

This tragedy has come as a shock to us all. It is a national calamity, and it has come at a time when the nation can ill afford the loss of men so eminent in their respective spheres of duty. They were, one and all, carrying a heavy burden of responsibility and authority, which, in these times, means so much to the Commonwealth and the Empire. They had earned the utmost confidence of the Commonwealth Government, to whom this colossal misfortune is a blow unparalleled in the history of our country, and we can appreciate the many difficulties which may arise from it. Our deepest sympathy goes out to the relatives of every one of those involved, and it may be some consolation to them when it is realised that the call came whilst they were engaged in the carrying out of the very highest and most important duties on behalf of their country and fellow men. I feel sure that every member of this House will agree with the sentiments expressed in the resolution which I have moved.

Question passed, members standing.

House adjourned at 4.38 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 13th August, 1940.

Condolence: Canberra air disaster

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

CONDOLENCE—CANBERRA AIR DISASTER.

THE ACTING PREMIER (Hon. H. Millington—Mt. Hawthorn) [4.32]: I move—

That this House places on record its sense of the severe loss to the Commonwealth by the death of Brigadier the Hon. G. A. Street,

Minister for the Army; the Hon. J. V. Fairbairn, Minister for the Air; the Hon. Sir Henry Gullett, Vice-President of the Executive Council; Lieut.-General Sir Brudenell White, Chief of the General Staff, and the other passengers and members of the crew killed in the air disaster near Canberra.

That the foregoing resolution be transmitted by Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister through the Premier's Department with the request that the terms of the resolution be conveyed to the relatives of the deceased Ministers and the other passengers and members of the crew.

It is with very deep regret that I move this motion. In spite of the continuous disasters with which we are brought into contact and in spite of the fact that we as men accommodate ourselves to the idea of final disintegration, this disaster comes as a shock, not only to us, but also, I should say, to the whole of the people of the Commonwealth. It is something to which we cannot readily accommodate our minds. Notable men are included amongst the victims of the disaster. The Prime Minister was intimately acquainted with the record and character, the knowledge and administrative ability of the men placed in control of the important portfolios of the air and of the army, and when we think that they were specially selected for those positions by men who knew them best, we must realise that Australia has suffered an incomparable loss at a time that makes the loss disastrous to the whole of the people of the nation. For some months past our eyes have been on the Commonwealth Government, upon which we depend for the defence of Australia, and these two Ministers were selected for those highly important portfolios. From every point of view the loss to the people of Australia is severe. The loss to their relatives is equally severe. News of the disaster came to us as a shock, and we all felt completely stunned by it. This is one of those occasions when words fail to convey our feelings, but I am sure that independently of what may be said, all members present this afternoon are in accord in mind and heart with the sympathy that the motion conveys. Having regard to the great loss Australia has suffered and to the fact that all Australia mourns that loss, this House is anxious to show its sympathy, and therefore on behalf of the House and the people of Western Australia I move the motion.

HON. C. G. LATHAM (York) [4.35]: With deep regret I second the motion. As the Acting Premier has indicated, this is a time when not only the citizens of Australia, but also the citizens of the British Empire, are looking to their leading men to guide them through the great national crisis in which we find ourselves. We deplore the fact of so many of our leading men having met with such a terrible disaster. To express one's feelings on such an occasion is very difficult, because we all feel more or less stunned by the calamity that has befallen the Commonwealth. The Acting Premier has pointed out that these men were selected for their very intimate knowledge of the portfolios they held, and to replace them will be exceedingly difficult. Although normally we commit many of our thoughts and ideas to paper, there is little doubt that by the passing of those men much valuable information that may affect us will be lost. We cannot lose the Minister for the Army and his Chief of Staff without suffering great inconvenience, and probably some time will elapse before their successors will be able to pick up the train of thought in the minds of those men for building up the defence of this country, because they had been working on it at high pressure for quite a long time. I feel particularly sympathetic towards the Prime Minister; it must be a terrible blow to him to find no fewer than three of his Ministers suddenly taken from him. The man holding the high office of Prime Minister will need everybody to rally round him and render assistance in the great work he is carrying on. In addition our sympathy is extended to the relatives of the other passengers and of the crew. I wish to mention one of the crew, Flight-Lieut. Hitchcock, who was a Western Australian. We recall the tragic death of his father in Central Australia not very many years ago when he set out to render assistance to Sir Kingsford Smith. Flight-Lieut. Hitchcock was a Victoria Park boy, and members will deeply regret his passing and will sympathise with the mother, who has been unfortunate enough to suffer a second disaster in the family. My thoughts go out to her particularly in the great sorrow she must be experiencing since she received news of the disaster this morning. I would be fail-

ing in my duty if I did not echo the sentiments contained in the motion and endorse the proposal that the vote of condolence be conveyed to the near relatives of the victims of the accident, and also to the Prime Minister and his colleagues. With the deepest regret I associate myself with the remarks of the Acting Premier.

MR. McDONALD (West Perth) [4.40]: Members who sit in this part of the Chamber desire to join with the Acting Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and their fellow members in the motion which expresses our sense of the tragedy that has occurred to-day. This is, I believe, the most tragic air accident that has happened in our Commonwealth. There are to-day in the Empire and in other countries men and women who are meeting death with bravery in the course of their duty and for the cause in which they believe, as did the men who have met their deaths in this aeroplane accident. The victims were men who by virtue of their high office carried great responsibilities and were possessed of much knowledge. By to-day's tragedy we have lost men who by their station were of the greatest value to Australia at this particular time. I would only add that the three Ministers and Sir Brudenell White for a year or more carried what I may term the terrible responsibility associated with the occupancy of their offices at such a time as this. We have to acknowledge that they devoted all their energy and all their thought to the faithful discharge of their duties. We as a nation, having sustained this loss, can only pledge ourselves once again that we will carry through to its ultimate victorious conclusion the work to which the men who have died had set their hands and for which they have offered up their lives.

MR. NEEDHAM (Perth) [4.43]: It is with feelings of most poignant regret that, speaking on behalf of the State Executive of the Australian Labour Party in Western Australia, I join in the sentiments expressed by the Acting Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the National Party, tendering this Assembly's sympathy and condolences to the Federal Government and to the relatives of the Ministers, officials, and crew who have perished in the terrible tragedy that occurred this morning. A tragedy of this nature would be most serious

and most deplorable at any time. Realising the crisis through which this nation of the Australian Commonwealth is passing, and remembering that four of those men were at the head of very important departments of State, naturally the tragedy becomes all the more serious. I enjoyed the personal friendship of two of the men who met their deaths—in the persons of Sir Brudenell White and Sir Henry Gullett. I recognise the greatness of the work they did for our nation. Sir Brudenell White was a man amongst men, a man whom I always admired and respected. The loss to the nation of such men as these at this time will very greatly be felt. A few nights ago a good many of us had the pleasure of listening to a speech by the late Mr. Fairbairn. The Minister for Air had been engaged upon a flight around Australia, and had come to Perth. He made the fine speech to which I refer from the platform of the Capitol Theatre. On behalf of the State Executive of the Australian Labour Party I tender to the families of all of the deceased our very sincere sympathy for the irreparable loss they have sustained, a loss which is also suffered by the Commonwealth as a whole.

Question passed, members standing.

House adjourned at 4.47 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 14th August, 1940.

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

QUESTION—GOVERNMENT MOTOR VEHICLES.

Petrol Consumption.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER asked the Chief Secretary: What was the total cost of

petrol used by all Government-owned or subsidised motor vehicles during the years 1932-33 and 1939-40 respectively?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: Investigations show that in regard to some of the major departments the local purchase orders and store requisitions for the years prior to 1934 have been destroyed, and as the cost of petrol is not dissociated from other items of motor running costs in the accountancy records, the desired information is not obtainable for the year ended the 30th June, 1933.

Accurate information for the year ended the 30th June, 1940, could only be obtained by an examination of many thousands of local purchase orders and store requisitions. This would entail the employment of additional clerical assistance, at a probable cost of £40, and it is considered that this expenditure is not justified, as the comparative information for 1933 is not obtainable.

It is not possible to separate the petrol cost in regard to subsidised vehicles as the allowance paid, in practically all instances, covers all charges associated with the employees' vehicles.

QUESTIONS (2)—STATE FINANCE.

Emergency and Hospital Taxes and Loan Expenditure.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES (for Hon. H. Seddon) asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What was the total amount received last year from the financial emergency tax? 2, What was the total amount received, during the same period, from the hospital tax? 3, What was the total amount of loan expenditure during the same year?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, Financial emergency tax, £1,263,700. 2, Hospital tax, £271,690. 3, Cash expenditure from the Loan Fund on works was £1,939,549.

Special Grants to Hospitals.

Hon. E. H. H. HALL asked the Chief Secretary: What amounts have been paid as special grants to assisted hospitals for the year ended the 30th June, 1940, giving the names of hospitals concerned and the respective amounts granted?