

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.*First Day.*

MR. TONKIN (North-East Fremantle)
[3.32]: I move—

That the following address be presented to His Excellency in reply to the Speech he has been pleased to deliver to Parliament:—
“May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of the State of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the Speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.”

Before proceeding to refer to the Lieut.-Governor's Speech, I desire to add my congratulations to those you, Mr. Speaker, received earlier upon your election to the high and honourable position you now occupy. I understand that the attainment of that office represents the realisation of a long-cherished ambition. I am doubly pleased, therefore, to add my congratulations on this occasion. I would also like to congratulate the Premier upon again being appointed to his present high and important office. It is most reassuring in difficult times such as the present, to know that the destinies of the State are in such capable hands. I also congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. C. G. Latham, upon his elevation to the responsible position he now holds. Of course, the chances are that his efforts will be most ineffectual, because of the paucity of the number of members who may be expected to support his endeavours. I feel sure that he will do his best to add weight to his contentions, even despite the smallness of the numbers sitting behind him. Finally, I congratulate the member for Nedlands, the Hon. N. Keenan, on his appointment as Leader of his particular party, although the members sitting behind him have been considerably depleted in numbers, through circumstances over which he himself had no control.

The Minister for Works: All that are left him.

Mr. TONKIN: I dare say that, for the next few years at any rate, he and the members of his party will be busily engaged in thinking out some new policy under a fresh name in order that they may be saved from complete extinction.

Mr. Nulsen: No chance of that.

Mr. TONKIN: Referring to the Speech that His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor has

been pleased to deliver to us, at the outset I would draw attention to the fact that the Government are fully appreciative of the difficulties of the financial position. It is realised that they must adhere to the policy of sustained rigid economy so that we may remain within the limits of the deficit of £750,000 that has been stipulated for this State. I hope that the exercise of rigid economy will mean the elimination of waste only and not the curtailment of expenditure that is essential. It may be that expenditure can be saved, and so long as it is a saving in figures, all is well, but very often parsimonious expenditure is an economic blunder. I hope the Government, when they cut down expenditure where considered necessary, will adopt that course only so far as the elimination of waste is concerned. The most important problem with which Parliament will have to deal is that of unemployment and if the Government, at the end of their term of office, are able to demonstrate that they have done something appreciable to remedy the present difficult position, they will have earned the praise of those people who saw fit to repose confidence in them. The Government are fully seized with the importance of this problem, and the increased allocation of loan money granted to Western Australia will be spent to the last penny in the provision of work for those who unfortunately are unemployed. I am afraid I cannot hope for much from the Economic Conference in Europe. Probably nine out of every ten people to-day believe that international action is necessary to deal with current problems of financial stringency and world-wide depression. Personally I take a different view. I believe the first steps will have to be national, because I am of the opinion that the trouble is domestic. To my mind, the problem is essentially a national one. Let me give members a simple illustration. Consider the position of the bread-winner who is the head of a household and earns a weekly wage. Let us suppose that he has two sons who are out of employment. What would we think if that householder were to go across the road and engage a couple of men to cut his wood and mow his lawn, for which he paid them certain wages? What would we think of that action, seeing that the man's own sons were idle at the time? Such a position would be farical, and the family concerned would be

heading for bankruptcy. That is the position in which the State is placed to-day. Annually we are importing more and more goods. What that amounts to is that we are engaging people overseas to work for us. In other words, we are employing people overseas to work for us while unemployment is rife in our own midst. Let me give the House some figures relating to the position during the eleven months to the end of May last, and compare those with the figures for the previous year. If I do that, members will realise that we imported into this country goods of a total value of £52,293,000, which represented an increase of 31.2 per cent. compared with the previous eleven months. That demonstrates that this country, which is unable to employ its own people, has embarked upon a policy of employing more and yet more men overseas to produce goods for local requirements. What makes the position much worse is the fact that, owing to the decreased prices that our own primary products realise, we are paying more than ever for the services of the workers overseas than we ought to do. That is to say, we have to give away more of our produce in proportion for what we receive from overseas. Bankruptcy lies in that direction. Just as the domestic family, certain of whose members are out of work, despite which the services of others are engaged to do work for them, would be heading for bankruptcy, so Western Australia or any other State will be heading in a similar direction by the adoption of such a policy. So I say that the problem is essentially a domestic one. We must see to it that our own people are put back to work before we engage people elsewhere to work for us. We must take the unemployed and make them their own employers. They will create a demand for their labour and supply it themselves. To give another simple illustration: If £50 is available for expenditure and half a dozen people share it between them, then they possess purchasing power to the extent of £50. If we take £20 from them and give that money to another half-dozen people, we increase the number of people who can buy, but we do not increase the purchasing power available. Unfortunately, Governments to-day by various Acts of Parliament have taxed the people, taking money from even those who have been out

of work, and spreading the funds available under various systems amongst those who are unemployed. They have not increased the amount of the available purchasing power, and so have not improved the position. What needs to be done is to see that the unemployed persons are put to work and are made their own employers. They will create the demand for their labour which they will be in a position to supply. This State possesses wonderful resources in the way of soil fertility and variety of climate for the production of wheat, wool, timber, and other products. I venture to say there is not a single commodity that could not be produced in this State if we set ourselves to do it. If private enterprise will not get on with the job but is too timid and prefers rather to allow its money to remain in the banks, I say the Government must undertake the task. Someone has to do it if the problem is to be solved at all. Although that point of view may be different from what is generally expressed, I commend it to the consideration of the Government hoping that they will get to grips with the problem and do something to alleviate a condition that is so widespread to-day. Nothing has been done anywhere in the world to solve the problem. Go where we will, we find Governments waiting only for the morrow in the expectation of seeing a ray of hope somewhere. No definite method of attacking the problem has been attempted. It is not a time for the application of the theories of experts to the international sphere. It is time for the application of common-sense to the domestic economy of the country. The Speech mentions that the State has made great strides in the production of wool, dairy products, eggs, fruit and gold. That is extremely gratifying. I am reminded that bananas might also be included in that category. I am pleased indeed at the progress being made in the North-West and I am prepared to believe that before long the whole of the requirements of the State in the shape of bananas and pineapples will be supplied from that portion of this great country. Reference is made in the Speech to education. Unfortunately short-sighted Governments consider that this is a very large vote which can be sliced at whenever it is essential to make a saving. I feel certain that the present Government will

not take that view. Any cutting down of the vote for the education of the children is false economy. The progress of science and the introduction of machinery make it imperative that the hours of labour be considerably shortened in the near future. The consequent shortening of hours must give increased leisure to the men and women of the country, and how can the men and women spend their leisure profitably and intelligently unless they have had a reasonably good education? As the hours of leisure increase, so does the need for improved education increase. The figures mentioned in the Speech show that less than £10 per child was spent on education last year. Take a child who goes to school at the age of six years and continues until the age of 14; during those eight years the Government spend under £100 for the education of that child. Many men spend more than that on dogs and cats. Such a sum is little enough to fit a man or woman for life, and any further whittling down of the vote would be disastrous. There must be no attempt further to curtail the expenditure on education, and nobody will be more pleased than I shall be if the Government are able so to finance the country as to permit of increasing the vote for education, so that the children will have the benefit of a larger measure of education than they have received in the past. To my mind there can be no better investment than money spent in training the intellects and improving the minds of the boys and girls of to-day who will be the men and women of to-morrow. Unfortunately, perhaps, I am sufficiently pessimistic to believe that many of the men of about the age of 50 to-day will not see the end of the existing depression. I regret that I cannot take any other view. Still, those men will not have to bear the full brunt of it. The boys and girls who have just left school, for whom no avocations have been available and the best years of whose lives have been wasted, are the ones who will not be fitted to withstand such troubles as those we are experiencing to-day. We have had a period of prosperity which offered us ample opportunities and so made us the better fitted to cope with the present conditions. But there are men and women who have not yet done any work. When they left school no position was open

for them; they never had an opportunity to work, and if an opportunity does occur, how will they fit into any position? Their lives have been spoilt. Therefore it is essential that the country do everything possible so to liberalise the education of the people that some pleasure may be brought to those who find themselves, in a difficult period of history, the victims of circumstances over which they themselves have had little or no control. I hope that the labours of this Parliament will prove successful. I hope that the deliberations of the Government will lead them into the right track and that, as a result, the State will benefit considerably. If the Government succeed in bringing about some little measure of improvement, they will have justified their occupancy of the important office they hold. A matter I would like to mention had almost escaped my memory. One of the most difficult problems is going to be experienced in connection with the people who occupy workers' homes and war service homes. Tremendous expenditure has been incurred to provide those homes, and the men and women who assumed the obligations some years ago when prices were high and employment was available now find themselves unable to keep up their rental payments. Consequently they may be forced out of their homes and the country will have some hundreds of houses thrown on its hands. The occupants will be turned into the streets or obliged to live on the fore-shore, as some people are compelled to do to-day. The problem will not be a simple one for the Government. It seems to me that the people who originally undertook those obligations and lived up to them when they had work and were able to do so, should not be cast out when, through no fault of their own, they are unable to keep up their payments, small as they may be. I commend that phase of the problem to the consideration of the Government in the hope that they will give it sympathetic treatment and endeavour to do the right thing by the hundreds of people so circumstanced.

MR. WISE (Gascoyne) [3.50]: I desire formally to second the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply.

On motion by Mr. Latham, debate adjourned.