

# The Advertiser

and Register

ADELAIDE: THURSDAY,

MAY 21, 1931

## ECONOMY AND SCIENCE

It is reassuring to learn that the contemplated cut in the amount of money available to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research will not be nearly so drastic as at first was feared. The financial position makes the practice of economy necessary, wherever this is possible without destroying efficiency, and no department can reasonably expect to be entirely exempt from the use of the pruning knife. Unhappily, the Government has so far refused to heed the demand for a comprehensive policy of prudent reduction in expenditure. Only to departments, where it could cut costs without fear of losing more than a few votes, such as the Defence Department, has it turned in an attempt to effect savings. It would have been a grave blunder if it had sought, as was rumored it intended to do, to diminish the amount to be used in scientific research during the coming twelve months, by £90,000. It now appears that this is not intended, and that no work of outstanding importance will suffer in consequence of the savings that are to be made. Only research work of minor moment is to be held up for the time being. Urgent as is the need for economy, the most ardent advocates of reform would not be likely to acquiesce in the singling out of a department engaged in work of incalculable value to Australia, for a 90 per cent., or even a 50 per cent., cut in its funds while, in every other direction, extravagance continued unabated. Ordinary prudence would suggest that economies should start where they can be effected without prejudice to future prosperity. That there is ample room for large savings, is of course a matter of common knowledge. Little investigation is needed to discover the exact places where these can be effected. They must be known already to Mr. Scullin and Mr. Theodore. It is not lack of knowledge, but a disinclination to risk unpopularity with a section of the community on which they depend for their political position, that accounts for their stubborn disregard of the peril which confronts Australia.

The duty of putting into practice a policy of retrenchment is not a pleasant one, but it must be faced if the nation is to be saved from insolvency. The virtual disbandment of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research would not tend to better Australia's position. It would mean sacrificing the future with the present, as a glance at the history and achievements of the department would make clear. Australia depends mostly on her primary products for her prosperity. Only by fostering these, can she maintain the large export trade which is essential to her well-being. If a substantial balance in favor of her outgoing commerce, as compared with the volume of imports, is to be built up as a permanent means of maintaining an equal exchange, when interest payments have been met, it will be necessary to utilise to the best advantage all our natural resources. The application of scientific principles and knowledge to the various branches of primary industry has proved decidedly advantageous in the past. But we cannot afford to rest on achievements already attained. Other countries are moving rapidly forward. Australia must not lag behind. The Council for Scientific and Industrial



Research has mapped out for itself a programme which promises well; and it is desirable that it should be carried out as completely as circumstances will permit. Mr. G. F. Jenkins, vice-president of the Stockowners' Association, in a statement in our columns yesterday indicated some of the things which stand to the credit of the Council, and these afford abundant justification for it being allowed to continue its admirable work, as far as possible freed from financial disabilities. It is true that the beneficial results of research work usually are not immediately apparent. Many of the problems with which investigators are concerned are of an exceedingly complex nature; their elucidation requires much patient experimenting, the results of which have to be observed and noted, and checked and counter-checked, over a considerable period; and often it happens that methods, which promised well in the initial stage, finally have to be abandoned in favor of others. Only by taking long views, can the value be accurately appraised; but it is none the less real on that account.

It is only necessary to instance what has been done in connection with the prickly pear nuisance in Queensland, to show how important it is, from the point of view of the primary producer, and therefore of the nation, that scientific research should be maintained at a high standard of efficiency. Who could compute the debt the wheat-farming industry owes to the application of science to the treatment of the soil and the selection of varieties of seed? Large areas of country previously regarded as little better than desert have been brought under profitable cultivation by the application of fertilisers. Average yields have been increased, and pests are gradually being brought under control. Animal nutrition has become a separate branch of study, which has already justified the time, labor, and money expended in connection with it, and which is big with promise for the future. Increases in quantity, and improvement in quality, of nearly every kind of primary produce stand to the good account of scientific investigation. Everywhere, in primary and secondary industries alike, the world is turning to science for the solution of the many problems which are constantly arising, and it is gratifying that a comparatively young country like Australia is taking a worthy place in original research. Many of the problems are peculiar to Australia. Climate and other conditions make local study imperative. This, of course, is supplemented by the results of research carried out in other parts of the world; but, in not a few instances, considerable modifications have to be devised and adopted to make overseas discoveries applicable here. If some economies can be effected in the work of scientific research, without seriously imperilling the organisation which has been built up, they should not be overlooked. What is wanted, however, is a well-planned comprehensive scheme for reducing departmental expenses — one which will make a real impression on the financial situation. When such a plan is brought into operation, no department can hope to be excluded. Australia must learn to live within her restricted means, and, in order that this may be done, a policy of reduced expenditure must be accepted by all branches of Government service.