

## **There are none so blind.....**

There is something wrong in rural Australia. The discontent is such that increasing numbers of voters are looking to some alternative to the political choices they have been offered for half a century. The media cannot understand why so many are turning to minor parties and Independents.

Instead of trying to understand the real reasons for the disenchantment of country people, political analysts infer that dissidents are weak minded racists. That is an insult to something like a million people who have turned their backs on the traditional parties all over the country. Anyone who dares to challenge the conventional wisdom of the press is belittled by a mass media that jealously protects its own right to free speech. Rural people have every reason to distrust the media. The media has a vested interest in the concentration of people in big cities. It can more easily brain wash the masses who dutifully respond. Country people are starting to realize that the mass media determines government policy, not political parties.

The seeds were sown over thirty years ago when the major political parties embarked on programs that stimulated the growth of the capital cities at the expense of regional and country towns. Their policies were inevitably leading to splitting Australia into two cultures. Their financial policies ensured that almost all migrants over the past thirty years have concentrated in the cities instead of merging into all facets of Australian life.

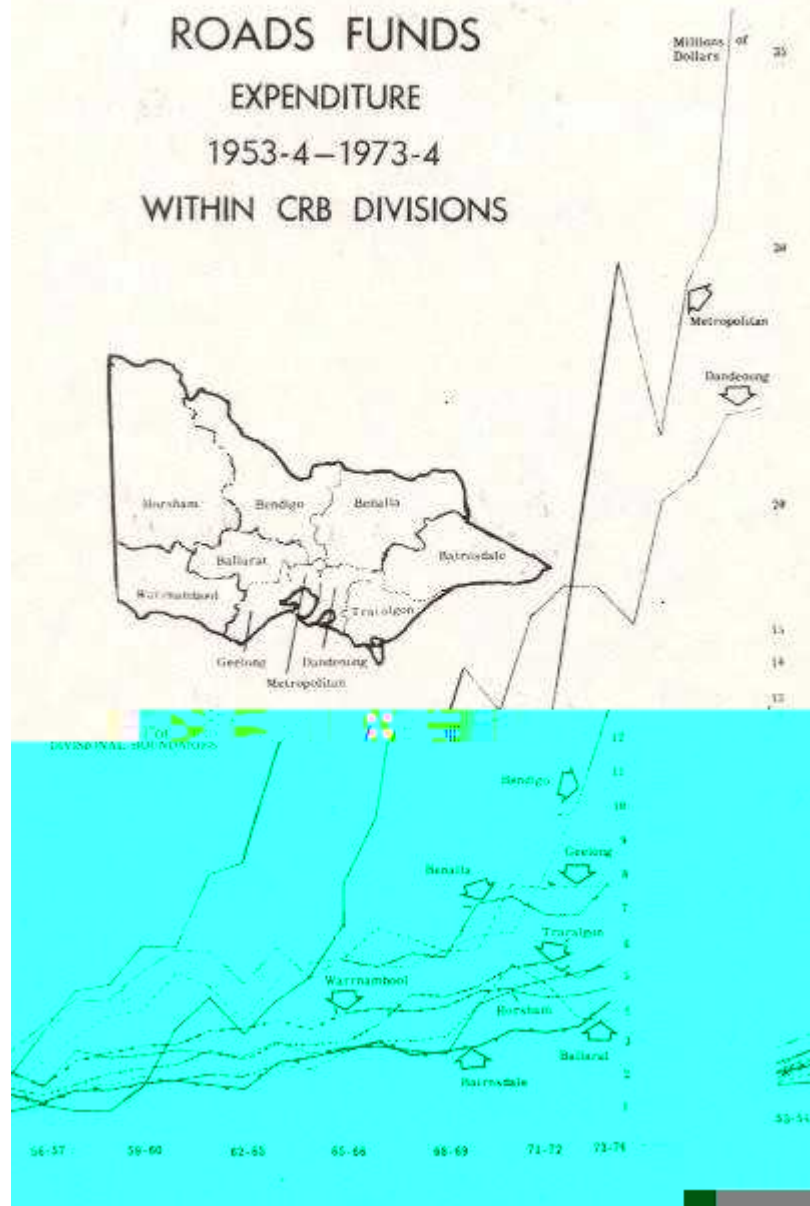
Many country people do not understand the real reasons why the lifestyles they are trying to cling to are being eroded from under them. Certainly, those who vote for the major parties do not seem to understand. It is not that anyone is telling lies - it is just that the whole truth is not being told.

The link below leads to a submission that has been sent to the Economic Development Committee of the Victorian Parliament. The submission identifies an amount of \$1.4 billion for public transport in excess of what is paid in comparable cities in New Zealand and Canada. It also refers to an amount of \$1 billion taken in superannuation payments from the economy of the country and invested in the city. The amount lost to country businesses through "Whole of Government Contracts" is far beyond my limited resources to estimate. Even though the State government criticises the dire effects of Compulsory Competitive Tendering, it is practising the same policy.

Fuel pricing also has an enormous influence on structural change as the costs for rural people who may use large quantities of fuel in their businesses and also need to have regard for the cost of travelling to use facilities in their nearest town. Economy of scale is used as the justification for the differences in fuel pricing between city and country. Economy of scale is the excuse for the differences in telephone charges. Exactly the same influences govern the price of milk but for decades every Victorian was able to purchase milk at a standard price no matter where they lived.

Road funding is another area where different rules are applied in the cities compared with the country. A substantial change was made in 1968. This graph shows how road funds were poured into the metropolitan area.

Leave was granted, and the graph was as follows—



Country Roads Board. Funding trends 1952 -1972.

Traffic counts are used as the basis for determining the importance of a road and, hence, its status for funding. If a "local" road that is funded substantially by Local Government through taxes on property can register a high enough vehicle count, it may qualify for "Main" road or "Highway" status and be funded from taxes, not rates.

The principle of reclaiming from property owners part of the value added to their properties by the provision of publicly funded facilities was forgotten in the rush to win votes in the large cities. A road that does not yet exist in the metropolitan area, and therefore has no traffic count, has been declared a road of National Importance by the Commonwealth Government, which will join the State in funding it without any ratepayers funds whatsoever. This is despite the fact that it is claimed that it will save

an enormous amount of money. If that is so, surely those who will save that money should pay for it, not people in remote areas whose properties are more likely to be reduced in value by the project.

The result of these policies now is that some metropolitan municipalities spend less than 5% of their rate revenue on roads while some country Councils spend nearly 90%. It is stretching the bounds of credibility to suggest that ratepayers in remote country areas gain any financial benefit from freeways in the cities. Yet these same ratepayers are also expected to pay for "local" roads that can be hundreds of kilometres away from their properties.

The substance of the submission to the Economic Development Committee is that those who enjoy the benefits of economies of scale should also bear the liabilities that flow from the same aggregation of population.

If that simple proposition is acknowledged, it is not an unreasonable suggestion that the annual transfer of wealth from the country to the city in the State of Victoria alone is well in excess of \$3 billion annually.