

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 8th November, 1944.

	PAGE
Questions: Native settlements, as to conditions, education, etc.	1607
Swan River crabs, as to size	1607
Bills: Motor Vehicle (Third Party Insurance) Act Amendment, 1A.	1607
Rural and Industries Bank, 3A.	1608
Constitution Acts Amendment (No. 2), report	1608
Members of Parliament Fund Act Amendment, 2A., Com., report	1632
Government business, precedence	1608
Leave of absence	1608
Motions: Mortgages, personal covenant, to inquire by Select Committee	1608
Crown Suits Act, as to rights of subjects	1615
Industrial Arbitration Court, as to power to order improved processes, etc.	1617
State-wide post-war works, as to plans for official inspections	1635
Old age and invalid pensioners, as to earnings and basic wage equivalent	1642
Metropolitan Meat Supply Select Committee, consideration of report	1621

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

QUESTIONS (2).

NATIVE SETTLEMENTS.

As to Conditions, Education, Etc.

Mr. HOAR asked the Minister for the North-West:

(1) Is there any strict medical supervision in the Moore River and Carrolup Native Settlements?

(2) Are periodical reports called for as to camp sanitation and cleanliness of sleeping quarters?

(3) Is it true that at Moore River settlement the bed clothes and mattresses are allowed to remain in a filthy state and that the beds are bug infested?

(4) Is it true that at Carrolup settlement there are about 150 children of school age receiving no kind of education through absence of school facilities?

(5) If so, what is being done to overcome this state of affairs?

(6) In view of present intense hostile criticism of the administration of native affairs, does he not think that a most exhaustive inquiry into all phases of native settlement life is desirable?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes. Moore River Native Settlement is visited monthly and at any other time when required by Dr. Myles, of Moora, also

three qualified nurses are permanently employed on the settlement.

Carrolup is also under professional attendance by Dr. Caldwell, of Katanning, fortnightly and any other time when required, and two qualified nurses are employed on the settlement.

(2) Yes.

(3) No.

(4) Yes, approximately 80 children are involved at present.

(5) The Education Department intends opening the schools after the Christmas vacation.

(6) With a full knowledge of the facts, the answer is no.

SWAN RIVER CRABS.

As to Size.

Mr. KELLY asked the Minister for the North-West:

(1) Is he aware that sand banks and shallow waters of the Swan River are at present teeming with very small male and female crabs?

(2) That children and grown-ups are netting large numbers of these undersized crabs?

(3) That a great number are being destroyed and thrown back into the water?

(4) Is there a minimum size at which crabs are permitted to be taken from the river?

(5) To whom is the policing of regulations entrusted?

(6) If a minimum size applies, is it the same for male and female crabs?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Quantities are being caught by amateur crabbers, some crabs no doubt being of small size.

(3) No.

(4) No.

(5) and (6) Answered by No. (4).

BILL—MOTOR VEHICLE (THIRD PARTY INSURANCE) ACT AMENDMENT.

Introduced by the Premier (for the Minister for Works) and read a first time.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PRECEDENCE.

THE PREMIER [4.34]: I move—

That on Wednesday, the 15th November, and each alternate Wednesday thereafter, Government business shall take precedence of all motions and Orders of the Day as on other days.

A similar motion is usually moved at about this period of a session. Sometimes Government business takes precedence on every Wednesday but the position at present is such that alternative Wednesdays will be sufficient. Regarding the business now appearing on the notice paper, a suitable opportunity will be given for discussion upon the respective items and that will apply also to Bills that have been introduced by private members. At the moment I cannot give members any indication as to when the Government considers the session may close. We are not in as advanced a position as usual with regard to Government business, and it may be necessary to sit a little longer than has been customary. In that respect I am sure the Government will have the co-operation of members so that the session may end at about the ordinary time.

Question put and passed.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motions by Mr. Wilson, leave of absence for one month granted to Mr. Newton (Greenough), on the ground of service oversea with the R.A.A.F. and to Mr. Raphael (Victoria Park) on the ground of military service.

BILL—RURAL AND INDUSTRIES BANK.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

BILL—CONSTITUTION ACTS AMENDMENT (No. 2).

Report of Committee adopted.

MOTION—MORTGAGES, PERSONAL COVENANT.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

MR. BERRY (Irwin-Moore) [4.37]: I move—

That, in accordance with a resolution of this House carried on the 25th October last, a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into

and report upon suitable legislation dealing with the personal covenant as affecting all mortgages.

I am pleased to see that the motion has reached the House after a somewhat turbulent passage, and I trust that the principle outlined in it will meet with the approval of members. I should endeavour to refrain from making out a case for the motion by reiterating what has been said already in connection with the personal covenant. Originally my idea was that the move should concern the rural section because I know that best. The motion I now move is more embracing by virtue of the fact that it now relates to the personal covenant as affecting all mortgages. I think the motion is worded in accordance with true logical perspective, because when a motion dealing with the subject was originally moved an amendment was agreed to for the appointment of a Joint Select Committee to consider the matter. Unfortunately the position was left entirely in the air because, although the motion was agreed to, no committee of any sort was appointed to give effect to it. I do not mind whether or not the matter is dealt with by a Joint Select Committee representative of both Houses. But I think the Legislative Assembly is quite capable of dealing with the matter itself.

There is no need to apply to the Upper House to bring in any of the elderly gentlemen there to help us out with a problem of this description. In this House we put up a case to demonstrate that, from the country point of view, it is necessary to do something with regard to personal covenants. There is no need for me to go all over that again. We took that action because we had come to the conclusion that there was need for it; and, by the time the motion was brought to its conclusion, it seemed that we had met with sufficient support for it to be admitted that perhaps a Select Committee would be a very good thing in order to ascertain whether there was any substantiation for the claim we had made as members of this House. That, really, was what was in my mind. We had no intention of endeavouring to bolster up in any way those who would profit through dishonesty. The idea we had in our minds was that we wanted some court of equity to which people could appeal when the distress resulting from the personal covenant had come upon them. That is all. Nor are we alone

in that direction because, as has been pointed out, this problem has arisen elsewhere and we find that in the Canadian Province of Saskatchewan it has been dealt with in a highly effectual manner. If I may be allowed to do so, I will read Section 2 of the Canadian Act for the Limitation of Certain Civil Rights—

(1) Where land is hereafter sold under an agreement for sale in writing, or mortgaged whether by legal or equitable mortgage for the purpose of securing the purchase price or part of the purchase price of the land affected, or where a mortgage is hereafter given as collateral security for the purchase price or part of the purchase price of land, the vendor's or mortgagee's right to recover the unpaid balance due shall be restricted to the land sold or mortgaged and to cancellation of the agreement for sale or foreclosure of the mortgage or sale of the property, and no action shall lie on the covenant for payment contained in the agreement for sale or mortgage.

(2) The benefit of the provisions contained in Subsection (1) shall extend to and include:

- (a) the personal covenant of the purchaser contained in any assignment by the vendor of such an agreement for sale;
- (b) the personal covenant of the assignee contained in any assignment by the purchaser of such an agreement for sale;
- (c) the personal covenant of the mortgagee contained in an agreement extending any such mortgage;
- (d) the personal covenant of a purchaser of lands subject to any such mortgage to assume and pay the mortgage;

and no action shall lie on any such personal covenant.

That provision in itself shows that the problem has cropped up in Canada. A problem of this nature is bound to crop up when one finds instances in the country where the personal covenant is actually imposing a restriction upon a man's life assurance policy. I referred to that aspect in this Chamber about two years ago. I have definite proof of the facts I then stated. Oddly enough, the Saskatchewan Act covers this aspect too, providing by Section 12—

Notwithstanding anything contained in any agreement for sale of land hereafter made or in any mortgage of land hereafter given, or in any agreement renewing or extending the same, no premium upon or in respect of an insurance policy on the life of the purchaser or mortgagee taken by or assigned to the vendor or mortgagee as collateral security for the amount owing under the agreement for sale or mortgage, shall be charged or added by the vendor or mortgagee to the account of the pur-

chaser or mortgagee in respect of the amount so owing or for a lien or charge on the land; and any agreement, stipulation, or covenant to the contrary is and shall be null, void and of no effect.

I should say the people of Saskatchewan have rather more humanitarian views, perhaps, than we have in Western Australia; but I have no doubt that we shall arrive at a stage where we in our turn can bring forward a report which will enable the Government of Western Australia to determine to bring forward a Bill which will be fair, equitable and honest to all concerned. After all it is a distressing state of affairs, when one puts one's life work into some effect, to find that through force of circumstances one is driven off one's asset, not actually physically but by the exigencies of uncontrollable misfortune; that by lack of money, and by lack of chance one finds that one's property is unsaleable and of no interest to anybody, of no value at all, even though it is the main security of the original mortgagee, who after a number of years finds himself in penury, and the thing upon which his security was based gone. I suggest in the motion that we be allowed to make inquiries and find out what can be done in a practical sense to help people of the State whom misfortune has brought to such a plight.

We are told, as we are always told in these times of changing legislation, that the enforcement of such motions will affect credit. The motion brings forward a matter which presses much more heavily on people in the country, people on the land; I refer especially to farmers and their properties. We were told before the motion came forward that it would curtail credit. Whenever we start to do anything humanitarian we are told that credit is a fickle jade, only too happy to transfer her affections to somebody else if we are not sufficiently pleasing in her eyes. I do not think that this motion relating to the lending of money is going to inflict hardship on the people by virtue of their powerlessness to pay, a possibility over which the law has no control, though I do not think it would matter very much whether all creditors went into the drain. I subscribe to the view that perhaps it would be a good thing for this country, and perhaps for most countries, if the Government took over all credit from institutions of national benefit.

So this red herring of the loss of credit does not deter me from bringing my motion before the House and asking for a Select Committee. I have mentioned the facts about a life assurance policy. That is a most important point. In my opinion, the Canadian legislation is a great move forward, for there is nothing more pernicious than the case I have actual knowledge of and brought forward here. I cannot give the name of the man affected, but if anybody wishes verification of the story from the man himself, I will write to him asking his permission. He found himself at such a low ebb that his creditors told him, "You must now hand over the only property you have left, your life assurance policy." That is an amazing happening in what we call a civilised era. I shall not labour the motion. We have had the subject well thrashed out already; and, as I said, even the Minister has intimated that he will agree to some form of Select Committee. That in itself is sufficient justification for now bringing the motion forward, instead of leaving the whole subject high and dry as it was before. So I think that rather than go over the remainder of a subject already dealt with, I will save time by formally moving the motion and entrusting it to members.

MR. WATTS (Katanning): I second the motion, and propose to say very little on it. The member for Irwin-Moore has done me a service in moving it. It will be recalled that the hon. member was the seconder of the previous motion on this subject brought before the House. I feel that we should have no difficulty in obtaining a Select Committee; but I was reluctant to proceed on the lines of moving for one in view of the fact that it would be impossible for me to attend meetings, because I am at present already serving upon a Select Committee. To that extent I am indebted to the member for Irwin-Moore. The arguments I could have advanced are arguments the committee, when appointed, can look into, and nothing but benefit can result from such an inquiry.

HON. N. KEENAN (Nedlands): I move an amendment—

That all the words after "That" in line 1 down to and including the word "Committee" in line 3 be struck out, with a view to inserting the following words:—
"in the opinion of this House, notwith-

standing the proviso to the decision of the House on the 25th October, a Royal Commission should."

I do not propose to make any reference to the merits of the matters to be inquired into. The object is to appoint some tribunal to inquire into those matters, and it would be a waste of time to attempt to anticipate what would be put before that tribunal. That tribunal will call evidence and admit evidence on the subject, and it is not of any advantage that we should now discuss what must be dealt with in a proper manner and in proper order by that tribunal. My first reason for asking that a Royal Commission should be appointed in lieu of a Select Committee is the magnitude of the question involved. Members will notice that it relates not only to rural industry but to all industry. It relates not merely to any particular part of the State but to all parts of the State. It would affect our industrial life in every form and in every part of the State.

My second reason is the complexity of the matters involved. It relates to all mortgages—every kind of mortgage that might be met with in the course of carrying on the business life of the State—and it applies to the past as well as to the future. It applies to existing mortgages, dealing with past matters and to future mortgages that may be entered into by any parties in any portion of the State engaged in any industry. Then, too, there is the effect that such a change of the law would produce. It must affect our economic life, which is entirely based on personal credit. The whole of the economic structure, so far as borrowing is concerned, is the personal equation, as the Minister very properly pointed out when discussing a Bill that was before the House recently. There is, besides, the question of the effect on future borrowing and how far that effect will be beneficial or the reverse. It is of the widest possible scope; and, if ever a Royal Commission were justified, as distinct from a Select Committee, it is fully justified in this particular matter.

There is this further consideration, which only arises on account of the time factor: If this matter were handed over to a Select Committee, that Committee could not possibly complete its inquiry before the House rose, even if the rising were delayed until a few days before Christmas—and we hope

that it will rise a considerable time before Christmas. It will take months to complete the calling of evidence and its examination and the proper cataloguing of that evidence; and, even if a Select Committee were appointed, it would have to be converted into an honorary Royal Commission in order to enable it to carry on the work. I do not hesitate to say that this is a matter of such importance as to warrant an inquiry by a Royal Commission. For these reasons I move for the deletion of the words designated.

MR. WATTS (Katanning—on amendment): It is not my desire that this amendment should be agreed to. The principle involved in the inquiry suggested is one that has already had, as the member for Irwin-Moore suggested, a troublesome and somewhat turbulent course in this Assembly since the beginning of this session; and the House, at the invitation of the Minister for Lands, has already agreed to the idea of referring that troublesome matter to a Select Committee. Whether the Committee should be a joint Select Committee or one confined to this House does not matter; the motion for a Select Committee could be made to read one way or the other. During my 9½ years membership of this Assembly I have sat on seven Select Committees, one of which—under your own chairmanship, Mr. Speaker—inquired into a matter which I think was as involved in many aspects as is the proposal now before the House; in some directions it was more involved. I have always found that Select Committees formed of persons chosen with reasonable care from among the member of this House have been able to produce reports which have been a credit to them and which have not, in any sense, shown lack of appreciation or knowledge of the matters involved in the inquiry or of the affairs of the State generally.

In consequence, it does not appear to me that there is any need to go outside the members of this House in any inquiry of this nature. It is an inquiry in which the matters involved are of such a nature as to be comparatively well within the knowledge of every member of this House. They are undoubtedly within the knowledge of a considerable number of the members of this House from whom the members of the Select Committee could be chosen. Another point to be considered is that this House cannot

appoint a Royal Commission. It can appoint a Select Committee and can elect the personnel of that Committee. It can extend the time for the consideration of the Committee's report. It is not obliged to compel the Select Committee to present its report before the House rises some time during next month. If the House is satisfied that the committee's difficulties or shortage of time prevent it from bringing down a report in the time originally granted, it is competent for the House—and that has been done—to extend the time for a lengthy period. But the House itself decides that there shall be an inquiry and it is unnecessary for anyone else subsequently to make a determination on the recommendation or expression of opinion of this House. The personnel of the Select Committees are wisely chosen to provide competent men to deal with the problems needing consideration. The member for Nedlands in moving this amendment claimed as one reason for seeking a Royal Commission that credit in this country was entirely based on the personal factor. I think I quote his exact words when I say "entirely based."

Hon. N. Keenan: I said the economic structure was based on the personal factor.

Mr. WATTS: I find that the greater part of the credit obtained on mortgages is based on the value of the security. For what purpose do we have these careful valuations made? For what purpose do we have enactments in some cases which provide a maximum loan on a percentage of that value? It is not because the loan that is to be made is based upon the personal equation. Neither do I agree that this Select Committee, of necessity, must bring down a report which requires action in regard to past mortgages. It may be—and that will be a matter for those appointed to decide—that it will take an attitude somewhat similar to that of the Legislature of Saskatchewan, mentioned by the hon. member just now, and deal only with future securities. If that is so, then any argument as to the danger of credit will substantially come to an end. I think it might be a great deal better for a large section of the community in Western Australia if it were not quite so easy to get 75 per cent. of the value of the property which is offered as a pledge for the loan.

Many of the arguments that have taken place in this House in regard to mortgage indebtedness might never have taken place

had there been, from our earliest days, less generosity—if I may use that word in this regard—on the part of the lender, because in many cases in the ultimate the liability has been found to be as great as or greater than the value of the security and the debtor has been put in an invidious position in connection with the loss of the equity that he fondly imagined in the early stages he possessed. So, on the counts that I have mentioned, namely that a Select Committee is perfectly competent to deal with a matter of this kind, it is desirable that members of this Legislature should personally concern themselves with a matter of this sort which requires investigation for legislative purposes, and that the appointment of a Royal Commission is not within the power of this House alone whereas that of a Select Committee is, and on the further ground that an extension of time can be obtained if it is desired because the Select Committee cannot achieve its purpose before the House actually rises, I ask members to oppose the amendment.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (on amendment): I have on many occasions in this Chamber given an indication that I am averse to Select Committees inquiring into matters that are technical and could be political. I have on that basis opposed the appointment of many Select Committees. When this matter was before the House previously and an amendment of mine was agreed to that the whole subject was so involved and far-reaching in its effect that it should be referred to a Select Committee of both Houses, I had in mind the general desire that a subject of its importance, of its complexity and of its far-reaching and involved nature should be inquired into on the widest possible scale. It is a subject that must be shorn of all political motive—if there is any political motive in it. Therefore it must, in my view, be a matter for an impartial and expert tribunal to inquire into and deal with. It needs to be one able not only to use the benefit of its experience and judgment but, as was mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition, able to make deductions from the evidence and the facts, and make the considerable research that is essential in the course of its inquiry. For these reasons I am disposed to support the amendment moved by the member for Nedlands.

If we can get an impartial review of this subject it will settle for all time opinions, not based on facts, in regard to what should be considered to be a fair thing, a reasonable thing and a proper thing taking into consideration the economic structure involved in financial matters covered by the post-war era. So, speaking for the Government and on the spur of the moment, I give members this assurance that, if they do share my view and support the amendment, the Government will give the earliest consideration to the appointment of an appropriate Commissioner or Commissioners. Further than that I am prepared to say that with the intricacies of the personal covenant in mortgages and all aspects of the personal equation as applying to the personal covenant to mortgages I shall, before the terms of reference are drawn, consult with those who have firm opinions on the subject in case they can give us a lead as to what might be included in those terms. I want to be wholly fair in this matter, not with any partisanship, and not with any motive other than that the whole subject should be thoroughly inquired into in an authoritative way.

MR. McDONALD (West Perth—on amendment): Because of the width of the inquiry referred to by the member for Nedlands and the Minister for Lands, a wise determination is of great importance, not only to the mortgagors concerned, but also to the whole of the people of this State. This matter seems to me to have particular importance at the present time. We hope that in the not too distant future it will be possible to return to commerce and international trade. There is a possibility—we hope so at any rate—that manufacturers who are operating in other countries will come to our State. They may be prepared to bring their capital here. If this possibility exists the structure of our commercial system is the first thing that they will consider. I would therefore like to see the inquiry made by the best possible tribunal, without in any way disparaging the ability of the members of this House who may possibly be members of the tribunal appointed. A Royal Commission also has some advantages which might be convenient as compared to a Select Committee. A Select

Committee has no power to administer an oath; a Royal Commission has that power. A Select Committee has no power to compel the attendance of Ministers; a Royal Commission has that power. A Royal Commission has power, at the request of a witness, to give him a certificate that will grant him adequate protection in respect of any statements that he may make before the Commission. No such power is possessed by a Select Committee. A Royal Commission, therefore, is equipped with a wider range of powers for the examination of a subject which is of major importance to the people of the State. In all the circumstances I am disposed to support the amendment.

MR. DONEY (Williams-Narrogin—on amendment): It has been claimed by the last three speakers that the work involved in an inquiry of this kind is of considerable magnitude and complexity. There is no doubt that that is so. That was in the mind of the member for Irwin-Moore, I have no doubt, when he moved the motion and considered that the matter involved was within the compass of the powers of a Select Committee. As a matter of fact, I believe that what is within the compass or power of a Royal Commission is equally within the powers of a Select Committee drawn thoughtfully from members of this Assembly. I am just a little dubious at the moment, without some assurance from the other side of the House, as to whether we can be certain of a Royal Commission being appointed if this amendment is agreed to.

The Minister for Lands: I give that assurance.

Mr. DONEY: That answer, therefore, destroys my objection in that respect. There is one other objection, namely, that quite a number of Royal Commissions have been appointed within the past five years. Some very excellent reports have been submitted. They certainly deserve action being based upon them, but no action worth while has been taken. I am referring specifically to the Royal Commission in respect of unemployment. Mr. Justice Wolff was the Commissioner on that occasion. Mr. Justice Wolff was also the Royal Commissioner to inquire into matters affecting the University. Another Royal Commissioner was Mr. H. D. Moseley who inquired into native affairs. Members here were in general agree-

ment that their reports were really excellent, but I do not remember any action that has followed as a result of them. I am reminded that a particularly fine report on the pastoral situation was made by the Surveyor General.

The Minister for Lands: How many of his recommendations have not been given effect to?

Mr. DONEY: I have not counted the number.

The Minister for Mines: You never—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The Minister for Lands: Can you name a recommendation that has not been given effect to?

Mr. Watts: Legislation.

The Minister for Lands: Every recommendation has been given effect to. You do not know what you are talking about.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. DONEY: It may be that in part I do not know what I am talking about. I do not mind admitting that that may be so. I can recall speeches delivered by members on the Treasury Bench of which it might be said that they knew nothing whatever of what they were talking about. However, I do not recall more than two or three occasions when the recommendations of Royal Commissions were given effect to and those were not major recommendations. I oppose the amendment.

MR. BERRY (Irwin-Moore—on amendment): I oppose the amendment. The Minister definitely stated that we were to work along the lines of a Joint Select Committee of both Houses and naturally, with the concurrence of the Leader of the Opposition, I moved for a Select Committee. Had the Minister made it clear that he did not intend us to have a Select Committee but that he was agreeable to the appointment of a Royal Commission, I would certainly have worded my motion in that way. I am disappointed—

The Minister for Lands: You do not look like it.

Mr. BERRY: No member of this House can point the finger of scorn at me in a political sense. I entered the House in order to help the people and without political ambition of any kind. The same atti-

tude has actuated me in moving the motion, which is a clean straight-forward one. However, it would have been worded in accordance with the expression of the member for Nedlands had I been given a lead in the first instance. This is the only point about the amendment that disappoints me. I do not know whether I shall be in order in expressing my feelings, but it is a matter of the utmost difficulty to get a Select Committee or any other body to inquire into this matter. Some of us are convinced that an inquiry is needed and that we must have it. If we do not get it this session, we will chase it next session.

MR. SHEARN (Maylands—on amendment): This is a question that has been under discussion for some time, so there is no need for me to say very much more than that I find myself in accord with the amendment moved by the member for Nedlands. Members of the Country Party from time to time have submitted that a great deal of personal suffering has arisen from the implications of the personal covenant, but we have to remember, as the member for West Perth pointed out, that this motion might well have a definite effect on the economic structure of the State. If it were to have an adverse effect, it is inseparable from the situation that the individuals concerned would be greatly disadvantaged. With other members, I wish to see the matter thoroughly investigated in a manner free from all entanglements. I wish to be satisfied that any investigation shall be of an expert character. This is a highly involved question presenting many aspects all closely related to the economic life of the State. I believe that the most thorough way of dealing with the question would be inquiry by Royal Commission. It might not be possible for a Select Committee to get all the angles in order to make a sound decision. This is a question that ought to be decided by experts and, in saying this, I speak with some knowledge of the subject. I have great sympathy with people in the many disabilities they are suffering but, when we do not know whether any action contemplated would have a retrospective effect or not, we ought to have such an inquiry as will ensure that all the details are considered and that, when a decision is arrived at, it will be one founded upon expert opinion and sound advice.

MR. LESLIE (Mt. Marshall—on amendment): I am not really averse to the inquiry being made by a Royal Commission, but what I am concerned about is the fact that there may be a measure of delay if we have a Royal Commission, and I do not want any delay to occur. The Minister has suggested that there might be some motive behind the move to get an inquiry. I take it that he implied political motive. It does not make any difference whether the question is investigated by a Royal Commission, a Select Committee or an individual; political motive in its broadest sense must be there, because only by political motive can we aim to progress beyond stagnation point, which may or may not have been reached. It is political motive that drives us forward at any time, and every movement made in the legislative arena is inspired by political motive but not necessarily by party political motive.

I assure the Minister that there is no party political motive behind this motion so far as we are concerned, but there is a political motive in the sense that we believe it is possible that the existence of this particular set of circumstances might be detrimental, not only to the mortgagor, but also to the mortgagee. That is why I am of opinion that the quicker we start to make an inquiry, the better it will be for all. Whatever the verdict of any committee or commission might be, I do not think it will have any detrimental effect upon the economic stability or prosperity of the State. On the other hand it might have the result—as I believe it will—of improving the present position. At this stage we do not know whether the application of the personal covenant is actually a detriment in the matter of money-borrowing or lending. Possibly the injustice done has been so slight and so restricted as to warrant its application in general for the good it does, and that only in a few instances has it operated unjustly. So far as I know, the evidence advanced has indicated that the personal covenant is a handicap and an injustice as it applies at present. We ought to assure ourselves on that point. On the question of the inquiry being made by Royal Commission, I may not be fully aware of the powers of a Royal Commission in the matter of taking evidence, but I think I am correct in saying that a Royal Commission appointed by the West-

ern Australian Government would have no power to call for persons or papers or to call witnesses from other States.

The Minister for Lands: No more than a Select Committee would.

Mr. LESLIE: In that respect, therefore, the powers of a Royal Commission would not be in excess of those of a Select Committee. Its powers would exceed those of a Select Committee only because a commission would be able to take evidence on oath. My mind reverts to a Royal Commission that sat some years ago; the subject-matter of the inquiry has escaped me for the moment. It was found that quite a lot of evidence could not be obtained, for the simple reason that the headquarters of the concern were not domiciled in Western Australia. Thus the Government found itself thwarted in its attempts to have that matter investigated. A similar situation might arise on this occasion. A Royal Commission might desire to get evidence from a financial institution, and its demands could be defeated by the fact that the books, papers and headquarters were outside the State. Consequently, a Royal Commission would not be able to do anything more than a Select Committee could do.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that members of this House are fully capable of conducting this inquiry and could carry it through expeditiously. The ramifications of the question, I grant, are very wide indeed, and need to be fully investigated. All said and done, what we are mainly concerned about is to ascertain details of the operation of the personal covenant as it has applied in the past, and for that all the evidence we need is here. I am sure that on behalf of both sides of what must be a political question in its widest sense, evidence will be given for their own protection and that both sides will be prepared to tender such evidence before a Select Committee and would not require inquiry by Royal Commission. I oppose the amendment.

Amendment (to strike out words) put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	..	..	..	31
Noes	..	..	..	10
				—
Majority for	..	..	21	—

AYES.

Mrs. Cardell-Oliver	Mr. Needham
Mr. Collier	Mr. North
Mr. Coverley	Mr. Nulsen
Mr. Cross	Mr. Pantou
Mr. Graham	Mr. Rodoreda
Mr. Hawke	Mr. Shearn
Mr. J. Hegney	Mr. Smith
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Styants
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Holman	Mr. Triat
Mr. Keenan	Mr. Willcock
Mr. Leahy	Mr. Willmott
Mr. Marshall	Mr. Wise
Mr. McDonald	Mr. Withers
Mr. McLarty	Mr. Fox
Mr. Millington	

(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Berry	Mr. Perkins
Mr. Doney	Mr. Seward
Mr. Hill	Mr. Telfer
Mr. Leslie	Mr. Watts
Mr. Owen	Mr. Thorn

(Teller.)

Amendment thus passed.

MR. McLARTY (Murray-Welling'on):

I move—

That the words proposed to be inserted be inserted.

Mr. Doney: Are those the words suggested by the member for Nedlands?

Mr. McLARTY: Yes.

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

MOTION—CROWN SUITS ACT.

As to Rights of Subjects.

MR. McDONALD (West Perth) [5.33]:

I move—

That, in the opinion of this House, the Government should without delay introduce legislation to provide that the subject shall have the same rights of action and redress at law against the Crown as exist between subject and subject.

Not long ago I had occasion to say something in the House upon the question of the rights of the subject as against the Crown; and, as I made an explanation at some length on that occasion, I do not propose to repeat it today. Putting the matter very briefly, one subject can sue another broadly on any one of three grounds or in three classes of action; first, under contract entered into between the parties; second, under what is called an implied contract, that is, where the parties do not expressly enter into a contract, but the circumstances are such that the court or the law will imply a contract. The illustration I gave was that if a sum of money were paid to a person by mistake, the law would imply a contract to repay that money to the person to whom

it really belonged. The third class of action is wrongs, or what are called torts. The law of Western Australia, until recently, was that in general the Crown could be sued for contracts; also, by invoking what was called a petition of right, the Crown could be sued for implied contracts. But with regard to wrongs, the Crown could only be sued if the wrongs arose in connection with a public work as defined by the Crown Suits Act. So that until recently the subject, as against the Crown, had the same rights regarding contracts and quasi-contracts as against a fellow citizen; but as regards wrongs, the right of the subject against the Crown was subject to very definite limitations.

By a recent decision of the High Court, the subject in this State no longer has the right to sue the Crown for what is called implied contracts, and therefore the remedies of the subject against the Crown in this State are now met with a still more extensive limitation. Prior to that recent decision of the High Court, it had been held on many occasions that the subject could sue the Crown, or have a remedy against the Crown, for an implied contract; but the High Court ruled this year that that is a wrong view, although held for so many years, and that there was no redress in this State for a subject who desired to sue for what is called implied contract. The result is that the ordinary citizen in this State, as against the Crown, is deprived of redress in quite a number of cases; and this motion is to affirm the principle that the law should be altered to give the subject, the citizen, the same right against the Crown as he would have against any other citizen. There is ample precedent or authority for taking this view. The main limitation on the right of a subject to sue the Crown, namely, that which relates to torts or wrongs, arises from a medieval principle of law that the King can do no wrong, and therefore that what was done by his officers could not be the subject of redress in the courts. We realise now that such a medieval principle should have no place in a modern system of jurisprudence. In addition, the Commonwealth, by a section in the Federal Judiciary Act, enables a subject to sue the Commonwealth as well for tort as for contract. Consequently, as far as the Commonwealth is concerned, the subject has a fairly complete remedy. The same is the position in New South Wales. By a statute of that State

the subject is given the right to sue the Government of New South Wales for wrongs as well as for contracts.

In 1928, a Bill was introduced into the British House of Commons—although for some reason I cannot find out it was not proceeded with—which aimed at making the British Government liable for torts or wrongs. When introducing the Bill in the House of Commons, the sponsor, Sir Henry Slessor, who afterwards became a judge of the English Court of Appeal, stated that the principle in his Bill had the support of the London Chamber of Commerce, the Bar Council of England, the Solicitors' Society of England, and many other commercial and responsible bodies, all of whom felt very strongly that the remedy of the subject against the Crown should be assimilated in Britain to that between subject and subject. I further referred, when speaking previously, to the comparatively recent article or address by Mr. Justice Lowe of the Supreme Court of Victoria. Mr. Justice Lowe in his address reviewed the position of the Crown as regards the subject in the Commonwealth and the various States, and he pronounced the opinion that there seemed to be no reason now why the subject should not be allowed to have the same right of redress for injuries or damage which he suffered against the Crown as he would have against a fellow citizen. Without stressing the matter, because I feel it does not need to be stressed, I think the Minister for Justice and the members of the House will agree with me that this reform is now overdue.

I do not think we can justify a position in which the subject is deprived of a remedy for injury or loss which he has suffered through the fault of the Crown. There is no possible reason for giving the Crown in any case a position of immunity as compared with the citizen or subject. The object of the motion is to affirm that, in the opinion of this House, the Government should bring down legislation in order to assimilate the remedies as against the Crown to the remedies as against the subject. I introduced a Bill—if I may refer to it—which on account of Constitutional reasons I was unable to proceed with as a private member. I have therefore taken the opportunity of asking the opinion and support of the House for speedy legislation to ensure that the subject in this State is not deprived of

remedies where he has sustained injury, damage or loss through the action of the Crown and for which the Crown would be held liable under the ordinary law. No attempt is being made to impose on the Crown any liability more extensive than that which the law imposes for his acts upon the ordinary citizen. All that is asked is that the liability of the Crown for its acts should be co-extensive with the liability of the man in the street. As the Crown has resources, it should be able to meet liabilities quite as well as the ordinary citizen.

I am particularly anxious that the law in this respect should be dealt with by the Government at the earliest possible opportunity; because, as a result of the decision of the High Court to which I have referred, the citizen in this State has had his remedies confined to an even narrower scope than was the case before the decision. I think the Government would be justified, and indeed would be rendering a service to all the people, if it took the earliest opportunity to bring our law regarding this question into line with the Commonwealth and New South Wales law at all events, and to ensure that there should be no differentiation between the Crown and the private person, and that both should answer equally for any loss, damage or injury which they may have occasioned to the ordinary citizen. I ask the support of the House to confirm this principle being embodied as soon as possible in suitable statutory form.

On motion by the Minister for Lands, debate adjourned.

MOTION—INDUSTRIAL ARBITRATION COURT.

As to Power to Order Improved Processes, etc.

Debate resumed from the 1st November on the following motion by Mr. North:—

Since modern conditions are gradually transforming the once useful Arbitration Court into a bottle-neck between industry and progress, action should be taken to increase the powers of the Court to enable it to—

- (1) order the installation of improvement of process in any particular industry;
- (2) certify that the funds necessary from time to time to give effect to No. (1) are for a purpose worthy of special rates of interest and amortisation; and

- (3) order that anyone losing employment because of the introduction of improved process receive full award rate of pay until further employment is obtained.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS [5.45]:

The opening words of the motion of the member for Claremont are in my opinion not correct, and therefore not justified. Those words are—

Since modern conditions are gradually transforming the once useful Arbitration Court into a bottle-neck between industry and progress—

certain action should be taken. The hon. member was not able to prove that modern conditions had been transforming the Arbitration Court into a bottle-neck between industry and progress. The main object of the Arbitration Court is to investigate claims made for alterations to wages and conditions. The court has carried out that duty not always with satisfaction to all the parties concerned, but certainly in a manner that compares favourably with the operations of similar tribunals in the other States of Australia. The court, in the fixation of working conditions and wages, has certainly not done anything to establish a bottle-neck between industry and progress. It might be possible to prove certain charges against the court of having done something which it should not have been done, and having failed to do something which should have been done, but I consider it is not at all possible for anyone to prove that the court has established a bottle-neck between industry and progress. I would be inclined to think that the court has to a considerable extent over the years assisted the progress of industry, and has certainly assisted to some extent the welfare of the workers of this State and of their dependants. Therefore whatever happens to the motion, unless it is completely defeated, these opening words, which in my opinion, are not correct and not justified, should be eliminated. The balance of the motion asks that action should be taken to give the court tremendous powers to operate along certain specified lines. The three lines of action specified in the motion are—

Firstly, to order the owners of industries to instal new processes in their industrial undertakings.

Secondly, to certify that any fund required to instal these improved processes shall be

made available under less than the ordinary rates of interest, and under more advantageous conditions regarding repayment than exist ordinarily and which normally are available to everyone else in the community.

Thirdly and finally, to order that anyone losing his employment because of the introduction of improved methods in industries shall receive the full award rate of pay until he is provided with further employment.

It may be advisable for the Government or some other organisation to give some degree of serious consideration to the suggestions contained in the motion, but I respectfully submit that the three lines of action suggested are not lines of action which should be brought within the jurisdiction and authority of the Court of Arbitration. I feel that the members of the court are not in any way trained to decide whether the industrial processes being operated in a particular place of business should be improved, and the extent to which they should be improved. The members of the court are trained specially, and their whole life's experience has been such as to fit them for the job of studying the rates of pay and the conditions of employment to be applied to industry. That is their special and specific duty, and I suggest to the mover of the motion that it is a duty which demands from them the full-time application of their ability and their knowledge. If we are to superimpose upon that important duty these complicated and not-easy-to-perform duties, I am satisfied that the members of the court will be overloaded, and will not be able to carry out any one of their duties satisfactorily. On that ground I think that the proposal in the motion to load this additional responsibility on to the shoulders of the members of the Arbitration Court is one that aims in the wrong direction so far as the men to deal with it are concerned.

We all agree and we all know that even in a small State like Western Australia—a small State from the point of view of industry—the installation of improved processes in industry has had the effect, and certainly had before the war, of displacing labour. This has applied not only to industry of a manufacturing character, but it has applied in the mining industry, to the farming industries, and in almost every undertaking where machinery is usable. In my opinion, the granting to the Arbitration Court or to any other authority of the

power to order the installation of improved machinery would not solve any particular problem. As a matter of fact, under the existing economic system it might very well intensify the problem by increasing the rate of displacement of labour. It is true that in the motion it is proposed to give the Arbitration Court power to order someone—I do not quite know whom—to pay to any displaced worker the full basic wage rate of pay until he is again absorbed into employment. I think we would be tackling the whole problem in somewhat the wrong way if we tackled it along the lines set out in the motion.

Mr. North: But this is the problem, is it not?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: What we ought to try to give some consideration to is the question of endeavouring to prevent the displacement of labour, something in the direction of trying to prevent industry from placing out of employment any of the manpower available within the State for employment in any industry. To do this it would be necessary, in my opinion, to tackle the question of the hours of labour generally, and to do something also regarding the systems of production and distribution. Under the existing economic system, as we all know, production generally is carried on for profit by those who own or control industry. When an industry ceases to return a profit to those owning and controlling it, it may be carried on for a time at a loss; but if the loss continues long enough economies are practised, and usually the first economy to be practised is that of dismissing a number of employees in the concern, or placing them on part-time employment. We know from our experience during the depression that the practice of economy in any industry of that description has the immediate and accumulative effect of undermining the profit-making capacity of the industry. Immediately a number of men are placed out of work they cease to receive incomes. When they have no income they have no purchasing power and so the demand for goods lessens to that extent.

We know that that is the vicious circle which occurs in an ever-widening way until depression develops, with all its ruinous effect upon the community generally. I am afraid the problem of trying to overcome the difficulties of the present economic sys-

tem is very much greater than has been visualised by the member for Claremont in his motion. I am satisfied there can be no adequate solution of the problem with which the hon. member is concerned until the system of production and distribution is so controlled and directed as to ensure that production and distribution generally shall be carried on for the benefit of the community as against being carried on for the purpose of giving those who own and control the systems of production and distribution all the profits upon the capital invested in those concerns. I think it is a very large step from production for profit to production for use. That in effect is a revolutionary step although it would not be impossible to achieve it by evolutionary and constitutional methods. Even though a physical revolution might not be necessary to accomplish it, I think it is not exaggerating to suggest that a mental revolution at least would be required. There would have to be a very drastic and sweeping change in the mental outlook of a majority of the people of Australia before that stage could be reached.

Despite all the opposition that has been expressed against the establishment of a system for production and distribution for use as against a system for profit, I am as sure as I can be that the day will come—it may even in our own lifetime—when such a system will be established and operated not only in Australia but in most if not all the countries of the world. I am not trying to blame those who control industry under the present system for the way that industries are operated. I know that under existing conditions when a man or company puts large sums of money into industry either on the productive or distributive side, it is merely a natural consequence that he or it should exercise capacity to the full for the purpose of ensuring that production and distribution are operated in such a way as to secure what is considered to be a fair return upon the capital invested. I am satisfied, too, that there are many men who own and control industries that, in a humanitarian sense, are quite as good as the average. I am satisfied that they do not consciously operate their industries as they do for the purpose of inflicting unemployment, hardship and poverty on any section of the community—but finally that is the result which does

accumulate in a community where industry, on the productive and distributive sides, is operated for profit. Moreover that is the only final result, the inevitable final result of such a system.

The only way by which a reasonable approach can be made towards the ideal of establishing regular, full employment for the people would be to assure to all bread-winners a reasonable, regular income, sufficient at least to enable everyone to purchase the necessities and, I should hope, some of the comforts of our daily existence. To those who have studied the development of industry in different countries of the world it will be apparent that there has been so often first the boom and then the break with its resultant depression. I submit, without any desire to go into any great detail this afternoon, that that state of affairs will recur in the future every so many years if the capitalistic system of production and distribution for profit is to be carried on after the war. I think the missing factor in the ownership and control of industry today and in the years of the past is the one concerning the actual welfare of mankind in the mass. Those of us who have taken an interest in this matter know from our own knowledge and experience that, so far as the owners and controllers of industry are concerned, when the choice is forced upon them because of economic conditions, they choose to protect and care for the plant and machinery in their factories, mines or other undertakings in preference to caring for the welfare of their men who may have worked for them for many years.

Mr. North: Or for the Government.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That applies to everyone.

Mr. North: Even to the Government.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: To the Government and to private enterprise as well. The existing economic system forces that upon everyone, when the operation of that system reaches the bursting point of its prevailing boom period. I feel that the member for Claremont realises that the provisions embodied in his motion are not fundamental. We have listened to far too many speeches by the member for Claremont not to be able to appreciate the fact that he understands far more fully than his motion would indicate just where the fundamental weaknesses are in the exist-

ing financial and economic systems. The proposals embodied in the motion represent merely palliatives. I believe he would be the first to agree with that description of his motion. They represent palliatives that would, perhaps, patch up some trouble here and some trouble there, but they would not in any degree provide a solution, except of a very temporary nature, for the real difficulties and problems associated with the question with which the motion deals.

It is my opinion, as I explained to the House a few weeks ago on a different matter, that the system of production and distribution cannot operate satisfactorily for any great length of time unless there is a drastic alteration in the financial system of Australia. I have already pointed out that I contend the opening words of the motion are unjustified and incapable of proof. I have also tried to indicate that, in my opinion, the work set out in the motion is work it would be most unsatisfactory to try to impose upon the men now constituting the Arbitration Court of this State. I also tried to show that, in my opinion, the line of action proposed in the motion, whilst it would afford some temporary relief here and there, would not in any degree represent a solution of any of the difficulties which flow from the breaking-down that occurs from time to time in our economic system, and which has inflicted unemployment upon so many people every now and again. In view of the opinions which I have expressed regarding the motion, I think it would be unwise for the House to carry it and I suggest to the member for Claremont that after the matter has been further debated and the opinions of other members obtained, he might be satisfied to withdraw the motion without the necessity of forcing it to a decision.

MR. SHEARN (Maylands): I listened very attentively to the speeches delivered by the member for Claremont and the Minister for Works. The idea actuating the member for Claremont was largely to afford the opportunity to review the consideration which the individual has received and which may be expected after the war as a result of the advance of science in relation to industry. I feel that the member for Claremont is to be commended for doing so, and therefore with his objective I find myself in total accord. I believe, as the Minister has pointed

out, that in the existing circumstances it would be quite impracticable and would be grossly unfair to all concerned to suggest that we should superimpose on the task confronting the Arbitration Court at the present time the added task implied in the motion. It might be more appropriately a matter for research and subsequent recommendation by a body that would investigate the advance of science in relation to industry in all its aspects. I feel sure the member for Claremont had that phase in mind and therefore I, with others, find myself supporting his contention. I hope the hon. member will accept the suggestion of the Minister and, having very appropriately raised this important question which concerns not only the workers but those charged with the control and management of industry generally, will be content to withdraw the motion.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

MR. SHEARN: Just as the hon. member in moving the motion visualised there, it is within the knowledge of myself and doubtless of other members of the House, that even prior to the advent of the war there were displacements of labour as the result of the introduction of scientific apparatus in the various industries. So of course the motion draws attention to the inevitable result, and I am therefore delighted, as also is the member who moved the motion, that the Minister in speaking on the subject commended it. I agree, further, that associated with this subject are so many different aspects that it would not be, in my humble opinion, wise to ask the Arbitration Court to assume the responsibility of the elucidation or the propounding of proposals which would bring about the ultimate object the hon. member has in view. I would like to see some means evolved by which the advocates both of the employees and the employers of the various industries affected by the increased mechanisation of industry might collaborate in evolving methods by which the human element in industry would receive recognition as the result of the invention of machinery.

But again I realise that the Industrial Arbitration Court in matters of conciliation has done a great deal for the benefit of industries in the past, and has shown a readiness, in many difficult directions, to pay attention to the human element in regard to the

various industries of the State generally. I have no doubt that they, too, at this moment are envisaging the ultimate solution, and that in due time they will, in the exercise of their respective responsibilities, experience a greater measure of hope, if I may so term it, than perhaps was possible or practicable in the past. I agree with the Minister that associated with this fundamental fact will be the condition of our financial system. As the mover has on various occasions spoken in this House in relation to that matter, and as motions referring to it have been submitted both by him and the member for Murchison, I have no doubt that those matters also have been progressively brought before the public.

Let us hope, therefore, that in the new order which seems to be developing all over the world as the result of the Atlantic Charter and various other responsible declarations, we may out of the process of all this evolve a system that will give the workers in industry, and indeed all people who play their part in the world generally, a more appropriate share of the result than has been the case hitherto. I am sorry I cannot agree with the process suggested by the hon. member. I am sure we all feel very grateful to the Minister for the opportunity he has afforded us of hearing his views; and I am of the opinion that having done that and brought home the facts to the Government and those concerned, who will in turn take the matter up, his purpose will be achieved by that means. Therefore I suggest that at this stage he may be prepared to withdraw the motion.

On the motion by Mr. McLarty, debate adjourned.

METROPOLITAN MEAT SUPPLY SELECT COMMITTEE.

To Adopt Report.

Debate resumed from the 1st November on the following motion by Mr. Seward:—

That in the opinion of this House the Government should give effect to the recommendations of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Meat Supply in the Metropolitan Area.

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE
[7.35]: The Select Committee of which the member for Pingelly was chairman, was appointed to inquire into several phases of the meat trade and of the marketing of stock,

principally for the supply of the metropolitan area and to some extent for export. I think that the hon. member in moving his motion was actuated by an earnest desire to have examined many of the difficulties the producers have experienced in the marketing of their stock. It will be remembered that on a scrutiny and examination of the original motion, it was materially altered by amendment; and the terms of reference upon which the Select Committee operated were substantially different from those originally moved. That, too, was done in good faith, and in an endeavour that the hon. member, through the Select Committee, could be the medium of solving some of the immediate problems associated with the meat trade. I pointed out to the House at the time that a departmental committee was then inquiring into many kindred problems. The departmental committee has added to its members authorities drawn from outside the Public Service—persons interested in various aspects of the trade from whom dependable and authoritative opinions could be obtained. That committee was not suspended during the inquiries of the Select Committee, and it is still continuing with them, and collecting information from throughout Australia. Further, it is obtaining information from countries overseas, including South Africa, where somewhat similar problems to those obtaining in this State are being experienced by the stock raisers and the people marketing the stock in that country.

I think it can be safely said, both from the report of this Select Committee and from our knowledge of the trade in this State, that producers regard it as much more important to investigate marketing in this State than to examine the experience of any other Australian State. One of the difficulties associated with marketing in Western Australia is that although Midland Junction has long been considered to be the fat stock market of Western Australia, its development, because of circumstances, is to become the important store market for Western Australia, and that although producers have the opportunity of submitting their stock at country sales of store stock or of resorting to private sales, there is always the difficulty associated with forced sales, or where farmers of necessity have to clear out all their stock from time to time; and Midland has to be the clearing house. The problem, therefore, is one that the agents have it

within their control to segregate the stock, to sell them either as fat stock or as store stock or even as of export quality. That position must remain, although it does give to the grower some disadvantage if it is not possible for him to withdraw from sale stock which could be better treated on his own account at a meat works than dealt with by sale at saleyards. That is one of the troubles whereby, although it is practised and has been practised, the withdrawal of certain lines again becomes a matter that raises difficulty with the credit system obtaining at Midland.

One of the matters that was introduced into the terms of reference for the Select Committee in an amendment moved by me, was an inquiry into the selling in the city on a weight and grade basis. It will be recalled that members who spoke to the original motion gave much prominence to and placed great stress on the advantage of selling on a weight and grade basis. It will be remembered, too, that I gave attention to many of the great difficulties, and that after the inquiry made by the Select Committee it has come to the conclusion that selling on a weight and grade basis in this State should not be instituted at present. That is the Select Committee's first recommendation, and I agree entirely not merely with the deduction drawn and the conclusions arrived at but with the committee's assessment of the evidence at hand. I consider it obvious that at this stage there would be great detriment to the producers of this State who produce special lines, such as summer lambs and lines of early lambs, if there were instituted a practicable system on a weight and grade basis for export parity. I am sure it would act prejudicially to the interests of very many producers of special lines in Western Australia. But there are also very many other aspects.

In the changing over at our principal abattoirs, as distinct from our export work, considerable expense would be involved and considerable structural alterations would be necessary; although I think that ultimately in the interests of all concerned and for the better handling of stock on the market, and in order to induce growers to market stock in prime condition and to take up the question of the fat stock market rather than send all lines in one consignment, the weight and grade basis is likely to be introduced into this State permanently. I regard that

as a fair summary of the position, that while the moment is not opportune it is a matter of evolution in the industry once the difficulties I have mentioned are overcome. So that I am not surprised that the committee arrived at the conclusion expressed in its first recommendation. At the same time the departmental committee is still probing the matter to see how soon and to what extent the system may be applied in this State. The next recommendation is—

That stock firms take greater care to so regulate the supply of fat stock to the Midland market as to meet as nearly as possible the weekly demand.

One of the difficulties associated with that recommendation is that bookings must be made by agents in excess, if possible, of anticipated market requirements. I think that Perth's weekly requirement is in the vicinity of 17,000 and bookings by agents reach very high figures at times, because it is difficult for them, even when in receipt of an assurance from growers that a certain line or a certain number of trucks are prime, to avoid undertaking considerable grading and sorting when the stock arrive in order to present them to the public in the best condition and according to the needs of the market. There are difficulties associated with the handling of stock at Midland; and members who have been there the night before, or in the small hours of the morning, when preparations for the sale are in progress, will know what difficulties the agents have in sorting trucks which contain everything from ewes and suckling lambs to wethers hardly able to walk. That is often the case. We have seen fat lambs in the same truck as ewes that can hardly get down the gateway. The agents have a difficult task because, as sometimes happens, a fire may cause the total destruction of feed on a certain property and from some districts, as near as that represented by the member for Murray-Wellington, 600 or 700 sheep have to be trucked at short notice to the Midland market and the agents have to do their best for the client.

This recommendation asks that stock firms take greater care to regulate the supply to meet as nearly as possible the weekly demand. In seasons such as this, the agents are having very great difficulty, and I think that the chairman and members of the Select Committee have not ignored that posi-

tion. They are in sympathy with the agents in their difficulties. However, I am taking the opportunity to discuss all aspects with the livestock salesmen to see whether there can be a betterment of conditions not only regarding booking but also to keep out of the market, if at all possible, stock that would be better not trucked at all, but sold somewhere nearer their home town or their stores for agistment or sale as stores. They cannot be kept out in seasons such as this. It is very difficult, because we get, from districts as far apart as Lake Grace and Northampton, stock coming to the Midland market. While ewes and other aged sheep off shears are in such a condition that they are not fit to be sold as fat mutton, they are coming forward. Farmers have no alternative. It is a very difficult matter; but I realise that the Select Committee was very earnest in its desire to avoid the difficulties associated with the multitude of grades and types of sheep—because Midland is not only a fat stock market but a general market also—in an endeavour to keep certain types of sheep away from sales.

Mr. Seward: Keen inspection by country agents might help a great deal.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: There are always emergency cases in bad years. I think that very many more sheep should be sent direct to the works for treatment on owner's account. There are large numbers of sheep suitable for export grade that pass through the agents' hands to places perhaps not even tied to an agent. But, because of the practices of the past and the habits that farmers have got into, the sheep follow the normal course through the saleyards.

Mr. Perkins: Some are mixed consignments.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: That is the trouble relating to the former point I made in regard to general marketing, but it would be the farmers, in many cases, as the hon. member knows, who segregate sheep before trucking; and if, when sending their trucks they were to send two to one destination and one to another, I am certain that, with the present guaranteed price for fixed grades, selling on a weight and grade basis at Robb's Jetty, the owners would be shillings per head better off. Tens of thousands of sheep were, last year and the year before, dealt with on owner's ac-

count at Robb's Jetty, because I took the risk on behalf of the Government of giving a guaranteed price on the advice of the Under Secretary for Agriculture, who had scrutinised the subject very thoroughly in conjunction with the Meat Commission and concluded that it looked as though we would get out all right even by offering that price. Some of the ewes killed at Robb's Jetty on owner's account during the last two years have meant shillings per head to the grower which he would otherwise not have got had the sheep gone through the Midland market. There is on that point a matter dealt with in both the second and third recommendations, the matter of organisation within the farmer's own business. I realise it is difficult, because there is such competition in country districts, such stimulation and encouragement by agents, to pursue the course of business followed over many years.

Mr. Leslie: Could the department call the agents into consultation?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Usually agents are not unreasonable people. They have their business to protect and are anxious to get business. We know some country district agents who have property and stock tied to them do force sales. To get bookings, they will sell some sheep three or four times in one year. This is an entirely different matter, where sheep are being marketed for slaughter. We must remember, too, that farmers who have a distinct advantage in being near a market or a railway line are able to profit by the market trend much more readily than are those who are some distance away, and sheep not in a fat condition are marketed in those circumstances. Recommendation No. 3 is one in which the Government has interested itself for a long time. We have had consultations between the men concerned—master butchers and all those on whose behalf killing is done by separate interests, and the slaughtermen, most of whom are contract workers; and at last, after prolonged discussions and considerable negotiation, both employers and employees are ready to agree to the principle embodied in this recommendation.

As pointed out in the recommendation, it will require quite a lot of organisation and, on the part of the Government, some negotiations in order to meet the needs of

those who are key men and who are able to hold their own with all others, and yet find a place for those who cannot hold their own and who are extremely tired of the long and arduous work associated with slaughtering since the war began and manpower has been so short. It is a tribute to the abattoir workers in this State that, under the pressure conditions that have obtained during the last few years, we have been almost entirely free of industrial disputes and stoppages. Not merely members of the Select Committee but all those who know the circumstances connected with slaughtering—whether at Wyndham, Robb's Jetty, Midland or Albany—are aware that it is not a pleasant job. The younger generation has been taken out and the older generation has been carrying on and the men are becoming tired, not merely because of pressure of circumstances in the industry but from the nature of the work. While I agree with the principle in this recommendation, I remind members it is one to which it is difficult to give effect immediately. That is one point I want to raise.

I am not going to cavil at the motion moved by the member for P'ingelly that the Government should give effect to the recommendations of the Committee; but I shall have a lot to say if, on any subsequent occasion, there is a complaint that the Government, knowing the position, and in spite of the recommendations of the Select Committee, has not given effect to its report. If circumstances do not permit—as they do not at present—of our giving effect to the third recommendation, I hope that the hon. member and those of his party associated with him will have due recognition of our difficulties, particularly in regard to the manpower problem and the problem of organisation—both structural and within the working conditions of the industry—in giving effect to the recommendations.

Mr. Watts: I am sure we shall if you explain them at some reasonable time.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: There is only one thing that makes me suspicious of motives behind recommendations for Select Committees.

Mr. Watts: Do not bring it up again. It does not arise in this question; you should see that from the report.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I have said before that I commend the hon. member and those associated with him for the report they have submitted.

Mr. Watts: I heard you say it.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: And I hope he will not fall by the wayside and get into the channel some members have got into after recommendations have been made by Select Committees.

Mr. Watts: It is possible you might, if the positions were reversed.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I doubt it, because I do not like matters being raised for political motives. The fourth recommendation is one that is most contentious and the Government would be caused considerable concern in endeavouring to give effect to it. I have not seen in this report or in any report made departmentally sufficient argument to convince me that the Midland Abattoirs—in addition to the works at Robb's Jetty and the other export treatment works at Fremantle and Albany—should be licensed to treat stock for export. There is a number of objections to this recommendation. Midland was designed and is operated for the treatment of stock for local consumption rather than for export, and there is a prospect of considerable expenditure being necessary before this recommendation could even be entertained. A very large sum—running into tens of thousands of pounds—would be necessary for chillers. There would be a position in regard to inspection that predecessors of mine in the portfolio of agriculture have tried hard to guard against; that is, dual control of the killing floor in respect to stock being slaughtered for local consumption and for export.

One of the difficulties associated with meat being treated at a works which has a dual function is the conflict of view between meat inspectors. What may be an excellent article for export would normally, according to the price factor, go into local consumption. But at other times of the year meat that would be discarded for export might be excellent for local consumption. We have had in the past a certain amount of conflict as between State and Commonwealth departments on this particular matter. I am not anxious to have such conflicts. I am not anxious to force the Government into the difficult situation that

would arise at Midland in the matter of expenditure. Tens of thousands of pounds would be required for the chillers, and in addition transport facilities would be necessary to convey the frozen carcasses to Fremantle. There is much to recommend the slaughtering for export at some place adjacent to the port. Since the war broke out the Government has spent tens of thousands of pounds at Robb's Jetty and has created storage for hundreds of thousands of carcasses after treatment for export. We have at Robb's Jetty capacity to handle thousands of carcasses for many years. Since war broke out we have added sufficient cold storage space for 3,000 tons of export carcasses. This recommendation if put into effect—certainly no time is mentioned—in anything like the immediate future would not only raise the conflicts that I have mentioned, but would entail expenditure that is not warranted. However, the absence of any time factor in the recommendation does not incline me to be harsh and to act against the motion in general because of that particular weakness.

Mr. Perkins: You would have to put it into effect before you could bring about the weight and grade system there at any time in the future.

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: That is also a consideration and it does mean, so far as our provisional estimate is concerned—and I do not think the Select Committee obtained information through the Public Works or from the Principal Architect—that it will cost a large sum. That will be required not only for structural alterations to cope with the present situation, but for new buildings to give effect to the weight and grade basis. If we go further than that and proclaim the Midland works as export works, we are going to be faced with that expenditure anyway. So I ask members to be tolerant in their views. I cannot interpret just what is in their minds when they recommend that the Government give effect to these recommendations. This recommendation states—

In any alterations or extensions effected at Midland Abattoirs provision to be made for killing and freezing accommodation so that meat intended for export can be treated there as well as at the Robb's Jetty works.

So far as it goes that is quite safe, but I repeat I do not wish members to endeavour to exert any pressure in that regard be-

cause it would prove an embarrassment rather than be of assistance either to the Government or to the producer. I am quite in agreement with the last recommendation. The matter was raised at the last Premiers' Conference by, I think, the Commonwealth, in an endeavour to institute on an Australia-wide basis, the branding of meat according to quality. Members will recall that I spoke on this subject early in the session and pointed out the difficulties associated with the branding of meat according to quality if some meat was really prime although rejected for export. But, upon examination of the subject, there are ways and means of overcoming those difficulties. The Premier handed to me today a communication he had received from the Premier of Queensland with whom he had communicated because of the institution of that system in Queensland. This method is said to give great satisfaction to the producer and every security and protection to the householder.

I can assure members that we are going very closely into the variations necessary to be made to the Queensland system in order to institute branding, according to quality, in this State. Summing it all up, I am not averse to agreeing to the motion now moved, that the Government should give effect to these recommendations, but I think it should be with the reservation—not necessarily as an addendum to the motion—that it is to be within the limitation of the costs and the difficulties involved in the change-over at Midland for export. I would remind the House, too, that until the committee consisting of authorities on the subject furnishes the Government with its report, it would be unwise to make any drastic alteration in accordance with the principles recommended in this report when similar matters are being inquired into and will be reported upon.

Mr. Seward: Will that report be available to the House?

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I have no objection to its being made available because this committee is reporting at my request and has, as members know, been inquiring for quite a while into various aspects which have as their aim the promotion of better marketing facilities, better conditions at Government and private abattoirs and, in the long run, better means of handling meat for both local consumption

and for export. So I have no objection to the motion. I realise that the Select Committee did, with the means at its disposal and during the time it was operating, quite a good job in its survey and scrutiny of this subject.

MR. WILLMOTT (Sussex): As one of the members dealing with the question of meat for the metropolitan area, I am pleased with the remarks of the Minister for Agriculture. Although he does not agree with some of our recommendations, he is favourable to them on the whole. I did not mean by some of these recommendations—I had better not say “we” because I am speaking on my own behalf—that the Government should accept them immediately. The suggestion is rather that these things should come into force at some later date. That is so especially in connection with recommendations Nos. 3 and 4 dealing with the extension of freezing works at the Midland abattoirs. We considered, after careful inspection of Robb’s Jetty and the Midland works, that the works at Midland should be extended to give both producers and consumers a better article. That is why we suggested that all killing should be under the control of the Controller of Abattoirs. We thought, and some of the witnesses who came before us thought, that the work that the slaughtermen were doing had to be rushed through to get the job completed. We gathered from different witnesses that they had to rush the work so that the butchers could get the meat into their shops. I considered that, if they had the works extended and placed under the control of the Controller of Abattoirs, the work could be carried out far more efficiently than it is at present.

We gave the chain system a lot of consideration, but eventually decided that it could not come into force at present. I doubt whether it can be brought into being for some considerable time because it is not in the best interests of the tradesmen who are doing the job. The fast slaughterman and best killer has to work down to the rate of the slowest man. Each man has his own job to do on the chain system: he has his portion to do as the carcase moves along the chain. The Minister for Agriculture is not altogether keen on the suggestions that we have made in regard to giving more powers to the stock firms, although he

does agree with what we have suggested to a certain extent. We think that if the stock firms had more control and were given more authority over the market we would have a more even supply entering the Midland market each week. As the Minister explained, we do at present get mixed truckloads of stock. We get fat sheep, lambs and poor sheep in the one truck.

We think that if the stock firms had more control and there was proper inspection of the stock before leaving the farms, and stricter grading before the stock was trucked from the country we would get better quality fat stock at Midland. These things could be carried out if the stock firms had more control, but then we would need to have greater facilities for store stock in the country centres. We think that if we can build up greater numbers of store stock at country centres we shall overcome much of the difficulty of over-yarding at Midland. If the stock agents had greater control, I believe that many of the difficulties now existing at Midland Junction would be overcome.

I am pleased that the Minister has agreed to quite a number of the recommendations, and feel sure that if they are put into effect benefit will result, not only to the producers, but also to the consumers. Especially would this be so if we could introduce the system of branding the meat. This is one thing that would encourage producers to raise a better article, and this in turn would lead to consumers being supplied with a higher grade of meat. I hope that the Government will give effect to the recommendations, even if some of them cannot be put into force immediately, as we knew that some of them could not be adopted at this stage.

MR. LESLIE (Mt. Marshall): Members of the Select Committee must feel highly gratified at the complimentary remarks the Minister has passed on the report. Of course, the Minister was not actuated by any political motives, but I am actuated by political motives when I say that I regretfully have to admit experiencing some disappointment at the committee’s findings. The political motives that animate me are the interests of both the consumers and the producers. I do not query the finding of the Select Committee that the sale of fat stock on a weight and grade basis cannot be introduced at present. I abide by

the opinion of the members of the committee. They heard the evidence, and are in a position to know the facts. Their finding, however, will cause considerable disappointment amongst stock raisers in the country districts. I think the Minister should make plain to stockowners the reasons why the sale of meat on a weight and grade basis cannot be introduced at present. The fact that the Minister is able to support that recommendation will certainly carry some weight, but in view of the agitation that has existed in country districts for a considerable time and to a considerable extent—this was one of the reasons why the motion for the appointment of a Select Committee was moved—I am satisfied there will be disappointment.

The recommendation that stock firms might regulate the supply of fat stock going to the Midland market is one that stock raisers will favour. I would like to hear from members of the committee whether this possibility was discussed with the stock firms with a view to ensuring whether it would be practicable to a sufficient extent to meet the demand. I know that to do this will occasion considerable difficulty, because so much of the stock sold at Midland is sent down in accordance with seasonal conditions. The figures submitted by the Select Committee indicate that. However, to endeavour to get growers to hold back their stock at flush periods—the periods for which they have worked to raise the stock—will create some difficulty, but it should be possible for stock agents to select areas from which the stock can come and to control the quantity that can be sent to the Midland market—I am referring to normal seasons, rather than to the abnormal season now prevailing—and also to exercise some jurisdiction over the grading of stock. I am thinking of the smaller growers who send their stock to market, not by two or three truckloads, but by two or three of them combining to make up one truckload. It should be possible to discriminate between fat stock and store stock being sent to the market. I have seen stock loaded into trucks for transit to the market without any regard at all being paid to the condition of the sheep. This must have a detrimental effect upon the prices realised when the sheep reach the Midland market.

One aspect of the business with which the Select Committee did not deal deserves mention, though it was not specifically set forth in the terms of reference. I refer to the condition of stock on arrival at the Midland market. This is one of the most grievous causes of loss to stockowners. Stock being forwarded from country districts, under the present train arrangements, which have remained unaltered for years, has to spend a couple of days and nights in the trucks—sometimes in weather the like of which we are having now—before they reach the market. A very little alteration in the train service would overcome much of that difficulty. I suggest that the Minister might investigate the possibility of making these slight alterations, which is all that is necessary to ensure that the stock reaches the market in a better condition.

The most disappointing feature of the recommendations is that dealing with prices. Unfortunately I find no mention in the report dealing with this position of the terms of reference on which the committee was appointed. Paragraph (c) of the resolution reads—

Whether the prices for export and for local consumption are equitable for producers and enable meat to be available to consumers at reasonable rates.

Amongst stock raisers there is a very grave suspicion that someone is getting a big rake-off in the meat business, and that someone is not the producer or the consumer. I had hoped when the committee was appointed that we should learn where the rake-off is going. The disparity between the price the consumer pays and the price the producer receives is far too great to be allowed to pass unnoticed, but there is nothing I can do to remedy the matter now. I rose to speak at this stage in order to enable members of the Select Committee to reply to my queries. If the powers of the Select Committee did not extend far enough, I would have liked to see a recommendation that a Royal Commission be appointed to go further into the matter. I know that this is a grievous problem and one which is most disturbing to stock raisers.

The Minister for Agriculture: Were not you arguing this afternoon that a Select Committee had more authority than had a Royal Commission?

Mr. LESLIE: No. Anyhow, if the Minister finds that the authority exercised by the Select Committee was insufficient, he might even now have appointed a Royal Commission to pursue the investigation further. I cannot say whether the powers were too limited but, if a Royal Commission is necessary, it should be appointed. This is a matter that definitely demands investigation, because the disparity between the price charged to the consumer and the price received by the producer is far too great to be passed over lightly. However, the Select Committee made no reference to this aspect in its report. No doubt there was good reason for refraining from making such mention, and if so, I and the stock raisers will be glad to hear it. Stock raisers are interested in the report from that angle. I reiterate that while the Select Committee must feel satisfied at the complimentary remarks that have fallen from the Minister, and though I am glad that the Government in due course will adopt the recommendations so far as it is possible to do so, I, for political motives—if the Minister likes to put it that way—feel compelled to express disappointment at the committee's findings. Nevertheless, I support the motion.

MR. PERKINS (York): I speak as a member of the Select Committee which has prepared the report and made the recommendations in accordance with the terms of reference. I am gratified with the reception accorded by the Minister to the report and recommendations. Members of the departmental committee who were called before the committee gave us all possible assistance in our inquiry into the matters referred to us. The Minister said he thought that the weight-and-grade basis of selling meat for local consumption in this State will eventually come into operation by an evolutionary process, and the member for Mt. Marshall said that, in his opinion, the recommendation will be disappointing to growers generally. We took considerable evidence from representatives of the producers and the trade with regard to the first recommendation, and the conclusion from the evidence—as members who read the evidence will agree—was absolutely inescapable. To bring in the weight-and-grade system at present would not benefit the producers. Under that system a large number of producers would be penalised and there would be very

grave danger indeed that the level of prices would be export parity prices for by far the greater portion of the year, and for a greater portion of the year than happens at present when selling on the hoof operates at Midland and producers have the option of selling on the weight-and-grade basis at Robb's Jetty. Therefore, the weight and grade basis operates to the extent that producers have the opportunity to sell on that basis at export parity prices at Robb's Jetty.

The only advantage that a weight-and-grade basis could give to producers would arise if prices for the local market on a weight-and-grade basis were raised considerably over the basic price, which is the export parity at the present time. Therefore, in the opinion of the Committee, the producers will gain nothing as matters are at present. We have, however, qualified that by saying "at present" because war conditions are undoubtedly abnormal and none of us knows what changes may take place in the course of the next three or four years. Therefore, the further recommendations in Nos. 3 and 4 are designed to make the weight-and-grade basis of providing meat for the metropolitan market possible at some future date, if such is desirable. I will deal with the point more fully when I come to those particular recommendations. In regard to the second recommendation, the committee considered the possibility of referring powers to a statutory body to regulate the supply of stock to Midland Junction. I think that all the members of the committee, after careful consideration, came to the conclusion that although such a method would have advantages in preventing a glut or a great shortage at Midland Junction, it could also be the means of inflicting great hardship upon certain producers.

We do not think a statutory body would be as elastic as the present system, under which stock agents confer together prior to ordering trucks on the Thursday midday before the Wednesday sale. Under that system, producers who are suffering from shortage of feed or water and who are compelled to sell their stock, can give instructions to the agents that the trucks must be ordered. It is possible for the agent then definitely to order the trucks for those clients, and at the same time postpone the ordering of trucks for other clients who are in a more fortunate position and can hold their stock

for a later market. That undoubtedly does occur. Many producers who place orders with stock agents give them a certain discretion in the ordering of trucks. The more one considers the difficulties in regard to the regulation of the flow of stock to the Midland market, the more one is impressed by the danger of doing something which will penalise some producers who are in the worst position to suffer that disability.

The Minister did not deal with the second part of recommendation No. 2. This deals with the nomination of stock to be forwarded to Midland Junction by road as well as by rail. It is possible, in the event of a short ordering of trucks, for producers to send their stock into Midland Junction by road. There have been times when, although the number of stock nominated for transport by rail has been considerably below normal, the final figures of stock yarded have been above normal because of the extra stock delivered by road transport. That does not apply so much in wartime, because of the restriction of road transport, but it was a major factor in peace-time when transport was available. That does confer an advantage on producers who live in areas which enable them to transport stock by road. In regard to recommendation No. 3, the Minister agreed to the principle, but was somewhat critical of the possibility of putting it into effect in the near future. In my opinion, this recommendation will do more to prevent wide fluctuations in prices between the various pens of stock of even quality at Midland Junction than anything else I know of.

The evidence submitted by the retail butchers made it clear that if this service were provided, they could go to the Midland Junction saleyards and buy their requirements without having to purchase them through wholesalers. If a small retail butcher required 30 carcasses to supply his own shop, he could go to Midland Junction, purchase the sheep on the hoof, have them killed on his account by the abattoirs management, and delivered either by the abattoirs' own vans, or else by contract carter, right into his shop. Anyone reading the evidence tendered to the committee must be impressed by the statements which were made showing that in the past the wholesale butchers have exercised an exceedingly unwholesome influence on the meat trade in this State. The evidence also discloses that

at present none of the retail butchers is under the financial control of the wholesalers. That evidence was clear both on the part of the retailers and the wholesalers. Therefore, it is possible for a retail butcher to purchase his stock in the yards and have them treated on his own account at the abattoirs, if the management is able to find the labour and the facilities for that to be done. This would do away with the very restricted competition now existing at Midland Junction.

We understand that approximately only 20 wholesale butchers are operating in the Midland yards, and that is the maximum competition there can be for the fat stock sent to that market. Any broadening of competition will to a large extent rectify the complaints, particularly of the producers' organisations, that the prices which the producers receive for their stock varied greatly from pen to pen for sheep of very similar quality. The Minister also seemed somewhat critical of recommendation No. 4, asking for the setting up of killing and freezing facilities at Midland Junction for export. This is necessary to put the trade on a really solid basis at that centre. At present, stock in excess of the local market requirements which are purchased for export and which growers desire to have treated on their own account at Robb's Jetty after being through the Midland yards, have to be retrucked at Midland and sent to Robb's Jetty. It means double trucking and a certain amount of bruising of the stock involved.

The provision of export killing arrangements at Midland Junction would overcome some of that trouble. But what I regard as an even more important effect of the recommendation, and one that the Minister touched upon, is that provision for the killing and freezing accommodation at Midland would make it possible for the weight and grade basis for the disposal of meat for the local trade, to be introduced at Midland at any future time it was thought desirable. Obviously the weight and grade basis for the metropolitan trade requires exactly the same arrangements as are to be found where there is killing on owner's account at Robb's Jetty at present. Therefore if when major—and I think major is a word that may be very well added to our recommendations in paragraph 4—alterations are made at Midland Junction, the Minister might bear

in mind the possibility of improving the facilities in this regard.

The Minister for Agriculture: You are making the major point the kernel of the recommendation.

Mr. PERKINS: I think there may be minor alterations immediately required there, and we would hardly say that the Government should alter the whole of the works merely because it has to make provision for the killing of another 500 sheep a week. But if major alterations are contemplated the Government would be well advised to provide facilities for handling export stock at those works. There should not be any great difficulty in shipping the export stock without deterioration of the carcasses from freezers at Midland Junction to the ships. The length of the railway run is not very great. Once the carcasses leave the stores they should be placed into the ships in similar condition to what they are at present when coming from the Robb's Jetty store. The particular point I want to make is that when alterations and extensions are made, if these facilities are provided, it will be possible to put the weight and grade system into effect at Midland Junction without involving a great amount of expenditure at some future time.

The Minister thinks well of the suggestion in regard to branding meat. I do not know whether members are conversant with the system adopted, but if they read the evidence tendered to the committee they will see just what is involved in running a colour brand down the carcass so that the housewife can see whether a particular joint is first, second or third-grade meat, and whether it is lamb, wether or ewe mutton. It appeared to us to be a means of protecting the consumer against any undesirable practices which may exist in regard to passing off third quality meat as second or even first-grade meat. I wish to deal with only one other point, and that is in connection with the remarks made by the member for Mt. Marshall. He deplored the absence of any recommendation in regard to the prices that producers are receiving. Some evidence was tendered by various organisations dealing with prices, but the more one questioned those persons and the more one thought about the implications of this particular matter the more one became convinced of the impossibility of any Select Committee

such as this making a considered recommendation on this particular point.

The Minister for Agriculture: The whole set-up is not easy.

Mr. PERKINS: This part of it is the most difficult. Obviously it would require an inspection of the books of representative wholesalers and representative retailers to find out just what profits are being made, and it would require an inspection of those books for more than one season because obviously if that evidence is taken for one particular season there may be special circumstances which would, to some extent, falsify the conclusions that could be drawn from that evidence. The powers of a Royal Commission would be necessary to get the proper evidence. In addition at present both retail and wholesale prices are fixed by the Prices Commissioner who is supposed to make this very inquiry. I do not say that the prices recommended by the Prices Commissioner are the proper ones. As a matter of fact if we can draw any analogy from the prices recommended by the Prices Commissioner in certain other spheres then the margins between what we might call the producer and the consumer are very wide indeed, and the evidence before the committee indicated that the margins that have been allowed to the retailers have been fairly generous during the war period.

Before the war many of the retailers were in a rather difficult financial position, and apparently they have all cleared their debts to the wholesalers during the war period and are now in a sound financial position. It appears that the margin allowed to the retailers is fairly generous. On the other hand the evidence in regard to this year's operations by producers and departmental representatives, indicated that during the winter months, at least, the wholesalers had probably lost considerable sums of money in supplying the meat required for their, I might say, preferential clients. Undoubtedly some wholesalers have certain people whom they have to keep going, and the evidence put forward by a number of witnesses, entirely apart from the meat trade, indicated that the wholesalers had lost money for a portion of this year. However, that is no indication of what may have happened in any other year. I reiterate the point that it was impossible, from the evidence available, for the Select Committee

tee to make a considered recommendation regarding the fairness of prices to consumer and producer. If the House desires more information on this point I can only suggest that a body clothed with the powers of a Royal Commission be appointed to clear it up. In the meantime we have a Prices Commissioner who is charged with this very duty of seeing that producers receive and consumers pay fair prices.

Mr. Leslie: He makes a bad job of it.

Mr. PERKINS: If the Prices Commissioner is not doing that, I can only suggest that the people responsible for the Commissioner being clothed with his present powers should take steps to ensure that he does a better job in carrying out his duties than he does at the present time.

MR. SEWARD (Pingelly—in reply): I shall detain the House for only a few minutes in replying to the debate. I thank the Minister for the kindly way in which he has received the report of the Select Committee. I can assure him that it was not in my mind nor in that of any other member of the Select Committee that the recommendations we submitted were to be regarded as implying that the Government should give immediate effect to them. The object of the report was that, in view of certain alterations and improvements that are to be carried out at the Midland abattoirs, the Select Committee was concerned that when that stage was reached the recommendations advanced, particularly with regard to the slaughtering part of the work, would be given effect to. We recognise, of course, that the stock agents could effect improvements regarding the quality of the stock marketed. I am sure that if the country agents were to exercise a little more vigilance on consignment of stock to the abattoirs and inspected the beasts before they were sent down, they would be able to advise the growers whether or not they should send their stock to the Midland saleyards. If the stock were not up to the required standard they could advise the growers to send them to a store market where less railage would be involved and possibly better prices would be received.

We are hopeful that the quality of stock despatched to Midland Junction will be improved. When we visited the abattoirs I was surprised at the quality of some of the carcasses that were hanging up. If we

could get some organisation between the buyers and the producers, something could be done to improve the quality handled in the markets. I refer particularly to the mixed farmers and not to those who go in mainly for producing stock for the fat market. I am sure that if some of these people could visit the abattoirs and see their stock slaughtered, they would have a better appreciation of what a prime animal is than they possess at present. With regard to the objections raised by the member for Mt. Marshall, as I pointed out when I moved the adoption of the Select Committee's recommendations, it was found almost impossible to determine the question of prices merely because in normal times there is no basis on which to make the computation. While we have the advantage of the export market as at present, we then have a point from which to start upon that calculation. Without the export market there is no such basis. At the present juncture there is much argument against the adoption of the weight and grade basis as the sole method to be availed of in the disposal of stock. Owing to the variation in the quality of stock, particularly sheep, there would have to be innumerable variations in the grades to be adopted.

Mr. Leslie: I want to make sure that the country people get the report of the Select Committee and not merely the findings.

Mr. SEWARD: From the standpoint of improving prices to the producers, there is the question of the gradual raising of the quality of stock delivered at the Midland Junction abattoirs for slaughtering and further the provision of improved slaughtering methods at the abattoirs. The latter is the recommendation upon which I am particularly keen. As I mentioned in my earlier remarks, at the present time skins are sold on a damaged basis. Owing to the rush methods adopted, the skins are cut in the process and they therefore have to be disposed of on a damaged basis. If we can get over that difficulty, better prices will be paid for skins and that will be to the benefit of the producers. Then again, we want to see a different method installed at the abattoirs so that all butchers, large or small, can go there and buy their own requirements. Under the system we contemplate they will not be in the

hands of the big buyers and, with the more open competition, benefits should accrue to both consumer and producer.

Then there is the question of the branding of meat. Until such time as we raise the quality and grade of meat marketed, I am inclined to the belief that branding may be detrimental to many of the producers. If the stock they send in is branded third quality, they cannot expect to secure first or second quality prices. If we can secure a gradual improvement in the quality of stock sent to the abattoirs, that difficulty will be overcome in the course of time. There is one factor involved in the adoption of the weight and grade method of sale in the disposal of stock. If we were to adopt that method, there would be a possibility of the market being filled with third-grade meat, with little hope of disposing of it to any advantage. At the present time, the grower has the option of selling on the grade and weight basis, but if we could secure a general improvement in the quality of stock, that method could be introduced more freely at a later stage.

Mr. Leslie: But that is only on the export basis.

Mr. SEWARD: No, it is done now. Another important feature is the experience of New Zealand in connection with a fixed price for meat. In that Dominion there is considerable agitation to get away from it. That is mainly because £100,000,000 has been paid into Consolidated Revenue, which is in question. The growers claim that that money belongs to them and the Government says the money belongs to it.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I am afraid the hon. member is introducing new matter.

Mr. SEWARD: That is so, Mr. Speaker, but I merely introduced the point as a matter of information. In conclusion, I thank the House for its acceptance of the report, and I hope that when the opportunity arises the Government will give effect to the Select Committee's recommendations.

Question put and passed; the motion agreed to.

BILL—MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FUND ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

MR. WATTS (Kaitangata) [8.58] in moving the second reading said: In placing the Bill before members, I need hardly

make it clear that it has no party political significance of any kind and therefore may be dealt with in as dispassionate a manner as members of the House care to adopt. It is a measure which in part has already been discussed by me with the Minister for Justice, and, in fact, it was at his suggestion that I had an amendment prepared by the Crown Solicitor instead of having it drafted by the private members' draftsman. At that time the amendment proposed was only in respect of one clause which sought to insert a new section in the principal Act. That clause deals only with the question of the liability of the amount due to a member on losing membership going to his creditors in payment of their claims. At present it is exceedingly doubtful whether in the event of a member being in financial difficulties at the time of his loss of membership, the amount payable to him cannot be claimed by his creditors.

The measure which came into operation on the 1st July of this year says nothing about the amount payable out of the fund to a member not being liable to creditors' claims. While the argument might be advanced perhaps that, because the moneys are in the hands of trustees and for the purposes specified in the Act and for the benefit of an indicated class of person, the question of liability on the death of a member who may be in difficulties does not arise, I believe it can equally well be argued that it might arise. In those circumstances I believe that the House will agree that any such question should be definitely laid aside and the matter made perfectly clear, and made perfectly clear at a time when there is no question of this aspect arising.

The Premier: No claim.

Mr. WATTS: That is so. The fund has been in existence only something like four months and if we delayed dealing with this matter it might become subject to some court decision and render it necessary to bring in retrospective legislation to rectify it, or attempt to do so. It is that aspect of the matter which in the first place induced me to mention the subject to the Minister for Justice, and subsequently, at his suggestion, to confer with the Crown Solicitor. The clause in question proposes to insert a new section in the principal Act as follows:—

The right or interest of any member in the fund or any payment, compensation or benefit

payable thereout shall not be in any way assigned or charged or passed by operation of law to any person other than the member or his dependants as the case may be, in accordance with the provisions of the Schedule to this Act, and any moneys payable out of the fund on the death of a member shall not be assets for the payment of his debts or liabilities.

The Minister for Justice: There is a similar provision in the Superannuation and Family Benefits Act.

Mr. WATTS: I was about to support my point by quoting two enactments that bear either close or some similarity to the Members of Parliament Fund Act. One is the Superannuation and Family Benefits Act of 1938 which, in Section 82, says—

Pensions and other benefits under this Act shall not be in any way assigned or charged or passed by operation of law to any person other than the pensioner or beneficiary, and any moneys payable out of the fund on the death of a contributor or beneficiary shall not be assets for the payment of his debts or liabilities.

It will be readily recognised that there is a great similarity between the provision in the Superannuation and Family Benefits Act and the principle I now seek to insert in the Members of Parliament Fund Act, because in both cases the contributions are made or partly made by the person who has become the beneficiary or the person entitled to superannuation, or in the case of the Members of Parliament Fund Act, the member who is to be entitled to a share of the fund on loss of membership. In fact, the member of Parliament is in a better position to claim this liberation from liability, because he contributes out of his own funds the whole of the amount that makes up the Members of Parliament Fund, whereas, under the Superannuation and Family Benefits Act, there is a substantial contribution from Consolidated Revenue. That substantial contribution from Consolidated Revenue does not exist in respect to the Act I am now seeking to amend. The contributions under this Act are entirely made by the persons who hope to benefit.

Mr. North: The people ought to be told that.

Mr. WATTS: I am telling them now; it is one reason why I am raising the point at this stage. There is a resemblance between this provision and a provision in the Life Assurance Companies Act. The Members of Parliament Fund Act is a form of life

assurance, because loss of membership takes into consideration the death of a member. The premium is a fairly substantial one of £24 a year. In fact, there are some members of both Houses who, if they regarded the matter from the point of view of a death benefit, would be better off if they took out a life assurance policy than they would be under the provisions of this Act. There are two reasons for this, firstly, because unless they have paid £168 into the fund or been a member of the fund for seven years, they are not able to claim the maximum amount payable under the Act, whereas, in respect of a life assurance policy, if the person died at any moment after insuring, he would receive the full benefit of the policy. So there is a considerable similarity between the Life Assurance Companies Act provision and the provision I propose, although it will be quite clear to members that they are not precisely the same. Section 33 of the Life Assurance Companies Act says—

The property and interest of the assured in a policy effected upon his own life shall not be liable to be applied or made available in payment of his debts by any judgment, order or process of any court, and shall not, in the event of his bankruptcy, pass to the official receiver or the trustee or assignee of his estate.

In the case of an assured person dying after the passing of this Act, the moneys payable upon the death of the assured under or in respect of a policy effected upon his life shall not be liable to be applied or made available in payment of his debts by any judgment, order or process of any court, or in any other manner whatsoever, except by virtue of a contract or charge made by the assured in his lifetime, or by virtue of an express direction contained in his will or other testamentary instrument executed by him that the moneys arising from the policy shall be so applied.

The section then goes on to provide that there is some claim in respect of three years' premiums paid in regard to the policy. That, however, would only be a fraction of the amount of the policy, and the object is to prevent a person from taking out a policy with the intention of spending a great sum when he knows at the time that he is in great financial difficulty. That position does not arise under this measure. We are taking steps to put this matter straight before any such question can arise.

The remainder of the Bill now before the House has primarily come out of a suggestion made by you, Mr. Speaker, to me.

You, I understand, are one of the trustees of the fund, and the suggestion was that you had noticed I was seeking to amend the Act, and went on to say that you had an opinion by the member for Nedlands, of which he has been good enough to give me a copy. There are two amendments I shall seek to make, which I had prepared after that time with the intention of bringing both before the House simultaneously. I have a copy of the opinion of the member for Nedlands and I believe he is quite prepared to allow me to read portions of it to the House in explanation of the point of view that this Bill puts forward. I quote—

This Act is, I am informed, designed to provide members of both Houses of the West Australian Parliament with certain monetary compensation on their ceasing to be such members. The fund to defray this monetary compensation is created by contributions made by such members during the period of their membership. These contributions are compulsory, and are deducted from time to time from each payment to a member of his Parliamentary allowance, so that in each year the sum of £24 will be so deducted from each member.

Then there is some reference to the benefits to be derived, which does not need repetition.

There is a special provision whereby on the Act first coming into force any member who immediately before such date was a member, could pay voluntarily a lump sum into the fund in respect of any selected number of years already served by him as a member, and thereupon such selected number of years could count as years served after the coming into force of the Act.

One case was not provided for, namely, the case of a member whose prior service as a member was not continued to a date immediately before the coming into force of the Act. In effect, the whole scheme is one of mutual insurance designed to provide for members at the time of their ceasing to be members a payment not exceeding on the present scale £600 in all. The Act passed to give effect to this scheme is not at all happily drawn, although I am not prepared to say that if the matter came before a court it would not give a meaning to the words used in the Act which would give effect to the scheme as above outlined. On the other hand I am not prepared to say that the Court would do so, for the following reasons:—

The benefit coming to the insured person is to be paid, according to the Act, on loss of membership by such person. Although loss of membership is defined in the Act as loss of his seat in Parliament for any reason whatsoever, it seems to me to convey a meaning different from that of ceasing to be a member, which as above

set out is what the scheme intended to cover. For instance, if a member, of his own free will, resigned his seat in Parliament, could he be said to have suffered a loss of his seat in Parliament? Or if after dissolution of a Parliament in which he was serving he refused to nominate for a seat in the succeeding Parliament, or if a member of the Legislative Council on the expiration of his term for which he was selected, refused to nominate for a further term, could he be said to have suffered a loss of his seat in Parliament?

In the first of the above cases, he would have ceased to be a member, but it was difficult to allege he would have suffered a loss of his seat. In the second case it is not so clear, because if he had nominated he might not have been elected, which would certainly have amounted to loss of his seat. The same difficulty could possibly arise in the case of the death of a member. Whatever was the cause of death, it would certainly mean that the deceased ceased to be a member. But if death was the result of suicide, could it be intelligently alleged that the deceased suffered a loss of his seat in Parliament?

As above stated, it is possible that a court would hold that as the scheme is one for the benefit of a class it should be continued so as to give the maximum benefit to such class, and therefore it would overlook the difficulties abovementioned. But it is possible that a court might not take this view. In my opinion this position of doubt should never have been created, and now that it has been it should be, as soon as possible, corrected.

The Bill proposes to correct that difficulty by altering the definition of "loss of membership" to include "ceasing to be a member." I quote from the Bill—

"Loss of membership" includes cessation of membership through death, disqualification, resignation, defeat at the poll, failure to nominate for re-election or by reason of any other cause whatsoever whether ejusdem generis with the foregoing or otherwise, that a member shall not be deemed to have lost his seat by dissolution of the Legislative Assembly if he is elected to the next succeeding Parliament, or in the case of a member of the Legislative Council by expiration of his term if he is elected immediately thereafter for a further term.

So now this matter has been cleared up by that clause. There is a further amendment to the measure which has been produced, so far as I know, by the Crown Solicitor himself. He writes—

In Clause 4 of the Bill I have inserted a new clause in the schedule to stand as Clause 4. The proposed new Clause 4 gives an absolute discretion to the trustees to decide the person or persons entitled to benefit and the amount or proportion to be paid out. If this proposition is accepted it will save litigation.

The trustees are above reproach, they would undoubtedly construe the Act in a broad and favourable manner; injustice would be impossible if the final decision is left to the trustees.

I submit the measure to the House. It is to have retrospective effect from the 1st July, just four months back, because that was the date on which the fund came into operation. There are no disputes in regard to any of these matters, and so there is nothing undesirable whatever in giving the measure retrospective effect over a period of four months. I have been at some pains to explain the reasons which resulted in the amendment being brought forward. It is brought forward entirely with the idea of removing any possibility of doubt in respect of this fund, of which the member for Nedlands said that it was a compulsory matter and that a member had no control over the fund, and that as long as he was a member he must pay the £24 a year. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: The Government has no objection to the Bill. I consider that the Leader of the Opposition has given a very good exposition of the situation, and it seems to me that we are entitled to the protection he has already enunciated. For me to go over the points that the Leader of the Opposition has already so ably put before the House, would be a mere matter of repetition. In accordance with the position as we see it at the present juncture, the amendments suggested by the Leader of the Opposition will put the fund beyond all doubt.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

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

MOTION—STATE-WIDE POST-WAR WORKS.

As to Government Planes for Official Inspections.

Debate resumed from the 1st November on the following motion by Mr. North (as amended):—

This House realises that it cannot adequately handle the various problems which arise in the 1,000,000 square miles of our Western Australia-

lian territory unless the most modern transport facilities are utilised. It therefore advocates that the Government should acquire some well-found transport planes to enable Ministers, members of Parliament, and particularly engineers of the P.W.D., etc., to cover all parts of the State including the Kimberleys, paying particular attention to the need for and possibilities of water conservation and the utilisation of the rivers of the north-west of this State and the development of tropical and semi-tropical agriculture.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS [9.20]:

I feel a little diffident in speaking at great length upon this subject; and, as I understand it is the desire of the House to continue for at least another 45 minutes, I propose to address myself to aspects associated with the land settlement and development of Western Australia, as these matters come within the scope of the motion. The member for Claremont has presented in his motion many problems arising within our million square miles, and these problems were added to by the Leader of the Opposition in a specific mention of the Kimberleys, water conservation, utilisation of rivers, and the prospect of the development of agriculture in that region. So the motion affords an opportunity for members, if they are so disposed, to traverse the whole range of development of the State from the early days of its history up to the present methods of air transport to investigate, inquire into and report upon the development of our national resources. The subject is one which for many years has been of absorbing interest to me as a student of Australian history. I propose—I hope without wearying the House—first to refer to the exploits of those men who, particularly during the past 100 years, have explored this State and investigated its possibilities.

I do not propose necessarily to touch upon the exploits of the explorers who sailed along our shores in the 300 years intervening between the earliest discovery of Australia and the days of Governor Stirling. I shall deal particularly with the discoveries since about 1829. In the review which I propose to make, I desire it to be understood that I am dealing with the whole of Western Australia and pointing out the difficulties experienced by those fearless and brave men who, venturing into the desert areas and into the unknown, made it possible for us to know this State and plan for its development. The lives

and achievements of such men as Sturt and Oxley might well inspire the present generation. I shall deal very briefly with the exploits, discoveries and experiences of such men as Giles, Warburton and John Forrest, also of Carnegie, all of whom were imbued with the one thought, never to turn back.

Mr. Marshall: What about Wells? Does he not get honourable mention?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, and those associated with him in the Calvert expedition. They were remarkable men. It is necessary for those addressing themselves to this subject to have before them a map of Western Australia. They will find in places thin and feebly marked lines showing—mostly in the period between 1860 and 1897, and later to 1906—parts of this continent that very few people have taken the trouble to make themselves conversant with, either with respect to their assets or disabilities. The exploits of Sir George Grey from 1837 to 1839 along the coastline immediately to the north of this city are well worth the study of any interested member. It was surveyor Roe, afterwards our first Surveyor General, who in 1839 achieved the remarkable feat of rescuing Grey's party in the region now represented by the Premier. One very noteworthy thing is that the explorers of the richer parts of this continent were able to make themselves famous because they were included among the men who discovered something; but the men who penetrated into the little known regions, the regions of disabilities and difficulties almost impossible to overcome, are often left without a mention by the historian because they were considered to have discovered nothing. They were, however, among the heroes of the last century.

The exploits of such men as Giles and Warburton, and some of the achievements of Sir John Forrest, are epics in the history of our State. We have in Edward John Eyre a man who traversed the continent from east to west. His life story is contained in that remarkable book entitled "Waterless Horizons," by Western Australian writers, who give a very clear picture of the type of man he was and of his achievements. He set out on his long journey and, after terrific privations, being left without company, without food and water, insisted on taking the difficult path;

and, in spite of being rescued by a whaling ship, he continued his journey to Albany on foot. The life story of Eyre, who completed his journey in 1841 at the age of 25, has a remarkable coincidence, in that the West-East road, known as Eyre's Highway, constructed since the war began, was finished exactly 100 years after that intrepid explorer traversed the inhospitable region through which the road runs. We have read very much of him and revere his memory for his outstanding achievements.

I would like to refer briefly to the exploits of the Gregorys, who, from about 1855 onwards, became famous first because of their endeavours to locate the lost Leichardt expedition. The Gregorys came from Queensland in a little boat very appropriately named the "Tom Tough." They set out from Brisbane in August, 1855. They continued their work in this State until 1861. I have seen the tree—I have a photograph of it—the baobab tree on the bank of the Baines River over the border of this State—branded "Gregory, 12th June, 1856." Gregory—afterwards Sir A. C. Gregory—penetrated this continent down the Sturt River as far as Godfrey's Tank on the Canning Stock Route—a remarkable achievement to have been accomplished on foot. Most of the information we have of that country is due to the investigations of Gregory up to 1856. He had with him the famous Australian botanist—Australian because of the service he rendered to Australia, although not Australian-born. I refer to Baron von Mueller, who became the first president of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. The contribution of Baron von Mueller to the knowledge of our flora is something outstanding and is still unchallenged in the works of those who made such contributions during that period.

The Gregorys stayed in this State a long time. They were responsible for many works of value in the Murchison, and as far as Mt. Ham in the Far North. They named such mountains as our highest peak—Mt. Bruce (4,040 feet) in the Hamersley Range. Gregory was the first white man on the top of Mt. Bruce. I think—the member for Roebourne would know—that there have not been twelve people on the top of Mt. Bruce. Fortunately, I can claim to be one of them. The interesting aspect of the lives of these people is that most of their work was done voluntarily, at their own expense.

They were anxious to serve and acquire a knowledge of this country. Frank Gregory named many mountains in our North-West, even such small mountains as Wandagee on the station bearing the same name. The Gregorys traversed many of our North-West rivers, describing the country, and they did most of that work before 1870. The next two men I would refer to as men of outstanding achievement are Sturt and Stuart. There was one time in the history of Australia when Stuart in his travels from north to south was the only man on the stage so far as explorers were concerned. His activities were about the years 1859 to 1862, and it was on his traversed route of Australia that the existing north-south road was built and upon which the first overland telegraph line was constructed.

It was from that period that the probing of the west from that eastern boundary and of the country from the west to the eastern boundary was commenced. In the next decade, men like Giles, Gosse and John Forrest came into the picture. In my view Giles, little known though he is, was one of the outstanding explorers of this country. His life ended as a clerk to the mining warden at Kalgoorlie and he is buried at Coolgardie. During the years 1871 to 1875, Giles made a contribution that should never be forgotten. I would recommend to any student of the subject his two volumes "Australia Twice Traversed." Giles was the first man who traversed this continent from east to west and from west to east. The first attempt was made from where Alice Springs is situated, with a view to reaching the coast on the west. In his diary are to be found the most interesting and the most poignant stories of hardship and suffering. There is one epic that took place in the area known as Gibson's Desert where, 110 miles from his depot, his horse collapsed and died. His friend Gibson set out to do the 110 miles on his horse, and Giles set out on foot. They were 60 miles from water and 110 miles from food. The man on the horse perished but Giles walked the distance in nine days. He carried a water keg 60 miles, the keg weighing three times as much as the water it contained. He drank the last of the water when 20 miles from the depot.

In this House I have heard that it is a myth and ridiculous to say that the country comprising that area eastward to the Canning stock route is a desert. I would com-

mend to members a study of the diaries of such men, who described adequately and accurately the nature of the country as well as their experiences. We have the case of John Forrest who made explorations during the period when Warburton, trying to reach the west coast from Alice Springs, set out with 17 camels and five men, including two Afghans. On the way they ate the flesh of several of the camels and arrived with two, Warburton having lost the sight of one eye. He arrived, after three of the party had almost perished, at the head of the river known as the Oakover, a tributary of the De Grey. Warburton, who was an Englishman, made the journey at the age of 60. He wrote a book which I think is in this library, and is called "Across Australia." He travelled hundreds of miles of sandhills, lived on lizards, and even spoke of a camel's foot as being a delicacy. He almost perished for want of water—but he got through.

It was about that time that a young surveyor in the service of this State, John Forrest, inspired a Governor of this State to allow an expedition to start from Champion Bay eastward. Where Giles had failed a year before, it was fortuitous that Forrest reached the point where Giles turned back. When a storm arose, he penetrated 30 miles, obtained water from rockholes, and finally reached Alice Springs. He did his journey on horses and there is no doubt that in the journals and diaries of Forrest he is shown to be a man of remarkable spirit—a very brave man indeed. We pass from the age when Australia was traversed twice by Giles and by Forrest from approximately where the transcontinental line is now situated, and almost from Geraldton to Alice Springs—to the days when very little was known of the intervening country between the east and west routes of those explorers. Nothing was known of what was between, say, Coolgardie and Hall's Creek, a distance of over 1,000 miles. The nature of the country was known between Alice Springs and the Oakover. It was traversed by Warburton. The country between Alice Springs and Geraldton was known. It had been travelled by Giles and Forrest. Nothing but hundreds of miles of sandhills, parallel and monotonous, were to be found in these areas.

It was in 1897 that Carnegie, strange to relate another Britisher—a Scot—set out from Coolgardie after preparing for four years for the journey and having the

descriptions of some of the intervening country from the writings and recordings of his predecessors. Yet he prepared to face the known hazards irrespective of the hardships that he would have to endure. Members will find a brief description of his experiences in the well-known book "Spinifex and Sand." Anyone who doubts just what is the nature of the country to the east of the occupied land in this State should read "Across Australia" and "Spinifex and Sand." He would then realise how foolish it is to continue to think that that country is not in very truth a desert country. I would like to read a brief but very interesting comment made by Carnegie who, after reaching Hall's Creek in 1897, had four alternatives open to him. He could travel by the mail route from Hall's Creek to Derby and await the steamer which called there very irregularly and travel by boat to Perth; or he could ride to Derby and travel overland along the telegraph line by the 90-mile beach; or he could return the way he had come; or he could return by another route. These are his words—

We had four routes open to us: (1) either the road to Derby and thence by steamer; (2) the road to Derby and thence along the coastal telegraph line; (3) the way we had come; (4) and an entirely new route, taking our chances of the desert. The first was dismissed as feeble, the second as useless, and the third as idiotic. Therefore the fourth remained, and though it was natural enough for me to wish to win distinction in the world of travel, surely it speaks well for them, indeed, that my men were willing to accompany me.

Without the slightest hesitation, though knowing full well what lay before us, that we might even encounter worse difficulties than before, without any thought of prospective gain, they signified their readiness to return by whatever route I proposed. This is a point that I should like to make clear to all who may read this, for it is indicative of a trait often lost sight of by those accustomed to having, in novels and so forth, the more mercenary side of the Australian's character pointed out to them. A common subject of speculation is whether or no Australians would make good soldiers; as to that my belief is, that once they felt confidence in their officers none could make more loyal or willing troops; without that confidence they would be ill to manage, for the Australian is not the man to obey another merely because he is in authority—first he must prove himself fit to have that authority.

These words were written by a young Britisher, before any Australians had been tested in war.

I could speak of many others who have traversed this country. The member for Murchison reminded me of the ill-fated Wells and Calvert expedition which perished because of the fact that one of the wells plotted by Warburton was ten miles out of position. That country lies between the existing Balfour Downs Station in the electorate of the member for Pilbara and the Canning stock route. We come now to the life of Canning, the last of the explorers who, during the years 1902, 1903 and 1904, traversed the country between Wiluna, or Lake Way as it was then, and Hall's Creek in an endeavour to locate a stock route for the purpose of getting Kimberley cattle through to the goldfields. He traversed the country that Carnegie first went over, where there are 200 miles of sandhills. I can read an extract from Carnegie's diary in which he says that they crossed them at the rate of 60 to 80 in a day. Some of the hills were so steep that it was nearly impossible to get loaded camels up one side and down the other. The Canning stock route now passes through over 100 miles of that country. Canning located water at spots not far distant apart. Sometimes it was in shallow wells. The greatest distance between water on the existing route is 21 miles, and the average is about 14 miles. The wells are all equipped with a windlass and a trough.

Canning not only located the route, but two years later returned and sank and equipped the wells and, when a man of 70—not many years before his death—traversed the route again and reconditioned the wells. Even since the war, we have found that it is almost impossible to bring more than four or five mobs of cattle a year through that country. That is simply because of the nature of the country and the terrific hazard of the undertaking. As is well known there are still blacks who are killers, and one does not know, from one well to another, whether the windlass and the trough will be found to be at the bottom of the well. That is the nature of the country to the east of our settled lands. I think it is necessary for us to place our settled country in its true perspective. It is divided into several types. We have the area within the 6 inch to 10 inch rainfall belt where top feeds form the basis of the pastoral industry of the North; the coastal lands where grass plains and spinifex hills

are the basis of the pastoral industry in the central regions—and I refer more particularly to the Roebourne and Port Hedland districts—and we have the districts further north where twice and three times the rainfall is enjoyed, where cyclones and hurricanes are a feature of the climatic conditions and where the heaviest rains are associated with such visitations. All that country is now known to us, not merely because of the occupation since the early eighties of the Gascoyne, since George Gooch and Wheelock went from the Murchison to Wandagee to establish themselves, but also since there went further north some notable men such as the Burgeses and others and established themselves very successfully. I would not like to think that I am omitting many who deserve much credit for their early occupation of the country. Speaking extemporaneously, it is not possible to mention many. I say that those who penetrated and who settled it deserved much more in their generation than they were privileged to enjoy. Any privileges and enjoyment have come to those who followed.

We have the case of the far North Kimberleys where, in the early part of the century Frank Hann and Surveyor Broekman, father of engineer Drake-Broekman, penetrated the area between the Leopold Ranges and the Drysdale, made a report and named many prominent peaks. Settlement followed on the Fitzroy, where some settlement had previously been established. Then there are the records in very recent times of such men as Easton and others who went with him through all the country north and east of Derby, taking in the Drysdale River and as far east as the Forrest River. There is, in Easton's report, a description of much of the country. Easton is now living in Perth, still a young man, and his report was used by very many people who were endeavouring to attract population from other countries, notably in the heart of the Empire, in order to settle the North-West of Australia. The point in all the reports of those men who had some recent rural background is that they are candid descriptions of the country they traversed. Easton, in his summary, for example, uses these words—

The successful agricultural development of this country rests entirely with labour, and is not a question as to its suitability as a home for the white race. The climate is not too dry-

ing, but until the cost of labour is such as will enable us to grow tropical produce at a price at which we can enter into competition with other countries in the world's markets, there is little hope of success in this line.

Then he goes on to explain the variations in the flora. He had with him the present Government Botanist, Charles Gardner, who collected a tremendous amount of material which is now in Perth. One striking feature regarding the flora of that country is that it is definitely associated, not with tropical countries of the rain-forest type, but is directly associated with tropical countries of a semi-arid type. I stress this point because many people, in speaking and thinking about the prospects of our empty North in relation to settlement, visualise it as a country that must have the equivalent prospects of a country endowed with rain-forest areas, which are associated with rainfalls of 70 to 100 inches of rain per annum. A feature of our North-West is the remarkable and outstanding tree like the baobab, a tree which also has as its natural habitat the island of Madagascar and the West Coast of Africa. Many such specimens are typical of the nature of that country and its possibilities.

Much has been written and said of what can be done with that country. During my 20 years' association with it, I have tried to face the facts rather than be responsive to opinion not supported by facts. I believe that, in that country, there is a tremendous possibility for development if we face the problem and get the questions answered. We have evidence of the marine wealth of that part, not only in regard to fish but in regard to pearl shell. I have the figures of the production in the pearling industry at Broome. There has been no pearl shell fishing since the war, but the value of pearl shell won is nearly £5,000,000 and of the pearls over £1,000,000. The greatest number of boats operating from Broome was about 340 in 1913, when Broome had a population of almost 3,000 souls, a thousand of whom were whites. Broome, as some members know, is a delightful little town and also is one of the most livable on the North-West coast. The value of pearl shell received in the best year of Broome's history—1920—was £265,000 and pearls in that year were worth £84,000. There is the produce of a single industry, which is lying unworked and is building up during the war period. Many people consider that the pearl-

ing industry as such, extending from North-West Cape almost to Cape Londonderry, presents an opportunity for a tremendous population—to be exploited with coloured crews or white crews. In the districts of Roebourne and Pilbara, there are possibilities in that industry alone of sustaining a considerable population.

Of the mineral wealth of the North, it would perhaps be idle for me to speak, because several speeches have been made in this Chamber on Yampi and other places. I have been twice to Koolan Island. Whether a visual inspection is better than reading of it, I do not know, but there is at Yampi Sound one of the greatest deposits of iron-ore in the world, and certainly the greatest in this continent, awaiting development. There is, in the Hamersley Ranges, as the member for Roebourne has often told us, a potential in asbestos wealth in excess of that of all the gold won so far in Western Australia. That might sound an extravagant statement. It will be recorded, and will be found in the last report by Mining Engineer Foxall and his associate, Mr. Foreman, which was submitted to the Minister for Mines two years ago. The asbestos wealth in the Hamersley Range is in excess, at pre-war prices, of the total value of the gold won in this State, which I think, speaking from memory, is about £270,000,000. I mention those realities and facts, not as things that might be done with that country and to which it might not be suited but as factors representing actual wealth in that territory. And all those fine people who are enthusiasts for its development would, in my view, be on much sounder foundation if for the purpose of populating that region they endeavoured to promote activity, interest and development along the lines of proven wealth rather than indulge in ideas based on opinions and in very many cases on theory.

We have in the Kimberley region an area in which some hundreds of thousands of cattle and a very big sheep population are now carried, the cattle being under open range conditions in the main, without much segregation of herds until recent years, away from the water frontages, and there has been considerable eating-out of the natural advantages on the water frontages. In those pastoral regions developed as they have been since the won-

derful trip of the Duracks and others in about 1885, are also a story of achievement. At the Wyndham Meat Works we have the picture in its best year of their having treated nearly 40,000 head of cattle. The gross value of this product was £412,000, and the net value of the production of the Wyndham Meat Works in one year was over a third of a million pounds. And that achievement was made under conditions to which there is nothing comparable in the world. There is no similarity of present circumstances in the Kimberley region with such places as the Argentine; but to some extent, I submit, there could be.

It is all a question for investigation. We have in that Kimberley region an area that is proving on single properties capacity to carry over 100,000 sheep. The member for Murray-Wellington knows that that is so, and is personally interested in some highly developed properties which are a credit to the district, and would be a credit to any other district in this State. Those regions have been developed pastorally; they have prospects of intense development pastorally. That is a region with from 23 to 35 inches rainfall; I have all the records here and could state the rainfall since the early days, but I do not wish to weary the House. I can show those figures, and would do so if it were necessary to illustrate that this country is a difficult country agriculturally. I have gone to this trouble in order to satisfy my own viewpoint of verifying, as it were, a comparison of the Wyndham-Kimberley region with other areas which might be considered to be its counterpart. The nearest approach to a similar climate to Wyndham's is Nigeria in Africa, and we have only one record of agriculture under irrigation in any part of the world under similar conditions. In that African region the project is fraught with great hazards. It was an attempt to establish tropical agriculture in a climatic range very similar to that of Wyndham, where effective rainfall occurs in five months of the year, whereas of the remaining seven months, though any one of them could have been dry in some years, almost all of them have been dry.

It is almost a certainty that in the Kimberleys it will not rain during the months of June, July and August, but that

it will rain any day from the middle of November onwards until March, when the rain may be torrential, when the annual average is built up because of torrential downfall. Any irregularity is to be expected in the rainfall there. Rain cannot be depended on any day of the month or any week of the month. There is necessity for our giving consideration to any project, big or small, with agricultural prospects dependent on irrigation; for I fully believe that although the growing period for garden purposes is the winter season, and that although the rainfall season is the summer season, irrigation will be necessary in the summer if agriculture is to be even a possibility. My hope is this, that we shall get away from thinking that those who are prepared to face facts are decrying the country, and that those who make statements such as I made before the Grants Commission are making unfair statements. Until we can get a mental attitude of acknowledging the difficulties, we can never overcome them.

I regard the North, in which I have spent a few years of my life, as a very great prospect for Empire wealth; but we must not lose sight of the fact that it is not the only empty space in the world. Do not let us, like some people, regard the North as a place awaiting invasion. Let us not regard the facts only as the historian or the explorer has related them; let us regard the acknowledged facts that more recent occupation has given to us. I would commend that excellent book of Forsyth's, "The Myth of Open Spaces," to any person who would doubt the capacity of the white race to occupy certain climatic ranges. We have in this vast State a field for research unparalleled in Australia. From the Gilbert River, which flows into the Gulf of Carpentaria, across to the Gascoyne or the Ashburton in this State, we have an area crying out for investigation and research, with tremendous natural resources and much wealth.

The way to exploit that area is not to be blind to its difficulties but to admit them, not to foster ideas of settlement disregarding difficulties and dangers, because to do so would bring in its train chaos, confusion and desolation in the hearts of the people and would be a tax and burden on the whole community. The endeavour to overcome them is the method

of approach, in my opinion. I would like all the region north of Geraldton, which has similar conditions to much of Australia, to be investigated scientifically and thoroughly. The Commonwealth should be asked to provide not thousands but millions. It should be asked to spend half a million in research to solve the problems, because, if that country is to carry a population which would be adequate in a civil or military sense to defend it, £100,000,000 must be spent on it. Surely, if it is worth contemplating the spending of that amount, it is worth thinking of spending one-half per cent. of it, £500,000, in finding out all the things that should be known before the major scheme is launched, and that can be done within the lifetime of all in this Chamber. I would favour the sending of our Engineer-in-Chief to that country in Africa of which I have spoken, where there is a great similarity between the distribution of climatic types, where between the region of 14 degrees and 35 degrees north, the conditions are almost identical, where there is on the Senegal River a dam of gigantic proportions built for irrigation.

That country has a large native population, a great asset to it. But, irrespective of all that and of the labour difficulties that might be associated with the project for us, I would favour the sending of our Engineer-in-Chief to that country, with our best agriculturist, as an investment not merely to avoid mistakes, but to ensure success. I would favour the spending, in collaboration with the Commonwealth, of £20,000 a year at least for soil experts, entomologists, botanists, veterinary surgeons and other experts necessary to make a complete survey of the difficulties. Whether these be atmospheric humidity or aridity in connection with banana growing or the overcoming of natural pests to cotton that exist in the region, let us investigate the difficulties. During the last 24 hours I have been abused, even in the precincts of this House, for saying that this is a question of whether the North is to be developed as an economic proposition, or developed regardless of cost. That is the prospect. It is either one or the other. I say it does not matter much which it is; but let us be game enough and sane enough to be a little less like the ostrich and face the facts. I have no objection to the motion.

I have no apology to offer for my very firm view that the district between Carnarvon and Wyndham will carry an intense population some day. It will be developed through the utilisation of its natural resources and wealth, with agriculture in some places following as a natural sequence of events because of added population. I also say this, that in anything I can do, as the Government has endeavoured to do, to convince the Commonwealth that such matters involve decisions of high policy, I will have the backing of the Premier and my colleagues in an endeavour to bring about that result.

On motion by Mr. Rodoreda, debate adjourned.

MOTION—OLD AGE AND INVALID PENSIONERS.

As to Earnings and Basic Wage Equivalent.

Debate resumed from the 18th October on the following motion by Mrs. Cardell-Oliver:—

That, as this House approves of a living wage for all citizens, and realises that, in many cases, the income of pensioners does not allow for a decent standard of living, it urges the Commonwealth Government to take steps to raise the rate of pensions to those who are aged and infirm, and to allow all those pensioners able to work to earn an income, including the pension, equivalent to the basic wage.

MR. HOLMAN (Forrest) [10.12]: Because of the fact that the motion contains suggestions for the betterment of pensioners, it is necessary that I and other members should support it. We would all like to see old age pensioners enjoy a much better standard of living than their present standard. I certainly would like pensioners to be able to augment their pensions by being allowed to work and earn a little money to enable them to live in comfort. I am rather surprised at the manner in which the motion was brought forward. Probably it is a new idea that a member should introduce a motion and speak to it for only five minutes, leaving the remainder of the members to analyse it in their spare time and then to continue the debate. I have no wish to be put in the category of those mentioned by the member for Subiaco in the closing stage of her speech. She said, in effect, that if any member of this Chamber had not the

brains, the education or the intelligence to comprehend what the motion conveyed, God help them, they should not be here!

The Minister for Works: Choice, was it not?

Mr. HOLMAN: I have considered the motion and have made some research so as to express an intelligent opinion upon it. In speaking to the motion, some members have made certain criticisms which were unjustifiable to my way of thinking, and I intend to have something to say about them. I am sorry the member for Beverley is not here. He said—

Today we find the unfortunate male pensioner 65 years of age receiving a mere pittance of £1 7s. per week; and today a Labour Government which preaches the new order keeps him on that starvation rate.

That is not in accordance with the facts. Since the Federal Labour Party has come into power pensions have been increased from 47s. a fortnight to 54s. If it could be said that the Labour Government kept pensioners on a mere pittance, how much more truly could it be said that previous anti-Labour Governments have kept them on such a low pension that it is a wonder they are alive to tell the tale. If we study the history of pensions in this Commonwealth and the various increases that have been granted by different Governments, we will have a better conception as to which party kept these pensioners on a mere pittance.

Mr. McDonald: I do not think you have studied that.

Mr. HOLMAN: I have, and before me I have figures which I will be only too pleased to read if members desire me to do so. When the Menzies Government was in power, it increased the pension on two occasions, once by 2s. and a second time by 1s. I believe that was in accordance with legislation passed in connection with the cost of living. When the cost of living declined the Curtin Government was asked to do away with the cost of living adjustment to ensure that the pensions would not be decreased. The member for Beverley also stated—

Are not some members on the other side of the Chamber afraid that their union will say: "This pensioner is not a member of our union"?

That is a rather foolish statement. I can refer to my own industrial union as an example. Any member of that union, by

virtue of old age, retains his membership of the union and, on application, is exempt from paying any contribution. At any time that he is able to re-enter the trade, he can do so without being penalised. As a matter of fact, he is assisted back into the trade. He can continue his membership of the mortuary benefit fund at a minimum payment of 3d. a week, and retain his interest in the fund, which is in the nature of an insurance. So the remark of the member for Beverley was ridiculous. The unions have a great respect for their older members because they know the older members made it possible for those who followed to enjoy the conditions prevailing today. Even in the industrial awards there is provision for aged workers. There is a clause in various awards dealing with aged and infirm workers. That is also incorporated in Section 92 of the Industrial Arbitration Act which provides for aged and infirm workers to the extent that after a conference with the union or the court—and in some cases with the magistrate of a magisterial district—such workers are allowed to work for less than the prescribed rate in any award. That does away with foolish criticism of the kind offered by the member for Beverley. The unions like to see these older members enjoy the decent comfort they deserve. It has been hinted—as a matter of fact, it was stated—that the Party to which members of the opposite side belong, brought in the scheme of child endowment.

It has been stated outside, by people of a different political colour, that it was due to an anti-Labour Government that old-age pensions were inaugurated. In fact, they were in operation in some States prior to the Commonwealth taking over. I will admit that in 1908 this measure was brought into being by an anti-Labour Government; but there is a tag to it. The Government in power at that time was the Deakin Government which ruled only because Labour members of the Commonwealth Parliament gave it their support on the condition that certain reforms would be inaugurated during the life of the Deakin Ministry. That is not my statement but is a statement of fact. I have here an extract from the "Australian Encyclopaedia" in respect of the Deakin Government, which reads as follows:—

In 1903 Barton, glad to leave active politics and disturbed by the resignation of Kingston and the disfavour with which his naval policy

was regarded, retired to the high court bench and left Deakin the burden of the prime-ministership. Confronted at once with the impatience of the Labour Party and the sullen resistance of the official opposition, he lost ground at the elections of December, 1903, and was defeated by a combination of his opponents on a proposal to bring State business activities under the jurisdiction of the Federal Arbitration Court (which he opposed). A few months later he aided George Reid to oust the Labour ministry that had succeeded his own, and gave Reid's ministry a passive support until May, 1905. Then a speech in which he warned Reid that his support might eventually be withdrawn was taken for an immediate notice to quit, and after weeks of political turmoil he emerged again as Prime Minister with a small following of his own and a promise of steady support from Labour. This arrangement lasted for more than three years, during which a really protectionist tariff (with provision for preference to Britain) was established, the restrictions on alien immigration were somewhat modified, old age pensions were instituted, and a series of commercial laws (affecting copyright, trade marks, trusts, secret commissions, etc.) was passed; a beginning was also made with the military defence scheme. In 1907 Deakin visited England to take part in the colonial conference of that year, and toured the country after the conference was over in the interests of mutual fiscal preference. This exceptionally heavy strain on his physical powers brought about a collapse that was in the end to remove him altogether from public life.

Towards the end of 1908 the Labour Party, which had been growing restive, withdrew its support, wrecked the ministry, and substituted one of its own under Andrew Fisher.

From that we get the real history of the old age pensions and why they were instituted. They were instituted because of pressure brought to bear on the Deakin Government by the Labour members. I was interested in the statement of the member for Brown Hill-Ivanhoe that the weakness of these motions was in not putting them into effect. Although I am not in agreement with the way in which this motion is framed I hope that the old age pensioners of this State, and of the Commonwealth in general, will receive some benefit as the result of it. If the motion is analysed various weaknesses in its construction can be found. Some criticism has already been made of the way the motion has been framed, and I do not intend to reiterate what has already been said. The motion does state this, however—

That as this House approves of a living wage for all citizens and realises that, in many cases, the income of pensioners does not allow for a decent standard of living—

I cannot see why the words "in many cases" should be incorporated. In no case does the pension allow for a decent standard of living. Therefore those words are superfluous, and not only that but they instil a doubt in one's mind as to why there should be, even amongst pensioners, a certain amount of class distinction, or how there could be class distinction when they are expected to live on a mere pittance of 27s. a week. For that reason I make the point that in no case, in my estimation, is the amount that pensioners are getting sufficient to provide for a decent standard of living. The motion goes on to say that—

It urges the Commonwealth Government to take steps to raise the rate of pensions to those who are aged and infirm, and to allow those pensioners able to work to earn an income, including the pension, equivalent to the basic wage.

That part of the motion deals with only one class of pensioner in the Commonwealth. Those words deal with the infirm and aged. To bring it down to a more simplified form they relate to the old age pensioners. Infirm pensioners, according to the Act and according to advice I have received from the Deputy Commissioner and his assistant are not in any way related to the invalid pensioners. Therefore, this motion deals with only one class of pensioner. If there is to be an increase in the pensions, or if there is to be a decrease in the prohibition connected with the granting of pensions, then all pensioners should participate in those benefits. In most cases the various activities of pensioners throughout their lives have been of service to the nation. All these people are, therefore, entitled to these benefits and not one section to the exclusion of others. There is a weakness in the wording, "all those pensioners able to work to earn an income, including the pension, equivalent to the basic wage."

When we analyse those words we find we have the spectacle of a man and his wife both earning up to the basic wage—not that I say they should not have that money in their old age, but there is a weakness in it. The greatest weakness of all is that the motion does not give us any idea of what basic wage is intended. We all know that there are various basic wages. We have the male and the female basic wages. We have the State basic wage which includes the Goldfields rate, the Metropolitan rate and the

South-West rate. In addition we have the Federal basic wage as distinct from the State basic wage so that we are really groping in the dark because the motion does not say what basic wage we are to vote on. At present there is a big disparity between the State and the Federal basic wages, and also between the female rate and the male rate. We must also analyse another aspect. The Pensions Department does not discriminate between the sexes in respect to the amount of pensions they receive. We must therefore make up our minds whether we are going to discriminate as to the amount of wages that these male and female pensioners shall be allowed to earn.

Are we going to decide that the female is to be allowed to earn up to the female basic wage, or some other sum? I hope the member for Subiaco will explain these points when replying. Another aspect that I discovered during my researches is that the Australian Pensioners' League has never been consulted about this motion. When a member brings before this Chamber a motion vitally affecting a certain section of the community it is only in keeping for that member to consult those who are directly representing that section. I have spoken to Mr. J. T. Pollard, General Secretary of the Australian Pensioners' League, Western Australian Division, and he said members of the league were very annoyed because that body had not been consulted regarding this motion. I can quite understand the league's attitude. These matters have been receiving the consideration of the league. Within the last week or so, it has sent a circular to members of the Commonwealth Parliament detailing the reforms to the Pensions Act that the league considers necessary. One part of the circular says—

In the first place it is desirable that the pension should be not less than 40 per cent. of the Federal basic wage. This would bring the amount to £1 17s. a week for a single person. A married couple, of course, would receive £3 14s. per week. It is felt that this amount is the lowest that is compatible with a standard of comfort which it is the general desire of the people of Australia that pensioners should enjoy. My committee desires to bring this standard before you as an ultimate aim, and would suggest that the Act should be amended to provide for a gradual increase until this standard is reached.

That is not the only difficulty under which the pensioners are labouring. This mo-

tion deals only with the amount of pension received. Because we are not game enough to say that pensioners should receive an amount equivalent to the basic wage, we are going to ask them to work. I say that when we ask pensioners to work to enable them to enjoy a standard of living commensurate with what they deserve as pioneers of this country, we are making, not a step forward, but a step backward in our social structure. When a person reaches a certain age he should be able to sit back and enjoy the rest he has earned, and not have to go to work—nor should his wife have to go to work—to provide the wherewithal to give a decent standard of comfort. There are other ways of tackling this question, and the league has considered them and enunciated certain reforms, which could well have been included in the motion, with a view to giving the Commonwealth a lead to the end that better conditions might be provided and the prohibitions eliminated. The circular says—

The property clauses of the Act cause much distress, as the deductions on possession of property are excessive. In many cases this precludes pensioners with a few pounds investing in Commonwealth loans to assist the war effort.

As an example, a single person is quoted as having £150. If he invests this in war loans, he gets £3 15s. a year interest, and his pension is reduced by £10 a year. There is a direction in which we might use our influence with the Commonwealth Government to secure a remedy, and it is an expression of opinion that might well have been incorporated in the motion. In other cases insurance policies have been held for 20 or 30 years, and the surrender value of these policies is taken as property, although the possession of the policies entails payment of the premiums to keep them in force. In other words the pensioner is penalised because he has an insurance policy. His pension is reduced, and out of the reduced pension, he has to find the wherewithal to continue the payment of his premiums.

Here is another phase that might well be considered. This should interest the member for Subiaco, because it seriously affects members of her sex. A woman who is left a widow is entitled to a pension, and a married woman is entitled to a pension on

reaching the age of 60. There is another section of our womenfolk who have not had a chance of marrying or for some reason have not married, perhaps because of home ties. These women suffer great hardship before they are entitled to a pension at 60. The Act should be amended to entitle them to receive a pension, when the circumstances in which they are placed are such as to entitle them to a pension, long before reaching the age of 60. On the subject of permissible earnings, the league states—

If a pensioner accepts work, any amount earned over 12s. 6d. per week is deducted in full from the amount of the pension.

We feel that the amount of permissible earnings is too low and should be not less than £1 per week, and suggest that the pensioner should be allowed to earn £1 per week without its affecting his pension. Earnings over that amount should be subject to 50 per cent. reduction from the pension.

If there were an increase in pensions as well, it would materially assist pensioners who are now confined in homes for the aged; they would then be able to have a greater measure of comfort in those homes—comfort to which they are justly entitled. I will not labour this matter longer, as the hour is getting late; but the question could be debated at great length. As I said at the outset, I support the motion but not in its present form. The member for Subiaco, when outlining it, said—

I want to give some concrete examples, this being the only way to illustrate the necessity for what the motion proposes. Let me give the example of a woman who has perhaps a widow's pension and also has three children.

Why that example? I do not know. For the motion does not cover widows' pensions. It merely covers old-age pensions, and does not include either invalid or widows' pensions. I am sorry to note that the only lady member of the House should have committed a sin of omission by leaving out her own sex. However, it is my intention to endeavour to add to the motion words which will cover the hon. member's omission. I move an amendment—

That the following words be added:—
"The foregoing also to include the recipients of widows and invalid pensions."

On motion by Mr. Triat, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 10.55 p.m.