

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 4th August, 1955.

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MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY.

The Legislative Assembly met, pursuant to proclamation by His Excellency the Governor, which was read by the Clerk (Mr. F. E. Islip).

The SPEAKER took the Chair at 3 p.m.

SUMMONS FROM THE GOVERNOR.

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.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

QUESTIONS.

MOOLA BULLA CATTLE STATION.

Papers Relating to Sale.

Hon. SIR ROSS McLARTY (without notice) asked the Minister for Native Affairs:

Will he lay on the Table of the House all papers in connection with the sale of the Moola Bulla cattle station?

The MINISTER replied:

I have no objection to laying on the Table all papers that are under the jurisdiction of the Native Welfare Department, but the actual sale of Moola Bulla was effected by the Lands Department. So far as the Native Welfare Department is concerned, I shall be only too happy to lay the relevant papers on the Table.

Hon. SIR ROSS McLARTY (without notice) asked the Minister for Lands:

Will he lay on the Table of the House all papers in connection with the sale of the Moola Bulla cattle station?

The MINISTER replied:

Yes, next week.

SUPERANNUATION.

Request for Increased Payments.

Mr. NIMMO (without notice) asked the Treasurer:

(1) Will he give earnest consideration to the need for granting increases to pensioners under the Superannuation Act, 1871-1948?

(2) Will he consider especially the plight of those pensioners receiving very low pensions?

(3) Is he aware that there are 3,149 pensioners receiving less than £156 per annum; 444 receiving between £156 and £312 per annum and 338 receiving between £312 and £500 per annum, making a total of 3,931 pensioners receiving less than £500 per annum?

(4) If he is willing to take steps to improve the position of these pensioners, will he take the necessary action during the present session of Parliament?

The TREASURER replied:

I would advise the House that representations in connection with this subject have already been made to the Government by the interested trade unions and employee associations, and also by members on both sides of the House. In the Speech with which His Excellency was pleased to open Parliament, and which we had the privilege of hearing a few moments ago, it was indicated to members of both Houses and to the public that the Government will introduce legislation this session in connection with this matter.

DUST NUISANCE.

Rivervale, Victoria Park and South Perth.

Mr. YATES (without notice) asked the Premier:

In view of the ever-increasing dust nuisance which nightly blankets the districts of Rivervale, Victoria Park and South Perth, will the Premier have immediate investigations made with a view to having this nuisance removed?

The PREMIER replied:

Yes.

TRANSPORT.

Perishable Supplies, Cartage and Back Loading, Carnarvon to Perth.

Mr. NORTON (without notice) asked the Minister for Transport:

Has any consideration been given to the application made by the primary producers on the Gascoyne River for a transport permit for the cartage of all their perishable produce by road to Perth and for the back-loading of supplies to Carnarvon?

The MINISTER replied:

This matter was discussed some three weeks ago in Cabinet, but, due to my absence in Brisbane at a Transport Ministers' conference, nothing was done. However, I feel that I can assure the hon. member that this matter will receive the consideration of Cabinet, probably next week.

WHEAT SURPLUS.

Appointment of Committee to Consider Disposal.

Mr. BRADY (without notice) asked the Minister for Agriculture:

Will he consider the possibility of having a committee appointed by the State and Federal Governments and the Australian Wheat Board with a view to considering how Western Australia's surplus wheat can best be disposed of?

The MINISTER replied:

I will have consideration given to that matter if the hon. member will furnish me with the particulars.

DAIRYING INDUSTRY.

Findings of 1953 Survey and Government Attitude.

Mr. HEARMAN (without notice) asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Were any of the findings of the 1953 dairy survey conducted by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics into the cost structure and management problems of dairy farms in Western Australia, unexpected by the Government?

(2) What influence has the publication of this report had on the Government's attitude to the dairying industry?

The MINISTER replied:

I would say first of all that not all of the findings of the committee that inquired into the dairying industry were unexpected by the Government. In fact, in regard to one of their main recommendations the Government anticipated it by some 12 months, and here I refer to the increase in pastures on backward dairy farms. That work has been proceeding apace for considerably more than 12 months and we, as a Government, feel that it will overcome one of the major problems of the dairying industry, but, of course, it does not cover the whole situation.

There is such a thing as increased efficiency and when the hon. member understands, as a dairy farmer must, the quantity of butterfat per cow that we are getting on the average in this State, I think he will agree that there is a great opportunity for further effort in the direction of increased efficiency. The Government is this year spending what is for it a record of some £68,000 in this direction.

So far as the dairying industry is concerned and the effect that it must have on Government policy from now on, that is a question which is to be decided in the very near future, first of all at a conference between myself, officers of the Department of Agriculture and officers of the Rural and Industries Bank, together with the executives of the dairying industry and other interested parties, in an endeavour, by an exchange of ideas, to evolve a policy that will interest the State Government in further action. My view is that the dairying industry is today facing a desperate situation and quite a lot of our farmers are down on the peasant level.

RAILWAYS.

(a) Minimising Fatalities at Rivervale Crossing.

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

Bearing in mind the number of fatal accidents that have been happening at the Rivervale crossing and also the ever-increasing flow of traffic along Great Eastern Highway, will his department expedite a proposal to construct a subway at the Rivervale crossing?

The MINISTER replied:

The matter of the number of accidents occurring is of very considerable concern to the various departments which have jurisdiction over the railway crossings and access ways. No firm decision has been made as to the appropriate action to be taken in order to minimise the incidence of these accidents, but I assure the hon. member that whatever it is possible to do to reduce the number of accidents, will be done.

(b) Australian Design and Manufacture of Diesels.

Mr. BRADY (without notice) asked the Minister for Railways:

In view of the increasing number of diesels used, will he agree to consider calling for designs from Australian residents with a view to the making and fabricating of diesels in the W.A. Government Railway Workshops?

The MINISTER replied:

The Government has no intention to purchase more diesel locomotives as it has quite a large number still to be delivered on contract from overseas. If it is found that it is desirable to increase the fleet of diesel locomotives on our railways after the receipt of those engines, consideration will be given to having them both designed in Western Australia and built in the Midland Junction Workshops.

NARROWS BRIDGE.

Erection by Contract or Day Labour.

Hon. D. BRAND (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

Is it the Government's intention to build a bridge over the Narrows by contract?

The MINISTER replied:

The Government has not yet made any decision on what method will be adopted for the erection of the bridge. At present an engineer from the Main Roads Department, Mr. Godfrey, is in the United States of America furthering his inquiries into the requirements for the proper design and erection of this structure. I have no doubt that certain representations will be made when Mr. Godfrey returns, and the question of which method will be used to erect this bridge will be considered, and a decision made.

At this stage, it is impossible to say whether tenders will be called or the department will undertake the work itself by day labour. Anybody who has been paying any attention to what has transpired up to date would, I think, form the opinion that it is highly probable that tenders will be invited from all over the world, and with those tenders a request will be made for the provision of a suitable design. However, at present no firm decision has been made on the matter.

CHAMBERLAIN INDUSTRIES PTY. LTD.

Tabling Reports by Chartered Accountant.

Hon. A. F. WATTS (without notice) asked the Minister for Industrial Development:

Will he lay on the Table of the House two reports made by Sir Edwin Nixon, a prominent chartered accountant from

Melbourne, as a result of his inquiries into Chamberlain Industries Pty. Ltd., which reports were made about the end of 1952?

The MINISTER replied:

No. Theoretically, Chamberlain Industries Pty. Ltd. is a private concern and, consequently the file contains matters of a confidential nature. However, I have no objection to making the reports available to the Leader of the Country Party at any time he cares to call at the Department of Industrial Development.

HOUSING.

(a) Number of Homes Built by Commission.

Mr. ANDREW (without notice) asked the Minister for Housing:

Could he give me the figures of the number of houses built by the State Housing Commission for the year ended June, 1955, and also for the preceding four years?

The MINISTER replied:

The number of houses completed by the State Housing Commission for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1955, was 4,060. For the financial year ended the 30th June, 1954, the number was 3,564. For the previous financial year the number was 2,815 and for the year previous to that, 1951-52, the number of completed houses was 1,900.

Mr. Hutchinson: And the year before?

The MINISTER: The year before the number was 2,100 and for the year before that 1,600.

In regard to the second question, I am not aware of the exact figure, but I can give the hon. member some idea by stating that in the 2½ years' administration of the present Government, more houses will be built and completed than in the six-year period of the previous Government.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: We gave you all the materials to build them.

(b) Provision for Natives.

Mr. NALDER (without notice) asked the Minister for Housing:

Is the Minister aware that a house built for natives in a country town was completed nearly four months ago but has not been occupied by any native family because the rent has been too high?

The MINISTER replied:

I suggest first of all that the member has got his facts astray. I was not informed where the house was located but, from his point of view, it is an unfortunate fact, perhaps, that all the houses being specially built for natives have been built for sale, and none of them for rental purposes.

FISHING.*Confiscation of Net on Conviction.*

Mr. McCULLOCH (without notice) asked the Minister for Fisheries:

(1) When a person is charged and convicted for illegal fishing on the Swan River, is the net which is used for such purpose confiscated by the Fisheries Department?

(2) If not, why not?

The MINISTER replied:

The normal procedure is that when a person is caught catching fish illicitly within a prohibited area, the net is confiscated at that time and if a conviction follows the usual custom is for the net to be permanently confiscated.

Mr. May: I think you ought to give him his net back.

PRICE CONTROL.*Appointment of Royal Commission.*

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT (without notice) asked the Premier:

In view of the Government's intention to introduce a Bill to enable prices to be fixed at a time when, overseas, so many countries have achieved economic success by rejecting price control, will the Government appoint a Royal Commissioner, with proper qualifications, to investigate and report on all information available in Australia from the highest technical authorities on such a matter, so that this House, in considering such a Bill, may be fully informed and exercise a considered judgment as to whether or not, fixation of prices would result in a higher standard of living being obtained by a majority of the people?

The PREMIER replied:

The hon. member was good enough to give me a copy of the question which he has just presented. The first part of the question is a generalisation and the assertion made in it is open to very considerable argument. There appears to the Government to be no need to appoint a Royal Commission. The South Australian Government recently, led by Liberal Party Premier Playford, not only introduced a Bill to continue price control in South Australia for a further period, but also increased considerably the number of goods in South Australia under price control. In connection with the standard of living of the people of Western Australia I would say that it has gone down considerably for most people since the Legislative Council in this State refused the present Government the right to continue price control in Western Australia.

BETTING.*First Impressions of Betting Act Effect.*

HON. D. BRAND (without notice) asked the Minister for Police:

In spite of the experience of Premier Playford of South Australia, on betting, can the Minister give his first impressions of the implementation of the Betting Act in this State?

The MINISTER replied:

I should say that this question is very premature. The legislation came into effect only on Monday last and there has not been a racing date in the metropolitan area to judge what its effect would be, but there was a country race meeting at Northam and on an inspection of the betting shops by the Police Department, it was revealed that a much more orderly and desirable state of affairs existed than those which prevailed in this State during the last 25 to 30 years. I would not be prepared to say just what has been the effect of it. I feel certain if the board as constituted is given a free hand, it will, by the time this legislation has either been re-enacted or automatically lapsed, have brought about a much more favourable and desirable state of affairs as far as off-the-course betting is concerned than has existed in the past.

NORTH-WEST DEVELOPMENT.*Financial Assistance by Commonwealth.*

Mr. RHATIGAN (without notice) asked the Treasurer:

Can he give any indication when a reply will be received from the Prime Minister with reference to the suggestions put up by the all-party committee for finance necessary for the development of the northern portion of Western Australia?

The TREASURER replied:

I am not in a position to give an indication as to when the Commonwealth Government will make decisions on the case which was presented to it by an all-party committee from this Parliament. The subjects presented to the Commonwealth for consideration were very important. I think they would require considerable investigation by the Commonwealth Government and therefore I would not anticipate receiving decisions from the Commonwealth Government until much later this year.

GENERAL MOTORS HOLDEN.*Reducing Price of Products.*

Mr. BRADY (without notice) asked the Premier:

As General Motors Holden made a profit of £10,000,000 on a £40,000,000 investment in the last financial year, representing a return of approximately 25 per cent, will representations be made by the Government for a reduction in the prices of that firm's products in the State?

The PREMIER replied:

I drive a Holden car myself. When I saw the profit I thought I would be entitled to write to the company for a partial refund of the purchase price. I do hope sincerely that the company, as a contribution towards keeping the cost of living down in Australia will, in the near future, reduce the prices of its products.

ENTERTAINMENTS TAX.

Exemption of Agricultural Societies.

Mr. BOVELL (without notice) asked the Treasurer:

Will he give consideration to exempting from entertainments tax, all functions and entertainments arranged by agricultural societies throughout Western Australia and also funds for the use of those societies?

The TREASURER replied:

I would be very sympathetically disposed to do that, and I shall give the matter early consideration.

HOSPITALS.

Opening of Meekatharra Building.

Mr. O'BRIEN (without notice) asked the Minister for Health:

In view of the fact that the Meekatharra hospital is almost complete, will the Minister inform this House when it is anticipated that it will be opened?

The MINISTER replied:

It is anticipated that the hospital will be opened on the 27th September, 1955.

BILL—LEGAL PRACTITIONERS ACT AMENDMENT.

The PREMIER: 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 "A Bill for an Act to amend the Legal Practitioners Act, 1893-1950."

Leave given; Bill introduced and read a first time.

GOVERNOR'S OPENING SPEECH, DISTRIBUTION.

Mr. SPEAKER: Accompanied by hon. members of this Chamber, I attended His Excellency the Governor in the Legislative Council Chamber to hear the Speech which His Excellency was pleased to deliver to members of both Houses of Parliament. For the sake of greater accuracy, I have caused printed copies of the Speech to be distributed amongst members of this Chamber.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

First Day.

MR. JOHNSON (Leederville) [3.59]: It is part of the history, tradition and practice of the House that on the occasion of the opening of a session of Parliament a motion for the adoption of an Address-in-reply to the Governor's Speech should be

moved by one of the younger members. Today that honour has fallen to me, and I move—

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Governor, in reply to the Speech he has been pleased to deliver to Parliament:—

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

The form of this motion is the same as was used on the occasion of the opening of the first Parliament of Western Australia under Responsible Government—65 years ago.

The first "Hansard" of Western Australia—that of the second session of the First Parliament—records a similar motion in almost identical words. The wording is but slightly different from that which has been used in the Mother of Parliaments in Westminster since before records of such matters were first made.

Not only is this motion one with a long historic descent but nearly all the forms and ceremonials and traditions of this Chamber have descended to us practically unchanged since the time of the revolution in Cromwell's day. Most of our formalities and practices actually ante-date that period.

It is, therefore, of particular interest on this occasion to consider how we have, with remarkable ingenuity, kept religiously to the historic pattern and yet changed things completely. Before King Charles's day the opening address to Parliament was, in effect, an instruction by the King of what he intended Parliament to do—or else! Now it is a statement of the legislative pattern of the leaders of a democratically elected Government.

In the good old days before King Charles, if the King needed funds he invited merchants to lend, and if they refused they were hung up by the thumbs, or otherwise persuaded, until they gave the money.

Mr. J. Hegney: It's a pity we could not do that now!

Mr. JOHNSON: The King and his court rode to the hunt across field and garden, doing damage without compensation. The daughters of the ordinary folk were often the object of the hunt. Disease was common; death came early; transport moved no faster than a horse; there was no light save candles; and there were few books, and fewer who could read. In fact, the living standard of all but the highest then was not as high as that of the basic-wage earner today.

Back in those good old days, those who advocated material reforms were imprisoned by the King and castigated by the church for attempting to change the will of God. How much things have changed when today—in the framework of this same historic motion, still couched in archaic language—we consider a legislative programme aimed at further improvements in the standard of living of the ordinary man; at the raising of his status as an individual; at improving his health, his education and his security.

Back in King Charles's day a speech such as we have heard this afternoon would have been considered an attack on the Crown, completely revolutionary. Now it is quite unexciting.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: True!

Mr. JOHNSON: The history of the development of our country under the unchanged forms of parliamentary procedure has been an unchanging struggle between the forward-looking advocates of improvement and the backward-looking advocates of "the good old days." Those who advocate change have always been subject to charges of being in league with the devil, of advocating loose morals, and tearing down the foundations of society; and that is still the fashion. The methods by which reactionaries have attacked forward-looking politicians is another of the unchanged facets of the system. They still use slander and abuse, because constructive thought is lacking.

The remarkable change that has come about in the standard of living of the ordinary people without changing the formalities and framework of our traditional behaviour, has been possible because the advocates of progress have been men of moderation, as we still are, and the reactionaries have been too much subject to the will of the voter to be game to reverse obviously beneficial reforms like suppression of slavery, free education, Government hospitals, public water supply, electricity and gas, controlled working hours, public railways, tramways and passenger transport, arbitration, pensions and workers' compensation. Nor can it be expected that if the reactionary forces again get control of this House, they will reverse any of the major policies advocated in today's Speech.

Through the mouth of our Governor we have been told by our respected Leader, the Premier (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke) that in this session we will deal with many subjects aiming at making Western Australia a better place for each of us to live in: Price control to prevent undue exploitation, wage adjustment to give spending power to the public, and sales opportunity to commerce, water supplies for dry country areas, expanding education opportunities, easier home ownership and more abundant hospital facilities.

Reference should be made to the new electoral boundaries laid out by the Electoral Commission. In my electorate of Leederville, small areas have been transferred to West Perth, and North Perth, and the whole of Wembley has been added, making an even, cohesive, compact electorate without a great variety of problems. Our problems are State-wide problems like transport, schools, wages and margins, prices and similar matters. Most of our purely local problems are concerned with the Perth City Council. Our missing footpaths, our far too prevalent midgets, our insufficient drainage and excessive rates are all city council responsibilities, and not governmental. If they were governmental, it would be easier to get action.

On the very important issue of rating values, I am acting in my private capacity as a ratepayer in attempting to correct the unequal valuations in our area. With some other rate-paying friends, I have been before the Rating Appeal Board on four occasions, and I hope that the decision, when we eventually get it, will ensure that all ratepayers are treated equally as to valuations and rates. People in the Leederville electorate resent the dictatorial methods of the city council which never explains or justifies its actions, and consults no one.

There are two items which lie outside the power of this Government, but with which they would deal had they the power, which lies in Federal hands. Firstly, there is the injustice meted out to those dependent upon pensions. The standard of living of the pensioner who is solely dependent on that pension is a disgrace to any community, let alone one that professes to be a Christian community. In particular, those younger women with children of, or below, school age dependent upon the widow's pension cannot expect to eat three good meals a day, to clothe themselves, or the children, properly or to keep them warm in winter. The heathen practice of burying the widow with the husband was often more humane than the present starvation allowances called Commonwealth Social Services.

Hon. D. Brand: Rubbish!

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: What do you think of that!

Mr. JOHNSON: I, and I know all members who sit behind the Premier, regret that the only power we have in this matter is that of protest. I take this opportunity to invite everyone with a conscience to protest also—through their churches, their unions, their associations, their political groups—in every way they know, by voice, by letter, by deputation and by vote, to the responsible body, the Federal Parliament. Each of us is responsible for this blot on our way of life, each pensioner's death from tuberculosis or other disease contributed to by malnutrition, is on our shoulders.

The other problem we cannot control, although we can assist in its alleviation, concerns wheat. There is enough wheat in store throughout the world to feed for more than a year all those who normally eat wheat, and there is a harvest under way in the Northern Hemisphere. Soon we in Australia will also be harvesting a large crop. The pattern of the market is similar to that of 1929—full silos, and a harvest pressing on Government-supported prices. It was in a situation almost identical with the present that Russia started to export at the beginning of the last depression. If Russia were to ship 1,000,000 bushels of wheat to markets normally available to the western world, the effect on our economy would be as great as an A-bomb, and there is no massive retaliation possible. This was the opening move of the last depression. A fall in wheat prices, no matter how caused, would usher in a down-turn in world economics possibly steeper than that relating to the last depression.

The foolish policies of anti-progressive governments in England, U.S.A., and Australia have laid the whole world open to economic disaster, and put the ideal weapon for the destruction of the western way of life into the hands of our avowed enemies. There is only one possible remedy—planning—not only of the wheat industry, but of all vulnerable factors in the economy, like credit, time-payment in particular, prices, wages and employment, to ensure that our standards are maintained and to provide absolute certainty that the unemployed, the aged, the widow, and all children are always maintained above the minimum civilised standard, no matter who above that level suffers.

Let us use this session fruitfully in establishing a just basis for those plans which obviously must be implemented in the near future.

MR. O'BRIEN (Murchison): I formally second the motion.

On motion by Hon. Sir Ross McLarty, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE PREMIER (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam): I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday next.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 4.13 p.m.

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 9th August, 1955.

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

NORTHERN TERRITORY.

Opening of New Legislative Council Chamber.

The PRESIDENT: I have to advise members that the new Legislative Council Chamber for the Northern Territory was opened by His Excellency the Governor General, Sir William Slim, on the 25th March, 1955. I took the opportunity of conveying the good wishes of this Council to the President and members and now have pleasure in reading the following reply:—

Legislative Council
Building,
Darwin, N.T.,
13th April, 1955.

My Dear Mr. President,

I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of congratulations upon the occasion of the first meeting of the Legislative Council for the Northern Territory in its new Chamber.

It was most gracious of you to think of us on this day—one made memorable by the presence of Their Excellencies, Sir William and Lady Slim, and the inaugural speech by His Excellency.

The Council was also honoured by the presence of the Honourable Paul Hasluck, Minister of State for Territories, and a delegation from the Commonwealth Parliament, headed by Mr. Speaker of the Senate and Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Your message was very welcome and its receipt has been recorded in the minutes of that sitting.