems over and over again. In addition, many of our country centres have been doomed almost to extinction in order to satisfy the Premier's appetite for particular schemes which have little or no bearing on the development of the State for productive purposes and which are certainly not promoting the kind of development necessary to accommodate our rapidly growing population. What sort of progress can we say has taken place in South Australia over the last twenty years or so if practically all the so-called development has taken place in the metropolitan area? On the other hand, Labor's policy has always been to develop our country centres - we have urged the Government time and time again to give statesmanlike consideration to some plan of decentralization that would restore the proper economic balance of the

State and at the same time maintain and advance our rural centres, thus enabling them to support amenities and services which they cannot support now. But every time we have been met with opposition which we can only regard as being actuated by petty and unworthy motives. We know very well that there cannot be any real development in our rural areas unless we adopt an entirely new approach to the basis of land ownership; but, of course, an L. C. L. Government, which relies principally on the land-owners in the country for its majority in Parliament, will never espouse a policy calculated to disturb the interests it represents. Whenever we have spoken of decentralization and closer settlement, we have been met with this sort of absurd objection on the part of the Premier (quote): "It is quite obvious that with no sources of fresh water available and with the high cost of carting water long distances, it would be impossible to establish large concentrations of population in areas with rainfall of less than six inches" (unquote). I need hardly say that we were thinking of centres within the good rainfall areas, where, incidentally, the land is owned under the monopol-

istic system for which the Premier and his party stand. In order to disguise the real reason for opposing decentralization and ^{the} closer settlement of our rural areas, the Premier resorts to unbecoming ridicule of some proposal which has nothing to do with the subject.

The fact is, of course, that the Premier has no interest in the real development of the State - he is only interested in his own particular projects, which, by the way, have cost the people an enormous amount of money without affording a proportionate development of the State in the sense I have mentioned. For example, the power stations at Port Augusta, where more than £30M is to be spent, are largely for the purpose of providing the metropolitan area with electricity - they are not in any sense an example of decentralization - and it may be noted that they are situated in a district which has always been Labor. This is, indeed, the basic object of L. C. L. policy - to ensure, as far as possible, the preservation of the status quo in the political sphere. Everything else is subordinated to that. Meanwhile, we

have the absurdity of about 62 per cent of the total population being herded in the metropolitan area and 38 per cent scattered throughout ~~in~~ the rest of the State.

Another example of the Premier's attempt to evade the issue is to be seen in a reply he gave two years ago to Labor's motion for the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into decentralization. He quoted the number of houses built by the Housing Trust as proof of his Government's endeavours to arrest the drift of population from the country. He said that up to that time 7,830 houses had been built in 157 localities outside the metropolitan area and no doubt intended these figures to be impressive. On the face of them they were impressive - they represented an average of about 50 houses per locality - but, on analysis, I found that 5,261 of these houses were built in seven localities - Elizabeth, Salisbury, Mount Gambier, Port Augusta, Port Augusta West, Port Pirie and Whyalla - and nearly half of the houses were built at Elizabeth and Salisbury! While the seven localities mentioned

averaged 750 houses each, the other 150 localities averaged 17. And, of course, no-one now seriously regards Salisbury and Elizabeth as ^{being} outside the metropolitan area; and there is no doubt that if the Premier is given the opportunity in the near future, he will incorporate them officially in the metropolitan area for electoral purposes.

In any case, the mere building of houses in a rural locality is not evidence of decentralization. It is no good providing ^{houses} ~~housing~~ if the people who are to occupy them cannot find employment in the district. That is the real test, and in this respect the Playford Government has failed entirely simply because it is so imbued with the idea of retaining its political stranglehold over our rural areas. Labor, on the other hand, has plans for the closer settlement of those areas and the establishment of industries which will not only promote the development of the country centres but also assist in the solution of the various problems associated with our rapidly growing population. Without some such plan our troubles are likely to be very much aggravated in the not far distant future. Good night, listners.