

The Hon. L. H. S. THOMPSON (Higinbotham Province). - I deeply appreciate being given the honour of seconding the adoption of an Address-in-Reply so ably moved by my colleague, Mr, Gawith. The motion is a token of loyalty to our Gracious Majesty, the Queen, as well as an expression of gratitude to her distinguished representative in the State of Victoria, General Sir Dallas Brooks. The recent visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second and her consort, the Duke of Edinburgh, is still fresh in our memory. Indeed, many citizens of this State will never forget the sincerity, warmth, and spontaneity of the welcome afforded the Royal couple. Seldom in history could there have been a finer expression of undivided loyalty than that given to the Queen by Australian citizens last year. It is a matter for great jubilation that she should have evoked such a response from the people of Victoria in the year 1954 at the end of 50 years of world history which had seen the downfall of most of the long-established monarchies of Europe. For that reason alone we can look forward with Optimism to the future of our Empire which is held together neither by economic domination, nor by force of arms nor by constitutional ties, but by a common bond of allegiance to Her Gracious Majesty.

We are indeed fortunate to have such distinguished representatives of the Crown in the State of Victoria as Sir Dallas and Lady Brooks. This couple, by virtue of their broad tolerance, sincere and obvious interest in the many and varied activities of the State, and by reason of the friendly way in which they have mingled with all people, regardless Of class or vocation, have won the esteem and deep affection of the populace as a whole. Many a humble citizen, many a disabled soldier and many a crippled child has gained new hope and Spirit from a friendly chat with Sir Dallas Brooks, the people's Governor.

As this is the first occasion on which I have had the opportunity of speaking in this Chamber, I should like to pay a very brief tribute to my predecessor in the Higinbotham. Province, the late Sir James Kennedy. I think political supporters and opponents alike will concede that Sir James rendered distinguished service to the State as a churchman, as a statesman, and as an athlete over a long period of years. I am deeply conscious of the heavy mantle falling upon my shoulders in endeavouring to follow in the footsteps of one of the ability and integrity of Sir James.

It was pleasing to hear the well-balanced and comprehensive programme for the development of this State outlined by His Excellency yesterday. Recently much has been heard of the Government's policy, and much more will be heard in the future as, item by item, the promises made by the party now forming the Government are given legislative enactment. All thoughtful citizens of Victoria will be particularly gratified by the emphasis placed on education. In the 167 years of this country's history, we have tilled the fields, obtained valuable minerals from the ground, and built factories and cities, but where in fact does the true wealth of a nation lie? Undoubtedly it is in the character of its people, and the education system of the State must surely be the most important factor in moulding that national character. A high standard of education is particularly necessary in a democratic country because effective government in a democracy presupposes an enlightened and politically-conscious people, During the past five years there has been a tremendous increase in the number of children of school age in Victoria. In secondary schools, the number has increased by 45 per cent., and in primary schools by 32 per cent., with every possibility of similar increases within the next five years. The only alternative to an ambitious programme of development is a further increase in the size of classes, which would be intolerable to teachers and pupils alike. Therefore, an ambitious constructional and teacher recruitment policy on a scale not previously witnessed in this State must be adopted. The Government has expressed its willingness to undertake such a policy, in which it will be supported and encouraged by all right thinking citizens in Victoria.

It was pleasing to note that the Government intends to increase the maintenance grant to schools by 100 per cent. Since school committees were given the right to carry out maintenance work by means of a grant varying from £25 to £100 yearly, the volume of correspondence from schools to the Department has decreased by almost 100 per cent. Further experimentation in this field obviously is both necessary and desirable.

It is also gratifying to note that the Government promises to increase the amount available for subsidies by 25 per cent. because the subsidy system has worked well in the past. This proposed increase will act as a token of appreciation to the thousands of parents and other citizens throughout the State who have laboured so enthusiastically and so willingly in order to raise the standard of facilities available for the education of the younger people. It will also encourage these people to maintain the high standard of work they have performed in past years. From the Government's point of view, it is a sound proposal because an increase in the subsidies will stimulate local interest, local participation and, above all, local contributions. This system seems to me to be a most economical way of carrying out improvements to the State's education system because of the fact that when new equipment is purchased it becomes the permanent property of the State although the State may have provided only half the cost.

In the building of national character, it is obvious that a well-balanced home environment is essential and it is well-known that many of our child delinquents come from unsatisfactory homes. The Government must be commended for taking steps to safeguard the welfare and the security of the family unit. In the first place, it is embarking upon a most enterprising housing policy. It is undertaking to guarantee to approved financial institutions the right to advance up to 95 per cent. of the cost of a dwelling valued at £3,000. This proves that the Government is willing to help those who are prepared to help themselves, particularly those who are most in need of assistance. The Government is especially interested in providing homes for young married couples, many of whom at present are denied an opportunity of owning their own homes owing to the high costs. It will not be easy to implement this policy, but the Government is prepared to strain every nerve and sinew to ensure that a high percentage of our population consists of contented home owners, who will have every reason to take a pride in their own dwellings. From a monetary point of view, it is desirable that a high percentage of home occupiers should be home owners because they are responsible for their own maintenance work. As honorable members were told yesterday, the maintenance bill last year of the Housing Commission reached the mammoth proportions of over £300,000. Therefore, purely from the angle of economy, it is desirable that we should have a greater number of home owners in the State than we have at present.

The Government must also be congratulated upon its courageous attempt to tackle the somewhat contentious subject of reform of the Landlord and Tenant Act. Thoughtful citizens have been distressed through the failure of recent Administrations to tackle this difficult matter, and they have been most alarmed at the distressing condition of many older citizens who, during their more active working years, were thrifty and invested their savings in real estate in order to have an adequate income during the twilight of their lives. For many of these people the ownership of property has become a liability rather than an asset. During the ten years since the end of the second world war, it is a well-known fact that house maintenance costs have increased by 300 per cent. and municipal rates by a similar proportion. Despite that, the average rental in Victoria has increased by only 4 per cent. Justice of that type might have been tolerated in the Middle Ages, but it is strangely out of place in our modern, democratic society. One can well imagine what would happen if one said to members of the carpenters union, "I am very sorry, but from

now on you will have to work for 1940 wages." A general strike would be called immediately, and quite rightly so. Yet, in effect, that is what we are expecting the landlords of 1955 to do. They are compelled to pay for 1955 maintenance costs on 1940 wages. Obviously, that state of affairs cannot be tolerated any longer.

I should like heartily to endorse the remarks of Mr. Gawith yesterday about the need for an alteration in the regulations prescribing a 20-mile journey to enable persons to qualify as bona fide travellers and so have the right to obtain intoxicating liquor after ordinary hotel trading hours. The present limit was introduced in the horse and buggy days and is strangely out of place in the streamlined 1955 era. In the old days, if a man became intoxicated and attempted to drive the typical vehicle of the times - a horse and cart - he could do little or no damage except evoke a few barks from neighbouring dogs. But nowadays, when an intoxicated man sits behind the wheel of a high-powered motor-car, he ceases to be merely a menace to himself. He becomes a public menace and a potential murderer, and should be treated as such by the law.

Finally, the Government should be commended for its proposal to increase the amount of money available to the Department of Agriculture. Any Government that continued to neglect the primary industries of this State could be described only as a bad Government, because the future development of the country is closely allied to the prosperity of our primary industries - the life-blood of the nation. It would be just as dangerous to neglect the true interests of our primary producers as it would be to remove the bottom from a boat in mid-ocean.

This year, Victoria is celebrating the conclusion of 100 years of constitutional Government. In 1850, the Australian Colonies Government Act gave the various colonies the right to draw up their own constitutions, but it was not until the year 1855 that the first constitution for Victoria was drawn up and the first Ministry formed under William Clark Haines. Citizens of this State can look back upon 100 years of development with a sense of pride. Victoria has developed from an economically backward area - taking the first humble steps towards self-government into one of the most fertile and influential centres in the southern hemisphere. Her primary industries have prospered and her secondary industries have been placed on a sound basis. She has participated in the formation of a great Commonwealth and her sons have fought gallantly in the cause of freedom in two world wars. Therefore, we have every reason to approach the future in a spirit of hope and optimism. However, the future lies in our own hands; it is ours to make or to mar. One calls to mind the famous words of Sir Winston Churchill as the battle of Britain was about to begin. He said

The battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if this British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour"