

dealt only with the middle stage. Assume that a mother has borne several children and then become insane. The hon. member has not considered that. Insanity might occur at change of life.

The CHAIRMAN: That is not referred to in the amendment.

Hon. J. CORNELL: Mr. Sanderson returns to the charge again and again and will not be repelled. He asks whether this is the law in any other place. It is his business to find that out. Mr. Kirwan has taken Mr. Nicholson to task for not bringing his amendment before the meeting of ladies. That was his business; not Mr. Nicholson's.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: According to Mr. Cornell, it is my business to find out whether this provision is included in any other Divorce Act in Australia. Is that reasonable? Surely Mr. Cornell is not serious. I ask again, did the Commission referred to by Mr. Nicholson approve of such a provision as this? He is unable to answer. Everything to do with divorce in this country is based on the Act of 1863. Further, the hon. member in charge of the Bill is unable to answer my question as to what is the law in the other Australian States.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: In reply to Mr. Sanderson, the British Royal Commission did not make such a recommendation as Mr. Kirwan's amendment embodies. The Royal Commission's recommendation was simply—

We are satisfied that it will be in the interests of parties affected by cases of lunacy, in the interests of their children and of the State and morality, that insanity should be introduced as a ground of divorce.

The CHAIRMAN: We are dealing only with the amendment.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The Royal Commission did not attach such a qualification to their recommendation. I feel convinced that if this matter had been put before the women's organisations they would say, "We consider that the recommendations which were arrived at after due consideration by the Royal Commission in England are good enough for us." The result of Mr. Kirwan's amendment would only be increased immorality, and it would do more harm than good to the families who would be affected by it.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: We have it now that the English Royal Commission would not accept the amendment. But look at the position we put ourselves in now. This amendment, if inserted, would, according to the member in charge of the Bill, be contrary to the English law, and contrary to that important Royal Commission. But the whole of our marriage law in Western Australia is based on the preamble to the principal Act. Mr. Nicholson says, "I will not accept the amendment because it is not the English law and it is not the opinion of the English Royal Commission." In a measure that attitude has my support. But the whole position of affairs is entirely altered

when we are no longer working under the English law. Everybody admits that the Commonwealth has the power to take this matter over, and will take it over. We are going to have our own Australian marriage laws. It is curious, however, to find a member so confident about the English law and yet not knowing what is the Australian law.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: For my part, I shall be glad to afford Mr. Sanderson opportunity of looking into the question.

[The President resumed the Chair.]

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 9.28 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday 1st October, 1919.

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

QUESTION—RAILWAY EMPLOYEES, PEACE HOLIDAYS.

Mr. WILLCOCK asked the Minister for Railways: 1, Is it the policy of the Government that all permanent employees in the Railway Department be paid (a) two days' holiday on full pay for Armistice Day; or (b) if working, two days' pay at double time and two extra paid holidays on their annual leave? 2, Was this carried out in all cases of permanent employees? 3, Is it the policy of the Government that any permanent employee of the Railway Department who was absent (a) on leave without pay, or (b) on sick leave, should be granted two days' pay for the Armistice and Peace Days? 4, If so, will he issue instructions that any permanent employee of the Railway Department who has not been paid in the foregoing circumstances will be allowed two paid holidays?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: 1, (a) Yes. (b) Employees who

worked were paid at the rate of double time for the time worked, and granted extra paid leave (up to 16 hours) equivalent to the time worked on the two days. 2, Yes, with the exception of certain employees who absented themselves from work without permission on the morning of the 12th November, and who did not furnish a reasonable explanation for their absence. These men were only paid for half a day on that day. 3, (a) No. (b) It was originally intended that men on sick leave should not be so paid, but upon further inquiry and reconsideration, it has been decided that these men be also paid. 4, No. Only those who have not been paid, and who were absent on sick leave, will be allowed two days paid holidays.

QUESTION—COPPER FIND.

Mr. SMITH asked the Minister for Mines: 1, When was the new copper find, referred to in the "West Australian" on the 19th September, first reported to the Mines Department? 2, What is the Department's reason for delay in making the discovery public?

The MINISTER FOR MINES replied: 1, On 29th August correspondence from the prospector to his principals was handed in to the Department with the stipulation that it be regarded as confidential for the time being. On the same day the Inspector of Mines at Cue was instructed to visit the find and report. He immediately got in touch with the prospectors, and advised that he was leaving Cue on the 16th September en route to the locality, which is a considerable distance out. Sufficient time has not yet elapsed to permit of his report coming to hand. 2, Obviously I would not permit the Department to commit a breach of confidence, as it is desirable that prospectors and others doing business with it, should have the fullest confidence that their wishes will be respected.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motions by Mr. Hardwick, leave of absence for a fortnight granted to Mr. Money (Bunbury) on the ground of ill-health, and to Mr. Foley (Leonora) on the ground of urgent public business.

MOTION—RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION, PRIORITY.

Debate resumed from 27th August on amendment moved by Mr. Thomson (Katanning) to the following motion by Mr. Griffiths (York):—

"That the resolution passed by the House to the effect 'That the first railway to be constructed shall be the Esperance-Northwards line,' be waived to allow of the provision of the few miles of railway to Bruce Rock, necessary to remove the disabilities of the

large number of settlers on the Kuminin and Wadderin areas.'"

The amendment was as follows:—Strike out all the words after "be," and insert in lieu thereof:—"rescinded, and that all authorised railways should, in the opinion of this House, be constructed in the order in which they were authorised by Parliament."

The PREMIER (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [4.38]: I am afraid I have not any word of comfort for the hon. member who moved the motion. In 1916, when the Wilson Government came into power, this line was under construction. At the time, the construction of the line was stopped, and a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the question of the productiveness of the land to be served by this railway. There seemed to be some doubt as to whether there was too much salt in the land to carry on wheat growing successfully. The Commission consisted of Mr. Dempster of Esperance, Mr. Padbury of Moora, and Mr. McDonald of the Taxation Department—all experienced and capable men on whom this House could rely absolutely.

Hon. T. Walker: Was not Professor Paterson a member?

The PREMIER: No, he assisted the Commission and gave evidence. The Commission made inquiries not only in this State but extended them to the Eastern States. They took considerable time over their inquiries, and everything necessary to convince them was done. They presented their report, and recommended the land and the continuation of the construction of the railway. The commissioners stated in their report they were led to believe that the land would improve with cropping, that being the experience with the mallee lands in the Eastern States. During the first few years, the crops grown on similar land in the Eastern States were small but, with the working and sweetening of the soil, the yields increased. Although we have nothing to boast about in the way of crops, that has been the experience of the Esperance lands. The crops gradually improved until in 1916-17 the average was 10 bushels. Previous to that, the best average was five bushels. In 1917-18 the average yield for the few acres cultivated in our mallee country was 10.1 bushels, though in 1918-19 the average was only 3.3 bushels. Thus the yields have steadily improved with the working of the soil. The Government feel that they are committed to the construction of this line. It was authorised by Parliament in 1916, and in 1918 the member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker) who represents the Esperance district, induced the House to pass a motion which read—

That in the opinion of this House the first railway to be constructed in pursuance of the programme of railway construction authorised by Parliament should be the Esperance Northward line.

I opposed the motion at the time, and I do not know how the hon. member managed to

persuade the House to pass it. It should never have been passed.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: It was necessary before the Legislative Council would pass the Bill.

The PREMIER: However, the Government have decided that this line shall be built, and I hope that will satisfy the hon. member and set the question at rest. During the past few weeks, I have received telegrams and letters of protest from almost every gold-mining centre in the State. To-day, I received several from the Murchison gold-mining areas. I do not know how the people there came to hear of Esperance or the Esperance railway, but evidently they had heard because they wired protesting against any delay.

Mr. Lutey: It is a national question.

The PREMIER: I daresay the member for Kanowna had something to do with it.

Hon. T. Walker: A non-recognition of the justice of the case.

The PREMIER: Spontaneous, was it? I thought it only right to let the House know the intention of the Government, and there will therefore be no need to pass either the motion of the member for York or the amendment moved by the member for Kattanning. We have determined to build the line, but that will not interfere with the construction of any other necessary railway in the State.

Amendment put and negatived.

Question put, and a division called for.

The House divided.

Mr. SPEAKER: There being only one aye, I declare the noes have it.

Question thus negatived.

MOTION — STATE CHILDREN AND CHARITIES DEPARTMENTS.

Select Committee to inquire.

Debate resumed from the 3rd September, on the motion by Mr. Smith "That a select committee be appointed to inquire into the State Children and Charities Departments."

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. F. T. Broun—Beverley) [4.51]: The member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) in moving this motion was no doubt actuated by a desire to bring about proper supervision and efficient administration of the two departments in question. I compliment the hon. member on the action he has taken, since from the information which he has received, he no doubt considers inquiry necessary in order to ensure that every precaution shall be taken in the expenditure of public funds. Unfortunately, however, the information which the hon. member has received is not altogether reliable. On investigation I feel certain it will be found that as regards many of the cases mentioned, everything possible has been done by the departments concerned, and that

only in a very few instances would closer investigation have saved expenditure, and that only to a very small extent. The member for North Perth must have received his information either from an ex-officer of the department, or from a dissatisfied officer within the department; hence its unreliable nature. It must be realised that the control of a department with ramifications all over Western Australia is difficult. During the short time I have held office as Colonial Secretary, I have investigated various cases in which I was not satisfied after perusing the summary of the file; and in every case which I investigated I found that the inspectors had taken every precaution and used the most careful scrutiny. In almost every case, I felt bound to support the action of the Secretary of the State Children Department. The administration of monetary relief to 700 mothers is a difficult matter. The circumstances of the cases vary considerably, and the scale of payment has to be according to the position of the mother and frequently according to the child's state of health. The member for North Perth has mentioned cases in which assistance has been extended to mothers who were not deserving of it. He said in some instances the mothers had been married for a considerable time while the State allowance still continued. I have here a number of cases, a summary of which I will give the House, proving that in the instances referred to by the member for North Perth the closest investigation was made. There may have been some instances of imposition; it is impossible altogether to prevent imposition in this connection. Numbers of people will endeavour to impose on the department, and the department have to rely almost entirely upon the information given to them by applicants for allowances. It is possible that in some cases the State allowance may have been continued after remarriage of a widow. If the department are to watch every case receiving an allowance a large staff of inspectors would be required to travel around continually. Doubtful cases are reviewed every three months, and others as occasion offers. But the department do not know of a case in which the allowance has been paid to a widow for two years after remarriage, or for such a period while the recipients were able to keep themselves without State assistance. The member for North Perth said that the department have an inclination to send State children to institutions, that the department favour sending children to such institutions rather than boarding them out. But the fact is that wherever it is possible for the department to board out a child, that is done. The boarding out system has proved very much better than the institutional system. Children boarded out are better cared for, with resultant lesser mortality. The number of children boarded out in 1914 was 264. At the end of 1919 the number had risen to 709. The cases com-

mitted to institutions have decreased from 722 in 1914 to 706 in 1919. There has been a marked increase in the number of boarded out children since the present Secretary of the State Children Department has been in control. Hon. members will recollect that a select committee was appointed last year to inquire into proposed amendments of the State Children Act. After thorough investigation the committee made certain comments on the management of the State Children Department and especially on the boarding out system. I quote the following from the committee's report—

It is a matter of gratification to your committee to learn from the evidence which has been laid before it that what is known as the boarding out system is making steady headway in this State, and the evidence tendered by the State officials and others, both orally and by way of photographs, amply shows how well children thrive when thus treated. With regard to the institutions referred to by the member for North Perth, the select committee state—

This method of dealing with children must always play a very important part in our national life, and as a result of the examination of many witnesses connected with the various institutions the evidence adduced shows that these institutions are managed, principally by the representatives of religious bodies, in a satisfactory manner, and that the relations existing between them and the State Children Department are cordial and not in need of readjustment.

The hon. member stated that children sent to institutions did not receive the education which they ought to receive, and that instead of being given the usual school hours, they were made to work. From investigations which have been made, and from visits of inspection paid by departmental officers to these institutions from time to time, only one conclusion is possible, that the children in the institutions are being educated and treated just in the same way as they would be were they attending an ordinary school. They certainly do work. They are taught gardening and the milking of cows, and so forth, which is very useful to them after leaving the institution. But up to 14 years of age they receive the usual five hours' schooling and after that three hours per day. The Education Department send their inspectors to the schools every year, and the reports of those inspectors are very favourable to the manner in which the institutions are conducted. The hon. member mentioned several cases of payments having been made to widows and others when, as a matter of fact, they should have been used for the maintenance of their children. Those cases cannot be traced by the department. Nothing is known of them. Where the hon. member got his information I cannot imagine. In regard to the other cases mentioned by the

hon. member, I have had summaries made by the department in explanation. There was the case of the station master. This will bear the closest scrutiny. The department's summary is as follows:—

The police magistrate and Railway Department were approached by the department. The police magistrate considered it the duty of the department to assist, and relief was only granted under pressure, and in order to protect the wife and children. The man was sent to prison for his default. The children were subsequently committed to the care of this department and a maintenance order obtained. Payments are being made regularly under this order.

Another case mentioned by the hon. member was that of a widow with six children, to whom an allowance was made of two guineas per week. This, of course, is only a nominal sum for a widow with six children dependent upon her. We have no fixed scale but, instead, attention is paid to the surrounding circumstances and the allowances are based upon the merits of individual cases. The department's summary of the case referred to is as follows:—

The allowance was two guineas per week, subsequently reduced to 35s. Periodical inspection on 24-11-18; correspondence with Mrs. Morrell re her circumstances 12-12-18, 21-12-18, 14-1-19, 10-3-19; last inspection by inspector 26-6-19, when re-marriage discovered, namely, on 15-2-19; instructions given to discontinue payment on 27-6-19; husband wrote department 30-7-19 stating he was not in position to earn sufficient to keep his children and applying for sustenance; letter sent to husband 13-8-19 applying for refund of £36, amount of over-payment; further letter from husband 13-8-19, renewing his application for relief. On 26-6-19 on last inspection, the husband, who is ex-army reservist and served in late war, was out of work and sick, suffering from effect of wounds.

The hon. member will see that that was a deserving case. Another case mentioned by the hon. member was in regard to a widow who went to the Eastern States. The departmental summary of this case is as follows:—

Case of a widow who has been receiving relief for a long period. The department ascertained that she had left for the Eastern States and was informed that some money had been collected for her by some of the employees where she had been working, who considered she was looking very ill. The department made inquiries in the Eastern States and found that she had apparently given birth to an illegitimate child. The eldest daughter was looking after the children during her absence, and if the department had discontinued the allowance, the eldest daughter would have had no means of supporting them. The case is rather an unsatisfactory one, but the department is

anxious to give the woman a chance. If relief was stopped, the children would have had to come before the Children's Court and the State would have had to pay in any case.

Then we come to the case of the Collie twins, mentioned by the hon. member. There has been a great deal of correspondence dealing with this case, and I do not wish to weary the House by reading it. This correspondence started on the 19th December, 1917, and numerous letters have been written. The mother of the twins left Collie after the department took over the children. She informed the department that she was single and had no means of support for her children. The correspondence has been going on from time to time, and the department has been watching the case from 1917 until now. Recently the department received an anonymous letter stating that the mother is a married woman and giving the name and address; therefore further investigations will be made. The department have communicated with the police, asking them to trace the mother. If possible they will do so, but it is doubtful whether anything will be recovered.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: You will find it difficult to get the police to take action in such a case.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Another case mentioned by the hon. member was that of an extra officer of the department, whose services were dispensed with, and who issued a summons without authority against a grandmother. The hon. member said that when it was discovered that the grandmother was a rich woman, the summons was withdrawn. There were good reasons for withdrawing the summons, seeing that it had been issued without the authority of the secretary of the department. The grandmother was leaving the State and wanted to take the child with her. The mother objected. The departmental summary is as follows:—

The department has been endeavouring to collect maintenance from the father, who was said to be in New South Wales. The Interstate Destitute Persons Relief Act is not in force in New South Wales, and the department cannot take action under that Act. The department endeavoured to procure maintenance from the grandmother, who refused to pay, but wished the custody of the child, whom she intended taking to New South Wales. The mother of the child strongly objected to the child leaving the State.

Then the hon. member mentioned the case of a certain child and a foster mother. The "Sunday Times" took up this case. The department have this child placed out with a foster mother. It was considered advisable to remove the child. An appeal was made to the Minister but he upheld the action of the department. The police report shows that the woman who had charge of the child was not a fit and proper person to have her and had been fined in the police court. The foster-mother was strongly

backed by the "Sunday Times." The child is now in a good home and is doing well. Of course, in selecting these cases for investigation we have had to be guided by the statements made by the hon. member. In this instance the case related is the only one presenting features similar to those referred to by the hon. member. Then the hon. member spoke of a widow, the mother of a soldier, who had been overpaid £5 17s. The departmental summary is as follows:—

Widowed mother of a soldier was overpaid £5 17s. Department ascertained case through Repatriation Department. Refund was applied for and amount paid in full.

In another case inspector noticed that her appearance roused her suspicions. She denied that anything was wrong. Inspector visited Registrar General's office and ascertained that she had been married five months previously. The overpayment amounted to £15 10s. Application was made for refund and part payment has been made.

The hon. member mentioned the case of a woman remarried after the money had been paid. The departmental summary is as follows:—

The remarriage of this woman was brought under the notice of the Under Secretary by this department. It was understood that the man living in the house was her brother. The sum of £43 was overpaid. Application was made for a refund, but owing to there being seven children under 14 years, and a baby six weeks of age, it was not possible to obtain a refund. The husband, who was unemployed, applied for outdoor relief some time ago, and it was found necessary to grant a little relief.

I think these summaries prove the satisfactory working of the department. I agree with the hon. member that where an imposition is discovered, the department should take proceedings and prosecute the offender. It seems to me that many are out to take down the department if possible, and if ever we find attempts of this sort, prosecution should follow. The hon. member stated that in 1917 there was an excess expenditure of £10,000. During last year the excess was £913, and in 1917, the year referred to by the hon. member, the actual excess was only £4,192. The estimate for 1917-18 was £54,154 and the expenditure for that year was shown on the estimates for 1918-19 as £68,410, including the outdoor relief item of £10,000, which, during 1917-18, was under the control of the Medical Department. The expenditure by the State Children Department from the 1917-18 vote must be deducted from the total of £68,410, showing an actual expenditure of £58,346, which gives an excess from the vote of £4,192. There is no doubt that the expenditure by this department will be increased in the future. There are many reasons for this, and the question is how long we should continue to pay these allowances, which from

year to year are increasing, not out of proportion, however, to the expenditure in the other States. If a select committee is appointed it will be of some use if it is able to form some scheme whereby we can arrive at the necessity for these large sustenance allowances. The main items of expenditure are for the maintenance of State children, the payments to women on whom children are dependent, and outdoor relief. The number of children under care to the 30th June, 1914, was 986, and the cost of their maintenance was £20,580. For the year 1918-19 the number of children was 1,415 and the cost of maintenance was £29,849. In 1914 the number of mothers on whom children were dependent was 461 and the number of children 1,293, the expenditure being £16,507. In 1918-19 the number of mothers had increased to 725 and the number of children to 1,692 and the expenditure was £26,028. The expenditure on outdoor relief in 1914 was £4,227 and in 1918-19 this had increased to £9,691. I would point out that there was a fair amount of industrial unrest which created a great deal of unemployment, and it is necessary in these cases for a considerable amount of outdoor relief to be given. This, of course, swelled the vote. Outdoor relief fluctuates from time to time for many reasons. For instance, owing to the recent influenza epidemic there is quite a number of cases in which the husbands have died leaving the wives and families without support, and during the next year there will probably be a fairly big increase in this direction. I would like to give the figures so far as the different States are concerned to show that the vote under this heading has swelled as much there as it has in Western Australia. In Queensland in 1909 the expenditure in this direction was £27,880, and in 1918-19 it was £146,500. In Victoria in 1910 the expenditure was £89,639 and in 1918-19 it was £184,724. Taken on a population basis there is very little difference between Western Australia and the Eastern States.

Mr. Smith: What about the State children?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I have quoted the figures for the State Children Departments. The outdoor relief in Queensland and New South Wales is distinct from their State Children Departments, so that the position in this respect is different from what it is in Western Australia. In regard to maintenance fees, the member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) said that there has been no exertion in this direction so far as our State Children Department is concerned. Every endeavour, however, has been made when the maintenance order has been given to collect the amounts in question. He said also that there was a sum of £10,000 written off a short time ago. A good deal of this is due to the fact that the maintenance fees were not collected. An order is made, and in many cases it is impossible to collect the money. These amounts have accumulated since 1909. It

is not a wise thing to allow them to accumulate in that way, but they should be wiped off year by year if necessary. For the year ended 30th June, 1917, the amount of maintenance collected was £674, and to the 30th June, 1919, the amount collected was £1,819, or nearly three times as much. It will thus be seen that the Secretary of the State Children Department is doing everything possible in this direction. He is doing, indeed, better than has been done in the past and has kept a watchful eye on all these cases. There is no doubt that more maintenance will be collected in the future, and that cases will be carefully watched. Prompt attention has been given to the homes of many infants, and careful selections have been made. It is necessary that better accommodation should be provided for the receiving home, and it is certainly necessary for better accommodation to be provided for the State Children Department and the Children's Court. It is the intention of the Government to make provision in this direction. I hope that early next year the necessary buildings will be made available, and that they will be sufficiently large to comfortably accommodate the whole staff of the department and the Children's Court. Steps are being taken also so far as the receiving home is concerned. We hope to have provision made on the Estimates this year for a sufficient sum to build a home for that purpose.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Are you keeping children there now?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Yes.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: There is no necessity for that; they should not be kept there.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: We have no other building for the purpose, and that is why it is necessary to have a good home provided. So far as I can tell, from the short experience I have had of the department, the secretary and the officers of his staff are doing the best that is possible in the direction of careful supervision. I am not going to oppose the appointment of a select committee if the House considers it desirable that one should be appointed to inquire into the administration of the department. If a select committee is appointed, however, I fail to see that very much good can be done, because the cases are already being closely inquired into and investigated, and I know of no instance of money being spent that was not required to be spent.

Mr. ROCKE (South Fremantle) [5.25]: The figures quoted by the Colonial Secretary prove that the cost of the State Children Department in each of the States with one exception has increased very materially, the exception being in South Australia, where the decrease as between 1918 and 1919 is a matter of £243. In the other States the increase has reached a sum of about £6,000. In the matter of relief, it is to be expected that the Eastern States will be in a better

position than Western Australia for the reason that they are better established than we are here. Their industries are on a better footing, and when they are stricken by industrial troubles or by sickness they are able to bear the burden better than is Western Australia, especially in view of the fact that their population is much larger than ours. It is not to be expected that there will not be isolated cases of imposition. Some of those mentioned by the member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) must be exaggerated if the reply of the Colonial Secretary is correct. I do not suppose there is any doubt about that. The replies would have been compiled by the officers of the department, and nothing is to be gained by their making replies which are not strictly in accordance with the facts. I have every confidence in the officers of the department. I know some of the work they are called upon to perform and generally speaking, I think, they are doing very fine work. There is a great deal of controversy as to why there should be so much distress in Western Australia, and so much relief given from Government funds. Recently in Fremantle we had the case of a P. & O. steamer coming to port. She was declared by the local authorities to be clean. As a matter of fact she had sickness on board, and as a result of this about 36 lumpers who were working on the ship were taken ill, and 10 of these lost their lives. In some cases they left widows with a large number of children. In one case, I believe, there were 10 children left, and in another case eight children. To those members who represent industrial centres, it will be easy to imagine what distress an event of this description would cause. It is not an exceptional experience of mine for a widow to come to my home and say that she has lost her husband, that she has a certain number of children to support, that there is very little food in the house, and that she does not know how she is going to provide for them. In a case like that I have always approached the State Children Department, and, if I could give an assurance that the case is one for urgent assistance, help in the shape of a few shillings has been sent at once. An inspector has also been sent down to make inquiries, and if the case is deserving, and the widow and children are really in want of assistance, it is at once given by the department. All these cases tend to increase the expenditure of the department. It is not a State trading concern, and therefore cannot show a balance sheet. If the assistance which has been given by the department to these widows and children over a very difficult time in their lives could be placed to the credit of the department there would be a considerable balance in its favour. The department would then receive more of the credit it deserves and less of the adverse criticism which is sometimes levelled against it. I do not object to the criticism of the department. Every Government department which is responsible for the expenditure of public money should be criticised, and if the criticism is just and

helpful no doubt the result will be beneficial not only to the department but to the taxpayers in general. There has been a great deal of controversy as to which is the best method of dealing with State children, whether they should be sent to institutions or whether they should be boarded out with foster mothers, or left in the care of their natural mothers, who should be paid so much per week by the State for the maintenance of those children. I prefer a private home for children if it is possible to send them to such a home. But I would not depreciate the good work done by the institutions. I remember a few years ago a gentleman visiting this State from New South Wales. He was connected with the work amongst State children, and he spoke very much in favour of the boarding out system as against the system of institutions; and he did not speak very kindly about institutions. He did admit, however, that sometimes there were unmanageable children who could not be sent to private homes, and when pressed for a reply as to what he would do in the event of such children being unmanageable and not being suitable for private homes, he had no hesitation in saying that the department in that case would send a child to an institution. That shows that the institutions are doing work which private homes are not always able to do. The foster mother receives 8s. for the maintenance of a child, whilst the natural mother receives only 7s. I cannot understand why the difference should be made. I do not see how a mother can keep a child under 12s. a week, and it seems to me that if the cost of living is going to continue to advance then the expenditure of the department must increase very materially. Another thing that has to be borne in mind is that everything in the shape of food and clothing which the department has to provide is increasing in price. Contracts for Government supplies are at the present time of only four weeks' duration, whereas they used to be for twelve months, and whenever the price goes up the department must pay the increased amount. The number of mothers and children in receipt of assistance makes very sad reading, and gives food for reflection. I think that the requirement of which we are in need is a widows' pension, and it should be a matter for the consideration of the Commonwealth Government. The figures which have been quoted by the Colonial Secretary representing the expenditure in the Eastern States do not include outdoor relief nor money given to assist widows. Those figures only include the help which is given for the assistance of the children. If we had the total amount which is expended in assistance to mothers and children in the Eastern States, it would be found that the figures of this State more than favourably compared with those of our Eastern neighbours.

Hon. W. O. Angwin: No State Government does as much as we do.

Mr. ROCKE: No, but the figures in the Eastern States are much higher than ours, although we have not all the figures which might be supplied to help us make comparisons more complete. I have no objection to the appointment of a select committee. The committee may be able to formulate suggestions which may be of benefit to the department and to the children. If Parliament decides to grant the request of the hon. member it will be in the interests of all concerned. I do not think for a moment that the officers in charge of the department have anything to fear, and if any criticism is levelled against them I believe they will be able to answer such criticism, and if there is any doubt in the minds of the people or members of Parliament that doubt will be cleared up. I am sure the member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) has been moved by pure motives in submitting the motion to the House, but the figures he has quoted are not correct. They are rather exaggerated, and I am afraid he is including the figures, for instance, relating to the Old Men's Home.

Mr. Smith: Oh, no.

Mr. ROCKE: That institution, I understand, is now under the control of the Health Department.

Mr. Smith: My figures are taken from the Estimates.

Mr. ROCKE: They are very different from the figures quoted by the Colonial Secretary. However, I have no objection to the appointment of the select committee, and I intend to support the motion.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN (North-East Fremantle) [5.37]: The ground on which the member for North Perth based his request for the appointment of a select committee was in regard to the expenditure. He pointed out that the department was costing the State a considerable sum of money. I want to say, as one who had something to do with increasing the expenditure of the department, that under the conditions which prevail I am pleased the expenditure is high.

The Minister for Mines: It could not be avoided.

The Premier: You should not show your pleasure.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I am pleased that the figures are high under the present conditions. In 1911 the Government of the day contributed approximately £5,190 per annum for outdoor relief. That included assistance to widows as well as to old and sick persons unable to earn their livelihood. What was the reason? There were women and children by the hundred in this State going short of food.

The Minister for Mines: And clothing and boots.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Those people were going short of the necessities of life because the previous Government had made it a compulsory condition that before they were able to get assistance to enable them

to maintain their children they had to agree to those children becoming State children, though they would not lose control over them. The consequence was that there were hundreds of mothers as well as children going short of the necessities of life because the mothers refused to hand over to the State the control of their children until those children reached the age of 18 years. If those mothers had no feeling or inclination to retain the control of their own children they would bring the children before the court under the State Children Act, and they would immediately have them made State children and then the State would board them out to the mother. But the mother's control was gone as soon as the State stepped in, until the child reached the age of 18 years. The foster-parent for the time being was the State, though the child was temporarily under the mother's care. The children were available for inspection, and the inspectors of the department were able to learn how those children were cared for, and it was open not only to the Government inspectors to see them, but private individuals were able to call at the house from time to time for the express purpose of seeing whether the money contributed by the State was being well spent, and the children well looked after. The widowed mothers who had not lost all sense of respect and feeling refused to carry out the request of the State, and I am pleased to say that I happened to be a member of the Government at that particular time, and that all my colleagues were unanimous in agreeing that it was the duty of the State, whenever a child was left fatherless, to step in and see that that child was fed and clothed. That has been the cause of the increase in the expenditure in connection with the Charities Department. The expenditure rose from £5,190 on 30th June, 1911, to £37,122 on the 30th June, 1915, and I consider it was money well spent. The money was used for the purpose of bringing up the children in a healthy way, and thus make them an asset to the State, instead of allowing them to starve and perhaps be a drag on the community, because of inadequate nourishment in their youth. I feel almost ashamed at times to pick up a newspaper and find that, in connection with the criticism of the expenditure of the State, the first department to be attacked is that of the Charities. Why has there been such an increase in expenditure, is what they ask. I hope the Government—I do not care who they are—will take no heed of leading articles in the Press which attack the growing expenditure of the Charities Department, but will see that the children are at least properly nourished and clothed. If the expenditure in this direction is to be cut down we shall have to starve many children to do so. There is no fund in the world, whether it be a charity fund or otherwise, that has given assistance to the public without someone coming along to abuse it. But it is far better to have that abuse than that a num-

ber of innocent children should go without nourishment. The number of people who carry on this campaign of abuse is small in comparison with those who receive the needed help. Another attempt has been made in the State to take out of the hands of the Government the control of the Charities Department, so far as State children are concerned. It is desired that we should adopt the system in force in South Australia. In that State they are beginning to realise that the system in force there is not successful. It is far better, when we are dealing with women and children who for the time being are placed in the position of want and poverty, that the position of those people should be maintained a secret between the inspector and the Minister than it should be bruited about by busybodies. It is far better for the Minister to retain control, and the funds of the State will be far better guarded by the Minister than they would be if handed over to a board of persons who had no responsibility whatever. We are told by the Minister—I do not think he intended it—that children boarded out are better cared for than the children in institutions and that the mortality among them is lower. The Minister should have completed the statement. It is true that the mortality is lower among children boarded out than among children sent to institutions, but the reason is that children who are sickly and ill cannot be boarded out, as foster-mothers will not take them.

The Colonial Secretary: Not without extra payment.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Very few will take them at all, because they are afraid that, if a child dies, they might be condemned, but the institutions are open to all such children.

Mr. Harrison: The foster-mothers refuse to take the delicate children.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Yes; they do not want them. Sometimes when a boarded-out child shows signs of illness, the foster-mother asks the Department to take the child back. Four years ago, prior to the member for Pilbara making arrangements for the home at West Perth, there was no place in Western Australia outside of a foster-mother's to which a baby could be sent. The consequence was, a hospital for babies was built near Subiaco in connection with the Roman Catholic Church, and that is the only place in the State to-day where babies can be sent, except to foster-mothers. That is the only place where sick children can be sent, unless they are kept in the West Perth home. If the select committee are appointed, I think they should look very carefully into the question of building a receiving home. A receiving home is one for taking temporarily a child handed over to the State, with the object of providing it with a permanent home later, but there was built up at Subiaco a home where there were somewhere about 200 children and a staff was continually maintained. Once children were sent there, it was almost impossible to get them away. Those in charge of such an institution always keep

the number up to the standard necessary to fully employ the staff, instead of transferring the children to an institution or foster mother as was intended by the Act. If the Government intend to construct a new building and have an institution similar to the one they had at Subiaco, they will need a superintendent, a matron, a school master and a dozen or two nurses. If they build a home, they will have a permanent institution as before. The building at West Perth is not a suitable one, but it was a Government building and was fitted out merely to keep children temporarily until some other home could be provided for them. It was the means of closing down the home at Subiaco, and of reducing the expenditure of the Subiaco institution.

The Colonial Secretary: Do you suggest we should not build a home?

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I want the committee to look carefully into the matter. If it is a small place simply for transference, it will be all right. If it is a large building, the expense will go up as before. Reference has been made to the inspection of State children. State children are inspected not only by the Government inspectors, but also by committees located in various parts of the State. In the metropolitan area there is a very large committee. The ladies forming that committee visit the homes of State children; they visit the homes of foster mothers, but they have nothing to do with the home of a mother who is receiving assistance from the State. State children, however, are thoroughly inspected in order to see that the foster mother carries out her duty faithfully. The member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) emphasised strongly the matter of children going to the Eastern States under assistance from the State Government. I know this has been done, but it has been done out of money provided for the purpose of enabling a father or mother to be visited before he or she passed away, or in cases where a person has been sick and wishes to leave the State. If the children accompany the parent, the assistance from the State ceases. If the mother goes away under the advice of a doctor owing to ill-health, and can get a relative in the Eastern States to provide the wherewithal and the children remain here, they cannot be allowed to starve. Only in such instances have I known of a transfer to the Eastern States. The Minister referred to the assistance rendered by the police in cases where parents should contribute towards the maintenance of their children in charge of the State. It is very difficult to get the police to take action to bring up the father for default in providing maintenance. In nine cases out of ten, the police say they cannot find the man; yet it has been known that the person sought has been walking up and down Hay-street. Whether proper instructions have been given, I do not know, but I have asked why defaulters have not been reported to the police, and the reply has been that the police could not find them.

It has been reported that such a parent walked on board ship under the very eyes of the police and left the State, while the mother and children had to be maintained by the State. The hon. member mentioned a case with which he said I was familiar. I think he took the report of that case from the "Truth." Two children, twins, were committed to the State Children Department by the court, action having been taken by the police on the ground that the children were neglected. When the matter was brought under my notice, I was assured that the children were not neglected. I endeavoured to get the Minister to release the children, but the Minister could not see his way to do so. Those children were sent to the West Perth home and one was taken ill, but it recovered. After that it was the intention of the department to put them out to a foster-mother, but the mother of the children asked especially that the department should keep the children away from a foster mother. She preferred that the children should go into the Roman Catholic institution at Subiaco. The twins were aged 16 or 17 months and just able to toddle and the mother hoped to get them back in a little while. At the request of the mother they were put into the Roman Catholic institution. One was taken ill with pneumonia and died, and I believe no blame was due to the staff of the institution. The mother, however, when she saw the other child and asked it to go back home, said that the child ran to the nurse and left her altogether. She was distressed because the child took a greater interest in the sister than in her, its mother. This shows that the staff of the institution had done their duty to the child. Eventually the child was handed over to the grandmother, who now has charge of it. Therefore we should not take too much notice of all we see in the Press in regard to such matters. I repeat that I hope the Government will be very careful in dealing with this matter. While it is necessary to guard the finances of the State it is more necessary to see that every child has sufficient nourishment and clothing to enable it to grow up a strong and respectable citizen and become an asset to the State. I hope the Government will always give attention to this side of the question.

The MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. J. Seaddan—Albany) [5.56]: While I am satisfied the select committee will not discover much to find fault with in the administration of the State Children Department, the inquiry will serve a very good purpose, because it will cause members of the House to realise the very difficult problem that the departmental officials and the Minister are confronted with. It is quite easy to criticise the action of a department which has the care of something like 1,400 children when some isolated case is brought under the notice of a member, but I can assure the member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) from my experience of the last two or three

months, that I could mention a number of cases which would puzzle even him to come to a decision upon. We must remember we are dealing with the care of children and, whatever our opinions may be with regard to those responsible for the advent of the children into our midst, whether we agree that their conduct has not been exemplary, or otherwise, the responsibility devolves on the Government, and on the people to see that such children do not suffer. I wish to put a concrete case and to ask the member for North Perth a question. A bread winner was lost to a certain family in 1915, and by way of compensation the widow received between £600 and £700. There were three children. In 1919 we received an application for assistance for the maintenance of the three children, something less than five years after the widow had received the £650 compensation. We were assured that the family were practically penniless. They had just a few pounds left to carry on for a week or two. The mother asserted that she had been unable to earn anything between 1914 and 1919. What would the hon. member suggest in a case of that sort; that the mother had been extravagant and careless, and had shown no consideration for the children when she permitted that sum to pass through her hands and then sought the assistance of the State? Would he suggest that the Minister should refuse to give any assistance?

Mr. Smith: Not at all.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: The point arises whether we should deal out assistance in exactly the same fashion as regards indigent parents for whose actions the children cannot be responsible. The member for North Perth knows that we are continually bringing before our courts men who will not do their duty as parents. They can be pursued till the crack of doom, however, and there will be no assistance forthcoming except from the State.

Mr. Smith: But the Government should not employ men who will not pay for the maintenance of their children.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Possibly not; but if we can recover from such a man by employing him, it may be better to do that than to throw him on the unemployed market. There is a tendency in all of us to view these matters from the aspect of our personal surroundings. We may feel that we are doing our best for our children, and we may argue that everybody else ought to do likewise. But, unfortunately, we are not all constituted alike. The duty of a State, after all, is to give first consideration to those who cannot care for themselves; and that is the children. I care not how guilty of neglect a parent may be: the State must go beyond the interests of that parent, and even beyond its own interests, in order to see that the children do not suffer. The hon. member referred to the cases of erring mothers and widows who left two or three children to be cared for by the State. Though the State may bring those

people to justice, in the meantime it must give consideration to the proper care of the children. More than one case might be cited where, had the State not stepped in immediately and deferred investigation until a later date, some valuable lives would have been lost to Western Australia.

Mr. Smith: I am not suggesting that the State should discontinue the support of the children in such cases.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I believe the select committee will do some good. They may cause the Government and the people to realise that those who are enjoying the full benefits of living in a free land like this, have certain responsibilities, and that the duty devolves upon the Government of making certain persons recognise their responsibilities as citizens. The hon. member will discover, as the result of the committee's investigations, that what he suggests is already being done. There are frequent complaints that the department are too harsh, and want to know too much of the private affairs of people desiring assistance. Certainly, the complaints are in that direction rather than in the opposite one. On this subject, as on many others, a mere summing up of an expenditure of pounds, shillings, and pence does not convey the real position. Take the last few months. Goodness knows that Western Australia has suffered enough from industrial troubles, which mean unemployment and the lack of the necessary funds to supply food and clothing. In addition, Western Australia has had an epidemic of influenza which has removed the bread winner from many homes. In such circumstances the Government could not refuse assistance. As a result of the influenza epidemic alone, the expenditure of the Charities Department has increased tremendously during the last two or three months. The department have had applications for assistance from quarters which have never applied previously. Naturally, the unemployed difficulty and the aftermath of the war have also contributed largely to increase the expenditure. I trust, however, that the appointment of a select committee, and their inquiries, will not have the effect of hardening the hearts of those who are called upon to administer this most difficult department, probably the most difficult of all our departments to administer, because the officers are brought so very closely in contact with the public. I believe the member for North Perth is as desirous as any one of us that the State should do its duty in that direction. Only recently we have increased the amount of the allowance to foster mothers, in particular because of the increase in the cost of living. That increase in the cost of living has also meant an increased cost per head for State children in institutions or boarded out. In our receiving homes the cost of food and clothing has increased just as it has in the homes of the general public. As regards meat contracts, we were recently paying 6d. per lb.; the price is now 10d. For bread we were

paying 1¼d. per loaf; now the price is 2d. per loaf. Those facts, however, are not in any way proof of laxity of supervision by the departmental officers. The department are assisting over 700 women on whom children are dependent. Those women are continually coming before the department to make explanations with regard to their affairs, and it is not possible to keep so closely in touch with each individual case as to prevent altogether what may be termed victimisation of the department. Since he has been member for North Perth, the mover of this motion has had some experience of people coming along with good tales that caused him to put out a few shillings, only to find afterwards that he had been imposed upon. If the hon. member gets a little book of meal and bed tickets, he will find a remarkable decrease in the number of such callers. There are times, however, when the closest scrutiny, by cross-examination or otherwise, fails to detect an impostor. Generally on this subject, I agree entirely with the member for North-East Fremantle (Mr. Angwin). I do not think there is a difference of opinion in this House as regards the duty thrown upon the State. We talk about immigration. We want to expend State money in order to increase our population in this State—a policy with which I agree. But there can be no better population than our own children, born here and grown up in the Western Australian environment. If we are to spend money in bringing people here from the Old Country, then we are doubly justified in spending money to save the valuable lives of the children born in our midst. Even when prosperity prevails, there will be those who, through no fault of their own, owing to circumstances over which they have no control, find themselves thrown on the hands of the State. I hope that no action to be taken by the select committee, nor even this discussion by the House, will have the effect of causing the people to forget their responsibility as regards those members of the community who are not able to take care of themselves. With the Minister controlling the department, I welcome the appointment of a select committee; but I may tell the member for North Perth that if he were in the position of a plaintiff in the law courts and had to pay costs in the event of not being able to prove his case, he would find himself out of pocket at the close of the forthcoming inquiry. We are too often urged to appoint select committees on the ground that they cost nothing.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: None of us like select committees when we are in office.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: The Minister in charge of the department has already agreed to the appointment of the select committee. I speak now with a full knowledge that the select committee will sit, and I say that the hon. member, at the close of the investigation, will find his case very much weaker than he thinks it now. All cases of the kind to which he has referred are brought under the notice of the Minister, with full particulars obtained as the result of investi-

gation; and I can tell the member for North Perth that it is easier to criticise than to act. No two cases are exactly on all fours, and unless the Minister has a full appreciation of the responsibility he owes to the State, and also a full appreciation of the duty falling upon him as guardian of our children, of our weak, and our unprotected, deplorable blunders will occur. While agreeing to the appointment of a select committee, I desire to add on behalf of those controlling these most difficult departments that they have done well both for the State and for the preservation of child life.

Mr. UNDERWOOD (Pilbara) [6.12]: I support this motion, though since I have been in Parliament I have scarcely ever voted for the appointment of a select committee or a Royal Commission. Whilst a member of the Scaddan Government, I had the opportunity of being in charge of the departments here in question for about a year and nine months; and I was never satisfied in my own mind that the administration was doing anything like reasonably good work. It will be remembered that Mr. Longmore was then the officer in charge, and that, after an inquiry, he had to resign. So far as my own knowledge of Mr. Longmore went, he was not a suitable officer; and I considered the man under him as secretary to be worse. When the Scaddan Government went out of office, they left a recommendation that a well paid officer be appointed to take charge of the Charities Department, and that he should be given greater authority over the departmental inspectors than had obtained in the past. Then, of course, the Government of great economists, who were going to cure the deficit, came in, and they appointed a secretary at about £250 a year to take charge of a department spending anything up to £100,000 per annum.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: Before tea I stated that in my opinion there is need for inquiry into the department. I do not say it aggressively to any Minister, because I admit that while I was a Minister I was not satisfied. I have listened to the Colonial Secretary and I know where his information comes from. The replies are those put up by his officials, and I know how all officials can put up replies to criticisms. If they were nearly as able in general management of affairs as they are in putting up excuses, we would not require motions of this sort. This department spends nearly £100,000 a year. It is easily understood that there may be considerable waste in a department of such expenditure. The officer in charge of the department receives only something like £300 a year—it may be only £270. We require an expert officer in this department and, if possible, he should have some solid control over his inspectors. I know that again and again I found leakages in this department: I do not think any member of the House will

accuse me of being mean or paltry with unfortunate people who require help, but I found that quite a number were receiving assistance from this department who were not entitled to it, people who should have been working instead of living on the department. Confidential reports came to me from time to time. I made inquiries and found that numbers of people were living on this department who should have been earning their own living. This applies not only to the State Children Department but also to the Charities Department. I am convinced that an inquiry into this department will possibly do considerable good, that is to say, it will save the department from being imposed upon, as I know it was when I was the Ministerial head. I do not desire to criticise the officers, but the committee, I think, will be able to find out where the fault is. I am convinced that there is very considerable waste in the department. The replies put up by the Colonial Secretary are simply the replies of an official. If that official devoted as much of his time to saving money and to running his department properly as to framing replies, better results would be achieved. I am not altogether anxious to save money in this department, but I abhor waste and I detest the idea of people living on the rest of the community. There are some doing that. I support the motion in the hope that we shall get a management entirely different from anything we have ever had. If we can secure a suitable man we should pay him at least double £300 a year and should give him control over his inspectors, such a control that if an inspector is wrong, the head can get rid of him and appoint another. That is what I found a great difficulty. Men get into positions, and it does not matter how incompetent they might be they still continue in their positions. While we have that system we must have waste. I will support the motion.

Mr. SMITH (North Perth—in reply) [7.37]: My task in replying to the arguments used in this debate is fortunately a very easy one. Even the Minister himself has practically proved my case. In nearly every instance he admitted that what I had said was practically true, although of course he had the official explanation in regard to them all, an explanation trying to gloss over the seriousness of the cases. It is an old saying that where there is smoke there is fire. In this instance there is considerable smoke. Notwithstanding the departmental attempt to gloss over the cases quoted, it is quite apparent from what has been said here to-day that there is very urgent need for an inquiry into this department. I am pleased indeed that every member who has spoken has agreed with me as to the necessity for an inquiry. In view of that there should be no doubt as to the result when the question is put to the House. I wish to assure hon. mem-

bers that the object of my motion is based on a genuine desire to find out how things are being conducted by the departmental officials, not only in the interests of the State but in the interests of the children and of those people who are compelled to seek the assistance of the department. From the remarks made I take it some members are under the impression that I was complaining of the large amount of money being spent by the department. I wish to assure those hon. members that was not my object at all. I do not mind how much money is spent in the department, but I want to see that the State gets good value for that money. For a number of years the department has not submitted a report as to how it has spent the money, and in view of the rumours heard about the administration of the funds, hon. members are justified in coming to the conclusion that we ought to look into the affairs of the department and see how things are being managed. Large sums of money have been written off by the department without any satisfactory explanation other than it has been found impossible to collect that money. The House is entitled to a better explanation than that. It is not satisfactory for the department to write off £10,000 and simply tell us that it is unable to collect the money. We should have a more precise explanation of the reason why the department cannot collect the money. Unless a committee is appointed to inquire into the management of the department, it seems to me the department will simply drift on in the same loose style as in the past, feeling sure that the House will again agree to the writing off of any losses that may be incurred. No doubt the majority of the officers in the department are doing their best. I have not had much experience with them. What little I have had has shown me that in some cases they have been administering the department sympathetically and doing a great deal of good in relieving urgent cases and looking after the children. In other instances I have concluded that they might have done better than they did. I also found a tendency to pry into the private affairs of people unfortunate enough to have to appeal to the department for assistance. I scarcely think it is the province of the officials of the department to patronise applicants who are receiving charity, as these officials have done, and some improvement in this direction might be made. We heard from the member for Pilbara (Mr. Underwood), who was once head of the department himself, that he was not satisfied with the management. We must give a good deal of attention to what he says, but when he makes this remark surely a private member is justified also in wanting an inquiry into the department, and in asking for the appointment of a select committee. The member for South Fremantle (Mr. Rocke) said that it was impossible for an institution of this kind to present a balance-sheet, or to estimate the good that was being done for the

mothers and children who were being supported from the funds at its disposal. It is not possible to put an ordinary balance-sheet before the House, but we might have a statement of the expenditure showing where the money is going.

The Colonial Secretary: We will have one presently.

Mr. SMITH: That will be too late.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Government cut it out of their reports.

Mr. SMITH: I cannot see what excuse the department has for delaying the issue of its report. It is not a trading concern, and has not to make up estimates showing the value of its plant and stock, or the accounts outstanding. It is purely a spending department, and there is no reason why it should not make its report promptly to the day. The Minister says the accounts are going to be presented directly. Already four months of the financial have gone by and it is high time they were presented. I do not know whether he refers to the accounts for the past year.

The Colonial Secretary: I refer to those for 1913.

Mr. SMITH: It is ridiculous that we should have to wait so long for this information, and I think the Minister himself agrees with me. The Minister for Mines went vigorously into the case, and admits that it is desirable that a select committee should be appointed to go into the matter. He quoted a case where a widow three years ago had received £650 upon the death of her husband, and to-day she is appealing to the State for the support of her children. She gives no explanation as to how this money has been spent.

The Colonial Secretary: Would you let the children starve now?

Mr. SMITH: No. The State has no option but to support them. I would not offer any objection to that either.

Mr. O'Loughlen: She may have been an invalid.

Mr. SMITH: A select committee would inquire into a case of that kind, and might offer some suggestion to the Government as to how to deal with such things in the future. These cases would no doubt crop up from time to time.

The Colonial Secretary: How can we deal with them?

Mr. SMITH: An order for the payment of money is made through an officer of the court. It would be a simple matter for the officer to make the State department trustees for the children, to see that the money was spent in a proper manner.

Mr. O'Loughlen: There is no opposition to the motion. Why not let us get on?

Mr. SMITH: I am pleased that the Minister has promised better accommodation for the department. It is urgently needed. The officers cannot be expected to do good work unless they are properly provided for.

Mr. O'Loughlen: And have frosted windows, too.

Mr. SMITH: I hope the motion will be agreed to.

Question put and passed.

Select Committee appointed.

Ballot taken and a select committee appointed consisting of Messrs. Griffiths, Mullaney, Munsie, Rocke and the mover (Mr. Smith).

Mr. SMITH (North Perth) [8]: I move:

That the Committee have power to call for persons, papers and records, to sit on days on which the House stands adjourned, take evidence on oath, and report on the 9th October.

Question put and passed.

BILL—CONSTITUTION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from 3rd September.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. T. P. Draper—West Perth) [8.3]: Some little time has elapsed since this Bill was brought before the House and in submitting the second reading, the member for Menzies (Mr. Mullaney) expressed the belief that the appointment to the position of a Minister of the Crown of a person who is not a member of Parliament was contrary to the spirit of the Act. That was the first object he had in view in bringing in the amendment to the Act. Incidentally he has another object which I think he stated to be that the administration of the affairs of State should be confined to this Chamber, and the hon. member seeks to meet the objections he has in view by altering the Constitution Act in such a way that one member of the principal executive officers of the Crown, shall always be a member of another place and that the other five members of the executive must be members of this Assembly. I will first deal with what appears to me to be the constitutional aspect and as to whether the member for Menzies is justified in the belief he has expressed. Hon. members must bear in mind that the Constitution of this Parliament, in the same way as the Constitutions of other Parliaments of the British dominions, is partly written and partly unwritten. So far as it is written it depends upon the actual wording of the Constitution Act. So far as it is unwritten it depends upon the constitutional practice which has prevailed during the course of ages in the mother of Parliaments in the Old Country. We here are not confined to the four corners of the Constitution Act, but we are also guided by the practice of other Constitutions which are based upon the Constitution in the Old Country. So far as the Constitution Act goes, there is nothing whatever to prevent any person, whether a member of another place or a member of this House, or not, to be a member of the Ministry. Our Constitution Act is silent upon

the subject. Therefore, when dealing with the question as to what the practice has been elsewhere we will find, if we go into what has taken place in other Parliaments and in the Old Country, as well as in this country, that on many occasions persons have been appointed as Ministers who have held no seat in any House of Parliament. The member for Menzies gave two instances of this which actually occurred in Western Australia. One was the instance of Mr. Sayer who was appointed Attorney General before he became member for Claremont, and the other instance was that of Mr. Gregory who, I think, after he contested an election unsuccessfully, continued to be a member of the Ministry pending an inquiry into that election.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That was not on all fours with the Albany instance.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I am showing that from the constitutional point of view there is nothing to prevent a person who is a member of either House becoming a Minister of the Crown. In Ontario we find that in 1898 there were two members of the Ministry who held office for eight months without occupying a seat in Parliament. No objection was raised to their appointment as Ministers. The only exception taken was to the time during which they held office without becoming members of parliament. In Queensland in 1907 there was a Mr. Airey who held office for a considerable period as a Minister without being a member of Parliament. In Newfoundland in 1908 a gentleman named Kent held office for a short time without being a member of Parliament. In British Columbia a Minister of the Crown held office without being a member of Parliament, and in the Canadian Parliament there was a gentleman named Templeton who held office without being a member.

Mr. Underwood: What do they do in China?

Mr. Lambert: What do they do in Peru?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I have nothing to do with either China or Peru. The Parliaments which are not founded on the constitutional principles of the British Empire are not analogous and have nothing to do with us. In support of what I have said about the constitutional aspect, I would like to quote shortly from "Todd's Parliamentary Government," Volume 2, page 26. The quotation is at the bottom of the page and is as follows:—

While there is no absolute necessity for every member of the Cabinet to hold a departmental office under the Crown, the spirit of the Constitution requires that everyone occupying a seat in the Cabinet should also be a member of one or other of the Houses of Parliament. And no one should be introduced into the Cabinet, or be permitted to continue therein who is out of Parliament, unless he is likely to be returned by some constituency within a reasonable period.

Two instances occurred which are given by "Todd"—

In 1835 when Sir Robert Peel's Ministry was being constructed, it was determined to confer a seat in the Cabinet upon Sir George Murray, the master general of the ordnance. He accordingly became a candidate for a seat in the House of Commons but was defeated in the county of Perth.

It is pointed out that Sir George Murray held office under the Crown for a short period and on appeal, the opinion was expressed, that although it was unusual for a person to hold office, without a seat in Parliament, yet, if there was any immediate prospect of that person being returned, the objection could not apply. There was a similar instance in 1845 when Mr. Gladstone held office for some considerable time after being defeated at an election, and without being a member of Parliament. Hon. members will also find in "Todd's Parliamentary Government in the British Colonies," page 55, that this is stated—

It is the essence of responsible Government that the Governor should have as his constitutional advisers persons who already possess or can readily obtain a seat in one or other of the Legislative Chambers of the Colony in order that they may be thorough exponents of the opinions of the Government as well as the well understood wishes of the people.

Hon. members will find if they look at the records of Parliamentary Government, that there is nothing unconstitutional in a man being appointed a Minister who is not a member of Parliament, but it is also recognised by the Constitution that no one has a right to retain office as a member of the Ministry unless he is likely within a reasonable time to obtain a seat in Parliament, and, so far as the constitutional question is concerned, there can be no doubt whatever that what took place when the present member for Albany was elected, was strictly in accordance with the Constitution Act. I do not want to delay the House upon this matter.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Are you opposing the Bill?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I would like to point out to the hon. member who moved the second reading of the Bill that I am somewhat doubtful whether what he thinks will really effect the object he has in view. The hon. member suggests that he will achieve his object by imposing as a qualification to become a member of the Ministry, the fact that such person must hold a seat in either House, because he says one of the six elected officers must be a member of another place and the remaining five must be members of this House. It therefore exhausts the six principal executive officers of the Crown. If the language the hon. member has employed to effect his object is correct, it may lead to this startling result, that no man has a right to be a member of the Min-

istry—one of the principal executive officers of the Crown—unless he holds a seat. Therefore, on a general election when Parliament is dissolved, any Minister who happens to have a seat in this House is no longer qualified to be a member of the Ministry. That is the interpretation. The language the hon. member has used is really not appropriate to attain his object. Instead of proceeding with this Bill, it would be better if the hon. member sought, in more appropriate language, to effect his purpose by adding a clause to the Government Constitution Act Amendment Bill when that measure is brought down. I do not desire to mislead the hon. member or any member of the House, but I thought it necessary to point out clearly the position and to point out, in fairness to the hon. member, that it was somewhat doubtful whether he would be able to effect his purpose in the manner he suggests.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Will you support such a clause?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I will consider the amendment when it comes before the House. The amendment could be easily couched in plain language, something to the following effect, "That no person shall be appointed a member of the Ministry or one of the principal executive officers of the Crown unless at the time of his appointment he holds a seat in either another place or this Assembly." That is clear language about which there could be no mistake, and the question of interpretation as to how long a member could hold office would not arise. I suggest that the hon. member, with the consent of the House, withdraw the Bill, or that this debate be adjourned, so that the measure may be postponed until the Government Bill is brought before the House and I think, subject to the Speaker's ruling, the hon. member will then be at liberty to propose such an amendment as I have suggested.

Mr. Mullany: I desire to ask your ruling, Sir, on the point raised by the Attorney General. If I by permission withdraw the Bill, shall I be acting in accordance with the Standing Orders if I seek to attain my object by an amendment to the Government Bill?

Mr. SPEAKER: It will be necessary for me to see the Bill brought down by the Attorney General before I can decide the relevancy of any amendment which might be moved.

On motion by Mr. Nairn debate adjourned.

MOTION—WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT AND GENERAL INSURANCE.

Order read for the resumption of the debate from the 3rd September on the following motion by Mr. Underwood:—"That in the opinion of this House, it is desirable that the Government establish a general insurance fund in connection with the Workers' Compensation Act."

Mr. HARRISON (Avon) [8.20]: In the absence of the member for Sussex, I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and negatived.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [8.21]: I move an amendment—

That the following words be added
“And that the Act should be amended to include industrial diseases.”

I am in accord with the motion. It is high time the Government took into consideration the establishment of a general insurance fund for the purpose of workers' compensation, and I would like to see a general insurance fund for all purposes. I believe a great saving could be effected to the people generally and a large profit made by the State if general insurance were undertaken. On two occasions, when a Bill was sent to another place with a provision to bring miners' complaint and industrial diseases under the Workers' Compensation Act, the principal argument used against the inclusion of that provision was that it would be impossible to get insurance against such complaints by the local companies. The premiums would be so high that employers could not afford to pay them.

Mr. Underwood: Could not you bring down an amendment to the Act?

Mr. MUNSIE: No. If this was a definite motion, I would not be able to move my amendment, but seeing that it asks only for an expression of opinion, I am entitled to move the additional words. I want members to express an opinion whether they are favourable to the inclusion of industrial diseases under the Workers' Compensation Act. On the 28th August, 1918, the then Premier (Mr. Lefroy) answered a series of questions put by me with regard to the fund established by the Government for insurance under the Workers' Compensation Act of Government employees. The questions and answers were—

(1) What amount stands to the credit of the fund established for the payment of compensation to State employees who meet with accidents? (2) How long has such fund been in operation? (3) What is the amount of contributions paid in comparison with the amount paid to private companies? The replies were—(1) £29,680. (2) Since the 1st July, 1913. (3) In the majority of cases, the contributions are about one-half of those payable to private companies. In a few instances, higher proportions are charged, but these rates are less than the contributions paid to private companies.

There we have a definite illustration of the Government insuring the big majority of their employees, and of the premiums paid being only half of those paid to local companies. Yet in four years, the Government fund has met all liabilities and accumulated a profit of £29,680. This shows that private insurance companies are on a good wicket.

The Minister for Works: Too good a wicket, in my opinion.

Mr. MUNSIE: It is time the State took on general insurance. Immense good would accrue from it to the general public and to the State. In Queensland, the same argument was raised against the establishment of State insurance under the Workers' Compensation Act, and a proposal to include industrial diseases under that Act was thrown out. The Government took over the whole of the insurance in Queensland, except marine insurance and amended the Workers' Compensation Act, increasing the amount payable at death from £400 to £600 and in case of permanent incapacity from £400 to £700, and included miners' phthisis and other industrial diseases. I have a table showing how the insurance business worked out in Queensland in 1918 and it is worth reading. Under the Workers' Compensation Act the income for 1918 was £248,399; claims paid £132,277; expenses £27,789, added to reserves £30,263; year's surplus £58,070. The premiums charged by the State insurance in Queensland was 33½ per cent. less than the premiums paid previously to private companies. Still, the astonishing results quoted were achieved in one year. Under the heading “Miners' phthisis,” dealt with under Part B of a report on ‘the Workers' Compensation Act in Queensland, the following information is given—

The number of claims which have so far been admitted under Section 14B of the Workers' Compensation Act, 1916, in respect to miners' phthisis is 73. The amount paid in respect of such claims to date is £3,121 1s. 4d., together with £254 8s. 6d. for expenses. The estimated additional cost of final settlement of these claims is £21,481 18s. 9d. in addition to the amount already paid. The number of compassionate grants which have been made to date by the Home Department and by the State Government Insurance Office is 185. The total amount paid on account of those grants to date by the Home Department and by the Insurance Office is £10,936 4s. 10d.

The table under “Miners' Phthisis” shows that for the year the total income was £27,880, that the claims paid amounted to £1,005, and the expenses to £2,919, that there was added to reserves £16,792, and that the year's surplus amounted to £7,164. I do not want to deal with industrial diseases generally, but the worker to-day is having a fairly bad time even while in good health and while receiving the best of wages paid in Western Australia. If that worker contracts any disease attributable to his occupation, he gets practically no compensation. What is the result? He is left practically to charity. That is not a fair proposition. The calling should provide a livelihood for such a worker until he recovers. Industrial diseases should, therefore, be included in the Workers'

Compensation Act. If the Government established an insurance fund and amended the Workers' Compensation Act so as to include industrial diseases, the employers of labour could fully insure their employees under the Government scheme for less than the partial insurance of to-day is costing them. I have a good deal of information here with regard to other industrial diseases. However, the principal industrial disease in Western Australia to-day is miners' complaint. We have now the possibility of another big mining field opening up, and I trust the powers that be will see to it that the ventilation of the new field is such as to prevent so wide a prevalence of miners' complaint as exists in the older mines of Western Australia. I support the motion, and I trust my amendment will be carried.

Mr. TROY (Mount Magnet) [8.35]: I propose to offer a few words in support of the amendment of the member for Hannans. I am in entire sympathy with that hon. member's aims, and I regret that the Labour Governments which have been in power in this country, introducing as they did so many new precedents in departmental administration, failed to introduce a measure providing for a system of substantial insurance all round. I excuse those Governments somewhat, because it was not possible for them to do all things. I hope the present Government, or some other Government, will take the earliest opportunity of introducing a measure for compulsory insurance on the lines suggested by the motion and the amendment. In Western Australia alone there are between 50 and 60 firms engaged in life insurance and in insurance against fire and employer's liability. In addition, there are companies insuring against burglary, against breakage of plate glass, and against marine risks. These latter companies I have not included in my figures. The peculiar thing about the system is that while there are 50 or 60 companies operating, there are no cut rates. All the companies charge the same rates. Apparently they have a common agreement that the business shall be shared amongst them. If a new company comes to operate in Western Australia, that new company does not enter into competition, but arrangements are made for it to share in the business. In my opinion the existing system represents very great waste from the economic standpoint. It is wasteful in the extreme to allow in this small population 40 or 50 insurance companies to carry on the one business. The people of this country are taxed to maintain 40 or 50 managers, an equal number of boards of directors, and numerous inspectors, clerks, and other officers, while one institution could do the work well and efficiently. I am therefore prepared to support any measure to relieve the people of this country from excessive taxation so far as insurance is concerned.

The excessive number of insurance companies operating here represents a form of taxation on the people. The experience of Queensland shows that a Government can carry on insurance business to the advantage of the whole community.

Mr. Smith: How long has Queensland been doing that?

Mr. TROY: This is the third year.

Mr. Smith: The New Zealand Government have dropped the industrial business altogether.

Mr. TROY: I am not in the least influenced by that fact, because I know that Governments are influenced by political considerations. The present Government will drop the State sawmills if Parliament allows them. The present Government would never have the State Steamship Service if the people of the country did not insist upon it. The fact that a Tory Government dropped national insurance is no evidence of the failure of national insurance, but rather evidence of the exercise of political pressure. The Government which established State insurance in New Zealand was practically a Labour Government. It was the first democratic Government in Australasia. It was a Government which had the support of all the democratic elements in the community, and was elected by the very same class of people who in this country send members to sit on this side of the House. That New Zealand Government was opposed by that section of the community which in this country sends members to sit on the other side of the Chamber. The Seddon Government established State life assurance in New Zealand, and the Seddon Government was the forerunner of all the democratic Governments in Australasia. In Queensland we find that the first year's operation of State insurance resulted in a profit of £71,000, while rates were reduced by, I believe, from 30 to 40 per cent. Last year the reduction of rates was equivalent to a reduction of premiums by £52,000. I do not think any member of this House will be acting in the best interests of the community if he opposes a proposition of this character. I am sure that hon. members imbued with the idea of giving the people a fair and square deal will find it in their hearts to support both the motion and the amendment, which should commend themselves to all progressive minds. We might just as well have 50 or 60 Governments, 50 or 60 Mines Departments, or 50 or 60 Lands Departments, all doing the one business, as have 50 or 60 insurance companies, especially as amongst the 50 or 60 companies there is no competitive effort. I have much pleasure in supporting the motion as well as the amendment, and I hope the mover of the motion will accept the amendment.

Mr. LAMBERT (Coolgardie) [8.43]: Speaking in support of both the motion and the amendment, I greatly regret that the scope of the proposal has not been further

enlarged. With the last speaker, I certainly think the Government of this country should realise that insurance stands foremost among Western Australian monopolies which ought to be nationalised. I fancy I see the Minister for Works (Hon. W. J. George) nodding approval, and I hope we shall have the hon. gentleman's good offices in Cabinet, that he will use his persuasive powers to bring his colleagues to the realisation that, without the slightest derogation to the competitive system to which the present Ministers subscribe, insurance may be permitted to become the first avenue of nationalisation in Western Australia. To my mind it is a crying shame that we should go on building up a deficit and running this young and undeveloped country further into debt by allowing some 40 insurance companies to operate here, sucking the life-blood of the State. No worse form of exploitation or profiteering is conceivable than that represented by the insurance companies established here. I would not make that statement if there were even the slightest competition amongst them. But they have a so-called underwriters' association, which fixes the rates of insurance, and our people have to pay. As I mentioned once previously in this House, when there was a break in the underwriters' association fire insurance rates on the goldfields were lowered from 40s. per cent. to 5s. per cent.—a fact which in itself goes to show the financial exactions which the companies have been levying on the Western Australian people during the last quarter of a century. The last time we tackled these insurance companies in this House it was in connection with the Stamp Duties Act. What was the result? While we said they should pay the stamp duty on the amount of the premium paid, when the insurer paid the premium the company calmly asked him "Have you got the money for the stamp duty?" Surely hon. members on the other side, who pride themselves on their business acumen, know well that these institutions have outlived their usefulness. If ever they had any usefulness in this State, if ever they had any sense of financial fairness, we might show some consideration for them; but they never have had anything of the sort. They are different from the private banking institutions in that regard. I certainly have a little respect for private banking institutions. They have been a factor in the development of this young country, but these financial brigands, and Ned Kellys of commerce, these insurance companies, are deserving of not the slightest consideration.

Mr. Nairn: You are smoodging to your banker.

Mr. LAMBERT: No. I deal with the Commonwealth Bank, or rather the Commonwealth Bank deals with me. I only hope the Premier will look at this question in the light in which we view it, and recognise the fact that this will in no sense operate against the competitive system to which he subscribes. He should recognise that we have 42 useless

institutions in this State exacting possibly a quarter of a million from the people.

Mr. Smith: We have had a quarter of a million out of them this year.

Mr. LAMBERT: Why? Merely to prove their bona-fides, to show that if they had a fire they were in a position to pay.

The Minister for Works: And that money they have taken out of the people insured with them.

Mr. LAMBERT: That is so.

Mr. Smith: The real reason is that we want the money.

Mr. LAMBERT: If the Colonial Treasurer requires money he can get it in this direction without interfering with the competitive system. I appeal to hon. members that if we are to save the solvency of this State we should take advantage of some of these big and readily accessible avenues of profit. I should like to hear some of the farmers' representatives on this question. The Western Australian Farmers have had to go out of Australia to make a private arrangement with a Canadian firm, so that the farmers may secure some little relief.

Mr. Smith: Your information is not up to date. They have started their own company.

Mr. LAMBERT: They may have the nucleus of their own company, but they are practically underwriting with the Canadian company virtually the whole of their insurance business. I discussed the matter quite recently with the manager of that concern.

Mr. Nairn: They only started it to-day.

Mr. LAMBERT: However, that is beside the question. Insurance most readily lends itself to national control. There was no need for the hon. member who has just sat down to illustrate the position of State insurance in Queensland. It has returned a ten per cent. bonus to those insured, and in addition has lowered the premiums 25 per cent. Have the insurance companies of this State lowered the premiums?

The Minister for Works: Not a bit of it.

Mr. LAMBERT: I hope the Minister for Works, who shows some little sense of fairness—

The Minister for Works: The insurance people call me a darned fool.

Mr. LAMBERT: As a matter of fact it is the appeal principle the Minister possesses.

The Minister for Works: What do you mean by that exactly?

Mr. LAMBERT: Well, your best friends will speak the truth about you sometimes. I hope the Colonial Treasurer will recognise that even if he stands in the way of national control of insurance, it must inevitably come. There must be a change in the system of insurance in Australia. The Commonwealth Government are encroaching upon our means of procuring revenue, and if we let this slide, possibly the Commonwealth Government will absorb it. Just now we have an opportunity for absorbing this avenue of revenue for Western Australia. The insurance profits alone would get us out of our financial difficulties. It is the duty of every

hon. member to support general insurance in this State.

Mr. Maley: Only one insurance company, only one chemical works.

Mr. Smith: Only one member of Parliament.

Mr. Maley: What about only one church?

Mr. LAMBERT: My religious beliefs are sufficiently cosmopolitan to embrace even that, but I do not think the hon. member, with his bigotry, would see eye to eye with me. However, I am not concerned about that, although I am concerned about the hon. member's attitude on this important matter of workers' compensation and general insurance. Only a short while ago we had the spectacle of a small amendment passed by this House being thrown out by another place. It was an endeavour to curb the inroads of insurance companies. It is a shame that hon. members of another place should not try to protect the people from the operations of these concerns. It is the duty of hon. members to protect the people from the financial exactions of these blood-sucking insurance companies, and also to recognise that we have here a ready avenue of profit to the State. If we were to go before the people to-morrow and point out the profit we are allowing the insurance companies to take out of the people and, side by side with that, point out our own financial obligations, we would, I feel sure, come back with a mandate from the people to nationalise insurance. The people are sick to death of these financial, blood-sucking institutions, which are impoverishing Western Australia to-day.

Mr. Smith: Are you insured?

Mr. LAMBERT: Certainly, and if the State were controlling insurance I could be insured for double the amount at half the price. I only hope the member for North Perth and other members who sometimes refuse to see that conditions are changing, will agree that obligations have been cast upon us by the unfortunate war which should give us a broader and better outlook and teach us to think in the terms of the people rather than in those of the miserable institutions that have not our respect and should not have our support.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. W. J. George—Murray-Wellington) [8.55]: I have not gathered from the debate what the mover had in his mind in regard to the organisation of such a fund as he proposes in the motion; therefore I am not able to form more than a general opinion upon what I might call the general principle. Strange as it may appear, I am of the opinion that insurance in this State is one of those utilities which any Government would be justified in taking over. Two sessions ago I stated that in pretty strong terms. It does not require much argument to show that insurance companies in this State are being carried on at an enormous expense, which could be reduced very largely without impairing their efficiency; and in consequence they would not have to

extract so much money from the insurer. As a property-owner I have been insured in this State for nearly 30 years. I usually carry out my views, no matter what may be in front of me, and I have given them out. When the insurance companies tried to saddle me with the stamp duty, which should come out of their own profits, I did not continue my insurance, and I have not a penny of insurance on my property to-day. Some might say that I am a darned fool. At any rate, if I am, the only person to suffer will be myself. When I have strong convictions I am prepared to be my own insurer rather than see a wrong perpetrated, as in Western Australia to-day. In January of this year I was in Victoria. I did not have an opportunity for getting out of Melbourne much, but I definitely learned that right away in the forest, up Fern Tree Gully, risks fifty per cent. more hazardous than those on my farm at Brunswick were taken at 12s. 6d. per cent., whereas in Western Australia I was paying 20s. per cent. In regard to other property I hold, where I am paying 6s. 6d. the same risk, I found, was taken in Victoria at 3s. 6d., and there was no stamp duty imposed upon the assured. The two insurance companies that I have been dealing with since 1891 have been at me in a courteous manner for the last eight or nine months and sending me cover note after cover note, only to be met with my refusal to continue an insurance. I thought it only right that I should give my views in connection with the matter. It is not so much the difference that there would be in the payment of the stamp duty so far as I am concerned, but I know there are a great many people with small insurances upon whom this stamp duty is a burden, and it is not right that it should be imposed. The premiums these companies are now getting are altogether too heavy when compared with what takes place in Victoria, and they should be called upon to pay the stamp duties themselves. The companies employ a large body of clerks, canvassers, and adjusters, they have many paid directors on their boards, and there are expenses which can in the interests of the State safely be cut down. I am satisfied that if the State could see its way to take up fire insurance it would save much expense to the people, and, whereas the premium to-day is 20s., under a State insurance, I am of opinion that it could be cut down as low as 7s. 6d. per hundred pounds. A State fire insurance is an institution which comes within the utilities of Government, and could be carried on successfully, and the profits would go to the people who would support it by means of their premiums.

Mr. Duff: Another State enterprise!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Perhaps so. I do not mind that in such a case as this. The hon. member has probably learned during the war that many of the opinions we held for years have been changed by the outlook brought about

as a result of the war. I have no hesitation in saying that although I opposed the establishment of the State Steamship line, to-day I am convinced that carriage by sea for the goods of Australia should be managed either by the Commonwealth or by the State Governments themselves.

Mr. Nairn: You are on the wrong side of the House.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am on the right side of the House.

Mr. Nairn: Why do you want to sell the State sawmills?

Mr. Mullany: The State steamers will carry the timber from their own mills.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The war has brought one to take a fresh outlook on many of these things. If the hon. member wants to know what has caused me to change my opinion about the question of shipping, I will inform him that it is because of the conduct of the ship owners themselves, who have not only fleeced Australia, but the British Empire, which they have endeavoured to bleed white in the time of its agony. If I had my way I would have no mercy on the man who would sell his country, and similarly I would have no mercy on those people who have bled the Empire white in this time of stress.

Mr. O'Loughlen: He will not sell the State sawmills.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I thought this might be an opportunity of expressing my views and expressing them in a manner which could not be mistaken. So far as insurances are concerned, if the Government, of which I am a member, were of the same opinion and would bring forward a measure to provide for a State insurance in the direction I have suggested, I should be glad to support it.

Mr. HARRISON (Avon) [9.5]: We have in the course of the debate got on to a discussion upon general insurance by the Government. If we could speak to that we should have a wide field to go upon. The member for Pilbarra is to be congratulated upon bringing the matter before the House. It is, I think, only the thin edge of the wedge for a further discussion later on. If we consider carefully what insurance companies, which have been operating in Western Australia since the Goldfields broke out, have made in the way of profits, we can imagine what the case will be by the next century. It is also well to consider that during the war these very same companies, both life and fire insurance, have been able to contribute large sums of money to the war loans and the Peace loan, and also in the way of assisting the Commonwealth. This shows the size of their funds and the magnitude of their operations. If, when the Labour Government were in power, they had made this one of the first of their State enterprises, I think it would have been a great success, and would have led to others and very likely have been the cause of changing public

opinion. The Government departments in their operation have facilities for carrying out the necessary office work, and it is after all more a matter of office work than anything else. It pays these insurance companies to give away the whole of the first premium that is obtained in getting new business, for when they have once got the people on their books they do not consider that the next cost will be anything more than a fractional one. If the work were carried out by the Government it would pay handsomely.

Mr. Smith: How would the Government collect the bills?

Mr. HARRISON: Exactly in the same way as private enterprises do, and it is very profitable. If we consider the amount that these companies handle year by year and the cost of collecting the amounts, and take the amount of premiums that are paid, we can see how profitable a venture it is. We have it from questions that were asked some time ago that, in the first year's operations of the Industries Assistance Board in the matter of fire insurance, out of a sum of £22,000 paid in the way of premiums, only £2,000 odd were paid out in claims. That is a very big margin of profit to work on. The properties insured for the sum of £22,000 were mostly owned by settlers who were in distressful circumstances, and as a rule the fire claims are very much more in the case of those who are in poor circumstances than in other cases, because they cannot afford to take the same precautions as their richer neighbours. The amounts paid in premiums, against the amount paid in claims in connection with the Industries Assistance Board, prove what a splendid business it would have been for the Government to have had in hand. The operations of the insurance companies touch nearly everything in our lives. The present rates, however, would exhaust all the returns that a farmer would get from his property if he were to insure all that he could upon it. He might start off by insuring his own life and then the lives of the members of his family; he might then insure his stock and his residence and outbuildings and the whole of his crops, but if he did so he would probably not get enough off the farm to pay the premiums for each year. I think it would be a splendid business for the Government to take up, and I support the motion.

Mr. SMITH (North Perth) [9.11]: I sympathise with the amendment of the member for Hannans (Mr. Munsie), and think there is a great deal in the contention that workmen should be insured against industrial diseases, particularly miners' phthisis. I regret, however, that he has seen fit to tack his amendment on to what I consider the unworkable proposal contained in the motion itself. If he had made a separate motion of his amendment it would have stood a better chance of being carried.

Mr. Munsie: It has been carried twice through this Chamber, but thrown out elsewhere.

Mr. SMITH: I am prepared to support it again, but I cannot say that I feel disposed to support the motion.

Mr. Underwood: You crusty old tory.

Mr. SMITH: Not at all, and I am not speaking on behalf of the insurance companies, which we have heard so severely criticised this evening.

Mr. Munsie: And justly, too!

Mr. SMITH: There is some justice in some of the remarks that have been made, particularly in regard to the imposition of the stamp duty and the passing of this on to the customer. This was not intended by the Treasurer when the Stamp Act was amended. The insurance companies should pay the stamp duty themselves. It was on account of the way that the section of the Act was worded that a loophole was provided for the companies to pass on this tax. It is not too late to amend the Act to provide that the insurance companies themselves shall pay this stamp tax.

Mr. Munsie: The banks made a suggestion to the Treasurer that he could get money by charging 2d. for each cheque. They are very generous with other people's funds.

Mr. SMITH: I hope that the Government will do something to amend the Stamp Act so that it will be compulsory for the insurance companies to pay the duty themselves. A good deal has been said about State insurance. I have a report here dealing with the matter that I think would be of interest to the House to hear. It is a report of a meeting of the American National Convention of Insurance Commissioners held at St. Louis within the last two or three months and this question of State insurance was the subject under discussion. A resolution was unanimously adopted by the insurance commissioners of no fewer than 25 States. The report reads—

Great earnestness was manifested in defending the admirable claim settlement work of the companies as contrasted with the extensive and lax methods of practically all the State Fund administrators. This is considered by our contemporary a most significant expression by State authorities in favour of company work. The resolution reads: "Resolved: That this convention places on record the following facts: First: That the scale of benefit to the injured workmen depends only on the terms of the compensation law, which in turn reflects the sense of social justice in the community. Second: There is no assurance of speedier settlements from State funds, but on the contrary prompt settlements will be better secured by leaving the field of insurance open to competition.

Mr. Lutay: Who appointed those commissioners?

Mr. SMITH: The position is exactly the same in America where companies work on a common tariff.

Mr. Munsie: Do you know that the insurance companies in Western Australia under the Workers' Compensation Act are to-day demanding that a returned soldier shall sign on as a disabled worker and that he shall not be entitled to full compensation?

Mr. Wilson: Up to 75 per cent.

Mr. Nairn: Every returned soldier?

Mr. Munsie: Any returned soldier who has been discharged from the forces through incapacity.

Mr. SMITH: That is another view of the question altogether.

Mr. Munsie: It shows the character of the insurance companies.

Mr. SMITH: The report which I was quoting goes on—

Third: That competition between all forms of insurance not only gives the employer full liberty of choice in insurance protection, to which he is entitled, but it also develops the science of accident prevention and educates the employers to full utilisation thereof, because the self-interest of the insurance forces them to be active in accident prevention. Therefore, be it further resolved: That this convention express its convictions that the permanent interests of the employer and the employee are better served by competitive insurance, rather than by State monopolistic fund in respect to safety of coverage, promptness of settlements and progressive accident prevention, which is one of the main benefits to the employee.

That was the result arrived at by the National Insurance Commissioners of 25 States who investigated the question. They decided entirely against State insurance.

Mr. Mullany: They really carried a resolution of condemnation against themselves.

Mr. SMITH: I feel that there is a great deal in what I have read. I do not think the workers will get the benefit that they anticipate from State insurance. It may be that we may economise by having fewer insurance companies; but with the State method I am afraid we will be sadly disappointed. Queensland has been quoted as a case where it has been a success. But it has only been in existence there for two years.

The Minister for Works: What about New Zealand.

Mr. SMITH: They introduced it many years ago but they were glad to drop it. They have State accident insurance in New Zealand and I can quote figures to show that it is not at all popular there.

The Minister for Works: They have fire insurance in New Zealand.

Mr. SMITH: No; they have continued accident insurance.

Mr. Munsie: The State only run it there in competition with the companies.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: And the companies reduced their premiums considerably.

Mr. SMITH: To show that the State department did not catch on, I will quote the

accident premiums. The total premiums collected in New Zealand in 1917 for accident insurance amounted to £351,000 and of that total the Government department only received £22,000, the balance being distributed amongst the private companies. This shows clearly that the State department has not been so popular as we are given to suppose.

Mr. Munsie: They never really went in for it, they simply opened an office and said "You can insure here if you like." In Queensland the State department closed up many of the private companies.

Mr. SMITH: We have done a bit of State insurance here.

Mr. Munsie: And it has been payable, too.

Mr. SMITH: It has been said that the Government reduced the premiums.

Mr. Munsie: They did. Do you doubt the word of the late Premier?

Mr. SMITH: I know, because an instance came under my notice the other day. A State department demanded the same premium as the local companies when it was desired to insure the employees at the Zoological Gardens.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Zoo is not a State department.

Mr. SMITH: No; it is a semi-State department. At any rate we expected to get the employees of the Zoological Gardens insured at the same rate as the employees of Government departments, but the State insurance office demanded the premiums charged by the private companies.

Mr. Mullany: You are in favour of Government insurance when you yourself are interested.

Mr. SMITH: I will show eventually that we did get it, but some members have put forward the argument that the State department will charge less.

Mr. Munsie: For its own employees it is doing so.

Mr. SMITH: I have quoted an instance to show that the State department wanted to charge the same as the private companies. With regard to the motion, I do not think the mover of it has made out a good case, and I intend to vote against it.

Mr. UNDERWOOD (Pilbara—on amendment) [9.25]: It seems to me that the amendment is not relevant to the motion. The motion is that we establish an insurance office. That is one thing. The other is that the workers be insured against some complaint. I am absolutely in accord with the amendment, but it seems to me that it could easily have been moved on its own, altogether irrespective of who does the insurance. My motion is only in regard to the insurance under the Workers' Compensation Act. There are one or two things I would like to have included and it does not seem to me that this is the right motion under which to bring the alterations in connection with the Workers' Compensation Act. As a matter of fact, any member desiring to amend the Workers' Compensation Act should bring

in a Bill to amend that Act. The motion before the House will not apply to it at all. The motion is to establish an insurance fund. If the Government accept my motion they will bring in a Bill to establish the fund. The Government have not spoken on the subject.

The Minister for Works: I spoke, but I expressed my own views.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Premier has spoken on the motion.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: If the Government accept the motion, they will then have to introduce a Bill to establish a fund and if they accept the motion as amended they will also have to bring in a Bill to establish a fund, and then bring in another Bill to amend the Workers' Compensation Act.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Three years ago the House agreed to a fair rents Bill but it has never been introduced.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: That has nothing to do with this question. There has been no opposition to the motion except from the member for North Perth and he has shown, not by his words but by his action, that this is a most desirable thing to bring about. When he was dealing with the workers at the Zoo he wanted them insured under a Government system. I have not said and do not intend to say that the wage earner is going to get any material benefit from the introduction of this fund, but I claim it is the employers of men who are going to get the benefit. The workers will also get a better settlement but it is the reduction of the premiums to the employers that I am aiming at in asking the Government to establish this fund. I trust that the House will carry the motion and that the Government will bring in a Bill to establish the fund. In regard to the amendment, I am prepared to support that as solidly as I can.

The PREMIER (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [9.30]: I agree with the member for Pilbara (Mr. Underwood) that the words cannot be added to the motion, because they contemplate an amendment of the Workers' Compensation Act. Of course, before the House adopts it such an amendment should be the subject of inquiry. We should know what the cost would be, and something of the probable effects of the application of the provision. I take it the hon. member's intention is to apply this principle largely to miners' diseases such as miners' phthisis, which is the great trouble in industrial life. I do not think the House is in a position to say what funds would be necessary to cover the men employed in the mining industry. The hon. member should be able to tell us what the initial charges against the employers would be.

Hon. P. Collier: Whatever it would be it should be provided.

The PREMIER: Still we ought to have some information. Then we ought to know just what is intended. Is it intended to pay so much a week to men who contract

the disease? Of course it is, otherwise the amendment would be futile. Then what should be the scale of payments, and what should be provided in the case of death? I understand it is £400 in Queensland. Before the House adopts such an amendment, the full information should be before us. I quite agree that if men are employed in a dangerous occupation they ought to be paid additional wages to cover the risk they run, in order that they may insure themselves; or in the alternative they ought to be insured against the chance of being thrown out of work and having to go to the Old Men's Home. If the hon. member desires that the propriety of adding the amendment to the motion should be looked into, that can be done. We require information as to the payments to be made. The amendment is to apply to all industrial diseases. I do not know if other diseases are contracted apart from those contracted in the mining industry, but we should have all this information before us. I suggest the amendment ought not to be included but, if really desired, should be moved in a separate motion.

Mr. LUTEY (Brownhill-Ivanhoe) [9.35]: I support the amendment. The Premier desires that figures should be quoted as to the amount of risk. I take it the principle of having general insurance in connection with the workers' compensation fund is acceptable to hon. members. When it has been decided upon, we can then take into consideration the risk and the consequent scale of premiums. I think it is desirable that the House should first express an opinion on the principle.

The Premier: Surely it would apply to more than Government insurance.

Mr. LUTEY: Personally I would have national insurance, and cut out all other forms. Industrial diseases should be included in the Workers' Compensation Act and we should have a State insurance fund in connection with that Act. Everybody is agreed that we should have State insurance. The principle once adopted, the risk will then be taken into consideration and the premiums fixed accordingly.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [9.36]: The discussion both on the motion and on the amendment has covered a range which is really not embraced in the motion at all. The motion itself merely seeks to provide for Government insurance in regard to the Workers' Compensation Act, but those who have spoken to the motion have generally brought in the whole subject of fire and even life insurance. I am sorry it is not possible at this stage to enlarge the scope of the motion in order particularly to afford an opportunity to the Government to get an expression of opinion from the House as to general State insurance. The Minister for Works has put up a case which, I think, is unanswerable. As a matter of fact no hon. member has attempted to answer the argu-

ments advanced either by the mover of the motion or by the Minister for Works who supported it and who covered even a wider field than that embraced in the motion. On the general question of State insurance there appears to me to be no argument, notwithstanding the finding of all the commissioners in America. I did not quite gather who those commissioners were, who appointed them or what institutions they represented. In any case, the decision arrived at by a body of that description in America counts for nothing at all in Australia, because the whole policy in America has been for the private ownership of all the great public utilities. Their railways, their telegraphs, their waterways, all of those great public utilities that have been recognised throughout Australia from the beginning as properly belonging to the sphere of State control, have been operated by private enterprise in America, and it would be an astonishing thing if, in the midst of all that great influence of private enterprise, any body of commissioners were to arrive at a conclusion which would support State control of insurance. But we may discard altogether the opinions expressed by those men, and come nearer home. I believe that State insurance in Australasia was first established in New Zealand about a quarter of a century ago. It has been abandoned or repealed in recent years, but it had been in operation there for many years and throughout the life of what has been described as the democratic or radical Governments of New Zealand, and mainly through the life of the Seddon Government. If the Massey Government, essentially a conservative one, have decided to go back on the principle, that is no reason at all why the policy should be abandoned in other places.

Mr. Underwood: Even Victoria has gone in for it.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Yes, even my own conservative State of Victoria—I left it because it was too conservative—I find that since I left it has become more democratic and has established State insurance. Even in that State it is endorsed by such a Tory Chamber as the Legislative Council. In Queensland the system has been in existence for only two years and its success has been phenomenal. It started with no capital at all, yet it has shown substantial profits and has had the effect of reducing the premiums in that State, in addition to which it has paid a bonus of 10 per cent. to all insured.

Mr. Smith: What did the reduction in the premiums amount to?

Hon. P. COLLIER: The premiums have been reduced by 25 per cent. and the business still shows a profit of £40,000 or £50,000 after returning a 10 per cent. bonus to the insured.

Mr. Smith: Perhaps Western Australian companies are working on the irreducible minimum.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Yes, perhaps they are philanthropists. If so they are of a distinct

type from insurance companies operating in different parts of the world. The very fact that so many of them are carrying on business here, with duplication of expenditure, with all their offices and their staffs and their business machinery, suggests that they are not philanthropists. All could be operated by one office, one set of managers and one staff. I intend no offence when I say that the great majority of those employed in the business in Western Australia are so many parasites upon society.

The Minister for Works: Under State control no canvassers would be required.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Of course not. Whenever one travels about the country one meets these canvassers looking for business, all of which would come to the office if we had State insurance, without any of that canvassing, the cost of which has to be borne by the public.

Mr. Smith: Do you really think the business would come in?

Hon. P. COLLIER: Certainly I do. To-day the canvassers exist because they are in competition for the trade, but if there were only the one State insurance office all those who required insurance would come to the office to do their business. The ordinary person does not require much urgent persuasion on the part of a canvasser to induce him to protect his own property.

Mr. Smith: No business requires more canvassing than does insurance.

Hon. P. COLLIER: There may be those who require to be canvassed, but if they fail to cover themselves by insurance it is their own funeral.

Mr. Smith: But it leads to bankruptcies.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Well, if they go through the bankruptcy court they will become wise and will endeavour to avoid the court by insuring their property. It is a very poor argument indeed to say that we must keep up all these companies with their armies of canvassers, in order that a section of the community, which must be a small section, might be protected against their own folly and neglect. That does not appeal to me as being sound argument. Looking back upon the time when the Labour Government were in office and were embarking on so many of those undertakings, which involved the expenditure of large sums of money, which involved a considerable amount of work and worry to establish, and which after being established, had to enter into competition with others in the same line of business who had been highly organised for a number of years, looking back to that time, I say, I regret very much that we did not embark on a simple proposition of this kind, and wipe out all opposition and competition and establish a State Government insurance which, I am certain, would have been of much greater benefit to the community than some of the State enterprises we did embark upon. We had the matter under consideration, but we could not do everything in four or five years. In this State, we were being attacked from all sides, because it was contended that we were at-

tempting to do too much in the direction of State enterprise but, if the people had had sufficient judgment or wisdom to allow us to remain in office for another few years, this and many other schemes would have come under our purview and would have been established facts to-day. Our defeat was this country's loss in the matter of insurance and in many other directions. I intend to move a further amendment.

The Minister for Works: Why not get the original motion through? You will then have a principle and can go on afterwards with other things.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I am satisfied the Minister for Works, and not the Premier, speaks for the Government. I am satisfied a large majority on the other side, as well as on this side of the House, will follow the excellent lead of the Minister for Works.

The Minister for Works: I speak as an individual.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Speaking as an individual, the Minister carries very great weight, although he attempts to divest himself of his office as Minister. Whether he speaks as an individual or as a Minister, he carries great weight, and particularly on this subject he will carry three-quarters of the House with him. In order to afford the Government the opportunity to get an expression of opinion from the House on the whole comprehensive principle of State insurance, I have an amendment to embrace fire and general insurance, insurance under the Workers' Compensation Act, and also insurance against industrial diseases as moved by the member for Hannans.

Mr. Maley: You want to give the Minister a further opportunity to assist.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! the Minister is not under discussion.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I am satisfied that when the Minister and I combine to get a thing through the House, we shall be successful. In this connection, we have formed an alliance. My amendment will embrace all forms of insurance and though the motion, when carried in its amended form, will read hardly so well as it should, we shall have achieved the object of getting an expression of opinion on other phases of insurance, and that is all the Government can ask. When the House carries the amended motion, as I am sure it will, I hope the Government will not pass it into the waste-paper basket and forget all about it. The Premier said the member for Hannans gave no information to justify the House in carrying his amendment. What information does the Premier want? He said the hon. member had given no information as to the cost. How can the member for Hannans, or any other private member, supply figures as to the probable or possible cost? The hon. member is not an actuary. He is not in possession of information which would enable him to make an actuarial calculation as to the cost which might be incurred by carrying the amendment. We have a Mine Workers' Relief Fund operating on the Goldfields, to which the Government contribute

one-third of the total cost, the mine workers one-third, and the mine-owners one-third. I forget the actual amount distributed under that fund, but that is a form of insurance and, to bring it under the Act, would merely mean transferring those voluntary payments now made by the workers, the mine-owners, and the Government to the operations of the Act. There can be no argument against those men affected by industrial diseases being covered by insurance. It stands to the eternal disgrace of the Parliament of this country that, throughout the last quarter of a century and particularly during the past 10 or 15 years, the lives of the brightest and best of our manhood have been wasted and that they, after a few years operations in the deep mines, have been thrown on the industrial scrap heap. Surely if there is any section of the community who are entitled to the protection of insurance, it is the section who are thrown on the industrial scrap heap in this way, and who shorten their lives by reason of the occupation they are forced to follow. Fortunately, the majority of occupations do not affect the health of those concerned, but there are other occupations such as mining which a man enters and only has to follow long enough to come to the one end—the Sanatorium at Wooroloo. That man is rendering service to the community equal to, if not greater than the service of those who do not run the risk of sustaining ill-health, and surely such a man is entitled to protection and his dependants, surely, are entitled to protection by insurance under the Workers' Compensation Act. In other countries, such men are provided for, and the Labour Government's amendments would have made provision for mine workers and others, but they were thrown out in another place and that, I say, stands to the eternal disgrace of those responsible for it. To-day, men who ought to be in the prime of life at 40 years of age, having spent 10 or 12 years underground in our deep mines, are spending their last days at the Sanatorium, and their wives and children are dependent on charity doled out to them by the Charities Department. That should not be, and the question of industrial unrest comes in. How can we expect anything but industrial unrest, discontent, and dissatisfaction with the existing order of things which condemns men to a life of that kind, and throws them on the scrap heap when society has no further use for them. That is the sort of thing that produces discontent, and is doing more to promote revolution in this country than anything else I know of. Unless Parliament wakes up and makes provision for such men, they can expect only a very great accession to the ranks of those who are described as Bolsheviks. I hope the amendment will be carried. We are embarking on no new enterprise. It has been tried in other places with profit and success, and what more do we want? It will bring revenue to the Government and, if any Government needs an increased revenue, surely

it is our Government. In this morning's paper, the monthly statistics show that the deficit for September was £50,000; for the previous month it was £110,000, and for July £140,000; a total of £300,000 in three months. Gone a million is not in it with that, and we are going back at the rate of a million and a half a year. If we can supplement our revenue by means of a policy of this kind, why not do so? We have heard from the late Treasurer of the previous Government an acknowledgment of the fact that the establishment of the State Shipping Service was of great benefit to the revenue. Our deficit would have been much greater, but for the foresight and wisdom of the Labour Government in establishing those trading concerns which have brought revenue to the country during the crisis of the war. I move a further amendment—

That the following words be added, "together with fire and general insurance."

The Minister for Works: Had you not better recast your amendment? It does not make sense in its present form.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It does not read as well as I should like, but I do not think we can go back. We need not stand on the niceties of language. All we want is to get the sense of the House on the general principle.

Mr. SPEAKER: I do not see how the Workers' Compensation Act can be altered to include fire and general insurance. It is quite competent to deal with the amendment of the member for Hannans, because the motion refers to the Workers' Compensation Act, but fire and general insurance cannot be included in the Workers' Compensation Act. I therefore rule the amendment of the member for Boulder out of order.

The Minister for Works: I would like to point out—

Mr. SPEAKER: Are you rising to a point of order?

The Minister for Works: Certainly not disorder. May I be allowed to point out how the hon. member's desires may be attained?

Mr. SPEAKER: I have already pointed out that I cannot accept the hon. member's amendment. Do you object to my ruling?

The Minister for Works: No, but I suppose it will be open to me to move another amendment.

Amendment (Mr. Munsie's) put and passed.

Question as amended agreed to.

BILL—MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN (North-East Fremantle) [10.0] in moving the second reading said: Hon. members will notice that

there are no provisions in the Bill new to those which have been adopted in other parts of the world. In various parts of the world those responsible for electing members to our local bodies have been under an entirely different franchise from that which has been in existence in Western Australia. The first provision of the Bill is to strike out the reference to the disqualification of a female. In various parts of the world, not only do females take part in the administration of local government as councillors, but we have them holding positions as chairmen and mayors in England and New Zealand, and in other parts. There is no reason why a female should be disqualified from election to a municipal council, or any other body, if the people desire that she should be elected. During the war females have taken a more active part in the management and conduct of the business of the world than ever before. They have shown that they are qualified to take their place in the same way that men are in regard to the many services they have rendered, and there is no reason why they should not be allowed, if the people desire, to be elected to any local governing body. The next provision is for the payment of rates. Hon. members know that the Municipalities Act to-day gives all the powers necessary for the collection of rates. If a person does not pay a rate it goes on to the property and is retained there. If the rates are owing for a certain period, that property can be sold for payment, not only of the rates but for interest due from the time the rates should have been paid. I do not think it is right that a person should be disqualified from voting at a municipal election if the rates are unpaid. There is no doubt that the clear intention of Parliament in the passing of the Act was that the occupier of any premises should be the elector. Under the system in vogue in this State a very large percentage of the occupiers of premises pay their rates in their rents. In other words, a dwelling-house is let at so much per week to the tenant clear of all rates or other charges. Week by week the tenant is paying by instalment the amount of the rates due to the local governing body. The landlord, the owner of the property, who takes these instalments week by week is supposed to transfer them to the municipal council. We know that in a large number of cases this, unfortunately, is not done. Hundreds of occupiers in almost every municipality of any size are debarred from voting merely because the landlord did not pay the rates, on or before the 30th day of October. This means the disfranchisement of a large number of the electors, who desire to exercise their vote in connection with a local governing body, contrary to the desire and wish of Parliament. It is true that an occupier can, if he desires, pay the amount of rates due and deduct that amount from the rent, but I want hon. members to realise that in the first place the occupier has paid his rate in the rent, and

is not in a position until the roll comes out to know whether he has been enrolled as an elector or not. On the 1st September the electoral list is printed. He may see that his name is there and think he is all right because of that fact, but when the revision court meets, and the rates are not paid by the date fixed by the Act his name is erased from the list which is then called the electoral roll. Until his name is removed he does not know whether the landlord has paid the rates within the time prescribed by the Act or not. Therefore the non-payment of rates at a certain date should not disqualify him from voting. The local governing body has also power to bring a person, who has not paid his rates, before the court and to issue distress warrants if necessary. The principal clauses in the Bill deal with the election of mayor and councillors. Australia is the only place in the world, I am informed, where they have plural voting. Plural voting is not carried out through Australia but only in portions of it. When we realise that Australia, which claims to be the most democratic country in the world, is the only place in the world which has plural voting for a mayor and councillors, we must admit that we are far behind other parts in this matter. In New Zealand every ratepayer has one vote and only one. If a ratepayer has property in more than one ward he has to choose the ward in which he will vote. In this State for the election of councillors the ratepayer is allowed two votes. If he has a small amount of property in each ward, and the municipality is divided into four wards, he is allowed eight votes. In Queensland I think there is the same provision, and also in Victoria and Tasmania. South Australia allows one vote only for the election of councillor, but the ratepayer is allowed one vote in each ward, if the municipality is divided into wards. Some progress has now been made, for we find that in New South Wales in 1918 a Bill was introduced containing a provision exactly similar to that contained in the Bill now before the House—that is the provision of one ratepayer, one vote. If the ratepayer desires to vote in New South Wales, and has property in more than one ward, he can choose the ward in which he will exercise his vote. Similar legislation has been in existence in New Zealand for some years. In my opinion the dual vote is unfair. If a man owns thousands of pounds worth of property in the central ward in Perth, or is the occupier of property of a high value, he may have to pay in rates perhaps £400 or £500 a year, but under the present Act he is only entitled to two votes. If, however, a ratepayer has £25 worth of property in Victoria Park, North Perth, and Leederville he would be entitled to six votes upon the election of a councillor. Further, the ratepayer owning property in three wards of small value would have three persons representing him on the Council, while the owner or occupier of the property of high value in one ward would only have one re-

presentative there. The whole position is entirely unfair. It is not only unfair to the ratepayer, but is unfair to the people who thus do not get proper representation. In this State the mayor and councillors of municipalities are elected in much the same way as members of the Legislative Council are elected, namely, on the property qualification, and the views of the ratepayers do not receive proper expression. It is high time that Western Australia was brought into line with other parts of the world, and that each ratepayer was allowed only one vote. Provision is also made in the Bill for an increase in the rates. Hon. members will recollect that when the Municipalities Act was passed in 1906 the Government paid the local authorities a subsidy of pound for pound on all the rates received. These subsidies have now been abolished, but no provision has been made for the local authorities to obtain more revenue to enable them to carry out their work. Some of our local authorities have found great difficulty in keeping their streets in good repair. The rate in Western Australia is 1s. 6d., which is very much lower than it is in other parts of the world. While I ask hon. members to agree to give the local authorities permission to strike a higher rate it does not necessarily follow that they will do so. My experience of local governing bodies teaches me that they will always get out of striking a high rate if they can possibly do so. Their one object is to keep the rates down. In New South Wales, and even in this State, it has been found necessary to make it compulsory by Act of Parliament that local authorities should strike rates of a certain amount, an amount which would enable them efficiently to carry out their duties. Owing to the falling-off of municipal revenues, by reason of the abolition of Government subsidies, some local authorities must now be given power to increase their rates. It may be argued that they can borrow money to do the work, and impose extra loan rates. But borrowed money represents a heavy burden on the ratepayer, by reason not only of repayment but also of interest; and the interest eventually runs to considerably more than the amount of the loan—probably on the average to three times as much. Thus an increase in the general rate would save the municipalities a considerable amount of money, while also allowing them to carry out repairs in a proper manner. I am aware that the rates of some municipalities already approach the maximum. In my district the rate is 2s. 11½d. in the pound. While the municipality is not allowed to increase its general rate, it must make and repair roads out of loan, involving heavy interest payments. Therefore I hope hon. members will agree to give local authorities power to increase the general rate by 1s. if it is found necessary. The Bill includes a clause taken from the Roads Act, to empower local authorities to write off rates

when it is necessary and just to do so. Road boards now have that power, and it includes a clause empowering the Minister to authorise municipalities to write off rates. To my own knowledge, a great deal of hardship has been occasioned by the necessity for enforcing payment of rates by persons who really have not the money to pay them. I refer to the case of fatherless families finding it almost impossible to live. The local authority could not in justice and fairness compel such people to pay rates. When a widow is struggling to maintain her children, it would be unfair to put into force against her the provisions of the Municipalities Act for recovery of rates; and as a consequence the local authorities have carried on rates from year to year, showing them on the books as owing. In such a case the Minister would immediately agree to the writing-off of the arrears. The Bill also provides a clause dealing with subdivision of land. In 1912 I introduced into this Chamber a similar provision, which passed here but unfortunately was deleted elsewhere. Hon. members are aware that a plan for the subdivision of land must in the first instance be submitted to the municipal council. If they approve of it, it is deposited with the Registrar of Titles. The local authority approve what they consider a fair area of land for a building allotment. We have heard a good deal about overcrowding in various parts of the world, but we have plenty of it in Western Australia, though there is no necessity whatever for it here. Assume that the council approve a subdivisional plan providing a frontage of 60 feet. Once that plan has been deposited with the Registrar of Titles, there is nothing to prevent the sale of a portion of a block to another person, who can demand a title for that portion; and thus the frontage may be reduced to 30 or even 20 feet. In regard to buildings—which are governed by another section introduced to suit the Subiaco council—the Minister can refuse his approval if he considers the air space provided is not sufficient. We ought not to allow the present power of subdivision to continue. Cases occur almost daily of such excessive subdivision as I have mentioned. Therefore I hope members will agree to what I previously proposed in 1912.

Mr. Thomson: Why have you not introduced a Bill for the taxation of unimproved land values?

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I approve of that, but this Bill deals with only a few small though important matters which I trust will pass both Houses of Parliament. I am informed that the Government intend to introduce a new Municipalities Act next session. I am aware that the matter has been under consideration for some time. The present Bill proposes for the first time in Western Australia a system of preferential voting for municipal elections. I am in favour of a scheme whereby preferential

voting could be adopted in a district not divided into wards. Otherwise, where more than one candidate is to be elected there is great difficulty in counting the votes. I have been assured that at one election in this State where two positions had to be filled, it took no less than 25 counts of the votes to arrive at the result. If that is so, it would be extremely difficult in many places for the officials of the local authorities to count the votes. Hon. members will observe that the system of preferential voting proposed by this Bill is the same as that adopted for Parliamentary elections. The adoption of preferential voting in municipal elections will largely do away with that system which is a curse to-day—justices of the peace going around municipalities with ballot papers and filling them up with the names of their personal friends. A municipal voter has now a month in which to vote before the election is held, but under preferential voting only seven days will elapse between nomination and election, and that will be the limit of time during which ballot papers can be hawked about. Thus the justice of the peace will be largely prevented from canvassing for personal friends, as occasionally he does in return for payment. The clause dealing with that matter has been omitted from the Bill, but I shall introduce it if the measure passes the second reading. Hon. members will observe that I have restricted the Bill to a very few matters, my chief object being to allow the House to express an opinion on the principle of one ratepayer one vote. It is the fairest system that can be adopted; it is fair to the property owner, fair to the occupier, and fair to all persons concerned in the election of members of municipal bodies. Under the present municipal law property owners are protected so far as loans are concerned, because the Municipalities Act provides that on the question of a loan only property owners may vote, the reason being that their property is to be mortgaged for repayment of the loan. But as regards the management of the municipality and the conduct of municipal affairs, the owner, unless he is an occupier, has no vote at all. An owner who is not an occupier cannot vote in the election of mayor and councillors. I consider that this Bill will be the means of doing away with a good deal of the unfairness which now exists. Why should one man have the right to cast four votes for mayor?

The Minister for Works: Why should he not?

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I will tell the Minister why not. Very few of the men who have the right to cast four votes for mayor are owners of property. The majority of them are occupiers. Now, an occupier has not so large an interest at stake in the municipality as has the owner, who to-day can cast only one vote. Every penny that a man possesses has been spent in building a home for himself and he resides in it,

and that man, as the owner of the property, is entitled to exercise one vote only. The advancement of the district is to him a matter of much greater importance than it is to the occupier of a place, and that occupier perhaps has the right to cast four votes. That occupier may not have any special interest in the municipality at all. The position is unfair, unjust, and it is not equitable, and consequently we do not get the best administration in connection with our municipal system. The Bill which I am introducing will remedy that defect. In New South Wales a measure on similar lines has been introduced. That is the most populous State in the Commonwealth and it has been realised there that the system which has been in force in the past has been detrimental to the best interests of the State, and consequently they have altered the system of voting. They are following up the practice adopted in New Zealand, South Australia and in other countries of the world except Victoria, Western Australia and a portion of Queensland. I can confidently ask hon. members to agree to the Bill which will provide for a system in force in nearly every part of the world. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by the Minister for Works the debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 10.33 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 2nd October, 1919.

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

POINT OF ORDER—PAPERS ORDERED.

Hon. H. STEWART (South-East) [4.33]: May I draw your attention, Mr. President, to a matter which affects the rights of this House? On the 11th September last the Council passed, at my instance, the following resolution:—

That all papers in connection with the amended regulations under the Explosives Act, 1895, laid on the Table of the House