

Dear Legatee President,

For a long time I have been concerned over the fact that Legacy is no longer entirely functioning as the original members intended the club should do and in that respect has (unintentionally I know) "let the Founders down".

Originally at a meeting of ex-servicemen away back in September, 1923, at which I was present that the opinion was expressed that:

"We all have an obligation to see that the ideals for which so many Australians laid down their lives are maintained, in that regard we have inherited a legacy to see that those ideals are inculcated into the life of our nation, that the British heritage that we enjoy with its finest ingredients of patriotism, loyalty, justice, freedom and the like constitutes a legacy which we should cherish dearly."

From that statement made by an ex-serviceman arose the name and organisation called Legacy.

In the early days of Legacy there was always a strong functioning Committee called "Public Affairs", the duties of which were defined to "take action and report on matters affecting the public interest, particularly where events were in conflict with Legacy ideals".

The current idea throughout the length and breadth of Legacy that the word Legacy was adopted to mean the care of the dependants of deceased ex-servicemen is erroneous. This interpretation of the meaning of the word Legacy came several years after the foundation of Legacy.

It was not till the 14th December, 1926, just over three years after the foundation of the club that a resolution moved by myself to make children's welfare the major work of the Club was carried, after long discussion, but a rider was added to the motion that it was to be understood that "AS HERETOFORE, THE ENERGIES OF THE CLUB WOULD ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE IN THE SUPPORT OF ANY MATTER OR MOVEMENT AFFECTING THE INTERESTS OF RETURNED MEN AND WIDOWS AND DEPENDANTS OF DECEASED EX-SERVICEMEN".

This was the occasion when, speaking to the motion, the words "the care of children will give 'Legacy its Soul'" was first used. I mention this just to show that I was one of those in the forefront in supporting the proposition initiated by L/Frank Doolan that Legacy should undertake the care of "Deceased ex-servicemen's children and am still proud of the part I played in getting that work placed first amongst the objects of Legacy, and the coining of the phrase "This work if undertaken will give Legacy its Soul", but none of us at that time, I feel sure, ever imagined that the children's work would eventually overshadow and cause the abandonment of the other objects that Legacy was formed to carry out.

All that I have written above is for the purpose of demonstrating that at no time has Legacy's true objectives been formally abandoned, or any motion ever been passed cancelling the original objects of Legacy — one of those being to take action when the occasion warrants it; such an occasion has now arisen in the threat to the cutting out of the focal point of the Shrine of Remembrance by the continued erection of obscuring and dominating buildings in its vicinity.

I refer to the reported decision of the South Melbourne City Council to allow a huge motel (15 stories) to be erected at the corner of Albert Street and St. Kilda Road, in which case the original conception of the site to build Victoria's National War Memorial would be destroyed.

The arguments put forward at the time of the selection of the site for the memorial was that nothing would be able to obscure the view of the Shrine from North, South, East or West or from the view from ships coming up the bay; already the erection of the "B.P. Building" has partially obscured the view from the South.

The question I put forward now is, are we, as Legatees, to stand by and allow this threat to be carried out, or are we to throw the whole weight of our organization in behind the R.S.L. to prevent it? The Victorian President of the R.S.S.A.I.L.A. has already voiced his strong objections to the proposal of the erection of the motel. In the original objects of Legacy, No. 6 of which clearly states: "Support the R.S.S.A.I.L.A. in any worthy action concerning returned soldiers."

Experience in the past, in the old days of Legacy, has shown that when Legacy took up the cudgels to fight for an ideal it always won — in particular the story of how Legacy changed public opinion and won out against the Government and part of the Press when the decision had been made to erect a square at the top of Bourke Street as a national war memorial instead of the previously accepted design of a "Shrine of Remembrance" on the Domain site.

That experience was one of the highest achievements in the history of Legacy. The story of which is now being collated and written up by a self-appointed committee consisting of Kem Kemsley, Frank Doolan, Frank Meldrum and myself, which, when told in full, should make every Legatee realise what is possible when a body of men are sufficiently imbued with righteous fervour and enthusiasm for their cause, as was the case when Legacy decided to take the field in favour of a plan that was considered at the time as "dead as Caesar" and an impossible task to achieve. The fact that they did achieve it gives encouragement to believe that what was achieved then can be done again.

This, therefore, is an appeal to the Board of Management to take immediate steps by establishing a committee to begin the fight to ensure that the State Government passes a law for all time forbidding encroachment on, or allowing any obstruction to the proper viewing of Victoria's War Memorial, "The Shrine of Remembrance".

Yours in Legacy,

Donovan Soynt
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