

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Tuesday, June 8, 1954.

The PRESIDENT (Hon. Sir Walter Duncan) took the Chair at 2 p.m. and read prayers.

QUESTIONS.

METROPOLITAN PUBLIC TRANSPORT CONTROL.

The Hon. K. E. J. BARDOLPH—In opening Parliament His Excellency the Governor declared that the Government was preparing legislation for the establishment of a Metropolitan Public Transport Council. Can the Chief Secretary say whether it is intended to place all transport under the control of a Transport Council or will the suggested council be an advisory council only representative of the various interests?

The Hon. A. L. McEWIN—The Governor's remark was an intimation to Parliament that that matter is under consideration. When it has been finalized I will be in a position to supply the desired information.

ROAD GRANTS.

The Hon. E. H. EDMONDS—I ask leave to make a statement with a view to asking a question.

Leave granted.

The Hon. E. H. EDMONDS—Early in the year £400,000 was made available for allocation to councils for expenditure on roads with the stipulation that the money had to be spent by the end of this financial year. Some of the grants were made latterly and it is quite impossible for them to be spent within that time. Can the Minister clarify the position regarding any balances that may be unexpended by June 30?

The Hon. N. L. JUDE—The expenditure of each grant will be treated on its merits.

NORTH TERRACE-KING WILLIAM STREET TRAMWAY INTERSECTION.

The Hon. C. R. CUDMORE—Is the Minister of Local Government in favour of trams continuing to turn at the intersection of North Terrace and King William Street or would he think it proper that they should be made to proceed directly across the intersection?

The Hon. N. L. JUDE—The honourable member, who has directed similar questions previously, should know that I am not in charge of the police force which controls this matter nor am I directly in control of the Adelaide City Council which is also concerned in the matter. My personal opinion is that in

time it will not be necessary to ask this question because trams will not exist in Adelaide.

SUPPLY BILL (No. 1).

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from June 3. Page 9.)

The Hon. C. R. CUDMORE (Central No. 2)—I support the second reading and take this, my first opportunity, of congratulating the Hon. Mr. Jude on his elevation to the Cabinet. We, as a House, are pleased that we have a third Minister in this Chamber. In the past, because of illness or absence, we have frequently had only one Minister in the House and it has been difficult for him to carry on the work of this Chamber. I feel sure we all congratulate Mr. Jude and know that with his energy and enthusiasm he will do good work for this State. I would also like to congratulate Mr. Pattinson and Mr. Christian who have been elevated to Cabinet rank in the other House.

This Bill is in the usual form of a Supply Bill which comes before us on the first day of the session. The House usually meets in the middle of June and it has been necessary to provide for supply to carry on Government services during the period between July 1 and the time of the delivery of the Budget and the discussion of the Appropriation Bill. I have no criticism of the Bill as it is worded. It is for exactly the same amount and contains the same wording as the Supply Bill we approved last year. I will, however, comment on the new practice which is being adopted this year and will discuss briefly whether this procedure is desirable. I address my remarks particularly to the Attorney-General, who is the Government's legal adviser and I am not questioning in any way, Sir, your rulings or any procedure laid down by you. I am simply making these comments by way of a friendly suggestion to the Government as to what should be done in the future if it is necessary to have Supplementary Estimates carried before June 30. The practice has always been that the Address in Reply takes precedence over everything else, and the procedure is laid down quite clearly in our Standing Orders, namely:—

Until the Address in Reply to the Governor's Speech has been adopted no business beyond what is of formal or unopposed character shall be entertained.

I am not unmindful of Standing Order No. 191 and therefore I will endeavour to avoid

any reference to the Bill before another place, in any detail at least. Our procedure and our Standing Orders are copied from those of the House of Commons, and it is rather interesting to see the rules of the Commons regarding the precedence of the Address in Reply debate. I quote from the book by the Clerk of the House of Commons, Sir Gilbert Campion, the latest edition, 1950:—

On returning from the Lords the House does not immediately proceed with business, the sitting being by custom suspended until three o'clock. When it resumes, a certain amount of routine business is dispatched. The stereotyped form is gone through of reading a Bill which will never proceed any further before the King's Speech is taken into consideration, to show that, although the House always begins work with the King's Speech, it is not bound to do so.

A footnote is appended:—

The first day of sitting in every Parliament some one bill and no more receiveth the first reading for form's sake (C.J., 22nd March, 1603).

That was the time when the House of Commons was having its argument with the King and it wanted to make it clear that the Commons did not have to consider his speech first and so the Bill was just moved, and that procedure apparently still persists. There is another interesting thing to note; six days are, by agreement, devoted to the debate upon the Address in Reply. We have usually been able to dispose of the debate within three sitting days, four at most, but another place frequently takes three weeks and perhaps a month. In the House of Commons they bring in what is called a Consolidated Fund Bill, which allots a certain amount of money to carry on the Public Services until the passing of the Appropriation Bill. The Consolidated Fund Bill is the equivalent of our Supply Bill. Then they have the Appropriation Bill and, although the debate on the Address in Reply is limited to six days, so much importance is attached to financial matters and the debate on the Budget that 20 days, which may be extended to 23, are allowed, but it must be concluded by August 5. We do not have that provision, but we have the Standing Order which I have quoted, namely, that no other business shall be proceeded with except that of a formal or unofficial nature until after the Address in Reply debate. I do not pretend that my investigations have been exhaustive, but I find that as early as 1901, during the debate on the Address in Reply, Standing Orders were suspended and a Bill was introduced and put through for Supply for the

Government services for three months. By way of comparison it is of interest to note, in view of our Bill for £6,000,000 today, that the amount then was £400,000. In 1905 the same thing was done, and gradually it has become the practice—it has been invariably so since I have been a member of Parliament—to pass a Supply Bill on the first day of sitting purely as a formal matter, and *Hansard* shows that it has always been treated in that way; it has been moved and commented on by one or two speakers, but put through as an entirely formal matter, and it has therefore not interfered with the Address in Reply being the first business really discussed by Parliament as our Standing Order lays down.

I think that the difficulties that have arisen, if I may call them difficulties, are due to uniform taxation which came into operation in 1942-3. That changed the whole system of finance because we got only what we were allowed by the Commonwealth Government. I reiterate, if necessary, my objection to the system because I think it is entirely wrong that one body should collect money and another body spend it. After uniform taxation had been in operation for some time, in 1947 we had laid before us for the first time on the opening day Supplementary Estimates which were to be put through as a formal matter, followed by a Supply Bill. I ask members to mark the order in which that was done, as it was the correct procedure, because the Supplementary Estimates deal with the finance for the year up to June 30 and the Supply Bill gives the Government authority to spend certain moneys in the financial year commencing on July 1. Until this year it has been the practice to consider first the Supplementary Estimates and then the Supply Bill, which I suggest is the proper procedure. In 1947 we had the Supplementary Estimates first, in 1948 we followed the old practice of having only a Supply Bill which was put through formally, and in 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952 and 1953 we had the Supplementary Estimates, followed by Supply Bills treated as a formal matter, there being practically no debate.

Last year there were complaints in another place about not having time to debate the Supplementary Estimates. I need not remind honourable members that we suspended our sittings at 3.40 p.m. until the ringing of the bells, and the bells did not ring until 1 a.m., the Chamber finally adjourning at 3.39 a.m. on July 21. To get over that difficulty, the Government this year has introduced a new

scheme, which I think we are entitled to criticize in any way we like, of having the Supply Bill first. We are threatened with Supplementary Estimates second, and the presentation of the draft Address in Reply has been in effect wiped off and set down for July 27. Blackmore in his book says:—

The committee is ordered to report to the Council on the next day of meeting.

That has always been the case here. I draw attention to these things because I think, if we are to depart from our Standing Orders and our usual practice, we should realize what we are doing. In my opinion what we are doing is wrong, because the Address in Reply will devolve into nothing and its purpose will go unless we stick to our Standing Orders more rigidly than we are doing on this occasion. I can find no precedent for allowing a week to debate other matters in precedence to the Address in Reply. I have found cases in England, Western Australia, New Zealand and in Victoria in which Standing Orders were suspended to put through a very urgent matter, as we have done in the past with Supply Bills, but I can find no precedent for the procedure that has been introduced by the Government this year and which we are apparently adopting. I do not think it is desirable. I realize that I may be told it has nothing to do with me or with this House, because finance is primarily a matter for the popularly elected Chamber. That of course is perfectly true, but in our capacity as members of this Parliament we have a duty to the people to protect the rights still left to us as a quondam sovereign Parliament and secondly the rights and interests of the taxpayer.

The Hon. F. J. CONDON—We are responsible to only a certain section of the people.

The Hon. C. R. CUDMORE—That is so, but we have to do our duty by them. Returning to the question asked by Mr. Edmonds, I cannot convince myself that it is right from the point of view of the taxpayers or anyone else that people should be induced, if not forced, to spend money by a certain date, because it seems to me that that money is likely to be badly spent. In the press last week the chairman of the Commonwealth Grants Commission stated that South Australia is no longer a mendicant State, and I understand that the Prime Minister expressed himself last year in favour of the States returning to the system of collecting their own taxation. The scheme that has been put forward this year is in effect that the Supply Bill should be introduced first, put through the House of

Assembly quickly and sent up to us. Then we are to debate the Supply Bill, which would in effect be the Address in Reply debate, while we are waiting for another Bill to come. We will have no opportunity of discussing the second Bill in this Chamber. We will not have time to discuss it when it gets here and we cannot discuss it now under our Standing Orders. I hope this will not be continued, and that is the whole purpose of my few remarks this afternoon.

The Hon. F. J. CONDON—Why can't you discuss these things?

The Hon. C. R. CUDMORE—Because Standing Order 191 prevents my making any mention of what is in the Bill. Mr. Condon last Thursday gave us an interesting talk about flour milling and wheat. However, his remarks really constituted an Address in Reply speech because it is there that members air their grievances or complaints about omissions in the Governor's Speech. If we discuss anything we like on the Supply Bill, the Address in Reply debate will be robbed of its purpose. I do not deny Mr. Condon or other members the freedom to discuss flour milling or anything else on a Supply Bill, but in order to avoid this uncertainty as to what money we have and how we can use it, the Government should continue its efforts to get back to a system in which we collect our own finance. If Supplementary Estimates are necessary and are required under certain circumstances in which the Government gets more money than it knows what to do with, as is apparently the case this time, and it wants to shovel it out before June 30, then I suggest that Parliament be called together early enough to enable matters to be conducted in their proper order—that is, to have the Address in Reply debate, and if it is going to take a fortnight, then a limit on the time allowed for debate should be imposed as in the House of Commons. However, there has never been any necessity for that in this House, and there never will be. The House should be called together earlier to allow time to deal properly with the Address in Reply and then the Supplementary Estimates, which are the finances for the financial year, could be discussed and before June 30 a formal Supply Bill could be approved. I support the second reading but regret the procedure which has been adopted and hope that it will not occur again.

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON (Northern)—I support the Bill which provides for £6,000,000 to maintain the services of the State. 1

join with Mr. Cudmore in congratulating Mr. Jude on his elevation to the Ministry. I assure Mr. Jude that he has the goodwill of all members. My main reason for speaking on this measure is to reply to Mr. Condon's statements concerning the wheat industry. Members, and the public generally, should know the exact position of the wheat industry. Mr. Condon said that owing to the greed of a certain section of the community the flour milling industry had been allowed to get into a parlous state. He suggested that that section had no regard for the milling side of the wheat industry. As a representative of the Northern district in which mills are operating I agree that it is deplorable that the situation has arisen whereby those concerns are unable to export flour to the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. I point out, however, that that difficulty is not peculiar to the flour milling industry. A number of industries are being priced out of the overseas markets because of the increase in our internal costs. It has been suggested that the Australian Wheat Board has not made wheat available at a reduced price so that the flour milling industry—

The Hon. K. E. J. Bardolph—It has missed the bus.

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—Mr. Condon said that the board had missed the bus in not selling wheat at an early stage. I agree but remind him that it is easy to be wise after the event. In 1931 many farmers could have received 5s. a bushel for wheat but were told that the price would rise possibly to 8s. At that time the price, which was controlled by Saskatchewan and Alberta Wheat Pools, decreased to 1s. 8d. A number of farmers sold at the half way stage. The Australian Wheat Board has not met the situation as we would have liked. I believe it is the right policy to meet the market at the time because we are operating on a falling market and the earlier we get rid of wheat the better. It was suggested that £3,500,000 be spent on storing our wheat but if you work out the interest lost by the grower over 12 months at about 8d. a bushel, the £3,500,000 would represent another 10d. a bushel and we would probably get less when sold. The Australian Wheat Board was appointed by a Labor Government. Seven of the members were appointed not because of their ability and knowledge of wheat but because they were supporters of that Party.

The Hon. K. E. J. Bardolph—That is a severe indictment.

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—I am prepared to stand by it. One man who was appointed had to purchase land in order to qualify as a grower.

The Hon. F. J. Condon—Are you referring to the chairman?

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—No, he was elected at a subsequent election. In my opinion the electoral constitution was violated by the manner of electing representatives to that board.

The Hon. K. E. J. Bardolph—You are making sweeping charges.

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—I will stand by them. Our electoral system provides for preferential voting, but for the election to the Wheat Board the system was altered. Once the seven so-called representatives were appointed they became known to the farmers. At subsequent elections there were a number of aspirants for positions on the board but the men who had become known to the farmers were re-elected. In Queensland and Western Australia the growers elected their representatives and Sir John Teesdale was selected as the representative of Western Australian growers. That answers Mr. Condon's interjection about the chairman.

The Hon. K. E. J. Bardolph—What are you complaining about if the growers elected the board?

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—I am complaining about the system of election which resulted in the retention of those members. I hope the system will be altered.

The Hon. F. J. Condon—Of the 13 members, nine are farmers and what a mess they have made.

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—There are seven farmers on the board.

The Hon. F. J. Condon—There are nine: there are two more now.

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—I agree that the board missed the bus to a great extent by not selling the wheat, but that has nothing whatever to do, however, with the parlous condition of the flour milling industry. The reason for that is that we have so built up our economy that we are not able to compete with the rest of the world. What makes it worse is that in South Australia the price of mill offal is controlled in order to help the poultry and dairying industries. Before price control the milling industry purchased wheat at export prices but today cannot do so profitably owing to a disparity of 25s. a ton between the price of bran and pollard in Australia as compared with Canada. Canada is able to charge 25s.

a ton more and therefore is able to outbid us in the world markets. The price you receive overseas for flour determines the price of your offal. I noticed in the press that the poultry and dairying industries are short of bran because of the curtailment of milling. People are complaining that bran is cheaper than any other commodity. Price control has put the price of bran so low that the flour mills cannot operate profitably and therefore the poultry and dairying industries are getting short of bran and pollard.

The statement I desire to answer is that the wheatgrower has been greedy in fixing the price of wheat. It may interest members to know the price of export wheat as compared with the price of home consumption wheat. In no instance has the grower received the equivalent of the export price. In 1946 the price received for our export wheat was 10s. 1d. as compared with 4s. 11d. for home consumption wheat; in 1947, 14s. 5d. as against 4s. 11d.; 1948, 18s. and 6s. 3d.; 1949, 16s. 2d. and 7s. 1d.; 1950, 17s. 4d. and 7s. 10d.; 1951, 20s. 9d. and 10s.; 1952, 21s. 2d. and 11s. 11d., and this year the average price received overseas for export is 16s. and the price for home consumption 12s. 10d.

The Hon. C. R. Cudmore—But did not the farmer get some of the overseas price?

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—Of course, for any wheat sold overseas, but the bread consumer received his wheat at a lower figure and then, of course, the price was averaged and it was somewhere between those two figures. I therefore cannot see how it can be claimed that the farmer has been greedy and is responsible for putting up the price of bread.

The Hon. F. J. Condon—Will the honourable member explain what the farmers will think when they know they are losing 3s. a bushel?

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—I could explain many ways in which the wheatgrower has helped other industries. During the wool price boom the season opened very late and a quantity of wheat was used for feeding sheep at concessional prices. On another occasion the Queensland maizegrowers exported the whole of their harvest and purchased cheap wheat to feed their animals and we paid the carriage on it. I could go on ad infinitum showing what farmers have done for other industries. Now the honourable member wants them to support the flour milling industry by accepting a lower figure in order that the milling industry may be able to carry on and to assist poultry and dairy farmers. I notice, however,

that Mr. Condon said that flour mill employees are to receive 35s. a week less in other employment, so doubtless it is to his credit that he was able to get for them an additional 35s. during the good times.

Only last session we heard complaints that the wheatgrowers were not growing enough wheat, but today there is too much wheat on the world's markets and the price has dropped. Producers have to be prepared to accept a lower figure for most of their commodities, but that is no excuse for the Wheat Board for having failed to meet the situation. I think it should have met it. When the International Wheat Agreement was consummated in April, 1949—and I ask members to reflect upon the Government then in power—it appeared that we were giving away at least 4s. a bushel. The price dropped from 20s. 3d. to 16s. 1d. overnight and that cost the wheatgrowers about £17,000,000 a year over the five year term of the agreement. When renewal of the agreement was under consideration our own and the American representatives, I am sorry to say, stuck out for 18s. 3½d. a bushel whereas England would have entered the agreement had the price of 17s. 10d. been agreed upon. For a mere 5½d. a bushel they stood out and thus Great Britain was free to purchase wheat in an over-full market, and that has been one of the principal causes of the collapse in prices.

The Hon. F. J. Condon—What is it costing the farmers now because they missed the bus—£17,000,000?

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—The International Wheat Agreement provides for a maximum of 18s. 3½d. and a minimum of 13s. 10d., and the market has not yet receded to the minimum. The latest sale was at 14s. 11d. east of Suez and 14s. 6d. west of Suez. Therefore in reply to Mr. Condon I say that in no way can the position of the flour millers be levelled at the wheatgrowing industry. The farmers have made sacrifices throughout the years and have borne the brunt of the home consumption price which was introduced with the idea of keeping our economy at a lower level, and I would ask whether any other section of the community has made a like contribution?

The Hon. K. E. J. Bardolph—What about the workers? Their wages have been fixed and their margins for skill abolished.

The Hon. W. W. ROBINSON—That reminds me of the man who said to his wife, "My dear, we must economize," and she replied, "Yes, you shave yourself and I will cut your hair." That is about the position of other

people sharing sacrifices. The wheatgrowers have contributed materially to the economy of this country and endeavoured to keep it on a fair and reasonable basis, and had other sections of the community shown a similar attitude we might be able to compete in overseas markets today.

The Hon. C. D. ROWE (Midland)—I support the Bill, the purpose of which is to enable a sum of £6,000,000 to be made available to the Government to carry on public services for a short period. It is gratifying to know that the finances of the State are in such a satisfactory condition and that the year almost completed has finished better than we could have expected. As I listened to His Excellency's Speech it seemed that in almost every sphere there were records to report. The wheat crop yielded the very high average of 18bush. to the acre, with a total of 29,000,000bush. There were 1,000,000 acres under barley which produced 28,000,000bush., and 12,000,000 sheep depastured in the State. The Electricity Trust's output increased by 20 per cent and it sold 100,000,000 units more than in the previous year. The Education Department, that had to cope with a considerable increase in the number of scholars, has also been able to secure more teachers. Grants to subsidized hospitals for buildings, maintenance and equipment have been increased by £94,000, and grants to community hospitals and other medical institutions have been increased from £640,000 to £709,000, all of which, if taken at its face value, would lead us to believe that things are in a rosy condition and that the future is likely to be one of ease for us all. My view, however, is that the future is not nearly so bright as we might, at first glance, be led to believe from His Excellency's Speech. I do not propose to enter into the discussion which has ensued between Mr. Condon and Mr. Robinson regarding the price of wheat beyond saying that if the farmers watch the operations of the Wheat Board it will give them an opportunity to

consider what the socialized selling of goods may mean to them if things become a little more difficult and it becomes harder to make sales overseas.

The fall in the price of wheat—whether or not it could have been avoided by keener anticipation on the part of the Wheat Board—has occurred and there is also a fall in the price of barley, which in round terms means, assuming that production remains the same, that the farmer's income will be at least one-third less than it was 12 months ago and, as his main costs have been stabilized, it will mean considerably reduced net return to him, and this in turn will result in lower returns to the Treasury, so that in the future it will not be quite so easy for us to pass Supply Bills involving sums of £6,000,000 as the money will not be so readily available. Consequently I suggest that caution be exercised with regard to our expenditure, and on that point I support Mr. Cudmore regarding the grant of £400,000 to district councils for expenditure on roads. I have no criticism of the necessity to improve our roads, but I think it was unfortunate that the announcement could not be made until late in the year and I would like to think it possible for the expenditure to be carried over into the new financial year so that it could, perhaps, be spent more effectively. I do not wish to take these matters any further today for, as Mr. Cudmore said, there will be other and more appropriate opportunities to discuss them, but I believe my comments are relevant and with that I have pleasure in supporting the Bill.

The Hon. K. E. J. BARDOLPH secured the adjournment of the debate.

SESSIONAL COMMITTEES.

The House of Assembly notified the appointment of Sessional Committees.

ADJOURNMENT.

At 3 p.m. the Council adjourned until Wednesday, June 9, at 2 p.m.