Portland is still in the news.

I have just come from a meeting that was convened by the Honourable Murray Burne to discuss the question of trade through Portland, and the attitude of the Association of Employers of Waterside Labour to the payment of port levies which, if unchanged, will do so much damage to trade through Portland.

The meeting carried unanimously resolutions similar to those adopted at Portland a week or two ago.

The first resolution unanimously supported the Victorian Government's direct approach to the Federal Government on behalf of the Port, and urges the Federal government to take immediate action. The second resolution directly asks the Minister for Labour, Mr. Cameron, to make a direct approach to the A.E.W.L. and to use his influence to have the levy decision reversed. Thirdly, if a satisfactory reply is not received within a week a deputation to Mr. Cameron would be arranged with representatives of the State Government, local Members of Parliament, the Portland Harbor Trust, and other authorities who would seek a direct meeting with Mr. Cameron.

These resolutions re-affirm the points of view that were put at the earlier meeting, and to which Mr. Cameron has so far given no reply. He and his spokesmen continue to say that the change has resulted from something we did in 1969. I am afraid that is nonsense. Mr. Cameron himself has said that the increased levy is contrary to the Stevedoring Industry Charges Act, and the fact is that it has occurred under the present Government. I still firmly believe that if Mr. Cameron expressed a view firmly to the A.E.W.L., then they would reverse their decision.

One interesting fact has come to light in a letter to Mr. Byrne signed by a Mr. Craig, the Executive Director of the A.E.W.L. The letter indicates that on Friday 16th March, there were discussions with the Waterside Workers Federation and the A.C.T.U. According to Mr. Craig, both these organisations condemned the arrangements which had been applied by the A.E.W.L. before the 5th of March this year. According to Mr. Craig, any arrangements which required some of the smaller ports to subsidise other small ports through the uniform system which had applied, was rejected as being inequitable and entirely unreasonable.
I hope that is not the reason we have not heard more from Mr. Cameron. I appreciate the fact that he sent Mr. Foster to Portland to speak first hand with people in Portland, because he will now have a first hand account of how seriously this matter is viewed.

But it is not only Portland. It is many other decentralised ports who will suffer.

I have reported before that I have been made Chairman of both Liberal Party Primary Industry Committees - the Parliamentary Committee, and the Federal Organisational Committee. Both committees have been meeting. We had long discussions on the future of primary industries, and have recognised the special need for a strong rural voice at the present time.

At the Federal Rural Committee meeting last Friday, we discussed areas which needed particular examination, and which would be important in developing new policy. The work is being divided up between the various State Divisions of the Liberal Party, and the Parliamentary Members, who will report back as soon as possible.

I mentioned the need for a strong rural voice. This is emphasised by the Government's recent decisions concerning Rural Reconstruction. As we know, a decision has recently been made to continue the scheme, but at a much reduced rate. The previous Government had provided over $100 million in two years. A primary industry newsletter published on 21st March reported that Senator Wriedt sought to lift the rate of interest on debt reconstruction from 4 to 5%. The States would not accept this. Senator Wriedt had earlier been in difficulty with his own caucus in the matter, and there was a majority in Labor's Parliamentary caucus for the higher rate of interest. However, when Senator Wriedt met State Ministers - including Victoria's Bill Borthwick - opposition to the increased rate of interest was made plain, and was not acceptable to the States, including the Labor States.

Whereas we had provided over $100 million in two years, the present Government is providing $36 million for the next financial year. $12 million of that is likely to be a forward commitment, and the primary industry letter indicates that the actual expenditure for 1973/74 is to be limited to $24 million. That is less than half the rate of expenditure that the previous government had supported.

I wonder how many people recall the promises that were made in the pre-election period
by the present Government, when farmers were told that $500 million would be made available at 3% interest.

It is true that there has been a great about face in the fortunes of rural industry, but there is still a need for people to reconstruct their debts and for farm build up funds to put primary industry generally into a stronger and better position to resist any future situation when the prices might not be as satisfactory as they now are.

This is not just a question of funds for farmers. The total rural economy is dependent upon prosperous industries within that economy, and the towns in our own district - Portland and Warrnambool, Hamilton, Casterton and north to Horsham, and all the towns in between - are dependent for their livelihoods on Australia's great exporting primary industries.

There is another report contained in the same primary industry news letter that the wool industry is in for a shock over research and promotion funds for the International Wool Secretariat. The previous Government had promised the International Wool Secretariat $133 million for research and promotion over the years 1973-76. The Australian Wool Industry Conference was informed of this decision last November. There are now initial reports indicating that the present Government is going to provide greatly reduced funds in this area. I very much hope that the newsletter is not correct in that prediction.

All this indicates the necessity for a strong rural voice in the opposition benches, one that can speak not just for one industry or another, but for total rural communities upon which so much of Australia depends.
Library Digitised Collections

Author/s:
Fraser, Malcolm

Title:
Portland wool sales

Date:
25 March 1973

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/40592

File Description:
Portland wool sales

Terms and Conditions:
Copyright courtesy of Malcolm Fraser. Contact the University of Melbourne Archives for permission requests.