

12
B 12

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH
AT OPENING OF NOW, COBURG, VICTORIA,
11 JULY, 1975.

IN A WEEK MOMENTOUS IN THE HISTORY OF THIS NATION, A WEEK IN WHICH PARLIAMENT WAS RECALLED FOR A SPECIAL SESSION, A WEEK IN WHICH THE OPPOSITION SHOWED ITS FAMILIARITY WITH INTERNATIONAL FINANCE AND INTERSTATE INTRIGUE IT IS APPROPRIATE TO COME BACK TO EARTH TO THE GRASS ROOTS LEVEL OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE STATE WHERE I WAS BORN 59 YEARS AGO TODAY.

I WAS INVITED HERE BY A GREAT AUSTRALIAN, A GREAT SERVANT OF AUSTRALIA, A GREAT FRIEND, DR COOMBS, A.C., THE MAN ENTRUSTED WITH THE CONDUCT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION WHICH MY GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHED JUST A YEAR AGO.

.../2

IT IS WORTH REMEMBERING THAT FACT, BECAUSE IN ALL THE WELTER OF WORDS ABOUT THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND ITS OBLIGATIONS IN RECENT WEEKS, FEW HAVE BOTHERED TO RECALL THE FACT THAT THE ROYAL COMMISSION HAS BEEN CONTINUING ITS INVESTIGATION INTO THE PUBLIC SERVICE AT ALL LEVELS AND FROM ALL ANGLES, FOR A WHOLE YEAR. AND THAT FACT IS TOO READILY FORGOTTEN BY OUR DETRACTORS. SURE, IT HAS HAD A GOOD DEAL OF PUBLICITY AT TIMES, SUCH AS WHEN PERMANENT HEADS HAVE PRESENTED SUBMISSIONS AND SPOKEN TO THEM, BUT NOT NEARLY SO MUCH WHEN ORDINARY MORTALS HAVE BOTHERED TO PRESENT THEIR VIEWS.

IT IS, HOWEVER, TO THE VERY REAL CREDIT OF THIS ROYAL COMMISSION, UNDER DR COOMBS, THAT ITS OFFICERS HAVE DELIBERATELY SOUGHT OUT AND ENCOURAGED PEOPLE ON THE RECEIVING END OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE TO COMMENT ON THE QUALITY AND COMPETENCE OF THAT SERVICE AT THE POINT WHERE IT REACHES THE PUBLIC.

THAT, OF COURSE, IS WHERE NOW COMES IN, BECAUSE IT IS THE CREATION, THE BRANCHCHILD, OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION, AND A VERY PARTICULAR EXTENSION OF ITS RESEARCH PROGRAM. IT IS AN ATTEMPT TO SEE HOW MUCH BETTER SERVED PEOPLE COULD BE, GIVEN A MORE FLEXIBLE, IMAGINATIVE APPROACH TO THEIR NEEDS AS CONSUMERS OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE PRODUCT. ITS A SWING AWAY FROM THE SPECIALIST BOUTIQUE, AND BACK TO THE ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING STORES OF AUSTRALIA'S CHILDHOOD COUNTRY TOWNS.

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION - TO USE ITS FORMAL TITLE - HAS BEEN TOLD REPEATEDLY, ALL OVER AUSTRALIA, THAT THE DELIVERY OF WELFARE SERVICES, ALL OVER AUSTRALIA, IS CONFUSED AND CONFUSING. IT IS A SAD COMMENT ON THE WAY THINGS HAVE DEVELOPED IN OUR SOCIETY THAT THOSE VERY SERVICES DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE FREQUENTLY ADD TO THEIR SENSE OF BEWILDERMENT AND ALIENATION AT THE VERY TIME WHEN THEY NEED THE MOST SUPPORT. EVEN AT THE BEST OF TIMES, PEOPLE OFTEN HAVE DIFFICULTY KNOWING WHICH LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT, LET ALONE WHICH DEPARTMENT, OR WHICH SECTION OF WHICH DEPARTMENT, CAN HELP THEM.

AND IT'S ALL VERY WELL SAYING THAT YOU CAN LOOK IT UP IN A PHONEBOOK, BECAUSE - QUITE APART FROM WHETHER YOU CAN READ ENGLISH TO START WITH - IT'S ANYONE'S GUESS WHERE YOU MIGHT FIND A PARTICULAR SERVICE LISTED.

SO, NOW IS AN EXPERIMENT DEVISED BY THE ROYAL COMMISSION OFFICERS TO SEE WHETHER LOCATING AUSTRALIAN, STATE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND VOLUNTARY WELFARE AGENCIES IN THE ONE PLACE WILL HELP PEOPLE TO FIND THE PARTICULAR SERVICE THEY NEED.

NOW IS ALSO AN EXPERIMENT IN WORKER PARTICIPATION IN THE SENSE THAT IT WILL GIVE OFFICERS OF THESE VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK TOGETHER ON WORKING OUT HOW TO IMPROVE THE SERVICE THEY GIVE THE PUBLIC.

AT A TIME WHEN MORE PUBLICITY IS GIVEN TO THOSE THINGS WHICH DIVIDE THAN THOSE THINGS WHICH UNITE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT IN THIS COUNTRY, IT IS REFRESHING AND COMMENDABLE THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT HAS AGREED TO JOIN THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IN CONDUCTING A TRIAL RUN OF THE NOW SHOP FOR A TWO YEAR PERIOD. DURING THIS TIME THE EXPERIMENT WILL BE EVALUATED FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE PEOPLE WHO USE ITS SERVICES AS WELL AS THE PUBLIC SERVANTS WORKING IN THE SHOP.

INITIALLY THE NOW SHOP WILL INVOLVE OVER TWENTY PEOPLE IN EITHER FULL OR PART-TIME POSITIONS, AND IT WILL BE OF PARTICULAR BENEFIT TO THOSE WHO LIVE AND WORK IN THE NORTH WEST REGION - THAT IS, BRUNSWICK, COBURG, FAWKNER AND CAMPBELLFIELD.

THERE WILL BE TEN STAFF MEMBERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE - TWO SIMILAR DEPARTMENTS WHOSE SHORTENED NAMES, "SECURITY" AND "WELFARE", ARE EASY FOR THE BUREAUCRATS TO DISTINGUISH, BUT IT'S A DISTINCTION THAT MANY PEOPLE MAY NOT READILY APPRECIATE.

NOW AT COBURG WILL RECEIVE APPLICATIONS FOR PENSIONS AND BENEFITS, ADVISE ON ELIGIBILITY FOR PENSIONS AND BENEFITS AND FORWARD APPLICATIONS RECEIVED TO STATE HEADQUARTERS FOR PROCESSING AND PAYMENT. A SOCIAL WORKER WILL BE STATIONED IN THE OFFICE AND WILL UNDERTAKE SOME CASE WORK ACTIVITIES AS WELL AS LIAISE WITH OTHER WELFARE BODIES WITHIN THE COBURG/BRUNSWICK AREA TO HELP PLAN AND IMPLEMENT COMMUNITY WELFARE PROGRAMS. A FULL INFORMATION SERVICE ON SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS WILL BE PROVIDED IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE SURE THAT PEOPLE IN THE AREA BECOME PROPERLY AWARE OF WHAT ASSISTANCE THEY CAN EXPECT THROUGH THE AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY. NOW REALLY WILL BE A ONE-STOP-SHOP.

THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT HAS BROUGHT TOGETHER VOLUNTARY AGENCIES IN THE NORTH WEST AREA TO WORK IN WITH NOW, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS ALSO BEING INVOLVED THROUGH THE REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS.

SO, IN A VERY REAL SENSE, NOW WILL BE A ONE-STOP-SHOP WITH NOT ONLY AN ABUNDANCE OF CUSTOMERS, BUT ALSO AN EXISTING AND DEVELOPING GOODWILL.

IT IS, AFTER ALL, A PARTICULAR KIND OF GOOD-NATURED TAKEOVER OF SOMETHING THAT DIDN'T REALLY EXIST BEFORE. IT REPRESENTS A MERGING OF TALENT, A BURYING OF REAL AND IMAGINED RIVALRIES, AND A GREAT CHALLENGE TO ALL THOSE WHO WILL HAVE THE HEADACHE AND HEARTACHE OF MAKING IT WORK. I BELIEVE IT CAN BE MADE TO WORK. I HOPE IT DOES.

NOW IS THE HOUR. IT'S TIME TO CUT THE RED TAPE.
