

Legislative Council.

Tuesday, March 6, 1973.

The **PRESIDENT (the Hon. R. W. Garrett)** took the chair at 4.56 p.m., and read the prayer.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH.

PRESENTATION OF ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

The **PRESIDENT (the Hon. R. W. Garrett)**.—I have to report that, accompanied by honorable members, on 18th December last, I waited upon His Excellency the Governor and presented to him the Address of the Legislative Council, adopted on 15th November last, in reply to His Excellency's Speech on the opening of Parliament. His Excellency was pleased to make the following reply:—

MR. PRESIDENT AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL :

In the name and on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen I thank you for your expressions of loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign contained in the Address you have just presented to me.

I fully rely on your wisdom in deliberating upon the important measures to be brought under your consideration, and I earnestly hope that the results of your labours will be conducive to the advancement and prosperity of this State.

DEATH OF THE HONORABLE SIR PERCY THOMAS BYRNES.

Sir GILBERT CHANDLER (Minister of Agriculture).—I move—

That this House place on record their deep regret at the death of the Honorable Sir Percy Thomas Byrnes, a former member of this House, and their keen appreciation of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member for the North-Western Province, a Minister of the Crown, and Leader of the Country Party in the Legislative Council.

Again, it is my painful duty to move a motion of this type concerning the passing of one whom we loved and respected. Sir Percy Byrnes was first elected at a by-election on 13th June, 1942, and he represented the North-Western Province for 27 years until his retirement on 8th

September, 1969. He was Minister without Portfolio in the first Hollway Ministry from 20th November, 1947, to 3rd December 1958; and Commissioner of Public Works from 27th June, 1950, to 28th October, 1952, and again from 31st October to 17th December, 1952, in the first and second McDonald Ministries. During his periods as a member of the McDonald Ministries Sir Percy was also Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council. He was Leader of the Country Party in the Council from December, 1949, until his retirement from Parliament.

In 1960 Sir Percy represented the Victorian Parliament at a study course held at Westminster for members of Commonwealth Parliaments. He was knighted in 1964.

Sir Percy Byrnes was born at Eidsvold, Queensland, on 28th January, 1893, and educated at Wesley College, Melbourne, and Queen's College, University of Melbourne. During the first world war, he served with the first Australian Imperial Force from 1914 to 1918. Sir Percy spent a lifetime as a fruit grower, and served as a director of the Woorinen Co-operative Packing Company. He is survived by Lady Byrnes, a son and two daughters.

It is hardly necessary for me to elaborate on that great record of service rendered to his country by Sir Percy in both war and peace. When the business of the House was being arranged he co-operated with me, as Leader of the Government, at all times. Those of us who served with him will always remember Sir Percy as being an extremely fair man in debate, as one who was approachable, and as one who served the people well. One only had to visit his home town of Swan Hill to realize that a great number of people came to his home for advice and guidance on many and varied problems. There can be no doubt that, as a member of the first Australian Imperial Force, as a Parliamentarian, as Leader of the Government and Leader of the Country Party in this House for so

many years, as a family man, and as a friend, he will be remembered as long as we remember anybody with whom we have been associated in this Chamber. We mourn his passing and we convey our condolences to Lady Byrnes and his family for the loss of a man who gave a life of outstanding service to this State.

The Hon. J. W. GALBALLY (Melbourne North Province).—It was only a few weeks ago that I received a letter from Sir Percy Byrnes. He had just had his 80th birthday. He told me that he missed the House and his friends and opponents here very much. He suggested that he had retired in haste and he missed the associations so much that, on reflection, he thought he should have continued to sit here. Sir Percy missed us, but I am sure that I speak for most honorable members who were members of the House during his time when I say that we have missed him over the past three years.

Sir Percy was a unique figure in this Chamber. When he rose to speak, he always had a bundle of papers in his hand. He never looked at them; he used them only to brandish. "That is all right" he would say, waving the papers, "I am going to have my say." He was sharp in debate but he had a quality which I am sure some of us very much admired and would like to have for ourselves, that of being generous to opponents. This was not only on a personal footing but also in acceding, "Perhaps there is something to what you have said—but."

I do not know what Sir Percy's personal ambitions were. As the Leader of the House has said, he achieved much, but he always struck me as a man who unhesitatingly put his personal ambitions after those of his party. It was party first for Sir Percy. He was an astute politician and I am sure that he gave wise and experienced advice to members of his party. He was a cheerful man, quick to perceive faults in others but

generous in acknowledging the virtues of an opponent and minimizing his shortcomings.

Sir Percy leaves a widow and family who are known to most of us here. They will have many pleasant memories of a loving husband and a great father. Sir Percy was a lovable character and public life is the poorer for his passing.

The Hon. I. A. SWINBURNE (North-Eastern Province).—I join with the Leader of the House and Mr. Galbally in paying tribute to my late Leader and our colleague in this House. I first became associated with Sir Percy Byrnes in 1946 when I entered this House. He had already been a member for about four years. From the first time he won the election for the North-Western Province for the Country Party he held the seat until his retirement in 1969. During that long period of 27 years, he was recognized as one of Victoria's outstanding members of Parliament. He had an exceptional brain and the ability to analyse facts on a wide range of subjects. That was one of his great assets as a member of Parliament and as a counsellor to many people, not only in this House but throughout the State.

I probably had a greater opportunity than did most other members to get to know Sir Percy because I shared a room with him for about fourteen years. Living in the same room and working with him week in and week out for such a long period, I came to know the qualities he possessed. I can safely say that, over all that period, at no time did he ever show any ill-will to anyone. He was always prepared to lend a helping hand to whoever might pass his way.

His services to the House and the Parliament, as outlined by the Leader of the Government, were of a high order. On becoming a member of the House, he quickly rose to the rank of Assistant Minister in the Hollway Government and served as an Honorary Minister dealing with land settlement and water supply.

His hand was and still can be seen in many of the Acts relating to land settlement—particularly the rehabilitation of a large area of the Mallee—and water supply. He did great work in those spheres.

I had the pleasure of being associated with Sir Percy Byrnes when he was Leader of the Government in this House from 1950 to 1952 and he showed outstanding ability in what may have been a unique situation. He fulfilled his duties with immense tact and humour. On many occasions, the Government party had small numbers and very few friends but Sir Percy was always able to extract himself from any difficult situation which arose. One of his greatest efforts was his attempt to have the House pass the Greater Melbourne Council Bill. At that time I do not think Sir Percy had any friends and the Bill was thrown out so quickly that few realized that it had come and gone. But Sir Percy handled the matter tactfully and his efforts will always remain in my memory and in the memories of those who were members of the House at that time.

As the Leader of the Country Party in the Legislative Council for twenty years, Sir Percy always had the loyal support of every member of the party. For many years when the Country Party sat in the corner it held the balance of power between the Government and the Opposition, and had to take many important and difficult decisions. On many occasions, Sir Percy came into the Chamber not knowing what attitude his friend, Mr. Galbally, might take to something the Government was doing. It often fell to the Country Party to decide at short notice which of the other two parties it should support. On many occasions that decision was made by Sir Percy because he had no opportunity of obtaining guidance from the party but, at all times, he had the loyal support of every member of the Country Party.

Sir Percy carried out his duty with a great deal of humour, as Mr. Galbally rightly said. He parried and thrust at

both sides in a debate and finally made his decision. Even members of the Country Party often wondered on which side he would eventually come down. Sir Percy always acted fairly and squarely and I admired him for his handling of difficult situations. He had to display knowledge of wide-ranging issues and reach quick decisions.

Sir Percy Byrnes was concerned with the problems not only of his constituents in North-Western Province but also of people in the community wherever they were. All his speeches in this House and all the representations which he made to Ministers and departments were for the purpose of improving the lot of the persons in whom he interested himself. His main interest lay in the primary industries in which he was engaged. All of the industries with which he was associated in North-Western Province lost a good friend with his passing. Even up to the past few days persons engaged in those industries were still seeking his guidance and assistance in formulating policies for the future.

These are some of the reasons why in 1964 Her Majesty the Queen bestowed a knighthood on Sir Percy Byrnes for his services to Victoria. He served this country as a member of the first Australian Imperial Force and much of his ill health resulted from his war injuries. At times Sir Percy had to fight a pretty hard battle with his health, but over the long period mentioned he continued to carry out his duties. He was an outstanding servant of the people and made a great contribution not only to this Parliament and Victoria but also to Australia because his interests were not confined to Victoria; as a member of the Parliamentary Country Party his contribution was Australia-wide in the interests of his party and the future of this country.

Above all, Sir Percy Byrnes was a great family man. Over the years he was a devoted husband and a wonderful father to his family. The people of Swan Hill looked upon him as the father of the town, and I am sure they are sad at the passing of a great

friend who served them so faithfully and well. Members of the Country Party join with the Leader of the House and Mr. Galbally in offering our sympathy to Lady Byrnes and the members of her family.

The Hon. MURRAY BYRNE (Minister for State Development and Decentralization).—I wish to join, briefly, the Leaders of the House who have paid tributes to our late colleague and good friend, Sir Percy Byrnes. Sir Percy was one of the truly great men who have sat in this House in recent times. All honorable members are aware that he served his country well during the first world war and gave a lifetime of service to this House, the community and the State.

I had a rather interesting relationship with Sir Percy because his surname was almost identical with mine, except that at some stage the family added an "s". I well remember, after having been a member of this House for about a week, receiving quite a lot of correspondence which was undoubtedly intended for Sir Percy. This state of affairs continued for a number of years until Sir Percy received his well-deserved knighthood from the Queen. Occasions arose when I had to send on correspondence to Sir Percy and vice versa. On one occasion in this House Sir Percy endeavoured to make it clear to the various Government departments that although we were great friends we were not one and the same person. After Sir Percy had made his point very clearly and with great good humour, I returned to the Commercial Travellers Club and found that I had been allotted Sir Percy's room and he mine. Fortunately for me, his room was much better than the room I should have occupied. It was indicative of the man that when I was appointed Minister of Public Works the first letter I received—it was hand-written and delivered to me—was from Sir Percy Byrnes congratulating me, or commiserating with me, and stating that if he could assist me in that Ministry he would be happy to do so.

More recently, when I revisited Swan Hill, I received a message from Sir Percy offering me his hospitality and friendship. I have no doubt that other honorable members received similar messages. Sir Percy Byrnes was a very humane man, and no doubt his humanity developed as a result of his experiences because at times he had a hard life. He was certainly a very tolerant person, particularly with new members of the House. I suppose one could also say that he was a humble man although he had a strong personality. Sir Percy Byrnes was undoubtedly a great Victorian and a great Australian.

The Hon. A. R. MANSELL (North-Western Province).—I agree with everything that has been said by previous speakers about Sir Percy Byrnes. If one wishes to get to know a man one has to see how his family reacts with him in the home. Sir Percy's father was a public servant and had the job of handling returned servicemen at Red Cliffs after the first world war, which was no easy task, and he earned the nickname of "Dad" Byrnes. This was a term of endearment because he acted as a father to the young fellows who returned from the war.

Having been Sir Percy's colleague and having worked closely with him over the years, I know that Sir Percy was regarded as a father to the people of Swan Hill. He was like a brother to me as well as a colleague in representing the interests of the people of North-Western Province. It was an honour to work with Sir Percy Byrnes, and I am deeply appreciative of his friendship and advice and the influence he had on my life.

I visited Sir Percy's home on numerous occasions and it did one's heart good to see the love and understanding which he displayed towards his wife, his children and his grandchildren. Sir Percy sacrificed himself in many ways. I saw him two weeks ago when he was just out of hospital; he had been told to go

home and put his business affairs in order. After talking for a few minutes Sir Percy spoke about some of the work going on and said, "It's up to us" and I received a lecture on what we had to watch for the future. Sir Percy's predictions over the years were ultimately proved correct.

One of his keenest desires was to see the winery operating in Swan Hill. He had been asked to open it, and it hurt him to think that he might not be there to do it. Only a few months ago I picked him up in my car to take him to see a person who was having trouble about social service payments. At that time Sir Percy should have been in bed. He was not then a member of this House; he had retired, but people were still coming to his home and seeking his advice. Every now and then I would get a letter from Sir Percy and would have to get a magnifying glass and my wife to help me read it. The letter would be written on behalf of a person in trouble in the Swan Hill district. New Australians in that area all knew Sir Percy Byrnes and owed him a debt for his help and advice. Sir Percy has been a brother and a father to many of us. We have all lost a friend. I will always revere Sir Percy Byrnes.

The Hon. B. P. DUNN (North-Western Province).—On behalf of the constituents of North-Western Province I, too, wish to express their sorrow at the passing of Sir Percy Byrnes and to extend our sympathy to his widow and family. The Mallee in north-western Victoria, developed largely with Sir Percy Byrnes at the helm. To a large extent, the improvements evident in the Mallee today can be related back to the work that he did during his 27 years in this House as a member representing North-Western Province. During that time he served the people, guided them and assisted them in every possible way. Throughout the province the people came to trust and respect him, and that respect will continue in the future.

As the member who was chosen to succeed Sir Percy in this House, I believe his life should be an example to all new members of Parliament, to people holding public office and to the general public. His high ideals were matched with his clear-thinking brain so that he was able to implement his thoughts in a practical manner. Above all, his basic thought was for the people regardless of their position in life, whether they were influential or otherwise; each of them mattered very much to him and he carried out his duties and responsibilities to all of them. We have, in this House and in the North-Western Province, lost a great man.

The PRESIDENT (the Hon. R. W. Garrett).—I wish to add a few words to those already spoken by other honorable members. The electorate which Sir Percy Byrnes represented was some distance from Melbourne and I am not as familiar with his work in the electorate as are his colleagues who have spoken so eloquently of the dedication he applied to his work over the years. However, I remember him well as a member of this Chamber. All honorable members know that when we first come to this Parliament we feel as if we are a bit in the wilderness, and it is a little difficult to settle down. No one gave more assistance to new members than did Sir Percy Byrnes.

For about five years I sat in the seat now occupied by Mr. Fry and I saw Sir Percy Byrnes in action at fairly close quarters. As Mr. Galbally said, we recall how he used to brandish his sheaf of papers to drive home a point. In my early days as a member of this House, he said to me, "If I can ever help you, let me know." Over the years I often sought his advice and listened to what he said. He was very experienced and was only too anxious to help anyone who needed it.

Sir Percy was a friendly and fair-minded man. He was always ready to give credit where it was due. I recall that he sat where Mr. Swinburne is now and, on occasions, if

he thought the Government had done something that was satisfactory, he would say so. That was a very fair attitude, and it was typical of his attitude towards life. We regret very much his passing. He was a great Victorian and a great Parliamentarian. I am sure he will be a great loss to everyone in the Swan Hill district and to many other persons throughout the country. I am sure honorable members will agree that we should extend our deepest sympathy to his widow, Lady Byrnes, and to his family.

The motion was agreed to in silence, honorable members signifying their unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

ADJOURNMENT.

Sir GILBERT CHANDLER (Minister of Agriculture).—I move—

That the House, out of respect to the memory of the late Honorable Sir Percy Thomas Byrnes, do now adjourn until Eight o'clock this day.

The motion was agreed to.

The House adjourned at 5.30 p.m.

The PRESIDENT (the Hon. R. W. Garrett) took the chair at 8.4 p.m.

DEATHS OF THE HONORABLE PAUL JONES AND THE HONORABLE WILLIAM PETER BARRY.

Sir GILBERT CHANDLER (Minister of Agriculture).—I move—

That this House place on record their deep regret at the death of the Honorable Paul Jones, a former member of this House, and their keen appreciation of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member for the Doutta Galla Province and a Minister of the Crown.

Paul Jones was elected as member for Doutta Galla Province in September, 1938, and served continuously until June, 1958. He was Honorary Minister from 14th September to 18th September, 1943, in the first Cain Ministry. He represented the Commonwealth seat of Indi from 1928 to 1931. He was a member of the Board of Management, Australian War Memorial, for sixteen years.

He served three and a half years as a lieutenant in the first Australian Imperial Force. He was born on 15th June, 1878, and died on 27th December, 1972, at the age of 94 years.

On behalf of honorable members I express our condolences to the relatives of the late Honorable Paul Jones. He was a member of this House for approximately twenty years and he sat on the corner benches now occupied by members of the Country Party. Paul Jones became involved in the debates in this House, particularly when the debates related to the mining industry. He was most interested in gold-mining at Woods Point and had an excellent knowledge of the area. His death is a clear reminder to us that our days in this world are limited. It is my regrettable duty to move this motion of condolence which records in the annals of this Parliament our appreciation of a man who served his country in war and peace.

The Hon. J. W. GALBALLY (Melbourne North Province).—The remarks of the Leader of the House bring back many memories to me. I remember the Honorable Paul Jones as a member of this House. He was most informative on the mining industry, particularly gold mining, which always fascinated me from a distance. As I recall he was a confirmed and obdurate bachelor who enjoyed remarkably good health until he died. I saw him on Christmas Day two days before his death at the Caritus Christi Hospice in Studley Park Road, Kew. He was bedridden, but, as always, he looked remarkably fit and was happy and talkative. He assured me that he had never felt better in his life. Members of the Labor Party express their condolences to his relatives.

The Hon. I. A. SWINBURNE (North-Eastern Province).—I associate members of the Country Party with the motion moved by the Leader of the House and supported by Mr. Galbally. The Honorable Paul Jones was a prominent member of this Chamber for many years. Prior to