

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday, September 28, 1971

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

QUESTIONS**RURAL RECONSTRUCTION**

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS: I seek leave to make a brief statement prior to asking a question of the Minister of Lands.

Leave granted.

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS: It has been drawn to my attention that letters have been sent not only to country traders and country business people but also to local government about applicants under the rural reconstruction scheme. I have been informed that local government and some country businessmen have been advised that certain people have applied under the rural reconstruction scheme. They have received a letter from the Lands Department pointing out that those people have applied under the scheme and asking local government and the trades people whether they would accept 80c in the dollar for the debts owing. If my memory serves me correctly, this matter of the position of unsecured creditors was referred to in the debate on the Bill by several honourable members. Can the Minister tell me how many such letters have been sent to local government and private business operators, and does he realize the effect that this will have on the availability of credit in rural areas?

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: I shall be pleased to get a report on the matter because I cannot tell the honourable member immediately how many letters have been sent. Rather than answer the other part of his question, I will get a report and bring him back a considered reply.

The Hon. V. G. SPRINGETT: Is the Minister of Lands satisfied that sufficient staff is available to deal with the many applications being received for rural debt reconstruction assistance? I ask this question because previous answers given to honourable members' questions have suggested that progress in dealing with applications is rather slow, and I understand that a number of needy people are anxiously awaiting a reply to their applications.

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: I believe that sufficient staff is available to deal with the applications received. The honourable member would have heard other honourable members

asking questions on this matter, when the Government has been criticized on the length of the application form. However, the details requested therein are needed and, if this information were not sought on the application form, a further delay would occur while these particulars were obtained. It takes some time to process applications, and justice would not be done to the finances of this State or of the Commonwealth Government if applications were rushed through without being properly considered.

I believe applications are being processed in this State as quickly as they are in other States. Indeed, last week one of my departmental officers went to Western Australia to see how the scheme was working there. He found that not 1c was being paid out in Western Australia, although many applications had been received and in some cases approved. This has occurred because the necessary legislation has not been passed in Western Australia. I am informed that the current session of the Western Australian Parliament will finish shortly, perhaps next week. It appears, therefore, that we in South Australia are doing better than the other States, as some applications have already been approved here and some people are receiving assistance, whereas in Western Australia no-one is receiving assistance, although many applications have been processed.

The Hon. Sir Arthur Rymill: Is it a question of viability?

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: Because of the use now being made of the word "viability", I can say that it is applicable to this matter and that it aptly describes the situation.

The Hon. R. A. GEDDES: The Leader of the Opposition said that local government bodies had received a letter from the Lands Department asking whether they would accept 80c in the dollar for debts owing. Assuming that the money owing to local government would be for rates and taxes, will the Minister of Lands examine the legality of this point, and ascertain whether it is permissible by law for local government to accept anything other than the full amount of rates and taxes?

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: As the honourable member has raised a legal point, I will obtain a report on it for him.

The Hon. M. B. CAMERON: Can the Minister of Lands say whether a prerequisite for approval of an application under the scheme is that unsecured creditors agree to accept 80c in the dollar?

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: No decision has been made in that connection.

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS: Can the Minister of Lands say whether properties are inspected prior to the acceptance or rejection of an application for rural reconstruction?

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: The Leader did not say whether his question related to farm build-up or carry-on finance.

The Hon. R. C. DeGaris: Either.

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: Naturally, in regard to farm build-up, properties would be minutely inspected. Of course, if it became very obvious that an applicant was not eligible for assistance under the scheme, it would be a waste of time to look at his property; consequently, in those circumstances the answer would be "No". Where the points for and against approval of an application are fairly evenly balanced, the property is inspected and reports are sought from agricultural advisers of the Agriculture Department and from inspectors of the Lands Department.

HALLETT COVE DEVELOPMENT

The Hon. H. K. KEMP: I seek an answer from the Minister of Lands to my question of September 15 about Hallett Cove development.

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: The Minister of Environment and Conservation states that Cabinet has considered the proposals for the future development of the Hallett Cove area and has supported full protection of the area of scientific interest at Hallett Cove. In addition, the Minister of Environment and Conservation has asked the Director of Planning for an urgent report on the extent of the area that should be taken up around the 51-acre site of scientific interest as a necessary buffer zone. When this report is received, Cabinet will consider how much land it will acquire to meet its requirement.

HOSPITAL FIRE CONTROL

The Hon. V. G. SPRINGETT: I seek leave to make a short explanation prior to asking a question of the Chief Secretary.

Leave granted.

The Hon. V. G. SPRINGETT: In the last few weeks I have asked one or two questions regarding fire protection facilities in hospitals, particularly non-government hospitals, in this State, in reply to which I have been told that there are no rules and regulations governing fire control measures in South Australian hospitals and nursing homes apart from special provisions in the design of hospital buildings

in the case of specified hazards such as flammable materials, medical gases and so on. I was further told that prior to licensing and every three years thereafter or when a building is being altered the proprietor should (not "must") obtain a report stating that the requirements have been met in regard to construction, escapes, fire protection, equipment, alarms and fire control, but actual drill for the evacuation of bed-ridden patients is not carried out.

I was further told that safety regulations of the Department of Labour and Industry cover only such work areas as shops, warehouses, factories, and offices, and that hospitals would not be included within these definitions. Finally, I was told that the Fire Brigades Board has no legislative authority covering the need for instruction of hospital staff in fire drill and evacuation procedures. Will the Chief Secretary consider investigating and implementing urgent measures to prevent the sort of disaster which has occurred in some parts of the world and which, if it occurred here, could be compounded by reason of the absence of adequate fire prevention control facilities?

The Hon. A. J. SHARD: I shall be quite happy to have the position investigated. However, I do not want it to be understood that something will necessarily be done urgently. The media took up this question, as it usually does with anything a bit unsavoury, and gave it the usual publicity. This state of affairs has not just arisen, for these conditions have always existed in South Australia, and to say that something is urgently needed now is stretching the matter a bit. That is not to say that the position should not be improved. I am quite prepared to have the matter examined and, if necessary, lay down some procedure, but it must not be assumed that this will necessarily be in the direction the honourable member wishes.

APPLE AND PEAR INDUSTRY

The Hon. D. H. L. BANFIELD: It is reported that the Ministers of Agriculture from the various States met yesterday in Hobart and discussed the apple industry. Can the Minister of Agriculture report on the outcome of that meeting?

The Hon. T. M. CASEY: I attended the meeting yesterday in Hobart, at which Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia were represented. The Minister for Primary Industry (Hon. Ian Sinclair) was also present. I am afraid that as a result of the meeting the apple industry generally will not be

assisted greatly, because the Minister for Primary Industry made it clear that he was not prepared to recommend to the Commonwealth Government that the amount of guarantee be increased as suggested by the industry, from 4,400,000 bushels to 7,500,000 bushels; that is, on an 80c a bushel basis.

The Hon. R. A. Geddes: That is the subsidy.

The Hon. T. M. CASEY: Yes, over a period.

The Hon. H. K. Kemp: That relates to the guaranteed price.

The Hon. T. M. CASEY: It is the guaranteed price under the stabilization scheme for the apple and pear industry. The Minister claimed that the industry was warned as far back as six or seven years ago to make provision for the eventuality that has occurred now, and that the industry itself has not taken sufficient care to cope with the problems that have now arisen. For those reasons, he declined at yesterday's meeting to take the action that the States requested. Whether or not he changes his mind in the future remains to be seen.

I pointed out yesterday that to my way of thinking he was basing his suppositions on the present situation with regard to Britain's entering the European Economic Community. I believe that in the long term the industry has quite a bright future in South-East Asia, and I think that in the short term the Commonwealth would be well advised to support an industry such as this, because the situation has been reached in Tasmania where growers are not even spraying their trees at this time. They can see that, if they do not get the guarantee, there is not much point in producing fruit at all. Unless the Commonwealth Government changes its attitude in the near future the outlook for the apple and pear industry looks very grim.

WOOLLEN BLANKETS

The Hon. R. A. GEDDES: Has the Chief Secretary a reply to my recent question about the use of woollen blankets in Government hospitals?

The Hon. A. J. SHARD: The Hospitals Department Group Laundry (and Central Linen Service) at Dudley Park is equipped to and can handle woollen blankets and will launder any woollen blankets forwarded from participating hospitals and institutions. Similarly, woollen garments of children in social welfare institutions are also laundered. Woollen blankets are not included in the schedule of "standard"

linen items supplied to participating hospitals and institutions by the Central Linen Service on what is, in effect, a linen hire service. The use of cotton blankets in Government hospitals has continued for several years, following exhaustive investigations to determine the type of bed coverings that would meet medical requirements. It is of interest that there has been no significant evidence of cross-infection in the Royal Adelaide Hospital since the use of cotton was introduced instead of wool for bed clothing. The necessity for frequent laundering of bed linen in hospitals demands that the article to be laundered can be processed with a minimum of labour and a guarantee of maximum sterility. Woollen blankets would be required to be laundered after each patient's use and would not be an economic proposition. Woollen blankets, the property of any institution participating in the Group Laundry Service, can and would be processed if desired. This does not occur because of the acceptance and general satisfaction with cotton blankets supplied by the Central Linen Service.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2)

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from September 23. Page 1653.)

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS (Leader of the Opposition): Speaking to an Appropriation Bill always presents some difficulties for honourable members in this Council, for only in extreme circumstances can alterations be made to such a Bill. In these circumstances it is simple to direct attention to various aspects of the Bill and certain aspects of the Budget, to point out where the Government is over-spending, where it is under-spending, and to attempt to point out where the Government is taxing too strongly. The only occasion to my knowledge on which the Legislative Council has interfered with an Appropriation Bill and a Budget was in 1912, when the then Government attempted to appropriate moneys for a purpose for which no previous approval had been given by the Parliament. The action of the Legislative Council at that time was justified and a correct action in the circumstances.

One could conjure up in one's mind situations beyond the scope of the Budget where the defeat of the Budget or a change made in it would be justified by an Upper House as the only way in which a Government could be forced to consult the people on a specific issue.

This situation has occurred with Upper Houses in other parts of Australia, but to my knowledge has never occurred in South Australia.

The Bill proposes to appropriate a sum of \$349,388,000. That figure, added to the payments authorized by special Act (nearly a further \$100,000,000) and \$4,750,000 allowed for further wage and salary awards, brings the total expected expenditure for the year 1971-72 to \$454,000,000. Total receipts are estimated at \$446,622,000. Therefore, we see that the Government expects in this financial year a deficit of almost \$7,500,000.

Although we deal with the Loan Estimates separately from the Budget, as has been pointed out previously, the Loan Estimates have an effect on the Budget and the Budget has an effect on the Loan Estimates. During the debate on the Loan Estimates, honourable members in this Chamber drew attention to the effects of those Estimates on the Budget and, in doing so, complimented the Commonwealth Government on the recognition it has given in the last 12 months to the financial straitjacket in which the States find themselves at present. I do not wish to deal again with the effect of the Commonwealth Government's attitude towards Loan funds and their effects on the Budget, but let me briefly restate the changes that have occurred in respect of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth has accepted taking over from the States about \$20,000,000 or \$30,000,000 a year of the States' debt structure and also providing in current Loan Estimates an allocation of between \$20,000,000 and \$30,000,000 a year not as loans but as non-repayable and non-interest-bearing grants for capital works in South Australia. As was pointed out in the Loan Estimates debate, the fact that interest will no longer be payable on a certain part of the State's debt structure and also that grants instead of loans will be made for capital purposes has a significant effect upon the State's Budget. The total amount involved is about \$50,000,000, and one can readily appreciate the effect of this upon the State's Budget.

At this stage, let me say that I believe that, with this change of attitude of the Commonwealth, the States should now act responsibly in their Budget requirements. I now quote from the early part of the Chief Secretary's second reading explanation of the Bill, where he stated:

The Commonwealth, convinced by the submissions of the seriousness of State problems, agreed to make further improvements to the

States' share of national governmental resources to help meet in part the financial problems foreseen by everyone.

To the assumption by the Commonwealth of \$27,000,000 a year of the States' debt structure, the allocation of between \$20,000,000 and \$30,000,000 a year in direct grants in lieu of loans and the increase in reimbursements under the new formula, plus the handing over of pay-roll tax and the States' raising of that tax from 21 per cent to 31 per cent, plus the Budget deficit of which I have already spoken (nearly \$7,500,000), we add yet something else, for in the second reading explanation we see that the Government intends not only to increase taxes still further in South Australia but also to increase charges to the people of South Australia. I quote again from the Chief Secretary's second reading explanation:

The Commonwealth offer was in a package deal of which the three main parts were:

- (1) To give the States access to a growth tax under which they could vary the rates having regard to their responsibilities to provide services. As a result, the States are to take over pay-roll tax collections next month on salaries and wages payable from the beginning of this month. The taxation reimbursement grants are to be reduced by amounts corresponding to the yield forgone by the Commonwealth on a 21 per cent pay-roll tax levy.
- (2) To add back to the taxation reimbursement grants a special contribution of about \$22,400,000, which is payable in 1971-72 and will form part of the base grant to be escalated by the three factors of increase in population, increase in wages, and betterment in 1972-73 and future years.
- (3) To make a special supplementary contribution of \$40,000,000 toward the particular problems of 1971-72 only, problems such as the carry-over cost of salary and wage awards effective for part only of 1970-71. This supplement is comparable with that of \$43,000,000 determined late in 1970-71.

To this must also be added the matters already spoken of in the debate on the Loan Estimates. For the State, the Budget picture is rosier than it has been for many years, and it is up to the Government to act responsibly in this direction. As I have said, taxes and charges are still to be increased in South Australia. I quote once again from the Chief Secretary's second reading explanation:

Accordingly, the Budget includes the expected revenue from (1) a wide range of increased stamp duties on documents estimated to yield about \$4,150,000 in a full year and about

\$2,250,000 in 1971-72; and (2) increased hospital fees expected to yield about \$900,000 in a full year and about \$600,000 in 1971-72.

I propose examining quickly for the moment the increases expected in taxation and charges on the people of South Australia for the ensuing 12 months. Looking at these documents in front of us we see that State taxation increases from \$61,000,000 to \$91,000,000 (an increase of \$30,000,000) while State charges increase from \$159,000,000 to \$180,000,000 (an increase of \$21,000,000), making a total increase of \$51,000,000 for the State. If one examined this matter, one would find that Commonwealth reimbursements have increased by about \$24,000,000 this year compared to those of last year. Therefore, this State's income this year from increased taxation charges and Commonwealth reimbursement amounts to the staggering total of \$75,000,000. I freely admit that in examining these figures certain allowances must be made. I refer, first, to the \$2,700,000 that South Australia will lose in relation to receipts tax, and I am sure that honourable members will be pleased that this tax has been dropped. I refer, secondly, to the \$24,000,000 that will be received from pay-roll tax. Only about 40 per cent (or \$9,600,000) of the \$24,000,000 to which I have referred is additional taxation; the other 60 per cent has previously been collected by the Commonwealth Government at the rate of 21 per cent.

The increases in taxation and charges introduced in this Budget will impose a severe burden on the people of South Australia at a time when many South Australians should logically be looking for relief, particularly from the most damaging form of taxation we have: capital taxation. So many people in our community are faced with the insurmountable problem of paying heavy capital taxation without obtaining any income to enable them to do so. I am pleased that the Select Committee examined the impact on the community of this type of taxation, and I hope that the Government, when examining this whole matter of taxation, will include in its policy the recommendations made by the Select Committee, because in this whole field of capital taxation we are dealing with the problem of a person who is being forced to pay taxation but who, in many instances, is unable to do so.

Because there has been an increase in pay-roll tax (which will bring in about \$10,000,000 extra) and an increase of about \$20,000,000 or \$30,000,000 in Commonwealth reimburse-

ments, and because the Commonwealth Government has accepted a fair slice of the State's public debt and is making grants for capital works. I consider that some announcement should have been made in this Budget of a reduction of this form of taxation. I seek leave to conclude my remarks at a later date.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

AGED CITIZENS CLUBS (SUBSIDIES) ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Received from the House of Assembly and read a first time.

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from September 23. Page 1661.)

The Hon. G. J. GILFILLAN (Northern): I support the Bill, and I commend the Hon. Mr. Springett on the contribution he made to the debate last week. We in this Chamber are fortunate to have as one of our colleagues a medical practitioner of the honourable member's standing in the medical field, and we are well aware of his integrity as a member of this Council. Speeches such as the one he made on this Bill contribute much to a debate, and the Council has the benefit of his expert knowledge.

Any move to facilitate the registration within this State of medical practitioners is a move in the right direction. This legislation simplifies the procedure for those practitioners seeking registration. One of the problems South Australia faces is a shortage of medical practitioners and, if this Bill does anything to overcome this problem, it will be a step in the right direction.

The history of medical services in South Australia is most interesting. I represent a district that is about to celebrate its centenary and, on reading through the history of that district, it is interesting to see how in that district alone medical services have changed over the years. In 1871, when the district was first opened up, medical services did not exist, and people had to help one another. Indeed, the first storekeepers often pulled teeth for their clients as a free service, and there are many instances of emergency operations being performed by unqualified persons. Indeed, there are some instances of unqualified persons serving their fellow men by performing operations and treating persons with illnesses. Child-births had to take place without qualified medical assistance.

Medical services in the community have grown since then. We passed through a period during which the medical practitioner served a reasonably large area, when only few of the facilities available today were to hand. Before the advent of the motor vehicle, medical practitioners had to travel by horseback or by means of a wheeled vehicle called a trap, and often with a driver. Because of the time taken to travel to patients, doctors often had to sleep in the vehicle as they were being driven along, and they often had to wait in the vehicle for the crisis to which they were called, such as a childbirth or an illness, because it would have been impossible for them to return to their home and then make the call again.

There was then a change to the era of the motor vehicle and the telephone. This applied not only in the country areas but also in the metropolitan area, which was a growing community. The stage was then reached where we had medical practitioners throughout the State and the St. John Ambulance serving the country and metropolitan area alike. The Flying Doctor Service was established throughout the outback areas, and there was an increase in the technical services available to medical practitioners. These included the cardiograph and numerous other machines.

The current problem then arose, for with a sharp increase in population it was difficult to give adequate service because of a shortage of medical practitioners. However, this was to some extent overcome by the discovery of antibiotics and various new drugs which meant less attention necessary for patients and less time spent in hospitals. Excellent technical facilities are now available to all, and our country hospitals have been upgraded. We are moving into perhaps a centralization of nurse training with the new scheme. However, overall we face a growing problem with the shortage of medical practitioners. Many dedicated men are working long hours to serve their districts, but some of them are getting older and they are showing the strain of the long hours they have to work.

I wonder just where we are going from there? As I have said, we now have the facilities that have been provided by a succession of Governments, and we have the discoveries of modern science in medicine.

However, we face a shortage of medical practitioners not only in the country but, in my experience, in the metropolitan area of Adelaide and in other cities as well. The doctors in Adelaide appear to be working very hard, and a patient often has to wait a long time to receive attention. We have services such as the Royal District and Bush Nursing Association and the St. John Ambulance. We also have registered nurses and (an innovation of the last few years) nurse aides. These all play a very important part in the medical services of the State.

It is interesting to note that in the dental profession (in which there is also a grave shortage, particularly in country areas) we now have the aides, girls who, although not qualified as dentists, have been trained to work under the supervision of a qualified dentist. These girls are providing a valuable service throughout many areas of the State. I have seen these girls working in clinics at the schools where they are provided. I believe that this is a very valuable step in the dental care of the young people of this State, and I commend those responsible for setting up this scheme.

In the field of veterinary science, we also have throughout the State people who, although not qualified, fill a very real need in serving the State. I wonder whether more care of the sick could be undertaken by the various trained sections of the community. I refer to those who are not necessarily qualified as medical practitioners. I think that, to overcome some of the problems we have throughout the State, we could perhaps make more use of trained personnel working under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. I believe that this problem will not be solved easily, because we have an increasing population and increasing demands on the medical practitioners and the trained personnel that we have. As I believe that this Bill will facilitate the registration of medical practitioners and the administration of the Act, I have pleasure in supporting it.

The Hon. M. B. CAMERON secured the adjournment of the debate.

ADJOURNMENT

At 3.7 p.m. the Council adjourned until Wednesday, September 29, at 2.15 p.m.