

Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 23rd January, 1918.

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

[For "Questions on notice" and "Papers presented" see "Minutes of Proceedings."]]

OBITUARY—HON. A. G. JENKINS, LETTERS IN REPLY.

The PRESIDENT: I have received the following communications:—"Clendon," Flower-road, Colombo, 26th Oct., 1917. Dear Mr. President, I thank you most sincerely for the copy of 'Hansard' you sent me expressing the sympathy of members in my great sorrow, also for your own condolences. It is some consolation to know how much my dear son was respected and esteemed by his fellow members and I feel very grateful for your kindness in forwarding the same to me. Yours sincerely, Caroline Jenkins."

"15 Redcliffe Gardens, London, S.W. 20th Sept., 1917. Dear Sir Henry Briggs, I have this morning received your letter of the 24th July and the copy of 'Hansard.' My son joins me in thanking you and hon. members of the Legislative Council for your kind expressions of sympathy to us in our late bereavement. A. L. Jenkins."

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR GREETINGS.

The PRESIDENT: It may interest hon. members to know that during the adjournment I received, on their behalf, Christmas and New Year Greetings from Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. A. J. H. Saw, who is now in Egypt, also from the Hon. James Cornell, who is now on his way to the front; and from our late member the Hon. R. D. Mackenzie, who is still at the front in France.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Second Day—Conclusion.

Debate resumed from the 20th November, 1917.

Hon. A. SANDERSON (Metropolitan-Suburban) [4.37]: The circumstances in which we meet are unusual. There has been a long unavoidable delay in the debate on the Address-in-reply which was begun in November, and I may be permitted to remind hon. members and also myself exactly where we stand. We have a newly elected Assembly. It will be within the recollection of hon. members that the moribund Assembly elected a Ministry, a procedure unprecedented in the history of Western Australia.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Part of the Assembly.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: That is a good correction and I accept it at once. It only emphasises what I wish to point out, and I do not wish to exaggerate. Part of a moribund Assembly elected the Ministry and the procedure of electing the Ministry, whether it is good or bad, is quite a novel feature in

Western Australian affairs. I am not going to trace in detail or step by step what is within the recollection of every member here, and I am not going to attempt to outline the inevitable intrigues that will take place when we have a system of electing Ministries. Each member is intimately acquainted with what has come under his own observation, and a certain amount has come under my observation in that respect. We are interested in what goes on in this Chamber. We understood the old system of Government and it is not difficult to understand the new system of elective Ministries, but what have we got to-day, and what have we got in this Chamber? We have two Ministers from the Eastern Province, a province in which I am an elector, and I naturally join in congratulating my fellow electors in having two Ministers in the Upper House. But how did they get there? How comes it about that those two hon. members occupy the positions they do? It must be a matter that the public are rightly interested in and I am putting aside altogether the position of affairs in another place and what has gone on and what is going on there. But I think we must all be interested in this Chamber in what is going on here, and why we have the honour and the pleasure of those two hon. members from the Eastern Province as the sole representatives of the Government in this Chamber. Were they elected as Ministers, and if so, who elected them? Were they selected, and if so, who selected them? I was not asked to vote for them. I think we may safely say that the Colonial Secretary stepped into his natural position, and without any reserve whatever I congratulate him on the post he occupies. Unfortunately for myself possibly, I was unable to follow him in his political movements, although we came into the Chamber at the same time and in many respects I think in public affairs—because that is only what I am dealing with here—I found myself sometimes in agreement with him and sometimes entirely opposed to his attitude. It would be interesting and possibly of value to the country and to this Chamber, and to people who take any interest in Western Australian affairs, to give, step by step, the legitimate means—and I am not suggesting illegitimate means—which were taken in deposing the Labour Government, on the grounds that their finances were unsound. The charge brought against the late Labour Government was that their administrative ability was not equal to the business acumen which could be obtained elsewhere, and that their principles of finance and their administration were radically unsound. There was even a suggestion made that their financial methods were worse than unsound. Undoubtedly the suggestion was openly made in regard to the question of what is known as the Nevanas contract—I do not say by the leader of the House or by any member of this Chamber—that the dealings and negotiations with the Nevanas business were more than unsound, and that they reflected very little credit on the integrity and on the honesty of Ministers who were dealing with the matter. That was unques-

tionably the suggestion in some places, and an open statement in other places. Assuming all that to be correct, and that the Labour party had shown their incompetence, and assuming that their principles were radically unsound from start to finish—and to that I subscribe—what are we to say to hon. members and Ministers who displaced the Government at a time of admitted difficulty, unprecedented difficulty? What are we to say when we find Ministers of a party—and I may say I was not of that party—turning these men out of office at a time like this and coming into office themselves, and having 12 months or more to put their house in order, to indicate and outline to us how things should be put straight, and who come forward at a time like this with the record that they have? I have not had an opportunity of personally congratulating the Honorary Minister, Mr. Baxter, upon his accession to the position he holds, and I beg to do so now. It is certainly encouraging and advantageous to the country that the younger members of a somewhat senior assemblage like should have an opportunity of trying their prentice hands at the art of government, for it is an art. It would be unbecoming in me as an elector to criticise one of my representatives when he has come into that position. Let me assure the Honorary Minister that not only I myself, but I am certain a great many others, are following with the closest attention and interest his work in that very responsible position. I know it could be said, and it has been said, that my attitude is one of hostility towards the Government. That, however, is not so. My attitude is one of hostility to any Government of this country—and in that I carry out my election pledge—which either in their administration or the principles on which they are working, are unsound. I am convinced, and hope to convince 18,000 electors before long, that this Government has not a very creditable performance behind it in respect to its administration, although I will be the first to admit the enormous difficulties with which it has had to deal. Making a fair allowance for those difficulties, however, and looking back upon its record for the last 12 or 18 months, I say it is not a very creditable record for any Government to put before the country. In the remarks I wish to make on the one important public question, which is engaging attention, as shown by the Governor's Speech and the speech of the man in the street, namely the question of finance, let me protect myself so far as the leader of the House is concerned by telling him that I recognise that he is the spokesman of the Government in this House, and is not the Treasurer. Let him not imagine that I wish to make a public attack upon his finances. I do wish, however, to make a public attack on the finances of the Government. I must crave the indulgence of members of this Chamber because I am drafting an election address. It is of course the very last thing that any hon. member here would wish to listen to. An hon. member's own election address is probably dreadful enough to lis-

ten to, but someone else's must be very trying indeed for him to hear. It is quite possible that my remarks this afternoon, and this address that is being drafted, may sometimes run into each other, but I will attempt to strip the matter of all verbiage and claptrap, and put to hon. members what I admit they have heard, not once, or twice, but four times from myself. I only ask their attention on one point, and that is the development which has taken place in connection with the leader of the House in his public utterance on the problem of Western Australia—I refer to the separation movement. I do not suggest that everything that appeared in the public Press from his lips is accurate—he may possibly wish to correct one or two sentences, for we both know the difficulty in getting absolute accuracy in these matters, either on the part of the interviewer or the interviewed—but I take it for granted that he is not going to deny that a very important utterance was made by him on this question. At any rate, he will not be surprised when I tell him that I have studied it with the closest attention. There are three courses we can pursue. We can continue as we are doing, for we are a sovereign State and a portion of the Commonwealth of Australia. We can continue indefinitely, so far as I can see, on these lines if we see fit to do so, but I am thankful to say that the leader of the House is in agreement with me that this course is impossible. It is very refreshing to me to find myself in agreement with him on anything. The other procedure we can adopt is to separate from the Commonwealth; and the third procedure is to abolish State Governments and—

The PRESIDENT: I would point out to the hon. member that, while extreme latitude is always allowed to a speaker on the Address-in-reply, I think the subjects that are being brought before the House are many of them outside altogether the scope of the debate. There is a law laid down that any speech or address must be relevant to the motion before the House. We have simply the Governor's Speech before us, and I should like the hon. member in some measure to confine himself to the matters contained in that Speech and to keep somewhat within bounds. The question of the Federal Government and as to how it should be carried on, I maintain, does not come within the compass of the Governor's Speech.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I apologise to you, Sir, and to hon. members of this Chamber, and I shall not pursue that subject except in so far as you permit me to handle the financial question, and to indicate only how these three propositions affect the financial position. I shall now proceed to deal with the finances of this country. The leader of the House was kind enough to send me some papers and returns for which I asked, and I appreciate his action because it has saved me a very considerable amount of exhausting labour in trying to find out these particulars for myself. All the figures are in round numbers, and there will be nothing under half a million. The position of affairs is set out so clearly, so far

as our finances are concerned, and the returns so accurate that anyone who takes the trouble can find out where we are. I am going to pass by altogether what I call the capital account or what we call the public debt. There is a debt of over £100 a head independent altogether of our private liabilities, our municipal liabilities, and our Commonwealth liabilities, and to have a debt like that at a time like the present seems to me to be most unsound. But what is possibly worse than the capital account is what I believe in business circles would be called the profit and loss account—the revenue and expenditure account. That is where we are even worse than we are with the capital account. The accumulated deficit on the 30th June, 1917—that is last June—was roughly two millions of money and we funded a million and a half of that. There again that is the round figure. It would mean that we carry over to the next 12 months half a million of money. That in itself might be nothing to cause alarm, but what do we find? On the 31st December, last month, there was a deficit of £450,000 for the six months. That means that roughly speaking the deficit is two and a half millions. How are we going to pay that off? How are we going to deal with that? That is the question in a nutshell. I certainly do not think the present occupants of the Treasury bench are going to deal with this in a satisfactory way according to their public utterances. The leader of the House tells us—this is a very short extract—that—

If those charged with the administration of the Commonwealth Act persist in violating both letter and spirit to our detriment the cry for separation must grow, as representing the only means of preventing public bankruptcy and industrial stagnation—the only means of restoring that self-government which is the right and the privilege of every British community.

That is what the leader of the House says. I entirely agree with him, but what steps are his colleagues taking to deal with it? Does the hon. member seriously suggest as a means of dealing with the financial position, which he and I and everyone in this Chamber are agreed is most unsatisfactory from every point of view and must end in disaster—does he seriously suggest that he will support the separation movement? That is the question I ask him, and if he does say that is a solution of our difficulties, whatever the position of affairs are at the present time, I myself will not move one finger to separate from the rest of the States. I am not going to give reasons at the present, seeing the necessity for keeping close to the financial position. The leader of the House was kind enough and was generous enough publicly to state when there was no necessity to do so, that I had worked out the Federal problem some years ago and opposed the entry of Western Australia to federation. Whatever we may think of the Colonial Secretary, we know that a lack of generosity is not one of his failings. I have worked out the unification problem as dealing with the financial position. We cannot go on as we are going. I agree with him on that, but I would not move a finger for the separation movement. Therefore, we are compelled to con-

sider at the present time the question of unification. I am only going to say a few words more on the special subject of the sinking fund. Here again do not let the leader of the House imagine that I thought this was his proposal. It is the Treasurer's proposal presumably and if it is not brought down, although we are led to believe we might see the Bill on the question of the suspension of the sinking fund, I felt at the time, without going into the subject, it was only fraudulent bankruptcy to touch the sinking fund. I am convinced that the Government and their financial advisers and hon. members who look closely into the subject will find that there are other obstacles (apart from our intelligence and our own honesty fortunately for ourselves) in London that will prevent them carrying out their proposals. The Colonial Stock Act might be looked at by those interested in the subject and possibly we shall hear from the Treasurer a statement on this matter. I have not seen anything lately as to what he has decided to do or what the Government have decided to do, but as far as touching the trust funds as they are, the sinking fund and the interest payments, or the fund itself, which at the present time amounts to over five millions of money—I do not know what the technical term is, but the contribution fund the amount that is paid over to the holders of the trust fees, not as interest on the money but as contribution to the capital account, is £275,000. Other members will deal with this subject of public concern and I shall listen with attention. I regret that I trespassed and overstepped the line which separates relevancy from irrelevancy, but the circumstances, I think, will ensure my absolution. Outside one has more freedom, but whether we are inside or outside, or whether we are dealing with the Governor's Speech or the man in the street excluding all questions of imperial and foreign affairs for the moment, the one subject of interest to the public of this country and to the people who sent us here and whose interests we are supposed to represent, the one subject of prominent interest is the financial question. I shall be most interested to hear the leader of the House on the subject when the time comes. I rejoice to think he has publicly announced that the present system is impossible and I would only ask what will he consider his duty on the separation movement first of all because I think it is dangerous to the country to have a man in his responsible position suggesting such a thing, and secondly from a West Australian standpoint, it is a hopeless question. From a Commonwealth point of view it is a disloyal proposal; that is the question of separation. The question of separation seems to be disloyal to the Commonwealth and not only disloyal to the Commonwealth but to the Empire of which we are all doing something at the present time, I hope, to preserve.

Question put and passed; the Address adopted.

ADJOURNMENT—STATE OF BUSINESS.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. H. P. Colebatch—East) [5.15]: I move—

“That the House at its rising adjourn until Tuesday next.”

I think members will realise that I never contemplated that the Address-in-reply would finish this afternoon. I quite expected that it would last a day or two and if that had been so, other business would have been provided to be taken up. Now it will be necessary for members to meet on Tuesday.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan: What business will there be for Tuesday?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Very little business because it will be necessary for the preliminary stages in regard to certain Bills to be taken before we can proceed with them on a subsequent day.

Hon. R. J. Lynn: Adjourn until Tuesday week.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: If we do that we shall be in exactly the same position because it will be necessary to take the preliminary stages of the Bills.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Are these Bills ready?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: They are. It is not my intention to suspend the Standing Orders, I want to take everything in its proper order.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Have a formal sitting to-morrow and deal with the first stages of the Bills then.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: If it is the desire of members to have a formal sitting to-morrow so as to get through the first stages of certain Bills, that will be sufficient. In the meantime we may be able to ascertain some idea of the progress which is likely to be made in another place and have some idea of the wishes of hon. members whether it will be desirable to adjourn until Tuesday next or Tuesday of the following week. If that is the wish of hon. members, I simply move that the House do now adjourn.

Question—that the House do now adjourn—put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.17 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 23rd January, 1918.

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

ELECTION RETURN—KIMBERLEY.

The SPEAKER announced the return of writ for the election of a member for Kimberley, showing that Mr. M. P. Durack had been duly elected.

SWEARING-IN.

Mr. M. P. Durack (Kimberley) and Mr. J. B. Holman (Murchison) took and subscribed the oath and signed the roll.

[For "Questions on notice" and "Papers presented," see "Votes and Proceedings."]

QUESTION — WYNDHAM FREEZING WORKS, AND MR. NEVANAS.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN, without notice, asked the Minister for Works: Seeing that the Minister was chairman of the select committee which inquired into the Wyndham freezing works, would he favour inviting Mr. Nevanas to the bar of the House in order that he may give his version of the whole transaction? Mr. Nevanas was stated to be very anxious at the time to appear before the select committee, and I understand he is in Perth now.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In reply to the hon. member's somewhat embarrassing question, I should say that any matter connected with Mr. Nevanas had better remain quiescent for the present, or at all events until we know for what purpose Mr. Nevanas is in Western Australia. The hon. member and the public of Western Australia may rest perfectly assured that the Government will endeavour to protect the interests of the State so far as Mr. Nevanas is concerned. With that reply I think the hon. member should remain content.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Second Day.

Debate resumed from the 20th November, 1917.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [4.58]: In view of the exceptional circumstances in which the House meets to begin the work of the session, that is to say, with seven months of the financial year already expired, and with a lapse of two months since Parliament first met, I have no intention of wasting the time or the money of the country in debating the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply at this juncture. The Government have been returned from the country with a substantial majority. Theirs is the responsibility of putting forward a policy adequate to the requirements of the desperate condition of the State. So far we on this side do not know, nor does the country know, what that policy is. Consequently I shall reserve criticism or discussion until the Treasurer has delivered his Budget speech, and until the programme of the Government for the session is made known to the House and to the country.

Mr. H. ROBINSON (Albany) [4.59]: I desire to congratulate the Government on having afforded members the opportunity of participating in the last referendum campaign, which campaign enabled Western Australia once more to inform the world that, notwithstanding what our brothers in the Eastern States may do, we here are still prepared to stand by our pledged word.