

and that she cannot call on anything until probate duty is determined. This situation is unjust and should be examined. It is wrong that such a situation should exist in a progressive State.

I am sure all members are aware that there has been no increase in the hospitals and charities grant. This is an indictment of the Government because many hospitals in Victoria are in need of additional financial assistance. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition sits on the board of a hospital in my electorate. This is an efficient hospital. It is the busiest general hospital in Melbourne. It is most forward thinking. For a period this year it introduced a four-day week for its staff. This experiment proved most successful and it is planned to introduce it again next year. The hospital believes that the staff must be satisfied with the job they are doing at this hospital. I am, of course, referring to the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital, which has a staff of 800. It has a better casualty hospital section than any other hospital in Australia but it will be deprived of essential requirements and will not be able to do the work it seeks to do. Members of the staff will not be able to have so much pride in their work. Assistance is being given to the provision of an additional 200 beds in the next twelve months, but I do not think it is adequate.

This hospital is concerned for the care of patients, as is the situation in all hospitals, and the fact that financial assistance has not been increased is an indictment of the Government in my view and in the view of most people who live in Preston, Northcote, Coburg and Whittlesea. The Minister of Health was at the annual meeting of the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital and was surprised at the intense interest of the people of Preston. The hall was packed. In its annual report for 1971-72 the committee of management stated—

This year, 1971-72, has been another year of growth—the hospital has been extended

Mr. Kirkwood.

to its limits. All departments report increased patient needs and only the continued motivation and energy of the staff has enabled the hospital to cope with the added demands. Staff morale is high and the atmosphere is one of optimism that the future will bring better facilities to match increased needs.

Undoubtedly the future will bring greater demands in such an efficient hospital. It is rather interesting when one considers the Valuer General's Office, as probably everyone has done, to find that at present it has 73 qualified valuers. I should not be surprised if it had more valuers than are employed by all municipalities throughout Victoria. The departmental valuers do not go out in the field. They do not work as do valuers in municipalities. It makes me wonder why this empire building is being permitted by the Government. A few years ago the number of valuers was comparatively low but gradually and surely the number has increased to the high of 73.

Mr. CURNOW.—What do they all do?

Mr. KIRKWOOD.—I do not know. It is rather disconcerting to realize that local government is receiving less finance than that which is provided for the Valuer General's Office, and that the office employs more valuers than all local government organizations in Victoria.

What can one say when one reads the Treasurer's Budget Speech? It contains much puff about the environment. It is suggested that people are not interested in matters of environment and that they are not changing from their material needs. I have never read such poppycock. The only persons not interested in material needs are those who already have them. For those who are the hardest knocked, material needs are the hardest things to acquire. The Government, in its Budget, has forgotten those who have to struggle to live.

Mr. AUSTIN (Hampden).—I welcome this opportunity of speaking on the Budget, which, of course, is

the blueprint for the planning and development of this State for the ensuing twelve months, but before I do so I should like to pay a tribute to Sir Henry Bolte both as Premier of this State and as member for Hampden. He possessed the qualities which Australians most admire and this is why, as member for Hampden, and as Premier, he was such a tremendous success. He was the greatest Premier this State has ever seen. He had tremendous judgment, which continued through to the end of his Parliamentary career. At a time when he could well have retained the No. 1 job in this State he handed over because he knew the State would be in good hands. He did not succumb to power, and this probably shows the greatest quality of the man. He brought down a record seventeen successive Budgets. On behalf of the electorate of Hampden, and the people of Victoria, I wish him a long and happy retirement.

This is an exciting and progressive Budget which provides for an upgrading of expenditure in every department. It is proposed to increase expenditure on education by \$74 million bringing the total allocation to \$498 million, which represents 45 per cent of the Budget expenditure. Throughout the electorate of Hampden, one finds that school principals, teachers, advisory councils, school committees, parents and everybody associated with schools in the area are proud of their schools, even to the extent of claiming that their school is the best in Victoria. Educational facilities have reached a high level. However, the Government has shown that it recognizes that a great deal still needs to be done. In some areas there are shortages and the Government has shown its concern by increasing education expenditure by \$74 million this year.

The Government has shown concern also about inflation by its refusal to increase taxes and charges.

Undoubtedly inflation in Victoria and in Australia generally is at a frightening level. Perhaps honorable members should be thinking of a policy of no inflation at all rather than having acceptable levels of inflation, because it is always the people who can least afford it who are hardest hit.

If there is one problem which concerns people in country areas more than any other today it is the problem of the distribution of population. This was made evident to me during the by-election when people from all walks of life showed far more concern about job opportunities for their children than they did about any of their personal problems or any of the local issues.

The Government has shown that it is willing to take positive action to reverse the trends of recent years. The ten-point plan put forward by the Government is a positive, dynamic plan which can be made to work. I am sure it will receive the support not only of country people and country members of Parliament, but for the first time the people in the cities are ready to support a plan of decentralization because they understand that the need now is greater than it has ever been before. It is also significant that the Federal Government has come out strongly in support of decentralization and intends to assist in the planning and in the provision of finance. It is pleasing to see that the Federal Government is setting up a National Urban and Regional Development Authority.

My greatest concern regarding decentralization is for the smaller towns. I can think of towns in my own electorate, such as Skipton and Willaura, which have already lost a percentage of their population, particularly Willaura, where about 30 people have been forced to leave the town through a change in policy by the State Electricity Commission. When any Government department is moving its work force, I believe particular concern should be

shown towards the smaller towns and that their needs should be given the utmost consideration.

I wish to refer briefly to the rural situation in Victoria at present. I believe the seasonal conditions in the State are far worse than most people realize. Honorable members know that East Gippsland is having the worst drought on record. It has persisted now for more than twenty months. In other areas which are not as badly affected as East Gippsland conditions are worsening day by day. In the north-east of the State there is very little feed left, and no possibility of hay being cut. In the Wimmera and the Mallee, many areas are severely hit. The central district is already experiencing the drought. The Western District, which is traditionally a heavy rainfall area, is better than most other parts of Victoria, but there also without substantial falls of rain almost immediately there will be little chance of conserving fodder for the dry months ahead. Even at this stage cattle from the Western District are being agisted to the only area of the State which is having a favourable season—that is the area south of the Princes Highway. These cattle have been agisted at a record fee of \$2 a head. Hay already is being quoted at a \$1 a bale.

The reason why there have not been more complaints about seasonal conditions is that for the first time in many years, and somewhat unexpectedly, there has been a sharp rise in wool prices together with better prices for all types of stock. I mention these problems in the hope that by being made aware of the situation now, the Government might take steps to lessen the hardship for farmers in the future. The Government can be proud of the action it took in helping farmers in the 1967 drought and it can feel satisfied with the actions it has already taken to cope with the East Gippsland situation, where it has provided subsidies for fodder and loans at low interest rates. What the farmers need most at the moment is more in-

Mr. Austin.

formation about the situation in general. Farmers ought to know how many sheep and cattle there are in the State now compared with how many stock there are in a normal season, and they should know more about seasonal conditions in other areas of Victoria. The farmer should also be able to find out whether the killing works in the State are working at capacity, how much hay and oats there is in on-farm and other storages; and, in fact, whether wheat will be available if he has the money to buy it.

Most importantly, I believe the farmer should know what the Government is prepared to do if and when the shire in which he lives is declared a drought area. Information on this subject was not provided soon enough during the 1967 drought, and many prudent farmers were penalized because they acted before the information was made available. The honorable member for Gippsland East asked a question earlier today about the provision of work for drought-stricken farmers in Gippsland. It is anomalous that a farmer who has to spend some time on his property, because he has cows to milk or stock feed, is not eligible for drought relief work.

The farming community has made a remarkable recovery since the 1967 drought. This State has seen an increase in the prices of wool and other farm commodities, and now that the farming industry is again viable the Government should take every step it can to ensure that unfavourable seasonal conditions do not penalize the farmer too severely.

Mr. B. J. EVANS (Gippsland East).—At the outset I congratulate the honorable member for Hampden on his maiden speech in this Parliament. It is a very long time since an honorable member has been addressed in this Chamber as the honorable member for Hampden. It was interesting to hear his comments, and I must say that I strongly agree with many of them. However, I believe the policies pursued by his