

Dr. MALONEY.—Is the honorable member a Daniel come to judgment? If the people could rise in their power, and take effective action to remedy the injustice they are now suffering, secrecy would not hide Labour's wealthy opponents from the punishment which I believe they deserve. They are but a lesser evil than the great multi-millionaires who, by means of their capital and the present monetary system, have the power to make the people of any country miserable.

I now turn to members of the Country party. Silver of late years has been sold at a lower price than ever before. When I first raised the subject of silver currency, both Nationalist and Labour Governments were lackadaisical about it. My friend the honorable member for Newcastle (Mr. Watkins) supported me, but the only member of the Country party who paid me the compliment of considering my proposal was the honorable member for Forrest (Mr. Prowse). Honorable members will recall that an election occurred shortly after the declaration of war in 1914. The Broken Hill Proprietary Company, and all the wealthy mines announced through Mr. W. L. Baillieu that they intended to carry on at full pressure if they could obtain bank accommodation, but that otherwise they would have to close down their works. Having led the unemployed for about 20 years prior to that, I knew that nothing so disturbed credit as unemployment. Every honorable member knows that to-day to his regret. I wrote on this subject to the *Melbourne Age*, which paid me the compliment of publishing my letter in a most prominent column. I expressed regret that the Broken Hill Proprietary Company was prepared to close down its mines, and suggested that the subject of a silver currency should be considered. I pointed out that England had debased its currency more than at any time except during the reign of King Henry VIII.—

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. G. J. Bell).—The honorable member has exhausted his time.

Mr. MENZIES (Kooyong—Attorney-General) [11.7].—I do not wish to detain honorable members for a lengthy period on the last sitting day of the week, but I have a few words to say about one

phase of the problem before the chair which seems so far to have received insufficient attention. The debate, up to the present stage, if I may say so with great respect to honorable members, has proceeded on fairly well-worn lines. The usual references have been made to the alleged breakdown of the monetary system. Mention has also been made of the admitted necessity for a policy of public works for the relief of unemployment, but on quite a number of occasions, I venture to think, public works have been referred to as though in themselves they constituted a cure for unemployment. I need not indicate that these views do not find acceptance with members on this side of the Chamber. We do not advance the easy theory that the present troubles of Australia or of the world are due to monetary factors. I certainly do not accept the view that we shall cure unemployment by providing a palliative for it.

I propose to direct my mind to some portion, at least, of the amendment tabled by the right honorable the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Scullin), because in it I found some recognition of the fact that the problem is not confined to the two factors to which I have referred. If the right honorable gentleman will permit me to say so, I found in the form and substance of his amendment a confirmation of the worse suspicions that I had entertained concerning the policy which he propounded at the recent election. Yet I observe that the right honorable gentleman appreciated—although, as I shall endeavour to show, wrongly appreciated—the significance of one aspect of this matter which is commonly overlooked. That aspect will be found stated in the second paragraph of the amendment—

That the following words be added to the proposed Address: "and this House is of the opinion that to provide for relief of unemployment immediate action should be taken—

- (2.) to amend the Arbitration Act to ensure that full and favourable consideration be given to progressive reductions in the working hours and increases in living standards commensurate with increased powers of production, due to mechanization and speeding up of industry.

There, I venture to say, the Leader of the Opposition has drawn attention to a problem of the first importance. It is one that

deserves the earnest consideration of every honorable member, and its significance is fully appreciated in one passage of the Governor-General's Speech. It will be observed that the form of the amendment is such that it contemplates an amendment of the Arbitration Act. It does not direct attention to amendment of the industrial power, but to an amendment of the act exercising that power. It proposes that the act should be so amended as to ensure that full and favourable consideration will be given to certain views upon the interrelationship of employment and working hours.

Mr. SCULLIN.—We cannot alter the power by a vote in this House.

Mr. MENZIES.—I agree, and the first observation I make is that, whatever be the substantial merit of the right honorable gentleman's proposal, it directs itself to an impossibility, because it is not possible for this Parliament so to amend the Conciliation and Arbitration Act as to direct the Arbitration Court to reduce working hours.

Mr. ROSEVEAR.—The court has never been directed.

Mr. MENZIES.—That is so.

Mr. SCULLIN.—And the amendment does not direct it.

Mr. MENZIES.—The amendment states that the act should be so amended as to ensure favorable consideration of a certain proposition. How you can ensure favorable consideration of a proposition by a court except by telling the court itself to consider the matter favorably is beyond my understanding.

The Leader of the Opposition, in advance, sought to meet that argument, I agree, by making reference to what was section 25D of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, which directed the court to take into consideration the economic conditions of the community when making an award. Honorable members will observe that it is one thing to tell the court to consider factors, and another thing to tell it that it shall consider them favorably or give effect to them in one direction or another.

Mr. HOLLOWAY.—The honorable gentleman himself has been on a winner sometimes.

Mr. MENZIES.—Very frequently, particularly when opposed to the honor-

able member for Melbourne Ports. I am not offering this criticism on the language of the amendment merely in a captious way, but because I wish to use it as a preliminary to a brief consideration of the real significance of the problem raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

In 1900, when the Constitution of this Commonwealth was formulated, if we may judge by the language employed in it, the relations of employer and employee were regarded as of importance merely as something incidental, or more or less occasional. The only power given to the National Parliament was of a narrow and artificial kind. It was given power to legislate for conciliation and arbitration for the prevention and settlement of certain disputes. That was merely an occasional power, a partial power, a power which in the light of experience has proved, in my opinion, quite inadequate for dealing with the problem that was envisaged. The reason is that, in 1900, we did not fully perceive that industrial relationships are not merely something incidental or accidental but are something going to the very root of our social and political order. Consequently, if we are to consider the great question of employment fully, we can never consider it apart from some real and fundamental consideration of the industrial relationship itself. On that account, I feel grateful to the right honorable the Leader of the Opposition for having brought this problem before our minds. In Australia, whenever we think of a problem of that type we are not able to think of it in quite the same way as would be done in other countries. In any country of the unitary type there are, broadly, two questions to be propounded in relation to any problem; first, what is the nature of the disease, and, secondly, what is the desirable remedy. If both questions can be answered, the remedy can be put into immediate operation. In Australia we have a division of authority—I offer no criticism of it; as a federalist I believe in it—by which we are faced with a third question: who has the power to put the remedy into operation? That may sometimes be answered by saying that no one authority has that power; two sets of authorities have each a portion of it. At

any rate, such is the answer that must inevitably be given when we consider the industrial problem.

Mr. GREGORY.—It was never contemplated in the framing of the Constitution.

Mr. MENZIES.—I am handicapped in that respect. I do not know what was intended in the framing of the federal Constitution except by my reading of it, and even then what I understand it to mean is not always in line with what I am subsequently told authoritatively it does mean. The point I want to emphasize is this: With the division of authority that exists in relation to this matter, we have not only incurred, but have also succumbed to, the risk of saying that the difficulties of problems of a constitutional order are such as to render it undesirable to consider the matter at all. A division, or a sense of division, of authority very frequently completely inhibits action; in industrial matters we have, in recent years, developed the habit of saying that we do not know who has the power to do this or that; and that consequently it is a waste of time to think about it.

Mr. GARDEN.—And we "pass the buck"!

Mr. MENZIES.—Yes; in the elegant language of the honorable member, we "pass the buck". At the outset, I said that honorable members would find in the Governor-General's Speech a sentence which recognizes the importance of this matter. I refer to it because it has been adversely criticized, and because I believe honorable members have not properly appreciated what is behind it. The sentence is as follows:—

Consideration will be directed to three principal matters:—

(a) A complete survey of the unemployment problem—

It is at that point that most of the critics have stopped. They said: "Who wants it? Has it not been going on for years?" And up to that point I am prepared to agree with them; but the sentence does not end there. It goes on— in order to determine if there are any root causes which could be effectively dealt with by direct Commonwealth action or by some concerted action on the part of the Commonwealth and the States.

In other words, the object of this survey is not merely to determine the causes

but also to consider the causes in relation to the power that will deal with them. That is a very different inquiry.

Mr. RIORDAN.—Does not the Attorney-General think that three years of control by the United Australia party have been sufficient to enable this information to be obtained.

Mr. MENZIES.—I hope the honorable member will not call upon me to answer for the last three years; I shall have sufficient to do to answer for the next three years. I want to suggest, for the consideration of honorable members, three or four lines of inquiry of the first importance in relation to this matter, no one of which I believe has been thrashed out to conclusion, because of this sense of constitutional incompetence. The first is the problem of the training of skilled artisans. I am told, and I have gathered from my reading, that unemployment is felt most severely to-day among the unskilled workers, skilled artisans being almost at a premium.

Mr. BEASLEY.—To what industry is the honorable gentleman referring?

Mr. MENZIES.—The building industry.

Mr. BEASLEY.—That is not the case in New South Wales.

Mr. MENZIES.—I am sorry if the aftermath of past policies in New South Wales has left the building industry in that State in a depressed condition. In Victoria skilled artisans employed in the building industry are at a premium. Whether that is so universally or not, honorable members will at least admit that the possession of skill and training on the part of workmen definitely enhances their prospects of securing constant employment. For that reason I want to remind honorable members that the whole problem of the training of artisans is of the first importance. The problems of apprenticeship and the production of skilled workers have engaged the sporadic attention of the Arbitration Court, wages boards and special tribunals; but they have never been given complete and comprehensive consideration because of the division of constitutional authority.

Another problem which faces us is that of women employed in industry occupying positions which might otherwise be

held by men. I do not propose to deliver a diatribe on a problem, the very fringe of which we have scarcely yet touched. It is one which calls for most earnest, unprejudiced and probably courageous thought. It is one that cannot be left entirely to the higgling of the market in the Arbitration Court merely to a decision of the court in a particular case to meet a particular dispute. It is a kind of problem upon which some orderly and comprehensive view should be entertained in Australia.

The third problem, that of hours, was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition. When the right honorable gentleman speaks about hours of labour, he speaks of them not in relation to the settlement of an industrial dispute, but as something connected with the working out of a social philosophy. He said that he did not suggest that the hours should be 44 or 48 a week in relation to a particular dispute, but rather that hours should be considered in relation to the whole problem of mechanization of industry in such a way as to give the workers an increased share of leisure as a result of the increased efficiency of production. I admit the existence of that problem. Every one who possesses one spark of humanity or has watched the progress of events must admit that it is a very real one. The point is how are we to deal with it?

Mr. SCULLIN.—There is no mention of that in the Governor-General's Speech.

Mr. MENZIES.—On the contrary, the speech says that we propose to look at these matters and to formulate views upon them.

Mr. BEASLEY.—The Government has been a long time over it.

Mr. MENZIES.—I remind honorable members that we have had not more than three weeks in which to consider them.

Mr. BRENNAN.—The Government must have been waiting for the advent of the right honorable gentleman.

Mr. MENZIES.—It was; much more so than for the honorable member's return for Batman.

The fourth problem which confronts us is how far all those various factors which I have mentioned should be related to our capacity and need to carry on our export industries; in other words, how

far we can afford to discuss these things as if our economic system existed in a vacuum, how far they are affected and ought to be affected by the preservation of the export industries, which keep us an international unit instead of a detached one. I do not propose to indicate in a kerbstone fashion what the answer to this question should be; but I do say that any treatment of the problem of unemployment will be partial and haphazard unless it is prepared to go to the root causes in an endeavour to ascertain how far this Parliament can effect a policy in relation to them, and to what extent it is necessary again to go to the people and say: "We want from you a single power to enable this problem to be dealt with as a whole". That is a line of inquiry which opens out not only before the Government but also before every honorable member of this House. A reference is made in paragraph 4 of the right honorable gentleman's amendment to Australia-wide pools. The pool we most urgently need is an impartial disinterested pooling of the best mental resources of all parties in this House. If we think about this problem, having not superficial, but root causes in our mind, I believe that we shall do something which will constitute a real move forward in the Australian dealing with it.

May I conclude by saying something which honorable members may choose to regard as a criticism, but which I choose to regard as a perfectly frank admission. I make it as one who, it is true, is a completely untried member of this House, but has had some experience of both office and opposition in another Parliament. When we are not in office, we all too frequently regard the task of thinking as unnecessary, and, indeed, as irrelevant; and when we are in office we are so busy that we have little time for thinking. The result is that thinking about large problems tends to be discounted, and any government which says boldly in a policy speech or a Governor-General's Speech, "We propose to think," is at once accused of having idled for years past. I wish to take this opportunity to say, as I suppose it is permissible for me to say, that the members of the Lyons Ministry are to be congratulated.

Mr. GANDER.—Which Ministry? This one, or the one that will soon be in office?

Mr. MENZIES.—The names of the members of the Lyons Government may be found inside the front cover of *Hansard*.

Mr. GANDER.—But they are being sacked.

Mr. MENZIES.—I wish to say that the members of this Ministry, or the members of the Ministry which succeeds to the same title, are to be complimented upon having realized the importance of this problem, and upon having invited honorable members of the House to do so. Whether we are in opposition or in office, the time has come when we must pool all our mental resources and engage in some concerted thought about these most elementary and fundamental features of the greatest problem which confronts us.

Mr. BRENNAN (Batman) [11.33].—The Attorney-General (Mr. Menzies), whom I, as an old member of the Parliament, welcome as a new member, intimated that my return to Canberra was not expected. I do not think that that was what the honorable gentleman would call, in another sphere, a considered opinion. It was wrung from him, more or less, by, I hope, a not-too-unpleasant interjection. I should like to say to him that he was expected in this Parliament. I felt morally certain that when I arrived here I should find that he was "not dead but gone before."

Mr. ARCHDALE PARKHILL.—The honorable member has been sleeping for three years.

Mr. BRENNAN.—The Minister for Defence should cease rattling his sword. The Attorney-General was expected in this Parliament. Certainly he was not altogether wanted in the other Parliament. Poor Sir Stanley Argyle, the Premier of Victoria, looked at the Country party and then looked at the honorable member for Nunawading, now the Attorney-General of this Government, but then a colleague, and said under his breath, as an English king once said of an English

prelate: "Of the cowards that eat my bread, is there none will rid me of this turbulent priest?" The prayer so softly spoken was answered. The Attorney-General has come here because he was the chief obstacle to a *rapprochement* with the Country party, and the first thing that this turbulent priest did after his arrival in Canberra was to give absolution not only to the Leader of the Country party (Dr. Earle Page), but also to the party itself. If time permits I may have occasion during this speech to return to the honorable gentleman, because his standing here and elsewhere surely merits it.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Why not deal with his speech?

Mr. BRENNAN.—Last night the honorable member for Fawkner (Mr. Maxwell) plaintively said that he was charged with interjecting, whereas he had asked only one question. But that question drew such a crushing retort from the honorable member for Griffith (Mr. Baker) that one would have thought that prudence and experience alike would have dictated silence now. As a new member, I should like to be heard, if not in silence, at least with the respect due to a person who has been in exile for two and a half years, to the great regret of himself and the irreparable loss of his constituents.

No one could deny the modesty and appropriateness of the choice of words of the honorable gentleman who moved the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-Reply, and of his colleague who seconded the motion. They asked for no special notice. They did not seek praise at the hands of those who sent them forward to do this duty. They have received less than they asked. Seldom has a motion been so cavalierly treated by its sponsors as that moved and seconded by the two young and capable members who addressed themselves to this one by direction of the Government. It is true that the Minister for Defence (Mr. Parkhill) approached the table. I thought I heard him rattle his sword in his scabbard; but I might have misunderstood the signs and portents.

Mr. A. GREEN.—He might have been shaking his head.