

I strongly advocate that the granting of leases should be accompanied by stringent regulations, and that the lessees be called upon to render practical service such as clearing and maintaining fire breaks, planting trees under the direction of the appropriate forestry authorities, and taking turns in look-out work on fire towers, in fire fighting, and in listening to forest fire broadcasts. In that way we shall be able to awaken in the people a realization of their duty and, at the same time, provide the hard-worked forest officers with additional rangers. In view of the value of the forests, action should be taken along those lines.

We are living in strenuous times when a challenge is thrown out to us. It is a worth-while challenge, which will be accepted by the new Government. The Government proposes to face the various problems, not in the belief that they are overwhelming, but with due determination to solve them. The object is to ensure that Victoria reverts to the happy and prosperous condition which obtained before the last war.

**Mr. LECHTE** (Oakleigh).—I have been accorded the privilege of seconding the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-Reply so ably submitted by the honorable member for Benambra. His Excellency the Governor and Lady Dugan are now in the fourteenth year of their service in the Commonwealth of Australia, and I think I speak for every member of this House when I say that we were delighted when, after representations had been made to them, they consented to delay their departure for some months. By their great breadth of human understanding, by close attention to their duties and by the manner in which they have at all times carried out those duties, they have endeared themselves to all classes of the community. When they eventually depart from our shores, His Excellency and Lady Dugan will take to the Mother Country and to His Majesty the King, in particular, the good wishes and loyal affirmations of every patriotic citizen in the Commonwealth.

The preponderance of numbers on this (the Ministerial) side of the House is

indicative of two facts. One is that the people of the Commonwealth of Australia strenuously object to any political party relegating to itself powers over the financial affairs of the private citizen. The second is that the people of Victoria have confidence in the programme of the Liberal party and the Country party as propounded during the recent election campaign. They have confidence also in those who are administering the various Government Departments. I feel that I am echoing the general view that the vast majority of the electors have the utmost confidence in those who have been given the task of implementing the Government's policy. Although Opposition members are small in number, there is no doubt—judging from what has occurred in the past—that they will not be correspondingly silent. Indeed, that will be all to the good, because Opposition members, too, are representatives of the people. Their expressions of opinion will at all times be welcome, although the will of the majority must prevail and the traditions of this democratic House be upheld.

I do not desire to re-traverse all the ground covered by the honorable member for Benambra, but as I am seconding the motion now before the Chair I think it is appropriate that I should touch upon certain matters to which the honorable member referred. In the first place, there is the housing problem which, in my opinion and in that of most people, is of the highest importance and No. 1 priority on the Government's programme for the next three years. I am very confident that there is now in charge of the administration of the responsible Department a man of outstanding capability, integrity and honesty. He brings to his task the benefit of considerable business experience and acumen. Those who in the past have seen on the housing horizon nothing but a black cloud will now be able to look forward to the silver lining. It is highly desirable that during the life of the present Government the activities of the Housing Commission should be to some extent curtailed. I am not speaking in derogatory fashion of the Commission's activities. I trust, however, that machinery will be set

up to ensure that the Housing Commission eventually reverts to the purpose for which it was originally established, namely, the abolition of slums.

I consider that machinery should also be devised for lifting or relaxing a large number of the controls now operating in connection with the provision of housing. I emphasize for the guidance of those in charge of this Department the necessity for completing the many houses already started before embarking on new structures. As each house is completed it should be occupied by a family before permission is given to go ahead and lay foundations for new premises. I trust that during the life of this Parliament machinery will be set in motion for the lifting of existing house building controls. I do not advocate that they should be lifted at once, but I trust that a start will be made without delay so that private builders will be able to revert to their pre-war role as builders. Eventually, I hope that building will go back almost entirely to private home constructors.

I am in entire agreement with the Government's policy of decentralization of education. It has been suggested in the press that the Mildura branch of the Melbourne University is to be closed. That is unthinkable, and I agree with the honorable member for Benambra that the Government should consider the establishment of additional branches of the Melbourne University in country areas. I would urge the establishment of principles which will make it possible for any child possessing the necessary capabilities to pass through primary schools to the university free of charge. That is a worthy objective which I am confident will be attained in the near future. Academic instruction must be fostered, but Opposition members will agree that it is the technician, the workman who uses tools and instruments, who is the backbone of our industrial life. With a view to encouraging that branch of education, attention must be paid to the technical instruction of our young people.

I shall now deal briefly with the subject of transport. Members are probably aware that the first railway line which was opened in Victoria in 1854 connected

*Mr. Lechte.*

Flinders-street and Sandridge. Liberal party members on many occasions have been accused of being conservative in their outlook but, so far as the railways are concerned, previous Administrations have been far more conservative. The Government should appreciate the necessity for being progressive and realistic. In many regards the railway services of Australia have become obsolete and it is entirely wrong that alternative forms of transport which can provide fast and efficient service should be retarded by artificial restrictions introduced in an attempt to bolster up a railway system that has become obsolete and unwieldy. The alternative systems should be encouraged by the Government. I trust that the Minister of Transport will not be solely a Minister for the railways.

For too long have the words "railway" and "transport" been synonymous. I am not overlooking the good work that the Railway Department has done. For suburban passenger services and for the conveyance from country centres of heavy and unwieldy freight the railway system will never be superseded. In this year of 1947, however, we should appreciate that the people desire to move freely, expeditiously, and comfortably from place to place. My observations have convinced me that that cannot be done with our existing railway system, and we must face the fact that road and air transport will be the principal means of transport of the future.

Tied up with our rail transport system is the problem of Victoria's dependence on another State for black coal supplies. It is to be hoped that during the life of this Parliament that dependence for fuel on another State will be overcome. The honorable member for Benambra referred to the idiosyncrasies of the livers of New South Wales miners, but I would point out that this Government has the intestinal fortitude to combat the liverish idiosyncrasies of the New South Wales miners.

Reference has been made to the need for the provision of adequate water and electricity supplies in various country centres. So far as country dwellers are concerned, that is the No. 1 problem of to-day; but we do not have to go to

country centres for examples of that need. In my electorate, and in contiguous electorates, some householders have been waiting since 1942 for the supply of electric power to their properties, while others have been waiting since 1939 for an efficient and adequate water supply. In an electorate adjoining mine there is a group of twenty houses either built or in the process of being built. At a cost of nearly £100 one house owner had a three-quarter-inch pipeline connected to his property from a main nearly 2 miles away, but the other occupants are dependent on tank water caught from the house roofs for ordinary domestic water supply purposes. In 1942 they were optimistic about their prospect of receiving an adequate supply within a short period, but up to date the position has been in no way improved. All that is necessary to overcome the difficulty is to link up with a main three-quarters of a mile away. The residents were told seven years ago that piping was not then available for the purpose; it is still not available, and it is our duty to see that the water is provided without further delay. For too long have they been told that the aftermath of war is the cause of the failure of the Department to take appropriate action.

In this country to-day there are certain people who have a vested interest in seeing that sections of the people are kept in a discontented state by being refused household amenities which cannot be termed luxuries. Production is the keynote so far as housing and public works are concerned. There again some people, actuated by vested interest, are doing their utmost to see that production is kept at a low level. The Government has a mandate from the people of Victoria to deal in any way it thinks fit with those who are apparently determined to keep production at that low level. Whatever action the Government takes to overcome the difficulty will be supported by the majority of the people of Victoria. We must see that sections are not permitted to exercise an influence which has the effect of retarding the production of goods badly needed both in Australia and overseas.

It was with gratification that I listened to the references of the honorable member for Benambra to the question of uniform taxation. It is pertinent to point out that a former Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. Alfred Deakin, when speaking in London in 1902 said that he foresaw the day when a Socialist-minded Government in Australia would take the taxing rights from the States. He added that when that had been done it was only a matter of time before State Parliaments would fall by the wayside. His words were indeed prophetic because in another Parliament not long ago a member glibly pointed out that that is exactly what is taking place under the Commonwealth uniform taxation scheme to-day. Victoria has been allotted the sum of £40 million and has been told that it is to spend that amount annually for the next seven years. It is like giving a boy of fourteen a suit of clothes and telling him that he has to wear it until he reaches the age of 21 years. Not only is the principle of uniform taxation utterly wrong but in my view it is unconstitutional. I trust that the best legal brains available in the State will be at the disposal of this Parliament to fight the uniform taxation issue to a successful conclusion.

A former member of this House, when seconding a motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply recently, said that persons and Governments should be judged by their actions. On that basis the present Government has nothing to fear. It was particularly gratifying to find that on the 8th of November last the people of Victoria vindicated the actions of Opposition members of this House, and of members of another place, which gave the people an opportunity of indicating their views on one of the most important questions confronting the people of Australia in recent years. My colleagues and I will resist any attempt to alter or reform the constitution of the Legislative Council. While there is in this community a vicious minority prepared to hold decent citizens to ransom, we have to thank God that the Legislative Council is ready to stand against that unscrupulous division. This Government will legislate in the interests

of all sections without fear or favour, and in its measures will uphold the sovereign rights of the people.

On the motion of Mr. CAIN (Northcote), the debate was adjourned until next day.

#### COMMITTEES OF SUPPLY AND WAYS AND MEANS.

Mr. HOLLWAY (Premier and Treasurer) moved, by leave, the following motions, which were agreed to:—

That the Standing Orders be suspended so as to allow the Committees of Supply and Ways and Means to be appointed forthwith.

That this House will, this day, resolve itself into a Committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to His Majesty.

That this House will, this day, resolve itself into a Committee to consider of the Ways and Means for raising the Supply to be granted to his Majesty.

#### ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES.

The SPEAKER (the Hon. T. K. Maltby).—The House will now proceed to the election of a Chairman of Committees.

Mr. MIBUS (Borong).—I move—

That the honorable member for Gippsland East (the Hon. Albert Eli Lind) be appointed Chairman of Committees of this House.

It is with great pleasure that I submit that nomination. The honorable member for Gippsland East has rendered long, faithful, and distinguished services not only to his constituents but also to the State as a Minister of the Crown in various capacities. He was Minister of Forests for the record term of eight years, and for a shorter period was Minister of Public Instruction. On two occasions, he was Acting Premier, and was for many years Deputy Premier. He enjoys the respect of all honorable members, and I am sure that he will fill the position with dignity, ability and, above all, with impartiality. The honorable member for Rodney will, if required, act as scrutineer.

Mr. BENNETT (Gippsland West).—I have great pleasure in seconding the motion. I endorse every word uttered by the honorable member for Borong

concerning the capacity of the honorable member for Gippsland East. He has been a member of this House for 28 years, and has gained the experience and knowledge that will enable him satisfactorily to occupy the post of Chairman of Committees. He was a Minister of the Crown for ten and a half years, of which period he was for two years Minister of Public Instruction, and for eight and a half years he was Minister of Lands; throughout the whole period he was also Minister of Forests. That fact is an index to his ability. It will be recalled that he piloted through amendments to the Closer Settlement Act in 1938. He has a practical knowledge of that subject, and that enabled him to explain proposals of great significance to ex-soldier settlers. Through his efforts a revaluation of properties was undertaken, and a writing down of the men's debts was effected. That legislation gave the ex-soldiers a new lease of life, and they settled down to their work with fresh hope.

The thanks of the whole community are due to the honorable member for Gippsland East for his activities in connection with that measure. The old Act contained 550 sections, and the more one studied them the more befogged one became. Even the officers of the Department could not interpret the provisions. The honorable member for Gippsland East submitted an amending Bill containing only 46 clauses, and they are expressed in language that we all can understand.

In 1935 the honorable member submitted the important South Melbourne and Port Melbourne Land Bill which enabled General Motors-Holdens Limited to begin activities at Fisherman's Bend. Beautiful factories have been erected there, and the legislation has been productive of much good. Then too, the honorable member for Gippsland East had a big hand in the measure that had to be passed before paper mills could be erected in Gippsland. In every way he must be proud of his accomplishments. I must add a personal touch. About eighteen years ago, when I became a member of this House, I was very simple in regard to parliamentary procedure, but I had the good fortune to take a