

ing the war period by from 100 to 500 per cent; the drugs have been supplied to all members of the Friendly Societies Association at the rates ruling prior to 1914.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: They must have been making enormous profits at that time.

Hon. H. MILLINGTON: The Bill is for the purpose of validating the investment made by the Friendly Societies Association. Under the Friendly Societies Act it would have been lawful for the Kalgoorlie Friendly Societies Association to have entered into a business of this description if they could have purchased it outright. There are precedents in this State. The Perth Friendly Societies Association have a chemist's business. So, too, have the Friendly Societies Association of Boulder. The difficulty that has arisen in this case is that the Friendly Societies Association at Kalgoorlie had not sufficient money to purchase the business outright and therefore they had to call on members of friendly societies affiliated with them to take shares to the extent of £680. For some time the Kalgoorlie Friendly Societies Association and the registrar exchanged correspondence on this subject. The registrar is of opinion that the Kalgoorlie Friendly Societies Association acted illegally in combining with others to purchase a business, whereas they would have been justified in purchasing it outright. The registrar has suggested the passage of the Bill as a way out of the difficulty. The Government have no objection to the Bill. It has been introduced by a private member merely because the Government think that course preferable. No one has any interest in this chemist's business beyond the members of the Kalgoorlie Friendly Societies Association in which, I may add, there are seven lodges. All the lodges operating in that town are affiliated and others still to come will have an opportunity of affiliating. In another place the Attorney General said that he had no objection to the Bill, and that he considered it was necessary to validate the investment made by the Kalgoorlie Friendly Societies Association. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time

Hon. J. CORNELL (South) [9.22]: I second the motion. Neither here nor in another place has any effort been made to hide anything in connection with the Bill. The whole of the facts have been placed before hon. members, who, indeed, could not ask for a better guarantee than that the Attorney General is perfectly satisfied with the Bill. The purchase of the chemist's business was made under the misapprehension that it was perfectly legitimate. That was about five years ago. After it had been pointed out by the registrar that there was a doubt as to the legality of the transaction it was decided to have a special Bill passed. Assuming that the Chamber did not desire to fall into line with the Government and with the registrar and the friendly societies, what would happen? There would be something in the nature of a mimic war. The friendly societies, having carried on the bus-

iness for five years under a misapprehension, would have to continue to carry on illegally.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: The Bill validates past and future investments.

Hon. J. CORNELL: Mr. Millington has pointed out that there are seven lodges affiliated with the Kalgoorlie Friendly Societies Association and that new lodges may be formed, in which event those lodges will be entitled to affiliate. I understand that a petition has been circulated by the Pharmaceutical Society protesting not so much against the Bill as against any extension of the precedent. I am closely connected with Kalgoorlie and with Boulder, yet I have never heard a single protest from any local chemist. The Pharmaceutical Society have a right to protest, but I take it they are protesting not so much against the Bill as against any extension of the precedent, which, of course, would have to be considered on its merits.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: The Bill provides for an extension.

Hon. J. CORNELL: Only in the way of further shareholders, in the form of new lodges. That, of course, is only right, for we do not want a close corporation for existing societies. For years past the friendly societies in Perth and in Boulder have had their own dispensaries. In the case of Kalgoorlie the funds would not permit of the association purchasing the business outright. Seeing that the friendly societies have carried on during the period of the war on the basis of pre-war rates, they are worthy of the favourable consideration of this House.

On motion by Hon. J. J. Holmes, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9.31 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 30th September, 1919.

	PAGE
Questions: Potato restrictions	675
Salt Works employees	675
Butter and Bacon factories, assistance ...	675
Soldier Settlement, Northern districts ...	675
Assent to Bill	675
Bills: Health Act Amendment	675
Crown Suits Act Amendment, returned from Council	700
General Loan and Inscribed Stock Act Amendment, returned from Council	700
Justices Act Amendment, returned from Council	700
State Children Act Amendment, Council's Message	700
Health Act Amendment, Council's Message ...	700
Prices Regulation, 2nd, Com. stage	675, 700
Traffic Com.	700

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

QUESTION—POTATO RESTRICTIONS.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN asked the Honorary Minister: 1, Is he aware that residents of the timber districts and South-Western Line are unable to purchase reasonable supplies of potatoes even at prohibitive cost? 2, Will he inform the House of the utility of fixing Mundijong as the boundary line where the embargo applies? 3, Will the Government, in view of its past experience, remove the restrictions, and by that means prevent monopoly?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied: 1, Yes, due to shortage of shipping space and to the potato crops in this State not yet being ready for digging. 2, To protect the South-West portion of the State against the introduction of diseases. 3, No. It is expected that there will be an abundant supply of potatoes in a few weeks' time.

QUESTION—SALT WORKS EMPLOYEES.

Mr. WILLCOCK asked the Premier: 1, Is he aware that in January last a number of men, approximately 50, were employed by a contractor under contract to the Port Gregory Salt Works, and collected a large amount of salt at Port Gregory, but that owing to the agreement not being carried out in its entirety the men were not paid anything? 2, Is he also aware that the company referred to are taking possession of the salt collected and stored at Port Gregory? 3, As the Government granted railway fares and sustenance to many of the men referred to, will the Government take some steps to see that the men obtain their wages or portion thereof out of the proceeds of the sale of the salt?

The PREMIER replied: 1, Yes. 2, No. 3, The case for the men referred to is in the hands of Mr. Robinson, Solicitor, of Geraldton. Most of the men are Italians and the Italian Consul has been notified of the position. The Government have no power to enforce payment to the men of their wages.

QUESTION—BUTTER AND BACON FACTORIES, ASSISTANCE.

Mr. PICKERING (for Mr. Maley) asked the Honorary Minister: 1, What amount has been paid, or promised by way of loan to the Avon District Co-operative Butter and Bacon Co., Ltd., at Northam? 2, What rate of interest is being charged therefor? 3, What was the actual amount of capital subscribed by the shareholders of the company at date of making the loan? 4, When will finality be reached in regard to the question of a site for the factory of the Geraldton Co-operative Butter and Bacon Co., Ltd.?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied: 1, £5,000 repayable in 25 years. 2, First year no interest; second year 2 per cent., third year 3 per cent., fourth year 4 per

cent., fifth year, and every subsequent year, interest to be at current bank rate of interest. 3, £5,182, of which £2,180 10s. had been paid up. 4, As soon as possible.

QUESTION — SOLDIER SETTLEMENTS, NORTHERN AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS.

Mr. PICKERING (for Mr. Maley) asked the Minister for Repatriation:—1, Will he take steps to approach the attorney of the absentee owners of the Mendel and Lawe's estates, situate between Mingenew and Mullewa, with a view to acquiring this land and making it available for soldiers in the northern agricultural districts who are unable to secure land in those districts at present? 2, Is he aware of the extent of Crown land suitable for settlement north of the Geraldton-Yuna Railway and towards Mullewa?

The MINISTER FOR REPATRIATION replied: 1, The matter will receive consideration. 2, No.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Governor received and read notifying assent to the Crown Suits Act Amendment Bill.

BILL—HEALTH ACT AMENDMENT.

Standing Orders Suspension—Remaining Stages.

The PREMIER (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [4.38]: I move—

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as to permit of the passing of the Health Act Amendment Bill through all its stages on this day.

The SPEAKER: As there are 26 members in the House, and as no objection has been raised, I will put the question.

Question put and passed.

Report of Committee adopted.

Bill read a third time and returned to the Legislative Council with amendments.

BILL—PRICES REGULATION.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 23rd September.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [4.40]: If there was any doubt in the mind of any hon. member, prior to the speech of the leader of the Opposition, that profiteering had existed in the Commonwealth, at all events for the last four or five years, that doubt has, I think, been successfully dispelled. I realise the difficulty the Government have in introducing a Bill of this description at the present period. I am sorry the Government have relented so late in the day and departed from the attitude they took up some three

and a-half years ago. Members now sitting on the Government side of the House practically ridiculed the Bill that was introduced by the Labour party and placed on the statute-book. When it was brought up for re-enactment history shows that, although it was not definitely opposed here, it was defeated in another place. Since then prices have gone up abnormally in Western Australia. I realise from a perusal of the Bill that it is a difficult matter to endeavour to reduce prices by legislation. The object of Governments, both State and Commonwealth, should be to reduce the price of the necessary commodities of life. Everyone realises that prices are too high and that something has to be done to bring them down. I desire to quote one or two instances to prove that, in my opinion, there has been profiteering, but before doing that I wish to deal with one or two phases of the Bill. With the leader of the Opposition, I disagree with the provision in the Bill for one Commissioner. I do not think it is humanly possible for any one man in Western Australia to give satisfaction to the people as a Commissioner controlling prices. It is too much for one man. Further, in my opinion the wage-earning section of the community generally is entitled to representation on a price fixing board. The law of the land provides for the settlement of industrial disputes by arbitration. When the worker, irrespective of the calling he is engaged in, goes before the Arbitration Court, he has to lay the whole of his cards upon the table. He is questioned as to what clothes he wears and as to those worn by his wife and children, and he is also asked as to the cost of this or that commodity. He has to supply the whole of this information in order to prove that a certain minimum or standard wage is necessary for him to live and keep his wife and family. That being the case, it is only just to ask that he should have representation on a board that is going to fix the prices of the commodities he will have to buy with the wages fixed by another board. I protest against the provision for so much secrecy. Irrespective of how publicity may affect one or two individuals or firms, all evidence taken before the Commissioner should be taken in open court, with the Press present. When the Commissioner is inquiring as to whether or not a price is too high the public should know what the conditions are. The Federal price-fixing scheme provided for the same secrecy, the Commissioner being given autocratic powers as to the publication of evidence. When the master bakers increased the price of bread without consulting the Commissioner, I, with three others, waited on the Commissioner in regard to that increase. We expected that our arguments before the Commissioner would be published in the Press, and a pressman came along with us; but before taking the evidence the Commissioner refused to allow the pressman to remain, saying it was not a matter of public concern. I say it was of public concern. The whole

of the evidence put up by us should have been conveyed to the public, together with the evidence given in rebuttal, so that the public would be in a position to judge of the merits of the case. Under the Bill as printed, everything will be done in camera and the public will not know the attitude of the Commissioner. The Cost of Living Commission in this State, when dealing with various items, used to suppress, at the request of business people giving evidence, details which, I contend, should have been made public. The workers had a representative on that Commission. He protested against the secrecy, but he was overruled, the chairman agreeing that the evidence should not be published, for the reason that it might interfere with the business arrangements of the firms giving evidence. Seeing how vital this question is to the community, I hope the House will insist that when a man is charging a price which in the opinion of the Commissioner is too high, the evidence given on the point shall be taken in public. The success or failure of the Bill will rest purely upon the administration of the measure. Personally, I have no faith in the sympathetic administration of the Bill by the present Government; because with one exception the members of the Government have opposed price-fixing of any sort. How, then, can the present Government sympathetically administer a measure, the principle of which they do not believe in? It is true the Minister for Mines has privately and publicly declared himself in favour of price fixing. If that Minister is given the administration of the Act, probably his administration will be sympathetic; but, after all, he is only one member of the Government and has to be guided by the majority Cabinet decision, and so his hands will be tied, while, as I have contended, in the hands of any other member of the present Government the Act will not be sympathetically administered.

The Minister for Works: Why should you have these doubts?

Mr. MUNSIE: I cannot help it, seeing that the Minister for Works has spoken so emphatically against price fixing.

The Minister for Works: When?

Mr. MUNSIE: When the previous Bill was introduced, and again when it was brought up for re-enactment. I have here the hon. member's remarks in "Hansard." The leader of the Opposition when speaking the other night quoted figures dealing with meat as affecting the whole of the Commonwealth. I wish to say a few words on the local aspect of the same question. At present we are enjoying a little relief, the prices having fallen. But here again it is purely a matter of administration. When meat was at the highest price in Western Australia a proposition was put up to the present Premier which, if acted upon, would have been of benefit to the grower and consumer alike. When the deputation waited on the Premier he argued that the system in operation in Western Australia was in operation in the whole of the States, and he said it had evidently worked very satis-

factorily. I admit it has worked satisfactorily to a section of the community, but in this State it has not worked satisfactorily to the large majority of the consumers, nor even to the growers. What is wrong? We must have some control. The people have been taxed and the Government have been constrained to build abattoirs, primarily for health purposes, to prevent men slaughtering anywhere and everywhere under all sorts of conditions. As I say, the State has been put to the expense of establishing abattoirs. The Government now practically hand over the control of all stock brought to those abattoirs to three or four people who act as agents. Some control is necessary. What is wrong with establishing a board of control consisting of one representative of the growers, one of the consumers, and one appointed by the Government? We must have some board to regulate the supply of meat to the Government abattoirs, for without it we should have the farmers from all over the State sending stock to market at times opportune to themselves, resulting in a glut one week and in the following week no meat at all. If a board representative of the three sections were controlling the supply, and if the agent were cut out altogether, both the grower and the consumer would get a much better deal than at present. The member for East Perth (Mr. Hardwick) made rather light of my statements when dealing with the question of meat a little time ago.

Mr. Hardwick: Nonsense; I supported you.

Mr. MUNSIE: My statement was absolutely correct. The farmers and the pastoralists had sold their sheep to the agents for 5d. and 5½d. per lb., and within three weeks the same stock realised 1s. and 1s. 0½d. per lb. at the Midland Junction saleyards. Who got the difference? The agents; and the public had to pay. That was not fair either to the grower or to the consumer. Let me quote a well known instance of profiteering in regard to Nestle's milk. The leader of the Opposition quoted from the Interstate Commission's report the Commonwealth figures relating to the Nestle's Milk Co. Let me recall what happened in Western Australia, and let me express the hope that when the Bill becomes law the Minister administering it will see to it that such a state of affairs is not permitted to occur again. A month before the price-fixing regulations were lifted from Nestle's milk, one could go into any big store in Perth and get half a dozen tins of Nestle's milk, but for about a week or a fortnight prior to the lifting of the regulations, one was lucky if he got two tins of milk at a time. There was then an absolute scarcity of Nestle's milk in the retail shops all over Australia. But on the day this regulation was lifted, there were 25,000 cases of Nestle's milk in bond at Fremantle. Within 24 hours of the lifting of the regulations, up went the price, and one could get as much Nestle's milk as one required. If that is not plain proof of profiteering, I do not know what is. Let me quote one or

two other local instances. A certain man in this State, requiring some wire, asked for quotations for No. 10 steel galvanised. The lowest quote he got in Western Australia was £60 per ton. Being dissatisfied with this, he cabled to England. That man got the wire landed at Fremantle for £29 10s. a ton.

Mr. Smith: When?

Mr. MUNSIE: Within the last two months. If the hon. member likes, I will give him the name privately. He got 20 tons of wire at £29 10s. a ton.

Mr. Thomson: He was jolly lucky.

Mr. MUNSIE: If he had dealt with local merchants, he would have been lucky to get it for less than £60 a ton. That is a plain instance of profiteering.

Mr. Thomson: The indent price was £40 odd three months ago, so your man was darned lucky.

Mr. Smith: You can buy good Australian wire for £30.

Mr. MUNSIE: Evidently he was a shrewd business man and would not consent to be robbed by the local grab-balls, who are taking advantage of war conditions to rob the people. I have another little instance. There is a spanner known as the Alligator spanner. It comprises a set of three, which will fit any nut from a quarter of an inch or less up to 2½ inches. The invoice price of those spanners to the merchants in Western Australia is 2s. per set.

The Minister for Works: Is that delivered here and duty paid?

Mr. MUNSIE: The invoice price is 2s., and they charge for the smallest spanner of the set 2s. 9d., for the medium one 3s. 9d., and for the full sized one 5s. 9d., a total of 12s. 3d. for the set, which cost them 2s.

The Minister for Works: Are you sure that 2s. covers the duty and everything else?

Mr. MUNSIE: If it does not cover the duty, it is at least 100 per cent. too high.

The Minister for Works: I agree with you there.

Mr. MUNSIE: The invoice price to the firm is 2s. and they sell at an advance of over 500 per cent., which is daylight robbery. I received a letter to-day giving another instance of profiteering and showing the absolute necessity for price fixing and price regulating. It deals with leather. Everyone knows that when the embargo was lifted, statements were made in the Press that boots were likely to be increased in price by 10s. per pair. They have gone up 5s. per pair. On the day that statement appeared in the Press, one firm increased the price of the boots exhibited in their windows by 5s. a pair. Boots which in the morning were marked 22s. 6d. were marked on the same afternoon 27s. 6d. The writer of this letter, who knows all about leather, points out that immediately the embargo was lifted, not only did the leather merchants say they were going to charge an increased price for any leather they might

tan in future, but they increased by 40 per cent. the price of all leather in stock as well as all hides in process of tanning. That is not a fair deal to the people. Questions have been asked in the Federal House three or four times as to the raising of the embargo and what the Government intend to do. The Federal Minister controlling price fixing arrangements has absolutely no sympathy with price fixing and the public will not get satisfaction from such a man. The Commonwealth are regulating the price of leather now. They say that before any leather may be exported from Australia, any man must have the right of refusal for supplies for local requirements. That is a poor way of regulating prices. I know there is a big shortage of leather on the Continent and some people will argue that, while the price is so high in Europe, we should not deprive the grower in Western Australia from getting the best price possible. I would not object if the grower were getting the increased price, or if he were getting something extra. People who own the bullocks do not get two per cent. increase on the price of the hides, whereas the actual increase has been 40 per cent.

Mr. Hardwick: Is not the grower getting that advance on the price paid for the bullocks?

Mr. MUNSIE: No.

Mr. Hardwick: What sent the price up?

Mr. MUNSIE: Not the return for the hides.

Mr. Hardwick: That is the cause, absolutely.

Mr. MUNSIE: How ridiculous that statement is. When bullocks were bringing the highest price in Western Australia, the embargo on leather had not been lifted. It was not the hide which caused the high prices then.

Mr. Hardwick: They were getting it, on the meat then.

Mr. MUNSIE: And now, also. I have a list showing the profits of nine different companies, all purely Australian companies with the exception of the Fiji branch of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, which I will quote separately. They are principally steamship companies. It may be urged that this Bill cannot possibly control them. I admit it is difficult for the State Government to control shipping companies whose head offices are not in Western Australia, and unfortunately none of the head offices are here, but it is well that the Government and the people should realise what profits the shipping companies are making. In 1916 the Melbourne Steamship Co. made a profit of £153,000, in 1918 £297,000; Huddart Parker & Co., 1916 £146,000, 1918 £308,000; Adelaide Steamship Co., 1916 £190,000, 1918 £503,000; Union Steamship Co., 1916 £485,000, 1918 £722,000; Burns, Philp & Co., 1916 £294,000, 1918 £498,000; Colonial Sugar Refining Co., Australia, 1916 £864,000; 1918 £1,282,000; Colonial Sugar Refining Co., Fiji section, 1916 £226,000, 1918 £554,000; Dalgety & Co., 1916

£808,000, 1918 £913,000; Elder, Smith & Co., 1916 £391,000, 1918 £496,000; Henry Jones & Co., the Tasmanian jam manufacturers, 1916 £45,000, 1918 £104,000. Those figures are sufficient to convince anyone that something should have been done to prevent those companies from making such excessive profits. I realise that the Government, under this Bill, would not be able to control any one of those companies, but if the Federal Government had been sincere in their price-fixing regulations, they could have prevented any increase in the profits of any of those companies during the three years. I believe it is time the Government took a firm stand and determined that companies shall not make excessive profits at the expense of the consumers. Many people say we must secure unanimity between the worker and the employer before we can restore normal conditions in Australia. While Governments—State or Federal—permit companies and individuals to deliberately rob the people to the extent they are being robbed at present, we shall never get industrial peace. The workers are not going to tolerate it. There is no question about that. Something drastic must be done, and the sooner it is done the better it will be for all concerned. People tell us the workers do not know what they want, but I wish to say on behalf of the workers of Western Australia that the average wages man, with a wife and four children, cannot possibly make ends meet and live in decent comfort on the wages he is receiving to-day. That is a scandalous state of affairs in a country like this, and there is absolutely no necessity for it. If the Governments were determined and sincere in their desire to see that the people got a fair deal, I am satisfied prices could be reduced, without injury to anyone, by at least 25 per cent. all round. If the Government succeeded in achieving that, we should have gone a long way towards securing industrial peace, but until that is done it is of no use looking for industrial peace. I urge upon the Government the necessity of doing something to reduce the cost of living and for administering this Bill sympathetically. Particularly is this necessary when we have such an optimistic gentleman as Premier. We recently made a tour of the wheat belt and I was favourably impressed with what I saw. Some of the country was quite a revelation to me, though I admit we saw it at the best possible time of the year. Everywhere we went, the farmers wanted railway facilities. They were perfectly satisfied with their conditions. In fact, each centre we visited was described to us as the best agricultural centre in the State. Provision has been made for the men who own the farms; they are getting an increased price for the commodity they produce, but the men who are doing the laborious work of clearing the land are paid by the present Government exactly the same rate as was paid nine years ago. I hope the Premier's optimism will lead him to see that while prices remain as they

are to-day the Agricultural Bank will pay more liberally to those clearing land. In some instances it is admitted that prices have been reduced, thought in one or two isolated instances the price has been increased by half a crown per acre. On the average, however, the price to-day remains the same for the working man as it was nine years ago; and that is unfair. The sooner this Bill is enacted and the Government take firm measures to bring about a reduction in the cost of living the better it will be for all concerned. When the Bill is in Committee I shall do what I can to have one or two clauses amended, and if possible to persuade the Government to insert one or two additional provisions. The one feature of the Bill which strikes me as almost in the nature of a farce is the penalties provided for breaches. They are so small as to be absolutely absurd. There is the provision that a man who can prove that he has been overcharged may obtain a refund. But in most instances it would cost him more than the amount of the refund to obtain it. The penalty provided for proved breach of the measure should be made about four times what it is at present, if it is to act as a deterrent.

Mr. ROCKE (South Fremantle) [5.18]: The question of price-fixing represents a problem of a complex nature, and I believe that if an attempt is to be made sincerely to deal with the matter those who are responsible for the framing of the measure must take into consideration the cause which is responsible for the heavy burdens placed upon the people. To my mind this Bill does not realise that the cause in this instance is a huge conspiracy directed by master minds. The motive of the conspirators seems to me a deeper one than appears at the first glance. I do not think the motive is entirely one of getting wealth. I fear that the motive is to drive the people of the working classes into such a condition that they will probably be crushed by military power.

The Minister for Works: What?

Mr. ROCKE: The position in England to-day is a pretty effective commentary on the remark I have just made. The profiteering which is rampant has been encouraged by certain sections in Parliament and by sections of the Press. However, it has been shown by every speaker against profiteering and particularly by the leader of the Opposition in this Chamber, that the worst phase of the evil is in that part of our society which may be termed the section of distribution. Mere recognition of the fact that profiteering is in existence will fail to lift the burden from the people one iota. Neither will all the pious resolutions which from time to time have been carried against profiteering be of any avail. Nor, again, will the buffoonery of the profane Mr. Hughes lift one ounce of that heavy burden. I admit the law of values, just as I admit every other economic law;

but every economic law has a basis upon which we must work to make our deductions. The basis of the law of values is contained in what may be termed a proviso of four words, and those four words are "All things being equal." There is no doubt that disturbances are caused by fluctuations in the value of money. Price is only one of the many possible ways of expressing exchange values. Though we often employ one of these terms for the other, it is inadvisable to confound them. The belief, for example, that when the price of a commodity is the same in two places, its value is necessarily the same, or inversely to believe that when the price of a thing has varied its value must also have varied to the same extent, may be a gross error. If the value of gold and silver to-day is different from what it was yesterday, then evidently the value of any object measured in gold or silver must also have changed, that is to say, its price must have varied in a degree inversely proportionate to the change that has taken place in the value of the precious metals. Suppose that the length of the yard stick is reduced by one-tenth; henceforth all objects measured with it appear to be longer, yet in reality they are no longer than before because the apparent change is only an illusion produced by the contraction of the unit of measurement. Similarly, if gold and silver lose one-tenth of their value, it is evident that the price of all commodities, that is their value expressed in money, must have increased. We may, therefore, formulate the following law: every fluctuation in the value of money causes a proportionate inverse fluctuation in prices. As the quantity of gold and silver is the principal factor affecting the value of money, we may add a second formula, which is, however, open to more exceptions than the first: every fluctuation in the quantity of money causes a proportionate change in prices. If, for example, the quantity of money in a country should be doubled, we may be sure that, all other things being equal, prices will rise considerably. Consequently it is very difficult to tell whether or not the value of commodities has really changed, because the only measure we have is in itself subject to variation. So it may happen that an increase in wages, for instance, is due not to a real rise in the value of labour, but to a fall in the value of the money in which the wage of labour is paid. Now, the basis of that law is that all things must be equal. We find that there is no attempt, not even on the part of those who are responsible for profiteering, to prove that there is any equality in the rise in the price of commodities. Money in Australia has not increased in quantity. We have had no inflow of foreign capital. In fact, there should have been a decrease in the amount of money in Australia, for the simple reason that a good deal of it has been used in the destructive forces of war. The fact that the rise in the price of commodities is not equal on every article is positive proof

that the cause is foreign to the law governing the value of money. Then the question is to find out what is really the cause of the advance in the cost of living. As I said before, the leader of the Opposition proved that profiteering is mostly in distribution. The other day I came across a very interesting paragraph in the "West Australian" relating to the establishment of stores in Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta, and at other places along the Great Western railway. It appears that the Commonwealth Commissioner of Railways was defending an application made to the Federal Arbitration Court for an increase in the wages of the men employed on the railway. In the first instance he used the argument that because of the establishment of these stores, and because of the fact that by means of them the workmen were enabled to keep clear, in a degree, of the profiteering of the middlemen, these facts should be taken into consideration in fixing their wages. That argument was used against any rise in wages. Mr. Justice Powers, who heard the case, is reported as saying that—

As regards the claim of the Railway Commissioner to have wages deductions made in consideration of goods supplied by him at a cheaper rate than that charged by the general storekeepers in Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta and for the goods supplied by him along the trans-Australian line at Port Augusta rates, he was pleased to announce that the Commissioner, after consideration, had withdrawn the claim, and the men would now be free to deal at the Commissioner's stores or where they pleased and receive the same rates of pay. The Commissioner's action would enable employees, if they thought fit, to avoid the loss of part of their wages in profiteers' profits. He was satisfied that the Commissioner's action in selling goods at prices to cover the cost and store expenses only, had caused the cost of living to be reduced, and the necessity for providing higher wages because of the greatly increased cost of living along the line had been avoided.

There is one instance right in our midst where the middleman has been cut out and the cost of commodities has in consequence been reduced. We have evidence also of the restriction of trade by manipulation of markets. Some time ago I mentioned in this Chamber the exploitation of the Western Australian butter market. The local price-fixing commissioner went to Fremantle to investigate supplies there, and he was shown empty stores. Consequently he reported to the Federal price-fixing commissioner accordingly, upon what he had seen in Fremantle. But, as a matter of fact, two days after that report had been made, it was discovered that there were ample supplies of butter in Fremantle. However, those who were then manipulating the market succeeded in getting a rise of 2d. per lb. in the price of butter, and the workers had to pay it. Referring to restrictions on the market, particularly as regards those commodities which are called necessities of life, I wish now to

speak of food supplies. It is interesting to know that last week there arrived at Fremantle a ship packed to the hatches with cases of clothes-pegs, cases of Dutch cleanser, and cases of Clever Mary, while there was scarcely a food line in the ship, notwithstanding the well known fact that Western Australia at present is short of food supplies. This just shows that everything must take precedence to the food supplies of the people according to the whim of those who claim to control the right to live. We have heard a good deal about the fight between might and right. But that fight has not been confined to European nations. The fight is going on to-day between financial might and moral right. In this connection I may quote the president of the New South Wales Arbitration Court, who recently said—

References were made at a short sitting of the High Court to-day to the signing of the armistice. The Chief Justice said: "The court has met on an occasion without precedent in the recorded annals of the world. Now that victory has been attained and we are not likely to be coerced into any compromise between right and wrong, we may look forward with confidence and hope to the task before the nation of recasting the conditions and revising the doctrines which have so long been regarded by the multitudes as axiomatic and fundamental. The question which appears to me most calling for settlement is that involving the mutual relations of the people one to another. The old deeply-rooted idea of a division into classes, who are natural enemies and whose duty and destiny are to prey on one another, must give place to a sense of equality and of the paramount duty of every man to bear his part of his neighbour's burdens as well as his own. I know this will involve a radical change of mental attitude of the community, but I do not despair of the result."

That is a very fine sentiment, but we see no evidence of it being put into effect by those who are controlling the situation at the present time. The main feature of the Bill lies in the provision for the appointment of a commissioner. Some members have advocated the appointment of commissioners, but whether there is to be one or more, the outstanding qualification of that man or men must be, that he or they shall be expert in the matter of costing accountancy. It is very easy to produce a statement of costs that will deceive everybody but the most expert.

Mr. Pickering: That is stated in the report of the Interstate Commission.

Mr. ROCKE: I never saw the report but I know there is a Federal department operating in Perth where statements of accounts are handed in and they appear correct until the experts get on to them, and after dissecting them the fraud is found, although it is very hard to detect. So that to put a man in the position of commissioner just because he may have had some business ex-

perience, or because he may have some political standing, or because he may have some friends in power, will mean that the usefulness of the measure will be considerably lessened. The commissioner must also be in receipt of a salary which must be commensurate with the position. We pay our judges so that they shall be immune from temptation and thereby assure to the people, whose confidence they must possess, that they will be able to go along without receiving anything in the shape of a bribe. Now, if the commissioner to be appointed under the Bill does not receive adequate remuneration, he may be placed in the position of the unjust steward—"How much owest thou the boss?" "£100." "I will make it £50 and we will divide the difference." We must see that the Bill provides against every occurrence of that description. For more than a quarter of a century the workers of Australia have been more or less highly organised. They have paid hundreds of thousands of pounds towards reaching a goal which they call the control of production, distribution and exchange, and I say to-day, without fear of contradiction, that after a quarter of a century of hard work, the building up of funds and the expenditure of those funds, the worker to-day is in a worse position than he was 25 years ago. Strangely enough, no one seems to have suggested any middle course. The goal has been set and nothing else has been acceptable to the leaders of labour. I am going to suggest something now, and the word I am going to use may be misunderstood. It is the word "compromise." I do not mean compromise with anything that is detrimental to the people, but I do say that if we cannot control the means of production, distribution and exchange, then we may be able to control the means of distribution. It has been shown over and over again that profiteering is found in our system of distribution, and I feel that that is the one thing which any Government, whatever its politics may be, is able to accept as part of its policy. We have seen that the middleman is the cause of the rise in prices. He stands between the producer and the consumer. He is the barrier which is set up so that the producer cannot go to the consumer; neither can the consumer go to the producer. In my first speech in this House I referred to the case of Belgium, where the American Food Commission fed some millions of people and reduced the price of commodities to lower than that which was ruling at that time in London.

Mr. Davies: The Commission were paid by the State.

Mr. ROCKE: In Belgium the people paid.

Mr. Davies: I mean the man.

[The Deputy Speaker took the Chair.]

Mr. ROCKE: It was really only a small Commission.

Mr. Davies: By whom was the Commission paid?

Mr. ROCKE: I do not know, but I am relating what the Commission did. The first thing Mr. Hoover did was to kick out of Belgium, bag and baggage, the middleman, and by so doing the cost of living was reduced to the Belgians so that they could live cheaper than could our own people in London. The fundamental principles of a system of public distribution would be something like this:—

The wholesaler and retailer of commodities have a certain amount of money capital invested in the business of buying and selling. The end and aim of such business is to buy in the cheapest market and to sell in the highest, make the largest profits such conditions of supply and demand will permit, and endeavour to show a healthy balance-sheet. To keep their heads above water in this ocean of commerce they are compelled to have recourse to speculation and manipulation, which are either mild or violent forms of "profiteering." This is done both unconsciously and deliberately.

I am sorry to say that the evidence goes to prove that it is more deliberately than unconsciously done.

Under this procedure the interests of the producer and consumer are forced into the background, until at last the speculators, great middlemen, and multiple shops dominate the position. The true function of man is to produce. If that is so then it should be to the interests of the producer to produce. But under the sway of private distribution the incentive to produce is blighted because vigorous production may not fit in with the scheme of some genius whose knowledge of the market enables him to do "good business" in buying and selling. Under an ideal system of distribution all classes of goods must reach the consumer in adequate quantities without any unnecessary price inflation on the way.

If we can accomplish that the middleman must go.

Mr. Thomson: How do you propose to do it?

Mr. ROCKE: I will tell the hon. member directly. The extract goes on—

This stipulation is one that the consumer can appreciate from bitter experience, and there is consequently no need to quote statistics here to prove that an unorganised system of transportation and distribution is one of the great factors contributing to the world-wide "cost of living."

The hon. member for Katanning asks how it is to be done. It can only be done by the Government taking over the whole system of distribution just as the American Commission did in Belgium.

Mr. Thomson: Which Government, this Government?

Mr. ROCKE: Any Government that has the interests of the people at heart. So long as we leave the middleman where he is we will never eliminate profiteering. Mr.

Joseph Davies—no relation of the member for Guildford—who was a member of the United States Federal Trade Commission, expresses his opinion as follows:—

Government can take action against human greed and selfishness. As I see it, the principal evil is the waste in our distributive system and our failure to smash the exorbitant profits of the middleman. Of course, there are honest middlemen, and there may also be combinations of producers or manufacturers that raise prices, but generally speaking, producers and manufacturers are receiving only fair return. It is the distributor who is getting the money.

The distributor has brought about himself condemnation from every right-thinking man of the community, not only in Australia, and not only in America, but in other parts of the world. It has been proved beyond doubt that the distributor is the man who is responsible for profiteering.

Hon. P. Collier: He may be a wholesale distributor or a retail distributor.

Mr. ROCKE: I am speaking of the wholesalers. They are the men who are the criminals in this case.

Hon. P. Collier: It would not be so bad if the producer got the benefit of the high prices.

Mr. ROCKE: It is the man who toils not neither does he spin, except as someone said, spins yarns, and he is very good at that. But if the producer could get the benefit of the high prices, there is no doubt some arrangement could be made for the consumer. The distributor operates on paper and he receives more benefit, even, than the manufacturer. Mr. Davies goes on to say—

Our efforts must be along the line of preventing the erection of artificial barriers in the natural channels of trade. . . . Warehousing has come to be as important as production itself. As an unregulated agency, warehousing is a menace. The business is vested with the public interest and it has got to be brought under public control. All producers shall have access to the markets of the community. The word "market" shall mean the consuming public, and not the "artificial market" of the private distributor. All classes of goods shall reach the consumer in adequate quantities and with the minimum of expense. So far as possible, expenses shall consist solely of payment for services rendered, and not for intermediate profits.

I have no objection to any man being paid for services rendered, but I do object to the people having to pay for superfluous services which we find in the system of distribution which is so costly and which is designed to cause industrial chaos such as the world has never yet seen. What I have pointed out to the House, and tried to make clear, is the folly of believing that relief may be obtained by the workers going to the Arbitration Court for an increase of wages. The workers go to the court and ask

for an increase. Say they get five per cent. Immediately there is an increase in the cost of living to the extent of 7½ or 10 per cent. Every time the worker goes to the Arbitration Court he is in a worse position than he was before. It is not the manufacturers' fault; it is not the consumers' fault. Then the fault must rest at the door of the middle man. The position in England to-day is very disturbing, and must cause great concern to every man who does any thinking at all. I refuse to believe that the object of the workers of England is to aim at the overthrow of the Constitution or the overthrow even of the Government, but I do believe that those men are forced into the position they have taken up by the action of the profiteer. They are simply striking out along these lines that have not only been advocated but instilled into their minds, that the first law of nature is self-defence. Those men are seeking for the right to live, for themselves, their wives, and their children. The Press states that the men are making use of direct action to bring about that which they desire. I totally disagree with that view. I do not believe that direct action enters into the matter. The men believe that no other weapon is left for them to use. Fancy bringing up a family on 18s. a week before the war! And yet the minimum to-day is only 41s. and the cost of commodities in England I am told is greater than the cost of commodities in Australia. We cannot get all we want, but the men know that at the very first opportunity their wages will be reduced to the pre-war level, and they will then be on the verge of starvation as they have been for so many years. The position in England is fraught with grave danger, and I for one would be pleased and thankful to see a settlement of the trouble, such a settlement as will ensure that justice is done to the men who are now striving for that which is their undoubted right. I urge upon those who are in the forefront of the Labour movement to take into consideration the question of the public control of distribution. I believe in that way the lot of the worker will be made very much brighter, and that it will be one step at all events towards the goal the worker has set himself to attain. I am pleased to see the Bill before the House. Any measure that is brought here, which is calculated to bring even a meed of relief to the people, will receive my support. I hope in Committee some alteration may be made to the Bill that will make it a little more effective. It is admitted even by the framers of the measure that it is only a framework, and it devolves upon Parliament to build upon that framework to the end that something may be done to alleviate the sufferings of our people. It is patent to anyone that only those commodities can be affected that are produced within the State. If any attempt were made to control the price of goods produced in the

Eastern States or if it were possible to fix a price for these goods the comrades in crime, the shipping combine, would step in and undo all that the legislation has done. The neglect of the Commonwealth Government must be deprecated. They could have taken the matter in hand years ago and prevented prices from soaring to the extent they have soared. I hope Parliament may find some way of assisting the people of the State who are labouring under such great disabilities, and give the worker that which is his just due, and the due also of his wife and children, namely, the right to live in decency and comfort.

Mr. DAVIES (Guildford) [5.54]: I would not have said anything on this matter but for the fact that it concerns the people so vitally that it is necessary for anyone who has anything new to say to add it to the debate. I do not profess to have anything very new to add to what has already been said in the Chamber to-night, or to what has been said during the past 25 years with regard to the methods of distribution. I think with the member for South Fremantle (Mr. Rocke) that the problem facing us to-day is how to bring the consumer and producer into closer touch with each other. Much has been said regarding the high cost of living in Australia. I have here some interesting figures which will show plainly the state of affairs throughout the world. In Australia to June, 1919, the increased cost of living was 47 per cent., in the United Kingdom to March, 1919, it was 120 per cent., in the United States to September, 1918, 75 per cent., in Canada to December, 1918, it was 84 per cent., in New Zealand to April, 1919, it was 42 per cent., in South Africa to December, 1918, it was 34 per cent., and in Sweden to November, 1918, it was 220 per cent. With the exception of South Africa, according to these figures, Australia is the cheapest country to live in.

Mr. Munsie: So it ought to be.

Mr. DAVIES: No doubt. That is not the point just at present.

Mr. Munsie: It is the point. There is no necessity for commodities to rise in price in Australia.

Mr. DAVIES: That may be the case so far as some commodities are concerned.

Mr. Munsie: The majority of them.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Bread, butter, meat and wool!

Mr. DAVIES: So far as the cost of production of these things is concerned, it will be admitted that it is much in excess to-day of what it was formerly. We have only to read the announcement of the Premier the other day when he said the farmers of the State would be guaranteed 5s. a bushel at the siding, less freight. It is a different state of affairs from what it was two or three years ago, and will certainly affect the price of bread. We have also to look around in other directions. It will be admitted generally that

to-day the cost of production is much higher than it was formerly.

Mr. Jones: Why?

Mr. DAVIES: It is too long a story, but I am prepared to admit that profiteering certainly is a factor in the matter, and an important factor. It is, however, not so great a factor, I think, as is popularly believed and I will tell hon. members why. One instance may be quoted, and I daresay there are two or three in Western Australia. The instance I would quote is in regard to local building material. Let us take the question of the manufacture of bricks. To-day that is a subject causing great concern in this State, particularly owing to the fact that there are so many thousand returned soldiers awaiting their homes. Bricks to-day are only 1s. per thousand more in price than they were in 1914, that is, prior to the war.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The Minister for Works keeps the price down.

Mr. DAVIES: Last year a loss was made at the State brick yards of something like £1,500, and yet private employers are to-day selling the product of their yards at exactly the same price as that charged at the State yards. I know that from bills I have seen, and yet these men are supposed to be making a profit, and I believe they are. That should be a guide to the House when discussing this matter if they are going to limit profits—and I hope they do—and put something into the Bill which may have that effect. It appears, therefore, that the difference between the cost of production at the private brick yards, and that at the State brick yards, provides the private employer with sufficient profit to enable him to carry on.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What should be sufficient?

Mr. DAVIES: I can tell the hon. member, so far as bricks are concerned. The employers stated on oath in 1914 that 5s. a thousand clear profit on bricks would be satisfactory to them. The leader of the Opposition referred to the fact the other night that immediately after the price fixing measure was defeated in Western Australia the cost of living rose. I want to pay a tribute to the late Labour Government for bringing in a price fixing measure. It was the first one of its kind in the world, and for that they deserve the thanks, not only of the community of this State, but every other part of the world where this question is of importance. Undoubtedly they led the way. The latest figures issued by Mr. Knibbs show that, compared with the corresponding month of August, 1918, there is an increase in all the States. The greatest increase occurred in Western Australia, namely, 30.2 per cent. To-day the increases since the war commenced are—Queensland, 64.5 per cent.; New South Wales, 52.4 per cent.; Victoria, 44.9 per cent.; Tasmania, 44 per cent., and Western Australia 40.9 per cent. I would point out that the 30 per cent. increase out of the 40.9 per cent. since 1914 has occurred, according to Mr. Knibbs, within the last 12 months.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Ridiculous. Get Knibbs on house rents in Perth.

Mr. DAVIES: He has been quoted often enough in the House.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The figures are not correct.

Mr. DAVIES: They have been accepted as authentic.

Mr. O'Loughlen: You do not accept them.

Mr. DAVIES: I would like to suggest to the Government, if they are sincere, and I am prepared to admit that they are, in their endeavour to bring in a price fixing measure, that they should appoint a commission not to inquire into the prices alone but to inquire into the cost of production of commodities that we are able to control in Western Australia.

The Attorney General: The one will follow on the other.

Mr. DAVIES: The Government would be wise, even if they only confined themselves to one item during the period of six or 12 months, to adopt this suggestion. So long as we get hold of that item and show the public of Western Australia that it is produced at a fair price and sold to the consumer at a fair price, the workers and everyone else will be satisfied. What agitates the minds of the people to-day more than anything else is, not the abnormal increase in the high cost of living since the war, but the fact that there are unscrupulous individuals in Australia who are making greater profits to-day than they did previously. That is what is hurting the people.

Mr. Willcock: It is the high cost of living. They would not mind how much profit was made if they could live decently.

Mr. DAVIES: It would be another matter if the people could live decently, and a suggestion on the question has been made to the Government. It is being followed to-day in the Eastern States. The South Australian Government are regarded as the most conservative in Australia to-day.

Mr. O'Loughlen: South Australia is the most democratic community in Australia.

Mr. DAVIES: Let us see what South Australia has decided upon. Speaking in the Assembly on the 16th September, the Attorney General said they were going to amend the industrial court and, among other things, were going to provide that periodically the living wage rate—which would operate automatically—and all lower rates fixed by the courts and industrial boards should be raised to the living wage or lowered as the cost of living went down.

Mr. Willcock: He also said there was no profiteering.

Mr. DAVIES: Yes, but this is what he said on the 16th September. I remember it because I referred to the matter during the Address-in-reply, and held that once declared by the court the basic wage should be declared a common rule. In the meantime the Government should not allow that to go on any longer, but should meet both the wishes and the needs of the wage-earners

of this community by making the basic wage automatically a common rule in various districts.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Mr. O'Loughlen: They do not make it a living wage.

Mr. Willcock: You ought not to take any notice of men who say there is no profiteering in Australia.

The Minister for Mines: I do not know any man who would not profiteer if he had the chance.

Mr. DAVIES: I am prepared to admit that the provisions of the Bill are not adequate to meet existing conditions, but I commend the Government on having brought in a measure of this nature and thrown on the House the responsibility of so shaping it as to meet the situation. It is far better than has been done in the past. For instance, past Governments would bring in a measure and say "There it is; accept it or reject it." On this occasion the Government have brought down the skeleton of a Bill, and the responsibility for re-moulding it is thrown on the House.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Do you think they intend it to be regarded as a skeleton?

Mr. DAVIES: Whether they do or not, it will be so accepted by the House.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: You are very simple.

Mr. Lambert: That is as far as they intend to go.

The Minister for Mines: Frequently a Bill is only a skeleton when it leaves the House.

Mr. DAVIES: Regarding the cost of living, in the Old Country during the war, when the German submarining was at its height, the British Government nationalised the distribution of food supplies, notwithstanding which prices have gone up enormously in the United Kingdom as compared with Australia. The mere fact of nationalising the food supplies will not reduce the cost to the consumer, unless indeed we have a very efficient management, a point in which it appears to me we are lacking in respect of all State enterprises. I am much afraid that if we were to nationalise the means of production, distribution and exchange throughout Australia, the first effect would be to increase the cost to the consumer, until such times as those in the industry agree to co-operate with the employer and endeavour to produce the best possible article for the consumer. I disagree with the contention of the leader of the Opposition that the law of supply and demand is being repealed or entirely eliminated. I think that is very wide of the mark, as has been proved to-night by the member for South Fremantle, who referred to the fact that the price of meat has been reduced recently. What is the reason for that? Mutton certainly has been reduced considerably in price, owing to the fact that the supply is greater than it was a few weeks ago, whereas in regard to beef, we are no better off than we were before,

because the supplies are short of the demand. I agree that that should not be made an excuse for profiteering.

Hon. P. Collier: It is only when supplies are short that the law of supply and demand is permitted to operate.

Mr. DAVIES: That is owing largely to the fact that the consumer himself is the greatest competitor at that particular time. There are people, especially those with money, who say, "I am going to have meat at any price." Of course while that continues the price must soar. It will have been noticed in the newspapers that the bricklayers have secured an agreement for 16s. a day, a condition inserted by the employers being that the employees shall first serve the members of the Builders' Association. Are the employers silly enough to think that the bricklayers will work at 16s. a day if another employer offers 18s.? It is just the same with the man who has a commodity to sell. The moment supplies are short, he immediately claims the highest price. It is at such a time that price-fixing legislation will be of benefit to the community. The Bill is a step in the right direction, and if the Government will co-operate with other Australian Governments and the Government of the United Kingdom, there should be some chance of the measure proving effective. Until we get hold of the cost of production—which in Western Australia can be done only in respect of very few articles—we can never do anything to arrive at what is a fair price to the consumer. I hope the House will so shape the measure that it will result in securing fair and reasonable prices to the consumer.

Mr. PICKERING (Sussex) [6.10]: I wish to congratulate the leader of the Opposition on his eloquent address on this subject the other night. He placed before the House much which was new and of great interest to hon. members. I should like to read one or two of the statements he quoted, with a view to emphasising some remarks of my own. The hon. member quoted this—

As already indicated, owing to restricted imports competition, if not wholly eliminated, has been reduced to unimportant proportions. But whatever may be said in excuse of manufacturers in availing themselves of the ordinary custom of traders when competition is relaxed, it is much to be regretted that the greater proportion of those excessive profits were derived during the period in which they were engaged in supplying material for the clothing of our soldiers, and when they were acting in unison.

Again he quoted—

The enhanced prices are directly attributable to the war and to the fact that local manufacturers and wholesale and retail distributors have to a large extent taken advantage of the abnormal con-

ditions for the purpose of increasing their profits.

When dealing with a subject somewhat akin to this I emphasised the point that protection was at the root of most of our troubles in regard to the cost of living.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What about England with her free trade?

Mr. PICKERING: I will come to that. These two statements that have been quoted by the leader of the Opposition from a report with which, apparently, he sympathises, to my mind are a most direct attack on that iniquitous system of fiscal policy, protection. It shows that in a time of war the people of Australia have been living under abnormal conditions of protection. What has been the result? There has been a combination of manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers to despoil the people under this fiscal craze. It is evident to me that if we are in earnest about reducing the cost of commodities to our people, we must start by an effort to cut down the highly protective tariff. I am not altogether in sympathy with the Bill, inasmuch as I believe it is only tinkering with the question. I think first of all we should attempt to remedy this position through a decrease in our Customs tariff, and, secondly, if we are determined to maintain our protective system we should at least make an effort to fix prices on scientific lines. What I would suggest is not price-fixing, but rather the limitation of profits. This system of price-fixing, which is based entirely on the maximum, is not at all a fair one. The leader of the Opposition declared that scarcity was no excuse for an increase in prices. That sentiment was repeated by the member for Guildford to-night. If scarcity is not an excuse for an increase in price, why then is a glut held to be an excuse for a reduction of price?

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. PICKERING: Before tea I was discussing the question of fixing prices and providing a maximum. That is the only provision made in the Bill, the fixing of a maximum under Clause 9. Certain interjections were made by the member for Fremantle (Mr. Jones) when the member for Guildford (Mr. Davies) was speaking on the increased cost of production. The Interstate Commission in their report dealing with the currant and raisin industry said—

The cost of production undoubtedly has risen considerably during the last few years, but very large profits have been made by producers during the war, and, in the opinion of the Commission, an extension of the industry has been encouraged which, when the war is over and the various other producing countries of the world again come into competition with Australian production, may prove not to have been justified.

I contend that this illustrates the pernicious principle of protection. It shows that during war time the currant and raisin industry has been adequately protected by the war, inasmuch as produce of this nature could not be imported.

The Premier: There is a very strong combine, though.

Mr. PICKERING: That is coincident with protection, and it has been illustrated by the leader of the Opposition in his speech. It applies to every industry. Another remark made by the member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen) was that the question of protection did not apply to England. I contend that England has been labouring under a most favoured system of protection for a considerable time, inasmuch as external supplies were cut off to a large extent, and the consequent increase in the price of commodities and foodstuffs in England was due to the artificial system of protection.

Hon. P. Collier: It certainly could not be said there was free trade.

Mr. PICKERING: No.

The Premier: Who was protecting her?

Hon. P. Collier: The war conditions were protecting her.

Mr. PICKERING: In price-fixing, the minimum must be considered with regard to the primary producers. To-day we are in the position of getting a good price for the articles we produce. We are getting a good price for our wheat, brought about by certain artificial conditions. When those artificial conditions cease, we may return to the state of affairs which existed prior to the war. As regards potatoes, we are getting a price out of all reason, and I say that as a producer. I have known the time when it was impossible to get a price which paid us for sending the potatoes to market. When I was speaking on this point before, the member for Forrest interjected that a price of £8 a ton for potatoes would not be complained of. If the minimum price were fixed at £8 a ton and we were sure of getting that amount for our produce, we would be prepared to supply as much as the consumers needed. But while there is an element of doubt that prices may be reduced when there is a scarcity, there is no element of doubt that prices would not be raised when there was a glut. Immediately there is a glut prices fall, and the position becomes fatal to the producer.

The Minister for Works: The worst of it is the consumer does not get the benefit of any fall in prices.

Mr. PICKERING: Generally speaking that is so; but the producer should at least have a fair deal, in any price-fixing measure which is passed by this House.

The Minister for Works: Hear, hear! I quite agree with you.

Mr. PICKERING: The member for Guildford gave a comparative table of the increases in the cost of living in different countries. It must be borne in mind that these increases are comparative in the countries to which they pertain, that is to say,

the differences in prices in Australia apply to Australia only, and in England to England only. In England the ratio between the price of commodities prior to and during the war was considerably over 100 per cent. The wages in England have gone up proportionately, and perhaps wages will have to be increased still further in this State if conditions are to be improved.

Hon. P. Collier: Wages have gone up in England to as much as 150 per cent.

The Premier: There was plenty of room for it, too.

Mr. PICKERING: But prior to the war, the wages in England bore a more favourable ratio to the price of living than in this State, and the increase has been relatively much greater there than in the Commonwealth. The increased cost of production has been due in a large measure to the war. We find that the price of machinery has gone up and higher wages have been paid; parts of machinery have increased in price out of all proportion; bags have gone up beyond all expectation; oils have gone up to a very high figure; wire, netting, and iron have advanced in price, and one of the great factors which is troubling the producer of to-day is inefficiency. We have not got the skilled labour coming forward which we require in the farming industry, and this applies not only to farming but to all industries. I contend that no increases of wages will bring about an improvement in the conditions because, as soon as an increase takes place in one industry, an increase is asked for in all other industries, and so it goes on in a vicious circle. The only way is to make our mechanics, workmen, and people generally more efficient. The more efficient our mechanics become in their trade, the greater the output will be. Not only must we deal with the inefficiency of our workmen, but also with the inefficient plants of our manufacturers. No doubt the system of protection has fostered inefficient plants in the manufacturing industries, and often on obsolete premises, and the whole trend of protection has been to bring about inefficiency in every respect. As soon as it is found that the tariff is not high enough to protect an inefficient industry, application is made for an increase, which is granted, and so it goes on ad infinitum. If we are going to bring about any real benefits to the people, we must aim at making our people more efficient. Referring to the Bill, I find there is no provision to prevent exportation of the necessities of life to places beyond the limits of the Commonwealth. I concede that the previous Act was a war time measure, but I would like to draw attention to the fact that to-day we are exporting chaff to the Eastern States and, as a result, the price of chaff locally is being held up much higher than it should be.

Hon. P. Collier: If we fixed the price, there would be no need to prevent exportation.

Mr. PICKERING: That is so. It is quite possible there might be a shortage in certain things we are exporting, and we would

have no control over that. There was a provision in the original Act which applied only to exports beyond Australia. I would like to know the intention of including that in the previous measure. Whether the Bill will have the effect of preventing the exportation of things essential to our people and thus getting them sold at a reasonable price locally, I cannot say, but it is my duty to call the attention of the Government to that aspect of the question.

The Attorney General: You show the impossibility of the State dealing with this matter.

Mr. PICKERING: I quite admit this measure can be only an expedient. The only measure coincident with protection is a limitation of profits. There is a clause in the Bill relating to the proclamation of areas which should receive serious consideration. The proclamation of areas under other price-fixing measures has applied only to the metropolis. We people in the country districts receive no protection at all in such a case, although the country traders have the advantage of lower rents and lower taxes. Still, we do not get the advantage which accrues to the people of the metropolitan areas as a result of the proclamation of areas. I would like to hear an explanation of that point, and to know whether this clause cannot be applied to protect the people of the country districts. While I realise it is absolutely necessary that the high cost of living should be reduced, I regret very much that it cannot be done more efficiently than has been suggested by the Government. The essentials to a reduction in the cost of living are, first of all, a reduction in the tariff; failing that, a limitation of profits. Price fixing is only an expedient at the best of times. Increasing wages will not have any effect. The only thing that rests with us as a people is, by our education system and other means, to increase the efficiency of our people. We shall not be able to bring about a big change in the condition of the world by any act of price fixing, but if we train our people to give a better return for their wages, not by longer hours but by greater efficiency and better work, we shall go far towards relieving the difficulty which confronts us to-day. In conclusion, let me say that one of the remedies lying at our hands is that of co-operation. The Country party have always been in favour of co-operative trading. By this means the element of distribution which is so roundly condemned by the member for South Fremantle (Mr. Rocke) would be largely overcome, and the sooner the co-operative movement receives the all-round encouragement of the Government, the better it will be for those interested in it and for those interested in the reduction of the cost of living. Failing those expedients, it is my determination to support this measure, providing it is possible to amend the Bill in the Committee stage. I was absent from the House when the leader of the Opposition spoke on this Bill, but I read with much interest the report of his remarks. I think

those remarks are such as must very strongly commend themselves to the favourable consideration of the House. I presume the Minister in charge of the Bill will give us his reasons for proposing only one Commissioner. In view of the arguments of the leader of the Opposition and the member for Hannans (Mr. Munsie) I am rather inclined, at the moment, to favour three Commissioners in place of one. Whilst I am prepared to accord every support to a representative of the consumers, and more particularly of the working classes, on the board, I think it would be wise to have as third Commissioner a man representing the primary producers. Undoubtedly the primary producer is one of the biggest assets of this State and of the Commonwealth, and anything done inimical to his interests is something detrimental to the advancement of the country. Therefore, in considering the appointment of three Commissioners, I think the leader of the Opposition should join with me in endeavouring to secure that one Commissioner shall be representative of the producers generally. Before committing myself to supporting this Bill entirely, I want to know from the Minister in charge why the powers of the Commission are to be so drastically limited. If the Bill is to be of any value to the people, the Commissioner, or the Commissioners, should have wide powers in giving effect to decisions.

Mr. NAIRN (Swan) [7.49]: I support the second reading of this measure, and at the outset I desire to congratulate the leader of the Opposition on the splendid exposition he has given of his cause. This evening compliments are plentiful across the floor of the House, and I have no hesitation in rendering to the leader of the Opposition my mead of praise. In common with all members, I realise the extreme difficulty of arriving at any conclusion which will materially affect the cost of living. After all, the desire which we have more than any other is to reduce the cost of living. As regards Western Australia and the Commonwealth generally, we have some occasion to congratulate ourselves that during the last five years of war, and of general disturbance of trade and commerce, the increase in cost of living here has been very small indeed in comparison with other countries. The reasons for that would be difficult to state in a few words. In my opinion, one of the chief reasons is undoubtedly the distance of Australia from Europe. I believe that, had the markets of Europe been available to the producers of Australia, the cost of living in Australia would have risen in conformity with the general surroundings. The comparative smallness of the increase here in the cost of living must be borne in mind when we are discussing this subject. Whilst producers in other parts of the world are obtaining high prices for their products, it is indeed a debatable point whether a country which can produce but cannot deliver is in a better position than any other country. I realise the diffi-

culty of the State's applying this measure very effectively to cheapen the prices of the commodities that we chiefly desire to deal with; and this is largely so because prices are fixed before the commodities reach this State. If every State of the Commonwealth had such a measure as this, it would be more or less effective as regards the prices of articles produced in Australia.

Hon. P. Collier: As a matter of fact, an effective price-fixing law in Victoria reduces the cost of living here.

Mr. NAIRN: That is so. An effective price-fixing law in any one Australian State must automatically affect prices in all the other Australian States in which the goods of that State are distributed. As regards our imports, however, there is no Australian law which can materially affect their prices. The only law which can affect them is the law of supply and demand. I know my friends opposite do not attach as much importance as I do to that immutable law. I acknowledge that it is not a law which can always be availed of for the purpose of sustaining an argument. That law is too often nullified as the result of combinations and rings and other means of getting control of a particular article. In such circumstances the law of supply and demand is in suspense. Generally speaking, however, I do not think any suspension of the law of supply and demand has greatly affected the cost of living in Australia. One of the most important causes, in my opinion, is the tariff under which we live at the present time. The Australian tariff has been in existence sufficiently long to outlive its usefulness entirely. This is particularly so as regards its application to foodstuffs. I need only mention that since the war the Australian people have paid in one year alone on sugar—I am not quite sure of the year—no less than half a million sterling excise through the Customs. That is an entirely useless contribution so far as the protection of the sugar industry is concerned.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Is that half a million revenue, or is it profit on the purchase of sugar by the Commonwealth Government?

Mr. NAIRN: According to "Knibbs," who, I suppose, will be accepted on this point, the Customs collected on sugar £510,000 revenue and excise during the year 1916-17. That indicates a condition of things in which protection has run mad. We have then arrived at a stage where it is impossible to stimulate local production further by production. Therefore, it is pure extortion to take from the people anything like £500,000 in one year in respect of one commodity of that kind.

Hon. P. Collier: It is really taxation through the Customs.

Mr. NAIRN: Yes, and nothing else. Right through the tariff, from one end to the other, are to be found similar anomalies. I am speaking now from a protectionist standpoint, for I do not agree with the member for Nelson (Mr. Pickering) that free trade is going to solve all the difficulties

under which this young country labours. I am speaking now against a tariff which is not a protective tariff but a destructive tariff, which is by no means a scientific tariff.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Commonwealth made another £500,000 out of their purchase of sugar. That is one million pounds taxation on sugar alone.

Mr. NAIRN: Quite so; and every Government in turn has done precisely the same thing. Meantime we are crying aloud that the increase in the cost of living is due entirely to the profiteers. I believe that we have in Australia our proportion of profiteers. It would be very difficult to state, however, what the total effect of profiteering is in this country as compared with the total increase in the cost of living. I honestly think that the effect of profiteering is nothing like what is generally believed.

Hon. P. Collier: But it is one of the factors.

Mr. NAIRN: Yes, and one that the Government are entitled to deal with. The Government are entitled to have at hand such a measure as will be effective where profiteering can be proved. When we have arrived at a definition of profiteering, we shall have gone a long way towards solving the supreme difficulty so far as trade and commerce are concerned. For what is profiteering in one man's business could not be called profiteering in the case of another man's. I speak of gross profits in this connection. A definition of profiteering has yet to be framed and defined. However, without going further into that aspect, here we have a tariff which, in one year, draws from the five million people of Australia £13,000,000; and that is exclusive of excise on beer, spirits, tobacco, cigarettes, and cigars—all items which are very heavy revenue producers. The excise on those articles represents a further 3¼ millions sterling. Thus the Australian people contribute through Customs and excise no less a sum than 15 millions sterling in one year.

Mr. Pilkington: And the proposal now is to raise the tariff.

Mr. NAIRN: Why give all our attention to profiteering? If we wish to effect something useful, we must set out on a general campaign to show the whole of the people the true position. There are many causes of the increased cost of living quite apart from the tariff. One of them, and probably the one exercising the greatest influence, has been the universal shortage of commodities throughout the world. Most nations during the past five years have given up production except for war purposes, more or less. Consequently, a tremendous shortage exists throughout the world; and where there is a shortage there is no alternative to a full supply except high prices. If 1,000 articles are required, and only 500 can be produced, what other known means is there of meeting the difficulty than an increase of prices? I am not going to justify the increase of prices. I do not say it is just. I say it is

cruel. But I say that it has existed and that it still exists. I say that up to the present no other means is known of overcoming the difficulty.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: When supplies were short in the Old Country, the people were rationed.

Mr. NAIRN: But that did not in any way reduce the prices. That did not solve the difficulty as regards prices. Figures have proved it.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Government fixed the prices.

Mr. NAIRN: But the Government did not fix low prices. There is little advantage in fixing prices if the prices fixed are not low. The law of supply and demand will be much more effective than the fixing of a price which is already high. We may reasonably expect that within the next year or two prices will gradually fall. There is evidence of that even to-day. The member for Hannans (Mr. Munsie) brought forward this evening some evidence tending in that direction, in connection with the price of nails, and if the statement he makes is correct, it is only giving an instance where already a considerable reduction has taken place in the value of that particular commodity because no person could have bought it at anything like the same price 12 months ago. A great deal of our difficulty is temperamental, and the temper of the people to-day throughout the world is abnormal. One need not be surprised that we have turmoil everywhere, and I venture to say that when the world is prepared to be normal, from that moment onwards we will have a considerable reduction in the cost of living and in the price of commodities. I know of no other way by which the cost of living will be permanently reduced. I am not against giving the Government such power as is necessary to deal with unfair trading in the community. Another matter which has had a great deal to do with the increase of prices is that of exchange. I have no intention of going into the technicalities of exchange, but I assert that exchanges throughout the world are contrary to what existed before the war; they are out of step.

Mr. Troy: That is only a recent occurrence.

Mr. NAIRN: It has no relation to profiteering and it is likely to become more acute. I am asked who fixes the exchange. I will tell hon. members. Take the position between Australia and America. In connection with any article we get from America, we find that the exchange is roughly 17 per cent.

Mr. Davies: Nobody gets it.

Mr. NAIRN: No, but we lose it. It cannot go anywhere because it does not exist. It does not pay anyone. I am just quoting America as an example. The same thing applies to India and Asia. The one commodity the value of which is almost universally fixed is the sovereign which commands 20s. But if my friends will take a hundred sovereigns to anywhere in Eastern Asia

they will obtain 30s. credit in goods. Yet the sovereign is an article that has a fixed value throughout the world. What is the use of saying we can by statutory declaration fix the price of anything when we cannot do that in connection with the sovereign?

Hon. W. C. Angwin: What do you get for the sovereign in America?

Mr. NAIRN: Let me return to America. Every article purchased in America for Australia carries an additional surcharge of 17 per cent. The reason is obvious and simple. It is that whilst America is sending us very large quantities of goods she is purchasing from us very small quantities. When we sell we make an exchange of some kind or other and when America sells us goods and we cannot send back any goods, the only thing is to pay back in sovereigns. Sovereigns are not available just now. The banking institution of the world was Britain, and before the war sovereigns were permitted to go out from the country to secure exchange. That state of affairs does not exist now. No rule can alter that until trade is equalised and balanced. We can do as we like. We can break down but we cannot build up, and that is the law of the world as it exists at the present time. That is one of the thousand things which is contributing towards the high cost of living. It is all very well to set up the profiteer as the bogey. I am as ready as anyone else to destroy the profiteer.

Mr. Troy: He does not exist.

Mr. NAIRN: He does exist.

Mr. Troy: For how long?

Mr. NAIRN: Ever since the time of Moses.

Mr. Willcock: The remedy is to produce what we require in Australia.

Mr. NAIRN: That is so, but more than that, there is no country in the world that can produce the whole of its requirements.

Hon. P. Collier: The hon. member's arguments are true, but the only point so far as the high price of exchange is concerned is that we have no control over it. We do control other things.

Mr. NAIRN: What I want to do is to destroy the delusion that some would work on the people, and that is if we can get rid of the profiteer, we can get back to normal conditions.

Hon. P. Collier: We can reduce the cost of living.

Mr. NAIRN: To try to abolish the profiteer outside Australia is absurd and impossible, and the sooner we face the facts and allocate to each cause its due contribution to the increased cost of living, the better for all concerned. The one difficulty would be to get rid of the man who purchases and sells again—the speculator.

Hon. P. Collier: The middleman.

Mr. NAIRN: That is another dream. We have been told that all we have to do is to pass a law to prevent a man re-selling an article before it reaches the retailer or the consumer. I want to remind the leader of

the Opposition that if we were to pass such a law as that, we would be turning away from Australia goods that were coming into it, because no law here can compel a man not to sell goods that are not already landed in the Commonwealth. We have evidence of profiteers who have succeeded not necessarily by cornering the market, but by finding themselves in the position of having large commodities or being able to procure that article of which there is a scarcity and getting profits to an undue extent. As the member for Sussex (Mr. Pickering) remarked, how are we going to deal with the profiteer primary producer? At the present time we are paying in this State anything up to £40 a ton for potatoes. It will be generally admitted that that is a ridiculously high price.

Hon. P. Collier: Fix it at £14.

Mr. NAIRN: If we did we would in fairness have to fix a minimum. Further, if we tell the producer that he is not to exceed a certain price, we must give him a guarantee that he will obtain that price. I cannot see any other way out of it.

Mr. TROY: In that case you have the law of supply and demand.

Mr. NAIRN: If anyone can show me the means by which we can find a way out of it my vote will be with them. Right through at the present time we are suffering more through the primary producer getting high prices for his goods than for any other reason. Nothing was said about the primary producer while he was producing at a loss, but the moment he is producing and getting an excessive profit someone wants to take it from him. I hope that when the Bill reaches the Committee stage we shall amend it in such a way as to make it effective. There is one thing in common about which we agree, and it is that as far as possible we should try to reduce the price of commodities, and so far as this Bill will give the Government that power, I am prepared to give them my support.

Mr. TROY (Mount Magnet) [8.11]: I do not propose to make any lengthy remarks on this Bill because during my speech on the Address-in-reply I stated that in my opinion there was a necessity for a Bill of this character. I do not propose to give the Government any credit for the introduction of the Bill into Parliament, or to Parliament either for its introduction because in my opinion there is no virtue in compulsion. The Bill has only been introduced because public agitation compelled its introduction, and had not the public taken a hand in the matter, and the returned soldiers as well, there would have been no mention of a Bill of this nature, and neither would Mr. Hughes have made such a mouthful about the matter as he is doing now. Ever since the last price fixing Bill was defeated by the Upper House, profiteering in this country and in the Commonwealth has been rampant. In fact, profiteering has been allowed by the Federal Parliament, and it has been encouraged by the Federal Government in order that the man who made money by increasing the cost

of commodities to the people might place his profits in the war loan and thus enable the Commonwealth Government to raise the necessary means to carry on the war. That sort of conspiracy is not new. It has happened in every war the British Government have been engaged in. It is a harsh thing to extort money from the people's pockets in order to carry on war, but if they can be compelled to pay high prices for commodities the Government take a share of the plunder with which to carry on the war. That is what has happened in Australia. The Commonwealth Government had price fixing Commissioners in every State and on no occasion have those highly paid officers, costing the Commonwealth thousands of pounds, taken one solitary action. That was because they were not allowed to do so. I guarantee that if Mr. Rae, the late price fixing Commissioner for the Federal Government in Western Australia, was allowed to speak his mind, he would say that he was not allowed to take any action whatever.

The Attorney General: I do not think you are right there.

Mr. TROY: I am sure of it. I know this, that when Mr. Rae was one of the price fixing Commissioners for Western Australia under the State Act, he was very energetic on behalf of the consumers and producers. He made himself a most unpopular man, but he gave valuable services at a time when he was backed up by the Government who gave the people a fair deal. I am not sure that the people have yet recovered from what the hon. member for Swan calls abnormal conditions, but I do hope that they will have recovered sufficiently by the next Federal elections to be able to reply to Mr. Hughes's war cry that he is out to down the profiteers. All the evidence proves that the profiteer in Australia is robbing the people and that this is entirely due to the support and encouragement offered by such men as Mr. Hughes and members of his party.

Mr. Nairn: Are you speaking of when he belonged to your party?

Mr. TROY: No, I am speaking of him since he belonged to the hon. member's party. He has now to appeal to the people of the Commonwealth. Some time ago he announced his war cry—down with the Bolshevik and the profiteer. He pretends to belong to neither party, but as a matter of fact he is following no middle course. This is the sort of thing that will occur: When he takes the platform, he will be supported on it by the profiteer, and after the elections we may be certain that nothing more will be done against the profiteer. I give the Government no credit for the introduction of the measure, because compulsion is no virtue. I have heard the member for Swan make, what amounts to, apologies for the profiteer. He made much ado about the rate of exchange and the law of supply and demand. I would point out that 90 per cent. of the commodities that are so largely used in Australia were produced in this country in abundance during the war. I am prepared to make due allow-

ances for all those commodities imported into the country which are affected by the rate of exchange or by the tariff.

The Attorney General: Did you say 90 per cent.?

Mr. TROY: Yes.

Mr. Nairn: Why not make it 95 per cent.?

Mr. TROY: I said 90 per cent. I am speaking of the essential commodities. Let us take wool, meat, boots, clothing, bread, and sugar. These comprise the essential requirements of the people, and were produced in abundance in Australia during the war. They were also stocked largely in the cities, and in our depôts, and there has been no scarcity of them. Notwithstanding this the people have found it utterly impossible to carry on under existing conditions or to obtain these commodities at reasonable prices.

The Attorney General: I think your percentage is wrong. We produce no cotton goods at all.

Mr. TROY: I am not talking about cotton goods. We produce an abundance of wool.

Mr. Nairn: No manufactured wool.

Mr. TROY: The wool has been manufactured into wearing apparel in Australia. The Interstate Commission sets forth that firms were profiteering in soldiers' uniforms, and has asked the Federal Government to take action. The Government, though they condemned profiteering, absolutely ignored the recommendation of their own Interstate Commission. Is it any wonder that we should in such circumstances be suspicious of the party cry of politicians like the present Prime Minister of Australia? I had an instance brought under my notice the other day of profiteering in this State. The primary producers, and those who consume the product of which I am going to speak, will follow me. I grow wheat, and at considerable cost during the last few years I have grown a few bags of it. I have had to bear the expense of sowing, of labour, of providing seed and superphosphate, and run the risk of bad seasons. I also provided bags at a high cost, and had to send my wheat to the mill to be gristed. Upon sending a ton of wheat to the Geraldton flour mill to be gristed I received £11 2s. 6d., after paying all the costs of production. I had occasion recently to buy some flour. I went to an adjacent town and paid cash over the counter at the rate of £16 a ton for flour similar to that which I had sold at Geraldton for £11 2s. 6d. a little while before. The freight that the storekeeper had to pay to get his flour to the store was at the rate of 8s. 3d. per ton. Although the vendor of this flour took no risk and merely sold it over the counter, he received nearly £5 per ton for his trouble.

Hon. P. Collier: He received practically 50 per cent. more than you did.

Mr. TROY: I have kept a record of this transaction. I stated at the time that it was rather a high price to charge, and the reply was that it was a reasonable price. I then said, "Let it go at that." I may repeat that I paid cash for the flour.

The Attorney General: If everyone paid cash they would not have to pay so much.

Mr. TROY: I have heard that before. We would pay just the same. I have heard a lot about the rate of exchange and how the tariff affects commodities. Last night I was told by a well-known commercial gentleman of this town, the manager of one of the biggest trading concerns in the State, that he priced some wire locally for the fencing of some properties. The price that was quoted to him was at the rate of £44 a ton. He then told me that he had cabled to London, and by the "Australind" he had the other day landed wire costing £29 a ton c.i.f. at Fremantle.

Mr. Smith: What duty did he have to pay on it?

Mr. TROY: That was the whole cost. He had nothing more to pay except the cost of conveying the wire to the properties which had to be fenced. He was able to save his firm at the rate of £15 per ton, as compared with what he would have had to pay to the merchants. That is a large profit to make on one ton of wire.

Mr. Smith: There is something wrong about your prices.

Mr. TROY: Not at all. This gentleman gave me those figures last night.

Mr. Nairn: He is working under the lap for someone.

The Attorney General: Where did the wire come from?

Mr. TROY: That does not matter.

The Attorney General: Probably it came from America.

Mr. TROY: Possibly.

The Attorney General: He cannot get any more of it at that price.

Mr. TROY: He says he can. At all events if he can do that others can do the same. How does the Minister know that he cannot get any more?

The Attorney General: I happen to know, just as the hon. member does.

Mr. TROY: The member for Swan said that our commodities should have been cheap, and that we can congratulate ourselves upon the fact that they were cheaper here than in any other part of the world, and that this was due to the distance of Australia from the seat of war. That would have been of advantage if the Government of the day had taken the opportunity that was afforded. Living would have been cheap, no doubt, if the Government of the day had seen that the food supplies were sold at a reasonable rate. Whilst the cost of living was less here than in many other countries, it was very much higher than it should have been. That is my belief. I would have preferred to have seen high prices for our commodities sold overseas rather than lower prices because the money would have gone to the people and they would have received their share of it. They would also have been able to pay for the commodities because they would have had the money. We have had the commodities in the country, but the

people did not get the full benefit of them because of the profiteer.

Hon. P. Collier: There ought to have been record low prices in Australia.

Mr. TROY: The law of supply and demand did not operate so far as our wool, our clothing, our food supplies, etc., were concerned. We had them in abundance but we fared very badly. The mayor of Perth in this afternoon's paper makes some remarks about his impressions in the Eastern States.

Hon. P. Collier: Let us give three cheers.

Mr. TROY: He said—

The general opinion is that we have not yet reached the limit in prices, especially for cotton and wool goods.

America of course controls cotton.

The Americans seem to control all the cotton and Britain controls all the wool.

He also says that according to yesterday's paper Continental buyers were buying wool freely on the London market at 5s. 5½d. to 8s. 0½d. per pound, which is about three times the normal value. There again the Nationalist Governments have betrayed the best interests of the Commonwealth. They have sold our wool at a flat rate of 1s. 3d. a lb. It has been sold in the open market at from 5s. to 8s. a pound, and we have to pay high prices for the woollen goods purchased from the old Mother country.

Mr. Smith: The wool growers have participated in 50 per cent. of the profits.

Mr. TROY: Lieutenant-Colonel Lassiter, one of the leading commercial men of the Commonwealth, when interviewed on his return from the Old Country, said that there was such waste and such maladministration in regard to the control of the wool that he doubted whether the wool growers of Australia would receive a solitary halfpenny as a result of their share in the profits. The "Age" had a leading article on the matter at the time. We are paying excess costs for a commodity which we produce, and which we have given away to the people of other countries to make the profit upon. Every interest in Australia has been sacrificed, and yet we are told that we must not think of that. Canada before the war had a debit balance of \$40,000,000. During the first years of the war Canada wiped out the debt entirely and had a credit of several millions. To-day Canada is in a position to lend money and pay its own national debt without any trouble, because of the opportunity that Canadian statesmen secured for their people in regard to the sale of their products. The people there are paying no more for their commodities than we do in Australia. I do not object to high prices if everyone has a share in the benefits accruing from the commodity which is bringing in those high prices. Had the woolgrowers of Australia secured 3s. or 4s. a pound extra for their wool there would have come to the country an additional 50 or 60 millions as the result of the sale of that wool. And the money would have gone round. Workers would have secured better wages, and we should all have had more money to meet our taxation and other liabilities.

One does not mind paying high prices if one has the money. To-day we have to pay high prices without having the money. We have given away the resources of the country, and now we have the most unscrupulous man in the Commonwealth who gave away our inheritance declaring that he is out to fight the profiteer. I hope people will not be influenced by that sort of talk at the next Federal elections. I am satisfied that while the present National Government remain at the head of the Commonwealth affairs we shall get no justice either in this or any of the other States. The hon. member referred to the tariff as being the chief cause of the high cost of commodities. But there are many commodities not affected by the tariff. The tariff does not affect the sugar supply of Australia, except in so far as all importations of sugar have to pay duty. During the war sugar in Australia was much cheaper than in other parts of the world.

Mr. Nairn: No. In Java it was only half the price.

Mr. TROY: But what sort of sugar was it? It was not even refined. I have listened with contempt to the yarns circulated by interested persons to the effect that the high price of boots is due to the fact that people will not wear a boot at a reasonable price. I have even heard politicians say "Do you know that over in the Eastern States the manufacturers say they cannot sell a boot at £1, because people want boots at £2." That is all humbug. When I buy a pair of boots I want as good a boot as I can get at the lowest possible price.

Mr. Smith: That is your Scotch caution.

Mr. TROY: I have a contempt for that sort of story. It is always heard from interested persons. During the whole course of the war the Commonwealth has been a hot-bed of profiteering. I feel sure that when, at the next Federal elections, Mr. Hughes, like Quixote tilting at windmills, will be fighting the profiteers, he will have with him on the platform all the profiteers, waving flags and giving three cheers. But once the elections are over there will be no more of it. The people are being humbugged, and I as one of them say they deserve to be humbugged. But regarding the high prices and their relation to the law of supply and demand, it must be remembered that that law operates but infrequently. For instance, chaff a little while ago was dear because there was a shortage. The price is easier now, and presently new supplies will be coming in, in consequence of which the price will fall. I doubt whether chaff has been held up to any great extent; at any rate, the evidence does not show that large quantities have been held up. That sort of thing operates but infrequently. For the next four or five years there may be a surplus of chaff, with consequent normal prices. So, too, in respect of a lot of other commodities. But in regard to the real necessities of the people.

ple, we have had abundance of supplies in the Commonwealth, notwithstanding which profiteering has been greatly in evidence. The success of this measure, whole or partial, will depend entirely upon its administration by the Government. If the Government are sincere I am sure the measure will have a good result. When the Labour Government operated the Price-Fixing Act very fine results were achieved. Even so far as Youanmi, 70 miles from the railway, it was possible to keep a check on the price of commodities. If the Government are sincere, and if they give their officers strong support and proper powers, good will certainly result from the operation of this measure. I heartily support it, but, like other hon. members on this side, I want to see it amended to provide for three commissioners. The work is too much for one commissioner. A man like Mr. Rae has a knowledge of business methods, but he has little or no knowledge from the producer's standpoint, and very little from that of the workers'. If we can get a commission consisting of three experts, and if, in addition, the Government are sincere, then the measure will certainly have beneficial results.

Mr. LAMBERT (Coolgardie) [8.38]: I do not think there is any spiritual or temporal power on God's earth which will curb the money lust of some of the profiteers of this State. It is all very well to say there is no profiteering. I suppose it is safe to declare that 50 per cent. of the goods consumed in this State to-day are directly or indirectly handled by two or three different sets of profiteers. It is useless to bring in a skeleton Bill like this and expect that practical effect can be given to it. The Government would have shown a greater desire to curb the profiteer in this State had the Federal Government been approached and an attempt made to see whether we could not get uniformity of action throughout Australia. Since we have delegated many of our powers to the Federal authorities, it is absurd that one State Government should try to deal with this matter. The only effective way to deal with profiteering in Australia would be for the Commonwealth Government to become the sole importer of all goods into Australia. Then we should not only get, to some extent, the ascertained value of production and the profits of those handling goods in Australia, but we could also eliminate the luxuries and unnecessary goods that come into Australia to-day.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Commonwealth Government made a pretty poor fist of exporting the goods.

Mr. LAMBERT: That is admittedly true, but I believe that the only effective way of ascertaining the cost of production and the reasonable profit on goods handled in this country would be for the Commonwealth Government to do the importing. For instance, I had a practical experience of one of the biggest importing firms in this State. We wanted sulphur for manufacturing lime-

sulphur spray for orchards. Before the shipping strike sulphur stood at £14 10s. per ton in this State. The moment the seamen's strike came on, when I was called upon to make 3,000 or 4,000 gallons of lime-sulphur spray, two of the biggest firms of importers wanted £25 per ton for the sulphur. That is only one of three or four instances which I could quote to show that these firms have taken advantage of the seamen's strike so as to screw out of the unfortunate consumers undue profits. I agree with the member for North-East Fremantle (Mr. Angwin) that the Federal Government in handling much of the exporting business have not done it with that skill and judgment that should have been shown. At the same time if we wish to get at the actual cost of production on overseas goods, and to then determine the profit upon those goods, it can be done in a uniform way only by the Commonwealth Government. I hope the day will not come when we shall hand over more of our functions to the Commonwealth Government. It would be an absolute danger, not only to the interests of the States, but to the very lives and existences of the States. The Commonwealth are threatening us with financial ruin now. The State Governments should call upon the Federal Government to handle all importing. If the central authority can carry out any duties, this is one of them. If this mad craze shared by the member for Sussex (Mr. Pickering) to keep on importing goods from Germany and other countries continues, if the hon. member fancies there is nothing beyond wheat-growing for the industrial future of Australia, I can see no alternative to the Federal Government controlling Australia. The hon. member speaks about the tariff and protecting the producers and the industries. God help us! He is representing a class of people the most highly protected on God's earth, the farmers of this State. At every turn the Government are called upon to assist them, and they are never done. They wish to be protected from the front gate to the back gate and still they do not seem to be satisfied. Much has been said about the tariff by the members for Swan and Sussex.

Mr. Pickering: Cheer up.

Mr. LAMBERT: The hon. member is not very cheerful. Usually his appearance resembles that of a sanctimonious Wesleyan parson.

Mr. Pickering: I ask that that remark be withdrawn.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member takes exception to the remark.

Mr. LAMBERT: If it is offensive, I withdraw it. The hon. member is not given to looking cheerful. He hardly infuses any cheerfulness into the House when he comes here expounding his free trade nonsense. It is time the people of this country realised that, if we are to do any good in the way of developing our almost limitless resources and industries, we must shut down on those who would exploit us with the products of labour from more favoured countries. No doubt the

hon. member would like to see the products of low wage countries of the world swamping us here, and his opinions, I am afraid, are shared by many in Australia, into whom it is impossible to infuse anything like a patriotic spirit. Let me tell the member for Sussex—

Mr. Pickering: Give the Bill some attention now.

Mr. LAMBERT: There are some people who have faith in this country and its resources, who have a soul beyond chasing kangaroos and bandicoots, and who desire to see this country realise the destiny of which it is capable. That destiny can only be realised by shutting out the cheap imports from Japan and other countries.

Mr. Pickering: Especially chemicals.

The Minister for Works: Especially matches.

Mr. LAMBERT: Members must know, irrespective of their political faith, whether they be Cobdenites or other "ites," that there is no hope otherwise of building up secondary industries in this State, or indeed in the Commonwealth. One of the difficulties we experience is the backward condition of our secondary industries. We have to rely on the Eastern States and it is little short of scandalous that, notwithstanding our almost limitless resources, we have to import four or five million pounds worth of goods every year from the Eastern States. I hope members will try to realise the magnitude of this country.

Mr. Pickering: You absorb it all.

Mr. LAMBERT: I wish to try to infuse into the hon. member, however difficult it may appear to be, that it is his duty to the country, and that duty can only be discharged by showing faith in the country. He should try to catch a little of the faith which the Premier has in this State.

The Minister for Works: We are all optimists over here.

Mr. LAMBERT: I do not think any harm can be done by carrying the second reading of this Bill. The Government would have shown greater sincerity and a greater desire to curb the profiteering which exists in this State, if they had endeavoured to get uniform authority throughout Australia.

The Attorney General: How do you know they did not try to do it?

Mr. LAMBERT: If they have tried, the Attorney General need not keep the information up his sleeve. I do not think that Mr. Hughes will handle it at all unless he does so for the sake of a good election parrot-cry. I do not know to what extent the conference at present sitting in Melbourne are endeavouring to devise ways of dealing with the question. It is to be hoped they are trying to do something. If the Attorney General or the Premier has some knowledge of what is being done, it should be given to the House. It is not their sole property. We have a right to know if negotiations are in progress, or whether this Bill is only a skeleton of a humbug to meet the clamour for price fixing. We have a

right to know whether the conference is endeavouring to get the Federal Government to deal with this all-important question. It is a matter of the greatest importance, to which the greatest attention should be given by all sections of the community. Until people realise that there is a lot of unnecessary profiteering and discontent existing in the community, we shall never get the Federal Government to act in a practical way. I hope, before the second reading is passed, the Attorney General will give us some idea whether an endeavour is being made in Melbourne to get Mr. Hughes to deal with this all-important question in a practical and sensible way, instead of pandering to the soldiers and trotting around the country like a tenth rate circus clown. I do not think much good will be done by supporting the second reading, but no harm can come from it and possibly, if a central authority is not established, sensible commissioners and sensible administration locally may do something to curb the unnecessarily high prices of commodities in Western Australia.

Mr. JONES (Fremantle) [8.52]: I do not consider the Bill is worth discussing. Throughout the length and breadth, not only of Western Australia but of other countries in the world, there has been a growing agitation during the last few years against the high cost of living. The Government recognise that and, in order to stave off the evil day, have brought in this quack measure. They realise just as well as members on this side of the House that this measure is only tinkering with the question. This State, in common with every other community, is suffering from a grievous sickness. The Government doctor has been called in and, instead of endeavouring to diagnose the sickness and bringing to his assistance the medical science acquired through the ages, he says "Yes, the patient has a pimple on his nose" and proceeds to poultice it with a Bill of this description.

Mr. O'Loughlin: I call attention to the state of the House. Members troop out by the dozen whenever the hon. member gets on his feet.

Mr. Hardwick: You cannot force members to listen.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Bells rung and a quorum formed.

Mr. JONES: Owing to the poorness of the House, it was my intention to deal briefly with the measure, but now that a few more members are here to listen, I propose to proceed at some length. I rose to warn the Government that if they consider that a measure of this description will bulldoze the public and stave off the evil day for any length of time, they are making a grave mistake. It is all very well for members of the Government to line up behind the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth and go with him in his usual dignified damning of the profiteers, but do members on the Government benches realise that to endeavour to

deal with the profiteers by a Bill of this description is sheer and rank hypocrisy? The present commercial system exists for one purpose and for one purpose only, and that is to make profits. The more profits that can be made, the more successful the system is considered to be and, in order to show how sincere and consistent they are, the Government introduce a Bill to deal with the profiteers and assist Mr. Hughes in damning them. We have no alternative than to vote for the measure, but I believe the country will realise that this piece of humbug, this piece of sticking plaster, which the Government are applying to a social cancer, is nothing more or less than a mean, paltry, election dodge, and will deal with it accordingly. I do not expect any difference in the cost of living to result from this measure, and I do not think the public of this State expect it either.

Mr. SMITH (North Perth) [8.57]: I support the Bill. We have listened to-night to various discourses on the Bill and to an explanation of the operation of exchange, the working of the tariff and various other causes to account for the high cost of living. I wish to compliment the leader of the Opposition on his very clear exposition which was so substantially backed up by quotations from the evidence taken by the Interstate Commission. The findings of the Interstate Commission were very clear, and left no doubt in our minds that profiteering exists to a considerable extent throughout Australia. Of course there was really no necessity for proof in this direction, because everyone knows from his own knowledge and experience that profiteering has been rampant throughout the land. Although I am prepared to support the Bill, I still feel that this is a question which should be grappled with by the Federal Government. Our State Government will have great difficulty in dealing with the question because they can control prices only as regards products of Western Australia. Most of the goods that are sold in this country originate outside of it, and the profiteer, knowing full well his particular business, sees that the goods are loaded up before they reach Western Australia, so that the State Government will not be in a position to deal with the matter as stringently as the necessities of the case demand. I recognise the difficult position in which the Government find themselves in this respect, and I am not very hopeful that they will be able to do much good in the direction of controlling prices. But I feel that the Bill, if passed, will act as a sort of policeman, having a deterrent effect on any attempts by local profiteers to raise prices artificially. In hearing out what I say, let me remind the House of one or two glaring instances. There is the Vacuum Oil Company. That is an American Company, an off-shoot, I understand, of the Standard Oil Company; and their ramifications are such that it is really impossible for this Government or for any Australian

Government to exercise any proper control over their Australian prices. We also have the example of the milk companies. That is another instance in which the State Government cannot obtain any really effective control over local prices. The prices are fixed before the goods arrive in Western Australia, and I fail to see how the Government can exercise any effective control. I agree with the suggestion which has been put forward during the debate that one Commissioner is not sufficient to administer the measure. In my opinion, at the very least, there is sufficient work—that is, if the Government are sincere—for three active Commissioners. We have already had the experience of one Commissioner controlling a similar Statute and finding the work more than he could properly attend to; and therefore I hope the Government will see their way to alter their Bill in that direction and appoint at least two Commissioners, if not three, to administer it. I would like to go even further, and give the Commission power to act. The Bill as it stands proposes merely that the Commission should recommend prices to be fixed by the Government. That is simply putting the operation of the measure under political control, which I consider most undesirable. We may have in power a Government—I do not say this or any other Government—not anxious to see the provisions of this measure enforced, and all they would have to do would be to delay bringing into operation the recommendations of the Commission. Therefore it would be much better if the Commission had power to act on their own initiative in fixing prices. I cannot entirely agree with the proposal that all evidence taken by the Commission should be made public. There are many things which traders may legitimately desire to withhold. One trader might have an advantage over another, and it would be very unfair if he was required to disclose how he was able to work his trade cheaper than a competitor. Therefore I do not agree with the proposal that all evidence should be given in public. At any rate, witnesses should have the right to ask that their evidence be not published. With regard to the Bill generally, although there is not much opportunity for the local Government to control prices, still there is one direction in which they may exercise some effective control. I refer to the speculation that is rampant in local produce. We know that it is the practice of chaff merchants, for instance, to go around early in the season and buy up considerable quantities of chaff from the hard-up farmers—buy it while it is still in the field. When the merchants have been able to secure what they regard as the bulk of the supplies, they begin to regulate prices, and send them up sky high. That is a direction in which a great deal of good might be done by preventing speculation. There should be no buying up of foodstuffs or necessities before they are brought into market. If these people want to indulge in speculation, the

new discovery at Hampton Plains will afford them plenty of opportunity to make or lose as much money as ever they desire.

Hon. P. Collier: In the case you refer to, prices should be fixed to give a fair return on the outlay, but not to yield the exorbitant profit which the speculators desire to make.

Mr. SMITH: I think we should go further and absolutely prohibit the buying up of necessaries in advance for speculative purposes. The speculators are not philanthropists. The Colonial Secretary tells us that they buy chaff and cut it up with their engines and store it here and regulate prices. My experience is that that is not in exact accordance with the facts. The chaff is brought to Perth, and I know of my own knowledge that although exceptionally good prices have been offered for chaff in the railway yards, the speculative holders have not been satisfied but have withdrawn the chaff from sale. The Government railways have been helping them, too. The railways charge the merely nominal fee of 4s. per truck for 24 hours' demurrage. At the expiration of that time the chaff is put on the market again. With such assistance from the Railway Department, the speculator cannot be compelled to sell his chaff, and the public cannot get the benefit of lower prices, and the famous law of supply and demand has no free opportunity. The fee of 4s. is a ridiculous charge for 24 hours' demurrage whilst the speculator is making as much as £4 by hanging on to the chaff for a day. Suppose he holds it for a week, that is only 28s. demurrage. We saw chaff rise £5 in a week last season, and we may see the same thing happen again. And not only the Railway Department assist the speculator in the necessities of life. The price of potatoes has been referred to this evening. I know the Brunswick State Farm last season grew some potatoes and, instead of putting them on the market when they had been dug, decided to hold them for a better price, notwithstanding the fact that a high price was ruling. The result was that the department held the potatoes too long, and that the potatoes went rotten, practically the whole crop being lost.

The Colonial Secretary: Who was responsible for that?

Mr. SMITH: The Minister for Agriculture, I should say. Possibly the information is news to the Colonial Secretary, and he is rather indignant about it and wants to know who is responsible so that he may deal with the culprit. He can discover the responsible officer for himself. But I assure him it is well known that the Agricultural Department went in for speculating in food-stuffs and owing to lack of experience got badly beaten.

Mr. O'Loughlen: They do not hold their bacon long enough, though.

Mr. SMITH: The bacon is another story. However, the speculators in chaff who go around the country buying up produce make out that they are philanthropists inasmuch as they assist the hard-up man on the land. The fact is that they make advances to him if he

has a prospective crop and is in need of money. The Agricultural Bank could very well take up the running here. If they were prepared to assist the primary producer with small advances against his crop, it would do away with the necessity for a man having to sell when hard pressed for money. I hope the Government, if they are sincere in the wish to reduce prices, will consider the advisability of doing something in that direction. I do not agree with those who would regulate the price to the primary producer, because we know that he as a rule is not the profiteer. Take the case of the potato growers, who are supposed to be getting fabulous prices to-day.

Hon. P. Collier: Is it the grower who is getting them?

Mr. SMITH: I say he is entitled to get them. I would always favour the grower being able to send his potatoes to the open market and get whatever is offered him. If we are going to fix a maximum price for the producer, we must also fix a minimum price. It would be absolutely unfair to tell the primary producer that his price should be so much at the present time of scarcity. If we are going to reduce the price in regard to the primary producer we must also fix the minimum.

Hon. P. Collier: If you do not give him the benefit of good years you must guarantee him against bad years.

Mr. SMITH: For that reason I do not think it is possible to introduce a workable measure. How very few potato growers have been able to retire with a competency. I do not suppose the member for Sussex (Mr. Pickering) could name a single one in his electorate, where it is possible to grow excellent potatoes and get good crops. We have to take them year in and year out, and average them up. I have said all I intend to say at the present juncture. I intend to support the Bill and hope that the Government will be able to make alterations in the directions which have been suggested by hon. members.

Mr. WILLCOCK (Geraldton) [9.18]: Sufficient has been said by way of comparative statements that I do not propose to give examples of what profits have been made prior to or during the war. We pretty well agree from what we have seen in the Press during the past two or three weeks that it is the intention of the Federal Government to deal with this important matter of price fixing. We find that in the Federal Parliament the Prime Minister intends to introduce a Bill for the amendment of the Constitution, as a means towards that end, and therefore I consider that the measure before this House, although it might be an indication of the good intentions of the present Government, it may, in a short time be, as they say in legal parlance, *ultra vires*, because next session the Federal Government will deal with the whole question of price fixing. I agree that the Commissioner should be allowed a certain amount of discretion in

the fixing of prices of commodities which come before his notice. The leader of the Opposition outlined an amendment which should be accepted by the Government and which I am prepared to support. That is that any individual in the State should be allowed to go to the Commissioner and make a complaint which should be investigated, and if found to be justified, the Commissioner himself, without any delay of perhaps two or three weeks, should be able to go to the Minister and justify what has been said. Then if there be sufficient justification for him to act he should be allowed to immediately give that benefit by way of a reduction in price, to which he thinks the community is entitled. The member for Guildford (Mr. Davies) when speaking to-night—and he claims to interpret the sentiments of the working class—said that the people were not so much concerned with the high cost of living. What they were concerned about was that there were certain individuals making excessive profits. I think I can claim to know something about the working-class movement, and I can say that the working class do not care how much profit is made, provided they get sufficient remuneration for their services in order to live in average comfort and in a decent way.

Mr. Hudson: Do you say that seriously?

Mr. WILLCOCK: I do. We would not have so many deputations to the Premier if the people could live up to the standard of four or five years ago, and there would not be any demonstrations, and in fact this Bill would not have been heard of.

The Attorney General: There is no one doing that.

Mr. WILLCOCK: It seems to be one of the excuses that because we are not as badly off as other people, we are getting on all right. I say we ought to be as well off as it is possible for us to be. It does not make any difference to know that someone in some other part of the world is worse off than we are. The member for Swan made some reference to brokerage in connection with distribution. I know of several brokers in this city and in other cities who are interested in making certain commodities change hands as often as they can get brokerage. I know of a broker who sold to one person certain articles which he knew were wanted by someone else, and he transferred them to the man who required them, and charged on both transactions, while the intermediary knew nothing about it until he was sent a cheque for £5. Mr. Ryan, the Premier of Queensland, proved that during its transport from England to Australia a considerable quantity of commodities change hands and the enhanced price in consequence was equal to 25 or 30 per cent. That amount, however, was divided amongst a number of individuals and did not look much when it appeared in their balance-sheets. Various remedies have been sug-

gested for the present high cost of living. The Premier and other people have gone round the country and preached the gospel of work, and yet we seem to have no desire to keep the people at work. The Queensland Labour Government set out to introduce a Bill to give the opportunity to everyone to work—the object of the Bill being to provide employment for all who were out of work and desired and were willing to work. If there had been any desire to carry in its entirety the gospel which was being preached in Western Australia, the Government of this State would have followed the example of Queensland and introduced an unemployment Bill on lines similar to those of the Bill of Queensland. The member for Swan also made reference to the exchange rate about which we have heard a lot recently. I interjected when he was speaking, that the remedy lay, so far as that was concerned, in production in Australia. If we are able to produce most of the things we are importing, even if we produce them at 10 per cent. greater cost than in America, we shall still be 7 per cent. better off because of the fact that we pay 17 per cent. exchange. I know a man who went for a trip to Europe and who took with him fifty sovereigns. He disposed of 48 of them in Bombay and got paper money for them which, when he arrived in England, represented no less than 35s. for each sovereign. If we all could get hold of 50 sovereigns and sell them at Bombay for a similar equivalent we could get a trip to India for almost nothing. Another thing which we should endeavour to bring about in this State, but which may not meet with the approval of the Government, is the publication of the balance-sheets of the firms doing business in the State. As has been pointed out during the course of the debate, when the workers go before the Arbitration Court, they have to state the whole of their private affairs to the court—everything in connection with the cost of living, everything that they earn, the prices of their tools of trade, etc.—all has to be disclosed. The cost of living business is of such importance that the publication of the balance sheets of the firms doing business in particular trades should be insisted on and provision to that effect should be included in the Bill. We can only talk in a general way in most instances, and only those companies that have their stock quoted on the exchange are obliged to publish their balance sheets at the present time, but if the balance sheets of all the companies doing business in the State were subjected to the public scrutiny and it were found out what enormous profits were being made, it would then be possible to compel them to keep within limits. The Minister for Works said that we were all optimists. I am one, and while, so far as the Bill is concerned I do not think it will do very much good, if it does some good, and we take one step forward we shall probably get somewhere and give relief to those who most require it. I will support the second reading.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. T. P. Draper—West Perth—in reply) [9.28]: The debate has resulted in a good deal of information being given to the House and to the public, and that information will be recognised as being generally useful. There has not been much unreasonable criticism. Some hon. members have described the measure as a quack one, or a piece of hypocrisy, or words to that effect, showing by such criticism that they are unable to find fault with the Bill. On the other hand there is also the sound and solid criticism offered by the leader of the Opposition and others in the Chamber, which is criticism of a different character and couched in a very different spirit. One cannot help thinking, after listening to the debate in the House, that everyone who is concerned in any way with the selling of commodities is saying, "It is not I; it is the other fellow who is the person you want to get at. I have nothing to do with it." Everyone puts forward a different reason why prices are high. The general public, however, will get some advantage by having it clearly reported that there are many causes for high prices at present, in addition to that of profiteering. The member for Swan (Mr. Nairn) gave us various causes which are well known and which perhaps are rather intricate to follow, but which it is of advantage for the general public also to know. Another hon. member gave as one reason for the high prices the present tariff. In normal times the tariff may have some effect, but I should doubt very much whether the tariff in the present abnormal times, when our imports are so restricted, has very much to do with the matter. It has also been said that profiteering has had something to do with the high prices, but the extent of that influence is not generally known. It is universally surmised, but the exact extent of its effect is not known. Machinery is provided in the Bill by which information can be obtained to enable the public to see for themselves the extent that profiteering may be going on, as they think it is going on, and also the extent to which that profiteering enhances the prices of commodities which they are obliged to purchase. The leader of the Opposition gave us a great deal of useful information. He had evidently been to considerable trouble in obtaining it. I regret that the reports from which he quoted are not generally obtainable in Western Australia. In addition, he compiled his information and delivered it to the House in so lucid a form that it must undoubtedly have a great deal of value regarding the general question of high prices—I am not going to say of profiteering, because I think the hon. member, like myself, knows that very little evidence is obtainable upon that question at present. It struck me when listening to him that it was a pity he was not delivering the speech in another place, namely, the Federal House, and also a pity that the Federal House did not obtain the requisite constitutional powers to deal with the subject.

Mr. Lutey: Hear, hear!

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: It is obvious to everyone who has been listening to the debate, and it is obvious to many persons outside this Chamber, that we can do very little. We are a small State and are hampered by the fact that we cannot do anything which in any way interferes with interstate traffic. Many of the goods which are imported here are sold at high prices and over these we have very little control. The only things we can really deal with are those articles we produce ourselves. In regard to profiteering in these articles, they are limited in scope, because during the last two or three years we have had all our wheat and wool purchased under statute by the Government. One of the objections raised to the Bill by the leader of the Opposition was that it was not as effective a measure as that which was passed in 1914, namely, the Act to control trade in war time. I think that the only respect in which that Act can be said to have been more effective than the present Bill is that the penalties under that Act were heavier. The Act itself was passed at a time when little was known about the subject. It was really an experiment in legislation. If applied to-day the Act would not, I think, enable the requisite information to be obtained in order to permit the subject to be properly dealt with. So far as the penalties set out in the Bill are concerned, there is really no objection, if the House thinks that they are too small, to their being increased. That is merely a question of detail and is not one that is going to be opposed by the Government. Another defect in the Bill that was, I understand, instanced by the leader of the Opposition, was that it would depend upon the administration. I am rather astonished at this being raised by the leader of the Opposition, because I think it has always been the attitude taken up by both sides of the House that the administration must take the responsibility of carrying out an Act, and that they have no right to delegate that responsibility to others, and therefore they must stand or fall by their own actions in administration. So far, therefore, as that can be alleged as a defect, if I have understood the observations of the hon. member aright, it is a matter which I doubt very much would be altered in Committee. There is another objection also which has not been voiced by any other hon. member, and it is that the Bill itself is limited in time. I ask hon. members to think seriously about this. What else can they expect? Legislation of this kind is still in the experimental stages. We are not living in normal times. The world is out of joint and people are hysterical in more senses than one.

Hon. P. Collier: Finish the quotation—"O cursed spite! That ever I was born to set it right."

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: People think abnormally, and there are many difficulties which crop up in the aftermath of

war. They do not know where to turn and are inclined to see grievances in every hedgerow. It is only natural. We cannot expect anything else. Therefore, to pass a Bill of this nature, which interferes with the established principles of commerce and also with what has generally been recognised as the law of supply and demand, and to make such a Bill permanent now, would not only be an act of indiscretion but an act of folly. Another question which arises is that there should be more than one commissioner. Of course if one commissioner is not sufficient to effectively carry out his duties under the Act and make the necessary inquiries, the difficulty will have to be met. In order to carry out the Act there can be no objection to appointing more than one commissioner. That also is merely a question of detail. Where I do hesitate to endorse the remarks of the leader of the Opposition is when he goes further and says that a section of the community, namely the wage earners, should be represented on a board of commissioners. Let us see how far that carries us. Who is not a wage earner in the State. The wage earners in the idea of the hon. member are to have representation on a board. The natural consequence of that is that we have had the member for Sussex (Mr. Pickering) showing that the producers must also have a representative on the board. Another hon. member says we must have two representatives on the board, one on behalf of the wage earners, and the other on behalf of the producers. Where in the name of commonsense do the public come in? Are they not to have any representation? When we are dealing with a tribunal which has the right of recommending prices to be fixed and to go over a man's books and examine them and probe into his business down to the bottom, we must have a body of men, not representative of any particular class, but one to help the public at large. As the Bill stands, the Government must take the responsibility of administering the Act, and of appointing such men as they think can be relied upon to give effective justice to all classes of the community.

Mr. Lutey: Give Mr. Lazarus the job; he will manage it.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Another question which arises is that all the information obtained by the commissioner should be made public. An analogy is drawn, and I think incorrectly, between what would take place before this commission and what takes place in the Arbitration Court. If hon. members will think for a moment they will see that there is no such analogy. A union of workers goes to the Arbitration Court with the object of having a minimum wage fixed. There is no secrecy about their minimum wage. Everyone knows it, and it does no harm to let the people know what it is. They go there with that object, and in order to obtain it evidence is given as to the cost of living. How does that apply when we are applying, as we are in this case, an

abnormal remedy to fix prices and in order to fix these prices we examine all the books of a man's business. The man might unfortunately be in insolvent circumstances. The commissioner examines his books and the information is given to the public. What credit is such a man going to get in the future? This is simply an instance. There is no analogy between what takes place in the Arbitration Court and what will happen by reason of the action of a commissioner under this price-fixing measure.

Hon. P. Collier: I suppose no worker is in a position to be a bankrupt.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: He may or may not be, but his books are not examined.

Mr. Chesson: Yes, they are. All the accounts have to be examined, and he has to produce them.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: As regards the limitation of profits, I said in introducing the Bill that I was not aware of any precedent which would help in the drafting of this measure. It certainly would be a dangerous thing if Western Australia, a small portion of the Commonwealth, were to adopt a measure of the kind which fixes a definite interest or profit to be made out of capital, and such rate was not adopted by the rest of the Commonwealth or the rest of the world. Any action of that kind would, of course, have a bad effect upon the trade of Western Australia. The member for Sussex suggested that he preferred some fixed rate of profit to the prices being fixed. Putting aside the question of competition, which will affect my argument, if a trader knows that he will only be allowed to make a certain percentage of profit, he will naturally not be so careful in the management of his business and with the capital he has in it. The capital will therefore not be so efficiently employed. Take the converse: where a price is fixed at which a man can sell it will really achieve a better result as regards the price the public will have to pay. It is obviously to the interest of the trader to produce his goods as cheaply as possible, and the capital he employs will, therefore, be more efficiently used. So far as our knowledge goes at present, it appears to me that we have no option. If we are going to take steps to bring down the prices of certain commodities, the only practicable way of doing it is by a measure of this kind, and not by a measure which imposes a limitation on profits. I speak without knowledge of what has taken place in other countries, and what I am now saying may not prove to be correct; but at present I think the measure we have here would be more practicable and effective than the alternative which has been suggested. I do not desire to detain the House at length. Many of the points which have been mentioned as likely to prove contentious will no doubt be thrashed out in Committee.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

BILLS (3) RETURNED FROM THE COUNCIL.

- 1, Crown Suits Act Amendment.
Without amendment.
- 2, General Loan and Inscribed Stock Act Amendment.
- 3, Justices Act Amendment.
With amendments.

BILL—STATE CHILDREN ACT AMENDMENT.

Council's Message.

Message received from the Council notifying that amendments Nos. 2 to 7 inclusive, No. 9, Nos. 11 to 19 inclusive made by the Assembly had been agreed to, but that No. 10 had not been agreed to and that Nos. 1 and 8 had been agreed to with modifications.

BILL—HEALTH ACT AMENDMENT.

Council's Message.

Message received from the Council notifying that it had agreed to the Assembly's amendments.

BILL—PRICES REGULATION.

As to Committee Stage.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. T. P. Draper—West Perth) [9.51]: I move—

That the Committee stage of the Prices Regulation Bill be made an order of the day for the next sitting of the House.

Mr. TROY: The Attorney General cannot go back on that, since other business has been before the House. That Bill is in the air.

Mr. SPEAKER: The second reading of the Prices Regulation Bill was carried, and before the House proceeded to deal further with the Bill I proceeded to read the Messages which I had received. The Minister is now in order in moving that the Committee stage be fixed for the next sitting of the House.

Mr. TROY: I have no desire to block the Minister but he should have moved that motion immediately after the second reading had been carried. Several motions have since been taken that the consideration of certain other Bills be made Orders of the Day for the next sitting of the House.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member knows well that Messages received from another place are read to the House so as not to interrupt business. The second reading of the Prices Regulation Bill had been carried when I proceeded to read the Messages. The Attorney General is now in order in moving either that I do now leave the Chair for the purpose of considering the Bill in Committee, or that the Committee stage be made an Order of the Day for the next sitting of the House.

Mr. TROY: I want to take this point of order now, that the Attorney General is not in order at this stage in moving that the Committee stage of the Prices Regulation Bill be fixed for the next sitting of the House, because the time he should have done that was when the second reading was carried. Other business has intervened in the meantime, and this House has passed several resolutions, and we cannot now go back to a Bill which has been left in the air at a certain stage. However, I have no desire to push the point, though I know the proceeding is not regular.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Attorney General is in order in moving his motion.

Question put and passed.

BILL—TRAFFIC.

In Committee.

Resumed from the 25th September.

Mr. Stubbs in the Chair; the Minister for Works in charge of the Bill.

Clause 40—Regulations (partly considered):

Mr. SMITH: Subparagraph (1) of paragraph (i) of Subclause (1) seems to me to overload the Bill. In view of paragraph (j) which already provides for regulating the driving and so forth of teams, it is quite unnecessary; and I move an amendment—

That in paragraph (i) of Subclause (1), subparagraph (1) be struck out.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: This paragraph is already law in this State by Section 169 of the Municipalities Act. I confess that I do not quite see the reason why it should be here, but it can do no harm, and I hope the Committee will not strike it out.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Like the member for North Perth, I see no need whatever for subparagraph (1). It covers exactly the same ground as subparagraph (j).

Amendment put and passed.

Mr. SMITH: In subparagraph (o) I do not like the word "restrict." I think it is quite sufficient if regulations are made to regulate processions on roads, without restricting the processions. I move an amendment—

That in subparagraph (o) of paragraph (i) of Subclause (1) the words "and restrict" be struck out.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I hope the Committee will not agree to the amendment. Seeing that it has been decided that the police shall control the traffic, the words are in order. The police who are dealing with this matter should have the power to deal with processions.

Mr. SMITH: I do not see why any section of the community who wish to have their processions should not be allowed to hold them provided they carry them out under the regulations. I cannot imagine a case where a Minister would wish to restrict any

community or organisation. If he has the power to regulate processions that is all he can expect. What I would like to know is what kind of a procession should be stopped and what kind should be allowed.

Mr. ROCKE: In the event of the two words "and restrict" remaining, will it be possible to strike out one of them. The word "and" should be replaced by the word "or."

Mr. MUNSIE: If the Minister has power to regulate processions that is all that is required. I am not prepared to give power to any man to say that any section of the community has not the right to hold a procession.

Mr. NAIRN: There are good reasons why the clause should remain with the words as they appear. It is very easy to imagine such a procession as would be calculated to bring about a state of disorder. Take the goldfields as an instance. Assuming that a certain race desired to have a procession there it would be wise in the interests of law and order to prevent it. It would be useless to say that we could regulate it. There should be power to absolutely restrict.

Mr. Munsie: Do you think it would be possible for the race referred to to attempt to hold such a procession?

Mr. NAIRN: They would.

Mr. Munsie: Not at all.

Mr. NAIRN: I think so and under those circumstances the Minister should have power to restrict. The Minister would not think of restricting a procession that had been carried out for years.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: A measure has already been passed on two occasions providing only for the regulating of processions. Would the Minister's power be exercised under this Bill? The city authorities might say to a body desirous of holding a procession, "You are not to hold that procession until you tell us how it is to be constituted." But it very often happens that it is not possible to state until the very last moment how a procession is going to be constituted.

Hon. P. Collier: The ignorant bumbles; they should be dumped into the river.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: There are very few places of any size outside of Perth where attempts have been made to restrict processions. In Fremantle, Claremont, Perth, Guildford, Midland Junction, Kalgoorlie, and Boulder the Minister has no power under this Act, for in the Municipalities Act the power is given to the local council. That is about the only provision in regard to traffic which has not been repealed. I hope the amendment will be carried.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I am sure the good sense of the Committee will agree to the amendment. There may be infrequent instances such as suggested by the member for Swan, when racial feeling is running high, when it might be advisable to restrict the holding of processions. But even so, the possible abuse that might be made of the provision far outweighs the need for the restrictive powers suggested. Already there

is sufficient power to meet any possible circumstances, whilst, on the other hand, I do not like the word "restrict." There has been too much restriction exercised in Australia in recent years. So accustomed have we become to having restrictions on our freedom that we are inclined to accept it as a matter of course.

Mr. Smith: We are getting Germanised.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That is so. Whilst in other parts of the world freedom has been achieved, I am afraid we in Australia to a certain extent have been losing it. The word "restrict" is an invitation to ignorant bumbles, such as we have in the Perth city council, to exercise a power of restriction; indeed such is the extent of their understanding that they would read it as an obligation upon them to restrict. Personally, I would take away such power from them until the citizens become sufficiently well informed to elect councillors, who will represent them in a reasonable spirit. I would have no objection to placing this power in the hands of the present Minister for Works if we could be assured of his continued occupancy of the office. As we cannot have that assurance let us strike out the word "restrict." The member for North-East Fremantle has pointed out that the schedule does not provide for repealing the power already possessed by the local authorities under the Municipal Corporations Act. I hope the hon. member will attend to that when we reach the schedule. In the Perth city council to-day are a pack of men who can only be regarded as a reflection on the intelligence of the ratepayers who elected them. The city council have asked the Eight Hours Committee to submit the entire programme of the Eight Hours' procession for their approval.

Mr. Munsie: But it is not going to be submitted.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I should think not, and if the Perth City Council stand in our way we will throw them into the river. I will gladly lead the procession with that object in view. There is no body in this State, whether English, Irish, Scotch, or Eight Hours, who will submit to the tyrannical action of those ignorant bumbles in the city council. I hope the Committee will accept the amendment.

Mr. LAMBERT: I support the amendment. I agree with the leader of the Opposition that it is time we stripped some of the municipal councils of the right to say whether any organisation shall hold a procession. There is growing up in this State an assumed authority by local councils which must be curbed by Parliament. The Kalgoorlie town council the other day had the impudence to level an insult at the organised labour bodies of that community. The Perth city council the other day had the audacity to level a direct insult at the Catholic community of the State, and possibly to-morrow we shall have our Scotch friends in all their picturesque attire, attacked by the council on the score of indecency. Recently the Kalgoorlie council

prevented us from speaking in Hannans-street, a privilege we had enjoyed for 20 years. Some of the powers should be taken from the councils and vested in the Minister. There would be no fear of the Minister acting other than wisely, because he is answerable to Parliament.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member has expressed his opinion about a body of men who are just as liable to do good work or to make as many mistakes as members of this House. Councillors' positions are honorary, and the State is greatly indebted to them for their services. I should regret to think that the work I did in the Perth city council was regarded as valueless.

Mr. Lambert: They did not dabble in politics at that time.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: So long as processions are orderly and do not interfere with other traffic, I see no reason why they should not be allowed, but there should be power to see that order is maintained. At times, political feeling runs pretty high, and processions of different factions might clash. The responsible body must have power to maintain order and to ensure that its desires are respected. I prefer that the words proposed to be struck out should be retained. They are not intended to interfere with anyone's freedom.

Mr. Munzie: I do not think they would have been included if it had not been for what happened recently in the metropolitan area.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member is entitled to his belief, but the framers of the Bill know neither politics nor religious beliefs. They have tried to include such safeguards as are essential. That is all.

Hon. P. Collier: You want to squelch Percy Bruntton.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Not at all. While one might feel inclined to squelch some people, broad-minded men like the leader of the Opposition regard such cases more in sorrow than in anger.

Amendment put and negatived.

Mr. NAIRN: The Minister has given me an assurance that provision has been made to meet my suggestion. Therefore I have no desire to proceed with my proposed amendment.

Mr. WILLCOCK: The Bill so far makes provision that no person shall drive any vehicle negligently or recklessly. I wish to retain the section which gives power to stipulate speed limits for motors. The Automobile Club desire that speed limits shall not be specially provided. Recently I saw two motor cars almost crash at the corner of Hay-street and Barrack-street. In my opinion both were driving recklessly and negligently; yet it would have been impossible to secure a conviction against the driver of either under the provisions of this measure.

The Minister for Works: If the Bill is passed these cases will be dealt with under Clause 25.

Mr. WILLCOCK: Some power must be given to show what is negligence and what

is recklessness. Every motor car driver who has been charged in connection with any fatality has always pleaded that he has been driving neither negligently nor recklessly. This seems to have been inspired by the Automobile Club in order that the motor hogs may drive at a pace which in their opinion is not beyond what it should be. Parliament should have power to say that motors should not exceed a certain pace. I move an amendment—

That in subclause 1, paragraph (i), a new sub-paragraph be added to stand as subparagraph "q" as follows: "to regulate the speed or pace which persons shall ride or drive or vehicles be driven round the corners or across the intersections of any street or streets, way or ways, or across any bridge or along any particular part or parts of any municipal or roads district."

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: The portions of the Bill we have already passed will give sufficient power to deal with this. We have provided for the regulation of traffic or the use of vehicles on roads, and the regulation of traffic covers speed, and everything else. The Bill also makes provision for prescribing rules to be observed in respect of any vehicles to be used or driven on roads.

Mr. Willcock: I should like specific power given in this instance.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: If that is the case the Committee should proceed to make regulations to cover everything.

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

Ayes	9
Noes	16

Majority against .. 7

AYES.

Mr. Angwin
Mr. Chesson
Mr. Collier
Mr. Jones
Mr. Lutey

Mr. Roche
Mr. Troy
Mr. Willcock
Mr. Munzie

(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Broun
Mr. Brown
Mr. Draper
Mr. Duff
Mr. Durack
Mr. George
Mr. Griffiths
Mr. Hickmott

Mr. Mitchell
Mr. Nairn
Mr. Pickering
Mr. Scaddan
Mr. Smith
Mr. Thomson
Mr. Willmott
Mr. Hardwick

(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

Mr. SMITH: Subparagraph (g) of paragraph (ii) seems another case of overloading. Apparently its effect would be to prevent the driver of a licensed vehicle from picking up a child of his, or a friend, unless the child or the friend hired the vehicle.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The object of the subparagraph is to prevent people who are not prepared to pay for their trips from riding on a vehicle which is plying for hire. The Municipalities Act contains a similar provision, which is designed for the benefit of those who let cabs and cars out on hire. Persons who are not prepared to pay should not enjoy the same privileges as those who do pay.

Mr. SMITH: The subparagraph is quite unnecessary, and I move an amendment—

That in paragraph (ii) of Subclause (1), subparagraph (g) be struck out.

Amendment put, and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	11
Noes	15

Majority against .. 4

AYES.

Mr. Brown	Mr. Nairn
Mr. Draper	Mr. Pickering
Mr. George	Mr. Scaddan
Mr. Griffiths	Mr. Willmott
Mr. Hickmott	Mr. Hardwick
Mr. Mitchell	(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Angwin	Mr. Mulhany
Mr. Brown	Mr. Rooke
Mr. Chesson	Mr. Smith
Mr. Collier	Mr. Thomson
Mr. Duff	Mr. Troy
Mr. Durack	Mr. Willcock
Mr. Jones	Mr. Munsie
Mr. Lutey	(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

Mr. PICKERING: I move an amendment—

That in Subclause (1) paragraph (vi.) be struck out.

This paragraph proposes to give power to limit the number of passenger-vehicle or carriers' licenses which may be granted in any district. As regards my town, Busselton, it is considered that any number of licenses should be granted; and I see no reason why the proposed restriction should apply elsewhere.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: A similar provision is embodied in the Municipalities Act, and I presume the object is to prevent an unlimited number of vehicles plying for hire.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That cannot occur under this Bill even if the paragraph is deleted.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: There was a case in which one cab did well, whereupon two or three more cabs came along, and ultimately none of them did well. The local authorities do not wish to make the paragraph prohibitive, but they desire power to ensure that men make a decent living. However, I am not particular about this paragraph.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: The subparagraph merely empowers the Minister to make a regulation if he thinks fit. Personally I would prefer to see the paragraph deleted. No regulation if it is made can over-ride the clause. This clause gives the Minister power to state by regulation what shall be a reasonable requirement.

Amendment put and negatived.

Paragraph (vii.):

Mr. SMITH: The words "having previously engaged" should be added to the clause, otherwise a demand might be made on a carrier to undertake an engagement when he might be engaged by somebody else.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: But this is only to make regulations.

Subparagraph (c) of paragraph (viii.):

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I move an amendment—

That subparagraph (c) be struck out and that the following be inserted in lieu—"Prescribe the maximum weight which might be taken across any bridge or culvert."

Amendment put and passed.

[The Speaker took the Chair.]

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 11.15 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 1st October, 1919.

Questions: Wheat Silos	703
Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act Amend- ment	704
Statute of Limitations, protection of creditors	704
Public Service appointments	704
War Precautions (Communities) Regulations	704
Motion: Financial relations with Commonwealth	704
Bills: Kalgoorlie Friendly Societies Investments Validation, 2B	711
Divorce Act Amendment, Com.	716

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

QUESTION—WHEAT SILOS.

Hon. H. CARSON asked the Honorary Minister: 1, Are the Federal Government still prepared to loan moneys to the State Government for building wheat silos? 2, If so, will the Government introduce this session a Bill for their erection.

The HONORARY MINISTER replied: 1, No. 2, Answered by No. 1.