

Excellency the Lieut.-Governor, and have received from his hand the following:—

The Hon. the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly,—

It is with much pleasure that I learn that you have been elected by the members of the Legislative Assembly to the high and honourable office of Speaker of that House. I have every confidence that you will fill the office in a worthy and dignified manner. (Signed) James Mitchell, Lieut.-Governor.

SUMMONS FROM THE LIEUT.-GOVERNOR.

Mr. Speaker and hon. members, in response to summons, preceded to the Legislative Council Chamber and, having heard His Excellency deliver the opening Speech (*vide* Council report *ante*), returned to the Legislative Assembly Chamber.

[*The Speaker took the Chair.*]

BILL—DRIED FRUITS ACT AMENDMENT.

THE PREMIER: In order to assert and maintain the undoubted rights and privileges of this House to initiate legislation, I move, without notice, for leave to introduce a Bill for an Act to continue the operation of the Dried Fruits Act, 1926-1937.

Leave given; Bill introduced and read a first time.

LIEUT.-GOVERNOR'S OPENING SPEECH, DISTRIBUTION.

Mr. SPEAKER: Accompanied by hon. members of this Chamber, I attended His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor in the Legislative Council Chamber to hear the Speech which His Excellency was pleased to deliver to both Houses of Parliament. For the sake of greater accuracy, I have caused copies of the Speech to be distributed amongst members of this Chamber.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

First Day.

MR. HOAR (Nelson) [3.28]: I move—

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor in reply to the Speech he has been pleased to deliver to Parliament:—“May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia, in Parliament assembled, beg to express our

loyalty to our most gracious Sovereign and to thank Your Excellency for the Speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.”

I would be lacking in a spirit of justice if I failed to use this occasion to congratulate the Government on its fourth successive term. That is an outstanding achievement in the history of the State, and one which is deserving of the highest commendation from all sections of the community. It is also pleasing to me to note that the occasion of the opening of the 18th Parliament of this State coincides with the continued onward march of the Allied Armies. The military situation on all fronts today suggests that this most terrible of wars might be brought to a reasonably early and successful conclusion. This fact, however, imposes a great responsibility on the Commonwealth and State Parliaments to see that the conditions on the home front are worthy of the great services that our men and women are today rendering in the cause of humanity.

In looking into the post-war world, so far as we can from this distance, it seems to me that land settlement will probably play an important part in the rehabilitation of our service personnel. I am more than interested to note in His Excellency's Speech in this regard that an extensive examination has already been made of unalienated areas in the South-West portion of the State likely to be suitable for land settlement; and that provision of further farms from Crown lands is being preceded by exhaustive examinations and soil surveys, and investigations into the economic possibilities of drainage extensions. Those remarks deal with the type of country that I know something about; the extreme South-West. That portion, as most members realise, is today largely taken up with the dairying industry. I believe myself that this extensive examination will have to be followed by a complete change of outlook and settlement policy before the people of the future, in this locality, can hope to look forward with any measure of confidence.

It is within my certain knowledge that the people in the dairying industry, in the past years, have been compelled to exist on a subsistence standard far below that prescribed by the Arbitration Court as the minimum for adult labour. It is not a question of who is to blame, because there are probably quite a number of contributory causes. The fact is, however, that these people have to exist under such conditions in this land of

abundant wealth. Such a state of affairs casts a serious reflection on a nation of people who pride themselves on their humanistic ideals. At the present time the dairying industry, due to inflated prices and higher costs because of the war situation, is being artificially bolstered by a £7,500,000 subsidy, without which, of course, it could not exist other than on a continued low standard. In normal times there does not appear to be any planning behind the industry. There does not seem to be any scheme of stabilisation capable of solving the real problem; there is no minimum or guaranteed price sufficient to enable the farmer to pay his costs of development, plan his work ahead and enjoy a standard of living commensurate with the service he is rendering the community.

It must be obvious to all who have studied this question that the settlement conditions of the past, as they apply to the small farmer at any rate, have not produced the results anticipated, but have bred a people almost wholly subservient to the will of bank officials, and faced with a debt that only the third or fourth generation can hope to pay. They have no feeling of security, and, in addition, they have a wholesome distrust of politicians generally. That is a frank statement of the economic situation and of the mental outlook of the average farmer as I see it, and one which creates a situation that will have to be altered if the new world is to mean anything at all. We all hope that the term of the present Parliament will see the end of the war and the beginning of the new life.

At the close of hostilities we shall probably find many hundreds of our returned men who have a desire for farming seeking a livelihood on the land. It depends upon the amount of time and thought we give the subject now as to the kind of life those men will enjoy in the years to come. To expect a man to settle on the land without some assurance of security is not reasonable. I can see that the whole of our land settlement policy will have to be reviewed and, to a large extent, revised. In this connection, may I say, the areas mentioned in His Excellency's Speech are well known to me, and I feel that before they can be opened up in a manner that will ensure security to future farmers, the Government must assume greater responsibility in the resultant cost. I am more than interested

in a statement made by the Surveyor-General, Mr. Fyfe, in his 1943 report. He stated—

Calculations of cost of development and net earning capacities of two home maintenance areas of Crown land in the heavy timber districts of the South Coast, one mainly for dairying and the other mainly for sheep, showed that assuming the methods of development generally adopted in 1938 were applied and no attempt made to clear the land in a very short period, a selector could expect to pay interest on the capital cost of his farm and provide a reasonable standard of living for himself and family after seven or eight years' hard work and very simple living. He could not, however, be expected to pay the accumulated interest on his debt which would accrue during the period of progressive development. In other words, when fully developed, both these properties should be capable under efficient management of carrying a debt equal to the value of them on a cost less depreciation basis, less interest on improvements during the period in which the land was emerging from an unimproved to a productive state.

I accept that view and consider it to be the only sound basis of settlement in that part of the State. The accumulation of principal is one thing, but to expect a farmer in the years to come to bear an interest burden that has been accumulated and compounded during the early years of settlement when he had no chance whatever of making payment is illogical and unreasonable. The very fact that so much money has already been written off this land is proof enough for me that the original conditions of settlement were unsound.

Another condition of successful settlement is the provision of payable and dependable prices for farm products. It is not of much use going to great expense to open up land only to provide a bread-line standard for the occupiers. Farmers expect something better than that. It is not reasonable to expect a farmer to become a victim of depressed overseas prices brought about largely in other countries under the old trade and fiscal policies which have had the general effect of reducing standards all round. Something better than this is required. Today we are seeking to plan internationally. There has already been held an International Labour Office Conference. There is also an International Monetary Conference which is concluding its deliberations. The idea is so to plan the world as to give the greatest security and happiness to the people of all countries. The success

of these plans and the realisation of this ideal will, of course, depend upon the amount of sincerity imbuing the men who sit at the conference tables. After the close of the war there will be for a number of years a period of assured markets for our exportable primary products, but when the devastated countries of the world again begin to come into production, a situation might develop, due to the fact that selfishness and greed have yet to be eradicated from human nature, whereby all the evils of the last depression will again afflict the farmer.

It is a well-known fact that that depression was brought about, not as a result of any shortage of goods, but because there were too many goods in relation to the purchasing power of the people. The consequence was that prices collapsed, wage standards were lowered and the situation was further aggravated by the machinations of an outworn financial system. The point I wish to make is that while Australia should co-operate with other countries to the limit of its capacity in seeking to bring security and stabilisation to world conditions, it should at the same time so plan its internal economy as to protect its own people in the event of there being an international breakdown.

Reverting to the dairying industry, I consider that there should be no return in any circumstances to the price of 7d. or 8d. per lb. for butter fat such as prevailed during the last depression, no matter what other countries think about us or how much their financial wizards seek to impose their will upon us. Today, under wartime emergency measures, we have to resort to artificial means to impart some sort of stability to our primary industries. It is to be hoped that at the conclusion of the war both Commonwealth and State Governments will realise that one of the main essentials to sound settlement and good husbandry is a payable, dependable price for farmers' products.

Linked closely with post-war settlement conditions is the provision of comfortable and suitable homes. I do not think that this matter can be over-emphasised. Good homes rank high in the list of life's essentials, and there is no single condition in the lives of the people that has such a damaging effect on health or is so harmful in other ways as is unsuitable housing. The

character of a child to a large extent is determined by its home environment. Good homes and healthy surroundings mean happy people; bad housing and unsuitable surroundings have a depressing effect, which may often be seen in the faces of the people.

During the last six months I have done a considerable amount of travelling in the out-back areas of the Nelson district and from the point of view of farmers' homes, I do not like what I have seen. In the older settled areas people are living in the original rude shacks and tin humpies that were erected many years ago as temporary shelters. Over the intervening years those people have been trying to make a living and to pay the administration charges of the Agricultural Bank, and they have not had either the time or the money to enable them to build better homes for themselves. Almost all those dwellings are unfit for human habitation and would be condemned on sight by any competent health authority.

Of all the places that I have seen, Walpole cries out the loudest for the earliest possible attention. I notice from the 1943 report of the Agricultural Bank dealing with group settlements that, at the time of the publication of the report, 460 vacant holdings were in the hands of the bank. I made it my business to inspect a number of those properties and examine the homes that once held out such fond hopes to the settlers. Today those properties present a picture of utter desolation and decay, owing partly to the normal passage of time and partly to thieving and vandalism on a grand scale. The position is this: The war may end sooner than we expect, and we may be faced with hundreds of applications for land, many of which no doubt will be for selections in the South-West.

Probably the Government's policy will be to re-people the abandoned farms before embarking upon fresh settlement ventures. With such a policy I would agree, but I consider that before any of those farms are opened for selection, provision should be made for suitable and comfortable homes. The Commonwealth Government has stated its intention to provide good homes for farmers and farm workers, but I am unable to find out very much about this proposal. There seems to be some doubt as to how it will be financed or whether the scheme will include farms under mortgage to other finan-

cial institutions. The one thing I am certain of is that if the building of farmers' homes is going to depend upon whether the properties are unencumbered then there will not be many homes built in the South-West.

I find myself disappointed with the progress being made today in the matter of a home-building plan for farmers, and I consider that so far as this State is concerned there should be, as I have already mentioned, an immediate survey made of all the vacant holdings now held by the Agricultural Bank with a view to assessing not only damage and deterioration of soil fertility or future productivity, but also the possibility of a home-building plan that will fit in with the desires of the people of the post-war world. If for any reason it is found impossible to include such a plan in a larger national scheme because of some peculiar thought that a man with a mortgage around his neck does not need a home, I suggest that this Parliament should consider injecting more life and vigour into our own Agricultural Bank. Today that institution acts purely as a debt-collecting agency. I am open to correction but I have never heard of one constructive idea emanating from that moribund institution.

Mr. Doney: Hear, hear!

Mr. HOAR: It is my opinion that an agricultural bank should not exist merely as a debt-collecting agency; it should be a positive inspiration to agriculturists throughout the State. Such a state of affairs does not exist today with regard to our own Agricul-

tural Bank, and I therefore suggest that the Government should give earnest consideration to utilising the institution for that purpose and giving it sufficient power, if it has not already got it, to undertake a home-building plan with respect to the properties under its jurisdiction, because home building today must have an important place in any of the Government's plans for the years following the war. People are demanding better conditions than they have known hitherto and a way must be found to extend those benefits to the farming community; for, whilst all phases of industrial life are to some extent related and interdependent, agriculture remains the broad basis on which rests the whole of our national life. If that base is impoverished, then that will be reflected in almost every home in the Commonwealth. Our task, then, should be to plan the new world in such a way as to make our primary industries secure.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES: I formally second the motion.

On motion by Mr. Watts, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE PREMIER: I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday, the 1st August.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 3.50 p.m.