

moving the motion, with the merits of the case. What we are concerned about is the effect and the result. There is no question about the seriousness of the position. One point about which I am concerned is that I believe the opportunity was present to convert the furnaces at the power house from coal to oil burning, and I say this in spite of what the Chief Secretary has told us.

Why was not provision made to change over from coal to oil burning so that electricity could be supplied by the power house even if there was a stoppage of coal supplies? I consider that it must have been a deep and bitter disappointment to the 140 odd men who landed a few days ago, many of them from Britain and Germany, men who have not been in this country for five or six years, and also to the 21 men who had served 3½ years in the Forces, and who landed in the dark last night after flying over a blacked-out city.

Hon. C. B. Williams: They fought in vain.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Keep your beer quiet!

Hon. C. B. Williams: They fought in vain. Strikes will get the worker the money; nothing else will.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: If this is the new order they are returning to, they must come back with a sense of disappointment and frustration. I desire to ask leave of the House to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

House adjourned at 6.17 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 25th September, 1945.

Motion: Urgency, Collie coal stoppage and disruption of industry	PAGE 341
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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

MOTION—URGENCY.

Collie Coal Stoppage and Disruption of Industry.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received the following letter from the member for West Perth:—

I wish to inform you that, when the Legislative Assembly meets tomorrow, Tuesday, the 25th inst., I desire to move the adjournment of the House to discuss a matter of urgency, namely, the stoppage of work on the Collie coal mines, the industrial loss and hardship occasioned to the people of the State, and the avoidance of such situations in future. Ross McDonald, 24th September, 1945.

It will be necessary for seven members to rise in their places to support the proposal.

Seven members having risen in their places,

MR. McDONALD (West Perth) [4.33]: In moving that the House do now adjourn on a matter of urgency, I do not think I need any further evidence than the appearance of this Chamber. It is evident from the circumstances under which we are meeting that something has taken place which is of sufficient importance to occasion concern. The stoppage of work at Collie has caused such widespread dislocation and loss that I feel sure people of the State would expect this Parliament to make it a subject of discussion.

I do not consider this to be an occasion for any words which might widen the breach that has arisen in connection with the dispute or which might militate against the exercise of a spirit of reason and a sense of responsibility on all sides. It is rather a time for a sober appreciation of the nature and effect of such a stoppage, and a discussion of means by which in future such stoppages may be minimised or prevented.

Let me say I admit at once that coalmining is an arduous calling. I know that after six years of abnormal conditions and strain due to the war, we must expect some degree of unrest and some degree of industrial disequilibrium until we reach a more normal basis, and I would be one of the first to give the Collie miners full credit for having, in common with many other millions of Australians, kept to their work steadily during the critical years of the war. I believe, however, that while allowing all those things, it is necessary for us to face the fact that, through the stoppage at Collie, a great deal of industrial loss has been occasioned and a great deal of personal hardship and inconvenience have been caused. We are told by the newspaper that 20,000 men are out of work and that there has been a great loss of perishables; and the grave words of the Premier himself show the seriousness with which he views the conditions that have

been brought about by this stoppage. There is no need for me to emphasise that aspect of the matter; it is sufficiently well known to every member.

The regulation of the coalmining industry has been, during the war, under the exclusive control of the Commonwealth Parliament. This has been done under National Security Regulations and the National Security Act and, since last year, has been the subject of a special piece of legislation by the Commonwealth Parliament known as the Coal Production (War-time) Act, 1944. This Act was designed to provide special machinery for the rapid hearing and adjustment of disputes in the coalmining industry. Fortunately, in this State, such disputes have been absent until lately, but we know that they have been extremely serious in the Eastern States. Under the legislation of the Commonwealth Parliament, I remind members, without entering into details, that there is a Coal Commissioner, Mr. Mighell, who is the supreme director of industrial matters and the production of coal. There is the Central Industrial Authority who is the chief officer on whom is placed the duty of determining industrial disputes—Mr. Willis—who is now in this State, and there is power to have local industrial authorities in the States or on the scene of any threatened trouble which may hear the cause of complaint and, in some cases, settle it, while in others they may make a recommendation to the Central Industrial Authority, Mr. Willis.

The story of the industrial trouble at Collie is shortly this: Last year the coalminers' union submitted a claim for increased wages and made the claim first of all before a local industrial authority and then before the Central Industrial Authority. In June of last year, Mr. Willis issued an award, which brought the wages of Collie miners to a parity with those of New South Wales coalminers. Early this year the engineers at Collie made a claim for increased rates, and there was subsequently a strike by those workers, following which Mr. Justice Drake-Brockman visited this State and, after hearing the claims of the engineers, made an award by which they obtained an increase in their wage rates. So we see that the Collie Miners' Union last June had the wages of its members brought up to a parity with those of the New South Wales miners by an award of the Central Industrial Authority, Mr. Willis.

Recently, the Coal Miners' Union submitted a claim to the local industrial authority seeking a 20 per cent. increase in day rates and a 15 per cent. increase in piece work rates underground. This was argued last month before the local industrial authority, which—I understand from the Press—made a report and recommendation to the Central Industrial Authority, Mr. Willis, in Sydney. I gather that it would be the function or in the power of Mr. Willis to accept the recommendation of the local industrial authority which sat in Collie last month. What the local industrial authority recommended is more than I know and, I suppose, more than anybody else knows. Mr. Willis is now at Collie and apparently it is in his power to confirm or accept on the spot, if he thinks fit, the recommendation of the local industrial authority. I believe I am correct in saying—and this may be a matter in which the Collie miners are interested—that even awards by a central industrial authority are subject to revision or some degree of revision by the Coal Commissioner, Mr. Mighell, who is charged with the over-riding responsibility of ensuring some degree of uniformity in the industry throughout Australia, and with making sure that the wage policy does not conflict with the Commonwealth Government's policy of wage and price pegging under National Security regulations. We see, therefore, that the dispute at Collie was heard last month, which is not very long ago; but that the decision has not yet been given, but may be given at any time. Let me say at once that the responsibility for peace in the coal industry has been demanded by the Commonwealth Parliament and Government, and is entirely in their hands.

The responsibility for the settlement of disputes rests in the hands of the Commonwealth Government and the various industrial authorities which it has set up by Act of Parliament and regulation. But a breach of industrial law, whether Federal or State, is a failure to observe the law, and ensurance of the observance of law, of respect for the law, of the rule of law in a civilised community is a matter which is mainly the function of this Parliament and this State Government. That is the reason why I have felt with others that the occasion should not be allowed to pass without some discussion of an important matter

affecting the progress and the living standard of the people of our State, and without some indication of the views of Parliament and of the Government on that matter. The issue is one of very great importance, not so much on account of the present dispute—difficult as it is and the occasion of so much loss—but from the point of view of the people knowing the attitude of the legislators in this State as to anything that may occur in the future. It is far better for us to make our views clear, because that will help to guide those who otherwise may be tempted to have recourse to pressure tactics.

Any anomalies in the wage structure of the coalminers were, I believe, removed by the award of last June, and their claims therefore become a matter in which they demand an increase in their rates of wages over and above cost of living increase. That conflicts with the Commonwealth Government's policy of pegging wages and prices in order to keep down the very obvious threat of inflation, which is involved by the immense amount of purchasing power that was dammed up through the shortage of commodities in the war years; and with that policy of maintaining prices and costs at a fixed level, I think everybody will be in full agreement. One can well understand the sense of responsibility with which any Commonwealth industrial tribunal must approach a claim for increased wages that would cut across the national economic policy of the Commonwealth Parliament and the Commonwealth Government. I want to say also—and I think this should be said—that, arduous as the work is at Collie, I do not think that in regard to wage rates the Collie miners can fairly claim to have been inconsiderately treated either by the Commonwealth Parliament or by this Parliament.

I have in mind that only two years ago this Parliament—and I myself supported the Bill—agreed to legislation under which the Collie miners became the only section of people in Western Australia, outside direct employees of the Crown, who are entitled to receive pensions subsidised by all the taxpayers of this State, even by taxpayers who themselves have no other pension to which to look forward except the old-age pension. From the taxpayers, although their contribution was not large in volume, that measure was a generous one,

and might well have induced a sense of responsibility—and I think it should from all thoughtful miners—towards the rest of the people of Western Australia who have made this special privilege available, partly from their own pockets, in order to give the miners security in their old age and in the case of accident, and security for their families and children as well. I do not think this is an occasion on which there is need to say a good deal.

The facts are clear; the issues are clear to the public, and, I think, to this House. I am sure that the vast majority of unionists are responsible men; and one can possibly feel that after the good record of industry in this State, and of the coalminers on the Collie field, some new element has come into the industrial life of the coalminers—an element which is of a subversive character. That is only conjecture; but in view of the past record of the miners, I venture to say it is a conjecture that one might well be justified in entertaining. I would like to see the Government take appropriate measures to find out whether there is any such element exercising undue pressure upon a body of men who otherwise would be responsible citizens of the State.

There is also forced home to us the fact that we have no legislation in this State which is adequate to the importance and power of the industrial trade union structure. The Trade Unions Act was passed 42 years ago and is little more than a measure to legalise the formation of industrial organisations. In view of the care we have taken in this Parliament in the case of companies with a view to protecting the shareholders, the public and creditors and the penalties we have imposed upon those in charge of companies if they act contrary to the public interest, then I think we could in future assist responsible unionists if we brought down legislation under which we could be assured that no undue pressure would be brought to bear by what was really a minority in the industry, and by ensuring that there shall be a secret ballot in matters of this kind so that responsible unionists would have no difficulty in recording their votes for a responsible attitude towards the rest of the community. Allowing for the arduous nature of coalmining, if any miner feels himself unprepared to work in the Collie mines under conditions laid down by

law, it would not be unreasonable for the State to assist him to transfer to some other vocation. I feel sure that, with the many men returning soon to the State and seeking occupations with fairly satisfactory pay accruing to them, there should be no difficulty in getting the proper supply of labour to work the coal mines.

The last thing I want to say on this subject is that it would be perhaps unnecessary and superfluous to mention that this Parliament and this Government stand for the observance of the law. Industrial arbitration is the law of this land both in the Commonwealth and State spheres. Looking not at the immediate stoppage of work but to the attitude towards the law that we want to see created and maintained in the future by all the people, whether employers or employees, I feel we would be justified in reaffirming the attitude of Parliament and, I am sure, of the Government as well, that while legislation is on the statute-book it will be maintained by Parliament and by the Government; that respect for the law is fundamental in any civilised society; and that offenders against it shall be punished, irrespective of who they may be or how powerful they may be. Furthermore, I think it can be reaffirmed that Parliament and the Government look forward with confidence, especially in the light of conditions that have obtained during the last few days, to the co-operation of all people of good will, both unionists and employers, in making certain to the greatest possible extent that matters in dispute will be settled by arbitration without causing that attack on production and living conditions which is the inevitable result to the community of constant sequences of stoppages of work. In these circumstances, I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

MR. WATTS (Katanning) [4.55]: It is my intention to second the motion, because I regard it as a motion of protest against the action that has been taken by our friends, the miners at Collie, in circumstances which I do not think warrant any such course. I should imagine that the members of the Government would hold a similar view and therefore it should be difficult for them to offer opposition to the motion because, if they do not hold that view, they must undoubtedly be open to the belief that they are prepared to see 500,000 people held

to ransom by 500. I said a year or two ago in this House—and I am not going to withdraw it now—that I believed the industrial workers of this State were the cream of the industrial workers of Australia. There are times when even cream will, before its due time, because of some atmospheric or other conditions, turn sour, and I have a belief in my mind that the underlying cause of this trouble is interference—and I class it as interference, notwithstanding that it is under statutory law—by the Commonwealth Government in matters industrial in this State, which matters for many years past have been successfully attended to by the tribunals of this State.

It seems to me that had the tribunals of this State, constituted as they have been and successful as they have been over a period of 20 or more years, been able to officiate in this case, as they have officiated in dozens of instances in the past, this particular hold-up, which started about a week ago, would have been over long before the people of the metropolis, and indeed many people outside that area, were subjected to the state of affairs in which they now find themselves.

Mr. North: It is a taste of the "Yes" vote.

Mr. WATTS: The hon. member can put it that way if he cares. It is certainly a taste of the sort of meddling and muddling we might have expected had we done as some people wished us to do and handed over a greater measure of authority to our Federal overlords. My chief concern in this matter is this: How much longer are the people of this State, and chiefly of the metropolitan area at the moment, to be subjected to the conditions in which they now find themselves? How much longer is the health of our children and our womenfolk to be prejudiced by the state of affairs that now exists? How much longer are 20,000 men, if that is the correct figure, to be kept out of employment because of the existing state of affairs?

The Minister for Lands: When he mentioned 20,000, I think the member for West Perth was referring to the Eastern States, not to here.

Mr. Cross: He should get the correct figures.

Mr. McDonald: That was the figure mentioned in the Press.

Mr. WATTS: There are a great many industrial establishments and a large number of people whose wheels of industry cannot turn in the absence of a supply of electric current. There is one thing quite apart from that dislocation that must be borne in mind. So far as I am concerned, I would not for one moment subscribe to any state of affairs which kept the miners at Collie or any other section of the industrial community in a position of inferiority compared with any other section insofar as concerns the return it gets for the work it does. I believe that trades unionism was founded to ensure that every worker got a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and, as such, it is entitled or was entitled to the respect, not only of members of this community, but of every other person. Yet when one finds that the circumstances are such that there is not any noticeable inequality, when there are tribunals set up for the purpose of making determinations and when those tribunals—though, as I say, they have been made clumsy and in my view ineffectual because of Commonwealth interference—are prepared to act in settling the disputes or difficulties that may arise from time to time, I say there can be no government, either State or Commonwealth, that can honestly and sincerely believe the existing state of affairs to be justified, or that can honestly and sincerely look upon the position that exists today, where 500,000 people are held to ransom by approximately 500 people, with anything but sorrow.

I wish to compliment the member for West Perth, in that he approached this matter this afternoon not in anger, but in sorrow that such a state of affairs should be allowed to exist. It is a sorry commentary on our own lack of foresight—as I have never suggested anything else I say, “Our lack of foresight” rather than “The Government's lack of foresight,” because I wish to be reasonable in this matter—that we have not taken precautions to see that when there is no coal available—whether for this present reason or some other—our great industrial enterprise, the East Perth Power House, can function. It is obviously necessary that in all our future transactions in that regard, where we as the people of the State, through the Government of the State, propose on a big scale to supply the people of the State with power, we should make certain that if for reasons

similar to these—or any other reasons—it becomes impossible or impracticable to continue to supply that power from our native coal resources, we have some other means of doing it. If that were the position we should not have to concern ourselves so greatly with the present state of affairs.

It is not fundamental that this Assembly has to meet today with half a dozen hurricane lamps in lieu of the delightful electric lighting facilities recently provided for us by the Minister for Works. That matters but little, and we can doubtless manage to express our views and see our way about the notice paper with the aid of the substitutes that are upon our benches now, but the hospitals, and other institutions of tremendous importance in dealing with the health and other social questions of our people, are fundamental, and they are the things with which I am concerned. It matters greatly as to the transport of our citizens to and from their daily work. It matters greatly, too, that there should be people unemployed and unable to go about their lawful vocations because one small section of the community has taken the action that it has taken. Whether there be—as I have already admitted there may be—some underlying justification for it, I submit there is not sufficient justification to warrant the present state of affairs.

It will be surprising to me if, taking this motion as one substantially of protest against the state of affairs that has arisen, the Government of the State does not admit that there is justification for that protest. If it does not, then we can only assume that it looks with a favourable eye on those who are unreasonable, as there is indication that the people in this particular case are for the time being. If, on the contrary, the Government asserts that the matter is beyond its control, we shall not deny it, because the law, unfortunately, and quite wrongly, says that it is beyond its control. If the Government goes on to say that it joins with us in protesting against the state of affairs that exists, then at least we shall know that its activities and beliefs are in the right direction and we shall be able—I have no doubt—to subscribe to the point of view which it will then express. It seems to me, therefore, that the moving of this motion is fully justified, and I have no difficulty in seconding it.

THE PREMIER (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascayne) [5.5]: The motion for adjournment that has been so temperately moved by the member for West Perth and supported by the Leader of the Opposition is one which means, interpreting not the usual meaning of the motion, but the manner in which it was moved, that there is a dire need for attention to be drawn to the seriousness of the position occasioned by the stoppage of mining at Collie. The member for West Perth drew attention to the condition of this Chamber as being complete evidence—if such be necessary here—of the seriousness of the effects of such stoppage in every industry and, with that temperate approach to the subject, I am disposed to suggest that if this were a game of cricket and you, Mr. Speaker, were the umpire, one could certainly, at this stage, appeal successfully against the light. Since that is not the position I hasten, firstly, to point out the attitude of the Government in connection with the dispute as it exists at present and, then, to deal with what has been attempted in the past, and later to deal with what are the intentions of the Government as to the future.

In dealing with the present, I intend to quote from several telegrams and from several documents that have been exchanged between Governments in the course of the present dispute. Both the member for West Perth and the Leader of the Opposition made it quite clear that the Commonwealth Coal Act and the regulations thereunder control the production of coal in Australia. I would like to have it clearly recalled just how wide are the authorities accepted by the Commonwealth in that connection, and the responsibilities thereunder. The Coal Production (War-time) Act, No. 1 of 1944, sets out clearly, in Section 3, the objects. In Section 17 it further sets out clearly the powers and functions of the Commissioner appointed under the Act. Section 17 reads as follows:—

The Commissioner is charged with the duty of making provision for securing an increase in the production of coal for the needs of Australia and of the Powers allied with His Majesty in the present war and is empowered to regulate and control the production, treatment, handling, supply, distribution, storage, marketing and consumption of coal, and for those purposes, and for the purpose of carrying out his duties and of exercising any of his powers and functions under this Act, is

empowered to make such orders, and to take such measures, give such directions and do such things, as he thinks necessary or expedient.

In Section 31 of the Coal Act there are clearly defined the powers of the Central Industrial Authority, who is the person appointed to deal with industrial matters under this Act. The Central Industrial Authority is charged with a very great responsibility and is given great authority. Section 31 reads—

(1) The Central Industrial Authority shall have power to consider and determine any industrial dispute or any matter of which he has cognisance, and for that purpose shall have (in addition to any other powers conferred on him by this Act) all powers which are given to the court or the Chief Judge of the Court as regards an industrial dispute of which the court has cognisance.

(2) In exercising his powers under this Act, the Central Industrial Authority shall act according to equity, good conscience and the substantial merits of the case, without regard to technicalities or legal forms, and shall not be bound by any rules of evidence, but may inform his mind on any matter in such manner as he thinks just.

Further, there will be found in Section 31 of that Act just how the referring of those powers may be applied to a local authority, so I think at the outset it is advisable to recall very clearly just where, in this case, the authority lies. Though the State Government is vitally concerned in the matter it has had no authority, at any stage in this dispute, to settle it. I wish to emphasise this point, that even before the stoppage took place, and before the aggregate meeting was called last Wednesday, the Government took every step possible to avoid such a stoppage.

On Monday of last week members of the miners' union, and indeed the president of it, waited upon the Minister for Mines and myself, advising us that an aggregate meeting was to be called for last Wednesday. These men had unsuccessfully stated their case in Sydney—had pleaded their cause and had asked, that if the statement of claim which they had lodged was not possible of decision the claim that anomalies existed should immediately be heard, and the Government acted immediately in that connection. The Minister for Mines sent this telegram to Senator Ashley, Minister for Supply and Shipping, who controls—administratively—the Coal Act—

Account serious dissatisfaction recent decision yourself and Coal Commissioner Collie coalminers holding aggregate meeting Wednesday next Stop Distinct possibility industrial trouble which with present coal position would be most serious Stop In order avoid this State Government asks your assurance that Central Industrial Authority will at Collie at earliest opportunity hear miners' claim that anomalies exist.

That telegram met with no response until two days later, when a very unsatisfactory reply in our view was received. The reply from Senator Ashley stated—

Central Industrial Authority is dealing with all claims lodged by Collie miners to date and decision should reach you within course of next few days. As to claim for 20 per cent. increase on all day wage rates both the Central Industrial Authority and the Coal Commissioner have advised the miners' representative that no anomaly exists and that the claim cannot be granted in view of economic organisation regulations.

The telegram went on to say—

Neither Central Industrial Authority nor Coal Commissioner can agree to further increases which would result in Collie men receiving higher rates than Federation members anywhere else.

Since that telegram was merely a recital of the approach of the Collie miners to the Coal Commissioner and did not answer our questions, the following telegram was sent to the Prime Minister:—

Minister Mines this State on Monday communicated with Minister Ashley regarding serious dissatisfaction Collie coalminers owing refusal of Coal Commissioner and Minister Ashley to agree that Central Industrial Authority would hear at Collie miners' claim that anomalies exist. Aggregate meeting held today and coal production ceased. State Government not asking for Commonwealth board to come to Collie to consider wages increase on percentage or any other basis, but to proceed here immediately to hear claim that anomalies exist. Imperative that investigation into claim that there are anomalies be undertaken immediately. As alternative, State Government asks for immediate restoration to the State of powers regarding industrial affairs and conditions. Owing to all our industry and transport threatened with stoppage we may be forced to take other action through our Arbitration Court, but cannot stress too strongly that solution of immediate problem lies in agreement by Commonwealth to have Central Industrial Authority proceed immediately to Collie to hear claim regarding alleged anomalies.

As no reply was received to that telegram by Friday morning, I telephoned the Prime Minister, and after conversation with him as

to the dire result on industry, on the economic structure of this State generally, on the serious plight of our hospitals and the effect upon foodstuffs, I subsequently received a telegram from him agreeing that the Central Industrial Authority, Mr. Willis, should proceed to Perth. It was mentioned in the wire that the purpose of his coming here was to hear the claim that anomalies existed.

Constant contact was kept with the representatives of the miners at Collie, and every day in every possible way representatives of the Government continued to stress the dire results which would continue to affect this State unless the miners returned to work immediately; but from day to day the conference was adjourned because the miners then stated that, in addition to the authority hearing the claim that anomalies existed, they desired to have the claim associated with the anomalies heard and determined at Collie, which of course was an entirely different matter. That became their attitude because of their extreme dissatisfaction, expressed at all their meetings, with the treatment which they had received at the hands of the Commonwealth authority both when in Sydney and since their return. Following their meeting on Saturday, I attempted to contact Mr. Willis, who was to proceed from Sydney to Melbourne on Sunday, to ascertain whether it was lawful or possible for him to accede to the miners' request, stating the position and only stating it as they had expressed it. Mr. Willis has arrived and is in Collie. The Government, in considering this matter over the week-end was so concerned at what appeared to be inevitable that it caused a very frank wire to be sent to the coalminers yesterday. That wire reads as follows:—

Willis arrives Collie tomorrow Tuesday. Desperate position developing throughout State by paralysis of transport and industry because of no coal. Complete paralysis by Thursday this week. Military and civil hospitals including maternity in grave difficulties. Lives of sick and injured people including returned Servicemen imperilled. Food supplies metropolitan area endangered as all abattoirs and refrigeration services at standstill. Sewerage system in serious danger. Existing industries closed down and had effect on several proposed new industries. Government legislative proposals re South-West power scheme based on Collie held up by uncertainty of adequate supplies of coal for project. General position re employment extremely bad. No power metropolitan area for essential domestic purposes. Minister Mines Marshall and Gray will arrive Collie noon tomorrow Tuesday to place position before

your executive and later before men at mass meeting. State Government again urges men return to work immediately.

I have overlooked a point up to this stage in the events that developed late last week. On Friday last the Government told the miners that if the negotiations for their approach to the Commonwealth failed, we would, if the President of the Arbitration Court agreed, send him to Collie to confer with them and report to the Government, provided the men returned to work immediately. Our successful effort in getting Mr. Willis here rendered that course unnecessary. When the Prime Minister was in Perth six or eight weeks ago, I made a point of contacting him personally on many matters that were worrying us in Western Australia, one of them being the coal position. We asked him whether he would agree that authority be delegated to a local reference board to deal with day-to-day difficulties to enable them to be more readily decided.

We further asked the Prime Minister to delegate authority under the Coal Act to deal with developmental work. Both of those points were causing unrest and difficulty on the Collie field. We have had the authorities and experts of the Commonwealth appointed under the Coal Act in Collie who have advised and reported upon developmental work and other matters; but, knowing what the difficulties associated with our field were in comparison with other fields in the Eastern States, we knew that so far as this State was concerned it was just and proper that the Commonwealth should accede to our request. Following on that, we have asked, as I have indicated, that there should be restored to the State—if these disputes cannot be settled more readily from the Eastern States—the responsibility of wage-pegging and industrial matters at present dealt with under the Coal Act.

We were very conscious of the far-reaching effects of that request, but I am quite unmoved by the plea that the granting of the request will cause disturbance and disability in other spheres. In this State we are often affected very seriously by decisions which advantageously affect other States and prejudicially affect ours. But in this case we are quite prepared to take the consequences of exercising the authority in this State. I feel that I cannot over-stress the point that the Government for a long time has been extremely conscious of the implica-

tions and the dire effects to the State if a serious stoppage, such as the present one, were brought to us. We, too, have been quite aware of the situation that has been war-caused and has developed at Collie. We know that the average age of the miners has substantially increased. We know that the very wet season we have experienced has also militated against coal production. We know, too, that the result of our advances, even in specifying names of men for release, to the manpower authorities has seriously disadvantaged us, for we have had in that connection very little response.

For the twelve months ended the 30th June last the production of coal averaged 1,000 tons for the railways and 500 tons for the power house in short supply every week. From month to month the ex-Minister for Mines conferred with the mines management and with the representatives of the men in an effort to better the position. Although insufficiency of coal to meet daily needs was not the result of any hitch at Collie, in spite of the constant worry associated with the position, we have been unable to improve the circumstances. Following the visit of certain members of the Commonwealth technical staff to investigate and report upon Collie in July, I, then acting for the Hon. J. C. Willecock, called together the management and the men because we felt that unless there was a marked improvement a crisis such as has occurred would occur.

I want to say that so far as the mine management is concerned—those commonly known as the mine owners—it is an unfortunate fact that costs of production do not worry them one scrap. Provided that any increases are made by a properly constituted tribunal those increases are passed on to the cost of the coal; and pre-war, and since the war, there has to my mind been very little indication of anxiety on the part of the management to increase coal production. There has been a laissez-faire attitude for many months.

Hon. P. Collier: More lazy than fair!

The PREMIER: Much more; but when we met the management and the men on the last occasion I asked the question point blank of them all. "Can we take it for granted that an increase in production of coal at Collie is the desire of all of us?"

Although that was answered in the affirmative, results have not proved that very much interest has been taken in that connection by the management. I think, too, that although we have heard in the last few days much comment and much condemnation by those who do not even know what the dispute is about—such as machine-gunning the miners and even doing away with the Government, and all sorts of things that are quite beside the point under discussion—I think it is necessary at this stage for everyone to know the true position and the true relationship between the management and the men.

And all of the aspects associated with production—the conditions of the men and the improvement in production because of happier circumstances on the field—appear to the Government not to have received the attention they should have received. While the company associated with the production of coal can remain unmoved by crises and unaffected by costs of production there can be very little alteration in the circumstances. We realise, too, that with the restoration of normal manpower there is an expansion necessary in coal production and a very big expansion required to meet the State's needs. There are many matters in dispute with the coalmining companies, on which it is impossible for the Government to arbitrate. There are many matters, too, that call for reference to engineers. I have come to this conclusion, looking forward in a long-term sense, that, in connection with the well-being of this State and the necessity for its expansion, there is a vital need for a complete inquiry, very quickly, into all methods necessary to promote coal production in Western Australia.

There is every necessity for a commissioner, fully clothed with all authority, and knowing what our immediate needs and our future anticipated needs might be, to report upon ways and means of achieving that result. Whether such an inquiry is confined to Collic or not is beside the question, but the plans of this Government both for industrial expansion and for the benefit of the community in general by the reticulation and development of power services depend upon the use of native material of this country—coal; coal that is here in thousands of millions of tons and available for several generations. I think it is very necessary for us, at a very early stage, to take no hazard whatever as to whether the industrial ex-

pansion in secondary industries, in primary industries, and in amenities to all sections shall be possible, or whether we shall be disadvantaged always because of being on the borderline of safety in regard to coal production.

I desire to advise the House that since I have been speaking a message has come through from Collic to where the Minister for Mines, Hon. W. M. Marshall, proceeded early this morning. What happened in Collic today was this: Two Ministers of this Government proceeded there without any contact at all with, and before making any approach to contact, the Federal industrial authority. The Government was determined, even if negotiations with the industrial authority tomorrow failed, that the Minister for Mines and the Honorary Minister (Hon. E. H. Gray) should go to Collic and stress the point of view to the men that we have repeated by telephone and in conversation in recent days, namely, that if Mr. Willis's decision was against the men and they were disappointed, the Minister would, in spite of any attitude, address them to place the point of view of the Government and the people strongly before them. That has taken place and I have this message from Collic:

The men have decided to return to work tomorrow morning on the understanding that Mr. Willis remains and hears the men's claims. The State Government to help him, wherever necessary, to obtain authority from the Commonwealth to hear and determine the claims. The men are prepared to work on Saturday, which is pay Saturday, if required by the Government.

That message has come through from the Minister for Mines since I have been speaking. The miners met at 3.30 p.m., and two minutes before the House met at 4.30 p.m. I was on the phone, but no decision had then been arrived at. I am very happy to make the statement I have to the House, and hope that the mover and the seconder of this motion will be completely satisfied that the Government has, over a period of years and particularly during the war years, exerted every effort, not only to keep the wheels of industry going and to maintain the maximum war effort, but to prepare plans to see that the maximum effort in regard to labour and production shall, from this day, come through better production from Collic.

MR. DONEY (Williams-Narrogin) [5.35]: We are all naturally very pleased indeed with the message that has just come

through from Collie and which the Premier quite properly has made known to this House. That message, of course, has solved the problem with which the House was faced a few moments ago, but it has not, of course—nor could it do so—solved the question of just how exactly similar positions can be met in the future. We all realise that there is in this State no shortage of material so far-reaching, so quickly far-reaching, so serious and so generally disastrous for that matter, as that of coal. This, consequently, is a most important debate, although not so important now as it was before the Premier made known the decision arrived at in Collie. I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, understand, and that the House generally understands, that the action taken by this side of the House in launching this motion, to which three members have spoken, was, in no sense intended as a vote of want of confidence in the Government. Far from it! There has not been, I hope—certainly not from this side of the House—any desire to have a clash of purposes in regard to the motion. It was, as a matter of fact, an attempt to get unity of aim so that we might arrive at some sound, helpful decision, and might possibly be able to gather from the speeches an idea as to how best to ward off similar troubles in the future.

It will be admitted that the member for West Perth, and the Leader of the Opposition, and the Premier too, adopted a serious and temperate tone. I say that the men at Collie should not have struck. I think, in general, that that view is held, too, by all members opposite. I have, nevertheless, in mind this fact, that I do not know quite what made them strike. Until one does know that, one is not acting properly in coming to a decision on the matter. All the same we have to reflect upon this, that there does exist now, and has for many years past, a legal means of securing a hearing of a grievance such as the men at Collie have. This point, too, arose from the speech that the Premier delivered. He made certain advances to the Commonwealth Government, the day before yesterday I take it, and received no reply whatever until two days had elapsed. The Federal authorities must surely have known that their delay was causing a continuance here of the very trouble and suffering from lack of food, light, etc., that we have been experiencing for nearly a week now.

The strike will, perhaps, have done some good if, as a result of the debate here today, we can only evolve machinery that will prevent the occurrence of future strikes. I do not know whether that can be brought about, but such a task, although not perhaps easy of achievement, is surely not impossible. Certainly there have been strikes over the past 60, 70 and 80 years in different parts of the world, but that is no reason to assume that the problem affecting strikes is one not capable of solution. I do not know whether today strikes occur in Russia. The Press gives the idea that the Russians have managed, in some strange way, to overcome them, but I have my doubts. All the same, I still think the problem is not outside the competency of, say, half-a-dozen sound, earnest and knowledgable men if they sat down possibly for a week, a month or six months in an endeavour to find some means to overcome the matter of constantly recurring strikes.

I do not think that there is now any need to go as far into this matter as I had originally intended. But it does certainly seem to me that a strike, particularly one at Collie, is an absurdly small thing alongside the far bigger trouble that we have managed to overcome after six years of strife. It is truly an amazing thing that while we were able to overcome a trouble affecting, I suppose, 2,000,000,000 people, a relatively small matter, such as this strike, can be a little too much for us. As I said, and I repeat in closing, there seems now not the same reason for continuing this debate as there seemed a little while ago. I therefore compliment the Premier, and those associated with him on the benches opposite, on being relieved from further worries in regard to this matter.

Mr. McDONALD: With the permission of the seconder—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! There is no right of reply to the motion.

Mr. McDONALD: As the motion has served the purpose for which it was intended, namely, to allow those who desired to make a statement on the matter to do so, I ask, with the permission of the seconder, to withdraw it in the usual way.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

House adjourned at 5.45 p.m.