

## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

*Fourth Day.*

Debate resumed from the 15th August.

**HON. R. C. MATTISKE** (Metropolitan) [4.38]: In rising for the first time to address this Chamber, I do so with considerable nervous pride. Nervous I must be for obvious reasons, and proud I am to sit here among so able a body of men and take my part in serving this great State of ours. I sincerely thank the electors of the Metropolitan Province for giving me this opportunity to serve and assure them that I will spare no effort to uphold their trust and confidence.

Thrilling though this occasion may be, it is tempered by the sad circumstances necessitating the by-election as a result of which I am here today. I have been particularly impressed with the sincerity of the remarks of various speakers to the Address-in-reply and Supply Bill regarding the work done in this House by the late Hon. Harry Hearn. Up to the present we have missed his jovial personality; and I fear that as the session progresses we will, when discussing the many debates that are listed, miss the wealth of knowledge that he possessed. Already I have some slight knowledge of commerce and industry, and I dedicate myself to a close study of those aspects, so that I may eventually be able to act in some small way as a substitute for the late Mr. Hearn.

I did not have the pleasure of knowing the late Hon. Don Barker, but it is evident that the State has suffered a further severe loss through his passing. From the references made in the House it is clear that he too was held in very high esteem by all. The State can ill afford to lose citizens with particular knowledge. Especially it cannot afford to lose one so conversant with the north-west portion of the State at a time when it is on the threshold of rapid and extensive development. To the relatives of the two late hon. members I offer my sincere sympathy.

When members were speaking on the Supply Bill, and on the Address-in-reply, they congratulated the three newly admitted members. I would like to add my personal congratulations to Hon. George Jeffery and Hon. Graham MacKinnon. I wish them both long and successful parliamentary careers.

In thanking members for the warmth of their welcome, I would like especially to mention how much we appreciate the assistance and friendly advice that we have received to date. Particularly am I pleased with the personal interest that has been taken in us, regardless of political views. I hope that this interest will continue and that members will assist us by correcting our faults so that we may be the better able to serve.

In speaking to the Address-in-reply, there are many matters on which I would like to comment, but at this juncture I feel I have insufficient knowledge to enable me to contribute anything of value to this House. There is, however, one matter to which I would like to draw attention, and that is where His Excellency, towards the end of his Speech, stated—

The Government will assist financially towards the establishment of social centres for the aged.

It is only a brief statement in the Speech, but, in my opinion, a highly important one. The problem of an aging population is not peculiar to this State. Governments throughout the world are faced with it, and are concerned not only with the social but also the economic aspects. Committees have been appointed and considerable research has been carried out, but to date there has been no general solution of the problem. With improvements in medical science, the discovery of new drugs, and a progressive increase in the standard of living throughout the world, there is no doubt that the average span of life has been lengthened.

Mainly because of large-scale selective migration, the population of Australia has not aged as rapidly as it has in most other countries, but the problem is nevertheless pressing. Research in Great Britain regarding the number of men of 65 years of age and over, and women of 60 years of age and over has revealed that in 1911 there were 2,750,000, or 1 in 15; in 1951 there were 6,500,000, or 2 in 15; and it is estimated that in 1977 there will be 9,750,000, or 3 in 15. On the other hand, the number of people in the age group of 20 to 40 is expected to fall by 7 per cent. in the next 10 years.

Experience has shown that in rural areas the aged are usually cared for, while in industrial societies the family groups break down. With the great advances made in industry in Australia since the war, the effect of the aging population has been accentuated. The social problems associated with old age are well known, and I think may be summed up by the old German saying: "One father will readily care for five sons, but five sons will not care for one father." In view of this and the loneliness through a shrinking circle of friends, there is an urgent need for community centres for the aged as envisaged by the Perth City Council.

The drive for £50,000 for the establishment of a centre for the aged is worthy of the highest praise, and deserves every possible assistance; and it is the duty of the Government to contribute substantially to it. The statement of His Excellency to the effect that this will be done is, therefore, most welcome. I would now like to go a little further and deal with some of the economic aspects of an aging population.

The figures I quoted reveal a rapidly decreasing population of breadwinners in Great Britain. To overcome this, we have two alternatives: firstly, to increase the output of the existing breadwinners; and secondly, to increase the proportion of breadwinners. The output of the existing breadwinners can be increased only by lengthening the working hours, or through the introduction of new techniques. As the first alternative is undesirable, we are left with only one—namely, to improve the methods of production.

Since the war, great strides have been made in this direction, particularly with the development of mechanisation in industry to the high level of automation by which term we now know some of the more intricate machines. There is a natural reaction against new ideas, particularly those involving a readjustment of the labour forces. For this reason, automation in certain countries is being viewed with suspicion; but in America it is being hailed as a boon to mankind.

I am of the opinion that automation will be the solution to the economic problems associated with an aging population. As automation is costly to install, and depends largely upon a huge output for its economic use, it cannot be used generally. Therefore we must look to other means to overcome the problem completely. In this regard, we must turn to the second alternative: an increase in the number of breadwinners. At the lower end of the age scale this can be done only by reducing the school-leaving age and thereby impairing the efficiency of the individual during his working life. That is not desirable.

At the other end of the group, however, there is definite scope. Various surveys have revealed that among the breadwinners who have been retired through old age, there is a great number whose chronological age is considerably in excess of their physical age. It is of paramount importance today that the right of the older workers to lead a full and active life and so continue in productive work, if willing and able, be recognised and accepted.

I am fully aware of the numerous difficulties associated with the removal of a compulsory retiring age; but these are not insurmountable. Breadwinners past the retiring age should be encouraged to continue working in suitable jobs, provision being made for a lowering of status and a lowering of salary, if necessary. Collateral with this, it is necessary for existing superannuation schemes and taxation of lump sum payments to be reviewed. At present, 5 per cent. of lump sum payments are taxable, provided the taxpayer ceases work, while the whole is taxable if he continues in employment.

Such continuity of employment, apart from arresting the decline in the number of breadwinners, will reduce the burden

of pension payments and increase the standard of living for all. Furthermore, it will remove the feeling of being thrown on the economic scrap-heap, a feeling at present being suffered by so many healthy Australians. In these remarks I have presupposed a period of full employment and have avoided the many complications to the main argument; but I hope that I have conveyed a clear message to members to give them some food for thought, as I consider this problem is an urgent one, and one requiring their serious consideration.

In conclusion, I wish to thank members for their patient hearing, and to assure them that I will do all in my power to increase my knowledge and experience as rapidly as possible in the hope that I can contribute in a worth-while manner to the important debates in this House. I have much pleasure in supporting the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply.

*Sitting suspended from 4.55 to 5.8 p.m.*

**HON. A. R. JONES** (Midland) [5.8]: In addressing myself to the debate, I would first like to congratulate those members who have been returned to this House: not only the new members, but also those who retained their seats. For my own part, I would like to thank the electors of the Midland Province for again relying on me to conduct myself in their interests. Together with other members, I am very sorry indeed that, in the short space of time we were away from this Chamber, we lost two of our members.

In the person of the late Mr. Harry Hearn, we had one who contributed much to the debates which determined what went on to the statute book in relation to industrial matters. I feel sure the workers of this State have lost one of the best advocates they had, because Mr. Hearn gave serious thought to all industrial legislation that came before us, and this of course was backed up by the immense knowledge he had gained in industry. I believe that he did his best for the workers when dealing with industrial matters and considering the ability of industry to provide. As I have said, I feel sure that those people are going to miss his sound judgment more than anyone else.

I can only reiterate what has been said in relation to the late Don Barker. He was a very staunch advocate for the people and the district of the North-West. I will personally miss him very much because, whenever I rose to address myself to a Bill, he was one of those who delighted in interjecting and drawing the crabs, as the saying goes. I shall miss those interjections very much.

I suppose the debate on the Address-in-reply is considered one of the most important of the year. I have often wondered how important it is. There are 30