

not only of discrimination, but men who are entirely free from even the slightest suspicion of bias towards either of the interested parties, the employers and employees. The inspectors proposed to be appointed are members of the Police Force. I know of no more fitting people to act in that capacity, but I do suggest that this Bill may make us wonder whether it is not unwise that the members of the Police Force should be associated with any outside organisation, either political or industrial.

On motion by Hon. W. J. Mann, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 6.11 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly.

*Thursday, 5th October, 1944.*

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

### MOTION—URGENCY.

#### *Hay Crops and Harvesting Problems.*

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received the following letter from the member for Pingelly:—

I desire, with your concurrence, to move the adjournment of the House today to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, viz.: the need to make provision for an assured supply of labour for handling the hay crop, and a Government assurance that those who cut hay crops will receive payment for such surplus hay that they have at the stipulated price, as published in today's "The West Australian."

Unless action on these lines is taken within the next few days much hay that it is possible to cut will be lost for such purposes, and serious difficulties may later on arise.

It will be necessary for seven members to rise in their places to support the hon. member's proposal.

Seven members having risen in their places,

MR. SEWARD (Pingelly) [4.34]: I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

I would not intrude this matter on the time of the House were it not for the seriousness and urgency of the position as set out in my letter to you, Mr. Speaker. In case there should be any members not au fait with hay-cutting matters, and in view of the statements one hears from time to time in this connection, I would like to point out that hay-cutting is different from other farming operations as it has to be carried out on the day the crop is ready to be cut. A crop may be a hay-cutting proposition today, whereas next Saturday would be too late to cut it. Therefore the matter has to be treated as urgent. I saw it stated only last Monday that a decision had to be made on the question within the next month or two. That is obviously far from being the case. In an average season another month would probably be time for making a decision in late districts in the Great Southern, but I would remind the House that it has been the practice in the past in districts north of Moora to cut hay before the Royal Show, which used to be held in the first week of October. As a matter of fact, hay-cutting is in progress in those districts now and in some it may be too late to cut. Consequently the decision cannot possibly be allowed to be made as late as within the next month or so.

The urgency is the greater this season because good hay crops in the State are few indeed and, as far as I can learn, the majority are from Northam northwards. Therefore, in the early districts, the crops will have to be cut earlier than would normally be the case. Then again much depends on the weather. If we get cold, showery, wet or dull weather, hay-cutting is delayed, but we have been getting the reverse. We have been having unduly hot weather, with the result that unless definite action is taken before this week-end many crops that could be cut for hay will be lost for that purpose and will have to be left to be harvested for grain. There is a need to cut as much hay as possible this year. Members may recall that we had a long dry summer last year, and that that was followed by a fairly severe winter in which feed was abnormally short. The result is that all our reserves are depleted. Only today I learnt of a big firm in Perth

which is dealing in stock and which wanted to get some hay from a merchant. When the firm made application it was told there would be no hay available until the new season's supply came in.

There is no reserve in this country and we are now facing the summer with stock in a condition which is far from good. The stock has gone through a severe winter and it must be carried through the summer months. We shall require a large amount of hay, probably more than usual, in order to meet our needs until such time as the prospects in regard to next year's feed supplies are known. Then again the North-West has to be provided with fodder. All those factors bearing on the case make it urgent that any hay we can possibly cut for our own requirements should be cut. On top of that we have the Eastern States clamouring for any hay they may be able to obtain from any other State. So urgent is the need in the Eastern States that the Commonwealth Government has decided to make available a payment to cover costs of shipping hay to those in need. It may be asked why, if the hay is there to cut, the farmers do not cut it. There are two difficulties to be overcome. One is an indefiniteness regarding finance and the other is the lack of manpower.

When the question arises concerning the cutting of hay the farmer is faced with this prospect: If he cuts for hay he has a lot of work to do. He has to employ a certain amount of labour and the work is harder. There is no doubt about that. Then, having gone through this hard work, he has to wait until he has cut the hay into chaff before he obtains any more than a small percentage of payment for it. After stacking that hay it has to be kept until February or May or perhaps even as late as September. If it is not to be cut until the later months, the farmer must wait until then before he can secure his payment. On the other hand, he has the choice of letting his crop go for grain and then with the use of tractors and the advantage of bulk-handling he is in a much better position. Members will readily appreciate that it is much easier to allow a crop to grow for grain than it is to cut it for hay. The farmer knows that if he lets his crop go for grain it will be garnered by January and will go straight into the bulk bins, after which he will receive his cheque in payment. As a

matter of fact, there is no comparison between the two propositions.

If a farmer is confronted with the necessity for a decision as to whether he will cut for hay or allow his crop to grow for grain, he knows that it is easier and even more profitable to allow it to grow for grain. In the circumstances the farmer must be offered some inducement to cut his crop for hay. Then comes the question of guaranteeing him a price for his product. When a buyer goes along to interview him, he asks the farmer if he is willing to cut his crop for hay at an agreed price, and the farmer may reply in the affirmative. The farmer may say that he wants the hay cut for chaff before February. Naturally the farmer will want to have the use of his paddocks and he will also want his money. If the agent does not guarantee that he will have a cutting machine on the farm to enable the chaff to be cut in February, the farmer will certainly not cut for hay. Further, the agents have only a certain number of machines available, and therefore they cannot definitely promise to have a cutter on every farm property between now and February. To do so would be quite impossible. The agent probably will say that he will endeavour to do so, but that if he cannot the farmer will have to stack the hay and thatch it so as to preserve the stack until it can be cut for chaff. The farmer may not agree to that, and therefore the opportunity to buy that crop will have been lost.

There is another matter regarding which I have had instances quoted to me three or four times during the last few days. The farmers have a recollection of their experience in 1939, when the State was faced with a serious shortage of hay and chaff and farmers were urged to cut their crops for hay. They were told they would receive a better price for hay than they would get for grain. The Minister for Lands quoted the price that would be paid, and, speaking from memory, I think it was £3 per ton. What happened? Agents, including those representing the Agricultural Bank, went round the country districts and interviewed the farmers on their properties, urging them to cut their crops for hay. What was the result? Many farmers found themselves left with two or three stacks of hay that could not be sold, and therefore they had to dispose of them for from £1 to 30s. below what

they had been led to believe they would get, while in some instances the stacks had to be kept until August or September. In some cases they had to carry their stacks forward into the next year. In view of what happened then, if we were to ask farmers to cut for hay now, they would say, "No, I know what happened in 1939. I want something more definite. I want to know exactly what payment I am to get and I want to know when the cheque will be paid to me."

That phase of the problem has to be determined within the next few days, failing which many of the present crops will not be cut for hay. There is also the buyer's point of view. The buyer goes out to secure hay or chaff at a certain price which was mentioned in "The West Australian" today, namely, £4 10s. in the stack. While he knows that he can buy at that price, he is also aware that he cannot sell at a figure beyond the amount fixed. That is quite all right. The buyer secures sufficient for him to handle. If he should overbuy either hay or chaff he knows he will have to store the surplus. He has to make provision for storage until the following autumn.

The Minister for Mines: Has the price been fixed for chaff?

Mr. SEWARD: Yes, and as the buyer is not allowed to increase the price on account of the storage over a matter of months, as a business man he says, "I will not enter into a contract to purchase a quantity of hay or chaff that I cannot handle." There are two alternatives: Either he does not enter into a deal or he buys and disposes to the first available purchaser, which will probably be someone in the Eastern States. While I hope there may be a small surplus of chaff in Western Australia during the next two or three months, unless something is done to enable buyers to recoup themselves for the cost of storage, I think that later on in the autumn and certainly in the winter months, we will be faced with a serious shortage of hay and chaff. That is when the trouble will arise. Therefore I ask the Minister for Works, who is acting as Premier, to take this matter up and endeavour to secure a price that will recoup the expense entailed by storage requirements. The second difficulty that arises concerns the manpower position. Last night and this morning I had this phase brought very forcibly to my notice. After I got home last night I met

a man and, with several others, discussed the hay position. To my surprise this man said that he could cut 1,000 tons of hay tomorrow. We looked at him incredulously because all the talk previously had been about a shortage of hay. The man was asked why he did not cut for hay, and he replied that he could not do so because of the manpower position, and therefore he would not think for a moment of tackling the job.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Do you know the district where he is operating?

Mr. SEWARD: Yes, Coorow, and the hon. member knows the farmer, I think. Another man who is farming in the Dalwallinu district, said he could cut 2,000 tons of hay but would not do so because of the manpower situation.

Mr. Doney: There are many 2-ton crops in the Dalwallinu district.

Mr. SEWARD: When coming to Parliament House this morning, I asked a man whom I met what he thought about the hay situation. He replied, "Don't ask me. I know what happened four years ago when we were asked by the Government to cut for hay. I and my wife went out and stooked the hay, and what happened? I would not touch the proposition with a 40-ft. pole." Then we have the statement by the Manpower Directorate which was published in "The West Australian" this morning. It is obvious that if this problem is to be dealt with, it must be decided within the next few days.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It is almost too late now.

Mr. SEWARD: Of course. Here, however, is what the Manpower Directorate had to say about the matter—

In making a statement on the labour position for the hay harvest, an officer of the Manpower Directorate commented on remarks published in yesterday's issue of "The West Australian." "It is rather a pity," he said, "that the true position was not ascertained before the statement was made. The supply of labour for fodder conservation has received a great deal of attention for some time. Not only has the Manpower Directorate been exploring various avenues, but others, particularly the hay merchants and the Northam War Agricultural Committee, have been very active in the matter. The latter body has recently taken a census of requirements within its territory.

"I think most persons in the State are alive to the shortages of fodder," he continued. "This is apparent from the number of volunteers who are willing to undertake the work for a period. We are not now only concerned

with the provision of fodder for this State but also efforts are being made to provide some relief to drought-stricken areas in other portions of the Commonwealth.

Here are the arrangements—

“Arrangements have been made for a considerable number of men to be available within an area extending to 60 miles from Northam. Farmers within that region should send their hay harvesting requirements to the National Service Officer at Northam. That officer collaborates very closely with the Northam War Agricultural Committee, and, of course, with the head office of the Manpower Directorate in this State. Farmers outside that area should send their requirements to the Manpower Directorate, Box R. 1273, Perth.

In stating their requirements, full details as to number of persons, accommodation, wages, fares, period of employment including commencing date, full address of farm, and any other helpful information must be given. It must be remembered that, generally speaking, men with their own camping equipment are few and far between, nowadays.

That kind of stuff is utterly useless. The proposal is to operate 60 miles from Northam. Northam is normally a big hay district, and there is a great deal of hay in that district today. But the instances of 1,000 tons and 2,000 tons are outside the limit of 60 miles from Northam. What is the position? These men have to decide within the next two days. They have to write to the manpower authorities; and after they have done so, then, according to my experience, it is a million to one that in due course a form will arrive for them to fill in.

The Minister for Mines: A prescribed form!

Mr. SEWARD: All right. The man sets to work and fills in that form and sends it to the manpower authorities. Having waited a week or so, he will probably ring up in desperation and ask what is to be done regarding his manpower requirements. That sort of thing has been going on for years. I will quote a case in point. Some farmers in the Newdegate district made all arrangements through the manpower office and the local committee for shearers to be obtained at their farms, 60 miles from the railway. The shearers arrived, and they shored 3,000 sheep out of 7,000; and then they declared that they had to keep another appointment. I do not know that any other shearers have arrived to take their place.

Mr. SPEAKER: I think we are getting away from the motion.

Mr. SEWARD: I shall return to it, Sir. What I am stating is an illustration of the

delays that take place in dealing with the manpower authorities. What is the alternative? Unhesitatingly I say that it is the Army. There we have many men who are, to use their own words, wasting their time, insofar as they do not appear to have any work to do. We also have many army vehicles whose tyres are perishing for want of use. Surely it would be possible to get a detachment of men from the Army to go out and handle the harvest! All that is necessary is that any farmer who has a crop to cut for hay should get into communication with his road board secretary, who could supply confirmation of the farmer's statement to the manpower authorities, including the labour requirements. If that were done, and army vehicles are available, there is no reason why the men should not be on the job next morning. That would solve the problem. But are we to have this interminable correspondence? If so all the wheat crops will be lost. Army help in the shape of army vehicles and personnel are to be seen in photographs appearing in English illustrated papers. If that help can be furnished in England, where there is bombing and the people are almost in the front line, I see no reason why help could not be made available here.

Mr. Watts: That is being done in New Zealand.

Mr. SEWARD: Is that so? This proposition was put up to the Army Department during last week, and refused by that department. Why was it refused? Is not the ensuring of the necessary fodder for stock an army work, or a vital matter connected with army activities as much as anything else is? We want the feed for our horses and stock. If the men are given what is merely a slight diversion of employment for a few weeks in ensuring feed for our stock, it is just as effective training for them as anything could be. I venture to say the morale of the men will be increased 100 per cent. if they do this work. I submit this suggestion to the Acting Premier in the hope that he will take the matter up with the Premier and the Deputy Premier, who of course is Minister for Lands and Agriculture and has an intimate knowledge of the subject in all respects, so that they can see a head of the Army instead of conducting the business through the channel of the lesser lights.

It may be quite pertinently asked whether any information has been obtained as to the quantity of hay available. It is conceivable that we may rush in, having made all arrangements, only to find that sufficient labour has already been attracted. I have endeavoured to get that information, but the only result of my inquiries has been that less binder twine was sent out to the country this year than last year. The shortage of hay is much more acute this year than it was last year, and one would think that more binder twine would be sent out this year than was sent out last year. In one particular district I saw the best crops that I have seen in this season; yet I am assured today that only seven balls, not bales, of twine have been sold in that district. Then there is another matter which must be seriously considered, and that is the requirements of the North-West for baled hay. Unless we take action to deal with the matter, that particular activity will be lost sight of and an acute shortage will result later. The matter was mentioned to me when I was discussing the subject, because it was thought that something might be done to alleviate the position.

Then again a person said to me, "You know, we might get summer rains." I have no hesitation in saying that if we get summer rains they will, instead of relieving the position, make it considerably worse. Summer rains wash away the dry feed, and the farmer has to start feeding his stock straight-away. Next, the grass seeds germinate and all the plants are burnt up by the hot summer sun. Those rains would only accentuate the position instead of relieving it. I have endeavoured to outline the extreme urgency of the motion. As I said at the outset, some definite arrangement must be made before the next week-end is gone; otherwise a lot of crops which would have been cut for hay will have to be left to grow into grain and will be lost to the State.

**MR. MANN** (Beverley): The position is very serious indeed, and I intend to give the House stock figures comparing the facts as they were in 1914 with the facts as they were in 1943. In 1914 we had 4,418,402 sheep and 829,489 cattle. In 1943 the number of our sheep had increased to 10,723,800 and we had 849,618 cattle, of which 236,000 would be dairy cattle. I assume there are 100,000 cattle additional in

the southern areas. If we compare the position today with the position last year, we find that we could cut for hay 253,000 tons. So far as we know, there is no surplus hay in the State today, and I regard the position as most serious. There appear to be some members who consider that our present crops are sufficient to meet the requirements of the State, but I rather doubt that. A friend in my electorate told me a week ago, when I was at Corrigin, that the crops were doing very well, but I am expecting that owing to the long dry spell we have had the yield will be much lower.

As the member for Pingelly has pointed out, we shall have a long summer to face. In 1914 the position in the Great Southern district was better than it was in the eastern wheat-belt. Our trouble also is the question of manpower. It will pay a farmer with a 15-bushel crop of wheat to strip it for wheat rather than to cut it for hay. Another matter that arises is the type of men whom the farmers are asked to employ, such as civil servants and school children, whose labour is practically useless. I saw last year many thousand tons of hay remaining in the stack for months. It had deteriorated and had been ravaged by rabbits. The result was that the farmer said, "I will not cut for hay again, because I cannot get the hay in." In 1941 the Government asked the farmers to cut for hay and they responded. There is still 1,000 tons of that hay in the stack rotting away, not fit to be handled. I know a warrant officer who came from Gingin and appealed to his colonel to let them have his unit so that the Army could handle some hay, stook it and stack it. He thought it would be a change for the men, but his request was refused.

Now, this is a national matter. It does not concern this State alone. South Australia and Victoria are facing the worst season in their history; and surely the Commonwealth Government and the State Governments can co-operate to alleviate the position. If the men in the Army were fighting we would not mind, but they have been in Australia for four years and have not seen a shot fired. They are becoming demoralised. On the figure I have quoted—some 250,000 tons—I do not think Western Australia will have enough hay. Our main hay area is the Avon Valley, Northam, York and down to Beverley. Our

farmers are not going to cut hay at the present prices, without assured labour, and I would point out that there is a somewhat remarkable variation in the prices throughout Australia. In Tasmania, hay is £5 per ton; in New South Wales, £5 15s., and in Western Australia, £4 10s. Unless the Government is prepared to guarantee the farmer a reasonable price, he will not cut hay. Like the member for Pingelly, I have met farmers who would rather not cut for hay because of the possibility of later facing heavy rains like those which we had in 1941. There were tremendous rains in the wheat-belt then, and hay became a drug in the market.

Once a farmer has had a taste of handling hay, he does not want another. Unless there is a definite move in the near future, we shall be faced with depleted stocks. We require about a quarter of a million tons in this State and unless we get that quantity chaos will ensue. I have been in touch with the Agricultural Department and with the merchants, but cannot get satisfaction. A survey should have been made by the Government, through its departments, three weeks ago, especially in view of the approaching very dry summer. We have had a dry year, and men who follow a farming life know that a dry winter is seldom followed by a wet spring. As I say, I regard the position as very serious. For our own salvation we should act immediately. Farmers today are losing much of their crops, and I blame the Commonwealth Government and the State Government for not having realised earlier how serious the position is. I am glad the member for Pingelly has submitted the motion, which I support. I hope to hear from the Government this afternoon what it intends to do in the matter.

**MR. PERKINS (York):** The member for Pingelly and the member for Beverley have made clear to the House the great demand for hay and chaff that will exist this year. There is also the added demand of the Eastern States that we in this State are not normally called upon to satisfy. I do not know whether members have heard the announcement made today by the Minister for Commerce. It is as follows:—

Mr. Scully, the Minister for Commerce, asked for State co-operation in the production and distribution of hay and other stock foods. He said it would be necessary to cut the maxi-

mum quantity of hay in good areas for this season, and he hoped that Western Australia, where conditions were better than elsewhere, would make substantial contributions of hay and chaff to the Eastern States.

That is the position facing Western Australia today. There are our normal requirements to be met, and we are facing the prospect of a longer summer than usual and consequently larger demands for hay within our own State. In addition, as I said, we are being called upon to send supplies to the Eastern States. The bulk of the hay this year will not be available in the normal hay-growing districts. I represent a district which normally supplies a large quantity of the hay required in the State. That is the York district. Unfortunately, all the country in the Avon Valley has suffered from a poor rainfall and in consequence hay crops are definitely lighter than usual, even those crops which are fit to cut for hay. Many growers declare that the crops are not fit to cut for hay at all. The greater quantity of the crops fit to cut for hay this year are outside the normal hay-growing districts; and, with this increased demand for hay, many complications will arise of which I think the majority of members are not aware. Notwithstanding what has been said, ample crops are available to cut for the hay requirements of this State and of the Eastern States.

At the Bruce Rock end of my electorate a hay buyer, to whom I was speaking during the last week-end, told me that he had bought about 2,000 tons. He said that the majority of the crops he had inspected to purchase would yield from 30cwt. to two tons per acre. However, he only covered a limited acreage. A tremendous quantity of hay could be cut in those districts. I understand a similar position exists in Dalwallinu and other areas, but the difficulty is to secure labour to cut and handle the hay. We shall have to take steps to secure that labour. Members must also bear in mind that the farmers to whom I have been referring usually strip their crops for grain; the hay proposition is not particularly attractive to them, because their farm economy is based on stripping the crop for grain. They probably have not suitable machinery to cut a large quantity of hay and would therefore have to make special arrangements in order to cut increased quantities. They probably do

not normally employ enough labour to do that work. In addition, there are difficulties attached to catering for a greatly increased number of men to handle the increased quantity of hay. Another even more important aspect is that if these men in the wheat belt areas cut their crops for hay, they will not have the stubble for sheep feed.

So, as I say, from the point of view of the individual wheat farmer, the hay proposition is not attractive. If he cuts for hay, inevitably he will have to dispose of portion of his sheep flock; and, with the rather difficult store stock position in Western Australia at the moment he probably would not regard the prices he could obtain for his store stock as sufficiently recouped by what he might get for the hay. Actually, it will be more from a desire to help out other producers less fortunate than himself that the wheatbelt farmer will agree to cut a large portion of his crop for hay. There is also an anomaly in the prices fixed by the Prices Commissioner for hay in the stack and in the stook. The price fixed now for wheaten hay is £4 10s. per ton in the stack and £4 per ton delivered to the cutter. Hay to be delivered to the cutter must be placed on wagons, so that actually the extra 10s. a ton is payment for merely stacking the hay. Many growers who have been asked to cut their crops for hay on the basis of sale in the stook, or delivered to the cutter, consider they are being treated harshly in comparison with the man who is able to stack his hay crop.

It is exceedingly difficult for growers in the wheat belt to stack their hay because, as I stated before, their farm economy is based rather on the handling of grain; and therefore the great majority of the crops cut for hay in the wheatbelt will have to be sold in the stook, or on the basis of stook delivered to the cutter. Another difficulty is the question of who shall be responsible for the carrying of supplies for use later in the year. The great portion of the hay likely to be cut in the normal wheatbelt areas will be disposed of on the basis of cutting up directly from the stook. As members probably know, the great majority of the hay from the stook must be cut up by the end of February, at the very latest, if the danger of damage from early rains is to be avoided.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It is not good farming to leave it until February.

Mr. PERKINS: Probably most growers will want it cut by the end of December, but I am saying that the end of February is the maximum time which it can be left in the paddocks. The point I am trying to make is that someone must be responsible for carrying over a very large portion of the hay harvest until later in the year because, as far as the dairying industry is concerned, the supplies will be largely needed from March on to June and July. I do not know whether the Minister for Agriculture will be able to give us any indication of what is being done to ensure that those supplies are carried over but, if they are not, a very serious position will arise for the dairying industry next year should the season be late again—which is quite on the cards.

We cannot work on the assumption that we shall have rain to start the season in March or April of next year. It is quite likely that the stock will have to be fed into the winter months of 1945. I hope that the Minister will be able to make some reassuring announcement in regard to this. If he does not, I suggest to those people who might need fodder throughout the winter months of next year that they give their orders immediately to make sure that the supplies are available for them when they are needed. I do that because I am certain that the producers will refuse to cut hay and stack it on the off chance of its being required at a satisfactory price in the winter months of next year. The position that arose in 1938, when the Agricultural Bank bought quite a lot of hay and induced other farmers to cut on their own account hay which was not required at a later date because of early rains, makes the producers very cautious indeed in regard to cutting hay merely as a speculation. This year, in contradistinction to the position that arose in 1938, wheat is worth anything from 5s. to 6s. a bushel. It may be worth even more.

Mr. Berry: It is about 7s. 6d.

Mr. PERKINS: Sales have been made as high as that I think. In 1938 wheat was 2s. 6d. a bushel. Unless steps are taken to see that hay is actually contracted for by the people who will need it next year, then I am afraid the producers will refuse to be led into cutting their crops on a speculative basis. Speculation is altogether favourable to stripping the wheat for grain

and getting the money forthwith. I stress the point that labour is the key to the immediate problem. Most producers have been working under very difficult conditions for quite a long while. Practically all the farms are understaffed, and unless there is the certainty of sufficient labour being available properly to handle the hay crop I am perfectly certain the majority of producers will refuse to be saddled with any extra work and then have to carry the load on their own shoulders.

I hope some arrangements can be made so that the Army can make available any soldiers who may be in locations where they can help. I understand that whatever men have been made available by the Army in the past have been satisfactory. Both the merchants and the growers who employed them have been very satisfied with the service given. I think it is a great pity indeed that labour was not made available last year, when we had a bountiful season and there were tremendous areas of crop—some of it even self-sown—which could have been cut and so made the reserve available to carry us over a difficult time such as this at a very small economic cost to the State. As things are, to obtain the necessary hay supplies to save ourselves and the producers in the Eastern States, it is necessary to cut very valuable wheat crops which would bring in good returns to the producers and be of great benefit to the State. I did everything I could to get that labour made available last year. I spoke on the matter in the House and I arranged a number of meetings in the country, but I am afraid that there was little response from the authorities.

The small amount of labour made available by the Army was provided at far too late a stage. Most of the crops had got almost ripe before it was made available. Then there was a wild scramble by the merchants to cut whatever hay was fit for cutting. In fact, I saw two or three crops cut for hay that could, a fortnight after, have been stripped for grain. That hay was of very poor quality indeed. I hope the Minister will be able to inform us that the matter has been taken in hand, because it is absolutely urgent that some advice should be given to the growers to the effect that they will be helped out in this regard by labour being made available. I commend the member for Pingelly for moving the motion.

**MR. BERRY** (Irwin-Moore): I wish to commend the member for Pingelly for bringing this motion forward.

**Hon. W. D. Johnson**: Another speaker from the same side of the House.

**Mr. BERRY**: Even at the risk of repetition I am going to show my appreciation by standing up and supporting the motion. When the motion is passed, unless the Minister can assure us that the matter is well in hand, our claims should be telegraphed to the Premier and to the Minister for Agriculture who are in the Eastern States, and at the same time they should be asked to make the strongest representations to compel the Army to find the people necessary to carry out this work, which has become so essential because of the dry conditions and the early closing of the rains, even in this State. This question substantially divides itself into two sections. One is the question of labour and the other is the question of compensation for the work of cutting a crop for hay. First of all I shall deal with the question of compensation to the farmer, because I think that it is not much use finding labour for this purpose unless we know that the farmer is going to take off a crop of hay.

I associate myself very closely indeed with the remarks of the member for York, who pointed out that this hay crop business is no joke. The member for Pingelly stressed the fact that it is hard work. Many members have trudged behind a binder to do the stooking, carting and the hundred and one other little jobs in connection with hay. They know, as well as I do—I have done it too—what an arduous task it is. I imagine that it is the most difficult on the farm. But apart altogether from that, the member for York stressed the fact that we cut so close to the ground with our binders that we damage the feed value of the stubble. He pointed out that wheat stubble has a value from a sheep point of view, but that value is actually cut by the binder, put into the stook and turned into hay. Therefore that value must be recognised. In my district, where there is abundant subterranean clover growing with the crops, the loss is actually greater by virtue of the fact that the subterranean clover—and there is a considerable quantity of it—is taken off and goes to the stook, then to the stack and finally into the



bags of chaff. So there is that additional loss.

But there are even further losses, because those of us who are farming under those conditions find that the following year the subterranean clover does not reappear to the same extent as in the case of those crops not cut for hay, but harvested. Then again there is the price factor. Is it better for the farmer to take off a good wheat crop in the bags, or to take off a hay crop which entails all sorts of doubts, as the member for York said? If we expect these people to carry stacks of hay in their paddocks for any length of time it is our duty, surely, to see that they are recompensed so that what happened before, that is, when the time came for the selling of these stacks of hay it was found that the hay was not wanted, does not recur. That is a very important factor. But the most important to start off with is to see that it is made worth the while of the farmer to cut his crop. He would express his willingness if he could see that it was of advantage to him.

I do not think that the figure of £4 for hay in the stook and £4 10s. in the stack is sufficient to make it worth the farmer's while. It is not in my district. To cut hay means sacrificing the clover-feed properties of the stubble. When this question has been decided then the all-important problem of labour arises. I spoke in this House some years ago and tried to persuade, I do not know whom, that one of the mistakes we were making in this war was indiscriminately recruiting people from all over the wheatbelt and putting them in the Army, and, as a result, leaving the food front to the tender mercies of father and mother who were probably in the sixties, some three or four years ago. That is where we have fallen down on this duty of producing as much in Australia as possible. The people who have been left behind because of indiscriminate culling are no longer capable of carrying on the duties, which, in their patriotism, they were earlier prepared to shoulder. The consequence has been that in recent months we have had appeal after appeal to the manpower authorities to make labour available for such projects as the one we are now discussing.

I have been on several committees at the manpower office, and I know the difficulties of that department. I know that it has

been forced into the stupid position of inviting people to go 60 miles to Northam, as the member for Pingelly told us, to walk behind a binder for the week-end. Those people are inexperienced and become tired in the matter of an hour or two, particularly on a day like today. They are really out for a glorified holiday. Voluntary labour of that sort has never been and never will be satisfactory. I have no sympathy with such proposals. Another proposal that has been made is for community effort, one person jumping over the neighbour's fence to give a hand. That is impossible. The attitude of one farmer towards another is not conducive to that sort of thing being successful, and it would generally happen that when one was binding on his property, others would be binding on theirs also. Therefore that is hopeless. In working on these committees we have had to face the problems of shearing, carting and harvesting wheat and cutting hay. We as a committee knew that there was only one answer, and that answer is the Army. But the Army refused to play, and the Army has refused to play right through. I say that the Army should be made to play.

The Minister for Mines: Who is going to make it?

Mr. BERRY: I do not know, but what is the Prime Minister for? What is the Commonwealth Cabinet for? What is the State Cabinet for?

The Minister for Mines: We have nothing to do with this.

Mr. BERRY: Why does not the State Government do something about it? We have the same cry raised every time, "It is not our business; it is the business of the Commonwealth." Then when we go to the Commonwealth, we are told that it is an Army matter. This is a matter for the country, regardless of what the Minister says. I feel that what he says is so much hot air.

The Minister for Mines: What you are saying is just too silly.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. BERRY: It is not silly, and at any rate, I am not losing my temper over it. We have made appeals to the Army and the Army has fallen down.

The Minister for Mines: I agree with that.

Mr. BERRY: One of the reasons why it has fallen down is that a majority of the

men in the administrative positions in the Army were Militia officers before the war and others out of employment, and they got into the Army and, by a process of proof by exhaustion, have risen to a rank when anything they say goes. Our duty first and foremost is to produce food. This need has been hammered into us for years, and we cannot produce the food unless the Army is prepared to play. The Army must be made to play. It is no good saying the position is such that men cannot be spared from the Army. There are men in the Army who are demoralised through inactivity, men who wished to go oversea and could not go. There are men in the Army who have been idle for many months, but I need not enlarge upon that. Such men would be only too pleased if they were sent out to harvest these crops. We have to make the Army authorities see that point of view.

Certain releases have been made from the Army, but they have been very restricted. In a case of emergency it would be a matter of three weeks for hay cutting and the same for harvesting the wheat, and yet the Army boggles and fiddles and will not do anything. I have no sympathy with the arrogant, stupid, blatant opposition that comes from certain officials in the Army who, if I had my way, would not be even lance-corporals. I trust that something will be done along the lines I have suggested. The hay crop for the present season is endangered by the temperature prevailing to-day. Members must have noticed that such a day causes a change in the colour of the grass. My only objection to the motion is that it might be too late, but the member for Pingelly stressed that something should be done before the week-end and something must be done.

In 1933 this State produced 512,439 tons of hay. Last year the production was 322,600 tons, representing a fall of approximately 40 per cent. We know the reason for that, but the fact remains that that drop of 40 per cent. will become 60 per cent. if we do nothing. In the Eastern States it will probably be 80 per cent. or 90 per cent. In conclusion I suggest that we should be very wary indeed about allowing hay to be exported to the Eastern States unless this labour is made available here and unless the farmer is prepared to cut surplus hay over what I feel will be needed in this State. We have had trouble of this sort before.

To send a statement to the Commonwealth that if the Army cannot play, we won't play, would not be a bad idea. I commend the member for Pingelly for having brought the matter forward, and congratulate the member for Beverley and the member for York on their contributions to the debate.

**HON. W. D. JOHNSON** (Guildford Midland): There is no doubt that the position of the chaff supply in this State and in the Eastern States is causing very great anxiety. I feel that had this motion been moved on the 5th September it would have been of very great assistance in permitting of our organising so that we might get more hay than it is possible to get on the 5th October.

Mr. Doney: Did you at that time foresee the present state of affairs?

**Hon. W. D. JOHNSON**: The position is that the crop which is going to be cut for hay has already been cut or is in process of being cut, or is ready for the binders to go into the crop. If there has been no organisation in anticipation of cutting hay until the 5th October, it will not be cut, because it is getting too late in the season. There are many farmers who have crops suitable for hay, but they cannot cut them simply because they have not the plant for the purpose of hay-cutting. In reply to an interjection, the member for Pingelly was kind enough to tell me that there is 1,000 tons of crop available for hay. I wanted to know where it is, and I ventured the opinion that it is too late to turn it into hay.

Mr. Watts: He said it was at Coorow on the Midland line.

**Hon. W. D. JOHNSON**: We know that the Midland country has an early season. The first hay-cutting is at Geraldton, and farmers along the Midland line cut before quite a number of those in the Eastern districts.

Mr. Seward: There have been 10 inches of rain at Coorow since June.

**Hon. W. D. JOHNSON**: Speaking from practical experience, I would be surprised if there are 1,000 acres standing in Coorow today that is not already up to if not beyond the stage when it can be cut for hay.

Mr. Mann: Hay or prime hay?

**Hon. W. D. JOHNSON**: That is what I want to point out. There is hay and there is prime hay.

Mr. Doney: The Eastern States will be glad to get any sort of hay.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: If there is a farmer at Coorow who has 1,000 acres to cut, I venture to say that he has not the binders to cut it.

Mr. Seward: I said 1,000 tons.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: Well, take 1,000 tons. The member for York knows that there are few people with cutting plants capable of dealing with 1,000 tons in one season. Although a farmer might have a crop in a suitable condition to be cut for hay within the next few days, unless he got assistance from his neighbours by the pooling of binders, it is questionable whether he could get it done in the period now left to him. In my opinion, it is already too late. There is a certain number of chaff-cutters in the State. It is impossible to multiply chaff-cutting plants in days or months.

Mr. Perkins: A few of them are idle, too.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: At the moment, of course, practically all the cutters are idle, because they have cut last season's crop and stored it, and the stored supply is being drawn on. The plants are being overhauled and repaired and the teams put into shape to start cutting this season. What I wish to stress is that the volume of the supply of chaff is the capacity of the cutting plants. I am speaking now of steam-cut chaff. The member for Beverley knows that we all cut some chaff, but not many of us have steam-chaff cutters because we do not need them; we do not market chaff. When a merchant supplies chaff, it must be steam-cut chaff and in prime condition. To produce prime chaff, a steam-cutting plant is essential, and I believe there are only about 11 plants in the State. I went into the matter early this year and discussed it with Mr. Southern and Mr. Stiffold. It is estimated that each cutter, if properly staffed and handled, can cut 4,000 tons in the season, which gives a total of 44,000 tons, provided my figures are correct.

Mr. Mann: How much could a plant cut per day?

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: I do not know.

Mr. Mann: A good cutter can do seven tons a day.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: I know that the average for a cutter is 4,000 tons for the season. I know perfectly well that if a

plant is worked overtime and strained, it is possible to cut more, but the merchant will not strain his plant and will not work overtime. This is understandable; the merchant cannot afford to lose money on the business, therefore he simply works normal hours in accordance with award conditions and rates. We have to realise that the capacity of cutting plants is 44,000 or 45,000 tons, and I venture the opinion that that 45,000 tons or thereabouts has already been cut, is in process of being cut, or will not be cut at all. If we cut 45,000 tons our consumption, so far as I understand the position, would be 30,000 tons a year of chaff in this State. I am speaking of the sale of steam-cut prime chaff.

Mr. Leslie: That is a small percentage.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: A great deal more chaff than that is actually consumed. I cut chaff on my farm but do not market it. It is not prime chaff. The member for Beverley cuts chaff but it is not prime. If he wants prime chaff he sells his hay to a chaff merchant, who brings in his plant and cuts the hay so that he can guarantee to his clients that the prime hay that is then being produced by the member for Beverley has been cut by a steam-cutting plant and is therefore prime. The member for Beverley cannot himself do that. He does not carry a plant on his farm, and no farmer can afford to do that unless he becomes a chaff merchant. I estimate—my figures are my own—that 45,000 tons of hay will be cut, and that of that quantity 15,000 tons will be available for people outside Western Australia. My figures are based on normal conditions. If the season is as bad as some people say the consumption in Western Australia will be greater than 30,000 tons. This is what the merchants will do. They know they have clients who will take 30,000 tons, and they work their business on that basis. If they find, as they are likely to do this year because of the conditions, that there will probably be a surplus of 15,000 tons they will endeavour to organise so that that quantity will go to the Eastern States.

Mr. Seward: But suppose the merchants only buy 30,000 tons.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: That would not be as good as 45,000 tons. I am trying to arrive at a figure.

Mr. Leslie: Just imagination!

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: If 45,000 tons of hay are cut there is little doubt that 15,000 tons of it will go to the Eastern States. I do not desire that it should go there because in my opinion our own demand will be abnormal this year. I agree with the member for Pingelly that what will happen now is that the merchants will sell their surplus chaff over and above the normal needs of their clients. They will assume that these normal needs will absorb 30,000 tons and they will proceed to get away from the State 15,000 tons as quickly as possible. The question for consideration by the Government is whether it is going to commandeer that chaff for the relief of people in this State. If that is not done it will be sent outside the State.

Mr. Mann: Chaff dealing is always a gamble.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: The merchants are always gambling. The member for York compared hay that was cut from the stook with hay that was cut from the stack. That is a question of cutting capacity. The hon. member estimated that hay can stand in the stook until the end of February. Under normal conditions by the end of February such hay is particularly light and the value has enormously depreciated.

Mr. Perkins: You get less tonnage.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: We have to realise that the cutters will operate from about the middle of October, or they may be cutting now in some districts. Normally they start about the middle of this month, and cutting from the stook they should not have an ounce left by Xmas. To do that the chaffcutters can only cope with a given quantity. I am pleased that a little more advantage is gained by the man who stacks his hay compared with the man who carts from the stooks to the cutter. The farmer who thinks he is better off cutting from the stook to the cutter should not be encouraged. The better way is to give the maximum consideration to the stacking of the hay, for in the stack it remains prime in quality.

Mr. Perkins: Most wheat farmers are unable to stack their hay for want of labour.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: It is too late now to talk of labour for the cutting of hay. That time went by a month ago.

Mr. Perkins: No.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: The hon. member ought to realise that. We had an argument between the member for Irwin-Moore and the Minister for Mines. Representations will have to be made to the army authorities, we are told, whereas we know that we cannot expect to get a reply at least for a month.

Mr. Perkins: We hope so.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: No-one knows better than does the member for Pingelly that the army authorities cannot be speeded up.

Mr. Seward: Let the Premier take the matter up with them.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: Fortunately, we have the Premier and the Minister for Lands and Agriculture already in the Eastern States. I venture the opinion that they are giving very serious thought to this question. I believe they are getting telegrams from Western Australia protesting against the export of chaff from this State.

Mr. Perkins: Who is sending them?

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: Mr. Crooks, the secretary of the whole milk section of the Primary Producers' Association or someone else is sure to have sent telegrams. We have read about it in the paper in the last day or so. The member for Murray-Wellington knows all about it. At a meeting that was held two or three days ago an emphatic protest was entered. No doubt that protest was conveyed to the Premier in Canberra as well as to the Minister for Lands. Those concerned would have been foolish had they not communicated with those hon. gentlemen. Knowing as I do Mr. Crooks's activities and his enthusiasm on this matter I should imagine that more than one telegram has been sent. The Premier will, therefore, know that there has been this protest and will become active in that regard. We cannot hope to increase the quantity of chaff to be cut at the present stage. It is too late.

Mr. Perkins: It is not too late.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: Had we started a month ago we could have organised things, but they cannot be organised today. We cannot suddenly get more labour at once, and farmers cannot be expected to organise their binders at this stage and do something they do not normally do. It will be too late to cut the hay that members anticipate will be available. At this stage the crops will go

into grain and not into hay. We want to see whether we can get the labour to cut the hay that is in stack. We should not attempt to do too much from the stook. If hay is cut from the stook it must immediately be disposed of. That is the hay that will go to Melbourne, otherwise, as the member for Pingelly pointed out, it will have to go into store. For this purpose it is necessary to get storage accommodation, and hay storing places are not available for the carrying of an abnormal quantity of hay. Those concerned will not try to do that. They will cut hay from the stook and use it to meet the orders they will get from Adelaide and Melbourne.

We do not want our hay to be cut from the stook. What we do require is to see whether sufficient labour is available so that as much as possible can be put into stacks. That will be some guarantee against hay going to the Eastern States. Unless something is done to get control of the hay cut from the stook from 10,000 to 15,000 tons will almost immediately go to Melbourne. The merchants are prepared to buy it, and all they have to do is to organise the necessary shipping. They will be faced with difficulty, but they will endeavour to overcome it. They will try to get assistance from the Commonwealth Government to have the hay transported as soon as it is available. We want the Government to make a survey and see whether it cannot protect the surplus hay from going out of the State, because of the serious position in which that will leave the State, as pointed out by the member for Pingelly, next autumn or next winter. Unless that is done 15,000 tons of the State's production of hay will soon be on the water on the way to Melbourne or Adelaide.

**MR. DONEY** (Williams-Narrogin): The member for Guildford-Midland has made a most amazing speech, having regard to the circumstances in which this State and the other States find themselves at the moment. Some strange and altogether useless ideas seem to have been running riot in the hon. member's brain. I should very much like to know what prompted him to make a speech that surely will be regretted, having regard to all the circumstances.

**Mr. Watts:** It will go down in the annals of history as something even worse than the speech which he made giving the history of co-operation.

**Mr. DONEY:** I take no exception to what the hon. member had to say on that occasion.

**Mr. SPEAKER:** We are not discussing the hon. member as a co-operationist.

**Mr. DONEY:** I feel quite sure it will not be long before the hon. member himself feels very dissatisfied with his speech. Perhaps sufficient has been said in respect to the figures and general data applicable to the question raised by the member for Pingelly. There is, however, one other factor—a new one which has just come into the debate—namely, the view of the Government, that requires debating. I do not know to what extent the Minister for Mines, by his interjections, represents the feeling of the Government towards this question. I hope they do not represent it. Whilst the member for Guildford-Midland is deadly anxious to pursue a policy of inactivity the Minister for Mines—if his interjections are to be relied upon as representing the feeling of the Government—favours a policy of non-intervention. I suggest to the Government that it should forget that it is officially not responsible for action being taken in regard to this matter.

Strictly speaking, perhaps, the Government may not be responsible. This may fairly be said to be of Commonwealth concern. That may be so because the Army is concerned, and irrespective of the needs of the community, in wartime the Army is supreme. Strong as that argument may be I do not think it is strong enough to warrant the Government in taking no action. On the other hand I trust it will be animated by the same desires as we are on this side of the House, and will get behind this matter and push it for all it is worth. Consider the vast difference it will make to securing a solution of the problem if the Government gets behind it, and presses the Premier in Canberra by way of urgent telegram to make the necessary representations to the Minister for the Army, Mr. Forde, and thus ascertain whether that Minister's attitude towards General Blamey will have any effect. It may easily be that the High Command is stubborn. It usually is; but every now and then, on pressure being applied, it has to give way. It is the obvious duty of the Government to get in behind this matter and stress with all its power the requirements of the nation in this attempt to save the lives of Australia's cattle, sheep and

horses. I shall be bitterly disappointed and so will every member on this side of the House, and probably every member on the other side of the House, solely excepting the member for Guildford-Midland, if the Government does not take the action suggested.

**MR. McLARTY** (Murray-Wellington): I am sure we all realise the urgency of the matter raised by the member for Pingelly, who has stressed the fact that time is the essence of the contract. I think the Minister for the North-West is representing the Minister for Agriculture, and no doubt he has been listening to the remarks that have been made. The member for Pingelly has told us that something must be done within the next few days. I would draw the Minister's attention to a statement made by the member for York. I understood him to say that if something could be done in regard to labour within the next few days, sufficient hay could be cut for our own requirements and for the assistance of the drought-stricken farmers in the Eastern States. If that is the case, I should imagine that the authorities who control the release of manpower will surely do something, whether the matter rests with the manpower authorities or with the Army. They must know, and I am sure they do realise, what the present drought conditions mean throughout the Eastern States.

It is a mistake for anyone to think that we are not suffering from drought conditions in certain parts of Western Australia. Some of our pastoral areas are suffering from the worst drought experienced for very many years. I would remind members that, while it is considered that the South-West portion of this State has plenty of fodder, that is not so. The cutting off of the season will have a very detrimental effect. Further, the fact that farmers have been unable to use the quantity of superphosphate they desired to use will have an adverse effect upon pastures. The result will be that dairymen in the South-West in March, April and May will require hay or chaff and if it is not available to them, there will be a serious effect on the milk supply of this city. It will not be possible to export to the Eastern States any bran and pollard. There is a serious shortage already, and that will adversely affect the milk supply to the metropolitan area very soon. However, Mr. Speaker, you may say

that we are not dealing with bran and pollard at present, so I shall not proceed with that argument.

I am sure the Acting Premier is fully alive to the seriousness of the position. He lives in a district in which a lot of hay is grown, and when he visited his constituency recently the matter was probably brought to his notice. I am sure he will do what has been suggested, and will get in touch with the Premier and the Minister for Lands and inform them of the discussion that has taken place this afternoon. It has been stressed that time is the essence of the contract and, as the member for York has indicated, if something can be done within the next few days we shall not only be able to meet our own requirements but also do something to help the unfortunate drought-stricken farmers in the Eastern States.

**MR. WATTS** (Katanning): There is a great number of aspects of this matter to which I think I should make some reference before the Acting Premier or some other Minister replies to the debate. First of all, I would remind members that no farmer can be successful, no farmer can hope to cope with his obligations and become a successful farmer, unless he is prepared to conduct his affairs on what are known as business lines. If a man proposes to conduct his business on such lines, he must use methods that will result in his receiving a little more than he has to pay out, in other words, in his making a profit. When faced with all sorts of difficulties in regard to manpower and shortages of one kind and another, it is necessary to consider what method of disposing of produce is the one likely to provide the best possible return. Quite recently there have been recorded in the Press and quoted by members this afternoon the figures that the price controlling authorities are prepared to allow farmers to be paid for hay in the various stages of the process of taking it to the stack. We find that wheaten hay in the stack has had a maximum price of £4 10s. fixed for it. Yesterday a question was asked in regard to this same matter. The Minister representing the Minister for Agriculture was asked—

What was the average or ruling price during 1943-1944 for (a) wheaten chaff; (b) oaten chaff?

The Minister replied —

(a) and (b) F.a.q. chaff sold at from £7 10s. to £8 per ton for wheat, and from £7 to £7 10s. for oats ex truck wholesale. Inferior lines sold according to quality.

So that during last year when there was no great difficulty in regard to the supply of this product throughout Australia, a farmer was able to obtain up to £3 a ton more than it appears he will be likely to obtain this year. We will say that on the average he obtained 30s. a ton more than he will be able to obtain this year unless the decision of the price controlling authorities is amended very shortly. Is there any reason why the farmer should be prepared this year to cut more hay, as against stripping his crop for grain, particularly if it be on a wheat crop? In my opinion, the answer is "No," because this season he will receive 1s. a bushel more than he received last season for all the wheat he produces over what is known as "quota" wheat, to wit, the first 3,000 bushels of production. So he will be receiving a better price for wheat and a worse price for hay.

Therefore, this businessman, if he is a businessman—and very often farmers are good at it, and rightly so, for they would be ridiculed if they were not—this businessman is asked to do something in the national interest under very great difficulty—shortage of manpower and all the other problems associated with it—at a figure that is going to be less profitable to him and likely to leave him a lesser margin for interest and expenses than he received last year. I suggest to the Minister that the first thing to do is to advise the farming community—if possible tomorrow morning by radio—that the Government is prepared to accept a stipulated quantity of hay and buy it, taking some responsibility for looking after it and for seeing that it is supplied to those who need it as the year passes on. If the Government will do that, there is a reasonable prospect—I think a very good prospect—that men who at present have no intention of cutting hay will be likely to do so.

At the same time, I suggest to the Minister that he approach the price controlling authorities and say to them that some adjustment should be made of the price-controlled figure in order, within reasonable and proper bounds, to induce farmers to cut crops for hay. Many of those crops are

not particularly profitable as hay crops, because they are not likely to produce the quantity of hay per acre that constitutes a successful hay crop. There are many of the crops I have just mentioned in the lower Great Southern district in which a binder has in no circumstances yet been put, despite the observations of the member for Guildford-Midland who displayed either a degree of cantankerousness, which I fail to appreciate, or a great lack of knowledge. There are in that district seasonal conditions which are at least a month later than those in the northern areas of the State. In consequence, there are crops which have not been touched by a binder and in respect of which such action is unlikely to be taken inside the next week, and possibly for a longer period.

So, in regard to those crops, although they may not amount to two tons to the acre—I am certain they will not—they would make a source from which supplies would be obtainable, and farmers would be prepared to cut them for hay provided they were assured they would have money as a result of that cutting; that is, that they would receive a reasonable price for the product they were asked to supply. The member for Guildford-Midland was full of the idea that somebody should get to work and stop the transport of hay or chaff to the Eastern States. He quite overlooks, however, the fact that, except by inability to make transport available, it is impossible for any Government in Australia to prevent the transport of such commodities from State to State. I have already told this House why that cannot be done. The hon. member disagreed with me and wished to strike out all reference to that question, Section 92 of the Constitution, which demands that trade, commerce and intercourse between the States shall be absolutely free. So any Government that tries to restrain interstate traffic is going to be in an extremely difficult position if it comes to a show-down. Quite apart from that, the hon. member, in his apparent resentment of the idea of transporting anything across Australia to help our fellow Australian citizens in the Eastern States, overlooks that that is not the opinion of the hon. gentleman in the Commonwealth Parliament who is called upon to supervise the Department of Commerce and Agriculture.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

Mr. WATTS: I was saying that I thought the member for Guildford-Midland was obviously out of touch with the sentiments of the Federal Minister for Commerce in his objections to the transport of anything from this State, even if we could make arrangements to supply it, for the benefit of our fellow-citizens who are in grave difficulties in the Eastern States. It is reported in the Press that no less a sum than £3,000,000 is to be found, on a 50-50 basis, between the Commonwealth Government and the Governments of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia for the relief of the drought conditions in those three States, and also that the Commonwealth Government will be prepared to pay subsidies to cover transport and handling costs. The Minister for Commerce, Mr. Scully said that if it were necessary the maximum quantity of hay should be cut in the good areas this season, and he hoped that Western Australia, where conditions were better than elsewhere, would make substantial contributions of hay and chaff to the Eastern States. He also asked for State co-operation in the distribution of hay and other stock foods.

It is quite obvious that if we in Western Australia can encourage the cutting of hay, where it exists uncut—and in the absence of the member for Guildford-Midland I was obliged to traverse that extraordinary part of his speech, but I do not propose to do so again—it is right to attend to the matter. But I repeat that it will not be possible to do that unless some definite undertaking is given to the farmers of this State—and that in the very near future—that they will be assisted in doing the work, and will be given a price for the hay which they cut at the request of the Commonwealth Government. There is not much time to do this, even in the areas where it can still be done. If a survey has to be made in order to arrive at conclusions of this character, that survey will have to be started immediately, and arrangements made ready to be put into practicable effect before the end of next week to ensure that the best results now available may be achieved. We are continually told that our major fight today is on the food front.

We are being told at intervals by Press advertisements and the speeches of responsible persons that Australia must be the granary of the Pacific. Australia will not

be the granary of the Pacific, nor will the fight on the Australian food front be won unless some steps are taken, and the most active steps at that, to minimise the dire results of the war conditions throughout Australia, and more particularly in the three States that I have named. Therefore, when I hear members apparently amused at the idea that the Army cannot be made to release the necessary men for this type of work, or any other of a similar character, which is vital for the preservation of this granary, I am filled with amazement because we all know perfectly well that the Commonwealth Government and Parliament have complete charge of the laws which control the defence of the Commonwealth. If the Commonwealth Parliament chooses to enact legislation requiring every man to be discharged from the Army tomorrow, effect would have to be given to it. If in the present circumstances it chose to enact legislation requiring that a certain number of these men shall be released for any purpose, irrespective of what the High Command may say, those forces would be at the disposal of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Parliament, in that respect, is as supreme as any authority of that nature can be.

Mr. Rodoreda: It would not need to pass such legislation.

Mr. WATTS: I am not suggesting that it would, but much humour has been displayed here this afternoon on the question of the difficulties of ensuring that the requirements of the Government are met. The Commonwealth Government has full power to pass such legislation. If it does not do so then the position is so much easier, and I am one of those people who, like the member for Roebourne, believe that such legislation is not necessary. All that is required is courage and sincerity. Those are the two words that deal with the matter.

So it is necessary, as previous speakers have said, that the position should be explained to the responsible authorities at the head of affairs—not to persons in an inferior capacity—so that they may know what conditions exist and what can be done most easily to ameliorate them. I have no doubt that then they will take the necessary action. I cannot believe, and I would not ask this House to believe, that they would not take action to carry out something which they would obviously desire to be carried



out if they were in full possession of the facts. That seems to me the difficulty in regard to this matter. I do not want the House to believe that it is only members, on whatever side of the House they may be, who believe that there is a grave difficulty in regard to this matter. It is only 48 hours since a statement was published in the Press by an Agricultural Bank official. That statement is as follows—

It is now generally known that there will be a serious shortage of hay throughout Australia, said an official of the Agricultural Bank yesterday. The immediate effects will be serious. Taking a long view, the loss of stock this year will have an important bearing on production of meat and butter the next year. For these reasons it is essential that every possible ton of hay should be harvested. The quantity available in Western Australia if labour is supplied, would easily double the amount likely to be harvested under existing labour conditions.

That is not the view of members on this side or the other side of the House, but of an officer of the Agricultural Bank and made public to the people of this State yesterday morning. The report continues—

As food is most important, why should there not be more co-ordination between the Army and manpower authorities so that the maximum results can be achieved? A fortnight to three weeks' work would cover the period required for stooking. Why not make available soldiers for this job, which is not heavy work and does not require experience? Local committees could plan the areas to operate on from day to day.

So it is quite clear that the official view of the position is almost precisely similar to that which has been stated and reiterated here this afternoon. Nor is it in the interests of the farming community of this State alone that these representations are made—not by any means. That is quite clear. There are a great many other places in which there is every prospect that hay and chaff will be required in greater quantities than normal. It was only yesterday that I was discussing the position with a representative of the Pastoralists' Association. He made reference to the grave difficulties being experienced by pastoralists, particularly those with horses, and the necessity, with which they would be faced, of purchasing hay or chaff for the purpose of feed.

We know that a great many people have reverted to the use of horse vehicles in recent months because of the impossibility of obtaining tyres more particularly for their

motor vehicles, and so at least we shall find no diminution in the quantity of chaff required in Western Australia, but rather there will be a positive increase. If it is at all possible, we ought to be building up some reserve of fodder. There has been much talk about this matter. For two years there have been officers alleged to have been engaged in various places on behalf of the Commonwealth in arranging for fodder conservation. I am not going to say that it is because their efforts have been ineffectual that we find ourselves in our present position, but the fact remains, whether through weather conditions or failure of co-ordination in their efforts, they have not reached success, and as the position exists today, their efforts, if they can be made more effectual, are more urgently required than ever. The fact is that there is only one remedy and it is that a plain and unequivocal statement should be made to those who have reasonable hay crops that they should cut them, that a reasonable price will be guaranteed to them, and that they will receive the money.

According to a proposal published in to-day's Press, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales between them will be obliged to find £1,500,000 to relieve the drought conditions in their respective States. The other half of the £3,000,000 suggested is apparently to be found by the Commonwealth out of revenue. The Press report states that in all probability the Governments of those three States will have to borrow all or portion of the money. Western Australia is, therefore, fortunate by comparison, because it is not in the position of having to take those drastic steps in order to save some remnants of its agricultural community's production. In fact, our position is immeasurably better than that indicated in the reports coming to us from the Eastern States.

A week ago I was discussing matters with a high official of the Apple and Pear Acquisition Board, and he told me that his journey from New South Wales to the border of Western Australia had impressed him with the severity of the drought conditions that exist in the intermediate States. He said there was scarcely a blade of grass to be seen in large areas that he had known in past years as being fruitful and productive. If the Government of this State, not being faced with the conditions prevail-

ing in those three States, is asked to find some comparatively small amount to guarantee a reasonable price for and a reasonable cutting of all the hay available for farmers in this State and perhaps for the benefit of our brethren in the Eastern States, I feel it is not too much to ask it to do so. Consequently I am content at this stage to leave the matter to Ministers for their consideration.

**MR. LESLIE** (Mt. Marshall): I would like to differ very strongly from the statement of the member for Guildford-Midland that he believes this is not the time to raise the question.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: I said it is too late.

**Mr. LESLIE**: I differ from him, and suggest to him that if he reads the statements published in the Press during the last few days, he will realise that this question has been brought more prominently before the Government and before the public than ever. I am one who is of opinion that the time to strike is when the iron is hot. I learnt that from a member on the Government side of the House. The Prime Minister and Premiers of the States are grievously concerned about the hay position in Australia at present; and as the Minister for Commerce has stated, according to a report in to-night's paper, that he is looking to Western Australia to help the other States out of some of their difficulties, it is our duty to indicate to the Commonwealth that we are sympathetic to the appeal, but that the Commonwealth in turn owes us something if we are to endeavour to meet its wishes.

I do not hold myself up as a prophet, but I wish to say that at a public meeting held in my electorate at the beginning of May I appealed to the farmers in the electorate and other parts of the State to sow additional acres for hay. I forecasted that there would be a shortage in their own area owing to seasonal conditions.

The Minister for Works: The Minister for Lands made a similar appeal before that.

**Mr. LESLIE**: Yes, but perhaps the farmers took more notice of my appeal; at any rate, the actual acreage sown shows an increase. I made the appeal because seasonal conditions indicated that although an additional area should be put under crop for hay, there would be a smaller

average yield. Possibly that is where the reason for my appeal differed from that of the Minister's appeal. However, I forecasted a low average yield of hay, and most of the reports that have been received up to the present have shown that the indications of the season at that stage have proved correct. Many farmers, as the Minister has told us, have put in an additional area for hay, and I believe that if we now offered encouragement to the farmers who have crops that otherwise they would strip for grain, they would be prepared to cut extra areas for hay.

My appeal for additional hay was based also on the fact that in my district the prospects were that there would be a bigger demand for hay during the dry summer months than we had had in the previous year. The season is proving that my appeal was justified. Now that we have an appeal for help from the Eastern States, it is an additional one to that made by the Minister and by me for greater production for hay. What are we going to do now in order to encourage farmers to cut extra areas for hay? I agree with the member for Guildford-Midland that hay-cutting operations are limited by the amount of machinery available. Most farmers have one or two binders to do the work, but there is a lot of work that follows on the actual cutting of the hay crop.

There is the stooking; and in the areas I represent stooking is to be done in accordance with the usual practice. But farmers are not going to undertake this extra work unless right now they receive an assurance that in the operations following on the actual cutting they will receive manpower assistance to do the job, so that the hay will not be left in the paddocks for months on end; and, further, they require a guarantee against any loss should the optimistic idea of a surplus be realised. The farmers I refer to have not yet begun to cut hay, but they are about to do so. It is now that we must make the appeal to the Commonwealth Government to assist in those two directions by a definite assurance to our farmers that they can, with absolute safety, undertake to meet the appeal being made to them today, firstly for the safety of our own State and secondly to meet the additional demand which is coming to them from the Eastern States.

Mr. Cross: Why not get the Commonwealth Government to buy hay from the farmer at £8 per ton on the farm?

Mr. LESLIE: I would willingly agree to that were I not afraid that the member for Canning, together with some of his folk, would be only too ready to hover on the brink of the wheatbelt like vultures with a view to preying upon the small amount of extra butter and jam that the farmer may receive on his slice of bread as the result of a higher price. However, I make this appeal to our Government, that it should urge on the Commonwealth Government the absolute necessity for immediate action, and that this is the time to do so. From the speeches made here tonight, which incidentally have come mainly from representatives of the rural areas, the State Government must be convinced that this is a matter of urgency and does demand the Government's attention.

**THE MINISTER FOR WORKS:** I was greatly interested in the speech of the member for Mt. Marshall, as the district I represent produces a thousand times more hay than the district which he represents. I regret that I am not able to accord a word of appreciation to the member for Pingelly on the score of having given the Government some prior notification of his intention to move his motion today. As he did not give us any such notification, I am deprived of the pleasure which would otherwise have been mine in that regard. I am sure that every member of the House has listened carefully to all the speeches delivered on the motion. I am also sure that every member has been impressed with the very strong note of desperate urgency which almost every one of those speeches has sounded. Some of the speeches, indeed, have suggested that the position is so desperate that if something is not done within 24 hours, all will be lost. If this be so, or if the position is as urgent as all the speeches have indicated, it appears to me that the member for Mt. Marshall in particular perhaps, and other members who have spoken, have shown themselves greatly remiss in not having brought this subject up much sooner than has been the case. If the position is half as urgent as has been represented—and I think it is—a motion of this kind should have been moved some weeks ago.

It is not at all reasonable to come forward with a motion and say, "All these things must be done over the week-end." That does not in any shape or form give any of those charged with responsibility and authority in connection with the matter the slightest chance of doing many, if any, of the things which are required to be done. If the solution of these problems to the greatest extent that they can be solved were to be dependent upon the motion moved here today, then I say that not one of the problems would be solved wholly or even partially. It is only because the Government of the State has to a considerable extent been alive to the difficulties that were developing, that the problems discussed here today have already been tackled in several directions. Does any member of the Chamber, including any one of those who have spoken, consider seriously for a moment that the Minister for Lands and Agriculture, Hon. F. J. S. Wise, has had no conception of these problems and of the difficulties associated with them? Does any member of the Chamber think that the Minister has done nothing for the last several weeks to have something adequate accomplished in regard to manpower and something in regard to prices?

Mr. Doney: That has not been suggested.

**The MINISTER FOR WORKS:** As a matter of fact, members of this Chamber, who are not on the other side of the House either, have made written or other representations to the Minister concerned, not today or yesterday or this month, but last month in regard to the problems which were developing. And the Minister concerned, in his turn, has taken several steps in endeavouring to meet the difficulties of the situation as well as it was in his power to have them met. The member for Pingelly asks that an assurance be given covering the supply of an adequate amount of labour to enable all farmers who wish to cut their crops for hay, to so act. He asks in the second place for a Government assurance that farmers will receive for the surplus hay which they cut prices based upon the prices published in "The West Australian" of today's date.

Mr. Doney: The first official pronouncement made in respect of what you say was made by the manager of the Agricultural Bank yesterday, was it not?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am not talking about official pronouncements. If talking and making pronouncements would solve all these difficulties and problems none of them would be left.

Mr. Doney: Why did he make that statement?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That statement made by the manager of the Agricultural Bank does not conflict in any way with what I have said. I said that the Minister for Lands and Agriculture has been aware for several weeks past that these difficulties would arise, and that he has been taking all steps within his power to see that they would be successfully met.

Mr. Watts: Why was it necessary—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The manager of the Agricultural Bank is as much entitled as are members of the Opposition to draw attention to the difficulties and problems that exist and to suggest that this might be done, that that might be done, or that something else might be done. It is rather remarkable in regard to this matter that in those districts where local committees have been operating for the purpose of ensuring that adequate steps would be taken, such steps appear to have been taken or are in course of being taken at the moment. I received correspondence from the local War Agricultural Committee and from other organisations in my district some two or three weeks ago as to the provision of manpower. I made representations to the responsible authorities and within recent days have been assured that the manpower required to handle the hay crops in the districts concerned will be made available.

Mr. Doney: The manpower authorities stated a month ago there would be no releases from the Army.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am not talking about what someone said a month ago. I am talking about assurances given to me within recent days by the manpower authorities. These indicate the up-to-date policy being adopted for making suitable manpower available to assist farmers to cut their crops for hay, should they so desire.

Mr. Doney: It has not been made known to the public. You would not deny that.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The arrangements which have been and are being made have been communicated to the people most vitally concerned, that is, to the farmers in those districts where committees have been operating and upon which of course they have representation. I presume the districts that have not had labour made available to them, or where arrangements have not been made for the supply of labour, are those districts in which farmers have not decided to cut their crops for hay.

Mr. Seward: In which they do not usually cut for hay.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I find it difficult to understand the reasoning of a member who complains that labour has not been made available for hay-cutting to farmers who have not made any application for such labour.

Mr. Doney: Are you assuming that sufficient labour has been or is being made available?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am suggesting that in those districts where an organised effort has been made to obtain labour for hay-cutting purposes the labour has been, or is in the process of being, made available.

Mr. Mann: It has not been made available in the Beverley district.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am explaining to the House the official information which was made available to me.

Mr. Leslie: You are hoping it has been done.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am not hoping anything of the kind. I am giving this information that sufficient labour has been made available, and I say that I have passed the information on to the committee concerned in the Northam district. I understand that district covers an area within a radius of 60 miles of Northam. It is usually the largest haygrowing district in the State. I suggest that if there are farmers in other parts of the State who have decided to cut their crops for hay and who require suitable labour for the purpose, they should immediately make their labour requirements known to the Manpower Department. If the Department of Agriculture or the Government can assist them to obtain suitable labour requirements, then the department or the Government will be prepared to co-operate

fully with those farmers, individually or collectively.

Mr. Doney: You appreciate that the nature of the problem has suddenly changed in the Eastern States?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is no use talking in circles on this matter. It is no good indulging in generalities. It is no good saying that many farmers would cut hay in the Coorow district or the Wyal-katchem district or any other district, if only labour were available. That does not help a scrap. It does not help the manpower authorities, it does not help the Government, it does not help the farmer. What is required to be done—and done quickly—is that the farmers in the districts concerned who are willing to cut their crops for hay should indicate their manpower requirements immediately.

Mr. Seward: They do not want to cut for hay, but would do so in a national emergency if they could get the labour.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Now we are getting down to tinctacks. We are finding out now that all the generalised talk about the non-availability of manpower is due to the fact that no manpower has been requested.

Mr. Mann: What rot!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It has not been requested because the farmers who might cut hay have not yet decided to do so.

Mr. Mann: Oh!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Judging by the groans of the member for Beverley, he and the member for Pingelly are in grave disagreement on this particular point.

Several members interjected.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I must ask members to keep order and allow the Acting Premier to make his reply.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I say it is a matter of commonsense approach to the problem of manpower. It is essential that any farmer who wants to cut his crop for hay, or who has decided to do so, should give the authorities concerned the opportunity to make the labour available to him. It is no use standing up in this House and abusing the Army, or condemning the manpower authorities for not having made suitable labour available to farmer Jones of Coorow for haycutting purposes, if no one knows that farmer Jones of Coorow is willing to cut his crop for hay.

Mr. Berry: He is not, unless he knows he is going to be paid for it.

Several members interjected.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I think we ought to get down to earth about this question of labour.

Opposition members: Yes!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am sure that if the member for Beverley decided to cut his crop for hay he would—in one of those rare rational moments of his—immediately make his labour requirements known to the manpower authorities. That is the commonsense approach. It is what every-one ought to do.

Mr. Mann: I am still waiting for labour.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am telling the hon. member that in regard to the district within a 60 miles radius of Northam they have succeeded or will succeed almost immediately. I suggest to members representing farming districts that if they want to assist in a practical way in regard to this problem they can do it best by finding out from local farmers just how much labour they require for the purpose of cutting their crops for hay.

Mr. Leslie: They will say, "Will we get the labour?"

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: If any member representing any farming district will, tomorrow or early next week, indicate any definite requirements to me, I will undertake to make immediate contact with the manpower authorities for the purpose of trying to obtain the necessary labour without delay.

Mr. Mann: Will you promise—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I must ask the member for Beverley not to ask questions.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Therefore I suggest that in regard to the question of manpower the fair thing to do in the circumstances is to give the manpower authorities the opportunity at least to provide whatever labour requirements might be necessary. We all know how difficult it is to obtain manpower in these days for anything. I think that most members might agree that Australia, in these later war years, is in reality being called upon to do things which are beyond her physical powers of achievement and that the demands upon Australia, especially upon the home front, instead of decreasing as the war goes on, are

increasing and are likely to continue increasing. So the question of making manpower available for this and that and for a thousand and one things is becoming a most acute problem. I do not indulge in wholesale condemnation of the manpower authorities in this State, because I feel that they have tremendous problems to face and have very little means available to them to enable them to solve those problems, even partly.

Mr. Berry: I think we agree with that.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In regard to this particular question of labour for harvesting crops of hay, however, we might this year, and particularly at this time, expect much greater assistance from the Commonwealth authorities in regard to making suitable labour available for harvesting hay crops in Western Australia.

Mr. Leslie: That is what we are asking for.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: We might reasonably expect that help, because the Eastern States, or the majority of them, for once in a while are looking to Western Australia for urgently needed assistance. Since the Eastern States are looking to us for that assistance, the Commonwealth, as a special authority, will naturally be very deeply concerned in seeing that as much hay as possible is cut in this State in the hope that from the total area cut a fair share might be shipped from Western Australia to South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. I think that the Commonwealth Government, through its appropriate Commonwealth Departments, including the Manpower Department and the Army, may take effective steps to see that all of the suitable labour required in this State to assist farmers to cut crops is made available.

Mr. Leslie: If this motion is carried that "may" will be converted into "will," we hope.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: If we carry this motion it will not make any difference. I should think the member for Mt. Marshall would understand that, without my having to tell him. Whether this motion is carried, defeated or withdrawn will not make the slightest difference in a practical sense, as I am sure the majority of members of this House would agree. I want to emphasise again that if members from farming districts want to help their farmers to obtain labour to harvest their crops for hay I hope they will, as soon as possible, obtain definite

particulars of the labour required and submit those particulars to the manpower authorities. As I said earlier, if they will also submit those particulars to me, I will endeavour to use my best efforts with the Manpower Department and the other authorities concerned to see that the required labour is made available. In regard to the question of an assurance from the Government that it will guarantee that the prices specified in this morning's paper will be paid for any surplus hay cut by the farmers, I think that guarantee already exists. The prices have already been fixed and so they operate and will continue to operate. The only other thing required to ensure that any farmer who cuts his crop for hay will receive the prices specified is that there shall be the necessary demand for hay or chaff.

Mr. Seward: That is the point.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That is the vital point. It is no use having a price of £4 10s. a ton in the stack or some other price in the stook, or some other price for hay in chaff form, unless there is a demand for the commodities. The farmer does not get much satisfaction out of a guaranteed price of £5 10s. for something he produces, if he cannot sell it. If we look at the position in Western Australia today—leaving out of account for the moment the Eastern States—I think we will see that there will be in this State a fairly heavy demand for hay and chaff. If we look over the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia I think we can see a demand existing, and likely to exist for many months to come, which it will be impossible fully to meet. I think, therefore, it is obvious that the demand is there and will continue to exist beyond any capacity of ours fully to supply. In addition, as I have already said, the guaranteed prices are in existence. The other States and the Commonwealth are so greatly concerned about supplies that the Commonwealth Government has already publicly declared its willingness and intention to make subsidies available to farmers in this State who produce hay crops, so that the whole of the handling costs and freight charges involved in transferring the hay or the chaff from this State to any of the Eastern States will be fully met.

Mr. Leslie: It is the Eastern States that will profit from that.

**THE MINISTER FOR WORKS:** I do not see that anyone will profit from it. The farmer in Western Australia will get a guaranteed price for what he produces.

**Mr. Leslie:** He gets that when he sells on the local market.

**THE MINISTER FOR WORKS:** He does not get any more or any less; he is in the same position. The farmer gets the guaranteed price for any portion of his crop that is shipped to the Eastern States. The Commonwealth Government comes in and by way of subsidy pays all the handling and freight charges involved in shipping the products from this State to any one of the other States. The benefit which farmers in the other States receive is that they get an urgently required measure of help—not all they need by any means though—to assist them in the dire troubles inflicted upon them because of unfavourable seasonal conditions.

The Premier, Hon. J. C. Willcock, and the Minister for Lands and Agriculture, Hon. F. J. S. Wise, have been in the Eastern States for some days, as members are aware. They have been discussing at the Premiers' Conference these very problems and difficulties which we are discussing here. In Canberra today there was a meeting of the Australian Agricultural Council at which all States and the Commonwealth were represented. At this particular conference very close consideration to the particular problems covered by this motion was given. I am sure that every member of the House realises immediately that the Minister for Lands and Agriculture at that conference would put before the Commonwealth authorities the urgent manpower needs of Western Australia, if the farmers of this State are to be expected to cut their crops of hay in order that some measure of what they produce shall be made available to the distressed farmers in the Eastern States of the Commonwealth.

**Mr. Leslie:** We can add weight to his representation.

**THE MINISTER FOR WORKS:** I think that if this Parliament has to carry a motion to add weight to someone's representations, then the weight so added is not very great. In any event, the conference concludes today and I am sure that whatever has been said here this afternoon has been equally well said by the Minister at today's con-

ference in Canberra, and equally explained and stressed by him at interviews he has had with the Prime Minister, with the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Scully, and with the Commonwealth manpower representatives and the representatives of the Army in Canberra. So, members and farmers generally can be assured beyond any question of doubt that the Premier, and the Minister for Agriculture, in particular, have been giving almost constant attention to these particular problems in the course of their stay at Canberra during the last few days.

Therefore I hope that in view of what I have said, and in view of what the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture have been doing in Canberra in consultation with the representatives of the Commonwealth and of the drought-affected States, the member for Pingelly will be satisfied with having had the matter ventilated and discussed and will, in consequence, be prepared to withdraw the motion. I conclude by giving him an absolute assurance that the Government will assist the farmers concerned in regard to manpower, and I think it is clear that the Government can give an assurance, if one be required, that a demand will exist and will continue to exist for all the hay which will be produced in this State during the next few weeks, and that that hay will be purchased either by private business men, or by public authorities at the prices specified by the Deputy Commissioner of Prices in this State, which prices were published in today's "West Australian."

Question put and negatived; the motion defeated.

### **BILLS (3)—RETURNED.**

- 1, Financial Emergency Act Amendment.
- 2, Testator's Family Maintenance Act Amendment.
- 3, Plant Diseases (Registration Fees) Act Amendment.

Without amendment.

### **BILL—COMPANIES ACT AMENDMENT.**

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

### **BILL—EVIDENCE ACT AMENDMENT.**

Report of Committee adopted.

## BILL—NATIVES (CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS).

### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 3rd October.

**MR. SHEARN** (Maylands) [8.27]: With the principle of this Bill I am sure every member will be in entire accord. As the Minister indicated when introducing the measure, it merely fringes the many things that should be done for the amelioration of the conditions of the aborigines and half-castes of this State. But it is, nevertheless, a noteworthy and praiseworthy move in that direction. I believe that the time has arrived when we should face the situation that past administrations of this country since the framing of our Constitution, which included responsibilities in respect of the care of natives, have not been all that is desired. I believe that in the present Commissioner of Native Affairs, his staff and indeed the Minister, we have men who are thoroughly seized with the responsibility of their tremendous task. But they are considerably hampered by the relatively small sum of money which is made available to them.

I think the Minister pointed out, when introducing the Bill, that whereas in about the year 1930 a sum of only about £27,000 was made available, there has been considerable increase since. Notwithstanding that, it is still totally inadequate to provide for all that these people not only desire, but which is their right as the dispossessed people, as they are of this continent. The aboriginal question is one upon which it would be possible to speak for hours. It has many aspects, but for the moment we are concerned with only one, and that is to give citizenship rights to these people on qualifications laid down in the Bill. So, with the principle of the measure I, in common with other members who have spoken, am in absolute accord. With the member for Pilbara, I agree that in the drafting of this commendable scheme of right of citizenship for the natives, there have been laid down certain requirements that detract from the merit of the scheme that the Minister has in mind. With the member who made reference to it, I feel it would be interesting to see what the reaction would be if we attempted to apply such restrictions to white people.

At the outset we should recognise that this question should be approached from the humane point of view. We should

recognise the fact that we have the spectacle of these people, some of them married and with families, living and conforming generally to our standard of civilised conditions and playing an important part in various industrial activities associated directly or indirectly with the war effort. Therefore I am pleased that we propose to give them something at least toward what has been their just right from the time when the whites took over from these people the country that belonged to them. I believe the time has arrived—and I understand the Minister has it in mind—to provide a better system of education for the aborigines and half-castes, and that the measure postulate a more earnest attempt to provide improved social conditions for them and perhaps to give them, not only in wartime but also in the post-war period, something comparable with the economic conditions of the white race for which they will have qualified themselves.

Like the member for Pilbara, who took exception to one provision in relation to the application, I take exception to another provision, which stipulates that the applicant must within two years have divorced himself from all tribal associations. Seeing that we are dealing with what I am assuming is the detribalised section of the native community, it would be interesting to know what lies behind the idea of requiring applicants to dissolve their native associations. This savours of a man's being ostracised before he can become entitled to citizenship rights. If the Minister is sincere, as I believe he is, in the wish to grant these people one of the many privileges long overdue, surely there is no necessity for what, in my humble opinion, is tantamount to ostracising the applicant from his fellow-men, any more than we are expected to ostracise ourselves from our friends. Outside of tribal conditions, against which we can appreciate there must be some bar, I see no reason why we should insist upon an applicant's dissociating himself from his friends. Unless the Minister can give an explanation which at present is not apparent to me, I hope that in Committee we shall be able to have that reference eliminated.

As I said before, with the general principle of the Bill I am in thorough agreement, and I repeat that I hope this is only one of many things that will be done without much further delay to improve the statu-



of the aborigines and half-castes of this State. This is an innovation in the realm of native administration, and I trust it will be emulated and, as a result, a general scheme of improvement will be formulated so that the aborigines and half-castes of other States as well may be given an opportunity to play a full part, on their qualifying, as many are doing, in the development of the country and the maintenance of the prestige that they themselves have achieved. I appreciate that the Government is at a tremendous disadvantage owing to the restricted finance at its disposal. This is a matter that should be seriously discussed with the Commonwealth authorities, who should co-operate with the States in the direction of making adequate provision to ensure that the natives shall receive proper education, proper social conditions, including housing and economic conditions. For these reasons, I have pleasure in supporting the second reading.

**MR. GRAHAM** (East Perth): The Minister—and with him I would include the department—should be complimented on the initiative he has displayed in bringing this measure before the House, thus, as he pointed out, leading Australia in the matter of legislation for the native people. The provisions of the Bill are, in effect, a charter for the natives in Western Australia. I feel, too, that the measure will provide an opportunity in this Parliament to test the sincerity of certain people with regard to those principles and freedoms of which so much has been spoken, particularly during recent months. I am somewhat suspicious of those who, while paying acknowledgment to the measure in principle, nevertheless desire to see it hedged with so many restrictions and difficulties as to make it of very little practical value.

Notwithstanding a common belief to the contrary, there is considerable public interest in native welfare, and particularly does this remark apply to our white women-folk. I express the hope at this juncture that because this Bill affects persons who at the moment are non-voters, members will not be influenced on that account and show a proneness to impose restrictions too severe and thus defeat the object and purpose of the Bill. In some quarters there is a belief that natives, generally speaking, are unworthy of the consideration pro-

posed to be bestowed upon them under this Bill. Many instances have been quoted of their conflict with the laws of the State, especially in the matter of offences associated with drink, stealing, and fighting, as well as certain sex offences.

**Mr. Fox:** The natives have not got it on their own!

**Mr. GRAHAM:** The member for South Fremantle has made precisely the point I desired to make. While condemnatory utterances can be made against some natives, those utterances certainly do not apply to anything like the great majority of the aborigines. Similarly, I feel that numbers of our own race set anything but good examples in their general conduct, whether in regard to matters moral or those of a more mundane nature. The Bill seeks to deal with those of the natives who to all intents and purposes have ceased to be natives; that is, those who do at the present time, by and large, conform to the requirements and standards of the white population of Western Australia. As was pointed out by the member for Maylands, numbers of the white population are not living on a particularly high standard at present. I feel that in view of the qualifications necessary to fulfil the requirements of the Bill so as to have any reasonable chance of being accepted, there will not be any great number of natives found taking advantage of the provisions of the measure, and that a lesser number still will be granted the full rights of citizenship if the measure in fact becomes law.

The Minister demonstrated to the House that people of the native race who are in somewhat close contact with white people have shown themselves able to assume responsibility and able to conform, reasonably at any rate, to the standards of the whites. He instanced those qualities in connection with payments for child endowment and maternity allowances, and, further, urged the fact that quite a number of them—this was news to many members—are working in industry in the metropolitan area and elsewhere. And of course there are, in addition, those who are members of the Fighting Forces. It was certainly information, and gratifying information to me, to learn that as many as 400 of them are members of various units of the Fighting Forces. If they are accepted, and if they conform, as they must, to the requirements of the Services, I would sug-

gest that at least those 400 have demonstrated their worthiness for serious consideration to become accepted citizens of Western Australia.

Because this is a new step, an innovation, so far as I personally am concerned, I am prepared to waive some objections that I ordinarily would entertain regarding the stringent requirements that a native shall conform to before being granted a certificate of citizenship by a magistrate. I have exceptions which I do not desire to emphasise, because this is an experimental measure and a starting point. It represents a commencement from which we can proceed to build and fashion, and to amend the measure progressively. I do consider, however, that when natives have made application to a magistrate and been accepted, they should be Australian citizens in fact. Further, having passed what appears by a general consensus of opinion to be rather a stringent test, these people should be regarded, and placed on exactly the same footing and basis, as every other Australian. Surely one thing we want to avoid is minorities so far as our citizens are concerned. We do not want different laws applying to different people in different ways. So stringent are the conditions to be fulfilled before a native is accepted, that after acceptance there should be no law applying to him that does not apply to other members of the community. Therefore I am opposed to the provisions of the Bill which allow of suspension and cancellation of certificates of citizenship once granted.

Citizenship bestows on each one of us certain privileges and imposes on all of us certain responsibilities. Laws are enacted which presumably are to apply to all alike; and, that being the case, I see no reason whatsoever for any discrimination against black citizens as opposed to white. I ask why every one who has been accepted as an Australian citizen but previously was a native should run the risk of having his certificate of citizenship revoked or at any rate suspended should he "go bush"—as the term is. After all, I feel that if some of these natives, or erstwhile natives, do go back for something approaching an extended period to their own ex-kinsmen, they would operate somewhat in the nature of missionaries or crusaders, and those who are still natives

would feel that they are closer to us generally.

Those natives who have accepted the responsibility of citizenship would have a message to take to the present native people. I feel, therefore, that the fact of their not only associating but actually for periods living with their native people must have a good effect. Under the common law there should be no discrimination against those who, though previously natives, have been accepted as Australian citizens. In the same way the fact of having been convicted of drunkenness on two occasions—this constituting habitual drunkenness—should not be a debarring factor. After all, our community contains many people who are offenders in that respect, and yet their right to citizenship is in no way whatever impugned.

Mr. McLarty: Drink is a dangerous thing among natives.

Mr. GRAHAM: There have been interludes in Perth, Fremantle and elsewhere by white people with all the appearances of the very ugly demonstrations indeed. The provision under which a native who has become a citizen with full rights forfeits those rights if he contracts certain diseases is, to my mind, grossly unfair. This provision, it is suggested, is necessary on medical grounds or for health reasons because of a provision in the Native Administration Act dealing with isolation. I appreciate the fact that certain of the diseases specified are common to the natives only; but surely it should be possible to make an appropriate amendment to the Health Act and thus obviate the insertion of a clause in this measure that is, to say the least, irksome, and that makes a differentiation between citizens of Australia when, as a matter of principle, there should be no differentiation whatever.

Either a person is or is not a citizen of this country; that is how I view the position. The measure is, as was indicated by the Minister, a stepping-stone to far greater things for the natives. I hope that it is a stepping-stone towards Parliamentary representation for the natives. I appreciate that in general the principle of sectional representation is wrong, but this is experimental legislation. We are dealing with a grave problem and one which in many respects has been neglected. Just as in the Commonwealth Parliament the Northern Territory is represented by a

member who has no right to vote, so, when a certain number of natives have assumed citizenship, I see no reason whatever why they should not be represented in Parliament in order to give expression to their views. Such representative being closer to the natives, would be able to present their views and his knowledge would be extremely helpful in resolving the particularly difficult problems affecting the natives.

**Mr. Berry:** Do you mean a representative elected by the natives?

**Mr. GRAHAM:** Yes, and responsible to the natives. I appreciate that this measure will apply to natives who have assimilated our living conditions; but I think some provision should be made in this Bill for the remainder. We should obtain the advice of well-qualified anthropologists in dealing with this particular problem. It is an exceedingly difficult one, because on their traditions and customs we are seeking to superimpose the culture, traditions and customs of a higher civilisation that has subsisted for hundreds of years. We must expect a severe crisis in the process. I believe that a better understanding of the outlook and wishes of the natives could be obtained if action were taken to secure expert advice. This Bill sets up a goal or a standard to which the natives can aspire and hope to achieve. Many natives at present live in precisely the same way as do whites, yet they are denied the rights ordinarily accorded to whites under our electoral laws, our land laws, our health laws, our laws relating to mining and many other laws.

It is my belief that many natives will make sincere attempts to attain higher standards of living, and will seek to educate and improve their children in the hope that the latter also will become creditable citizens of the State. If the Bill becomes law, then as far as I can see nothing but good can come from it. It will tend to uplift the native races, as it will give them an inspiration and an ideal for which to strive. It may be asked, what harm can be done by passing the measure? I have asked myself that question and I can see no harm whatever resulting from its passage. The Bill provides that natives claiming citizenship rights must prove their bona fides. That is not the case with whites, because only effluxion of time is necessary to secure them those rights. Con-

sequently, the natives who have proved their claims will feel that they have earned their citizenship rights in every sense of the term. and, as I stated earlier and now repeat, such natives, having been accepted by the magistrate, should be accepted by us without any reservation whatsoever. There should be no discrimination of any kind against them.

I hope that the magistrates who will be entrusted with the responsibility of granting or refusing applications will, in their wisdom, interpret the spirit and intention of the Bill as liberally and as generously as they possibly can. We have a duty and a responsibility to our natives, a duty too long neglected, and if there is a generous and co-operative spirit exercised in the administration of this measure, should it become law, then, as the Minister said, Western Australia will have given a lead in concrete fashion in the way of treating the natives races of Australia.

**MR. NEEDHAM** (Perth): I welcome the Bill, and congratulate the Government on taking a bold step forward for the benefit of the natives of this State. In doing so, the Government is perpetuating the policy which this State has followed for many years of trying to treat the natives as they should be treated. But while I realise the Bill is a step forward, and, as I said, a bold step, I think we will have to make haste slowly. The tenor of the debate so far suggests that all members will vote for this measure. All contend that the natives should be granted the status of full citizenship. At the same time, we must remember that there will necessarily be required many safeguards in order to help the natives to realise the responsibilities they will be called upon to carry.

While I welcome the Bill and congratulate the Government on having brought it down, I am fearful whether we are doing the right thing at this stage. I admit that Western Australia has set an example to the rest of the States in its treatment of natives but, even allowing that, I do not consider the natives have been treated as well as they should have been. Australia as a whole has nothing to boast about in that regard. I am of the opinion that before a measure of this nature was submitted to Parliament some attention should have been given to the education of natives as to what is meant by citizenship. Citizenship is not to be lightly undertaken at

any time. We must admit that members of our own race are frequently indifferent to the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. Now we propose to confer on the natives, suddenly as it were, full rights of citizenship. It is true that the Bill provides for a two-year period of dissociation from tribal relationship, but I think it might have been better for us to have helped the natives by teaching them something of civic responsibilities before we brought in a measure of this kind. However, the Bill is here, and I presume it will become the law of the land—at any rate, I hope it will—and it is designed to make the native a full citizen of the State.

In the circumstances, the responsible authorities should do everything possible to assist the natives to realise the responsibilities they will incur. While citizenship brings responsibilities, it also brings penalties if we do not live up to the full standard. That brings me to the restrictions proposed in the measure and the penalties that might be imposed. I am not going to say at this stage that I will support all the clauses dealing with restrictions, but we must not be too liberal. If we are, we shall probably spoil the aim we have in view. If we say to these people, "After two years of dissociation from tribal relationships you may become a citizen of this country" and let it end there I am afraid we shall have failed in our task. The suggestion has been made that the people of our own race do certain things; that they break the laws of the country in moral and other senses yet still retain their rights of citizenship. That is true, but we cannot compare the natives with the citizens of the white race.

We must remember that whatever had characteristics the natives possess they gained mostly from association with white people who are supposed to be models. If we do not have certain safeguards in this measure, we shall find that the natives will not be able to become the moral, diligent and industrious citizens the Government intends them to be and proposes to help them become through this measure. The Bill is worthy of sympathetic consideration. As the Minister has said, it is principally a machinery Bill. The member for East Perth has suggested that the time will come when we may have special representation of the natives in this Assembly.

Mr. McLarty: That is looking ahead.

Mr. NEEDHAM: It is looking very much ahead. We have a long way to go before that stage is reached. Our responsibility is to do everything possible, by legislation of this nature, to help the natives to become capable citizens and, when we reach the stage at which we can say that all the natives are upright, industrious and worthy of full citizenship, I will be inclined to view the question of representation from a different angle altogether. I would not advocate special representation. I would like to see a native who had proved himself a worthy citizen and had taken an interest in the affairs of this country elected to this Chamber the same as any other member. He would then be able to put before this House and this country his views in the same way as anyone else. However, as the member for Murray-Wellington has said, we are taking a very long view indeed if we look to the day when there will be either special or ordinary representation of natives in the Parliament of this State.

Our aim now should be so to enact legislation that will help the natives to become good citizens. If the Bill becomes law it will mark a milestone in the social progress of this country and this Commonwealth. We will be the cynosure of all eyes. The eyes not only of the people of Australia but of all the people of the British Commonwealth of Nations will watch with keen interest the result of legislation of this nature.

Mr. Seward: The Maoris sit in the New Zealand Parliament.

Mr. NEEDHAM: The member for Pingelly refers to the Maori. He is a vastly different man from the Western Australian aboriginal. He is a better man physically and mentally. Another native who is much stronger physically and mentally than the Western Australian native is the Papuan.

Mr. Seward: The natives—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The member for Pingelly is highly disorderly in interjecting out of his seat.

Mr. NEEDHAM: The Papuan native should reap the full standard of citizenship more speedily even than the Maori, let alone the aboriginal of Western Australia. Therefore I welcome the measure. I am sure that when it comes into operation it will do good, not only for the native, but for the people of Western Australia.

On motion by Mr. Cross, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 9.12 p.m.*