

Mr. BROAD (Swan Hill).- In speaking to the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Speech of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, on behalf of the Queen, I first wish to re-affirm the loyalty of the people of the Swan Hill electorate and also to express my pleasure that Sir Rohan Delacombe, who was absent at the time of the opening of Parliament, is now about to return. I hope Sir Rohan will be with us for a further three years. I have been chosen to carry on the work of the late Mr. Harold Stirling who served the Swan Hill electorate well for a period of sixteen years. I hope to continue that standard of service.

I propose to inform honorable members of the industries by which the electorate that I represent lives, their problems and also some of the various social problems which are important. In future, whenever I have occasion to mention any matter concerning Swan Hill, honorable members will be better able to understand what I am talking about. Swan Hill lives almost entirely by its agricultural production and allied industries that service its machinery and process its products. There is considerable diversity of production - wheat, wool, meat, barley, oats, pasture seed and sawmilling in the non-irrigation areas; and dairying, citrus, dried and fresh fruits, olives, vegetables and wine in the irrigated areas.

One of the least known and most recently-established industries in the Swan Hill electorate is the salt industry which is carried on at Lake Tyrell. Today, more salt than wheat is transported from Sea Lake. This is a high-grade product. Salt water, approximately four times as salty as sea water, continues to seep into this lake from an underground supply that is practically inexhaustible. I have no doubt much more will be heard of this industry in the future. In passing, I might say that there are some districts in the electorate, notably in the irrigation areas, where farmers wish there was not such an inexhaustible supply of salt water so near to the surface.

The wheat districts in the Swan Hill electorate are admirably suited to modern mechanical production; they are fully equipped for bulk handling. Each railway station in the electorate has its bulk handling installation, and there are four 1,000,000 bushel storages located at Berriwillock, Wycheproof, Ultima, and Quambatook. The production per man employed in this industry in Australia is the highest in the world.

Not many years ago, most of this area was in dire trouble through dust, drift and soil erosion, until it was discovered that the main cause of soil erosion was faulty land use and an impoverished, depleted soil. Many years have passed since then, and a great deal of progress has been made, as a result of the assistance and leadership of the Soil Conservation Authority and the Department of Agriculture. Today, a much higher standard of agriculture is practised in this district and headway is still being made.

I recall that as a boy I spent many days with my father each autumn cutting stinkwort. This work seemed to be a losing battle until it was discovered that the cure for stinkwort was not the hoe but improvement of the soil by the addition of super-phosphate and the planting of suitable legumes. As a result of that know-ledge and its application, nowadays I scarcely see a single plant of that weed. Furthermore, a great many other weeds which were caused by depleted soil have also disappeared. I regret to say, however, that there still exist some bad weeds, the worst in my district being amsinckia and skeleton weed. Their control, whether by cultivation or spraying, is one of the major expenses in running a farm.

The most difficult problem facing all of Australia's rural industries at present is the fall in world markets and the rise in the cost of production. While various price-support plans have been necessary in rural industries in Australia in order to off-set the disadvantage suffered by the

farmer as a result of our tariff policies and to give him the protection that other sections of industry enjoy, nevertheless it is becoming increasingly obvious as years go by that, if every primary producing country in the world adopts this policy, it can result in the intensification of the problems that these plans were designed to alleviate. Thus, European primary producers, who are heavily subsidized, are able to outbid and undercut Australia on many of the world's major markets. The most obvious moral is that eventually planning, in order to be successful, must be on a world-wide basis. In this field Australia has already played a prominent part among the producing nations of the world, and I have no doubt that, as the years go by, this work will become increasingly important. I hope Australia can continue to play its part.

I now wish to examine a little more deeply certain problems in my electorate. I shall refer chiefly to the social and political aspects of these problems. There is nothing more important or disturbing than the extent to which the small farmer, the small businessman and the small town are gradually being squeezed out. Some of the greatest improvements that have come to rural centres in Victoria in recent years have intensified the difficulties. The good main roads system which we enjoy today has been the downfall of many small country towns. Undoubtedly, the increased use of the deep-freeze and the refrigerator, which has been made possible by the extension of State Electricity Commission power lines, enabling larger purchases of perishable foodstuffs on cheaper markets, has also weakened the position of small country towns and the many families who are dependent upon their business activities. Larger towns are examining this disturbing trend with a good deal of apprehension.

There is probably no complete remedy for this widespread trouble, but several things could be of assistance. The continuance of the policy of improving schools, hospitals, medical centres, water supplies, pre-school centres and all such facilities that generally add to the convenience and comfort of country life, is the most important of all. The co-operation and loyalty of country people to their own districts and to their fellow citizens is also essential.

Sometimes, Government policy has imposed hardship upon small country towns. The trading policy of the State Electricity Commission, particularly in regard to the offering of life-time free service on some lines is one example, as it constitutes a hardship to the small retailer. The policy of differential rail freights is another example, although this is not so severe as it used to be.

I am aware that this trouble is not by any means confined to the country districts. If the small farmer, the small business and the small town are disappearing from the rural scene, much the same process is also going on in city areas. Whether in city or country, I regret this tendency in modern life. The larger units and firms may be more economical and more profitable, but I am satisfied that in terms of human happiness and contentment the world will be much the poorer as the number of people who are owners and proprietors diminishes. I think the biblical writer knew what he was talking about when he expressed the idea of every man sitting beneath his own vine and fig tree. By this, he meant that ownership adds to human satisfaction and contentment. However, despite the trend that is so noticeable in life today and which is so widespread and increasing, I am happy to say that in the Swan hill electorate there are many areas of successful closer settlement, chiefly in the irrigation districts. These areas, which are not seriously affected by drought, preserve a continuity of production in the electorate, and this is valuable.

In his Speech, the Lieutenant-Governor stated that the prospects at the time were favourable, but everything depended upon good spring rains. I am sorry to say that during the past four or five

weeks only a few points of rain have fallen in my electorate, with the result that the prospects are not as good as my constituents had hoped. However, the prospects for the cereal crops are almost normal throughout the greater part of the electorate, although in the western section, there is a large area, the centre of which is Manangatang and Annuello, which is still drought stricken for the third successive year. I hope something will be done before long to alleviate this serious and unfortunate position.

I have dealt with some of the facts and problems associated with the Swan Hill electorate. There is no need for me to recite them all as I shall have further opportunities of dealing with them in the future. I hope the electorate which I have the honour to represent will continue to make a worthwhile contribution to the wealth of Victoria, and that its political representative in this chamber will make a worth-while contribution to the Parliament.