Electoral Talk

Looking back over the last 3 weeks of parliament I believe it's fair to say that the institution has become more serious, more hardworking and a place of greater and proper dignity.

It would not be fair if I were not to give credit to the new Speaker Mr. Gordon Scholes who has set a standard for impartiality which is a personal tribute to him. He has not feared to use his tongue on the Prime Minister or to sit down a government Minister for wasting the time of the house.

But we would also be doing the Opposition less than justice if we did not accept some share of credit. So far there has been no repetition of the rowdy scenes which have marked the conduct of the national parliament and for which all parties have to shoulder blame.

Interjections are far fewer in number and have become all the more effective because of this.

Question Time is going better for all parties in the House.

A while ago constant interruptions and general exploitation of the rules of parliament had reduced the number of questions for which there was time during the 45 minutes given to questions to about 8.

This last week as many as 16 or 17 questions have been asked in the same period which it means twice the opportunity for the government supporters to provide Ministers with opportunities to air their latest proposals, but it also provides the Opposition with twice the opportunity to keep up the pressure on the government. That is the Opposition's constitutional role.

It also provides backbenchers on both sides of the parliament with a better opportunating to raise those matters which are important to their constituents.

One of the things the Opposition has tried to do is to restore to parliament its proper function as a place where important decisions are announced and where policy is declared.

The Prime Minister has made a rare statement on foreign affairs to the House while the Minister for Defence made an equally unusual report on his responsibilities.

I took the opportunity earlier this month to put before the parliament proposals for reform which I believe could make the work of parliament faster and more effective.

I suggested that the whole of the House should divide into two general purpose committees to deal with minor legislation, and although, the Leader of government business gagged debate on my motion after I had spoken, I believe the reforms I have advocated must come eventually, in the interests of better parliament.

Farmers' Rally at Warrnambool

The Minister for Agriculture, Sen. Wriedt and I both missed the rally which we were to have attended at Warrnambool a week ago, but for very different reasons.
Sen. Wriedt stayed in Canberra to discuss the affairs of the Labor Party at a meeting of its Federal Executive.

I flew off from Canberra to Victoria but was prevented from landing first at Warrnambool and then at Hamilton because of fog. I issued a challenge to Sen. Wriedt to debate rural policies with me at a different place, after he said that the people of Warrnambool were an "unintelligent audience" and that he would not go to Warrnambool.

I have denounced Sen. Wriedt for this offensive remark but I shall certainly take the first opportunity to put before a farming audience, from the same platform, as Sen. Wriedt, the rural policies which we believe are the right ones for Australia.

Just for the record, this is what Senator Wriedt said to me when he wrote a few days ago.

Senator Wriedt said: "I do not intend to go back to Warrnambool in the near future as I am sick and tired of being deliberately maligned and my position distorted by bigoted elements in that area".

The people of Western Victoria will know how to judge that remark.
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Fraser, Malcolm

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