

I think members will realise that I never contemplated that the Address-in-reply would finish this afternoon. I quite expected that it would last a day or two and if that had been so, other business would have been provided to be taken up. Now it will be necessary for members to meet on Tuesday.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan: What business will there be for Tuesday?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Very little business because it will be necessary for the preliminary stages in regard to certain Bills to be taken before we can proceed with them on a subsequent day.

Hon. R. J. Lynn: Adjourn until Tuesday week.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: If we do that we shall be in exactly the same position because it will be necessary to take the preliminary stages of the Bills.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Are these Bills ready?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: They are. It is not my intention to suspend the Standing Orders, I want to take everything in its proper order.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Have a formal sitting to-morrow and deal with the first stages of the Bills then.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: If it is the desire of members to have a formal sitting to-morrow so as to get through the first stages of certain Bills, that will be sufficient. In the meantime we may be able to ascertain some idea of the progress which is likely to be made in another place and have some idea of the wishes of hon. members whether it will be desirable to adjourn until Tuesday next or Tuesday of the following week. If that is the wish of hon. members, I simply move that the House do now adjourn.

Question—that the House do now adjourn—put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.17 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 23rd January, 1918.

The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

ELECTION RETURN—KIMBERLEY.

The SPEAKER announced the return of writ for the election of a member for Kimberley, showing that Mr. M. P. Durack had been duly elected.

SWEARING-IN.

Mr. M. P. Durack (Kimberley) and Mr. J. B. Holman (Murchison) took and subscribed the oath and signed the roll.

[For "Questions on notice" and "Papers presented," see "Votes and Proceedings."]

QUESTION — WYNDHAM FREEZING WORKS, AND MR. NEVANAS.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN, without notice, asked the Minister for Works: Seeing that the Minister was chairman of the select committee which inquired into the Wyndham freezing works, would he favour inviting Mr. Nevanas to the bar of the House in order that he may give his version of the whole transaction? Mr. Nevanas was stated to be very anxious at the time to appear before the select committee, and I understand he is in Perth now.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In reply to the hon. member's somewhat embarrassing question, I should say that any matter connected with Mr. Nevanas had better remain quiescent for the present, or at all events until we know for what purpose Mr. Nevanas is in Western Australia. The hon. member and the public of Western Australia may rest perfectly assured that the Government will endeavour to protect the interests of the State so far as Mr. Nevanas is concerned. With that reply I think the hon. member should remain content.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Second Day.

Debate resumed from the 20th November, 1917.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [4.58]: In view of the exceptional circumstances in which the House meets to begin the work of the session, that is to say, with seven months of the financial year already expired, and with a lapse of two months since Parliament first met, I have no intention of wasting the time or the money of the country in debating the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply at this juncture. The Government have been returned from the country with a substantial majority. Theirs is the responsibility of putting forward a policy adequate to the requirements of the desperate condition of the State. So far we on this side do not know, nor does the country know, what that policy is. Consequently I shall reserve criticism or discussion until the Treasurer has delivered his Budget speech, and until the programme of the Government for the session is made known to the House and to the country.

Mr. H. ROBINSON (Albany) [4.59]: I desire to congratulate the Government on having afforded members the opportunity of participating in the last referendum campaign, which campaign enabled Western Australia once more to inform the world that, notwithstanding what our brothers in the Eastern States may do, we here are still prepared to stand by our pledged word.

Mr. Hoiman: Not you.

Mr. Jones: The last shilling?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: We have been enabled once more to proclaim our inflexible determination to send the last man and the last shilling rather than see this war of liberation against tyranny and militarism lost or concluded in an unsatisfactory peace. I wish also to offer congratulations to the Treasurer on having produced for the month of December a surplus. I sincerely hope this surplus will be the forerunner of many more.

Mr. O'Loughlin: Did you find out where he got it from?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. Lambert: On a point or order I do not think it is fair that a new speaker should be interrupted in this manner.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I understand that the Government have not definitely decided upon a permanent scheme of repatriation, and we have to depend on what we can gather or glean from the Press. I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to a leaflet which has been distributed throughout the British Isles apparently from the Agent General's office, but through the Royal Colonial Institute, and with the permission of the House I would like to read some extracts from it. The scheme as set out in this leaflet may and probably will be accepted throughout the British Isles as part of the Western Australian Government's intentions, and I consider it incumbent on the Government either to confirm or correct the ideas and impressions which may be gaining ground in the Home land as to what we propose to do. There is no doubt that as we have in our midst a large number of returned men there will be a far greater number in the Old country, who, on reading the information contained in the leaflet will be only too pleased to take advantage of the opportunity to migrate to Western Australia. I will read an extract from the pamphlet:—

"Western Australia." The Government are at present granting homestead farms to new settlers whilst for British and Australian ex-service men, and dependants of deceased soldiers, suitable land is to be provided accompanied by the following special features: (a) Liberal advances through the Agricultural Bank at cost, plus reasonable working charges, and under special terms of repayment, against improvements, stock and implements. (b) The establishment of a "Repatriation Fund" for making advances, with or without interest apart from those referred to in paragraph (a) for maintenance by way of general assistance to returned soldiers and their families. (c) Ameliorative aid for maintaining returned soldiers, etc., until their lands become sufficiently productive, is to be granted by the Western Australian branch of the British Red Cross Society. Western Australia is arranging to settle on her lands by the end of 1918, some 8,850 ex-soldiers and sailors as under, wheat lands and mixed farming 8,000 men; dairying, fruit growing, and intense culture 850 men. The advances necessary for improvements, etc., are expected to amount to £500 each. The Government are providing educational facilities

for disabled soldiers in certain branches of industry through existing channels and the local War Council has already established a scheme for training men in poultry farming, etc. The question of training men disabled who are unsuited to work on the land is receiving attention at the hands of the Government, who are collecting full information from institutions established in England, France, and elsewhere.

Hon. P. Collier: Who issued that pamphlet?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I have the original document in my hand. It was issued by the Royal Colonial Institute, London, but the contents, I take it, have been gathered from the Agent General's office in London.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That was published in the "West Australian."

The Minister for Works: Is there any date on the pamphlet?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: There is a date, but I cannot give it for the moment. That leaflet which is in circulation in the Home land is absolutely misleading, and I would like the Government to give the House an assurance that it will be withdrawn from circulation at once. I should like to ask where is the £4,425,000 coming from to settle these 8,000 odd men referred to in the pamphlet? I understand that the idea is based on the assistance which has been promised by the Imperial Government through the medium of the Federal Parliament, but I would ask the members of the Government, and particularly the Minister in charge of this scheme, whether he has made any arrangements with the Federal authorities for the loan of that sum of money in one year. I understand that the Government have been doing something in connection with repatriation. We have noticed that they are endeavouring to establish poultry farming in the metropolitan area. I understand that 10 acres of land are being set aside for each returned man, and I would ask whether there is a single man in Western Australia who could make a living from poultry alone on such a small area.

Mr. Collier: And with 20 clucky hens.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I understand the number of hens to be supplied is 200. I hope the Minister in charge of this scheme will not expect a returned soldier to make a living from such a proposal unless the Minister out of the kindness of his heart is prepared perpetually to pay the losses which will be sustained, for I unhesitatingly say that there is not a man anywhere, let alone a returned soldier, who will be able to make a living out of poultry on 10 acres of land. We have instances of 200, 300, and up to 500 hens being kept in good localities, and the owners of them having to go out and earn wages in order to make ends meet. I know of an instance of a man who has 500 hens and whose son is at the war. He has to go out and earn wages in order to keep the farm going until the return of his son from the front. It is generally conceded that it costs about 1s. a dozen to produce the eggs, and for some considerable time past the leading stores have not been able to sell the eggs which have been offering at 3d. a dozen; yet in the face of that we have the Minister spending £5,000 on a small area which was repurchased. The

expenditure of that money will represent about £500 for each block on houses, wind-mills, tanks, and runs. The money is being spent under the provisions of the Workers' Homes Act with the repayments extending over about 25 years. The men are to be supplied with 200 head of poultry now being raised at the poultry farm at Subiaco. I ask the House to say whether it is not an utter impossibility for any man to make a living under such conditions. If we desire to help returned soldiers we should stop such an absurd idea as that which has been put forward in connection with poultry raising. The scheme, I understand, is under way and plans are being prepared. The residents of Osborne Park have expressed the opinion that the scheme has no chance of success and that the men will be away from their allotments in six months. The land in which these men are to be settled has no swamp area, but is all sand with the usual timber to be found on it. I understand that there is a man in the State who has made money out of poultry farming, but he has something like 50 acres, and he has been established for a considerable time and has spent far more on the property than the Government can ever afford to do. I understand that the Minister for Industries is the Minister who is in charge of repatriation, and as I feel that I am under an obligation to do all I can for returned soldiers, I might express the opinion that the Minister for Industries who is also the Attorney General and has control of the Forestry Department—which department by the way runs a nursery to compete against private nurserymen—has far more to do than he can possibly give his complete attention to. There has recently been held in this State a conference on forestry, and while I do not say it should not have taken place, I think that the Government of Western Australia in these strenuous times should not have been expected to find money to defray the cost of such a conference. I object strongly to the Government repurchasing private estates. I think that all Government land should be utilised first. In connection with the estates which were repurchased by previous Parliaments, the prices paid were so high that we cannot for a moment think of settling returned soldiers on them and expect them to make a living. The obstacles which are placed in the way of returned soldiers securing land I think should be removed. I understand that a returned soldier must go before two boards. The first board asks him what is the colour of his hair and whether he cleans his teeth, and before he passes that set of austere gentlemen, he has to go before another board who inquire into his qualifications for settling on the land. Whilst I congratulate the Government on giving us the opportunity during the recent referendum campaign of asking outsiders to enlist, at the same time I have it on good authority that behind the Government petticoats there are 300 or more eligibles, and it is the bounden duty of the Government, and also that of hon. members, to see that these men are made to do their duty, and that occupations are found for those who have returned. So far as I am con-

cerned, I want to assure Ministers that I am prepared to give them all my help, and my business experience is at their disposal, providing I am given a fair and reasonable opportunity of expressing my views, and I am at the same time quite prepared to abide the decision of the House, but I am not prepared to blindly accept whatever any Minister may choose to decide upon by himself alone. If Ministers are still going to adhere to the principle of propounding their own ideas and schemes and issue or confide them to members through the channel of the press, without giving hon. members of this House an opportunity of expressing an opinion or vote upon them, where does the necessity for 40 odd members at £300 per annum come in? It has been said that ordinary business methods do not apply to the Government, and that they have special ways of doing things. I quite agree that the Government have special ways of doing things, but it is almost impossible to get information under these special ways from heads of departments, particularly in regard to the finances. By altering these antediluvian methods and having an up-to-date system instituted, it would mean that the financial figures as placed before us at various times would be more clearly understood by the House. I am of opinion that thoroughly practical men should be chosen in various districts who have a true conception of the settlers' requirements in sheep breeding, cereal growing, orchard work, dairying, etc., who would act as Government advisers and who would classify and report upon the land available and also its adaptability for the several purposes and all within a 12-mile radius of existing railways. I feel sure it would not be an impossible proposition to select and appoint permanent Boards in each separate district of residents who would help and advise settlers until they became acquainted with the conditions under which they would have to work and live and these services would be carried out voluntarily. For I am convinced the man on the land is only too anxious to render whatever help he can to the men who have fought and returned from the firing line. In this respect, I hope Ministers will be able to bring the information before the House in such a way that there will be no necessity for members to go to the heads of departments, and that we shall have at various times a systematised statement. This would give Ministers more control over the heads of the departments, and it would give members greater interest in the actual operations and work of the Government. The working of the finances of the various departments could then be reviewed periodically.

The Minister for Works: Are you going to set the permanent heads of the departments against Ministers, because that would be the effect of it?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I know that alterations will have to be made, and I do not necessarily say that Ministers should come into conflict with the heads of the departments. I am pleading that information should be placed before the House in such a manner

that it can be understood, instead of being in the guise of merely approximate figures, compiled in such a manner that even professional men versed in the latest methods of accountancy would fail to understand it. I venture to say that, in many instances, even the Minister placing such figures before the House is not aware of the real position. At a later stage I will deal more fully with this. It is absolutely imperative in all departments that the antedeluvian methods in vogue for so long shall be altered and some up-to-date system adopted. I sincerely hope that Ministers will bring down Estimates which will give details as to how the money has already been spent, and that, in future, the Estimates will be submitted to the House before the greater portion of the money has been spent. With reference to the engagement of certain public servants, we have a striking example of the extraordinary methods adopted by the Government. I refer to the engagement of the late Fruit Commissioner. I am sorry to have to do this, but we have here an authentic case. The gentleman himself has furnished us with the information, and we may take it that the details are correct. The engagement of the late Fruit Commissioner was made on the following conditions:—1, The position was to be a permanent one. 2, Subject to the Minister for Agriculture only. 3, He was to be permitted to own an orchard and farm property, in addition to carrying on his duties to the State. 4, All expenses of himself, wife and family and furniture were to be paid by the Government. Assuming these conditions to be correct, I venture to remark that no business firm in the State would have engaged any servant, no matter what his qualification were, upon such terms and conditions. It only goes to show the looseness of the system which permits such unbusiness-like arrangements to be made. Notwithstanding that he was to be paid £750 a year, he was to be permitted to own a farm and to farm it. Yet, in the case of a low-wage man on the railways, if his wife starts a little store, he is dismissed. I say the conditions under which the late Fruit Commissioner was engaged would not be tolerated by any business firm in Australia. I know that this is an isolated case, and I trust that no State employees will be engaged on like conditions in the future.

Mr. O'Loughlin: Was there not an object in permitting him to own an orchard?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: He was permitted to own it and work it. In reference to the State trading concerns, although on principle I am opposed to the Government competing with its own taxpayers, yet we have at present a number of State enterprises, and my previous remarks apply to these. I hope the Minister in charge of these trading concerns will bring them up to date and put them on a business footing. Although at present it is impossible to say whether or not they could be sold, the time is not far distant when some of them will be disposed of. If they are put on a better footing, it will be easier to dispose of them at a satisfactory figure. I am not prepared to sup-

port any Government who might propose to increase these State trading concerns. Quite recently we had an instance in which the State Implement Works quoted for some meters, although the works had no machinery available for making them, and no data as to costing to go upon, as against two firms who had installed machinery for this purpose.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: And who wanted to rob the State of 7s. 6d. per meter.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: It has been claimed by the advocates of the State Trading Concerns that the main reason for their establishment was to cheapen living in Western Australia. One cannot but give credit for that desire. But what do we find? It was well known to the Government that, last year, we had an abnormally heavy fruit crop. The State Sawmills' manager must have been aware of the large quantity of fruit cases to be used, and at the beginning of the season fruit cases were quoted 8s. 8d. at Mount Barker. Presently it was announced from the State Sawmills that there were no cases available, and for some considerable time orchardists suffered great losses in consequence, being unable to get cases at any price. Then came the edict from the State Sawmills that the cases could not be manufactured at 8s. 8d. and that the price in future would be 11s. The Fruitgrowers' Association could not afford to squabble over the difference, and straightway they forwarded their orders for cases.

The Minister for Works: You would not have fruit cases supplied at a loss?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: When we remember that these sawmills were established to cheapen prices, it is extraordinary to find that a large sawmilling concern close to the State Sawmills adopted the same price, namely, 11s., and that the price arranged by the State Sawmills for this year is identical with that of the other huge sawmilling concern. If we are to have the State sawmills bolstering up the price at the cost of the taxpayer, it is time somebody moved for an investigation. Notwithstanding that the price was raised from 8s. 8d. to 11s. we have the wonderful return of a profit on this enterprise of less than half per cent. on the capital employed. With reference to the State brickworks, the Minister in charge has stated that every brick being turned out at present represents a loss to the State.

Mr. Green: Nonsense. There was a profit of £800 for the last half year.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I hope the Minister will inform the House whether it is a fact that this loss as stated is correct, and if so whether he will have it rectified at the earliest possible moment. In respect of these State enterprises, I would draw attention to the fact that a great injustice is being done to private enterprise and a loss entailed upon the taxpayer through a clause in the Government contracts which stipulates that in all Government works the materials necessary must be procured from the State departments. Let me give hon. members one example which has occurred in my constituency: A little time ago it was decided to erect a bridge across the

river at Denmark. In the terms of the contract, it was specified that the timber must be purchased from the State mills at a price laid down by the department. The price of this timber delivered at Denmark railway station was £6 15s. per load, to which 3s. per load had to be added for cartage from the station to the bridge site. The manager of the local timber company at Denmark has informed me that his company would have delivered the same quantity and equal quality of timber at the bridge site at £4 5s. per load, and would have made a fair profit at that figure. This means that for the purpose of bolstering up the State sawmills the Public Works Department had to pay on a contract of a few hundred pounds no less a sum than £132 10s. more than would have been the case had local and private enterprise been given a fair deal in the matter.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: How long ago was that?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I cannot say, but I can assure the hon. member that the facts are correct. And yet, with all such unequal advantages, the trading department of the State cannot even make ends meet. Under such conditions is it any wonder that one section of the community is crying out against the other, and confidence becomes shaken? No wonder the deficit has mounted up if the public works of the State have had to carry the burden of these ill-conceived, ill-managed trading concerns, which have been and are throttling the competitive industries of the State by such unsound and unfair methods as I have described. It is not my intention, at this stage, to criticise the Education Department of the State, but there are one or two points I should like to refer to. At the present time I believe it is customary to admit very young children into the primary schools, even mere babies of three years of age. The schools of the State should not be made public nurseries. The teachers' services can surely be more profitably made use of than by teaching babies of such tender years. Surely children of five and six years are quite young enough for the commencement of school days. I think that country district schools, particularly, should include in their curriculum a course of training adaptable to the various primary industries associated with the particular district, and that the principles of agriculture should be inculcated into the minds of the children in such a way as to make them of greater usefulness to their parents, and at the same time give them an interest in their surroundings which may be the means of keeping them from overcrowding our cities and towns. This would mean that the sons and daughters of the farmers would have their training in the particular occupation that is carried on in the district, be the means of keeping them in the district and also of helping their fathers, as well as preventing them from migrating to the city as they do in so many instances now. I hope that where a State farm is established due advantage will be taken of the fact, and that, if possible, weekly lessons will be given to the scholars in the district. With reference to the taxation questions, I understand the Government

are endeavouring to get the State and the Federal Taxation Departments combined under one control. I am sure every member in this Chamber will be only too pleased to do his best to have this desirable amalgamation carried out.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That has been tried for some time.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I hope these departments will be governed under one system, and that this system will be clearly defined. Taxpayers will then have an opportunity of making direct appeals as to their assessments, without having to go to the Court, and I am convinced that in this respect a saving can be effected. A saving could also be effected if taxpayers were permitted to make out returns on their own paper. The forms which are issued by the departments now are so complicated and intricate that it requires a professional man to fill them up in many instances, and this constitutes a double burden upon the taxpayer. In many cases the cost of these services amounts to more than the actual tax itself. I again congratulate the Colonial Treasurer upon the explicit information that he gave recently, with reference to the State finances and his attempts at economies. I hope that every Minister will give to this House the same sort of information, and will go through his departments, try to effect economies, and notify the House accordingly. We must all hope during these strenuous times that Ministers will rigidly adhere to the expenditure that is actually passed by Parliament. If Ministers wish to retain the confidence of the House, at least we should be given an opportunity of voting for or against these various amounts. I would like to draw the attention of the House to the report of the Auditor General. This report has been before members every year, I understand, but I have not heard that very much notice has been taken of it. There are one or two instances which I would like to quote, and which I think members should take serious notice of. Under the heading of "Works and Industries," the Auditor General says—

"The direct collections by Works officers were banked at monthly (or longer) intervals, in lieu of weekly, as directed by the Treasurer."

If these moneys are held by Government officials, where are they held, and who keeps them? What individual in the public service has the right to hold Government money for a month or longer?

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Where are these officers, in what part of the State are they employed?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Although we are taxed so that we have scarcely any money to spend on production, yet we have the Auditor General telling us in his report for 1916 that we have officers of the Public Service holding Government money for a month or longer. Should we permit these things to go on and take no action when the matter has been brought before us by the Auditor General? We should take action. With reference to the State sawmills, the Auditor General says—

"Although requested, no wages sheets have been supplied for an amount of £1,045 11s. 1d., stated to have been disbursed." That is another glaring instance of the way money is being handled. This money is supposed to have been expended, but there are no vouchers for it.

Mr. O'Loghlen: What is the explanation of the department?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: What would become of a private firm if it could not produce its vouchers for wages? If the Government can insist upon local enterprises doing their business in a certain way, they should insist upon their own employees doing so also.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: He has signed the account as being correct.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: It appears that there are some funny things going on in connection with the State sawmills. I have yet to learn from the Minister for Lands, who has been dealing with this particular matter, or from the Minister for Works, or any other member of the Government, that it is possible in a sawmill to make cases out of fruit trees. We have, however, the glaring instance of an expenditure for fruit trees at the State sawmills amounting to £46 15s. 9d., and of this amount being charged to the vote for "Working expenses, etcetera." Who authorised the planting of this orchard at the State sawmills? Was it for the manager, or was it planted for the then Government? The statement still stands that the taxpayer of Western Australia had to pay £46 odd for fruit trees at the State sawmills. As an experienced orchardist I must say that the purchase of the trees forms a very small part of the cost of production of fruit, because the clearing of the land to receive the trees would probably run into considerably more. I have no doubt we should be surprised if we had before us the whole cost of this orchard. I should very much like to know who authorised this.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Whoever did so did the right thing. It is a lovely orchard.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I should like to make another commentary upon this particular department. The Auditor General says—

"Although requested, the necessary information to enable a check to be made has not been supplied in regard to an advance of £80 paid to the manager of the sawmills for travelling expenses, when visiting the Eastern States of the Commonwealth."

Hon. W. C. Angwin: On business.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Whether that money was duly authorised or not to enable this gentleman to go to the Eastern States on business, who had the right to pay the money, and why is there no check upon it? With regard to Stores suspense, the Auditor General says—

"The Suspense Stores on hand at 30th June, 1916, according to the Treasury books, were: Government stores, £184,461 19s. 10d.; Railway stores, £320,571 1s. 7d. These have been purchased without Parliamentary authority with money obtained from the public account and not charged

to any of the three funds, namely, Revenue, Loan, or Trust."

In 1916 we had half a million of the taxpayers' money spent without the authorisation of Parliament, and we have a statement that as it is a Suspense Account it cannot appear in the balance sheet. Notwithstanding that these things occurred in 1916, I have yet to learn that they have been stopped since. I bring these matters before the House with an object which I hope hon. members will agree to at a later period. I also notice, in reference to railway stores, that the Auditor General states that stock is only taken once in every three years. Is it any wonder that the railways do not pay, and that we have had placed before us a pending deficit for this year? Another item in connection with the Auditor General's report is that the Stores Suspense Account was charged with an amount of £7,126 16s. 6d. for payments made by the Agent General, but no vouchers have been supplied supporting the charge. If such forms did not come to hand in an ordinary commercial business no money would pass at all, and no law could insist upon money passing. And yet we have the sum of £7,000 passed in as paid, but a considerable time after we have the astounding statement that no vouchers have been produced with regard to it.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Auditor General says that no vouchers have yet been produced. It takes a long time to get them here in these days. Be honest in your remarks.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I can only read to hon. members what the Auditor General says, and cannot read what is in the hon. member's imagination.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Read what is there.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I have read the statement made by the Auditor General.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: He used the word "yet."

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I give the Auditor General credit for knowing what he is talking about.

Hon. T. Walker: Why do you not read what he says?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: With regard to the Treasury expenditure, the Auditor General says—

"Treasury expenditure return No. 5 also shows 'Excess expenditure' £560 17s. 1d. No excess, however, appears in any book of account in the Treasury."

What has become of that money, and how does that entry come in? The House, I think, will agree with me that I have gone far enough in this matter, because I see I am irritating hon. members opposite.

Mr. Munsie: No, not in the least.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: It is necessary, in my opinion, that more assistance should be given to the Auditor General to enable him to carry out in a proper manner the complete supervision of the accounts of the State.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: We want a new Auditor General.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I think the Auditor General's remarks are so clear and explicit that it would be in the best interests of the

country if the Government would appoint a committee of members of the House to go into the whole of his statements and present a report to the House, and ask the House to give immediate effect to the finding. I hope that if no other plea I have made this afternoon is agreed to, that this particular plea will be given effect to. If these leakages—and I use the word with all due respect—are stopped, and the finances of the State are properly managed, if large sums of money are not paid away without authority, and if goods which are unnecessary are not purchased, the Treasurer should not be obliged to impose additional taxation upon an already overburdened State. If we look into all these matters, we will find that a considerable amount is involved, and we are not in a position to do what we used to do in better days.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: These are not leakages, but just payments.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I hope the Government will appoint such a committee as I have suggested, to go into the Auditor General's report for 1916. With respect to economy, I would draw attention to the Perth Public Library and Museum, the cost of which institution for the year 1916 amounted to the somewhat surprising total of £6,469. During the currency of the war, I maintain, with all due respect to metropolitan members, such an institution should be closed, and a returned soldier placed in charge of it during the currency of the war, when at least £5,000 of the taxpayers' money would be saved annually. In regard to the Stamp Act, the Government have recently been imposing hardships on some City firms by causing them to be fined for issuing unstamped interim receipts, although the official stamped receipts were issued on the same day or on the following day. At the same time there are firms in Western Australia who issue hundreds of cheques weekly without paying the 1d. stamp duty on one of them; they simply have endorsed cheques paid through the bank. If the Taxation Department will look up those firms, they will find that since the passing of the last Stamp Act the revenue of the State has suffered to a considerable extent. With reference to vermin boards, it appears that in most localities the endeavour is to make the residents find the money required to destroy vermin. From the Auditor General's report, however, I find that the settlers in the Gascoyne district have been more favourably treated.

Hon. P. Collier: You are up against another financial expert now. You had better be careful.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: The balance owing by the Gascoyne Vermin Board on the 30th June last amounted to £70,849 3s. 1d. Whilst I am prepared to believe that the Government who made the arrangement which has resulted in this debit were actuated by the highest ideals, I consider the present Government should see that the amount advanced is repaid with interest. The interest outstanding at the end of 1916 amounted to no less than £18,763 3s. 1d.

Hon. P. Collier: You have no hope of squeezing that out of those squatters.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: When the Government are imposing on other localities the necessity for rating themselves in connection with vermin destruction, they should at least see that the Gascoyne people pay up their back dues. A cheque for £18,000 or £19,000 would be very acceptable to the Government just now.

Mr. Munsie: We are right with you there.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: As for the Industries Assistance Board, from my own knowledge I can state that chaos reigns in the affairs of the board. I could give dozens of instances where it has been found impossible to obtain the exact position of a farmer under the board; and it is for the benefit of farmers that the board exists. At present the board are a political body. The affairs of the board should be conducted through what we regard as the standard of administration in Western Australia—the Agricultural Bank. The board are really a new institution.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: It was supposed to be merely a temporary affair.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: The board being a new institution, it was only natural that the officers could not possibly know the full ins and outs of the position of all the farmers, could not possibly know who was worthy of assistance, and who was not. And yet, next door to the board's offices, there is a permanent staff thoroughly conversant with the position of individual farmers. I refer, of course, to the Agricultural Bank. The bank have their inspectors out constantly, and know the position of every farmer in Western Australia. Instead of making use of the reliable information of that institution, the Government start a new board. I say unhesitatingly that complete chaos reigns in the affairs of the board. I hope the Government, who in many instances are trying to effect economies, will amalgamate, if I may use the word, the Industries Assistance Board with the Agricultural Bank, when, I am sure, favourable results will accrue not only to our farmers but to the State. I do not wish to go into the question of the wheat marketing scheme, but I must refer to one phase of it. We have been given to understand that one of the objects the Government had in view this season was to save expense to the farmer. For that reason they did not want undue competition at the various centres. At each centre there was to be only one agent to receive wheat on behalf of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. But what is happening? I say at once that what is occurring is the fault of the House. That is the peculiar aspect of the matter. In Tambellup, for example, there is a representative of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., and one man whom I may call a tally clerk. They have been at Tambellup for a fortnight, and during that time only one load of wheat has come in. A further surprising feature is that there are also stationed at Tambellup two Government men connected with the wheat scheme—whom I may call bosses, and one whom I may call the tally clerk. I would like to learn from the Government what these three men are doing at Tambellup, and who is paying them? One can only

surmise that the Government do not trust the Westralian Farmers Ltd.

Member: In that they may be showing good judgment.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: If the farmer is to be saddled with the expense of these three extra men, the result will be that the taxpayer will be called upon to pay the difference between the sale price of the wheat and the unnecessary expenses which the Government are incurring. Turning now to the subject of Royal Commissions, I am uncompromisingly opposed to them, and I hope the Government will take the very firmest stand in putting a stop to their unnecessary operations, and to the piling up of uncalled-for expenditure on the over-burdened taxpayer. We have gleaned from the Press that the Royal Commission on Agriculture have offered some good suggestions; but there are ways and means of obtaining those suggestions more simply and more cheaply. I have yet to learn of any benefit which has accrued to the State of Western Australia directly from a Royal Commission. The only result up to date has been that the taxpayer has had to pay enormous sums for the cost of these Royal Commissions. I understand that the cost to date of the Royal Commission on Agriculture amounts to something over £4,000. The Royal Commission on the Cost of Living are absolutely making themselves the laughing stock of people who know anything of the subject. For some time past lengthy reports of that body's proceedings have been published in the Press, and the Premier has informed the House that the cost of the Commission to date was £182. It means that for the purpose of advertising the boot trade of Western Australia the Government have saddled the taxpayer with the expense of £182. What other result has accrued? Are we getting our boots any cheaper to-day?

Mr. Lutey: How does the cost of the Royal Commission on the Cost of Living compare with the cost of some other Royal Commissions?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: The question naturally arises, if it costs £182 to find out nothing about boots in this State, what is it going to cost to find out nothing in a similar way about all the other commodities? Recently the Royal Commission have been simply wasting their time. I am surprised that the members of the Commission did not know before they started their investigations that the Federal Government are operating the produce of Australia, and more particularly butter, and that the prices for both buying and selling are assessed by the Federal Government.

Mr. Lutey: The merchants ignore those prices.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: No matter what the findings of the State Royal Commission may be, they can have no effect.

Hon. P. Collier: They have had the effect of proving to the people of Western Australia that the profiteer is abroad amongst them.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I sincerely hope the Government will have those Commissions

stopped forthwith. I make the suggestion that if inquiries of this nature are necessary—and probably it may be necessary from time to time to undertake these investigations—why should not the Government secure the services of members of Parliament for the purpose?

Mr. Jones: And pay them. Good!

Mr. H. ROBINSON: We are paid to do our duty, and why should not the Government call on us to do this work?

Hon. P. Collier: We have made such a mess of our duties in the past, that our activities ought to be restricted.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: In reply to that interjection, I take it that the members of Royal Commissions would not necessarily be chosen from the side on which the hon. member interjecting sits, but that the personnel of Royal Commissions would be judiciously selected from both sides of the House. Further, the personnel need not necessarily be restricted to members of Parliament, for I feel sure that there are in Western Australia commercial men who would offer their services for such a purpose gratuitously.

Mr. Munsie: Of course they would, in order to protect their own interests.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: These commercial men would know something of the subjects which the Royal Commissions are supposed to investigate.

Mr. Lutey: They would frame nice reports.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Do you question the ability of the members of the Royal Commission on the Cost of Living?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Yes, undoubtedly.

Hon. P. Collier: In what way?

Mr. O'Loughlen: No matter what the report of the Commission may be, I say you will not find three better men in the country.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: As regards local borrowing for local production, I hope the Government will be able to carry out their scheme, which I feel sure will prove of great benefit to the State. If confidence is to be quickly restored in Western Australia, it will be only through determined action by the Government in advancing money to assist production. Let the Government not merely talk about this, but let them put their principles into practice. The sooner the Government put their plan into operation, the better it will be for Western Australia. I am convinced that the proposal to start butter and bacon factories will receive support from both sides of the House: but I trust the Government will judiciously go into the details of the various schemes before placing at the disposal of every town in the State a butter and bacon factory. Provided these conditions are observed by the Government, it will not be long before Western Australia will be producing more than her requirements in both butter and bacon. Here let me mention the Denmark butter and bacon factory. I do not wish to comment on what has been stated in the Press by the Honorary Minister (Mr. Baxter); but I consider that credit is due to the late Commissioner for the South-West, Mr. Connor, for arranging the alteration of the original scheme and converting the farm into a butter and bacon factory. That factory has been the means of en-

abling a number of Denmark settlers to turn the corner. As we know, the Denmark settlers have had a most trying time from the inception of the settlement. They were wrongly placed on the land, and the land was wrongly priced. Not until Mr. Connor initiated the butter and bacon factory at Denmark was there a reasonable ray of hope for those settlers. Although the facilities at the factory are somewhat behind the times, yet its operations for the last 12 months, including working expenses for a full year but sales for only eight months, showed a profit. The profit was for only eight months because during the summer months they are unable to do anything. The proposition before the Government at the present time is that they should increase the works to enable the settlers there to continue to make a living for the full twelve months. I have had the honour of placing before the Ministry particulars in this respect, and I sincerely hope the Government will give the matter full consideration and that it will not be long before they decide on the extension of a very important asset. This will help the farmers in the vicinity of Denmark, and if it is not done, there will be no living for the 300 families in the vicinity of that place. If the Government will increase the facilities in the direction I have suggested we shall have a flourishing example in that part of the State of what is badly wanted in Western Australia.

Mr. O'Loghlen: It would be a trading concern then.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: If the Government will establish an up-to-date factory there, within two or three years the settlers of Denmark will be able to take it over as a co-operative concern. I know nothing better than that at the present time, and if the Government are sincere, they can do in this part of the State what they are always declaring it is their intention to do. With reference to the Albany wool stores, much has been said about them, and while I do not desire to go into the pros and cons of this question, I would like to point out that the greater part of the newspaper controversy which has taken place on the matter has not been altogether true. If the Government will provide in these stores for the freezing of fat lambs and pigs, with established abattoirs in close proximity, the works will be conducted with success. So far as the returned soldiers are concerned, there are already in this State about 2,000, and I think it is the duty of the Minister in charge of repatriation to close himself up in his office and seek the assistance of the most practical men. There is another matter that I would like to bring under the notice of the House and it is that of the Torbay drainage scheme. As hon. members know, the Government have spent over £12,000 on this scheme of drainage which was supposed to take the water off the settlers' properties and enable them to farm their various holdings. Before the scheme was started it used to cost £20 or £30 a year to clear the bar. Since the Government have spent £12,000 there, and have ruined nearly every settler in the district, it costs £150 a year to clear the bar, and yet we have it from the Government that the scheme has proved a success. When

I tell hon. members that when the scheme was first started there were 70 settlers in the vicinity of it working 430 acres, and that to-day there are only 19 settlers working 60 acres, it will be admitted that the figures speak for themselves. I hope that Government, at no matter what cost, will get expert advice in the direction of rectifying what at the present time is a most unsatisfactory drain. I understand that in the early stages this scheme was passed by the Engineer-in-Chief, and that being so, that officer could only state that the scheme at the present time was a success, but the Government last week sent another engineer down there to try to get the settlers to take it over. At the same time the Engineer-in-Chief was looking over the scheme to see whether alterations could be made. Is it fair to the settlers of any district that the Government should try and make them accept something which they declared was good, and at the same time make inquiries in the direction of effecting alterations. Two years ago the estimated losses to the settlers in the district totalled over £70,000, and if we add to that railway freight, we can form an idea of what the State has also lost. I hope the Government will do something to rectify what is an unsatisfactory scheme from beginning to end. Undoubtedly the people there are worse off to-day than they were before the Government even thought of a drainage scheme. With regard to the railways of the State, I hope the Government will appoint a Commission to go into the question of administration generally. It appears evident that the concern is too big for one man to control, no matter how capable that man may be. The Commission I would suggest should be a Commission of members of Parliament. The present Commissioner of Railways, who has not been in good health for some time to come, has too much to shoulder with the management of the railways and the tramways. There should be sectioning of the departments in the future so that statements of revenue and expenditure for the various sections might be shown.

Mr. O'Loghlen: We have asked for them for 10 years past.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Whenever we ask for a return dealing with a certain section with the object of getting improvements effected along that section, we receive a reply that the railways generally are not paying and that consequently the request cannot be agreed to. I will give an instance which will prove that something should be done. Recently the scheduled time of the Denmark express has been altered by the addition to it of 20 minutes, so that the produce picked up might catch the train at Kalgoorlie. I had the honour of travelling on the first train under the altered arrangements. We left Torbay Junction at 10 minutes to one and arrived at Albany, a distance of 9 miles, at 2 o'clock. It took an hour and 10 minutes to do that journey. Surely that is not a record that anyone should be proud of. With reference to decentralisation, this has been the declared policy of Government after Government, and one is glad to know that some attempt has been made to carry out the principle in one or two instances. I am convinced that as the Greater

Perth scheme is almost completed, it would be in the best interests of the State to municipalise the tramways, the ferries, and sewerage. By bringing these concerns under local government control, the taxpayer would benefit considerably and it would be possible to locate the losses. The municipality would be able to borrow more money on the tramways than the Government can do at the present time, and the result would be more extensions and generally a better service. The same applies to the ferries and the sewerage system. With reference to Parliamentary hours, I hope that the Government will consider the advisableness of beginning the afternoon sitting at 3 o'clock and on one day a week, preferably Thursday, starting the sitting at 10 o'clock in the morning. The constituents of the State have sent hon. members to represent them here at the present time more seriously than has ever been done in connection with any other Parliament. We have been sent here to endeavour to straighten out the finances, and if we are to attempt to do that, we must come here willing to work and to do our duty in longer periods than the Government have arranged for us. Moreover, it is unfair to ask country members to come up as has been done this week, to attend to the work of Parliament for only two afternoons and two evenings. It would be decidedly preferable in the interests of better debating if we were to sit in the afternoons and early in the evening rather than into the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning. I sincerely trust that the Government will pay some attention to the suggestions I have made with regard to returned soldiers and that the measures which will be submitted will be in the direction of giving to these men that help to which they are entitled and also in the direction of altering the chaotic state of the finances.

Mr. PILKINGTON (Perth) [6.10]: As the last speaker has observed, this Parliament has been sent back in the hope that it will be able to do something towards straightening out the finances of the State. It appears to me that in the present condition of affairs, there is one matter paramount above all others which it is the duty of the Government and this Parliament to deal with; I mean that of the State's finances. A very few figures with which perhaps hon. members are familiar, are sufficient to show both the condition of the finances and the proposals which, up to date, the Government have made for the purpose of meeting the present difficulties. Stating those figures very shortly, they are as follows:—The deficit for the last financial year was £700,000. The deficit for the current financial year in the absence of any remedial measures, is estimated by the Treasurer at £1,057,000. If one wishes to test the value of that estimate by the events of the last six months, one can easily do so. The Treasurer estimated the deficit for the first five months of the current financial year at the sum of £400,000. In fact the deficit for that period was £494,000, exceeding the estimate by nearly £100,000. On the other

hand, as has been mentioned before this afternoon, there was a surplus in December of £26,000, leaving a deficit for the whole of the half year just ended of £457,000, indicating, I think, that the Treasurer's estimate was fairly accurate and that in the absence of remedial measures, the deficit for the present financial year may be expected to be £1,057,000 as estimated. The importance of these figures is this—it is an increase in the annual deficit of 50 per cent. in the absence of remedial measures. It means that in the absence of remedial measures the annual deficit jumps from £2 to £3: that is for every £2 of the deficit last year, there is £3 this year. I have not the faintest notion of what the increase may be next year, but that we may expect an increase, and a large increase, is beyond doubt.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. PILKINGTON: Before tea I was pointing out the enormous increase in the annual deficit between last year and the present financial year, an increase amounting to 50 per cent. I would ask the attention of hon. members to another view of the finances. The total deficit on the 31st December, 1917, amounted to the sum of £2,518,000. If hon. members will refer to the last issue of the Loan Account, the last issue which I have seen, it will be noticed that the total amount which is shown as due from the Treasurer is the sum of £1,822,000. That has, I take it, been all spent and is part of the deficit with which we are now faced. The whole of the loan money was spent and it became necessary to draw upon another account, and the expenditure of trust moneys then began. The trust moneys spent amounted to £695,000, making the total of £2,518,000. These figures are significant and cause us to look with some anxiety to the remedies which the Government have up to date proposed. It may be the Government have remedies which it is proposed to put forward and of which we know nothing, but I am speaking of the remedies which the Government have up to date made public. Those remedies were stated in the policy speech of the Premier and were as follows:—In the first place the Government propose the suspension of the sinking fund, which will give them a sum of £300,000 per annum. Next they propose that there shall be certain economies effected which they estimate at a sum of £100,000 per annum. Next, certain taxation was suggested, an increased annual income tax which would give another £160,000. Then there was to be an increased dividend duty tax which would give £27,000, and an increase in the stamp duties and shipping, and insurance company taxation, which was to give £25,000 per annum, and a tax on what was called the sporting community, which was estimated to return £28,000; making a total of £640,000 by these remedial measures. But we were told at the same time that these remedial measures would only be applicable to half the year. Therefore, they would only get one-half that sum to set against the deficit of this year, namely, £320,000, of which £150,000 is represented by