

Mr. FELL (Greensborough).—I am pleased to have this opportunity of speaking to the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Speech of His Excellency the Governor. I wish to thank the electors of Greensborough who have entrusted me with the problems of the electorate for the next three years. I believe that my actions in that period will achieve more than anything I say this evening.

At the outset, I wish to state my views on Parliamentary democracy. In particular, I consider that every member of this Parliament should have an opportunity to express his views, irrespective of whether he is a member of a major party, a member of a minor party or an independent. He should always have the opportunity to express himself, and from my brief experience in this House I consider that you, Mr. Speaker, safeguard the interests of all honorable members in this regard; I thank you personally for adopting this attitude.

It is essential in a community that there should be no inequality of opportunity between individuals and I propose to discuss several aspects of our society in which I consider that there is definite inequality of opportunity from the time of the birth of a child until it reaches adulthood. I shall refer at length to many of the items and cite as examples cases in my own electorate. The matters to which I propose to refer are causing State wide and even nation wide problems.

I shall start with the facilities that are provided, allegedly by the Government but actually by the municipalities, from the birth of the child. Through the goodwill of municipalities pre-natal clinics, pre-school centres and infant welfare centres are provided. I agree that the Government subsidizes the municipalities to enable them to provide these facilities, but I can well remember a municipality which built a centre in 1953 at a cost of \$18,000 receiving a subsidy of \$4,500. A similar centre

built today would cost \$41,000, which is an increase in cost of 230 per cent. It would be reasonable to assume that the subsidy paid by the Government to the municipality would increase proportionately, but that is not so. The subsidy for such a centre today would be only \$6,000, which is an increase of only 33 per cent. However, I do not intend to bore the House with figures and from now on I shall dwell on the philosophies.

The inequalities to which I previously referred are very much evident in the area in which one is fortunate or unfortunate to live. I could quote examples from Camberwell, Diamond Valley or the inner suburbs. The quality of the facilities that are available depends on the affluence of the community and the ability of the municipality to raise rates. The services that are provided for children should not depend on the circumstances in which a particular community lives. Children have a natural entitlement to these services and their availability should not depend on the ability of a local governing authority to provide them.

I have referred to the birth of the child, pre-school centres and infant welfare centres, the subsidies available for these facilities and the inability of some communities to provide adequate services, but I have not mentioned the fact that if a child's parents are sufficiently affluent he will enter the world at a disadvantage. A child can enter the world merely with the services of a mid-wife—admittedly that is rare today—but it is more common for a child to be born at a private hospital because the facilities of public hospitals are not available to everyone. A person who is earning slightly more than the basic wage is not entitled to use the facilities of a public hospital. In these days most newly born babies remain in hospital only for four days, but if the parents can afford it they can stay for a fortnight, which is the period most honorable members would have remained in hospital when they were babies.

Pre-school facilities are available to few people in the community and this is to be regretted because a child of pre-school age is in its most receptive mood. I am sure the Minister of Education will agree that a child who is old enough to enter a pre-school centre is more receptive to any type of learning at that stage than at any other stage in its life. Unfortunately, only those children whose parents can afford to contribute financially towards the cost of establishing and running pre-school centres have the opportunity of attending these centres.

I am concerned about those children who do not have this opportunity, because they start off at primary school at a disadvantage. I am sure that statement will be substantiated by school teachers or by anyone else interested in education.

I move now to those children who, through no fault of their own, have only one parent. These children either miss out entirely on a preliminary education or if they are fortunate they are accommodated in a day nursery. What type of day nursery do the fortunate ones go to? Invariably it is a privately-owned day nursery or one similar to the establishment in North Melbourne. The centre at North Melbourne caters expressly for children with single parents. This centre not only looks after the children but also looks after the family by trying to keep its members together as a family unit. I am most impressed by that thought in connection with this centre, but I am concerned that there are so few of these centres throughout Melbourne and the suburbs. The same position probably applies throughout the State. I am certain that honorable members who think about this for the first time will be equally concerned and I hope it will not be the last time they will think about it. Children with a single parent are more entitled to help than anyone else because they start life under a grave handicap. How can a widower cope in such circumstances, particularly if there are no facilities which he can use? He can

get his children accepted at private day nurseries only if he can afford it. The situation becomes critical if there are three or four children in the family.

I believe I have emphasized this subject sufficiently, but in case I have omitted to make some points relating to the various stages of a child's life honorable members should infer that I believe this State has a major role to play in providing for children the various services to which I refer. If the Government wants to delegate authority for providing these facilities to a lower authority, such as a municipal council, it should ensure that that other authority is responsible only for the administration of the centres and is free of all other encumbrances and insurmountable financial obstacles.

I shall now refer to primary education in the life of a child. This is the stage where there can be an extremely marked difference between the lives of various children. At this stage a child may have the choice of receiving education in either the private sector or the public sector. The expression "public school education" is the greatest misnomer I have ever heard. For a person to say that he has been to a public school in my opinion should mean that he has attended one of the State's educational institutions. It is entirely wrong to refer to private schools as public schools.

I intend to refer firstly to the difference between private schools and what I call public schools. It is fair to say that students in the State education system are at a marked disadvantage compared with those in private schools, in both standards of teaching and buildings and class sizes. It would also be a fair statement that the permanent buildings in use in the State education system are more comfortable than portable classrooms, which are like dog boxes. Unfortunately, inferior accommodation of this type is invariably provided wherever there is overcrowding. There appear, therefore, to be three standards of education in this State.

In an affluent area, which does not have a significant rate of development, there are fewer problems than in outer suburban areas, such as the Greensborough electorate in which I live, where the population is increasing at a rate exceeding 10 per cent per annum. The electoral enrolments in this area, if I might be excused for referring to a parochial matter, highlight the marked increase in population and show that a fourth standard of education, which is causing alarm in my electorate, and probably in other areas, is now becoming evident. I refer to the fact that educational facilities will be inadequate at the start of the next school year.

An examination reveals that, in one area—Watsonia—the enrolments at two associated primary schools are 964 and 826 pupils respectively. In addition, rapid housing development is evident; in fact, more than 450 homes are at present in the course of construction. No new primary school is being built in this area although the local residents have been assured that one will be provided for the start of the next school year. However, plans for the new school do not exist on the drawing board. I have referred to the inequalities of the standards of education in the primary schools.

I shall now deal with the real problem. Obviously, a crisis exists in education, more particularly in secondary education. This is especially noticeable in my electorate. It is emphasized by the noise that is being created in Parliament, in local newspapers, in the municipalities, in the national press, and in the teaching profession.

In the Shire of Eltham in my electorate, 400 sixth grade students attend the primary schools which are located within the zone of the Eltham High School, and if enrolled at Eltham next year would cause a total enrolment of nearly 1,400 pupils. This is a ridiculous situation because the secondary school facilities cannot cope with so many new pupils. Obviously, another school, for which no

plan exists, must virtually be plucked out of the air in a hurry, or alternatively, the existing school sites must be burdened with additional prefabricated class-rooms. Neither of these alternatives is readily acceptable to this Parliament or to the people at large.

Better planning is urgently needed in secondary education. New schools are required and all schools must be properly staffed. I invite honorable members to examine some of the educational inequalities that exist. I shall compare the Kew High School, which contains all up-to-date facilities, with the Eltham High School to emphasize the marked differences in school standards which exist. Eltham High School, which has grown like Topsy, contains everything, including prefabs, Bristols and all types of temporary class-rooms. The situation at Eltham High School is typical of the position at many other secondary schools.

I wonder just what is the Education Department's plan for education. Is it to provide a standard of education under which equal facilities will be available for all children? This is not being done at present, as can be seen from a comparison of Eltham High School with new schools, such as Montmorency High School. In many new types of school buildings, blocks E and H, which are the canteen and library facilities, are being used as class-rooms. This is not in the best interests of the students; it certainly deprives them of the use of library facilities. The private schools have all the facilities—grounds, buildings and adequate staff—that are needed in a good education system. Obviously, therefore, students attending private schools enjoy privileges which are not available at other schools.

I emphasize that not all of the facilities available in our secondary schools are provided by the State. As a member of a high school advisory council, I know that the parents of scholars, by subscriptions through composite fees, are required

to finance the provision of many educational facilities. For many years, this system has been denounced as unconstitutional; it cannot be compulsorily imposed. However, I have personal knowledge that, during assembly at a certain school, a student was singled out because his parent, who was in receipt of an invalid pension, was unable to pay the composite fee. The student was unable to take part in various school activities. The child left the school immediately to return home and, because the parent was not well enough to visit the school or have a telephone conversation with the principal, a couple of days elapsed before any action could be taken. I shall be happy to supply details of this incident to the Minister of Education if he requires them.

I am sure the Minister will consider the possibility of introducing clerical assistance to relieve teachers of non-teaching duties. This suggestion has the acclaim of the education committee of the Labor Party, and, as I have had the opportunity of discussing it with them, I believe it has the backing of teacher organizations. I do not believe there is any good reason why it cannot be instituted at all stages of education. It would largely relieve the present shortage of teachers. I realize that it would not correct that position completely, but I do not intend to elaborate on that point at the moment.

I turn now to study the disadvantageous positions in which many students find themselves when passing from a secondary education level to a tertiary level. I am sure that all honorable members will agree that the student who has matriculated and wishes to enter a university has a marked advantage. Of these students, it will be found that those who have gone to a special coaching college, because their parents have been able to afford it, possess a distinct advantage. That is the first category of students. The second

category consists of students who have attended a private school. Since the quality of the staffing and the facilities at those schools are superior, those students have every chance of being able to pass, and to pass well. In their turn, they are at a definite advantage when compared with students who attend State schools.

The standards of State schools vary, according to their location. As was revealed in an answer to a question on notice in the House today, teaching staff show a marked preference for schools in the south-eastern and southern suburbs of Melbourne; and if one looks at schools in the western suburbs one sees how different the situation is. It naturally follows that some inducement should be offered to lessen the inequalities which now exist.

There are three sets of standards in education, namely, those of the private coaching colleges, those of the public schools and those of schools within the State school system; but within the State school system there is such a variation in standards that even in schools within my electorate a very large percentage of students are entirely missing sections of their school life. This is because there are no teachers to teach them. Within my electorate there are serious gaps in the educational programmes of the McLeod High School, the Watsonia High School, the Montmorency High School, the Eltham High School, the Hurstbridge High School and the Watsonia Technical School. Each school has the same problem of having no teachers for some subjects.

My own children are at a disadvantage as a result of this shortage of teaching staff. When I married, I knew that I must become interested in politics, because I believed it was useless to bring children into the world unless I was interested in making the world a better place in which to live; I realize, however, that irrespective of the political party to which they

belong, that is a problem which faces all honorable members of this House. The question is: Do we intend to meet this problem, or do we intend to sit here complacently and say, "It is all right, old fellow, we will get through"? Is that the attitude which we should adopt? Will the House adopt that attitude, or will it seek to review the situation and not blame others for its own lack of endeavour?

I now turn to what I contend is the next stage in education, namely, adult education and re-education. Obviously there is a need for adult education and re-education in view of the vast changes that have taken place in the whole concept of our living over recent years. Those changes have led to a complete reorganization of thinking, and the progress of science has introduced many innovations; even the use of the pill took much understanding throughout the world.

There is need for a reappraisal of our standards. What are we looking for? Are we to say to people, "Whether you like it or not you will be educated only to the standard which you can afford and you will then fall into the niche which matches your ability"? or are we to make full use of our existing educational facilities? Although there are inequalities in the facilities provided for education, in my opinion they are not so great that they cannot be used for the re-education of adults who find themselves in a position in which, because of lack of education, they are unable to accept positions in which they would be happy.

Adult education and re-education should be free of charge. If fees are required, such education will be placed out of the reach of young married couples who have children or children on the way and who cannot afford to pay for the additional education they need to advance themselves economically. Every opportunity should be afforded them to educate or re-educate themselves. If

an adult wishes to attend, for example, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, he should be given the opportunity to do so, without having financial restrictions imposed upon him; in fact, the only additional cost to the department would be that involved in providing staff, since the buildings are there. Most high and technical schools are not used in the evenings.

I have dealt at some length with inequalities in education so far as they affect able-bodied children, but what is the situation of less fortunate, handicapped, children?

Mr. Speaker, today I asked a question without notice relating to the establishment of special schools. I shall applaud any announcement of an intention to establish special schools, whether they are for mentally or physically handicapped children, because many parents within my electorate cannot afford private education for their handicapped children. Although I do not assert that it is necessarily the case, some of these children may have only one parent, and it would be quite intolerable to place such burdens upon them.

I shall refer now to the problems facing local government. I am a councillor of a municipality neighbouring the one referred to by the honorable member for Preston, and the problems which he indicated are also experienced within my own municipality. Parliament has an obligation to prevent any increase in the financial burden which is placed upon the community and which is in fact causing inequalities for children.

It is fair to say that the Opposition supports the system of uniform taxation which requires that each person shall contribute taxes for the running of the country according to his income. Municipal rates are a flat amount and, in my own case, I pay the same municipal rate as my next-door neighbour who happens to be receiving a widow's pension. My ability to pay those rates

is greater than hers. Moreover, if one delves further into the matter, probably one will find that I am paying only three-quarters of the amount paid by my next-door neighbour because I am able to claim the rates as an income tax deduction whereas the pensioner cannot do so because she does not submit a taxation return.

Parliament should resolve to do everything in its power to ensure that these flat and regressive types of taxation levied in the community are abolished and in their place to institute a form of taxation, whether it is additional or otherwise, to be fairly levied throughout the community, as is Commonwealth income taxation, thus placing all persons on a more level footing than has been so in the past.

Now I desire to dwell on the geriatric facilities provided in municipalities. I am thinking again of that same person who has gone through life, paid taxes and at the eventide, when he may be a single survivor of a married couple, may find that he is in difficult circumstances because of the heavy burden of flat and indirect taxes as well as the inability to care for himself. I ask honorable members what we are supposed to do with these people. After all, they are our forebears, the people who pioneered the areas in which we now live and enjoy the environment. These people fought for the things which we now enjoy such as the 40-hour five-day week, sick pay, workers compensation and other benefits.

We enjoy these things but we do not look after those who made them possible. Every honorable member has an earnest responsibility to ensure that a start is made in providing facilities. I use the word "start" advisedly because one could state that Mount Royal and Cheltenham Home and Hospital for the Aged constitute the entire facilities for aged persons in need. The Government should extend geriatric facilities on a State level and not leave it to municipalities—the administration of such

places may be left to local councils. The Government should take the bit between its teeth and provide those services in this field.

Another item relating to local government which should be elaborated upon is street construction costs in newly developing areas. Within the electorate of Greensborough ratepayers within the City of Heidelberg, the Shire of Diamond Valley and the Shire of Eltham are demanding that roads be constructed so that they may get to their places of employment. However, some home owners are very incensed when they find, as occurred in one instance in Montmorency, that they are being billed for the construction of a side road abutting their property. In this case, a corner property was involved and the side road was constructed under a private street construction scheme.

For some honorable members who may not know what a private street construction scheme is, it is a scheme in which abutting owners are charged for the construction of the road and they may well be paying it off for a period of ten or twenty years, by which time the road has crumbled. To my knowledge, this system of financing street construction is the only one in existence within the Commonwealth. In New South Wales the owners are charged for kerbs, channels and footpaths, but no charge is made for the road or the drainage.

In the case to which I referred earlier, a woman had to pay \$700 for the construction of a side street only to find that twelve months later the front street was constructed under a different scheme under which subsequently she was charged a further \$1,500. This is not unique; it is a regular occurrence throughout outer suburban areas. For a regulation allotment of 55 feet by 125 feet, the road bill totals \$2,200. This is the most regressive type of taxation that can be placed on any section of the community, whether it consists of members of the working-class, pensioners or otherwise.

This regressive form of taxation is causing so much heartache that it is not an overstatement to say that the worry to some elderly persons as to how the costs will be paid off is hastening their departure. It is no consolation to them that the costs will be charged against their estates when they have died. After all, we will all reach that stage and at that time we will want economic security. The only way of providing it in this field may be to copy action taken in other States. I have yet to ascertain how they find the money to do this, but they are succeeding in providing the facilities without charging the abutting property owners. As a matter of urgency the Government should investigate how this can be done.

I now desire to relate my remarks to a problem which affects the whole community, namely, police protection. It is essential that our children should be protected. If police protection is not provided, there is every chance that some of our children will not reach adulthood. For example, in the Greensborough electorate, there is only one policeman to every 4,000 people.

I cite the case of a migrant who had been in Australia for only eight weeks and resided in my electorate. On returning home from work one evening he was brutally bashed and had to be hospitalized. This man has no recourse other than by civil action to damages from the louts who bashed him. He is unable to take this action because he has no capital assets. A fund should be established to compensate victims of assaults.

The Government has a responsibility to protect its citizens, and the best way to do this is to provide an adequate Police Force, which could be recruited at proper standards if adequate salaries were paid. Recruits are available if the Government is prepared to pay for them.

Honorable members must insist on their right of speech without interruption, whether or not others agree

with what they are saying. In a democracy, it is essential to hear what a man has to say. As previous speakers have proved, the blame for the inadequacies existing in Victoria today can be fairly levelled at the Liberal Government of this State. It is useless for the Government to complain that it has insufficient finance to overcome its deficiencies because both State and Federal Governments have the same policy. If that policy is restrictive, it is high time the Government was changed.

Mr. BIRRELL (Geelong).—This debate gives honorable members the opportunity to express their loyalty to the reigning Sovereign, and, on a broad spectrum, to bring forward any matters of local or State-wide interest which they deem important. I add my personal endorsement to the expressions of loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, whom all members serve in one capacity or another in this House.

I shall deal with a mixture of local and State-wide issues. It is interesting to note that, in the past fifteen years, the population of the second largest city in Victoria, Geelong, has grown by 50 per cent. Some derogatory remarks have been made concerning State administration, particularly in the sphere of education. In the same period, the number of persons being educated has risen by 123 per cent—from 10,437 to 23,312 as at June, 1970. I quote from the official figures of the Education Department. This is an indication of the way in which the Government has met and is meeting the challenges of the 1960s and 1970s.

In the ebb and flow of years, one is apt to forget the aggregation of results and the amounts spent on education in a decade and a half. The 23,000 students today are getting at least as good an education as did the 10,000 students in 1955. At least, the facilities are as good. The non-human elements are as good; after all, an inspection of modern schools