

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 9th April, 1942.

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

MOTION—SITTING DAYS AND HOURS.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, ordered—

That so much of Standing Order 48 be suspended as is necessary to enable the Council to meet for the despatch of business on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in each week during the remainder of the session at the hour of 11 o'clock in the forenoon.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

The Chief Secretary and the State's War Effort.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West) [4.43]: Members will recall that just previous to Parliament's adjourning in December last, the war position had developed so seriously that the unprecedented step was taken of postponing the elections, which ordinarily would have been completed for both Houses not later than this month; and the Government intimated that Parliament would not be prorogued in the usual way, but would be called together as occasion warranted. Consistent with that understanding, we meet today.

It is not proposed to introduce any legislation this session, and it is hoped that our sittings can conclude at the end of next week when the Premier will leave to attend a Premiers' Conference which has been called by the Prime Minister for the 22nd April in Canberra. I understand that most important matters affecting all the States of the Commonwealth are to be dealt with at the conference.

At the conclusion of my remarks I propose to move a motion which will give members an opportunity to discuss the present emergency position. It will be understood, of course, that for security reasons some

matters cannot be openly discussed in detail, and I feel sure members will have due regard for this in any remarks they make.

Since we last met, much history has been made. Events have taken place with startling rapidity, and, unpalatable though it may be, we have to admit reverses on a scale that might well have daunted less resourceful and courageous people, but which, on the contrary, have stirred our nation and allies in such a way as to produce an all-in effort that will ultimately pave the way to victory. Under these circumstances it is unnecessary for me to emphasise that all members of the Government have been more than fully occupied. At the outbreak of the war this Government offered its whole-hearted co-operation and assistance to the Commonwealth Government, whose responsibility it is to provide for the defence of the country, and it can be said that in every way we have lived up to that undertaking.

Through the stress and strain of the last few months, facing problems that few of us ever thought would come our way, there has been one desire only, and that to switch over our peace-loving nation to a maximum wartime footing in a minimum of time. Changes of this nature cannot be accomplished without inconvenience and real sacrifice, but the fact that our soil has been despoiled by enemy forces has brought not only a full realisation of our peril, but also a determination on the part of all sections of the community for an all-in effort which will add lustre to the reputation of Australia and be an invaluable contribution to the common cause.

In another place the Premier is making a statement in general terms in which he will refer to many matters that have no doubt been exercising the minds of members, particularly such items as—

The representations made by him and other Ministers to the Federal Government and Army leaders on matters of military significance.

The need for increased production of armaments and the assistance we are receiving in this respect from overseas.

The necessity for, and steps being taken to bring about a tremendous increase in our production of perishable foodstuffs on account of a very large number of our fighting men who must be provided for.

The necessity for the rapid expansion of secondary industries associated with the war effort, together with the manpower problems this involves.

The uncertain position of the goldmining industry which plays such a great part in the economic life of the State.

The effect of war requirements on our railways.

The production, transport and storage of wheat.

The absolute necessity for increased supplies of coal.

The organising of reserves of foodstuffs throughout the State, together with the organising of current supplies for the civil population.

The re-organisation of the Civil Defence Council and developments in that connection which have been so marked in recent months.

In connection with the last-mentioned item, the Premier will also make a statement giving information in regard to the financial obligations of the State and Commonwealth as arranged at a conference held some time ago, whereby it was provided that the Commonwealth Government would in the first place supply a sum of £500,000, and that this and the other States would be expected to put up a similar amount of the quota, whatever that quota might be. Before the conference concluded the Commonwealth Government agreed to find a further £500,000 from which this State would receive at least as much as it did from the first £500,000, but the Commonwealth Government did not at present require the State Government to provide the equivalent amount, concerning which negotiations are now proceeding. Those matters to which I have just referred are of the utmost importance. I do not propose at this juncture to go into detail concerning them, because the Premier will be dealing with them in another place, and members will be able to get that information before we meet on Tuesday next.

There are also other matters I would like to deal with. For instance, the Minister for Works (Hon. H. Millington) has found it necessary to relegate into the background practically all our own domestic requirements for buildings, road work, etc., in order to concentrate all our resources on matters of defence importance.

The Public Works and Water Supply Departments have carried out defence works comprising water supplies, sewerage installations, stormwater drainage, harbour and dock work and dredging, construction of reinforced concrete oil tanks, engineering surveys and investigations, laying of oil mains, aerodrome runways, gun emplace-

ments, etc., construction of various types of buildings, hutments, etc., and on the mechanical side, the manufacture of gun emplacements, munitions, etc. In order to expedite these works practically all civil works have been closed down including such large undertakings as the Stirling irrigation reservoir, irrigation channelling, Goldfields Water Supply main conduit renovations, and the Perth Hospital.

Apart from a relatively few men engaged on the maintenance and repair of essential services—essential both from the military and civil standpoints—all available workers are now engaged on works of a national emergency character. In effect, practically the whole of the State Public Works organisation has been placed at the disposal of the Commonwealth Government, and the works undertaken on behalf of that Government have extended as far north as Darwin. The State Engineering Works at North Fremantle has been reconstructed and reorganised and has been, and is continuing to be, freely availed of by all branches of the armed forces, including the United States Navy.

Active steps have been taken in all practicable ways to protect essential services from possible damage and interruption by air raids. These works embrace all water supply and sewerage undertakings, including the very important Goldfields Water Supply scheme. Restrictions are now in force on all consumers connected to the Mundaring scheme, and in addition to stores connected with the scheme, railway dams en route are also being filled with Mundaring water as a national security measure. Water must play a big part in any country where war activities are taking place. This Government has endeavoured to safeguard the position so far as it humanly possible on behalf of the military forces within the State and of the civilian population. To conserve water to meet possible requirements in relation to evacuees or billeting, severe water rationing has been put into effect, independent of the Mundaring scheme. This applies particularly to major towns along the Great Southern railway.

Throughout the past year, virtually the whole of the departmental resources in manpower and equipment have been engaged on work of importance to the war effort. This applies to the Main Roads, Public Works

and Water Supply Departments. The construction organisations have been engaged continuously on defence works for the various branches of the armed forces and the shortage of manpower has necessitated drawing labour from all possible sources, resulting in the reduction of maintenance gangs to an absolute minimum.

I understand that in certain places some inconvenience has been caused because of these circumstances, but in almost all instances the inconvenience is accepted as part of the price the community must pay in order that we may place ourselves in the best position to accomplish that which we have to do in connection with our war effort. One outstanding work undertaken for the defence services was the building of the Western Australian portion of the East-West road, involving some 450 miles of new construction. This work was completed in a comparatively short time and in a very satisfactory manner.

The normal construction programmes for main and developmental roads have been entirely suspended, and the very limited bitumen supplies which have been received during the past two years have been sufficient for maintenance works only after meeting defence requirements. This has all been done with the full co-operation of the trade unions. The Railway Department has been of great assistance in many ways, and if the whole story of the activities of the Midland Junction Workshops could be told, its achievements would reflect the utmost credit on all concerned. The total value of all contracts received to date approximate £1,198,000, sub-contracts amounting to only £76,000, which is included in the larger figure.

The Education Department has been faced with rather serious problems in its desire to take every precaution to safeguard the lives of children, and at the same time has not been unmindful of their education. In all, 13 schools situated in military areas, as at Fremantle, or in target areas have been vacated and the children dispersed among the suburban schools. In the vast majority of instances this has brought the children nearer their homes and thus eliminated possible congestion on public conveyances. In all, about 6,000 children have been dispersed

from dangerous to what I would describe as less dangerous schools. A similar dispersal has taken place in the Bunbury area. There has also been a certain amount of voluntary evacuation from the metropolitan and port areas to the country districts. To meet the increased enrolment in country schools, extra staff, accommodation and equipment have been provided for, and in some cases new schools opened. Respecting the students of secondary schools, a special correspondence system has been commenced whereby the evacuee student may carry on his studies with his own teacher. This has been availed of very extensively. The activities of the ordinary correspondence classes have also been extended to meet the requirements of the isolated evacuees. An increase of 500 has been registered in this Department.

With regard to the protection of school children, it must be understood that the Education Department does not intend to take any risk with the lives of the children, and should the military situation warrant it, the schools in threatened areas will be closed. However, as an insurance against the unforeseen, the department has taken further precautions. Acting in conjunction with, and on the advice of the Civil Defence Council, slit trench protection has been provided in the playgrounds of the metropolitan schools. This has been done by voluntary labour, and the Government appreciates the co-operation and help received from parents and citizens' associations, local governing bodies and others.

The technical branch of the Education Department has given very substantial help to the war effort by the training of technicians and tradesmen for the Army, R.A.A.F. and Munitions Factory Board. Statistics, which to me are most interesting, show that to the end of 1941, 714 men were trained in 12 trade categories for the Army, while 818 fitters were trained for the R.A.A.F. and an additional 324 mechanics and fitters for munition work. From the beginning of this year there has been a substantial increase in these activities. The current training load of the technical schools, which in 1941 was never more than 300, has this year reached the peak total of 1,170, and this figure will be maintained. That, I think, is a remarkable achievement. This increase has strained both the technical facilities and staff, but

the ordinary teaching activities have been maintained with a minimum of inconvenience and interruption.

It is also pleasing to know that the aeronautical workshop at the Perth Technical College is now to be used to its fullest extent, and I am informed that the college is considered by the representative of the Ministry of Aircraft Production to be equal to anything of its kind in the Commonwealth. The training of 60 aircraft fitters will be commenced as soon as the local committee has completed the work of selection from 250 applications which have already been received.

Even before the war the Government was seized with the importance of technical education, but the war has emphasised the supreme national importance of this phase of education. In consequence of its increasing importance, the Government is seeking, through its officers, to lay down a policy for the future development of technical education in this State.

The war position has thrown upon the Police Department many extra duties, and the department is assisting all the fighting services and civil defence in many ways. The special intelligence section, which deals with such matters as aliens, subversive activities, etc., has done particularly good work, and members will be interested to learn that the recent disclosures with regard to an organisation known as the "Australia First Movement" were brought about as a result of the splendid work of this branch of the civil police in this State.

The control of the liquor trade has also received attention, and as members are aware, the Commonwealth Government has intimated its intention to reduce trading hours throughout the Commonwealth to seven per day. That restriction was to have taken effect as from Monday next, but, as members will have noticed from reports appearing in the Press, the imposition of those restrictions has been postponed until after the 22nd April, which is the date on which the Premiers' Conference will meet in Canberra.

The Department of Industrial Development is also closely associated in many ways with the war effort, and I should perhaps refer to what may be considered the most important new industry which has been established in this State for many

years, namely, the exploitation of Lake Champion for the production of potash and the possible production of alunite for the manufacture of aluminium. There are other important by-products, too. Arrangements have already been made for the commencement of the erection of the necessary buildings, plant, etc.

Negotiations are still proceeding with England and America in regard to the possible establishment of the charcoal iron industry in this State, and the State Government has made available a certain amount of money in order to test the suitability of our local hardwoods for the manufacture of charcoal for this purpose. Charcoal is an important item these days, and the Department of Industrial Development has been very active in an endeavour to increase production with the co-operation of the State Sawmills Department and the various saw mills throughout Western Australia with the object of using waste timber for this purpose. The Liquid Fuel Control Board is co-operating with the department with the idea of increasing supplies in country districts, particularly in the direction of persuading farmers to produce charcoal, thus saving freight and transport generally.

The organising of reserve stocks of food throughout the country is also the responsibility of the Minister in charge of the Department of Industrial Development (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke) and an interesting fact is that reserve stocks were available in almost every district before Japan came into the war. There were a few districts where the local storekeepers showed a disinclination to provide the necessary storage, but this has now been overcome. Difficulties have cropped up, however, in recent weeks in regard to current supplies of foodstuffs for civilians. This arises from the fact that this State has allowed itself to become dependent on the Eastern States for a large proportion of its prepared foodstuffs and those States are experiencing production difficulties arising out of the large number of fighting men who now have to be supplied. The food canning industry has been rapidly extended to deal with commodities such as meat, vegetables, fish and tomatoes. The interruption and disorganisation of traffic from the East on account of military necessity has also aggravated the position respecting the pro-

vision of food supplies. The present position is regarded rather seriously, and the Government has taken steps to protect the interests of Western Australia as far as possible.

The Government has now authorised the Emergency Reserve Stocks Committee to organise as far as possible current supplies of foodstuffs for civilian consumption, in addition to the emergency supplies. The chairman of the Emergency Reserve Stocks Committee has been made a member of the Foodstuffs Advisory Committee, which committee is responsible for the organising of the production of all kinds of foodstuffs from the land. In addition, the recently appointed Commonwealth Deputy Controller of Defence Foodstuffs in W.A. (Mr. Robins), who is well-known to most of us as secretary of the State Tender Board for years and is organising the food supplies for the whole of the fighting services, has been made a member of the Emergency Reserve Stocks Committee. The whole of the food requirements of the population, military and civil, is by these means being organised.

On the agricultural side, the Minister and the department, recognising the seriousness and vital importance of the problem, are faced with a most difficult situation. Every possible step is being taken to safeguard the position. Owing to the large number of members of the Fighting Forces in this State, there has been a very severe tax upon our food supplies. For instance, it is estimated that military needs demand an increased production of no less than 30,000 tons, or approximately 30 per cent., in our vegetable production. So serious is this position that steps have been taken to manpower reputable vegetable growers. It is also estimated that no less than 17,000 tons of potatoes above our normal production will be required during this year. This represents approximately 2,000 acres of additional cropping, and arrangements have already been made for a big increase in production, but whether such an increase will be achieved is indeed a moot point.

Flax production, which is a new industry in this State, has been given much attention, the department having organised the whole work of distribution of seed, harvesting and earthing. Three mills are in operation. It is pleasing to know that the Western Australian crop of tobacco last season was

the highest quality in the Commonwealth, and that the Commonwealth has requested increased production during next year. An endeavour is being made to increase the production by 25 per cent. during 1942-43. Difficulty was experienced during 1941 in regard to the export of eggs, and it was necessary for the State Government to guarantee exporters against loss up to an amount of £8,000, which enabled the price of eggs to be maintained at approximately 1s. per dozen. It is necessary to increase the manufacture of condensed milk from 1½ to 2½ million gallons, and in order to do this the transfer of five million gallons from butter and cheese to whole or condensed milk will be necessitated.

Butter represents another difficult problem. Owing to the great increase in military requirements it is anticipated there will be a shortage of 24,000 boxes of butter to the end of August, 1942, and possibly there will be no export of butter during this year, while a further import of 50,000 boxes up to June of 1943 may be required.

The position regarding beef supplies is indeed serious. With the Wyndham Meat-works not operating, and no possibility of shipments of cattle from Derby, there will be a probable shortage by August of some 4,400 tons. This aspect, of course, is receiving the attention of the department; but a survey which is being made of the mutton and lamb position indicates that supplies will be adequate for our needs and may supplement beef. Again, as to fertilisers, members are aware that superphosphate has been rationed; and it may be necessary further to reduce the ration for 1942-43. There is also a serious Australian shortage of sulphate of ammonia, because Australia only supplies, as a rule, one-half of her requirements, and as no imports are at present possible, and as munitions require at least one-half of that which is manufactured in Australia, it is now only available in mixed fertilisers, all of which have been reserved for genuine commercial farmers for tobacco, tomato, potato and other vegetable crops. Normally, Western Australia uses 3,400 tons, but for the year ended the 30th June this year we shall have received only 840 tons. There is also a serious shortage of potash at present, and none is available except to commercial growers of tobacco and vegetables. Blood-and-bone is also being rationed by co-operation with the main distributors.

I have not exhausted by any means the items of importance which have been receiving the close attention of the Government, but I think I have given a very brief survey of matters which are of vital importance and which will indicate the revolution that has taken place in the everyday activities of the Government. It will be remembered that when the life of Parliament was extended, the Premier agreed that he would consult the leaders of the other parties whenever possible, and this has been done. There has been the utmost co-operation on many matters, and the goodwill which has been exhibited is very much appreciated. Members, too, have shown a keen desire to render assistance and to be associated with the war effort in many ways.

Before concluding my remarks may I emphasise that while it is not possible to discuss in detail many of the subjects mentioned, the Government has lost no opportunity to make representations to, and collaborate with, the Commonwealth Government on matters appertaining to the defence of this State. Our enemies had a long start in preparing for war, and they have had the advantage of the initiative simply because they possessed the armament and the equipment. This position is gradually being overcome, and as the weeks go by we patently grow stronger and stronger. It is very pleasing and most heartening to see our American cousins fully armed and equipped at our side; and this, together with the return of our own troops from oversea, also fully armed, has given us confidence and brightened our outlook considerably.

The horrors of war have already been experienced in Australia in the northern parts of our State, and none can tell where the next blow will fall. The intentions of the enemy are known only to himself, but whatever they are, they must be frustrated at all costs. Nearer and nearer the full impact of the menace is bearing down upon this country. These are just plain facts which cannot be denied, and facts which any clear-thinking person can understand for himself. Dispositions are, of course, being made to meet them, but there is still much to be done and there must be no relaxation of our effort. Recent successes in Darwin and New Guinea speak for themselves.

What the future has in store we do not know. It may be a grim future with the

horrors of an invasion. Whatever it may prove to be, I feel sure the citizens of this State, and Australians generally, will face it. The time has come for nothing less than total warfare. Everyone must take his or her place either in the field or in essential services. Our Prime Minister, on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, has stated that total mobilisation is the policy of the Commonwealth Government and that all members of the community must respond to the Government's call in the urgent need of the nation. I feel that the wonderful reputation this State has achieved in the realm of patriotic activities, as regards men, money, and effort, is a guarantee that we shall not be found wanting.

All I have to add is that, brief as my remarks had necessarily to be in view of the numerous items I was obliged to mention, I feel sure that in the course of the discussion which will take place many questions will be raised. Doubtless a considerable amount of information will be asked for; but I would urge members to bear in mind what I stated at the beginning of my remarks—that there are many things we cannot possibly discuss openly in detail. However, I can say to members what I have said here on many occasions, that I shall be only too pleased to furnish to the fullest possible extent any information they desire, subject only to the limitations I have indicated.

MOTION—PRINTING MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West) [5.30]: I move—

That the Ministerial Statement be printed.

On motion by Hon. H. Seddon, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.31 p.m.