

Perth scheme is almost completed, it would be in the best interests of the State to municipalise the tramways, the ferries, and sewerage. By bringing these concerns under local government control, the taxpayer would benefit considerably and it would be possible to locate the losses. The municipality would be able to borrow more money on the tramways than the Government can do at the present time, and the result would be more extensions and generally a better service. The same applies to the ferries and the sewerage system. With reference to Parliamentary hours, I hope that the Government will consider the advisableness of beginning the afternoon sitting at 3 o'clock and on one day a week, preferably Thursday, starting the sitting at 10 o'clock in the morning. The constituents of the State have sent hon. members to represent them here at the present time more seriously than has ever been done in connection with any other Parliament. We have been sent here to endeavour to straighten out the finances, and if we are to attempt to do that, we must come here willing to work and to do our duty in longer periods than the Government have arranged for us. Moreover, it is unfair to ask country members to come up as has been done this week, to attend to the work of Parliament for only two afternoons and two evenings. It would be decidedly preferable in the interests of better debating if we were to sit in the afternoons and early in the evening rather than into the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning. I sincerely trust that the Government will pay some attention to the suggestions I have made with regard to returned soldiers and that the measures which will be submitted will be in the direction of giving to these men that help to which they are entitled and also in the direction of altering the chaotic state of the finances.

Mr. PILKINGTON (Perth) [6.10]: As the last speaker has observed, this Parliament has been sent back in the hope that it will be able to do something towards straightening out the finances of the State. It appears to me that in the present condition of affairs, there is one matter paramount above all others which it is the duty of the Government and this Parliament to deal with; I mean that of the State's finances. A very few figures with which perhaps hon. members are familiar, are sufficient to show both the condition of the finances and the proposals which, up to date, the Government have made for the purpose of meeting the present difficulties. Stating those figures very shortly, they are as follows:—The deficit for the last financial year was £700,000. The deficit for the current financial year in the absence of any remedial measures, is estimated by the Treasurer at £1,057,000. If one wishes to test the value of that estimate by the events of the last six months, one can easily do so. The Treasurer estimated the deficit for the first five months of the current financial year at the sum of £400,000. In fact the deficit for that period was £494,000, exceeding the estimate by nearly £100,000. On the other

afternoon, there was a surplus in December of £26,000, leaving a deficit for the whole of the half year just ended of £457,000, indicating, I think, that the Treasurer's estimate was fairly accurate and that in the absence of remedial measures, the deficit for the present financial year may be expected to be £1,057,000 as estimated. The importance of these figures is this—it is an increase in the annual deficit of 50 per cent. in the absence of remedial measures. It means that in the absence of remedial measures the annual deficit jumps from £2 to £3: that is for every £2 of the deficit last year, there is £3 this year. I have not the faintest notion of what the increase may be next year, but that we may expect an increase, and a large increase, is beyond doubt.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. PILKINGTON: Before tea I was pointing out the enormous increase in the annual deficit between last year and the present financial year, an increase amounting to 50 per cent. I would ask the attention of hon. members to another view of the finances. The total deficit on the 31st December, 1917, amounted to the sum of £2,518,000. If hon. members will refer to the last issue of the Loan Account, the last issue which I have seen, it will be noticed that the total amount which is shown as due from the Treasurer is the sum of £1,822,000. That has, I take it, been all spent and is part of the deficit with which we are now faced. The whole of the loan money was spent and it became necessary to draw upon another account, and the expenditure of trust moneys then began. The trust moneys spent amounted to £695,000, making the total of £2,518,000. These figures are significant and cause us to look with some anxiety to the remedies which the Government have up to date proposed. It may be the Government have remedies which it is proposed to put forward and of which we know nothing, but I am speaking of the remedies which the Government have up to date made public. Those remedies were stated in the policy speech of the Premier and were as follows:—In the first place the Government propose the suspension of the sinking fund, which will give them a sum of £300,000 per annum. Next they propose that there shall be certain economies effected which they estimate at a sum of £100,000 per annum. Next, certain taxation was suggested, an increased annual income tax which would give another £160,000. Then there was to be an increased dividend duty tax which would give £27,000, and an increase in the stamp duties and shipping, and insurance company taxation, which was to give £25,000 per annum, and a tax on what was called the sporting community, which was estimated to return £28,000; making a total of £640,000 by these remedial measures. But we were told at the same time that these remedial measures would only be applicable to half the year. Therefore, they would only get one-half that sum to set against the deficit of this year, namely, £320,000, of which £150,000 is represented by



suspension of the sinking fund. The total remedies which the Government propose to introduce by taxation and economies give a total of £170,000 per annum to set against, as stated in the policy speech, the deficit of the current financial year. But hon. members will observe that of that £170,000 a sum of £80,000 was to be obtained by an increase in the income tax, and I confess I have long wished to understand how an increase in the income tax, which would fall on the incomes earned in the current financial year, is to be set against the deficit of the same year. That income tax will not be collected until the next financial year and will, therefore, not be available to set against the deficit of the present financial year. The same remark applies to the increase in the dividend duty tax. That increase in the dividend duty tax is the sum of £13,500, making a total of £93,500, which will not be available, and I think the same remark may apply to the £25,000 in so far as it is to be raised by shipping and insurance taxation charges. Roughly, say, £100,000 out of the £170,000 will not be available for the present financial year, which leaves us in the position that the Government's remedial proposals, putting aside the suspension of the sinking fund, will give us a sum of £70,000 to set against an expected deficit of £1,057,000, and I venture to say those figures show that the Government's proposals are utterly and hopelessly inadequate to deal with the position. Let me just point out what that means. In the figures which I have given we are going back, according to the estimate of the Colonial Treasurer, and I have no doubt he is right, at the rate of £3,000 a day, while with the remedial measures suggested by the Government, putting aside the suspension of the sinking fund for the moment, we are going to set against the £3,000 a day roughly £200 a day. Throw in the whole of the sinking fund and you get £600 a day. Those figures will be, of course, increased next year because there will be the full figures available, but at the same time it is to be expected there will be an increase in the annual deficit. There is one observation I should like to make in regard to the figures I have referred to and it is this: it is a remarkable fact that all the proposed remedies appear to emanate from the Colonial Treasurer. There does not appear to be any suggestion from any other source. Someone just now interjected what was I going to do about it. But it is the duty of the Government to find out what has to be done, and if they find out that they are absolutely incapable of dealing with the matter it is for them to say so.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): It is the duty of the Government critics too.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The position, as I understand it of a Government critic, is that he is entitled to criticise fairly and sincerely and honestly, and that is what I am endeavouring to do, but I say this, the Government should remember that those who stand outside the Government have not the same opportunity of knowing the facts which the Government know. The Government know the facts and the figures, which we do not. It is impossible

for me, if I was the best skilled business man in railway matters, to say what should be done in regard to the railways, but the Government have the opportunity of ascertaining the whole of the facts, and it is impossible for anyone outside the Government to point out as a certainty what the figures and facts are. Anyone outside can only suggest general principles, and as I criticise honestly, fairly and sincerely, I expect the Government to listen and answer me in the same honest and sincere spirit. I mentioned just now that one of the Government remedies was the suspension of the sinking fund. I am not prepared to say the time may not arrive in a State such as this when the suspension of the sinking fund is justifiable, but I say this, the suspension of the sinking fund is pro tanto a repudiation of our obligations and no suspension of the sinking fund can be justified unless accompanied by economies and good administration, showing that the Government has a reasonable chance and expectation of meeting the serious difficulties that we are in to tide over them. During the last general election I referred to the education vote and I refer to it again. The estimate of the education vote for the present year is, I understand—I take the figures from the policy speech of the Premier—a sum of £375,000, including the University vote. It is the largest sum that has ever been voted for education in any one year in Western Australia. I spoke of that matter during the general election campaign, and I wish to make clear the position I took up then, and which I take up now. I am not concerned with any question as to the efficiency of the Education Department. I am not concerned at the moment with any question as to whether there is waste or extravagance. What I am concerned with is this: we have an enormous deficit, increasing by leaps and bounds, and this education vote is bigger than ever before. It is a vote which any outsider knows can be cut down, and if the Government and Parliament say it shall be cut down, it can be cut down.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): In what particular instance?

Mr. PILKINGTON: The hon. member asks me to make suggestions. They can only be made by any person in the position of the Government. If the Government wish to cut down, their first duty would be to get together the heads of the departments and find out how it is best to cut down. It is not for me to do that. I cannot do it. What I do say is that that vote can be cut down, and the State will continue doing its business. If the affairs of the State cannot be put in order without cutting down that vote, it should be cut down as a mere matter of good business and honesty.

Mr. Thomson: In what way?

Mr. Griffiths: The way you suggested was to starve the minds of the children.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I never advocated anything of the sort in my life. I do not pretend to know enough about the Education Department to say what should be cut out and what should not. I have not the



necessary knowledge, and I think no hon. member has it. Any member who set out to cut down that vote would first have to get the necessary information from the permanent officials in charge of the department.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): Start on the University.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I am indifferent as to where you start, but I say we are spending on education a sum which we are not justified in spending. Every penny saved from the education vote would go to reduce the amount of trust funds which we are spending at present. Those who say I am desirous of starving the brains of the children will perhaps tell me themselves if I am right in my contention that it is necessary to cut down expenses. If we do not cut down somewhere we shall be in serious trouble at an early date. I will ask those who say the vote cannot be cut down because the children would starve, what they propose to do when the State is not in a position to pay its interest bill?

Mr. Jones: Why not resort to taxation?

Mr. PILKINGTON: If the hon. member will suggest any reasonable form of taxation which can be imposed at the present juncture I feel certain the Government will be prepared to accept it. According to the Constitution under which we live I find it exceedingly difficult to discover any fresh available avenue of taxation.

Mr. Jones: Unimproved land values.

Mr. PILKINGTON: When the hon. member shows to what extent an unimproved land values tax will meet the present position I shall be glad to hear him.

Hon. P. Collier: The "West Australian" explained it the other day.

Mr. PILKINGTON: Not how by such a tax we are to meet the present difficulties.

Mr. Holman: It would all help.

Mr. PILKINGTON: That is precisely the point of view I should like hon. members to note. When we shall have worked out the amount of taxation we can expect to get, we shall see what sort of deficit is to be expected next year, and see whether the taxation is sufficient. Unless every possible source of saving is made use of, this deficit will not be stopped. I am not attacking the Education Department. Let us assume that it is the finest in the world, and I still say we have not the money to spend on it. If we do not cut it down I fail to see how it is possible for the deficit to be met.

Mr. Thomson: By how much do you suggest it should be cut down?

Mr. PILKINGTON: Again I say it is impossible for an outsider to determine that without the assistance of the heads of departments. I only say, "Here is a vote which we know can be cut down." It may be that it should be cut down to the basis of reducing it to cover only primary schools. In order to find a satisfactory scheme of reduction a great many matters will have to be gone into which I do not know anything about.

Mr. Lambert: You would propose making education a close preserve.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I have no intention of doing so. My whole desire is this: if the education vote can be maintained and if we can at the same time meet the deficit, I do not ask that a penny of the education vote be taken. I only say that if we cannot meet the deficit without taking a part of this vote, we shall have to do it to carry through. If my contention is correct it will follow that some day we shall not have money for education or anything else. I would preserve some portion of the education vote to go on continuously, whereas I fancy some hon. members would say, "Keep it at the full strength at present," and when they found themselves, a few years hence, without funds they would then let it all go.

Mr. O'Loughlen: There are other departments.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I do not think there are any departments at all which ought not to occupy our attention. For instance, let us turn to the Railway Department. I am not able to say that in the Railway Department it is possible to make large economies or retrenchments. I suspect it is, but I am not able to say that it can be done, as I can say in the case of the Education Department. But the position of the Railways to-day is this: there is a loss expected during the present financial year of a sum approaching £400,000. The Railways are the largest receiving and spending department which the Government have to deal with. The problem which is presented by the Railways to-day is the most serious problem that any individual Minister has to deal with, and the sincerity of a Government can be judged to some extent by the manner in which they deal with that department. I ask the House does it indicate that the Government are seized of the importance of that problem and its difficulties, are seized of the importance of the question to the country, when they select to be Minister for Railways the hon. member for Yilgarn (Hon. C. A. Hudson). Against the member for Yilgarn I have not one word to say. He is a reputable member of an honourable profession to which I myself belong, but I do say that it is ridiculous to suggest that the member for Yilgarn was the best person that the Government could find to undertake the problem which faces the Minister for Railways. It is no reflection on the member for Yilgarn to say so. The same might be said of myself if I held the same position. But I do say that the sincerity of the Government can be judged by that appointment of Minister for Railways to face this problem. I ask hon. members can it be said that in the appointment of the member for Yilgarn the Government were actuated solely by the motive of finding a person who was most capable of dealing with this, the greatest problem which has to be dealt with by any individual Minister? I think, to that question there is but one answer. Indeed, if the Ministry were seriously dealing with this question, one would expect that the Minister for Railways, whoever he might be, would be recognised to have in that position sufficient to occupy the attention of one man. If the member for Yilgarn were the most capable man in Australia for the



position of Minister of Railways, then I venture to say it would be absurd to burden him with the further duties of Minister for Mines.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: You must remember that the Railways are under a special Act.

Mr. PILKINGTON: That is perfectly true, but what I am putting forward is that the problem which has to be dealt with by the Minister for Railways is the biggest problem that any individual Minister in the present Government is faced with, and I submit to the House that the manner in which that matter has been dealt with is not in accordance with the best interests of the State, and does not show a desire to deal with the matter in the best interests of the State. I say, in fact, the appointment was actuated by party considerations. When I say party considerations, I should like to let members understand that I do not speak of party as a thing which is in itself evil; for when party means that there is an association together of men for political purposes, men who are bound together by an honest and sincere political faith, then party is a good thing. However, the appointment of the member for Yilgarn was not based upon any consideration of any political faith.

Mr. Green: Are there not other Ministers who might be open to criticism as well?

Mr. PILKINGTON: There is no question about that. I have not selected the member for Yilgarn for criticism for any personal reason. I happen to have criticised him because he is put in charge of this, the greatest receiving and spending department of the Government, and because it appears to me that proper care in the making of such appointment was not exercised. That is the only reason why I have selected that Minister.

Hon. P. Collier: It was as bad, if not worse, to put the important Department of Agriculture under an Honorary Minister.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I must be allowed to point out that if I were to criticise the Government in detail I might detain hon. members a great deal longer than hon. members would like to be detained. I may say I am attempting to confine myself to those matters which concern the finances of the State, or are closely connected therewith; many matters to which I should otherwise refer I propose to pass over in silence. The next point I would consider has been already referred to this evening, namely, that of State enterprises. I refer to it in this connection: I am desirous of knowing what is the policy of the Government in connection with State enterprises. The matter is one which in my view at any rate is of very great importance. I am not attacking State enterprises, and never have done so, on the ground that they do not pay—the majority of them I believe do not pay—that is not the importance of the matter. The reason, I believe, why the majority of persons, who have a strong opinion on the matter, disapprove of State enterprises is this: we believe that the prosperity of a country necessarily depends upon the success of private individuals in business, and we also believe that when a State engages in business in competition with private individuals private enterprise is then choked. In other words, State enter-

prise when in competition with private enterprise tends to choke the prosperity of a country. That, put very shortly, is the political belief which I hold, and which I think most hon. members believe is sincere and which they see the reason of. No doubt I shall be told that I am raising here a controversial question. The answer is that a controversial question is not being raised by me; it is here. It is raised by the facts themselves. Here are State trading concerns in being, and the public and this House are entitled, I think, to know from the Government what their policy is with regard to them, one way or the other. Is it their policy to maintain these enterprises, or to get rid of them?

Mr. O'Loughlen: To maintain them.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I do not know whether the hon. member is right or wrong. Not long ago I introduced a deputation to the Premier, and the members of that deputation were desirous of knowing what the policy of the Government was. The Premier gave us a very long answer, and was followed by the Minister for Works, and we went away without knowing what the policy was. I am not criticising the Premier for his answer on that occasion, because I do not know whether the Attorney General had told him what the policy of the Government was. If he had not done so, the Premier, of course, would not know. Under these circumstances, the difficulty in which the Premier was placed is obvious.

The Minister for Works: You are entirely wrong there.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The Minister for Works told us that he was very strongly against State enterprises, but that he was going to carry them on. The Premier told us that he was always against State enterprises, and that he always would be against them, that we all knew what his views were, but still "at the same time," he said, in effect, "State enterprises are going to be carried on." We were told that whatever the policy of the Government was and whatever the Government thought—but what they thought they would not tell us—they were going to carry on these State enterprises exactly in the same way as if hon. members opposite were in charge of them.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): Quite right.

Mr. PILKINGTON: What we are entitled to know is, what is the policy of the Government? Are the Government in favour of the State enterprises or not? I can quite understand the Government saying, "We cannot put an end to them at the moment," but is it their policy to get rid of them or is it not?

The Premier: Now we are coming to it.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The Premier may like to say to one section of his supporters that it is the policy of the Government to carry on, and to another section that it is not their policy to do so, but the Government should have some definite policy upon a matter which is here in our midst. Let them say either that they are in favour of State enterprises or against them. This House and the public are entitled to have an answer to that question.

Hon. P. Collier: Is it their policy to sit upon the fence?



Mr. PILKINGTON: That is apparently what they are trying to do in this matter, and I am afraid it is extremely uncomfortable for them.

Mr. Lambert: And you are not likely to make it any more comfortable for them.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I was merely endeavouring to afford them a little assistance in the matter. There are many questions upon which I should like to have touched, but do not propose to speak upon them at this juncture because they do not immediately concern the State's finances. I have in mind, however, such a matter as the curious development of an elective Ministry.

Mr. Mullany: If you were in power, would you get rid of State enterprises at once?

Mr. PILKINGTON: If I had my way, I would tell the public that my policy was to get rid of them at the earliest possible opportunity. Of course, I would not throw them away.

The Minister for Works: That is what you were told by myself.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I am very glad that the Minister for Works has now explained what he had intended to say, but did not say. If he will look at the account of the interview, he will find that he did not say this at all. If it is the policy of the Government, as a Government, to get rid of the State enterprises at the earliest possible date, I am glad to hear it, and trust that they will show that they mean to do this by bringing in a Bill, which I think will be necessary, to enable them to dispose of them.

Member: Would you dispose of the Government railways?

Mr. PILKINGTON: It is true that the railways form a part of the State enterprises, but when I speak of State trading concerns or State enterprises I refer to those concerns which are in competition with private enterprises.

Mr. Munsie: The Midland Railway is a private enterprise.

Mr. PILKINGTON: There is one other matter to which I wish to refer, but which is connected comparatively remotely with the finances of this State, and that is a matter which was debated in the House when the Wheat Marketing Bill was before us some few weeks ago. This is a matter upon which I appeal to the Government to speak with a little more candour. I may have misapprehended what took place, and what I read in "Hansard." The Minister for Works tells me that I entirely misapprehended what he said the other day. At all events, the same misapprehension under which I have suffered was in the minds of others who were present, with the exception of the Premier who has not yet told me what he thought of it. The question to which I wish to refer is that of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. There was a proposition put forward by hon. members opposite which appeared to me to be a very reasonable one. They said, "We want to know how it was that the zone system, which the Government had intended to recognise or to adopt, or had contemplated adopting, was abandoned." It was, in fact,

abandoned and the result was that the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., got the whole job.

Hon. P. Collier: We have had no explanation as to that yet.

Mr. PILKINGTON: My impression is that this House has had no explanation yet, but I am perfectly satisfied that there is a sound, simple, and good explanation available.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The members of the Country party know.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The explanation which was given by the Premier, who got up to explain, was that he had never given any undertaking that there should be a zone system. No one ever said he had done so; that was not the point. The point was, why was the zone system given up? It had never been entirely adopted, but clearly had been contemplated. It was, however, given up, and one company got the lot. I confess after all that has been said in the House, that if the man in the street goes away thinking that there is something odd about it, he is justified in the attitude he adopts. When I speak of the man in the street, I mean the general public, who have not had the advantage of hearing a private explanation between closed doors. The general public must be wondering what the explanation is. I believe the explanation to be an extremely simple one, and I trust I am right. I repeat, the zone system was contemplated. The Government considered, whether on representation or not I do not know, that as the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., was a farmers co-operative company, it was a fair thing that the farmers should have an opportunity of dealing with their own company, and consequently the Government said, "All right, we will not have the zone system. You can have the whole country, and the farmers can deal with the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., or the other firms." The other firms then said, "We will not come in." If that is the explanation, which I have gathered from various sources, then there is nothing wrong in what has been done except that the Government have surrounded the matter with a veil of mystery, for what reason I do not know.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: They could not go to another agent. They were compelled under the Act to go to the agent who was appointed.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The difference was this, that if the zone system was done away with and the whole of the country thrown open to the agents, then the farmers would be able to deal with their own company, the co-operative company.

Mr. Maley: Who suggested the zone system?

Mr. PILKINGTON: I do not know, and that point does not matter. The point that requires explanation, and upon which members opposite were asking for an explanation, was that the zone system had been contemplated and was then thrown up. What was the reason? That question was not answered.

Mr. Lambert: Do you attach any political significance to the matter?

Mr. PILKINGTON: No. I believe the thing to have been honest, straight-forward



and right, but I do complain that the Government threw a veil of mystery over it. I feel keenly about the matter, although I am not a Country party man or a Farmers and Settlers' Association man. I do, however, firmly believe that this co-operative movement in Western Australia amongst the farmers is a sound one. It is in fact a sound form of private enterprise, and if the Government would only keep their noses out of it the thing will be a success, as it has been a success elsewhere. If the Government put their noses into it, it will not be a success. If the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., have been or are at any time unfairly favoured by the Government, that will be the end of the co-operative movement. That movement will be damned for ever, and rightly so. What I have said about the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., is this, that I believe that the transaction between them and the Government was a perfectly straightforward, proper and right one. I cannot put the position plainer than that. I believe that the only thing that was wrong was that the Government allowed the transaction to be surrounded by mystery, and they have not given a clear explanation of the surrounding facts. I am not suggesting that there was anything wrong. On the contrary, I have suggested that everything was right. What I say is that if any Government try unfairly to assist any of these co-operative concerns, the concern must prove a failure; that if this co-operative movement relies upon the Government, seeks to be bolstered up with Government funds, it will fail. I believe in the co-operative movement so long, and so long only, as it remains a private enterprise, working out its own salvation. I have been endeavouring to explain why it is most important that the Government should not present proper actions in such a mysterious manner as to make those actions look wrong. The co-operative movement will depend for its success entirely on working out its own salvation.

The Minister for Works: I say the action of the Government has been straightforward and above board.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I am afraid that the Minister for Works, having been misunderstood by me, now seeks to get level by misunderstanding me. There are certain matters upon which I should like to understand the position of the Government. I have touched upon those matters, and they amount shortly to these: Do the Government recognise that the present rate of increase of the annual deficit, if not checked, must land the State in financial disaster? Do the Government recognise that the proposals so far made by them to check such increase, are inadequate? If the Government do not recognise that their proposals are inadequate, will the Government give the figures and estimates showing how such proposals are adequate? Do the Government believe they can put the finances of the State on a sound basis? If so, will the Government state how they propose to do so, giving figures and estimates showing the expected results? Have the Government formulated

any scheme for dealing with the present financial condition of the Railway Department? If so, what is it? Are the Government in favour of maintaining the State trading concerns or not? If the Government do not know the answer to this last question, will the Government say so?

Mr. Munsie: The Premier ought to ask you to give notice of those questions.

Hon. P. Collier: They are very pertinent, anyhow.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The Government have plenty of time in which to find the answers; and, if they give satisfactory answers to these questions, I shall be the most pleased man in this House. I should like to conclude by saying that if the Government will tackle the question of the finances vigorously, they will find no firmer or more loyal supporter in this House than myself, but that if they refuse to do so—and I confess that up to the present, with the exception, perhaps, of the Colonial Treasurer, they do not appear to me to have done so—I am bound to be their opponent in this House. For to me it is plain that any Government who, in the present crisis, sit in office and do not resolutely and purposefully deal with the financial question, are in office for the benefit of themselves and not in the interests of the State.

Mr. HARRISON (Avon) [§.20]: I am very pleased that members of this House have made an attempt to carry on the business of the State by means of a National Government. It is not the followers of the National Government who are at fault—if anyone is at fault—that the best men in this House are not on the Treasury bench or in the Cabinet. By the expedient of an elective Ministry, members on the Opposition side as well as members on this side had the opportunity of entrusting Ministerial portfolios to the men best qualified to promote the interests of the whole of the people of this State. It is a great pity, therefore, as regards not only Western Australia but also the Commonwealth, that the Opposition have seen fit to stand aside. If ever there was a time in the history of this State and of the Commonwealth when all parties should have joined hands for the uplifting of administration, this is the time, during the war. For three years past many members of this House have had that as an objective, and it ought to have been carried into effect. Let me point out that no section of the community can reap advantage at the expense of other sections without the whole community suffering. It is not for me to-day to plead for any particular section of our community. I merely point out that if one of the three great sections of Western Australia suffers, the other two are bound to suffer also. We cannot injure the industrial portion of our community—say, by placing upon them burdens greater than they can bear—without necessarily affecting primary energy and industrial energy and commercial energy. Three separate strands cannot possibly bear as heavy a weight as can the same three strands if solidly combined in a rope. And never has this State had to carry such a weight as it has to carry to-day. We speak of reducing



the deficit and of the Treasurer's duty in that connection. But is it possible for this State to meet its current obligations while from 30,000 to 40,000 of its best and most energetic citizens, men from 18 to 45 years of age, are away at the Front?

Hon. P. Collier: But an attempt can be made to prevent the State from drifting.

Mr. HARRISON: To that end we want the aid of gentlemen of the ability of the hon. member who has just interjected. The hon. member had the opportunity, but refused to avail himself of it; and it is not the fault of this side of the House if he is not on the Treasury bench administering. If Western Australia is to have the best that this tenth Parliament can give the people, we must be united in our efforts. Even if the best of our manhood were not away at the Front, there would still be the difficulty of meeting our current indebtedness, because we have not the outlet for our national energy—we have not the ships needed to carry the product of our energy to the markets of the world. It was not my intention to make a speech to-night. The leader of the Opposition declined to make a speech. There is, however, one specially important matter, one vitally important matter, which I desire to bring before hon. members. I could not move the adjournment of the House, though I believe the matter to be of such national weight as to warrant a motion for the adjournment in order to permit of its discussion. I refer to the position of the primary industries, and especially of agriculture, relatively to the rabbit danger. I am not going from the sublime to the ridiculous. Before I sit down I shall endeavour to make hon. members realise what the rabbit question really means. During the last 12 months the pest has developed to an extent not realised even by the farmers themselves. I want the Government to make every farmer with even one rabbit on his property realise what the danger is, not only to himself, but to the entire industry and to the State. The Country party want the Government to set to work immediately distributing poison all over Western Australia to the vermin boards and roads boards. Every farmer should be made to realise how much depends on his efforts in the first 14 days of February. During that fortnight every farmer with a rabbit on his property should be engaged on the destruction of that rabbit. We must have concerted action, right throughout every farm and every holding that carries a single rabbit. To-day on my property there are 20 rabbits where there was only one last year. Many farmers, in many districts, have lost hundreds of acres of crop. We have it that numbers of these farmers will not be able to continue, and this applies even to farmers whom the Industries Assistance Board are paying 9s. per day in order to keep them on their holdings. Even such men have been compelled to leave their properties on account of the rabbits. Between the two fences the pest is now so serious that unless we all go to work simultaneously it cannot be checked. Some farmers who to-day have a few rabbits on their properties think it is a good thing, and that

they will be able to get a few dinners off the rabbits, and that it will not matter. To-day they feel secure. But in the course of a few weeks they will lose their next season's crop by reason of the rabbits. The period suitable for successful poisoning is only short. Every day lost between now and the middle of February may mean the loss of many acres of crop next year. That is where the seriousness and extreme urgency of the matter lie. I suggest that the Government should within 24 hours get into communication with the various farming districts and centres, and send out poison all over the State. I suggest, further, that the farmers be advised through the "Government Gazette" that they must during, say, the first 14 days of February comply with the conditions of an Order-in-Council to be issued in this connection by the Minister for Lands. Unless these steps are taken, we shall not get the farmers to realise the seriousness of the position.

Mr. Maley: What about the rabbits on Crown lands?

Mr. HARRISON: There is no question that the Crown lands are the breeding grounds of the rabbits. But the rabbits congregate most where the most succulent feed is obtainable, and the most succulent feed is obtainable where the farmer cultivates the land and conserves the moisture. Throughout the salt lake districts, around the edges of the lakes, there is succulent feed to-day. The attention of the Government should in the first instance be directed to destroying the rabbits where the succulent feed exists. Attention should then be directed to the Government's own lands right throughout the State as far as it can possibly be done. There are not only the assets of the farmers to be considered, but the assets of the Industries Assistance Board, and the assets of the Agricultural Bank; and, further, the interests of our railway system are also menaced by the rabbit pest. If hon. members will go into the matter closely, and view it as it should be viewed, they will realise the immediate seriousness of the position. I have risen in order to bring the rabbit question before the House. I want the Government to take the matter in hand seriously without waiting even 24 hours. What are we to do? It is up to every one of us, no matter where he sits in this House, to do his level best for the State in this danger. I do not agree with the views expressed by the member for Perth (Mr. Pilkington) in regard to reducing the Education Vote. The one word for Western Australia to-day is efficiency, in whatever direction we can attain it. The present expenditure of the Education Vote may or may not be the best expenditure in the interests of Western Australia, but it is the very last vote we should reduce if that reduction is going to affect efficiency. The losses which have resulted from those who have gone to the front and not returned will have to be made up by our boys and girls; they will have to carry the weight of what is ahead of us. They will have to repay the whole of the military expenditure which we have incurred, and they will have to do not only that but they will have to keep the wheels of industry



moving, and they will have to bring up the succeeding generation, and if we are to keep our place in the world's markets, if we are to remain efficient, we cannot repudiate our obligations; we shall have to provide for our children the best means whereby they will be able to maintain a state of efficiency. We must, therefore, not neglect our primary, secondary and technical schools. We must do for the children of Western Australia the very utmost that is within our power, and not only in connection with education but in all other matters as well. As I pointed out three years ago, we want to modernise our departments, but, as the member for Perth declared, I am not here to show how the departments are to be modernised. We have brains in Western Australia capable of bringing about that improvement. An attempt has been made to do that in connection with some of our trading concerns. These have been brought into line with the trading concerns outside, and the nearer we get to the successful methods adopted elsewhere, the more efficient will those concerns become. It has been stated that there is only one method by which that can be done, and it is by the appointment of a board. We should get away from jealousies which exist.

Hon. T. Walker: Do you mean a board over the whole public service?

Mr. HARRISON: I dare say that would be a very good idea. If I remember correctly, I made a suggestion some years ago that a gentleman from one of the banking institutions should be appointed to conduct such an investigation into the service, and I pointed out that his salary would be saved in no time. The question of that expense would be nothing at all in comparison to the ultimate saving which would be effected. I am told that certain departments impose charges against other departments, whilst some departments do not make a charge at all for services rendered. Yet they receive money from the Treasury. How can we define the cost of government if one department makes a charge and another does not? I throw out the suggestion which I have just made as a means of overcoming the difficulty. We can also, by amalgamating departments, get more effective work done without duplicating that work and bringing about complications as well. In that way also we could save money and achieve better results. I would be very glad if that question, too, were tackled. We should do more than to preach economy; we should practise it. In this very Chamber we ask far too many questions across the floor of the House. If every question costs, in the aggregate, £10, members should see the wisdom of economising in that direction. Unless there is some matter which is really important to the State as a whole, and the answer to which is going to be of benefit, a question should not be asked with reference to it across the floor of this Chamber. I trust that this tenth Parliament of Western Australia will leave its mark and that we will get above trying to make political capital out of the other side. The people are sick and tired of this changing of policy after policy. Let us rise above the practices of the

past and do our best for the State and Empire.

Mr. GRIFFITHS (York) [8.36]: It was not my intention to speak on the Address-in-reply; I was going to follow the good example set by the leader of the Opposition because I felt, as he did, that it would be saving so much of the country's time and money. There are, however, one or two things which I desire to bring under notice, but which should not take more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. We have had laid before us in the past the policy of the Government I have the honour to support.

Hon. T. Walker: Honour?

Mr. GRIFFITHS: Honour. The fourth paragraph in the Speech refers to the question of repatriation. We have been away for two months engaged on the Referendum campaign, and whilst I say that we as a State can congratulate ourselves upon the result of our efforts, so far as the vote was concerned, there has been a grievous disappointment to many of us that the call to supply reinforcements for our men at the front has been turned down by the Eastern States.

Hon. T. Walker: That is not correct. Reinforcements and conscription are two different things.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: I do not desire to introduce anything of a controversial nature but I would like to mention that I have letters in my possession from my mother who describes to me the horrors of a Zeppelin raid over London when she, with many others, was forced to go into an underground tube and remain there from 8.30 in the evening until 2.30 next morning. In graphically describing what took place, she mentioned that in going out of the tube were to be seen mothers with babies in arms and two or three children dragging behind, and it was common to hear remarks such as this. "I hope to goodness they have not been in our street." Great hardships were inflicted upon women and children there. I have my son here now who, after nearly three years of service in the trenches, was attacked with trench fever and only had 10 days' leave when he was ordered back to the trench, only to be re-ordered back to the hospital. Is it small wonder that many of us feel strongly the neglect of Australia to supply reinforcements, so as to enable those brave men who have been fighting so long to get that rest which they need so badly. Had the hon. member who interjected the experience of going home and finding it in ruins, and perhaps his wife and children amongst the ruins, he would feel on this subject as strongly as I do.

Hon. T. Walker: How do you know I have not had it.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: I am judging by the interjection.

Hon. T. Walker: My interjection was that you were confusing the two things.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: I am not going to be taken off the track. If we do not send men to assist those at the front, it is certainly up to us to do the best we can for them when they return here. I am not going to deal with the Normalup Inlet scheme, and in regard to the