

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.**THE CHIEF SECRETARY: I move—**

That the House at its rising adjourn till 2.15 p.m. tomorrow.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 4.34 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 1st April, 1943.

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The PRESIDENT took the Chair at 2.15 p.m., and read prayers.

BILL—COMMONWEALTH POWERS.*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. A. THOMSON (South-East)

[2.18] : The Bill before us is one of the most important ever submitted to Parliament since I have had the privilege of participating in the public life of Western Australia. I shall support the second reading, but not because I approve of the measure, for I reserve the right to vote against the third reading should it not be satisfactorily amended in certain directions at the Committee stage. I would vote for the Bill with a greater degree of confidence had the Commonwealth Government adopted a more reasonable attitude when it broached the subject of post-war reconstruction. Had it consulted the State Governments seeking their co-operation in dealing with a matter of such vital importance, I feel confident the States would have welcomed such an appeal and would have rendered wholehearted help in coping with the work.

On the other hand, the Commonwealth Government threatened Australia with the holding of a referendum even at a time when the enemy was at our gates. It sought to force from the States autocratic powers which, if granted, would have meant the elimination of State Parliaments and our right to self-government. Like the dictators, the Commonwealth Government, under the guise of the exigencies of war, found a way

to gain what they desired through the National Security Regulations, which gave the Government so much power that it became hungry for the exercise of still further authority. The present Commonwealth Government claims to represent democracy, but it can be said with truth that it has become absolutely dictatorial and by the measure now before us seeks to gain complete control over the destinies of the people of Australia. If suspicion has arisen in the minds of many people respecting the introduction of this legislation, it is entirely due to the extremely dictatorial attitude adopted by the Commonwealth Government, and by its methods in approaching the very important subject of post-war reconstruction. For weeks over the air and through the Press propaganda was indulged in threatening the holding of a referendum, and daily was it stressed that only Canberra was capable of dealing with this important matter.

By comparison, the Federal propaganda equalled that of Goebbels in Germany where, day in and day out, the Germans were told that the Nazis were the only section fit to control the country. In somewhat similar strain Australians were told that only Canberra could do the job, which was entirely beyond the capacity of the States. On the other hand, the States, through their Legislatures, had been building up and developing their respective portions of Australia long before the Commonwealth came into being. Let us examine the dictatorial attitude of Canberra! When the thinking people of South Australia and Western Australia began to display doubts about this legislation and its possible effects on the development of their respective States, Canberra actually threatened a judicial inquiry into the actions of those who were exercising their traditional privilege of thinking for themselves, and refusing to be hustled into supporting a measure which may have serious repercussions on the future citizens of this State. Let me quote from a telegram from Canberra which appeared in "The West Australian" dated the 18th January, 1943—

The (Federal) Government is becoming more concerned about the propaganda in South Australia and Western Australia against the Powers Bill. The propaganda seeks to bring about the rejection of the Bill by the Parliaments of both States and the Government takes exception to it on the following grounds—

(1) If successful, it would either force the Commonwealth to face the post-war period with inadequate powers or precipitate the war-

time referendum which the Constitution Convention considered should be avoided.

It would be very difficult for Canberra to convince me that the Convention was a constitutional convention as we have understood the term in years gone by.

(2) It is costing large sums of money, which the Government considers should be used instead in the war effort.

(3) It is relying on theories of laissez faire which the Government claims must have a bad psychological influence on a community which will need more and more to discipline itself towards the aim of winning the war.

I do not know what the cost of this propaganda may have been in South Australia, but I do not think that very much money has been spent in this State in the effort to get the people to consider the position that would be created if this far-reaching measure were passed. In fact, I am sure that the expenditure in this State was small. The Commonwealth Government is evidently of the opinion that the community is in need of greater discipline for winning the war. In my opinion the Commonwealth Government itself has shown a serious lack of control and failed to make any attempt to discipline the community to the end of winning the war. In many ways it has shown a lamentable weakness. Its action in sending out so many thousands of letters to the people appealing for support for the war loan shows a serious lack of that principle which the Commonwealth itself is advocating.

I felt absolutely disgusted recently to see the methods being adopted on behalf of the Commonwealth Government to induce people to subscribe to the war loan. In Forrest Place we had the spectacle of men belonging to the Army indulging in wrestling and boxing exhibitions. Most of us have seen similar exhibitions at country shows over the years and know that they are regarded merely as sideshows. To my mind it is derogatory to the dignity of the Commonwealth that those in charge of the loan campaign evidently consider that the only way of inducing the people to appreciate their responsibilities and subscribe to the war loan is by staging exhibitions of this sort.

Hon. C. B. Williams: There were no politicians at all in those exhibitions.

Hon. A. THOMSON: If the Commonwealth Government is sincere in the desire to discipline the people of Australia with a view to winning the war, it should do, in the matter of raising the requisite funds to

carry on the war, exactly what it is doing by conscripting men and women into the various branches of the services. I believe that a majority of the people would willingly support a properly co-ordinated scheme whereby everybody would play his part in the direction of providing funds for war purposes. I consider that the methods adopted, in providing such shows as were given in Forrest Place, do not reflect credit on Australia and must excite ridicule of our enemies. The Bill provides for the continuance of its operation for a period of five years after the war; but many thinking people believe that the granting of the powers sought will mean their transfer to the Commonwealth for all time. The duty of the House is to amend the measure so that it will secure the recovery of our State rights and privileges after the agreed period has elapsed.

One member said we should not be suspicious of the motives or desires of the Commonwealth Government. In the incidents I propose to quote I do not wish to convey that they are against the credit of the present Commonwealth Government. The hon. member in question urged that there should be no dwelling on past misdeeds. However, there is also the true saying, "By their deeds shall ye know them." I could quote numerous instances of insincerity on the part of the Commonwealth Governments as regards the general progress of Western Australia. Some years ago an opportunity offered itself for the development of the Yampi Sound iron deposits. Those deposits were in process of development, which at the time would have enabled this State to reap considerable benefit.

Hon. C. B. Williams: And also Japan!

Hon. A. THOMSON: Allegedly in the interests of Australia as a whole, the Commonwealth Government of the day decided that the deposits should be conserved for the Australian people. In this Chamber I submitted a motion—which I regret did not receive a great deal of support—that in view of the Commonwealth Government's disallowing any development in that area, it should make some compensation to Western Australia for the severe loss it suffered through its decision. However, no suggestion was made that compensation would be granted. I understand that Western Australia has the highest percentage, per capita, of men and women enlisted in the Army and

other services, and that the same remark applies to Western Australian contributions to war loans. Certainly it cannot be said that we received adequate consideration when it came to war expenditure.

Other members have mentioned our gold-mining industry. All of us are aware, through Press reports, of Mr. Dedman's statement that Western Australian miners were perfectly satisfied with the closing-down of their industry for the sake of the war effort. That industry, notwithstanding, has been a vital factor in the prosperity and increased population of Western Australia. Certainly from the present Commonwealth Government the industry has not received that consideration to which it is justly entitled. While there are many who say that our monetary system will have to be altered, the general trend of present-day thought is that gold will play a highly important part in post-war reconstruction.

Let us now take the present Commonwealth Government's action regarding labour for the wheat harvest! When fixing high wages, the Government accorded scant consideration to the question of allowing the producers to pass on increased costs, as was done in the case of manufactures and business concerns. But how hurriedly did the Government cancel the small concession just before the meeting of the Commonwealth Parliament! And its dismissal of Messrs. Teasdale and Diver from the Australian Wheat Board and the appointment in their places of apparent supporters of the Government savoured strongly of a policy of spoils to the victors. Yet Australia as a whole benefited materially from the experience of bulk handling, which the wheat industry had gained since the inception of the scheme in Western Australia. Mr. Teasdale, who has a complete knowledge of the industry, and Mr. Diver, who is president of the Wheatgrowers' Federation of Australia, received the first intimation of their dismissal when it was announced through the daily Press!

Now I come to something a little nearer home. The Legislative Assembly appointed a Select Committee to inquire into the operations of the Australian Wheat Board at North Fremantle. On the 9th March the Select Committee's report was presented, and in it we learn of an amazing position. The Commonwealth Government, through the Wheat Board, decided on the 4th September,

1941, to erect a hospital silo, the growers' representatives on the board being in a minority on the question. Construction was authorised during the meeting of the board on the 8th and 9th January, 1942, and the contractors, Messrs. Haunstrop & Co., sent plant to Western Australia for the purpose of beginning the work of construction. Just fancy! Such is the administration of which it has been alleged so frequently that Australia as a whole would benefit if that administration constituted the sole Government in Australia! Our State Government did not approve of the proposed action of the Commonwealth Government, and we find from the report that on the 30th January the Prime Minister telegraphed to our Premier that the Wheat Board's activities were being seriously delayed by the absence of authority to enter upon the land affected. Our Minister for Lands, Hon. F. J. S. Wise, refuted that statement in a lettergram. Next we find that despite Mr. Wise's protest our Premier was advised that Western Australia's attitude towards the Wheat Board had been noted—an indication that some attention was to be paid to the State Government's wishes.

During the first week in May, however, the State Director of Works, Mr. Dumas, discovered that building operations had been commenced on the hospital silo and had been in progress for some time. When this information was received, the Minister for Lands intimated that it was the first notification the State Government had of its protest being disregarded. On page 5 of the Select Committee's report we learn that the Prime Minister, the Minister for Defence, and the Minister for the Interior were being applied to for permission for Commonwealth public servants to be authorised to give evidence before, and produce relevant material to, the Select Committee. This is what the committee says—

As it appeared from the correspondence from the Defence Department and the Department of the Interior that witnesses associated with certain Commonwealth Government departments would not be available for some considerable time—if at all—the committee was obliged to reach its conclusions without having the evidence of such witnesses before it.

That is the treatment which is being meted out to this State by the Minister for the Interior and also by the Prime Minister, who is the Federal member for Fremantle. We find that our State Government and a Select Committee appointed by the Parliament of this State made requests to the

Commonwealth Government which were ignored by it. Yet there are people who say it would be a good thing for Australia if we had one Parliament only! What I have read constitutes a damning indictment of the Commonwealth Government; and it certainly invites us to give the most careful consideration to the passing of a measure such as the one now before us. The instances I have quoted show that the present Commonwealth Government has ignored all sections of the community but one. It claims that it wants an all-in effort to win the war, but we find that it does not practise what it preaches. Only those people belonging to the Labour Party are considered to be worthy of trust.

In our own State, Mr. Watts, the Leader of the Opposition, moved for the appointment of a committee, to be composed of members of Parliament, to consider and assist in a rural post-war reconstruction scheme. The Minister for Lands said, in effect, that he and the officers whom he had deputed to consider this problem were the only persons capable of solving it, and that it was unnecessary to appoint the suggested committee. The Minister for Labour helped to defeat Mr. Watts's motion. He, in effect, made the same statement as did the Minister for Lands. He pointed out that the committees which he had appointed were quite capable of looking after the matter of public works to be undertaken when the war ended. I am happy to say, however, that he has since reconsidered his decision and that a committee, comprised of members of Parliament, has been appointed to consider these matters. Unfortunately, so far as the war effort is concerned, the Commonwealth Government and the State Government, while pleading for an all-in effort, in practice have done everything they possibly can to keep the control entirely in the hands of the political section to which they belong. While I wish to credit the Commonwealth Government with the good intentions it expresses, nevertheless, I feel this House has a duty to perform. That duty is, as far as is humanly possible, to safeguard our State rights when dealing with this measure in Committee.

I desire to place on record my sincere appreciation of the services rendered to this State by Mr. Watts, the Leader of the Opposition, who was one of our representatives at the alleged Convention recently held in Canberra; and also to Mr. Ross McDonald,

the Leader of the National Party. To those two gentlemen this State is under a considerable debt of gratitude for their earnest endeavours to protect the rights and privileges of the State. Several members have mentioned a publication which was printed under the direction of the Hon. H. V. Evatt, K.C. There is no doubt it behoves everyone who seriously considers the future of his children and children's children carefully to examine the proposals, now submitted for consideration by this House. Dealing with post-war reconstruction, Dr. Evatt says—

Though individual subject-matters of power are also enumerated, they are given by way of illustration, and not by way of limitation. That appears on page 120. On the same page, he says—

It is obvious that, if the amendment is accepted, the duties that will devolve on the Parliament in time of peace will be added to, and that some increase will be required in the number of members of the national Parliament.

If there is to be an increase in the number of this State's representatives in the National Parliament, I hope the basis will be that adopted in the case of main road construction, that is, that smaller populations and larger areas will be taken into account, although some members have stated that they are neither desirous nor anxious that there should be any increase in our Federal representation.

On page 120 of Dr. Evatt's publication he makes the following statement—

The measure is not a party measure and I hope it will not be so considered.

If we may judge by the way in which the Bill was passed in another place, it is, as submitted to us, a purely party measure. It is to be regretted that party should be imported into this matter. I personally am considering it only from the point of view of protecting the rights and privileges of Western Australia. I have lived in this State many years and feel I have a bounden duty to myself and my children, as well as to the people who returned me to Parliament. That duty is to safeguard, as far as I possibly can, the rights and privileges of this State. I desire to quote a further statement, appearing on page 122 of Dr. Evatt's publication, reading—

The Australian Labour Party is the only political party with a forward-looking policy. It visualises post-war reconstruction to be in the nature of a new social order based upon democracy and the rights of all men and women

to enjoy the fruits of honest toil. It rejects dictatorship.

I am sorry to say that the Labour Party in Australia has not carried out that principle. Indeed, I am afraid it has exercised a dictatorship which cannot in any way be claimed to be true democracy. I shall support the second reading but reserve to myself the right to vote against the third reading unless the Bill is amended in a way that will as far as possible safeguard the rights and privileges of the people of Western Australia.

HON. E. H. H. HALL (Central): One cannot think of this Bill without its being brought home very seriously to one that this is a time when members of the State Parliament are required to take that broad national outlook which such an occasion demands. I think that most of us very naturally shrink from having hurled at us the accusation that we are State-righters, that our horizons are bounded by the particular State in which we live, that we are anti-Federal and that we are, in short, little-minded Australians. It is very easy for people to pass such reflections upon us. I can only say that in common with other members I have thought and read and listened to as much as possible on this subject, so that I might try my level best to take that outlook which I think a Bill like this demands. Were it not for actual happenings I might be inclined to be led away, as the people of Australia were led away in 1900, by the sentiments of idealists, who spoke of one great, big, solid united Australia, one flag, one destiny. That appeals to most people. We do not like to think that we are cut up into various groups in this great big Continent but rather that we present a united front to the rest of the world. I repeat that were it not for the experience we have had one might be inclined to listen again to the idealist.

We were very properly appealed to in this Chamber the other day to drop our suspicious attitude, and if ever there was a time when it was necessary for appeals of that kind to be made it is now. We have been continually told that something better will come out of the dreadful state in which the world finds itself today. That something better has been referred to as a new order. We certainly will not realise our expectations, either individually or as a body, unless we can rid our minds of the suspicion we have towards each other individu-

ally and politically, that suspicion which exists in this State and in Australia amongst our own people who are yet animated, as is freely admitted, with one aim and object—the good of the country. Unless we can get rid of that suspicion how can we look forward to working amicably with foreign people, to ridding our minds of that suspicion towards them to which we are told we are subject because we are so far removed from the rest of the world? Even when we were getting people out from the Old Country to populate this vast undeveloped State of ours there was a good deal not merely of suspicion, but open hostility, exhibited towards our own kith and kin from oversea.

The advice tendered to us the other day is advice that should be remembered. I would be prepared to accept that advice and to believe all the printed matter that Dr. Evatt has sent over; I would be prepared to use a vulgarism, to swallow it hook, line and sinker, were it not for the fact that I know through actual happenings the treatment that has been meted out to this my native State. We cannot get away from that which has actually happened. Many of us believe—and that belief has not come through something we have read or been told but from what has actually happened—that as a result of our experiences we can prove to any impartial tribunal that this State has not received the equitable treatment we were led to believe it would receive. Another thing we have been requested to do is to rise above party politics. I think the records will prove that since I have been in this Chamber I have tried as far as possible to rise above party politics. I have voted more frequently for legislation introduced by Labour than has any other non-Labour member in this House, and I can point to my record to justify my claim that I have tried to vote impartially on measures brought before this Chamber. But when I am asked to view this measure apart from party politics I would be false to all that is within me if I forgot this undoubted fact: That unification is part of Labour's platform and has been for years. Not only does Labour want to do away with State Parliaments but what has always amazed me is that it also wants to do away with the Senate. Members have stated here, and it has been said in other States, that this is the thin end of the wedge and I would not be in my right senses if I did not concede that that statement is absolutely justified by the facts.

Another thing about which there cannot be two opinions is that the present Commonwealth Labour Government has repeatedly stressed, as it must, the vital necessity for our bending all our energies to and spending all our time and our money on winning this war. No one will dispute that. It is the duty of the Commonwealth Government, and it has done that. It has urged on the people of Australia the absolute necessity of doing that. However, we find that side by side with the repeated and continual exhortations at this time when the ship of State is called upon to weather the severest storm in history, the Commonwealth Government, whose sole responsibility it is to lead its people in the way they should go, in order that the ship may safely clear the storm, is scattering all over the place its money which it says is so essential to win the war. We say that this is the time and place to remind ourselves of the inconsistencies of the people who are leading Australia in its most critical period. That being so, how can any sane man with evidences such as I have given—and they are not things I have imagined, but actualities—accept the promises put forward by Dr. Evatt?

Hon. G. B. Wood: They are good speakers, but bad actors.

Hon. E. H. H. HALL: I could understand people saying of me or thinking about me, "Well, it ill-becomes you to find fault with the Government for making an increased amount available for social services." I plead guilty to the fact that I have asked the Labour Government here repeatedly to do a fair thing by the widows and orphans of this State. I am glad to know, although it is probably not through my repeated and continual advocacy but from very shame's sake, that at last something has been done. It did get away from that miserable, inadequate and paltry payment of 7s. per week, which had been made for years to the widow for her to feed, clothe and educate her children. The amount was raised to 9s., but not in all cases. So they say, "What about you? You have been talking about inconsistency, and now that the Commonwealth Government proposes to give further aid to the people you find fault with it." A very homely saying comes to my mind—"there is a time and place for everything."

Our young aircraftsman—I notice he is not in his place today; I hope he is engaged on something more important—continually

tells us that whenever the Government proposes to do something there are a lot of old men here who say that the time is not opportune. If we believe the people in charge of this continent when they tell us that the war is vital, and that there is no time to be lost; that all the money we have got must be devoted to this one purpose, then why in the name of fortune do they do what has already been done, namely, increase pensions and scatter money around on other social services? There would be some justification for indulging in extravagant and bitter language on this subject, but I do not intend to do so. It is of no use. Democracy today is accepted in Australia as a dead letter because the Commonwealth Government has not a majority. We are confronted with the fact that Australia is being ruled by two independent gentlemen; independent in politics. But when it comes to the acceptance of positions, they are not so independent. If a man is truly independent and wishes to retain the independency he professes he will be completely independent and not accept anything from either party.

I am not a Shakespearean scholar, but I well remember some of the things the great dramatist said. I am sorry to say I have not always heeded these few quotations. One was, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." Another was, "Lend your money and lose your friend." If he did not say that he should have done. Another thing he said was, "Our debts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt." It is because I remember these words that I am honestly and genuinely fearful that we might do something that would cause us to lose the good that we might win by listening to the voice that comes through in so many millions of printed pamphlets from the East. But I cannot forget what has been dealt out to us. So I say it is my duty to those people who have had to bear the heat and burden of the day to remember that and to vote accordingly. I might just as well occupy the stage for a few minutes as anyone else, because I realise only too well that all that can be said about this Bill has been said. One thing has not been mentioned yet in this Chamber—and one tries to get away from what has been said before—and I intend to make reference to it.

If ever there was an occasion on which all political parties of this State were absolutely unanimous it was when the present Com-

monwealth Government, with the Prime Minister a Western Australian member, perpetrated one of the greatest injustices that this State has ever suffered in the blow it dealt to our goldmining industry. It brought all our political parties together as one man. Those at the other end of this building, who are telling us that we should have confidence in these people, had very little confidence in them only a few months ago. People might say, "Well, you are so vehement, serious and earnest about winning the war, be consistent. These men were wanted; they were badly wanted to assist in winning the war." All right! Can any member honestly answer this question: If the goldmining industry had meant, to the economics of New South Wales or Victoria, what it did to this State, would it have received the treatment it did here? It would take a good many Dr. Evatts to make me believe that. It could have happened, but it is highly improbable because the number of members from New South Wales and Victoria simply would not have allowed it to occur. But with our five members, even though one of them is the Prime Minister, in the House of Representatives they, and particularly the Prime Minister, were powerless to help.

I hope I shall be forgiven if I refer to another matter. I do not wish to jump in and deal with a topic that some other member may desire to discuss, but I have referred to it previously. We have not heard from any of the representatives of the North Province, but what I shall mention is a State matter. I have in mind the vast undeveloped area that is known as the North-West. The present State Government has been in power for many years. Has it made any approach to the Commonwealth Government to take over that big undeveloped area? But do not let us blame the little fellows here. What about the big chaps in the Eastern States who want to grab all the powers set out in the Bill? Have they demanded that in the interests of Australia it was necessary for the Commonwealth to take over and develop that huge territory? I have not heard of anything of the sort. Had it not been for a providential dispensation, we would possibly by now have had to answer seriously for our failure to realise the mistakes that have been made. I shall say no more on that phase.

Hon. G. W. Miles: You cannot blame the present State Government. Previous Governments neglected the North as well.

Hon. E. H. H. HALL: I am specifically referring to the scheme mooted some years ago in favour of the Commonwealth taking over part of Western Australia above a certain parallel. I do not care what Government has been in power in either the State or Federal sphere; I say that for the good of Australia that vast empty space in the North should have been developed. From those who have been there and appreciate the wonderful opportunities for development that exist in that part of the State, I have heard of what may be done, provided the necessary capital is forthcoming. The State has not at its disposal the money required for such a project and so it must be a task for the Commonwealth Government. Has that Government displayed any great anxiety to deal with that problem? No, it has not! Now the Commonwealth Government wants all these powers outlined in the Bill in order to provide for the terrible times we are to experience when the war is over.

Some of us were rightly reminded the other day of what occurred when hostilities ceased in 1918. Surely members do not forget what happened then! Was there any scarcity of money in those days? Certainly not! Everyone was busily engaged in supplying the requirements of the men who returned from the war, and of their families as well. I remember it well, because that was about the time I left the Commonwealth Public Service and went into business. Land was freely changing hands and extensive areas were being opened up and developed in the hinterland. That was not when we experienced difficult times, because at that stage the returned soldiers were drawing their deferred pay. It was a few years later that trouble developed—and that is what we have to bear in mind and prepare for now.

Members ask why there is urgency about this matter. I do not desire to be misunderstood. I think that the sooner we can secure some co-ordinated plan to provide for the great many men and women who will return to civil life when hostilities cease, the better it will be for all concerned. We must be careful in that respect. As to those who have indicated that they will vote against the second reading of the Bill, they are permitted to act as their consciences dictate. I cannot adopt that attitude. I am determined that, as far as lies within my power, those upon whose efforts we are relying for

our safety and for our protection from foreign aggression shall have everything possible done for them in the future. So that I shall not lay myself open to blame for failure to do everything necessary to enable any Government concerned successfully to inaugurate, control and supervise the many activities that will have to be set in motion, I shall see to it that the required powers are forthcoming.

Personally, I do not know that the Commonwealth Government has not already all the powers that are essential, particularly when we ask ourselves who was responsible for the repatriation of the men and women who returned from the 1914-18 war. Obviously it was a Commonwealth matter. The Repatriation Department in this State is a Federal department. If the Commonwealth Government handed over some of the activities connected with various operations to the State Government and the State Government did not handle the work in a manner that was regarded as satisfactory, the Commonwealth Government had its remedy. To my mind, repatriation is wholly and solely a Federal matter. However, in order not to incur any risks whatever, I am prepared to give the Commonwealth Government all the powers it seeks, to enable it to do that which we all feel should be done in order to deal expeditiously, energetically and efficiently with the repatriation of all those who are engaged in the task of subduing our enemies. The Bill contains some clauses that I do not favour, and when these are considered in Committee I shall act accordingly. Meanwhile, I support the second reading.

On motion by Hon. G. W. Miles, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY: I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 2.15 p.m. on Tuesday, the 6th April.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 3.18 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 6th April, 1913.

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The PRESIDENT took the Chair at 2.15 p.m., and read prayers.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Lieut.-Governor received and read notifying assent to the Public Authorities (Retirement of Members) Bill.

BILL—COMMONWEALTH POWERS.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 1st April.

HON. G. W. MILES (North) [2.20]: I am supporting the Bill.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: All the clauses?

Hon. G. W. MILES: The hon. member will hear my views as I proceed. I will deal with the amendments on the notice paper on their merits at the Committee stage. Those who are opposed to this Bill missed their strongest argument, which is that a moribund Parliament is asked to give powers to the Commonwealth. That has not been stressed, and that is one of the reasons why I say I will deal with the amendments in Committee according to my discretion. There should have been a properly constituted Convention to go into this question and a referendum should eventually have been taken. The proposed period of five years for the duration of the Act means nothing. Once these questions are referred to the Commonwealth, they will be referred for all time. There has been a lot of criticism of the Bill and of the Commonwealth Government. The last time I made a speech in this House I referred to squealers in Australia against England. Today I will deal with Western Australian squealers against the Commonwealth. They have put up arguments from their point of view.

But there is another side to the question. A lot of good secession arguments have been advanced. While I admit there have been certain disabilities through Federation, those disabilities apparently could not have been avoided. On the other hand, there have been