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GOVERNOR-GENERAL S SPEECH ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

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Dame ENID LYONS (Darwin) [8.0]. It would be strange indeed were I not tonight deeply conscious of the fact, if not a little awed by the knowledge, that my shoulders rests a great weight of responsibility; because this is the first occasion upon which a woman has addressed this house. For that reason it is an occasion which, for every woman in the Commonwealth, marks in some degree a turning point in history. I am well aware that, as I acquit myself in the work that I have undertaken for the next three years, so shall I either prejudice or enhance the prospects of those women who may wish to follow me in public service in the years to come. I know that many honorable members have viewed the advent of women to the legislative halls with something approaching alarm; they have feared, I have no doubt, the somewhat too vigorous use of a new broom. I wish to reassure them. I hold very sound views on brooms, and sweeping. Although I quite realize that a new broom is a very useful adjunct to the work of the housewife, I also know that it undoubtedly is very unpopular in the broom cupboard; and this particular new broom knows that she has a very great deal to learn from the occupants of I dare not say this particular cupboard. At all events she hopes to conduct herself with sufficient modesty and sufficient sense of her lack of knowledge at least to earn the desire of honorable members to give her whatever help they may be able to give. I believe, very sincerely, that any woman entering the public arena must be prepared to work as men work; she must justify herself not as a woman but as a citizen; she must attack the same problems, and be prepared to shoulder the same burdens. But because I am a woman, and cannot divest myself of those qualities that are inherent in my sex, and because every one of us speaks broadly in the terms of one's own experience, honorable members will have to become accustomed to the application of the homely metaphors of the kitchen rather than those of the operating theatre, the workshop, or the farm. They must also become accustomed to the application to all kinds of measures of the touchstone of their effect upon the home and the family life. I hope that no-one will imagine that that implies in any way a limitation of my political interest. Rather, it implies an ever widening outlook on every problem that faces the world to-day. Every subject from high finance to international relations, from social security to the winning of the war, touches very closely the home and the family. The late King George V, as he neared the end of a great reign and a good life, made a statement upon which any one may base the whole of one's political philosophy, when he said, "The foundation of a nation's greatness is in the homes of its people". Therefore, honorable members will not, I know, be surprised when I say that I am likely to be even more concerned with national character than with national effort.

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Somewhere about the year 1830 there began a period in Australian history which for me has always held a peculiar fascination. I should like to have been born at about that time. I should like to have been alive in the days when bushrangers flourished, when life was hard and even raw, when gold was discovered, when the colonies became States, and when all of the great social and political movements were born which so coloured the fabric of Australian life; because, during all those years very much of what we now know as the Australian character was formed. It was during those years that we learned those things which still characterize the great bulk of our people: hatred of oppression, love of "a fair go", a passion for justice. It was in those years that we developed those qualities of initiative and daring that have marked our men in every war in which they have fought qualities which, I hope, will never be allowed to die. We are now on the threshold of such another era, when further formative measures will have to be taken; because we are today an organized community which no longer 'exists purely upon the initiative of its individual members, and if we would 'serve Australia well we must preserve those characteristics that were formed 'during that early period of our history.

I have been delighted, since I came here, to find the almost unanimity that exists in respect of the need for social service and in respect of many of the other problems that have been discussed in this chamber. In the matter of social security one thing stands out clearly in my mind. Such things are necessary in order that the weak shall not go to the wall, that the strong may be supported, that all may have justice. But we must never so blanket ourselves that those fine national qualities of which I have spoken shall no longer have play. I know so well that fear, want and idleness can kill the spirit of any people. But I know, too, that security can be bought at too great a cost: the cost of spiritual freedom. How, then, may we strike a balance? That, it seems to me, is the big question for us to decide today. There is one answer. We know perfectly well that any system of social security devised today must be financed largely from general taxation. Yet I would insist that every person in the community in receipt of any income whatsoever must make some contribution to the fund for social security. I want it to be an act of conscious citizenship. I want every child to be taught that when he begins to earn, then, for the first time, he will have the first privilege and right of citizenship to begin to contribute to the great scheme that has been designed to serve him when he is no longer able to work and to help all of those who at any period of their lives may meet with distress or trouble. In such a scheme, I believe, there should be pensions for all; there should be no means test; those who have should contribute according to their means. But every one, however little he or she earns, should contribute something, be it only a three-penny stamp, as a sort of token payment for the advantage of Australian citizenship. In passing, let me say this: There is one reform, at least, that could be applied to our present pensions system, which would have the greatest effect in making a little brighter the lives of those upon whom the years are already closing in. I consider that every pensioner should have his or her pension posted to him or her in the form of a cheque. At the present time any pensioner who so wishes has the right to have the pension sent in that way, but few pensioners are aware of it. If that were done, I believe that not only would congestion in post offices be relieved, but also that a small contribution would be made to easing the burden of those who have come to old age or illness.

I am delighted that the honorable member for Denison (Dr. Gaha) should have secured the honour of having introduced to this chamber, in this debate, the subject of population. Other members also have seized upon that subject, apparently with a very great deal of pleasure, and have dealt with it at some length; but to the honorable member for Denison go the honours. I, like him, have pondered on this subject not with my feet upon the mantle-piece, but knee-deep in shawls and feeding bottles. I have pondered it, surrounded by those who, by their very numbers, have done quite a good deal to boost the population of Australia. I believe that I have at least tried out some of the theories which would make for a better population, and that I know some of the difficulties that present themselves to any person who, in these days, desires to rear a family. One honorable member has spoken of the need for a greater population for reasons of defence. That, of course, is something that has to be considered. But there has also to be considered the fact that, unless we fill this country we shall have no justification in the years that are ahead for holding it at all.

Another honorable member spoke of the need for decentralization. On the north-west coast of Tasmania, which is a part of the district that I represent, there is, I believe, the best example of decentralization that is to be found anywhere in Australia; but I do not want the House to believe that that is why eleven members of the Lyons family were born at Devonport. I consider that something more than decentralization is necessary if the population of Australia is to be increased. It would be well to go back a little while and look for the reasons for the decline of population during the last 50 or 60 years. Two main reasons are ascribed, the first the growth of industrialism and the changed conditions resulting therefrom. Population became urban instead of rural, and the conditions in which children were brought up became less and less suitable. People were crowded. Housing was inadequate, and the large families went to the wall. The incidence of disease increased, and industrial disease came with the development of new occupations. The workers were unmercifully exploited. State paternalism became necessary, and even in State paternalism certain reasons for the decline of family life can be found. At the other end of the social scale other reasons can be found for the declining birth-rate. New inventions, and the provision of luxuries, provided new ways of spending incomes and leisure. There was less domestic help to be had. Finally, people began to think that the woman who became the mother of a family was something of a lunatic. About 30 years later she began to be regarded as something of a criminal lunatic. In the end the belief developed that it was a social virtue to produce fewer and fewer children. Where such a state of affairs exists, it is a matter of courage, even of hardihood, to have a family of more than two or three.

Still another reason for the declining birthrate is sometimes advanced, a reason belonging to the moral rather than to the economic sphere. It is to be found in that strange reluctance to reproduce themselves that has overtaken the peoples of the past in the final years of their decline. That is a picture which none of us cares to contemplate. I agree with the honorable member for Denison that we cannot hope, merely by economic measures, to increase the birthrate. Certain things are necessary to be done in order to ease the burden on families, but they must be looked upon only as measures of justice to those who are prepared to face their responsibilities. We need maternity and nursing services; we need some kind of

domestic help service; we need better houses. But those things cannot in themselves revive the falling birthrate. We must look to the basic wage, which at present provides for the needs of three children for every man who receives it; yet how many thousands of men in this country have no children at all? How many have fewer than three yet the three notional children of the man who has not any militate against the success in life of the children in other families of six and seven and eight. The basic wage is meagre enough in all conscience too meagre but it should be estimated upon the needs of a man and his wife, or of a man who must provide later for a wife, and the children should be provided for by an extension of the child endowment system. Let the man's wages be a direct charge upon industry, but the children should be a charge on the whole community. If we hope to increase the birthrate we must look to a resurgence of the national spirit, a resurgence of national vitality. We must look to a new concept of the dignity and worth of the family in the social order. I agree with Paul Bureau that the family is the matrix of humanity, the secret laboratory in which every unit of human society is prepared, organized and maintained, and if that laboratory is disorganized or chaotic, the most serious disorders in social life must be expected.

Let us pause for a moment and think of the time when the war shall end. Many speakers in the course of this debate have said that they believe that the war will end during the life of this Parliament, and all too many people hope and believe that by the attainment of victory we shall step straight into the golden age. Nothing could be more foolish, because the golden age will arrive only when you and I and everyone else have made some contribution towards it. We shall have to plan for it, and work for it and sacrifice ourselves for it. We speak of the men coming back, who must be kept on Army rates of pay until suitable work can be found for them. It sounds easy, but is very, very hard. First of all, what is suitable work for each of these men? It will not be sufficient merely to let them go out and take any kind of work. The employment offered them must provide a reasonable prospect of congenial occupation, perhaps for the greater part of their lives. And they will not want to stay on army rates of pay. They are young, eager and impatient, and they will be heartily sick of everything to do with the Army and with war. We must have patience for them. We must be prepared, particularly the women, to hold in stability those who have come back still in the grip of the restlessness engendered by war. Those who return will be, for the most part, in the age group of 20 to 30 years. They must be trained to a trade or profession. Our present apprenticeship cannot provide for their needs, and will have to be re-adjusted. Here, I believe, trade unionists can and will make a great contribution to national re-construction by considering and planning suitable alternatives to the laws which at present mean a great deal to them.

Almost every honorable member who has touched on this topic has spoken on housing. I, too, believe in a scheme of national housing. I believe that it will help in the re-absorption into industry of discharged men, but I believe also that we face a grave danger that the housing scheme will be overloaded with unnecessary costs. We have in Australia what I call a bricks and mortar complex. We cannot carry on any activity without housing it in a palace. We want in the homes that are to be built something less than is provided in some of the houses I have seen designed. We want good walls and strong foundations; we want good fittings, but we do not want something that will cost more than is necessary. Permanency in a cathedral is a

wonderful thing, but no one wants a house to last for 300 years. We need houses with sufficient space, so that the housewife can work in comfort. There must be space for the children to move about, and there must be sufficient space about the house so that it will not readily become a part of a crowded slum.

There was a reference in the Governor-General's Speech to an overhaul of the manpower situation. I hope that when the Government gives this matter its attention, it will re-adjust what I might call man-hours. At the present time there are thousands of women in the services and in munitions factories. By a slight re-adjustment of hours, it should be possible for them to receive some training that would fit them for civil life, particularly in the domestic sphere where I hope most of them will eventually find their place. Each week they could receive one or two hours' training in domestic science in canteens attached to munitions establishments, hospitals or military camps, so that when the men come home, torn, worn and wrecked, as many of them will be by their war experiences, they will have women to meet and greet them who will not be immediately harassed by a lack of knowledge of domestic work, and the running of happy homes.

Now let me turn just for a moment to the international sphere. I have heard expressions of opinion that have surprised and even hurt me, and I have heard some that have cheered me greatly. Some honorable members have assured us that there can never be any hope that mankind will escape the horror of war that descends upon the world every now and then. Others have assured us that by international co-ordination we can usher in very quickly the reign of peace for which we all long. I stand somewhere between the two schools of thought. Because of what has happened to me in this war I have become disillusioned. For years I went about the world preaching the gospel of peace and friendship and co-operation. I believed with all that my heart in disarmament, but I can never again advocate such a policy. I believe that we must arm ourselves to meet whatever danger may threaten us, but I also believe that we must co-operate with all those forces of good that are working for peace, and with all those people who have a will to peace, so that we may do whatever lies in our power to preserve peace in our time. However, it is not sufficient merely to cooperate, or should we limit the sphere of goodwill. Surely we can see that if Germany should rise again in Europe, Japan will rise again in the east as surely as the sun itself rises. The other evening I, in common with many other honorable members, saw a film dealing with the war in Europe. There was one scene which portrayed the evacuation from Dunkirk. We saw how the German army flowed across the Low Countries and over northern France, and how the small British army was squeezed into an ever-decreasing compass, until finally it was compressed into the small area immediately around Dunkirk. Then the picture showed a mist on the water, and the voice of the announcer said this: "And then out of the mist there came a strange flotilla warships and fishing smacks, and craft of all kinds filled the sea. It was the sea-going English come to rescue their own". And I felt, as I believe every other person felt who saw the picture, that this indeed was one of the greatest moments in the history of our race. I thought then, as I think now, that we should not fail occasionally to pause and look back upon the great moments of our past. We go along, thinking always that we progress, but sometimes we have to pause and take stock. I think that every Australian should pause now and again and say to himself, "Only 150 years ago this land was wilderness. Now we have

great cities, wonderful feats of engineering and beautiful buildings everywhere. And this is still a land of promise". We cannot afford to neglect some recognition of our past, even though we gaze into the future.

Now, honorable members will forgive me, I know, when I say that I bear the name of one of whom it was said in this chamber that to him the problems of government were not problems of blue books, not problems of statistics, but problems of human values and human hearts and human feelings. That, it seems to me, is a concept of government that we might well cherish. It is certainly one that I hold very dear. I hope that I shall never forget that everything that takes place in this chamber goes out somewhere to strike a human heart, to influence the life of some fellow being, and I believe this, too, with all my heart: that the duty of every government, whether in this country or any other, is to see that no man, because of the condition of his life, shall ever need lose his vision of the city of God.

Mr. CURTIN (Fremantle Prime Minister) [8.32]. We who have sat in this chamber tonight have participated in one of the historic episodes of our Commonwealth Parliament. For the first time, as the honorable member for Darwin (Dame Enid Lyons) has said, a member of her sex has stood as an equal in this chamber and addressed herself to the problems of the country. It is proper that I should say one or two words about the importance of this occasion. Our predecessors in this place and in other parliaments have struggled to give to women the right to vote and to sit as elected representatives of the people. We know that their struggles were met by the same degree of hostility as has marked almost every great change which has been contemplated in the affairs of men. The struggle for the enfranchisement of women, and for the right of women to sit in legislative assemblies, belongs indeed to the great struggle for freedom and free institutions which has marked the evolution of our race. I have no doubt that the first advocates found themselves in what could well be described as an unimportant minority, but gradually they won adherents and, in the course of time, the laws were changed, the franchise was widened, and women were given the right to vote and to sit in Parliament; but right is one thing and opportunity to exercise it another. It remained for the Seventeenth Parliament to assemble before, in either House of this Commonwealth Parliament, we found women elected as representatives of the people, and now in each chamber of this Commonwealth Parliament a woman sits, sits not because she is a woman, but because she has been elected by the people of Australia. That this great event in the development of Australian citizenship should occur during the greatest war that our country has ever waged is, I think, not a mere accident; it occurs because women, as women, and men, as men, have come to look at problems as problems. I have no doubt whatever that the electors of Darwin elected their representative because they believed that of the candidates offering she would make the best member, and I would respectfully say that that was the view of of the people of Western Australia also in making their selection of senators for that State. We do not any longer sit here as men, nor does the honorable member for Darwin attempt to suggest that she sits here as a woman: we all sit here as persons upon whom our fellow citizens have imposed a duty by preferring us to others who offered at the polls. It is, as the honorable member for Darwin has said, a very great responsibility that devolves upon here shoulders. I have no doubt that all the women of Australia will read what she has said tonight I

very respectfully offer my congratulations to the first woman who has had the honour to sit in the House of Representatives.

HONORABLE MEMBERS.—Hear, Hear!

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