

ment will probably result in my own demise from this Chamber. That, Mr President, is my commitment to this matter of principle.

[Applause.]

HON. W. G. ATKINSON (Central) [7.47 p.m.]: It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise in the Chamber for the first time, especially as I am following in the footsteps of the Hon. Norman Baxter, a man who served this Chamber well over a long period. It is with a combination of feelings that I stand here this evening: Pride, nervousness, and humbleness.

Pride, first of all, to be able to follow in the footsteps of the honourable member who preceded me. The Hon. Norm Baxter was first elected to this House in 1950 and served until earlier this year. He had a long and distinguished career, serving as Minister for Health in the Brand Government from 1971 to 1974, serving as Chairman of Committees for two periods, from 1963 to 1965 and from 1971 to 1974, and finishing his career as Chairman of the Honorary Royal Commission into racing and trotting. It gives me a great deal of pride to be able to congratulate him for his years of service in this House and to wish him well in his retirement.

I have a feeling of humbleness following in his footsteps as the member for Central Province and entering this House, where parliamentary democracy takes its rise. It certainly takes its rise in the history of this House. I have just one worry: I enter the House at the time when its very existence is under attack and threat.

I thank the electors of Central Province who have placed their confidence in me. I trust I can repay that confidence by working in as able a manner as did the former member.

The threat that the House is under and that falls on its representatives comes from the Government's stated moves to alter the Constitution. Over the years that this House has been in existence it has been known for the quality of the legislation that has emanated therefrom. I trust it will continue its resistance to damaging change and its responsibility to encourage progressive reforms for the benefit of all Western Australians.

Mr President, I congratulate you on once again being elected to the Chair of this Chamber. I congratulate the honourable members who have been elected or re-elected following the recent elections. I congratulate the Ministers on their appointment and the Hon. Des Dans for his appointment as Leader of the Government in the House. I express appreciation for the help I have received from members and for the help I have received from members of the staff. I have appreciated

their help as it has enabled me to settle into what is a new occupation.

As most members are aware, I am a farmer, a practical person. We have several other farmers in the Chamber and it does well to balance the intellectual side with a few practical people. I am a country person, having lived in the country all my life. I received my education in the country, starting at the Ballidu Primary School, then the Dalwallinu Primary School, then the Northam High School, followed by the Muresk Agricultural College. I live in Dalwallinu and I enjoy country life and country people.

Country people hold high the moral values of family life and community service, a combination which holds up in the face of adversity, something which country people seem to face so often with the natural disasters they have faced so regularly, it seems, over the last decade; disasters such as droughts, floods and fires. We have seen the effects of drought over the last seven or eight years; we have seen the disastrous results it has had on the country's economy. Not only a large part of the area I represent has suffered from this natural infliction; so too have large areas of the Eastern States. Naturally the country's economy has suffered from the downturn in the export income thus lost.

We saw the effects of floods in the south-west of Western Australia in the summer of 1982 and also recently. A most prophetic warning from Professor Parker recently appeared in *The West Australian* when, just several days before the Swan River flooded, he said that Perth faced a flood threat. The article stated—

PERTH'S long run of flood-free winters could change drastically in the next few years.

All it needs is an unusually high rainfall over the degraded land in the huge Avon River catchment

The result could be horrific inundations along the Swan River.

The catchment area of the Avon River basically covers the area I represent, so members can see the extent of this problem. We could easily return to a series of wet winters such as we experienced in the middle 1960s.

Another of the natural disasters that often hits country people but which very rarely hits city people is fire. We also had the case in this State of cyclone Alby several years ago and the damage that caused. We have recently had the experience of the devastating fires in the Eastern States, and—needless to say—we all realise the damage and heartbreak they caused to many people, and

the tremendous loss they caused to the country in terms of the economy.

As a farmer I am pleased to say that this season is much better than recent seasons, although we had a late start and finishing rains are essential. This has given country people a much better outlook, and it should flow over into the rest of the community generally.

I would like now to give members a little detail of Central Province. The province covers a huge area. I know it is not equal in size to some of the areas in the north, but it has a scattered population over virtually all of it and is only partially developed; it is a huge area. It covers 112 000 square kilometres. To illustrate its size, it is nearly half the area of the State of Victoria, which covers an area of 227 000 square kilometres. Central Province encompasses 29 shires, one town council, and part of the Yalgoo Shire. It has 68 schools and the Muresk Agricultural College. It has 27 500 electors on the roll.

As a wheat grower I am pleased to point out that, of Co-operative Bulk Handling's 202 receival points in this State, 102 are in Central Province. Of the 1981-82 wheat harvest of 4.5 million tonnes, some 55 per cent, or 2.4 million tonnes, was produced and delivered within Central Province. Unfortunately it is a bit difficult to ascertain the quantity actually carted to the ports from the province, but it could rise to the 60 per cent mark. So, some 60 per cent of the State's wheat is produced in the area I represent.

It is with a great deal of pride that I join the Hon. Mick Gayfer in this Chamber, he being the Chairman of CBH, the company that means so much to farmers. Besides producing all that wheat, some 22 per cent of the oat production and 16 per cent of the barley production of the State occurs in this province. So it can be seen that the Assembly electorates that make up the province—Mt. Marshall, Merredin and Avon—play an important part in the export earnings of the State and contribute very heavily to the revenue of the railways. As a point of interest, in 1981-82 one of the largest receival points was Kalannie in the north of the province, where 49 800 tonnes of wheat were delivered. Another large receival point is Kulin, where 48 762 tonnes of wheat were delivered. It would be remiss of me if I were not to mention the home town of the Hon. Mick Gayfer, because 42 600 tonnes of wheat were delivered to the Corrigin receival point.

Mineral production in Central Province has played an important role over the years. However, the recent closure of the charcoal iron industry in Wundowie and of the Koolyanobbing mining ven-

ture has meant that mineral production in the region once more depends on goldmining in the Yilgarn area, in such places as Bullfinch and Marvel Loch. It is now an important part of mineral production in the province.

The province is well served with services such as water, electricity, railways, roads and communications. We have a tractor manufacturing company at Merredin, where the Phillips-Merredin company has been manufacturing the Acremaster tractor for some years. Regrettably the company has had financial problems recently, but hopefully it will overcome them, so allowing its 35 employees to once again have work.

In such a huge area we naturally have problems providing the services and amenities that city people take absolutely for granted; things like roads, water, electricity, medical and educational facilities, TV and radio, and sport and recreational facilities. Over the years, successive Governments have helped local governments to provide these facilities, but rising costs have slowed down this development. These rising costs are contributed to by high interest rates and constantly rising wages.

We are faced with huge costs just to employ a person these days. We must meet long service leave entitlements, holiday loadings, superannuation and workers' compensation. More recently we have the case before the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission involving redundancy payments. If a farmer wants to take on an employee who is in the 40-years-of-age bracket, and if after a year the farmer is hit by a drought and must put off that employee, he has to pay that person another year's wages. That is hardly conducive to healthy employment.

Other costs are holding up works programmes in the country. Fuel levies have been imposed to fund the ARBD grants. Unfortunately, by reason of distance, and the large amount of fuel used on farms, country people contribute very heavily to this fund. The restrictions that the Main Roads Department places on them by means of road counts ensures that insufficient funds are returned to the areas from whence they are generated.

I now turn to a matter that is worrying the local shire councils in the area: the rapid rise in workers' compensation insurance. One shire in the area has this year experienced a rise of \$10 000 in its workers' compensation premium, which represents a 62 per cent increase over 12 months. Another has had an increase from \$20 000 to \$33 000 in one year, or a rise of \$13 000; this is on \$2 000 less wages. The rates have climbed from 4.6 per cent in 1981-82 to 6.22 per cent in

1982-83 and to 9.82 per cent in 1983-84; so in a three-year period we have seen the rates for workers' compensation more than double. When this is combined with the other costs of labour, such as the provision of housing, which employers in the country must provide, holiday loadings, and the possibility of very heavy redundancy payments, it means local councils need to inflict a very steep rise in rates upon their ratepayers unless they are prepared to make quite drastic cuts in the services they provide.

These costs are placing a real burden on all employers of labour, not only in the country, but also throughout the community, causing people to be out of work and prices to rise.

I now turn to a great problem in the country, one of the essential ingredients for life in the country—water. Water is essential not only for people living in the country, but also to farmers for stock. The action of turning on a tap which most people in the city would take absolutely for granted—that if one turns on a tap a stream of good quality water will issue forth—is not available over large areas of the province that I represent. This is a huge social problem. I trust honourable members have read in the Press about women having to cart water during the period when their husbands are out with the harvester. They must try to get enough water for household use and have a little left over for the garden so they can have a bit of greenery around instead of the dry red dirt we have seen so much of over the last few years.

Many households in this area depend entirely on rainwater which is caught off the roof and held in tanks provided at their own cost. We then have the cost of providing water for stock—sheep, cattle and piggeries—and also in this day and age with chemical farming becoming more and more the in thing, the need to provide good quality water to use with sprays.

Over most of the area we have the goldfields scheme which covers most of the lower half of the province; indeed, it covers the area right up to the Shire of Dalwallinu where I reside. Where it is not available farmers and other people have been forced to provide their own supplies and they have made, in some cases, considerable financial sacrifices in constructing dams only to find that after the dams fill they leak almost as quickly as the water runs into them. Numerous bores are put down on properties, only to find that the salinity of the water is too great to be of any use for the stock. So we have a combination of lack of suitable clays for dams, saline waters and, over the last few years, lack of rains to fill all the dams which do hold water; and all this means that the

provision of water has become a very real problem.

Mundaring Weir has been stretched to its limit to provide water for the area. I again remind honourable members of the Agaton water scheme which could cover a fair proportion of this area. I would like to read a summary of this scheme because I regard it as a very important one for the area. The summary reads as follows—

For a number of years, moves have been made to develop and utilise the underground water reserves from the area known as the Agaton groundwater resource—West of Watheroo.

In May 1979 the then Government of Western Australia approached the Federal Government for funds to develop The North Eastern Agricultural Water Supply—Agaton Project.

A Joint Commonwealth-State Committee was established and their subsequent report in July, 1980 called for a Study of the benefits and costs of the Project as well as the development of the On-Farm alternative.

During November, 1981 the cost-benefit Study of the North Eastern Agricultural Water Supply (Agaton Project) and the On-Farm Alternative, was released.

Indications were quite clear at this point, that the Scheme had little likelihood of proceeding, unless there was a farmer contribution to cost at a high percentage rate—30 per cent.

Members of the Rural Water Council of W.A.—Shire Council delegates, C.W.A. and Farmer Delegates—having spent a considerable amount of time and effort in working towards the implementation of the Scheme, felt compelled to pursue and investigate the principle of Farmer contribution.

Subsequent surveys conducted during 1982 established the fact that the principle of farmer contribution, whether it be 25 per cent, 20 per cent or lower, was generally unacceptable, not only to potential consumers of the water but to Parliamentarians and to the public at large. It must be stressed at this point, that despite the general rejection of farmer contribution, a significant number of farmers, in a desperate bid to establish secure water supplies were prepared to contribute to the cost of the Agaton project, even to the extent of mortgaging their properties.

The Agaton Scheme would service approximately, one million hectares of farming

land with water from an assured continuous water supply, using less than 50 per cent of the source available.

Water to supply 334 000 hectares would be transferred from the Mundaring Weir source, thus reducing the demand from that source.

The remaining 664 000 hectares of farmland including several townships with very poor water supply, would be then supplied with reticulated water.

This area has been designated and recognised as having the highest priority in terms of need for a secure water supply due to the difficulty of establishing on-farm water supplies whether they be from an underground source or surface water storage.

I could read from that report at length, but I believe what I have read out illustrates the point we want to get across.

I remind the Government, and I would like it incorporated in *Hansard*, of a quote from an article in the *Central Midlands Herald* of 10 February 1983 which reads as follows—

Opposition would move on Agaton

In conjunction with the Australian Labor Party candidate for Mt Marshall, Mr Bob Couzens, and the ALP candidate for Central Province, Mr Roy Little, the Opposition's spokesman for Water Resources, Mr Parker, gave firm commitments on the party's attitude towards the implementation of the much discussed Agaton water scheme.

He announced at Mukinbudin that the ALP would move immediately to have the scheme listed as a No. 1 priority for application for Federal funds and that on gaining government the first stage would be put into operation.

"The scheme", he said, "was an essential service to the people who would be served by it, and therefore should have the priority listing it so deserved.

"For far too long the needs of country people have been neglected, and a State Labor Government would rectify this injustice.

"People living in areas not now reticulated are equally entitled to Government regard to provide those services at a fair and equitable cost, the same as those areas already serviced," Mr Parker concluded.

I believe that that is a firm promise and I urge the Government, particularly because of the reintroduction of the Perth-Fremantle railway

passenger service—and in doing so, stressing the social value of reintroducing that service—to place equal emphasis on the social value of implementing this scheme which over a period of approximately 10 years would not cost a lot more than the loss that will be made on that railway.

I now turn to some old problems that confront the area. Because of the vastness of the area, we have problems with television and radio reception, another thing that city people take for granted. A large portion of the north-east and south-east sectors have either very poor television reception or none at all. For the area in between, very expensive masts and boosters must be employed to gain any reception at all.

We have recently seen Telecom unions pressurising the Federal Government to try to stop something which promises to provide some sort of reliable service for these people—AUSSAT. Fortunately—and I commend it for this—the Federal Labor Government has seen fit to go ahead with this scheme and hopefully it will improve reception in those areas.

While giving the Federal Government a pat on the back for one thing, I must deplore its actions in breaking an election promise in which it gave an undertaking earlier this year to keep down telephone charges. Despite that promise we have heard a recent announcement of a \$10 rise in the rental charge for telephones and a 15 per cent rise in STD charges, again a big factor in the cost of living for country people.

Freight is another problem faced by country people caused by the distance factor. Farmers in the outlying areas of Central Province and the Yilgarn pay \$22 a tonne for wheat to be freighted to the port. These people are probably facing a rise this year in the vicinity of eight per cent. They also have to pay this sort of money to get fertiliser to that area and these charges place in jeopardy the viability of growing wheat over a large part of the north-eastern area of Central Province. Not only is the cost of freight leading to problems there, but it is also increasing the number of farmers carting their own wheat and fertiliser, and this compounds the problem of traffic on the roads.

Another serious matter facing the area, which harks back to the mention I made of the Avon River and its flood problems, is land degradation. Because of a series of dry seasons we now have severe erosion problems; with overworked land, and high winds causing frequent dust storms over this area. We have a steadily increasing salinity problem. Over the years research has been carried out by the Department of Agriculture, but unfor-

fortunately in recent years there seems to have been a conflict of direction between that department and private interests which are trying to do something to stop the enormous loss we are facing. In recent weeks it has been suggested that the State is losing something in the vicinity of \$94 million a year because of this ever-increasing salinity problem.

I could not sit down without mentioning some of the problems farmers face outside their farms. I am talking about industrial problems that have occurred on the wharf at Kwinana. Some of these problems may have been avoidable and some may not have been, but unfortunately the unions there have seen fit to lay a log of claims on CBH which, in some cases, are absolutely ridiculous.

I would like to refer to a few of the clauses in this log of claims. Clause 1 seeks \$300 wages for 30 hours' work a week; clause 2 refers to shift work, 8.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. Monday to Friday—what about the railways in the meantime? Clause 4 is for shift work only with the approval of the Waterside Workers Federation; day shift normal time, evening shift double time, and night shift treble time. Clause 9 seeks an unconditional travelling allowance of \$20 per week paid to all workers—already we see wages going up. Clause 12 is for annual leave of six weeks plus 50 per cent loading. Clause 13 seeks long service leave of 13 weeks after 10 years' service, 13 weeks after 20 years and 13 weeks after 27 years. Now the crunch comes: plus 50 per cent. Clause 19 refers to stop work meetings and seeks that employees be paid for 12 times four hours of stop work meetings per annum—48 hours of stop work time to be made up by the farmers. Lastly, and I am not sure whether it will be affected by the Medicare programme, is the welfare fund—the employer to fund all health costs.

The strike at Kwinana during the last summer cost the farmers in this State in direct costs \$250 000. In indirect costs—extra rail freight, and loss of wages to railway workers—it probably cost this State \$500 000. It is a very expensive exercise and one that farmers cannot afford to pay.

I remind the Government of the comment made by the Hon. Mark Nevill when he said, "The ALP represents the light on the hill to agriculture". I believe that remark could be true because of the actions of some ALP Governments in the past, and their establishment of a number of boards. Certainly, I cannot deny that these boards have been of benefit to the farmers, but they have also affiliations with the Labor movement and I only hope the Government can control the unions so this country will not be brought to

its knees by the industrial action we see so much of today.

Mr President, I thank you for the opportunity of speaking for the first time in this House and I thank honourable members for listening to me in the manner they have done.

I commend the motion.

Debate adjourned, on motion by the Hon. Margaret McAleer.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON. D. K. DANS (South Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [8.19 p.m.]: I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Questions: Answers

HON. G. E. MASTERS (West) [8.20 p.m.]: I believe the House should not adjourn until I make a few comments about answers to questions that have been given in this House over the last two to three weeks by the Government—or should I say lack of answers. One can only assume that for some reason the Government is trying to hide some of the facts that should be presented and made available to the public in this State by either the Opposition or other members of Parliament.

I raise this matter because of two questions to which I failed to obtain a reasonable answer. The Opposition deplores the actions of the State Government in relation to the effects of its wages and salaries decision on Treasury and departmental budgeting since the Government came into office in February 1983.

I refer to questions numbered 42 and 47 and the astounding answers given by the Leader of the House, the Minister for Industrial Relations. The questions related to decisions made by the Minister regarding salaries and wages increases since he became Minister. I simply asked on how many occasions did he make certain decisions relating to sections 4 and 13(2) of the Salaries and Wages Freeze Act. The answer I received was that the information was not readily available and would take some considerable time to collate. This is a ridiculous answer and should be subject to some sort of censure from this House.

The Minister said that he and his Government supported the wages freeze, but I believe he said this with tongue in cheek because he has weakly caved in to the TLC in recent disputes. I guess his action was the result of the advice of his advisers, who are definitely supporting wages and salaries increases. The Minister may well smile, but he