Last week the House of Representatives ended its work for 1974. The Senate will be sitting for one further week to deal with matters that had to be referred from the House of Representatives.

Parliamentary Debates

I do not really believe that it was a particularly notable year. A good deal of work was done it is true but the quality of the debates was not as good as I believe they ought to have been and largely because many significant policy statements from the Government were made outside the Parliament, either in press conferences or just by general issue to the public. Major statements ought to be made in the Parliament. When the Prime Minister returns from overseas he should report in reasonable detail through the Parliament to the people of Australia and other Ministers should follow the same practice.

This has not been done under this Government and as a result the significant debates that used to take place in the Parliament tended to be put aside.

The Prime Minister and Farmers

The Prime Minister appeared on "Four Corners" recently and in that interview he spoke about Government support (and that really ought to be in inverted commas) for rural industries. The Prime Minister said, "the fact is there is a better hope now for people who live in the country and more of them live in country towns than ever before."

The Prime Minister is really only saying in another way "you have never had it so good". We all remember that he said that earlier in the year at a meeting in Gippsland. It was not particularly well received. His language on this occasion was more moderate but he does not understand that beef prices have been at rock bottom, he does not understand that wool and sheep prices are very much lower than they have been.

Primary producers not only have to put up with vastly reduced returns - they also have to put up with increased costs that have risen much more than the general cost of living because the superphosphate subsidy has been removed. Other matters which have occurred mean that the costs of farming have gone up much more than the general level of costs.

I do not think the Prime Minister will ever understand about life
on the land. It is alien to him and he does not seem to have a feeling for the problems and difficulties of people who live outside the great cities.

No alibi for Mr Whitlam

The Prime Minister has been seeking to persuade people that the economic problems of this Government are caused by overseas factors. This is a defeatist view because even if there were problems caused from overseas a Government that really knew what it was about would say "we can overcome that, we can work together and no matter what happens overseas we are going to be able to preserve the kind of Australia that we would all want."

But he does not say that. He says that inflation is caused by overseas events, that unemployment is worse overseas than it is in Australia. Because it is bad there, it is bad here in addition. It is a weak excuse. It is not even an accurate excuse because as I have said before if we had suffered from the increase in oil prices that have occurred overseas inflation would already have been over 30%. In addition to that the wage claims that were supported by this Government cannot be blamed on the government overseas or on trade unions overseas.

The tariff cuts leading to unemployment can only be blamed on the present Government. The general extravagances of the Government, whether it is in hiring a Qantas jet for the Prime Minister when he could easily go on a commercial jet and set an example of restraint under present circumstances, or whether it is in the general expenditure plans of this Government, are matters which cannot be blamed on the people overseas. They are the responsibility of the Prime Minister. It is within his power to alter that if he wanted it.

What has happened in Australia so far is home grown. Our difficulties, the level of unemployment are home grown and home caused. That is the tragedy of it all.

This has been recognised by other Ministers. Certainly Frank Crean who is shortly to be deposed as Treasurer indicated that the main inflationary elements in Australia were Australian caused. That would seem to blow out the Prime Minister's alibi.

Call for an enquiry into administration in the Department of Labour

We need a public enquiry into all aspects of the administration of the various plans that the Minister for Labour has introduced in recent times. An enquiry into the National Employment and Training Scheme which is full of anomalies, an enquiry into the resources needed by the Department of Labour - needed to deal expeditiously and quickly with people who are experiencing hardship under the present circumstances, under the present conditions of rising unemployment.
The Minister for Labour is getting into a real muddle in the administration of his Department. It is a Department geared significantly to a full employment situation where the strain on local Commonwealth Employment Services and officers is not all that great. Now the Department is just not equal to deal with the additional obligations put upon them.

It is not only the fact that there are more - and a growing number - of unemployed applying for help. There is also the National Re-training scheme. In that area people who are unemployed are having to wait a considerable time. People who are in a job and who want to be re-trained for one reason or another would have to wait a matter of months.

The Minister indicated the other day that 529 additional officers are being recruited. I don't know why they have not been recruiting more over the course of this year as unemployment has grown. The Minister has known full well for a long while that there would be additional responsibilities on his Department as a result of the re-training scheme. It is only in recent times according to an answer he gave on the 4th December in Parliament that they have been seeking additional officers for the Department of Labour.

$200 a week for not working

Another admission was made by the Minister during the same question time when he said that people could be paid by this Government $200 a week not to work.

There is a scheme called the Income Maintenance Scheme. If a person is put out of work as a result of the Government's earlier tariff cuts, he would then receive for six months the average weekly earnings that he has received over the previous six months. If he has been earning $200 a week with overtime that might have been available then that is what he gets for the next six months. The Minister admitted that many people in these circumstances would be getting more than those who were left in employment because with the downturn in activity overtime is now much less. In many areas it has been cut out. Therefore in a number of industries people who were retrenched from a particular factory are being paid more for six months to do nothing than people who are still working in that particular factory.

In some industries there is even now a shortage of employees because why would a person go to work for a wage which because of no overtime is now less than the Government's six months paid holiday.

I have spoken earlier of the anomalies under the NEAT scheme but let me mention just one or two.

A person on a widows' pension with nothing but the pension going onto..
the re-training scheme would lose her widows' pension and her pension rights. Somebody with $10,000 a year would be able to go along and get the re-training allowance for the same course. There is no justice or equity in these particular matters.

In addition to this a single person gets the same allowance as a married person with family obligations. The allowance I believe ought to be adjusted to meet the needs of individuals. That would better suit families and at the same time be much more economical for the tax payer. I agree with and I support many of the objectives of the re-training programmes but the administration is abysmal. It is shockingly expensive and the tax payer is going to have to carry an unreal financial burden as the result.