
In many respects it has been a muddled and difficult year. People in Australia believe that the sense of direction and general purpose that has for so long characterised Australia's national force has been replaced by changes in attitude, policy and outlook, which the majority of Australians do not like. Within Australia attempts have been made to turn many aspects of life upside-down. People who are buying their own home and who have been promised low interest rates, find that interest rates of 9 to 14 percent are now common.

Farmers who were promised interest rates of 3 percent are paying 9 percent or more on their general overdraft. Small businesses are likely to have the problem of a shortage of cash. If the average person conducting a small business is to pay a high rate or interest for his finance, he can be placed in a very difficult situation indeed if trading fortunes change.

There is a degree of uncertainty throughout the community. New investment decisions are not being made. Oil search is running down and mineral search is being pursued much less vigorously than in the past. The Government's policies are throwing these industries into a state of turmoil.

We have found that there were extensive efforts to place an export tax on Australian meat. The stupidity of that move was clearly shown. Employment figures over the last year have generally been good, but there are some signs of slackening of the demand for labour in the last few weeks of this year, and I am very concerned indeed about the employment position for 1974. This is traditionally a time when tens and thousands of school leavers seek to enter the work force and they might well be trying to do this when a general down-turn in the Australian economy is imminent.
These are unhealthy signs. Rates of interest are much too high. Everything from nails to electric motors is in short supply. I am told that because of the shortages of essential components many manufacturers will be forced to reduce labour in the coming year, not because they can't sell commodities at the present time, but they can't get components from other suppliers or from overseas. I would not be at all surprised if this does in fact occur because I have visited a number of establishments which have been employing more labour than they can fully use at the moment hoping that they would be able to get supplies so that they can give their employees work to perform. This situation does not seem to be improving.

Everything I have mentioned in this talk so far is an Australian phenomenon - high interest rates and uneasiness in the business investment sector. On top of that we have a very dangerous economic situation overseas. Interest rates in many countries are even higher than in Australia. National economic policies have, in a number of instances, failed. In addition there are the Arab oil restrictions which could well lead to a significant lessening of trade between countries and to major unemployment in most of the Western countries - Europe, Britain, America and Japan.

The Government has tried to suggest that Australia will be insulated from these moves. We are fairly independent in motor fuel, but for industrial and bunkering fuel we are dependent on overseas supplies. If the economies of other countries are knocked about, if there is a very significant down-turn in Japanese business activities, if there is major unemployment in Japan and in Europe, if world trade sinks down into the depths and there is every indication that it will, then that is bound to have an impact on Australia. The policies of the present Government will re-inforce that impact. There is no indication yet that the present Government has the slightest awareness
of these dangers and the possible implications for the employment of tens of thousands of Australian people.

This was a Government that was meant to show compassion for the average Australian. How is that compassion matched with interest rates which makes it extraordinarily difficult for the average person starting out in life to build or buy their own home. How does that compassion match when people in country areas struggling to establish de-centralised industries or to maintain and improve farms must pay interest at 9 or 10 percent a year. It is a cruel situation and one that has been forced upon this country by the present Government.

When there has been employment running at too high a level the migrant community is often hardest hit. Special measures need to be taken to make sure that no one section of the community carries an undue share of any difficulties that might arise. In spite of a great deal of talk there is much remaining to be done to see that migrants are aware of the rights and services that are available to all Australians.

Contact with migrant community committees convinced me that Government agencies alone are inadequate for the task needed of them. Government agencies and services need further extension, they need more interpreters and sometimes they need more patience with people who may not understand the Australian system. In addition to that there ought to be more Commonwealth Government support for the various welfare committees which have been and are being established by the migrant communities.

There are immense migrant language problems in Australia. Government Departments themselves are repeatedly asking
voluntary migrant community welfare officers, who are overworked in their own capacity, to serve as interpreters because the Government itself cannot provide them.

As Liberal Party Spokesman on migration as well as Labour, I am looking at the problems created by this situation. I have so far seen enough to know there are many difficult human problems that the general community is not aware of and which the general services of Government are ill-equipped to cope with. The migrant welfare committees are well placed to provide additional assistance. They are largely voluntary, but they need more support and much greater recognition for the very valuable services they are undertaking.