

ship I think a record has been established in the number of budgets where he has succeeded in that direction.

I am pleased that the Government intends to bring down legislation to deal with the question of soil erosion. Those who have had the opportunity of witnessing the situation existing in the Eastern States of the Commonwealth during the past summer must be impressed with the necessity of every part of Australia getting on with the job now. Even though it may be said that the problem is not so acute in Western Australia, nevertheless it would be tragic for us to wait until inroads have been made into some of our fertile soils before we take appropriate action. When one visits the other States of the Commonwealth one sees during the dry summer season by day and by night vast clouds of red sand constantly drifting through the skies. The movement of the sand itself is so noticeable that when travelling people find that considerable layers of dust accumulate in closed railway compartments. There is also the spectacle of hundreds of sheep lying dead in paddocks because of lack of water and feed. The paddocks themselves are bare as billiard tables, being absolutely devoid of vegetation of any kind. Fences have been completely covered with banks of sand, and dwellers in those areas have had to leave their homes to proceed to other places because of the choking dust. When the rains come there is a flood of brown water flowing through the creeks, streams and rivers carrying to the ocean the top soil that is lost to the country for ever. This is a most serious problem and I am pleased that the Government will be tackling it.

I conclude on the note that with regard to the days lying ahead there devolves upon all members of all Parliaments in Australia the need to become venturesome and progressive in their outlook and not to concentrate on a desire to return to the days that existed before the outbreak of war. In our young undeveloped country we should not be afraid to experiment. Surely we can learn from the pioneers and explorers of not so many years ago that there are new paths which can be traversed and new courses which can be followed. Even in our short period of living memory we must be seized of the fact that there was much at

fault with the old order of things and accordingly we should pledge ourselves that the days following this war will be a substantial improvement on the days that went before.

**Mr. MARSHALL** (Murchison): I formally second the motion.

On motion by Mr. Watts, debate adjourned.

### ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

**THE PREMIER** (Hon. J. C. Willcock—Geraldton): I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday, the 31st July.

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 4.10 p.m.*

## Legislative Council.

*Tuesday, 31st July, 1945.*

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The PRESIDENT took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

### AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT.

*Section "B," 1944.*

**THE PRESIDENT:** I have received from the Auditor General a copy of Section "B" of his report on the Treasurer's statement of Public Accounts for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1944. It will be laid on the Table of the House.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENT— PREMIERSHIP OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

*Resignation of Hon. J. C. Willcock.*

**THE CHIEF SECRETARY** (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West): I desire to inform the House that the Hon. J. C. Willcock has,

for health reasons, resigned the Premiership of the State and has been succeeded by the Hon. F. J. S. Wise.

### QUESTION—HOUSING.

#### *As to Day Labour and Contract Costs.*

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT asked the Chief Secretary: Is the Government aware of comparative costs, in other States, of homes built by day labour and by contract?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

The only information available relates to the State of Victoria and is as follows:—

METROPOLITAN AREA (AS AT APRIL, 1945).

	Contract.		Day Labour.		
	Brick.	Timber.	Brick.	Timber.	Concrete.
<i>Two Bedrooms :</i>	£	£	£	£	£
In pairs ....	945	....	930	....	750
Single ....	905	735	980	....	790
<i>Three Bedrooms :</i>					
In pairs ....	1,055	....	1,040	....	870
Single ....	1,095	910	1,090	....	910

The above figures are for the complete building, including fencing, paths, out-buildings, fittings and all work within the site, but do not include the land or charges for architects' fees or administration.

### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

#### *Second Day.*

Debate resumed from the 26th July.

HON. C. F. BAXTER (East) [5.0]: The Leader of the House has announced the resignation of the Premier and the appointment of Mr. Wise in his place. I am sure that those who have had association with the Premier will regret that his health is such as to necessitate his relinquishing office before the end of the Parliamentary term. He has carried on the work of Parliament in a very creditable manner. Apparently he had the knack of keeping peace among the different sections in the House. I congratulate Mr. Wise on his elevation which, in my opinion, is well earned. His rise in Parliament has been rapid. He has shown ability and energy, not only to deal with the task in hand, but to see it through to the end. I hope that his tenure of office will be a pleasant one, and will be rather short.

The Governor's Speech is more lacking than ever, and is merely a record of matters with which we are already acquainted. Outside of the proposed legislation that we have already had before us, probably not in the same form, only two items have been mentioned, namely, the Lake Campion alunite deposits and the Wundowie charcoal iron venture. It is futile to be told that, up to date, with all the enormous expenditure of money, and the time occupied, Lake Campion has only produced a quantity of potash. Not only the people of the State, but Parliamentarians, expected greater things than that from the Lake Campion deposits. As to Wundowie, I have nothing to say in regard to production, or anything else. Apparently the only thing that can be said about it is the adverse comment one hears from the general public in relation to it.

I would like to refer to what I consider a disaster at the present time, and that is the demise of the late Prime Minister, the Right Hon. John Curtin, who passed away at a time when his administration of Australian affairs, covering a period during the greatest calamity in the world's history, was being brought to a successful issue. He had performed the greater portion of his task, and had done so with such credit that his name will go down in history as one of the world's leading statesmen. His heavy task during the European war was greatly added to two months after his assumption of office by the entry of Japan into the conflict and to this was added the control and balance of a very difficult Cabinet team. His love of his country, combined with close application to the many far-reaching and vital issues, had a telling effect upon his health. No man can take a pre-eminent and effective part in contentions that shake nations, or the discussion of great national issues in domestic economy and finance, without keen reproach and fierce misconception. But with integrity unsoiled, the purpose pure and a blameless life, conflicting views and differing counsels disappear, and firmly fixed upon character and actual achievement his good fame rests secure. He has gone down to the grave peacefully and quietly, and his character will stand upon the pages of history. I desire to sympathise with Mrs. Curtin and her family.

With the view of awakening more interest and also of securing more consideration and reasonable treatment I intend dealing with some matters of importance. Radical alterations are necessary, more especially as regards the future. Whilst I am not setting out to be critical, there must of necessity be criticism owing to the treatment meted out in the past and, in most instances, still carried on. I refer to such matters as wheatgrowing and the many serious drawbacks associated therewith; supplies and transport of necessities to carry on production successfully; water supplies and the serious position of the North-West; hold-ups in industry; debt adjustment in the pastoral and farming areas, and many other matters. The most urgent need in Great Britain now—and it will be for some time to come—is food. In addition, millions are starving on the continent of Europe. Even in Australia food supplies are short, but nevertheless every effort should be made to send supplies to those who need them so badly. Australia, in addition to her own requirements for war purposes and the civilian population, is expected to provide supplies for her Allies. Every person should be prepared to give full assistance from all angles. Producers should be considered in every way in their efforts to produce to the maximum. There is room for great improvement in this direction.

To assist producers, P.O.W. were made available, and whilst in the large majority of cases this labour is of some little assistance, the services of these men are not of great value. Inexperience, language and other drawbacks mean poor results from their labours. As a crowning effort the employers are now called on to pay double wages. This imposition has been enforced by the Commonwealth Government which should be more concerned with encouraging production in the much needed efforts to provide foodstuffs, than by bending again to trades unions. Many producers are debarred from making full efforts by the shortage of tractor power and the want of rubber tyres for their vehicles. The rubber position is very acute. New tyres are almost impossible to procure, but there are hundreds of thousands of partially used tyres, which have been removed from Army vehicles, in large quantities all over Australia, and which the Army

would rather allow to perish than make available.

Apparently the maxim of the Army is, "What we have we hold." Neither Governments, Commonwealth nor State, made the slightest attempt to have these tyres made available until Senator Ashley, after being approached by myself, took the matter in hand. As a result a few tyres are being made available, but the quantities are so small that I feel that the Army is going slow with the distribution. These tyres are urgently needed by people in other industries, and would give great assistance and return some value if so used instead of being allowed to perish at Nungarin and other places in this State and in the Eastern States. It is to be hoped that the Government will take this matter up with the Commonwealth Government. Through manpower shortage and scarcity of materials the buildings, and particularly the fences, on farms are in bad order. The drift has been going on for years. The heavy rains during the past month have done serious damage. In some cases miles of fences have been washed away. In addition to ordinary use, large quantities of barbed wire are needed for temporary purposes. There are no supplies other than the surplus stocks which the Army is occasionally selling. Recent disposals were of black barbed wire only, the galvanised wire being withheld. I am referring to surplus Army stock.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: There are thousands of coils of galvanised barbed wire in the South Australian agricultural showgrounds. I saw them there the other day.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: A lot of the wire has been used, and some of it is in short lengths only. There is not only this drawback, but black wire is unsuitable for farms and, in addition, with freight, erection, etc., its life becomes too costly. There is no doubt the disposal is being made to foist the poor quality wire on to people who must have it for immediate use. This shows scant consideration for the industry that is being depended on to speed up food supplies. This is a matter that our Government should pursue with the Federal Government. Present stocks of wheat in Australia are very low and the policy in the past applying to this matter has been responsible for the position that has developed. The allocation

of licensed areas for Western Australia was arrived at by taking the average over the years from 1937 to 1941 which gave an Australian acreage average of 13 million. On this basis the Western Australian licensed acreage would be three million. But by a special regulation the licensed area in this State was further reduced to approximately two million acres.

It was shown clearly that wheat could be held in reasonably good condition for years, and had the special restriction not applied we would today be holding an appreciable quantity of wheat. While it might be said that this was brought about by superphosphate shortages at the time that the restrictions applied to Western Australia—not to any other State—there was superphosphate available and we could have continued to put in the whole acreage, or at least the greater proportion of it. Had we done so we would have, today, a much larger quantity of wheat on hand which would have helped Australia and possibly the whole of the outside world. Since then superphosphate supplies have been restricted. But the acreage restriction meant that superphosphate which could have been used in this State was sent to benefit the Eastern States. It was a very short-sighted policy. Compensation at the rate of 12s. per acre was paid on the acreage which was brought under this special regulation. The total amount of compensation paid over the period under review exceeded half a million, the figure being £570,000.

The restriction policy, added to the shortage of superphosphate, has resulted in many wheatgrowers ceasing operations. Regarding the present year, it is laid down that if 50 per cent. of the licensed area is not sown with wheat no compensation will be paid. Owing to many drawbacks such as shortage of labour, late deliveries of superphosphate, oils and other requirements, and because of the heavy rainfall there will be a fair number of wheatgrowers who will not reach the required acreage and will suffer accordingly. It is hoped that this position will receive further consideration. Wheatgrowers have had a very raw deal from the Federal Government. Over the three years, wheat for stock feed was supplied at 2s. 10½d. per bushel, plus 6d. bounty. It has been stated that the bounty was paid to wheatgrowers. This is most misleading as it was paid to give cheap

stock food to users, and even with this added to the 2s. 10½d. it made the amount only 3s. 4½d. for wheat against export parity value of 6s. 6d. per bushel. Last year this return was increased by 1s. per bushel, but even that amount was much below export parity. Contrast the treatment of wheatgrowers during this war and that meted out to them during the 1914-18 world conflict. During the progress of the earlier war wheatgrowers received the world's parity for their products but the Commonwealth Government's policy during the present hostilities has had the effect of robbing the wheatgrowers. I agree that cheap wheat should be made available for the gristing of flour and for stock food as a matter of national importance. But the wheatgrower should not be asked to shoulder the expense. The taxpayer should most certainly make up the difference between the local price and export parity. Surely that course should be adopted instead of imposing such harsh conditions on the growers themselves!

Why should the wheatgrowers be compelled to provide cheap requirements for the rest of the community? No other section is treated so harshly. The Commonwealth Minister for Commerce and Agriculture (Mr. Scully), who is fond of making statements and so frequently contradicts himself, said recently that the total realisation on the No. 8 pool—the 1944-45 pool—would be 4s. 1d. for bagged wheat. The export value being 7s. 6d. per bushel, this shows plainly that no consideration can be expected from a Government that is controlled by the trade unions. In this respect it would perhaps be advisable for me to give members particulars of the results of all the pools to indicate how the unfortunate wheatgrower has been adversely affected by Commonwealth policy. The results of the pools to date, leaving out fractional prices, are as follows:—

COMPENSATION PAYMENTS MADE BY THE AUSTRALIAN WHEAT BOARD UP TO AND INCLUDING 10TH JULY, 1945.

Pool.	Year.	Bulk Wheat.	Bagged Wheat.
		s. d.	s. d.
No. 1	1938-39	2 4	2 5
No. 2	1939-40	3 5	3 7
No. 4	1940-41	3 9	3 11
No. 5	1941-42	3 9	4 0
No. 6	1942-43	3 10	4 0
No. 7	1943-44	3 11	4 1
No. 8	1944-45	3 11	4 1

It is necessary to explain that for the four pools, 1938-39 to 1941-42, inclusive, the payments were on the basis of "on rails

at ports." Consequently, to arrive at the net payments received, growers had to deduct from the second payment for the No. 1 pool and from the first payments for Nos. 2, 4 and 5 pools, rail freight from their delivery siding to the nearest port. For the last three pools mentioned, 1942-43 to 1944-45, the payments were at sidings. I should explain, of course, that there was no No. 3 pool in Western Australia. It was announced on the 2nd July, 1945, that payments of 1½d. for bulk wheat and 1½d. for bagged wheat for the 1940-41 season, affecting No. 4 pool, would be made shortly, but these would be subject to any fractional adjustment necessary so as to distribute the whole of the funds available. That discloses the wheat position. That shows the treatment that has been extended to the growers during the present war as compared with the treatment meted out to them during the 1914-18 war when every pool price reached export parity.

Another item that has given cause for grave concern concerns wool. The shortage of materials during the war period resulted in the attention of scientists being directed to the production of substitutes for wool. Among the many successfully produced were synthetic fibres, in connection with which many important discoveries have been made. As there is no need for further research work in that direction, synthetic fibres have now been commercialised and constitute a very serious menace to our wool industry. The Australian wool industry is so important to every resident of the Commonwealth that every effort must be made to protect it. Quite recently I heard part of a broadcast on the subject of "Rayon versus Wool," and I was astounded to hear the speaker say—

Rayon is very acceptable to the people and if it can be produced at a reasonable cost, why should the people not have it—even if the wool industry has to go?

Is there no supervision over such broadcasts? Surely statements of this nature are so damaging to Australia and to everyone of the seven million inhabitants of the country, that they should not be permitted, seeing that they are calculated detrimentally to affect one of the leading industries in Australia which produces the best wool in the world. It is an industry that is worth £70,000,000 per annum to Australia, and surely it is one that should have every

encouragement. It provides direct employment for 150,000 people and indirectly for possibly four times that number. The wool industry is providing funds to popularise the product and to fight opposition from synthetic fibres. Members will readily realise that such misleading and incorrect statements injure the campaign to promote the use of wool by encouraging people to avail themselves of rayon.

Wool constitutes an important industry giving employment to an extremely large number of people. As the raw material is grown here, the aim should be to manufacture the raw material into goods for export, giving employment to thousands of additional people and keeping the revenue in the country itself. Our aim should be to establish up-to-date woollen mills throughout Australia in places where the climate and water supplies are suitable. Both those factors are necessary in connection with the manufacture of woollen goods. For the Commonwealth Government to provide any assistance for the manufacture of rayon in Australia is to commit an act of sabotage. In the interests of Australia, everything should be done to discourage the manufacture or importation of rayon. Recent statements by Federal Ministers indicate that they favour the extensive manufacture of substitutes in opposition to the woollen industry. However, this is just characteristic of the Commonwealth Government's attitude towards the producers. With regard to the tractor and truck position, producers have been urged to speed up supplies that are so essential to provide for the requirements of the Fighting Services and the civilian population, and also for export to countries where people are starving; but this move has not been adequately supported by the Commonwealth and State Governments. Producers are now finding themselves made use of as a sort of dumping ground for Army material. Surplus barbed wire, plain wire and wire netting is being made available but in supplies that are only of a poor quality, such as black wire and wire that has been already used. Many of the parcels are made up of short lengths. The life of black wire on farming areas is too short, and this occasions expenditure that farmers cannot shoulder.

Tyres for tractors and trucks are short in supply and in consequence operations on

many farms have been held up. The maximum advantage has been taken of the position to overload farmers with excessive costs and while tyres cannot be supplied, a large number of lend lease trucks have been made available for purchase. Farmers, on being pressed, have, owing to their inability to secure suitable tyres for their own trucks, purchased the lend lease vehicles at outrageous prices. While they have been led to believe that the trucks were 2-ton trucks, many proved to be 4-ton trucks and were consequently too costly to operate. Then again new tyres with spares were supplied on the trucks. If proper consideration had been extended to the farmers who were asked to maintain production, more tyres would have been made available for the trucks already in the possession of the growers but which had been held up because of the farmers' inability to procure the tyres that were required.

As regards the supply of tractors, which are necessary to enable farmers to secure the maximum production from their holdings and furthermore to overcome to a large extent the manpower position, the supplies made available for Western Australia were not as liberal as those provided in the other States. There have been hundreds of applicants and a very large number of approvals for purchase, but a small quantity only has been made available to farmers. Plainly, the Commonwealth Government's policy is to impose on those it states should produce the food supplies, and certainly the producers have nothing to thank the Commonwealth Government for in this respect. The policy of forcing surplus stocks for farmers' requirements should be replaced by one under which necessary requirements would be provided for as there were surpluses available, and thus protect purchasers from being further overloaded with debt.

During the past summer, thousands of acres of stock food and many miles of fencing wire destroyed by disastrous fires mainly caused by sparks from railway engines. To observe a locomotive at night running up an incline is to see a display of fireworks, and yet we have been told that spark-arresters have been installed in order to prevent any danger of fires! It has been stated freely that the serious increase in the number of fires last summer was due to the use of Garratt engines. Ap-

parently no spark-arresters have been fitted to that type of engine, of which I have been informed there are 21 in use. As the damage has been so great, it is necessary to ascertain if the Railway Department is preparing to overcome the danger before next summer. If it were possible to make the department pay for the damage caused by these fires, I venture to suggest that the trouble would quickly be remedied.

To sue the Commissioner of Railways successfully on account of fire damage caused by sparks from the department's engines, it would be necessary to prove to the court that the sparks had been seen to come from the locomotive. This would not be possible even if one were alongside the train. Members will realise that some other action is necessary to minimise the destruction that occurs annually. The losses caused last year represented a serious blow to those unfortunate farmers who had grass, fencing, and, in some instances, stock destroyed by the fires. Special legislation was placed on the statute-book to secure better control over bush fires and, under the provisions of that measure, bush fire brigades were established in different country centres. These have done splendid work in checking fires and protecting stock and property. However, the most important task is the prevention of these outbreaks, most of which are caused by sparks from railway engines. The question arises: Does the Railway Department intend to make alterations so that the streams of live coals will be prevented from being ejected from railway engines? I will await the Chief Secretary's reply on this point, and, if I do not deem it satisfactory, some action will be necessary to protect the country areas from further devastation.

For the fifth year in succession the State has shown a surplus. The past year's surplus was stated as £4,490, an infinitesimal amount, and the previous surpluses were of a like nature. The five years' surpluses average £16,000. When speaking of the past year's surplus of £4,490 the Premier stated that he was "very well satisfied." On what grounds could he feel gratified? I cannot see any grounds for satisfaction with an increase in revenue of £2,800,000 over the period stated, and the evasion by the Government of every avoidable expenditure which could call for manpower and materials. Every Government instrumentality has been

neglected and no effort has been made to prevent deterioration of buildings. Wherein lies the satisfaction? The deferred maintenance will be difficult to meet and naturally the costs will considerably exceed the amount which should have been expended for maintenance during the period under review.

Public buildings have been allowed to drift into a shocking state. As an illustration, take the railways, which are far from being the only Government service to suffer. These are in a shocking state; naturally, in common with other Government concerns, they suffered badly throughout the depression. In addition, the Labour Government immediately prior to the war did not make the usual annual provision for funds, but no doubt denied these to the Railway Department in order to bolster up the financial position prior to an election. Therefore the railways were in a bad way before the difficulties arose which were brought on by the war. This was a very serious and far-reaching handicap. In the annual report of the Commissioner appears a very gloomy review of the position of the railways. It is stated—

In the years following the economic depression of 1930-32, the Railways were faced with an accumulation of deferred maintenance representing upwards of £500,000, and our present inability to keep pace with necessary repairs and renewals of permanent way, rolling stock and structures has built up a liability which already greatly exceeds that which accrued during the depression and the total must keep building up until manpower, materials and finance in sufficient quantities are available to reduce it. This accumulated liability does not appear as an outstanding in departmental accounts but is nevertheless a real and inescapable liability which must be liquidated in due course.

When taken into consideration with other Government services, this statement makes the Premier's assurance that he was "very well satisfied" appear ludicrous. Early in July the Premier stated—

The railways expenditure for last year included £45,000 set aside to meet the future cost of belated repairs and this brings the total provision for belated repairs of the railways to £165,000.

This amount is totally inadequate. The railways are in a shocking state and the amount mentioned is only a little more than what was usually provided per annum to keep the system running. The other States have set

up reserves running into millions of pounds. It is not to be expected that this State should equal them, but why the optimism regarding the small surplus when one considers the huge expenditure that will be necessary to cover repairs that have been withheld for years and to meet which such a small sum is set aside? This State's instrumentalities have benefited greatly from war requirements, the railways by war haulage and transport of Army personnel, thus making it necessary for private enterprise to use the most costly system of carriage.

When the war revenue received by the various Government utilities ceases, it will be a serious blow to the revenue of the State. It is quite apparent that Western Australia will be in a weak financial position, and it does appear that the State will be forced to borrow extensively thereby adding to an already heavy indebtedness for railway improvements and other Government requirements. Such borrowings will need to be of such a magnitude that the taxpayer will be burdened with debt charges which will cover a very long period of years and prove to be a serious burden on the State's progress. With such an outlook for the future, ostrich-like assurances are of little value. Something much more statesmanlike is needed.

A most important feature of the State's administration is the provision of up-to-date electoral rolls. During a recent inquiry it was shown that whilst the Legislative Assembly rolls, owing to compulsory enrolment, contained approximately 90 per cent. of the names of persons entitled to vote, the Council rolls only contained about 60 per cent. of those who were entitled to be enrolled. The many jibes and the frequent criticisms by the Government and its supporters, who at all times refer to the small number of electors on the Legislative Council rolls, are unwarranted. The Government is entirely to blame, as it has taken practically no action in the matter. Early this year I approached the Electoral Department to procure the East Province roll. I was presented with the master roll of 1942, an additional supplementary roll of 1943, and 11 foolscap sheets containing additional names for enrolment. My desire was to arrange to have the rolls improved, as all country Legislative Council rolls were in a very bad state. The East Province roll contains approximately 12,000

names. I am of opinion that if it were reasonably brought up to date the number would be approximately 20,000.

Apparently the Government is not anxious to improve the Legislative Council rolls. I wrote to the Premier asking that the roll be reprinted so that a movement could be made to enrol persons, but my repeated requests were met by the answer that the rolls would be printed late this year. This would take the matter into the busy time of the primary producers and very little progress would be made. I replied stating the necessity for bringing the rolls up to date and said that the attempt to purify them per medium of the roll, the supplementary roll and the names covering 11 foolscap sheets was too difficult and very costly, and that reasonable improvement could not be expected if that method were adopted. The Minister replied that the Government had given further consideration to the matter and that the rolls could not be printed until late in the year, but that the Electoral Department was working on them. The printing is therefore left until a few months prior to the election, and such a late date will not allow reasonable time in which to procure the necessary enrolments.

The reference to the Electoral Department's purifying the rolls comes with very bad grace from the Government. The Chief Electoral Officer, in his evidence before the inquiry which I mentioned, stated that repeated applications for additional staff and more money to improve the Legislative Council rolls were refused. The Willeoek Government has shown no interest whatever in improving the rolls. It has expended funds on cleansing the Legislative Assembly rolls but this was quite unnecessary, as enrolment for the Assembly is compulsory. Whilst the Government states that the rolls will be reprinted late this year, it will be interesting to learn just how the Government Printer can be expected to print the Legislative Council rolls when his department will be hard-pressed to cope with the additional Parliamentary work. It is quite probable that the rolls will not be printed before next year and, if so, it would be useless attempting to bring them up to date.

At long last the Government has seen fit to alter hotel trading hours by extending the time of closing from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. It would be interesting to learn what has roused the Government from its slumber. Over three

years ago, that is, on the 15th April, 1942, this House passed a motion which was placed before it by me and which, among other matters, recommended that the closing hour should be extended from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. In November of the same year, a motion with the same end in view was passed by the Assembly. During the intervening period all employees who were engaged up to 6 p.m. were denied the right to hotel refreshment. The rushed drinking which was indulged in, and the drink, when procurable, which was taken into homes, have had a very bad effect. Other recommendations in the motion agreed to by the House were ignored by the Government.

It is a matter for gratification that since we last met the war in Europe has ended, or perhaps I should say that hostilities there have ceased. Day by day successful measures are gradually bringing the Pacific war to a victorious close and it is therefore necessary that a firm stand should be made to meet the many difficulties which will surely follow the conclusion of hostilities. Two months after Japan commenced war the Curtin Government issued its economic organisation regulations under the National Security Act. These, among other matters, imposed wage-pegging on Australian workers as part of the plan for maintaining economic stability; rationing, price fixing, control of capital issues in every direction and a heavy burden of taxation were the main impositions. These have worked very favourably. The combination enabled the Commonwealth Government to pour out huge volumes of credit during a period of short supply of goods without destroying the value of the currency. Unfortunately, however, whilst the decency and patriotism of some workers have made them unwilling up till now to take advantage of the disastrous weakness of Labour politicians in handling some unions, the industrial behaviour of the members of those unions has not been influenced by decency or patriotism.

The unions which have ignored the wage ceilings, flouted the Industrial Arbitration Court and its awards to gain advantages irrespective of whether these were reasonable and irrespective of the harmful effect of their actions on the war effort, are not likely to cease their efforts to exploit the weakness of Labour Governments which are charged with the administration of the law. If these unions are not restrained they will naturally



encourage the unions which have given of their best to take advantage of what force can secure for them. Our record in this State has not been as bad as those of the Eastern States, but we have nothing to be proud of. Quite recently we were facing three strikes. Two of these directly aimed at further increasing wages, whilst the third did so indirectly. The road transport hold-up lasted for months, and during several week-ends other sections of drivers were called into conference for the purpose of influencing them to join in an all-round hold-up. Fortunately these efforts failed, but the State Government did not make the slightest attempt to bring about a settlement. It tried to throw the responsibility on to the Commonwealth Government, but that Government told the State Government to accept its own responsibility by taking the case to the State Arbitration Court.

The laxity of the State Government has allowed the boot industry strike to be taken over by the Federal authorities. This is in common with all its actions in shelving all it can, and allowing the Federal Government to invade and control what are really State rights. It made no move whatever as regards the Collie dispute, but sat back while Mr. Holloway sent his emissary over, well knowing that Judge Drake-Brockman would grant advantages to those causing the dispute. I know the answer the Government representative will give to this House, and that is that the employers should state a case against the employees, well knowing that if such action were taken the employers would be placed in an invidious position and would suffer badly in the future. The Government is charged with administering the laws of the country but, in fear of offending the unions, it allows hold-ups in industry to continue without the slightest move on its part. Subsection (2) of Section 163 under Part X of the Industrial Arbitration Act sets out that it is the responsibility of the Registrar to take action. There is nothing indefinite about the direction. It reads—

It shall be the duty of the Registrar whenever a total or partial cessation of work occurs in or in connection with any industry to make immediate inquiry into the cause thereof, and if on such inquiry he shall be of the opinion that any person has committed or is committing any breach of this Act, or of any industrial agreement or award of the court, he shall forthwith acquaint the court and the Crown Law officers accordingly.

If one looks for a definition of industry, it is clearly set out as covering industries that are causing trouble. In that respect, as the Registrar is too weak to do his duty and has avoided it and allowed these things to continue, the Government, which is administering the laws of the country, should take action. The Act says that it shall be the duty of the Registrar to take action and the Registrar is a Government servant under Government control. Consequently the whole responsibility rests with the Government, whose plain duty is to see that its servants do their work as defined; but the Government ignores its plain duty by allowing matters to drift along. The only conclusion is that it is either afraid of taking action against unions or—worse still—is prepared to allow unions to defy the laws and industrial awards to gain their ends.

Dealing now with the pastoral industry, I notice there has been a meeting at Whim Creek. Just what it was intended to do at that meeting I do not know; all I know is that there was to be a conference. But for weeks I have been investigating the position. If we want to save the North-West of this State, and protect the southern areas from the inroads of pests that will follow the vacating of stations in the North, some action must be taken. When members have heard me, they will perceive the reason for my statement, and they will realise that not much has been done in the past. Although not a direct representative of the North, I believe that all members should be and, in fact, are interested in the welfare of every portion of the State. I therefore crave the indulgence of the House to permit me to deal with at least certain of the problems vitally affecting the pastoral industry, which has in the past contributed so materially to the volume of the State's production as a whole. Evidence is accumulating day by day which confirms what has been apparent to thinking people for many years past; namely, that our North-West—and the pastoral industry generally—is in a very bad way.

Newspaper reports indicate that a stage has been reached when station properties are being abandoned in some areas. One of the most disturbing features is the eagerness with which men who have done so much in the development of the North seem prepared to get out as soon as they can. Their

sons, who should be their natural successors in the management of the properties, have also had enough. Primarily the causes of the industry's parlous position are drought, cyclones and dingoes. For the seasonal conditions, Governments cannot be blamed. The industry, as well as the community in general, however, has a right to ask what the Government is doing to alleviate the position. The answer to such a question must be—little, or nothing. Unless the Government is galvanised into taking some positive and prompt action, and abandons its present Micawber-like attitude, it will find a still larger section of the industry beyond rehabilitation.

To date the Government appears to have adopted the attitude that it has discharged its duty by ordering certain inquiries and despatching its departmental officers on lecturing tours to the areas concerned. The time is long past for such a nebulous attitude, and what is required is action designed to render some real assistance and inspire hope in those still left in the industry. It will be recollected that as far back as 1940 the Government appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into and report upon the financial and economic position of the pastoral industry in the leasehold areas of the State. The Royal Commission furnished a report which can be regarded as a useful document, in that it disclosed the devastation wrought by the drought which commenced in 1935, following on years of depression, when producers even in the most favoured portions of the State were unable to make ends meet, because of the low values received for their products. Drought conditions have continued over a big section of the North during eight of the last ten years, and the industry is still suffering grievously as a result. Despite the wealth of information placed at its disposal as the result of the Commission's investigations, one looks in vain for evidence of any real effort on the part of the Government to apply remedial measures.

A close study of the voluminous report of the Royal Commission discloses that a number of negative conclusions were reached, a number of suggestions were offered for future administrative procedure on such matters as rent appraisements, and certain recommendations were made for further inquiries by Government experts on proposals

put forward by witnesses before the Commission. None of these matters represented any real contribution to the solution of the industry's immediate problems, and it is safe to assume that most have been snugly relegated to pigeon holes. It is with the positive recommendations of the Royal Commission that I am concerned, and more particularly as to the action taken by the Government to give effect to such recommendations. What were these recommendations which I have referred to as positive recommendations, because they called for definite action—for the most part Government action—calculated to afford some relief to this very sick industry? On perusing the 177 pages of the report I find that the positive recommendations number only seven in all. Of these, three were not implemented; one was rendered incapable of implementation by reason of the Commonwealth taking over income tax; the result in one case is unknown; and the remaining two were eventually acted upon.

Whether the action taken in these two instances was the direct result of the Royal Commission's investigations is not beyond doubt. Truly it can be said the mountain laboured and brought forth a mouse! I have no intention or desire to disparage the work of the Royal Commission. In collating a wealth of authentic evidence of the parlous state of the industry, it performed a very useful service, and to this extent amply justified its appointment. My complaint is against the Government, which appears oblivious of the fact that the industry is in many respects now in a worse position than when the Royal Commission submitted its report. Returning to its seven positive recommendations, the two that have resulted in executive or departmental action are contained in paragraphs 1036 and 1044 of the report. They relate to the appointment of two additional trappers in the pastoral areas south of the Kimberleys, and the abolition of the royalty on kangaroo skins in the pastoral areas. Neither required a Royal Commission to justify its adoption. Protests against the collection of royalty on kangaroo skins had been made by the industry for many years before the appointment of the Commission. How far the appointment of two additional trappers has gone to dispose of the dingo menace can best be judged from the knowledge that the dingo menace in certain dis-

tricts has never been worse than it is today. Flocks in these districts are being virtually eaten alive. It is safe to say that before the problem is overcome it will require not two trappers, but more like 22.

In paragraph 1080 of the report a recommendation was made for an amendment of the State Income Tax Assessment Act to permit drought losses to be carried forward for five years as an offset against subsequent profits, in lieu of four years as provided for in the then existing legislation. Some two or three years after the Commission's inquiry, the Commonwealth became the sole income tax levying authority and the Government was thus saved the responsibility of standing up to the Commission's recommendation, inadequate though it was. "Hansard" will disclose that as far back as 1937 I endeavoured to have the provisions of the State Income Tax Assessment Act amended to extend the period for the carrying forward of losses for an extra year, but without success, due to the opposition of the Government. In paragraph 1052 of the report, the Royal Commission dealt with the question of rent payable on the rabbit-proof fences, and recommended that no rent be charged to pastoral lessees whose properties were traversed, unless use was made of the fence. In cases of partial use, each case was recommended to be treated on its merits. I am unaware whether or not effect has been given to this recommendation, and would welcome the advice of the Government as to what has been done in regard to the matter.

Paragraphs 644 and 677 of the report contain recommendations for reductions for a limited period in the shipping freights and railway freights on wool from drought-affected areas. Not only were those recommendations studiously ignored by the Government, but, on the grounds of increasing costs due to war, the shipping freights on the North-West coast were subjected to successive increases aggregating approximately 35 per cent. above pre-war level. While the Government lost no time in passing on to an impoverished industry the additional premiums for war risk insurance on its vessels by means of increased freights, it has shown no such alacrity to reduce freights as premiums on hulls have declined with the lessening of risk from enemy action. The last of the positive recommendations of the Commission which

failed to be implemented is contained in paragraph 794; that is the suggested alteration in the Farmers' Debt Adjustment Act, to provide for the compulsory reduction of secured debts. I am aware that the Commission's recommendation envisaged funds being forthcoming from the Commonwealth Government to implement its plan for debt adjustment for the pastoral areas. I presume the Government did apply to the Commonwealth for the necessary funds, but the fact remains that the Commission's recommendation was not given effect to, and in its place a voluntary scheme was inaugurated. I am prepared to believe that the voluntary scheme has been the means of providing some assistance to a section of those in dire financial straits. It cannot be denied that the scheme has failed to prevent a number of pastoralists, who have spent a lifetime in the industry, being forced off their properties, and to this extent it has failed.

In view of the Government's past attitude to the compulsory adjustment of debts, one is entitled to entertain doubts whether the failure to obtain Commonwealth funds to implement the Commission's recommendation did not merely provide a plausible excuse for the maintenance of the Government's opposition to the compulsory writing down of secured debts. The farmers' debts adjustment legislation has performed good service to the farming community, and has been responsible for keeping many farms in production, even though secured creditors have been placed in a most favoured position under the Act. Unsecured creditors have fared badly by being compelled to accept a few shillings in the pound on their debts, and the improvement in the general financial position of the debtors has increased in the value of securities held by the privileged secured creditors. The Country Party has consistently maintained that a voluntary scheme of debt adjustment would not prove effective against harsh secured creditors, and support for its contention is now found in the experience of this scheme which has applied to the pastoral industry.

The Government has opposed every attempt by the Country Party to enact the compulsory adjustment of secured debts. The onus is therefore upon the Government to prevent the abandonment of properties as a result of the failure of its voluntary scheme. The compulsory writing down of debts on a sound basis, with due regard to

production, markets, and personal equation, will eventually have to be faced, but the absence of necessary legislation has in the meantime wrought serious injury. Had it been applied when first urged by the Country Party I am sure that at least some of the properties being vacated would have been enabled to carry on, despite seasonal and other disabilities. A most disturbing feature of the whole position is that the abandonment of large areas means that they become breeding grounds for vermin, such as dingoes, foxes, and kangaroos, with a consequent threat to the continued existence of adjoining properties. It is common knowledge that the control of the dingo problem in many of the pastoral districts is entirely out of hand, and it is sincerely to be hoped that the Royal Commission on the Vermin Act will, in its report, stir the Government into taking some effective measures to control this menace.

The review of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the pastoral industry which I have made, and the resultant action, or, more correctly, the lack of action on the part of the Government, reveals a lamentable bankruptcy of ideas on the part of those in control of the State's affairs. I contend that it is high time the Government got busy, and approached the 'problem of rehabilitation of the pastoral industry with some display of statesmanship. I suggest the first thing it might well do is to grant freedom of land rents for a specified period of, say, 10 years. It is common knowledge that the great bulk of our pastoral country has, because of protracted drought, greatly deteriorated as regards carrying capacity. Prior to the drought the pastoral areas depastured an aggregate of 5,500,000 sheep; during the past 10 years the number has not exceeded 3,000,000, and at present it is probably materially less. Many properties are carrying only a fraction of their pre-drought numbers.

Current land rents are grossly excessive, having regard to carrying capacity and value of production, and, in accordance with the provision of the Land Act, should have been reappraised three years ago. Members are aware, of course, that rent remissions, either wholly or in part, are being made by the Pastoral Appraisal Board from year to year, in respect of properties affected by drought, but this in no way detracts from the inequity of maintaining rentals at pre-

drought level pending the long overdue re-appraisements. It is quite feasible that a lessee who is receiving a 25 per cent. remission on account of drought, will be entitled, on re-appraisal, to have his rentals reduced by half, because of the reduced carrying capacity of his lease, as the result of the long drought. He is, in consequence, despite the 25 per cent. remission granted, being called upon to pay 100 per cent. more in land rents than he should, with a promise that an adjustment will be made at some future date. If this constitutes the Government's idea of extending a helping hand to a stricken industry, its future is indeed black. The next thing I suggest the Government should do is to give some belated attention to the recommendations of the Royal Commission for a reduction in shipping and rail freights on wool produced in areas which have been affected by drought. The wartime increases on shipping freights should be immediately removed. The scant consideration given by the Government to the conclusions of its own Royal Commission is clearly demonstrated by its action in not only ignoring the recommendations for reductions in shipping and rail freights on wool from drought-affected areas, but in imposing increases on shipping freights approximating 35 per cent.

Our North-West coast has had to put up with a deplorable shipping service during the war and, having regard to the fact that there exists no practical alternative for the conveyance of freight, it has been atrociously treated by the powers in control of shipping. Cargo has been frequently shut out, or overcarried, and wool has accumulated at ports for months, with embarrassing delays in the receipt of proceeds by the financially involved producers, who are thereby mulcted in additional interest charges. Despite urgent appeals by the United Kingdom for more meat, there are cattle, and no doubt sheep, in the West Kimberleys, which cannot be marketed because no shipping space is available; at present there are some hundreds of sheep waiting at Carnarvon for shipping space. The Government should make it its business to see that shipping control is made to realise the deplorable state of affairs on the North-West coast.

The next major matter to which the Government should attend, if it is really serious in its desire to rehabilitate the pastoral in-

dustry, is to approach the Commonwealth Government for some equitable form of taxation relief. If the Commonwealth desires not only to have the North populated, but to retain the present dwindling population, it might well put it on a comparable basis with the Northern Territory, where income derived from primary production has been tax free for the past 20 years. I know it will be contended that constitutional difficulties would preclude such treatment, but no constitutional difficulty has prevented the Commonwealth Government recently introducing a system of rebates, applicable to taxpayers within certain zones. There are two such zones in Western Australia; one is "A" which takes in Nullagine, and where there is a deduction allowed of £40 on income—

Hon. G. W. Miles: On the taxable income.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: And a deduction on wages of 15s. per week. Then there is "B" zone which extends to Mukinbudin and takes in Phillips River, where there is an allowance of £20 on income and 7s. a week on wages.

Hon. L. Craig: That is a mere fleabite.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Of course; I am talking of the constitutional aspect. If it is constitutional to do that, surely it is constitutional to do what I am suggesting. The principle having been adopted, constitutional difficulties should not prevent its extension, and thus not only afford an opportunity to those not so adversely affected by drought to build up some reserves to meet the inevitable future droughts but, more important still, to assist those who are endeavouring to rehabilitate themselves financially, to do so by reducing their drought-inflated overdrafts out of any profits which might be made. Failing complete tax relief for a period, the Government would do well to press the Commonwealth for relief on the lines suggested by the Royal Commission, that is, in the extension of the period allowed for the carrying forward of drought losses. The Commission recommended that the period should be extended to five years—

Hon. G. W. Miles: It should be ten years.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: As I have said, the Commission recommended that the period should be extended to five years, but, in the light of conditions which have operated since the report was made, this period

is totally inadequate, and would be merely tinkering with the problem. Nothing less than 10 years would suffice to meet the position of an industry that is subject to such devastating droughts. Any such provision would need to date back to 1936. It was in that and the succeeding years that huge losses were incurred, and a great proportion of those losses are, by effluxion of the existing four-year limit, already rendered unrecoverable from subsequent profits for income tax purposes. Other necessary tax reforms, if the drift of population from our outback areas is to be arrested, are more liberal allowances by way of deductions for medical expenses, and the cost of education of children, who, because of the lack of local schooling facilities, have to be sent away from home. It will be recalled that the present Government very strongly opposed my efforts to introduce such a provision into our then State Income Tax Assessment Act some years ago.

I have dealt with what I consider the fundamental problems of the North and have indicated the course of action which the Government should take to alleviate such problems. It is not claimed that the survey made by any means exhausts the difficulties of those endeavouring to carry on in the areas under review. The first consideration, however, is that the industry must be assisted to rehabilitate itself financially and economically. A prosperous pastoral industry is fundamental to the continued occupation of our North. It will be time enough for the Government to worry about the undoubted fishing, tourist, irrigation, and other potentialities of the North, when it has done something really worthwhile to put the pastoral industry on an economic basis.

There is unlimited scope for the undertaking of essential improvements such as port facilities, the development of all weather roads, the provision of decent amenities in respect of housing, schooling and hospitalisation. All these, however, will count for little unless sheep and cattle growers are enabled to carry on profitably, and it is up to the Government to abandon the lethargic attitude it has adopted for far too long, and to bestir itself into taking some positive action to improve the present lamentable state of affairs. The abandonment of North-West properties means the danger of the

dingoes and other pests coming south. That portion of our State is far too important to be ignored at the present time. We must see that the sheep and cattle growers there receive all the consideration that we can possibly give them, if we want to save the rich North-West, which is of such importance to every taxpayer and every person in Western Australia. I support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply.

On motion by Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch, debate adjourned.

### **BILL—SUPPLY (No. 1), £2,700,000.**

Received from the Assembly and read a first time.

*House adjourned at 6.18 p.m.*

## **Legislative Assembly.**

*Tuesday, 31st July, 1945.*

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 p.m. and read prayers.

### **PREMIERSHIP OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.**

*Resignation of Hon. J. C. Willcock.*

**HON. J. C. WILLCOCK** (Geraldton) [4.32]: I would like to inform the House that since its last meeting I have waited upon His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor and tendered my resignation as Premier and Treasurer. I remember that on taking over the office of Premier in this State, nearly

nine years ago, I expressed the desire that when—I left this position the decorum, dignity and general conduct of the Assembly would not have deteriorated or, on the other hand, that it would have been upheld in the traditional way of this Parliament. While, of course, there is not a close political friendship between opposing parties in this House, there has been mutual respect and esteem, even though there are differences of opinion. That was the position while Hon. P. Collier was Premier, and also when Sir James Mitchell was Premier. While they had strong political differences, whenever it was necessary in the interests of Western Australia and to conduct the business of the House in a way which would reflect credit on the Parliament of Western Australia, those leaders got together and arranged the business so that it was carried out to the mutual satisfaction of themselves and with the dignity and decorum that have always characterised the carrying on of the Parliament of Western Australia.

I am not particularly happy in surrendering the seals of office. After having been in the position for a considerable number of years one does not like to feel that the strain is becoming too great, and undoubtedly I have felt the strain of a continued period in office of 20 years, on and off, and one cannot do that with the energy and enthusiasm that one likes without its taking some toll. My general health has suffered a little, and my many friends told me, when I announced that I was going to resign from my position, that they thought it was a very wise move on my part. It is a satisfactory move to me. I decided on this step about a month ago, and after a month's cogitation and experience in having decided to make this move I feel much more satisfied than when I first made the decision. In these circumstances there are no regrets of that kind.

Before taking leave of the House, as Leader, I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the courtesy and consideration that you have extended to me at all times. I also want to thank my colleagues, on the front bench particularly, and all the others on this side of the House for, what I term, the wonderful support and consideration they have given to me as Leader. I have never asked any one of my colleagues, or member of the Party to do anything which he has not readily consented to do even