Today I want to talk about the Post Office, the Dairy Industry Survey and Continental China.

The Post Office

Last week I opened a new and renovated Post Office for Warrnambool. Few people realise that the Postmaster-General’s Department is bigger than B.H.P., General Motors Holdens, British Tobacco, Coles and Myers put together. Its assets are just short of $2,000 million and it has a staff of over 100,000. Its capital expenditure has gone up from about $100 million to about $600 million in ten years, and at the same time its running costs have gone from $200 million to $600 million. It is a vast enterprise and its activities affect our lives in many different ways.

Direct Payments from the Treasury Tax Payers’ Funds to the Post Office have increased from $100 to $230 million over ten years, and that is the end of the figures.

There is always objection to increases in Post Office charges, but as costs go up the Post Office either has to reduce its services, reduce its rate of capital expansion, charge higher prices for its services, or get more money from Treasury Tax Payers’ Funds. The Government has over the years tried to strike a balance between increases in charges and payments from the tax payer. It just boils down to the fact that if you want the service, or an improved service, you have to pay for it. I think we would generally agree that telephone services, which are very expensive to provide, have improved greatly over the last ten or fifteen years. For example, in this electorate the number of automatic exchanges has gone up from 63 to 93 and the number of subscribers on automatic service have more than doubled, but I know there is still quite a way to go.

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The Dairy Industry Survey

The Minister for Primary Industry announced recently that the Bureau of Agricultural Economics is to conduct an economic survey into the dairy industry, covering the three years ending 1969/70.

The last survey covered the early part of the 1960's, and many changes have occurred in the industry since then - in techniques of production and in the market situation for dairy products.

The present dairy industry stabilisation arrangements expire in June of next year, and the results of the Survey would help the Government and the industry in considering future arrangements after that time.

The survey will cover all states, starting in Victoria.

Mr. Sinclair said that he hoped there would be full co-operation from dairy farmers, and that this would be essential if the Survey was to be successful.

The Australian Dairy Industry Council and the Australian Dairy Farmers Federation had pledged their full support for the Survey.

China and the United Nations

There has been a great deal of discussion over the last two or three weeks, and we have had reports of a successful tour by a United States "ping pong" team to China, and an Australian team is also visiting Continental China for the first time in many years.

The Prime Minister has announced that the Government
is considering relaxation of trade restrictions, and it has been made plain that there is hope for an increase in trade and co-lateral activities of different kinds.

A lot of this has got mixed up with wheat and possible future sales by the Australian Wheat Board, which has traditionally been the authority for the negotiation of international sales.

I am sure it is the general objective of the Board to be left free to conduct its operations without political interference. This is the way it should be.

People have sought to make a good deal of the fact that Continental China has not bought much wheat from us recently. The information available to me indicates that their own crops had increased greatly, and that their requirements for wheat were down. In addition to that, the Chinese used to export rice and import wheat, but I am advised that their rice markets overseas have fallen, and thus some of their internal consumption might convert from wheat to rice, again reducing the demand for overseas wheat.

Out of all this came an offer by Dr. Rex Patterson to visit Peking for the Opposition to discuss the wheat trade. This is something for which the Wheat Board is itself responsible. I don't think political intervention of this kind will really help.

One of the intriguing things about this situation is that the Australian Broadcasting Commission requested that Mr. John Penlington be able to go to Continental China so that "Four Corners" could produce a film concerning China.

The A.B.C. was contacted by Mr. Edward Hill, the Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia, and Mr. Hill said that he had been asked by the Chinese authorities to handle the matter.

Mr. Hill wished to meet Mr. Penlington to form some impression of him before he would give his approval. Mr. Hill said
that unless this course was accepted, the application would not be given any further consideration.

Thus, the A.B.C., which wishes to send somebody to Continental China, was refused unless its personnel were vetted by a leading member of the Australian Communist Party.

At the very least, it is an odd way of doing business.
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