

# Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 13th August, 1946.

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

*Seventh Day.*

Debate resumed from the 8th August.

**HON. A. THOMSON** (South-East) [4.34]: I desire first of all to congratulate you, Mr. President, on having attained the high and dignified position of President of this House. The many years of service that you gave as Chairman of Committees warrant that you will carry out the duties of the position with credit to yourself and honour to the Legislative Council. I desire also to congratulate Mr. Seddon on having been appointed to the position of Chairman of Committees, and to welcome Messrs. Bennetts, Simpson and Forrest as new members. I sincerely regret the loss of Sir John Kirwan, and we shall miss his wise and experienced judgment.

I wish also to congratulate Mr. Kitson on his appointment as Agent General for Western Australia. During the period he has occupied the position of Chief Secretary he has always been courteous, though he has had a difficult task to perform in leading the House. When we compare the duties of Chief Secretary with those of Ministers in another place, it is certain that those Ministers have a much easier task than that of the Chief Secretary. It is to Mr. Kitson's credit that he has done his work so well. In him we have a wonderful example of the possibilities awaiting people who come to Australia. Mr. Kitson left the Old Country many years ago in the interests of his health and has since tackled many hard jobs, one of the hardest of which, I think, has been that of leading this House. He has done well to be able to go back to the Old Country, having filled the honourable position of Chief Secretary in the Legislative Council of Western Australia, to represent this State there. I feel sure that he will fill that position with great credit to himself, and that Western Australia will be well served by him in that capacity.

In the Lieut.-Governor's Speech, we are being led into the Promised Land of milk and honey, as were the Israelites of old. Provided that the Commonwealth Government finds us sufficient cash, by that assistance all the promises may be met, and everything in the garden should then be lovely. I agree with the statement that appeared in the Press, that it is only by increased production that we can help to feed the starving people of the Homeland and provide for the sustenance of our own people. That definitely applies to our coal production and, on the whole, the men of Collie have responded much better than have the miners in New South Wales. I was sorry to see them reverse their vote and remain affiliated with the miners in the East. While the wise men are supposed to come from the East, I am satisfied that the men of the West are more level-headed and better balanced in their judgment.

The appointment of Mr. W. J. Wallwork as Commissioner was a wise step, and I trust his efforts to hold the scales of justice will be satisfactory to all concerned and that the production of coal will prove remunerative, both to the miners and to the mineowners, giving them a reasonable profit after the Taxation Department has had its rake-off. With improved methods, coal production should increase and costs be reduced, for coal is the base upon which all industry rests. I agree with the recent statement that all reasonable requirements for the comfortable working of industry can and should be adjusted, if possible, on the spot. I am sure Mr. Wallwork will endeavour to keep the wheels of industry moving.

Attention is drawn in the Speech to the shortage of houses and building materials. The Workers' Homes Board is sympathetic to anyone needing a roof over his head, but if it cannot issue a permit where, in a deserving case, someone desires to erect a private home, it is not much satisfaction to the homeless person to know that he has that sympathy. The shortage of timber, especially dried and seasoned timber, required for the purposes of joinery, flooring, weatherboards, skirting and mouldings, presents a serious problem. With a view to meeting that particular need, I asked the Minister whether the Government would seek financial help from the Commonwealth to enable more drying kilns to be constructed to

provide seasoned timber for workers' homes. I consider that the Commonwealth in conjunction with the State should provide many timber drying kilns at once; otherwise we shall have to wait for years before the requisite timber can be dried under natural conditions. Those interested in the trade knew that the State mills had four kilns operating. Yet despite that fact there is a serious shortage of seasoned timber. I hope that something will be done in this direction very shortly.

According to the Minister we exported to the Eastern States 20,000,000 super feet and oversea 7,000,000 super feet of jarrah. So we are sending out of the State at least 25 per cent. of our timber which today is required here. I hope the Government will give serious consideration to the question of reserving greater supplies for home requirements. When we find that nothing over 9 ft. in length may be sold without a permit, and that the Government proposes still further to limit the sale of material, it will inflict a serious hardship on country business and on farmers generally. The retention of the timber now being exported to the Eastern States would at least help to provide more homes, and with more men returning to the milling industry, the export trade could soon be overtaken again. To my mind charity should begin at home. If soft woods again become available, they will help in the production of joinery and furniture.

As to wood versus brick houses, I notice that the Workers' Homes Board has at last realised that the average cost of a brick residence is only approximately slightly less than 10 per cent. over that of wood construction. Having realised that fact, I trust that the board will not over-ride the local authorities by insisting on the erection of timber structures in what they, in their judgment, consider should be brick areas. It is only a matter of a few years before the extra cost of maintenance and the higher insurance rates on a wooden house level up the cost, and bricks can easily be manufactured in the country towns as well as in the city. If more brick homes were erected, it would be the means of saving much timber for the floor and roofing construction of other much-needed homes.

I know a firm in the Great Southern that contacted the Forests Department with the idea of getting plans to construct a kiln

for the purpose of drying timber, but the facilities in that district were not suitable and hence I asked the Minister that question. I believe that if we are to be able to supply the many homes that are needed with the requisite joinery, let alone the flooring and mouldings, the Government should provide immediately for the construction of drying kilns, which are a rather expensive item, though in view of the urgent need for homes, I think it is absolutely essential to find the money for this purpose.

A point was raised by Sir Hal Colebatch that the annual deficit on the railways exceeded the amount provided by the State for the education of our children. That is a rather alarming comparison. I am pleased that at long last something is being done to convey country children to central schools by means of bus services. This gives country children a much better chance and is very much more satisfactory for the teachers. When Mr. Clubb was Director of Education, I endeavoured to interest the department in the idea of conveying children to a central school and providing a hostel. At that time the department did not consider the scheme to be practicable.

I congratulate the Minister for Education on having compelled the department to see the light. I am convinced that the Government will have to consider the establishment of hostels for country children. It is all very well to convey children to a central school, but many of them have to travel 20, 30, or 40 miles per day, and to my mind it would be much more practicable and better for the children if a hostel were provided with the regional school. The present position is very unsatisfactory. The Country Women's Association and the Methodists at Albany have undertaken the responsibility of providing a hostel to house the children from surrounding districts. Parents of children in the country have had to face a great problem to determine where their children were going to reside when they had an opportunity to attend the High School at Albany.

I am pleased to notice that members of the Teachers' Union have decided that it is part of their job to educate the public as well as the children. They have appointed an organiser to tour the country districts and he has been holding successful meet-

ings. Though this may appear to be undermining the work of the Parents and Citizens' Associations which have done very good work, I congratulate the teachers on their efforts to educate the public as well as the children. I also compliment the union on having adopted the objective that every child has a right to attend the University if it so desires. I think every member will agree with that objective.

I sincerely wish that the teachers could induce their fellow-unionists in other industries to adopt a similar slogan. When a boy leaves school, he has the right to learn a trade or profession if he so desires. This is only logical. But what do we find? Amongst the trade unions there is a totally different outlook. The unions, assisted by the findings of the Arbitration Court, impose conditions contrary to the ideal espoused by the Teachers' Union. The restrictions imposed debar a boy from entering any trade he desires. A boy has a right to demand education, but he cannot demand the right to learn a trade. The unions have, unfortunately, become close corporations. This is exemplified by the control that is being imposed upon ex-Servicemen who are trainees. It seems to me that the Regional Re-establishment Committee has had the buck passed to it by the Commonwealth Government, and that any delays and shortcomings that have occurred in relation to the ex-Servicemen will be attributed to the committee.

Representatives of unions and employers have entered into an unholy alliance to restrict ex-Servicemen from receiving that full measure of training they were led to expect when they were discharged. I asked questions on this subject which were answered by the Chief Secretary on the 6th August. The first two questions I asked were—

1. Is the Chief Secretary aware of the dissatisfaction existing among Service personnel at the failure of the Reconstruction Training Scheme and the Land Settlement Scheme to measure up to what members of the Forces were led to expect?

2. Is he aware that, at the end of June, out of 4,306 applications for full-time vocational training only 1,223 were receiving training?

The Chief Secretary replied—

1. I am aware that a degree of dissatisfac-

2. Yes. The statistics were presented by the Deputy Director of Post-War Reconstruction to a recent meeting of the W.A. Regional Re-establishment Committee, of which the Deputy Director is Chairman.

So it is safe to assume that the replies to my questions came from the Deputy Director of Post-War Reconstruction. The third question was—

Can he inform the House what is the cause of the delay and slow rate of intake of accepted trainees?

The reply is most interesting. It reads as follows:—

The Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The State is co-operating with the Commonwealth by placing its technical education facilities at the disposal of the Commonwealth. It is not responsible for the determination of training rates or quotas.

So the State Government is not responsible for the training rates or quotas! The quotas are decided by the unions. The reply I received was that the responsibility is the Commonwealth Government's and the State is making technical educational facilities available. The buck is being passed to the Regional Re-establishment Committee, so the training of these men is the responsibility of nobody except an unofficial organisation appointed by the Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with the State Government.

I stated earlier that the representatives of the unions and the employers seemed to have entered into an unholy alliance to restrict ex-Servicemen from receiving the full measure of training they were led to expect when discharged. We now find that the unions decide what is the absorptive capacity of their particular trades. I propose to quote remarks attributed to Mr. Taylor, secretary of the Carpenters' Union, that appeared in "The Daily News." He said—

These men are going to be thoroughly trained or not trained at all. Our one aim is to see that the whole thing is a success and that every man will be 100 per cent. as a tradesman when finished.

That would be all very well if ever these Servicemen had an opportunity of learning a trade. "The Daily News" report continues—

This statement was made today by Car-

menting on criticism levelled at the progress of ex-Service training of men for the building trade.

He stressed that the standard of proficiency required in this State for carpenters and joiners was high. Trainees could not be rushed through a course and then dumped on the industry. Said he: "From the union point of view the capacity to absorb trainees is based on the continued supply of materials. There has to be some guarantee that there will be an increase in building supplies. The absorptive capacity of the trade at the present time is about 40 ex-Service trainees a year.

The Honorary Minister: What trade is that?

Hon. A. THOMSON: This refers to carpenters. Mr. Tailor proceeded—

So far 43 men have been passed into the industry to continue their training. This union wants to see the trainees receive thorough tuition. To achieve this the number of men to receive their initial training under the scheme will have to be restricted. Overcrowded classes mean that the instructors cannot give them the grounding required.

The report continues—

Mr. Tailor said that in the Eastern States large numbers of men were being put through rehabilitation training irrespective of whether or not the classes are unwieldy.

As a result, the standard of instruction and examination was low, and after these men had served their period as laid down by the post-war reconstruction scheme they would still not be efficient tradesmen.

Of course, what he forgot to say was that it would be quite possible for those men who are trainees—and who, in the opinion of his union, would not be efficient—to travel over here and obtain a job, for there is any amount of work for them even though they are not carpenters. It does not need an absolutely first-class tradesman to help in the construction of a building. Mr. Tailor continued—

These unfortunate men will find in years to come that they are not wanted in the building industry because they are unable to carry out the work required by employers.

You, Sir, and I know that that has applied to the building trade from time immemorial. When things are very busy, everyone who can use a hammer and saw has a chance of getting a job, but when things are slack, the best men are kept on. I venture to say, however, that the training these men have had as carpenters or as carpenters' labourers will be of value to them even

if they have to go back to pick and shovel work. They will have had some training and will therefore be more valuable to the State, even if they are not as successful as we would like them to be. Mr. Tailor continued—

Here we are maintaining a higher standard and, after four years' apprenticeship, we expect that these ex-Service trainees will be equal to, if not better than, men who have done their five years' apprenticeship in normal circumstances.

Another point that seems to me neglected by critics of the scheme is that a high standard of physical fitness is required for this work.

There has been talk of opening another school to increase the number of returned men to be trained, irrespective of whether the industry can accommodate them.

I have stopped that, as I consider it would have a bad psychological effect on trainees who, having finished their course, find they must wait around for someone to take them on as apprentices.

The report concluded—

In other States, Mr. Tailor pointed out, the trade had been sectionised and a trainee was taught either carpentry or joinery, not both.

Because of different conditions in Western Australia, particularly the scattered nature of the industry, a journeyman must be a carpenter and a joiner and was schooled in both jobs.

That is very excellent. It is a high ideal; but I venture to say from many years of experience that it would not be necessary for a carpenter to be a joiner or vice versa. Each has his own particular sphere in which to work and in these days of specialisation, if one goes to the big timber yards one finds there are men specialising in the making of sashes and doors and so forth. They become expert in those occupations and are quite satisfied to remain in them. I consider that the standard adopted in the East, though criticised by Mr. Tailor, is much more satisfactory for the trainees.

That is one of the union secretaries. I have a copy of a statement made in the "Sunday Times" on the 7th August by Mr. Coram, secretary of the Plumbers' Union, and a member of the Regional Re-establishment Committee. He said—

Reconstruction training is a different matter. A young man under 21 who enlisted and so lost his opportunity to learn a trade can now apply for training in any occupation.

Provided he is capable of completing his training, his chances are then regulated by the unions, who say how many men their particular trade can absorb.

Trainees go to technical school until they reach 40 per cent. of the full wage, then go to an employer to be apprenticed for four years instead of the usual five. As their apprenticeship goes on, their employers' share of their wages goes up, but all the time full wages are received, the balances being made up by the Federal Government. Progress is a bit slow, owing to the shortage of materials and facilities, but this unavoidable bottleneck applies only to reconstruction training. Pre-war apprentices are placed immediately they are discharged.

There we have a definite statement by two men who are controlling the opportunities that are given to ex-Servicemen to learn a trade. What surprises me is that many working men whose sons have been away overseas are going to be placed in the unfortunate position of seeing their sons doomed to be pushed into dead-end alleyways. At this stage I will quote from the Lieut.-Governor's Speech as follows:—

Ministers fully recognise the heavy responsibility which rests upon the community to re-establish in civil life those whose service and sacrifice contributed so much to our national preservation.

I am entirely in accord with that. When we come to the realms of practical politics, to every-day life, we find, however, that the Government is not exhibiting that degree of responsibility, according to the reply given to me in this House.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: Neither Government!

Hon. A. THOMSON: The responsibility has been passed on to the unions, or the unions have claimed that privilege, which is immoral and wrong. If it is fair and just that the Teachers' Union should feel its responsibility to the extent of appointing an organiser to address public meetings in our country towns, urging that the children should have the right to demand education, I feel that every ex-Serviceman, if he desires it, should also have the moral right to demand that he should be enabled to learn a trade, but that is denied to him today. I should like to quote what General Eisenhower said when he received the freedom of the City of London, one of the greatest honours that can be conferred on any man,

and I do not think any man deserves it more than he did. The General said—

The kinship among nations is not the real treasure freemen possess—the right to preserve his freedom of worship; his equality before the law; his liberty to speak and act as he sees fit, subject only to the provision that he trespass not upon similar rights of others.

Would to God these words were being put into effect throughout the world today! With regard to ex-Servicemen, it cannot by any means be said that the freedom which they fought to preserve is accorded to them. We have concrete examples of the authority which unions have taken upon themselves to say "Sorry, old man, you want to learn a trade but we cannot take more than 43 trainees for 12 months. If you wait for a year or two you may get a job with someone else." What hope are we offering those men who desire to learn the different trades? Their own fellowmen are denying them that opportunity, and the whole thing seems to be uncharitable and inhuman. I have quoted what Mr. Tailor and Mr. Coram said.

There is a proposal to bring 1,000 tradesmen to Australia. To such men I personally extend a warm welcome. They also may be trainees. Why not? Why debar our own people from becoming tradesmen by fixing the absorptive capacity of our trades according to Mr. Tailor and Mr. Coram? Take bricklaying! If any member is interested enough to walk along the Riverside Drive he will see men being trained at their trade at the back of No. 5 where the R.A.A.F. is, and will witness what has been done there. I presume these men will fool away weeks of their time, and will ultimately reach a building. They will then put in four years before being considered worthy to be called bricklayers.

According to the union rules of the painting trade men have to serve as trainees for four years. How many of us in this Chamber have been able to do our own little bit of painting, particularly in these days of prepared paints? These are bought in tins and are much more economical than are whitelead and the mixing of paint oneself. That method is far superior to the old one of hand-mixing. It is ridiculous to lay down a hard and fast rule that painters must serve for four years and bricklayers and plumbers for a similar term. The Commonwealth and State Governments are building houses to rent. The trainees would be better employed

in working on these brick and wooden houses under the supervision of instructors, and with a number of practical tradesmen to direct them. Many members have no doubt visited the Bindoon school—Boys' Town as it is called. At that place untrained boys under the supervision of a priest in charge have erected the buildings which members will have seen. I am sure that ex-Servicemen would respond if they received actual training on the buildings themselves. That would cost much less than does the present method and be far more satisfactory.

To me it appears that the Commonwealth Government is dodging its responsibilities and the State Government has not accepted its full responsibility for the training of ex-Servicemen. I make that statement with deep regret. I may be knocking my head against a brick wall, but I do think it is time someone drew attention to the deplorable condition of affairs and the grave dissatisfaction which has come about in connection with the training of ex-Servicemen. On page 4 of the Speech we find the following statement—

Approximately 300 men are employed on the preparation of farms for the War Service Land Settlement Scheme. The main dairy farm project includes 225 farms and allotment is expected to commence at an early date. Great difficulty has been experienced in obtaining sufficient farms in wheat and sheep areas. A number of holdings have already been purchased and allotment of some should commence in the near future.

At a recent conference at Tambellup a motion was carried condemning the chaotic condition that land settlement had drifted into. I propose to read what Mr. Fyfe, the Director of Land Settlement, had to say in the Press in May last. The Press statement is as follows:—

An agreement has been reached between the Commonwealth and the Western Australian Government as to the suitability of 11 properties in Western Australia for settlement.

The Minister for Post-war Reconstruction, Mr. Dedman, said that he could not yet announce the properties and their areas. The State Government would indicate them under its land settlement scheme for returned Servicemen.

The Director of Land Settlement (Mr. W. V. Fyfe) said in Perth last night that the majority of the 11 properties approved by the Commonwealth were well improved and that it should not be long before they were advertised as available for selection by qualified

"It will not be long," we are told. That statement is made all the time. "Soon the matter will be fixed up," it is said. The report continues—

"The difficulties of reaching agreement as to the minimum size of holdings and valuation and economic factors have been largely overcome," said Mr. Fyfe. "The procedure now in operation should greatly facilitate putting the War Service Land Settlement Scheme into operation in this State."

The impression had been gained, he said, that war service land settlement activities in this State had been directed mainly towards obtaining and preparing dairy farms to the disadvantage of ex-Servicemen who required wheat and sheep farms. That was not so. In regard to dairy farms, extensive preparatory work had been carried out during the past 12 months, and it appeared probable that the full demand from ex-Servicemen for dairy farms would be met within a reasonable period.

I want members to notice this final paragraph—

About 750 offers of privately-owned wheat and sheep farms, he said, had been received by the Land Purchase Board, and 426 of those had been considered. Taxation Department valuers under the Chief Valuer (Mr. V. L. Steffanoni) were engaged in the valuation of about 130 properties. As their reports were received, they were considered by the Land Purchase Board, one member of which inspected the property in each case. After the board's recommendations had been approved by the Minister for Lands (Mr. Panton), they were forwarded to the Commonwealth War Service Land Settlement Director (Mr. W. A. McLaren) in Sydney. Mr. McLaren obtained the advice of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Canberra, after the receipt of which he notified the Director of Land Settlement in this State of the Commonwealth's decision.

So that we find that the position we are confronted with today is that when the purchase of a block of land, considered suitable for soldier settlement, is desired, the proposal has to go through the hands of not less than five of these authorities. I am surprised at the situation that has arisen, and feel sure that had our Premier, Mr. Wise, been in control and the relevant agreement was as it should be, most of the men who have made applications would be on their blocks today. Mr. Wise was chairman of the State Soldier Settlement Commission, and Mr. Fyfe, who was formerly the Surveyor General, is the Director of Soldier Settlement. We find, therefore,

been made, very little progress has been registered so far—and we still receive promises.

The propaganda that has been indulged in by the Government is rather remarkable. Should there be any attempt to criticise the authorities, or to draw attention to the chaotic position that has arisen with regard to soldier settlement, the Premier, or someone else, promptly rushes to the Press with a statement showing that earnest consideration is being given to the position, that progress is being made, and that soon something will be done. I previously mentioned the questions I had asked and the replies I received from the Chief Secretary. I draw the attention of members especially to No. 4 of my questions, which reads—

Has any intimation been conveyed by this Government to the Commonwealth Government of the dissatisfaction existing in Western Australia?

That question was carefully ignored. The reply I received was—

The Western Australian Regional Reconstruction Training Committee is responsible for the administration of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training scheme in accordance with the policy determined by the Central Reconstruction Training Committee, and to ensure the closest collaboration between the Commonwealth and State Governments.

We are quite well aware of the conditions, but, as members will note, the question I asked was whether any information had been conveyed by the State Government to the Commonwealth regarding the dissatisfaction existing in Western Australia, and there was no reply to that question from the Government—except to pass the buck on to the regional committee. I asked those questions on the 6th August and promptly the Minister for Lands, Mr. Panton, rushed into the Press in defence and, under the headings "Soldiers' Settlement," "Allotment of Farms," "Federal Decision Awaited," the report in "The West Australian" contained the following—

The Minister for Lands (Mr. Panton) said yesterday that steady progress was being made with the War Service Land Settlement Scheme. It was expected that a Commonwealth decision would enable 20 farms in the wheat and sheep areas and 20 dairy farms to be advertised within the next few weeks as available for selection by qualified ex-Servicemen.

I trust I will be pardoned for making the charge, but it seems to me that the State

Government appears to be most anxious to protect the real culprit, the bottleneck at Canberra—the Commonwealth Government. The State Government rushes into the Press as soon as possible with the assurance that something will soon be done. We have a later reference to the matter, one that appeared in the Press on the 10th August. When addressing a meeting at Bridgetown, the Minister for Lands said—

The Government does not propose to be stampeded into buying unsuitable land and rushing men on to unsuitable blocks.

The Chief Secretary: What is wrong with that?

Hon. A. THOMSON: The Minister continued—

Everything humanly possible is being done to avoid the tragic and expensive mistakes of the land settlement scheme that followed the 1914-18 war.

At that meeting an address was also delivered by Mr. Fyfe. Then again, as Mr. Fyfe pointed out at a meeting at Boyup Brook, allotments of properties are to be on the selective system and all leases will be on the 99-year basis. He also mentioned that because of this there was no provision in the agreement for tenure. If the agreement that has been entered into between the Commonwealth Government and the States had been such as to leave the responsibility in these matters with the State Government, it might well be asked: Who knows better whether land in Western Australia is suitable for the settlement of returned soldiers than those in authority here? In those circumstances, why the necessity to send matters for decision to Mr. McLaren in Sydney, or to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Canberra?

Surely to God, with all the experience Mr. Fyfe, the Premier and the Minister for Lands have had in this State, the matter could have been left in the hands of the State Government and, had that been done, I am sure something far more satisfactory would have been accomplished long ere this. Why the Premier agreed to such a contract with the Commonwealth Government, especially as he was the chairman of the Soldier Land Settlement Commission and Mr. Fyfe is the Director of Soldier Settlement, I cannot understand. Certainly I cannot see how we can expect to make progress in the existing circumstances. I hope that

by drawing attention to the matter, steps will be taken to prevent a continuance of the present delaying methods. During my remarks, the Chief Secretary interjected with a question as to what was wrong with regard to the delay. Considering that it is now 12 months—

The Chief Secretary: I did not ask any question about the delay. I asked what was wrong with the Government saying it would not be stampeded into purchasing unsuitable land.

Hon. A. THOMSON: My reply to that interjection would be that the Government has certainly not been stampeded and, so far as I can ascertain, it is not the Government that is purchasing the land. A land purchase board has been appointed and I have furthermore enumerated the various authorities through whose hands applications for the purchase of land and the allotment of blocks must proceed. It is my honest conviction that, seeing that Mr. Fyfe was formerly the Surveyor General of this State and in view of the capacity of the Rural Bank Commissioners, much more could and should have been accomplished. The whole trouble is that everything has to be sent to Canberra for decision. In voicing these opinions, I condemn the State Government which, I say, has fallen down on its job, and so has the Commonwealth Government.

To digress a little, it is remarkable that, during the war period, all members of this House and of the Legislative Assembly who were not sitting on the Government side freely offered their services to assist on any committees that were appointed to further the war effort. Were any members so appointed? Not on your life!

Hon. C. B. Williams: Were any members of the Government party, apart from Ministers, appointed to any such committee?

Hon. A. THOMSON: Quite so.

Hon. C. B. Williams: So there is not anything in your favour there.

Hon. A. THOMSON: That is no reply to the point I raised. The Government kept control of the situation, and everything it has done has been from the party point of view.

Hon. C. B. Williams: From the cash point of view.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I regret to say that there is an unholy alliance between the unions and some employers. With regard to the training of men, the Government has handed over to the unions the decision as to how many men shall be employed.

Hon. C. B. Williams: You were a member of the Carpenters' Union once!

Hon. A. THOMSON: Yes.

Hon. C. B. Williams: You were one of the original members in this State.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I am not ashamed of that. I have no objection to unions, which have done excellent work in the past. On the other hand, I demand the right to criticise them if I think their actions have been wrong, and I certainly think they are wrong in denying fellow-citizens the right to work, and compelling them to go through a training period of four years in order to learn trades such as bricklaying and carpentry.

Hon. C. B. Williams: How many apprentices were there to a journeyman in your time? Tell us that, Alec, please!

Hon. A. THOMSON: The trouble in my time was that most of us struck the bad years of the depression and the bursting of the boom. I know that in those days the only opportunity that scores of young men had to learn a trade was if they were fortunate enough to have fathers who were bricklayers, plasterers, or tradesmen of some other description.

Hon. C. B. Williams: You are quite right there.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Those were the only young fellows who had any opportunity to learn a trade, and they certainly had a lot to be thankful for.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Do you believe in monopolies?

Hon. A. THOMSON: I do not believe in them at all.

Hon. C. B. Williams: You belong to one.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I do not.

The PRESIDENT: Order! This dialogue must cease.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I honestly believe my criticism to be justified and correct, otherwise I would not have made such a statement. I hope that, as a result, it will at least make it clear to ex-Servicemen, and

give them some little satisfaction to know, that some members of Parliament are interested in their future well-being.

Hon. G. Fraser: Are you saying that the unions stop ex-Servicemen from getting work?

Hon. C. B. Williams: Order! I beg your pardon, Mr. President!

Hon. A. THOMSON: I will not repeat the statement I have already made, but I can show the quotations to the hon. member.

Hon. G. Fraser: I heard the statements but I think you said that the unions are stopping men from getting work.

Hon. A. THOMSON: So they are.

Hon. G. Fraser: Definitely, they are not.

The Honorary Minister: The Bricklayers' Union has been particularly helpful in this matter.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I do not say that they are not helpful, but they are definitely saying that they will not accept more men than they consider is the absorptive capacity of the trade.

The Honorary Minister: The bricklayers did not say that.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I have dealt with the statements of representatives of two unions on the matter. Turning again to the Lieut.-Governor's Speech, our attention is drawn therein to the deficit of £912,559. I can at least congratulate the Premier and Treasurer upon placing the true state of the finances before us. Labour has been in control of government in this State for about 19 years. It cannot, therefore, blame the Legislative Council for the deficits that have occurred during that period and, consequently, must accept full responsibility for the present financial position. When the Financial Agreement was before the State Legislature I strongly supported it, believing then, as I do now, that the effect would be that the Loan Council would regulate the rate of interest offered to the public. At that time each State was competing with loans on the money market and raising the interest rates against each other.

When the then Premier, Mr. Willcock, entered into the uniform taxation agree-

ment it was definitely stated by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, that it was merely a temporary measure that would operate during the war period. It is unfortunate that the present Prime Minister, Mr. Chifley, has dishonoured the understanding and the promise made by Mr. Curtin. To repudiate an honourable understanding arrived at between two Governments is, as the member for Katanning characterised it when referring to the matter in another place, both dishonest and fraudulent. If it were done in private business circles the person responsible for the act would not be deemed worthy of trust or be received in any organised society. The Treasurer had, I am sure, very reluctantly to accept £740,000 as a sop; and it should give some of his supporters, who seem to be so anxious to abolish State Parliaments, cause for thought, for when the Commonwealth Government repudiates an honourable agreement, how can Western Australia, with only five representatives in the Commonwealth Parliament, trust that Parliament unless it has an agreement that has been signed on the dotted line and sealed? It would be interesting to know what it is costing Western Australia to send Ministers and departmental officers, with staff, to attend the many conferences which it has been necessary to hold in Canberra since 1939.

Dealing with the goldmining industry, I desire to congratulate the present Minister for Mines on having been able to galvanise the Commonwealth Government into taking steps to return the mining machinery which was taken away from the Murchison goldfield. It is rather surprising to learn, however, that since 1939 the Commonwealth Government has collected no less a sum than £3,000,000 by taking half of the increased price of gold produced here over the price of £9 per ounce. I offer my encouragement and assistance to any movement for the betterment of this industry. In my opinion, gold started Western Australia upon its progress. It is also, in my opinion, the best medium of rehabilitating not only our ex-Servicemen but also the State—that is, if given the necessary encouragement.

Parliament has been informed by the Premier that our deficit of £912,559 has been met by the generosity of the Grants Commission. In this connection, I should like to

quote from the Speech. On page 4 we find the following—

Under the Commonwealth Income Tax (Reimbursement) Act, the State has submitted a claim to the Commonwealth Grants Commission for the amount necessary to enable the budget to be balanced, and Ministers are hopeful that the full claim will be met.

In spite of the protests of the State Governments, the Commonwealth Government has decided to continue the system of uniform taxation adopted during the war as a temporary measure. This action, if permanent, will have far-reaching effects on the financial position of the State. When the Commonwealth Government could not be induced to abandon its proposal, the States endeavoured to make the best possible bargain and an agreement was reached whereby the States will receive additional compensation. For 1946-47 Western Australia will receive the substantial increase of £740,000.

While we may appreciate the apparent generosity of the Commonwealth Government in paying us £912,559, when I saw the announcement in the Press I thought, "Thank God, the Federal election is approaching," and that is probably what the Premier said. What a change of heart in the Federal Treasurer who, at the Premiers' Conference, was adamant regarding uniform taxation and told the Premiers, in effect, "You will take what I give you." Of course, the Grants Commission saw the error of its ways, because from charging Western Australia with spending too much on social services and education, doubtless, in view of the Federal election looming up, it also had a change of heart and disgorged £912,559. But I would again draw attention to the fact that the Commonwealth has taken approximately £600,000 a year from us by way of gold tax, and so it is not quite so generous as it might have been to this State.

How generous the Commonwealth Government can be at times! When by a referendum Western Australia sought to secede, the then Commonwealth Government became most concerned; and Hon. P. Collier, as Premier, greatly benefited because the Commonwealth Government felt that possibly we might be able to secede. I wish we had been. Compare a tax of £3,000,000 on our gold industry alone with the position that exists in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, all of which were able to build up substantial reserves. This State benefited but little by expenditure caused by war conditions.

One other subject I desire to touch upon is a topic on which I generally have something to say. I refer to the Fremantle Harbour Trust. We have not had the opportunity to peruse the annual statement submitted to Parliament by the Fremantle Harbour Trust, but I find that the Auditor General draws attention to the matter. He forecasts an increase of 15 per cent. in harbour charges. I trust that this extra charge will not be submitted to us for our support; rather, we should be looking for a reduction. It would be most interesting if it were possible to compare the cost of a ship visiting Fremantle in 1939 with the cost today. I know wages have increased, as well as the cost of coal and other shipping requirements; but has the roster system proved to be a success? The Auditor General states that the expenses were high owing mainly to increasing costs incurred in handling cargo and in connection with its custody. Yet the surplus was £328,929. I wish to quote from the report of the Auditor General on this matter, as follows:—

The inadequacy of the existing scale of handling charges to provide the revenue necessary to meet the progressively increasing cost of performing these services has been commented upon in previous reports, and while the deficits in respect of the cargo handling services in earlier years have to some extent been met by a surcharge of 20 per cent., operative as from 2nd January, 1942, on the schedule scale of charges on general cargo, with a further increase of 15 per cent. as from 19th January, 1943, the aggregate surcharge of 35 per cent. is still insufficient to bring receipts from this source into line with the costs rightly chargeable to the service. The factors responsible for this adverse position in the past, though perhaps varied in their incidence, have not yet materially abated. On the contrary, the tendency must be indirectly towards a steadily increasing cost, if for no other reason than the progressive decline in the collective efficiency of the labour available for this work, due almost entirely to the operation of the present rotary system for the engagement of labour at this port. These remarks are not intended as a criticism of that system, which was evolved primarily to ensure the best possible turnround of ships and a more even distribution of the work to be done, with a view to equalising, as far as possible, the earnings of the workers engaged in the industry; but one effect of the system, and an important one as regards the Trust's cargo handling service, is that the younger and more able men are allocated to those duties requiring the greater physical endurance, usually aboard vessels, with the result that the older and less physically able are drafted for work ashore. While this

may be economically sound from the viewpoint of the industry as a whole, the disadvantage to one section of the work, the shore handling, will be apparent, as while the system continues there will always be a higher average of less physically capable men working ashore than aboard vessels, with a consequent lower output per man ashore.

We know that after the war of 1914-18 the Fremantle Harbour Trust imposed a surcharge. We also know that on the 2nd January, 1942, an additional 20 per cent. was imposed; while on the 19th January, 1943, still another 15 per cent. was imposed. I do not know whether these imposts were submitted to Parliament for its approval. I have tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain a copy of the regulations governing the Fremantle Harbour Trust. One would think that a copy of the regulations would be made available to members.

I shall be speaking on other subjects at a later date. I have been brutally frank and critical respecting the treatment of our ex-Servicemen, and I do not withdraw one word of what I said. If the result of that criticism is the acceleration of assistance to those men, then I consider the time I have spent in addressing the House will not have been wasted. I support the motion.

**HON. R. M. FORREST** (North) [5.43]:

I desire to congratulate you, Mr. President, upon your appointment to the high office which you now hold in this Chamber. I also congratulate Mr. Seddon upon his appointment as Chairman of Committees. May I congratulate, too, Mr. Kitson, on his appointment as Agent General for Western Australia.

Hon. A. Thomson: Hear, hear!

**HON. R. M. FORREST**: I take the opportunity to express my sincere appreciation of the very kindly welcome that has been extended to me by hon. members of the House. In speaking for the first time in this Chamber, it is my wish to make some reference to the province that I and my colleagues represent. I am anxious to take the earliest opportunity to deal with the problems that confront our northern areas, because there has never been a time when the North requires the consideration that it does today. The disabilities of this vast area are considerable. It is only those who have spent their lives there who can fully appreciate what the people have had to put up with

in the past. If one travels as I have, through the whole of the province from Wyndham to the Murchison, visiting over 80 per cent. of the sheep and cattle stations and every town and mining centre, one gets a good picture of the magnitude of this country, and finds that there are separate problems facing each district.

The importance to our State and to Australia of the northern areas cannot be over-emphasised. From the point of view of defence, the North-West is vulnerable and is a highly important strategic area. From the economic point of view the North, with its great pastoral industry, its mineral wealth and its capacity for the development of existing industries, is entitled to a high place in our economy. We were glad of the appointment by the Government of a special committee to inquire into the problems of the North, and our appreciation is due to the Government for the recommendations that have already been submitted.

No doubt members have heard of an association that has been formed in the North, known as the North-West and Kimberley Advancement Association. The first meeting of this body was held at Whim Creek. Dr. Hislop gave a good description of this meeting to members. I attended that meeting and later I was present at the conference at Roebourne. At that conference there were representatives of every road board district in the North from Wyndham to the Gascoyne. Every subject was discussed, and I think that was the first time that all the people of the North and North-West formed themselves into a committee and discussed their problems. The main object of this association is the complete elimination of taxation for 20 years. If this were to come about most of the problems facing this part of Western Australia would be solved. People would then flock to the North and a great deal of capital would be introduced, and new industries would open up everywhere. But we are not going to get people to work and live in the North under the present heavy burden of taxation when they can live more cheaply in a much more moderate climate. The population in the North today is lower than it has been for the past 30 years. There is one person to every 180 square miles, whereas, I understand that in Europe there are 180 persons to each square mile.

I would like to mention something about a big problem in the North-West—transport. Every industry there depends entirely on road transport. We have two so-called highways. One is known as the Coastal Highway and runs from Northampton to Port Hedland via the coastal towns of Carnarvon, Onslow and Roebourne. The other is known as the Great Northern Highway and runs from Meekatharra to Wyndham via Nullagine and Marble Bar, and then connects with the Coastal Highway at Port Hedland. Thence it goes via the 90-mile Beach to Broome, then across to Derby, and inland to Fitzroy Crossing and Hall's Creek. No doubt there has been, annually, a wicked waste of money spent on patching up these so-called highways. If one year's maintenance were to be spent on the purchase of up-to-date road-making machinery, it would not be long before we would have roads of which we could be proud instead of the present ones, which are a disgrace!

Hon. G. B. Wood: That applies all over the State.

Hon. R. M. FORREST: Some industries have started in the North but most of them have failed owing to the high cost of transport. We cannot expect to have cheap transport unless we have good roads. I would like to mention something about the main industries of the North. The first is the pastoral industry. For the past 15 years this industry has gone through difficult and depressing times mainly owing to the continuous drought, the ravages of blowflies and the great increase of vermin.

I have seen some pathetic cases on my travels. Stations have been established for from 40 to 60 years and their owners, through no fault of their own, find that they now have no equity in their holdings and they have been forced to leave them with little chance of making a new start in life. How has this state of affairs come about? It is mainly, as I said before, because of the drought, and also because of the high cost of production and the high interest rate that has been charged on overdrafts. During the depression the interest rate was 6 per cent., and there was a move in certain quarters to raise it to 7 per cent. when wool was bringing an average price of £8 per bale. I would like to give one instance, which occurred prior to the

war, of rising costs. One station purchased 10,000 iron posts to do some fencing, and they cost 10½d. per post.

The Honorary Minister: Was that the cost landed there?

Hon. R. M. FORREST: The following year that station purchased 5,000 of these posts and the cost had risen to 1s. 1d. per post. The next year it was found necessary to purchase another 4,000 posts, and the cost then had risen to 1s. 3½d. That is a rise of 50 per cent. in three years. How can any industry progress with such rising costs? Now we find that the Commonwealth Government has confiscated—to put it mildly—£7,000,000 of the growers' money. The Government says that it is for scientific research. Well, I understand that a 5 per cent. contributing fund is already provided for scientific research, and that up to the 30th June, 1946, a levy was imposed on the wool-growers of Australia at the rate of 2s. per bale for scientific and industrial research. If the pastoral industry is to be put on a sound economic basis, production costs must come down and interest rates must be reduced.

I would like to say a few words about mining. I suppose we have in the North every kind of mineral that exists, but very little has been done to exploit those resources mainly because of the high cost of transport. At Marble Bar, and also at Wittenoom Gorge in the Hamersley Ranges—about 200 miles inland from Roebourne—a great deal has been done. I understand that at the Comet Mine, which is only six miles from Marble Bar, over £250,000 has already been expended on development, and the same applies to the Wittenoom Gorge asbestos mine. With sympathetic help and consideration from our Government, there is no reason why these two mines should not one day be the centres of thriving industrial towns.

Tropical agriculture is, no doubt, well established on the Gascoyne River near Carnarvon. I think the banana plantations there would compare favourably with any in Australia. The pioneers of this industry deserve every encouragement, and the plantations are a credit to them. With quicker transport there is no reason why the perishable goods from these plantations should not arrive at the metropolitan area within 24 hours of leaving Carnarvon.

I hope the Government will make a thorough survey of the Gascoyne River in order to ascertain the amount of water that is available, so giving the growers or planters greater security of tenure. As members are probably aware, there are two towns in the North, Onslow and Port Hedland, that have exceedingly poor water supplies; in fact, at Port Hedland the water is as salty as the sea. We know there is water at Onslow—or we think we do—but it is a matter of the cost of piping the water to the town. Drinking water is brought to Port Hedland by train and costs residents 3s. 6d. per 100 gallons. The military aerodrome, only eight miles from the township, has an abundance of fresh water and surely the residents, who have to spend their lives in such towns, are entitled to some consideration.

The pearling industry has suffered more than most other industries in the North. It was completely lost during the war years and Broome was the town which suffered most. The industry could be put on a sound financial basis again, and it deserves every encouragement from the Government. The pearlers who lost their luggers through no fault of their own should have every consideration shown them and should, I think, be reimbursed in order that they may buy new luggers.

In the North there are three towns, Onslow, Roebourne and Port Hedland, without a doctor. The Flying Doctor Service is doing, and has done, a wonderful job, but is it not asking far too much of one medical man that he should look after these three towns as well as the whole of the inland between Port Hedland and Exmouth Gulf? It is imperative that a doctor be stationed at every town in the North, and that the Flying Doctor Service be extended to cover the whole of the inland between Wyndham and Carnarvon.

Another big problem in the North is that of education, especially for those people who live away from the towns. The correspondence system has been a great help to the outback people and has been appreciated by them, but the time comes when a child has to be sent away to school, and then the cost to the parents becomes very high. How can a man who is on a salary—living away from the towns—afford £100 or £150 per year to have a child educated? He

may have two or three children and it is practically impossible for him to pay for their education. I think it is only right that the Government should pay a subsidy to parents who have to send their children away to school.

At a later date I hope to discuss many other subjects such as aviation, shipping and harbour facilities, postal services, telephonic communication, and also the problem of natives and half-castes. The last-mentioned, no doubt, is fast becoming a serious problem in the North-West, mainly owing to interference by an ignorant, mischievous, and unscrupulous section of the community—

Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. R. M. FORREST:—whose main object seems to be to create trouble and discontent among people who are naturally a happy and contented race. In conclusion, I would say that the story of the North is one of pioneering endeavour, courage and endurance which could not be surpassed in any other country. I support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply.

On motion by Hon. E. M. Heenan, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 6.7 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly.

*Tuesday, 13th August, 1946.*

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