

**Mr. HUGHES** (Caulfield). - It is with much diffidence that I rise so early in the session to address the House, but I believe that there are some matters of considerable urgency that have yet to be discussed on the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-Reply. At the outset I should like to join in the congratulations bestowed on the honorable member for Bulla and Dalhousie, and on the honorable member for Port Fairy and Glenelg for having made so much of so little in their speeches initiating this debate, because we are all conscious of the limitations in the range of subjects dealt with in the Governor's Speech. As a matter of fact, the honorable member for Bulla and Dalhousie took as a compliment the criticism of the Leader of the Opposition that the present Government is a No-No Government. If the subjects dealt with in the Governor's Speech indicate the limits of the Government's programme, it will probably go down in history as the No-No-No Government. One might almost give five No's to the title - no typhoid inquiry, no Public Service tribunal, no liquor control inquiry, no redistribution of seats, and no education programme.

When the debate was adjourned last night, the honorable member for Ouyen was supporting his Leader in the attitude that honorable gentleman had adopted regarding redistribution or no redistribution, as the case may be. The honorable member for Ouyen was speaking in defence of country areas, and among the problems with which he dealt were irrigation, and Government bores in particular. My comment at the time was not entirely facetious or idle, because I said that, unfortunately there was, on the part of many members, a lack of interest in the subject. I suppose that the problem of country versus city arises out of the fact that the State has been partitioned in an unnatural way, and I suppose also, that that fact makes the Country party feel that the time has arrived to fight for and maintain the present inequitable balance of power, probably because there is a lack of appreciation by the members of the various parties of the needs of both country and city.

The time has come when we can say that the problems of our State are not merely peculiar to the country or the city, but are problems of the State as a whole. We have reached the stage when we must consider the questions of post-war reconstruction and of the rehabilitation of the men who are in the fighting services at the present time. I venture to say that no parochial attitude towards the future of Victoria will ever solve the difficulties that will face this Parliament and the State generally when the war is over. We have no desire to witness a repetition of the anomalies of 1918 onwards, nor do we wish to see a congestion of large sections of the community in and around the metropolitan area. We do hope, however, for a decentralization of industry and population, and that will involve the formulation of a wise constructive programme for the provision of amenities for country areas. Those amenities must include water supply, electric power, and other facilities common to the metropolitan area.

I do not believe any member of the United Country party considers that the present balance of power is equitable - that 137,000 electors should wield a majority in this House. No amount of persuading could convince any one of us that such a situation can be accounted as equitable, and for that reason I introduce at this stage a suggestion that the time has arrived to consider proportional representation as a permanent solution of the problem. I do not see how any proposal for a redistribution of seats can avoid a thorough investigation of proportional representation as the basis of our future electorates. No section of the community is entirely homogeneous, and to draw artificial boundaries around any section leads to anomalies such as we find at the present moment, as the result of which large minorities are virtually unrepresented in this House. I believe that members of this Chamber who are protagonists of proportional representation are prepared to support my suggestion. They will appreciate that the present situation is one of the factors contributing to widespread cynicism concerning our public life. To

say the least, it is a most disturbing factor. The anomaly to which I allude does violence to one of the basic principles of democracy. At the present time, it would be extremely difficult for the electors of Victoria to dismiss the Government by voting against it, and we have evidence of that in the existing disproportionate balance of power in this House. It seems to me that the power of the electors to dismiss a Government from office by voting against it is basic to the preservation of democratic rights; but the existing distribution of seats makes such an action impossible.

At this juncture, I wish to address myself to the question of liquor reform. I strongly support the suggestion of the honorable member for St. Kilda that there should be instituted a much wider inquiry than that proposed by the Government, which is favouring an investigation by the licensing Court into the anomalies of the existing licensing laws.

Mr. MCKENZIE.- What would you suggest ?

Mr. HUGHES.- I would suggest that there is a widespread public demand for a searching inquiry into certain phases of the problem, including hotel rents, and the relation of hotels to breweries. An examination of the present regrettable practice of bar drinking behind closed doors, and of the alcoholic content of wines and beer is also required. I venture to say that an impartial committee representing all competent sections of the community whose interests are involved in such an inquiry could very well submit reasonable recommendations to the Government for appropriate action. May I respectfully suggest that the licensing Court is too close to the administration to be a competent body to inquire into anomalies of the laws with the enforcement of which the Court is itself entrusted? The demands I have indicated are neither fanatical nor immoderate; on the contrary, they are demands voiced by many persons who could be accounted most moderate in their desire for community welfare and, if their legitimate demands were refused, the Government would run the risk of engendering more comprehensive and violent criticism of the system of liquor control as a whole. If concessions are granted by the Government as the result of an immediate inquiry, wise legislation for many years to come will probably be ensured.

Until the question of firewood supplies was raised by another member of this House, it was not my intention to allude to it. The constituency I have the honour to represent is greatly concerned about the quality of the firewood now being supplied. I have in my possession a letter from one municipal council emphasizing four highly unsatisfactory aspects of firewood supply. The first complaint relates to shortage of supplies sent from the country to local wood merchants. I made personal investigation and found that 14 out of 16 wood merchants were inadequately supplied with stocks. In the second place complaints were made by local wood merchants that they were required to pay by weight for wood which they did not receive. I inspected one 5-ton truck of 1-foot blocks sent from Noojee. The truck, because of the water content of the wood, weighed 62 tons. No wood merchant can be expected to live by the profit made from wood bought which, even when sold, will not burn. He cannot make profit out of the loss of water. The wood was literally waterlogged. One truck of 2-foot wood which normally should weigh 5 tons 15 cwt., weighed 7 tons 5 cwt. Not only is the wood unsuitable for use because of its water content, but it is also of exceedingly poor quality, and it would appear that the Forests Commission is clearing its forests at the expense of the public. Messmate, stringy bark, and peppermint seem to be the principal kinds of wood supplied.

Mr. LIND.- They are good if dry.

Mr. HUGHES.- If dry they are fairly good for burning in an open fireplace, but it is almost impossible to burn them in a grate.

I think all honorable members will agree that the most serious omission from the Governor's Speech is any reference to education, nor is there any evidence of a realistic and understanding approach to that subject. I suppose all other subjects of public welfare fade into insignificance when we consider this major problem of education. It has been stated in this House that there is no man competent to speak with a full knowledge of the subject, and I think all honorable members will heartily agree with me that it is one especially for experts. There is remarkable unanimity at the present time on the part of experts concerning what needs to be done as early as possible. I have tabulated the findings of four different groups of authorities on the need for change. Those four groups are: The Australian Council for Educational Research, the Educational Reform Association, a State school committee at Horsham, and Mr. S. R. Dickinson, who was quoted yesterday by the honorable member for Brighton.

Mr. LIND.- Where is the Council for Public Instruction?

Mr. HUGHES.- Its report, I regret to say, I did not have before me. I cite these authorities not for the purpose necessarily of scientific analysis, but merely to show the striking unanimity that exists among such groups. On the subject of finance, the Australian Council for Educational Research assumes that the programme is the important thing, and that, no matter what the cost, it is efficiency that is desired. The Educational Reform Association says that this State cannot afford to delay educational reform, and that the lowest capital expenditure in the next five years should be £3,300,000 spread over the five years, and that the annual expenditure should be increased by £2,000,000, bringing it approximately to £5,000,000. The Horsham State School Committee, which wrote to me recently on this subject, says the State cannot afford not to spend money on education. Mr. Dickinson said that the State spent £3 per head per annum on tobacco, £6 per head per annum on liquor, an incalculable amount on gambling and pictures, and yet spent less than £2 per head on education. The latest figure of the cost per head of education was given in the *Review of Education in Australia* for 1939. In that report the figure was quoted as £1 15s. 3d. in 1938.

Mr. HOLLAND.- The cost in Victoria is £7 10s. per head.

Mr. HUGHES.- The figures that I give are from page 137 of the *Review of Education in Australia* for 1939. The total expenditure in 1938 was given as £3,277,855. Educationists are unanimous that the size of classes should be reduced to at least 30 pupils; and again there is remarkable unanimity in all the councils of experts that this is a necessary reform. On questions of buildings, many of them obsolete; of playgrounds that are not only inadequate, but also definitely unhealthy and untidy; and of buildings which were in order many years ago but to-day are hopelessly inadequate, there is also general agreement. On the subject of schools in the community, there is unanimity that they should have a much closer relationship to the community as a whole, and should be centres of community life, both for parents and children. There is unanimity that the school-leaving age should be increased as soon as possible to sixteen years, and that adult education is one of the neglected departments of education. We can no longer ignore the fact that equipment is sadly lacking, particularly libraries and gymnasiums, and that juvenile delinquency would be lessened if there were a reasonable approach to the subject of education.

We are told that the State of Victoria spent £1,000,000 more on education last year than it spent ten years ago. It should not be deduced from that fact that our education system is efficient, and that the expenditure is adequate. One has only to look back to 1928 to find that the expenditure was £3,340,000 odd, which continued until 1930. In 1933, when the State had suffered the

worst ravages of the depression, education expenditure had fallen to the lowest figure for many years, so that to make any comparison with 1933 is to show education in a very poor light indeed. If we take into consideration the increase in the cost of living in the last five years we see that while that increase has been 25 per cent., the increase in education expenditure has been approximately only 6 per cent.

Mr. LIND.- Do you not think there are difficulties in wartime as great as in depression time?

Mr. HUGHES.- I would not suggest that the difficulties of the present day should in any way be minimized, but I am suggesting that now is the time to plan for post-war education, so that in two years, or earlier or later, if need be, adequate provision can be made to change the whole system to something better. However, I maintain that even if the annual expenditure were raised immediately by £5,000,000, we should still miss the main purpose of education. A complete review of the whole system is needed, and any cheeseparing policy at this stage must be regarded as an economic waste, as well as a waste of human material.

At the end of the war we must be ready to raise the school-leaving age to sixteen years, if for no other reason than partially to solve the problem of unemployment that will arise. No postponement of planning in that direction could be justified. Such a proposal requires the immediate preparation of teachers and equipment so that when the war ends we shall be able immediately to go into action. In the matter of the size of classes, we are prone to overlook the fact that there are 500 classes in metropolitan schools in which there are more than 50 children. To expect junior teachers to undertake the training of children in classes of 50 and over is to expect more than is humanly possible, if, at the same time, we aim at efficiency.

Mr. LIND.- What do you mean by junior teachers?

Mr. HUGHES.- I merely cite junior teachers as one instance; many senior teachers have classes of more than 50 pupils. I am personally aware of cases of junior teachers, just beginning their teaching careers, who have had to take charge of more than 50 of the youngest children in the school. That task is beyond normal human ability. Undoubtedly, we are now suffering from lack of man power, but there are some anomalies we have not looked at in that regard. Because of our slavish adherence to the rule of seniority, some teachers have been retired on reaching the retiring age of 65 years - a head teacher in one case of which I am personally aware - yet the Department could well have retained the services of such highly-trained officers. The head teacher to whom I have referred had to choose between taking a lower status in his school or leaving the Education Department and performing other duties. He took the second course. It is a strange anomaly that in these days such competent men in the teaching service should be required to retire from the Department.

Mr. LIND.- I hope the Leader of the Opposition is heeding your words.

Mr. CAIN.- I am heeding them.

Mr. LIND (to Mr. Cain).- We remember what you advocated yesterday.

Mr. CAIN.- My objection was to the Government undertaking the work of the Public Service Board.

Mr. HUGHES.- I have said sufficient on the lack of planning to pass now to the problem of equality of educational opportunity. It is a basic injustice that a child aged 14 years is forced to

leave school in order to supplement the family income. Educational advancement should not depend on the ability of the parents to pay, and the mere extension of the scholarship system or competitive examinations does not meet the need. Advancement in education should be based on aptitude only. There are many children going on to secondary schools who, if the qualification of aptitude be applied, will probably be excluded from secondary education. If that position is rectified, and particularly if a careful analysis of aptitude is maintained throughout the educational system, we shall avoid some of the psychological maladjustments that occur in later life.

It is a source of great regret to myself and, I presume, to other members, that the Melbourne Boys' High School is still being used by other than our education authorities. It seems anomalous that the one great high school in this city, which should be open to boys who cannot be given the privilege of a college education, is still closed to them. I trust that the Minister of Public Instruction will do his utmost to see that the school is returned as early as possible for the education of our boys.

Mr. LIND.- We have pleaded for that for some time.

Mr. HUGHES.- Another aspect of education to which we should immediately pay attention is the relationship of our State schools to private colleges. At present there is a gulf between them, and we cannot be satisfied in a democracy while that gulf remains. I think the time has come when the whole situation should be reviewed, and the relationship of all schools should be analysed very carefully.

Mr. MCKENZIE.- Do you think that gulf is as wide as the gulf between Lazarus and Dives?

Mr. HUGHES.- I am not sure whether I am supposed to know the answer to that interjection either as Dives or Lazarus, but the educational gulf is a wide one. Unfortunately, it is too wide; but it can be bridged. Education from pre-school kindergarten on to the university needs to come under review, because, until we have made education available to all children on the basis of merit, we cannot be satisfied. Personally, I should be glad to see completely free education from the kindergarten to the university.

Mr. EVERARD.- You are not alone in expressing that wish.

Mr. HUGHES.- I cannot speak on the subject of education without linking with it the question of health and fitness, because education is definitely linked with the future welfare of the State, and particularly the health of the children. It is anomalous that in a State such as Victoria there can exist widespread malnutrition among our school children. It is also anomalous that we find it necessary for voluntary organizations to provide meals for children in order to raise the standard of health. If we approach the question of the health of the community wisely, we must see that the necessity for good health is important when the child commences school. Preventive treatment is desirable at that stage rather than curative treatment later for many of the illnesses from which school children suffer.

Mr. MUTTON.- What is your view on the question of the establishment of baby clinics in every municipality?

Mr. HUGHES.- As yet, I do not believe that the establishment of baby clinic has touched the problem of sickness in schools, and until we institute regular medical and dental examinations of all school children we shall not be able to deal with the diseases that afflict children during

school years.

Mr. MICHAELIS.- Would you agree that a purer milk supply is necessary?

Mr. HUGHES.- I think the State has sadly failed in its approach to the problem of adult education. It seems to me that in our educational programme we have assumed that once a child reaches the school-leaving age of fourteen years it is then ready to accept the responsibilities of adulthood. We should be aware that no child at the age of fourteen years, under our present education system, is ready to accept the responsibilities of adult life. In fact, the vital years in a child's life are from fourteen to sixteen, when it begins to develop social consciousness. We have failed to train our people for the responsibilities of citizenship because we have allowed them to regard their education as finished at the age of fourteen years. If we could now institute the education of boys and girls at the age of fourteen years in the subjects of social diseases and social responsibilities, we should avoid many of the existing anomalies.

Religious instruction is now given in State schools, and, although good work is done, the present system cannot be regarded as satisfactory. It has some very unsatisfactory phases, and I think school authorities generally are not happy about the arrangement; many of the persons giving religious instruction feel that they are allowed to teach the subject almost on sufferance. The problem will not be solved merely by adding religion as a subject. We must realize that religion plays an integral part in the life of the community, and it should be embraced in the school curriculum with a coherent motive and purpose. That will overcome the problem of the present disjointed understanding of religion on the part of children. Many of them now leave school at fourteen years, totally unprepared to face the problems of adolescence or the other problems that confront them as they grow to manhood or womanhood, because their religious training at fourteen years was incomplete. The time has come when the basis of education must be reexamined, particularly in view of the problems that we shall face during the post-war period. I am confident that we are all convinced of the utter wrongness of the present war, and that we do not want a repetition of the present state of affairs. But we are conscious that in this necessary struggle to overthrow Fascism we are facing the reconstruction of society. We are determined that Fascism shall never raise its head again in the community if we can achieve that end. We do not want our children in another twenty years to be called upon to face what young men are experiencing to-day, and now is the time when we ought to consider education in relation to the wider world of to-morrow.

How can we possibly avoid a repetition of the mistakes of this generation? If Australia is no longer to live in the glorious isolation it has enjoyed in the past, and if we are to enter a world of greater freedom and greater security, we must now increase education facilities so that our children will be fitted to live in the world of to-morrow. If we do not undertake that task now, we shall experience a repetition of the tragic mistakes of the past. We are hoping for a different form of social and economic organization to give greater freedom and security, but if we do not prepare our children to use and not to abuse those privileges, we will be inviting disaster.

The need for education reform is not confined to this State, and one of its aspects that must be examined by a competent body is its relationship to Australia as a whole. It seems to me that a reasonable approach to the question would be the appointment of a competent committee, consisting of members of this House, and representatives of teachers of schools and colleges, parents, the university, and the churches. All are vitally concerned in the matter. The committee I envisage would be able to make recommendations to extend the field of education as I have

discussed it.

Mr. MCKENZIE.- Would it be a coordinating committee?

Mr. HUGHES.- I should prefer a Select Committee of experts to make recommendations on these matters to Parliament.