

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 pearl-ers 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.

	PAGE
Questions: Soldier land settlement—(a) as to applications under Commonwealth scheme	241
(b) as to purchase of dairy stock	241
Bulldozers and tractors, as to allotments to States	241
Housing timber, as to exports to Eastern States	241
Water supplies, as to Mendel Wongoondy-Koeketa Estate	242
Native administration, as to request for Commonwealth grant	242
Bills: Electoral (War Time) Act Amendment, 1R.	242
Road Districts Act Amendment, 1R.	242
Feeding Stuffs Act Amendment (No. 1), 2R.	242
Bulk Handling Act Amendment, 2R.	243
Factories and Shops Act Amendment, 2A.	245
State Government Insurance Office Act Amendment, 2R.	247
Legislative Council Referendum, 2R.	251

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