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1901-05-10

Senate.

The President took the chair at 11 a.m.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

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His Excellency the Governor-General entered the chamber and took the chair. A message was forwarded to the House of Representatives intimating that His Excellency awaited the attendance of the members in the Senate chamber, who being come with their Speaker,

HIS EXCELLENCY was pleased to deliver the following speech : - " Gentlemen of the Senate and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives : " As the first Australian Parliament, you have been honoured with the presence of His Royal Highness the Duke of Cornwall and York as His Majesty's High Commissioner. Your Labours will be watched with interest throughout the civilized world. The ceremony of yesterday marks a triumphant culmination of prolonged and strenuous endeavour for the attainment of the national representation essential to the progress of Australia. "The inauguration of the Commonwealth in January was conducted in Sydney with a splendour worthy of the spirit of union animating the citizens of every part of Australia. It is now that the people so joined ordain the initiation in Melbourne of legislation which, there is reason to trust, will go far to realize the high hopes of the founders of Union. " The Act constituting this Commonwealth was among the last great measures that received the assent of Her late Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria. Few indeed are the subjects of His Majesty King Edward who, in their grief for the nation's loss of his beloved mother, fail to derive some solace from the fact that she was spared to witness so great a step in the extension of free institutions, and in the consolidation of her empire. " The commission which was opened yesterday enabled His Royal Highness the Duke of Cornwall and York graciously to deliver to you a memorable speech, containing a message from the King to his subjects in Australia - a message which demonstrates alike his pride in his sovereignty over the Commonwealth, and his strong resolve to follow in the path of the august ruler whom he succeeds. " The duty laid on your Governor-General is one of great honour and distinction, but it is a work of the highest responsibility to preside over the early achievements of the Australian people in the wide development and just government of the great charge now first committed to their care. "You will be called on to deal with a number of legislative proposals of the highest importance. In the first place, it will be necessary to submit to you measures for setting in motion the machinery of the Constitution, and for adapting to their new condition the great departments, recently transferred, of Defence, Customs and Excise, and Posts and Telegraphs. " You will be asked to constitute a High Court of Australia, with an extensive Appellate and Federal Jurisdiction. It is hoped that the character of this court will be so eminent, and its powers so comprehensive, that its decisions will be accepted as final by the great majority of litigants. " A Bill will be introduced to create a commission for the execution and maintenance of the provisions of the Constitution relating to trade and commerce. It is intended to confer wide powers, judicial and administrative, on this body, so that in the exercise of its authority the interests of each State may be secured, consistently with those of the people of the Commonwealth as a whole. " A Bill to regulate the public service of the Federation will be submitted. The merits of the laws of the several States in this regard have been given due weight in the preparation of this measure, which my advisers trust you will find just in its appreciation of good conduct and ability, and careful to secure the best and most economical results to the public. " Steps have already been taken to cope with the difficult matter of selecting the federal territory, within which the capital of the Commonwealth is to be built ; and in this task no longer time will be occupied than is necessary for the exercise of good judgment in the choice of an area which, it is hoped, will be of a size ample for all public requirements, and of which the climate, accessibility, and natural beauty will give promise of a seat of Government worthy of the new nation. " Bills for the firm restriction of the immigration of Asiatics and for the diminution and gradual abolition of the introduction of labour from the South Sea Islands will be laid before you. " Measures are also in preparation to provide for conciliation and arbitration in cases of industrial disputes extending beyond the limits of any one State, for the placing of patents and inventions under one uniform administration throughout the Commonwealth, and for the grant of an uniform franchise in all federal elections by the adoption of adult suffrage. "Some time must elapse before the financial conditions of the Commonwealth will admit of provision being made for old-age

pensions. It is, however, the desire of my Ministers to deal with the subject as soon as practicable. " As soon as the necessary data have been collected, Bills will be prepared relating to banking, and providing for uniformity in the laws regulating federal elections. Navigation, shipping, and quarantine are among the subjects of proposed legislation, and consideration is being given to the best means of taking over, converting, renewing, or consolidating the public debts of States. " Gentlemen of the House of Representatives : " Estimates of Expenditure will be submitted to you in due course, and will be economical. They will, however, safeguard the efficiency of the services of the Commonwealth. " Gentlemen of the Senate and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives : " The fiscal proposals of any Federal . Government must be largely dependent on the financial exigencies of the States. The adoption of the existing tariff of any one of these States is impracticable, and would be unjust. To secure a reasonably sufficient return of surplus revenue to each State, so as fairly to observe the intention of the Constitution, while avoiding the unnecessary destruction of sources of employment, is a work which prohibits a rigid adherence to fiscal theories. "Revenue must, of course, be. the first consideration ; but existing tariffs have, in all the States, given rise to industries many of which are so substantial that my advisers consider that any policy tending to destroy them is inadmissible. A tariff which gives fair consideration to these factors must necessarily operate protectively as well as for the production of revenue. " The relations of the Commonwealth with the Islands of the Pacific have been occupying the earnest attention of Ministers, who have taken such steps as seem to them prudent for the protection of Australian interests in this regard, without in any sense embarrassing the international relations of His Majesty's Government. "The question of the construction of a railway connecting with these eastern communities the vast and hitherto isolated State of Western Australia has been under consideration. Examinations of the country intervening between the railway systems of South and "Western Australia are now in progress, together with other inquiries. It is hoped that they may result in showing that the undertaking is justifiable. "Isolation was the chief obstacle to the early adoption of the Constitution by Western Australia, until the hope of closer connexion influenced the people of the West to risk the threatened perils of that political union of the continent which their vote at the referendum did much to complete. "No doubt the project of railway connexion between the Northern Territory and the Southern States will before long assume great public importance. A proposal made by the Government of South Australia for the surrender by that State, and the acceptance by the Commonwealth, of the Northern Territory is under careful consideration. "As soon as practicable after the necessary Act has been passed, means will be taken for the judicious strengthening of the defence of the Commonwealth. Extravagant expenditure will be avoided, and reliance will be placed, to the fullest reasonable extent, in our citizen soldiery. It is confidently hoped that the services of a most able and distinguished officer will be secured for the supreme military command. "As soon as practicable, the postal and telegraphic rates of the several States will be assimilated, and, when the finances of the Commonwealth admit, an uniform and, if possible, universal penny postage rate will be established. "The legislation which I have outlined may not, of course, be entirely carried into effect in a single session. Your labours will be prolonged if only the most urgent of the proposals of Ministers are to occupy your attention. " Intercolonial free-trade will be established in the very act of imposing a Federal Tariff, and my Ministers bespeak for their fiscal proposals your devoted attention in the present session. " Every effort will, with your generous assistance, be made to carry the urgent measures named into law. "As a very great portion of Australia has been visited with abundant rains, there is reason to hope that the country generally will be blessed with a prosperous season, leading to an increase in commercial and industrial activity. " In leaving you now to your grave responsibilities, I earnestly hope that, under Divine guidance, your patriotic labours in a memorable session will deserve and earn the gratitude of the Australian people."

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR

NOR-GENERAL, having retired, and the members of the House of Representatives withdrawn,

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Vice-President of the Executive Council

Senator O'CONNOR

. - I move -

That the Senate at its rising do adjourn until Tuesday, 21st May, at 2.30 p.m.

I make that motion now, because it appears to me it will commend itself to honorable members. It will be very little use meeting here for the purpose of doing business during next week. There would be only three days of sitting, and during most of that time there will be meetings and entertainments of different kinds, provided by the hospitable State of Victoria and its citizens, which I think most of us expect to attend. There is very little use in endeavouring to go on unless we can have the full House, which we ought to have for the transaction of important business. There will be nothing gained by meeting next week, and I think I shall have the assent of the Senate to the motion that Tuesday, the 21st inst., be the day on which we again meet for the despatch of business. On that date the Address in Reply will be taken into consideration. I may state, for the information of honorable members, that I propose to-day to move for the appointment of a committee to prepare the Address in Reply to the Speech of the Governor-General. That committee will prepare its report, and the adoption of the report will be made an order of the day for Tuesday, the 21st inst., so that the first business will be the consideration of the Address in Reply to the Governor-General's Speech.

Senator MILLEN

- . Might I suggest to the representative of the Government that, in view of the fact that next week is to be a parliamentary holiday, he should make the meeting on Tuesday an hour later. There are some representatives, like myself, of distant States, who propose to leave Melbourne for a few days next week, and as the train by which we intend to return is due at mid-day on Tuesday, it will be a little inconvenient to attend here promptly. If he could see his way to make the meeting hour half-past three or four, there are many who would appreciate the concession.

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Senator GOULD

- I would suggest that we should meet at four o'clock, instead of two or' half -past two, for the reason that the trains from New South Wales do not arrive until half-past twelve. Possibly they may be a little late, and senators would want to get lunch before coming here. It has been pointed out by the Vice-President of the Executive Council that it is desirable we should have a full House when business is being dealt with, and I feel perfectly confident we would have a much better chance of getting a full House at four o'clock than at the earlier hour. There can then be no excuse for honorable members not being in their places when the Senate opens. I think that would be a convenience to senators coming from New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia. Many of them desire to get home for a few days before they commence work in real earnest.

Senator O'CONNOR(New South Wales Vice President of the Executive Council). - There appears to be no objection to the course suggested. It would be a convenience, no doubt, to honorable members, and for this particular occasion there is really no reason why the concession should not be made. Therefore, with the consent of the Senate, I will alter my motion, and make the hour of meeting four o'clock on Tuesday. That, of course, means that we shall meet sharp at four o'clock.

Question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

PROPOSED STANDING ORDERS

Vice-President of the Executive Council

Senator O'CONNOR

. - I lay on the table draft standing orders relative to public business, and I move -
That the document be printed.

These standing orders have been very carefully prepared from the standing orders of the different States, and I think they will be found to embody everything that is reasonable and practical and satisfactory for the conduct of public business, as disclosed by actual experience in the working of the State Parliaments. There is nothing very new or sensational in them. Honorable members will find, I think, that they are familiar with all of them, and will recognise that they have been prepared with a view to what is reasonable in the conduct and despatch of public business.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Senator O'CONNOR

- I may state that this document, when printed, will be circulated as soon as possible, and we hope that by Saturday, or at all events Monday, it will be in the hands of honorable members, so that there will be abundant time to consider it before the meeting of the Senate. As supplementary to the action that has

just been taken, I propose on Tuesday week to move -

That, until the Senate shall have adopted the standing orders on the report of the committee to be appointed to prepare them, the draft standing orders laid on the table of the Senate on the 10th May be temporarily adopted.

SERVICE AND EXECUTION OF PROCESS BILL

Bill presented by Senator O'CONNOR (New South Wales), and read the first time.

QUESTION

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- By leave of the Senate, I desire to ask Senator O'Connor whether it is proposed to move for the constitution of a Standing Orders Committee. It seems to me that unanimity of opinion in regard to the standing orders which have just been brought forward will not be obtained until such a committee, consisting of experienced men, has been appointed, and has reported on them to the Senate. That would save a great deal of time and inconvenience.

Vice-President of the Executive Council

Senator O'CONNOR

. - The Government intends to request the Senate to assent to the appointment of a Standing Orders Committee for the purpose of considering the standing orders. It has been thought desirable, however, to postpone the naming of the committee until next sitting. There is no committee more important than this; and I think it well that honorable members should have an opportunity of knowing something of each other before proceeding to a selection, so that we may be in a better position to judge how it should be constituted.

Senator Glassey

- Will the committee be appointed prior to the adoption of these standing orders?

Senator O'CONNOR

- That cannot be. You will see it is necessary, in order to carry on the business of the Senate, to have some procedure which will guide us. We have no procedure now, but I propose to move a motion at the next sitting which will constitute these standing orders provisionally, to guide the proceedings of the Senate, until the Standing Orders Committee reports. Probably, on next sitting day I will move for the appointment of a Standing Orders Committee. That committee will then go to work at once, and I hope very soon will have a report ready upon which the House may finally decide: what are to be its standing orders.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address in Reply

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The PRESIDENT

- I have to report to the Senate that, in this chamber, this forenoon. His Excellency the Governor-General was pleased to deliver his opening speech, of which, for greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy, which I will now read. As a rule, I do not find any utility in reading a speech in the chamber in which it was delivered. This is, however, an exceptional occasion, inasmuch as this is the first speech addressed by the Governor-General to the Parliament of the Australian Commonwealth, and I intend, therefore, to depart from the ordinary practice.

The Governor-General's speech was read by the President.

Motion by Senator O'Connor agreed to-

That a committee, consisting of Senators Fraser, Gould, Keating, McGregor, and the mover, be appointed to prepare an address in reply to His Excellency's speech, and to report to the Senate on Tuesday, 21st May.

Senator GOULD

- With regard to the motion just carried, of course it is understood that Senator O'Connor's endeavour has been to secure on the committee honorable members from all sides of the Senate. I desire to say that I will be in opposition to a great deal of what is contained in the speech.

QUESTION

RETIREMENT OF MEMBERS

Senator WALKER

- May I ask whether any time has been fixed for the consideration of the question of the retirement of senators in rotation?

Senator O'CONNOR

- That matter will be considered when we meet again, on Tuesday, 21 May. I shall be prepared then to make some statement.

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11:52:00

Senate adjourned at 11.52 a.m.