

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 1st August, 1940.

Question: Industries promotion	PAGE	80
Address-in-reply, fourth day		80

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

QUESTION—INDUSTRIES PROMOTION

Hon. H. SEDDON asked the Chief Secretary: Will he lay on the Table the report of the year's operations carried out by the research officer, Mr. Fernie?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: A report will be made available on the completion of 12 months' operations in September next. A paper on the Development of Secondary Industries in W.A. was recently given by Mr. Fernie to the Institute of Engineers, and this will be made available if so desired.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Fourth Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. H. L. ROCHE (South-East) [4.33]: At the outset I should like to thank Mr. Baxter, Mr. Cornell and Mr. Wood for the kindly manner in which they have welcomed me to this House. When the time comes for me to make room for somebody else, if I can feel that I have been able to do my duty as a representative of the people in the way that I consider it should be done and am able to leave behind me the good feelings and kindly thoughts that every member seems to entertain for my predecessor, I shall believe that I have been successful in the discharge of my duty.

I, with some of the members who have spoken on the Address-in-reply, must express my regret that the Government has not given any indication of its intention to extend something really worth-while in the way of material aid to the primary industries. Session after session, questions are raised as to further assistance in the form of everlasting sops to those engaged in an industry who

are over-weighted and are carrying on under a handicap that makes success impossible. I refer particularly to the debt condition of much of our rural industry. Sufficient experience has now been obtained of the workings of our rural relief legislation and of the amended Agricultural Bank Act to show plainly enough to those who wish to learn that, whilst the present burden of secured debt continues to rest on the farmers and agriculturists generally, the industry cannot hope to reach a healthy state.

The position of many of the people engaged in industry today is infinitely worse than it was 20 years ago. In those days a man who went on the land had the prospect that, after a period of hard work, frugal living and enterprise, he might build up a competency for himself and a measure of independence, but as a result of the last ten years' experience, it must surely be obvious that such attraction as the land held for people years ago exists for them no longer, and that the deferring of consideration of the position of the industry in the mass and the evasion of any worth-while effort at reconstruction can only result in a continuation of the deterioration that has been taking place in the morale of the embarrassed agriculturists of this State. To-day there is not the old incentive for people to succeed, for the simple reason that they cannot hope to carry the costs that are loaded on to them as a result of our settled policy, as a result of the standards of living that we as a people believe the community is entitled to, and as a result—and, in my opinion this is the worst feature of all—of the overloading of their industry by the weight of the secured debt that has been built up in years past.

The country people and the farmers are interdependent to a marked degree. I think it is realised that the production of the farmers is necessary to enable the country business people to carry on, and that the country business people are necessary to the farmer to arrange for distribution and credit. After ten years of struggling, with wool prices in the main low and wheat in most years unpayable, we have reached a stage where the equity of a majority of the farmers has gone and where a large proportion of them are not, as was stated in this House a day or two ago, on starvation wages, but are existing on a subsistence level with no wages at all. I think the Par-

liament and the people of this State must realise, and realise very soon, that the average Australian will not go into the bush to live amongst the dust and heat and flies, without any protection of Arbitration Court awards and without any guarantee or results for his years of labour, unless we can make the living conditions for him much more suitable than they are at the moment and much more in accord with the belief generally cherished as to what constitutes a reasonable standard of living. The position is such, I think, that we can ask ourselves the question, who wants land in this State to-day under existing conditions? Those people who have been carrying on for years find that their children are taking the first opportunity to leave. They find that they are not able to recompense their children for their labour in anything like the manner in which workers are recompensed in other industries, or wages men employed in other avocations. After all said and done, if the parents offered the property to the children, the children would not accept it. In many cases children of farmers have seen their parents, after 20 or 30 years of struggling, in a worse position than they were when they first went on the land. The rural youngster of to-day—though brought up in the bush, where educational facilities are not nearly so good as those offering in the cities and towns—has a sufficiently high standard of intelligence to realise that there is no future for him in country conditions such as they are now. The idea that under those circumstances we can build up or carry on with a race of agriculturists no better than tenant farmers is, to my mind, untenable. The tenant farmers of the Old Country for years, I understand, fought for the right to dispose of their own produce and the proceeds of that produce; but in this country that right is denied to our people. Under such legislation as we have, including the Agricultural Bank Act, the farmer is controlled not only with regard to his produce but with regard to the proceeds. It is well enough to say that where he is paying his interest he is not interfered with, but with wool and wheat at the prices we have had it is a physical impossibility for many of those men to make their avocation pay on the indebtedness they are being asked to carry.

I do not believe that many people outside the rural areas realise the deterioration that

is taking place, or the utter hopelessness of the outlook for so many farmers who, after all, deserve well of Western Australia. One finds among many of them a revolt against the existing state of affairs—what to my mind seems a kind of incipient communism, not destructive or disloyal, but they wonder where their place is in the scheme of things and why they should be expected to carry on under conditions which no other section of this community would entertain for five minutes. We see the concern that is displayed for some of the big industries and some of the big monopolies and institutions in Australia. We also have evidence of how little concern is shown for the primary producer. I wish particularly to emphasise what has been done in this State in respect of the control of meat prices, without the producer being consulted. Although the consumer presumably was the main concern, a price was fixed only for the retailer, and without the producer being consulted. On the other hand, we have the position as it obtains with regard to superphosphate—an essential to the producer in Western Australia. In that case the consumer, namely, the farmer, was apparently not consulted; but the producer or manufacturer of superphosphate was given a price approximately 40 per cent. higher than that at which his product was sold in the preceding year. It is no wonder to me, on occasion, that those who are carrying on under a heavy handicap and see these things happening, should ask, "Whom do you think we are fighting for?" They are, of course, just as loyal as you, Mr. President, and I; and although they pose that question, they know very well what we are fighting for—those things which are thought to be most worth while in any British community. I want members to understand the reaction of those people, living as they are, divorced from so many of the amenities of our Australian life as known in the larger centres of population. In my opinion we have reached the stage where the Governments of Australia should define their attitude, plainly and without equivocation, to the rural industries, more especially to the wheat and wool industries, because those two at the moment are carrying on at a loss. They have not received the consideration to which they are entitled. Whilst spokesmen for both the State and the Federal authorities are repeating, almost ad nauseam at times, the need for stimulating production,

and the demand that there will be in the dim and distant future for our products, we are at the moment faced with a position that much of the world which we have come to regard as markets for our products is now closed to us, and that difficulties are being experienced, and will in all probability be accentuated, in the shipment of our produce.

I think that when Governments ask those people to go on producing without any guarantee for the future, without any assurance that increased costs, will be re-imbursed to them in market prices, they are asking something that is not reasonable. They should not continually "pass the buck" to the producers, but should take some of the responsibility themselves and say just how far this production should go. I consider that it is up to the Western Australian Government to take that stand and declare whether it wants the wheat in unlimited quantities, and, if it does, whether it will be prepared to ensure that at least cost of production price will be given for it. Similarly with wool. I am one of those who, like I believe, the majority of woolgrowers, and certainly the majority of our small growers, are firmly convinced that when the wool appraisements were instituted and the Commonwealth Government acquired the wool, it was done at a figure not sufficient to cover the cost of production. I understand that in certain portions of the State, especially in some of the pastoral areas, there are people who believe that they can grow wool and show a handsome profit at the appraised prices. But that is not the experience of the great majority of small growers. For the last year at least, I think, we were justified in expecting that consideration would be given to that aspect. I realise now that what has taken place in Belgium and Northern France, together with Italy coming into the war, may give rise to certain difficulties in pressing for an increase from the British Government for the Australian wool clip. At the same time, if that production is to be continued some assurance must be given to the producer. Sheep will, of course, continue to grow wool; but from the producer's point of view there is no sense in growing wool if he does not obtain a return commensurate with his costs.

There is a matter to which I would like to refer, although I do not think that as yet anything definite has been done with regard to it. It may be merely a rumour, but if it

is more than a rumour I trust the Government will give it serious consideration. I have heard it stated that arrangements are being made to place enemy aliens in this State on some of our heavily timbered country to do clearing and development work with a view to establishing further settlement. Most of us who are acquainted with our rural areas realise that the majority of such settlements which have been attempted in Western Australia have not been outstanding successes. Our major trouble to-day is to keep our present settlers on the land. When returns from farming are enticing or sufficiently profitable, we will have no difficulty in inducing people to settle on the land. I certainly am strongly of the opinion that enemy aliens should work for their keep. The people of Australia should not be expected to support them for nothing; but I would suggest to the Government that west of the Great Southern district there are tens of thousands of acres capable of development. These areas are already occupied by settlers whose financial position is such that they cannot develop their virgin country or their timbered country to the extent that the State may desire. From Mt. Barker as far north as Marradong there is a district with a good rainfall where top-dressing and pasture development would bring about a tremendous increase in the State's production. We cannot, however, secure that production unless the land is cleared. From the State's point of view, I submit it is a much better proposition to clear country that is already occupied, if the present settlers cannot afford to do so, and possibly charge them a reasonable amount for such work, payable on exceptionally easy terms. That would be better than clearing unoccupied land in the hope that at some time in the dim and distant future we may be able to build up additional settlements. We already have had some experience of that and have found after a few years that the land has had to be cleared a second time.

A matter of considerable interest to the province I represent and one that has recently been the subject of a deputation to the Minister for Railways, concerns the provision of an alternative freight to Albany at a comparative rate in order to make good the loss sustained through the acquisition of the steamship "Kybra" by the Commonwealth Government. As members are aware,

the "Kybra" was engaged on the south-east coastal trade, and Albany business people were enabled to do a considerable amount of business with Perth and Fremantle because of the reasonable shipping freights. That advantage has been lost to them. They are therefore requesting the Government to give favourable consideration to a request that one train a month should run to Albany in order to meet the requirements of that district at a freight rate comparable to that which was charged for carriage by the "Kybra." It is just as well to understand plainly that we cannot expect to retain this business if our railway freights or our railway policy, or our Government policy, is so rigid that it cannot be adjusted. If Albany business men cannot obtain this concession then in my opinion they will be fully justified in transferring their business to Adelaide. There is a shipping service between Adelaide and Albany; from memory I think the freight is, on the average, only about a third of the rail freight from Fremantle to Albany. If we wish to retain that business, the State will have to give very earnest consideration to the position. To try to pass the responsibility on to the Federal Government is useless; because, as I view the situation, the Commonwealth Government does not mind whether the business goes to Perth, Fremantle or Adelaide. Discussing the matter with a gentleman in charge of one of the big firms in Perth which is doing a considerable amount of business with the southern end of the State, he summed his position up very clearly and plainly by saying that, as manager of the Perth branch, he would naturally prefer to do the business in this State, as the firm has its factory here; but if that is not possible, it will not matter much to the firm, because the Albany business will be transferred to the books of the Adelaide branch. That should be borne in mind and I trust the Government will do something with regard to the matter.

I desire to make some reference to the position in which we find ourselves owing to the international situation. I make no apology for introducing the subject of the war; because, when all is said and done, I suppose every member will agree that all we have and all we are is at stake in this great struggle. I must say, however, that we do not seem to be making much progress in this country towards meeting the threat—and it is a dire threat—with which we are con-

fronted. I do not believe that we can fight a total war and at the same time maintain a peace-time economy. We should make every effort thoroughly to organise all our resources. The catch-cry of "business as usual" which has been heard so often in this country is, in my opinion, one of the biggest handicaps Australia has to carry. Too many people who lived through the last war have, I am afraid, cherished fond hopes of the opening up of possibilities for profit and for personal advancement. I am of opinion that those possibilities will not be long maintained on this occasion. There will be no room for them; everything we have will have to go into the melting pot.

Not being pessimistic, I have the greatest faith in the British people, especially when standing alone, and when everything looks at its worst. But I think we should be somewhat careful of the wishful thinking of the people who assure themselves that Germany cannot defeat the British Empire. I do not think Germany will ever beat the British Empire, but I am certain that the German war machine and the organisation of the German nation on the lines on which we have reason to believe it has been developed, is a real threat to the Empire, and unless considerably more is done in Australia than we seem willing to do to date, the result may not be nearly as satisfactory as so many of our people appear to take for granted. Whatever happens within the next few months, it appears to me that those months will be the crucial period; we will see much of the Old Country destroyed and many of its industries wrecked and production seriously curtailed. We will probably reach the stage where, possibly within the next six months, Canada, Australia, India and Africa will have to take over the greater burden of the war, the industrial production and the equipment of the fighting forces to a greater degree than we ever contemplated in the past. Our help will be needed to pull the Old Country through, since she may not be in the position to carry the whole of the burden, or even the major portion of it. We can only do what might yet be required of us by the organisation of all our industries and all our resources. Our position has led us to carry on so far in a too haphazard way. We have been extremely fortunate that the war has not been brought closer home to us. International difficulties east of Suez may develop in the Indian and

Pacific Oceans to the extent that we may find ourselves in a desperately dangerous position. Although the war has been going on for nearly 12 months, it has not been until the last couple of months that there has been that provision made for our defence that circumstances demand. I do not consider that the attitude we have adopted towards aliens in this country should be permitted to continue much longer. All said and done, if the position were reversed, a Britisher in an enemy country would be under such control that there would be no chance of his being a danger to that country's national effort. There are aliens throughout this country of German and Italian birth who, even though they are naturalised, are apparently not under any restraint. I believe that they are a very real menace to the conduct of this country's war effort.

Whilst dealing with the war, although it is a matter largely for the Federal authorities, indeed almost entirely so, I think that the Government should define its attitude more clearly as to what it requires of our people in the way of service in the armed forces of the community. I have studied the booklet of the list of reserved occupations. The Defence Department, when enlisting men in the A.I.F., is endeavouring to retain skilled men in the industries of this country, and whilst admittedly necessary, this action seems to have led the authorities along the path of safety, almost to the point of absurdity. Studying the reserved occupations, one can go from peanut-growers to men working in a cordial factory, and from book-keepers to clerks and caretakers, and so on, and one will find that those occupations are classified as reserved. Those people are not admissible in the A.I.F. unless they do, as thousands have done, tell untruths and throw up their jobs for the express purpose of serving their country. The conviction is forced upon me that in regard to enlistments up to date, the Federal Government wishes to enlist only the men who are out of work, the sustenance workers or the youth of this country who, as a result of the depression, has not been able to find for himself a steady job. The man who has any stake in the country or who may be in a worth-while position is protected under "reserved occupations." But it is to the credit of thousands of our people that they prefer to call themselves unemployed so that they might be

accepted to serve in the A.I.F. When the time arrives for further enlistments, the list of reserved occupations will have to be subjected to drastic review. We all realise that the war effort of Australia is going to loom largely in the business of this Parliament, and I think it would be a good suggestion if members of the State Parliament were able to convey their views, and those of the Federal authorities, to their constituents. To this end, it might be possible to make arrangements that when a secret session of the Federal Parliament is held, the State Premiers and some of the State Ministers should be invited to attend, and in that way they in their turn could convey to State members, again in a secret session of the State Parliaments, whatever information they were entitled to receive. In that way members of the State Parliaments would have some idea of what was ahead of them, and an idea of the handicaps under which the Federal Government is labouring and the problems facing the Government. If the Governments took the people more into their confidence, the people would respond to a surprising degree. It is difficult for our Federal members—the number representing us is entirely inadequate—to keep in touch with their constituents and at the same time represent them in Canberra thousands of miles away. Therefore in my opinion the State members could help them considerably. We hear reports as to the inadequacy of our equipment and our organisation and the fact that we have infantry without munitions, machine gunners without machine guns and artillery without artillery. It makes one wonder how long, if these assertions are true, the Government can expect to continue and maintain an appearance of preparedness. I am not making this statement with any mischievous intent; I have no fear that it may be of use to any enemy country because I have sufficient respect for the enemy we are confronting today to believe that he knows much more about the conditions of Australian defence than we ourselves as average Australians know. It is disturbing to know that although we are mobilising returned soldiers in Australia for home defence, it does not seem possible to supply them with rifles. On the other hand, there must be thousands of privately-owned weapons that could be requisitioned for use. Possibly I

have unduly trespassed on the time of hon. members by referring to questions that do not directly concern this Parliament, but we are, as I understand, representing the people of Western Australia, and it is those people who are affected. So I hope it will be possible for the Government to give us reasonably frequent opportunities to debate the war position and the question of Australian defence.

Hon. G. Fraser: You can continue now for another hour if you like.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: The hon. member is very kind. There are several matters that particularly affect us in this State, matters that are well within the province of the State Government; but it does not seem to me that we are justified in worrying and bickering as to whether this or that is a State or a Commonwealth responsibility. One matter only to which I wish to refer is the position of the men in the Northam camp who, when on leave and desirous of coming to the metropolitan area are forced to pay their own train fares. The amount is 5s., which is the figure charged for soldiers on week-end leave. I am given to understand that this is similar to the fare imposed by the Railway Department for the conveyance of those who desire to indulge in week-end hikes to centres considerably further away than is Northam from Perth. When we remember that many of the soldiers, after making their allotments, are drawing only 2s. a day, and also what the service in which they are enlisting is likely to involve, and the sacrifice they are likely to make for the defence of this community, it does not seem right to charge these men a train fare. As I have said, this is not an occasion for bickering between the Commonwealth and the State Governments, but I cannot refrain from saying that these men should be given a free pass on the railways.

Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: We who are not called upon to offer ourselves for what may be the supreme sacrifice might well offer some small benefit in return. In connection with enlistments in the A.I.F., there is another matter to which I would like to draw the attention of the Chief Secretary. I refer to the cost of securing extracts from the office of Births, Deaths and Marriages, when birth certificates are

demanded of the men at the time of enlistment. Before a soldier can obtain separation allowance for his children he has to provide proof of birth to the military authorities. In the great majority of instances the minimum cost of such proof is 2s. 6d. I do not see why this State should make a profit to bolster up its finances, as is apparently being done now in this case. Surely the necessary certificates should be issued at a nominal cost, if not entirely free. I understand that in certain circumstances, where men can prove they are indigent, they can be supplied with a verification of birth at a cost of 9d. for each child. I should have thought that 9d. for all the children in one family would be a sufficiently large amount to pay. The machinery already exists for the issue of the necessary documents, and it is only a question of setting up an organisation between the Defence Department, and the Registrar General's Department, for dozens if not hundreds of names to be checked off in a few hours.

Another matter I have been asked to take up is in respect to a simplified power of attorney. Many enlisted men desire to leave behind them powers of attorney so that their affairs may be attended to. The Government should also reconsider its attitude in regard to land rents, rates, and interest concerning men who held farms at the time of their enlistment. I know that in certain circumstances farming is a reserved occupation, but many farmers have already found their way into the ranks of the A.I.F. Once a man is accepted for service he should be given freedom from all such worries during the time he is with the Australian Imperial Forces. To what extent we can interest the military authorities in the next matter to which I wish to refer, I do not know, but it is one that should be ventilated. When men are being advised to report to camp they are usually not admitted immediately after the medical examination. They are told to report later to whatever camp they have to go. It seems unfair that a man who has been kept in camp for a number of days should find that his pay and his separation allowance do not start until he has been attested. Surely the separation allowance should start from the day when the soldier leaves home to travel to whatever camp is specified in the notice he receives. I understand also that recruits in the R.A.A.F. have