

of life for all Victorians, better facilities for honorable members must be provided and this should be done during the current session.

The quality of life of all Victorians depends largely on legislation enacted by this Parliament. Wise legislation can be enacted only if honorable members have sufficient time in which to consider the measures, have access to proper research facilities and are perhaps better equipped to ensure that the measures presented in fact benefit all Victorians in the best possible way. Accordingly, I call on the Government to provide better facilities for honorable members during this current session.

As I said at the outset, I welcome the opportunity of making these few remarks concerning three areas of Government administration. During other debates, particularly the debate on the Budget, honorable members will have the opportunity of studying the Government's programme in greater detail and no doubt will participate in those debates in which a better contribution can be made.

Mr. HANN (Rodney).—I am pleased to take this opportunity of acknowledging the honour that has been bestowed upon me by the electors of Rodney. Firstly, I congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on being elected to your high office. I feel that I have a somewhat formal affinity with you because we have both been linked, back along the line, with the great dairying industry which has played such an important role in Victoria's development.

I take this opportunity of expressing the loyalty of my electors and my own personal loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. I suggest that the people of northern Victoria have a close affinity in their allegiance to Her Majesty. I also pay a tribute to His Excellency the Governor, Sir Rohan Delacombe, and Lady Delacombe for the role that they have played in the State and the friendly manner in which they have carried out their duties. They have visited

my electorate on a number of occasions and have made many friends in the area.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr. R. S. L. McDonald and Mrs. McDonald, who gave freely of their time for some nine years in looking after the interests of the electors of Rodney. They made a wide circle of friends within the electorate and within this House. I wish Mr. and Mrs. McDonald a long and happy retirement.

The Rodney electorate covers some 2,500 square miles and is centred on Echuca. The River Murray forms the northern border, the Goulburn River borders portion of the eastern side of the electorate and the Loddon River the western boundary. It is very much dependent on irrigation for primary production, and is in the centre of an intensive agricultural area linked with the improved irrigation schemes on the Goulburn and Campaspe rivers and the River Murray.

The main centre is the City of Echuca which has a population of approximately 8,000. It is an expanding population and back in the 1870s Echuca was the largest inland river port in Victoria and in fact the second largest port in the State. River boats carried merchandise and wool along the reaches of the Murrumbidgee River as far as Wagga Wagga, along the River Murray as far as Albury and along the Goulburn River as far as Seymour. Interest in these historical links is being rekindled by the Echuca City Council with the support of the State Government to promote tourism in the area. The Government has seen fit to provide financial support for a vast restoration scheme which is currently in progress. Large sums of money have been spent on restoring the old river port, Hopwood House, and the recent purchase of the river boat *Pevensey*, which created quite a deal of interest in the City of Echuca with the historical journey that the river steam boat made from Mildura back to Echuca.

I was pleased to hear an honorable member yesterday mention the Echuca Regional Development Association, which is a local voluntary organization interested in the promotion of tourism and industry in Echuca. Organizations of this type play an important part in decentralization and in the encouragement of local voluntary assistance. These bodies do not depend entirely on Governments, and this is good. They are prepared to help themselves. This leads to the subject of decentralization. Nine years ago, the former honorable member for Rodney made a speech which indicated his concern with this problem. For many years the Country Party has been concerned about decentralization, and now the Government, the Opposition, all political parties and the people in the metropolitan area are concerned about it because of the enormous problems that people are facing. It is of little value to promote decentralization to country people. The point is to convince people living in the metropolitan area of the advantages of living in a healthier environment and getting away from the highly-urbanized situation in which they find themselves in Australia in comparison with virtually any other country in the world.

The City of Echuca lends itself to industrial development. Since the second world war a major industry has been the local ball-bearing company which has continued to prosper. It struggles from time to time because of the various decisions made by Governments, particularly on tariffs, and also because of the high cost of inflation and wages. However, the industry is still expanding. The Government has supported the Echuca City Council in providing finance to encourage Sheppards Textiles in that city. Many industries have shown an interest in Echuca, particularly since the proposals for the Albury-Wodonga complex were announced. A similar situation exists in Moama, which is located on the opposite side of the River Murray. The two cities have an enormous

potential for industrial and population growth, particularly in view of their close proximity to Melbourne. Echuca is two and a half hours by road from Melbourne. The fact that many people realize that they can spend a week-end in such an environment has developed the tourist potential of the city.

Many people recognize the advantages of shopping in a country city, and that these communities have facilities equivalent to those in the metropolitan area. One of the problems in promoting decentralization is that people do not want to leave the metropolitan area because they believe the facilities are better there than in the country. People who move from the metropolitan area for short periods and for holidays are beginning to realize the advantages of the country. This is beneficial both for tourism and for the industries in Echuca. The promotion of decentralization is dependent on the amount of finance that the Government is prepared to spend on its development throughout the country. The key to the problem is to have sufficient finance to encourage industries into the country and keep them there.

One of the problems that have existed in Echuca for many years has been the bridge over the River Murray, which is shared by road and rail traffic. This problem has been hanging over the city council and the various Government departments for many years. I hope it will be resolved in the near future and that a new bridge will be built to provide a better link between Moama and Echuca, and virtually create a gateway from Victoria to the southern portion of New South Wales and to portions of northern Australia.

This leads to the question of the promotion of a standard gauge rail link from Melbourne to Echuca and into the southern regions of New South Wales. The line could connect with the Indian-Pacific railway and provide an alternative rail link between Melbourne and both Perth and

Sydney. Having regard to the enormous number of cars that are on the road, such links will be essential to solve future transport problems. I can envisage a time when people will depend for more on public forms of transport than on private cars. Therefore, I have been discouraged at the suggestions from time to time for the closure of essential railway lines, which in many instances were established by our pioneer fathers many years ago.

A major centre in the Rodney electorate is the town of Kyabram which is in the heart of the fruit-growing district. Its major industry is the Kyabram Preserving Company. Many other industries operate in the district because of the availability of a stable work force, and because of the reasonable climate and quality of life that is enjoyed in country towns. I hope the Government will continue to provide incentives. Many industries have been granted certificates as decentralized industries and I hope additional assistance will be provided in the future to encourage the growth of these country towns.

There are six rural shires in the electorate of Rodney. Of particular note is the Shire of Rochester which is one of the larger dairy produce processing centres, not only in the southern hemisphere but possibly in the world. My constituents are proud because the factory is situated in the Rodney electorate. People who have seen the efficiency, the development and the production of the factory could not say that the industry is inefficient. Many other modern dairy produce factories are located in the Rodney electorate. The Shire of Cohuna, another major centre of the electorate, is a potential tourism attraction. The River Murray, with its attendant recreations, such as fishing, river sports, canoeing and speed-boating, produces enormous benefits for the tourist industry. The recreational facilities attract large numbers of people to the area during the holiday periods.

Mr. Hamer.

Unfortunately, in common with shires in other electorates, the shires in my electorate are facing severe financial problems. The severity of the problems is related to the amount of finance allocated to the shires, particularly for capital works. During the past five years the Country Roads Board has suffered a reduction in funds of 20 per cent in some shires in my electorate. The near-record rainfall this year has created an enormous flood problem. Approximately three weeks ago the estimate for the cost of repairing roads in the Country Roads Board's northern division commencing at Bendigo and covering a greater proportion of my electorate was in the vicinity of \$250,000. I hope the Government will seriously consider assisting the municipalities concerned, which have already been stretched to the limit financially. Assistance is urgently needed to carry out repairs to roads, bridges and structures of this type. Municipalities are being continually called on to provide extra welfare services, but as mentioned earlier by my colleague in this House the subsidies which were granted in the early stages are not sufficient to cope with inflation, higher wages and the increased costs of municipal services. The municipal councils are progressively paying a larger and larger portion of the subsidies. I believe the Government, which is dedicated to improve the quality of life, will provide extra finance for these services.

I represent a country electorate which is very much dependent on primary production, and dairying is the major industry. Some of the most efficient dairying areas not only in Australia but in the world are operated in the northern and other parts of Victoria. The industry is of world standard, both on the farms and in the factories. When I hear suggestions that the dairying industry is inefficient I become quite upset because at present farmers are struggling through extreme hardship, in many cases because of flooding; yet they are continuing to produce milk under these conditions. They

struggle on because it is a way of life in which they believe. They work far in excess of the average number of hours worked each week by other workers and in most instances for a lesser return than the average weekly wage. Nevertheless, they are providing benefits to the consumer and helping the export situation.

The return to the producer and the price of products to the consumer, particularly of dairy products but also a number of other agricultural products, have not changed significantly in the past twenty years. About 25 years ago farmers were receiving 52 pence a pound for butterfat and at present are receiving only approximately 60 cents a pound. In view of the increased prices of other consumer items and increased wages, farmers should be receiving a better return, but the industry is reluctant to put any extra burden on the consumer. I consider that farmers should receive recognition for their attitude.

A number of changes will be evident in the dairying industry. Mention has been made in this House of butterine. I have supported the introduction of this product for a number of years because there are benefits to be gained from its manufacture. There are some question marks in the industry, particularly about a greater share of the liquid milk market for a larger number of producers. The existing system was established a number of years ago to maintain a certain gallonage of milk all year round. I consider that that situation does not exist at present. Provided that a rational approach was taken to this problem it could be resolved so that more producers could participate. This would benefit not only the industry but also the consumer.

The majority of holdings in the Rodney electorate depend either partially or totally on irrigation. The irrigation area sustains all forms of agricultural production. There is a large beef industry and a fat lamb industry. The wool industry has come through the throes of the recent

drought and low wool prices and is once again starting to re-establish itself in the electorate. The wheat industry has been under considerable pressure. It is unfortunate that this year, when there is a world-wide shortage of wheat, very few farmers have been able to plant their crops because of the extensive flooding. I hope the Government will see fit to provide assistance in the form of flood relief equivalent to the amount of drought relief which has been provided in the past so that producers will be able to get through this year. Many of them will have little income because of the existing situation.

The fruit industry is a significant industry in the electorate, particularly in the eastern portion. It has suffered from a number of distinct problems, particularly in regard to export markets, getting the fruit to those markets and competition from a number of overseas countries. Consequently, quotas have been imposed by the various companies. There has been an improvement in the situation, but much more assistance must be given to this industry by both this Government and the Commonwealth Government with a view to finding new outlets and markets for fruit. I do not favour any system such as the tree-pull scheme because immediately quotas are imposed in any agricultural industry it becomes impossible to supply the demand for the product.

An unfortunate situation exists in the meat industry at present. In view of the high cost of meat to the consumer, the return to the producer is criticized and it is said that the farmer is being paid an excessive price for his beef. The fact is that there are fewer producers who have animals to sell, and consequently there is a shortage of meat. The producer must be encouraged to increase production and so create a surplus. This is the only situation which will benefit the consumer because in those circumstances the price of the product goes down.

In 1972 the northern area of Victoria suffered one of the driest periods on record. It is now experiencing one of the wettest periods on record; since February the area has been inundated. This has caused severe hardship to many producers in the electorate. As I said earlier, it has not been possible for farmers to sow wheat, barley and oat crops because much of their farmland is under water. One farmer with 900 acres has 800 acres under about 18 inches of water, and that will be the position for some time yet.

In the dairying industry many farmers are trying to milk their cows under great difficulties, struggling to get them through the mud twice a day. In some instances they have had to restrict their milking to once a day because of the enormous problem of getting the mud off the cows. Some farms, particularly small ones, are completely inundated and the farmers have had to sell stock and take jobs outside their farms. I urge the Government to give serious consideration to affording relief for these people.

This raises the question of drainage, which is one of the most serious problems in this part of northern Victoria. The areas where previous Governments saw fit to introduce a drainage system with the irrigation system are reasonably well off, but in quite a number of areas, particularly on the eastern side of the electorate, around Kyabram and Timmering through to Tongala and a number of areas west of Lockington and Calival to Pyramid Hill, much of the farmland is under inches of water and will remain so for some time because insufficient drainage has been provided. This means lost production in these areas, which affects the Government as it loses revenue because of the reduced income and production of the farmers.

The flooding and lack of drainage is also increasing the salting problem in the electorate. I urge the Government seriously to consider making money

available and asking the Federal Government for additional finance to enable drainage works to proceed at a much faster rate and to solve this problem before it becomes more serious, although I doubt whether it could be much more serious than it is at present.

In the Speech of His Excellency the Governor, which outlined the Government's proposals, much was said about the quality of life. I hope a better quality of life will not be confined to one section of the community but will be shared between both city and country people. This is one difficulty which must be faced and resolved; a better understanding between the country and the city must be achieved. The existing situation has resulted from a lack of communication and not understanding each other's problems. This is something which we all have a responsibility to try to amend.

The problem of inflation has been referred to. As one of the many young men in this Parliament who have been given the responsibility of looking after the interests of electors—for many years, we hope—I am hesitant about suggestions that restrictions should be placed on either prices or wages. One of the major difficulties today is that although Australia is a young country—only about 200 years old—we are trying to live at the same standard as many industrialized and developed countries which have been established for thousands of years. I consider that this is good and that this country has great potential because people are prepared to work, as were the pioneers, and the Australian has been generally recognized as a person who is prepared to "hop in and have a go".

I believe the problem facing the community is, once again, lack of communication between employer and employee. Governments must attempt to improve this relationship, to increase the productivity

and keep things flowing. I do not believe there is any reason why Governments should put an artificial restraint on prices and wages to try to slow down the economy because that is harmful to all people, particularly those who cannot control their own situation. I should like more emphasis to be placed on getting the people of this country back to work and overcoming the situation in which the Government is paying large numbers of people not to work.

This is one of the biggest problems confronting the community, particularly amongst young people. A young person leaves school and goes straight on to unemployment relief in a period when he would normally be looking for a job. Unfortunately many of them do not go off unemployment relief.

In conclusion I look forward to playing my part in this House by expressing the point of view of the people who have elected me to represent their interests and I hope that I am able to do this for many years to come.

On the motion of Mr. BIRRELL (Geelong), the debate was adjourned.

It was ordered that the debate be adjourned until next day.

The sitting was suspended at 6.27 p.m. until 8.5 p.m.

APPROPRIATION BILL.

(Budget Debate)

Mr. HAMER (Premier and Treasurer) presented a message from His Excellency the Governor transmitting Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 1973-74 in lieu of Estimates of Expenditure for the first four months of the year 1973-74 transmitted on 19th June, 1973, and recommending that an appropriation be made from the Consolidated Fund for the purposes of the Appropriation Bill 1973.

Mr. HAMER (Premier and Treasurer) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to apply a sum out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending 30th June, 1974, and to appropriate the Supplies granted in this and the last preceding session of Parliament and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

Mr. HAMER (Premier and Treasurer).—I move—

That this Bill be now read a second time.

I bring to the House today the Budget for the financial year 1973-74. It is my second Budget, and it rests on the foundation of the one which I presented last year. There I defined the goals we had set and the way we proposed to go about achieving them. It was a Budget which had as its background the continuous and progressive financial planning of a Government then in office for seventeen years, and to the leadership of which I had just succeeded.

Those seventeen years had witnessed a tempo of growth and development of the State such as had not been seen since the first quarter of a century which followed the coming of responsible government to Victoria over 100 years before. The fruits of that development were to be seen in a balanced and prosperous economy; in high and rising material living standards. The economic growth which was the very basis of this prosperity was not mere accident. Decisive and defined policies in the government of the State had promoted the climate for it in Victoria, and had encouraged and fostered the private endeavour which was, and continues to be, the very mainspring on which development rests.