

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Thursday, February 7, 1957.

The PRESIDENT (Hon Sir Walter Duncan) took the Chair at 2.15 p.m. and read prayers.

### QUESTIONS.

#### RE-SITING OF MOOROOK.

The Hon. C. R. STORY—Has the Attorney-General any reply to my representations to the Minister of Lands regarding the re-siting of the town of Moorook?

The Hon. C. D. ROWE—I have conferred with the Minister of Lands regarding re-siting the town of Moorook consequent upon the extensive damage there due to the flood. A conference was held at Moorook on November 15 last, and was attended by the chairman of the district council of Loxton (Mr. Glatz), the local Flood Committee and the Assistant Director of Lands (Mr. Gordon), when a proposal for re-siting the town was discussed. In accordance with an undertaking then given, the district officer at Barmera was instructed to confer with the committee and submit recommendations on a suitable site and for a domestic water service. The site has been selected and a tentative subdivision plan prepared and submitted to the Engineer-in-Chief for an estimate of the cost of providing a domestic water supply to the selected area. As soon as this estimate has been received, the complete proposal will be submitted to the Government for consideration and the matter will be expedited as far as possible. It has been ascertained that 12 persons have indicated to the Housing Trust that they would be interested in obtaining homes in the proposed new area.

#### INTERSTATE HAULIERS AND ROAD MAINTENANCE.

The Hon. F. J. CONDON—It has been reported that the president of the Interstate Road Transport Association of South Australia has said that road transport has paid millions of pounds to the South Australian Government for the upkeep of roads but none of that money has been used for this purpose. Would the Minister of Roads indicate whether this statement is correct, or would he care to comment on it?

The Hon. N. L. JUDE—I feel it is only necessary for me to say that the statement is incorrect and is hardly worthy of comment.

The Hon. K. E. J. BARDOLPH—Can the Minister inform the Council the number of

interstate hauliers who have registered their vehicles in South Australia, and the amount of tonnage fees paid since the promulgation of the regulations?

The Hon. N. L. JUDE—No.

#### AMENDMENT OF COMMONWEALTH CONSTITUTION.

The Hon. C. R. CUDMORE—I ask leave to make a statement with a view to asking a question.

Leave granted.

The Hon. C. R. CUDMORE—This year is not only the centenary of State government in this State; it happens to be just 60 years since the famous convention in 1897 that fixed the Constitution of Australia. There were distinguished South Australians at that convention, some of whom played a great part in the drafting of the Constitution. In November, 1938, this House, after some debate, resolved that:—

In the opinion of this Council the Government of the State should bring before the Premiers' Conference the desirability of holding a convention of representatives of the States to provide proposals for amendment to the Constitution.

I remind members who were here then and draw the attention of others to the fact that the original resolution submitted to this House included the Commonwealth, but this House in its wisdom decided that what was really wanted was another conference of the States only.

The war intervened after that, and nothing was done for a long time. The next thing that I can find is that in March, 1955, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at its meeting, I think at Hobart, carried unanimously a resolution that in any committee or convention considering alteration to the Constitution the States as such should be represented. The matter went much further in 1956, when the Commonwealth Government on May 24 appointed a Joint Committee of all parties and of both Houses to inquire into what alterations to the Constitution were desirable. That committee is functioning, and is travelling around Australia taking evidence and so on.

Immediately there was some repercussion in the States. The first was on May 29, when the Premier of Victoria was reported in the press as follows:—

He favoured a special all-party committee to examine the Constitution. It was no good attempting a revision of the Constitution from a purely Federal angle. Any move

to amend the Constitution would be doomed unless the States were represented on any proposed convention. He agreed fully with Mr. Cosgrove on State participation in any talks. The reference to Mr. Cosgrove was because he had said that the States should be invited to take part in any discussions on alterations to the Constitution.

Almost straight away after that, the New South Wales Parliament came into the matter and on June 20, 1956, carried a resolution appointing a committee of both Houses to inquire into the Constitution and on what amendments were desirable in regard to that State. Members hardly need to be reminded that, so far as South Australia is concerned, on August 29, 1956, Mr. O'Halloran, the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Assembly, moved:—

That in the opinion of this House it is desirable that the Premier should approach the Premiers of the other States with a view to arranging for the submission to the Commonwealth Government of a joint request by the Premiers of all the States for the representation of each State, on the basis of one representative of the Government and one representative of the Opposition, on the Constitution Committee now considering proposed amendments to the Federal Constitution.

The Premier did not agree to that and made it quite clear why, but concluded by saying:—

Assuming that this were agreed to, and we went to Canberra, I am sure that before we started to get to the vital principles we would come to a complete deadlock because we would find that a re-allocation of powers would be one way traffic only. I am not prepared to go into a conference knowing before that the traffic will be one way only. It would not be give and take—we would be purely on the giving end. Under those circumstances I do not propose to support the motion.

Those are the things that have happened, but to show how widespread the desire is from one end of Australia to the other that this matter should be properly explored, as recently as last week the following article appeared in *The Mail*:—

The Western Australian economic crisis which is slowly percolating through to the eastern States has made no firm impact on the Federal Cabinet. Some Ministers, however, see this sort of situation as a test of the whole Federal structure, and it is being discussed privately by members of the Parliamentary Committee now reviewing the Constitution . . .

The States have equal powers and rights with the Commonwealth, but this kind of situation shows once again that the Parliament which has the purse strings has the power. Australia must soon decide whether it will make the Federal system work or allow the financial power held in Canberra to transfer Federation into a central system in a few years. To

some people this is academic, but it is at the heart of almost every political argument every day.

I would sum up by saying that there are several ways of dealing with this matter, which is exercising the minds of all responsible people in Australia. One is to let the Commonwealth put up what it wants without any reference to the States; another, as has been suggested by several Premiers and others, is that the States should be represented with the Commonwealth at any conference. Neither course has been accepted. The Commonwealth committee is still proceeding to carry out its investigations and will no doubt bring in a report. To put it in a nutshell the position is that the case for the Commonwealth for alterations of the Constitution is being laboriously and seriously prepared, whereas the case for the States is not being prepared by anyone. I regard the situation very seriously at this stage of our Federal system and therefore I give notice that on Tuesday next I will ask the Attorney-General the following question:—

Will the South Australian Government take the initiative in calling a ~~Conference~~ conference or convention of representatives, Parliamentary and otherwise, of the States only without the Commonwealth in order to attempt to reach agreement on what alterations to the Australian Constitution the States as a whole consider desirable and will support?

#### MURRAY RIVER FLOOD DAMAGE.

The Hon. S. C. BEVAN—Quite recently a statement appeared in the press, attributed to the Commonwealth Treasurer, to the effect that no further aid would be forthcoming from the Commonwealth for rehabilitation in the Murray River districts affected by the flood. Shortly afterwards a statement was made, attributed to the Premier, that an additional sum of £1,750,000 would be required for rebuilding roads, embankments and so forth. Has the State Government made a further request for aid to the Commonwealth Treasurer? If not, does it intend to do so?

The Hon. C. D. ROWE—The Government has made a request for a further amount to meet the cost of repairing damage as a result of the flood and has supported it with very carefully prepared data and information, and is awaiting a reply.

#### RAILWAYS DEPARTMENT COAL CONTRACTS.

The Hon. F. J. CONDON—As a result of the visit to South Australia by the chairman of the New South Wales Coal Board,

has the Railways Department entered into further contracts for coal, and, if so, for what period?

The Hon. N. L. JUDE—I am aware that negotiations have been taking place, but whether any specific contract has been entered into I do not know. I will obtain a report and let the honourable member know.

#### INTEREST-FREE LOANS TO DISTRICT COUNCILS.

The Hon. C. R. STORY—Can the Minister of Local Government say whether the present policy of making interest-free loans to district councils for the purchase of plant is to be discontinued or materially reduced in the near future?

The Hon. N. L. JUDE—The policy of the Government remains virtually the same, but it is governed by the finance available. This year I believe that the amount available for interest-free loans for machinery was somewhat reduced, but I am sure that members will realize that the important thing, as far as the department is concerned, is to maintain the balance between loans for machinery and grants for roads. It is not good to have too much machinery and no roadmaking money or *vice versa*, and the funds available are governed primarily by that aspect.

#### ADJOURNMENT.

At 2.35 p.m. the Council adjourned until Tuesday, February 12, at 2.15 p.m.