

On motion by Hon. J. Mills debate adjourned.

BILL—NURSES REGISTRATION.

Assembly's Message.

Message received from the Assembly notifying that it had agreed to the amendment made by the Council.

BILL—PERMANENT RESERVES

(No. 2).

Assembly's Message.

Message received from the Assembly notifying that it had agreed to the amendment made by the Council.

House adjourned at 5.55 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Friday, 6th January, 1922.

Questions: Woollen Mills, Government assistance	2787
Railways—E. G. Backshall's appointment ...	2787
Railway project—Carnarvon-Killilil ...	2787
Industries Assistance Board, Losses in crops	2787
Select Committees: Traffic Act Amendment Bill	2788
War Gratuity Bonds, Consideration of Report	2788
Joint Select Committee: Federation and the State,	
Consideration of Interim report ...	2793
Bills: Grain, Council's Message ...	2788
Architects, Council's Message ...	2788
Inspection of Machinery, Council's Message	2788
Nurses Registration, Council's Amendment ...	2788
Permanent Reserves (No. 2), Council's Amend-	
ment ...	2788
Prices Regulation Act Amendment and Con-	
tinuance, all stages ...	2795
Land Agents, Council's Amendments ...	2798
Return: Collie and Newcastle coal ...	2798

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

QUESTION—WOOLLEN MILLS, GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE.

Mr. WILSON asked the Minister for Industries: 1, What financial assistance will the Government give to Western Australian companies to assist them in starting worsted and woollen mills in this State? 2, Are the funds of the Industries Assistance Board available for such purpose; if so, on what terms? 3, What is the amount of money

spent to date in collecting data for the establishment of woollen mills in this State? 4, Is any money being spent at the present time for the purposes of question No. 3; if so, in what practical direction is the money being spent?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE (for the Minister for Industries) replied: 1, This is a matter that will depend entirely on the circumstances of the case submitted. 2, Under Part 3 of the Industries Assistance Act the Minister for Industries is empowered to make advances to approved industrial undertakings. 3, The sum of £410 19s. 4d. was paid to an English woollen expert who visited Western Australia in connection with the proposed establishment of the industry. There have also been investigations carried out departmentally. 4, None.

QUESTION—RAILWAYS, E. G. BACKSHALL'S APPOINTMENT.

Mr. CORBOY asked the Minister for Railways: 1, What was the date of Mr. E. G. Backshall's latest appointment to the railway service? 2, What was his salary on appointment? 3, What is the salary attached to the position at the present time?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE (for the Minister for Railways) replied: 1, 10th November, 1919. 2, £350 per annum. 3, £409 per annum. An increase of £59 was granted in common with all members of the salaried staff in consequence of increase in basic wage awarded by the Court of Arbitration.

QUESTION—RAILWAY PROJECT, CARNARVON-KILLILIL.

Mr. PICKERING (for Mr. Angelo) asked the Premier: Have any steps been taken to give effect to the resolution unanimously passed by this House on the 15th September, 1920, that a report be obtained as to the advisability of constructing a railway from the port of Carnarvon to the junction of the Gascoyne and Lyons Rivers?

The PREMIER replied: Inspection was made by Mr. Tindal in the latter part of 1920, and further inquiries now being completed, he is compiling a report on this proposed railway.

QUESTION—INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE BOARD, LOSSES ON CROPS.

Mr. HARRISON asked the Premier: 1, What was the total amount of cover against loss to crops under the Industries Assistance Board in each of the years 1916-17, 1917-18, 1918-19, 1919-20, 1920-21? 2, What was the total amount of premiums paid by clients and of claims met by insurance companies on the harvest of each of these years?

The PREMIER replied: 1, 1916-17, 1917-18, 1918-19, no record kept by the board, the business being transacted between the settler and the insurance company. 1919-20, £1,844,188. 1920-21, £2,064,870. 2, 1916-17, premiums £19,421, losses £3,924; 1917-18, premiums £14,892, losses £6,771; 1918-19, premiums £14,416, losses £7,586; 1919-20, premiums £23,788, losses £11,808; 1920-21, premiums £26,365, losses £7,270.

BILL—GRAIN.

Council's amendments.

The PREMIER (Hon. Sir James Mitchell—Northam) [4.38]: Yesterday, by an omission I did not ask the Committee to draw up reasons for our disagreeing with the amendments made by the Council to the Grain Bill. With the permission of the House I will repeat the omission now.

A Committee consisting of the Premier, Hon. W. C. Angwin and Mr. Harrison drew up reasons for not agreeing to certain of the Council's amendments and for amending one other amendment.

Reasons adopted and a message accordingly returned to the Council.

BILL—ARCHITECTS.

Council's Message.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. W. J. George—Murray-Wellington) [4.44]: Last evening when dealing with the message from the Council on the Architect's Bill we omitted to draft reasons for disagreeing with the amendments made by the Council.

A Committee consisting of the Minister for Works, Mr. Pickering and Mr. McCallum drew up reasons for not agreeing to one amendment made by the Council and for modifying one other amendment.

Reasons adopted and a message accordingly returned to the Council.

SELECT COMMITTEE—TRAFFIC ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

Request for member to give evidence.

Message from the Council received and read requesting the Assembly to authorise the Hon. W. J. George to attend to give evidence before the select committee on the Traffic Act Amendment Bill.

On motion by the Premier, leave granted in accordance with the request.

BILL—INSPECTION OF MACHINERY.

Council's Message.

Message from the Council received and read notifying that it insisted upon amendment No. 1; that it did not insist upon amend-

ments Nos. 2, 3, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 26 and 27; that it agreed to the modifications made by the Assembly to the Council's amendments Nos. 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24; and respecting amendment No. 4, to which the Assembly disagreed, the Council proposed a new amendment as an alternative.

BILL—NURSES REGISTRATION.

Council's amendment.

Amendment made by the Council now considered.

In Committee.

Mr. Stubbs in the Chair; the Colonial Secretary in charge of the Bill.

Clause 14, paragraph (b).—Strike out the words "uniform and."

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I move—That the amendment be agreed to.

The amendment deals with registered nurses. I do not intend to contest the amendment, which is not of great importance.

Question put and passed, the Council's amendment agreed to.

Resolution reported, report adopted and a Message accordingly transmitted to the Council.

BILL—PERMANENT RESERVES (No. 2).

Council's amendment.

Amendment made by the Council now considered.

In Committee.

Mr. Stubbs in the Chair; the Premier in charge of the Bill.

Schedule, Part II.—Strike out the words "the Ord River" and insert "Cambridge Gulf."

The PREMIER: I move—

That the amendment be agreed to. By an error in the department, Ord River was included instead of Cambridge Gulf.

Question put and passed; the Council's amendment agreed to.

Resolution reported, the report adopted and a Message accordingly transmitted to the Council.

SELECT COMMITTEE. WAR GRATUITY BONDS.

Consideration of Report.

Mr. WILSON (Collie) [4.55]: I move—

That in the opinion of this House the recommendations of the select committee on war gratuity bonds should receive the earnest consideration of the Government. I will not delay the House for long, but I wish to put a few pertinent facts before hon. members so that they may understand

the position. When I moved for the appointment of a select committee some months ago it was then thought that some of the charges were overdrawn and that we had made them too grave. The committee, however, found that the charges were more than proved up to the hilt. At the outset, I wish to pay a tribute of appreciation to the Federal authorities and especially to the two officers, Mr. Sheehan, from the Eastern States, and Mr. Friel, from the local Commonwealth sub-Treasury. Those two officers went out of their way to assist the committee and spent hours and nights getting data for us. Their assistance was a splendid help to us. Without that assistance, we could not have achieved the results we did. We received something like 135 complaints from diggers. The complaints were lodged in writing and set out how the soldiers had been taken down in connection with land and money transactions. When we consider that there were something like 29,000 bonds issued in Western Australia, it will be realised that the percentage of 135 compared with 29,000 was very small. The committee believe that any number of soldiers have been taken down, but rather than get publicity, those men are prepared to grin and bear it. The committee, with the assistance of the Federal authorities, have got something like £11,000 refunded to the soldiers in amounts varying from £5 to £35 and £40 each. That is to say, in the case of a digger who had a bond for £100, he bought a block of land for £40 and received back £60 out of his bond. Now that digger will get another bond for £33. The valuations in many instances were outrageously high. The committee are of the opinion, although no recommendation has been made on the matter, that it would have been better had the bonds been made negotiable at the outset. Had that been done, I believe the digger would have received a better deal. A rate of $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. is not large and men with money will not invest at $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. when they can get from 7 to 9 per cent. elsewhere. Had the bonds been negotiable and made to bear interest at, say, 7 per cent., the digger would have received a better deal. The members of the committee were unanimous. There was never one word of discord throughout the whole proceedings about what punishment we would mete out to those land agents. In fact, if we had the power we would have put some of them where they are now.

The Premier: You are getting vicious in your old age.

Mr. WILSON: I am not vicious; I am fair. Persons who will ask the digger to go and fight for them so that they may stay here in comfort and then take the digger down when he returns, are not fit to live amongst us.

Mr. Latham: Hear, hear! That is right.

The Minister for Works: They should be hung as high as Haman.

Mr. WILSON: At any rate, I would not hang them to a lamp post but would choose something quicker. Perhaps the digger was to blame a good deal, but, after all, we must make allowances for a man who had been through five years of hell and who, on his return, may not have been quite normal and was therefore glad to get a few pounds in the quickest possible way in order to have a good time. We must also remember that some of these men had been accustomed to drawing 10s. or 12s. a day before the war and that they fought for the country for the miserable sum of 6s.

The Minister for Works: Some of my men only got 1s. 2d. a day.

Mr. WILSON: A man who fights for his country should receive the highest possible pay. If such a thing could be brought about there would be fewer wars. Now with respect to some of the land transactions. I made certain charges in this House and these have been borne out by the evidence which was taken before the select committee. In one case it was proved that a man had sold the same block of land five times. He gave a buyer 14 days in which to pay up, but before the expiration of that period he actually, and deliberately, sold it to another person. That charge was abundantly proved before the select committee. The select committee dealt with two or three arch scoundrels, men with money, who saw an opportunity of taking down the digger. These men were James Chesters, Dr. Wright, and a wandering Jew named Louis Abrahams.

Hon. P. Collier: He was wandering all right.

Mr. WILSON: I am going to say something about this Abrahams. He must have known that we were going to call him before the select committee because, when we were appointed, he got away as quickly as possible. We tried by telegraph and by mail to reach him but he proved too swift for us. However, the police are now on his track.

Mr. Harrison: We have all heard of him before.

Mr. WILSON: And you will hear of him again. His solicitor in Perth, Mr. Abbott, could not tell the committee where he was. We sent a summons after him but that was ignored. Having received no reply, we prosecuted inquiries and found that he had been staying at a certain place in Melbourne all the time. The select committee have got the police on his track and as soon as we can get hold of him we shall proceed further. That is why it is the desire of the select committee to be appointed an honorary Royal Commission. Then, when we get hold of Abrahams, it will be a battle between a Scotchman and a Jew. I do not know whether he will understand me, but the committee will take every care to let him understand them. The committee summoned to appear to give evidence many people whose transactions were fairly honourable. We wish

to say that it was only a question of value in some cases, and the committee were able to secure satisfaction for the digger. In these cases we have no hesitation in saying that the people concerned acted honourably. With regard to cash transactions, we found that many men paid up in full, but of most of those people who bought for cash the soldiers' bonds and who were brought before the committee, I have no hesitation in saying that a bigger pack of liars never before gathered together in one place. I did not believe one of these people, nor did any other member of the committee, when we were told by them that they only got 5¼ per cent. interest. There was only one honest man amongst them and he happened to be a German, who confessed that he took more. This man, however, refunded the money in two cases. We were not able to finalise the cash transactions because in some cases men gave receipts to say that they got the full amount. In those cases we were not able to move any further. We also investigated a few deals in furniture and machinery and in these instances we were able to adjust matters to the satisfaction of the men who practically gave away their bonds. I do not know that I can labour the question much further because hon. members have the report and the evidence before them. I am pleased to think that the member for Moore (Col. Denton) has seen fit to ask a question with regard to the disposal of funds collected by other bodies for the use of soldiers and their dependants, and I trust that the Government will appoint a Royal Commission to go into that question. I believe these societies have done good work with the money. But at the present time how is that money being disbursed? We read letters every day in the daily Press from soldiers' widows, of the extent to which they have been put upon and who are getting barely enough on which to live. If this money were available for the widows and children some good would be done. There is no reason why it should go towards the erection of palatial buildings and the purchase of costly furniture. I compliment the member for Moore on bringing the matter forward, and I hope the Government will see fit to appoint a commission of inquiry to deal with the matter. With regard to the recommendations of the select committee, I trust the Minister for Justice with the aid of the officials of the Crown Law Department will take immediate steps to investigate the transactions in which Chesters, Dr. Wright, Jelley and Abrahams engaged, with a view to steps being taken to prosecute. We ask the Government to take heed of our recommendations in this respect, and to instruct the Crown Law officers to inquire into these particular dealings with the object, if possible, of putting these men inside. I am only sorry that the House did not give the select committee power to gaoil some of these men, because, if anyone deserved imprisonment in connection with some of these transactions, the men I have named certainly did, and they should never be let

out again. Another matter too which the Government should not lose sight of is the fact that a civil servant carried on this work of negotiating bonds in his office and in office hours—in Government time he laid himself out to take down the men who fought for him and others. With regard to Abrahams and the others the select committee ask to be appointed a Royal Commission without pay so that the cases of those people may be investigated to the finish. A final word now with regard to a wrong impression which has got about concerning the work performed by the select committee. The impression was general amongst the public—I do not know how they got it—that the members of the select committee were paid for the work they were doing, and that because of the fees they were receiving they were stringing out the inquiry. The committee gave their services gratuitously and devoted a considerable amount of time to the investigations they made. Not only that, but they also are out of pocket as the result of their efforts to get redress for the diggers.

Mr. Underwood: What about trying to make the Press aware of that fact?

Mr. WILSON: I am trying to do that now, and I think they will take a note of it. While on this subject I may tell a story of an incident that occurred in my electorate. A man named Bickley got back a bond for £33 and he entered the boarding house where he was staying and threw it on the table, remarking, "See what the little fellow—meaning me—did for me. One chap then said: "That is no thanks to Wilson because he got well paid for it. He got £2 2s. a sitting for it." I am complaining about being misunderstood. I have much pleasure in commending the motion to the consideration of the House.

Mr. RICHARDSON (Subiaco) [5.10]: I wish to endorse the remarks made by the member for Collie (Mr. Wilson). He has dealt fairly exhaustively with the question and it is therefore not necessary for me to refer to it at any great length. There is, however, one phase of the question that I desire to touch upon. At the initial stage of the proceedings of the select committee it was thought generally by the public as well as by the members of the committee that we were going to experience difficulty with the Federal authorities. I wish now to pay a tribute to the two Federal officers who were associated with us in our deliberations. I refer to Mr. Sheehan who came from Melbourne, and Mr. Friel who is in charge of the sub-Treasury in Perth. Nothing was too great for those gentlemen to do for the select committee, and had it not been for them the difficulties confronting the committee would have been far greater, and I am certain it would have taken us double the time to complete our investigations. The results of the committee's investigations proved conclusively that there was urgent necessity for those inquiries to be made.

Right throughout it was quite evident that only a few people were engaged in the mean work of taking down returned soldiers. It was not a general thing throughout the State; the business seemed to have been confined to about 20 or 30 people in the State, people with money—how they came by it we know not. It was quite evident that the business was limited to these people, who, from beginning to end laid themselves out to catch the returned Jigger by reason of his distress at that particular time. I think the select committee justified their appointment by reason of the fact, as the member for Collie has pointed out, that so much money has been returned to the soldiers, either by way of cash or by bonds. In many cases, too, cheques have been sent to returned soldiers representing sums of which they had been practically defrauded, with the intimation that it was hoped nothing further would be heard of the matter. If we could only estimate how much money was returned in this manner, I am convinced the total would open the eyes of the people of the State. The appointment of the committee had a wonderful effect, and I sincerely hope that the Government will appoint the members of the committee honorary Royal Commissioners so that they may complete their work. The committee were practically unanimous throughout the whole of the proceedings. With regard to the regulations framed by the Federal authorities the average man would come to the conclusion that there was no chance of breaking through them. But where the seller and the buyer entered into collusion, there was no possibility of the Federal or any other Government being able to do anything. We found ourselves on many occasions up against a brick wall, for the reason that on investigation, with the assistance of the two Treasury officers, we discovered that some of the men who complained had actually sent in affidavits to the effect that they had received the full face value of their bonds and the accrued interest to date. The hands of the Committee were tied to a certain extent, because some of the witnesses stated that they had complained in the hope of assisting their fellow men. Witnesses were even prepared to appear before the committee and let it go out to the public that they had committed perjury with the idea of assisting some of their fellow men. There were many soldiers who never laid a complaint at all. We discovered that the digger was by no means a squealer. He realised that he had been taken down, but he refrained from complaining. Every member knew of cases in which soldiers had been taken down. Some of them were approached, but they said that while they knew they had fallen in, they would not say anything about it. This redounds greatly to the credit of the returned soldier. I hope the recommendations we have made will be given effect to, and I trust that the recommendation with regard to the civil servant who became implicated will be considered by the Government at the earliest possible date.

Mr. CORBOY (Yilgarn) [5.17]: I wish to re-iterate the thanks of the committee to the two officers of the Federal Government who assisted us. When we first started our labours it was thought that we would have some difficulty with the Federal Government in regard to getting the information and assistance we required, but after that little misunderstanding had been cleared up, the two officers detailed did everything possible to assist us. I would like to read a short extract from the evidence of Mr. Sheehan, of the Commonwealth Treasury, Melbourne, to clear up a matter regarding which a good many people are in doubt. It relates to the man Abrahams and the Mia Mia Pastoral Company. This man has eluded us so far, but we are determined to get him some day and the chairman has sufficiently demonstrated his determination to convince me that we shall get him.

Mr. Latham: That man should be prevented from carrying out any transactions in this State.

Mr. CORBOY: The evidence states—

The value of the 17 bonds, including interest to the date of transactions, amounted to £1,609 1s. 9d. The Mia Mia Pastoral Company paid in cash to those bond owners, £1,008 6s. 9d., and in respect of the balance, they sold land for which the company proposed to charge £600 15s., that being the total in the 17 cases. The company took this full amount of £600 15s. out of the bonds of the men concerned, that is to say, they paid in full out of the bonds for the blocks of land so purchased. The Treasury was so dissatisfied with the transactions, owing to one of the cases coming under notice during the earlier stages, that we had valuations made of the land which had been sold. The valuers valued the land at £239 10s. The Treasury has told this company that these transactions can only be allowed on the basis of the valuer's report, and that the prices the company proposed to charge could not be allowed. The company have been jibbing ever since over that. Abrahams has not received the bonds. The Treasury hold the bonds. Before Mr. Sheehan came over, it was intended that Abrahams should get a bond for the cash he had paid plus the value placed on the land by the Federal valuer. He has not yet agreed to that, and nothing definite has been done. Mr. Sheehan has given a definite assurance that the soldiers will not be charged one penny more than the £239 10s., the value placed on the land by the Commonwealth valuer.

Mr. Underwood: Will the soldiers get the money back?

Mr. CORBOY: They will get new bonds.

Mr. Underwood: Will they give the money back?

Mr. CORBOY: Some of them have done so and have had their bonds returned to them. If I had dealt with a man like

Abrahams and had the cash, I would pay him the money and take my bond back. The publicity given to the labours of the committee has revealed what happened. I was extremely gratified at the good fortune that attended our labours throughout. Excepting in one or two instances where we found ourselves up against a brick wall, we were able to accomplish something and it is a matter for congratulation that our efforts have not gone for nought. I want to draw the attention of the Premier to the question asked by the member for Moore (Col. Denton) a few days ago with reference to other war funds. The hon. member asked the Premier to consider the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the whole of the war funds. I think this would be worth while. It is alleged—I do not know whether it is true—that one organisation has in its possession no less than £10,000 worth of pianos which were donated to the soldiers and not to that particular organisation. If these things are true—and it would be worth finding out whether they are true—it is time something was done. Many of our returned soldiers are in urgent need of assistance and they should receive the benefit of the things which were donated to them. The select committee feel extremely grateful for the assistance rendered so willingly by everyone and particularly by the two Federal officers.

Mr. McCALLUM (South Fremantle) [5.22]: This has been my first experience as a member of a select committee. I had formed the opinion that the work of select committees generally did not result in much good, and that the reports were usually pigeon-holed and there the matter ended.

Mr. Harrison: That is the general opinion outside.

Mr. McCALLUM: The select committee on gratuity bonds have achieved something for at least £10,000 had been returned to the soldiers up to the time of presenting the report. We hope the matter will not be allowed to rest there. If a burglar were caught in your house, Mr. Speaker, and he apologised and offered to hand back the property he was stealing, you would not be agreeable to letting him go. You would want to hand him over to be dealt with. That is the position of a number of land agents. They have been caught red-handed robbing people and, although they have agreed to pay up, we do not think that is sufficient. They should be punished. They have admitted that they set out to deliberately thwart the regulations of the Commonwealth Government. They knew what they were doing; they knew they were circumventing the law. We recommend that the Government take action. I do not know whether such action should be taken by the State or the Commonwealth Government, but the matter should be put in the hands of the legal authorities and prosecution should follow in the cases which have been

mentioned. It has been comparatively easy to trace down the land transactions, but we are convinced that just as much fraud has been committed in connection with the financial transactions. However, it is almost impossible to get proof of this. The soldier and the man cashing the bond signed statements that the full value had been paid and received, and it is almost impossible to find out who was to blame. One deal in land was particularly barefaced. Chesters, of Subiaco, admitted that he bought 13 blocks of land at £2 10s. each on one day and sold them to soldiers for £40 each on the next day.

Hon. P. Collier: That is the chap who said he had nothing against the soldier.

Mr. McCALLUM: Yes, a man who could make £40 out of £2 10s. blocks in 24 hours should not have anything against them.

Mr. Richardson: He sold one of those blocks five times over.

Mr. McCALLUM: I have recollections of the same gentleman appearing on platforms and waving flags during the war.

Hon. P. Collier: He nearly got into this House once.

Mr. McCALLUM: And everyone else was accounted a traitor or pro-German if he happened to differ from him on certain principles. If Chesters is allowed to go scot free, it will be evidence that the Government do not do their duty.

Hon. P. Collier: If they let him go, we should open all our gaols.

Mr. McCALLUM: These offenders should be dealt with, and we definitely recommend the Government to take action. We received valuable assistance from the Federal officers, Mr. Sheehan and Mr. Friel. At the beginning of the inquiry, I thought the Commonwealth authorities were out to block us. Mr. Friel was anxious to help us, but he had to carry out his instructions. From the moment Mr. Sheehan arrived with instructions, we received all possible assistance and information. Much of the success of the committee's work is due to the tact, determination, and thoroughness with which the chairman, the member for Collic, carried out his work. He gave a great deal of time to the work of the committee, handled witnesses in first-class fashion, and showed that he was able to extract all the information he wanted from them. The fact that so much money has been returned to the soldiers is largely due to the chairman. The report is brief; it contains three definite recommendations, and I hope the Government will give effect to them at the earliest possible date.

The PREMIER (Hon. Sir James Mitchell—Northam) [5.28]: I have not had time to look through all the evidence tendered before the select committee, but I am pleased at the way the work of the committee has been conducted. Of course we knew when Mr. Wilson was appointed chairman that the work would be well done and that few, if any, would escape. From long experience of the hon.

member we knew how well he would conduct the inquiry. The Government will give serious consideration to the recommendations of the select committee, and I shall ask the Crown Law Department to look into the matters mentioned here to-day. If men have been guilty of fraud, they ought to pay the penalty for it. Regarding the suggestion that there should be another inquiry concerning the funds collected during the war, I should like to talk the matter over with those interested before coming to a decision. If it is merely to ascertain what balances are held, it will be a very simple matter, but if we appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into every collection during all the years of war, it would be quite impossible.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, you could not do that.

Mr. Corboy: You could not get anyone to take the job on.

The PREMIER: Such an undertaking would be an impossible one. I believe there are balances in certain funds. I mentioned the matter a few months ago. It would be possible, I think, to ascertain how those balances stand in the case of funds collected for special purposes. I have no doubt that many committees holding small balances would be glad to get rid of them. Indeed, I think the committees would be grateful to the House if we told them how to deal with such balances. I want the select committee to let me know how far they do wish to go in these inquiries, because, as we all know, there were, of course, thousands of these collections during war time.

Question put and passed.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE—FEDERATION AND THE STATE.

Consideration of Interim Report.

Mr. ANGELO (Gascoyne) [5.32]: I move—

That in the opinion of this House the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on the proposed Federal Constitution should receive the earliest consideration of the Government.

A few weeks ago the joint select committee presented a short interim report, setting out that the committee had found that the questions referred to them necessitated a close study of the history of the foundation of the Commonwealth, and also a close study of the Federal Constitution and of all the various laws appertaining thereto. The committee found also that it was necessary to ascertain how these laws, of which so many have been passed since the inauguration of Federation, have affected the State of Western Australia. As the House knows, the Premier very kindly placed at the disposal of the committee the services of the Under Treasurer as financial adviser; and Mr. Owen has been doing a great deal of good work, studying the Federal Constitution and also recent works dealing with that subject. He

has supplied the committee with a voluminous report of the result of his investigations, and the committee are also studying the subject for themselves. They have not, however, been able to accomplish as much as they would have liked. You, Mr. Speaker, know that the session has been very strenuous. As I have stated, the subject of the committee's investigation requires close study; and I would ask hon. members to consider how it is possible for the members of the committee to attend to their parliamentary duties and at the same time give the necessary attention to the vitally important subject of their special inquiry? The Leader of the Opposition and his deputy are working day and night to carry out their duties in this Chamber. Would it be fair to ask those gentlemen, who have more work to do than falls to the lot of the ordinary private member, to address themselves also to the subject which is engaging the attention of the joint select committee? Considerations such as these have moved the joint select committee to advance the suggestion that they should be appointed an honorary Royal Commission, so that after their parliamentary duties for the session have been discharged they may devote their undivided attention to the subject which Parliament has specially remitted to them. Speaking for myself, as a member of the joint select committee, I know that I am expected to keep in touch with parliamentary matters and to make myself conversant with the various Bills being submitted to this Chamber. The double task of parliamentary and select committee duties amounts to almost an impossibility to perform. Therefore, speaking for the Assembly members of the joint select committee, I hope this Chamber will authorise us to continue our investigations as suggested. The committee's report, when it comes out, will be of a far-reaching nature. We are asked to determine not only how Federation has affected Western Australia in its finances and its industries, but also to frame whatever amendments may be needed in the Federal Constitution—a very important matter, and one which will require a great deal of thought. In the Upper House the request that the joint select committee should be appointed an honorary Royal Commission has received a sympathetic reply from the Leader there, which leads me to hope that the present application will meet with a favourable response in this Chamber. We all recognise that the question how Federation has affected Western Australia is one of the utmost importance. In recent years we have heard expressions of opinion from the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the Country Party, and indeed from every section of the Chamber, to the effect that to Federation can be traced a very considerable proportion of our financial troubles. According to the report prepared by Mr. Owen some time ago, Western Australia has already lost 10

millions sterling in cash alone through being federated, besides suffering serious disadvantages in its industrial and commercial life. As is well known, this Parliament is not alone in its desire to discover how Federation has affected the individual State. The South Australian Legislative Assembly has carried a motion for the appointment of a committee of inquiry; and Queensland and Tasmania are following suit. I believe it was the fact of these four States all moving in the same direction that induced Mr. Hughes to bring forward that almost impossible Bill which he introduced into the House of Representatives some little time ago—to withdraw it pretty promptly. That measure has been dropped and it has since been suggested that the Federal Parliament itself could frame suggestions for amendments of the Federal Constitution. I do not for a moment believe that such a method of altering the Federal Constitution will appeal either to the people of this State or to the peoples of the other States. The matter is one, therefore, that should be debated in this Parliament. I should like to make a suggestion to the Premier in this connection, and it is—

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member cannot do that on this motion.

Mr. ANGELO: It is all on the one subject, Sir. My suggestion is that the Premier should consult with the Premiers of the other States to see if it would not be possible to hold a convention of the States—a States convention—ignoring the Federal Government altogether. After all, the six States are the parties to the Federal compact; and if any alteration is necessary in the Federal Constitution, that alteration should be effected by the six States themselves.

Mr. Underwood: The Federal Constitution cannot be altered without the consent of the States.

Mr. ANGELO: As the Federal Parliament has turned down the Bill to which I have referred, and has thereby refused to hold a convention, what is there to prevent the States themselves holding a convention of their own? As we know, the Federal elections will be held next year. If our Premier could get the other State Premiers to agree to a convention, we could prepare our case during the next few months. The States convention could be held in, say, June or July; and then, upon the Federal Parliament meeting again, the amendments suggested by the State convention in the Federal Constitution could be submitted to the Commonwealth Legislature. If that Legislature turned the suggestions down, then we could so educate the Federal electors of this State that when the Federal elections came round those electors would return to the Commonwealth Parliament members sympathetic towards the State, and prepared to demand that there should be no further Federal encroachments on

State rights, and even to demand the return of some of the rights already lost to the States by reason of the cormorant-like desires and actions of the Federal Parliament. I consider that an immense amount of good can be done by this means. Even if the Premier cannot get the other States to agree to such a convention, the mere preparation of a report such as the joint select committee have in contemplation, and its publication to the people of the State, would educate our Federal electors so that they would exercise considerable caution in casting their votes at the next Federal elections. If a States convention is to be held, it should be on the basis of equal representation for the various States, on the same principle as obtained in connection with the Federal convention of 20 odd years ago.

Mr. Davies: How is it to be expected that those States which are alleged to be hating on Western Australia will agree to the suggested States convention?

Mr. ANGELO: I am glad of that interjection. That aspect has already been put up to me. I was told, "You will never get New South Wales and Victoria to agree to a States convention." But recently I was in Victoria and New South Wales, and met numerous members of the State Parliaments; and I was surprised at the prevalence amongst them of a feeling that the States' parliamentarians are being treated in an undignified manner by Federal members. Federal members look down upon State members, I am told. Members of Eastern States Parliaments refer with considerable feeling to the fact that Federal members usurp the functions of State members, and make encroachments on the rights of State members, in many instances doing things which are properly the functions of State members. Upon my inquiring of various members of Eastern States Parliaments whether in the event of the Federal Government not holding a convention, they thought their Parliaments would agree to the holding of a States convention, they unhesitatingly declared, speaking for themselves, that they would support such a proposal. Now, there is the question of the 25s. capitation grant to be considered. No member of the Parliament of either New South Wales or Victoria is willing to see that capitation grant curtailed or abolished. That is one vital question on which the suggested State convention could do a lot of good. Then there is the question of the tariff—I do not think any of the States is satisfied with the latest tariff—and there are the questions of special grants to Tasmania and Western Australia. All these problems must be considered at a convention of the States. Years ago we were promised a convention at the end of the first 20 years, but the Prime Minister has broken his promise and declared that no convention is to be held. I hope the Premier, when at the Premiers' Conference, will consult the other

Premiers with a view to arranging for a convention of the States.

The PREMIER (Hon. Sir James Mitchell—Northam) [5.47]: Of course the recommendation can proceed without the consideration of the Government. It is most important that as a State we should know where we stand. That is why the Government are prepared to continue the select committee as a Royal Commission in order that they might complete their investigation. We have to remember that the Federal Government can crush us, and practically have crushed us. Their collection of taxes has made it almost impossible for the State to get sufficient taxation. Of course, war expenditure has to be provided for, but apart from that the expense of the Federal Government should not be very heavy. When Federation was first entered into it was thought the expenditure of the Federal Government would be very small indeed. But not only have they collected taxation at every opportunity, but they have spent very lavishly, and are still doing so. Apart from Posts and Telegraphs, Defence and Customs, we see nothing of the Federal Government in this State. Children have to be educated by the State Government, hospitals maintained by the State Government, and in addition we have to develop the State. All these responsibilities are ours, whereas the duties of the Federal Government are very few, notwithstanding which they collect about three times as much taxation as does the State. It cannot continue. The position is worse with us and with Queensland than with any of the other States, because we are so little developed. We must have money for development, and if interest is to be found on the money so used, it must come from taxation. Yet in every avenue of taxation the Federal Government collections are so heavy as to render it almost impossible for the State to secure any increased taxation. This inquiry ought to disclose without too much detail, but still in detail, just what is happening, particularly in respect of the iniquitous tariff, showing how it is blocking the way of development. The people are getting little or nothing as the result of the Federal collections of taxation, while the State has to render innumerable services. We cannot get out of the Federal compact—I wish we had never got into it—but we can see to it that we get an opportunity to live and serve the people we represent. The member for Carnarvon (Mr. Angelo) suggests the formation of a great political organisation, and the election to the Federal Parliament of only such men as will stand for State rights as against Federal encroachment. If all the States would do that, we should soon be all right. For my part, I should be very glad to join with other people of this State who would refuse to return to the Federal Parliament any but those who stood for State

rights. It would be the greatest move towards abolition of party ever made in this State. If ever anything effective is to be done, it will have to be through some such movement. After 20 years, surely, the Constitution requires amendment! We know that it does. It ought to be possible for our representatives to induce the Federal Government to call a convention. This State in particular has suffered as the result of Federation. The Federal taxation is so heavy that it does not give much opportunity to the State. It is the duty of every man to see that we get sufficient money to educate our children, develop the country, protect the people, and serve them in the many ways necessary for their well being. In view of the Federal collections and the Federal encroachment it is difficult to know how the State is to carry on. We have the whole of the North to be developed.

Mr. Underwood: Don't leave yourself short on our account.

The PREMIER: But it worries me. We are not able to do all that we would like to do, or all that we ought to do, simply because the Federal Government leave us so little money. Consider what the tariff means! Half our farmers are using second-hand machinery to avoid the payment of the iniquitous duty! A machine which cost £100 before the war costs £200 to-day, principally in consequence of the tariff. Whereas at one time a farmer could be set up on the land for £200, to-day it would cost £300 merely to provide him with a complete set of machinery. I want to see the stuff made in Australia, and I do not object to a tariff which would enable these things to be manufactured within the Commonwealth; but I do object to a tariff devised exclusively for revenue purposes. I hope the select committee will go on with its work, and that the result will be to make the people of the State realise where they stand. During last year the Federal Government collected in duty and excise, £630,000 from liquor consumed in this State. Nobody complained; the money was paid cheerfully and willingly. Yet, when the State Government, which has all the cost of policing and controlling the traffic, ask for a paltry £130,000 there is at once an outcry. I hope the Committee will in simple fashion make the situation clear to the public.

Question put and passed.

BILL—PRICES REGULATION ACT AMENDMENT.

All stages.

The PREMIER (Hon. Sir James Mitchell—Northam) [6.0]: I move—

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as to enable the Bill to be introduced without notice.

Mr. SPEAKER: As the motion has been submitted without notice, it is necessary for

a majority of 26 members to be in favour of it to secure its adoption.

Question put.

The SPEAKER: As there is no dissentient voice, and as there are 26 members present I declare the motion carried.

Question thus passed.

First Reading.

On motion by the Premier, Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading.

The PREMIER (Hon. Sir James Mitchell—Northam) [6.3] in moving the second reading said:—The Prices Regulation Act expired on the 31st December. This Bill revives the Act passed last year, and will continue the operations of the Prices Regulation Act for the present year. It is unnecessary to discuss the Act itself because its principles are well known. A great deal of good work has been done under it, and prices have been kept in check.

Mr. Chesson: In the city but not much in the country.

The PREMIER: Did the hon. member bring any cases of that sort under the notice of the Commission?

Mr. Chesson: It was useless to do so.

The PREMIER: Not at all.

Mr. Chesson: It was waste of time.

The PREMIER: It is true the Commission has been dissolved, but power is taken under this Bill to give the Governor the right from time to time to reappoint it to deal with specific matters that may be referred to it by an Order in Council. If it is necessary that such work as was required to be done last year should be done again, it can be arranged. There is still need for the Prices Regulation Commission, especially when prices are soaring from day to day. In some directions prices are falling, but there is still need to have this power. Many people objected to the commission when it was first appointed, and it has been said that prices have been fixed at a higher rate than would have been the case had it not been for the commission. I disagree with that view, for I think the commission did a lot of good, as was shown by the cases that went through my own hands. To-day flour is dearer in South Australia than it is here, because we can fix the price in this State. The idea is that the commissioners shall be brought into use when required. Two of them are Government officials, and the other is Mr. Burgess. They have done excellent work, and no man can fairly complain of what they did. They made strangely few mistakes, and they are men whom the public can trust. I think it is necessary to have some authoritative persons watching the movement in prices from time to time, just as if the commission were sitting permanently. There are some requisites which affect the farmers, and will require to be watched for a year or two until things come back to normal. It is a very

necessary thing to have the commission this year, and I hope the House will agree to give the Government this power. In some directions combinations exist that we little dream of. I remember a Federal politician saying that combination is common sense, but sometimes it is an expensive common sense. I could mention cases of combination against the farmers.

Mr. Pickering: Against them?

The PREMIER: There is no chance of the farmers themselves combining.

Mr. Latham: They have done a little of it.

The PREMIER: They have not done it anywhere.

Mr. Johnston: They are beginning to wake up.

The PREMIER: We ask the House to give us power to revive this commission from time to time during the year as may seem to us desirable.

Mr. Latham: You propose to abolish the office temporarily?

The PREMIER: It is abolished. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [6.10]: I agree with the Premier that we should continue our price fixing legislation for another year. It may be necessary for the public to have permanent legislation of this kind. I agree that the commission has done good work, but not such effective work as I anticipated. The results have not been nearly so good as the public hoped and expected when the Act was passed. The commissioners had many difficulties to contend with, but in a quiet way I believe that acting as policemen they did prevent increases in prices right along the line. I am sorry the Government allowed the Act to lapse. It would appear from the wording of the Bill that it was only proposed to have the work carried out in the future in a limited fashion, and that only such questions as it may be found necessary to refer to the commission will be so referred. I am sorry the commission was not continued in its entirety, and I do not know that the Bill will do very much good.

The Premier: It can be made to go as far as we like.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If the Government has the will and the desire to make it go as far as the Act went before, it can be done. The whole commission should be revived.

The Premier: It will be made to go as far as may be necessary.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If the Government wish it they will have power to revive the commission and do much as was done in the past. Having regard, however, to some of the influences that were opposed to price fixing altogether, I am not sure that it will not be used again in this direction. The Premier spoke about the regulation of prices. We have reached such a stage in regard to production and distribution of the whole of the necessities of life that competition has been altogether eliminated. Society is faced

with the problem of devising ways and means by legislation of seeing that the public are not taken down, as it were, by the action of monopolies and combinations. There is practically no competition at all to-day.

Hon. W. C. Augwin: If you do not join a combination the threat is used that you will be put out of business.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The ramifications of these combinations are so wide, and their power is so great, that no matter where one looks now the position is the same, namely, the combinations fix the price and everyone in that particular line of business has to fall into agreement and trade at the prices fixed from time to time. Should anyone dare to take up an independent attitude and give the public the benefit of competition, the pressure becomes so strong upon him that he is forced out of business.

Mr. Mann: Is that not so in every walk of life?

Hon. P. COLLIER: I do not know about that. It is so with regard to all necessities of life.

Mr. Mann: And wages.

Hon. P. COLLIER: No. There is a great difference there.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Before tea, the member for Perth interjected to the effect that wages were fixed by combinations and that the prices of commodities were fixed by combinations of traders. The difference is that wages are fixed by an independent tribunal—the Arbitration Court—a body with no interest to serve one way or the other, but prices are fixed by the sellers themselves. I do not wish to labour the question. Everyone has fairly fixed ideas regarding the regulation of prices and the Act. I agree with the Premier that we should continue the Act.

Mr. Sampson: Does the Act keep down prices?

Hon. P. COLLIER: Not always, but in many directions it has kept down prices.

Mr. Sampson: Prices have dropped where regulation has ceased.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The very fact of this law being in existence acts as a policeman and prevents prices from increasing in many directions. I hope the Bill will be passed, and that the Government will keep the commission in existence and allow them to carry on their work.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Mr. Stubbs in the Chair; the Premier in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of Section 10 of No. 16 of 1920:

Mr. UNDERWOOD: What will be the cost of continuing the commission?

The Premier: The cost last year was very small. There are only two members.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: The commission have an office, a secretary and a typist. Is it intended to retain the office and staff?

The PREMIER: We must retain the typist; the secretary is a junior in the service. The work must be done. I should not think the cost would be much.

Mr. Underwood: How much?

The PREMIER: I should think not more than £700 for the year.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: If it is necessary to keep the office and secretary, it is not worth while retaining the commission.

The Premier: I do not think it will be; it all depends on the work to be done.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: I am confident the commission did not relieve the people to the extent of the amount expended on the commission's salaries.

The Premier: You are wrong.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: I am not. The commission had a tendency to keep some prices up. But for the commission milk would have been supplied to consumers at a lower price. The present price is 9d. a quart, and people do not use nearly so much milk as they would if the price were lower. That price was fixed by the price raising commission.

The Premier: You are quite wrong.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: In my opinion the commission failed. All it did was to prevent dealers from reducing their prices. The commission tried to fix the price of meat and failed. It is admitted that they cannot fix the price of fruit or vegetables. Neither can they fix the price of bread, because we come under the wheat scheme.

Mr. Davies: They did fix the price of bread.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member appears to be making a second reading speech.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: I claim that I am entitled to inquire whether the expenditure of £700 is warranted. The commission cannot deal with the essentials of life; therefore why spend money on retaining the commission? The Premier would be wise to cut out the whole of the expenditure, because the commission have not been able to reduce the cost of living. We have never heard of a dealer in the necessities of life becoming excessively wealthy. We have never heard of a wealthy grocer.

Mr. Harrison: The drapers are the men who make the money.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: Yes, and the merchant princes who deal in fimsies, ladies' shoes and ninnons. The price of sugar is fixed by the Federal Government, and what prices remain for the commission to fix? If the commission could cut down the price of ladies' glass shoes which cost 45s. and are worth about 7s. 6d., I would support the commission.

Mr. J. H. Smith: Ah! I suspect you.

MacCallum Smith: You need not buy them.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Like spirits, the higher you put them up, the more the people will buy.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: Yes, one lady pays 45s. for a pair of shoes and her friend goes along and asks for a 50s. pair, but the seller shows her a 30s. pair, and she takes them. I trust we shall not continue the commission with the office and staff which in some cases have kept up prices.

Mr. DAVIES: There is one difficulty I see in regard to Clause 2, and it is, that if the commission are going out of existence, will it mean that all proclaimed prices will cease to exist? If the prices proclaimed to-day cease to exist it will be all right, but if the prices now proclaimed remain, who is to take the initiative, say in regard to milk, in the event of bran and pollard going down?

Mr. Sampson: Competition.

Mr. DAVIES: Then there is no use in having the Bill.

Mr. ANGELO: I take it the object of the Government is to end the Act, and to secure machinery which will enable them in times of emergency, if they find the public are being exploited, to be able to act under a temporary measure. But it seems to me that £700 is too much to expend on a temporary board. Why could we not do what is done in private life and appoint a secretary on the understanding that he provides an office and a staff? This could be done with advantage.

The Premier: In this case the chairman is a member of the civil service.

Mr. ANGELO: The machinery under the Bill should not cost more than £300 a year and I would like a proviso inserted to that effect.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 3, Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

BILL—LAND AGENTS.

Council's amendments.

Bill returned from the Council with a Schedule of 15 amendments, which were now considered.

No. 1—Clause 2, Add to the definition of "land agent," "but does not include public accountants acting in the discharge of their duties as trustees, liquidators, or receivers."

The PREMIER: This is a perfectly reasonable amendment. I move—

That the amendment be agreed to.

Question put and passed; the Council's amendment agreed to.

No. 2—Clause 3, Strike out "January" and insert "April."

The PREMIER: This is merely altering the date on which the Act shall come into force. I move—

That the amendment be agreed to.

Question put and passed; the Council's amendment agreed to.

No. 3—Clause 4, In the proviso, strike out "Thirtieth day of June" and insert "31st day of March."

On motion by the Premier, the Council's amendment agreed to.

No. 4—Clause 5, Subclause 3, Strike out "as on the 15th day of January then last passed."

The PREMIER: This amendment means that a copy of the register will be published notwithstanding the fact that the 15th January has passed.

Mr. UNDERWOOD: I enter a very strong protest against attempting to pass legislation in this manner. Not one member has a copy of the amendments made by the Council, and no one has the slightest idea of the nature of any of these amendments; we do not know the least thing about them. The Premier might just as well say that we are nonentities and that the Council may have their own way.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: This is a simple amendment, but at the same time, as there is no possibility of closing down the session for a few days, these amendments might be placed upon the Notice Paper so that we may understand what we are doing. We know from past experience that all Governments are lax in the publication of necessary statements and reports. It may be that the license of an agent may be taken away from him, and if the list is not published till late in the year, others will not have an opportunity of knowing that the individual is not licensed.

The PREMIER: I have no objection to these amendments being placed upon the Notice Paper.

Progress reported.

RETURN—COLLIE AND NEWCASTLE COAL.

On motion by Mr. Wilson, ordered: That a return be laid upon the Table of the House giving—(a) The weekly issues of Newcastle and Collie coals (separately) over all the Government railways for the twelve months ending 27th November, 1921. (b) The weekly issues of Newcastle and Collie coals (separately) over the northern railways of the State for the twelve months ending 27th November, 1921.

House adjourned at 8.10 p.m.