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C.O. OPENING TRACK

ANN: THIS IS A BROADCAST BY THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, HON. DON DUNSTAN, ON BEHALF OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY.

DON: GOOD EVENING. IT'S NOW SOME TWO AND A HALF YEARS SINCE THE L.C.L. GOVERNMENT TOOK OFFICE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA WITH A 42% VOTE LONG ENOUGH FOR ANY GOVERNMENT WORTH THE NAME TO MAKE ITS INTENTIONS CLEAR.

AND THE L.C.L. GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS ON TWO MAJOR ISSUES ARE INDEED VERY CLEAR. IN THE MATTERS OF PROTECTION FOR HOME BUILDERS AND BUYERS, AND PROTECTION FOR CONSUMERS, ITS INTENTION HAS BEEN TO DO ABSOLUTELY NOTHING AT ALL.

WHEN THE LABOR GOVERNMENT LEFT OFFICE IN 1968 WE HAD THESE MATTERS WELL AND TRULY IN HAND. TAKE CONSUMER PROTECTION. WE GOT THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF ALL AUSTRALIAN ATTORNEYS GENERAL TO AGREE IN 1966 THAT A HIGHLY EXPERT COMMITTEE FROM THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN LAW SCHOOL SHOULD BE SET UP TO INVESTIGATE AUSTRALIA'S ANTIQUE LAWS ON HIRE PURCHASE AND CREDIT SALES, AND TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON MISLEADING OR UNTRUTHFUL ADVERTISING. THE PROBLEM IS (AND WAS) THAT PEOPLE WHO BUY GOODS ON HIRE PURCHASE OR TIME PAYMENT (AND THAT'S NOW MOST PEOPLE) DO NOT HAVE SIMPLE, EASY WAYS TO GET PROTECTION IF WHAT THEY BUY IS FOUND TO BE SHODDY, OR IF WHAT THEY RECEIVE AFTER A SALE IS NOT WHAT THEY WERE LED TO EXPECT BY THE SALESMAN.

AS THE LAW STANDS NOW, A SHOP MIGHT SELL A REFRIGERATOR, BUT A FINANCE COMPANY PROVIDES THE CREDIT MONEY AND, BY LAW, OWNS THE REFRIGERATOR. BUT IF IT IS A BAD REFRIGERATOR, THE FINANCE COMPANY WON'T TAKE IT BACK AND REFUND WHAT'S BEEN PAID. AND IF THE SHOP THE REFRIGERATOR WAS BOUGHT FROM IS TAKEN TO COURT, YOU COULD BECOME INVOLVED IN A VERY LONG, EXPENSIVE AND COMPLICATED LEGAL

SITUATION IN WHICH YOU LOSE EVERYTHING. LIKEWISE, USED CARS, WHERE WITH A FEW UNSCRUPULOUS DEALERS FAULTY CARS ARE SOLD TO DRIVERS WHO ONLY DISCOVER THE TRUTH A 1,000 MILES LATER. HAVING SIGNED THE CONTRACT WITH THE DEALER AND THE FINANCE COMPANY, THERE IS OFTEN NOTHING TO DO BUT PAY FOR CRIPPLING REPAIRS. IF THE DEALER IS TAKEN TO COURT, AGAIN THERE IS A COMPLEX LEGAL ARGUMENT AND CASE THAT FEW DRIVERS CAN REALLY AFFORD. AGAIN IT'S A SITUATION WHERE THE CONSUMER CAN END UP WITH A LOSS ALL ROUND.

THE ADELAIDE LAW SCHOOL REPORT ON CONSUMER CREDIT COVERED SUCH SITUATIONS, ALONG WITH MANY MANY MORE. IF ITS RECOMMENDATIONS HAD BEEN PUT INTO EFFECT, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A WHOLE SERIES OF EASY TO UNDERSTAND PROTECTIONS AND RIGHTS FOR THE CONSUMER, AND HE WOULDN'T BE FACED WITH CRIPPLING COURT COSTS. BUT THE REPORT CAME OUT AFTER THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HAD LEFT OFFICE - AND WHAT HAS THE LCL GOVERNMENT DONE WITH IT? NOTHING. NOTHING AT ALL. THEY HAVE DELIBERATELY IGNORED ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT REPORTS EVER GIVEN A STATE GOVERNMENT - AND IN DOING SO HAVE DISPLAYED A CYNICAL INDIFFERENCE TO THE WAY PEOPLE'S MONEY IS BEING LOST IN MISLEADING, UNTRUTHFUL OR UNFAIR TRANSACTIONS.

THE OTHER AREA OF CONSUMER PROTECTION WHICH HAD CONCERNED THE LABOR GOVERNMENT INVOLVED THE SMALL HOME BUYER. AND THIS IS AN AREA IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO SHOWN A CYNICAL INDIFFERENCE TO THE WAY SOME PEOPLE ARE BEING TAKEN DOWN. THE FACT IS THAT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA SPEC BUILDERS ARE ABLE TO COMMIT WHAT AMOUNTS TO DAYLIGHT ROBBERY. IN THE TEA TREE GULLY, MODBURY AND DARLINGTON DISTRICTS ESPECIALLY, BUT ALSO THROUGHOUT THE METROPOLITAN AREA AND THE STATE, SOME SO-CALLED "BUILDING BROKERS" BUY UP AND CUT UP LAND, SELL IT TO PEOPLE ALONG WITH A CONTRACT TO BUILD SOME KIND OF STANDARD-DESIGN HOUSE, AND THEN SUB-LET CONTRACTS FOR THE BUILDING OF THESE HOUSES TO JUST ABOUT ANYBODY.

AND JUST ABOUT ANYBODY BUILDS THEM. THE RESULT IS THAT OWNERS MOVE INTO THEIR BRAND NEW HOMES, ONLY TO FIND THEM BREAKING APART WITHIN A FEW MONTHS. THE SPEC BUILDERS HAVE USUALLY GONE OUT OF BUSINESS. SOME-TIMES THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS ARE NEEDED FOR REPAIRS. AND NO LEGAL REDRESS IS READILY OR CHEAPLY AVAILABLE.

NOT ONLY WAS THE LABOR GOVERNMENT VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS SITUATION - SO WAS THE BUILDING TRADE AND THE TRADESMEN THAT WORKED IN IT. THEY ASKED US TO HELP, AND WE DID. THE BUILDERS LICENSING ACT WAS PASSED THROUGH PARLIAMENT. IT MEANT THAT BUILDERS WERE TO BE LICENSED AND THAT QUALIFIED BUILDING TRADESMEN WERE TO BE PROFESSIONALLY RECOGNIZED. A BUILDERS LICENSING BOARD WAS SET UP CONTAINING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BUILDING INDUSTRY, THEIR EMPLOYEES, AND THE COMMUNITY IN GENERAL. ON THE SAME LINES, AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE WAS SET UP TO WORK OUT PROCEDURES BY WHICH QUALIFIED TRADESMEN COULD BE PROFESSIONALLY RECOGNISED. THE RESULT WAS TO HAVE BEEN THAT PEOPLE WHO FOUND THEY HAD BADLY BUILT HOUSES COULD THEN GO TO BUILDERS LICENSING BOARD FOR HELP. THE BOARD COULD HAVE FORCED REPAIRS BY THE BUILDER, OR CANCELLED THE BUILDER'S LICENCE.

NOW THE BUILDING INDUSTRY WANTED THIS LEGISLATION TO TAKE EFFECT. SO DID THE EMPLOYEES. AND SO DID THE CONSUMER, FOR WHOM A HOUSE IS THE BIGGEST ITEM HE'LL EVER BUY IN HIS LIFE. AND AGAIN THE LCL GOVERNMENT HAS DONE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING, CYNICALLY DISREGARDING THE FACT THAT PEOPLE ARE BEING TAKEN DOWN IN THIS AREA. FOR SOME VAGUE ILLOGICAL REASON, THE LCL GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THAT SUCH REGULATIONS ARE BAD AND THAT A LAW OF SUPPLY-AND-DEMAND SHOULD BE SUPPORTED, EVEN IF PEOPLE LOSE MONEY IN THE PROCESS. THE BUILDERS LICENSING ACT WAS TO HAVE BEEN PROCLAIMED IN JUNE, 1968. THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HAD FINISHED ALL THE WORK ON IT. THE LCL GOVERNMENT HAS LET IT MOLDER ON THEIR LEGISLATIVE SHELVES EVER SINCE. THEY HAVE NOT PROCLAIMED IT, AND HAVE ATTEMPTED AMENDMENTS THAT WOULD HAVE MADE THE ACT

COMPLETELY INEFFECTIVE WINDOW DRESSING.

FROM ALL THE SIGNS AND SIGNALS OF THE PAST FEW WEEKS, WE CAN NOW PREDICT AN ELECTION COMING UP IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA IN SOME SIX WEEKS. THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO ANSWER AT THAT TIME FOR ITS INACTION ON CONSUMER PROTECTION. IT WILL HAVE TO ANSWER ALSO FOR THE ACTIONS OF ITS MEMBERS IN THE UPPER HOUSE WHO LAST YEAR THREW OUT THE ONLY CONSUMER REPORT RECOMMENDED BILL THAT EVER GOT INTO PARLIAMENT. THAT WAS A LABOR PARTY BILL DESIGNED TO STOP MISLEADING ADVERTISING - THE LCL MEMBERS IN THE UPPER HOUSE FELT, APPARENTLY, THAT TRUTH IN ADVERTISING WAS A BAD THING, AND COULDN'T BE SUPPORTED IN ANY WAY.

WELL, AS FAR AS LABOR IS CONCERNED, THE COURSE IS CLEAR. THE LABOR GOVERNMENT YOU'LL BE ELECTING WITHIN SOME SIX SHORT WEEKS WILL NOT BE LETTING IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUES LIKE THIS BE PUT ASIDE. PEOPLE SHOULD NOT HAVE TO FIGHT TO GET A FAIR DEAL WHEN THEY BUY A CAR OR A HOUSE OR ANY OTHER CONSUMER ITEM. THE LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL ACT TO ENSURE COMPLETE CONSUMER PROTECTION FOR EVERYONE. AND IN THIS MATTER AS IN OTHERS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA WILL SET THE PACE FOR THE 'SEVENTIES. IT'LL BE A MATTER OF LIVING BETTER WITH LABOR FOR EVERYONE.

GOOD NIGHT.

ANN. YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO A BROADCAST BY THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, DON DUNSTAN, ON BEHALF OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY.

C.O. CLOSING TRACK.