

Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 8th August, 1928.

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

QUESTION—UNEMPLOYED, SHELTER FACILITIES.

Hon. A LOVEKIN asked the Chief Secretary: 1, Is it a fact that the Premier applied to the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth for the temporary use of military stretchers and bedding to relieve shelterless unemployed, and was refused? 2, If so, what was the reason for the refusal?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1 and 2, An application for the loan of sleeping equipment for 120 men was made to the Prime Minister, and a reply was received regretting that none was available.

QUESTION—MINERS' PHTHISIS, EXAMINATIONS.

Hon. H. SEDDON asked the Chief Secretary: In connection with the X-Ray examinations conducted by the staff of the Kalgoorlie Health Laboratory in 1926-27-28, under the provisions of the Miners' Phthisis Act: 1, Has a report been furnished by the medical officer conducting the examinations? 2, Is any information compiled showing the history of the affected cases? 3, Have any recommendations been made by the medical officer with a view to eliminating or minimising the effect of "dust" as a result of the knowledge gained in the course of such examinations? 4, Will such report be made available to Parliament?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, Yes, so far as the examinations carried out during 1925-26 are concerned, but only the results of the 1927 and 1928 examinations have been reported to date. 2, Yes, regarding the cases examined during 1925-26. 3, No. 4, Yes.

QUESTION—AGRICULTURAL BANK ADVANCES.

Hon. A. LOVEKIN asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What amounts were authorised during the three years ended 30th June, 1928, by the Agricultural Bank to civilian and ex-soldier settlers for clearing? 2, What amounts were actually advanced? 3, Is the balance (if any) still available to and required by the persons to whom the advances were authorised? 4, If not, are the balances available to others, or have they lapsed? 5, What percentage of the advances made by the Agricultural Bank is derived from Migration funds, and what percentage from ordinary Loan funds?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, £1,209,344. 2, £1,125,846. 3, Generally yes. A loan if not used within two years may be cancelled. 4, Answered by No. 3. 5, Two per cent. Migration, 98 per cent. Loan Fund. No advances made from Migration Funds prior to 1st July, 1927.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Third Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. H. A. STEPHENSON (Metropolitan-Suburban) [4.37]: I do not intend to make a long speech, but to deal with one or two items only. It is very pleasing to note that our wheat yield for 1927-28 amounted to over 35,000,000 bushels, that being something over 5,000,000 bushels more than the total for the previous year. I understand that a further effort is to be made to introduce the bulk-handling system in this State. The Minister for Works is reported by cable to have stated in Canada that he was very much impressed by the system of bulk handling adopted there, and that as soon as he returned to this State he would endeavour to introduce a similar system here. I should like to issue a word of warning to the Government. The time is not nearly ripe for the handling of wheat in bulk in Western Australia. If it were entered upon, it would mean great loss to the State, and would not benefit the farmers. I should like to stress three points in particular. The first is that nearly all the advocates of the bulk-handling system base their arguments upon the adoption of it by the United States and Canada. They, however, miss the main point. The United

States and Canada are not in anything like the same position in regard to harvesting as we are, owing to the moist conditions prevailing in those countries. They cannot strip their wheat there. They have to put the reaper and binder into their crops, tie up their hay in sheaves, have it stooked, and then it has to be stacked, and remain in the stack for some time before it is ready for threshing. When it is ready for threshing, it is graded and cleaned at the same time. It is thus a very simple matter to go in for bulk handling there. Members will have noted that before they reach that stage they will have had to incur a good deal of expense. In Western Australia we have the finest climate in the world for the harvesting of wheat and other grains. As soon as our wheat is ripe, all the farmer has to do is to put in his reaper threshing machine, and he can then harvest his wheat direct into bags, when it is ready to be taken to the nearest siding or station. He loads up his motor lorry or wagon, carts the wheat to the nearest railway, and can then sell it or do what he likes with it, for he has actually finished with it. That is a great advantage over the United States or Canada. The second point is that we have in this State about 600 unattended sidings, not inclusive of those along the Midland railway. One can understand what that means to farmers. There are no officials present at these places, and it is, therefore, very difficult for farmers to get information as to when trucks are likely to be available. We can imagine the position of a farmer who has carted his wheat in bulk over 15 miles to one of these unattended sidings, and then, finding there are no trucks available, has to take it back in bulk to his farm. He cannot leave the wheat lying loose on the ramp, and therefore has to hold it until he receives information that there are trucks available to take away his grain. That in itself would represent a considerable loss. Such a thing occurs very often to-day, even with regard to the transport of superphosphate and bagged wheats. Very often the trucks do not arrive at the sidings until long after they are expected. If a farmer took in a wagon-load of bagged wheat and the trucks were not available at the siding, he could dump the wheat on the ramp and not be forced to cart it back to his farm. In the circumstances, it can be seen that no comparison can be made between the conditions prevailing in Western Australia and those prevailing in Canada and other parts

of the world where bulk handling is in operation. We have the best system for our climatic conditions, and if bulk handling is to be inaugurated here, I think it will be found that very few farmers will change over from the present system to that of bulk handling. The present system is the most convenient and the cheapest in the long run for the farmers.

Hon. V. Hamersley: It is suitable for the merchants, not for the farmers.

Hon. H. A. STEPHENSON: The third point is that it has been suggested it will be an easy matter to convert ordinary railway trucks so that they will be suitable for the bulk handling of wheat. Everyone knows that is not so. I have it on good authority that if the Government attempted to convert sufficient trucks to carry the harvest in bulk next year, it would cost them over £1,000,000. It is clear that if we attempt to introduce the bulk-handling system of wheat here, it will mean a very costly proposition. It will probably mean involving the State in great losses.

Hon. H. Stewart: A Royal Commission reported to the contrary.

Hon. H. A. STEPHENSON: I do not care what any Royal Commission may have reported. If the Government intend to go in for bulk handling, I hope they will procure the fullest information before they commit this State to any such scheme. If they do that I have no doubt what the result will be.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: There is no reference to bulk handling in the Governor's Speech!

Hon. H. A. STEPHENSON: Seven or eight years ago an attempt was made to introduce bulk handling here. At the time Mr. Hughes was Prime Minister, the Federal Government agreed, in conjunction, I think, with the State Government, to provide capital for a scheme under certain conditions. An attempt was made to establish a company and a number of our farmers took up shares. Unfortunately, that proved unsuccessful and the farmers lost nearly the whole of the money they put into the concern. Then, again, a number of years ago a bulk handling system was inaugurated in New South Wales and I believe it has been unsuccessful. At the present moment the scheme owes the New South Wales Government something like £4,000,000. That should be an object lesson for this State. I hope that if the present Government contemplate embarking upon any scheme, they will

see that someone who is thoroughly competent to undertake the task, is entrusted with the duty of making a complete investigation and reporting to them. If that is done I feel positive that the scheme will not be proceeded with. Wheat production has increased in Western Australia at a great rate and that has served to emphasise the unsatisfactory position here regarding export standards. Twenty years ago when Western Australia produced a small quantity of wheat only and shipping overseas was commenced, no standard quality was fixed upon which the wheat was sold. Subsequently the merchants approached the Perth and Fremantle Chambers of Commerce and asked them to fix an f.a.q. standard. Those chambers were only too pleased to undertake the duties, and they have carried on since then. At their expense, those two bodies have had samples of wheat procured in the country districts and from the various samples procured have struck the f.a.q. standard. In these days the work is getting beyond the chambers and the time has arrived when a better system should be adopted. This year, I understand, the export merchants have been asked to procure samples upon which the Chambers of Commerce can fix the standard. That is not satisfactory. We ship wheat to centres in nearly every part of the world, and the f.a.q. standard is not fixed till late in February. Frequently, a lot of our season's wheat is shipped away in December. The Chambers of Commerce are not financially strong enough to send out their agents to procure samples throughout the country districts, and it is not satisfactory that the export shippers should be asked to procure grain from the various districts so that the f.a.q. standard may be fixed. A similar position arose in Tasmania many years ago and it proved unsatisfactory there.

Hon. H. Stewart: Does Tasmania grow wheat?

Hon. H. A. STEPHENSON: Yes. Upwards of 85 per cent. of Tasmanian wheat and other products are exported.

Hon. H. Stewart: Would Tasmania grow half a million bushels of wheat?

Hon. H. A. STEPHENSON: That does not affect the position; the principle is the same. The absence of a proper standard there was found detrimental and the Tasmanian Government took up the matter. Under the Grain and Produce Export Act,

it is compulsory in Tasmania for the shippers to notify the Agricultural Department when they are about to ship wheat, oat, barley, potatoes and other lines. Since that Act has been in operation there has been practically no trouble. The Government have their officers who inspect the produce before it is put on board the ship, and they issue a Government certificate when the goods reach their destinations. Instead of the purchaser being able to refuse to accept them on some imaginary grievance relative to quality, he has to accept the consignment under the Government certificate. That puts trading on a much better footing. Something similar will have to be done here, and the sooner the better. I suggest that the Government take steps at once to make the necessary provision so that our trade may be undertaken under similarly satisfactory conditions. I want to refer to one other matter, and it has reference to the improvements at the Fremantle harbour. It will be agreed that superphosphate is an essential article for a State such as Western Australia. I understand that considerably over 200,000 tons of superphosphate will be required by the farmers of Western Australia for next season. Last year between 120,000 and 150,000 tons of phosphatic rock and sulphur were discharged at Fremantle. The handling of those cargoes is very disagreeable and I admit that the men who have to undertake that work, have just cause for objection. In my opinion, the Government should provide for the mechanical handling of raw materials of that description. If that were done, ships would be discharged in about half the time that it takes now, and the great saving in freight that would be effected could be passed on to the primary producers. Certainly it would be better in the interests of men who are engaged in unloading phosphatic rock and sulphur. I commend that suggestion to the Government. I understand from men competent to judge that although we shall require 200,000 tons of superphosphate for next season, in eight or ten years' time that quantity will be doubled. Hon. members will readily perceive that this represents a big problem. In no other single port throughout Australia are there unloaded such large quantities of raw materials, such as phosphatic rock and sulphur, as at Fremantle. Not one of the other ports in the Commonwealth has provided for mechanical handling, but I under-

stand that it has been successfully operating in New Zealand, where it has been the means of cheapening superphosphate supplies. In this State the price of superphosphate has been reduced since last year, and if we can reduce it still further by the method to which I have referred, it will be a good thing for the State. I support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply.

Debate suspended until a later stage of the sitting.

BILL—SUPPLY (No. 1) £1,910,500.

Received from the Assembly and read a first time.

STANDING ORDERS SUSPENSION.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [5.3]: I move—

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Supply Bill to be taken into consideration forthwith and passed through its remaining stages at this sitting.

Question put and passed.

Second Reading.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [5.5] in moving the second reading said: The amount asked for in the Bill totals £1,910,500 made up as follows: From Consolidated Revenue Fund £850,000, General Loan Fund £750,000, Government Property Sales Fund £10,500, and Treasurer's Advance £300,000. The amounts are the same as those included in the first Supply Bill passed last year, except that the Land Improvement Loan Fund has been eliminated, as a different procedure from the past is provided for in the Financial Agreement Bill. The amounts are based on the estimates of two months' requirements. Hon. members will realise that a Supply Bill is necessary pending the passing of the Estimates. These have been provided and are now under consideration, and it is hoped that the Treasurer will be able to present them at an early date. Last year's financial results were hardly as good as had been anticipated. This was largely the outcome of a shortage in the estimated collections of income tax. Taxation from this source was much over-estimated. The amount received was only £323,597 as compared with the estimate of £390,000, leaving a shortage of

£66,403. The only other large decrease was that of the railways. The returns were £3,835,299, whilst the estimate was £3,890,000, or an over-estimate of £64,701. The failure to reach the estimate was due largely to the shipping position. The actual collections of revenue from all sources for the year as compared with the estimate were—estimate £9,877,596, actual receipts £9,807,949, a shortage of £69,647. The expenditure was slightly less than was estimated, the figures being—estimate £9,843,397, and the actual expenditure £9,834,415, a decrease of £8,982. The railway expenditure was below the estimate, to a certain extent offsetting the reduced revenue. The amount of £350,000 was placed in suspense last year pending the adoption of the Financial Agreement. It still remains there and will be held in suspense until appropriated by Parliament. A sum of £40,000 was, as estimated, received from the State Savings Bank for the purchase of a site for a new building in Barrack-street. This amount was placed in suspense in accordance with a statement made when dealing with last year's estimates, and will be utilised later on for the erection of a further Government office building for the purpose of the savings bank. Although the year closed with a small deficit, it proved prosperous from a business point of view. The harvest was a record one—35,187,195 bushels. The trade of the State showed a substantial increase. Exports were valued at £17,940,775, and imports amounted to £18,287,876, or only £347,101 more than the exports. Savings Bank deposits showed an increase for the year of £730,406, a record increase for any one year. To date this year promises well. The area under crop is a record, and the prospects of a good season appear to be bright. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment, and the report adopted.

Third Reading.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [5.10]: I move—

That the Bill be now read a third time.

HON. A. LOVEKIN (Metropolitan) [5.11]: When the Bill was in Committee I missed the opportunity to draw attention to Clause 2 which sets out—

The said sums shall be available to satisfy the warrants under the hand of the Governor, under the provisions of the law now in force, in respect of any services voted by the Legislative Assembly

I do not consider that is in accord with the Constitution. This money must be voted by Parliament, not the Legislative Assembly alone. I desire to draw the attention of the Chief Secretary to that.

The Chief Secretary: So far as my memory serves me, the same provision has appeared in every Supply Bill that has been presented to Parliament.

Hon. A. LOVEKIN: Section 72 of the Constitution Act states—

After and subject to the charges hereinbefore mentioned, all the Consolidated Revenue Fund shall be appropriated to such purpose as any Act of the Legislature shall prescribe.

It does not say “. . . the Legislative Assembly shall prescribe.” Perhaps the Chief Secretary will agree to the adjournment of the debate for a little while so that we may look further into the matter.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central—in reply) [5.12]: Mr. Lovekin must surely agree that this is not a matter of urgency. The question can be considered without resorting to adjourning the debate. I assure the hon. member that the same practice has been followed ever since we have had Responsible Government.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Has the same form been adopted?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I am almost positive on the point. If hon. members will turn to the preamble of the Bill they will see that both Houses are mentioned. I have before me the Supply Bills of 1918 and 1919, and I find that the clauses are exactly similar to clause 2 of the Bill now under discussion. In any case, the matter can be investigated without the debate on this Bill being adjourned, and when the next Supply Bill comes forward, the hon. member can raise the same objection.

Hon. A. Lovekin: I will accept that.

HON. J. J. HOLMES (North) [5.17]: Another matter might be looked into at the same time. I understand that there can be no expenditure without the authority of Parliament. So far as I am aware, Parliament authorised expenditure up to the 30th June last, and to-day is the 8th August. Many payments have been made, presumably, since the 1st July, including salaries for July. By what authority have those payments been made? If payments can be made without parliamentary authority in this manner, it is only a matter of form to put up a Bill such as this, which we are being asked to treat as a matter of urgency.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and *passed*.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Debate resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON. SIR WILLIAM LATHLAIN (Metropolitan-Suburban) [5.19]: The few remarks I am about to make are in some degree the result of certain observations made by Mr. Fraser in moving the adoption of the Address-in-reply. The hon. member said it was strange that when one spoke to city people about country matters they were apt to become indifferent, and that in general they were more concerned as to how matters appertaining to the country affected the city. Speaking as a city man, and speaking on behalf of all the city people, I have to say that nowhere in Australia will one find city people more wrapped up in the prosperity and progress of the country districts than in Western Australia. The city population of Western Australia realise, and realise clearly, that we are all interdependent one upon the other. Mr. Fraser said he had already learnt something since entering the House, and I am sure he will also learn that in this Chamber anything affecting the country receives the same serious consideration from city members as from any country member. Mr. Fraser commended the Government for having abolished the tipping system, and I congratulate them upon showing the first bit of backbone that has been displayed during many years in an endeavour to abolish something of the gambling spirit that is prevalent throughout Western Australia. If the Government

went a great deal further in that direction, it would be much better in the interests of the people. One can hardly walk the streets of Perth on any day of the week—sometimes not excluding Sunday—without being importuned to buy sweep tickets or something of a similar nature. White City is now in its off season and therefore in oblivion, but many occurrences there are such as to disgrace any community in the world. I hope steps will be taken to abolish White City altogether.

Hon. E. H. Gray: In view of what you say, you cannot have travelled much.

Hon. Sir WILLIAM LATHLAIN: One need only read the police court reports to learn what takes place at White City. As regards the Government's proposals for the maintenance of hospitals, I am sure hon. members will give the most serious consideration to any scheme for placing those institutions upon a sound financial basis without compelling them to descend to the demoralising efforts put forth from time to time for their financial support. It is the duty of every citizen—every citizen without any exemption—to maintain the hospitals. The measure relating to hospitals which was before the Chamber previously, was defeated because the exemptions were so wide that the people who would benefit most from the hospitals would have been entirely absolved from contributing towards their maintenance. Accordingly I look forward with keen expectation as to what the proposals under the Bill will be. With regard to redistribution of seats, I shall await the measure before offering any comment upon it. A matter which I desire to stress is the provision of the new bridge at Fremantle, which involves the extension of the Fremantle harbour generally. Mr. Fraser, in touching on this subject, said it was one that concerned his province. May I say that it concerns every province, and indeed vitally affects every citizen of the State. The position put before us last session, when we were asked to agree to certain proposals for preliminary work, was somewhat unsatisfactory. The Chief Secretary then stated, on the authority of the Engineer-in-Chief, that if the harbour were extended inwards—that is to say, up the river—undoubtedly it would cause the water-level to rise in Perth waters. On the other hand, we have an authority like Sir George Buchanan ridiculing that idea, and stating that there will be no such effect. Doubtless we shall hear more on this subject later, but

I wish to say now that members of this Chamber are entitled to every consideration, and to all the information that can possibly be obtained, when deciding upon any question connected with the Fremantle harbour. I repeat, the matter is one that vitally concerns every citizen. When the new bridge has been constructed, it will be there practically for all time; and its cost will be considerably over a million sterling. The first essential is to define where harbour extension is to take place. The Harbour Trust Commissioners, I understand, strongly favour extension up the river; and that is the opinion held by most people, and I personally believe it to be correct. But when we are definitely informed by the Chief Secretary, on the strength of information given to him, that harbour extension up the river means that Perth waters will rise considerably, and when, on the other hand, we have Sir George Buchanan's letter ridiculing the whole idea, we find ourselves in an awkward position. My only object in rising to speak at the present juncture is to urge that the House shall have placed before it not only all the information that is available, but all the information that can possibly be obtained, upon this vitally important subject. When two such eminent engineers are in direct opposition to one another, the problem is an extremely difficult one for this House to decide. I shall not dwell further on the subject, except to suggest that a Royal Commission inquire into it, or that expert evidence be obtained, so that we shall know where we are in regard to harbour extension and the building of the bridge. I have only to add that I support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply.

On motion by Hon. V. Hammersley, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.25 p.m.