

# Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 26th March, 1918.

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

## EXPEDITIONARY FORCES, EASTER GREETINGS.

The PREMIER (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore) [4.33]: I desire to move—

"That in this hour of trial and anxiety we, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, forward Easter greetings to our soldiers overseas, expressing our admiration of their unconquerable valour and endurance in conjunction with that of the soldiers of the Empire and the Allies, our complete confidence in the ultimate success of the cause of freedom and righteousness, and our hopes for their early and triumphant return to their Australian homes."

I ask the House to approve of the motion because I feel sure that our men at the Front will be gratified to know that we, the Parliament of the country, representing not only them, but the people of Western Australia, are thinking of them at the present moment. Now, when our soldiers are passing through one of the most difficult and important phases in the history of this great and terrible war, I feel sure the Empire from one end to the other is seriously thinking about the present position; but although we may be thinking seriously about it, at the same time we feel not the slightest doubt of the ultimate triumphant success of our arms, which have been exercised in this terrible warfare for nearly four years. We feel that not only the future of the Empire, but the future of the world depends upon the issue of this great and terrible conflagration that is now spreading over Europe both east and west. There are but few of us in the House who have not dear ones engaged in this terrible struggle, and I am quite sure that a motion such as this must appeal to everyone of us. We all have good wishes in our hearts for the country in which we live, and we all desire to forward some expression of sympathy with our men at the Front, together with our gratitude to them that have gone forth to fight for our hearts and homes. Those who are engaged in this struggle on our account will no doubt feel a certain amount of pride in the knowledge that those whom they have left behind are thinking of them at the present time. I have not the slightest doubt, no true Britisher has the slightest doubt, of the result of this terrible struggle. We in Australia have scarcely been brought to realise the full weight of it, owing to the fact that we are so far distant from the scene of operations. At the same time it has been brought home to many of us, and many sad hearts have been left in Western Australia on account of those who are now fighting for us in distant lands. I submit the motion to the House, feeling that members will be desirous of sending some cheery word of greeting to those who are fighting for us so far away.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [5.37]: I have much pleasure in seconding the motion. Indeed, at a time such as this, mere words fail to adequately express the feelings of every man and woman throughout the whole wide domain of the British Empire. During the past three or four days, it is quite clear from the scanty cables that have been sent to Australia, we have reached the greatest crisis of the war, and although the British army has been forced to yield ground to a slight degree, nevertheless we feel confident that, as it has ever been in the history of the British Empire, in the end the British arms will not be defeated. It may be said that during the next week or two the freedom of the world will be balanced on a very fine pivot. It may tumble on either side, but, having the knowledge of what has gone before, we feel confident that notwithstanding the fact that our enemies have brought to their aid overwhelming numbers of men and overwhelming power in machinery and guns, that indomitable, bulldog tenacity that has always characterised the British race, in conjunction with the determination of the heroic French and others associated with us on the West front, will stay eventually the onward march of our enemies. I have pleasure in seconding the motion and re-echoing all the sentiments expressed by the Premier. As far as we can learn, our own men up to the present have not participated in the great battle now in progress; but it is inevitable that before many days they, too, will be called upon to help stay the rush of the enemy. In the knowledge of the way in which they have acquitted themselves in the past, we are confident that our Australian soldiers will be not less active and strenuous than their British comrades in staying the onslaught of the enemy.

Question put and passed.

[For "Questions on Notice" and "Papers Presented" see "Votes and Proceedings."]

## QUESTION—BULK HANDLING OF WHEAT.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN (without notice) asked the Premier: Seeing that the hon. gentleman has laid on the Table a report by the Agent General on bulk handling of wheat in Canada, will he also lay on the Table a report on the same subject made by the Engineer-in-Chief after his trip through Canada?

The PREMIER replied: I have no objection to laying that report also on the Table.

## SELECT COMMITTEE, RABBIT PEST.

Report Presented.

Mr. Smith brought up the report of the select committee appointed to inquire into the rabbit pest.

Report received and read.

Mr. SMITH (North Perth) [5.22]: I move—

"That the report, exclusive of the evidence, be printed."

Question put and passed.

# BILL—DIVIDEND DUTIES ACT AMENDMENT.

In Committee.

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

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of Section 2:

Mr. MUNSIE: Will the Colonial Treasurer explain why the administration of this clause is put under the Commissioner of Taxation?

The COLONIAL TREASURER: When we come to Clause 4 I intend to move an amendment providing that the Commissioner of Taxation shall be under the Colonial Treasurer. It appears that the custom has grown up for the Commissioner of Taxation to administer these Acts, but, in view of the expression of opinion of hon. members the other evening that the Minister should be in control, I intend to move this amendment.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 3—agreed to.

Clause 4—Amendment of Section 3:

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move an amendment—

“That after the words ‘Commissioner of Taxation’ the words ‘under the Colonial Treasurer’ be inserted.”

Amendment put and passed, the clause as amended agreed to.

Clause 5—agreed to.

Clause 6—Amendment of Section 7:

Hon. P. COLLIER: This is the crux of the Bill. The present Act provides for the payment of one shilling in the pound, but this Bill purports to increase it to 1s. 3d., which is an increase of 25 per cent. Before considering any of these taxation Bills which may be placed before us, and in order that the Committee may deal fairly with all these taxation proposals, it is our duty to see that each sum that it is proposed to increase should bear some relation to the other increases. It would not be fair for an increase of 25 per cent. to be made in one form of taxation, and that the increase be 100 per cent. in another form of taxation. There are some increases set out in the Stamp Act Amendment Bill of as much as 100 per cent. I do not know whether the increase of 3d. in the pound in this case is sufficient or not. There was collected last year a sum of £104,000 under the Dividend Duties Act. That would mean that dividend duties were paid on a total of £2,080,000, and it may be that the £2,080,000 which paid taxation last year might be called upon to bear a heavier burden than is proposed in the Bill. I do not say off hand that it would be, but the Committee might say if we had knowledge of what has to be paid under the Income Tax Bill, if people are called upon to pay double the amount of income tax, then the Committee might think the dividend duties ought to be double or at any rate higher than is proposed in the Bill. It would greatly assist members if, before dealing finally with any of the taxation measures, we had the second readings moved of the whole of the taxation Bills, and then we should know whether the

increase in one class of tax bears the same relation to the increase in another.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: There is a certain amount of fairness in the suggestion of the leader of the Opposition, and I can arrange to have the other Bills placed on the Table of the House almost immediately, as soon as I can get the Assessment Bill ready. All the other Bills are ready but the Assessment Bill is not quite. If it will allow members to arrive at a clearer decision of the fairness of taxation, I do not think it unreasonable to ask that all the Bills should be placed on the Table at the one time.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Progress reported.

## ANNUAL ESTIMATES, 1917-18.

In Committee of Supply.

Resumed from the 21st March; Mr. Stubbs in the Chair.

Mines Department, Hon. C. A. Hudson, Minister.

Vote—Mines, £72,882:

Item, Wardens; one at £636, one at £576, one at £552, one at £432, one at £282—£2,883.

The CHAIRMAN: An amendment has been moved to reduce the item by £10.

Amendment put and negatived.

Item, Government Geologist £804.

Mr. MUNSIE: The Minister in introducing his Estimates, said there was to be a reduction in the geological field staff. I should like to know what the reduction is.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: We are dispensing with the services of two field geologists, and one geologist will be engaged in the work of draftsmanship. The position of Assistant Government Geologist will not be filled. That will effect a saving not only in the amount of salaries, but in field expenses.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Minister intends to reduce the field staff by two geologists, and one of those two, I understand, will be placed in the office.

The Minister for Mines: No, the third man is now engaged in field work.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Then you are reducing the field staff by three officers.

The Minister for Mines: Yes.

Mr. MUNSIE: I hope the Minister will not continue this class of reduction. There should be as little reduction as possible in the field staff if any good is to be done. From the Minister's explanation practically there will be no geologist in the field, and if a prospector finds anything which he is not too sure about, he will have to send the sample to Perth, which will mean two months before any definite reply is received. I agree with the arrangement made by the late Minister for Mines of sending a geologist with prospecting parties. I think it would be better if the Minister sent men into the field and reduced the office staff.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I thought I had made myself clear. These geologists have been specially engaged from 1910 until now in making surveys of the different locali-

ties that were already known, and the result of their work has been published in bulletins. What I propose to do with those retained in the department is to utilise them exclusively in field work. There is very little work now to be done.

Mr. FOLEY: I am glad to have the assurance of the Minister that what might be considered necessary work in the direction of field geologists will not be curtailed. I know that good geological work has been done. Recently Mr. Hogan at Mt. Linden has been giving useful information and Mr. Talbot did good work, but the great drawback is that the result is not published for years after the work has been done. There are many districts that have not been surveyed, and I think that geologists ought to be sent into these districts. If there is a desire to curtail expenditure it is no good to curtail field work. In the event of the services of a geologist being required, I hope the Minister will see that they are always available.

Item, Government Mineralogist and Chemist, £432.

Mr. FOLEY: I have held the opinion that the chemist should be called upon to assist the prospector in Western Australia. All of us who represent mining districts are well aware that we might unconsciously be walking over untold wealth. Our ores and our country generally are very different from those in any other part of Australia. We should send out chemists to determine what the country really contains. In the Eastern States in the old days the greater part of the prospecting was done by men with pick and dish. When they found rich alluvial they could always trace it to its source. In this State it has not been so, and in many instances the sources of rich alluvial have never been discovered. The department could not better spend money than in sending mineralogists and chemists out to assist in the prospecting of our mineral areas. I commend this to the consideration of the Minister.

Vote—Inspection of Machinery, £3,863:

Item, Chief Inspector and Chairman of Board of Examiners, £528.

Mr. MUNSIE: In my opinion this salary could be saved without detriment to the efficiency of the boiler inspection. This gentleman rarely, if ever, inspects a boiler. He has a clerk in charge at £216 to assist him in doing nothing. Farther down the page we find six inspectors provided for. Those are the gentlemen who really do all the work of boiler inspection. We pay the Chief Inspector merely as a figurehead. The Chief Mining Engineer is quite capable of doing the work of Chief Inspector of Machinery, and moreover, has ample time in which to do it. I think this item represents a waste of money.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: This position has been created by the Act, which provides for the inspection of machinery. Under that Act it is necessary to have a chief inspector. Again, as has been pointed out by the hon. member, there is a staff of inspectors to be administered, and it is necessary that one should be in charge of that staff, as the head of the sub-department. It is also the

duty of this officer to sit as chairman of the board of examiners. In that capacity during the past year his work has not been very great, but previously he employed a considerable part of his time in examining candidates. More recently there has not been a great deal of work to do. It might have been possible to amalgamate this office with another if we could properly house the department. However, in accordance with the Act, it is necessary to have someone in charge.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: If hon. members will look through the various sub-departments, they will find that this is probably the only one with an increase of expenditure. Yet the Minister has said that the work has not been so heavy during the past year as it was previously.

The Minister for Mines: That is, in the examination of candidates.

Mr. Maley: The increase is only £3.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: If the hon. member will turn up the Estimates for 1915-16 he will find that the increase to-day is over £200. This year's estimate is £3,863, which is the largest for some years, notwithstanding that the work has materially fallen off. I cannot agree that, because the Act says we must have a man in this position, that man should be kept in his office all the time. He is the Chief Inspector of Machinery, and therefore should be outside, doing some inspecting. According to the Minister, this officer is kept merely to control a small staff. We pay him £528 to look after six men. The clerk in charge should do all the office work, while the chief inspector went out and did some inspecting.

Mr. MUNSIE: If hon. members will turn up the latest report of the Mines Department they will find that, as chairman of the examining board, this gentleman had only 122 applications for engine-drivers' certificates, and that only 100 certificates of all classes were granted. Out of that 100, many were purely formal matters, as, for instance, men coming from the Eastern States with first-class certificates and putting in those certificates. That is the only work this gentleman has had to do. By way of protesting against this condition of affairs, I move—

“That the item be reduced by £10.”

The Government can here make a saving without any impairing of efficiency. If, as the Minister said, only a leader of the inspecting staff is required, we could pay one of the six inspectors £10 or £15 extra to accept the responsibility. The Chief Mining Engineer is competent and has sufficient time in which to carry out the duties of the Chief Inspector of Machinery.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Inspection of Machinery Act, 1904, provides that there must be a Chief Inspector of Machinery; but a small amending Act passed in 1910, at the instance of Mr. Gregory, who was then Minister for Mines, did away with the necessity for having a special officer as Chief Inspector of Machinery. I believe Mr. Gregory's intention was to amalgamate this office with another office in the Mines Department, the idea being to bring the inspection of machinery under the control of the State Mining

Engineer. It is, therefore, competent for us to abolish the position of Chief Inspector of Machinery.

The Minister for Mines: I admit it is competent to appoint someone else to do the work, that it is not necessary to have a special officer for that work.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Perhaps it is not for me to take exception to this vote, which shows no material alteration when compared with the votes during the years I was at the head of the department. Nevertheless, we live in times of economy, and the Government are abolishing many offices and amalgamating others, and this position is perhaps one which might engage the attention of Ministers with advantage to the State. If it is not considered wise or judicious to abolish the position, still the Chief Inspector might be asked to do some field work. He has only a total of 12 officers under him. I observe that in his last report, as in previous reports, he complains that the work of his branch is greatly in arrears by reason of his not having a sufficient staff of inspectors.

The Minister for Mines: There have been applications recently from the timber mills for the appointment of additional inspectors.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Chief Inspector, instead of continually complaining that the work of his branch is in arrears and persistently asking for increase in his staff, might well go out into the country and himself do some practical inspection work.

Mr. Pickering: Does not he do that?

Hon. P. COLLIER: No; and he has never done it. Although he has only six inspectors and six of a clerical staff, he nevertheless finds sufficient to do in the administration of that staff of 12 to engage the whole of his time right throughout the year.

Mr. Pickering: What are his duties?

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Clerical.

Mr. Munsie: He has to tell the other six inspectors where to go and what to do.

Hon. P. COLLIER: His reports disclose how a great deal of his time is taken up. I observe that his last report shows a reduction of about 50 per cent. on the volume he was accustomed to produce when I was Minister. But it still contains a good deal of unnecessary tabulated matter, such as the mileage travelled by his inspectors per rail, coach, motor car, and on foot. I tried to induce him to omit that information, but he has a great affection for these voluminous details. I do not see how, in these days of economy, the Chief Inspector can find sufficient to occupy his time in controlling his small staff.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Whilst I cannot agree to the reduction of the item, I assure the Committee that the question of economising in this branch will have serious consideration during the next few months. There seems no reason why the Chief Inspector should not fulfil the whole of his functions as inspector of machinery. If he is not doing it—and I am not aware that he is not doing it—I shall see that he does it.

Amendment put and negatived.

Item, Incidentals, all branches, including all contingent expenses not otherwise provided for, £10,750.

Mr. MUNSIE: This item shows a reduction of £1,065 on last year's expenditure. I have heard complaints that there has been cutting down of incidental expenditure to the detriment of efficiency. Will the Minister state how the reduction has been brought about?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: For the year 1916-17 the vote for incidentals amounted to £10,850 and the expenditure to £11,815. During the year 1916-17 under this item Mines generally absorbed £5,350, whilst this year the estimate is £5,000, showing a saving of £350. That saving is being effected principally in stationery, printing, and typewriters. Of the same item Explosives and Analytical during 1916-17 absorbed £434, while this year's estimate is £350, showing a reduction of £84. Geological Survey for 1916-17 absorbed £3,415, whilst this year's estimate is £2,700, showing a reduction of £715. In the same connection Inspection of Machinery last year accounted for £1,722, whilst this year's estimate is £1,700. The School of Mines for 1916-17 expended in incidentals £394, while this year's estimate is £1000.

Mr. Munsie: I am satisfied.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: This item discloses economy in the wrong direction, inasmuch as for the year 1915-16 it was only £10,336. With every change of Government there seems to be a large increase of expenditure. The saving shown on these Estimates for this item is only as between last year and the current year. The vote for 1915-16 was £11,250. The Government of that day impressed on the departments the urgent necessity for economy in incidental expenditure, and took steps to ensure that that expenditure was reduced. I move an amendment—

“That the item be reduced by £300.”

The MINISTER FOR MINES: These estimates do not ask for as much as the hon. member asked for in 1915-16.

Hon. P. Collier: But you are asking for more than we expended.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: The item shows an absolute reduction of £100 on last year's expenditure.

Hon. P. Collier: But an increase over the expenditure of the last year but one.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Only an increase of £300. Besides, we are not in a position now to make comparisons with 1915-16, because we do not know what amounts were outstanding at the close of that financial year.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: The Minister has shown a reduction owing to the fact that the vote was less than last year, but based on the expenditure of 1915-16, there is an increase this year of £314. I understand the Minister expects to reduce some of the work on geological surveys.

The Minister for Mines: There will be an increase in travelling expenses really.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: If the number of officers is reduced, surely the travelling expenses will also be reduced. The amount

which was voted for 1915-16 ought to be sufficient for the requirements of this year. We ought not to increase incidental expenditure in any department. If it is the idea of the Minister to keep down expenses, then here is where the reduction should come in.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I admit that the figures for 1915-16, showing an expenditure of £10,336, is correct, but it was estimated that year that the expenditure would be £11,250. Last year it was estimated to expend £10,350 and the vote was exceeded, the amount expended being £11,815. This year it was necessary to make inquiries into some of the expenditure under this item. I went carefully into the matter but I could not ascertain the full details. It is rarely that the details of this item are given. I have been unable to trace any record of the actual manner in which the £10,366 was expended in 1915-16, and until I find that out I cannot advise the Committee that it would be wise to further reduce the item. The amount this year of £10,750 is actually a reduction of £1,065 on the previous year. In an aggregate amount like this it is hard to confine the expenditure within £100 or so. We cannot anticipate all the work that has to be done by officers of the department; there may be more or less travelling. Take, as an instance, the Kalgoolie mining school. There is an increase this year for the requirements of that school. It was found even on last year's expenditure that the amount would not be sufficient to keep the school up to the full requirements.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: You find that in every sub-department.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: In every sub-department we have a decrease except in this one. I think we have shown a desire to economise, as we have already cut this item down by £1,065.

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

Ayes .. .. .	10
Noes .. .. .	25

Majority against .. . 15

#### AYES.

Mr. Angwin	Mr. Munsie
Mr. Collier	Mr. Rooke
Mr. Green	Mr. Walker
Mr. Johnston	Mr. O'Loughlen
Mr. Jones	(Teller.)
Mr. Lutey	

#### NOES.

Mr. Angelo	Mr. Mitchell
Mr. Broun	Mr. Mullanv
Mr. Brown	Mr. Nairn
Mr. Davies	Mr. Pickering
Mr. Draper	Mr. Piesse
Mr. Durack	Mr. H. Robinson
Mr. Gardiner	Mr. R. T. Robinson
Mr. George	Mr. Smith
Mr. Harrison	Mr. Thomson
Mr. Hickmott	Mr. Underwood
Mr. Hudson	Mr. Voryard
Mr. Lefroy	Mr. Hardwick
Mr. Maley	(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

Vote put and passed.

Business undertakings—

Vote—Avondale and Harvey estates, £3,910:

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Surely the Minister will tell us something about this vote. It has been stated that the Avondale estate is in a very bad way; it is said that the estate has been neglected and that the bush is growing again. We ought to know something about it.

The PREMIER: All the unsold portions of the Avondale estate which is not being used for cultivation is being used for stock raising purposes, and satisfactorily. The wool clip will show a substantial increase on the previous year. The net profit for the year ending 31st March, 1917, was £389 4s. 4d., which, added to the profit of previous years, was £2,305, and this profit is, after paying interest on the land utilised—£1,811 17s. 8d. It may be said that some land is getting overgrown again, but on all properties, if attention is not paid, this will occur. Attention will have to be paid to this matter. It is the desire of the Government to utilise this estate for settlement purposes, and it would be a good place to utilise for the settlement of returned soldiers who desire to go on the land. The original cost of the estate was something like £49,000. The total area is 9,635 acres, and the land farmed and utilised by the Government totals 8,136 acres, the value of that land being £45,298. The land sold and still held is 787 acres.

Hon. T. Walker: Is that the true value or the inflated value?

The PREMIER: It is calculated on the price we paid for the land.

Mr. O'Loughlen: But it is not the value of the land to-day.

The PREMIER: As hon. members know, the Government offered it for sale, but were unable to dispose of it.

Mr. O'Loughlen: That shows the price was too high.

The PREMIER: That was the case, unfortunately, with many of the repurchased estates. We have to try and reduce the value of the land, as we have the power to do now. It would be better for the country to even lose a little on account of the purchase money, rather than have the land unsettled. I am desirous of seeing a number of prosperous farms on this area, and it is the wish of the Government that there should be settlement on it as early as possible. I have been endeavouring to find an opportunity to inspect the property myself. That visit will be of benefit to myself, and I will be able to form an estimate of what the real value of the land will be to those who are likely to settle on it. It is close to a railway line and is well adapted for returned soldiers' settlements.

Hon. T. Walker: They would have to pay back the purchase money.

The PREMIER: We can reduce the price to whatever we like. The land originally cost about £5 an acre, but it will have to be reduced to considerably below that.

Mr. Broun: Some of the blocks are £50 an acre.

The PREMIER: It will not be of any use putting men on the land and tying a mill-stone round their necks.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Do you think there would be any chance of the original owners refunding any portion of the purchase money to the State?

The PREMIER: I do not think so. Even though the place has been worked without loss it will be better to make use of the whole area for settlement purposes.

Item, Avondale estate, general expenses, including purchase working plant, wages, working expenses, interest, etc., £3,700.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I was pleased to hear the Premier state that this property had shown a profit of £2,304, and that last year the profit had been £800 odd.

The Premier: I said £2,304 since the beginning.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Some time back hon. members opposite contradicted me when I told them that this property was showing a profit.

Mr. Munsie: But it was a bad deal from the beginning.

Mr. Hickmott: Has interest on the capital been allowed?

The Premier: Yes, at four per cent.

Mr. Broun: No sinking fund.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I remember the last time I dealt with this matter, the Minister was in Melbourne, and I was told that I was making incorrect statements. I was told that it was a matter of impossibility for the work which was being carried out there to result in a profit. Yet we have the Premier informing us that the total profit to date is £2,304.

Mr. Broun: I notice that the estimated revenue is £3,730, while the estimated expenditure is £3,700.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I am talking about what has been done in the past. The Avondale estate has been in charge of Mr. John Robinson, who thoroughly understands farming. He has taken an active interest in this property, and no person has been better pleased with the results for several years past than Mr. Robinson. It is useless going into the question of the purchase. We know that a considerable sum of money has to be found for interest. That makes the land to a large extent useless as a farming proposition. My only hope is that the proceeds this year will turn out better than was anticipated.

Mr. HARRISON: I was interested to hear from the Premier that the interest charged on this property was four per cent. Could not this property bear interest at seven per cent., and thus be placed on the same footing as the farms occupied by those who are under the Industries Assistance Board, and which are to have that rate of interest charged as from the 1st April. The Avondale estate, I am informed, realised £1,300 on wool alone this season. Many of the farmers under the Industries Assistance Board have no sheep, and therefore they have not the wool assets to meet the higher interest.

The Premier: But the four per cent. is interest on debentures.

Mr. HARRISON: Yes, and the money used by the Industries Assistance Board farmers is used over and over again. It was first obtained at a lower rate than it is possible to get it at the present time.

The PREMIER: This property was sold to the Government on debentures bearing interest at four per cent., and that is the interest which is charged up against the estate. Hon. members will notice that the item on the Estimates refers to interest.

Mr. Thomson: Does that include the purchase of sheep for the estate?

The PREMIER: Yes. While the estimated expenditure is £3,700, the estimated revenue is £3,730. It is only a small profit; still the estate is paying interest on debentures.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: The member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) said it was of no use discussing the capital expenditure on this estate. If I make reference to it I hope it will indicate that the Government should not proceed any farther in this direction. The Premier in his policy speech at Moora said he was appointing a committee to make recommendations in connection with the acquiring of further estates for the settlement of returned soldiers. We have purchased this Avondale estate and 24 others at a cost of half a million of money, and I do not think it can be said that as many as five of them are turning out well. The settlers on the estates purchased in the Geraldton district have been continually applying for relief, and we have had similar experience in connection with other re-purchased estates. In each case the capital cost was so heavy that the incoming tenants were handicapped at the start. Last year we passed an amending Bill giving the Government power to make a reduction in the prices charged to settlers on those estates. If we made a reduction of even £2 per acre it would be wise if it resulted in getting those estates properly settled. The member for North-East Fremantle pointed out that the Avondale estate was paying. Certainly it would be a pretty bad proposition if it showed a loss. In any case, the profit is of very little use from the producing point of view. The same remark applies to all the other acquired estates. We should accept the Avondale purchase as a lesson to us not to acquire any further estates. The Avondale estate comprises 1,700 acres of granite rocks for which we have paid £5 per acre. It is clear that there must be some very inferior land there, or settlers would have been willing to take it up. The estate is in one of the most favoured districts of the State, and is right alongside the railway line, notwithstanding which it was hawked about for months, and we could get only one settler to go on it. For a time the same conditions obtained at Denmark, and they obtain also in regard to Yandanooka. In all we have 25 of those estates, and the settlers who have gone on them have required relief owing to the high prices paid in the first instance to the vendors. It is paradoxical that we should have those estates on hand when we have been sending agents all over the world announcing that we have millions of acres of Crown lands awaiting settlement.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not know that the hon. member is altogether in order.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: We are discussing the Avondale estate.

The CHAIRMAN: But not the general policy.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: We require a policy for the repurchased estates.

The Premier: The policy is to get people on them.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: It should be a lesson to the Government that while we have Crown lands awaiting settlement, we should not purchase any further lands, whether to please a friend or silence a foe.

The PREMIER: The hon. member declared that I had said in my policy speech it was the intention of the Government to repurchase estates.

Mr. O'Loghlen: No, to appoint a committee to recommend.

The PREMIER: I said that the Government had appointed a board whose duty it would be to select land suitable for settlement, to fix the size of the holdings, to recommend areas to be cleared and to report on the advisableness of repurchasing estates. At that time I had piles of offers of estates which I had turned down.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Are the Government endeavouring to repurchase further estates?

The PREMIER: No, certainly not. We have already in repurchased estates, in conjunction with the Crown lands, sufficient land available to settle an enormous number of people. At the same time we realise that if a property suitable for settlement is offered at a reasonable price which will enable the settlers on it to make a living out of it, it might be advisable to repurchase such a property. However, at the present time the Government have no estates whatever in mind, and no intention of repurchasing any estates.

Mr. BROWN: I hope hon. members will not condemn the Avondale estate. It is one of the finest in the Beverley district. Had it been worked in an economical manner, a very much greater profit would have been made out of it. With all due respect, I say that Mr. Robinson is not competent to manage the estate. I am certain of that, because I am living alongside of him and so I can see what his management is. I would not put Mr. Robinson on my own estate to manage it. There should have been a big margin of profit on the Avondale estate. It is a good property and I hope the Government will settle it as it should be settled. If they do not put returned soldiers on it they should at least subdivide it into four or five farms. I admit there is some stone on the property, but there is not more than 1,200 acres which, on that account, could not be cultivated. Rather than allow the estate to remain in its present condition, it would be better to reduce the price per acre, although not to anything like the extent of £2 as suggested by the member for Forrest. Alternatively the property should be let on very long terms, which would give the lessee a chance of recouping his invested capital. In the past the estate has been one of the

worst in the country for noxious weeds, instead of setting a good example in that respect. I hope something definite will be done with the property.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I was sorry to hear the hon. member make an attack on Mr. Robinson. It should be remembered that Mr. Robinson is managing the estate, together with that of Yandanooka, from Perth. From what I know of him, Mr. Robinson is one of our best officers. Possibly he has done something to offend the hon. member as a neighbour. Perhaps some sheep have got through the fences. The Premier will admit that Mr. Robinson is one of the faithful officers of the department. He has done very good work, not only in the department but in respect of land settlement also. He has assisted a large number of persons to settle on the land. If he were as bad a manager as the hon. member suggests, the estate would not have shown a net profit of £2,304.

Mr. Brown: That is the total profit for all the years it has been running. It should have made that profit in one year.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: It has not been running for many years, and for portion of the time only a very small area was farmed. Also it has suffered from bad seasons just as have other estates.

Mr. Brown: There was only one year.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: When we remember the large numbers of persons in the State who have not been able to make both ends meet, some credit should be given to the gentleman who has control of farming in these areas. We find that last year there was a profit of £800 on this farm.

Mr. Brown: How can you say that Mr. Robinson is ruining this place as it should be run?

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I am merely going on the figures placed before us. Apparently the hon. member desires that this property should be a loss to the State, and that we should reduce the value of the land contained in it. No doubt if the property was subdivided for closer settlement the State would gain indirectly, but nevertheless there would be a loss.

Item, Harvey Estate, general expenses, etc., £210.

Mr. PICKERING: From a return I have of land available under the Returned Soldiers Settlement Scheme it appears that there are 50 blocks near the railway in the Harvey district. Are these blocks referred to in this item? There is land in this district with which I am not at all satisfied from this point of view, but there is also other land of first class quality. Will the Minister give us some definite information on the point?

The PREMIER: This is all the Harvey estate. A portion of it has been cut up and is now being offered to returned soldiers. I believe that some have elected to go there. The sum of only £210 is set down for expenditure on this estate. There is a caretaker on the place who is paid £136 a year. He keeps the fences in repair, cultivates the orchard, and plants the produce. It is estimated that £300 will come out of the estate this year.

Mr. SMITH: I wish to complain about the erratic manner in which the Estimates are placed before us. In connection with the Avondale estate, interest is included in the item, but in this case the interest is not included. We have no way of gauging whether an estate is paying or not, and this is very misleading. It is about time the Harvey estate was cut up and offered to the public. Large sums of money have been spent in clearing this estate, and if it is not taken up the undergrowth will make its appearance again and in a year or so it will cost as much to clear as it did in the first place. I do not know whether it is generally known that the estate is on the market. Will the Minister tell us how much of this estate has been offered to returned soldiers, and how many have been settled on it?

The PREMIER: The Government cannot force people on the land if they will not go there. This estate has been offered to returned soldiers for the past six months. An office has been established at the Lands Department under the Returned Soldiers Settlement Scheme, and the Returned Soldiers Association has been kept closely in touch with all proceedings. Every opportunity has been given to returned soldiers to take up this land.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Have any arrangements been made for cutting up this estate into larger blocks? This property is situated in one of the finest districts in the State. It was cleared by the Government at a reasonable price after having been acquired cheaply. It is true that the estate has been available for some months.

Mr. Pickering: Not the best of the land.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Have the objections lodged by returned soldier applicants been met? Some four or five returned soldiers have taken up blocks there. Others have been anxious to settle on the land, and naturally I directed their attention to Harvey rather than to the wheat belt. They inspected the Harvey estate and subsequently pointed out that they were obliged, under the terms of settlement, to take two blocks, one in the more favoured locality already cleared, and the other about a mile away, the latter being uncleared land. The object was said to be to enable these men to earn money from the Agricultural Bank by clearing the one block so that they might be enabled to live on the other. Many of these men are not fit for this work. Some of them have said they would be satisfied with the one block if they could get it. Have the original blocks been enlarged, and is it possible for returned soldier applicants to take up one entire block instead of having to take two a mile apart? Several good applicants have turned the proposition down because of these terms, and have gone into the wheat belt.

The PREMIER: I am sorry the Honorary Minister is not well enough to be here tonight, because he is closely in touch with the matter. The terms mentioned by the member for Forrest were imposed with the object of benefiting the settler so that he might, while working on the one place, be able to earn money from the Agricultural Bank in the way indicated. I do not like the idea of having a

man's property divided in this way. There were some departmental objections which I think should be overcome. I will go into the matter with a view to arranging some means by which a man can have his land all in one block.

Vote put and passed.

Railway Department (Hon. C. A. Hudson, Minister).

Vote—Railways. £1,425,561:

THE MINISTER FOR MINES AND RAILWAYS (Hon. C. A. Hudson—Vilgarn) [9.30]: In introducing the Estimates of the Railway Department it is not customary to enter into detail, as the report of the Commissioner of Railways sets out full particulars of the working of the department. The financial year has proceeded over a considerable number of months, and I propose to give a few figures bearing on the Estimates now before the Committee. The vote for the Railway Department for 1916-17 was £1,446,133, and the expenditure for the same year £1,455,879, the expenditure thus exceeding the vote by £9,746. The revenue estimated for 1916-17 was £1,905,000, but the earnings did not reach that estimate by some £26,000. However, the result of the year's working was that the department earned £1,878,434, and expended £1,455,879, the surplus being £422,555. When the interest, £643,765, was taken into account, the loss shown on the working of the railways was £221,210. These are Treasury figures. The vote for 1916-17 was about £50,000 less than the expenditure for the previous year, and that amount was saved except for £9,746, as just mentioned. To account for that excess there are the following items: increased cost of Newcastle and Collie coal, owing to the war, £10,205; and extra wages paid to employees under the Arbitration Court award, £3,500; or a total of £13,705. So that actually there was a saving on the year of £70,000. In estimating for the current year, the Commissioner framed an estimate of £1,707,000 for earnings, and of £1,425,561 for expenditure, showing a balance of earnings over expenditure of £281,439. The interest has increased this year by about £25,000; and, the total of interest being £669,000, there was on the Commissioner's estimated figures, at the time the Estimates were prepared, a loss of £387,561. That would be an excess of £172,000 odd on the loss of the previous year. In the estimate made for the current year the earnings are reduced, as hon. members see, by £171,000 approximately. In arriving at this figure the Commissioner allowed for a falling off in traffic on various items, the principal of these being wheat £70,000, fruit £13,000, class goods £13,000, and trans-Australian railway construction freights £49,000. The actual amount received under the last head during the previous year was about £45,000, and it is estimated that there will be very little this year. The anticipated loss from reduction in revenue from passenger fares, parcels, and mails is £30,000. It is, of course, difficult for the Commissioner to estimate accurately, and I would not have disturbed these figures were it not for the fact that the earnings for the first seven months of



the year have been somewhat in excess of anticipation.

Hon. P. Collier: What is the estimated deficit for the year?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The anticipated expenditure which I have given is £1,425,000, and that shows a reduction on the previous year's expenditure of £30,000. That is what the Commissioner estimated he would be able to save in the expenditure. But he had to make provision, over the previous year, for the war bonus of £20,000. That bonus operated during only portion of the previous year. The extra cost for coal this year is estimated at £16,000. Then there is expenditure for re-sleeping, re-railing and repairing after the washaways of last year, £13,000 and £26,000 respectively. This could not be longer delayed, because there is necessity, as must be recognised, to keep up the standard of the working railways. The whole of this expenditure will not be incurred during the present financial year, but most of it will. In addition, there are 93 miles of railway which were taken over last year, and 67 miles taken over this year. That additional mileage is not shown in the report nor in the Estimates submitted; but it has a bearing on the estimated expenditure of the working railways. Regard must also be had, of course, to the extra cost of materials and stores, which have all increased in price since these Estimates were prepared. The approximate financial results for the seven months ended on the 31st January of this year, as compared with the same period during the previous financial year, are, earnings £1,047,000 as against £1,071,000, and working expenses £815,000 as against £849,000. The surplus shown for the seven months ended on the 31st January last is thus £232,846, as against the surplus in the previous financial year of only £222,220. That shows an advantage for the current financial year of about £10,000. Interest, of course, has increased this year, and has raised the loss on the seven months working to £156,000 as against £144,000 for the same period of last year. The earnings, however, have improved by reason principally of the increase in the amount received and to be received for the haulage of wheat. I have already pointed out that the Commissioner anticipated a loss of £70,000 in the haulage of wheat; but a good deal of that will be recovered. The passenger traffic has kept up better than anticipated; indeed, at Christmas time, it was better than in several previous years. The Commissioner has also received £15,000 from the Commonwealth Government in connection with services rendered to the military, which amount we did not expect would be paid so early.

Hon. P. Collier: That is for services rendered since the war began, and we are getting something of what belongs to us?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: That is so. We did not expect to get the amount.

Hon. P. Collier: You deserve it for having squeezed it out of them. We could not manage that.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The adjustment of the matter is not yet quite

complete. That amount brings the estimated revenue up to £60,000 in excess of anticipation. The working expenses have been kept down during the same seven months, and it is expected that a further saving will be effected. The principal item of increase is the higher wages which will have to be paid under the award recently delivered by the Arbitration Court—an extra expenditure, it is estimated, of £39,000 for the year. The amounts I have already mentioned for repairs will not be all expended during the current financial year, but the final figures submitted show that the earnings anticipated, £1,767,000, will exceed the working expenses, £1,450,561 by £316,000. The interest bill, however, will be £669,000, showing an anticipated loss of £352,561, as against the loss estimated at the time these Estimates were framed, £357,000. So that the approximate loss for the year, taken on the basis of the experience of the past seven months, will be about £350,000. It may be some comfort, although not very much, to make a comparison of the figures of the working of our railways with the working of those of the other States, having regard to the population. In Western Australia the net loss for the years 1914 to 1917, inclusive, was £161,120. In South Australia it was £392,402; in Victoria, £1,500,398; in New South Wales, £431,779; in Queensland, £1,229,726; and in Tasmania £348,585. We are the lowest for the period of the war by a good margin. Western Australia, in point of population, is nearly equal to Queensland, and Queensland has lost during the period of the war £1,229,000, whilst our loss was only £161,000. The population per mile of railway varied from 110 in 1914 to 91 in 1917 as regards this State. In Queensland the population per mile of railway varied from 144 in 1914 to 128 in 1917. I think that in comparing these figures it is plain that the management of our railways has, at any rate, not been neglected.

Hon. J. MITCHELL (Northam) [9.43]: I am sorry that we have not heard from the Minister the Government's intentions in regard to the control of our railways. We have heard that there is to be a change in the control of the railways, and it would have been well if the Government had taken the Committee into their confidence. On the statement of the Minister, we have been very well served in the past, and particularly since the war began. It should be remembered that the traffic on our railways has fallen off enormously. Since the outbreak of the war there has been practically no timber traffic, which previously represented 28 per cent. of the goods traffic. Moreover, all our industries have shown a reduced output; and I think there will be considerably less tonnage from the land next year. This year, of course, shows a considerable reduction on last year in regard to the area cropped; and that means not only reduced traffic for the railways, due to decreased production, but also reduced traffic in the way of farmers' requirements, and of the passenger fares which follow increased earnings, and also in other

ways. The Railways, therefore, have suffered a good deal more than we are inclined to allow the Railway Department credit for. We have a very large mileage considering our population—a far greater mileage in proportion to population than any other State. We have, too, a great many miles of railway on our goldfields which are not fully used—in fact, hundreds of miles of railway on the goldfields are used very little. Something has been said against spur agricultural lines. The Commissioner has brought forward the spur lines year after year in his reports, and many hon. members believe that the loss on the railways is largely due to those agricultural spur lines. The total loss on the agricultural railways for the year is something like £40,000, but the Committee should realise that, were it not for the spur agricultural lines, there would be a very much less traffic on the main lines, and, consequently, a heavier loss on the system as a whole. It has to be remembered, too, that this loss is occurring at a time when agriculture is depressed. We have had four or five bad seasons. When seasons become normal again, the earnings on the agricultural lines will be much greater, and I hope that many of the lines now showing a loss will then be included in the general system. I do not think that the method adopted of arriving at the value of the spur line is fair; only the non-paying agricultural lines are shown, while all that are paying are included in the ordinary system. Notwithstanding anything that may be said to the contrary, we have been particularly fortunate with our agricultural railways. We are inclined to criticise the Railway Department because a considerable loss will be shown this year, but while we regret that loss we must remember that the existing condition of things is entirely responsible for it. So far as the agriculturists are concerned they have good friends in the Commissioner of Railways and his staff. I do not know what the intention of the Government may be in regard to the control of the railways in the future, but this I know, that whatever happens and whoever may be in charge, the loss which is being experienced will continue until traffic is restored. We have in our railways a great business undertaking, and even if they were privately owned they would be showing a big loss on account of the times we are passing through. The railways have been built to carry special traffic. That traffic has been temporarily lost, and will not be restored until we get shipping tonnage once more. What is the intention of the Government with regard to the Commissionership? It seems to me that we might well wait until the war is over before inviting applications to fill the position; there would then be a wider choice. It would be better to continue the existing state of affairs because the position cannot possibly be improved by any changes the Government may make. There are some who think otherwise, but that is my opinion, and it has been formed as the result of considerable experience. It would be better, in my opinion, if the rail-

ways were removed even further from political control. In the past it has always been the custom, whenever an additional £50,000 or £100,000 has been required, for the Minister to instruct the Commissioner to increase the freights. The Commissioner then of course becomes unpopular. The increase of freights is always a Ministerial act, but the Minister never takes the credit for it.

The Minister for Railways: The freights can only be increased with the approval of the Minister.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: They are nearly always increased on the suggestion of the Minister.

Mr. Johnston: I think the Commissioner is always suggesting it.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I do not know what was the experience of the leader of the Opposition when he was Minister for Railways. Whenever the Minister wants increased revenue from the railways he should certainly take the responsibility for it. We have in the Commissioner a capable officer who has had long experience, and a change at the present time would mean that we would bring in someone without experience who, in the circumstances, would not do as well. I would suggest that the question of appointing a new Commissioner be deferred until after the war. The reasons are obvious. The great trouble in the Railway Department seems to be that there is no one capable of acting as Commissioner at any time. The Chief Traffic Manager is the next official but he is not a highly paid servant. The responsibility which the Commissioner carries is too great, and beyond the capacity of an ordinary man, physically or mentally. There must be continuous trouble in a department like that which employs over 6,000 men. Hon. members should recognise the difficulties which have to be faced. At the same time we should not forget that in 1911 the railways showed a profit of £220,000. It would be interesting to know how the working of the railways has resulted in the different periods, including the past ten years.

The Minister for Railways: You will find the information on page 4 of the annual report. Since 1906 a profit of £670,000 has been shown after paying interest.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Our railways will increase in value with the increase of population. The money the State owes has been invested in substantial securities, largely in our railways, and we must not lose sight of the fact that the working of the railways over a number of years has been satisfactory. Parliament would not ask more than that £670,000 profit under normal conditions. The great thing is to get the freights as low as possible. We must not expect very much profit from the railways, and if at any time we make £200,000 in one year some of that should go back into the system. The railways should not be used to swell the revenue.

Mr. O'Loughlin: When they built up that big profit they starved the system; it was run to bed rock.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: At that time freights were reduced considerably and a sum of money was spent on improvements.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It required considerable expenditure to put the system right.

Mr. Smith: The loss this year is what we have to consider. What are we going to do about it?

Mr. O'Loughlen: When the Labour Government came in they immediately ordered 1,000 wagons.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I wish it had been 10,000 wagons.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Labour Government had to spend two millions of money on the railways.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The need for an increased number of wagons meant that there was increased traffic.

Hon. P. Collier: There had not been one new engine added to the stock when the Labour Government took office.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The engines were on order then.

Hon. P. Collier: We had to pay for them.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I think there was a considerable sum of money set aside for rolling stock.

Hon. P. Collier: Yes, set aside.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: And hon. members took it into account.

The CHAIRMAN: What has all that to do with the railway system in 1918?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I do not think it has been the custom to refuse to allow members to make comparisons.

The CHAIRMAN: If every member is going to discuss what happened in 1911 we shall be here with the Estimates until 1919.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: At all events we are here to do our duty. However, I have no desire to distress you. I wish to dispel the idea that the railways have not been satisfactory. Discussion will be useful in that it will enable members to come to a correct judgment as to the work done by the officials whose salaries we are discussing. I would like to hear from the Minister his intention in regard to the control of the railways, and I would like to know what steps have been taken in that direction.

Mr. PIESSE (Toodyay) [9.1]: No doubt the statement of the Minister in regard to the prospective loss on the working of the railways for the present year involves big figures and justifies considerable anxiety. Nevertheless I feel that we have a lot to be proud of in the management of our railways. I am sorry to hear the rumour that it is intended to change the management. Although there is a prospective heavy loss, in fairness to the Commissioner it should be remarked that the accumulated profits of the last 10 years leave a considerable margin to meet whatever deficit may accrue this year.

Mr. Smith: Where are those profits?

Mr. PIESSE: In the Commissioner's report it will be seen that the profits of the last 10 years amount to £969,000. If we deduct from that the prospective loss to date, it leaves something like £600,000 profit which has passed to the current revenue of the State. It must not be forgotten that the Commissioner has had a considerable amount of work to do in improving new lines. This should not be the

work of the Commissioner. I know of district railways only partially built, the completion of the work having had to be carried out by the Commissioner and the cost thereof deducted from the revenue of the department. It is not fair to ask the Commissioner to control the railways and, at the same time, furnish them with the necessary equipment. Several lines have been only half ballasted and only half equipped. Even to-day there are many demands for trucking yards which should have been furnished by the Works Department. It is not the duty of the Commissioner to provide those conveniences.

Mr. O'Loughlen: He is going to get the revenue. The Public Works Department get no revenue from trucking yards.

Mr. Thomson: The Commissioner will get revenue when settlement shall have advanced sufficiently to give a reasonable return for those conveniences.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The people find the money, whichever department spends it.

Mr. PIESSE: The Commissioner should not be called upon to provide those facilities, which could have been provided much more cheaply when the line was being constructed. The Commissioner has even had to re-ballast lines, a work which should have been carried out by the contractor. Further than that, I submit that the work of controlling the railways is too great for one Commissioner, more especially in view of the fact that he has also the care of the tramways.

Mr. Smith: You do not suggest that he has made a success of the tramways.

Mr. PIESSE: He has not altogether made a failure of them. There is very little to complain of with regard to the tramways.

Mr. Smith: Except that the profits from the tramways are used to provide railway facilities for the country districts.

Mr. PIESSE: Rather do the profits of the railways go to extend tramway facilities. I hope that no alteration will be made in the management of the railways.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Have the Government announced their intention of making a change?

Mr. PIESSE: Not so far as I am aware, but I have heard it rumoured. I hope that no alteration will be made, at least until after the war, when conditions shall have settled down again. To bring in new management at this stage would be most unfair to the present Commissioner.

Mr. THOMSON (Katanning) [9.10]: Unlike the hon. member, I consider there is great room for improvement in the management of our railways. Considerable money could be saved in that direction. I am not going to condemn the Commissioner, because it is a physical impossibility for him to attend to all the details. If he knew some of the things that are going on he would probably effect a radical alteration. Quite recently firewood required at Ongerup was trucked something like 100 miles, notwithstanding that there was plenty of timber growing in the immediate vicinity of the railway station at that place. Again, if hon. members will turn to the Estimates of Ways and Works they will find that we are paying the Chief Engineer for Exist-

ing Lines £900 per annum. We have the Public Works Department constructing railways which this engineer has to inspect before taking over. I maintain that all new railways should be constructed under his supervision. At present we are paying for double supervision.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: It provides a check.

Mr. THOMSON: I do not know that we have any check when railways are constructed departmentally, because the Railway Department has to take them over and, in a great many instances, complete them.

The Minister for Works: I suppose you know that with every one of those lines a sum of money is handed to the Commissioner to make up any deficiency.

Mr. THOMSON: We require to do away with the duplication of the engineering staff. If the Chief Engineer of Existing Lines is competent to look after all the railways, he should be competent to supervise construction.

Mr. O'Loghlen: He may be fully employed on existing lines.

Mr. THOMSON: I think he has a little spare time on hand. I agree with the member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) that the spur lines do not get full credit for the traffic they contribute to the main lines. Under existing conditions we have two classes of freight for the carriage of goods. Goods can be sent either at owner's risk or at Commissioner's risk. The latter class is double the rate of the former, notwithstanding which the Commissioner is responsible for goods only while they are in his possession. Thus, if a case of goods is found to be damaged when delivered, the Commissioner is exempt from responsibility. I have received the following letter from a business man in my district—

As you are aware, we recently brought an action against the Commissioner of Railways for damage to furniture in transit. We acknowledge that those goods were sent at owner's risk, but we hold it to be a case of wilful neglect. The magistrate acknowledged in his verdict that a charge of culpable neglect might have succeeded, but gave judgment against us as to wilful neglect, practically stating that it was utterly impossible to obtain a verdict in such a case. This is the fifth consignment we have received damaged. We are compelled to avail ourselves of the O.R. clause on account of the excessive cost of extra packing as well as freight to get the goods by Commissioner's risk. We have obtained opinion as to whether to take our case to a higher court. We are advised it is hopeless to try to get a verdict against the Commissioner under the present Act, which frees him from absolutely any responsibility. We are prepared to take an ordinary risk, but we consider the Commissioner should not be allowed to exercise gross and culpable neglect in handling goods without being liable, and it is quite time in the interests of the general public that the Railway Act should be amended to make him liable in such extreme cases.

I have had personal experience of this very question. The Commissioner should

be made a common carrier. He should not be allowed to contract himself out of a liability by Act of Parliament. The Commissioner should be responsible. Under the present regulations it is a matter of impossibility to sheet home a case of wilful negligence to the Railway Department. In order to prove wilful negligence one has to show that a railway employee deliberately and wilfully damaged certain goods.

The Minister for Railways: It would need an Act of Parliament to alter the law.

Mr. THOMSON: If that is the case such legislation should be introduced. The Commissioner of Railways should be dealt with in the same way as private individuals would be dealt with in such circumstances, and should be a common carrier. To show what is possible to happen in connection with the Railway Department, I wish to inform the Committee that on the 4th June, 1917, a gentleman residing in Katanning was run into by a travelling water tank which was being shunted. I wish to show the absurd position taken up by the Railway Department. After nearly killing this man they wanted to hold him responsible for damaging a signal ladder. On the 20th June this letter was sent to the Chief Engineer of Existing Lines—

We have to inform you that on the 4th inst., whilst attempting to cross the public crossing in Clive-street, Katanning, the railway employees here were shunting a rake of water trucks without lights, whistles, or signals of any description, the said trucks crashed into my car, and carried some some distance on to the railway property, where it now lies. A statement has already been given to the station-master in charge here (when he asked for same). I have been suffering severely from shock since, otherwise would have gone further into the matter than at present.

I consider that the Chief Engineer of Existing Lines could very well inspect the railways which are constructed, because he has had time to send a letter of the following description, in reply to that which I have just quoted:—

I have to advise you of liability in connection with the damage to a signal ladder, caused by your motor car colliding with a travelling water tank at Clive-street level crossing at Katanning on the 4th inst. An account for the cost of effecting repairs will be rendered later by the Chief Accountant, Railways.

Hon. P. Collier: What is wrong with that?

Mr. THOMSON: Was there ever a piece of more colossal impertinence. After having nearly killed a man and damaged his motor-car they have the cool impertinence to write in this strain.

Hon. P. Collier: Was it the fault of the Railway Department?

Mr. THOMSON: It was their fault. I have gone over the crossing myself on occasions when there have been no lights and no whistles sounding.

The Minister for Railways: Is an action pending?

Mr. THOMSON: I do not know.

The Minister for Railways: It is hardly fair to comment in this way if an action is pending.

Mr. THOMSON: If after nearly killing a man the Railway Department are going to hold him responsible for damaging Government property, it is time that an alteration was made in the administration of our railways.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The official is protecting the State.

Mr. THOMSON: Oh, of course. If such a thing had happened to the hon. member he would have taken the same action as this gentleman took. This gentleman replied to the Chief Engineer of Existing Lines on the 22nd June in the following manner:—

I am in receipt of yours of the 18th inst., and note that you intend effecting repairs to a signal ladder, and charging same up to myself. I presume this is a departmental procedure. If not, it is certainly colossal cheek on your part, as the Government railway water tank you mention crashed into my car and carried it on to the railway property without my sanction, I assure you. Further to this, after the accident occurred, instead of the railway authorities at Katanning lifting the car out of the way of passing trains they simply pushed the car over on its side, thereby damaging it considerably more. However, I am placing this matter in my solicitor's hands, and any further correspondence you wish to direct to myself I refer you—to my solicitor.

The Minister for Railways: Suppose you leave it to the solicitor?

Mr. THOMSON: I merely quote this to show what is likely to happen under the super-management of the Railway Department. A good deal has been said about the iniquity of private concerns, but if anyone has a claim against the Railway Department and can prove it up to the hilt, they will not satisfy that claim and are always prepared to go to a higher court. I could also quote an instance given in the "Sunday Times" to show that a considerable sum of money was wasted by the Railway Department, and that the High Court absolutely refused to allow them to carry it any further. It is all very well for the officials who have the finances of the State behind them. Even if the very humblest member of the community has a case against the Government the officials have no right to prevent him from getting justice by taking the matter to a higher court. In my opinion we can have much more efficient management of our railways, and a considerable saving could be effected in this direction. With regard to our spur lines, it would be very economical to introduce a system of motor transport.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That would take money.

Hon. P. Collier: And you have to get the power.

Mr. THOMSON: It is not altogether impossible. Motor-cars can be purchased at a very reasonable price, and can be fitted with wheels to run on the lines. Such a system

would often save the use of a heavy engine perhaps drawing an empty train.

The Minister for Railways: You could easily cut out the trains if they are being run empty.

Mr. THOMSON: That only goes to show what we might expect from the Railway Department.

The Minister for Railways: I thought you were complaining about empty trains running out.

Mr. THOMSON: I want to get a more efficient service. We should give the people in the outer parts of the State better conveniences than they now enjoy. In some of these districts where the trains are only being run once a week the people are quite satisfied, because they recognise that there is no justification at present for running them more frequently, but if the Government intend to economise they should cut out some of the trains on the main lines and in the metropolitan area, and not cause the man outback to suffer all the inconvenience.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: If they did that they would have to stop the trains on the spur lines altogether, because there would be no money with which to run them.

Mr. THOMSON: Not at all. If the spur lines had credited to them the full amount of the traffic which goes over them they would be shown to be in a far better position than they are to-day. Reverting to the question of owner's risk, I say it behoves the Minister to see that the public get a better deal than they are now getting.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. W. J. George—Murray-Wellington) [9.27]: The member for Toodyay (Mr. Piesse) made reference to the manner in which the Public Works Department turn over the lines to the Railway Department. Years ago, railway lines were ordered by the Government to be built at so much per mile and they were built at that price, and the result was that when I was in charge of the Railway Department I spent a great amount of money in subsequently putting them right. During the past few years our railways have not been built under these silly and idiotic methods. Before lines are turned over by the Works Department, the Engineer for Existing Lines with his assistants goes carefully over them. They also see the lines when they are being constructed, and know about them before they are constructed. When they take the lines over it is agreed between the Engineer in Chief of the Public Works Department and the Engineer for Existing Lines as to what would be a fair sum to allow the Railway Department to make up for any deficiencies that may be considered should be made up.

Mr. Piesse: Was that system adopted on the Dowerin-Merredin loop line?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I cannot tell the hon. member. To show the unreasonableness of some of these things, I would say that only last week I dealt with a claim from the working railways for nearly £3,000, in connection with a line which was taken over three years ago and has been working ever since. They now complain that the banks were not made of sufficiently good material, and that

the ballast was not of the depth that it should have been. They had £3,000 from the Works Department to make up for any deficiencies of this kind, and after the line has been in running order for three years they now have the cast-iron cheek to come along and ask for more money for a line which they should have had "saved" enough to look after. If their inspection of the line which they took over is not sufficient to enable them to feel that they have confidence in their own judgment it does not say very much for their being able to make a better job of building a railway line than the Public Works Department.

Mr. PICKERING (Sussex) [9.29]: Some two years ago I believe an amount was placed on the Estimates in connection with the Busselton jetty. This amount was warranted at the time by the amount of traffic which was going over the jetty in the shape of timber for shipment.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That was not brought in under the railways; it was a special item.

The CHAIRMAN: We are dealing with the general policy at present.

Mr. PICKERING: I wish to illustrate that general policy.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That was a Works Department vote.

Mr. PICKERING: I understand that the amount was passed and that it was intended to expend the money on effecting necessary repairs to this jetty. But for the veto of the Commissioner of Railways this money would have been so expended. It is altogether wrong that the Commissioner should be able to veto the action taken by this Committee. The work was necessary and the money was authorised by Parliament, and the Minister for Works was prepared to spend it. It seems, however, that the Commissioner has power to over-ride this Chamber in regard to giving effect to such necessary work. I wish to protest against this action. As soon as the Government are in a position to do so I hope that they will again place that money on the Estimates in order that, when the war is over and shipping resumes its normal sway, the jetty will be placed in a position to handle the traffic in a proper manner. The member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson) mentioned the subject of motor trains on spur lines, and I am very much in accord with his argument. Motor trains are being used, I believe, in America with good results. If, by that means—that is to say, one carriage with an engine attached—good service is given at a low rate, it will stimulate traffic on these lines and give settlers a very much more frequent service. Another matter I desire to bring under the notice of the Minister for Railways is the desirability of making the motor trolleys of the Railway Department available in case of sickness or accident in remote districts. Many remote centres—Busselton, for instance—are without medical attendants. The nearest medical practitioner to Busselton resides at Bunbury, and in winter time the roads are really impracticable for motor traffic. We know that the Railway Department have these trolleys, which they could make available in such circumstances, for urgent cases of sickness or accident. On the items I shall have some observations to make,

but I trust the Minister will particularly bear in mind my suggestion with regard to making available motor trolleys in case of sickness or accident in a country district.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [9.32]: I think there must be some misapprehension with regard to the point raised by the last speaker, that the Commissioner of Railways had vetoed the vote of Parliament in connection with the Busselton jetty.

Mr. Pickering: It is so.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I do not know the facts of the case, but I venture to say that if they were all known the hon. member would find that he has been misinformed.

Mr. Pickering: I have it on very good authority.

The Minister for Works: The Commissioner objected to the expenditure.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That is quite a different thing from exercising a veto over a vote of Parliament, or over any decision of the Minister controlling the department. Whilst I have known the Commissioner of Railways strenuously oppose the expenditure of money in directions which he did not consider wise, I certainly in my experience have never known him to be in a position to exercise a power of veto. The member for Sussex spoke of the Commissioner's exercising a veto; but I am sure that the hon. member, if placed in full possession of the facts, would find that he has been misinformed. I am not surprised at individual complaints such as those voiced by the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson). It has to be borne in mind that Western Australia has 3,420 miles of railway, operated by about 6,500 employees. It has also to be remembered that that system of 3,420 miles of railway must nearly touch in their various lives, one way or another, the greater proportion of the population of this State. The railway officials would have accomplished a marvel indeed had they been able to go on, year in year out, without having individual cases of complaint such as those mentioned by the member for Katanning. Because some man with a motor car got in the way of a railway train at a crossing, are we to condemn the management of our railway system? How can such an accident as that quoted by the hon. member be urged, in reason, against the management of the railways? In the best managed concern in the world such things as that would happen. To adduce that accident as a reflection on the railway management is carrying things too far.

Mr. Thomson: Do you approve, then, of a matter of that sort?

Hon. P. COLLIER: The engine certainly had a right to be on that road, and I venture to say if the facts were known it would be found that at that particular time the motor car had not a right to be in that particular place. If that is so, the Railway Department are quite within their rights.

Mr. Thomson: I said that there was no whistle blown and that no lights were shown.

Hon. P. COLLIER: There never are whistles or lights in such cases. I have never known of an accident on the railways

but the engine-driver and the guard were both asleep. That was my invariable experience during the time I was Minister. In case of an accident it was always the fault of the railway officials. If it was so in this particular instance, the matter is one for decision in the courts of law. If the Railway Department have been in any way culpable, they are amenable to the laws of the land.

Mr. Thomson: One has a lot of hope of winning in a case of owner's risk.

Hon. P. COLLIER: There is another point raised by the hon. member. The policy of carrying goods at owner's risk is not confined to Western Australia alone. I think it is the policy of all the railway systems of Australasia.

The Minister for Works: The policy of practically all the railway systems on earth.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If any person wants his goods carried at the Commissioner's risk, he can do so by paying for it. Between an individual carrier and the Railway Department with 6,000 or 7,000 employees there is a vast difference. If the Commissioner of Railways were to assume responsibility or risk in respect of all the goods that he takes possession of, he would land himself in a serious loss at the end of each year.

The Minister for Railways: Yes, if he carried them at the rate he charges.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Yes. The Commissioner would have to increase the rates in order to cover the increased risk taken. It is an entirely different matter if a carrier takes goods himself, or if he conveys them by a comparatively small number of men under his control. Unless the Commissioner of Railways increased his rates to cover the loss involved in carrying goods at his own risk, he would find himself in serious financial trouble at the end of the year. I am one of those who think that, notwithstanding there are causes for complaint from one end of the State to the other, it is always to be borne in mind that in such a large system causes for complaint are bound to arise. Let me call to the minds of hon. members the story of our friend who invented the first locomotive. It will be remembered that when the first railway Bill in the world was introduced into the Parliament of Great Britain, it was referred to a Committee of the House of Lords. Objection was raised to the passage of the Bill on the ground that cows might get on the railway line.

Mr. Smith: One member of a former Western Australian Parliament objected to the Perth-Fremantle railway on the same ground.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That hon. member was travelling along the same line as the illustrious lords to whom I am referring. One member of the committee asked George Stephenson what would happen if a cow got on the line? The reply was, "It would be very awkward for the coo." So that objection was disposed of. However, cows have been getting on to railway lines ever since, though in these modern times the motor car has taken the place of the cow. I have no doubt that at no distant date in the future we shall have aeroplanes travelling too low and get-

ting into the way of passing trains. It is inevitable that there must be complaints in a large system like the Railway Department. If the department are going to accept every complaint as being gospel truth, they will find themselves landed with very heavy penalties.

Mr. Thomson: If you prove your case, the department will not pay you then.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That is a reflection on the law. During the time I administered the Railway Department not a day passed but I received complaints of the same description. The complaints were very numerous indeed. They came in every week from all over the State. The Railway Department repudiated responsibility as a matter of principle.

Mr. Thomson: Yes, as a matter of principle.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Quite right, too. The Railway Department in the first instance repudiate responsibility because if they did not do so there would be no end of boards of inquiry going around the country to investigate complaints. The responsibility is upon the person complaining to make out a case. We know also, however, that the Railway Department have paid compensation without going to court when a sufficiently good case has been made out. Taking our railway system by and large, I think it compares fairly well with the systems in other parts of Australia. The figures quoted by the Minister this evening, as to the losses shown on the various systems in other parts of the Commonwealth since the outbreak of war, speak at any rate fairly well for the management of the Western Australian system, though I may add that in order to make complete the comparisons established by the figures which the Minister quoted, and which asserted that the losses made by our system during the past three years have been considerably less than those experienced in the other States, we should have figures showing freights and fares as well. For we know that it is easy to keep down one's loss, or even show a profit, on a railway system by charging abnormally high freights and fares. In order to make the comparison of real value, we should have the comparative freights and fares—

The Minister for Railways: And costs.

Hon. P. COLLIER: And costs as well, as between the Eastern States and Western Australia. On the figures quoted, however, we have come out fairly well. Even the figures from 1906-7 to 1913-14, which were quoted by the Minister, are in favour of our system, showing, as they do, a total profit over working expenses of £960,000 for those years. As against that profit, we have during the past three years had a loss of £280,000. Adding to that the estimated loss for this year, which is £352,561, we have the result that the profit earned by our railway system from 1906-7 to 1916-17 was £409,000. That takes into account working expenses and interest. The Committee cannot base its criticism of the railway management on the results of the past year or two. It is only fair that we should take into consideration the operation of the system over

a lengthy period, for all will admit that the last three years have not by any means been normal. We know very well that the Railway Commissioner and his staff have had to contend with utterly exceptional conditions, and even to a greater degree, I venture to say, than any other State of the Commonwealth. So far as I am aware, not one of the big industries of the Eastern States has been closed down by the war; not one. In Western Australia, one of our largest primary industries, and that which was a most profitable one for the Railway Department, the timber industry, has of course been closed down. The timber industry was one of the greatest sources of revenue the department had, and one from which the department earned most profit; and we know that that industry has almost ceased to exist. That ought to be taken into consideration. Then, too, during the last two years the Railway Department has lost traffic through the trans-continental railway being competed, and further than that, it should not be forgotten that whilst the railway system of New South Wales obtains coal for about 6s. a ton or thereabouts, and fuel is one of the biggest items in the Railway Department, it is to-day costing up to 23s. or 24s. for Newcastle coal in Western Australia. So there is an enormous increase as compared with the railways of the Eastern States. And the water is much more expensive in this State compared with the Eastern States, and is not of such uniform quality. Take our goldfields lines, stretching over hundreds of miles, where the traffic is only one way. We have the system running 600 miles to Meekatharra, and to the Murchison, and in another direction 600 miles to Laverton, and right to Albany, 300 miles odd, with no backloading on the goldfields systems, and indeed no intermediate traffic. We have long stretches of hundreds of miles where the railways do not pick up any loading at all. Take Southern Cross to Kalgoorlie, 120 miles, there is no traffic picked up whatever. From Kalgoorlie to Leonora, another stretch of 160 miles, there is no traffic. The difficulties which we have to contend against in the railway system are incomparable with those of the Eastern States. That should not be forgotten in any criticism of the management of the railways. I do not know what the Government propose to do in regard to the future management of the railways. It was suggested, not definitely stated, at the opening of the session that the Government proposed to get an expert from the Malay States to report on the system generally. Since then we have not heard anything regarding that, and I do not know if the Government intend to adhere to that decision. I think that is a matter on which we might be informed. This is the last opportunity this session that the House will have of discussing these matters connected with the railway system, and the Government might well take the House and the country into their confidence as to the future management. The same remark applies to the appointment of a Commissioner. I am one of those who think the Commissioner, having regard to the difficulties he has had to contend with, has

done fairly well. I want to emphasise the point that the Commissioner has had no easy task. He has had spur lines and other lines given over to him which have been constructed without any consideration for him. The Commissioner has been governed by Governmental policy, the Government looking many years ahead. Then he has not had anything to say as to the grade of the railways. He has had to take lines over when completed whether there was traffic for them or not. Therefore, I say the present Commissioner has done fairly well. The future management of the railways is one for the Government to decide, and it is an important one. My own opinion is that the Commissioner has been overloaded with the amount of work which he has had to do. To say that one man can satisfactorily control 4,300 miles of railway with 7,000 employees is asking too much. There is not one railway system in Australia where there has been fewer than three Commissioners to manage the system.

Mr. Smith: Who gave him the management of the trams?

Hon. P. COLLIER: This we did by the Tramways Act. But, after all, the management of the trams has not added so much to the work of the Commissioner, because they are managed by a superintendent.

Mr. Smith: He got £500 a year more.

Hon. P. COLLIER: So far as I was concerned the Commissioner would have got that increase if he had not taken over the trams at all. If we are going to make available to the services of the State the best brains, we have to pay big salaries. Nowhere in Australia has a Railway Commissioner been in receipt of such a salary. As a matter of fact, the salaries in other places are double, and even more. I know this, that at the time the Commissioner received his appointment he had an offer—and this is no hearsay, because I saw the document—from another State of a position at a salary of £2,000 a year, and if we were going to retain him it was necessary to increase his salary. So that, apart from the tramway system, he was entitled to an increase. The work is altogether too much for one man to do. Some people take a very narrow view of things, and say, "If you have an additional Commissioner, that is the way the money goes." Another Commissioner means £1,500 a year, but that is a very narrow view to take. It is false economy. Fifteen hundred a year in the management and conduct of a system like the railways, which is dealing with a revenue of one and three-quarter million pounds a year, is a mere drop in the ocean. It can be lost or won any day of the week. It is impossible for a Commissioner to keep in touch with such an extensive system, with such a scattered system, and give attention to the work in the head office as well. I very strongly urge the Government, from my experience of the department, to increase the number of Commissioners to at least two, if not three. I do not care who the man is, be he the greatest genius, he cannot do justice to such a big undertaking. There is only one other point, and that is the question of the increase in freights and fares. This is rather a mysterious



position for me, and I think before the House closes we have a right to know what the intention of the Government is as to the increases in freights. Ministers will know that there is in the country a very strong feeling against any increase in freights being levied at the present time, and I think we ought to have a definite statement from the Government as to whether it is their intention to increase the charges during recess. If it is the intention to increase the freights only slightly, it is not fair, and not treating the House or the country fairly to hold over a matter of this kind until the House gets into recess and then increase the fares and freights. I only wish to revert to what I said on the Mines Estimates. Any increase in railway freights as far as the goldfields are concerned, is false economy, false effort. It is false effort to the revenue, and will prove futile, because the revenue received by this means is counterbalanced by the loss of business. And what is true of the mining industry is equally true of the country lands and agricultural industries. The additional revenue got in that way is obtained at the expense of the primary producers of the country.

Mr. Johnston: And might result in a mild revolution.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I will not say that. It will have such an effect upon the primary industries of the country, mining, agriculture, timber and others, as will far outweigh any increase of revenue the Government may make. Therefore I urge upon the Minister to take the House into his confidence before the debate closes, and state what the policy of the Government is.

Mr. H. ROBINSON (Albany) [10.55]: I understand that some arrangement has been arrived at between the Commissioner of Western Australia and the Commissioners in the Eastern States with reference to bringing certain lines of goods from the Eastern States. I would like to have the Minister's decision on the matter, whether that rate will apply only to the metropolitan area, as I understand the goods are brought through to Perth; or is it the intention of the Government to in any form modify the present rates to the country districts, and to make an equal reduction to the metropolitan area? I should like also to have the decision of the Minister with reference to a line of goods of which arrangements, I believe, have already been made—I refer to potatoes. At the present juncture I hope it is not the intention of the Government to bring potatoes by the trans-continental railway. We have interstate steamers arriving weekly and the Eastern States are getting an undue preference in this respect against the grower of potatoes in this State. I do not know whether it is the intention of the Government to continue this particular line. Still, I should like to have the Minister's decision, and if it is necessary to bring the goods to the metropolitan area, some concession should be made to take the articles to additional parts of the State. I make this request particularly on behalf of my electorate. Unfortunately, for some unknown reason, the port of Albany is passed by almost entirely, whereas Fremantle

is getting steamers almost every week. I do not blame the present Government, but they are acquiescing in it. I shall blame them if they do not do something to benefit my electorate through the railways, and in this respect the country generally, and particularly the Great Southern district, if they see their way to introduce the port to port rates which have been previously introduced here. With reference to the Great Southern line, which I understand—but one cannot get the figures from the Commissioner—is the best paying line in the State, some considerable time ago the Commissioner promised that when the line was relaid with heavier rails, he would place on that line dining cars. I should like to have the Minister's decision as to whether it is the intention this coming season to place dining cars on the Great Southern line. I ask the Minister to take into comparison the amount of money and passengers that travel on the Great Southern line compared with the number of passengers and revenue derived from the goldfields lines. The leader of the Opposition said this evening that there is no money earned by the trains coming back. Fortunately for the Government there is return traffic on the Great Southern line. The train service at the present time is not equal to cope with the goods coming back.

Hon. P. Collier: I was referring to the goldfields line.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: The hon. member stated that there was no back traffic on the goldfields line. That being the case, some consideration should be meted out particularly in the summer months and a direct benefit would ensue for Albany and the many visitors who go to the only watering place in Western Australia.

Mr. Smith: What about Bunbury?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Albany is considered the watering place of the State. One day during the Christmas holidays gave a return of £1,100 and the nearest to that figure from any other place was £300. Some reference has been made to motor trolleys. I will give one particular instance in my electorate where a motor trolley would have been of considerable service in connection with an urgent call for a doctor from Denmark.

The Minister for Railways: You have had an explanation of that.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I have endeavoured to get some satisfaction from the Railway Department in this particular case, but up to the present time I have not even had an acknowledgment of my letter. I hope some arrangements will be made, especially in isolated places like Denmark, to make motor trolleys available for use by medical men when receiving urgent calls.

Mr. JOHNSTON (Williams-Narrogin) [10.3]: I desire to say a few words on these Estimates and especially to make an appeal to the Minister to have sectional returns embodied in future annual reports of the Railway Department. At the present time we get a report with many tables, apparently compiled at considerable expense, and I venture to say that the one item of information which members would value and which would put us in a good position to deal with the growing problem of the railways—and it is a growing

problem in view of the loss this year—is sectional returns. Ever since I have been in Parliament attempts have been made to get sectional returns so that we might know where the losses occur. You, Mr. Chairman, will remember that only a few weeks ago from your seat in this Chamber you endeavoured to get sectional returns laid on the Table of the House and in your effort you were supported by most country members. To my mind it was an amazing thing to find that a great majority of the metropolitan members seemed to rush to the help of the Government to prevent those returns being made available.

Mr. Smith: That is an unfair reflection on metropolitan members.

Mr. JOHNSTON: I do not want to reflect on anyone. I will try to explain the reason of their action, which, no doubt, was in the interests of the pampered metropolitan community. We are given some sectional returns, for spur lines only, and if it is possible to give those it should be equally possible to give similar returns with regard to the whole of the railway system. The returns which are quoted create a most unfair impression. We are told that a new railway in a new district, a railway which has been running for 12 months, has been running at a loss of a few thousand pounds. The details are given here, but we are not told the effect the construction of that line has had on the main system. I cannot help thinking that the department is in possession of some of this information. When Mr. Gregory, as Minister for Railways, came to the Great Southern district a few years ago he told us that the Great Southern railway was the best paying line in the State. I take it he had some official basis for that statement. At any rate I urge on the present Minister for Railways to give us the information we require, in the annual reports. We have been told by the leader of the Opposition that there is a feeling of uneasiness that the railway freights will be increased, and I am not going to labour that question, but I would urge the Government not to take action in that direction. I am sure that the Minister realises as well as I do that the primary industries of Western Australia cannot stand any more increases in the general railway freights. We had two increases of railway freights within the last two or three years and they did a great injury to the primary industries of agriculture and mining. I venture to say that the temper of the community in the outback districts will not stand any further increases of railway freights from a Government whom they partially assisted to put into power. Those who sit on the cross benches (Country party) are pledged to oppose an increase. I mentioned just now that a large number of metropolitan members are opposed to our getting sectional returns. The probable reason is because travelling is very much cheaper per mile to-day in the metropolitan area than it is in the country districts. At the present time most of the people in the metropolitan area have cheap periodical tickets which they use when going to their employment. It is very proper that that should be the case, but we should not run trains until

10 or 11 o'clock at night simply to take these same people to the picture shows and back again to their homes without imposing an extra charge. The Government might take into consideration the desirability of charging an extra fee to periodical ticket holders for travelling after 8 o'clock at night. In New Zealand, I understand, there have been restrictions placed on travelling at night time so far as periodical ticket holders are concerned. This is a matter the Minister might well look into and it would be infinitely preferable to increase the revenue in this way than to raise the railway freights. With regard to the question of motor trolleys, when railways are under construction those trolleys are kept at the head depot. The engineers use them to run to and from the lines under construction and in many cases they have been the means of saving the lives of people when accidents have happened. I suggest that the Government should keep one lorry at each railway depot for use in case of emergency. The Minister will find that the people will be prepared to pay for the convenience of these trolleys.

Mr. NAIRN (Swan) [10.10]: I desire to refer to two phases of the Railway Estimates. One has considerable bearing on the comments made in connection with the proposed increase of railway freights. The public and the various Governments have never yet given the Railway Department a fair deal. I mention that in the sense in which the member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) used to endeavour to impress the House with the fact that the Government were not giving the State Implement Works a fair deal. In other words, he stated that the profits which were being made were not being returned to the source from which they came. No less a sum than 17½ millions is invested in the railway system, and we have complete evidence of the fact that the Railway Department have never had a fair deal by looking back over a term of 10 years. In the space of 10 years the railways yielded a net profit of over £600,000 but that sum of money was absorbed in the Consolidated Revenue. It was taken away from the source whence it came. There is no business undertaking in the world that can exist and not be subject to the difficulties existing at the present time, if we do not permit it to have a reserve fund.

Hon. P. Collier: Then we cry out in the first year if there is a loss.

Mr. NAIRN: That is the crux of the position. The first time we have a lean year we cry out; in other words when the department, for one reason or another, cannot pay its way, an imposition is made on the people who have given the immense profit which was earned in the good years. Our railways will never be in a proper condition until they are placed on a sound basis. What the reason was for robbing them of their profit, heaven only knows.

The Minister for Railways: Unfortunately we cannot do it to-day.

Mr. NAIRN: I do not see the slightest reason for adopting such a course. To-day the necessity is just as much as to-morrow or as great as it was a year ago. We can anticipate that within a reasonable period the de-

partment will right itself and will again return profits to the people. But we must make preparation now. Probably not more than 60 per cent. of the people to-day are being compelled to pay that which was wrongfully taken from the railways in the past. With that exception the whole of the contributions to freight are being paid by the country. I often wonder why members representing the gold-fields and outback centres should allow those they represent to be so unfairly treated.

Mr. Lambert: Will you stand by us if we attempt to effect an alteration?

Mr. NAIRN: Of course so. How could a man do otherwise? Although those people have contributed to an accumulated profit of £600,000 in ten years, we are to impose another extra charge on the already high freight they pay, simply because we have absorbed the profits. I appeal to the Minister to consider this question, and see if there is not some sound sense in the suggestion. If the Minister will adopt the suggestion, he will earn for himself additional respect from the community. More or less indefinite statements have been made to the effect that it is proposed to introduce from outside, from the Malay States, someone to inquire into and report upon the railway management.

The Minister for Railways: You can get that out of your mind.

Mr. NAIRN: The qualifications of that expert may be exceptional, but I want to emphasise the fact that the principle of bringing in advice from outside is obsolete. We do not require to send out of the Commonwealth for men to conduct Commonwealth affairs. I prefer to see encouragement given to officers of the department, who should be taught to look forward to the possibility of filling the highest positions in the service. Obviously we do not know as much as we should like to know, but to make up the deficiency we should send our officers abroad for essential knowledge rather than bring in outsiders. In railway affairs there is only one place to-day where a man should go for up to date knowledge, and that is France. Our railway officials would there learn more in three months than an outsider could teach them in three years. One of the greatest shortcomings of the Commissioner of Railways is that he has been impervious to any new idea.

Mr. O'Loughlin: His officers have suffered from the same disability.

Mr. NAIRN: Well, if the head of an enterprise is conservative, not to say reactionary and blind to any new idea, the same disability will permeate the whole department. I appeal to the Minister to see that the officers of the department get proper opportunities of acquiring knowledge. If this were done it would result in putting the department in an infinitely better position than it is to-day.

Mr. GRIFFITHS (York) [10.22]: Mention has been made of motor lorries on the railways. Recently we read of the death of Dr. Davis of York. A little time ago there was brought under my notice some very bad cases of suffering in consequence of lack of facilities for getting injured people to a hospital. I then wrote to the doctor, who was concerned

in those cases, and told him that I had approached the Minister with the idea of getting a railway motor ambulance established. The doctor in reply told me that he had found it impossible to get into many back country places during the last wet season, owing to the condition of the roads. He said that in ordinary seasons many persons sick or injured suffered agonies in course of transport over bad roads. In his opinion, if a motor ambulance was provided, many lives would be saved in outback districts. The Royal Commission on Agriculture has recommended the establishment of motor ambulances, and I hope the Minister will be able to do something in this regard. Again, in respect to telephones. Mr. Hedges has introduced a service of his own. He was not allowed to use the existing telephone posts, but had to put up a separate set of posts and wires. The people out in that district are now trying to get a telephone service established between Ardath and Bruce Rock, and they find that it will be necessary to erect a third set of posts and wires. They are not allowed to use the established telephone service, even at certain hours of the day. In my opinion it is nothing short of ridiculous to compel them to erect a third set of posts and wires. I quite agree with what has been said by the member for Swan (Mr. Nairn) and others in regard to the Railway Commissioner and the service not having had a fair trial. I have previously expressed my views on that subject. There are many things one could growl about, as for instance the shortage of service, but in those times one has to put up with inconveniences. However, I must complain of the charges put upon little bits of machinery required in the back country. For instance, I am told that on each poison cart there is a charge of £3 4s.

The Minister for Railways: If you were to inquire at the department you would find that is not correct.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: Well, I am very pleased to hear it.

Mr. GREEN (Kalgoorlie) [10.25]: We are told by the Minister that we can estimate a loss of practically £1,000 per day for the forthcoming twelve months. I trust that the Government and members generally will not endeavour to make up the deficit by increasing the railway freights. This question is of the very greatest concern to the primary industries. For instance, in Kalgoorlie and Boulder, with a population of something under 30,000, the railway freights per head of the population are equivalent to £10 per annum. Therefore, a married man with his wife and three children has £50 per annum to pay on this score alone. The Commissioner himself has laid it down in his reports, particularly in that of last year, that we cannot expect to balance the railway ledger by increasing the freights. The position is obvious, because we have in this State only 91 persons for every mile of railway, which is only one-third of the figures taken as an average of the other States. The one solution of the problem is a tax on unim-

proved land values. The whole of the land values in the State, particularly in the metropolitan area, where they have paid nothing towards the railways—

Hon. W. C. Angwin: They pay to the extent to which they use the railways.

Mr. GREEN: They do not pay anything like the equivalent of the increased values due to the railways.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Land values in the metropolitan area have gone down.

Mr. GREEN: If the hon. member says they have gone down since the time the last blackfellows walked over his property at East Fremantle, I must refuse to believe him. The whole of the land values in the metropolitan area have been created by public works, and especially by the railways. It is impossible to raise the railway freights and allow the primary industries to continue. But for the assistance given it by the Government, it would be seen that the wheat industry is on its last legs. To raise the railway freights would spell disaster to the primary industries—particularly to that of mining, the condition of which is causing grave anxiety to-day. I hope the position of the railways will not be made an excuse for depriving a section of the railway employees of a fair deal in regard to salaries. I refer to that section known as "Railway officers and clerks." I know it is a bad time in which to mention increases in salary, but I feel it my bounden duty to speak on behalf of this portion of the railway service which has not been as well organised as the rest of it, and which, because of the fact that they are not so strong a union as the others, have not received that treatment at the hands of the Railway Department that has been meted out in other cases. I would like to compare the position of station-masters in this State with that of officers similarly employed in other States. Station-masters in this State start at £110 per annum. In Victoria, under much better conditions, they start at £160 per annum; in New South Wales £180 per annum, and in Queensland £180 per annum. The station-masters in this State must have a considerable knowledge and fill responsible positions. They must have a knowledge of traffic, rolling stock, livestock, vehicles, and a thousand and one other matters which will readily suggest themselves to the ex-Minister for Railways, who showed by his speech that he has such a good grip of the subject. To give a station-master, a man who has climbed the ladder, so to speak, and obtained a responsible position in the department, a salary of £140 a year, or £2 13s. 4d. a week, is a disgrace. Out of 153 station-masters in Western Australia, 90 of them get between £140 a year and £170 a year, allowing for a free house, which is valued at £26 a year. It will, therefore, be seen that the position is a pretty bad one. These men are not paid any overtime, and are only paid ordinary time for Sunday work. The range of salaries for station-masters in this State is between £140 and £300 per annum, but in Victoria the range is from £160 to £400 per annum,

and only 164 out of 611 station-masters there get under £180 a year.

Mr. Davies: Are they better organised there?

Mr. GREEN: I do not know what the position is in that State. If the hon. member desires to infer that with less trade unionism than there is now—

Mr. Davies: Nothing of the kind; no one knows that better than you do.

Mr. GREEN: What does the hon. member desire to point out?

Mr. Davies: The arbitration court should be open to them just as in the case of other workers.

Mr. GREEN: I agree with the hon. member.

Mr. Davies: Then why did you not bring this about long ago?

Mr. GREEN: I have known of the hon. member in the Labour movement for years, and have yet to learn that, although closely connected with a railway centre, he ever raised the question of making this a vital matter.

Mr. Davies: I did so on many occasions.

Mr. GREEN: It has remained for the hon. member to connect himself with a party which is unsympathetic in industrial matters before raising the point. I do not, however, wish to detain the Committee by encouraging further unseemly interjections on the part of the hon. member. It is true that a portion of the railway employees had an award in the court, and it seems regrettable that the department does not meet this particular portion of the employees by having a round table conference with them instead of forcing them into the court.

The Minister for Railways: To whom do you refer?

Mr. GREEN: To the railway officers. No agreement has been made regarding them.

The Minister for Mines: They have been met in conference.

Mr. GREEN: I regret that no agreement has been arrived at regarding them.

The Minister for Railways: That is another way of putting it.

Mr. GREEN: It is a pity that some agreement could not be arrived at under this head without the men being obliged to go to the court. In Queensland instead of these employees getting a minimum of £140 a year, their salary ranges from £190 to £335 per annum, and in addition to a free house they get light and fuel. Acting station-masters, who in this State are wretchedly paid, get much the same salary as the station-masters in that State. In New South Wales the range is from £180 to £420 per annum, and two-thirds of the railway employees get between £210 and £250 a year. I do not wish to make the position of the Minister impossible by exacting demands which I know he cannot meet, but the question of whether our railways are paying or not should not come in between the question of whether the Commissioner and the Minister are prepared to give this portion of the service, in which the officers are at present underpaid, a fair deal. Not quite 18½ per cent. of the station-masters in this State

get over £200 a year. The clerks are practically in the same position. There are adult clerks, some of them married, in our railway service to-day getting from £110 to £150 a year, or from £2 2s. 6d. a week to £2 17s. 6d. In Queensland no man gets under £140 a year, and this applies only to clerks between the ages of 20 and 21. The position in that State, where the conditions are very similar to those in this State, is, therefore, very much better than it is in Western Australia. When a clerk reaches the age of 21 in Queensland he receives £160 a year and then goes up in automatic rises to £220 a year. The Morse operators are also badly treated and reach their maximum at £180 a year. I think that nearly all their messages are taken in code. As far as my knowledge teaches me they are quite as busy as telegraphists in the Commonwealth service, who get, in some cases, almost double that maximum amount. It is suggested by some people that certain reforms should be effected in our railway service in the direction of abolishing the three district engineer offices, which are in different parts of the State. I only give these suggestions for what they are worth. As a precedent for this, I might mention that in Victoria—I admit that the case is not analogous to ours, because that is a much smaller State—the position of District engineer was abolished 20 years ago. Our district engineers have a considerable staff acting with them. While it may readily be admitted that the work which is now done by the district engineer would have to be done in the central office, it seems to me that there are districts in which the work is very slack, and in which the full staff would not be required. There is a considerable duplication of records as a result of having two sets of offices, one in the country and one at headquarters. In some district engineer offices there is the following staff—a district engineer, one or two surveyors, a draughtsman or two, a chief clerk, and a correspondence clerk, record clerks, probably an accountant's clerk, and one or two cadets. If, after investigation by the Minister, it can be found that the Victorian system could be adopted, that it was practicable to do so, a considerable saving could be effected in the Railway Department in regard to this particular matter. One or two matters in connection with correspondence in the Railway Department have been dealt with by an ex-member of this House, in the person of Mr. Lewis, who has a close knowledge of railway matters. Inquiries made from various railway employees—not Mr. Lewis this time—support the testimony given by him on that occasion. To show the circumlocutionary methods adopted, and still prevailing, in the Railway Department, let me postulate a case, let me assume, for instance, that some old lady goes to a booking clerk at the Kalgoorlie railway station to buy a ticket and then complains that she has not been given the right change. The old lady immediately writes to the Commissioner of Railways in Perth. The Commissioner of Railways communicates by letter with the Chief Traffic Manager. The Chief Traffic Manager deals with the complaint by sending it

on to the Kalgoorlie district superintendent. The district superintendent in turn sends it to the Kalgoorlie station master. The Kalgoorlie station master sends it to the officer in charge of the booking office. Thus finally the complaint gets back to the booking clerk, who is charged with having given the old lady 2d. or 3d. short change. He writes his explanation, and hands it to the officer in charge of the booking office, who sends it, along the lines of "the house that Jack built," to the Kalgoorlie station master. From him it goes to the district superintendent at Kalgoorlie, and from the district superintendent to the Chief Traffic Manager in Perth, who in turn hands it to the Commissioner, who passes it on to be dealt with by the Secretary for Railways. Certainly, in that connection some method might be brought about whereby, after the officer in charge of the booking office at Kalgoorlie has secured the explanation from the officer alleged to be at fault, it might be sent direct to the Commissioner for Railways. Now let me deal with the proposal, if it is still in the minds of Ministers, to bring a gentleman from the Malay States to report on our railway system. I have travelled in the Malay States, and to me it seems rather ludicrous to go into the jungle, into a place that is hardly yet civilised, to dig out a man and bring him to report on the railway system of what is undoubtedly one of the most enlightened States in the world; bring him here to suggest methods whereby transportation might be improved in Western Australia. I could understand the suggestion if it were to bring a man from the Old Country, or from France, as mentioned by the member for Swan (Mr. Nairn), or say from the United States of America, in many of the 48 States of which there is a greater mileage of railway than is to be found in some Empires. If such were the suggestion, it might meet with approval at our hands. But wherever we seek advice, the last place, in my opinion, for us to seek it is the jungles of Malaya. In this connection I was speaking to a gentleman who had travelled over the Malay States railways. I forget the length of the railway which forms the scene of the story I propose to relate, but it represents a national work of the Federated Malay States, and I think it may extend over a distance of 1,000 miles.

The Minister for Railways: I have already told you that the Government do not propose to obtain a report from the Malay States manager.

Mr. GREEN: I am very glad indeed to hear it, and I apologise to the Minister for my failure to hear him give the assurance. I am sorry, in one way, to have the assurance, because it almost prevents me from telling a good story. In the Malay States the trains do not proceed after nightfall. Wherever they may be at sunset, they get to the nearest station and stop dead. When the guard was asked the reason for the stoppage he replied, "How can you travel in the dark? A wild animal might get on the line." I quote this story in order to show how absurd it is to bring a man from a country where they are afraid to travel in the dark, to report on the railways of a State in which, last night, I was whirled

through the desert at the rate of 30 miles an hour without any fear whatever of accident.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN (North-East Fremantle) [10.45]: Several hon. members have complained that the Commissioner of Railways has not had fair play in the management of the railways. The member for York (Mr. Griffiths) pointed out that things would be different if the Commissioner had had a free hand. I agree with that view. In my opinion, the railways would to-day be better off to the extent of £60,000 if the Commissioner had had a free hand in dealing with district railways and the carriage of fertiliser. The Commissioner was anxious that the users of the district railways should pay the amount which he thought was justly due from them to the revenue of the department. Fertiliser, too, was carried at a very cheap rate prior to the reduction; and I do not think the Commissioner ever recommended that reduction. Thus, the gentlemen who bitterly complain of the action of the Government in refusing the Commissioner fair play and a free hand to deal with these matters, are the very gentlemen who used their influence on the Government to nullify the influence which the Commissioner should rightly exercise. They themselves, through the Government, forced the hands of the Commissioner, and then they rise here and declare that the Commissioner ought to have a free hand. I cannot follow such a line of argument. According to the last report of the Commissioner there is a loss of over £82,000 on the district railways.

Mr. Johnston: Let us have the complete returns.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: That is the result of the forcing of the Commissioner's hands by the hon. members who have complained. If we take everything into consideration, we must agree that the remarks of the leader of the Opposition are exactly to the point. We have not much to complain of as regards the finances of the Railway Department. In 1914-15 the revenue from local timber hauled in this State was £333,384. That was just before the war. The shipping did not fall off immediately, and during 1916-17 timber haulage produced a revenue of £107,441. Even that, however, represented a shrinkage of £225,000 odd from the previous year's figures. Since then, of course, there has been very little revenue from timber haulage, owing to the dearth of shipping. These facts show clearly that our Railway Department have been greatly handicapped by the loss of revenue from timber haulage.

The Minister for Railways: The traffic is simply not there.

Mr. Maley: The position is not due to the fertiliser rate, then?

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: The returns from fertiliser haulage for 1916-17 went down by £25,000. It all helped.

Mr. Maley: But the more fertiliser is used, the more freight the railways get back.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: How much freight are the railways getting from wheat this year? Perhaps the Minister will tell us, when he replies, what amount of money the Railway De-

partment are receiving this year for carriage of wheat.

Mr. Maley: The wheat is at the sidings; you cannot expect freight from it.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: But it had to be taken to the sidings. Special sidings have been established for the express purpose of stacking wheat. That wheat had to be taken to those sidings. Who has paid for its carriage?

The Minister for Railways: Roughly, the amount would be about £100,000.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: That is the amount outstanding this year by reason of the difficulty of handling our wheat. Taking everything into consideration the Commissioner has not been able to do all that he would have liked to do. Some hon. members have said that all that is necessary is to make the people in the metropolitan area pay. But how is that to be done? The member for Kalgoorlie (Mr. Green) says that we shall go to heaven as soon as we impose a land tax. Impose a land tax and all our troubles will be gone! I have been in Western Australia for 26 years, and I know of land at Fremantle for which to-day it would not be possible to get as much as was given for it when I first came to the State. Hundreds of miles of railways have been built and yet the value of land has decreased. A statement was made by one of the late Ministers during election time to the effect that it was intended to impose a flat rate of 2s. a ton on all goods carried on the railways, no matter where the destination might have been, so as to make the people in the metropolitan area pay as well as those in the country. The Government, that former Minister stated, were going to put the new rate into effect immediately. But it has not come about. The Government would not get an extra 6d. from the people in the metropolitan area, and the idea would have killed the Collie coal industry for bunkering to start with. All goods would have been taken from Fremantle to Perth either by road or by river instead of by rail.

The Minister for Railways: It was not done.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: No, but it was a proposal which the Government had under consideration, and the Minister in question stated that it was about to be put into effect. There is not the least doubt about it, the people in the metropolitan area are paying for the services rendered them in the same manner as the people in the country districts are doing.

Mr. Maley: Compare the metropolitan with the country rate.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Compare the number of passengers travelling.

Mr. Johnston: Compare the length of the journeys.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Take length of journeys and earnings per train mile. What revenue are we getting? There is scarcely a train running between Perth and Fremantle to-day that it is possible to get a seat in. The reduction in the service has been such that each train is filled long before it reaches its destination.

Hon. members representing country constituencies are always satisfied so long as someone else is left to pay; they are always anxious to transfer the burden to the shoulders of others. So far as our railway system is concerned, it will compare favourably with any other in Australia. Our management is just as good as that anywhere else in Australia and the officers are as diligent as those elsewhere. I agree with the member for Swan (Mr. Nairn), and I have mentioned the matter on other occasions, that we should consider the advisability of sending some of our young and capable officers to other parts of the world to study methods and to improve their knowledge. It has cost the State hundreds of thousands of pounds to bring experts from outside; and it has been the biggest fallacy we have ever had to contend with. The Fremantle dock cost £180,000 on the advice of experts from outside, which advice was acted upon in preference to that of our own engineers. We should not hesitate to send some of our most promising young officers to various parts of the world to acquire knowledge which could be turned to advantage in the State. The money would be better spent that way than by bringing in experts from outside. I am also in accord with the suggestion of the leader of the Opposition who considers that we should have two or three Commissioners in charge of the railways. In that way it would be possible to get rid of some of the district officers.

[Mr. Munsie took the Chair.]

Mr. HARRISON (Avon) [10.58]: I was pleased to hear the remarks of some hon. members with reference to the railways of the State and I trust the Minister will do what he can to bring about the reforms which have been suggested and to encourage those at present engaged in the railway service to attain higher efficiency. According to the member for Kalgoorlie (Mr. Green) there is a great amount of circumlocution with regard to small matters. That does not apply to the Railway department alone. I believe we have it in the Police Department and in pretty well every department in the State. I think there is great room for reform in the matter of these complaints being given direct in some way. Surely it can be done. In all private enterprises matters of the kind are dealt with direct, thus avoiding the trouble and delay arising through increased correspondence. There is a number of matters connected with the railways which are of vital importance to the State, but I do not intend to dwell upon them, because others have voiced some of the views I hold. I notice among the items, "Assistance to the ambulance." I remember going down to Fremantle with the Minister to witness a display of ambulance work. I was very pleased with what I saw. It was a credit to the officers of the Railway Department. They take a very keen interest in that particular branch of work. I wish to compliment them on their work that afternoon, and further to bring the attention of

the Minister again to a matter which cropped up that day, namely, the question of a new ambulance class situated at Merredin, which is a centre of the railway service connecting with several branch lines. That ambulance class are working under great difficulties. They have not a room in which to collect to receive the instructions given by the resident medical officer, and unless a citizen granted a room for the purpose, they would not be able to continue the class. I understand there is a suitable room in the barracks, but they have not been allowed to use it. I hope the Minister will see if something cannot be done in regard to this. While dealing with Merredin, I would like to treat of one phase of the railways from a view point opposite to that taken by the member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) who suggests that those who use the railways should pay for them. I am in accord partly with the member for Kalgoorlie (Mr. Green). The citizens of Perth and Fremantle enjoy prosperity as the result of the railways bringing in products from all over the vast territory of the State. The port of Fremantle has received very great advantage from the railway system, greater than any other port in Western Australia. The member for North-East Fremantle ought to remember that past Administrations have concentrated the railway system at Fremantle, and that other ports in the State have suffered in consequence. He touched upon the reduction of fertiliser freight, as if it was a sop to the Country party.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What else was it?

Mr. HARRISON: It was a matter entirely of production.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It is a credit to your party that they should be able to wield such power.

Mr. HARRISON: I think the other party did it, the Wilson Government. We, as farmers, sow seed to get a harvest, and the Railways induce the consumption of a larger quantity of fertiliser in order that we may get higher results from the soil, and so bring increased traffic to the railways. Without fertiliser our average crops would not be more than 51 per cent. of what they are. The State cannot produce crops without fertiliser, and therefore it is the duty of the Railways to assist the farmers and see that they do not lack fertiliser.

Mr. Willecock: Why should the Railways bear the burden?

Mr. HARRISON: The railways are for the advantage of the whole of the community, and we, through our industry, bring in greater railway revenue in consequence of the use of fertiliser. It is sound business for the Commissioner of Railways to decrease the freights on fertiliser and so secure increased production from the soil. When the farmers in the Merredin district travel by passenger train to Perth they have to spend two hours on the Merredin platform without shelter during midnight hours. Something ought to be done to see that those passengers do not continue to catch cold and contract pneumonia on that platform. I believe there

is a large block of land opposite the platform where a shelter shed could be erected.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Are you going to move a resolution by way of protest? If not, it is of no use discussing it now. We want to catch our trams.

Mr. HARRISON: I hope the hon. member will support my suggestion. He did not support it on the last occasion. One other point, and I will sit down. We had a Railway Advisory Board. It does not exist to-day. There are certain people in the Toodyay district who are badly in need of railway facilities and to whom those facilities have been promised. The Labour Administration promised in the Governor's Speech that they would do something in regard to this particular line; it was promised that the survey of the line would be carried out. Those promises have been made again and again.

Mr. O'Loughlen: You cannot discuss a proposed new railway on these Estimates.

Mr. HARRISON: I was speaking of the Railway Advisory Board.

Hon. P. Collier: That is for the Loan Estimates.

Mr. HARRISON: Well, those people have a real grievance, and something should be done to give them railway facilities. On other railways they were allowed to make dumps. I am speaking of Yorkrakine, North Baandee, and other centres.

Hon. P. Collier: They have a genuine grievance.

Mr. HARRISON: Certainly they have. These things ought to be attended to. Another place in my electorate needs attention, but I believe this has been already considered, and that Carrabin is to be given better facilities for the travelling public before the winter comes on. This ought to be started at once. People ought not to be made to suffer while waiting on unsheltered platforms for trains. The health and well being of the people should be the first consideration of members. The Government should give the same facilities for travellers on their railways as they would expect to be given if a private company owned them. I trust that the matter will be attended to.

Mr. WILLCOCK (Geraldton) [11.11]: In connection with the appointment of extra Commissioners it seems to me that if heads of the railway department are appointed at a higher salary than that enjoyed by those at present in charge of the work it will mean that we shall still get the same services but at an increased cost. It may almost be said that each of the heads of the various branches of the Railway Department is acting in the capacity of a Commissioner, so far as his own particular duties go. The head of the mechanical staff is practically the same as a Commissioner for that particular branch, and the same thing applies to the Chief Traffic Manager and the Chief Engineer of Existing Lines. I think it was hardly right to attach the tramway system to the Commissioner for Railways. There is quite enough work involved in the handling of the tramways to warrant the appointment of a man to take charge of the whole business. The Minister has given us

an assurance that there is going to be no inquiry into the Railway Department by an outside expert. The Colonial Treasurer, in discussing the public service, said it was the policy of the Government to encourage by means of bonuses any civil servant to make any suggestions whatsoever for the improvement of the service. I should like to know if this system is to be applied to the Railway Department. If the sum of, say, £10,000 was put upon the Estimates for the purpose of suitably rewarding men who made suggestions, which were the means of effecting savings in the Department, after a trial of perhaps a year or two, I feel sure that this would result in economies in the working of the Railway Department of something between £60,000 and £100,000. Many of the employees of the Railway Department have made suggestions in the past, but they have been entirely ignored. The member for Swan (Mr. Nairn), I think it was, said that the Commissioner for Railways was rather conservative. Every hon. member who has had any experience of the Railway Department will admit the truth of that statement. The suggestions which come from the members of the staff do not seem to be acted upon at all. Experts are sometimes sent out to inquire into certain matters which have first of all been brought under their notice by some member of the staff. Instead of the credit being given where it is due, I have known of instances in which experts have received an increase of £50 per annum for making reports upon information which was previously supplied by others engaged in their own branches. The Minister would be well advised if he continued the policy enunciated by the Colonial Treasurer, so far as the Public Service was concerned, in the Railway Department. As regards the rate for stock trucks in the metropolitan area, we have had it shown that a truck can be sent from any part of the suburban area to another part of it for a minimum charge of 5s. Anywhere in the outlying portions of the State or at private sidings the charge for shunting alone would be 4s. On the other hand, a truck can be taken as far from Perth as Chidlow's Well, handled two or three times, and the full amount charged is 5s. If a minimum charge was put upon anyone who wished to use a truck, whether in the metropolitan area or outside it, much benefit would be derived by the Railway Department. The member for Kalgoorlie (Mr. Green) talked about the circumlocution which occurs in the Railway Department in connection with minor accidents, and small complaints in reference to employees. I was in Geraldton some five weeks ago at a time when there was an engine off the track. A remark which was made to me by a man on that occasion seems to me very aptly to fit the position. He said, "It took about five minutes to get this engine on, but it will cost about £20 in correspondence to find out who is to blame in connection with the matter." This is the position of the Railway Department in such matters, and others which have to go through the files. There is another matter which tends to discourage the railway employees from taking a greater interest than they do in the



department. As soon as it is found that the revenue of the department has benefited as a result of the work of the officers, and a profit is being made, the cry goes up for a reduction in freights. Just when everything is working smoothly, and the men, although working at high pressure, are doing all they can to render the railway services as efficient as possible, the authorities instead of rewarding them for their work by payment of increments due, etcetera, listen to other people, and bow to the political pressure that is brought to bear upon them, and reduce the freights on such items as superphosphates, and so on. An alteration was recently made in the time table. So far as Geraldton is concerned, the Commissioner claims that there has been a saving of about £500. Although this may be the case from the point of view of a book-keeping entry, the actual result has been—just as we thought it would be—a loss in revenue, which amounts to practically the sum which is said to have been saved, and in addition there has been a vast amount of inconvenience to the people concerned. I should like to say a word or two about Collie coal.

Mr. O'Loughlen: If you are going to talk about that we shall be here all night.

Mr. WILLCOCK: It is the duty of every hon. member to see that, for the future at any rate, no pressure is brought to bear upon the Commissioner for Railways to use any particular coal unless it is worthy of such use.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The Commissioner has power to demand a good commodity. I am sick to death of hearing that he wants this and that.

The Minister for Railways: That is the situation as it stands to-day. He has an agreement and is entitled to enforce it.

Mr. WILLCOCK: We should see that the Commissioner does enforce it. Dirty coal has been supplied in the past. When the Commissioner endeavours to see that the State gets full value for its money, no matter how it may affect other people detrimentally, it is our duty to back him up.

Mr. O'Loughlen: I have heard of no opposition against the Commissioner enforcing his agreement.

Mr. WILLCOCK: Nor have I. When the Commissioner says that for the future he will not accept dirty coal hon. members should back him up, in the interests of the State, apart from any other consideration. I should like to hear from the Minister upon what date he expects to be able to pay the back time which is due under the Arbitration award, which has now been in force for three months. A considerable amount of back pay is due, and a large number of men is involved. These men are now waiting patiently to hear something in the matter.

The Minister for Railways: This will necessitate calculations as far back as last April.

Mr. WILLCOCK: Perhaps the Minister can give us an idea as to when payment will be made.

The Minister for Railways: I am not prepared to state that to-night.

Mr. WILLCOCK: Very well. As the hour is late, I will not detain the Committee longer.

The MINISTER FOR MINES AND RAILWAYS (Hon. C. A. Hudson—Yilgarn—in reply) [11.20]: During the course of this debate several hon. members have referred to difficulty occasioned by the want of a car to convey sick people from outlying centres to places where they can obtain treatment. The subject has had my attention for a considerable time. In fact, as a private member I tried for years to have such a system inaugurated on spur lines in my own district. However, the position now is that application has been made to the Colonial Secretary's Department, which controls Medical and Health; and from that department it has been referred back to me to ascertain from the Commissioner of Railways how much it would cost to make provision of that nature. So soon as the cost has been ascertained, a conference will be held between the Colonial Secretary and myself with a view of arriving at an arrangement. It must be understood that the making of such provision does not lie within the province of the Commissioner of Railways. The matter is really one for the Medical Department to attend to, though the Commissioner of Railways will assist as far as he can towards supplying the desired facilities. I have already informed the Committee that the Government have no intention of employing a gentleman, now travelling in Australia, who is manager of the railway system of the Malay States, to examine into our railway system. There are numerous other matters, raised in the course of the discussion, which I do not propose to traverse. They are so numerous and so varied, that to deal with them all would take a very long time. There are, however, two matters mentioned by the leader of the Opposition which call for reply to-night. They are the matter of increased railway freights, and the matter of a successor to the present Commissioner of Railways. The subject of railway freights was debated during the early part of this session, and I had in mind the question whether freights might be increased for the purpose of raising additional revenue. At that time it was contended that whilst there should be increases in some directions, there should be adjustments in others, because freights had already been raised twice since the outbreak of war—once by the Scaddan and once by the Wilson Government. These increases possibly did not operate, at all events in some respects, as intended by the respective Governments which made them; and there were anomalies which would have to be adjusted when the whole question came up for review. Accordingly, we decided to give the subject further consideration, because it is not intended by the present Government to impose any burden upon either the farming or the mining section of the community, or indeed upon any producing section. There was another factor which operated in the mind of the Government when deciding to refrain from increasing railway freights, and that was the fact, to which I have already alluded this evening, of the improvement in the railway revenue. Yet another factor was that in January last we were faced with the difficulty of obtaining goods from the Eastern States by

water; and that difficulty forced us to grant a low rate in order that supplies of food-stuffs and other necessary commodities might be made available to the people of Western Australia during that time of difficulty. It would have been absurd to raise railway freights in one direction, and then have had to reduce them in another with the object of obtaining supplies. I have the assurance of Cabinet that it is not intended to increase railway freights during the present financial year, and that freights will not be raised during the recess. With regard to the appointment of a successor to the present Commissioner of Railways, it is well known to hon. members that Mr. Short was appointed to the position ten years ago, for a term of five years, the appointment being renewed by the Scaddan Government. The renewal will expire on the 30th June next. The subject has been receiving the consideration of the Government; and whilst we, with other members who have spoken to-night—and I am glad there were so many—recognise the experience and the capabilities of the Commissioner, and also his devotion to his duties and his efforts to keep the finances of the department in order, and the results he has obtained in that connection, we felt that we should not be doing what was right if in these times of change we made a further appointment for a period of five years. We have informed the Commissioner of Railways that we do not intend to renew his appointment for five years, and we are now considering what should be done in the matter. There is the idea which has been enunciated by several members to-night—the appointment of two or three commissioners. We feel, or some of the Cabinet feel, that the present Commissioner, especially since he has had the management of the tramways and of the power house, has been overloaded, though not by any means overpaid. He has been overloaded with work, and inundated with staff matters which are submitted to him for his decision. Even to my little knowledge of the Railway Department, much of the Commissioner's time has been spent in the office when he might, with advantage to the Railways, have been outside. He might be given assistance in that inside work as I have indicated; and there might be interchange of duties between the two or three commissioners—whoever might be appointed—each having executive authority and one being in the office and the other one or two outside, thus putting the staff and the system to better and more satisfactory use. It may be asked, why have not the Government rushed in and appointed three commissioners, if that is the opinion of Ministers? Or we may be asked, why do not we re-appoint Mr. Short, or do this or that? The step to be taken, however, requires most careful consideration. A little reflection on the part of hon. members, and particularly some little regard to events in Victoria, will serve to demonstrate the need for the exercise of extreme caution in a matter of this description. The progress of affairs in Victoria relative to the appointment of a commissioner are receiving the closest

attention of this Government; and the whole subject, as I say, is being most carefully considered. After due deliberation, a decision will be arrived at; and we hope that our conclusion will be the right one. I do not think there is anything further I need say on these Estimates at the present stage, though I may refer to two matters raised by the member for Albany (Mr. H. Robinson). One has already been touched on—the overland rate from Adelaide to Kalgoorlie. The other referred to the carriage of potatoes. However, it would take me too long to debate now matters of a detail, or possibly a parochial, character. If the hon. member will mention such matters to me in my office, I shall be glad to give them immediate attention.

Mr. HARRISON: I move an amendment—

“That the vote be reduced by £300.”

I do this to protest against the lack of facilities and want of accommodation at Merredin. Three Ministers for Railways have promised that something should be done at this station, but so far there is no accommodation. If the railways were owned by a private company something would have been done before now. Passengers have to wait at this place in the middle of the night for the train and there is no shelter for them.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: The Minister might give an assurance that something will be done. Three trains converge at Merredin in the middle of the night and people waiting for the trains have to go in to the bush and light fires to keep themselves warm. At least a shelter shed might be put up for the accommodation of women and children.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is recognised by the Railway Department that facilities are required at Merredin and proper accommodation will be provided. An assurance has already been given that accommodation would be furnished.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Will you see that it is done?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes.

Mr. HARRISON: Now that the Minister has given an assurance that something will be done I ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Vote put and passed.

Vote—Tramways, £98,305:

Mr. O'LOGHLEN (Forrest) [11.35]: I want to point out the glaring anomalies that exist in regard to the salaries of the administrative staff. The officers taken over with the tramway system have been penalised. There is a great outcry and discontent, and while that exists we cannot hope for good results. I am not pleading for the men because they belong to any particular organisation. When the tramways were taken over the accountant was being paid £340 a year; he is now receiving £205 a year after 14 years' service. The senior clerk was receiving £234 a year, to-day he is getting £210 after 14½ years' service. A receiving clerk was being paid £208 a year, to-day he is getting £200 after 17 years' service. Another receiving clerk was paid £208 a year, now he is getting £180. Still another clerk was receiving £190, and he has been reduced to

£180 with 5½ years' service. A receiving clerk was getting £156, he has an advantage. The chief inspector was paid £260, now he is down to £235 after 17 years' service; another inspector was receiving £225, which was reduced to £200 after 18 years' service; still another inspector at £225 has been reduced to £200 after 13 years' service; car barn foreman £312, reduced to £310 after 13 years' service; overhead foreman, £256, also suffered a reduction after 17 years' service. I understand the object the Government had in view was to bring these officers into line with the administrative staff of the railways. I know one conductor who received an Irishman's rise. He was promoted to inspector controlling the traffic and transport on Sundays. He does not receive within 2s. of what he was previously paid, although he works two hours a day longer than a tramway conductor. These officers do not belong to any organisation. They do not even support the party to which I belong, but that does not blind me to the fact that they are suffering considerable reductions. The men are entirely dependent on the good wishes of the administrative staff. It does not appeal to me as good business, and we cannot expect to get the best results from officers if we are going to reduce them in salary to the extent of £20 or more. If we want good, efficient, and honest officers we must pay them, at any rate to within £20 of what the company were giving them. I hope the Minister will look into this question and see that some adjustment is made, and that some recompense is given to these men. If we do not, there cannot possibly be an efficient tramway system.

Mr. SMITH (North Perth) [11.45]: In dealing with these Estimates I desire to protest strongly against the continued levying of extortionate fares from the people who are compelled to use the tramways.

Mr. Troy: This is a hardy annual.

Mr. SMITH: When the tramways were taken over by the Government, a promise was made that as soon as the Government were able to procure cheaper power the fares would be reduced and the rolling stock would be increased. In 1912 in discussing the purchase of the tramways by the Government the present Minister for Works stated that having to pay a threepenny fare for a quarter of a mile ride in a tram was too much altogether, and that he saw no reason why the Government, when they got hold of the system, should not introduce penny sections. I wonder now that the hon. member's conscience does not prick him, because he is remaining in office and is supporting a Ministry who are making no effort to carry out the aims which he advocated as far back as 1912.

Mr. Foley: There are penny sections.

Mr. SMITH: Yes, the specially favoured suburb of Subiaco has a penny section. In December, 1914, I asked a question of Mr. Scaddan, who was then Premier, regarding the fares, and he said that he did not intend to reduce them until additional power was available. In January, 1915, I reminded Mr.

Scaddan of his promise, and he said that the Government intended to reduce the fares as soon as the new power station was completed, and that at the same time penny sections would be introduced. In July of last year the present Premier promised that immediate steps would be taken to keep faith with the public by giving them cheaper fares and that would be done when the new power house was completed. The new power house is now completed.

The Minister for Railways: Is it?

Mr. SMITH: At any rate the trams are obtaining their power from it and the City Council are also able to obtain power for a fraction of a penny. Notwithstanding the fact that the Government now have the cheaper power, they are still demanding a threepenny fare from the people who are compelled to use the trams. Hon. members who have occasion to use the trams must know that it is on very rare occasions on which it is possible to obtain seating accommodation. The cars are always disgracefully overcrowded.

The Minister for Railways: What would happen if we had penny sections?

Hon. P. Collier: The trams could not be more crowded even then.

Mr. SMITH: The management of the tramway system have miserably failed to run the system for the convenience of the public.

Hon. P. Collier: Absolutely.

Mr. SMITH: There has been plenty of time in which to make improvements, but those in authority have failed to do what was promised by the various Governments. I think the time has now arrived when the system should be handed over to the local authorities on any terms that the Government can get. When the system was controlled by private enterprise they were able to show a profit of over £30,000 annually. Last year, notwithstanding the fact that the service was much greater, the profit was only £4,000.

The Minister for Railways: After deducting interest.

Mr. Pickering: What was the amount for interest?

The Minister for Railways: It was £27,030.

Mr. SMITH: Next year instead of a profit I suppose we shall see a huge loss. It was part of the policy of the present Government to hand the trams over to the local authorities.

Hon. P. Collier: You mean the Wilson Government.

Mr. SMITH: The National Government. Why that idea has been dropped, I do not know. It seems to me that the Government are so hard up that they must retain control of any business undertaking which is showing a profit. It is grossly unfair that the metropolitan area should be bled by the imposition of extortionate fares in order to boost up losses in other departments. I have protested against this on every possible occasion, and I shall continue to do so. Members of the Government admit that it is not right to charge the public these high fares, yet they will do nothing to remedy the condition of things. I do not know when the Government will see

fit to make some change, and I do not know what new excuse they will find now that they are no longer able to state that the reform will be effected on the completion of the power house.

The Attorney General: Can you suggest how the local authorities are going to find £300,000 to provide for extensions?

Mr. SMITH: The credit of the local authorities in the money market to-day is higher than that of the Government. The local authorities can borrow at less than six per cent., whereas the Government are compelled to pay  $6\frac{1}{2}$  or  $6\frac{3}{4}$  per cent. It is all very well for the Attorney General to ask, "Can the local authority obtain money?"

The Attorney General: Where can they obtain it?

Mr. SMITH: They can obtain it easily, and on better terms than can the Government.

The Attorney General: The local authorities could not raise 300,000 pence, let alone £300,000.

Mr. SMITH: But why should the money be raised?

The Attorney General: Because one would not dream of handing over the trams to the Perth City Council, and trusting them to extend the trams to the suburbs.

Mr. SMITH: The local authority could raise the money, and extend the trams to North Beach without any trouble whatever. For not completing that extension the Government have put forward the excuse that they cannot get the money.

The Minister for Railways: No.

Mr. SMITH: Well, why do the Government not do it, and so bring in extra grist to the tramway mill?

Mr. Pickering: Had it been in Sydney it would have been done.

Mr. SMITH: And it can be done here. When the Government took over the trams they got rid of the best employees the old company had, and put inexperienced men in charge of the system. I do not wish to condemn the managers of the trams, but they have had no experience. Mr. Short was appointed at a salary of £500 to manage the trams, and now it comes out that this was intended merely as an increase in his salary as Commissioner of Railways. The Government appointed Mr. Shillington to manage the trams, a gentleman who had no previous experience whatever. Why did not the Government continue the employees of the company? The member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen) made it very clear that as the result of reducing the salaries of such employees as the Government did take over from the company, the Government are not getting fair value and, in consequence, we have had a considerable reduction in the profits.

Mr. Foley: The trams have made a good profit.

Mr. SMITH: Nothing like what they ought to have made. The profit has been decreasing every year since the Government took over, and I predict that next year there will be no profit at all, but a loss.

Mr. Foley: They have paid interest.

Mr. SMITH: So they should. The profit has been steadily decreasing.

The Attorney General: The company did not make a profit of £30,000 after providing interest and sinking fund. They did not set aside a penny for sinking fund.

Mr. SMITH: How much have the Government put towards a sinking fund?

The Attorney General: The Government have paid many thousands of pounds for repairs.

Mr. SMITH: And the trams to-day are in a very much worse state than when the Government took them over.

Hon. P. Collier: The department are not paying any sinking fund, but set aside an annual sum for belated repairs.

The Minister for Railways: Yes. £10,000 a year.

Mr. SMITH: Notwithstanding the large sum for belated repairs, the condition of the track is a disgrace.

The Minister for Railways: How are we going to put it right these times?

Mr. SMITH: Hand it over to the local authority, so that the people who use the trams shall have a say in their management.

The Attorney General: The local authority could not raise 2d. for the purpose.

Hon. P. Collier: That is a serious reflection on the Perth City Council.

Mr. SMITH: I hope the Government will take into consideration the making of some reduction in the present extortionate fares. I am sure it would pay them to introduce penny sections. Except during the rush hours, the trams run empty because people will not pay 3d. for an absurdly short ride. If the fares were reduced to one penny the trams would be full every journey.

Mr. FOLEY (Leonora) [11.57]: Notwithstanding the number of times the hon. member has brought up the question of penny sections, I have never heard from him any clear exposition as to how we could successfully run penny sections on the Perth trams. For every passenger carried on the Perth system 50 are carried on the Sydney system. That is the reason why they can have penny sections in Sydney. Yet even there it has been stopped now, and the fares increased. The hon. member said that for a quarter of a mile on the Perth trams a charge of 3d. is made. If we had penny sections under the same conditions as obtain in Sydney, we would be paying more for our longer rides than we pay under the present schedule. One can ride in a tram from Thomas-street to Loftus-street, in Leederville, for 3d. The distance is about three and a half miles. I do not suppose one could get a longer tram-ride anywhere for the money. If we had penny sections this could not be done. At the present rate of increase in our population it will be 50 years before we can introduce penny sections in Perth. The hon. member said that we should have penny sections except during rush hours. For my part I would be in favour of giving the concession to those who use the trams to travel to and from their work. These are the people who should get the greater rebate in fares, if any is to be given. The hon. member said there were no penny sections at present.

It is a penny fare from the railway station to King-street, and from the railway station to the Barrack-street jetty. These penny sections are not greatly made use of. Indeed, there are some people who do not know of them. There is also a penny section along Rokeby-road, in Subiaco. Those who use the trams for the purpose of going to work should get the benefit of any reduction that is made. I voted against the Government taking over the tramway service, but now that they have it under their control I say it is all moonshine for any hon. member to say that the system has not improved. We have more cars, and a greater mileage of tramway than under the old control. If we have done that we have done something. The one great difference between private and Government control of the tramway service is in the matter of the abominable dust nuisance which exists along every tram route. That is a trouble which the Government should take up, and endeavour to alleviate. It is impossible for anyone to travel along the Leederville line, and have a suit of clothes at the end of three months that will be worth a hang. The same thing applies to the Nedlands and Mt. Hawthorn routes.

Mr. Smith: The company did water the streets.

Mr. FOLEY: Yes, but the Government have not done so. I believe that the authorities say that water will do harm to trees that are tarred. If the powers that be cannot see farther ahead than that, and the roads are kept in their present state of disrepair, the sooner we do away with the tar the better. There is yet another abomination in connection with the tramway system. I am referring now to what are known as the "dog boxes." Those who put these cars on the tram rails should take one ride in them and have the hot air turred on to them at the Town Hall. The "dog boxes" should then be allowed to run one after another into the river, while the authorities say, "There goes nothing," for that is all they are worth. Men who are collecting the fares on the trams have told me that it is almost impossible for them to get them all, and if they do not get every fare and the inspector comes along there is trouble. The big cars that have been put upon the rails constitute a great boon to the people. When we think of what those who have gone to fight for us at the front have to contend with, if these things are all that we have to put up with, for my part I am willing to suffer them a little longer.

Mr. Smith: That is all very fine. You have a free pass.

Mr. FOLEY: There is not much in that. Whether one has a free pass or not one has just the same amount of dust and has to travel along the same road. The road is no softer and the dust is no thinner for the man who has a pass than for anyone else.

Hon. P. Collier: Except that the man who pays will not be in such a good frame of mind to put up with them.

Mr. FOLEY: Those are the men I am fighting for. The member for North Perth said that the tramways were making no profit, and that what profit there was diminished every year. We are actually showing a profit of £4,000 on the system. He also stated that the

company made a profit of £33,000 annually on their trams. The Government, however, made a profit of £4,000, after paying interest to the amount of £27,000. The hon. member did not say that the company were allowing for interest, but the Government have made that profit and given an improved service and more trams.

Mr. Smith: The company wrote off their stock each year and paid interest on debentures.

Mr. FOLEY: The City Council recently acquired some land, Perry's, on the way out to the North Beach. I am sure that hon. members would like to see that part of the country opened up. The Committee in control of that portion of the City Council's work stated that they could get sufficient money with which to construct a tram route to the north beach, connected up with the present system. If it is not possible for the Government to carry out this work, and the City Council are prepared to find the money and carry it out, I should like the Government to consider the proposal. I am not in favour of a local authority taking control of any single service in any given area, but in the case where the local authority considers that it would be in the best interests of that particular portion of the State that it should take control of some service I would be prepared to give it that control.

Mr. Smith: The trams are run very much better in Fremantle.

Mr. FOLEY: If the member for North-East Fremantle was here to-night I think he would have something to say on that point. It is certainly a vexed question at Fremantle, just as it is in Perth. I trust the Government will give the City Council an opportunity of carrying out this work, and so enhancing the value of the lands in that portion of the metropolitan area.

Mr. BROWN (Subiaco) [12.8]: Until such time as the Government have decided upon various extensions of the tramway system it would, I think, be utterly wrong to allow the City Council to make any particular loop line, which may suit their own purposes but not the metropolitan area in general. The City Council asked that an extension of the system should be made along Colin-street, across the railway, and so out through the land which they have acquired, to the North Beach. If there is going to be a tramline constructed out to the North Beach I say that it should run along Hay-street, past Jolimont, and so on in that direction. Until the Government decide that they will definitely arrange with the municipalities as regards extensions and will see that the Perth City Council or the local authorities take charge of the extensions, I think the Committee will be well advised to leave the tramway system in the hands of the Government. I was a member of a conference at which Mr. Frank Wilson stated that the Government would be willing to let the municipalities raise the necessary funds and take over the tramways; but then the difficulty as to extensions proved insurmountable.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [12.12 a.m.]: Ever since the acquisition of the tramway sys-

tem by the Government of this State I have refrained from criticism, because I considered that the new management ought to be allowed full time in which to effect improvements. I do think, however, the time has now arrived when the member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) is entitled to the consideration of the Committee as regards his protests against the general management and control, or want of management and control, of the tramway system. Any member who has visited other important cities and towns of Australia will agree that there is absolutely not in the Commonwealth a tramway system which for want of management and for general dilapidation compares with that of Perth. I say this as a member of the Government responsible for the taking over of the tramways; and I say it as one who has sat with patience for the space of three or four years hoping that after the new management had had a little more time some improvement would be effected. Take the question of fares. Nowhere in Australia are fares so high as in Perth.

Mr. Smith: Nowhere in the world.

Hon. P. COLLIER: My knowledge does not extend beyond Australasia; but I should be inclined to say, nowhere in the world. Only on one or two sections in the city of Perth, on which the fare is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., can a citizen ride on the tram for less than 3d.

Mr. Smith: And in favoured Subiaco.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Yes; and Subiaco is, moreover, the only suburb which has anything like a decent service during the busy hours of the day. As to the fares, I know the Commissioner's argument. I have heard it over and over again. I know he can put forward excuses. But it is time he was told definitely that Parliament and the people will no longer accept excuses for failure to reduce fares and effect improvements in the service. As to lower fares, the Commissioner argues that he already carries as many passengers as he has rolling stock for, and that if he reduced fares he would not be able to carry any more passengers. That is the kind of argument which was used in the days of the Ark. It seems an argument in favour of not building any more rolling stock. We have in this State all the material required for the building of tramcars, except the ironwork; and there is space for that in the ships coming out from the Old Country. Those ships bring to Australia articles not half so necessary as ironwork for tramways. Indeed, Australia is still importing luxuries, which could be cut out.

The Minister for Railways: As regards the ironwork, there is not only the shipping difficulty.

[Mr. Foley took the Chair.]

Hon. P. COLLIER: The time has arrived when the people of the City are entitled to some reduction of fares. In Melbourne there are numbers of lines on which one can travel eight and ten miles for 2d. as against our one mile for 3d. I fail to see that the respective populations of the two cities have any bearing on the matter, because such places as Melbourne and Sydney, if they have larger populations, also have longer lengths of track with greater quantities of rolling stock, and

heavier capitalisation. Here we are crowded right out of the trams, and still there is no redress. In that connection I marvel how the public put up with it, and how long-suffering they are as regards the overcrowded trams in the busy hours of the morning and the evening. I have often had to stand at the intersection of Hay and Barrack streets for half-an-hour because I could not get a car, the gates having been pulled up when the tram left St. George's terrace. From five o'clock onwards one may see a stream of people starting from the Wellington-street corner to walk to the Weld Club corner in order to secure, not a seat, but a standing position, on a car. Surely that state of things can be improved. Next as regards the profits of the tramway system. What the member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) says is quite true. Speaking from memory, the profit for the first year of Government control was something like £14,000 or £16,000. Then it came down to £10,000. This year it is down to £4,000. Every year the profit has been a reducing one. We may expect that next year the profit will be nil.

The Minister for Railways: Do not overlook the item for belated repairs.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I will come to that item presently. I undertake to say that for this year the tramways will show no profit whatever. And I will tell the Committee and the country why. I will give a little secret in formation. It is not the desire of the Commissioner of Railways to show any profit, which would swell the agitation for reduced fares. That is the reason why the item of belated repairs appear here. Every year since the nationalisation of the trams the Commissioner has taken a sum of £10,000 out of the revenue and used it for what he terms belated repairs. This year the item has risen from £10,000 to £14,000.

The Minister for Railways: This year the belated repairs cannot be done for £20,000.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That has been done deliberately in order to reduce the balance sheet profits for two reasons—to show a very narrow margin of profit so that the employees may be deterred from agitating for increased wages, and so that the public may be discouraged from agitating for decreased fares. Why was the £10,000 set down annually for belated repairs? To bring the tramway system into a general state of efficiency, we are and have been told. But I want to point out to the Minister that a considerable portion of that £10,000 has been devoted to works which are properly chargeable to capital account, and are not repairs in any sense. For instance, the work of deviating from Hay-street into Murray-street through Havelock-street which deviation was subsequently changed from the Havelock-street route to Milligan-street. Is not that an item properly chargeable to capital? And yet the cost of those two deviations has been met out of the belated repairs item.

The Minister for Railways: That is not a new line.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The work was charged to belated repairs, and I contend it was properly chargeable to capital. He is cutting

down his interest bill by taking revenue and devoting it to capital expenditure, and in that way keeping down the agitation for reduced fares. I am going to vote to reduce the item for belated repairs. As soon as the Commissioner shows a loss he will reduce the item "belated repairs" so as to balance the ledger. That is the way in which dust is thrown in the eyes of the people. "You cannot expect any improvements when the trams are not showing a profit," is what will be said. There has been spent about £50,000 in about five years and it has all come out of revenue. What belated repairs have been done? This money has been used on new works which should have been charged to capital. It is time that the tramway system was overhauled and that the public had some redress in the way of reduced fares and better accommodation. It is a bad advertisement for the State to see the trams overcrowded. I counted sixteen people on the back platform of one and the notice sets out that no more than six shall stand there. It is time that the game of gulling the people was put a stop to.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [12.23 a.m.]: I want the Minister when replying to inform the Committee what the intention of the Government is with regard to the request that the trams should be handed over to the local governing bodies. If over a vote of mine will prevent the grasping local body of Perth from ever getting control of the system, I will record it. I supported the Government in the proposal to acquire the trams, and I will support them in their desire to keep them. I agree that the system is far from being up to date, but it is better conducted than when the company had it. I am not going to discuss whether the deal was a good or a bad one, but it is a well known fact that the company for three years prior to the Government taking the trams over were negotiating with the local governing bodies in the hopes of getting rid of the concession, and everyone knew that not a shilling had been spent on repairs for the previous three years. It was almost unsafe to get on any of the cars at that time. That is not the position of affairs to-day.

The Minister for Railways: Some have had to be rebuilt or repaired out of all recognition.

Mr. MUNSIE: The Government have re-laid the line to Mt. Lawley and along Bulwer-street and Fitzgerald-street, and also duplicated both.

Mr. Smith: It is not more than they ought to have done.

Mr. MUNSIE: The hon. member will not admit that there has been any improvement at all. There has been improvement, but there is room for more. This is one of the concerns that is not telling too favourably for State control of public utilities, because it is not being run as it should be. But that will not alter the opinion I hold that the tramway system is better controlled than was the case when the company had it. My opinion is also that at least 25 per cent. of the people who use the trams are visitors to the State and Perth, and if any profit is derived from the system, that profit should go into Consolidated Revenue.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. C. A. Hudson—Yilgarn) [12.23 a.m.]: I am in a position to answer the question just asked by the hon. member for Hannans. It is not the present intention of the Government to hand over the tramway system to the Perth City Council. The question has been raised in relation to the conference which took place last Friday, when some members of Parliament and representatives of the municipal bodies met and discussed the question and they are to meet the Premier and myself to urge the Government to hand over the trams to the municipality. Up to the present time there is no intention of handing the system over to anyone to control. With regard to the management, it was advisedly placed in the hands of the Commissioner of Railways. I do not agree with the leader of the Opposition when he says that belated repairs were charged up for the purpose of keeping the fares as at present, and that the repairs should have been charged to capital.

Hon. P. Collier: There should be some belated repairs, but not to so large an amount.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The very instance the hon. member gave showed that his argument was not sound. He said that, having taken up one set of rails and put them down in another place, they became new work, and so some allowance must be made in the capital account.

Mr. Munsie: The other rails have not yet been pulled up.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is renewing the old workings. We are only providing the same facilities as before. The facilities are not increased in any respect. The Government will take into consideration the suggestions that have been made for the better management of the trams. Many provisions would have to be made before penny sections could be introduced. The member for Leonora (Mr. Foley) has pointed out one of the difficulties that exist in the making of adjustments in that direction. I will leave it to the Committee to say whether or not they will accept the Estimates.

General debate concluded; votes and items discussed as follows:—

Item, Traffic Superintendent, £360.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I think this is one of the reasons why we have not the management we ought to have. Imagine the superintendent of a comprehensive tramway system receiving a salary of £360. Why, the accountant in the office of the old company drew £540! It might be asked, why did not I increase this item when I was Minister? The answer is that under the Railways Act all appointments at a lower salary than £400 rest entirely with the Commissioner, without reference to the Minister. The Commissioner, I suppose, felt that he would like to have the exclusive say in the appointment of a superintendent, and so the salary was fixed at less than £400. It is utterly ridiculous to pay only £360 to a man capable of superintending a tramway system in a capital city. Even a navvies' ganger on the Great Western railway was drawing more than that. I see that the amount set aside

for belated repairs has been increased by £4,000. In view of the form which these Estimates have taken, possibly I would not be allowed to move to reduce this amount. To meet the difficulty I move—

“That the total be reduced by £4,000.” That will bring this item for belated repairs into line with the amount voted in previous years. For two or three years prior to the Government taking over the system the old company neglected to carry out any repairs, in the anticipation of selling out to the Government. That being the case, it followed that for the first two or three years in which the Government had control, it was necessary to spend a considerable sum on belated repairs. But this item ought to be diminishing year by year, instead of which we find it increasing. The Estimate for this year is £4,000 greater than in the previous year. Why is this? Is the system in a worse position to-day than it has been during the past four or five years? That is the logical deduction from the attitude of the Commissioner. This length in Hay-street cannot be classed as repairs. As a matter of policy the line was abandoned and a new line laid in Havelock and Murray-streets. Then, after 12 months, the Government decided to put the track back into Hay-street. That is a work that ought to be charged to capital, and not to belated repairs.

Mr. SMITH: I will support the amendment. I am convinced that the Commissioner is deliberately faking his accounts.

The Minister for Railways: That is a pretty serious thing to say.

Mr. SMITH: And it is pretty serious to place misleading figures before members of the Committee. I see from the reports of the tramways that the sum of £10,000 is put down year after year for belated repairs. It is not possible that the genuine amount for belated repairs should be £10,000 every year. We should be told exactly what the figures are and how much is actually spent.

The Minister for Railways: That is the amount allocated.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It is time the system was altered.

Mr. SMITH: If we had the correct figures we should probably find that the amount was totally different. The Minister has no right to place misleading figures like these before us.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I represent the allegation of the member for North Perth that these figures are faked. I see no reason for his making such a statement, and regret very much that he had the temerity to do so. Last year the sum of £10,000, allocated for belated repairs, the relaying of the down-line and the removal of the up-line in Hay-street, was exceeded, and the State advanced £6,800 odd to meet the liabilities. Actually in the previous financial year the sum of £16,800 odd was paid. The difference between the allocation and the expenditure will have to be repaid from the £14,000 which I have included in this year's Estimates. The position can easily be verified from the auditor's reports and the general books of the various

departments. It is proposed to proceed as far as possible with the funds available, and if necessary apply for a grant from the Treasury. There is really only a sum of £7,000 available out of the vote of £14,000 this year, and I do not think any hon. member will say that this is too large a sum to set aside for the purpose of keeping the tramway system in working order.

Mr. SMITH: The figures only bear out what I say, that they have been faked. We are now told that the expenditure was £16,000, whereas according to the balance sheet, printed and circulated, it was £18,000.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I have made no attempt to mislead the Committee. It is merely a question of arithmetic. The money has been borrowed from the Treasurer to make up a total amount of £16,800 odd. The amount borrowed has to be repaid to the Treasury this year, and that will only leave £7,000 for the purposes indicated.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I cannot accept the explanation of the Minister. It is absurd for the Commissioner, who is his own judge in these matters, to say that he wants £20,000 for expenditure on belated repairs. The work which comes under this heading is not ordinary maintenance work.

The Minister for Railways: It is for relaying, etc.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Mostly for relaying worn-out tracks,—

The Minister for Railways: The whole of the line has been put down in parts.

Hon. P. COLLIER: And for new lines and new blocks.

Mr. Smith: The Commissioner says he cannot get new rails.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Some of the work might properly be charged up to maintenance. That is for the Commissioner to say.

The Minister for Railways: There is something in that argument.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If £10,000 was sufficient for the Commissioner in years gone by how is he going to spend £20,000 now for belated repairs, when he cannot get the rails? There is work being charged up under this item which should not be so charged.

The Minister for Railways: There is no maintenance.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It comes out of working expenses. There is no need for a sinking fund on the tramways if the system is kept in a normal state by this expenditure.

Amendment put and negatived.

Vote put and passed.

Vote—Electric Works, £19,246.

Mr. MUNSIE: How much further is it proposed to go?

The Premier: To the end of business undertakings controlled by the Minister for Railways.

Mr. MUNSIE: Electric works, again, represents something established by the Labour Government in the interests of the whole community, and especially for the benefit of the people of the metropolitan area. We were roundly abused for establishing the electric works, and yet the item shows a profit, as per foot note, of fully £11,000.



The Minister for Railways: The interest is not included.

Mr. MUNSIE: If that is so, the Estimates should not be submitted in this manner. Here is another enterprise of the Labour Government which will prove a success.

The Minister for Railways: So it will.

Mr. MUNSIE: I am glad to hear from a member of the National Government an expression of approval of a business undertaking or, more properly, a State trading concern. Many of the State trading concerns would show much better but for that measure forced through Parliament some time ago under which any profit from them goes into Consolidated Revenue, whilst any concern unfortunately showing a loss is debited with  $6\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. interest on the amount of such loss.

Vote put and passed.

Vote—State Batteries, £85,270:

Hon. P. COLLIER: Can the Minister state what is the anticipated profit or loss? I should also like to have the figures for the two preceding years. I have been trying to unravel the information, but the figures seem very conflicting. The public accounts show that last year the revenue was £61,200 and the expenditure £83,367, leaving a loss of £22,167. But those figures do not correspond with the figures in last year's Estimates.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: The figures I have refer, I think, to calendar years. For 1915 the expenditure was £47,080 and the receipts were £41,664, showing a loss of £5,416. For 1916, expenditure £51,622, receipts £45,639, loss £5,983. The expenditure for 1916-17 was £49,316.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That figure does not fit in with these Estimates, which state last year's expenditure as £83,367. However, the Minister's figure may not include tailings purchased.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Perhaps the leader of the Opposition has in view what he spoke of when on the Estimates generally, an item of £16,000 coming in from tailings. I have made inquiries, and find that that amount refers to an increase of realisation at Wiluna, which alters the figure somewhat.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The system was altered, in consultation with the Auditor General, just before I went out of office. But the batteries account does not show the true position. Hon. members may recollect that, in years gone by, the Mines Department purchased tailings and paid for them out of loan moneys. Now the department are treating those tailings and realising upon them, and putting the proceeds into revenue. That is equivalent to taking money out of loan and putting it into revenue. This explains the large increase in the totals, which have risen from £60,000 to £80,000 and £83,000. However, I suppose the system is run to-day on the same lines as all along. The estimated loss for the year is only about £8,000. If the department manage to keep within that amount they will do very well. In any case, I do not wish to criticise the State batteries, because if there is one sub-department of this State which is capable and efficient and run to the best advantage it is these batteries under their superintendent.

Vote put and passed.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Progress reported.

House adjourned 1 a.m. (Wednesday).

## Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 27th March, 1918.

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

### MOTION—STANDING ORDERS SUSPENSION.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. H. P. Colebatch—East) [4.34]: I move—

"That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Totalisator Duty Act Amendment Bill being passed through its remaining stages at this day's sitting of the House."

My reason for asking for the suspension of the Standing Orders is, as I explained yesterday, that a great number of country members are desirous of not sitting on Thursday because of the fact that there are no trains running on Good Friday and it would be impossible for them to reach their homes in time for the Easter holidays.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan: What is the hurry about this particular Bill?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I am proceeding to explain. The Bill to amend the Totalisator Duty Act has been passed by another place, and I understand it has been agreed to by the racing community. Of course it is the desire of the Government, from a revenue point of view, that this Bill shall pass through all its stages by Thursday, but in order to avoid meeting on Thursday, I desire, if it is the will of the House, to pass the Bill at this sitting. The reason for putting the Bill through at the present sitting is, as I shall explain when moving the second reading, that it will give us an additional revenue of £3,000 because, if it is passed before the holidays, it will apply to the races which are to be held during Easter week.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: That is the very best reason.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN (South) [4.36]: While thoroughly in favour of this Bill, there is a point in connection with the desire to pass it through its remaining stages to-day, or indeed to pass the Bill to-morrow to which I would direct the Colonial Secretary's attention. He will agree with me that there is a good reason why the Bill should not be hurried through; that reason is that the Totalisator Bill ought to be considered in association with the tax which it is proposed to impose upon book-