Radio Talk.

Recently in Federal Parliament the Opposition raised, in the traditional manner, a motion directed towards criticism of the Government over the provision of adequate aged, invalid and widows' pensions and other social service benefits.

In reply, my colleague the Minister for Social Services, Mr. Wentworth, pointed out a few truths in relation to the Government's record, and how substantially the social welfare program had substantially improved as a result of Government decisions. The Minister also pointed out a few truths in relation to Labor's record—and did this very effectively in a comparison of figures related to pension rates. First, my colleague produced figures for pension rates for a widow with one child as they are today compared with what they were when the ALP were last in office (in 1949). Then, the widow with one child received £4.75 a week, which today, allowing for price level changes, would be worth just short of £11. How does that widow fare today? With one child, she receives a basic pension of £14 (³ more than the last ALP pension equivalent), and today on top of that there are a range of additional benefits. For instance, she is paid in addition £2 supplementary assistance, £4 mother's allowance and £2.50 a week for the child. This adds up to a weekly total of £22.50—more than twice the purchasing power afforded by the Labor Party, which claims to stand as the traditional watchdogs of the welfare of the needy. But, then again, the £22.50 did not tell the whole story because the widow is now entitled to medical services, and a number of other concessions, including assistance under the widow's training scheme, introduced by the Government in the last Budget. Nearly 2000 widows have now applied for help under this vocational guidance scheme. A comparison of rates received by the old age pensioner in 1949 and now also revealed an interesting picture. With his or her pension, plus the fringe benefits and medical services, the old age pensioner today receives nearly twice in terms of purchasing power what he received under Labor. My colleague pointed out that the Government had raised the standards of social services over the years, and last budget saw an increase of £72 million under social welfare spending. He had, he said, no doubt that the next Budget would show the same kind of story.

I will not weary you with details of the Parliamentary debate, but a short summary of the Government's aims and record in this field will, I believe, hold more interest. The Commonwealth has been moving on a broad, comprehensive front towards lifting the standards of welfare services. The Prime Minister has said that "no nation can be great unless it seeks not only materially to progress but also to take care of the
And the Government has acted. Operating now are schemes announced in the last budget. No longer need those patients who insure adequately with a hospital fund fear of the financial consequences of long-term and chronic illness. He or she is now eligible for full hospital insurance benefits regardless of length of hospitalisation.

Under the new benefit announced in the 1968 Budget, patients in nursing homes needing more intensive care receive an extra $3.00 a day on top of the $2.00 ordinary benefit. And the Commonwealth entered a new field with its decision to pay benefits for physically and mentally handicapped children.

On top of this the Commonwealth has put to the States a comprehensive program for the care of the aged. This is a three-pronged program providing for senior citizen centres, home housekeeping services, and paramedical services such as physiotherapy in the homes of aged persons' own homes.

In addition the Commonwealth has offered $5 million over five years for the development of new nursing homes in the States.

These efforts cannot merely be termed political propaganda. The welfare achievements of the Gorton Government have already brought increased benefit to more than a million Australian residents. It will continue to look to the needs of the aged, the sick and the needy.

The weakness of Australia's national service call-up system was underlined when President Nixon recently asked Congress to introduce a random selection system for the military draft. The ballot system has operated successfully from the start of the Australian scheme since 1964 to increase the strength of the Regular Army to meet existing and foreseeable defence commitments at home and abroad as well as providing stronger citizen forces. The Australian system selects, through the use of birthdates, the number to be considered for call-up.

More than 100,000 a year register under this system--far more than needed to actually serve--and the random selection system determines those who will actually go into the Army. The American attitude stems from the appointment of a Presidential Committee by former President Johnson in February 1967. This committee examined the suggestion that voluntary service could be sufficiently encouraged to eliminate the need for national service call-up. However, it came up with the recommendation that the draft should be continued to provide the nation with a flexible system of manpower procurement to meet national security commitments under all foreseeable circumstances. It also proposed changes in the selection procedure to be based on the principle of random selection as adopted in Australia.

Despite criticism coming
from certain sources in Australia, the Australian scheme has proved to be completely fair, equitable and impartial, and has resulted in the widest cross-section of the community being called up to serve. It is not open to manipulation. And now the United States is moving towards adoption of this method.

The Minister for Primary Industry, Mr. Doug Anthony, had some interesting information for Parliament during the week. Mr. Anthony announced that the West Australian Government had advised the Commonwealth Government that it would accept the Commonwealth's offer in relation to the marginal dairy farm reconstruction scheme. Under this scheme the Commonwealth is prepared to make up to $25 million available over a four-year period to help people to voluntarily leave the industry and to assist amalgamation of farms in an effort to diversify operations into beef or other pursuits. The Commonwealth's proposal was widely welcomed when it was proposed, if members of all parties...

The dairying industry expressed support for the principles of the scheme, although some felt that the scheme should go further than it will under the present proposals. The Minister told Parliament that of the money used by a State, half would be a non-repayable grant, and the remaining half would be a repayable loan with interest at the long-term bond rate at time of drawing. Mr. Anthony recalled that in February this year the Premier of NSW, Mr. Askin, wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of all the States. The States did not reject the scheme, but asked for the Commonwealth to provide all the funds needed, including $9 million, as well as costs of administration, and made other suggestions which would have led to a situation in which the States would act entirely on behalf of, and under the direction of, the Commonwealth. But, the Minister pointed out, the States should take part as active and responsible principals and not as passive agents. The Commonwealth, he said, recently advised the States that it holds to the offer it made last September—and again asked each State for its co-operation. Western Australia had now accepted that offer. No other State has.
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