This week Federal Parliament resumed for the Parliamentary Year 1971 and I resume the weekly talks in which I report direct to you in Wannon in the series "Our Australia." This series is designed to give you general information and provide background on current affairs as they affect both Wannon and Australia.

In this my first programme for the year, I would like to talk with you about the meeting I convened of Liberal Party Branches of Wannon at Hamilton....the Government's rural reconstruction scheme, and rumours in the Wannon Electorate.

WANNON MEETING

At Hamilton Art Gallery auditorium last week about 150 officers and members of all Liberal Party Branches of Wannon Electorate attended an informal meeting in which I outlined problems facing the Government today, and heard the problems of the electorate from delegates and party members.

It was a most successful meeting at which those in attendance were able to forceably put problems that concerned their Branches and I will be doing all in my power to help find solutions to these problems.

One of the problems raised was a recommendation made in a research study by the Australian Wool Board and Queensland University to close the wool selling centre at Portland.

I told the meeting that as I had fought hard to have the centre established in the first place, so I would oppose with all my strength any proposal to close the centre, which I believe is of vital importance to Portland's prosperity.

The study by the Wool Board and the University also recommended the closing of wool facilities at Geelong, Ballarat, Albury and Goulburn in NSW. I do not agree with the recommendations.

In my opening address to the meeting I covered defence, national service, inflationary problems and rural industries.

I outlined Australia's role in its area of strategic interest - SE Asia - in view of the modifying policies of the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union's increased activities in Australia's area of interest.

Because of changing events it has become increasingly clear that Australia must do more to help itself in the future, and because of this situation there was a need for continuing national service.
The Government is well aware of the problems and arguments against national service. But if Australia is to have the forces it needs, then the Government has to make decisions to get those forces. The Government must do what it believes necessary for the security of Australia.

On inflation, I blame in part the rapidity of wage increase decisions and the apparent lack of firmness shown by industry in resisting over-award pay claims. There was a time when employers opposed these claims and arbitration resolved the dealocked situation. Today, it seems that the attitude by employers is to accept claims for over-award payments then pass on the cost to the consumer in the form of increased charges and costs. Increased wages, followed by additional costs of products, have helped significantly to create inflation.

I must say something about competition, and the need for more of it. There are today, too many anti-competitive influences in Australian commerce. One of the significant elements in the present inflationary situation is that some businesses, because they are protected from effectual competition by price-fixing arrangements with those who should be their competitors, lack any incentive to resist demands for wage increases above award rates. To give in without demur is the easy way out. Such a business, being surrounded by friendly "competitors" can pass on the increased cost to the consumer.

For the past few weeks the Government has been seeking ways and means of saving money and curbing inflation, and discussions were held with industry and trade unions.

You are aware now of what steps the Government proposes as outlined by the Prime Minister in Canberra. Some of the steps taken may be unpalatable to a lot of you but they are necessary for the good of the country at this time and had to be taken in the public interest.

Of course Mr. Hawke's proposal for a 35-hour working week would add immeasurably to costs overall, for everyone. I believe that if people are only prepared to work 35 hours each week for their country then they do not deserve the better things that this country has to offer.

RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

I found out at the Wannon Electorate meeting that many people only had sketchy ideas on what was being done by the Government in its Rural Reconstruction Scheme.

To date, five States - NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia - have accepted a Commonwealth Government offer of finance for rural reconstruction.
It is hoped that the remaining State - Victoria - will accept the Government's offer at an early date so that the reconstruction programme can be implemented as quickly as possible.

The Commonwealth's offer to the States had been for the provision of $100-million over four years as a loan carrying an interest rate of three per cent. However, after discussions with the States the Commonwealth had agreed to make an alternative offer of a loan of $75-million at 6%, and a grant of $25-million. In both cases the repayment period for the loan will be 20 years with an initial three-year holiday from repayments of the principal. The States which have accepted the offer have done so on the basis of the alternative offer.

An agreement covering operations of the programme and its financial arrangements is being drawn up for signature by the Commonwealth and the States for approval by Federal Parliament.

In addition to the $100-million, funds under Commonwealth control amounting to about $7-million which is held in trust by several States as a carryover from reconstruction schemes of the 1930's, and could be used for the new rural reconstruction scheme.

The purpose of the new programme is to help primary producers who are in difficulty, and in danger of losing their properties, but who have the potential for long-term success.

RUMOURS IN ELECTORATE

There have been suggestions and rumours within ALP circles that I will not be standing as a candidate for Wannon in 1972, because Wannon is considered by some Labor people as a marginal seat.

Let me absolutely and without equivocation deny both these rumours. I will stand and win Wannon in 1972. I can only believe that the ALP is worried and that its allegations are wishful thinking on their part.

I will be squarely facing the polls at the next general election in 1972 as the Member for Wannon and as your Federal representative. If the ALP is not aware of this, then I believe the ALP is out of touch. I believe this type of allegation is mischievous and shows a lack of confidence by the ALP.

Since I first offered myself as a candidate in 1955, I have contested and won six Federal Elections, and won them well. This is evidenced in the facts that the first three elections went to a second and final count, while the last three were won by absolute majorities.
I won the 1955 Election with more than 7,000 votes and 67% of the preference votes. In 1958, I won with 10,517 votes and 91% of the preferences. In 1961, I increased my winning margin to 11,868 votes and 94% of the preferences.

Between 1955-1961, the Liberal-Country Party improved its position by 4,257 votes while the ALP lost about 1,000 votes.

The last three elections have been won by me in Wannon with an absolute majority in each case, against the combined efforts of the ALP and DLP.

As I said earlier, the rumours abroad in the electorate make it obvious that the ALP is concerned over its chances of achieving electorate success in 1972...and so they should be.
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