

**Legislative Council,***Thursday, 6th August, 1925.*


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

### QUESTION—RAILWAYS CONSTRUCTED AND AUTHORISED.

Hon. H. SEDDON (for Hon. A. Burvill) asked the Colonial Secretary: 1, How many railways have been constructed in the State since the year 1896? 2, What are the names, length, cost or estimated cost of construction of the railways? 3, What railways passed by Parliament are still under construction, and what is the estimated cost of construction? 4, What railways passed by Parliament are not yet under construction, and what is their estimated cost?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY replied: A return will be prepared giving the desired information.

### COMMITTEES FOR THE SESSION.

On motion by the Colonial Secretary sessional committees were appointed as follows:—

Standing Orders.—The President, the Colonial Secretary, the Chairman of Committees, Hons. A. Lovekin and J. Nicholson.

Library.—The President, Hons. A. J. H. Saw and H. Stewart.

Printing.—The President, Hons. A. Lovekin and T. Moore

House Committee.—The President, Hons. J. Cornell, E. H. Gray, J. W. Kirwan, and G. Potter.

### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

*Fourth Day.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. J. W. KIRWAN (South) [4.35]: I desire to join with other members of this Chamber in the welcome extended to Mr. Glasheen, a welcome which is invariably ex-

tended here to all new members in the hope that they will soon become acquainted with the tone and atmosphere of the Chamber, and the spirit in which business is conducted here. The hon. member will find that in this House all the various political parties in the State are represented, but he will also find that party ties are not as tightly bound with regard to members of this Chamber as is the case in another place. Each member of this House, judging by my experience of it, has control of his political soul, irrespective of what party he may belong to. Furthermore, Mr. Glasheen will find that in this House, whilst we differ amongst ourselves, and sometimes the differences are very sharp, yet at the same time we maintain our self-respect towards one another, and that whatever differences may exist in this Chamber they do not go beyond its doors. He will find, I think, from his experience of the Legislative Council, that it is a very different Chamber indeed from what it is sometimes misrepresented to be, and very unjustly so, in certain quarters of the community. As regards the Speech delivered by His Excellency the Governor, there is nothing fresh in the document. I can find in it nothing that we were not acquainted with before the Speech was uttered. It is a peculiarly verbose document regarding those matters of which we are thoroughly well informed, and it is peculiarly brief and cryptic regarding those matters about which we know little but would like to know more. There was one feature of the Speech that must have given gratification to all—the announcement that the deficit for the last financial year was smaller than it has ever been since the time when Mr. Frank Wilson was in office in 1911. There are members who have represented that result as due to the efforts of the present Government. Other members—Mr. Ewing is an example—have attributed it to the foresight and statesmanship of the previous Government. From my point of view, whatever credit may be due to the present Government and to the last Government for the reduction of the annual deficit to the low figure of £58,000, the reduction is mainly due to the fact that the State has had a most bountiful harvest. The harvest is a record one. The yield was 5,000,000 bushels in excess of that for the previous year, and when there has been a bountiful harvest of that nature it is bound to improve the finances,

bound to improve the railway revenue, bound also to improve the return from taxation, and in other ways very much to improve the financial position. The Government have been singularly fortunate in that during their first year of office they have had a record harvest. Whatever credit may be due to the present Government or to the last Government, from my point of view the excellent nature of the harvest and the high prices obtainable in the world's markets have been mainly responsible for the financial improvement recorded in the Governor's Speech. At the same time I do hope that the reduction of the deficit to a lower figure than it has been since 1911 will not be made an excuse for any raid on the Treasury, or any extravagance, because although the deficit is down to £58,000 for the last financial year, yet the State is by no means out of the financial wood. We have an accumulated deficit of over six millions sterling still hanging over us, and that is a serious matter. What to my mind is an even more serious matter than the accumulated deficit is the fact that the interest charges, apart altogether from the sinking fund charges, upon our indebtedness amount to more than one-third of the total revenue of the State. In view of that circumstance I welcome the reference made in the Speech to the fact that notwithstanding the excellent result as regards the deficit the greatest care needs to be exercised in the department of finance. I sincerely trust that that statement will be borne in mind by one and all of the Ministers, and also by those hon. members who are in the habit of approaching Ministers with requests that involve further expenditure from the public finances. I am glad to notice that the Speech also contains references to the Government's intentions in the direction of development in the great province of which I have the honour to be one of the representatives. That province, which I represent with Mr. Dodd and Mr. Cornell in this Chamber, extends from Kondinin, Newdegate, Ravensthorpe, and Hopetoun in the west away to Eucla and the South Australian border in the east. Lately I made a tour of the whole of that district, and the more I saw of the country and the more I discussed its possibilities with the people there, the more impressed I became with the greatness of its resources, and also with the fact of how little we who

live in Western Australia know of Western Australia. It is rather a pity that the members of the Government, and if possible even the members of both Houses, could not have made a tour such as I made a few months ago. I am quite convinced that if they had been over that country, and had met the people whom I have met, and had seen the country that I have seen, and heard of its agricultural and pastoral and mineral resources, there would be no more talk of any want of land for settlers in this State, more especially when it is remembered that the whole of that vast area, which comprises a very large proportion of the State of Western Australia, is within the temperate zone. The resources of the province are but little known; it is but sparsely peopled; and the Government and the residents in the capital, I believe, have only the faintest idea of the value of that province to Western Australia. But it is a great reserve that will be opened up some day and will undoubtedly be in the years to come peopled by a prosperous and contented community. The particular portion of that province which the Speech indicates the Government intend to direct their attention to, with a view to its development, includes the area between Calgarin, which is east of Kondinin, and Ravensthorpe. There is in that country a considerable area of valuable agricultural land. The Government are classifying that area, but I would impress on the Government that whatever is being done with a view to the development of that part of the State, there is to-day an isolated railway running from Hopetoun to Ravensthorpe. To my mind an isolated railway of that sort is nothing more than a useless and expensive absurdity. At Ravensthorpe, the country is of a very excellent nature and the agricultural results have been extremely satisfactory to the farmers; still the results can never be entirely satisfactory so long as the people are handicapped as they are by the enormous railway and steamer charges due to their extreme isolation. That area can never be properly developed until the isolated railway from Hopetoun to Ravensthorpe is linked up with the main railway system of the State. I was also pleased to see that the Government intend to develop the area between Norseman and Esperance. Between Salmon Gums and Scaddan, as the Colonial Secretary is well aware, the coun-

try consists of heavy mallee. I think there is no similar country in Western Australia. It is country that the Colonial Secretary has spoken of in this Chamber in the very highest terms, but it will take a great deal of money to bring it to the full productive stage. It is much more expensive country to develop than is the country through which the railway that the Government are about to construct will pass between Salmon Gums and Norseman. The mallee country although it may be very simply cleared on the surface, takes a number of years to clear of roots, and it is many years before the suckers are finally dealt with. For that reason farmers in that area will need generous assistance from the Government. But if that generous assistance be conceded, the Government have no fear whatever that they will be amply repaid in the future. The experience of mallee country in the Eastern States has been that in the early years the crops usually are very light and it takes several years to bring such country to the full productive stage. So far there has been a very good season in that part of the State and already the people of the district are talking of having a very considerable quantity of wheat to export during the coming harvest. The harbour at Esperance, which the Colonial Secretary has seen, has many advantages, but the existing jetty was placed in a most unfortunate position, and in order that any large quantity of wheat may be properly handled, it is essential that there should be a deep water jetty constructed. This could be done without any very heavy expenditure. It is one of the urgent requirements of that part of the State and one of the requirements that will be absolutely necessary to its future progress. In the matter of new legislation foreshadowed in the Speech, a number of Bills are mentioned but beyond the titles we have no idea of what they are likely to contain, and it would be premature to anticipate what they really mean. Amongst the Bills mentioned I notice an amendment of the Constitution Act. I do not know really what that means but there is one amendment to the Constitution which I advocated in this House on the Address-in-reply last year and which I understand the Government intended to effect. However, nothing has been done in the matter. On the Address-in-reply I pointed to the urgent necessity for increasing the present number of Ministers. The Constitution

Act was framed between a quarter of a century and 30 years ago. It provided for six principal Executive Ministers. Since then the business that the Government have to carry out has been vastly increased. The population of the State has grown enormously and in addition the State has undertaken a considerable number of new enterprises never contemplated 20 or 30 years ago. The work of Ministers is vastly greater than it was in former times. I always think it is rather unfortunate that when a Government—whatever Government—is in power, of the Parliamentary supporters of that Government, the whole of the administrative work is usually left to seven or eight men and there are numbers of other members of the party supporting the Government who have no opportunity for carrying out administrative duties. It is true that there are three Honorary Ministers at present, and by the way, it is absurd to have men called Honorary Ministers when they actually are not honorary in the sense of not receiving any remuneration. Of course officially they receive no remuneration, but that is a mere fiction, as we know that various Governments, for many years past, have recognised a method by which so-called Honorary Ministers have been remunerated. I suggest that the Government should go into the whole matter of the work of administration and increase the number of Ministers. Possibly in this way the Government would be able to increase the number of principal portfolios and to add to the number of those now called Honorary Ministers, but who might be described as Parliamentary secretaries or under secretaries, men who would occupy subordinate positions to the principal Ministers and who would be in much the same position as under secretaries are in the Imperial Parliament. The work would be a training for men to subsequently aspire to the higher office of Ministers. I need only remind hon. members of the duties some of the Ministers are called upon to perform to-day. Take Mr. Troy, a gentleman for whom I have a great respect. He is a very hard working and most conscientious Minister. He is Minister for Mines and Minister for Agriculture, the two most important industries in the State. Why mining and agriculture should be associated has always been a source of wonder to me. If the Minister for Agriculture is to be associated with another portfolio, surely it ought to be that of lands.

However, the fact remains that the Minister for Mines and the Minister for Agriculture are one and the same gentleman. The duties of Minister for Mines ought to be in the hands of a man who is solely occupied with the work of the Mines Department. Mr. Troy has to travel over the whole of the agricultural areas and over the whole of the mining area and he has to administer the affairs of those departments. No matter how energetic or able he may be, he cannot do justice to the extensive nature of his work. Take the Minister with whom we in this Chamber are most acquainted, namely, the Colonial Secretary. Mr. Drew is Colonial Secretary, Minister for Education, Minister for the North-West, Minister for Health, and I think he has charge of several subordinate departments. In addition to that, while Parliament is sitting he has to carefully study every Bill that comes before the House and has to be able to answer the hundred and one arguments advanced in the House. He requires to have the whole range of public affairs of the State at his finger ends, and no matter how hard he may work, he cannot do justice to duties so stupendous as that. Surely in the circumstances some arrangements could be made for an increase in the number of Ministers and the number of under secretaries or Parliamentary secretaries or whatever they may be termed. In any case the work ought to be so apportioned that no one man should be required to discharge the duties the Leader of the House is called upon to carry out in a busy session. Last session what happened? He was working day and night until it became impossible for him to attend to his administrative duties, which during the last few weeks of the session had to be carried out by, I think, the Premier himself. I understand the Government were contemplating some increase in the number of Ministers, and I hope they will give the matter consideration. They are a Ministry very keen in the furtherance of the 44-hour week, but I should like to know any Minister who could do justice to the work of his department in a week of 44 hours. Since the Government are so generous towards Government employees, they might be equally generous towards themselves. If they were, probably they would be able to do better work for the community generally. Before I conclude I wish to refer to a matter that is of vital interest to the people I represent. I refer to the great industry of gold

mining. I regret to say that I have been disappointed with the attitude of this Government towards gold mining. The Speech says that "the future of gold mining may be regarded in a spirit of optimism." We can all agree on that. We have in this State an auriferous area that is undoubtedly the greatest and the richest in the whole world and I think that the people of Western Australia too often forget that fact. The auriferous area in this State does not cover one goldfield or two, or half a dozen, but it covers what might be said to be a continent of goldfields. Gold extends from the Kimberleys in the north right down to the Phillips River and Dundas in the south. No other country in the world can cover such an immense area of territory with yellow, to indicate its auriferous belt. We cannot do too much to stimulate the industry. Even though, when money has been spent in the stimulation of gold mining, it may not at times have brought the reward expected, yet we should keep on encouraging those who are battling in the interior of the State to make fortunes for themselves, and in doing that, adding to the wealth and progress of the State. A reference to the industry contained in the Speech is a simple statement that "every possible assistance has been rendered to the industry by the Government." With all due respect, I would like to compare that with the lavish promises of generous help made by the present Premier when delivering his pre-election speech at Boulder. A comparison between that statement and what has been done shows how the promises made remain to be redeemed. To my mind the gold-mining industry is bound up with another matter that has been referred to in the Speech, and that is the Federal Disabilities Commission. When that Commission was appointed the Government of this State also appointed a committee for the purpose of preparing a case to submit to the Commission. The report of the committee has been printed and I have studied it very carefully. I am sorry to say, however, that I cannot congratulate that committee upon the report that it presented. It is a pathetically weak statement of what should be an excellent case for better treatment for Western Australia by the Commonwealth. The members comprising the committee included the Hon. Norbert Keenan, K.C., as chairman. He was eminently fitted for the position, possessed as he is with one of the brightest intellects in Western Australia. He was At-

torney General of this State for some years and a member of Parliament for many years. For some years, however, he has been out of public life and I do not know that lately he has taken a very deep interest in public affairs, either Commonwealth or State. It is certain he was not in any way responsible for what is lacking in the report. He was there in the position, I take it, of a man who would be briefed by the other members of the committee. If he had been provided with proper material, I am perfectly satisfied that there is no one in this State who could have made better use of the material or have made out a better case for Western Australia. But the fault in connection with the appointment of that committee was that there was not one person on it who was acquainted with the aspect of affairs from the Federal viewpoint. It was essential in dealing with the case of Western Australia that someone intimately acquainted with Federal affairs, someone who had a Federal outlook, should have been a member of it, or that more men of that type should have been members. What do we find in the report? We find complaints against the policy of various Commonwealth Governments, complaints against protection, complaints because the Commonwealth Savings Bank was started, complaints that applied equally to other States as well as to this. What the policy of the Commonwealth is must be accepted, but where the real disabilities in Western Australia lie is in regard to matters respecting which the State is treated differently from the other States. Had the committee confined themselves to the point that Western Australia is treated differently from the other States—and many instances in that respect could have been given—the report would have been much more satisfactory. The report does not contain one practical suggestion as to what the Commonwealth should do in order to relieve Western Australia from its disabilities. It has remained for those who are interested in the mining industry to advance what has been the one practical suggestion to meet the circumstances that have arisen. Some people say that the condition of the finances of Western Australia was due to Federation. What has been the real cause of Western Australia not advancing, as rapidly during recent years as it had done before, is the falling-off in the production of gold. In 1905 the output of gold from Western Australia was valued at £8,300,000. During last year the output was

worth £2,500,000. Is that not the real cause of Western Australia not advancing at the same rate as it did during the boom years of the goldfields?

Hon. J. Duffell: That has been compensated for to some extent by the prices obtained for wheat and wool.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I do not think the decline has been fully compensated for, or anything like it. I claim that the real cause of the reduced rate of advancement of the State is the decline in the gold-mining industry. If we desired to restore Western Australia to the state of prosperity it enjoyed when the mining industry was booming, what course should we adopt? Something that could bring the industry back to its former flourishing position, and in doing that we should be creating a condition of prosperity throughout the whole State. What is the cause of the decline in the gold-mining industry? No mining man will admit that it is due to the poorness of the zones that have been reached or to the working out of the auriferous areas. There are still enormous areas of auriferous country in Western Australia that could be worked if the cost of working could be lowered in reason. To-day the ores that are being treated are of higher grade than ever before in the history of the State. The industry has declined, not through any poorness of the zone reached, but mainly because of the increased cost of working. Consider what has happened regarding the industry. Gold is the only article that can be mentioned, the cost of producing which has increased, while its value has decreased. It costs more to-day to produce an ounce of gold than ever before, but the amount of material wealth that can be got for an ounce of gold is less to-day than ever before. It does not apply to any other industry that where the cost of production went up, the price to be got for the commodity went down, and that is why the mining industry is in the position it occupies to-day. In these circumstances, the gold mining community has said that an appeal ought to be made to the Commonwealth Government for assistance, on lines similar to those adopted in regard to other industries in Australia, when these industries have been in need. Personally, I have no hesitation in saying that I am a freetrader; I do not believe in the spoon-feeding of industries to the extent indulged in by the Commonwealth. I consider that is all wrong; it is not economically sound to spoon-feed industries in

the manner that has been done, but what I do say is that if you spoon-feed one industry, why not logically spoon-feed others? There is no industry that has suffered so severely from the results of protection as has gold mining. It has received no benefit whatever from Protection. When Protection is the policy of Australia, even though we do not agree with it and we are sorry it is so, yet is it not fair to say, why not assist the great industry that is to-day most in need of protection—the gold mining industry? We simply ask the Disabilities Commission to apply to that industry the same policy that has been applied to the sugar industry, meat production and dozens of other industries that I could detail, particulars of which can be found in the statistical records. Take one for example, the meat export trade. The Australian exporters could not sell meat in the London market in competition with South American exporters. What did the Commonwealth Government do? They made inquiries and found that by means of subsidies or granting bonuses to the Australian meat exporters to the extent of a farthing per lb., our exporters were able to sell Australian meat in the London market and compete successfully with the South Americans. With that policy operating in so many industries and bonuses being paid in so many directions, why should not the gold mining industry secure equal benefits? Seeing that the gold mining industry has suffered as the result of the policy of protection, why should it not receive corresponding advantages? No suggestion as to remedies is set out in the report submitted to the Commonwealth Royal Commission by the Western Australian Advisory Committee, but there is one statement that is evidence in favour of the solution suggested by the mining community. That statement is as follows:—

Those of us who have attempted to reduce into definite figures the loss suffered by the State of Western Australia in consequence of the gold output being compulsorily acquired at an arbitrary price by the Commonwealth, put down the loss suffered by the mine owners at the figure of £3,000,000.

In seeking assistance we do not ask for it for the gold mining industry of Western Australia alone, but for that industry throughout Australia generally. As Western Australia produces such a large proportion of the gold in Australia, the benefits, of course, will largely come to Western Australia. In view of the direct and indirect losses sustained by the industry because of

the policy of the Commonwealth, all we ask is a quid pro quo. What could be more fair? We desire the Federal Government to extend to the gold mining industry the policy of protection that the Government extends to other industries, most of which are protected by means of the Customs duties. Others, including 20 or 30 industries throughout Australia, have been assisted by means of bonuses or bounties. Is it not fair that the industry that has been the pioneer of all other industries and has done so much for Australia, should be granted a quid pro quo under some form of protection to make up for the losses suffered through the application of the general policy of Protection? Having regard to the vast importance of this question to Western Australia, I am sorry indeed that no reference whatever was made in the Governor's Speech to the payment of the gold bonus. All sorts of trivial matters of minor consequence are mentioned, but the gold bonus represents a question that affects the whole prosperity of the State. If we can succeed in getting a bonus of £1 an ounce for a fixed period, it will do more towards regaining our former prosperity than anything else that could be done. Yet no reference appears to it in the Speech! In common with the rest of the people on the goldfields, I was also disappointed that no official intimation was received from the Government regarding their attitude towards the gold bonus when the Federal Disabilities Commission were here. One or two references were made by the Ministers that seemed to imply that they were not in favour of the payment of a gold bonus. After the Commission had left the State, a favourable announcement by the Government was issued, but it would have been much better had the announcement been made more promptly and while the members of the Commission were here. The matter has been referred to the Board of Trade by the Commonwealth Government. One member of this Chamber is on the Board of Trade, and I look to him with hope and confidence in the sure belief that he will see that justice is done to our gold mining industry in this matter. If that industry be revived, then the prosperity of the State generally must be revived, and it will do much towards the solution of all our difficulties.

On motion by Hon. G. Potter debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 5.22 p.m.*