

Legislative Assembly.

Thursday, 5th December, 1946.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 7.30 p.m., and read prayers.

QUESTIONS.

METROPOLITAN PASSENGER TRANSPORT.

As to Report of Committee.

Mr. McDONALD asked the Minister for Railways:

1, Has the committee consisting of the Commissioner of Railways (Mr. J. A. Ellis), the Under Treasurer (Mr. A. J. Reid) and the then Chairman of the Transport Board (Mr. R. L. Millen), which was appointed last year to investigate transport matters in the metropolitan area, and to report to the Government on the advisability of setting up an authority for the co-ordinated control and management of metropolitan passenger transport, presented its report, and if so, on what date?

2, Will he lay the report upon the Table of the House?

The MINISTER replied:

1 and 2, The report, which was purely departmental for the guidance of the Government, is under consideration. A much wider inquiry is planned for all transport matters on a State-wide basis which will be in the nature of a Royal Commission to include members of Parliament.

SILICOSIS.

As to Aluminium Therapy Treatment.

Mr. STYANTS asked the Minister for Mines:

1, Will he lay upon the Table of the House a copy of the report from Dr. W. E. George, of the Bureau of Medical Inspection, Broken Hill, N.S.W., re aluminium therapy treatment, submitted after his tour of inspection into this matter in Canada and America?

2, In view of Dr. George's recommendation that this treatment be given only on a voluntary basis, what is the intention of the Department of Mines re its introduction into the metalliferous mines in this State?

The MINISTER replied:

1, Yes.

2, Dr. George's recommendations have been considered by the Mines Department and the Kalgoorlie Laboratory Medical Officers. The latter suggest that from a medical viewpoint it would be very desirable that Dr. George visit Kalgoorlie to examine conditions on the spot and discuss his recommendations with them and also with other representatives of the Department of Mines and the mining industry.

As "Aluminium Therapy" is a patent the rights of use of which are only permitted providing the patentees are satisfied with its possibilities of success and methods of installation and, as Dr. George has been nominated by the patentee, McIntyre Research Ltd., as its authority in Australia, it is considered that such a visit is now essential, and accordingly a letter has been despatched to the New South Wales Government asking if his visit can be agreed to and expedited.

Following such visit, it is hoped to finalise the matter of the introduction of the therapy in this State.

COLLIE COAL.

As to Prices, Treatment, Etc.

Mr. STYANTS asked the Minister for Railways:

1, Because of the large and increasing quantities of coal being supplied from the Wallsend "open cut," will means be provided, at an early date, for the screening and picking of this coal intended for locomotive use?

2, Has a test been made to ascertain the percentage of non-inflammable matter contained in the "mixture" being supplied as coal from this source?

3, If so, what are the respective test results obtained when compared with coal received from the Stockton, Cardiff and Proprietary mines, respectively?

4, What is the price being paid for the Wallsend "open cut" coal compared with coals from other mines on the Collie coal-field?

The MINISTER replied:

1, The taking of unscreened Wallsend coal for locomotive use is a temporary measure designed to increase production to tide the Railways over the four weeks ending 18th January, 1947, of the miners' annual holidays. If the need for additional coal from Wallsend for locomotive purposes continues after that date, the screening and picking of it will be taken up with the suppliers.

2, No.

3, Answered by No. 2.

4, Negotiations regarding price are proceeding. Tentatively and subject to adjustment, the same price is being paid for Wallsend coal as for other coal supplied by Amalgamated Collieries Ltd.

SOUTH-WEST BUS SERVICE.

As to Commencement.

Mr. WILLMOTT asked the Minister for Railways:

1, When can the travelling public expect the bus service to commence operations between Busselton, Margaret River, Augusta and Flinders Bay?

2, How many days' service per week will be operated?

The MINISTER replied:

1, As soon as buses are available. Chassis have been ordered and delivery is expected early in 1947.

2, Timetables are at present under consideration but finality regarding the service to be operated has not yet been reached.

BILLS (3)—FIRST READING.

1, Road Closure.

2, Reserves.

Introduced by the Minister for Lands.

3, State (Western Australian) Alunite Industry.

Introduced by the Minister for Industrial Development.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motions by Mr. Cross, leave of absence for two weeks granted to Mr. Holman (Forrest) and Hon. P. Collier (Boulder) on the ground of ill health.

BILL—TIMBER INDUSTRY REGULATION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 3rd December.

MR. McDONALD (West Perth) [7.38]: As the Minister explained, under the Timber Industry Regulation Act there is power to appoint a workmen's inspector, or inspectors, in connection with the sawmilling trade in the country. That has been done and I gathered, from the Minister's speech when introducing the Bill, that there is one workmen's inspector, but I am not sure of that. The inspector now operating under the Act is concerned with the sawmills and milling operations in the country areas, and has no authority or power, by legislation or otherwise, to concern himself with the timber yards in the metropolitan area.

The Minister for Labour: He is entitled to look at one.

Mr. McDONALD: Yes, I must make that exception because the Minister pointed out that one timber yard in the metropolitan area dealt with logs and, as a result, came under the authority of the workmen's inspector under the Timber Industry Regulation Act. In connection with the metropolitan timberyards there is a separate industrial union. Those engaged in the sawmilling industry as employees in the country have their own sawmilling employees' union. At present with regard to the metropolitan timberyards the safety and the health of the employees are dealt with under two Acts—the Factories and Shops Act, because the timberyards are factories within the meaning of that Act and are therefore subject to inspection by the inspectors operating under that Act, and, secondly, the Inspection of Machinery Act

of 1921 in regard to machinery of a description that brings them within the purview of that Act.

It is now proposed by the Bill that the workmen's inspector who is at present operating under the authority of the Timber Industry Regulation Act shall have power to exercise his functions in relation to the timberyards in the metropolitan area. The suggestion of the Minister in support of the Bill was that inspectors under the Factories and Shops Act were not so conversant with sawmilling operations in certain of their aspects as would be the workmen's inspector operating in connection with the sawmills in the country areas. I feel after an examination of the Bill that it is not necessary; in fact, there are certain disadvantages, which I shall proceed to mention and give the reasons that have induced me to arrive at that conclusion. The Minister said that the workmen's inspector who is now engaged in connection with country sawmills would undertake, in addition to his present duties, the inspection of metropolitan timberyards and claimed that no additional inspectors would need to be appointed if this Bill became law. I think the Minister is unduly optimistic in that respect.

The mere description of the additional duties which the inspector who is now operating in the country will have to undertake in connection with the metropolitan timberyards, leads one to believe that unless he is very much under-engaged in the country, he cannot cope with the additional tasks he will have to carry out under the Bill. I say that because, as the Minister explained to the House, there are 1,500 employees in the metropolitan area engaged in association with the timberyards and joinery works, and the Bill proposes that the workmen's inspector from the country shall have inspectorial duties in connection with both the yards and the joinery works in the metropolitan area. It is unduly optimistic to think that the workmen's inspector at present, we may assume, reasonably busily engaged in the country, could undertake the inspection of establishments employing 1,500 men in the metropolitan area and still adequately cope with his duties in connection with the country sawmills. I think it will be found that, should the Bill become law, no great length

of time will elapse before additional workmen's inspectors will have to be employed, and that will mean an additional charge upon the revenues of the Government.

On the other hand, at the present time and should the law remain as it is today, the duty of inspecting timberyards and joinery works in the metropolitan area is discharged in the first place by inspectors under the Factories and Shops Act who are now doing the work and, secondly, by inspectors under the Inspection of Machinery Act who are obliged to inspect the machinery at least once a year. So it seems to me from the point of view of expense, which was mentioned as a reason in connection with the Bill now before the House, we would be more economical if we retained the present arrangement with regard to inspections under the Factories and Shops Act and the Inspection of Machinery Act by those officials who are now doing the work, and permitted them to continue doing so without any addition to their numbers.

Furthermore, from the point of view of efficiency, I cannot follow the suggestion that the workmen's inspector will be able to attend to the safety and health factors associated with the metropolitan woodyards and joinery works better than can the inspectors under the Factories and Shops Act. The latter inspectors are trained and experienced men, and are concerned particularly with all types of machinery and safety appliances proper for use in connection with such undertakings. Under the Factories and Shops Act they have most comprehensive authority. That measure sets out all kinds of matters as to which they are to concern themselves. For example, in addition to the safety of the machinery, which may happen to be installed in the works I have in mind, they have to concern themselves with looking into the danger of fires and the prevention of fires. They deal with accidents and inquiries regarding them, with dust and matters of that description which may affect the health or comfort of employees. They also deal with overcrowding so as to ensure ample space for the employees, with the lighting of premises, and they furthermore deal extensively with various kinds of amenities in the way of change-rooms, retiring places, meal-rooms and other matters that progressive factory legislation

requires should be provided in up-to-date factories.

By a comparison, therefore, of the two Acts—the Timber Industry Regulation Act and the Factories and Shops Act—it seems to me that inspectors under the Factories and Shops Act have a far wider range of authority and usefulness than is conferred upon inspectors under the Timber Industry Regulation Act. From the point of view of competence, which the Minister mentioned as a factor that is involved, I suggest that the expert inspectors of the Factories Department who are engaged every day in dealing with all kinds of factories and machinery, have a far wider experience and, in addition, far more expert knowledge of safety appliances than could be attributed to the workmen's inspector who is concerned with one class of machinery, namely, that associated with sawmilling and sawmilling operations.

I have already said that as a further safeguard at present existing under the Inspection of Machinery Act, the department has power to inspect machinery at least once a year to satisfy itself that the plant is in order and adequately protected to ensure the safety of the employees. The inspectors from the Machinery Department are particularly skilled men and well qualified to investigate matters of that description. From my examination of the Bill it seems not to be necessary; it seems that the necessary supervision of safety and health in the metropolitan timberyards and joinery works has been, and is being, catered for by two departments, which are entirely qualified at the present time by their personnel to undertake this class of work. In fact, they might be said to be qualified as well as or better than the workmen's inspector under the timber regulations, who is a man of limited experience regarding machinery, and very limited experience of other aspects which are covered by the much wider provisions of the Factories and Shops Act.

But there is a further aspect. It may be possible that the Minister intends that the inspectors under the Factories and Shops Act will continue to exercise a certain degree of supervision over timberyards and joinery works in the metropolitan area. But if we pass this Bill, what will happen is this: Those establishments then come under

three authorities; first of all, this week they may have the inspector from the Inspection of Machinery Department. He comes along and inspects the power-driven machinery, gives his directions and makes his report. The following week along may come the inspector under the Factories and Shops Act and he, under his jurisdiction, also is empowered to make recommendations and give his report. Then the following week along may come the workmen's inspector under the Timber Industry Regulation Act, and he goes over the establishments and again exercises authority.

While I believe in every possible precaution, I do suggest that by this Bill we are rather overdoing it. If we have these establishments under three authorities, there is more likely to be confusion and difficulty than an advantage from the ministrations and attentions of the representatives of three entirely different and separated departments. So I feel that the safety and health in these departments can be more adequately dealt with by continuing the control and inspection by the inspectors of the Factories Department and the Inspection of Machinery Department, as has been done in the past and is being done now. I do not quite know why the Bill should have been introduced.

It may be that the unions feel—and they have been the moving spirit in this matter I understand from the Minister's speech—that it is a matter over which they might have some extra authority, although there is a metropolitan union of the timberyard employees. But when there are at present two authorities dealing with the health and safety of the men—and I think adequately—it is not apparent to me why we should make a change, or bring from the country from time to time a workmen's inspector, no doubt fully employed in attending to his duties on the sawmills, and require him to undertake supervision over matters in the metropolitan area which other authorities are doing and are capable of doing. I feel that the position could be more safely and economically left as it is, and that the control of the joinery works and the timberyards, for safety and health—most necessary, most desirable, I agree—could be left with confidence in the hands of the factories inspector and the inspector from the Inspection of Machinery Department. For

that reason the Bill does not seem to me to be one that should commend itself to the House.

THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR (Hon. A. H. Panton—Leederville—in reply) [7.55]: Whilst one can agree with a great deal of what the member for West Perth has said, he overlooks one important fact. I have not suggested, so far as I know, that the factories inspectors are not doing their work. The fact remains, however, that they are not workmen's inspectors. The hon. member has mentioned the inspectors of the Inspection of Machinery Department, but they inspect mining machinery, and we have mining inspectors and workmen's inspectors in that industry. The same thing applies to the coalmines. There are coalmine inspectors and workmen's inspectors. Now, the same thing applies also to the timbermills. What we desire, and what the workers in this particular industry desire, is a workmen's inspector. I think it is becoming general now in large industries to appoint workmen's inspectors, who are elected by the men themselves. The men seem to have more faith in these inspectors than they have in inspectors appointed under the Factories and Shops Act, who must work within the Act and are subject to the Minister for the time being controlling that department. We have the alternative of bringing down a measure to amend the Factories and Shops Act. I admit, in order to appoint a workmen's inspector for the timberyards and joinery works.

Personally, I would like the proposal in the Bill to be given a trial. There are some 1,500 men engaged in the timber industry in a fairly concentrated area. I propose by the Bill to give those men an opportunity to try out a workmen's inspector who is conversant with mills and the duties of the men. I do not think there will be any duplication of inspections at all. As a matter of fact, if the measure proves successful there is no reason why all the metropolitan mills should not be brought under this particular measure, and then the inspectors could do all of the work at the mills, thus relieving the other inspectors. When introducing the Bill, I said, and I repeat, that factories, shops and industries are growing so fast that the inspectors of the Factories Department have a tremendous amount of

work to do; and if they could be relieved of this particular work it would be a great help to them.

In addition, industries are growing in the country. We have factories there and are continually receiving complaints that they are not being inspected. It would need an army of inspectors to travel throughout this great State of ours to inspect all the country factories. We do not want to do that. The difficulties anticipated by the member for West Perth I feel will not arise. The measure would make for contentment amongst the workers in this industry. I have no hesitation in saying that I think it will prove satisfactory. Both district and special inspectors will have the right under it to make inspections of timberyards and the Chief Inspector of Factories could be told that he could leave this work to them. I do not visualise all the troubles that the member for West Perth has mentioned. In fact, I think the measure will have the opposite effect.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee, etc.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

BILL—CANNING DISTRICT SANITARY SITE.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 27th November.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [8.3]: This Bill deals with the continued existence of the sanitary site established by the Perth City Council a short time ago somewhere near the Collier pine plantation. The old site was in Kent-street, in the Victoria Park district; but, because of the construction of a large school there, and the extension of housing in that area, the existence of the depot became undesirable and obnoxious to a large extent and, as a result, the officers of the Health Department took action to compel the Perth City Council to transfer the depot to a new site. On the advice of the officers of the department and of the Town Planning Commissioner, a new site was chosen near the Collier pine planta-

tion. I understand it cost the Perth City Council approximately £10,000 to establish the new depot. I also believe that the old depot was operated by a private individual under contract from the Perth City Council.

Mr. Cross: And still is.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I cannot be absolutely sure on that point, but my advice is that the new depot is conducted by the City Council itself. However, that is not very material to the aim of the Bill. This depot is necessary because of the comparatively large number of houses in portions of the Victoria Park and South Perth districts that still have to rely upon the outmoded pan system. That system is still in operation in those areas because it was not possible during the war for the properties in question to be connected to the metropolitan sewerage system. That was due to the fact that manpower and materials that normally would have been used for the purpose of connecting those properties were needed for war purposes.

Even since the war, it has been extremely difficult to obtain the skilled manpower and materials required to enable the properties to be connected in any great number. In that regard it must be remembered that a considerable number of new houses have been erected in different parts of the metropolitan area, and those new houses have had to be given facilities of this kind. Wherever it has been possible to connect the new properties to the sewerage system, that has been done. Consequently, most of the suitable labour and materials available have been used to give effective services to the new houses. The purpose of the Bill is to compel the City Council to abandon the use of the new depot from the 1st January, 1949—that is, two years from January of next year. I do not think Parliament would be justified at this stage in setting down a date on which the depot should cease operations, nor do I think that Parliament or anyone else is in a position at the moment to say that it will be possible in two years' time to do without this sanitary depot.

It is merely a matter of guesswork today whether it will be possible to do without the depot from January, 1949. My own opinion is that it will be necessary to continue the depot in operation for some period after that date. Therefore it seems unreasonable for Parliament to say to the City Council,

as it would say if this Bill becomes an Act, "You must continue to operate this depot for another two years, but at the end of that time you must not continue it for one minute longer." That is an unreasonable attitude and an entirely wrong position for Parliament to put the Perth City Council in. I agree with the member for Canning that no time should be lost in connecting to the sewerage system all those properties which today are served by this sanitary service and depot. Local authorities in the metropolitan area have legal power to compel landowners to connect their properties to the sewerage system. Because it is not possible under present conditions for that to be done with every property, local authorities in the metropolitan area do, I understand, compel any new houses constructed to instal a septic tank as against the pan system, if such new properties cannot be connected to the sewerage system.

I suggest that the Bill is premature. It states that in two years' time the City Council must cease to use this depot. What harm would there be in this Bill being defeated and Parliament looking at the position in 12 months' time? If Parliament were then satisfied that within 12 or 18 months, or two years from then everybody within the areas being served by the depot would have an opportunity of connecting his property to the sewerage system, it would be fair and right for Parliament to say to the City Council, "You may continue to operate this depot for 12 months, 18 months or two years from this time, and after that period has passed you must not continue to use the depot any longer." Therefore, on behalf of the Government, I oppose the Bill, for the reasons I have given. If, however, the Bill passes the second reading stage, I hope that, in Committee, the period of two years to be allowed to the Perth City Council will be increased by at least an additional 12 months.

Mr. OWEN: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and negatived.

MR. CROSS (Canning—in reply) [8.13]: The Minister stated that the local authorities are now compelling people to instal septic tanks. The Perth City Council did not do that at all. The people in their area were forced to instal septic tanks only as a result of the Bill I brought down last ses-

sion, and for no other reason. The Minister said it would be wise to postpone the Bill for a year; but if we adjourn the matter for 12 months and bring it up again, the same excuse will be made; and the people in the houses now being built nearly alongside the site—within half a mile of it—want a deadline established for the existence of this sanitary site. I know from bitter experience that it is not possible to have a sanitary site without the accompanying smell, filth and flies; and, with the flies, dysentery and all kinds of illnesses. I appeal to members to support the Bill and if, in Committee, they think an extension of another year is necessary, I will agree. Last session, when another Minister was opposing a move for a Select Committee on this matter, he made statements that in the ensuing 12 months have been proved to be wrong. If a larger area—the areas are Victoria Park and South Perth—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member cannot make a speech in reply to the Minister's.

Mr. CROSS: I am not trying to.

Mr. SPEAKER: I point out that the Minister has not a chance to reply to the hon. member if he continues in that strain.

Mr. CROSS: Very well. I appeal to members to support the Bill, because its only aim is to rid the metropolitan area of the filthy pan system and to provide a deadline for its abolition for ever. I will say no more about it. I am prepared to accept an amendment, in Committee, to make the date 1950 instead of 1949.

Question put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	..	..	..	20
Noes	..	...	..	16
				—
Majority for	..	..		4
				—

AYES.

Mr. Fox	Mr. McLarty
Mr. Graham	Mr. Millington
Mr. J. Hegney	Mr. Rodoreda
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Seward
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Smith
Mr. Holman	Mr. Styants
Mr. Kelly	Mr. Telfer
Mr. Leaby	Mr. Triat
Mr. Leslie	Mr. Withers
Mr. McDonald	Mr. Cross

(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Brand	Mr. Panton
Mr. Coverley	Mr. Shearn
Mr. Doney	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Hawke	Mr. Watts
Mr. Keenan	Mr. Willcock
Mr. Marshall	Mr. Willmott
Mr. Nulsen	Mr. Wise
Mr. Owen	Mr. Perkins

(Teller.)

Question thus passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Mr. Rodoreda in the Chair; Mr. Cross in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Land in schedule not to be used as a sanitary depot:

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I move an amendment—

That in line 5 the word "forty-nine" be struck out and the word "fifty" inserted in lieu.

Amendment put and passed; the clause, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 6, Schedule, Title—agreed to.

Bill reported with an amendment and the report adopted.

BILL—ECONOMIC STABILITY.

Second Reading.

THE PREMIER (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [8.23] in moving the second reading said: At the Premiers' Conference held in August of this year, it was unanimously agreed by representatives of State Governments that it was desirable, in the interests of economic security, to continue in operation regulations under certain sections of the National Security Act. The regulations concerned include the National Security (Prices) Regulations, the National Security (Landlord and Tenant) Regulations, the National Security (Capital Issues) Regulations, and the National Security (Economic Organisation) Regulations other than Regulation 4 and Parts 4 and 5. Those regulations are set out in the manual of National Security Regulations, a copy of which I have with me. I understand a complete copy is not available in the references of the House, but this copy is available to all members should any section or any particular regulation affect them, or should they desire to refer to any or all of the regulations. Briefly, they are

as follows:—The prices regulations relate primarily to the power of the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner to fix and declare the maximum price at which any declared goods may be sold or any services supplied or carried out.

Those regulations are well known to members, in their application, and are at present under the control and direction of the Commonwealth representative, the Deputy Commissioner of Prices in this State. Western Australia is only concerned with Parts 1, 3 and 4 and Regulation 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Regulations. Parts 1 and 4 are, respectively, preliminary and miscellaneous parts. Part 3, however, deals with the recovery of possession of prescribed premises. It limits the grounds upon which a lessor may take court proceedings for an order for the recovery of prescribed premises or for the ejection of a tenant, and requires the court to take into consideration the question of hardship to any person. Regulation 11 of Part 2 provides for a rent controller who may, under Regulation 78, exclude premises from the operation of the regulations for a period not exceeding six months. Part 2 of the Capital Issues Regulations prevents, without the consent of the Commonwealth Treasurer, the registration of any trading society, company, club or association with a nominal capital exceeding £10,000, and prevents the issue of capital in any one year beyond £10,000 and the issue of shares at a premium or under any circumstances of that kind.

There have been cases where the approval of the Commonwealth Treasurer, in the interests of States and of industries within States, that consent has been obtained. Part 3 of the Capital Issues Regulations, without the Treasurer's consent, limits the issue of securities or any mortgage or charge to £1,500 in one year, and also limits certain interest rates. There are exceptions in favour of banks, pastoral companies and local authorities. Those exceptions are clearly set out in a group of regulations in the National Security Orders. Part 4 limits the amount of interest on deposits, subject to exemptions in favour of banks, building societies, declared pastoral companies and partnerships. The Economic Organisation Regulations apply to a prohibi-

tion, without Treasury consent, of the transferring of properties, including all dealings in relation to shares or debentures of a company.

Part 3A of the Economic Organisation Regulations prohibits, without Treasury consent, the transfer of a residential business. The Bill now introduced excludes Parts 4 and 5 of the Economic Organisation Regulations, which relate to the fixing by the Commonwealth Bank of maximum rates of interest in respect of any debts whatsoever, whether security is given or not, and to certain industrial provisions that are generally referred to as the wage-pegging regulations. Part 5 of the Economic Organisation Regulations generally pegged wages at what they were prior to the 10th February, 1942. The Bill expressly excludes such wage-pegging regulations from the operation of the measure. While it is fully realised that there have been many defects in these regulations and certain difficulties associated with them there is no doubt it is vital that they be continued if Australia is to avoid industrial and economic chaos.

At the Premiers' Conference, the legal position was fully explained by the Commonwealth Solicitor General, Professor Bailey. He made it clear that the National Security Act would expire on the 31st December of this year and the power of the Commonwealth to maintain the regulations after that date was very dubious. The States therefore agreed in respect of these regulations to co-operate by submitting to the respective Parliaments legislation in similar terms to protect the interests of the nation by continuing these controls for the time being and to ensure their validity should they, as is anticipated, be dubious in their authority after the 31st December next.

Much discussion took place as to the best means of giving effect to this authority, and it was considered most desirable that the Commonwealth should have a Bill drafted and submitted to the States for their consideration. The Bill was drafted, and a few weeks ago a conference was called, to take place in the early part of last week, which the representatives of the States were invited to attend. We sought the assistance of another State to allow its Solicitor General to appear for us, and Mr. Bean, Solicitor General in South Australia,

so acted. The Bill which emerged from that conference is the one now before the House. It has already been introduced and passed by the House of Assembly in South Australia and has been presented to the Parliaments of two other States. I have received from the Premier of South Australia, Mr. Playford, a copy of the Bill agreed to at the conference and a report in connection with it. He also advised me that the measure had been introduced in his State.

Briefly the Bill provides that the State can bring into force by proclamation all of the regulations set out, or any part of them. When any of the regulations are brought into force under the measure, they will have the effect of State regulations and may be repealed or amended by further regulations made by the Governor of the State. They will continue to be administered by Commonwealth officers under the existing set-up, and the organisations now in existence in the various States for that purpose. The only difference will be that their legality will depend upon State legislation instead of the Commonwealth law.

I have been advised that all of the legal representatives of the States—I understand the Solicitors General of the different States attended the Melbourne conference—were of the opinion that a Bill of this sort would provide a satisfactory way of dealing with the emergency. They thought that if a particular control was deemed necessary to be continued for a longer period or a period after the Commonwealth regulations ceased to be effective, it was necessary to devise a way of getting unified control throughout the six States. They considered that this Bill would provide satisfactorily for the continuance of any permanent control until any other form of control was devised.

This Bill accordingly provides that it shall continue in operation until a date to be fixed by proclamation and shall be deemed to be repealed on that date. Members may wonder whether this measure will in any way conflict with the legislation passed last session to refer the control of prices to the Commonwealth Government till the end of 1947. Although that legislation was passed in this State, some States did not pass it and, to the extent that the present Bill deals with price regulations, it may overlap the measure of last year

only so far as Western Australia is concerned, but the control now being transferred to the State will have authority and effect after the end of 1947 when the National Security Regulations lapse or are dubious in their authority, as the case may be.

The Commonwealth Government is very anxious to get as simply as possible a continuation for the time being of these controls that are so vitally necessary to our economic set-up, and therefore the prices control is being continued in this measure. It is necessary, in view of the doubt as to what might happen and what challenges might be made after the end of this year, that uniform legislation be passed in all the States and it is necessary also that this measure be passed before the end of the present session.

Mr. McDonald: Would you proclaim the regulations straight away?

The PREMIER: No, not until after the 31st December so as to avoid any possibility of overlapping. I understand that Dr. Evatt is of opinion that the regulations may continue if not challenged and be effective while not challenged, but since that is a very dubious principle upon which to base a continuation of such vital matters, it was thought that legislation by all the States was the best way to overcome the difficulty. Those are the principles of the Bill—the continuation of the regulations covering prices, landlord and tenant, capital issues, and that part of the economic regulations to which I have referred. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Watts, debate adjourned.

BILL—GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS
(Hon. W. M. Marshall—Murchison) [8.41]
in moving the second reading said: This measure involves only two principles. In the first place it seeks to introduce a change in the form of management of the State Railways. Just why the present form of management was established under the existing Act is most difficult for anyone today to understand, and to endeavour to jus-

tify it is equally difficult. In principle, it is an absolute negation of democratic principle, and I suggest that over the years, it has built up a form of bureaucracy which can be said to do no other than present a revolting case so far as democratic principles are concerned. Once power and authority are granted, thus removing the individual or individuals from the reach of the people, a state of affairs results which can never, according to the experience of nations as a whole, succeed for any lengthy period.

Under such a state of affairs, bureaucratic powers are vested in certain individuals or groups of individuals answerable to none but themselves and responsible to nobody but themselves and, when we adopt such a system, we set the basis for a totalitarian state. Every Minister is answerable to this House for the whole of the activities of the departments in his charge. He is responsible to this Chamber for all acts of commission or omission of the departments which, for the time being, he has the honour to preside over. Each and every member of the House is answerable to the people. The invidious position immediately presents itself that members, who represent the community, look to the Minister to give effect to the wishes of the people, and the Minister is in the unfortunate position of not being able to do so. It is, therefore, obvious that there is no semblance of democracy in such a set of circumstances.

In a set-up like that the Minister becomes a mere figure-head and takes the place of a buffer between a disgruntled community and those who are all-powerful. If Ministerial authority is denied a Minister, and reposes in the hands of an individual or a group of individuals, the Minister's position must be obvious to all. He is, in the eyes of the public, responsible for all the acts performed by those who have what are really his power and authority, and those who are all-powerful have no responsibility to the public. So I put it to this Chamber that such a factor in the history of a State, proclaiming democracy, must appear to be something that is very objectionable. So far as I am aware there is no other department or State instrumentality where Ministerial control is so hopeless as it is in the Railway Department, having regard to the Railway Act of 1904. My own personal experience is that I have found the officers of the Railway Department courteous to the last degree. But

eventually their will prevails because of a policy of passive resistance against the Minister.

I frankly confess that I have found the position almost intolerable. I would be quite safe in saying that there is a greater degree of discontent amongst the employees of the railway and tramway systems than in any other of our Government departments. It is true that post-war periods usually bring with them a trail of discontent, and we find that during such time people are more ready to create industrial trouble than ordinarily. Allowing for all that I think I am correct in saying that there is more dissatisfaction expressed by the community in regard to the railway administration than anything else. We have to take cognisance of these obvious facts to see whether some policy can be pursued so that the anomalies may be immediately remedied. Some of the troubles that have beset the Railway Department might have been avoided if the Minister could have probed more thoroughly and frequently into their causes. But it would be of little use for the Minister for Railways to endeavour to make such examinations when it is particularly doubtful whether he has the power and authority so to do.

I do not want the House to deduce, from what I have said, that I believe the present management of the railway system is altogether inefficient. That is not so. I subscribe to the contention, advanced by other members, that our railway officials have had to perform, under great disadvantages, a very difficult task. So, one has to search deeper in order to find some evidence as to the cause of so much unrest and dissatisfaction. Until the Minister is free to make his own inquiries I feel that there will not be any speedy and ready change in the present state of affairs. The position held by the Commissioner of Railways is far too colossal for one man. It is true that the Electricity Department has been transferred to another authority, but the great growth of our railway system, coupled as it is with the tramway system, which is also growing rapidly, has caused the position of the commissioner to become so unwieldy that it is almost impossible for him thoroughly to scrutinise all the activities of his heads and sub-heads so as to prevent certain happenings which, from time to time,

have caused discontent and which, I may say, have led to general dissatisfaction and distrust.

So the Bill proposes that the Railway Department shall fall into line with all other departments. We do not suggest that the powers, responsibilities or the authority of the commissioner shall in any way be altered, but we do propose that his activities shall be subject to Ministerial control. In passing, might I say that it is strange that while all other departments and departmental heads and sub-heads have been, by law, subjected to Ministerial control, they have not experienced the same dissatisfaction and discontent as has been the case in the railways. So it is felt by the Government that a change is necessary. What the Bill provides is already law in other institutions which have met with every degree of success. While there has been no reason to change the present system that operates under the Railway Act we have found that it is necessary to change from the system set up in the Railway Act to that which governs other departments. The Bill would not have been necessary had the Government found it possible to introduce a measure, which it contemplated introducing, to co-ordinate all modes of transport. Unfortunately we could not do that this session, so we are taking the opportunity of giving Parliament a chance to decide whether it is agreeable to having the Railway Department governed by the laws that prevail in other departments.

That is the first principle in this Bill. The second is to make provision for the keeping of proper accounts by the Commissioner of Railways and the audit thereof by the Auditor General, as well as requiring annual balance sheets and statements of receipts and expenditure duly audited and reported upon by the Auditor General. Here again it must be considered rather strange, having regard to the heavy turnover in railway finance, both on the revenue and expenditure sides, that Parliament has never been given an opportunity to have a report from the Auditor General submitted to it, with his comments thereon, as applies in relation to all other departments. In order to ascertain exactly how this omission became applicable to the railway system, placing it in a position entirely different from all other departments, we must go back over the early

history of the railways to obtain a complete outline of the situation.

In the annual report of the Auditor General on railway matters for the year ended the 30th June, 1904, which report was submitted approximately six months after the Railway Act became law, the Auditor General of that period recommended that the Railway Act should be amended to make it compulsory for an annual balance sheet and profit and loss account, with other necessary statements, to be presented to Parliament by the Minister, and that such accounts should be certified by the Auditor General. It appears from the records that at that time nothing was done. Apparently the recommendations of the Auditor General were not considered by Parliament, and so the position drifted. Then, in 1906, in his annual report for the financial year, 1905-06, the Auditor General explained that he had been unable to conduct a check of the accounts of the Railway Department and added—

Seeing, however the existence of an audit branch in the Railway Department and having in view the practice in other States and New Zealand; also the utter inability, with the staff at the disposal of the Auditor General, to undertake the work and that each year the attention of Parliament has been drawn to the fact, it is considered that the action taken is justified.

What the Auditor General was referring to there was the creation of an audit branch within the Railway Department itself, and he refers to that as being justified in the circumstances, because seemingly Parliament of that period would not provide him with sufficient staff to undertake the audit work, and as the Railway Department had taken it upon itself to do so, he referred to the action taken as being justified in the circumstances. Section 48 of the Audit Act of 1904 states—

The Governor may exempt from detailed audit by the Auditor General, but not from appropriation audit by him, the accounts of receipts and expenditure of any department, the peculiar duties, constitution or circumstances of which may render such exemption expedient.

Acting under those powers, the Executive Council on the 9th October, 1907, exempted from detailed audit certain phases of the accounts of the Railway Department, and those conditions continued for a considerable time. On the 4th March, 1909, that

particular order of Executive Council was cancelled and a fresh exemption granted relating to six separate phases of the railway accounts. That later exemption is still in force. I would point out to the House that were that Executive Council order to be cancelled, there remains no provision in the Railway Act requiring the presentation of an annual balance sheet duly audited by the Auditor General. Thus we find that in connection with the railways entirely different conditions obtain compared with the obligations upon all other departments that are under ministerial control, and even upon many institutions and organisations that are not under ministerial control. The railways represent the only section enjoying this exemption, notwithstanding that the annual revenue and expenditure of that business undertaking reach approximately the £14,000,000 mark. For many years, therefore, the Auditor General has had to rely upon, and accept, certificates from the Controller of Accounts of the Railway Department, and he has had to be satisfied with them.

Parliament itself obtains no information whatever regarding the balance sheet and profit and loss accounts of the railways or any report thereon by the Auditor General. The Railway Act contains no provision for that to be done. The present Auditor General, in a review of the position, has stated that the original exemption from the detailed audit was sought only because the necessary staff could not be made available to him. I have referred to that matter which I think was actually a request at that time for the creation of an audit branch within the Railway Department itself. Concerning the internal audit in the department, which has been carried out since 1909, the point is that up to 1922 the position of Auditor of Receipts was separate from that of Chief Accountant. In other words, there were two branches within the Railway Department, one controlled by the Auditor of Receipts and the other by the Chief Accountant.

In 1922 the two positions were amalgamated and one officer was placed in charge of both sections and designated "Controller of Accounts and Audits." This meant that from 1922 the Chief Accountant has been responsible to the Com-

missioner of Railways in the dual capacity of Chief Accountant and Auditor. The next senior officer in the Accounts Branch is the Auditor of Disbursements who appears to be responsible directly to the Controller of Accounts. Thus, since 1922, the position has obtained in the Railway Department that there has been no independent audit at all. This applies in a department which, out of a total financial turnover of approximately £14,000,000, absorbs in its own operations practically one-third of that total and the same proportion applies to the State revenue. With regard to the colossal expenditure of the department, from that standpoint alone, one-third of the total amount is absorbed by the department itself in its activities and, although the Treasurer is responsible to that extent, Parliament receives no report from the Auditor General upon the financial position. Parliament lives in entire ignorance of how the money is either received or expended. Nor can it procure the report of an independent auditor, such as is provided by the Auditor General, with comments and recommendations, in connection with other governmental activities.

After we pass the Railway Estimates Parliament loses further financial control. The Commissioner of Railways spends the money without any interference by Parliament and to the same degree is quite outside ministerial control. As members know, the Commissioner of Railways carries on and spends the money as he deems fit and proper in the circumstances confronting him. It may be agreed that the arrangement is most peculiar and, to say the least of it, somewhat improper having regard to the fact that no other section of governmental activity has like advantages or privileges. I feel it is wrong in principle that it should continue. The present system of control necessarily tends to restrict the usefulness of any audit carried out and limits the reports of the checking officers. There is the danger, too, that any departure from principle and practice, be it right or wrong, may never be made known to the Commissioner. That could happen where we have two officers, one subservient to the other.

No matter what the subordinate officer may recommend or report—I do not say this happens, but there is nothing to prevent it from happening—his recommenda-

tions or reports may never reach the Commissioner for the reason that the accountant, who is also the chief audit officer, can over-ride a report of any of his audit inspectors. I do not say that that happens, but it could and the report need get no further than the accountant's office. Even should the report be made available to the Commissioner, I point out that there is no independent check upon the activities of the department. In 1939, the senior inspector of the Audit Department reported that he considered the existing arrangements for the audit of the Railway Department were unsatisfactory for those reasons. The basic principle in all commercial houses and in other Government departments is that there shall be an audit which, in the final analysis, must be entirely removed from those controlling the finances.

What is more objectionable, I think, is the fact that Parliament does not receive any recommendation from an independent auditor, such as the Auditor General, who is responsible to Parliament only. He is free to make any comment he wishes upon any aspect of expenditure or of collection of revenue. I think members will agree that only such a person should submit a report to Parliament upon the accounts of a Government instrumentality. The Bill proposes to alter the position which I have explained, and to bring the audit of the Railway Department into line with modern practice, such as prevails in all commercial houses and in most Government departments. The only audit reports which should be submitted to Parliament should be those of the Auditor General, who has expressed the obvious opinion that in this way only can Parliament be assured of the true financial position of any Government instrumentality. I subscribe to that opinion, as I think members will. I may add that it is only by this method that Parliament can decide whether the undertaking under the control of the Commissioner of Railways is being efficiently conducted or not.

The provisions of the Bill relating to the keeping of accounts and audit follow closely similar provisions in the State Electricity Commission Act of 1945, but it has been considered necessary to insert additional provisions corresponding to Section 65 of the Rural and Industries Bank Act, 1944, relating to an internal audit by the Com-

missioner of Railways. It will be obvious to members that in such a big concern as the Railway Department it is absolutely essential to have a continuous audit, or what is usually known as a running audit. This Bill does not propose to interfere with that audit in any way. I respectfully suggest that such a system would be of material help and advantage, if this Bill becomes law, to the Auditor General. It is reasonable to assume that much of the checking work in the running audit now carried out by the Controller of Accounts will be acceptable, as I have already mentioned, to the Audit Department.

It will be much more satisfactory to change the practice in the manner provided by the Bill and allow the Auditor General, who is responsible only to Parliament, to assume the responsibility of reporting to Parliament upon the financial obligations and accounts of this huge undertaking. I am certain members will agree with that contention. The revenue and expenditure of the Railway Department represents approximately one-third of the State's income and expenditure and should be subject to the Audit Act. This Bill proposes to provide for that. Opportunity should now be taken to make the change, as I am given to understand that the Controller of Accounts of the Railway Department is about to retire on account of age. Those are the only two principles embodied in the measure, namely, that the Railway Department will be brought into line with all other departments so far as Ministerial jurisdiction is concerned, and that railway accounts will be subject to the Audit Act. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Seward, debate adjourned.

BILL—COAL PRODUCTION.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. W. M. Marshall—Murchison) [9.24] in moving the second reading said: The measure that I now have the privilege of introducing to the House contains three different principles. At the outset, I would say that if the Bill does become law, it may never be necessary to exercise any of the powers

which will be conferred by it. There are two pieces of legislation in existence today upon which this Bill is framed. One is known as the Coal Production (Commonwealth) War Time Act, and the other as the Coal Act of New South Wales. The latter recently became law in that State. The measure now before the House does not contain some of the very drastic provisions embodied in those Acts. In comparison, it is a mild piece of legislation. It is being introduced because of the possibility of the Commonwealth Act expiring on the 31st December. The Commonwealth has not yet definitely decided whether it will introduce legislation in this connection which might be applicable to Western Australia, and which would, I believe, contain similar provisions to those in the Commonwealth Act I have mentioned. If the Government does introduce such legislation, the Bill with which we are now dealing, should it become law, will of course be ineffective, because where a State law and a Commonwealth law clash, so to speak, the Commonwealth legislation prevails.

Mr. McDonald: Under what power would the Commonwealth act?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: The Commonwealth Act to which I referred expires on the 31st December; but I am not sure at this juncture whether the Commonwealth proposes to introduce further legislation in order to continue that Act, which was introduced during the war.

Hon. N. Keenan: Under what authority would the Commonwealth Parliament do that?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I am not prepared to be cross-examined on constitutional law. I must concede that my friend interjecting is much better versed in constitutional law than I am, as he is an eminent K.C. Strange as it may seem, the Commonwealth Government does do certain things of which many of us challenge the legality from time to time, but invariably the Commonwealth prevails. If the Commonwealth does not introduce further legislation on the subject, then it is urgently necessary to pass this Bill in order to save the situation so far as Western Australia is concerned. The importance of the coal-mining industry must not be lost sight of. It is the very soul of the industrial life of the nation; and so far as is humanly pos-

sible, we should take the action necessary to see that coal is produced economically and scientifically, scientific production involving modern mining methods. Modern mining practices would conserve to the nation a greater quantity of this very valuable asset than is the case when a mine is developed on unscientific lines.

In passing, I would say that it seems to have been traditional in coalmining, from its very early history, to pursue a policy of making anything do for the time being. So far as my knowledge serves me, it has not been considered of any great importance that a nation should take a grip of an asset of such great value as is coal and see that every ton is so mined as to preserve for posterity as much of it as possible for the future development of the nation. I do not want to be over-critical of the coalfields of Western Australia, because I think that of all the coal deposits within Australia the Collie fields have been the hardest to develop. Those responsible had a most difficult task to perform. In developing the Collie coal basin in the early days, they found themselves up against colossal obstacles. Alleged experts reported adversely upon the calorific value and the characteristics of coal produced at Collie, so that it was almost impossible for those who were interested in the fields to secure a market of any sort for the product.

It was only to be expected, therefore, that the Collie coalfields would be opened up in an unscientific way. That was unfortunate. It is probable that the introduction of new mining methods will save the situation to a material extent; but it does seem a catastrophe that we should have so mined our fields as to leave almost as much coal in the earth as we have taken out. Unless methods are developed that will enable us to recover the remaining portion of the coal, it will be lost to the nation for all time. Coal is a heritage. Western Australia—and probably Australia as a whole—is more severely handicapped than are other countries, for we have no oil gushers in the Commonwealth. I hope that will be rectified in the near future. Unlike many other countries, too, we have no flowing streams that we can harness for the purpose of generating power; and in the major portion of our State there is no wood that can be utilised for that purpose. Consequently, coal be-

comes of phenomenal importance to this State, and we cannot afford any longer to neglect it.

I suggest to members that the time is long overdue when legislation should have been introduced to ensure that so far as practicable modern and economical mining methods were applied. This Bill contains provision giving the Minister power in that direction. It differs from similar measures I have already referred to. In those Bills there are drastic powers. I would like members to study the New South Wales law of today, and to take some cognisance of the National Security Regulations, with a view to observing the terrific power reposed in a body of individuals who have complete control and can do almost anything they deem it prudent to do with the coalmining industry in other States.

This Bill is absolutely essential for the purpose of giving the Minister power to see that proper mining methods are introduced and that up-to-date machinery is used for the purpose of economical and efficient mining. Apart from that, it would be a tragedy if we had no control over the distribution of coal when it was produced—that is, assuming that the National Security Regulations and the Coal Production Act of the Commonwealth expire on the 31st of this month. While the supply of coal is so much below the demand, if this or any other Government failed to take hold of that which was produced and to distribute it wisely, it would not be able to give effect to its policy. Coal uncontrolled would drift into avenues into which it should not go, and would be procured by industries that were not justified in receiving it in preference to those which were in the main providing materials for such things as home building and the generation of electricity and many other national necessities.

It is essential that this measure should be passed, because if the National Security Regulations are discarded and no other similar law prevails, the results will be serious if production falls short of consumption. Those remarks cover the first two principles in the Bill. The third also is to be found in the other Acts to which I have referred and in the National Security Regulations. This third provision gives power to create an industrial tribunal. The law in this respect is

absolutely similar to that which has been prevailing over a period of years.

Mr. McDonald: During the war! I thought the war was over.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: No; the honourable member is not altogether correct. Before the war, there was a tribunal constantly sitting in Collie. I intend to explain the difference as I proceed. It is not proposed to give this tribunal any more authority than is to be found in the Industrial Arbitration Act. Under that measure the Arbitration Court can delegate its powers to what is known as an industrial board or a board of reference. That board then functions in the same way as would the court. In this Bill, power is provided to create a similar tribunal. That has been found necessary because the creations of the Arbitration Court functions for temporary periods and, in cases, merely deal with an incidental matter of an industrial character. It has been found that since the creation of the tribunal, which is now in existence in Collie, it has meant much in the direction of industrial peace and contentment. To a large degree it has been instrumental in maintaining peace in that industry, because it sat constantly and was always available, and could to some extent foresee industrial trouble. When such disputes came into existence suddenly the board could deal with them at a moment's notice, and it was therefore found to be a great success. In view of that the Government feels that it should perpetuate this tribunal. The President of the Arbitration Court is wholeheartedly behind it and when asked to express his opinion on it he said—

Whatever value in a general sort of way the Commonwealth control over coalmining may have had, one obvious virtue appears certain. That is that coalminers are a race apart in the industrial world and special and intimate attention to their industrial affairs is necessary.

This tribunal does not go any further, legally, than an industrial board created under the arbitration laws. It has all the power necessary to deal with industrial disputes, to regulate wages and conditions of employment. It can deal with industrial disputes of a minor character. It is constantly sitting and can visit the scene of any dispute. Mr. Wallwork, who for a considerable time has been chairman of the board, said he found it most satisfactory to discard formalities such as obtain in the court itself and

go underground, view the cause of the discontent and give a decision on the spot. That method has been found successful and has been instrumental in settling many of the industrial disputes that would have disrupted the industry, particularly during the war period, had it not been for the activities of this tribunal. All its decisions are filed with the Arbitration Court and it plays exactly the same part as an industrial tribunal created by that court.

If any party is aggrieved at a decision, appeal can be made to the court just as would be the case in appealing from the decision of an industrial tribunal created by it. There is no difference whatever in that respect. The real justification for a separate tribunal is evidenced in the statement of the President of the court, that coalminers are a race apart in the industrial world and that special and more intimate attention to their industrial affairs is necessary. That has been borne out by our experience over a period of years. I would point out to the member for West Perth that before the war an industrial board created by the court sat at Collie and functioned regularly for a considerable time. No member of this Chamber would feel satisfied to think that Western Australia was going to have the same experience with the coalmining industry as that of the other States. It is far better to take the necessary action to prevent disputes and discontent than to ignore legislation of this sort and wait until industrial upheavals become numerous, with a consequentially disastrous effect on the industrial life of the country. That is the purpose for which this Bill is submitted.

I do not want members to argue that this tribunal will usurp the powers of the court or challenge its authority in any way, because that is not so. It is simply a tribunal equal to that which the court has power to create and has frequently created. Western Australia has a great opportunity. During the war period its industries—though possibly not to the extent of those of other States—progressed materially. Both English and American investors are viewing Western Australia for openings for investment. Anyone who knows the Far East as I know it, having spent years there, must realise what a great market is waiting for development by real wealth.

Western Australia has the greatest opportunity of all the States. Our industrial life depends on coal and without legislation such as this to ensure that our mines are scientifically, efficiently and economically developed, so that every ton of coal is utilised during their development, and unless we have industrial peace in that industry, the possibility of our competing successfully with our sister States or with other nations is extremely remote.

I ask members not to let this opportunity slip by. The Government realises the position at Collie and knows that although the miners have behaved remarkably well—as have the companies also—it must not be thought that all is well there, because it is not so. Like all other industrialists, more particularly as they are obliged by virtue of economic pressure to spend almost one-third of their existence in the bowels of the earth, they look to Parliament to give them those privileges, concessions and amenities that any decent individual might expect Parliament to bestow on them. Those are the three principles contained in the Bill. I submit the measure for the consideration of the Chamber in the sincere hope that under no circumstances will there be an attempt to make drastic alterations to it. It is a mild measure when compared with legislation prevailing in other States. It is wanted merely to give the workers a tribunal to look after their industrial interests and see that the distribution of coal—while production is lower than consumption—is equitable, and that the industry generally is so ordered as to be thoroughly economical. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. McLarty, debate adjourned.

ANNUAL ESTIMATES—1946-1947.

In Committee of Supply.

Resumed from the previous day; Mr. Rodoreda in the Chair.

Vote—Agriculture £192,112 (partly considered):

MR. PERKINS (York) [9.57]: The Department of Agriculture is extremely important in a State such as Western Australia and is of particular interest to country members. I listened with attention to the Min-

ister when introducing his Estimates, and the contact that country members have with the department from time to time, coupled with the Minister's explanation, gives a fairly clear idea of what the department is aiming to do and the difficulties with which it is faced. It would be easy to criticise the department, not so much on what it has done, because I think its officers are giving good service in view of the difficulties with which they are faced, but rather as to the lack of facilities in the department to do much of what a Department of Agriculture should do. However, I think all that is well known to members and has been discussed here from time to time.

It is a matter of urgency to improve the facilities of the department and give better service than has been given in recent years. We should have a considerably improved service, compared with that given in pre-war years before the department was faced with difficulties in matters of staffing, buildings, etc. Undoubtedly, very good work has been done on the experimental farms, but even there the activities of the department could be considerably expanded by co-operating in various districts with farmers who would be prepared to assist along the lines I have suggested. The experimental work in other States is carried out, not necessarily on farms set up for that special purpose, but often by co-operation with particular farmers who are prepared to make their land and implements available for the carrying out of less comprehensive experiments. This aspect has been discussed at length on previous occasions, and I do not want to occupy the time of members unduly on the subject tonight.

The Minister had quite a lot to say about the prospects of the wheat industry. I am afraid I do not entirely agree with him in some of the views he expressed. It would be stupid to ignore the possibility of what might occur in future in a State like ours so dependent upon the wheat industry and upon good prices ruling for the product, but the Minister appeared to go out of his way to find reasons to show that the price of wheat is likely to fall to slump level in the not distant future. On the other hand, he dealt to a very minor extent with the factors that point in the opposite direction. Even during the depression years, I question

whether there was ever any great over-production of wheat. I believe that almost all the difficulties that befell the wheat industry particularly, but also other primary industries to lesser extent, were due to a general breakdown in international trade.

Anyone who studied the marketing of wheat closely during those years could not help realising that trade was being forced into absolutely unnatural channels. Countries were producing commodities that they were unsuited to produce; and when we find trade being forced into artificial channels—if I may so express it—then it is inevitable that great dislocation will occur and that there will be indications of apparent over-production in certain countries. I believe that the national policy of a country like Australia, which is so dependent for its general welfare on receiving adequate returns from its great exporting industry, should be directed to keeping international trade flowing as freely as possible and preventing any grave dislocation of it.

Members will recall that, even in those depression years when the export price of wheat was as low as 2s. 6d. f.o.b. ports and less at country sidings, the normal consumers of Australian wheat in European countries were paying 8s. or more a bushel. I think the price during the depression years never fell below 8s. a bushel in France, where wheat prices are usually lower than in some of the other Continental countries, while in some parts of Europe, the price was as high as 16s. and 20s. a bushel expressed in the equivalent of Australian currency. If those figures indicate the cost of producing wheat in those countries, and if measures could be taken to free the flow of trade between those countries and Australia, thus enabling them to exchange for Australian wheat the products they can raise more efficiently than we can, we should have largely solved any of the wheat export difficulties we suffered during the depression.

Again, it would be stupid to ignore the fact that such difficulties might recur, but if that sort of economic nationalism is allowed to develop throughout the world, we shall run into a major international catastrophe. It would be the first step towards international war. It would be a form of economic war, and economic war is usually

the precursor of actual physical war. While possibilities exist that wheat prices might fall to glut level at some future time, if they do so many other international difficulties will arise. At the moment, when all the activities of statesmen in the major countries of the world are directed to building up a system of international control to obviate a repetition of such happenings, it is silly for us to regard as imminent a fall in the price of wheat to glut level. Such talk is creating a fear complex in the minds of our producers, and an entirely false picture in the minds of the commercial fraternity generally.

While it is most desirable to prevent any form of boom conditions, it is particularly stupid to take an unduly pessimistic view of the future. Unfortunately, it seems to have been the policy of the Commonwealth Government, in order to get the wheat stabilisation scheme approved, to paint that extremely pessimistic picture, but I was greatly surprised to hear our own Minister for Agriculture echoing the propaganda that has been put out, particularly by the Commonwealth Department of Trade and Commerce. To say the least, it is exaggerated, and I believe there are quite as many factors pointing to profitable prices. Certainly they might not be as high as those ruling at present for wheat in the international market, but they should be very much higher prices than obtained in the period from 1930 to 1940.

Even at present, a study of the figures shows that the production of wheat throughout the world is at a very high level. During the war years, it remained at a high level, and the shortage of wheat throughout the world at present has not been created by poor crops in any part of the world, but has been due to abnormal consumption of wheat.

The Minister for Agriculture: How much wheat was produced in Europe during the war? Do not talk nonsense!

Mr. PERKINS: I have not the figures with me tonight, but if the Minister looks up the records, he will be amazed at the small percentage drop in wheat production during the war.

The Minister for Agriculture: No cropping in France, the Balkan countries and a large part of Russia!

Mr. PERKINS: That is a stupid statement. There was quite a good crop in France, and the importations into France in recent years have been very little, if any, greater than in the pre-war years. The production in Europe was very much better than one might have expected it to be.

Mr. Seward: In the circumstances, it was most remarkable.

Mr. PERKINS: I agree. The shortage of wheat at present has been caused rather by abnormal consumption, not necessarily human consumption, but by the diversion of wheat to stockfeeding channels particularly.

Mr. Watts: And losses at sea.

Mr. PERKINS: I suppose they would be a factor. My chief reason for speaking on these Estimates was to point out that the Minister painted an unduly gloomy picture. I consider he did not represent the position at all fairly. We cannot expect the present abnormal prices to continue indefinitely. Admittedly, they are abnormal. Wheat has recently been sold by Turkey to other European countries at the equivalent of 27s. a bushel in our money, but there is a very wide difference between 27s. and the 5s. or 6s. a bushel which we in Australian regard as a reasonable figure.

The price of wheat from 1918 to 1930 varied from 4s. 6d. to about 6s. 3d. or 6s. 4d., except in one year when it rose to 9s. a bushel. Thus prices recently have been very much higher than they were in the period immediately after the first world war. Still, we must not lose sight of the fact that there is a measure of inflation in all countries. The currency does not purchase the quantity of goods it did formerly, and this accounts in some degree for the different price levels. Our own Department of Agriculture should be in a position to give authentic information to growers on this subject, and I hope the Minister will give more study to wheat prices and the wheat position generally than he has done up to the present.

MR. WATTS (Katanning) [10.15]: In the course of his remarks last evening, the Minister cast some doubt on the figures I had given during the Address-in-reply debate

as to the decrease in the area licensed for wheat in Western Australia, and more particularly the increase in the area licensed for wheat in the other States as compared with the period ended in the 1939 season. At the time I quoted those figures I gave the source whence I obtained them and that source was the "Hansard" reports of the proceedings of the Commonwealth Parliament. I hope that I have not altogether lost such reputation as I possessed either for veracity or disclosing the reasons why I believe the statements I make are correct. On that occasion I quoted the source of the information I gave as being a statement made in the Commonwealth Parliament by Senator J. M. Fraser, who was then holding the portfolio of Minister for Trade and Customs.

The figures I quoted, although they do unfortunately vary quite substantially from those mentioned by the Minister last evening were, because of the fact that they were published in "Hansard" and came from the lips of such a responsible person as Senator Fraser, accepted by me as being entirely accurate. It is impossible for me to say at this stage whether Senator Fraser was correct in the statements he made and the Minister has been wrongly advised, or whether there has been some different method used by the respective persons in arriving at the figures supplied in each case. But on page 1902 of the Senate debates on the Supply Bill on the 27th June, 1946, in the course of his remarks Senator Fraser said—

A question has been addressed to me by Senator Gibson regarding wheat production. Despite the cry that has been raised that wheat production has been retarded, I draw attention to the acreages licensed for the planting of wheat for grain this season. The areas for the various States and Australian capital territory are as follows:—

	Acres.
New South Wales	5,978,000
Victoria	3,649,000
South Australia	2,834,000
Western Australia	2,065,000

The Minister's figures last evening were as follows:—

	Acres.
New South Wales	4,880,000
Victoria	3,570,000
South Australia	2,829,000
Western Australia	2,559,000

The figures I quoted were those of Senator Fraser. They show a considerably greater area than the Minister's in respect of New

South Wales and they show a considerably smaller area in respect of Western Australia. In consequence my comparisons were based—and properly based, on the information in my possession which appeared to be thoroughly reliable—on the Senator's figures. The Federal Minister's statement went on—

These figures do not include the area sown for hay, and of course, farmers may now sow with wheat all land licensed for that purpose. The average areas sown for wheat during the five years ended 1938-39 were as follows:—

	Acres.
New South Wales	4,168,000
Victoria	2,522,000
South Australia	3,096,000
Western Australia	2,864,000

My comment was that there had been an increase in the area licensed or sown to wheat in New South Wales of 1,800,000 acres, which was the difference between 4,168,000 and 5,978,000. I observed that there had been an increase in Victoria of approximately 800,000 acres because the 1938-39 figures were given as 2,522,000 acres and the 1945-46 figures as 3,469,000 acres. I further observed that there had been a decrease in Western Australia of over 700,000 acres because the 1938-39 figures were given as 2,864,000 acres and the 1945-46 figures as 2,065,000 acres.

I have taken the trouble to make reference to those figures in some detail because, as I said, I wish to preserve both in this House and as far as the public are concerned a reputation for at least being careful as to the source of the information I use in any criticism in which I may indulge; and I think it will be readily realised both by the House and by the public that one cannot be expected to take any better source of information than the official debates of this Parliament or any other Parliament of the Australian Commonwealth. I might say, too, that even the figures given by the Minister do not, it would appear, agree with the figures that are available from the State Statistician in his preliminary agricultural, dairying and pastoral statistics for the season 1945-46. In dealing with the area cropped for wheat, he shows for 1938-39 a little less than 3,500,000 acres and for 1945-46, 1,835,000 acres, which is a reduction of the area actually sown as opposed to the area licensed and sown of over 1,500,000 acres.

So it is not clear to me, as I said, what the reason is for the discrepancies in these

figures; but they obviously exist, and as the weight of evidence is two to one that Western Australia has a very much reduced acreage available and the evidence of Senator Fraser is that New South Wales at least and Victoria have a very much increased area, I submit that it was not unreasonable for me to ask a question on the Address-in-reply as to how that state of affairs had come about. I also made some observation as to the tobacco industry which I said had fallen into the doldrums or was likely to do so. The figures that I quoted came from a newspaper report, and while newspaper reporters are usually accurate it is possible for them, as it is for other people, to make mistakes. They indicate that the acreage under tobacco and the production of tobacco had decreased by something like 70 per cent. in the period mentioned.

The Minister assured us last evening that there has been some diminution in acreage because certain people who went into the industry, more or less temporarily, have come out of it, but that there has been a gradual improvement in the standard of tobacco leaf and that, as a consequence, the industry is getting into a prosperous condition. If it comes to a battle of figures, I think the remark I made that, on the figures, the industry was in the doldrums, is capable of substantiation. I again quote from the preliminary statistics of the Government Statistician where he said that in 1943-44 some 1,611 acres were under tobacco in this State and that in 1944-45 that area had been reduced to 1,003 acres, and, in 1945-46, to 529 acres.

If that is not a substantial reduction, needing more explanation than that a few people who went into it temporarily had gone out of it, I do not know what is. It shows a reduction of approximately 1,100 acres, out of 1,600, in two years. It, therefore, does not strike me as typifying a state of progress in the tobacco growing industry; rather, I think the reverse. I submit to you, Mr. Chairman, as a fair-minded man, that the use of the phrase that the industry was apparently in the doldrums was not out of order. I do not propose to address myself to other aspects of the Agricultural Estimates this evening, but I thought it proper to deal with the mat-

ters that the Minister referred to as having come from me.

MR. SEWARD (Pingelly) [10.28]: I listened with interest to the summary of this important department given by the Minister last night. While I agree that the Apple and Pear Board did valuable work during the war years—in fact it saved the industry from ruin—I point out that one branch of its activities was, in the main, responsible for the criticism of the public. I refer to the distribution of the fruit. It was essential that we should have the board so as to pay the growers for the fruit they had grown, but the public could not understand, and I could not either, why, when so much fruit was said to be lying on the ground, that which was offered for sale to the general public was of such inferior quality. In the early part of the season, when one would expect to get new fruit, only windfalls were available in the shops. It was seldom that we could get an apple that had been picked from the tree. If the Minister, when passing through country districts, were to take note of the fruit offered for sale he would be struck by the shocking apples displayed in the shop windows. They are of the sort that would have been given to the pigs a few years ago. People cannot understand why, when the apples could not be exported, they were not able to get first-class fruit. I suppose the board must be continued for a year or two, so it would be advisable for the department to give consideration to the point I have raised. I know that this is a board functioning under a Federal Act, but it is distributing a Western Australian product and the citizens of this State naturally and rightly blame the Agricultural Department if it does not interest itself to see that the consuming public get good fruit when it is so easily and well grown here.

I was pleased to hear the member for York deal with the Minister's pessimistic attitude about the future of wheat. I endorse what the hon. member said. I am not going to set myself up as a prophet or an authority on the prospects of the wheat market. Anyone who takes on that job is foolish; but I have endeavoured to get the best available information on the question, and it all points to the fact that for the next five or six years, while there may be a slight

fall in wheat values, high prices will prevail. That is due mainly to the enormous amount of wheat required as a result of the war, to feed the starving populations throughout the world. I do not know whether the Minister or the department gets the valuable review of the wheat position, not only in Australia, but throughout the world, contained in the "Wheat Bulletin" issued fortnightly by Co-op. Bulk Handling Ltd. If he does, he will find in it verification of what was said by the member for York as to the remarkable amount of wheat produced in the European countries that were the centre of the war during the last few years.

The Minister for Agriculture: Quite the reverse.

Mr. SEWARD: I have not got the figures with me, but I could turn them up. The review of the world wheat position in that bulletin is as good a one as it is possible to get in Australia. If that paper is not sent to the department I suggest that arrangements be made so that it will be available.

The Minister for Agriculture: I receive it regularly.

Mr. SEWARD: Then the Minister will find that what I have said is borne out by one of those bulletins. The Minister also indicated that the fall in the production of wheat in this State was largely due to insufficient superphosphate. With that I agree. I wish he would make some inquiries and let the farming community have authoritative and up-to-date information as to when we will get Nauru and Ocean Island superphosphate in reasonable supplies.

The Minister for Agriculture: Some will be available shortly, but unfortunately at an increased price.

Mr. SEWARD: I understand that that is so. The re-erection of the gantries affects the position. No one seems to know just when they will be re-erected. In fact, no one seems to know whether they are even being made. Something more than just the lack of superphosphate is affecting the farming industry of the State. I would like the department to conduct an exhaustive examination into this matter so as to find out just what is the position of the farming industry. Men who have been farming for many years have come to me asking whether there is any chance of their selling their

properties to the Land Purchase Board for returned soldiers. I receive, almost every day, such requests coupled with the statement, "The sooner I get off the farm, the better." People do not want to sell properties that they have built up by means of hard work, if everything is all right. But everything is not all right; there are many disabilities affecting the industry.

Lack of amenities, poor schooling facilities and other such factors are driving farmers from their holdings, and making the younger people desirous of getting jobs in the city. A well-known and leading sheep-breeder recently told me that his son was not interested in his property, and that he would probably have to sell it eventually. The department should ascertain what is the cause of that sort of thing, in order to remove the disability. I was disappointed with what the Minister said about the investigations into infertility in sheep, but was pleased to hear that further inquiries are to be made. A dead-end has been reached here, but an officer is to be sent Home to continue the work. I hope the officer is not to be Mr. Mountjoy, and that it will be someone more fitted to a position on the C.S.I.R. than is that gentleman. I think the farming community generally would welcome knowledge as to which officer is to be sent. I do not know whether it is to be a State officer, or one sent by the C.S.I.R. from the Eastern States.

I was disappointed to learn that no further progress can be made in the investigations here, but I have sufficient confidence in the investigating officers to know that no stone will be left unturned in an effort to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion to their efforts. Some departmental officers imagine they know everything about farming. It is a peculiarity of many civil servants that they get into a rut and imagine that all about a particular matter is known by the department. I say that because of something that happened in the early part of this year when some valuable information was obtained by many farmers, not as a result of action by the department, but of action taken by the National Bank.

A man named Whitehead made some experiments at Hines Hill and the bank issued invitations to a demonstration to be held on his farm. Five hundred or six

hundred people attended and spent the day with the owner of the property. Some officers of the Department of Agriculture also attended. The owner explained the methods by which he had turned a farm that would not grow either grass or crops into one growing crops of up to 15 bushels to the acre, as well as good pastures. The visitors were so impressed that some of them, from my electorate, immediately sent me a letter, signed by about 21 persons, asking that I should bring the matter to the notice of the Government with a view to having recognition given to the work done by Mr. Whitehead. I think he is fully entitled to some recognition.

The Minister for Agriculture: He did not discover anything.

Mr. SEWARD: I do not agree. I was speaking to a farmer, a few weeks before this demonstration, who asked me how the investigation into the infertility of sheep was progressing, and I said I had met Dr. Bennetts a few weeks before that. The farmer said he had been carrying out experiments on his farm. He stated that every year farmers ploughed their land to the same depth, with the result that a hard bed was formed, which nothing would penetrate. He pointed out that there is a heavy growth of grass in the sheep-yards after the winter, but that the stock will not touch it, and that a prolific growth is to be found in the paddocks where there are dung droppings, but that again the stock will not touch it. He said, "We are putting super into the earth and the crop takes some of it. Then the grass takes what is left. It is simply liquid super, and the stock do not do well on it." He said that he had broken up that hard bed in the soil without turning it over. That is exactly what Mr. Whitehead has done.

The Minister for Agriculture: That is what the department advocated.

Mr. SEWARD: I would like to see proof of that. I told the people who wrote this letter about the department, and I saw Dr. Teakle. I have here a pamphlet on the management of salt land, and it mentions nothing about what Mr. Whitehead did. It says, "Ploughing or scarifying in the autumn has a good effect." Mr. Roberts was particular to point out to me that he did not plough the bed up. He simply broke it up. Had he turned it over, he would

have brought the sub-soil to the top, which would have done a lot of damage. One of the departmental officers who was present at the demonstration was roundly condemned and, in fact, ridiculed. One of my correspondents says—

I have never heard any of the Agricultural Department officers advocate Whitehead's method of cultivation for salt, nor have I seen any article in the Agricultural Journal on the subject; in fact the officer who was present at the demonstration said that as the State farms had no salt problem, there had been no necessity to experiment on the matter.

That is a nice thing for a departmental officer to say. The greatest menace to agriculture in the southern part of this State is not soil erosion, but salt. I was out recently with Mr. Brownlie and the Minister for Lands, on a long tour, and we passed many places where there were large areas without vegetation, owing to salt. That must be overcome. Mr. Whitehead has made experiments that I think are worthy of the closest investigation. The farmers attending the demonstration were unanimous in saying that his experiments had been successful and that they intended to do similar work on their own properties, but the departmental officer could not see it. In time, the department will find that it has been wrong. The demonstration was organised by the National Bank, which circularised farmers with an invitation to tend. As I have pointed out, the department arranged demonstrations or displays at the farms, but the trouble is that it does not advertise them and does not make transport facilities available so that people may get there. This is the big trouble.

I spoke the other night about the condition of the country roads. It is all very well to tell the people that a demonstration will be held, say, at Merredin. As this man said, people attended that demonstration from as far east as Southern Cross, as far south as Dumbleyung, from 100 miles north of Merredin and from just east of Northam, but to do that on the roads in their present condition is not possible. If the Government, when arranging these demonstrations at the State farms, would run a Diesel and advertise the fact, I am sure that many more farmers would take advantage of the opportunity. When the people of Kulin came to me, they told me that although they knew the demon-

strations had been held for some years, they had not even seen the Merredin State Farm.

Last year a fire-fighting demonstration was held at the State Forest at Narrogin and was fairly well attended. I had written to the department asking that the fixture should be advertised. The week before last there was a similar demonstration at Pingelly and the department rang me on Wednesday to inform me that it was to take place on the following Thursday. Only five people attended and the fire-fighters had taken their apparatus there from Dinninup. This sort of thing is very disheartening to those concerned and certainly achieves no good. All such demonstrations should be properly advertised.

Another point I wish to mention is that the departmental officers ought to visit the various farms. I have taken this matter up with the Under-Secretary. I have a letter from a farmer in my district who says—

I am worried about my affairs—the sharp decline in the productivity of the farm commencing in 1943 gradually, 1944 drought, 1945-46 too wet. From six-bag drop in 1942 to six bushels since, and 14½lbs. cut of wool both in 1942 and 1943 to about half that these last two years. At one time, Mr. Wild, of the Agricultural Department, used to call in occasionally, but since he was promoted, we have not had that benefit.

That man is troubled about the decline in the productivity of his farm and he wants the assistance of departmental officers. Surely such assistance should be made available to him! I strongly urge that more motor cars be made available to the expert officers. Men like Mr. McGarry cannot do their work and the people cannot get the benefit of the experts' experience if these men have to travel by train. Still Mr. McGarry does it and does valuable work, but the Minister should make cars available to the experts so that they may give advice to the farmers. If they called and discussed the troubles of the farmers, they would be welcomed and the farmers would profit by it.

The Minister kindly made available to me a copy of the report of his departmental committee on the grading and selling of fat-stock. I regret that the Minister did not publish that report, because a lot of propaganda is being indulged in at present about the weight-and-grade method of selling sheep. This House appointed a Select Committee

to investigate the matter last year and the departmental committee was sitting at the same time. Both committees arrived at practically the same conclusions, and I think the substance of those conclusions should be circulated as widely as possible. Three of the conclusions were—

1. That the competitive auction system should be retained.
2. That the Adelaide system was favoured.
3. That price-fixing must be avoided.

There is one organisation that has been flogging this question for a couple of years in an attempt to convince farmers that the weight-and-grade method will solve all their problems. The delegation that came to this State to investigate the matter reached similar conclusions, namely, that the competitive system must be retained and that the weight-and-grade system would not solve farmers' troubles. It would be advisable to publish the report so that the information could be broadcast through the State and people would not be influenced by what I regard as false information.

Progress reported.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon.

A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 2 p.m. tomorrow.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.52 p.m.