

Opposition said that the list of Supply should be circulated amongst honorable members. I understand that the motion now before us is to enable the list of Supply to be circulated. We must first deal with the Speech of the Governor, and subsequently with Supply.

The motion was agreed to.

THE GOVERNOR'S SPEECH.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

The SPEAKER.—I have to report that the members of this House this day attended the Legislative Council chamber, when His Excellency the Governor was pleased to make a Speech to both Houses of Parliament, of which, for greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy. As the Speech is printed, and copies are in the hands of honorable members, it will not be necessary for me to read it.

Mr. ALLAN moved—

That the following Address-in-Reply to the Speech of His Excellency the Governor to both Houses of Parliament be agreed to by this House:—

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, the Legislative Assembly of Victoria, in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

He said—His Excellency's Speech was not a long one, and naturally I have to turn to the address delivered by the Premier at Wangaratta to know just what the new Government are going to do. I was very well satisfied with the speech delivered at Wangaratta when I read it just after it was delivered, but when I read it again to-day I was still better satisfied. I believe it should meet with the general approval of the people, and, if carried out, I am hopeful that it will be a distinct benefit to all the electors. Since I have been in the House I have noticed that it is a very good one for talking. The clouds in Europe are darker to-day than they have ever been, and my opinion is that if we do not look out we shall not require to legislate, because there will be some one else here to legislate for us. At all events, the war is in a worse stage now than it has been at any time since it started three years ago. The Russians have fallen out, Italy is in a difficult position and may not be able to extricate herself, and we have the whole German army going over to the West front. This

House should give a lead to the people. We should tell them that we are going to win the war, and, if possible, how we are going to win it. As a new member, I look upon the matter of winning the war as the greatest and the biggest problem in front of the State. We country members have come into this House with the object of stimulating production. We know, and it has been said by one honorable member already, that the people are drifting to the city of Melbourne. The drift has been going on so long that one-half of the population are living in the metropolis.

Mr. ROGERS.—We told you that before.

Mr. ALLAN.—Well, I am repeating it.

Mr. ELMSLIE.—We have had country representatives here all the time, and they have done nothing to prevent it.

Mr. ALLAN.—The more country representatives we get into the House, the more satisfied will the country electors be, and we may be able to stop the drift to the city. As a producer, I must tell the House that we can stop the drift to the city without any difficulty, providing we make the emoluments and the attractions in the country districts greater than they are to-day. Unfortunately, the attractions of the city to-day are much greater than the attractions of the country districts, and I sometimes wonder myself why I live away in the back-blocks when, perhaps, I could have lived in the glitter and life of the city.

Mr. ROGERS.—You won't go back again.

Mr. ALLAN.—I do not suppose I will if I get in with the crowd down here for long enough. A new Government has come into power, and we country representatives have come in with the object of bringing about efficiency and economy just so far as we can. I do not want honorable members to imagine that by the term "economy," we mean cutting down, or any retrograde step of any kind. But we do want to lop off some of the excrescences, and we hope by careful management to be able to finance the State without additional taxation.

Mr. HANNAH.—You will be a marvel if you can do it.

Mr. ALLAN.—I am well aware that the Government has a hard row to hoe. There have been a good many Treasury-bills issued in the past, and it might be difficult to renew them in the near future.

At all events, I know that we have loans amounting to £34,000,000 falling due within the next five years. We borrowed that money at slightly under 4 per cent., and the New South Wales Government have had to borrow at 5½ per cent. I do not know at what rate of interest we shall be able to get money, but it is abundantly evident that we shall have to pay at least 2 per cent. more for the renewal of those loans. Consequently, the present Government will have either to economize, or to increase taxation. I hope that the policy will be to cut down expenditure rather than to tax the people more than they are taxed to-day. It seems to me that we can reasonably cut down expenditure, and, on looking at the figures, I am rather surprised to see the rate at which the expenditure has risen during the last few years. I notice that in 1911 it was something less than £9,500,000, while now it is more than £12,000,000. The war has been going on most of that time, and we naturally want to save all we can for that end, because it is only reasonable to expect that it will mean additional taxation. Of course, the more that the State takes away from the people, the less they will have to give to the Commonwealth Government to finance the war. I notice also the statement in the Premier's speech that railway management will be taken into consideration, and that seems to me to be pretty nearly the crux of the whole financial position. We collect more than £6,000,000 in revenue from the railways, or slightly more than half the revenue of the State. We want expert business management in our railways, which have been losing a considerable sum of money each year, the loss last year being something between £400,000 and £500,000. It is evident that we have to try to put a stop to the drift in the railways. I feel satisfied in my own mind that we must have better management than we have to-day.

Mr. ELMSLIE.—You have to stop the profiteers, too.

Mr. ALLAN.—I suppose in a big business concern we want business management. It is not very easy to get it. In the Railway Department we naturally want expert management, and so far as I can see, we shall have to go outside of the State for it.

Mr. ELMSLIE.—You are a good Australia, crying "stinking fish."

Mr. ALLAN.—I say that the railways must be well managed, wherever we get a manager. If we can get a good manager in Victoria, very well. But I do not know where there is one in our own State. As far as I can see, in the Railway Department they seem to get into grooves, and you have to give them a jolly good jolt to get them out again. You can only give them that jolt by bringing some one here who knows nothing about our railways system, and who will put his foot down and say, "This has got to be done, and I am going to do it."

Mr. ELMSLIE.—Some one who knows nothing about our railways!

Mr. ALLAN.—It seems rather strange that, although we have passed through two of the best years the producers have ever seen, the deficit on the railways is mounting up.

Mr. HANNAH.—You don't say two of the best years so far as the consumers are concerned?

Mr. ALLAN.—The honorable member can speak mighty well for the consumers. I should like him to follow the plough for a while, and he would think more of the producer than he does. In 1915, we had the biggest wheat harvest that was ever grown in Victoria, and last year the yield was somewhat above normal, yet the deficit in the railways is getting worse and worse. That shows that this House and this Government must do something to stem the drift in our railway finances. I believe it can be done. Whether it can be done without the increased freights and fares or not, I am not in a position to say. But I am in a position to say that the last increase put a tax of something like £10 per man on the growers of wheat, wool, and other products throughout the State. That is rather a big amount, and if it had been put on in the form of income tax there would have been a good deal of howling.

Mr. PRENDERGAST.—You are getting a 75 per cent. increase in the price of the wool.

Mr. ALLAN.—And we have to pay 100 per cent. more for a sheep when we buy it. The honorable member sees one side of the question, but unfortunately we see the other side of the question.

Mr. MCKENZIE.—The increase in the price of wool is nothing like 75 per cent.

Mr. ALLAN.—I am not going to say much on the wheat question to-day, because I have some colleagues who understand it as well as, if not better than, I do, and as leader of my little party I want to give them all the ground they can to cover. I do not know whether they will talk as well as the honorable members on the other (the Opposition) side of the House, but they will give the House downright facts and figures, and the result of their experience at all events. We are quite satisfied with the formation of the Wheat Pool. We realize that to form the Wheat Pool was the right thing, and the only thing to do, but we are not satisfied with the management of it, and honorable members may be quite sure that we shall have something to say when we have the opportunity of discussing the appointment of any gentleman who is going on the board of management of the Wheat Pool. We, as farmers, own the wheat until such time as it is sold to the consumer or to the British Government, and we are going to have something to do in the management until that time, at all events. I am particularly well pleased to know that we have the Minister of Agriculture in this Chamber.

Mr. LEMMON.—The Minister of Lands is in the other House.

Mr. ALLAN.—I look upon this as a constructive House, and, if possible, I should like all the Ministers to be in this House, so that we could question them and get straight-out answers on any matters pertaining to the different Departments. We cannot question Ministers who sit in the other Chamber. In his speech the Premier made a reference to closer settlement. I come from a closer settlement area, and I have no hesitation in saying to the House that there is a good deal wrong with the Closer Settlement Act. We are, perhaps, a volatile people in Australia. At all events, we have gone on buying estates without having any reasonable assurance as to who we were going to put on them, or where we were going to get settlers from. The consequence is that to-day a good deal of our land is lying idle. Some of it is going back—getting covered with undergrowth, and perhaps turning into a wilderness. I am therefore very pleased indeed to note that there is to be an amendment of the Closer Settlement Act, and when the

amending measure comes before the House, we who come from the closer settlement areas will, I hope, be able to give honorable members a few points as to what could be done to help the settlers to get on better than they have done in the past, without doing an injury to the finances of the State. There is one other matter which was not mentioned in the Premier's speech, but which goes hand in hand with the closer settlement question, and that is fruit-growing. If we are going to keep the people on the richer areas of land in the closer settlement districts, we must do something to assist the fruit industry. I know that an Act was passed providing for money to be advanced for the erection of drying and canning factories in the country districts. I certainly do not believe in centralization, but I do say that that is starting at the wrong end. The difficulty to-day is not so much in canning fruit as in finding a market for it, and the only way in which it can be put on the market in a satisfactory manner is by having a head clearing house in the city of Melbourne. All the railways run into this city. I did not have anything to do with building them, or perhaps I should have built more cross-country lines. However, anything we do put on a railway is practically certain to come to the city of Melbourne before we can get it on the track to its destination. I do not know whether we know quite enough about fruit-growing and the canning industry or not, but if we do not we ought to learn about it before we embark on any new and costly scheme. Honorable members can realize that, if closer settlement is going to be a success, we must show the settlers how to sell their fruit. They can grow the fruit all right. There is no doubt about that at all, and with a water supply cheaper than the water supply in many other parts of the world I believe our settlers can grow fruit as cheaply as the orchardists in America, or in other countries. We should be able to manufacture fruit products and sell them just as well as they can in California, for instance. I know we are paying a good deal to prop up the sugar-growing industry in Queensland, and in doing that we are naturally knocking down our own fruit industry. It is difficult to know how to solve the problem, but there should be some way

out of it, if it is only by making a rebate to those who can fruit or put it on the market in the shape of jam, and so on. There are one or two other small matters which I will just mention that are not in the Premier's speech. In the Northern District we look upon irrigation as the chief factor in settling people upon the land. We have tried in the past, but unsuccessfully, to prevent dredging on the upper reaches of our rivers. If you go up the Owens River in the summer time, you will notice the clear head water flowing out of the mountains. When you come down to Bright, however, you will notice that the water resembles pea soup, and, going on past Wangaratta, it will be found that the silt has reached the Murray River. There is a danger of the silting up of those rivers, that will be worth millions of pounds to us in the future. This is being done with the object of winning just a small quantity of gold from land that could, in the interests of the State, be more profitably left in its natural condition. The people in the northern areas are altogether against dredging. There is one other matter that I may mention, and that is forestry. We pay away a big amount yearly in Australia for timber that is grown in other parts of the world, and it may surprise honorable members to hear that, in my electorate, firewood is being carted 8 or 9 miles to closer settlement areas, and where it will be got from in ten years' time is more than I can say. We can grow all the timber that we want, both for building purposes and for firewood. But it does not appear to me that we have started on the right lines. I admit that the honorable member for Gippsland South, who was Minister of Forests in the last Administration, did a good deal in this respect. It is somewhat unfortunate that a Minister does not remain in office long enough to get quite familiar with it. We change our Ministers of Forests a little too often. I suppose the honorable member for Gippsland South will agree with me. However, I want to see the timber industry put on a sound basis. We have destroyed, I am sorry to say, some of the finest forests on the face of the globe. We cannot bring them back, but we can preserve what timber we have, and we can plant more trees, with the object of growing not only hardwood, but softwood, and, in fact, every kind of wood that we require in Australia. I hope that the pre-

sent Government will give this matter earnest consideration before they retire from office.

Mr. HANNAH.—The honorable member for Rodney and myself are at one on that matter.

Mr. ALLAN.—I quite agree that very good work has been done by the honorable member for Collingwood on behalf of our timber industry, and also for our soldiers. While I know that I shall not be able to agree with him on all questions, I am pleased that I can agree with him on some. There is just one other matter I wish to direct attention to before I resume my seat. Some time ago the price of wheat was fixed at 4s. 9d.; elsewhere it has gone up to something like 8s. I want to state, as a country member, that if any price fixing proposition is brought forward here, honorable members can be quite sure that I shall be opposed to it. We want to let the law of supply and demand rule our produce. We know that it will rule it in the end, no matter what may be done. But we are not going to have a price fixed below that obtaining in the world's markets.

Mr. PRENDERGAST.—When poor old Mother England is at war, dip your hands into her pockets!

Mr. ALLAN.—You try to protect the farmer, which is absolutely impossible. We do not want protection, but we do want, without restrictions, the world's markets. Although there is a good deal of complaint when the price of some product is high, that is the shortest road to low prices. Naturally we all turn to grow a product from which we can get a greater remuneration than from any other. Consequently, when we get plenty of growers of that product, the price is brought down. That is the natural consequence. That is why I say high prices mean the shortest road to low prices. I dare say we may inquire into some of the price fixing episodes. A good many questions, of course, will arise as time goes on. I thank honorable members for the very patient hearing they have given me, and hope that I shall be better prepared and a little harder to put down when I speak in the future than I am to-day.

Mr. EVERARD.—I have much pleasure in seconding the motion proposed by my old friend, the honorable member for Rodney. As a new member for the constituency of Evelyn, I am proud to have