

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

Third Session of the Twentieth Parliament

Parliament was prorogued on the 15th October, 1951, to the 16th October, 1951, when it met for the despatch of business.

Parliament was opened by His Excellency the Administrator.

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 16th October, 1951.

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OPENING OF PARLIAMENT.

The Legislative Council met at 4.30 p.m.
The PRESIDENT took the Chair.

PROCLAMATION.

The Clerk of Parliaments (Mr. A. B. Sparks) read the proclamation of His Excellency the Administrator summoning the third session of the Twentieth Parliament.

ADMINISTRATOR'S OPENING SPEECH.

His Excellency the Administrator entered the Council Chamber at 4.31 p.m., and, members of the Legislative Assembly having also attended in the Chamber obediently to summons, His Excellency was pleased to deliver the following Speech:—

Mr. President and Honourable Members of the Legislative Council—

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly—

The Third Session of the Twentieth Parliament has been summoned for the transaction of public business in order that consideration may be given to matters arising out of the Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act, and other measures.

I now declare this Session of Parliament open, and trust that Providence may bless your labours in the interest of this State.

His Excellency and members of the Legislative Assembly then withdrew from the Chamber.

[The President resumed the Chair.]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT.

Section "A," 1951.

The PRESIDENT: I have received from the Auditor General a copy of Section "A" of his report on the Treasurer's statement of the Public Accounts for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1951. It will be laid on the Table of the House.

BILL—BUSH FIRES ACT AMENDMENT.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: In order to assert and maintain the undoubted rights and privileges of this House to initiate legislation, I move, without notice, for leave to introduce a Bill entitled "An Act to amend the Bush Fires Act, 1937-1950."

Leave given; Bill introduced and read a first time.

ADMINISTRATOR'S SPEECH, DISTRIBUTION.

The PRESIDENT: For the sake of greater accuracy, I have obtained from His Excellency the Administrator copies of the Speech he has been pleased to deliver to Parliament. These will now be distributed amongst hon. members.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Adopted.

HON. J. MURRAY (South-West) [4.45]:
I move—

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency the Administrator in reply to the Speech he has been pleased to deliver to Parliament:—

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of the State of Western Australia, in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious Sovereign and to thank Your Excellency for the Speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

While I realise that the Government is anxious speedily to observe the formalities associated with the opening of this session of Parliament, I would remind members that since the previous opening the British Commonwealth of Nations has been shocked by the ill-health of His Majesty the King. I think I would be lacking in my duty if I did not express the deep regret that is felt throughout Australia because we will not have the opportunity to welcome His Majesty and the Queen in the near future. Although we are very disappointed, that feeling is tempered somewhat by the knowledge that we are to be given an opportunity to accord a Royal welcome to Princess Elizabeth and her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh.

I will not trespass on the time of members any further except to make a few remarks on the much discussed rent Bill. Over the week-end the Premier expressed the hope that when the new Bill came before the Legislative Council, it would receive more support than did the previous measure. I hope that the Premier, after the Bill has been considered by the Crown Law Department, other necessary departments and by Cabinet, will see that the measure, after being dealt with in the Legislative Assembly, will be presented to this Chamber containing a minimum of verbiage and a maximum of clarity. If that is done, when the measure passes this House, as no doubt it will, the public generally will understand its full meaning.

HON. J. McI. THOMSON (South): I formally second the motion.

HON. G. BENNETTS (South-East) [4.50]: I did not intend to speak to this motion but there is one matter that I neglected to discuss during my speech on the Address-in-reply last session. I refer to the policy adopted by the State Housing Commission. The Commission has adopted a grabbing policy in that it has taken over land purchased by people who intended to build their own homes at a later stage in their lives. I have had to take this matter up on two occasions.

One instance had relation to a Goldfields resident who was suffering from a miner's complaint and who purchased a block in a part of my district. The Public Works Department wanted the land. Arrangements were made for the deeds to be returned to the department and the block was taken away from the owner. This was done after he had paid some-

where in the vicinity of £25 or £30 for the block, with a view to residing there on account of his ill-health. After the block had been taken from him, he was informed by the department that he would receive about £15 for it.

He made his protest to me and asked me to take the matter up. I did so and he was then offered another block of land, which he went to see. When he returned to Kalgoorlie he was told by the departmental officers that they were very sorry that he could not have that block as they had made a mistake. He was then offered another in a position that was absolutely useless. He got tired of trying to do anything with the Housing Commission and asked me to see if I could get any more for the block that he had surrendered. He was finally paid £30. This man did not want the money so much; he was in ill-health and on account of his illness, had been ordered to go to the locality where he had purchased the block.

There was another case of a person in Boulder who had a block in the Belmont district. He purchased the land many years ago with a view to retiring there, and I think it cost him about £40. If one buys a block of land on the time payment system and does not carry out one's obligations, one is often prosecuted and compelled to pay the full price. Anyhow, the land in the Belmont area was taken from the person I refer to, and it has now been built on. This man, I believe, was offered £25 for the block, but as he had owned it a long time, he had, what with rates and taxes and so on, paid about £90 for it.

There is another aspect of this case. The people on the adjoining block agreed to take away some of the soil and level the area. So that block was ready to be built on. The Commission took over the land and there is now a house on it. The man protested and was offered a block on a sandhill or in some other place where he did not wish to build. This has been going on for a couple of years, and the latest reply I received from the department concerning the matter was to the effect that if he still desired to build and approached the authorities in the matter, they would try to fix him up with a suitable block. This is a very unsatisfactory way to deal with a matter of this kind. I think it is a shame that blocks should be taken from people who perhaps have bought them with a view to residing there in their old age, or who may have purchased them for their sons who are returning from the war.

There is another matter which I should like the Leader of the House to take up with the Premier and that is the question of the visit of Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh. I should like him to suggest to the Premier that when they arrive in this country, they should journey

to Kalgoorlie. I think the Princess and the Duke should visit Kalgoorlie in order to see where the wealth of the State was produced in the early days. I shall not speak any longer, but I hope my remarks will bring some result and that we will see Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh at Kalgoorlie.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (Central) [4.55]: Mr. Bennetts has more or less stolen my thunder because this is the only subject on which I wish to speak. He complains about the powers of the Government to carry out resumptions of land. There was a time, of course, when resumptions could be made only by the Public Works Department, and that included provision for reconstruction work. That system was very much liberalised by legislation passed in more recent years, when it was extended to quite a number of departments. The greatest offender in this regard today is the State Housing Commission, which was once the Workers' Homes Board.

I agree with the hon. member that resumption of land in this State is running wild. It is costing the Government a lot of money and is causing a great deal of inconvenience to the owners of properties. There is one case which I should like to mention where it looks to me as if the people who own the land are being hounded by the Education Department and, probably, the land resumption officer. In this particular case, the people concerned have six acres at Osborne Park which they purchased about 20 years ago. Part of this land is being used as a vineyard, from the proceeds of which they earn their living.

The Government had already given these people notice of its intention to resume three out of the six acres, and more recently advised them that it was proposed to take the whole of the block. That land was purchased many years ago; the owners have certainly had some income from it, but it seems to me most extraordinary that the Government is able to step in and take away from people land which they have purchased and which provides them with an income.

Hon. H. Hearn: That is the story of Naboth's vineyard.

Hon. SIR CHARLES LATHAM: These people are thrifty and were deriving some income from this land. The department also found that one of the sons had two blocks of land in Oxford-street which were also resumed. It seems to me that the department is chasing these people particularly. They came to Australia many years ago and are now Australians. Their name is Stampalia. I think they have been treated very unfairly. The land I have mentioned in Oxford-st. was resumed two years ago and they have not yet been paid for it.

The price put on this land was much below its value and from the date when the resumption was made to the present the depreciation in currency has been considerable. So if they are paid now, the return to them will be less than what was the value of the holding when they purchased it.

The remedy they have is to submit the matter to arbitration, and the unfair part of it is that arbitration is not provided free of charge. I think the law provides that if the resumption is a subject matter of arbitration, then if it exceeds the amount offered by less than 50 per cent., the person making the application has got to pay. The unfortunate part is that the individual pays. There is not very much justice in it because, of course, as taxpayers we pay collectively and it seems to be a very one-sided deal. There are so many people who are affected in this way.

The Education Department has a committee that goes around making selections and resumptions. Evidently this committee just makes application and the rest is done by the land resumption officer at the Public Works Department. They do not mind whose land they take and they do not look around to see if there is any other property for sale that could be purchased. This high-handed method of commandeering people's land—three acres out of the six in the case I have mentioned—seems to me very unfair indeed. I do not know whether the Minister for Education has any authority over the committee appointed to make a selection of sites for schools; he may have to sign the authority, but from what I remember of resumptions in former years, the Minister had to give the authorisation and then it went to the resumption officer.

I have no objection to the Crown's obtaining land that is really needed, but it should be used when it is acquired and not held out of use for years, because that results in depriving the owner of the opportunity of obtaining an income from it. Such treatment is very unfair indeed. I hope that the Minister will pass on my remarks and let us have a reply. The only opportunity we have to deal with such questions is when the Appropriation Bill comes before us, and members know that, by the time the measure reaches this House, everyone is clamouring to finish the session and get away, and so we do not get a reasonable opportunity to ventilate such grievances. I hope that something will be done in respect of the case I have mentioned because I consider that the people concerned have been very unfairly treated. They have been deprived of their means of making a livelihood, and assets which they purchased 20 years ago to provide for their old age have been taken from them, so it seems to me that this is a very bad case.

I join with the mover of the motion in expressing regret that His Majesty the King will not be able to visit us in the coming year, but any feeling of disappointment has been minimised by the announcement that he has been restored to health, and everybody in the British Empire must have felt pleased at that news. His Majesty has proved himself a great king. His task has been a hard one to perform, but he has carried out his duties in such a manner as to appeal to all his subjects. When the Princess and Duke arrive, we shall give them a reception equal to that accorded them elsewhere. We have read how popular their visit to Canada has been, and I am satisfied that their visit to Australia will be no less popular.

His Excellency the Administrator, in his Speech this afternoon intimated that we shall be asked to consider certain legislation. We shall see that it is well discussed and I have no doubt that the House will arrive at a wise decision.

Question put and passed; the Address adopted.

As to Presentation.

On motion by the Minister for Transport, resolved:

That the Address be presented to His Excellency the Administrator by the President and such members as may desire to accompany him.

House adjourned at 5.4 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 16th October, 1951.

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MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY.

The Legislative Assembly met at 4.30 p.m., pursuant to proclamation by His Excellency the Administrator, which was read by the Clerk (Mr. F. E. Islip).

SUMMONS FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR.

The Speaker and members, in response to summons, proceeded to the Legislative Council Chamber and, having heard His Excellency deliver the opening Speech (*vide* Council report *ante*), they returned to the Assembly Chamber.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT.

Section "A," 1951.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received from the Auditor General a copy of Section "A" of his report on the Treasurer's statement of the Public Accounts for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1951. It will be laid on the Table of the House.

CHAIRMEN (TEMPORARY) OF COMMITTEES.

Mr. SPEAKER: I desire to announce that I have appointed Mr. Hill, Mr. Rodoreda and Mr. Yates to be temporary Chairmen of Committees for the session.

QUESTIONS.

RAILWAYS.

As to Engineer's Report on Welshpool-Bassendean Chord Line.

Mr. J. HEGNEY (without notice) asked the Minister representing the Minister for Railways:

Will the Minister make available the report of Mr. Brisbane, the independent engineer, regarding the respective merits of the two proposed railway routes through the Belmont district?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

It is intended to make the report available to the members representing the districts affected in any way, and therefore the hon. member may rest assured that a copy of the report will be made available to him.

BUTTER.

As to Price in Other States.

Mr. J. HEGNEY (without notice) asked the Attorney General:

Is he aware that a statement was made in the Commonwealth Parliament last week that the price of butter in three States—South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania—is 3s. 1½d. and as the price in Western Australia is 3s. 2d. per lb., can he explain the difference between the prices charged in this State and elsewhere?