

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 13th August, 1924.

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

QUESTION—NAVIGATION ACT, EXEMPTION.

Mr. SLEEMAN asked the Premier: 1, Were the State Government approached by the Federal Government for an opinion before the granting of exemption to the s.s. "Centaur" to trade on the North-West coast of this State? 2, If so, what opinion was given?

The PREMIER replied: 1 and 2, No.

QUESTION—UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON asked the Colonial Treasurer: 1, Have the Government agreed to spend pound for pound with the City Council on new unscheduled works which the Council may undertake for the relief of the unemployed? 2, If so, will the same terms and conditions be granted to other local governing bodies of the metropolitan area?

The COLONIAL TREASURER replied: 1 and 2, No; and no request of this nature has been made.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Eighth Day.

Mr. BARNARD (Sussex) [4.35]: As one of the new members, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Speaker. Also I wish to congratulate the Premier and his Ministers on their attainment to office. At the last election it was the people's wish that those gentlemen should take office, and we have to abide by that decision. Let us hope that the people will not be disappointed in the Premier and his Ministers. It has been pleasing to hear hon. members express their willingness to help the Premier in the work he has before him. In the Governor's Speech I notice that every part of Western Australia is mentioned for assistance; so apparently the same old policy is to be carried on by the new Government. That will be gratifying to those on this side. The Premier has said that he will require at least £7,000,000 this year for the works of the country. Judging from the requests we have heard from members here it is clear that

£7,000,000 will not be sufficient to carry out all the works required. The Premier is likely to have a difficult problem in finding the money. I hope he will be able to get sufficient to carry out the most necessary works, and that hon. members' requests will be acceded to, for I am sure they are quite justified. My own have not yet been added to the list. Fortunately they are very small indeed. Of course, like Geraldton and Fremantle and Bunbury, Busselton has a harbour requiring attention. To me it seems that Busselton's claim in this respect is more urgent than any of the others. We have a jetty not equal to the business of the port. Owing to the Margaret River railway being almost completed, the timber mills erected along that line are sending timber through Busselton to Bunbury because the accommodation at our jetty is not sufficient for the berthing of the large boats that come for timber.

The Minister for Lands: Will not a lot of that timber go to Augusta in future?

Mr. BARNARD: I hope not. It is closer to our port than to Augusta, and the Augusta jetty will require a lot more repairs than will ours to be able to berth timber boats. The jetty-head there is only 600 feet long, whereas the timber boats are up to 450 feet in length. The Margaret River railway has not yet been taken over by the Government, although 1922 tons of timber have been sent through to Bunbury for shipment. Then there are some smaller requirements in my electorate. For instance, a railway station at Donnybrook is necessary and has been half-promised for many years. Yet new stations of much less importance are being built elsewhere. The most pressing question of all is that of group settlement. The Minister for Lands last night gave us some astonishing figures. Speaking of land settlement generally he said that £11,000,000 had been lent to farmers. I take it most of that has been lent in the wheat areas. The Treasurer has said that he requires one and a-quarter million pounds for the group settlements this year. It is a very large sum, but I hope he will be able to find all that is necessary to carry on the good work initiated by Sir James Mitchell. The policy of group settlement has found favour with the Labour Party. Last night the Minister for Lands told us that the party had kept the Government in power last session because they were satisfied with the group settlement policy.

The Minister for Lands: I said because they were carrying out our policy.

Mr. BARNARD: It is one and the same. I am glad the Minister is going to continue that policy of development of group settlement. Notwithstanding the criticism levelled against the scheme and against Sir James Mitchell who inaugurated it, all must admit that good work has been done. The member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) criticised the group settlement and the South-West lands. He said the

South-West country would take years to sweeten, and that the clearing of the land should be carried out on a different system, the bigger trees being ringbarked. Of course, ringbarked country is easier and cheaper to clear than is green country; but if we are to wait five or seven years for the country to be cleared, how can we hope to develop group settlement? As for the land requiring to be sweetened, the hon. member must know that his statement was incorrect; for it has been proved that in that country, where green timber grew last year crops will grow this year, crops including potatoes and oats. They are not grown in large quantities at the present time. A potato crop will yield from eight to ten tons to the acre. The oat crops were exceptionally good, and the best sheaf shown in the district had been grown on one of the groups that was green the year before. This indicates that the country is not sour and does not require years of sweetening. A lot has been said about clearing, and it has been stated that it should have been done by contract rather than by the group settlers. The scheme that was adopted was a good one. Although there are men from the Old Country who have never used an axe, especially the type used in Australia, they have to be taught, and this is the easiest way to teach them. In a short time they will be able to do the work as well as an Australian. I have been amongst the group settlements as much as anyone. I have seen the work the settlers have been doing, and I am of opinion that the majority will make good if they are given a chance. The Minister for Lands admitted he thought each man should have a cow upon which to practice milking, and that it was better to spoil one cow than ten. It is a good idea. The same thing applies to the men who are working on the land. If they have never done any clearing in their lives, it is better that they should be shown how to do it under supervision such as in a group. An area of 25 acres is not sufficient for one man, and each will have to clear more of his own land. The clearing methods adopted are much the same as the old type that is adopted by other people. Traction engines are being used, and these are in charge of qualified men who do the tree pulling. When a tractor is not used the ordinary tree puller is brought into requisition. Any man with common sense can use a treepuller in a very little while. That part of the work, therefore, is done in the same way as a contractor would do it. I should like the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) to take a trip to the South-West, for I feel sure that he has not seen as much of that part of the State as he should have seen. If he went through the districts and saw the clover growing there, he would know that the land was not so sour as he thought it was. Last year in the group settlements in my district 2,700 acres of clover were planted, and this is now doing

well. I am satisfied that the group settlements will be the mainstay of Western Australia. It is a system of development that we should encourage. Let us hope the Government will continue the work, and will be able to find the money necessary to enable them to carry it on. The Minister for Lands referred to the storekeepers. I am justified in defending them, particularly those in my district. It has been stated that the prices charged for goods are exorbitant, and that the new settlers are being robbed by the storekeepers. I flatly contradict that statement. Exorbitant prices are not charged in the district I represent. The prices that are current in the town are those that are charged by the storekeeper to the settler, plus the extra freight that is charged by the group settlement lorries to take the goods to the store. If exorbitant charges are made it is due to the cost of getting the goods out by the group settlement lorries. The storekeepers are doing their best to assist the settlers in every way. If robbery is being committed, it is against the storekeeper and not in his favour. We all have to suffer. That is in the game. It goes against the grain, however, for one to hear it stated that the storekeepers are robbing the men on the land. The Premier says he requires another million and a half of money this year. I hope that will be forthcoming, even if he has to go to England to get it. It is badly needed for the development of our lands. We should not stop the immigration policy that has been carried on so successfully during the last year or two. If we want to keep Australia white, we must have plenty of white people in it. It is only by means of immigration and assisting the men on the land that we shall maintain a white Australia.

The Minister for Lands: It is easy to bring men out and put them on to clearing the land, but the difficulties begin when they start farming operations.

Mr. BARNARD: Quite so. If the settlers go in for dairying they will have a good market for their produce. Associated with that industry is the pig-raising industry. I am not afraid of that part of the programme. We want to stop the large sum of money that is going out of the State every year in purchasing produce from outside. The South-West is an ideal country for this particular class of production.

The Minister for Lands: Members representing the North-West say that their part of the State is the ideal country.

Mr. BARNARD: Members seem to think that the group settlements have been established in the wrong place.

The Minister for Lands: No.

Mr. BARNARD: Some of them would like to have them in their own districts. If the settlements had been established in the wheat belt, members representing that part of the State would have been at the back of them.

Mr. Thomson: That is not correct.

Mr. Sampson: There is a good deal of antagonism shown.

Mr. BARNARD: During the electioneering campaign one candidate, on behalf of the Country Party, said that group settlements would be a failure, that the country was no good, and that it would take a settler from 15 to 20 years to make a success of his operations. That candidate was not returned to Parliament. It is our duty to assist the Government in their land development policy. I hope we shall not have as much trouble to get the money as is anticipated, and that when the agreement is known it will be found to be better for us than the present conditions.

The Minister for Lands: We have to get seven million pounds in addition to that. How are we going to do it?

Mr. BARNARD: We may have to send the Premier to England. I am satisfied he would be able to make out a good enough case to the British Government to ensure his getting the money. It is as much to the interests of that Government as it is to ours that we should bring their people to Western Australia. The Imperial Government want the unemployed out of the country. They are spending millions every year in doles and it is better that the money represented by those doles should be given to the Western Australian Government so that it may be spent in putting these people on the land. A reference has been made to a Royal Commission to inquire into the group settlements. That will be merely a waste of money. I do not think any good can come out of it, although it may clear the atmosphere a little and assist the Minister for Lands in carrying out his programme.

Mr. Sampson: It will certainly hold up the work.

Mr. BARNARD: I do not think any more good will come of it than has come of other Royal Commissions.

Mr. Wilson: You did not say that during the election campaign.

Mr. BARNARD: I did.

Mr. Wilson: You were in favour of the Commission.

Mr. BARNARD: I was not, for I thought it unnecessary. Labour candidates, however, said they were going to insist upon it and I suppose they will get it. I am sure it will not do any harm, but it will be a waste of time and money. There is no doubt the group settlement scheme will be a success, though I do not say that every settler will become a successful farmer. That is more than we can expect. Some of the settlers are not cut out for the life, and will never do any good at it. Others who are hard workers and enthusiastic will, I am sure, make good. It is easy to pick out the men who are industrious and promising. They work during every spare moment

they have in the clearing of their blocks around the homes, and they are assisted by their wives and children. Others do nothing around their homes and never will do anything. I am thankful to say the latter are in the minority. In the years to come we shall no doubt live to be proud of our group settlements, and to regard them in the same light as we regard the wheat belt—the backbone of Western Australia.

Mr. MILLINGTON (Leederville) [4.55]: Before applying myself to the question before the House, I take this opportunity of congratulating you, Sir, upon your election as Speaker. I believe from the point of view of capacity, knowledge, experience and temperament, you are well fitted to control this Chamber. I would have preferred that the Labour precedent had been followed. In your case, of course, there was no need for any adventitious aid to enable you to uphold the dignity of the position. I will not, however, deal with this contentious question, but bow to your decision in the matter. I also congratulate the Government upon their occupancy of the Treasury bench. For the past eight years I have, as an outsider, followed their work in the House. It was a strenuous work, seeing that they numbered 17 instead of 26. I believe, however, the experience they gained has well equipped them for the position they now hold. It is not, therefore, any formal congratulation that I extend to the Government. There are now two branches of the Country Party in this Chamber. I am very much interested in the Country Party. I have not yet ascertained what has led up to the division in the ranks, but I may discover it later on. I have followed all that has been printed concerning the various reasons that have led up to the division in the ranks, and the only way I can account for it is that it is due to their close association with Sir James Mitchell, who has made two Country Parties grow where one grew before. I am prepared to accept the assurances so seriously put forward by the Deputy Leader of the Country Party, and also the Leader of the other Country Party.

Mr. Lindsay: There is only one.

Mr. MILLINGTON: The other is referred to as a sprout from the old Country Party.

Mr. George: It is a very vigorous one.

Mr. MILLINGTON: The member for York (Mr. Latham) gave his assurance that he would accord his support to the present Government. Knowing the member for Williams-Narrogin (Mr. E. B. Johnston) as I do, I am also prepared to accept his assurance, and to take it seriously. I have no doubt it will be hon-