

Legislative Council,

Tuesday, 5th August, 1941.

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

CHAIRMEN (TEMPORARY) OF COMMITTEES.

The PRESIDENT: In accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 31A I am required to nominate, during each session, a panel of not less than two members who shall act as temporary Chairmen of Committees. Accordingly I nominate the following members to act as temporary Chairmen of Committees during the present session:—Hon. J. Nicholson, Hon. V. Hamersley, and Hon. G. Fraser.

QUESTION—EDUCATION.

Cost of Technical Schools.

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What was the total cost of buildings and plant in connection with the Perth, Fremantle, Midland Junction, Kalgoorlie, and Wiluna technical schools respectively? 2, What is the amount of annual salaries and expenses in connection with the foregoing technical schools respectively?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, Perth Technical College, £104,707, Fremantle Technical School, £12,921, Midland Junction Technical School, £468, Eastern Goldfields Technical School, £4,216; there is no technical school at Wiluna; there is a branch of the Kalgoorlie School of Mines. 2, Salaries.—Perth Technical College, £19,139, Fremantle Technical School, £3,465, Midland Junction Technical School, £965, Eastern Goldfields Technical School, £1,523. Expenses—£3,396.

QUESTION—RAILWAYS.

Damage to Coaching Stock.

Hon. H. SEDDON asked the Chief Secretary: What was the cost of the damage caused to coaching stock on the Government railways by troops and trainees during the year ended the 30th June, 1941?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: Accounts rendered for damage to coaching stock by troops and trainees totalled £107 11s. 1d. The amount does not include costs of repairing damage to coaches used by troops for which responsibility could not be definitely fixed on individuals or groups.

QUESTION—CHAFF.

Defence Department Tenders.

Hon. G. B. WOOD asked the Chief Secretary: 1, Is the Government aware that in a recent contract for chaff for the Light Horse at present in camp, the lowest tender was not accepted, and that, through the acceptance of a higher tender, the taxpayers will be called upon to pay £190 more than is necessary? 2, Will the Government ascertain the name of the successful tenderer, and the names of the experts who advised the contract board in the purchase of the aforementioned chaff? 3, In view of the fact that independent experts assessed the samples of chaff which were submitted to the contract board as of equal feeding value, will the Government ascertain, and announce to this House, why the lowest tender was not accepted?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, 2, and 3, The Government has no knowledge of the activities of the Commonwealth Tender Board, and suggests that any information in this connection which is desired by the hon. member should be sought from the board direct.

QUESTION—INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD.

Hon. H. SEDDON asked the Chief Secretary: 1, Has a report been made to the responsible Minister upon the activities of the Industrial Development Board? 2, When will the report be available to Parliament?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, The Council for the Development of Industries is a non-statutory body which meets each month under the chairmanship of the

Minister for Industrial Development. A report of the Department's activities for the previous month is received and discussed at each meeting of the Council. 2, The activities of the Department and the Council are explained to Parliament each year when the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure are introduced. A Bill providing for a Bureau of Industry and Economic Research with a statutory responsibility to present a report to Parliament each year was defeated in the Legislative Council on the 24th November, 1938.

QUESTION—WATER SUPPLIES, GOLDFIELDS BRANCH.

Hon. H. SEDDON asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What were the revenue and expenditure of the Goldfields Water Supply Branch for the year ended the 30th June, 1941? 2, What were the working expenses, interest and sinking fund charges respectively? 3, What was the surplus—if any—on the year's operations? 4, When will the report of this branch for the year ended the 30th June, 1941, be available?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, 2, and 3, The accounts of the Goldfields Water Supply undertaking cannot be finalised for some weeks and the information desired is therefore not yet available. 4, It is anticipated that the balance sheet of the Goldfields Water Supply undertaking will be presented to Parliament in October and the general departmental report in November.

QUESTION—PLANT DISEASES ACT.

Orchard Fees and Inspectors.

Hon. G. B. WOOD asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What was the amount collected in orchard registration fees for the years ended the 30th June, 1939, 1940, and 1941? 2, How many extra orchard inspectors have been appointed and what is the amount of salaries involved in consequence of the extra revenue derived from the increase in orchard registration?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, Year 1938-39, £2,259 12s.; 1939-40, £2,932 15s. 8d.; 1940-41, £4,687 3s. 2d. 2, Three extra orchard inspectors have been appointed. Extra salaries involved £560 3s. 4d.

QUESTION—TRAFFIC ACT.

Petrol and Charcoal-driven Vehicles.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON asked the Chief Secretary: In furtherance of the policy of the Government to encourage and assist the establishment of the gas producer industry in this State, will it—1, take steps, by regulation, to amend the Traffic Act in respect of license fees so as to obviate the payment of a higher fee for the registration of a vehicle fitted with a gas producer unit; 2, have reduced, or waived altogether, the fee for registration of a producer unit trailer outfit, thus coming into line with the practice in the Eastern States; 3, in view of the very serious petrol restrictions, will the Government consider a reduction in licensing fees and introduce a quarterly licensing period for all vehicles?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: It is not customary to disclose Government policy in replying to Parliamentary questions. A Ministerial statement, however, appears in the "West Australian" newspaper today to which I would refer the hon. member.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Second Day.

Debate resumed from the 31st July.

HON. G. B. WOOD (East) [4.43]: Before proceeding with my remarks in support of the motion, I wish to refer to the soldier members of this Chamber. I commend Mr. Fraser for the step he has taken in preparation for service in the fighting forces for the duration of the war. Mr. Parker is also to be commended for, although he has not joined the fighting forces, he will be going away on active service. Anyone who travels in an official capacity on the high seas today can be regarded as being on active service. We shall be seeing Mr. Parker in the House from time to time, because I understand he will be absent only for certain periods. Mr. Fraser, however, is to be away for the duration of the war. I desire to express my appreciation of the good feeling that has always existed between him and other members of the House. We often have arguments and interjections but I do not think any member of the House takes what is given to him with such good humour as does Mr. Fraser. I offer him my heartiest congratulations and my sincere

commendation of the step he has taken, and wish him a safe return in the not distant future.

Since we last met, the war has passed through many phases, and it will not be out of place, perhaps, if something is said about the wonderful part our own troops have played in the conflict. They did not do very much last year, but since then they have served in the Near East as we expected them to serve. I do not intend to dwell on the war, but desire to commend this Government for trying to have more war work done in Western Australia than has been done in the past. In establishing such work in this State, we need to look far ahead and to ensure that whatever is undertaken is of a more or less permanent character. We do not know how long the struggle will last. Even when it is over we shall always have to realise that we have a potential enemy in the North. I refer to Japan. That menace will always exist. Judging from the present position whatever happens elsewhere, the Japanese will dig themselves into countries near Australia. Prevention is better than cure. I hope that whatever is done to protect this country will be of a permanent character, and that those people will be made aware that we are ready for them and intend to prevent them from coming too far down this way.

Another point to which I desire to refer is the rough time a Government can have in time of war. I am referring to the Commonwealth Government, and when I say Government I am not thinking of any particular type of Government. I do not care whether it is a Labour, a Country Party or a National Government. Whatever party is in power, the people should give it a reasonable chance and try to help it in every possible way. I am not referring to the political opponents of the Commonwealth Government. There are other people who are supposed to be its friends but who want another Prime Minister. They appear to put every possible obstacle in the way of the Prime Minister and his friends to prevent them from carrying on in the way they should. We live in a democracy and people unsympathetic to the Government should wait until there is a general election, at which time they will be given an open go, and can elect the representative of their choice. When an election has been held, I suggest that those in authority should be

given an opportunity to make good, as has been the case in the past, irrespective of the political character of the party in power.

The Lieut.-Governor's Speech does not give us much inkling of what we can expect with regard to legislation this session. It was long, but only about three lines were devoted to a brief mention of the Government's plans. Many people have been hazarding guesses as to what would be done concerning traffic fees. In this morning's paper appeared a paragraph indicating how the Government intended to amend the Traffic Act. A good deal of misunderstanding would have been obviated if a pronouncement had been made some time ago with regard to traffic licenses.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: It is a pity there was not something in "Hansard" about it.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Yes. Another aspect of the war to which I wish to refer is militia training. We have to face as much militia training as is possible, but great hardships are being caused in the farming and country areas on account of the period for which our young men have to go into camp. Seemingly those responsible for drawing up the programme of training have given no consideration to the needs of industry. I am not in accord with the idea that only some of the farmers and their sons should do a share of training. They are called up at haphazard periods, during shearing and harvest time, both very inconvenient seasons. The principal military camp should be arranged for the middle of January to the middle of April. If that period was adopted there would be less bother and fewer applications for exemption. The sons of some farmers get permanent exemption. If the period of training was fixed for the three months mentioned, 90 per cent. of the men in the farming areas would receive at least that period of training.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: You know that that is entirely a Federal matter.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I am quite aware of that, but we are entitled to discuss matters of this kind and make suggestions to the Commonwealth Government. Let me also refer to the Home Guard which, in this State, is limited to 8,000 men. I do not see why there should not be three times as many. Many active men in the country can hold a

rifle; in fact most men up to 60 years of age should be enrolled. I would make enrolment in the Home Guard compulsory.

Hon. J. Cornell: Why have they not joined?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Because the number is limited.

Hon. J. Cornell: No, it is still a long way under strength.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: No doubt the hon. member is speaking for his own district.

Hon. J. Cornell: I am speaking for all districts.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: At York we have a limit of 50, and are trying to get that increased to 75 with the idea of helping other places that are below their quotas.

Hon. A. Thomson: Do you mean 50 in number or 50 years of age?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Fifty in number. I understand that Northam has more applicants than can be accepted. Perhaps service in the Home Guard could be made compulsory. If it were, I would offer no objection. As the young men have to go into camp for military training, I cannot see why older men should not be available for home defence. Many of the older men are able-bodied and are good shots.

Hon. J. Cornell: Are you aware who are really eligible for the Home Guard?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Yes.

Hon. J. Cornell: Men have to be rejected for active service with one of the three forces before they are eligible to join the Home Guard.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: The Home Guard was originally provided by returned soldiers only, but during the last three months other citizens have been admitted, much to the benefit of the Home Guard. I understand that the idea of restricting membership of the Home Guard to returned soldiers did not work very well, because there was only a limited number in Australia. Many men who could not go to the 1914-18 war are quite capable of serving in the Home Guard.

One of the principal problems in the farming areas is that of wheat stabilisation. Judging by the reference in the Speech, I doubt whether the Government realises the gravity of the wheat position. It is particularly grave in this State because of the acuteness of the storage problem, and be-

cause the railways have not been able to cope with the crop. In only three years out of nine have the railways been able to handle the whole of our wheat crop. I shall revert to this point later, but it is one feature of a very disturbing position. We in Western Australia are facing a huge surplus of wheat. We have a carry-over of 18,000,000 bushels and the estimated crop for this season is 32,000,000 bushels, making a total carry-over of 50,000,000 bushels. Practically no wheat is being shipped at present. At the end of the harvest we shall have about 50,000,000 bushels of wheat on our hands, and the Railway Department could only undertake to move it to the seaboard or to mills at the rate of 17,000 tons a week. The Railway Department has slipped on that estimate. In the first week it slipped back 6,000 tons, in the second week 10,000 tons, then 9,000, 7,000, 4,000, 4,000, 2,000, 5,000, 8,000, 3,000, and so on, until, at the end of June, the six months' arrears totalled 106,000 tons. If the railways were able to operate flat out for 12 months working every day of the week, and if ships were available to take the wheat away and storage was available, it would be possible to move only 32,000,000 bushels.

The Chief Secretary: Whose estimate are you giving?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I have worked out these figures on the estimate of the department that it could move 17,000 tons a week.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: Is that all the railways can do?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Yes, assuming that there are ships to take the wheat away and that storage accommodation is available. Even if the war ceased tomorrow, ships would probably not be forthcoming for 12 months. I quote these figures to show what a sorry position we are reaching. The railways fell short of the estimate by 106,000 tons in a period of about six months, so that they were not moving anything like the estimate of 17,000 tons a week. I suppose the estimate was an optimistic one. With the present rolling stock, I doubt whether they could do any better.

Hon. H. Tuckey: Does that matter much if there are no ships to take the wheat away?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Where are we going to store the wheat? What is the use of growing wheat if the result is to place us in this difficult position?

The Chief Secretary: Why blame the railways?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I am not blaming the railways. I am making a constructive suggestion. Obviously the railways are not in a position to cope with the wheat and more drastic restrictions should be enforced in the industry. I am not blaming the railways for having fallen down on the estimate. It was not their fault. Lack of rolling stock was probably the reason.

The Chief Secretary: If it was not their fault, why put it that way?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: The Minister is taking my remarks in the wrong way. Whatever the railways have done, we are accumulating that quantity of wheat. The railways cannot handle it and we have not the requisite storage accommodation. If one would take the trouble to work it out, one would find that at the end of this harvest we will have a tremendous quantity of wheat on hand; and then we shall be faced with another harvest. The point is, what is to be done?

Hon. L. Craig: What do you suggest?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I suggest that the acreage should be cut down to 50 per cent. or even less. What is the use of growing wheat for weevils to eat? Why grow wheat year after year and ask the Commonwealth Government for a subsidy to keep the farmers on the land? We should not be asking the Commonwealth to subsidise something which is not wanted here and which cannot be got away, even if it were wanted elsewhere.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: What is your legislative remedy?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: As I said, to cut down the wheat acreage to 50 per cent. or even 33½ per cent., and recompense the farmers who will not be able to grow wheat.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: The farmers will make more by not putting in wheat than by putting it in.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Yes. Although I have not worked out the figure myself, I understand it will cost about 1¼ million pounds on a non-cropping subsidy for our farmers not to put in a certain number of acres of wheat. It would cost Western Australia over £5,000,000 for a subsidy if the wheat were put in, and then it would be eaten by weevils. I know my policy is a

drastic one, seemingly a policy of despair, but we must face the position. Even if ships were available to take away our wheat, we could not transport it over our railways. As I have said, in only three years out of nine has the Railway Department coped with the wheat traffic. In 1931, 1932 and again in 1934, the railways slipped back to the extent of 25,000,000 bushels of wheat. The following three years were bad from the production point of view and the Railway Department then was able to pick up a great deal of the leeway. Unfortunately, at the end of 1940 we found we had an accumulation of 18,000,000 bushels of wheat, showing clearly that had the season been good the department could not have coped with the wheat traffic. Had good seasons continued we should have had such an accumulation of wheat that it would not have been possible under present railway conditions to deal with it in the lifetime of any member in this Chamber.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Where is the wheat stored?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Large quantities are stored in the country and there is some at Fremantle and other ports. I am not blaming the Railway Department. I am merely pointing out that even if all this wheat were transported to Fremantle it could not be got away because of lack of ships. Huge quantities would have to be left in the country, because we have not enough bins at the port to hold it.

Hon. A. Thomson: It would be more economical for the Government to subsidise the farmer not to put in so much wheat.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: That has been done in Canada and the United States.

Hon. A. Thomson: That is so.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: As members of Parliament, we must face this position. I know my suggestion sounds drastic and that it is a retrograde step.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Have you any idea of the quantity of last year's wheat at sidings?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I do not know where all the 18,000,000 bushels of wheat lie, but large quantities are at the sidings, and one can hear weevils working in some of the bins. That will give members an idea of the position.

I now offer some criticism of the Railway Department for its lack of co-operation with the bulk handling scheme. I have it on good authority that at Fremantle, owing to this lack of co-operation by the railways, 15 per cent. of the labour employed by the bulk handling scheme is forced to remain idle for certain periods. They work for two or three hours and then cease because trucks are not available. On the other hand, if there happen to be a few more trucks than can be conveniently coped with by the labour available, the Railway Department charges the bulk handling scheme demurrage; this notwithstanding that at the same time in the country districts dozens of trucks are loaded at bins and cannot be hauled to the port. I ask that the Minister for Railways take this matter up with the department in order to ensure a little more co-operation. I believe the actual figure is 14.7 per cent. of the bulk handling labour that must remain idle through lack of co-operation by the Railway Department.

Hon. A. Thomson: In other words, the railways are never wrong; they charge demurrage.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: That is so. The railways should forgo some of the demurrage, because there are in the country districts trucks which the department is unable at present to haul to the coast. If the farmers cannot put in their crops, there should be a moratorium. How otherwise can the wheat farmers stand up to their financial obligations? That, of course, may be a matter for the Federal Government; it may be a matter for the State Government, or for both Federal and State Governments. Another point that will require close attention is that, if there is to be a reduction to 50 or 33 per cent. in the wheat acreage, then those farmers who depend solely upon wheat should receive first consideration.

Some farmers do not depend entirely upon wheat and can turn their attention to other products. Quite a number of the farmers that I represent in the wheat belt have only one source of income, namely, from wheat. Their properties are unfenced and their water supplies limited. I hope that in any proposal put forward these farmers will be given first consideration with respect to acreage. One other matter that I would urge the State Cabinet to

push forward—it is a Federal matter, I know—is that the earliest possible pronouncement should be made with respect to acreage next year. Many farmers are coming to me and asking, "What are we to do? Shall we go on fallowing?" The season is well on and they do not yet know what their position will be. They hear a report about a 50 per cent. reduction in acreage and they know the Agricultural Bank has adopted that policy. The answer I give them is, "Do what the Agricultural Bank says and cut your fallow down by 50 per cent., and I do not think you will be far out."

There is much talk about making power alcohol from wheat. That may relieve the position a little, but I doubt whether it will have much effect. When the works are to be established I hope consideration will be given to the situation of the wheat; in other words, I hope these works will be erected in the country, if it is at all possible to do so.

Hon. J. Cornell: I understand they are to be erected at Spencer's Brook.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: That would be a suitable site. I am aware, however, of the difficulty with respect to water and coal, and it is hard to say whether the coal should be brought to the wheat or the wheat taken to the coal. Spencer's Brook would certainly be a suitable site, provided fresh water in sufficient quantities could be obtained. Other sites occur to my mind—Merredin, Kellerberrin, Northam and others. The subject of wheat is a mournful one and I am glad to get away from it. I am pleased to say that we have every prospect of a wonderfully good season.

During the last two weeks the lamb export position suddenly changed. We thought we would be able to ship only a third of our lambs, but the Meat Board discovered there was sufficient refrigerated space available to ship away all our lambs. That will help to alleviate the position. I believe we can also dispose of all our eggs. Some of the other primary industries, however, are in a bad way, particularly the butter industry. I hope legislation will be introduced to prohibit the importation, for the duration of the war, of products needed to manufacture margarine. I think those products come chiefly from the Islands. It seems ridiculous that we should import

these products when we have a surplus of butter in Australia. It may be necessary to compensate the margarine manufacturers, but I have not gone closely into that aspect. I have heard it said frequently that margarine is a cheap food for the poor man, but the price now is about 1s. 2d. a pound. Many of our butter producers would be glad to receive that sum for their surplus unexportable butter. I do not see why some of our butter should not be sold at a cheaper rate to help the position.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: Provision has been made for the Federal Government to be buyers of all second qualities of butter this season, but details of the proposal are not yet available.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I am glad to hear that, because the present position looks bad. I desire to commend our University for the excellent work it has done in connection with gas producer units. I was pleased to learn that two of the first three gas producers approved of in this State were made in my province. I understand other units have been approved since. I cannot understand why more publicity is not given by the Government to the efforts of the University in this direction. The University says that the approved gas producer is not such a bad thing after all, and that it will not ruin a car in three or four months, as many people imagine. I bought one myself and had it fitted to my car. Before I did so, I paid a visit to the University, and was told by Professor Blakeley about the three producers that had been approved by the University. I understand two more units have since been approved. I was told that they would cause no more injury to a car than petrol would. Even to-day, throughout the State, one hears this said, "I am not going to have my car ruined by a gas producer." Farmers have said they would not have gas producers attached to their cars because the units would ruin their vehicles. I am convinced that that attitude could easily be altered by a Government pronouncement, in which event many more gas producers would be installed.

Hon. J. Cornell: I am told that on the goldfields lack of charcoal supplies constitutes the greatest difficulty.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I shall deal with that phase later on. Another suggestion I make to the Government relates to the petrol

supplies available in country districts. Many farmers are unable to send their children to school because they have not the necessary fuel. They are unable to purchase gas producers because they have not the requisite funds available. I suggest that the Government should adopt some scheme to enable farmers to procure gas producers, with repayments at so much per month. I may be told that that is a Federal matter, but nevertheless a big problem has to be faced. At present there are 60,000 motor cars licensed, and only 3,000 gas producers have been installed.

The Chief Secretary: Do the farmers own their cars?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I hope so. I am afraid that the greater proportion of cars owned by farmers is out of date and not worth much for mortgage purposes. On the other hand, I know of some dilapidated cars to which gas producer units have been attached, and they run well. When speaking to one man interested in the construction of gas producer units at Kellerberrin, I asked if it were not possible for him to accept terms from farmers for the purchase of units. He told me he could not think of doing so because it would be necessary to approach the banks regarding finance: and up would go the price.

Hon. H. V. Piesse: Did not the Government provide finance for butter producers?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I fail to see why the Government should not deal direct with the farmers, especially those associated with the Agricultural Bank. The Government would receive returns very quickly, and the farmers would be able to make repayments at the rate of, say, £3 or £4 a month.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: The farmers should instal units on their tractors and cut down tractor costs before dealing with their motor cars.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: That suggestion is apt, coming from a metropolitan member! Some people entertain the idea that the farmer should be content to sit on his tractor all day and not worry about getting anywhere in his motor car.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: I do not say that, but he should make a start with his tractor.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Plenty of farmers have installed gas producers on their tractors. On the other hand, when a farmer

lives 15 miles from a township, surely he should be allowed a form of transport that will enable him to get to town easily. Some farmers are not able to convey their children to school. I have made representations on behalf of two of my constituents who are in that position. They could not get sufficient petrol supplies to enable them to run their cars, and have not the facilities available to people in the metropolitan area. There are no buses or trams running for their convenience. Most decidedly those people would be greatly advantaged if they were able to secure supplies of some cheaper fuel. In many instances farmers are burning mallee roots to secure charcoal supplies for their gas producers. I trust the Government will make it possible for the agriculturists to secure gas producers. At present a unit costs anything from £40 to £70.

Hon. H. V. Piesse: The farmer cannot face such heavy expenditure.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: He has no hope of doing so.

The Chief Secretary: What security would the farmer give?

Hon. H. V. Piesse: His gas producer!

Hon. G. B. WOOD: The farmer would provide the security that he usually does when he approaches the Agricultural Bank, or any other financial institution, for assistance. Surely the proposition to encourage farmers to instal gas producers, instead of paying money for petrol, is economically sound. When I spoke during the Address-in-reply debate 12 months ago, I predicted that the State's transport problem would shortly be largely wrapped up in that of charcoal supplies. I urged the Government then to utilise the service of sustenance workers to make up any shortage in charcoal that private enterprise was unable to supply, but I am afraid the Government did not do so. I am aware that recently some steps were taken to deal with that phase. My suggestion was that men on relief work should be used for the production of charcoal, instead of grubbing trees along our roads and clearing.

The Honorary Minister: At the time you speak of we had charcoal supplies but could not sell them.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Quite so, but today the position is different. Even with only 3,000 gas producer units installed, there is

a shortage of charcoal. Both in the city and in the country districts manufacturers are hard at work turning out gas producers. and I predict that in six months we shall have about 10,000 installed.

Hon. J. Cornell: The difficulty on the goldfields is to get wood with which to provide charcoal.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: There is plenty available in the South-West, and I am sure the Government could have done much better than it has. I noticed a huge retort being erected at Kellerberrin for the production of charcoal, but that represents merely a flea-bite compared with what we require. Another big concern is operating in the hills but is unable to supply the orders received. If that commodity could be turned out in large quantities, there would be purchasers for hundreds of tons of charcoal. I am glad the Government has awakened to the necessities of the position, and that some hundreds of workers are operating under the direction of officials of the Forests Department. Had something been done along those lines 12 months ago, the present shortage would have been avoided.

Hon. G. Fraser: The Government had supplies 12 months ago but could not get rid of them.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: The industry was in its infancy at that stage. However, the fact remains that there is a big shortage to-day, and I am afraid the position will become very serious. Regarding country transport matters in particular, the main difficulty is that the farmers cannot get petrol supplies nor yet charcoal. Petrol rationing is such that extreme difficulty will be experienced before gas producer units can be made available to deal with the situation. I hope the State Liquid Fuel Control Board will be provided with more extensive powers to enable a better deal to be meted out to country producers. One family residing 30 miles from a centre at present gets five gallons of petrol. Another family living two miles from the centre is provided with the same ration. So it goes on right through the piece. I suggest that local committees be set up to deal with the rationing. We all know the circumstances obtaining in the Liquid Fuel Control Board office, and local committees would assist in alleviating them.

Hon. H. Tuckey: Something of the sort has already been done.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I have not noticed any announcement regarding such an authorisation.

Hon. H. Tuckey: At any rate, there is a move to secure it.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: That is a different proposition.

Hon. J. Cornell: The danger there is one of "you scratch my back and I will scratch yours."

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I do not see why the mayor or road board chairman and one or two influential residents should not meet as an honorary committee to deal with rationing problems, and make recommendations to the Liquid Fuel Control Board.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: Something should be done to relieve the position at the Fuel Board office.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Yes. The officials do not know where they are. I do not suggest that every recommendation forwarded by a local committee would be adopted, but men living on the spot and knowing the circumstances would be able to make recommendations so that country residents would receive a fairer deal. I recognise that at present it is impossible to secure uniformity with regard to rationing. One starting-price bookmaker had more petrol available than I had at one time. How that came about I cannot say.

Hon. H. V. Piesse: He must have laid the odds on petrol tickets.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Why did you not use charcoal?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I have now installed a gas producer unit on my car. However, I think the appointment of local committees with power to make recommendations to the Liquid Fuel Control Board would ease the situation, and I hope the Government will give consideration to that proposal.

I was glad to read the announcement in the "West Australian" this morning with regard to motor licenses. The relief indicated is long overdue. All concerned have been in the dark. Road boards have not known what to do regarding their annual programmes of work. Individual owners did not know whether they could afford to license their cars. Why the Government's announcement was not forthcoming two months ago, I cannot understand, but I am glad it has been made even at this late hour and that the owners of gas producer plants

will not be penalised to the extent of another pound or so in taxation. Those who instal gas producers should be encouraged. In Germany people in that position were granted a bonus.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: You do not suggest we should follow a course set by Germany?

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Yes, because in this instance it was a good lead. Of course, I do not suggest that owners of gas producer units should be paid a bonus, but they should receive encouragement in the form of reduced license fees. They are doing a national work.

Hon. J. Cornell: At any rate, they should receive consideration.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I am glad to hear Mr. Cornell's interjection. The man who buys a gas producer unit has to pay £60 or so, and should receive just as much consideration as does the man who drives his car on petrol. I hope that when legislation is introduced for our consideration, the matters I have referred to will be dealt with, and that the owners of gas producer units will have equal consideration extended to them.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: As encouragement to a local industry, the gas producer man should receive more consideration.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Will Mr. Wood please resume his seat? I must ask hon. members not to interject so much. Such interruptions make it extremely difficult for "Hansard" accurately to report the hon. member's speech, especially when he is replying to interjections, which, I know, "Hansard" cannot possibly hear. The hon. member may proceed.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: One other point regarding this question is whether the reduced rates should have retrospective effect. Naturally, the owners of motor cars would be pleased to have it that way, but there is another aspect to be considered. When the chairman of a road board was speaking to me, he put the other side of the question. He said, "Whatever you do, do not make this provision retrospective. We have made our plans and drawn up our works programme. We have our men at work. If the money is taken from us, we shall not know where we stand." Members will thus see that there are two sides to this particular phase, and each must have due consideration. To-day I asked a question regarding

a military chaff contract and I confess I was disappointed at the answer I received. I did not expect the State Government to take any action to right what may have been a wrong, because I realise the matter comes within the province of the Federal Government. However, I wish to make it perfectly clear that I had hoped the State Government would have helped me in some inquiries I have been asked to make.

About a week ago I was approached by two influential organisations in Northam, and was asked what I knew about the chaff contract. I replied that I knew very little except what I had seen in the paper. The people concerned then asked me if I would have a discussion with them. I agreed to do that and was introduced to Mr. Williams, a chaff merchant. In this matter I had no personal axe to grind, and did not know Mr. Williams until the Saturday before last. It seemed to me, however, that some mistake had been made. Mr. Williams showed me two samples of chaff, which he claimed to have obtained from the district contract board. He said to me, "My chaff was rejected, but the tender of another person was accepted at a price that was £190 in excess of my tender." I was then shown the two samples of chaff, and was asked which I thought was the better. After looking at them—I am not an expert chaff buyer—I declared that there was no difference between the feeding value of the two samples. Notwithstanding that, Mr. Williams' contract was rejected, although its acceptance would have saved the country £190. I was asked what I would do about the matter, and replied that I would bring it up in the House and ask the Government to see what could be done.

To guard against the possibility of the samples submitted to me by Mr. Williams having been interfered with, I went to the district contract board, and stated that I had been asked to investigate the business. I said I was not prepared to have anything to do with the matter if everything was all right, but that I would very much like to see the chaff on which the board had made its decision. My request was met with a flat refusal, and I did not see the board's sample. I ask members what they would have done in the circumstances; let the matter drop or go on with it. If I had been shown the two samples and had found that there

was a difference between them, I would have known what to do, but in the circumstances I see no reason why they should not have been shown to me. I am prepared to believe Mr. Williams, that the samples which he showed me were the correct ones. Particularly do I take that stand in view of the hush-hush policy that has been adopted. I had hoped the Government would have helped me a little and used one of its officers to see what could be done to investigate the position. I maintain that when the tenders were called and the samples submitted (even if there was a difference between them) and the contract board could have saved the country £190, it should have made a further investigation and inspected the bulk supplies. For some reason the board decided to accept the highest tender. I do not say there was anything irregular in its action, and have no desire to take advantage of my position as a member of this House. I feel sure, however, that a big mistake has been made and that Williams Brothers have been hardly treated. The firm of Williams Brothers has supplied chaff before to military camps. I know that Capt. Craig has expressed the opinion that its chaff was very good, and that it was as good as he had ever seen in the camps. I have here a letter written by Major A. Shilling. Mr. Williams wrote to that officer and asked him what he thought of the chaff that had been supplied before. I will read the letter to demonstrate that Williams Brothers have in the past played the game in the matter of chaff supplies. The communication is as follows:—

In response to your recent letter inquiring as to my opinion of the chaff supplied to the Tenth Light Horse Regiment during the camp concluded in April, I can only repeat the opinion I gave you prior to leaving Western Australia, namely, that it was quite the best chaff that we ever received in any camp in which I was with the regiment. The quality was even and of a high class throughout, and speaking from the point of view of the squadron of my command, it was most gratifying to have so little trouble in a matter which gave considerable bother at some previous camps.

Why Williams Brothers were treated in the manner I have described, I do not know. As it seemed to me I had struck a brick wall when going to the board, I thought the Government might do something, but probably the matter will be broached in the Federal Parliament and an explanation asked for. I understand the Chairman of

the board said he was dependent on his expert advisers. Surely they know enough about chaff to realise that, when it is possible to save £190 on one camp alone, they would be warranted in making a further investigation.

The Midland Junction stockyards call for some comment. They are a wonderful source of revenue to the Government, so much so that we are never told how much profit is made there, but are kept in the dark. When we try to find out what the profits are, we are told that the accounts are merged in with those relating to the abattoirs accounts, and that we cannot get the figures. I do know that the farmers who send their stock to the yards are entitled to a better deal with their sheep than they now receive. The yards are in a disgraceful condition. Half of them is cemented and the rest of them is made up of old sleepers, which become wet, muddy and dirty. When farmers send their lambs to the yards, the animals get stained and dirty, and the farmers must lose hundreds of pounds a year from that cause. Stained sheep are generally knocked down to the butcher at a third of their value. I urge the Government to do something to improve the position of these yards. They are a paying proposition. I am not asking them to spend money on a concern that is a losing one, and in this particular instance the users of the yards are deserving of more consideration. Furthermore, sheep arrive at Midland Junction at all hours of the day. I believe during the week before last sheep arrived at 4 p.m. There should have been no need for that. Under present conditions butchers do not know where they are, or when sheep are likely to arrive. Sometimes the trucks come in at 1 p.m. and sometimes at 3 p.m., and the sales extend into the afternoon. I do not know why the railways cannot deliver the sheep at an earlier hour; they should be able to do so. Stock should be given preference over every other class of freight. I trust that some consideration will be given to this matter.

Meat prices at Midland Junction have improved. Last year a great deal was said on that question. When I introduced my Bill last session, I made certain suggestions for an improvement in the situation. I am pleased to say the Prices Fixing Com-

missioner has adopted the main principle of the Bill, although that was rejected in another place. He is now working on the margin of profit, and by that means the prices have been better than they were when a flat rate of 6d. a lb. or some other price was fixed.

Hon. L. Craig: The Commissioner had no authority to fix the price at 6d.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: No, but he frightened the butchers into doing so, when he said that he would gazette a certain price if they did not bring down the prices at auction. It is satisfactory to know that some of the suggestions contained in my Bill are being carried out by the Price Fixing Commissioner. We now hear no murmurs from the farmers, who appear to be satisfied with the prices they are getting to-day.

I wish now to deal with some of the facilities offered by the railways, in particular those at Spencer's Brook station. Conditions there are a disgrace, owing principally to the congestion at the refreshment rooms. Two or three trains may come in at once, such as a military train as well as one that is on its way to Albany. On such an occasion a state of chaos exists. The refreshment room is only 12 ft. long on either side of the platform. When two or three hundred passengers are clamouring at once for cups of tea, members may imagine what a condition arises. Plenty of room is available for the extension of the refreshment facilities, and, although suggestions have been made to the Commissioner of Railways, nothing has been done to carry them out. The place at which passengers have their food and drink is only 12 ft. long, and the platform where they stand is only 5½ ft. wide. When trains are rushing through, people are endangered by having to stand in so small a space. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the western express tears through, often at a time when passengers from the Albany train are obtaining refreshments. There is only about 3½ ft. of roof under which to stand when drinking tea.

Hon. H. V. Piesse: The Chidlow's Well station is just as bad.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I was not going to say anything about that, although in its way it is bad enough. There is no room for extension there, as is the case at Spencer's

Brook. I know of nothing to prevent the Railway Department from improving the facilities at Spencer's Brook and providing better accommodation for the travelling public.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: It is an important junction.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: The refreshment room could be extended without much additional expenditure. I imagine that fully 25 per cent. more people are travelling by train to-day, if we take into account soldiers as well as the public, than travelled two years ago. The department owes a duty to the public, who have been forced to use the railways, and should see to it that greater conveniences are provided for passengers. Members can imagine what it is like to arrive at Spencer's Brook on a wet day, and to be obliged to stand close to the railway line out in the rain drinking tea and eating a sandwich. One of these days a dreadful accident will occur at that station. At any time a soldiers' train, loaded with members of the forces, may come into the station and one or more of the doors may have been flung open. If such a thing occurred, there is every likelihood of at least half-a-dozen persons being killed. If the refreshment rooms could be extended 20 or 30 yards along the platform the position would be alleviated, and the crowds would be strung out when partaking of refreshment.

I asked a question this afternoon about the registration of orchards. What I said would happen, when the Bill to amend the Act came before the House, has happened. I said the Government would not use the money in doing what it set out to do. The registration fee was increased from 1s. up to £2 10s. in the case of some orchards. I remarked at the time that the Government would not employ inspectors to police the orchards, and it has not done so. On the figures I have obtained from the Chief Secretary I find that the Government is making a handsome profit out of these registrations. The matter is one which should be inquired into, and rectified. The Government ought not to get away with it any more. Whether it can obtain the additional orchard inspectors or not, I do not know. However, I anticipated what would happen, as did other members.

Hon. A. Thomson: We said the fees collected would be completely swallowed up by the extra expense.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: We have been enlightened to-day. Many farmers are extremely annoyed about the orchard inspection. They cannot sell their fruit. The fees were imposed just before the war, before the export position became so unfavourable. When the farmers see the figures I elicited this afternoon—and I shall take care they do—they will feel extremely sorry that the Government took such action. I am prepared to accept some increase in the original registration fees if necessary, for I know what fruit-fly is just as well as anybody does. I suggest the Minister should gradually increase the fees as required for inspection. In this case the Minister started from the top, and the Government does not come down when it gets too much money. My view is that the fees should go up until the return from them is adequate. The Minister collects this money from the unfortunate orchardists, and proper use is not made of it. As things are at present, I hold that the Act should be amended to reduce the fees to a figure that will cover the pay of extra inspectors. I know of places where not an extra inspector has ever been seen. Baker's Hill is a case in point, and I could mention others.

Now I wish to touch briefly on the chaff position. Last year we were faced with one of the worst droughts in the State's history, and Government officials and others urged the necessity for many farmers to cut hay to meet the position. I know of quite a number of farmers who did cut hay, and are still landed with it. A deputation approached the Minister to ascertain what he would do about the matter. The hon. gentleman acknowledged that he did feel some responsibility concerning farmers who normally did not cut hay—farmers in remote districts. Those farmers cut hay from a sense of duty. That remark may sound far-fetched, but there were farmers as well as Government officials who considered it was a duty to cut as much hay as possible. Mr. Kelsall, a farmer at Moora, has £450 worth of hay, and cannot get rid of it. He was in a bad position to secure cutters, but Government officials had convinced him that everything would be all right if he cut hay. I could cite other instances. The Minister offered these people a miserable 25s. per ton advance. I do not blame the Government one whit for urging farmers to cut hay, for at the time it seemed neces-

-ary. I thought it was the right course to take, but when the season changed, and we found there was more hay cut than was required in the country, these people became entitled to some compensation. The compensation they got was an advance of 25s. per ton, with numerous strings attached to it. I hope that even at this, the eleventh hour, the Government will deal with each of those cases on its merits. Mr. Kelsall, for instance, had a fine crop of wheat. The Minister for Agriculture knows the official to whom this farmer spoke about the matter. I will not mention the official's name. In view of the facts I have stated I ask the Government to extend consideration to the farmers affected. I do not say that it should take the farmers en bloc and give everyone who is landed with hay something. On the other hand, farmers in remote districts who never before cut hay are entitled to something more than an advance of 25s. per ton with all sorts of unfavourable conditions attached to it. But I will not enlarge upon that aspect now.

I am glad to learn from the Speech that the Ministry does not intend to increase taxation. At a time like this that matter should be left to the absolute discretion of the Commonwealth Government. In view of Western Australia's surplus, about which we have heard lately, it is only proper that extra taxation should be left alone as regards this State. Finally, as to the debt structure of the primary producer, a great deal has been heard about primary producers' debts. It is gratifying to know to-day that on account of the drastic times we are facing and will have to face, many people who are against that type of legislation are to-day looking forward to some alteration in the debt structure not only of the primary producers but also of others who have suffered through war conditions. I support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.51 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 5th August, 1941.

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

MOTION—CONDOLENCE.

The Late G. J. Lambert, M.L.A.

THE DEPUTY PREMIER (Hon. H. Millington—Mr. Hawthorn) [4.31]: I move—

That this House desires to place upon its records its profound sense of the loss sustained in the passing of the late George James Lambert, a member of this House, and that an expression of the sincerest sympathy of members be conveyed to his widow and family by Mr. Speaker.

During his life, and very early in his life, Mr. Lambert established a fine record of public achievement. Some 37 years ago, when quite a young man, he was elected a member of the Kalgoorlie Municipal Council and served in that capacity for some time. About 25 years ago he was elected as member of this Chamber for Coolgardie, and later as member for Yilgarn-Coolgardie, which seat he held at the time of his death. In addition to his wide general knowledge, he brought to this House a special knowledge of mining and metallurgy. He was also a most enthusiastic supporter of the industrial development of Western Australia. In all these public activities he served his generation faithfully and well. I believe, however, that he would most desire to be remembered for his genial and bright friendship. He was a most companionable man, one to whom we could refer as a "good mixer." During his life he gathered an incredible store of knowledge and experience, and we all know how delighted he was to recount his experiences. We shall remember him in that respect. He also possessed considerable initiative and originality. At times he was