

there is power in this measure to bring into force similar provisions which will operate by virtue of State legislation. The Commonwealth Act, under which the Coal Distribution Committee now operates, is one of those Acts which is for the duration of the war and six months afterwards and there is doubt constitutionally as to whether it may be held invalid at any time. I am not quite sure whether the Commonwealth proposes to withdraw from this field immediately or in the near future, but I am endeavouring to get that information. However, if the Commonwealth should withdraw or if its existing legislation should be inoperative, through being unconstitutional or otherwise, then under this Bill the Coal Distribution Committee can function so long as it is needed to ensure that our coal supplies are put to their best possible use.

Those are the three principles contained in the Bill. I have gone into the figures of the coal production on the Collie field and in 1939 the result was 557,535 tons; in 1943 it had dropped, owing to war causes, to 531,546 tons. In 1945 it had recovered to 543,000 tons and in 1946 to 642,000 tons, while in 1947 it rose still further to 730,000 tons. On the figures available it looks as if the production for 1948 will be somewhere near 800,000 tons, so we can see the progressive production of coal from our Collie field and the growing demands of industry for the coal resources which we can supply.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Are those figures for calendar years?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes, they are for calendar years. There are two new mining activities which we hope will be in production before very long; one of which will be in production we hope in about 12 months' time. With these added mining activities superimposed upon the present mines, then the production will grow appreciably larger as it is needed for the economy of the State.

Mr. May: It will be up to a million tons a year.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes, 1,000,000 tons a year should be, I think within comparatively early reach. Last year the representatives of the Collie Miners' Union proceeded to Kalgoorlie and met the mine-owners in the goldmining industry with a view to consulting with them as to the

supply of Collie coal for the goldmining industry on the Eastern Goldfields. The miners and their representatives are interested in securing markets and outlets for our coal resources and by the measure now before the House they will be associated with the development of our Collie field and the best utilisation of our coal resources.

Mr. May: It can be landed in Kalgoorlie cheaper than firewood.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It is an important aspect to be considered and it is a development which will be of considerable interest. Those are the three main features of the Bill: the development of our coal resources on the best possible lines, the provision of industrial machinery for the conciliation and settlement of any differences on the coalfields, and machinery to secure the equitable distribution of coal. I will be glad, as best I can, to discuss the matter any further in the Committee stage and in the meantime I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. May, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 12.20 a.m.

Legislative Council.

Thursday, 11th November, 1948.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Questions : Infantile paralysis, as to medical research	2339
Railways, (a) as to transport of prams	2339
(b) as to bookings for Eastern States	2339
Motion : Hospitals, staffing and administration, to inquire by Royal Commission	2332
Bills : Western Australian Marine, report	2349
Government Railways Act Amendment, 2r.	2349

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

QUESTIONS.**INFANTILE PARALYSIS.***As to Medical Research.*

Hon. G. BENNETTS asked the Chief Secretary:

Is it the intention of the Government to appoint a board of medical practitioners to investigate the treatment of infantile paralysis? If so, when will the research commence?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

An advisory committee, consisting of senior medical practitioners, has already been appointed to advise the Government in connection with all matters relating to poliomyelitis. This committee sits from time to time for the purpose of advising and assisting the Government.

RAILWAYS.*(a) As to Transport of Prams.*

Hon. E. M. DAVIES asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Will the Minister ascertain the reason why prams are not permitted to be carried between Fremantle and West Perth and intermediate stations on passenger trains leaving Fremantle at 4.26 p.m., and 4.36 p.m. on week days?

(2) Will the Minister point out to the Railway Department the inconvenience and delay caused mothers with children by being compelled to wait from 3.50 p.m. to 5.5 p.m. for transport?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) The trains referred to have fine connections to make at Perth during the height of the business peak period, and acceptance of intermediate pram traffic would cause late running of these and connecting trains.

(2) Restrictions on carriage of prams during peak periods are common to most forms of transport, but are kept to a minimum so far as rail services are concerned.

(b) As to Bookings for Eastern States.

Hon. E. M. DAVIES asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Is it possible for the Railway Department to make facilities available so that bookings for the Eastern States may be made at Fremantle?

(2) If not, what are the reasons?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) Bookings for the Eastern States may be made at the Fremantle Railway Station.

(2) Answered by No. (1).

MOTION—HOSPITALS, STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION.*To Inquire by Royal Commission.*

HON. G. BENNETTS (South) [4.36]: I move—

That in view of the unsatisfactory hospital conditions in the Goldfields and the constantly recurring difficulty in staffing the hospitals, this House requests the Government to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into and report upon—

(a) the provision of nursing staffs adequate to meet the needs of the hospitals;

(b) the administration of hospitals.

My reason for moving this motion is the inadequate staffing and the condition generally of Goldfields hospitals. For some time past at Kalgoorlie trouble has been experienced in obtaining nursing staff. Of late the position has become so serious that letters have been written by two different bodies to the Kalgoorlie Council requesting that something be done, and public meetings have been called.

In "The Kalgoorlie Miner" of the 8th November there appeared a letter from the medical profession on the Goldfields asking that a public meeting be called of the local governing bodies and other interested parties on the Goldfields, to see what could be done to relieve the shortage of nursing staff and thus provide adequate accommodation in the hospital. In that newspaper on the 3rd November there appeared a letter, part of which read—

Some nurses in the theatre on Wednesday were on duty for 20 hours and long hours were expected on the following day.

That sort of thing is occurring fairly often. There is only about half the required number of nurses at the hospital, with the result that they are working long hours. They are doing a wonderful job but cannot be very happy under those circumstances. When younger girls hear the nurses talking of the unduly long hours, they will not become trainees. On the 27th October the following appeared in the Press—

So acute is the staff position at the Kalgoorlie District Hospital that unless some development occurs within the next few days many more beds will have to be closed down.

At Kalgoorlie we have a 200-bed hospital, but for two years we have been unable to use the intermediate ward, which means that a beautiful ward remains closed through lack of staff. In addition, many beds cannot be availed of for the same reason. As recently as the 17th October I received a complaint from a Mrs. Gould, who came in from along the Trans. line to enter the hospital, having been sent there by Dr. Young. But on inquiries being made for accommodation, it was found that she could not enter the hospital because of insufficient nursing staff. There were plenty of beds available, but no nurses. I think members will admit that it is time something was done to alleviate this position.

On the 5th November I called at the Kalgoorlie Hospital and on that day the nursing staff comprised one matron, one assistant matron, eight A class sisters, seven C and D class nurses, 45 trainees out of a required number of 88, and ten nursing assistants. The tutor sister at this hospital is doing a wonderful job and her work is an asset to the Goldfields people, but I understand she has now given notice of her intention to leave. She is discontented with the state of affairs existing at that hospital. The nurses' discontent, I understand, could be removed if they were given concession fares on their long week-ends off, or time off in between their annual leave. The only concession fare the nursing staff receive is on their annual leave.

While she was at Kalgoorlie, it was recently necessary for the tutor sister to visit her people at Mt. Barker, and her fare alone cost her £14, and, in addition, she lost a week's pay for the time she was absent. Quite a number of the girls nursing in the Kalgoorlie Hospital have left homes either in the metropolitan area or in country districts, and consequently they become lonely and wish to visit their people occasionally. If some arrangement could be made to permit these girls to visit their families at different periods, it might assist in overcoming some of the problems in relation to the nursing profession today.

The Kalgoorlie Hospital includes a maternity ward of 30 beds, and the nurses there are kept exceptionally busy. The average number of patients per day throughout the year is 25 and, of course, there are 25 babies also to care for. When visiting my daughter,

who was an inmate of this ward, I noticed that the nurses were particularly busy and that the mothers were helping them. Since then the matron has denied this, and we cannot blame her for that, because she does not wish to have any criticism published regarding her hospital. However, when one sees what is happening and knows the actual facts, one must have something to say; it was brought right under my notice. During that visit, a patient who was an ex-nurse was assisting the nurses by weighing the babies. There were three mothers in the kitchen and my own daughter helped in serving out tea during the evening. The matron, of course, said that the mothers had no right to do that. On that night there were six expectant mothers in the hospital, and three babies were born within three minutes, which caused the whole staff to be very busy, and consequently the mothers had to assist the nurses.

The staff at the Kalgoorlie Hospital is extremely obliging and I think everyone will agree that nurses and sisters in hospitals go out of their way to help patients. In September, 64 babies were born and during October, 57. That will give members an indication how the population on the Goldfields is increasing. I have talked to different matrons and nurses in various districts and ascertained from them that if there were an interchange of matrons and nurses, perhaps from the Eastern States, for a term not exceeding three years, the position might be improved.

A sister told me that on one occasion she was sent to take charge of a certain part of a hospital, and when she reported for duty she carried out the work she was instructed to do. However, when pay day arrived, she was paid only at the ordinary nurse's rate. She complained to the matron who told her it was the responsibility of the department, and also that she considered there was too much red tape in the Medical Department in the administration of hospitals. There is also a little corruption there. I know nothing about that, but if a Royal Commission were appointed it would probably discover where the trouble exists.

Two matrons also told me that if yearly conferences were held and properly conducted, this would assist in solving some of their problems. The reason for their

comments regarding the conducting of these conferences was that, when one such conference was held, no business of any importance was done. The object of the conference seemed to be to get the nurses together to have a chat over a cup of afternoon tea. If the Royal Commission were to inquire into that aspect they could perhaps establish a better basis on which these conferences could be held. One of them told me that, while at the conference, she spoke to a trainee from one of the training schools, who said that the trainees were very disappointed with the matron on account of their being called upon to work long hours. When they went to the matron and asked about their time, she replied, "You are here to get a certificate," as much as to say that if they made any complaint, they would be scrubbed at the examination. Such things are apt to cause considerable discontent amongst the nurses.

I visited the Coolgardie Hospital on the 3rd October. The maternity ward there has been closed down. At the time of my visit, there were 16 patients and, during that week, the number was expected to increase to 24. At that hospital the staff consisted of one matron, six nurses, a cook, an orderly, a laundryman and four maids. There was no nurse holding a double certificate and the matron in consequence had to work very long hours. She is not a woman to complain; she was very obliging, but such a burden is too much to expect anyone to carry. This sort of thing is liable to cause discontent. This matron is a fine type of woman and there was such harmony amongst the staff that it seemed to be like one family working together.

However, unless some of the disadvantages under which they are working can be removed, I am afraid that conditions at that hospital will also drift. The matron and nurses are living in one room, and the night nurse also has to sleep there so that when the day nurses are on duty, the night nurse cannot get her proper rest because the other nurses have occasion to use the room in order to get their clothes, change, etc. No washing or bathing facilities are provided at the quarters; the nurses have to go to the maternity ward and use the ablution facilities there. No hot water system is installed; all the hot water needed has to be heated in pots on the stove. Thus members will appreciate that ordinary facilities are

badly needed. Hospitals cannot manage without hot water in abundance because the need for it is so great and so constant. At Coolgardie the hospital board is responsible for the payment of the doctor's salary, which is £1,000 a year.

The Esperance Hospital, which is also in my province, is probably the worst hospital of the lot. On the 12th October, when I, with other members, inspected the place, I learned that an application had been made to the Medical Department a long time before for extensions, including a maternity wing and additional accommodation. Esperance is an 11-bed hospital and yet it has 24 beds. Some of the women patients have to be put in the children's ward, and it has been necessary to borrow extra beds locally. I believe that four were obtained from the Fresh Air League Home and the rest from residents of the town. A couple of cots also had to be borrowed for children. Since then some secondhand beds have been sent from other hospitals and, on the occasion of my next visit, they were being painted.

The staff consisted of one matron, no sisters or nurses, three maids, an orderly, a laundry-woman and no cook; yet this staff had to undertake responsibility for the cooking as well as caring for the patients. The matron, a woman of outstanding type, told me that she had been on her feet for 24 hours continuously when the hospital was crowded. A message was sent to Norseman requesting the assistance of a nurse to help in the emergency. A nurse agreed to go but could not get transport for two days. The hospital has no hot water system and the small stove provided has to be used for heating water. What a long way behind the times that is! I repeat that it is most essential for all hospitals to have an abundance of hot water, and the facilities should be provided to supply it. I think Dr. Hislop will bear me out in that statement.

It has been stated that the average number of beds occupied over a period would be very low. Until the last five or six years, very few people would go there. The doctor was a man of 85, and people preferred to go to Kalgoorlie or Norseman for treatment. At that time the Norseman Hospital was crowded. Since then a good medical man has been obtained for Esperance and is doing an excellent job, so that patients now, instead of going to Norseman, remain at

Esperance. The hospital is also catering for people from the mallee districts as well as Ravensthorpe. In view of the improvements being made by the road board to put Esperance on the map, I believe that in a short space of time the population will show an increase. In view of the visit of the Honorary Minister for Agriculture and his Press statement about the land at Esperance, I feel sure that increased settlement will result. A large fish canning factory is being erected at Esperance. Forty more men will be employed there before Christmas.

There is the Fresh Air League Home down there and three contingents of 120 children in each party will be entering that institution. Thus, during the next month there will be 360 children in the town, and hospital accommodation will need to be available in case of sickness. The influx of visitors to Esperance for the Christmas season last year totalled £7,000. The hospital has 11 beds and there is a 14.7 bed average. When I was there 24 patients were in the hospital. On many occasions there have been 20 patients and some of them have had to go out on to the verandah. I went there on the 31st October and amongst those who were on the verandah was a half-caste woman. There is no provision allowing for the separation of half-castes from others; but we are all humane, and proper accommodation must be provided for everyone.

The population at Ravensthorpe is very small. There is a hospital, but no staff is available. The flying doctor calls at the place, but there was no sister during the time I visited Ravensthorpe. I also went to Lake Grace and the staff told me of the discontent that existed. They had to have their meals in the sitting-room and that is not in the best interests of the nurses. I have newspaper cuttings which indicate that people on the Goldfields are very discontented at the drift in our hospitals, and something should be done immediately. Even if it costs the State a few thousand pounds, it is better to expend that money in restoring our own people to health than to introduce into the country certain classes of immigrants that are coming here these days.

Last year, Dr. Hislop, one of our leading medical men, went to America to inspect

hospitals there. In this House we heard him speak about his visit, and his remarks were extremely interesting. I also saw pictures which he showed of some of the hospitals he had inspected. Nothing appears to have been done as an outcome of his trip to the United States. I think that members of this House should look to Dr. Hislop for advice and constructive suggestions as to how to bring our hospitals up to a satisfactory standard and how to deal with our nursing problems.

I know that in certain hospitals there are matrons who have been there too long and who appear to regard the hospitals as belonging to them. This makes it very hard for girls to work with them. From what I have seen, and from what I have been told by many of these girls who have approached me during the past month, I would consider that two years is quite long enough for matrons to be at a hospital, or three years at the outside. In that way we might save our nurses. On the Goldfields we are continually putting nurses through training schools, but there are no amenities for them when they have passed and no encouragement for them to remain. We spend money to train them and away they go. Ways and means must be devised to keep these girls. There ought to be a Royal Commission to inquire into the matter, or perhaps Dr. Hislop may be able to tell us of a better way out. The local governing bodies convened a public meeting on Wednesday and they will be making suggestions to the Chief Secretary as to what might be done.

The Chief Secretary: You mean to the Minister for Health.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: Yes. I suppose other members will be able to tell of conditions in their own districts. I have not been to Southern Cross recently and will not speak of the conditions there, because I have not any first-hand information and do not want to mislead the House. I wish to make an inspection and perhaps I may be able to say something about it later. I have brought this matter forward to indicate the position that exists in the places I have mentioned, and other members will have an opportunity to voice any complaints they wish to make.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [5.7]: I fear that a Royal Commission would not assist us in any way; and I think that the hon. member has brought this motion forward merely, as he said, in order to show the state of affairs that exists and in order that other members can make their complaints. The Government knows only too well the condition of the hospital buildings throughout the State and the position that prevails with regard to the shortage of staff—not only nursing staff, but domestic staff as well. I was somewhat surprised at the mildness of the hon. member's remarks.

Hon. G. Bennetts: I did not want to make it too hard.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY: Quite obviously the hon member has not seen the conditions in other towns, which are infinitely worse than those in the places to which he refers.

Hon. G. Bennetts: I did not want to chip in on other members' districts.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY: Whether that is so or not, the hon. member is asking for a Royal Commission to inquire into the position throughout the State; but he referred only to hospitals that, in comparison with others, are quite good. I am not trying to deny that the state of affairs in our hospitals is bad. The staff numbers are far below what they should be; but I would like to say this concerning the matrons, the sisters and the trainees: They are all doing a wonderful job, especially outback.

Members: Hear, hear!

THE CHIEF SECRETARY: They are doing their work under exceptionally poor conditions. There are many married trained nurses who, especially at Kalgoorlie, have given as much of their time to the hospital as they have been able to spare from their home duties, in order to assist in the maternity ward. The hospital at Kalgoorlie in comparison with some others is in a good position. When I was last there, the intermediate ward was closed because of lack of staff, and the question of staff has been exercising the mind of the Government for a considerable time. There are reasons why the staff difficulty is so acute, and I would like to mention some of them.

During the war the calls upon the services of young females who would normally

have become nursing trainees, accompanied by lavish advertisements in favour of the Auxiliaries to the Armed Services and war factories, resulted in a reduction of the numbers in training. During some of the war years the loss of trainees and nurses due to marriage was considerably higher than the number trained. This was specially noticeable in 1943, when 119 completed training and 259 were married; and in 1946, when 176 completed training and 236 were married. During the war years, 332 more nurses were married and were lost to nursing than the number who completed their training. This takes no account of the losses to nursing from war causes nor the heavy loss in trainees from marriage and other causes.

Members can appreciate that of those who undertake training, there are many who decide they do not like the life. A number become sick, and others accompany their parents, who transfer to other places. Not only trained nurses but also trainee nurses get married, and this adversely affects the position. The effect of all this was not felt so much during the war as afterwards. Some of the nurses whose husbands were in the Services, continued nursing during the war; but when the war ended they left the hospitals in order to join their husbands and take up domestic duties.

An increase amounting to nearly 18 per cent. in bed days over a period of eight years is another cause of staff shortage, and this tendency has been accentuated by the Commonwealth Hospital Benefits Act. The Commonwealth pays 8s. a day to each patient or to the hospital in which a patient is accommodated. The result is that people who formerly stayed at home when they were sick now desire to enter hospital because the cost is little or no more to them. Again people on the medium incomes can afford to go to hospital because they have 8s. a day paid by the Commonwealth towards their hospital expenses. As a result hospitals are very overcrowded.

Take maternity cases: There is a great number of medical men who refuse—I will not say "refuse"—but they prefer not to, and some of them actually say they will not, attend a woman for a maternity case except in a hospital. Hence all maternity hospitals are full. The day after I took over the office of Minister for Health. I

received a deputation from the members representing the Fremantle district.

Hon. G. Bennetts: From the Goldfields.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I had two, one from the Goldfields and one from the Fremantle district. They followed each other and were approximately two days apart. Included on one of those deputations was the previous Minister for Health and these deputations came along within a week of our taking office to know what the Government intended to do about hospitals generally, as well as maternity hospitals.

Hon. G. Bennetts: We were sent by the local governing bodies.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: It was extremely flattering because when the deputations came to me they apparently expected me to do something within a week although the previous Government had had 14 years to take action. At the end of that 14 years there was an acute hospital shortage, especially with maternity hospitals, and these deputations, one member of which was the ex-Minister for Health, came to me to see what I could do about the position.

Hon. G. Bennetts: Our President came with us, too.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Yes, the President came with one of the deputations to see what could be done after the Government had been in office for a week, and yet the previous Government had not been able to do anything over the previous 14 years. During the depression period—1930-1933—the birth-rate dropped considerably and we are now suffering as a result of that decline in the number of young women who would normally be applying for training. Every effort has been made to get trainees. The hours have been shortened and the wages raised. The wages at the moment are higher than they were a short time ago; and because the hours have been shortened to 40 per week, it means that we need more nurses.

Hospitals in the country, including Kalgoorlie, should be training institutions, but they cannot get sufficient young women to undertake the work. The Kalgoorlie Hospital's normal requirement of trainees is 100, but it is at present 30 short of that number. If it is not possible to get trainees to go there, I do not know how a Royal

Commission is going to get them. Mr. Bennetts suggested some better conditions—

Hon. G. Bennetts: Not better conditions. Their conditions are good.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Then what did the hon. member suggest?

Hon. G. Bennetts: I suggested that amenities be provided, such as rail travel, to make them more contented.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: If they are allowed to leave the place, they will not return. What we want to do is to stop them from leaving, and I cannot see that their running down to Esperance and other places would be of any use.

Hon. G. Bennetts: What they want is to get home on their long week-ends or every quarter or get free passes to Esperance.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Unfortunately they do not get any long weekends as they must be available to the hospital as required. True, they are allowed days off, but I do not know how we could give them two or three days' leave to go down to Esperance for a week-end on a free pass. They are very well paid and are well cared for and I do not think there have been any complaints about the treatment of trainees. The conditions of the various hospitals are very bad, not only in the places mentioned by the hon. member but also throughout Western Australia, and every effort is being made to improve them.

Unfortunately we cannot get new buildings erected because it is not a question of money but a question of construction. When tenders are called we do not receive replies because there is so much building work available in the city, and consequently builders will not go into country areas. Tenders have been called for work at Kalgoorlie, Wooroloo and Collie, and we cannot get one reply. In Kalgoorlie tenders have been called three times, and still nothing can be done.

Hon. G. Bennetts: Not at the price you want to pay.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: It is not a question of price. We cannot get tenders.

Hon. G. Bennetts: I do not think that is right.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: With a Government building there is so much supervision that the contractors do not

worry about putting in for the job while there is so much other building work available where they are not so closely supervised. I do not suggest that the contractor will jerrybuild for other people, but with Government projects there is certain supervision and builders apparently object to it. In a number of cases no tenders have been received when called for, even on two or more occasions, and work cannot be proceeded with. This is particularly regrettable because our most urgent works are those associated with country training schools. The failure to get the required improvements must constitute a handicap to the desired expansion of training.

In Perth we have taken over Forrest House, and £75,000 is to be spent on a nurses' home at the Children's Hospital. When or how we are going to get it built, I do not know; but everything possible is being done. The main improvements to the Kalgoorlie Hospital will be to the midwifery ward, but no satisfactory tender has been received. The complete renovation of the Kalgoorlie Hospital is also open for tender and if a suitable one is received, work should commence before long. The Leonora Hospital is being substantially rebuilt with the energetic assistance of the hospital board and the Sons of Gwalia Mine management from materials available at the Edna May Mine. Substantial work, amounting almost to rebuilding is also in hand at Mount Magnet by the transfer of buildings from Youanmi. At Meekatharra considerable rebuilding will be undertaken by transfer of buildings from Reedy Hospital.

Hot water and proper fire services have been added to the Norseman Hospital, while requests have been made and are being investigated for improvements and enlargements at Esperance. Although a complaint has been made about Esperance, I would point out that there is a very excellent hospital, fully staffed, at Norseman. Therefore, they are not nearly as badly off in the Esperance district as they are in many other parts of the State. I am not saying that the hospital should not have this work carried out—it will be done as soon as possible—but there are other parts of Western Australia besides the portions mentioned by the hon. member.

Hon. G. Bennetts: The Norseman Hospital would not be in that condition had it not

been for the assistance of the mining companies.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: A large number of hospitals would not be as good as they are if it were not for the work carried out by local residents and boards throughout the State. They keep them up to the mark and Norseman has an excellent board. The shortage of nurses is not confined to Kalgoorlie or Esperance or any other portion of the State; it is worldwide.

The added competition of other forms of employment in factories, offices, etc., throughout the British Empire and America has also made the position worse. Many of these positions were filled by men until the stress of war made the employment of women unavoidable, and unfortunately, the women are remaining in those jobs. Over a period of 13 years the number of women employed in a typical group of industries rose from 3,165 to 6,690. The deficiency of nurses has been officially stated in England to reach 40,000, and in America it has been authoritatively estimated at 75,000. In every State of the Commonwealth and New Zealand the same condition exists, and the problem is not one which can be solved immediately by the importation of nurses from other places. It is, however, one of the gravest problems and the Government has given close attention to means of overcoming the situation.

The staffing of hospitals is not as inadequate as it was, but no means exist by which remaining shortages may be spread evenly. Consequently, crises in one town or another continue to arise and can be overcome only by strenuous effort. In January, 1947, the shortage was calculated as being 217 trained nurses, and 91 trainees. The registered shortage today is 83 trained nurses and 53 trainees. Notwithstanding the shortage of nurses in Great Britain, a nomination for 250 nurses was placed with the Commonwealth Government. Against this a number has arrived, but because of the grave shortages of nurses in England, no great influx can be expected from there.

In the Western Australian Agency in Savoy House, London, a notice was put up calling for trained nurses to migrate to this State but at the request of the authorities it was removed as it was not a fair thing to take trained nurses away from England when they are so urgently required there.

The pay for nurses in Western Australia is not exceeded in any other State. Trained nurses from England and the Eastern States who have registered with the Nurses Registration Board totalled 189 in 1947 and 192 in the 10 months of 1948.

In addition, the Government has twice concurred with the Nurses Registration Board in improving the salaries, allowances and conditions of work for all nurses and hospital workers. It has often been said that the nurses in other States enjoy better conditions and that nurses from this State go to the Eastern States on that account. That is not so, because there is always a movement of nurses from State to State and all round the world. By this means we get an exchange of nurses and consequently there is no need to arrange for exchanges between States. They move around with the object of seeing the world, and in that way we get our fair share.

Two years ago less than 500 nurses were in training in the metropolitan area, while the Government scheme for training at Wooroloo and in Kalgoorlie and country hospitals had broken down. The number of trainees in the metropolitan area has been increased to add to the annual output, as well as to meet the needs of the enlarged accommodation in the Royal Perth Hospital and the demands for shorter hours. There are now, in the metropolitan area, 621 nurses in training, whilst in Government hospitals and at Wooroloo another 200 are training. These numbers will increase progressively as new preliminary classes are commenced and the earlier trainees are absorbed into the hospitals. Unfortunately, we could not get enough applicants to fill the openings for trainees.

Obviously the Children's Hospital requires adequate accommodation for nurses and extensive buildings are being erected at King Edward Memorial Hospital to provide nurses' quarters. The position is very bad at that institution and members will agree it is essential that that institution should be provided with a properly trained and fully adequate staff. That is where the training in midwifery is undertaken from which the whole State will benefit in due course, so that obviously proper facilities must be provided there.

[Resolved: That motions be continued.]

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Members will realise the enormous number of nurses required for the Royal Perth Hospital, the King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and also the various other hospitals in the metropolitan district. The old method of training has broken down. The previous Government realised that and passed a measure to amend the Nurses Registration Act, the object of which was the creation of a new class of nurse whose training would be specialised for dealing with tuberculosis. There are now 64 nurses undergoing that training. Efforts were made to secure male nurses for training in this work, but that was not altogether a success. Personally, I believe male nurses could be trained to carry out the work satisfactorily, if only they were available.

To build up the training of general nurses in country hospitals, the present Government appointed an organiser of nursing training, and the Nurses Registration Board approved of several of the larger country hospitals as training institutions, subject to important improvements being effected in the facilities for modern nursing and also in connection with the living accommodation available. Every possible step has been taken by the Government to meet those requirements and the number of nurses now training under that scheme is 134. However, this scheme is suffering some embarrassment through lack of suitable accommodation for a central school where preliminary training and annual periods of theoretical training could be undertaken. This objective necessitates the provision of living accommodation for approximately 50 girls, together with domestic staff, model hospital wards, and the installation of all the equipment and fixtures with which a nurse should be familiar. It has been impossible yet to secure any premises that are capable of being remodelled for this purpose, though several schemes are still under investigation.

Members will realise that it represents a job of considerable magnitude that is difficult to achieve in view of the need for housing. Much work has been done by the Government as the result of advice tendered by Dr. Hislop, but unfortunately it cannot give full effect to his desires because of the housing situation. Then again, the staffing position at Wooroloo a few months ago was catastrophic.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That is a good word.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: It describes the situation. Following a group nomination made by the previous Government and pursued by the present Administration, 58 Balts were received and employed at Wooroloo. Many of these have undertaken training as nurses and all have performed excellent work, so the institution is now running in something like an efficient manner. The crisis, which was acute and threatening, has now passed. Much has been done to improve the living conditions enjoyed by nurses and other hospital staff. The improvements consist both of enlarged and improved living accommodation and more adequate furnishings. Much has been done, but much remains to be done. Plans and specifications have been prepared, and in many cases tenders have been called for work of this character. In the present conditions of competition, with vast quantities of work available for selective choice, the experience has been that tenders are very difficult to obtain.

There are a few other points about the statement by Mr. Bennetts to which I would like to reply. He said that the Royal Commission would serve to draw attention to the needs of the hospitals. That is quite admitted. How could a Royal Commission assist in that direction? Who will act on the Royal Commission? Will it be a medical man, or an architect, or a matron—when it comes to considering the matter of training nurses—or will it be a matter of all three being appointed? Will the Royal Commission travel all over the country, involving the expenditure of a lot of money, after which it will be able to advise the Government only on matters respecting which it is at present fully aware. The Government knows the position and a Royal Commission is not necessary. It will not be able to help in any way at all.

It was urged by Mr. Bennetts that a Royal Commission would enable complaints to be brought forward. The department has files full of these complaints and knows all about them. The Commissioner of Public Health has travelled all over the State and has investigated the whole position. The department is doing all in its power to deal with the situation. A Royal Commission could do nothing of service at all. Mr. Bennetts referred to the doctor at Esperance who was 85 years old.

As soon as the Government assumed office and became aware of the position, it was realised that a change would have to be made, and someone else was sent there. That was attended to 18 months ago. All the matters raised by Mr. Bennetts are well and fully known to the department, and every effort is being made to overcome the difficulty.

HON. C. H. SIMPSON (Central) [5.40]: I listened with great interest to what Mr. Bennetts had to say in moving the motion and also to the remarks of the Chief Secretary. At the outset, I was in some doubt as to Mr. Bennett's intention because his motion reads as if the Royal Commission was to be appointed to conduct an inquiry that would apply to the Goldfields only. If that were so it would be wrong in principle, because the medical service concerns the State as a whole and any inquiry of the type sought should be on a State-wide basis. The Chief Secretary touched on that point and, for the time being at least, I am content to be reassured by what the Minister has to say.

In dealing with this subject I think it not inopportune to bring forward the claims of Geraldton for consideration. Our attention has been drawn recently to the grave need for an early move for the establishment of the promised regional hospital at Geraldton. As a matter of fact, all the hospitals in the country—at least in our part of the State—are sadly in need of being brought up to date. At Morawa an application has been submitted—it has since been approved—for the provision of additional hospital accommodation. The people there have also proposed the erection of another room which will be financed out of their own funds in order to make provision for the crop of babies anticipated in the near future.

Wongan Hills is in a similar position. There they have a small room 11ft. long, 7ft. wide and 8ft. high, into which six tiny cribs are placed for babies, while one end of the room is taken up with a cupboard. The ventilation, particularly in view of the fact that the room is on the northern side and is affected by the heat of the sun, leaves much to be desired. The people there have submitted an application to have the room enlarged to cover immediate needs.

In May of this year the Minister for Health paid a visit to Geraldton and was tended a civic reception by the mayor and

councillors. The mayor took advantage of the opportunity to draw the Minister's attention to the need for some concrete action with regard to the provision of improved hospital facilities at that centre. As the mayor is a highly-qualified medical man, it will be interesting to members and pertinent to the discussion, if I read what he said on that occasion, and also what the Minister had to say in the course of his reply. The mayor's statement was as follows:—

In accepting the administration of the Department of Public Health he (the Minister) accepted a long legacy of neglect. For almost 40 years the public health had been little more than a name and the people had never been invited to co-operate in carrying out duties associated with it. They had seldom been enlightened as to the benefits to be derived by the State by applying the science of public health or warned of the dangers of not applying these principles. They had, as a matter of fact been lulled into a sense of false security by successive supine Governments who had taken the easy way and today the country was confronted with formidable dangers. In the past the Commonwealth was protected by an effective barrier against the introduction of the deadly diseases which swept through Asia and other nearby and distant countries to decimate the population. That barrier was the time occupied in travelling to these shores, but the advent of air travel had swept away that barrier with one fell swoop. One bright spot in this State was that the Minister had in the Commissioner of Public Health (Dr. C. E. Cook) and his chief assistant (Dr. N. Kingsbury) two courageous and original thinkers, and they were doing their utmost to solve the difficult problems with which they were confronted.

Continuing, the Mayor said that some years ago the people of the State awoke to a consciousness of the dangers confronting them and started a State-wide agitation for more adequate hospital and health facilities. The Government awoke to find the people dissatisfied with the ancient and dilapidated ruins which had served them for so long as public hospitals. The Victoria District Hospital was solemnly condemned and a recommendation was framed that a new structure should be provided. Those with experience of the department knew, however, that all requests, however urgent and important, were always greeted with the one answer. The Minister, the Commissioner and the heads of the Department always replied, "We appreciate the necessity for what you ask, but we have no money." The war had indicated, however, that a country, even without money, could find many millions of pounds for its prosecution and people reasoned that if millions could be found for destruction, then a few millions should be provided for the protection of life. The Government learnt, as apparently Abraham Lincoln had learnt before it, that it was possible to fool all the

people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but all the people could not be fooled all the time. However, the Government retained the same answer, but it effected a slight change in its wording. "Money, yes, we have plenty of it, but we cannot find labour and materials," the people were now told.

Many would recollect that Geraldton had taken part in this State-wide agitation for improved hospital facilities, continued the Mayor. Several representative and enthusiastic meetings, attended by people from as far away as Mullewa and Three Springs, were held in the town and they were eventually promised by the Minister for Health that the hospital planning committee would visit the town. The old order died hard and it had still another shot in its locker. Before the hospital planning committee could come to the town they had visitors from the Public Health Department and they worked out a plan whereby the present hospital could be rehabilitated by knocking a wall down here, putting a partition there and adding something somewhere else. It was proposed that in this way the hospital could continue to serve a useful purpose. However, the people were not of a similar opinion and when the hospital planning committee inspected the building they agreed with the people that a new hospital was needed. However, the officials favoured using the same site, but the people opposed this viewpoint. Eventually a new site behind the Geraldton High School was selected and a contour survey of this area had since been made. Considerable money had been spent on the old hospital in recent times, and this was essential if the hospital was to fulfil its functions, but some were rather uneasy because they feared that, judging on past performances, the Government might reason that, having spent this money, they should continue to use the existing building. He could assure the Minister, however, that the people would not tolerate such an attitude. The building was never erected for the purposes for which it was now being used, and nothing but its complete demolition and the provision of a new building would supply Geraldton and district with a new modern hospital.

This is the reply of the Minister for Health—

Having assumed the administration of the Department of Public Health he appointed a sub-committee to assist him in this direction. It consisted of the Commissioner of Public Health (Dr. Cook), the Chief Architect (Mr. Clare) and himself and the committee endeavoured to plan a course of action. After a careful study of the whole position it was decided to attempt to improve immediately the existing conditions in many hospitals and they instituted what was termed a short-range policy and a long-range policy. Under the former the Government endeavoured to accomplish things which would effect an immediate improvement in hospital conditions. He hoped that Geraldton would benefit under both plans, and in view of the dual policy already decided

upon they trusted that they would not have to wait until "the crack of doom" before anything was done to improve hospital conditions in the town. They should not imagine that because something was being done under the Government's short-range plan to effect immediate improvements to the hospital, that the Government had abandoned its long-range plan. Four Ministers were either directly or indirectly concerned with building projects. As Minister for Health he was required to notify the Minister for Housing as to the hospital needs of the State and Mr. McDonald then made his recommendations to the Government. The Deputy Premier (Mr. A. F. Watts) as Minister for Education and the Minister for Works (Mr. V. Doney) all had claims to make in respect to buildings. He would like to promise that the new hospital at Geraldton would be commenced next year, if not sooner, but the claims of other departments had to be taken into consideration.

That affects the building side rather than the question of administration and nursing; but all three are tied together. The question of nurses going to a certain hospital or staying where they are depends on the up-to-date conveniences which are offered to them or the amenities which can be provided. I hesitate to draw a comparison between the claims of Kalgoorlie and Geraldton; but I would say that the industries of most Goldfields towns are founded on assets of a wasting nature and the time must come—we hope it will be far distant—when those towns will fade away and exist no longer. But the claims of a town like Geraldton, which is a coming centre, which is bound to become more solid and gain in population in the days to come, which has a huge hinterland and which is on the direct air route from the North to the South, are such that the Government should regard it as a No. 1 priority. That is all I have to say on the motion. I personally am content to accept the explanation that the Minister has given in regard to the motion.

On motion by Hon. J. G. Hislop, debate adjourned.

BILL—WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MARINE.

Report of Committee adopted.

BILL—GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 4th November.

HON. C. H. SIMPSON (Central) [5.51]: The Bill now under discussion seeks to do four things: First, to bring the whole system, including administration, under ministerial control; second, to set up a commission of three in place of the present single Commissioner; third, to appoint an advisory board to advise the Minister; and, fourth, to bring railway accounts under the control of the Auditor General. A further effect which will be secured if the Government Tramways and Ferries Bill is passed, will be that those instrumentalities will be divorced from the railways, instead of being part of the railway set-up, as at present.

Members may recall that a Bill somewhat similar to the present one, sponsored by the then Minister for Railways (Hon. W. M. Marshall) was brought before this Chamber two years ago. That Bill sought to bring all railway matters under ministerial control and to bring railway accounts under the control of the Auditor General. The Bill was defeated because members believed that the Commissioner's right to exercise unfettered control in regard to administrative matters should be preserved; and, while agreeing in principle with the idea of accounts supervision by the Auditor General, this House took the view that the Government already possessed that power under the Audit Act, 1906, and consequently further parliamentary sanction was not required.

Last year, the present Minister for Railways introduced another Bill providing for a directorate of five members to replace the present single Commissioner. The proposed directorate was to consist of two railway experts and three non-technical men representing respectively commercial, industrial and agricultural interests. Members took the view that that Bill should have been postponed until the Royal Commission then sitting had concluded its investigation, and that it was unwise to appoint to the directorate three non-technical members who could conceivably out-vote the acknowledged experts. That Bill also provided for railway accounts to come under the Auditor General. Again members of this House reminded the Minister that this could be achieved by an Executive Council minute, if considered desirable. For those reasons, and possibly others,

members defeated the Bill at its second reading by 20 votes to six.

The measure now before us goes further than last year's Bill, inasmuch as it seeks to establish ministerial control and proposes to constitute the non-technical members an advisory board to advise the Minister, instead of being members of the directorate with a direct say in the administration, as was proposed last year. Provision for administration by a commission of three and for railway accounts to come under the Auditor General are also embodied in the measure before us. Now, I will say at once that I will vote for the second reading of the Bill and will support all the proposals, except that to appoint an advisory board, which I intend to oppose. In principle, I am opposed to ministerial control of administrative functions, and I shall speak again on that matter later. The importance of this Bill may be gauged from the fact that it deals with a public utility representing an invested capital of £27,000,000, an annual income of about £4,000,000 and outgoings of £4,423,000 in round figures, with an interest bill of a further £1,000,000, approximately, and a payroll of nearly 10,000 employees.

For that reason I propose briefly to traverse certain salient points in our railway history, so that members who have not had time to delve into statistics for themselves will have some idea of the general background and development of our railway system. As a matter of historical interest, it may be noted that the first two lines in the State were built by private enterprise, the first being a timber company line from Canning to Rockingham, and the second a 12-mile stretch inland from the jetty at Vasse. From this modest beginning, railway construction proceeded apace, rapidly expanding as gold production developed and in later years the agricultural areas opened up.

In 1904, when the present Railway Act was passed, there were 1,541 miles of line, representing a capital value of nearly £9,000,000. The present railway mileage is 4,328, with a capital value of £27,290,190. According to Table No. 2 on page 45 of the Commissioner's annual report for 1947, railway earnings, since the inception of the

system, have been £136,269,231. Running expenses over that time have totalled nearly £107,000,000, leaving a favourable balance on actual working of £29,000,000. Interest charges, however, over the period amounted to over £36,000,000, resulting in an accumulated overall deficit of nearly £7,000,000. That was the position as at the 30th June last year. Since then there has been a further decline and the total position has become progressively worse.

This state of affairs was foreseen by the present Commissioner, who issued grave warnings regarding the downward trend of railway finances. In his 1944 report, under the heading of "Retrospect and Prospect," the Commissioner compared the 1943-44 results with the 1937-38 returns, and a warning was issued that while earnings could not be expected to maintain their then high level, no easement could be looked for in the burden of additional costs for which the department had no contra earning power and which it was impossible for the department to control. The railway deficit for 1933-34 was £452,234, the highest recorded by the department up to that date. In his 1946 report, under the heading of "Rising Costs and Static Charges," the Commissioner says—

I reiterated portion of the 1944 paragraph and enumerated additional costs which raised the annual burden of increased and inescapable expenditure since 1937-38 to £1,247,000.

The loss for that year, 1946, was £959,804. As all members are aware, since that time there have been rises in the basic wage, the introduction of the 40-hour week, and increases in the prices of coal, sleepers and stores. The deficit for the year ended June, 1947, was £1,410,856, including interest, and there has been a further drift since then. As an offset against this, the present Government has increased freights and fares, which will considerably help to arrest the drift. It is interesting, too, at this particular juncture, to examine figures relating to other Australian rail systems for purposes of comparison. The detailed figures with accompanying graphs, are set out on page 4 of the Commissioner's 1947 report. Taking the figures for the period 1938 to 1946—the latter year being the latest for which all figures are available—the increases in the

ratio of running expenses to earnings were as follows:—

State	1938	1946	Increase	Decrease
	%	%	%	%
W.A.	73.68	98.05	24.37	—
S.A.	87.23	104.76	17.53	—
Vic.	80.43	85.39	4.83	—
N.S.W.	70.61	79.68	9.02	—
Qld.	79.32	88.39	9.07	—
Tas.	126.35	114.77		11.58
N.Z.	96.05	*106.40	12.35	—

*1947.

Tasmania showed an improvement. In the absence of other figures which might indicate whether some freight adjustments were made in any of those systems, these figures are not conclusive, but they do indicate that Western Australia on the whole compares favourably with the other Australian systems. Up to 1943, it was the second lowest of any of the Australian States in its ratio of expenses to earnings. Since then, on all the Australian railway systems there has been a further drift in the unfavourable ratio of running expenses to earnings, and this has been the universal experience in other countries. If Western Australia's position is relatively worse than some of the others, it is the result of deterioration of plant and equipment and that, in turn, has been the result of Government policy rather than any fault on the part of the administration.

In his speech when introducing the Bill in this House, the Minister quoted certain strictures in regard to the administration. To those who have studied the Royal Commission's report, it will appear that these isolated passages are far from being a true and balanced reflection of the Royal Commissioners' attitude. If those strictures are examined, it will be found that instead of being reflections on the administration, they rather emphasise the very defects which the administration had from time to time drawn attention to. In any case, they should in all fairness be considered side by side with other extracts appearing in the report. On page 117 of the Royal Commissioners' report, under the heading of "Eulogy and Thanks," appears this passage—

We wish to express our appreciation of the assistance given to us in this inquiry by the Commissioner of Railways and his officers. Their courtesy in assembling the mass of information required by us, and the frankness with which they met our inquiries, assisted us greatly.

There is no suggestion that any information was withheld or not promptly given, or that the departmental records were not competent to give the required information promptly and accurately. I submit three more extracts from the chapter on Causes of Deterioration"—page 104, paragraphs 11, 13 and 15. Paragraph 11 reads—

From the evidence submitted by the Commissioner of Railways, the senior railway officers, the Under Treasurer, and an examination of the memoranda submitted by the Commissioner of Railways to the different Ministers for Railways (Appendix A), we are satisfied that the primary and major cause—the root cause—of the present state of deterioration and decay of the railways, is the shortsighted policy pursued in the past twenty years of economising in railway expenditure regardless of the consequences to the State's most important asset. Paragraph 13 says—

In the light of the memoranda submitted by Mr. Ellis and the discussions with Ministers for Railways from time to time, we can only express surprise that anybody failed to take more energetic action to prevent the railways from falling into their present state of near breakdown.

Paragraph 15 reads—

It is apparent that for some years now, the Commissioner of Railways, and heads of branches, as well as senior officers, had accepted the position that due to the "financial malnutrition" very little, if anything, could be done to improve matters. This inertia has had a devastating effect on the morale and efficiency of the service as a whole, and has also left its mark on the public who have evidently accepted the inefficiency of the railways as something inevitable which they had to suffer.

The two following paragraphs in the Royal Commission's report express much the same thought, so I will not trouble to quote them. So far as they express the view that the rank and file of the railways feel a sense of resentment and frustration when they are being subject to uninformed and hostile criticism, when they themselves know that they are expected to produce first-class results with third-class tools, I agree. That is the opinion I expressed last year when I also quoted a remark of one of the witnesses who said—

The Railway Department is a big goat. Everybody wants to milk it but nobody wants to feed it.

I want to say, too, that I entirely agree with Mr. Ellis in the remarks contained in his report to the Minister, dated the 4th

February, from which I extract the following:—

A lack of forcefulness is imputed to me in presenting the condition of the railways to the Government. . . . This ungenerous criticism appears not only unfair but unwarranted in view of the Royal Commissioner's remark—paragraph 13, p. 104 of the report—which I have already quoted, and which expresses surprise that in view of Mr. Ellis's memoranda, submitted to the Minister . . . no action was taken.

Let me at this stage quote another opinion from an excellent source. Mr. D. W. Brisbane, general manager of the Midland Railway Company, when giving evidence before the Select Committee appointed by this House in 1945 to consider the standardising of the railway gauge, said this—

Up to date the Western Australian Government Railways have had to work under probably the hardest conditions of any railway system in the world, with the poorest return of freight per mile of line. I think they have done extraordinarily well under the circumstances and, given portion of the amount now proposed for the standard gauge line between Kalgoorlie and Perth, the Western Australian Government Railways could improve their track and rollingstock and provide a service comparable with the best 3ft. 6in. lines anywhere.

Mr. Brisbane's opinion is a valuable one. It was not solicited in any way. There was no call or need for him to make that remark if he did not feel that way. His expert knowledge and his familiarity with local conditions are such that his opinions command respect. I would not have mentioned the foregoing but for the Minister's quoted extracts from the Royal Commissioner's report which, in my opinion, suggest a false picture as far as the administration is concerned.

The report of the Royal Commission is not without value, and no doubt many of the recommendations directed towards rehabilitating and improving the service will be put into operation. At the same time, it seems to me to fall short of what we had hoped for. We may better assess its value when we pause to consider the qualifications of the Royal Commissioners themselves. The chairman is not a railway expert and, while that does not rule out his suggestions as having no value, we would do well to remember that limitation and assess his opinions accordingly. Mr. du Plessis, on the other hand, is a railwayman, or rather is experienced in harbours and shipping, and railway development. He was, however,

unfamiliar with Australian conditions, and stated that recommendations based on South African practice would not be suited to Australian conditions. While I do not think the Minister would attempt to influence the recommendations of the Royal Commissioners, it is worthy of note that they have made a recommendation—No. 41, page 107—which is practically identical with the provisions of last year's Bill and with the subject matter of the measure before us.

Bearing all the facts in mind, I think we should exercise due caution in accepting or rejecting their various recommendations. I think all members will agree that the ideal Royal Commission would be one in which the investigators would report their findings, coupled with the knowledge that they would be called upon to justify their recommendations by taking over the administration, and implementing them.

The report on the condition of the locomotives, which appears on page 127 of the Royal Commission's report, makes interesting reading. Of a total of 391 locomotives at the 25th June, 1945, well over half were more than 40 years old; 20 were 50 or more years old, and 84 per cent. were over 30 years old. Experts claim that the accepted life of a locomotive is a maximum of 30 years, providing an adequate sum is expended on repairs. It is estimated that maintenance costs should equal one-fifth of the capital cost each year. Obviously, as engines get older, the maintenance costs increase until finally the stage is reached where further maintenance is uneconomic.

Summing it up, it seems to me as if the Royal Commissioners had framed their report mainly on information supplied by departmental railway officers and by reporting visual impressions such as might have occurred to the ordinary layman. Certainly, the report has told us nothing that we did not know before, and I cannot help thinking that in some of their recommendations the Royal Commissioners were influenced by the known views of the Government in matters of policy. The evidence of neglect in regard to buildings and fixtures can be explained, but perhaps not wholly excused, by the known fact that what little money was available had to be spent on track and rollingstock maintenance.

It is quite obvious that the Treasury would not give any more, and perhaps was not in a position to provide the required money even if it had desired to do so. One remedy would have been to adjust freights and fares, which no Government was willing to do. The position which developed was just the same as would have happened to the postal services if penny postage had been retained. As everyone knows, the Postal Department has increased its charges by 150 per cent. since 1914. The service then rendered for a 1d. now costs 2½d.; and other postal charges are in proportion.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. C. H. SIMPSON: Before tea I stated that one remedy to arrest the drift in railway finances would have been the raising of freights and fares. I pointed out that the Postal Department had found it necessary to raise its tariff by 150 per cent. to meet the increased cost of service. Another remedy might have been to curtail other public works and so divert moneys to railway maintenance.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Are the railways still carrying mails at the pre-war rates?

Hon. C. H. SIMPSON: I am not sure of that, but I know they do carry mails from point to point and I believe it is done under the old tariff.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Notwithstanding the increase in postal charges?

Hon. C. H. SIMPSON: That is as I understand it. Critics generally are in agreement in condemning the recommendations of the Stead Commission of 1921. That commission advised against the proposed purchase of a number of locomotives at a cost of £320,000. Those engines would have been a welcome addition to our locomotive strength today. Compared with the majority of the engines at present in service those locomotives would now have been in the prime of life. It is clear at this stage that the Stead Commission went to extremes in recommending drastic economies, and it seems equally clear that the Gibson report swings to the other extreme in recommending expenditures which might well be beyond the State's capacity.

However, I agree with the Minister's remark that many of these recommendations

should be considered by the administration in regard to their practicability and with due regard to questions of cost. The chapter dealing with finance, Chapter 6, page 106 of the Royal Commission's report, should receive very careful consideration, and I would venture to suggest to the Government that, in addition to the renewals fund recommended in the report, consideration be given to the establishment of a sinking fund, as was done with the original Goldfields Water Scheme, and as, I understand is now in operation in the Electricity Commission set-up. This would ensure consideration and adjustment by the Treasury each year, which in turn would compel effective action in the direction of maintaining stability in railway finances.

Coming now more particularly to the details of the subject matter of this Bill, and dealing first with ministerial control, I would point out that in the early years of our railway history the system was directly under ministerial control, and a Minister-commissioner sat in the House. That, over the years proved unsatisfactory and in 1904 the present Government Railways Act was passed. I freed the Minister from control of administration, which was then delegated to the Commissioner. That system, inaugurated in 1904, is still in operation. The relationship between the Minister and the Commissioner is a most important one. In order that members may realise the seriousness of this step, I propose to read an extract from the speech of the present Minister for Railway when speaking to the 1946 Bill. I quote from page 2648 of that year's "Hansard," where there appears the following:—

I am going to ask the House to allow me to read the remarks of a previous Minister for Railways—a relative of mine I am pleased to note—who, when dealing with a proposed amendment of the Railway Bill on the 23rd October, 1907, said this—

"I am of course aware that there are among members those who believe it would be wise to have political control of our railways. To a certain extent we have always had political control; but there are those who believe that the interests of the State would be better served by appointing a general manager, and placing the whole railway system under the direct control and control of a Minister, in opposition to what is known as the commissioner system. In the early days of railways in Western Australia they were under the control of a commissioner. In 1878 a commissioner was appointed, who subsequently became the political head of the railways. A general manager was

then appointed, and that system prevailed until 1902; and from the latter date we have had commissioner control. In considering this question of ministerial versus commissioner control, I would put it to members whether it is fair to ask a Minister to undertake the whole administrative control of the railways, seeing that we cannot give the same statutory power to a general manager that can be given to a commissioner. By adopting ministerial control we are compelled to throw the whole of the responsibility for the administration of the department on the Minister; and I ask is the Minister for the time being ever selected because of special knowledge in regard to railway administration? During Mr. George's term of office as commissioner, five years, we have had as Minister successively Mr. Kingsmill, Mr. Rason, Mr. Holman, Mr. Johnson, now myself; I take it that in no one instance was the Minister selected on account of any peculiar knowledge he had of railway administration. Each of them, I take it, was at liberty to create his own policy, or to follow the policy of his predecessor. It is easy for a Minister to fix his own line of policy in connection with the administration of the railways, and he is not bound to follow the policy of his predecessor. But when it comes to a question of railway administration, and when, as I have pointed out, we may have as many as five Ministers in five years, then to place the entire responsibility for the working of the railways on the Minister is placing on his shoulders a responsibility we have no right to put upon him; and if the Minister be given administrative power, I am quite satisfied that chaos will follow. That is if we had a strong Minister. If we had a Minister who felt inclined to adopt any recommendation which came before him and was controlled in a sense by the general manager, he would follow the policy which was carried out previously; but if we had three or four strong Ministers following one another I am sure the ministerial policy would be a very bad one, more especially if the Minister had had no training for work of that sort. I think members will agree with me when I say if we place the control of the railways under a Minister we are bound to have more political influence in connection with the working of the department than if the railways were controlled by a commissioner."

Those were the views of the Minister at that time and undoubtedly they were the views of the present Government even as late as last year, because last year's Bill did not make the Commissioner subject to the Minister in matters of administration. The question is whether the present proposal to bring the commissioner or commissioners under ministerial control can be justified in the light of past experience and the arguments advanced by the Minister himself. I think it can, but I desire to point out that this change can be justified only on the score of expediency.

The position, as I see it, is that up to the time when motor transport presented a serious threat to the railways, the system had not only been self-supporting, but also had shown a substantial profit over and above working expenses and interest payments, and the main consideration then, as distinct from now, was to maintain and if possible increase that profit as an aid to development. Under such circumstances, the Commissioner had a free hand. However, the time arrived when the railways no longer paid working expenses and interest, and the Commissioner became increasingly subject to the Minister, for obvious reasons.

Another factor was the limited term of the Commissioner's appointment, which was for five years only. If the Commissioner desired his appointment to be renewed, it was natural that he would pay the utmost respect towards those having the say in re-appointing him. Provision was also contained in the Railway Act for all matters outside the task of actual administration to be decided by the Minister, so that the degree of the Commissioner's independence was very limited. It is safe to say that 90 per cent. of railway control rested with the Minister, so the surrender of the remaining 10 per cent. would not be such a drastic change as it might seem.

In point of fact, where there is understanding and co-operation between the Minister and the Commissioner, it does not much matter which system operates. It seems likely that, whatever form of control is adopted, the Railway Department will be a headache for some time to come, and if the Minister desires to carry the whole burden I say, in view of the seriousness of the position, let him carry it. At the same time I hold that the system of commissioner-control is sound and I sincerely hope that when the present difficulties are resolved the tried and proved system of commissioner-control will be reverted to.

Apart from ministerial control this Bill provides for the appointment of a commission consisting of one commissioner and two assistant commissioners and also for a board of three members, in place of the present single Commissioner. When speaking of the Railway Bill introduced last year, I gave the following comparisons. I then said—

It has been suggested that the directorate system of control is advisable because our own system has grown too big for administration

by one man. It might be interesting to compare the amount of capital involved and the number of employees employed here with the position in the Eastern States. Here we have a total mileage of 4,831 miles and a capital investment of £27,000,000. Our employees number 8,598. New South Wales has 6,121 miles of railway—about 50 per cent. more than our own. The capital involved there is £155,000,000 and the employees number 56,558. They have six times as much invested capital and seven times the number of employees, but only one commissioner. In Victoria, which has slightly lower mileage than our own, the amount of capital involved is £53,000,000, with 26,807 employees governed by three commissioners, one of whom is chief. In South Australia, with 2,577 miles of line and a capital of £30,000,000 the system has only one commissioner.

I merely mention these items for the information of members and I admit that the desperate straits in which we now find ourselves demand action. If the commissioner's hand can be strengthened by having two qualified technical men as assistant commissioners, by all means let that be done. The provision to have railway accounts submitted to the Auditor General is sound. As I said before, that power now exists, but if the Minister will be happier on having it expressly embodied in the Bill, I do not think any member will object. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that the keeping and auditing of railway accounts is a highly technical business. The system of differential rating alone presents many pitfalls to the man who is not specially trained. Concessional ratings also are difficult to understand unless one is a specialist. For this reason it is likely that the Auditor General will need to train a special staff to handle the accounts of the Railway Department alone.

I now come to that portion of the Bill with which I disagree. Clause 10 provides for the constitution of an advisory board. I believe this proposed board is not required for the following reasons:—

- (1) It is unnecessary.
- (2) Its powers, functions and emoluments are not defined.
- (3) Its constitution is unsatisfactory.
- (4) It could be a potential source of disagreement between the Minister and his commissioners.
- (5) It could build up a staff entailing expense and requiring office accommodation.
- (6) In most cases it would duplicate work which could be more adequately performed by present railway personnel.

(7) It would occupy the time of key personnel by requiring the attendance of one of the commissioners at its meetings.

Dealing with these points, I suggest the following for consideration:—

No. 1. This Bill gives the Minister all the requisite powers. He could co-opt expert advice, if deemed necessary, outside the railway system to help him in the determination of matters of policy or administration as and when such questions arose, without the necessity of employing a permanent advisory board for all time. Up till the present, all such matters have been decided by the Minister or the Commissioner. Now that the appointment of two additional commissioners is proposed, it seems redundant to create an advisory board as well.

No. 2. The board's powers, functions and emoluments are not defined. It is true that the Royal Commissioners, on page 57 of the report, did make certain recommendations as follows:—

We recommend that it be laid down in the Act constituting this board that it shall be incumbent on the Minister for Railways to consult the board upon all matters of policy, but more particularly upon the following matters:—

- (a) The general policy of the railways.
- (b) Any substantial alteration in the tariffs of rates, fares and charges of the railways.
- (c) The estimates of revenue and expenditure, including expenditure from Loan funds, which are from time to time to be submitted to Parliament.
- (d) All Bills affecting the railways which the Minister proposes to submit to Parliament.
- (e) The expenditure of any sum exceeding £1,000 in respect of any one railway, work or service, other than a work or service expressly authorised by Parliament.
- (f) The general policy regarding diminution of expenditure.
- (g) Any substantial alteration to the scales or salaries, wages, or hours of duty of railway servants.
- (h) Any substantial change in the organisation of any branch of the railways.
- (i) The investigation of such schemes of railway construction and development as the Minister thinks should be carried out.
- (j) The administration of the different railway funds referred to in Chapter 6.

That is a fairly comprehensive list but it calls for expert advice of a high order indicating considerable railway knowledge. But one point stands out. The Royal Commis-

sioners recommended that it be laid down in this measure. This has not been done. What are we to suppose? That the Minister does not want this? Or has he a different idea? We are not told. I agree that item (g) dealing with wages, salaries and hours is a matter for the Arbitration Court, but the other items are not.

I believe that such a board as recommended by the Royal Commissioners might have some value, but in the very nature of things it would not need to be a board constantly in being, and in any case it is extremely doubtful if a board, such as is proposed, would fulfil the qualifications as set out. In the absence of a definition, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Minister has in mind other duties for this board; possibly matters affecting administration, for it is very difficult to define just where policy ends and administration begins.

No. 3. The board's constitution is unsatisfactory. I find myself wondering if this particular set-up has a political complexion. Three members are provided for—one representing agriculture, who might be presumed to be a Country and Democratic League supporter; one from commerce and industry, who presumably would be a Liberal, and the third to cover labour and industrial matters, who undoubtedly would be a Labour supporter. But I resent the possible implication that Liberals and capitalists are synonymous, because I joined the Liberal Party in the belief that its members came from all stations in life and all avenues of employment, and were those who held liberal views as distinct from illiberal views.

However, the point is that these representatives would be identified with sectional interests. They would depend on their respective sections for nomination in the first place and also for reappointment when their terms expired. Undoubtedly, each section would demand sectional service and the nominee could not expect reappointment unless he got tangible results. Therefore, his interest would be his section first and the railway system second, and possibly it would be a bad second. In the process he might try to secure—and he would be expected to try to secure—advantages of his section, quite possibly at the expense of the other sections. Even the sectional nominees might not be representative.

I will concede that the agricultural nominee might be interested in all forms of pro-

duce from the soil. But there is no suggestion that the commerce representative would be interested in say, the mining of gold, coal or lead, or the timber industry. And which, if any, of the board members would look after the travelling public or the private user of the railways? The industrial or labour member would presumably be a railway man, but railway services are specialised. There are 11 unions in the railways but a sectional representative, with, say, boiler-shop experience, would quite possibly not be interested in the traffic side or the locomotive side. If he were a permanent way man, he might know very little of the administration side, of signals or, say, timetable rostering.

No. 4. It could be a potential source of disagreement between the Minister and his commissioners. Clause 13 of the Bill provides that respecting any matter relating to the direction, maintenance, management and control of the Government railways, other than a matter of policy, the board may of its own motion, or at the request of the Minister shall, advise the Minister as to the determination of the matter. It is not clear how matters may arise for determination. I should say they are arising all the time, which looks as if the board would have a full-time job. Such matters might apply to safe working, staff, timetabling or the running of trains. The Minister might have an embarrassing time in deciding between his railway experts on the one hand, and his advisory board on the other.

The very composition of the board suggests that there will be many clashes of opinion between the board and the proposed railway commission, and the Minister and Cabinet could have many embarrassing and difficult problems to decide as between the conflicting views of the railway administration and the advisory board.

Apart from the superfluity of the board, it may well prove mischievous and subversive of discipline if, for instance, disgruntled employees should see in it an avenue for the ventilation of complaints which ordinarily would be dealt with by the Appeals or Promotions Boards, or even in matters which are outside the scope of those boards. Questions of policy could surely be decided without reference to such a board. The railways have been in existence long enough for the majority of questions of policy to have become almost routine matters, and items of

major policy would, in any case, be referred to Cabinet.

No. 5. It could build up a staff entailing expense and requiring office accommodation. In these days of shortage of accommodation and of swelling the ranks of civil servants, there is a principle involved; and I suggest that the Minister give the system a trial without such a board and test it out before we are committed to yet another Government department.

No. 6. In most cases it would duplicate work which could be more adequately performed by present railway personnel. This is inevitable in such a set-up as is proposed. I do not say that any such duplication is now contemplated, but the danger is there. It has happened in the past.

No. 7. It would occupy the time of key personnel by requiring the attendance of one of the commissioners at its meeting. Subsection (12) of proposed new Section 7, which is embodied in Clause 10, provides that one of the commissioners shall attend every meeting of the board but shall not act as a member of the board. If meetings were frequent, it is obvious that this would be a tax on the commissioner's time, and quite possibly interfere with his other important duties. Also, I do not doubt that certain sections to be represented on the advisory board rather welcome the idea of a representative to watch their particular interests; but unless the board has administrative powers, it could only report these matters to the Minister or the railway commissioners and that can be done now without a board. Parties can always approach the Minister or write to the Commissioner, and what are members of Parliament for if not to act on behalf of their constituents?

The Chief Secretary: They must not see the Commissioner.

Hon. C. H. SIMPSON: There is no objection to that. I think the bar applies only to deputations. Even if a board member were able to report on matters of which he had gained inside knowledge, it might be a matter which, for good reasons, could not be immediately resolved. I will give just one or two instances which might come before an advisory board if there were one in existence.

Each year, representations are made by Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. regarding the necessity for clearing bins at sidings ready

for the next season's harvest. These reminders are no doubt regarded as necessary. The facts are that each year the bins are cleared, and always have been. The Commissioner takes no exception to these reminders. He has come to look upon them as routine and has no hesitation in saying that the co-operative bulk handling organisation helps the department considerably, particularly by providing liners for trucks use for the carriage of bulk wheat, and in other ways. It is true that the department charge freight on these liners, which seems unfair but the parlous state of railway finances explains why this has to be done.

Another complaint is that some trucks are not correctly weighed. The Commissioner admits that the human factor makes some mistakes inevitable, but contends that such errors ought to average out, and claims—rightly, I think—that the weighings concern the department from a freight angle only and he cannot accept responsibility for commercial transactions based on railway weights. His limited staff and servicing equipment make this impossible. The Railway Department was also charged with having allowed five of its engines to be commandeered for war requirements, and for not having had those engines returned. The Commissioner explained that when the engines were handed over to the Commonwealth, the whole of Australia was in grave danger of invasion and, although a protest was made, it could not stand in face of national emergency. After the cessation of hostilities, the return of these engines was requested. Three were found to be useless but the remaining two were brought back to Western Australia. It was then found that one of these was unfit for service and a rebate was allowed by the Commonwealth. The fifth engine was put back into service.

I mention these matters because they would, I imagine, have been submitted to a board if there had been one. But the point is that a board could not have resolved these difficulties any more than the department was able to do. Apart from any other consideration, it can hardly be denied that the proposed board would add considerably to the volume of work of the commissioner and his two assistants.

In conclusion, I want to touch on the Minister's remarks about the standard gauge proposals. Members will recall that a Select Committee was appointed by this

House in 1945 to consider the question of a standard gauge from Kalgoorlie to Fremantle. The committee consisted of the Hons. A. Thomson, J. A. Dimmitt, W. J. Mann, H. L. Roche and G. Fraser. The committee found that the line had little to recommend it and could be justified only from a defence point of view, the opinion of the majority being that the Commonwealth should bear four-fifths of the cost instead of one-fifth, as suggested in the Commonwealth's original proposal. The committee's view undoubtedly was that, purely from a State angle and from a commercial point of view, the standard gauge was unwarranted.

The situation generally has changed little since then, except in the direction of higher costs and acute shortages of material. It is well known that the idea of gauge uniformity has been talked of for many years but was never acted upon, and it is by no means the wholly desirable thing that many people seem to think. The change-over would be a tardy and extremely costly business and would involve scrapping much valuable material. The average cost per mile of railway in this State with all equipment is just over £6,000. The cost of standard gauge was estimated three years ago at £20,000 per mile.

Whether we adopt the standard gauge or not, our present railway system will have to be regenerated and maintained to give continuous service, and unless the whole of our lines were converted, the 3ft. 6in. gauge would still have to be maintained unless a heavy transshipment programme were contemplated. The general idea of a uniform gauge is an old one, but has been revived in the past few years by Mr. Ward, Commonwealth Minister for Transport. The general idea was to have a standby job to relieve unemployment when the predicted depression came. Mr. Chifley is not very keen about it, and there is not any evidence of undue enthusiasm on the part of the military experts.

From a State point of view, the cost, even if heavily subsidised by the Commonwealth Government, would still represent a serious additional burden on our shoulders. It would mean a terrific drain on iron and steel for rails, etc., which material for the present at least, is badly needed for fencing wire, wire netting and water piping, as well

as many other necessities. I cannot quite follow the Minister when he speaks of reducing the present cost per ton-mile of 3.2d. progressively over a period of 10 to 20 years. The present cost per ton-mile in this State is not 3.2d.; it is only 1.95d., and in view of present upward trends in prices, I should say that the quoted figure is more likely to go up than to come down.

The Chief Secretary: Where did you get the figures you have just quoted?

Hon. C. H. SIMPSON: The Minister himself mentioned 3.2d. and I have worked out from the Commissioner's returns so many ton-miles at so much cost, and the result is 1.95d. per ton-mile. After all, South Africa, New Zealand, Java and Japan seem to find the 3ft. 6in. gauge sufficient for their requirements, while the metre gauge, which is about 2½in. narrower, is in use in Malaya, Burma and Siam. The populations of those countries are much greater than ours and apparently the 3ft. 6in. gauge fills their needs. The general manager of the Midland Railway Co., Mr. D. W. Brisbane, stated that with a 40-mile an hour service, which he considered to be well within the capacity of a 3ft. 6in. line, the trip to Kalgoorlie would take 9½ hours actual running time, or two hours longer, allowing for stops. Obviously the road-bed and the locomotives would need to be brought up to standard to enable this to be done. The famous Blue Train runs nearly 1,000 miles from Capetown to Johannesburg on a 3ft. 6in. track at an average speed, including stops, of 36.6 miles per hour.

My final word on the standard gauge is this: I think the money that this project would cost could be much better employed in building roads and other developmental utilities, which we badly need. I have put some amendments on the notice paper, the main one being in regard to the advisory board. The other amendments can be explained when the Bill reaches the Committee stage. I regret having occupied so much of the time of the House, but this Bill is a very important one and merits the closest possible consideration. With the reservations I have mentioned, I intend to support the second reading.

On motion by Hon. E. M. Davies, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 8.6 p.m.