

know that some members do not like the idea of any extension of state trading in any circumstances, but I think this is one of the instances in which members who have so frequently expressed opposition to State trading will realise that the State Government was justified in purchasing these works in the interests of the primary producers of Western Australia. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

**HON. H. V. PIESSE** (South-East): I consider that the action taken by the Government was necessary, particularly in view of the reports we had from those controlling these works. Remarks like those of Mr. Miles about the return of the capital of those who invested in the company are most uncalled for. For 20 years the people who took such a great interest in these works have had their money invested and have not received one single penny by way of return. Admittedly they are very fortunate at this stage to have their money returned. That is being done in order to enable work to be carried on that is most essential to Western Australia. There does not appear at the present moment to be any other avenue through which this work could be done by private enterprise or by the primary producers themselves. Consequently I must congratulate the Government on its action in this matter. I have read in the Press lately of the difficulties experienced in finding butchers to slaughter lambs available at these works.

I congratulate the committee, under the chairmanship of the Minister for Agriculture, for the manner in which it has set about obtaining labour rendered scarce by manpower difficulties. Without that labour, quite a number of lambs could not have been put on the market. We have other works near Albany and what has been done there this year has drawn upon the manpower of many farmers. However, the quota sent to that end of the State has been dealt with. All members will understand the reason for the Government's taking over the works. I would have liked to see at least two members of the previous company available to assist the new directors, who are nearly all civil servants. Mr. Farrell is a civil servant but I suppose he is one of the most practical men in the meat trade in Western Australia. I would have liked to see the producers represented and some of those who have been so long

associated with the previous company invited to remain with the new committee for 12 months at least in order that their useful knowledge might be available to it. I support the Bill.

**HON. G. B. WOOD** (East): I support the Bill. Like Mr. Piesse, the only fault I have to find with it is in regard to the committee of management. I am not so much concerned about members of the previous company being on the board but would like to see the producers represented. So long as the producers were represented I would be quite satisfied.

On motion by Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 4.36 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly.

*Wednesday, 25th November, 1942.*

	PAGE
Questions: Railway freights and fares .....	1543
Gas-producers, as to Nasco units .....	1544
Public debt, as to oversea payments .....	1544
Potato crop, as to digging .....	1544
Bills: National Emergency (Stocks of Goods), 1A. ....	1545
Death Duties (Taxing) Act Amendment, 2A. ....	1545
Income and Entertainments Tax (War Time Suspension), 2A. ....	1545
Health Act Amendment (No. 2), 2A., remaining stages .....	1547
Fire Brigades, Message, 2A. ....	1551
Constitution Acts Amendment, 2A. ....	1557
Medical Act Amendment, Com., report .....	1558
Annual Estimates: Committee of Supply, Votes and items discussed .....	1558

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

### QUESTIONS (4).

#### RAILWAY FREIGHTS AND FARES.

Hon. N. KEENAN asked the Minister for Railways: 1, Is the statement correct which was made by Mr. P. C. Raynor, the Deputy Secretary of the W.A. Government Railways, on the 6th November last before the Commonwealth Grants Commission, namely, that an all-round increase of 12½ per cent. in railway charges was proposed? 2, If so, is he aware that such increase would seriously affect the people living on the Eastern Gold-fields who are paying and always have paid rates for all services rendered by the railways of an amount highly payable to the Railways? 3, Is he aware that in addition

to the increased charge which would be made by the Railway Department, sales tax is imposed on such increased cost? 4, Will he undertake that if such increased charges for services to be rendered by the Railway Department, and particularly for the carriage of goods, are intended to be made, he will have same gazetted sufficiently long before the close of the present session of Parliament to allow of the matter being brought before the House? 5, Alternatively, will he undertake not to gazette any increase of charges for services to be rendered by the Railway Department whilst Parliament is in recess?

The MINISTER replied: 1 to 5, The statement made to the Grants Commission by the Deputy Secretary of Railways was made without reference to the Government, and has not been considered by the Government; consequently no declaration will be made until the proposal has been considered and a decision reached by the Government.

#### GAS-PRODUCERS.

*As to Nasco Units.*

Mr. SEWARD asked the Minister for Industrial Development: Has any action been taken to prohibit the sale of Nasco gas-producers in this State?

The MINISTER replied: The Commissioner of Police has been requested to refrain from licensing any further vehicles fitted with Nasco gas-producers, unless it is proved to his satisfaction that the thickness of the material of the firebox is not less than that specified by the Standards Association of Australia Code. This action was taken after an examination disclosed that some Nasco units had been sold with fire-boxes constructed of material which was lighter than that specified by the Code.

#### PUBLIC DEBT.

*As to Oversea Payments.*

Mr. NORTH asked the Treasurer: 1, What amount of national overseas public debt has been paid off since the 1930 depression? 2, Does lease-lend affect the position favourably or otherwise? 3, At present rate of sinking funds when will overseas debt be extinguished?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (for the Treasurer) replied: 1, Amount of overseas debt redeemed since the 30th June, 1930, is £2,865,502 16s. 2d. including loans of

£998,353 7s. 3d. and £140,000 for which special sinking funds had been provided. 2, The lease-lend arrangement operating between America and Great Britain, and the reciprocal lend-lease between the Allies and America may affect the position, but we are not in a position to comment at this stage. 3, By the provisions of the Financial Agreement of 1923 the control of the sinking funds of the Commonwealth and States is vested in the National Debt Commission. Sinking funds are not accumulated but subject to the agreement are applied to the redemption of the public debts of the various Governments or the re-purchase of securities issued in respect thereof. In normal times the policy of the Commission is to allocate the funds available to Australia, London, and New York in proportion to the amount of debt domiciled in the respective places, but owing to the needs of the war it is not possible at present to carry out that policy to its fullest extent. Theoretically the debt existing at the time the Financial Agreement came into force or an equivalent amount of other debt should be extinguished by the year 1955. On loans raised since the financial agreement, the period for which sinking fund contributions are payable is 53 years and in that time debt equivalent to the amount of the loan would be redeemed.

#### POTATO CROP.

*As to Digging.*

Mr. WITHERS (without notice) asked the Minister for Agriculture: Will he advise the House of the quantity of potatoes dug last week-end under the system of volunteer labour organised by the Department of Agriculture? Are the arrangements to continue? If so, are adequate plans made for the transport of volunteer workers?

The MINISTER replied: Every effort has been made to cope with the difficulties associated with potato digging, including a call for volunteer labour in any district adjacent to the operations. During last week-end 4,650 bags of potatoes were dug by volunteer labour. Of those 2,600 were dug by lumpers from Bunbury. There were 850 dug by other residents of Bunbury and 1,100 by miners from Collie. We hope that during next week-end the total of 4,650 bags dug by volunteer labour last week-end will be exceeded. Arrangements have been made for transport, even to the extent of endeavouring to meet the situation

by the provision of a special train for volunteer workers. Those arrangements have not been completed, but I hope they will be finalised in time to meet the requirements of all those who are trying to help in this difficult position.

### **BILL—NATIONAL EMERGENCY (STOCKS OF GOODS).**

Introduced by the Minister for Labour and read a first time.

### **BILL—DEATH DUTIES (TAXING) ACT AMENDMENT.**

*Second Reading.*

**THE MINISTER FOR LANDS** [2.24] in moving the second reading said: This Bill is introduced to extend the operations of the Death Duties (Taxing) Act which was passed last year, and which provides particularly for the estates of Australian soldiers serving in the Forces who might die in Australian territory because of enemy action. These concessions were originally granted to members of the A.I.F. on active service and "active service" was defined as service outside Australia. Owing to Japan coming into the war against the Allies and the theatre of war shifting to Australian territory, soldiers were killed within Australia as a result of enemy action and, as "active service" is defined as service outside Australia, it was not possible under the Act as it stood to give the concessions of probate duty to members of the Forces who were killed within Australian territory during the conflict with the Japanese. In addition to that, considerable forces of our Allies have landed in Australia, and some of those men have become casualties as the result of enemy action.

In spite of the passing of the Administration Act Amendment Bill recently to allow certain concessions regarding the payment of probate duty, the desire is that, by means of the Bill now before the House, that privilege shall be extended to the estates of those who are now our Allies and may be killed on Australian soil during the war period. The legislation recently passed extended that privilege regarding probate duties to Australian soldiers and members of the British Forces, as well as to members of the Forces of our Allies who happen to be killed here or die as the result of enemy action. The Death Duties (Taxing) Act,

which lays down the rate to be paid by the deceased person's estate, is a separate measure from the Administration Act. As the Death Duties (Taxing) Act is separate from that measure, a separate Bill is also required to accomplish what the Government has in mind.

The proposals contained in the Bill will, if agreed to, enable the Government to give effect to the amendments recently agreed upon in connection with the Administration Act, and thus enable similar concessions to be granted. Although this matter has not been taken up by all the other States so far, I believe consideration will be correspondingly extended there, not only to our own soldiers who may be killed within the borders of Australia but to those of our Allies. In all the circumstances, that seems to be merely just. Members will notice that the Bill will affect three of the schedules of the Death Duties (Taxing) Act. There are four schedules in that Act, but one deals with duty payable by foreign companies carrying on business in Australia, so that does not apply in this instance. The amendment will affect the three schedules attached to the Death Duties (Taxing) Act, No. 29 of 1934, of which I have a copy, should members wish to refer to it. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Doney, debate adjourned.

### **BILL—INCOME AND ENTERTAIN- MENTS TAX (WAR TIME SUS- PENSION).**

*Second Reading.*

**THE MINISTER FOR LANDS** [2.29] in moving the second reading said: Many members will regret the necessity for the introduction of this legislation. The reason for its appearance is to be found in the action of the Commonwealth in passing the Income Tax (War Time Arrangements) Act, which made it necessary for the States to waive their rights to certain taxation collections, which are provided for in the State laws. The Commonwealth, as members are aware, now has power to collect all State and Commonwealth taxation under the provisions of one Act for the duration of the war and for 12 months thereafter. It will be remembered that the States opposed the action of the Commonwealth in that re-

spect, and Western Australia was a party to the case taken to the High Court of Australia to test the validity of the Commonwealth Government's action. The decision of the High Court was in favour of the Commonwealth and, as a result, the Federal uniform taxation laws were declared valid. The State could, of course, continue to operate a State income tax in defiance of the Commonwealth law, but it requires only a cursory examination of the position to reach the decision that such a course would merely react to the detriment of our own State taxpayers, and it would be quite impossible to superimpose upon the Commonwealth taxation provisions something specific to meet the requirements of the State.

Therefore there is no alternative but to pass legislation to make provision for the waiving, for the time being, of the right of the State to collect its own taxation. The Commonwealth law makes provision for the payment to the State of £2,546,000, and, if the State refused to adopt the Commonwealth scheme and carry on, it would involve the forfeiture of the right to reimbursement to the extent of £2,546,000 from the Commonwealth, that sum representing the average tax collection for the two years immediately prior to the amalgamation of the Commonwealth and State taxes. The Bill now before the House suspends the collection of State taxes from the 1st July of this year, accruing after that date and payable under five different State Acts. Members will notice on perusing the Bill that those Acts are dealt with in separate clauses, and the first relates to the Income Tax (Rates for Deduction) Act. That is necessary because of the obligation imposed on employers statutorily to make deductions, so that the responsibility attaching to employers and others in that respect may be waived. Unless that were done, the obligation would continue. Another clause refers to the Income Tax Act, which deals with emergency cases, such as those relating to persons who are about to leave the State or Commonwealth, and for whom intermediate assessments are required in order that income tax may be collected from them before their assessments would normally be available.

Other Acts affected are the Gold Mining Profits Tax Act, the Hospital Fund (Contributions) Act, and the Entertainments Tax

Act. The suspension of those measures is for the duration of the war and for 12 months thereafter. The suspension of the Acts will allow all taxes, which would be chargeable up to the 30th June, 1942, to be still charged. The operation of the Entertainments Tax Act affected collections on entertainment tickets, and that taxation was payable at the source. For the time being, although it was not agreed until October that the State would waive its rights to that tax, it will be found that there is provision in the Bill for the commencement date of the Commonwealth authority to be slightly different from those affecting the other taxes mentioned. The Hospital Fund Contributions Act was for the purpose of imposing a tax of 1½d. in the pound on all wages, salary and income earned each year. In the case of wages and salaries, the tax was deducted at each pay period. The Government, upon the decision of the High Court going in favour of the Commonwealth, agreed to accept the Commonwealth's taxing proposals. It has notified the Commonwealth Government to this effect, and has since been receiving its monthly contribution of the average tax payable under State taxation measures.

The purpose of the Bill is to suspend the operation of the various Acts I have mentioned as from the 1st July, 1942, for the duration of the war and for 12 months thereafter, the Commonwealth coming into the field in regard to the entertainments tax, as I have already mentioned, as from the 1st October, 1942. In the agreement with the States regarding the entertainments taxation field the Commonwealth undertook to pay to the States the average tax collected by the States for the last two financial years. The Commonwealth, as I believe members are aware, has substantially increased the rates of the tax. I think that at the conference of Premiers held in Melbourne in August, the Commonwealth expressed the opinion that from the imposition of standard taxation on entertainments throughout Australia it would levy at least another £2,500,000 from entertainments tax sources.

The amount payable to this State for surrendering its entertainments taxation is approximately £98,000 per annum. In return we shall receive from the Commonwealth the tax collected by the State under the State Act up to the 31st October, and for

the remaining nine months of the year we shall receive nine-twelfths of the average amount of £98,000. As a matter of fact, it did appear to the States that because of the buoyancy of spending at that time there would be an increase generally in receipts from entertainments taxation; but, also at the time the matter was under consideration, it was obvious that had the States not vacated this field they would have been forced into a very difficult position—the Commonwealth invading the field and perhaps drying up, so far as the States were concerned, even the amounts they would otherwise be able to collect. The Bill is simply conched. It will be found to include within its six clauses provision for the suspension of the State's collecting of the amounts, in consequence of which it will be entitled to receive from the Commonwealth the average of its past two years' collections to reimburse it for taxation raised previously under its own laws. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Patrick, debate adjourned.

### **BILL—HEALTH ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).**

#### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

**MR. SHEARN** (Maylands) [2.40]: I propose to follow the good example set by the Minister for Health himself yesterday, when introducing this Bill; inasmuch as I am not anxious to presume, as a layman, to deal with the many aspects involved from a professional medical point of view. However, I would like to say at the outset that I commend the Minister, and the Government too, for having introduced the measure. Members will recollect the fact that not only has there been for some considerable time much public controversy over this important subject, but indeed during the recent Address-in-reply debate numerous members of this Chamber addressed themselves to the question. As the Minister pointed out when introducing the Bill, while there has been since the amendment Act of 1915 was passed a considerable reduction in the incidence of the various venereal diseases, unfortunately, in connection with the war, as seems inseparable from wars, there has been a sharp increase in that incidence.

Of course those who go about the city in particular have just seen what has happened, especially in relation to the Services. We find that there has been a kind of reaction to the glamour associated with the activities of the various Forces; and we have also noticed from particulars published, apart from what the Minister conveyed to us—the actual figure of cases reported was 815—the tremendous scourge this has been in relation to our community. The Commonwealth Government, of course, has seen fit to introduce a National Security Regulation to deal with the problem; and this in itself is sufficient to show the importance of the subject and the seriousness of the position. I feel sure the Bill will receive the whole-hearted support of the House, and also, I trust, of another place.

As the Minister indicated, the measure proposes to confer tremendous powers upon the Commissioner of Public Health. One may rightly say that the powers are drastic, such powers as under any other circumstances the House would be very chary about granting. But, after all, this is a matter which requires drastic handling not only in the interests of the present generation but also in those of future generations. I have a feeling—and I hope the Minister's ideas envisage this aspect also—that the matter should go further than the powers now to be bestowed on the Public Health Department and the Commissioner in particular. I would like to see a more educational attitude adopted. I realise that the Public Health Department and the Minister himself have been interested to see that a certain amount of propaganda—if I may use that term—is directed, and properly directed, to draw attention to this important social question. Now, as was the case in the past, there are those who feel that this matter should be treated in a more or less semi-confidential way, without undue publicity being given to the incidence of the diseases.

Mr. Warner: Mock modesty!

Mr. SHEARN: "Mock modesty" an honourable interjects. I feel that this is a subject which might well be taken up by means of the introduction into the school curriculum of a course of instruction under the supervision of a properly qualified person in relation to these particular matters, so that the children may not in subsequent life fall victims to the scourge as it has been in evid-

ence, both in this State and elsewhere during the last three or four years in particular. I would like to see the Government investigate the practicability—I use the word “practicability” advisedly—of the establishment of homes—I do not like the word “institutions”—where members of either sex who are seriously affected may be properly housed and treated and, in cases where the necessity exists, given a better opportunity of rehabilitating themselves in society. As this matter has been discussed at such length and is so well known to members, I cannot do better than follow the excellent example of the Minister and confine myself to the major points of importance.

With regard to the second portion of the Bill, that relating to infectious diseases, all I can say is that there will be a happy situation now as a result of the compromise between the Health Department, the Perth Hospital Board and the local authorities. For years past I know this has been a vexed question so far as the metropolitan local government bodies are concerned. It has been the cause of much contention and considerable discussion. After all, the Bill will make for more harmonious relationships between the Perth Hospital Board and the various authorities affected. Whilst I cannot presume to know all the details, from inquiries which I have made over the last few years I learn that we are fortunate now in having secured this compromise. I am convinced that the local authorities would find it difficult to maintain the services economically today under the old arrangement, and am therefore glad that a reversion to the two-thirds basis, as against the 50 per cent., of the amounts collected is now envisaged by this Bill. I have much pleasure in supporting the second reading.

**MR. SAMPSON** (Swan): I also take the opportunity of commending the Minister upon introducing this Bill. What is needed, I am sure, is the adoption of a gospel of knowledge. Throughout the ages venereal diseases have been the subject of false modesty. That is an attitude extremely bad from the national standpoint and it should be altered as quickly as possible. Since 1914, and before, the Ministry of Health in the Old Country has spared no effort to make known the importance of prevention of this disease; persons affected with it have been urged to obtain prompt

treatment. There were no half-measures in this publicity. Wherever men were wont to congregate, notices were to be seen and they helped to dispel the ignorance on this subject. The disease has always been considered as one that should be treated secretly. That is wrong. It is easily understandable that persons will not go about making a boast of the fact that they are suffering from such a disease; but it is nevertheless exceedingly important that a remedy should be found at the earliest possible moment. Syphilis has persisted down the centuries. One has only to turn up Holy Writ and one will read of its being especially referred to.

**Mr. J. Hegney:** Are you referring to Sodom and Gomorrah?

**Mr. SAMPSON:** Not at the moment. That is an unnatural offence to which I did not think of referring. Nevertheless, there is justification for reference to it.

**Mr. SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr. SAMPSON:** I was referring to syphilis. This disease persists unto the third and fourth generation. It is remarkable that it may remain dormant in human beings for a couple of generations and then revive. That has not been successfully refuted yet and consequently we may accept it as being true. I do not know that I can add much more; the Minister is to be congratulated upon having taken hold of this matter and I hope he will deal with it effectively. Every good must follow vigorous and thorough treatment. That these diseases are as prevalent as they are today is disgraceful from the standpoint of present-day medical science.

**Mr. Triat:** You do not blame the medical profession for it?

**Mr. SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Swan will address the Chair and not heed interjections.

**Mr. SAMPSON:** I have an idea that what the hon. member said is of great importance. I hope he will amplify his remarks later.

**Mr. Warner:** He said that you could not blame the medical fraternity for it.

**Mr. SAMPSON:** Well, who is to blame? We could blame the Minister. It is common practice to blame Ministers for every evil that exists. Here we have an opportunity to do good work in order to prevent the recurrence and spread of these diseases. With regard to the interjection by the mem-

ber for Middle Swan, that subject also is not frequently mentioned, although unfortunately it is far more prevalent than some people imagine. How it is to be treated I do not know. I question whether even the Minister, with all the ability and knowledge which his department may bring to bear, will be able to deal with it.

Mr. Warner: A surgical operation would do.

Mr. SAMPSON: I would like to hear the hon. member speak on that subject. It is a matter worthy of serious consideration. I heartily support the Bill. In my opinion, we have a great opportunity now effectively to deal with venereal diseases. We want thoroughness, and the first requirement is knowledge. If knowledge is available then we shall have made a big step forward toward the prevention of these diseases.

MR. CROSS (Canning): I could not possibly let this occasion pass without commenting upon the Bill. While a great portion of it is overdue and I welcome it, there is one provision to which I cannot possibly agree. The astounding feature of it is that the Minister entirely overlooked it when introducing the measure. The Bill provides that no chemist shall sell any derivative of the sulphanilamide group of drugs, except on the prescription of a medical practitioner. I would not be surprised if the B.M.A. were responsible for this provision.

The Minister for Health: That is the regulation now and has been for many months.

Mr. CROSS: I do not care whether it is or not. One has not much trouble in buying the drug. Sulphanilamide is one of the greatest discoveries of medical science in the last 30 or 40 years.

Mr. Thorn interjected.

Mr. CROSS: The hon. member knows it, because he has been treated with it.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. Thorn: The member for Canning has now cornered the market.

Mr. CROSS: A drug which has been proved almost to spell the end of the common cold and influenza, which has reduced the death rate from meningitis from 50 per cent. to five per cent., and which has taken people suffering from pneumonia almost out of the grave, should be available to the public. That is the reason why at the outbreak of hostilities the military authorities immediately froze all supplies of the drug.

Now, if a person requires the drug he must go to a doctor and pay him 10s. 6d. in order to get a prescription to obtain it. The excuse is that possibly the drug is a dangerous one; but chemists can give instructions to persons taking tablets for a minor complaint quite as well as can a doctor. It is practically common knowledge today that a person taking a 693 m.b. tablet, which is almost pure sulphanilamide, must not take aspirin within four or five hours and must not eat eggs or onions or any food containing sulphur in any form. After the 1914-18 war, it became the practice for people to take aspirin and aspro, and I believe that is the reason why now the medical profession is taking early steps to prevent people from obtaining sulphanilamide. I shall oppose this provision, because I think it against the best interests of the public. Other members, as well as myself, have had experience of sulphanilamide.

Mr. North: Do you say it cures colds?

Mr. CROSS: Yes. This is the only drug that will kill streptococci germs. It is one of the greatest discoveries of the last 50 years. If members had watched the papers they would have seen that even since the war began further properties have been discovered in the sulphanilamides and their derivatives. The doctors have discovered that a wound will heal in about a quarter the usual time by sprinkling sulphanilamide in the internal portions of it and then sewing it up. Not only that but it is a perfect disinfectant. I want to hear what the Minister has to say to justify the inclusion of this clause. For a while doctors were afraid to use the drug because not much was known about it, but now it has come into fairly common use. The people know about the drug and are using it.

Mr. J. Hegney: Where was it first discovered?

Mr. CROSS: In America.

Mr. J. Hegney: I thought it was in Germany.

Mr. CROSS: No, in America. I shall oppose the inclusion of those words which compel a person to pay 10s. 6d. to a doctor before he can get one or two tablets of this drug from the chemist to cure a common complaint.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee.*

Mr. Marshall in the Chair; the Minister for Health in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of Section 269:

Mr. CROSS: I move an amendment—

That proposed new Subsection (3) be struck out.

Mr. PATRICK: I was looking at these words from a different angle. I was under the impression that I had read of regulations under the National Security Act, published some time ago in the Press, dealing with this and other drugs in exactly the same way as is indicated in the Bill. The regulations were to the effect that this drug could not be purchased without a doctor's certificate, and further that the doctor's prescription had to be renewed every fortnight.

Mr. SAMPSON: This amendment is worthy of serious consideration. If as the member for Greenough has stated it is impossible to avoid this provision, then nothing further need be said on the subject. Unless there is Commonwealth legislation which makes essential a doctor's prescription, it should be possible to enable the purchase of the required drug or drugs without having to go to the expense referred to by the member for Canning. Perhaps the Minister could advise whether it is today practicable to purchase this drug. If so, this clause should be amended.

Mr. THORN: I do not pretend to have the knowledge regarding these drugs that the member for Canning has. He was quite right when he stated that I have used a fair amount of it. I will give my experience. I probably did not use it for the same purpose as did the hon. member. If this drug is not controlled there probably will not be any left for those who really need it, as in cases of pneumonia and meningitis. It is so popular that if it is not protected the market will be left bare. It is a dangerous drug and requires control. When I lost the use of one of my little fingers I was given four of these tablets every three hours, and it was not a nice experience. One cannot stand up to them; one has to lie down.

Mr. Cross: You cannot take more than nine at a time.

Mr. THORN: I know their effect in the case of blood-poisoning. It is very severe. If the drug is taken without being con-

trolled it might induce fatal effects. This is a valuable drug and should be looked after at a time like this. The clause should remain in the Bill.

Mr. CROSS: It was controlled in the first place because of its scarcity. The military authorities seized the lot of it throughout the Commonwealth and for a few weeks none was available for civilians. The drug is now manufactured in Sydney and there are ample supplies for everyone. I have discussed this drug with medical men and they have not experienced any dangerous consequences from its use because when a doctor gives a prescription he does not order a large quantity at a time. As members know a chemist has almost the same education as a doctor and could prescribe it in the same way. The doctors will not give more than a maximum of six tablets at a time. If one goes to a chemist he will probably be told not to eat four things.

Mr. Thorn: There must be a danger from eating those things.

Mr. CROSS: It is because this drug is a sulphide and, if taken with anything containing sulphur, such as eggs or onions, it induces a chemical effect. Even that condition is only applicable to a small percentage of people. I was told that by a doctor. It might be all right if the chemists kept a record because they have plenty of commonsense. If people have to go to medical practitioners for this drug they might as well go to them to purchase aspirin, because it is just as dangerous if taken in excessive quantities.

Mr. Patrick: Are chemists selling it freely now?

Mr. CROSS: Not freely, but some do sell it.

Mr. Patrick: Then they are breaking the law.

Mr. CROSS: I did not know there was a National Security Regulation covering the matter. Those regulations are churned out about two a day.

Mr. Patrick: The people affected, like the chemists, know about them.

Amendment put and negatived.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 3—Amendment of Section 279:

Mr. NEEDHAM: I realise the importance of this Bill and the necessity for controlling this disease, and if possible, eradicating it. I am somewhat concerned about the proposed new paragraph (b). I appre-



ciate that some place must be provided where victims of the disease may be treated, but is there no place other than a gaol hospital? The stigma of gaol should not be attached to this trouble. Admittedly there may be difficulty in providing a suitable place. I understand that patients are at present sent to the Perth Hospital. Why not send them there rather than to a gaol hospital? Is there any need to include the word "gaol" in this provision? It does not appear in the Act.

The **MINISTER FOR HEALTH**: There is a very good reason for including the word. If sufferers are a menace to society and should be detained, there must be means of detaining them for treatment. A few days ago two girls of about 18 cleared out of the Perth Hospital ward, were brought back, and cleared out again. When they appeared in the Children's Court, the magistrate said there was no option to sending them to gaol. Some place has to be provided. I do not believe in all this sentimental "tosh." If a person is a menace to society, his duty is to stay in the place where he can receive medical attention. If he will not stay there, he must be removed to a place where he can be held. No person will be sent to the gaol ward if he is prepared to undergo treatment in the hospital or any other place that might be provided. We are negotiating at present for a very suitable place. We want to treat these people as human beings but, if they are not prepared to be so treated, we must deal with them in a harsher way.

**Mr. NEEDHAM**: Do I understand that only extreme or incorrigible cases will be sent to the gaol hospital? If the Minister gives an assurance to that effect I shall be satisfied.

The **MINISTER FOR HEALTH**: The Act provides that the Commissioner of Public Health may compel a person to be treated, but cannot send him to a gaol hospital. This power is necessary to ensure treatment in refractory cases.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 4 to 8, Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

### *Third Reading.*

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

## **BILL—FIRE BRIGADES.**

### *Message.*

Message from the Lient.-Governor received and read recommending appropriation for the purposes of the Bill.

### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

**MR. CROSS** (Canning) [3.23]: With the Minister, I agree that this consolidation of the 1916 Act and its amendments is long overdue. In Great Britain, not only has the administration been brought up to date recently, but sweeping progress has also been made, and legislation in the Eastern States has been brought up to date. Since 1916, drastic changes have occurred in the methods of fire protection and much experience has been gained, but not even yet do the authorities regard the fire brigades as a common utility, such as the police force and the Water Supply Department.

At present the greater metropolitan area is divided into ten fire districts. Fifteen years ago I attempted to get the Act amended so as to constitute the whole of the greater metropolitan area a single fire district. At that time some members of the board considered I was mad but, with the experience gained in the intervening years, the board is now unanimously in favour of a single fire district for the whole of that area. The reason for this is not hard to find. Under the Act, each fire district is responsible for the provision and maintenance of a fire brigade. One district might have a station with up-to-date machines and equipment and well-trained men, and a nearby district might not bother to provide these facilities. Under the Act it is not possible for the district with full fire protection to compel the other district to share the cost of providing and maintaining the station.

Until a few years ago we had the spectacle of some municipalities and road districts in close proximity to the city having machines and men and paying a high fire rate, while adjoining districts paid a low rate, some of them as little as £20 a year, towards the cost of fire protection. This caused much discontent. Again, one district might establish a station near its boundary and an adjoining district might establish its station close by. This, of course, would be ridiculous. The common-sense method is to provide for systematic

protection throughout the greater metropolitan area so that stations would be located a reasonable distance apart.

When the parent Act was passed, transport was not as fast and roads were not as good as at present, and it was necessary to have stations closer together, but with the march of progress and events, it is only commonsense to plan a chain of stations at a considerably greater distance from each other than was requisite a few years ago. With the roads and equipment then available, it might have taken 20 or 30 minutes to reach a fire, but I do not think there is at present a station in the metropolitan area that could not reach the scene of a fire in 10 or 15 minutes and, as will be obvious to members, the first five minutes of a fire is the most important part. Thus the provision for a single fire district covering the whole of the greater metropolitan area is essential, and I doubt whether anybody will dispute the increased efficiency that will be attained.

In my opinion, the Minister has not gone far enough with this Bill. I do not know how many fire districts there were in Great Britain in former years, but every town had its own system of fire protection and there was neither cohesion nor co-operation between them; in fact, there was a general mix-up. When the war broke out, the need for greater efficiency was recognised, and the British Government not only created a single fire district but also took over the whole duty of fire protection, which is now regarded as one of the utilities and ranks second only in importance to the Fighting Forces. It has become more up-to-date. I commend the Minister for bringing down the Bill. One of its most important provisions is that which brings to us up-to-date and commonsense methods. In the greater metropolitan area there is no need for more than 10 or twelve stations. I remember that in South Perth only two or three years ago we had a fire station and a machine, and one man to look after it. He was little more than a telephone attendant. If he went to a fire single-handed he could not manage the machine and the hose, and attend to the fire properly.

Not less than four men are required to control a machine and the hose and to conduct fire operations efficiently. The Fire Brigades Board and the local authority

discussed the matter, with the result that there are now three men on duty at South Perth. That provides just a sufficient number of people to attend properly to the job. I hope members will realise that this is a step in the right direction. I also consider that the whole of the passenger traffic should be controlled by one body. I would include in that all buses, trains and transport facilities for passengers. They should all be brought under one control just as fire protection should be brought under one control. There should be not only single district but single control. The parent Act provided that if there was a fire in a district no machine could be sent outside of its own district to assist in stamping it out. That method has now been altered. I played some part in bringing about that change, although I was not then a member of Parliament. Members can see how foolish it was to adopt such a practice. If there was a big fire in Fremantle it was not possible to send a machine from Claremont to assist in putting it out.

In practice, for the last nine or ten years, the whole system has been changed. When a fire breaks out it is possible to send machines from one district to another. That is how things should be now under a single fire district. The greatest benefit to be derived from a single fire district is that if a big fire occurs in Perth all machines in the greater metropolitan area can be brought to it quickly, and the fire controlled. There is one direction in which the Minister has not gone far enough. He should have made fire insurance compulsory. I am amazed that the Minister did not consider doing that. Let me instance Hay-street or Murray-street. In the case of the latter street if Boans Ltd., decided not to insure the shop, it need not do so and no one could make it do so. If, therefore, a big fire occurred in that establishment and the fire brigade was called upon to put out the conflagration, as it would be, the company need not pay anything towards the necessary expenditure except for the time during which the firemen were present at the fire.

The Minister for the North-West: What extra amount should the company pay?

Mr. CROSS: It is an expensive pastime to maintain a fire brigade in a city of the size of Perth, expensive not only to maintain

it but to provide it in the first place. The brigade has to be kept in a state of efficiency for 24 hours a day on 365 days in the year. Everyone in the community should pay his fair share for fire protection. In the report of the Fire Brigades Board for the year ended the 30th September, 1940—the last report as yet to hand—reference is made to insurance. It point out that the fire brigades attended different kinds of fires to the number of 1,248, and that of 448 fires (probably buildings) there was no insurance in connection with 59 of them. This means that 58 owners or occupiers of buildings—a high percentage—did not insure their property, and thus avoided paying their full share towards the upkeep of the brigades. In the greater metropolitan area probably thousands of people do not insure their properties. If everyone had to meet his share of the cost it would be better for all concerned. Those people who fail to insure might have a fire in the city block, and not only endanger their own property but that which belongs to the people next door. It is only fair they should be compelled to pay their share of the insurance rates per medium of premiums.

Mr. Patrik: They might impoverish themselves if they do not insure.

Mr. CROSS: That may be so. Whilst they are taking the risk themselves they are equally endangering the property of their neighbours. Another of the provisions of the Bill sets up a fairer method of paying for the upkeep of brigades by the local authority. In the old days, when there were 10 different districts in the metropolitan area, almost every authority paid a different rate. Perhaps Midland Junction had to pay a rate of 3d. in the pound, whereas in the City of Perth for years the rate was about 1½d. The fire rate for my place is less than 5s. a year, which is not a great sum and cannot be cavilled at. The fire insurance on my place comes to 16s. 9d. so that, with the 5s. to which I have referred, the total amount is just over a guinea, and constitutes a reasonable charge.

In some districts in the old days, because machines were maintained in one part of the metropolitan area another part got the benefit of them without making proper payments, whereas other areas paid only a very low rate. The result was that some districts paid more than they should and others

paid less. The new proposal is a fair one. Every district in the greater metropolitan area will be asked to pay its fair share according to its geographical position. The Bill will also give the Fire Brigades Board power to fight fires on ships and to charge for the work done. I understand that in the past whilst fires on ships were dealt with the fire brigades had no power to make any charge. That was unfair. The Bill will also give the board power to impose a fire rate on people who do not insure in this State. Mining companies and others, I understand, have dodged the payment of fire rates because they have insured in London and not in Western Australia, notwithstanding that the properties have received protection from the fire brigades. The Minister has gone a step forward in that respect.

Mr. Doney: How has he got over that difficulty?

Mr. CROSS: He proposes to give the Fire Brigades Board power to levy a charge for the services rendered. The Minister also proposes to give the board the right to order that fire hydrants shall be installed. In the past many local authorities who have no responsibility for putting out fires, and perhaps do not care whether they are put out or not, have created difficulties in this respect. If the board said that 10 hydrants were necessary in a locality and that each would cost £10, the local authority might say, "We decline to instal any hydrants." It will be found from the reports issued by the board that many municipalities or local authorities had not a full sense of responsibility towards their ratepayers. They should have seen the necessity for the installation of more hydrants. The report of the board that many municipalities or local Department has continued to make large additions to the reticulation, but that owing to the unsatisfactory method of obtaining hydrants on the mains many mains were laid down without hydrants being placed therein. The Fire Brigades Board is a well-organised body, and has long since realised that when a district is built up and water mains are laid down, that is the time to put in curves so that provision can be made for the installation of hydrants later on. An inspection of the district is made and experts give advice to the local authorities, which in the past have been requested to put in a certain number of hydrants.

The report of the board discloses that requests are made to the local authorities for the installation of hydrants as new mains are laid down, but that out of 290 hydrants that were recommended, only 72 were supplied. That is a ridiculous state of affairs. It is impossible to put out a fire unless water can be drawn from the main. That is a most important thing. I am pleased that the Minister proposes to give authority to the board not that it should ask a local authority to instal hydrants in the interests of the safety and protection of the public, but to compel it to do so. I do not think anyone can grumble at that. I have discussed this matter with some of the members of the South Perth Road Board. They were growling about the number of hydrants they had to put in and the cost thereof. I took one of the members along a street a mile and a quarter in length and asked him how many hydrants should be in. I knew the number, because I had found out previously what it was. The road board member said he thought that about a dozen ought to be put in, but I informed him that there was actually only one in the street. I then pointed out what would happen if a house at one end caught fire, and it became necessary to lay a mile and a quarter of hose in order to extinguish the conflagration. He said that would be ridiculous. I am certain that this demonstration altered his attitude in respect to the putting in of hydrants. These are a necessary adjunct to any fire brigade. Unless firemen can make contact with the river it is absolutely essential that hydrants shall be put in at key positions.

I am pleased that the Minister proposes to give the board power to compel local authorities to put in hydrants at those places where it deems them to be necessary. Provision is made in the Bill for the insurance companies to pay according to their collections in each district. In the past the insurance companies used to pay according to the revenue from the whole State. The position was something like this: Take a place like Narrogin, in which everybody, let us assume, was insured and paid his premium. The right share of the premiums collected would go back into the fire district to maintain the brigade. In another place, say Wagin, three-fourths of the people might not bother to insure. Under the old system all the money was pooled and the

amount given to the central authority for distribution over the whole State. Now the insurance companies will contribute according to the proportion of revenue received from each district. That amount will be paid to each separate district or to the fire brigade for expenditure in that particular district. A further provision in the Bill is to empower the board to inquire into the cause of fires.

Two crimes, the incidence of which is decreasing faster than that of any other crimes, are those of coining and arson. Nevertheless, such crimes still occur. Not many years ago there was a fire in a block a few yards from the Perth Town Hall. All the firemen and everybody concerned knew that it was what was termed "a job." When they reached the place there were two fires in adjacent properties, but although it was known that it was a "job" there was no power to make proper inquiries. The Bill gives that authority. That is a fair proposition. I remember there was a fire in Victoria Park not far from my place. It occurred in a shop in which there was a number of empty boxes. The man put in a claim to the insurance company, but he was not paid. The company ascertained that the man had been associated with a fire under similar circumstances in another town and consequently declined to pay. No inquiry, however, was made. I had my own opinion about the occurrence, though I do not know that it matters much now since the man is dead. I think the fire brigade had its suspicions too, but there was no power to conduct an inquiry. The man's place was burnt down and there was a danger of two or three more houses being demolished. People lost fences and had their property damaged and there should have been an inquiry. If the man had been proved guilty he should have been brought to book.

Mr. Doney: You are not satisfied that the present means of assessing responsibility for fires are good enough?

Mr. CROSS: I am not.

Mr. Doney: On what ground?

Mr. CROSS: On the ground I have indicated that it is only commonsense that the fire brigade should have power to make inquiries when the circumstances are suspicious.

Mr. Doney: That is not stating a reason.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member should address the Chair.

Mr. Doney: The police have certain powers in that regard.

Mr. CROSS: I suppose they have. There is another provision in the Bill to increase the personnel of the board from 9 to 10. I do not object to that. If I moved an amendment along certain lines that I have in mind I daresay I should receive opposition from the other side of the House. It might be said that to increase the membership of the board to ten—and I propose to move an amendment increasing it to 11—would tend to make the board too cumbersome. If the proper course were taken, there would be only one representative of the metropolitan area and one for the whole of the country areas on the Fire Brigades Board. I would have three representatives from the insurance companies, one from the Volunteers' Association, and one from the employees.

Mr. Hughes: Why give control to the capitalistic insurance companies?

Mr. CROSS: They pay nearly all the money.

Mr. Hughes: Not if they can help it!

Mr. CROSS: They have not full control of the board. As a matter of fact, even under the proposals of this Bill the insurance companies will have only three representatives on a board of ten. I do not think that is too great a representation in view of the fact that they pay five-ninths of the money. I do not believe in people paying money into a concern without having reasonable representation on it.

Mr. Hughes: They get it off the people; they do not pay.

Mr. CROSS: So does everybody else who pays.

Mr. Hughes: You are becoming ultra-capitalistic.

Mr. CROSS: The local authorities get their money from the people too. As a matter of fact, the local authorities have too much representation. I do not propose to move for any change in that regard, because I believe that members opposite would raise strenuous opposition if it was suggested that the representation should be reduced from two to one and I think Fre-mantle members would growl. They would think, and rightly so, that if we reduced their representation to one—

Mr. Hughes: Why do you want to worry about them? You are a metropolitan member.

Mr. CROSS: I am not bothering about them. I am only suggesting that if representation was in accordance with the importance of the bodies represented, two representatives of local governing authorities would be sufficient. I propose to move an amendment for the inclusion of an employees' representative. I would point out that during the last 15 or 16 years quite a number of amendments have been suggested by the union. For instance, 15 years ago we submitted substantial recommendations for a single fire district. We also suggested, with a good deal of commonsense—and it was admitted by the board—that the board should have the right to compel the local authorities to put in fire hydrants where they were required in the interests of the public safety. We have made several other suggestions at different times. In Sydney the workers have a representative on the board and that provision works satisfactorily, I have heard no complaints about it. I thought that the Melbourne board had a workers' representative. I knew that the late Mr. Matt Murphy, the member for Melbourne ports, was on the board for a while and he was a member of the union. However, I found that he was not actually the representative of the union on the board, but represented some other interests in Melbourne. I propose to move that the board include an employees' representative and hope the idea will be supported. Ten years ago when this measure was before another place it was suggested that if the firemen were allowed to have a representative on the board I would be running the board. The members of another place gave me an enormous amount of credit. For a start, I would not have been on the board. Someone who knew more about the practical side of fire-fighting than I do would have been appointed.

Mr. Doney: Surely there could be nobody in that position!

Mr. CROSS: Oh, yes! I shall move that amendment and hope it will be carried. In a board of ten, if it came to an equally divided vote the chairman would be given two votes. If five were in favour of a proposal and five were opposed to it, in order to get a decision the chairman would have to be given an extra vote.

Mr. Doney: If one of the members were absent, the same position would arise.

Mr. CROSS: I suppose it would. I have another amendment to put on the notice paper. The Minister proposes to increase the amount which can be paid to members of the board from £250 to £550. When the amount was fixed in the parent Act, the rate of wages was about 9/ or 10/ a day. The Minister said yesterday that the members of the board attend about 9 or 10 meetings a year. They attend more than that, and they do a lot more work than is done at the meetings. In the report for the year ended September, 1940, it is stated that Mr. J. R. Campbell, the Chairman, attended 23 meetings, Mr. Curlewis 25, and Councillor W. R. Read 25. I believe that if a job is to be done properly it should be paid for. Some representatives travel from Kalgoorlie and it would be entirely wrong for them not to be adequately remunerated.

Mr. Doney: Are they quite willing to do the work in an honorary capacity?

Mr. CROSS: I cannot tell the hon. member. I have never discussed this matter with the board but I have previously voiced my opinion on the subject. I think the return suggested is quite fair for the work done in addition to attendance at meetings. If they do their job properly, they have to make inspections all over the country. I remember that on one occasion I was at Russelton and saw members of the board rushing about and making inspections. They have to go all over the State. Every now and again—and it is necessary at the present time—the board should send a couple of its members to have a look at some of the Eastern States fire brigades. Recently I inspected the fire brigades in every State of Australia. I think I offended some members of the Western Australian board when I said that fire precautions under war conditions in this State were well behind those prevailing in the Eastern States. They could not really contradict what I said, because they had not seen the conditions over there. If there is a burst water main in Sydney or Melbourne preparations have been made to meet the emergency, but so far as I know no such preparations have been made in Perth. In Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney several extra posts and men are available and there is a staff at hand for 24 hours a day. There are very efficient provisions in the event of an enemy attack. Conditions there are more up to

date than those prevailing in Western Australia, and I consider that the board should send two members or one member and the Chief Officer to have a look around in the other States. It is by no means certain that we shall not be attacked in Western Australia. I notice that the Commonwealth Government has taken steps to strengthen the General Post Office because it thinks there is a possibility of danger. I maintain that we have not in Western Australia all the protection we ought to enjoy. In Brisbane, for instance, the authorities had regard to possibilities long ago, and they increased the staff of 100 men by another 160. Of course I know something has been done here and I know that extra machines have been obtained together with trailer-pumps and so on. I know what we have got and what we are likely to receive.

The Minister for Mines: Do you? I would like to know what we are likely to receive.

Mr. CROSS: In several respects I believe Western Australia is not as up to date as other States, and I am convinced that it would be rendering a service to the State if one member of the board and the Chief Officer were sent East to inspect fire brigade arrangements there. If we require a job to be done well, we must pay for it. When we consider that the Fire Brigades Board controls an expenditure running up to £70,000 a year and administers a most effective, capable and well-organised service, no one will suggest that if the members receive an aggregate of £1,000 distributed among them in return for the work they do, they will be over-paid. At any rate at the appropriate time I shall move to increase the amount of the allowance from £550 to £1,000. It has nothing to do with me personally; I shall not be a member of the board, because I do not want to occupy such a position.

The Minister for Mines: Is that the only reason why you will not be a member of the Fire Brigades Board?

Mr. CROSS: The Government is to be commended for introducing the legislation, but nevertheless I intend to move the amendment I have indicated. As for the increase in the allowance to £1,000, members should realise that Mr. Smith, the chairman of the Fire Brigades Board in Sydney, receives £750 a year and the other members of the board £150 each. Moreover, it should be realised that the Sydney Fire Brigade is a

metropolitan concern whereas the Fire Brigades Board here controls fire-fighting matters throughout the State.

Mr. Patriek: But Sydney has a much larger population.

Mr. CROSS: That is so, but members of the board here would not get 3d. per hour out of what they receive by way of an allowance, if we take into consideration all that they do. Their time is not taken up solely with attending meetings, but they have to carry out inspections and travel about the State as well. The Act was introduced in 1916 and obviously is now out of date. In those early days the fire brigade here was quite a small body, but now it has become one of the greatest utility services in the metropolitan area and certainly one of the most efficient.

On motion by Hon. N. Keenan, debate adjourned.

## BILL—CONSTITUTION ACTS AMENDMENT.

### *Second Reading.*

**THE MINISTER FOR MINES** [4.5] in moving the second reading said: The Title to the Bill may be calculated to lead members to think that it is quite formidable.

Mr. Hughes: I rather suspect that it is dangerous.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: As a matter of fact, it is a simple measure. It will affect some hon. members who are at present serving with the Fighting Forces, and obviously may affect others who enlist in the future. Some members have already joined the Fighting Forces and there may be others who will follow suit or may engage upon certain war work for which they will be paid. In consequence of that, the fear has been expressed that members who have engaged upon war work may have endangered their seats in Parliament. The Commonwealth Government promulgated a regulation under the National Security Act purporting—I use the word advisedly—to afford protection to members of State Parliaments who join the Fighting Forces, or receive pensions arising out of their services with the Forces or accept positions in connection with the war effort.

Some doubt has arisen as to whether the particular regulation I refer to is in order and, from the constitutional aspect, the Government considers it wise to put the mat-

ter beyond all doubt by the introduction of the Bill now before members. I feel sure the member for Nedlands will agree that it is better to attain that end by means of State legislation than to rest content with the application of National Security Regulations. The Bill provides that notwithstanding the disqualifications set out in the appropriate sections of the Constitution, a member of Parliament shall not lose his seat, his election shall not be invalidated, nor shall he be disqualified from taking his seat in Parliament or be subject to a penalty if he joins the Defence Forces. It also applies to those who may receive pensions arising out of their service or who accept positions from the Commonwealth or State, which are created under the National Security Regulations and which the Minister of State for Defence may certify are connected with the defence of the Commonwealth or the efficient prosecution of the war.

Mr. Patriek: Would that cover members who are appointed to war organisation committees?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Yes, I think so. The member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe is, I understand, doing essential and important war work, and I think he would be covered.

Mr. Doney: Is it plain that he would be covered, or do you merely assume that?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: He would be plainly covered because of the inclusion of the words—

which the Minister of State for Defence certifies, by writing under his hand, is, in his opinion, connected with the defence of the Commonwealth or the efficient prosecution of the war.

Mr. Doney: That should cover him.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: An extraordinary feature of the Constitution, which was framed in 1899, is that a member of Parliament can hold a commission as an officer in the King's Navy or Army, and may receive full, half or retired pay, without incurring any disqualification or liability respecting his seat in Parliament. Not everyone is capable of being an officer, and no provision is included in the Constitution to protect the interests of a private or non-commissioned officer who may be doing an excellent job for the Crown in war work that may be brought within the definition of "office of profit." A member of Parliament is, therefore, debarred from doing

munitions work and accepting other war positions that carry payment for services rendered. Certain members are already affected by the position.

Mr. Patrick: Have they tried digging potatoes?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I do not know whether that would be regarded as war work. As certain members who are non-commissioned officers or privates find themselves in an invidious position, the Bill has been made retrospective in its application to the beginning of the war. The justification for that will be obvious. Another point is that the Constitution provides only for the Navy and the Army and does not apply to the Air Force at all. The member for North Perth, as an officer in the Air Force, is not protected under the Constitution at all, and there is a possibility that he may find himself in trouble. Under the section of the Constitution which deals with exemptions from disqualifications in the case of officers of the Navy and Army, he is not covered. What I have said traverses the Bill in a nutshell.

Mr. Hughes: If you intend the legislation to be retrospective, I doubt if you have made that clear enough.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I am prepared to make it clearer if necessary.

Mr. Hughes: I think it will have to be made a good deal plainer and much more specific, particularly if you intend it to cover some member already endangered.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I shall be prepared to deal with that matter in Committee, and I am certainly open to correction.

Mr. Hughes: At first glance I do not think the Bill is being made retrospective.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Everyone will agree that a member who enlists, honestly believing that he was not jeopardising his seat in Parliament, should receive protection. I have already quoted sub-paragraph (ii) of paragraph (b) of Subclause (1) of Clause 2.

Mr. Thorn: That should cover it.

The Minister for Works: That is the retrospective provision.

Mr. Hughes: I think it should read that the Bill should come into operation as from such and such a date.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I will agree to any provision that will make it definite so long as it is clear that we cover

those we wish to protect. I am sure no member of the House would desire to jeopardise any member's position simply because he has joined the Fighting Forces. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Thorn, debate adjourned.

## BILL—MEDICAL ACT AMENDMENT.

*In Committee.*

Resumed from the previous day. Mr. Marshall in the Chair; the Minister for Health in charge of the Bill.

The CHAIRMAN: Progress was reported after Clause 12 had been agreed to.

Clauses 13, 14—agreed to.

Postponed Clause 7—Amendment of Section 12:

The MINISTER FOR HEALTH: I move an amendment—

That after the word "improper" in line 2 of paragraph (a) the words "in relation to his professional conduct" be inserted.

This amendment was suggested, and drawn for me, by the member for Nedlands.

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

New clause:

The MINISTER FOR HEALTH: I move—

That a new clause be inserted as follows:—  
"8. Section 13 of the principal Act is amended by striking out the word 'January' in the first line and inserting the word 'May' in lieu thereof."

Registration under the Bill will be annual, and the amendment proposes that the fee to be paid annually by the practitioner is to be paid within four months from May instead of from January, as the parent Act provides.

New clause put and passed.

Bill reported with amendments, and the report adopted.

## ANNUAL ESTIMATES, 1942-43.

*In Committee of Supply.*

Debate resumed from the 19th November; Mr. Marshall in the Chair.

Vote—Agriculture, £94,370 (partly considered):

MR. PATRICK (Greenough) [4.22]: I have nothing but praise for the work of the Department of Agriculture. During the



year this department has carried on marvellous work, especially considering the poor accommodation and small staff it has had—work which would be a credit to any similar department established in the largest city of any other State. The department has shown farmers how to produce primary products, and how to cure various diseases, and it has also done research work; but it has failed to show the farmer how to produce and at the same time obtain a reasonable return for the labour involved in that production. I understand that a Federal Minister claims to have solved that problem. That Minister has made an award in regard to harvesting work. To show the interest that award has aroused in the farming districts, I propose to read a resolution carried unanimously at a large gathering of farmers held at Three Springs, which is the centre of a highly prosperous wheatgrowing district. The resolution, which it was decided should be telegraphed to the Prime Minister, reads—

That this meeting of farmers of the Three Springs Road Board District views with dismay and astonishment the rates of pay as fixed for the coming harvest and emphatically declares that the farming industry in its present condition cannot pay such wages and appeals to you for more just and reasonable treatment. This meeting protests against farmers being ordered to pay their employees, who are mostly unskilled, more than the farmer himself receives for his labour, and more than our sons are being paid on active service in the war zones, and more per week than the Agricultural Bank in this State allows many of its farmers to keep their families on for a month, and considers it is therefore unjust and ill-timed.

Copies of the resolution were supplied to the Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin; to the Federal member for the district, Mr. Johnson; and to the independent member of the Federal House of Representatives, Mr. Wilson. A strong protest has thus been entered against the action of the Commonwealth Government, the rates of pay being Commonwealth wide rates and applying to the harvesting of all grain crops. As members may be aware, I have always been one who favoured the payment of reasonable rates to farm workers. In fact, I have frequently stated here that it is anomalous that a man driving a baker's or a butcher's cart in the city is paid more than a man driving a seven or ten-horse team in the country, which is far more highly skilled work.

I take exception, firstly, to the manner in which the Commonwealth body, which fixed the rates of wages, was constituted. Two members, one of them from this State, represent the farming industry; two members represent the A.W.U.; and a former A.W.U. organiser is chairman. No evidence was taken by the board. The proceedings did not resemble a case in the Industrial Arbitration Court, where evidence is taken from people familiar with the industry. The rates were put up, the chairman gave his aye, and that was the end of the case. Strong exception can be taken to that procedure. The rates were fixed without any inquiry whatever having been made. Indeed, the same rates were fixed for all the States, without any State variations. In connection with every Federal industrial arbitration award relating to an industry variations exist from State to State. The wage payments carry a heavy loading of the basic wage in the form of a prosperity allowance. Now, I do not think anyone can contend that there is prosperity in the agricultural industry today. The accounts of the Agricultural Bank of this State which institution controls the destinies of many of our farmers, prove that the industry cannot carry a prosperity allowance. On top of that allowance, keep was added—something that is not done in any other award.

Any other industry in connection with which industrial awards are made is allowed to add increased costs to its prices but that cannot be done in connection with the agricultural industry. It must be born in mind that the price fixed represents the highest-priced portion of the crop, and that such price is really based on 1913 values. Most of the wheat produced in Western Australia will only realise 1s. 10d. per bushel. It will be seen that the farmer producing the greater quantity of wheat will have to pay rates which they are absolutely not in a position to pay. Another point is that most of the skilled farm hands are already in the various Fighting Services. Therefore the high rates fixed will be paid to unskilled and inefficient men. The position will be that the farmer must take whoever comes along and pay the man at the fixed rate, whether the man be efficient or not. And there are very few efficient men available today. I do not think it has been clearly understood or sufficiently emphasised that these high

rates apply also to the permanent men working on farms. There are instances to-day in which permanent farm labourers are drawing as much as £4 per week, together with a cottage free and the right to keep a cow and poultry. If such permanent men are put on to harvesting work, they will have to be paid as much as 3s. 3d. per hour and keep. That is entirely wrong, because the permanent farm-hand is generally a man who does both seeding and harvesting, these being part of his job.

The member for South Fremantle made some reference to the fact that this harvesting labour is only casual. It should not be casual. The permanent farm-hand is really the backbone of Western Australia's farming industry. He is the man who should be employed on all farm work. On a properly conducted farm casual work does not occur often; it mostly happens at shearing time. In normal times the permanent hand is the man who is relied upon to do what is termed casual work. It is ridiculous to put a permanent farm-hand on to casual work carrying these extraordinary rates of pay. Again, most men left on farms today are elderly, and the majority of the men who can be obtained to work on farms are also elderly. Many Arbitration Court awards contain a special provision for men of that type, who cannot do the work of a skilled adult worker. The elderly persons now carrying on farms are discouraged enough without being further discouraged by this new award. Take our Agricultural Bank! The Minister knows that the bank fixes every year a certain sum to be paid for wages by farmers under the bank's jurisdiction. I know the bank does not fix the amount on a very liberal scale. I have at various times interviewed the bank, and I found it made a quite arbitrary allowance. It said, "The farmer has so many hundreds of acres and so we fix the wages at so much." I do not think the bank ever fixed the wages on a scale equal to that of this new award.

There seems to be some disagreement between the various Ministers in the Federal Cabinet. This award was made by Mr. Ward, I understand, and at the same time, Mr. Scully, when speaking over the air, said that farmers had made big sacrifices because their sons had joined the Fighting Forces. He said it was therefore up to the voluntary workers to assist in harvesting and that

many people were offering to do so without pay. I do not think they will be allowed to do the work without pay; they will have to be paid the rates prescribed by this new award. We have one Minister stating that high rates of pay are to be fixed, and another Minister advocating that men should voluntarily assist the farmers in harvesting because their sons had joined the Fighting Forces. When talking over the air, Mr. Scully, in boosting up the Women's Land Army, said that women could be obtained at rates up to £2 per week and keep. When this committee of which I spoke was making its award, it was approached by the head of the Women's Land Army in New South Wales. She informed that committee that the women expected to get the same rates of pay as the men received, so that the statement made by Mr. Scully was not quite correct. I suppose the award was made with the idea that it would provide men badly wanted to do the work. In my opinion, it will not provide one extra skilled farm-hand. The award was neither asked for nor wanted. In that connection I desire to quote Mr. Wilson, the Independent member for Wimmera, who is keeping the present Commonwealth Government in power. On the 10th November the following appeared in the Press—

Mr. A. Wilson, the Independent in the House of Representatives for Wimmera, considers the new schedule of harvest wages announced by the Wheat Harvest Employment Committee as premature and unwarranted under present conditions.

Mr. Wilson said today that while it was freely conceded that conditions and wages for farm work have long called for attention, surely the first step should have been to deal with the debt and over-capitalisation position of the great majority of farmers which prevented that large section from even earning a meagre competence for themselves.

"At present," he said, "the type of labour offering for harvest work is, generally speaking, incapable of rendering efficient service. Until the serious economic position of primary producers has been corrected with the aid of the proposed land mortgage bank and adjustment of over-capitalisation, also the future assured by means of guaranteed prices for farm products possibly through a primary producers' Arbitration Court, the new wages schedule should not be carried out.

Members therefore know the opinion of Mr. Wilson, who is a practical farmer, on this matter. If the Commonwealth Government desires to close down the wheat industry—I think it has some such idea; there is no doubt it wishes to reduce wheatgrowing in

the Commonwealth—then it should do so honestly by restricting wheatgrowing in all the States and not in Western Australia alone. This is an attempt to kill the industry by subterfuge.

The Minister for Agriculture: It is a very difficult matter to do on a flat basis.

Mr. PATRICK: Of course it is. Various Ministers in the Commonwealth Government seem to have different methods of dealing with matters. A short time ago the Minister for Commerce appointed Mr. Bulcock—who I think was Minister for Agriculture in Queensland and who I understand is competent—as Director of Agriculture for the Commonwealth. The idea was that he should make decisions. He said that if he accepted the position he wanted it clearly laid down that he was to be allowed a free hand. Mr. Bulcock was to decide what phases of agriculture should be carried on during the war period. I think the Minister for Agriculture will agree with that. Mr. Bulcock is to be given a free hand.

The Minister for Agriculture: I know him very well.

Mr. PATRICK: Since the Minister for Commerce made that announcement, another Minister, Mr. Dedman, is reported in the Press as follows:—

Adelaide, November 20th.—It was announced today that with the object of directing primary production on the lines of war-time requirements the Minister for War Organisation of Industry (Mr. Dedman) had asked the Government to make available the services of Dr. A. R. Callaghan, . . .

A very competent man, I am sure. The report continues—

. . . principal of the Roseworthy Agricultural College, for the position of Agricultural Adviser to the Minister. The Premier (Mr. Playford) it is understood has agreed to leave of absence being granted to Dr. Callaghan for six months to accept the position.

So we have one Federal Minister who really has dealings with agriculture appointing Mr. Bulcock to carry on a certain class of work, and another Federal Minister appointing Dr. Callaghan to perform exactly the same functions. Apparently there does not seem to be much of the co-ordination in the Federal Cabinet that we hear so much about nowadays.

I was saying that the Agricultural Department, while it had been successful in directing farmers along lines of production, had failed to ensure that farmers shall produce the various lines at a profit. For a

long time I have urged that we should institute the study of agricultural economics in the Agricultural Department. The necessity for this has now been recognised. I make this quotation from a Victorian agricultural paper—

The New South Wales Department of Agriculture has made history in Australia by establishing a division of Agricultural Economics. This marks the end of an era in Australian agriculture. It has long been recognised that agriculture differs from secondary industry, in that it is unable to carry out its own scientific research. It was in order to carry out this research, and to disseminate the results among the farmers, that each State Government long ago organised its Department of Agriculture, with its research and field staffs. But such research, and also all Commonwealth research in agriculture through the C.S.I.R. has hitherto been confined to the physical and biological problems of agriculture.

Until recently the economic and social problems have been regarded as coming wholly within the ambit of the individual farmer. The establishment of a Division of Agricultural Economics implies an official recognition of the fact, that the problems of economic organisation, as well as the technical problems affecting the farmers' welfare, are problems which require collective effort in order to overcome them, and that they are as much a specialised study as plant-breeding, entomology, veterinary science, or soil chemistry. There is a big field open for study. To mention one question, the big variations in farmers' incomes over a series of years, due to prices and seasons. In the U.S.A., for instance, an all risk insurance for wheat crops has been available during the last three years. This covers a seasonal failure through lack of rainfall. In Australia we can only insure against hail and fire. So also various stabilisation schemes merit close study. It is no use having a bumper crop with a price collapse.

Members will therefore see that the study of agricultural economics has already been undertaken in one of our States. In my opinion, the basis of all good farming is a profitable price. That has been recognised in England. A guaranteed price, as stated by the British Minister for Agriculture, was the quickest and best way to obtain good returns. The results in England are amazing. England, which before the war produced only a third of its food requirements, is now producing two-thirds. The average production has increased by 50 per cent. The British Minister pointed out that before the war farmers were exhausting their land because they could not afford to put anything back into it. That is why I say the basis of all good farming is a profitable price. If the farmer does not get a

profitable price in order to give him something beyond the bare living necessities, then he cannot farm his land as it should be farmed. As the British Minister said, he cannot put something back into the land and so he cannot maintain its fertility. It would be a good idea for the Agricultural Department to farm a piece of land in order to ascertain what it costs to grow a bushel of wheat, after paying the recognised rate of wages.

The Minister for Agriculture: Why do that when we have the experience of men like yourself?

Mr. PATRICK: Experiences vary tremendously, as the Minister knows, if he will look at the report of the Wheat Commission. The department could secure a piece of ordinary wheatbelt land and ascertain exactly what the costs are. I know that years ago such an experiment was tried in South Australia, but I cannot say whether that farming property is still being worked. Everything was worked out, so that the cost of producing wheat, wool and other products was known exactly. The same experiment has been tried in other countries. In the United States there is what is known as a parity price. Much argument has taken place in the American Senate recently with the President over the maintenance of that price. The parity price is to maintain the purchasing power of the farm products on what is called a base period. The base period taken in the United States was from 1910 or 1911 to 1913. In Australia, taking 1911 as 1,000, the cost of living in 1940 increased to 1737, while in 1940 the purchasing power of wheat was estimated at only 38-100ths of the U.S.A. base period. Taking the price that we got in 1913, 4s. a bushel, the figure today would be about 1s. 7d. Most members have in their possession a little pamphlet that was published by the Hon. T. H. Bath. It includes the following:—

The original definition of the parity principle in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (familiarily known as the A.A.A.) declared that it was the policy of Congress, among other things, "to re-establish prices to farmers at a level that will give agricultural products a purchasing power with respect to articles that farmers buy, equivalent to the purchasing power of agricultural commodities in the base period. The base period in the case of all agricultural commodities except tobacco shall be the pre-war period August, 1909, to July, 1914." In the instance of tobacco the base period was from August, 1919, to July, 1929.

That has been carried out to a certain extent in the U.S.A., but not fully, and it caused the quarrel between the President and the Senate. The Senate wanted the principle carried out in its entirety, but still it has maintained the values of farm products at a higher level than they are in Australia. The argument I put up the first year I came into this Chamber is almost the same as the principle adopted in America under the new deal, namely, that the purchasing power of wheat and wool should be equivalent to the prices in 1910-13. Of course we have had an entirely differential treatment meted out to our farming industries as compared with our secondary industries in Australia. The secondary industries could, if at any time they found their costs too high to compete with the outside world, appeal to the Tariff Board. That tribunal would take evidence and, if it thought fit, recommend a higher duty which would enable the secondary industries to raise their prices. Most of the primary industries had to face competition in the outside world. This differential treatment has become more marked during the war, though, as the member for Irwin-Moore said, it is as necessary in war-time as munitions. In fact, as one visiting man from the United Kingdom put it at one time—farming produce forms the munitions of life, whereas the ordinary munitions of war are the munitions of death. The British Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Hudson, also pointed out the remarkable changes that have taken place in British agriculture since the war. He said that peace was desolating the land faster than war. To some extent that has been the position in Australia. Due to the prices for agricultural products in peace-time the land has been desolated, but here, instead of as in England, the position being altered in war, the same conditions apply today.

We have no war loadings or allowances to meet the rising costs. In fact, the Government strongly resists subsidies for farmers to equal the rising costs. The other day we had a belated and useless sop given to the dairying industry. A grant of £1,500,000 was made. Even that subsidy is not being given in the proper way. The matter has been referred to the Tariff Board to make inquiries into the industry in the various States and recommend some form of subsidy. There is also a wages board to be formed.

and, as the Minister for Commerce said, although these rates might be considered high they will not affect a great number of dairy farmers, because 80 per cent. of them are doing the labouring work themselves! That is an extraordinary statement to make. It appears that the families of the dairy farmers can work at a low rate without any compensation by way of increased prices, because it is a family business. When I was a kiddie going to school I was struck with the condition of the dairy farmers' children. They would walk to school with their heads nodding and would be falling asleep half the time; and the poor little devils would be shouted at by the teacher. They would have been up from 3 a.m. milking cows. They then had to walk to school, and were expected to do their school work in the same way as the other children. That state of affairs will continue under this system of family farming.

The high rates necessary for 20 per cent. of the workers in the industry are just as necessary for the families engaged in it. We have war loadings and cost of living allowances granted to other industries, and they constitute a direct payment made by the Government. To the extent that those amounts increase the war and other expenditure, it would be equally justifiable to make similar payments to primary industries and treat them as war expenditure. It makes no difference what they are called as most industries in Australia today are engaged on war work. If the Government makes a war loading and gives an additional payment for overtime and so forth to other industries, the cost falls on the Government and not on the people engaged in those industries. That is one of the reasons why I have argued that it would have paid the Commonwealth to have pegged wages and the prices of essential foodstuffs, and thus maintained the purchasing power of wages instead of paying extra for rising costs of living. After all the only effect of giving these extra rates for rising costs is further to increase the costs, and then another rise will have to be given to compensate for that further increase. One will be chasing the other all the time!

If, however, the wages are pegged and also the prices of essential foodstuffs, then we would retain the purchasing power of

wages and could subsidise the growers to maintain their standards. Such a system might even cost the Government less than the present one and, at the same time, put the agricultural industries on a better basis. That has been done in England and, to a certain extent, in New Zealand where the prices of bread, wages and coal have been pegged for the last year by subsidies. Satisfactory prices make for better farming. In fact, a farmer cannot farm properly unless he gets a satisfactory price. He then has more chance to cope with matters outside his actual farming operations, such as rabbits and grasshoppers. The labour problem today is a consideration when dealing with the grasshopper. The other day the Minister referred to the successful effort made by some farmers along the Midland line in coping with the grasshopper a year or two ago. They mustered a considerable body of men and poisoned on such a scale that they killed the grasshoppers right on the edge of the crops, and the losses were practically negligible. Those farmers could not do that today. The young enthusiastic men are all in the Forces and the few remaining could not attend to a matter of that sort. The only alternatives I can see to a profitable price are either a moratorium in connection with all rents, interest charges, etc., or to abandon the industry before a lower standard comes about. I had a letter from one of my road boards, the Morawa board on this subject. It is as follows:—

In view of the general depreciation in values of agricultural land in Western Australia over a period of ten years, we respectfully suggest to you as our Parliamentary representative that the time is overdue for a considerable reduction to be made by the State Government in the basic rental value of all land taken up under selection as such action would materially alter the abnormal taxation at present being imposed on primary producers.

Owing to the international wheat agreement, the present restrictions on areas to be planted for wheat are almost certain to be continued in post-war reconstruction and will vitally restrict the development of virgin land held under abovementioned selection and in view of these circumstances a full review of accrued rentals should be taken immediately.

This is only a very small part of the problem. Of course, land taken up during the last few years and coming under the present low conditions of values should be subject to some alteration, but there are instances where properties have been rented. A man rented a property along the Midland

line and, before there was any restriction on wheatgrowing—he is principally engaged in wheatgrowing—had contracted to pay a certain rental per annum for the farm. Under the altered conditions, he cannot pay, and so far as I know there is no provision under which he can get a reduction in his rent. All the problems mentioned by the Morawa Road Board can be solved only if farmers receive decent prices for their produce. The writing down of debts alone will provide no solution. The Minister has pointed out that writing down has been carried out by the Agricultural Bank, but that is no solution of the problem. As long as prices remain on an unpayable basis, the debts will be built up again, and I defy some of the farmers to carry on successfully, even with their debts written down.

The only real solution is a profitable price, and that is why I say an investigation of the economics of farming should be one of the main activities of the Department of Agriculture. We in this State have done well in the matter of production. We have one of the highest production rates per head in the world—New Zealand, I believe, has a higher rate—yet we have only to look at the figures of the Agricultural Bank to realise that the industry is in a very bad way. As members are aware, people today are leaving the farms and drifting into the towns, and only better living conditions and better social conditions can prevent this disastrous drift, which must be stopped if this State is to survive as an economic unit in the Federation.

**MR. J. H. SMITH (Nelson):** From my point of view, this is the most important division of the Estimates because it affects practically everything in the State. But for the country, there would be no need for the city and the metropolitan area. All the wealth and stability of the country are, in the first instance, derived from the land. The Minister for Agriculture has a particularly trying time at this period. There is a saying "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," but I think we might say that uneasy must be the mind of the Minister for Agriculture, whose brain and intellect must be working at top speed to evolve methods and means of lifting the agricultural industry out of the mire.

I see no possibility of hope or light until a Government with sufficiently wide vision

introduces legislation to provide that every man who produces goods essential to the welfare of the community shall be paid a minimum price for his product, just as is done in New Zealand. It is impossible to pay high wages for work on the land at present. The well-being of employees in secondary industries is safeguarded by arbitration courts. The other night the member for Irwin-Moore pointed out how impossible it was for the farmers to pay the standard of wages fixed for workers harvesting the wheat. The amount was £7 to £10 per week. The farmers cannot possibly pay such an amount until we lay down some other and very different system. If a man working in one of the secondary industries is entitled to a living wage, why should not the same thing apply to a man on the land? Why should a man working for a farmer have to accept something less than a living wage? There is no farmer who does not desire to pay his employees the full amount of wages to which they are entitled.

The member for Nedlands asked some questions regarding the proposed increase of 12½ per cent. in railway freights and fares. Perhaps on account of his long association with the goldfields, he made his question apply only to that part of the State, but any increase will affect the whole of the economic system of the State, and more especially will it affect the farmers. This increase, if imposed, will prove to be another nail in the coffin of the agriculturist. If we allow this 12½ per cent. to be added to railway charges, what is going to happen? We shall have a repetition of the old experience of the dog chasing its tail, and finally the whole of the extra cost will be loaded on to the man on the land.

**Mr. Sampson:** It will expedite the drift to the city.

**Mr. J. H. SMITH:** Yes, and the day will come when there will be no city. But for the people in the back areas engaged in primary industries, whether in the production of gold, timber or crops, there would be no cities. If the increased charges are imposed, the city will evade all this extra impost, because it has no railway freights to pay. The whole of the burden will fall upon the primary producers. It will not affect the trams or the buses of the city.

**Mr. Hughes:** The people in the city will be affected in the prices they have to pay.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Not at all. I saw a bag of cabbages weighing  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. sold in the market for 1s. 6d.

Mr. Sampson: The price has been as low as 9d.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Talk about the people in the city having to pay! There is no system of prices. The appointment of expensive boards will do no good until we find a method of fixing a minimum price for everything a man produces.

I note with great regret that the apple and pear acquisition scheme has gone by the board. This is another illustration of the way in which the smaller States—the motherless lambs—can be squeezed out.

The Minister for Justice: It has not gone by the board in Western Australia.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Poor Western Australia and Tasmania, with no representation, are squeezed out because the four larger States in the East do not require the scheme. I want to point out how dependent we are upon the continuance of this scheme. This year the larger States got no more fruit than supplied their own populations. So they said, "We will get out of the acquisition scheme and receive 6s. or 7s. per case for our production. Let Western Australia and Tasmania receive their miserly 1s. 10d. and 2s. 10d. for their packed fruit." That is the position as I see it. Under such circumstances there is no hope for the continued existence of the fruitgrowing industry here. Our early fruits, such as Cleopatras and Jonathans, come in just at the same time as the Queensland, South Australian and Victorian fruits come to hand. Our Dohertys and Yates and other varieties come in at a later stage.

Mr. Sampson: And Grannies!

Mr. J. H. SMITH: If ever there was a Granny in this Chamber, there is one today!

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member must not reflect upon other members.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Our friend from Swan knows that we have today a difficulty in supplying our local requirements with our Granny fruit. Our Granny fruit will keep until December and January. Yates and Dohertys are prolific bearers, but they have to be thinned before they can be brought to an export or marketable size—thinned very much. Therefore I regret that the acquisition scheme has gone by the board. The Minister's mind must be greatly perturbed.

All I can see for it is that we make every possible effort—I believe the Minister will do this, with the aid of his department and the fruitgrowers' associations—to secure at least another shilling. An article in "The West Australian" suggested another 6d., but that is not nearly sufficient. We should fight to get 2s. additional if possible, but another shilling would make all the difference to our growers. Otherwise they will be paid through the Acquisition Board—which means that our growers will get nothing. Something is better than nothing; and at least we have been able, through the Acquisition Board, to maintain our asset. That is all we have been able to do, fertilise and cultivate and spray in the expectation of the war terminating and our regaining the overseas markets. Now that the big States have gone out, the same thing applies. Western Australia and Tasmania, dependent on export markets and without shipping, are left in the lurch. The Minister will realise that Western Australia should receive some compensation.

Now as regards wheat: Goodness knows that industry encounters many difficulties! It is true also that many members understand the wheat position much better than I do. For the life of me, I cannot see any hope whatever for the wheatgrower. If the wheatgrower is to be burdened with the standard of wages which is to be put in force now, our wheatgrowing must go out of existence. I am glad that the barley position has righted itself.

The Minister for Agriculture: It is not quite correct to say that the position righted itself.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: But the position is much better today than it has been. I pass now to the subject of tobacco. We heard the Premier, when introducing his Loan Estimates, speak of the possibility of a big tobacco-growing industry here. Is it not farcical to speak like that? Our tobacco industry has never been in such a precarious position before. It is only a new industry. We see no hope for it unless there is a complete alteration. I propose to give the Committee some absolutely astounding figures. The Committee will be further astounded when I give some information about the British-Australian Tobacco Company. We are not allowed to manufacture the tobacco we grow here. A manufacturing company in Western Australia is not allowed to in-

crease its manufacture of tobacco. The surplus tobacco it had available had to go across to eastern Australia to satisfy the octopus there. In my district, if we try to make a corporation of the tobacco growers, we are not allowed to establish a factory.

The year before last I remember the Minister for Agriculture and myself being highly pleased with the result of the average price—I think, about 2s. 9d. per lb.—for our tobacco leaf. Everybody associated with the industry here felt buoyant, and the State Government itself assisted the tobacco growers to carry on until their production was sold. Last year we found that every grower went in extensively for tobacco, with the exception of Michelides, who possibly could not manufacture it and who could read the writing on the wall. We found that when the tobacco had been grown, cured, and put on the market, the first result was 1s. 11d. per lb. on the average under appraisalment. Thereupon the growers went on strike, saying, "We will withdraw the whole of our tobacco." For one or two days there was no further sale. Then the growers were promised something better. Next sale showed an increase from the previous figure of 1s. 11.9d. to 2s. 3.4d. However, the growers were not satisfied with that increased price, because it did not compare with the price of the year before, notwithstanding that costs had increased in the interim. At the next sales 2s. 3.2d. was realised, and at the following sales 2s. 4.7d., a slight increase. However, they had all been got in; the whole of the tobacco crop was on the floor to be sold. Then there was a sale at 2s. 1.7d. another at 2s. 1.3d., and the poor unfortunate growers who were in the last sale received only 1s. 10.1d. Is there not a screw loose somewhere when such things happen? We must realise that although the tobacco growers averaged only a trifle over 2s. 0.1d. per lb., the Commonwealth Government took to itself 6s. 10d. per lb., through excise, off the consumers. Thus the price was raised to roughly 9s. per lb., or a shade less. But what do we find when it comes to the manufacturers, the British-Australian Tobacco Company?

Mr. Needham: The combine!

Mr. J. H. SMITH: We know that the dark leaf produces 110 lbs. of tobacco, and that the fine leaf, or cigarette leaf, produces 106 lbs. of tobacco. But tobacco today can only be bought at 18s. per lb.,

which is the cheapest rate. The combine will not allow our own manufacturers—and Michelides, Ltd., has been the pioneer of tobacco manufacture in this State—to increase their production. The combine gets 9s. per lb. as wholesaler, and the retailers have to add something to that sum for their profit. How can an industry develop under such conditions? The Premier did not touch the real position at all. In a broad sweeping statement he told the House that the tobacco industry was flourishing. But it can only flourish under conditions different from those existing today; it cannot make headway under present conditions.

I know of many men in the industry who hardly made tucker out of it last year. I know other men in a fairly big way who are £300 and £400 in debt. Is not there something wrong somewhere? I saw the executive and secretary of the Tobacco Growers' Association when I was in Manjimup two or three weeks ago, and they produced their balance sheet to me. It is heartbreaking to see an industry, of which we expected so much, in the condition it is today. It has been said that we grow the best tobacco leaf in Australia, and that it is perhaps equal to tobacco grown anywhere in the world. But we are a funny people; we believe that something which is imported is better than that which we produce ourselves. Our growers are receiving 2s. 1d. per lb. for leaf which they have grown, cured, baled and then set up on the floors in Perth.

Mr. Doney: Whose judgment is it that our tobacco is the best in the world?

[Mr. Withers took the Chair.]

Mr. J. H. SMITH: I said that possibly it is some of the best tobacco grown in the world. Is it right that the Commonwealth Government should impose an excise duty of 6s. 10d. per lb. on tobacco? All men who carry on agriculture of any kind work under sweating conditions, and we shall have to alter our present system. These growers are working 16 to 20 hours per day. It is no use our sitting here as a Committee while men are living under such conditions. It is time metropolitan members realised that the stability of the State depends upon what we produce from the land. The position will never be improved by the appointment of boards. It will not be improved by orderly marketing, as it is termed. Orderly marketing secures for growers 1s. 6d.



per bag for cabbages. Would that price pay the grower? The only system is to guarantee the producer a reasonable price for his products. That would solve the problem. I do not propose to say anything further on the tobacco industry. The figures I have quoted are authentic and any member who so wishes can obtain them from the secretary of the Tobacco Growers' Association. It is almost impossible to procure tobacco today. One of our members went to the bar and asked for two ounces of pipe tobacco, but the steward said, "I shall have to cut this in two; I am sorry, but I can only give you one ounce."

Mr. W. Hegney: Austerity campaign!

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Yes, but it is only an austerity campaign for the producer. It is not an austerity campaign for the big manufacturers I spoke of, who make tremendous profits. The Minister's mind must be working at top speed to deal with all these various phases of agriculture. With regard to the dairying industry, the Commonwealth Government is making available to dairy farmers a subsidy of £2,000,000. But the subsidy must come out of the pockets of the consumers! Why not give the dairy farmers a payable price in the first instance? If the production of the land is to be subsidised, what is the use of people being on the land? We are running round in circles. We find the same thing applies to our pastoral industry.

The Minister for Agriculture: The purpose of a subsidy is to render subsidies unnecessary.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Of course, there should not be any subsidies. Take the meat market, which brings me to another subject! We cannot avoid strikes. Here, again, the Minister's mind must be harassed. Stock is being delivered to the Midland yards for sale, but where is it to be held? The great problem confronting this State today is the agricultural industry. It is becoming more serious as time goes on. Take the potato industry! At one time a person was allowed to go into a field and, provided he left the fork behind, he could dig himself a bag of potatoes at any time.

Mr. Needham: Today we cannot get the fork.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: I suppose we could get the fork if we had the opportunity to get a bag of potatoes, even if we had to get the fork from Perth. Another subject

with which I wish to deal is the flax industry. We are greatly concerned at present as to whether we shall be able to continue with this industry after the war. We should be able to do so, provided we reduce costs. I live in a district where perhaps most of the flax is grown. We know we could not compete with the world after the war; but we hope to be able to reduce costs to such an extent as to ensure a standard price, thus giving growers sufficient to keep the industry alive in the future. But something else gives me grave concern. Only two or three weeks ago in the district where most of the flax is grown, I saw sheaf after sheaf exhibited which disclosed the fact that rust had affected the entire crop. It was taking the seed out of the flax. I am wondering where we shall get our seed for the next season. As I said, the nine or 10 sheaves that I saw were all affected by rust. I am wondering whether that will extend to the fibre of the flax. I have heard nothing about it. If it does it will be a tragedy. The rust is prevalent in the wheat areas on account of the excessively wet season. I am looking forward to the industry being a buoyant one. The new mill is to be opened shortly. I hope to go down with the Minister when he opens it, and to find that the rust has not attacked the fibre.

Mr. North: What about the price?

Mr. J. H. SMITH: We have a guaranteed price. The average is about £6 5s. or £6 12s. It is a very good thing for the growers. It is so good that this year they have put in between 6,000 and 7,000 acres of flax. They have pulled out their oats and pasture crops and put in flax.

The Minister for Agriculture: Transport is going to be a difficulty.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Yes, transport is a problem. A sum of £20,000 is to be expended on a water scheme for the mill. I hope the Commonwealth Government will do something in that connection. The agricultural industry is a big problem. It is said, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Uneasy must be the mind of the Minister controlling agriculture in Western Australia! I could continue to speak for quite a long time with regard to the seriousness of the position facing the agricultural industry in this State as I see it. I can perceive no solution whatever. Members representing agricultural areas can come here and speak about the matter, but they will be

voices crying in the wilderness until the people of Western Australia can be awakened to a sense of responsibility and made to realise that if agriculture fails everything must fail. If primary industries go, there can be no State. We are not in a position to deal with secondary industries and the only way we can build up our population is through primary industries. I am looking forward to the day when the population of Western Australia will be 4,000,000 instead of 400,000 odd. We shall not be able to compete with the Eastern States until that time comes.

Hon. N. Keenan: That is a big jump.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: My friend from Nedlands laughs at the very thought of it. He says it is a wonderful joke.

Hon. N. Keenan: Jump!

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Perhaps the member for Nedlands thinks it is a wonderful joke that the people in the agricultural areas are down and out and starving. It does not matter to him in his retired position in Perth.

Mr. Marshall: In his snug job!

Mr. J. H. SMITH: I am not saying it is a snug job. But this is no joke so far as I am concerned.

Hon. N. Keenan: I did not say it was a joke, but that it was a big jump.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: I beg the hon. member's pardon. It is not a big jump for my imagination. Everybody must realise that if we are going to maintain this country and keep it for ourselves our population must increase tenfold. Why are envious people at our shores?

Mr. J. Hegney: How are you going to increase the population?

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Only through agriculture.

Mr. J. Hegney: You cannot grow population.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: No, but we can import population. This is a big thing to say, but I do not care where the population comes from so long as it is white. So long as I am on earth I will do my utmost, even to the extent of sacrificing my life, to try to keep our population white. The only way we can overcome our difficulties is by getting everybody in this Chamber to become agriculturally-minded. My friend from Middle Swan represents an agricultural area and I am sure he must be agriculturally-minded, and must see the seriousness

of the position and realise that the whole welfare of any country, and especially of Western Australia, depends on primary production. If it were not for that there would be no metropolitan area. Our timber industry, our gold industry, and our wheat industry are all primary industries. The officers of the Department of Agriculture are very fine men. The Under Secretary and all the officers are imbued with the idea of putting the industry on a better plane than that on which it exists today. I have never known it to be in a worse position. I do not see how it could possibly be any worse. There is not a ray of hope in any direction in which one looks as far as agriculture is concerned. The pig industry must be giving the Minister a great deal of concern. Consider the people around the metropolitan area who are in the piggery business and who were getting all the swill which has now been cut off! Today it looks to me as if we are practically up against a blank wall. The position cannot be altered and never will be altered until the whole system is changed. It will not be altered by the method suggested by the member for Murchison, namely, monetary reform. Agriculturists live, to a great extent, on barter.

Mr. Hughes: Does not everybody?

Mr. J. H. SMITH: I do not know what my friend from East Perth lives on.

Mr. Marshall: On the community!

Mr. J. H. SMITH: I do not know. I will leave it to the hon. member to say. We must alter the whole system and lay down a foundation established on solid rock, and not on sand. The producer must be guaranteed a minimum price for his product. Expensive boards have been set up with huge spending departments, but all those boards and the proposals for orderly marketing that have been made are not worth a snap of the fingers. The only proper system is that existing in New Zealand where the producer is given a guaranteed price.

MR. HILL (Albany): First of all I want to congratulate the Agricultural Department on the work it is doing. The department is one of the most important in the State and one of the best. Amongst the officers I have many personal friends. I look on those officers as friends and not as Government officials. The department has a different job from any other department in Australia. Nature never seems to be 100 per

cent. generous. Even in the Garden of Eden there was a devil. When I travelled through Australia two or three years ago and saw some of the finest land in this continent I was struck with the enormous expense necessary to provide transport facilities. Coming to Western Australia our fly in the ointment seems to be a shortage of minor elements. Our Agricultural Department today—and I particularly mention the efforts of Dr. Teakle—is doing wonderful work in finding the deficiencies of our soil. In the South-West portion of this State we have one of the finest climates in Australia. Transport facilities could be provided at a nominal cost, but our trouble seems to be these minor deficiencies. I would mention the Denmark wasting disease. A few weeks ago I saw some beautiful looking pasture but, unless cobalt is supplied in conjunction with it, the stock die of starvation. I understand that the Agricultural Department has discovered that the deficiency of cobalt is equal to one ounce per 40 cows, for 12 months.

Another important discovery made in my electorate by Dr Teakle was the deficiency of copper. In one case, 5 lbs. of copper sulphate, worth about 2s. 6d., increased the production of potatoes by about five tons to the acre. The Agricultural Department is one that we cannot afford to starve. There is a tremendous amount of room for co-operation between the scientist and the practical man. A lot is being said about feeding the guns. It is just as necessary to feed the people. It is only fair and proper that the ones whose job it is to feed the people should be on an equal footing with those who have to make the munitions to feed the guns. We are not concerned about over-producing munitions at the present time. If the war suddenly ended and we had to dump millions of pounds' worth of munitions we would be glad to do so but we all realise that on no account must there be a shortage of munitions. It would be equally disastrous to have a shortage of foodstuffs. Last March the Premier sent a circular letter to members, and suggested they should do what they could to increase production. A meeting along those lines was held at Albany, and we put this suggestion to the Premier—

To increase production it is essential that the producing of farm products be made as attractive as service in the Forces, or other work. Many will not produce unless a guaranteed minimum price is provided over a defin-

ite period of 15 months, to cover costs of planting, producing, storage and disposal." It is suggested that such price be fixed by a conference of representatives of producers, Agricultural Department, and Price Fixing Commissioner. Ten guineas f.o.r., siding, is submitted as a price for potatoes. It is essential that a scheme of finance for fertiliser and seed be arranged, such scheme to include a Government guarantee to merchants in the event of loss by flood, etc. Manpower is, of course, essential.

That was a sensible suggestion, and covered the position nicely. The position in connection with potatoes at the present time is that enough has been said about the shortage. It is possible we shall have a surplus. The minimum price should be paid to all those who have produced potatoes, even if some have to be dumped. We must at all costs maintain our production of foodstuffs. I would also like to say a few words on the dairying industry. I have received from one of my constituents a letter which I will read—

**Dairying Industry:**—In the news last evening, mention was made of Sir Earle Page having stated that it would be necessary to make the dairy industry as profitable for those concerned as the munition-making department. A few days earlier it had been announced that the metropolitan whole-milk suppliers were to receive an extra 1½d. per pint for their milk.

In contrast: The butter-fat suppliers for the past month have received 1½d. per pound less than previously, the reason being that the marketing levy has been increased from 1½d. to 1d. per pound. I am writing to ask, on behalf of all cream suppliers, if you could help in some way to try to improve conditions for the men who are working under a heavy load of rising costs and are receiving less payment.

We must not only increase production, but have production at a payable price to the producer. I wish to say a little about the much-debated apple and pear acquisition scheme. Some three years ago I was at a meeting of the Fruitgrowers' Association of this State, and it fell to me to announce that war had been declared. This was a serious blow to our industry, because in this State we are almost entirely dependent on the export trade. The executive realised that the Fruitgrowers' Association was facing the biggest crisis in its history. I think I am the only man in this Chamber who was present at the meeting at Kojonup when we discussed what we should do to meet the position brought about by the war. The proposition debated at that meeting was for a State-wide scheme only. It was suggested that the State Government be asked to intro-

duce the necessary legislation to market only a portion of our crop. Instead of that scheme going forward, the Commonwealth apple and pear acquisition scheme came into existence. It has been severely criticised, mostly by those who cater for the local market. Sufficient fruit is grown in the vicinity of the metropolitan area, under normal conditions, to meet the requirements of the local market, and that market exists because our big growers export the bulk of their production. If, now that shipping is not available, the whole of the fruit grown in this State was put into the local market, it would absolutely collapse and spell ruination for every apple and pear-grower in this State.

In the Commonwealth we have the States of South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales, each with a big local market and only a small proportion of the crop exported. Those States objected to the apple and pear acquisition scheme, and in this morning's paper it was announced that the scheme will only apply to Western Australia and Tasmania in future. That may be a good thing for the other States, but they can thank their lucky stars that transport conditions are not normal. If the surpluses of Western Australia and Tasmania were poured into the markets of Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, they would collapse, and the growers of those States would get nothing. I do not know how the Government will handle the matter, or what the Apple and Pear Board proposes to do, but I do agree with the member for Nelson that a higher price should be paid in this State for apples. The prices paid to the producer—and I am speaking from personal experience—only provide for an existence and make no allowance for any increase in costs. Personally—and I am speaking as one closely associated with the industry—I am grateful to our Minister and his officers for the work they have done in connection with this apple and pear acquisition scheme. I am pleased that that scheme still applies to Western Australia and Tasmania. It has saved from ruination an important industry of this State. I do not need to say more. I promise the department my whole-hearted co-operation in the enormous job it has in front of it today.

**MR. W. HEGNEY (Pilbara):** I have been prompted to rise owing to the remarks made by the member for Irwin-Moore last

week and other members who have spoken this afternoon, particularly in connection with the award issued by the Wheat Harvesting Commission. The member for Greenough said that the board consisted of two representatives of the A.W.U., two representatives of the employers, and an ex-organisier of the A.W.U. as chairman, the inference more or less—unintentionally, I believe—being that the latter was a partisan. With Mr. Blakely as chairman of the board, the position is no different in principle from that which existed during the many years when Mr. Justice Drake-Brockman presided, and he was an ex-president of the Employers' Federation.

Mr. Patrick: Except that this board did not take any evidence.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: Therefore I do not think that any interested party has ground for suggesting that the commission is of a partisan character. The chairman is an ex-Minister of the Commonwealth Parliament, and has had a wide experience of the agricultural industry and of industrial matters generally in the Eastern States. I should like to endeavour to remove some of the misunderstandings or misrepresentations regarding the award. The member for Greenough stated that permanent farm-hands were subject to the award, and insinuated that the award would apply to permanent farm-hands all the year round.

Mr. Patrick: No, I did not.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: I am pleased to have the hon. member's apology. The award applies only to the wheat harvest of 1942. It has been said, and is agreed, that quite a number of farm-hands are receiving £4 a week plus a cottage and keep. The actual position regarding the award is that probably 99 per cent. of the workers who come under the determination will receive £5 8s. a week and keep. The member for Nelson and other members have said that, if this award is applied, the industry will practically go out of existence. Actually the harvesting operations will last a month to six weeks, and the farmer who employs a permanent hand for the period of the harvest will be obliged to pay only about £7 extra.

The Commonwealth Arbitration Court, which undoubtedly gave a lead to this commission, has already stipulated a rate of pay for the industry of wool-growing, in which a casual worker known as a shed-hand receives in Western Australia £5 8s. a week

and keep. This figure is based on the assumption that, including lost time, the expedition will last 20 weeks. That is the position from the financial aspect. The farmers who would be bound by this award during shearing time have been bound by the Commonwealth Arbitration award under which they were obliged to pay £5 8s. a week and, if farmhands entered the shearing shed, the farmers were obliged to pay them the same rate.

I can remember when men engaged in the chaff-cutting industry worked 56 hours a week. After the 1914-18 war, when the price of wheat rose to about 9s. 9d. a bushel, the farmers' organisations opposed any increase of wages in the wheat-lumping industry. That, of course, was only human nature. For years farmers and chaff-cutting contractors paid £7 and £8 a week to their teamsters before any award was delivered. If the wheat industry is to be carried on and if men are to be encouraged to engage in it, the conditions for them must be improved. If the conditions and pay are such as will permit the worker to earn a decent living, I have no doubt that in due course a sufficient number of labourers will be offering.

Mr. Seward: There will be more labourers than farmers.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: As regards the casual worker engaged in wheat harvesting, the work will last approximately six weeks and the small farmer will require only one or two extra men, and I do not think that the additional amount of £15 to £30 will make or break the farmer. On the contrary, it will be an inducement for sufficient men to enter the industry and thus ensure that the harvesting operations are carried on satisfactorily.

The matter of zoning in the shearing industry generally is receiving the attention of a committee appointed some time ago to consider the question of organising the industry on a proper basis for next year. It was taken up too late to enable the committee to do a thoroughly effective job for this season. I urge the Minister, who is interested in shearing operations throughout the State, to exert every effort to ensure that the committee functions in good time to enable a reasonable system of zoning to be adopted all over Western Australia. The indications are that the number of skilled shearers required to carry on the industry may be reduced next year, and in conse-

quence it will be necessary to conserve manpower in every possible direction. If the matter is taken in hand early, I have no doubt that the pastoralists in the North-West will be able to get their sheep shorn in good time, and that the industry in the farming areas will be carried on with as much expedition as possible.

I was very pleased to note the reply given by the Minister some days ago to the member for Swan regarding the blow-fly pest. From inquiries I have made I feel confident that the Department of Agriculture will do everything possible to cope with the pest, because in certain portions of the North-West it is more destructive than the droughts that have visited the country in recent years, or the floods that have lately occurred in certain parts. I rose particularly to endeavour to remove a misapprehension regarding the conditions applying to the harvest. The workers in that industry are entitled to a reasonable standard of living, just as are the workers in any other industry.

Mr. Patrick: We have never denied that.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: I subscribe to the remarks of the member for Nelson and others to the effect that primary producers should receive favourable prices for their product. I believe that the wheat industry, and in fact all forms of primary production, must be placed on a scientific and commonsense basis. The little extra in wages that farmers will be required to pay for harvesting is not their main obstacle. Interest is the biggest stump the settler has to grub, and I believe that the move made by the Commonwealth Government to ensure a reasonable rate of pay for harvest workers will be an inducement for farmers to organise on a proper basis. They will be compelled to organise on a more intense basis to ensure receiving a favourable price. I believe the industry cannot survive if attempts are made to carry it on as in the past. I want to make that point clear. The farmers are entitled to decent accommodation and to the amenities of modern life; but they will not advance their cause by endeavouring to stultify the decision of a legally constituted board given to ensure that casual workers in the farming industry receive reasonable wages.

[Mr. J. Hegney took the Chair.]

MR. HUGHES (East Perth): I had not intended to intervene in the debate, but apparently a strange paradox is at large.

On the one hand we hear that people engaged in fruit production do not obtain a decent standard of living. We know that to be the fact in many instances. However, the member for Nelson seems inclined to think the city people have something to do with that unsatisfactory state of affairs. What we city people wonder about, on hearing such statements, is why that should be so. One would think that if producers of foodstuffs were not receiving adequate remuneration and a decent standard of living, some people must be getting a large rake-off from their labours. I do not think an assurance is needed from me that the city people are now paying terrific prices for foodstuffs.

Mr. Sampson: Not in all cases.

Mr. HUGHES: Not in all cases?

Mr. Sampson: No, certainly not!

Mr. HUGHES: I would like to know where these cabbages at 1s. 6d. per bag are obtainable. The housewives of the metropolitan area would say, "Yes, of course, cabbages are 1s. 6d. per bag, but there is only one cabbage in the bag."

Mr. Sampson: Cabbages can be had for 1d. each.

Mr. HUGHES: I believe I may say without fear of contradiction that prices of foodstuffs are so high in the metropolitan area that large numbers of people are not able to acquire essential foods. Now, here is something I saw myself on my way to Parliament House today. Cherries in London Court priced at 4s. 6d. per pound!

Mr. Sampson: Cherries are not an essential foodstuff.

Mr. HUGHES: I do not know why people eat cherries. Nevertheless, at 4s. 6d. per pound for them, somebody must be getting something.

Mr. Patrick: One can live without cherries.

Mr. HUGHES: One can live without cherries and without potatoes, and without a good many other things. Nevertheless, the fact is that cherries, which are in the category of foodstuffs, are being offered today in Perth at 4s. 6d. per pound. So somebody must be getting a large rake-off of profit in connection with the production and distribution of cherries. I wonder whether the producers of those cherries, whoever and wherever they may be, would agree not only to a minimum price for cherries but also to a maximum price? Cer-

tainly, if cherries cannot be produced and sold for less than 4s. 6d. per pound, they might as well not be produced at all, because they are beyond the purchasing power of the people. I do not believe that those cherries cost to produce and distribute anything approaching what would justify a retail price of 4s. 6d. per pound. Nor do I believe that, even with the interest on the mortgage thrown in, the producers of those cherries are getting a reasonable profit from the 4s. 6d. per pound. Somebody else is getting an utterly unreasonable profit.

When the people of the metropolitan area see such a price for a foodstuff, they find it hard to believe that the producers of that foodstuff are not receiving adequate remuneration. I can assure the Committee that with cherries at 4s. 6d. per pound the electors of East Perth are put right in the front rank of the Austerity Campaign, whether they like it or not! Cherries, I daresay, are not an essential food; but at present tomatoes are priced at 1s. 6d. per pound in Perth, wholesale at the markets. Surely it cannot be contended that tomatoes are not an essential as well as a wholesome food! There are persons who can tell one where such commodities can be bought at 6d. per pound—until one wants to buy them!

Mr. Patrick: I have bought tomatoes in the shops at 6d. per pound.

Mr. HUGHES: That being so, I commend the information to the Minister for Agriculture. If some shopkeepers can retail tomatoes at 6d. per pound, surely the fact of other shopkeepers charging 1s. 6d. per pound constitutes a reason for inquiry into profiteering—if it is so!

Mr. Patrick: On the other hand, I have seen cases of fruit sold at 1s. 6d. and 2s.

Mr. HUGHES: I will present the hon. member with a £10 note if he will now conduct me to a place in Perth where tomatoes can be bought at 1s. per case!

Mr. Patrick: Not at present, of course!

Mr. HUGHES: The fact remains that at the present time tomatoes rule at 1s. 6d. per pound retail and 1s. 3d. per pound wholesale. With all due respect to the Deputy Leader of the Country Party, I do not think that his Party will ever do the best for the people it tries to represent if its one policy is to be antagonistic to the people of the

metropolitan area. So long as the hon. member's Party has that one idea that it is good policy to attack the people of the metropolitan area—

Mr. Patrick: Have I ever attacked them?

Mr. HUGHES: When the hon. member talks that rubbish about tomatoes being sold at 1s. per case—

Mr. Patrick: But not at the present time.

Mr. HUGHES: Why did the hon. member interject that he had seen tomatoes sold at 1s. per case?

Mr. Patrick: I was merely telling you the price.

Mr. HUGHES: The object was not just to air the hon. member's knowledge! It was to depreciate, to attempt to disparage, my statement that tomatoes were 1s. 6d. per pound.

Mr. Doney: You have a suspicious mind!

Mr. HUGHES: I suggest that instead of going back into the Dark Ages and saying tomatoes were a 1s. a case then, the Deputy Leader of the Country Party would do well to attack the problem by ascertaining why it is that the people of the metropolitan area have to pay 1s. 6d. per pound now for tomatoes while the producer is not getting an adequate return for his labour.

Mr. Patrick: I think you told us that they brought 1s. 3d. wholesale.

Mr. HUGHES: Yes, 1s. 3d. a lb. wholesale. If the people of the metropolitan area have to pay that price wholesale, and the person who produces the tomatoes is not getting an adequate return for his labour, there is something radically wrong. I suggest that if it desired to help the grower, then, instead of disparaging that angle, we should find out why the people of the metropolitan area have to pay an excess price and why the grower does not get an adequate return for his labour. The remedy is to co-operate and ascertain why it is that the producer does not get an adequate return and why it is that people in the metropolitan area have to pay such a high price for that particular kind of food.

Mr. Patrick: It is due to scarcity. The people could not get the tomatoes because the quantity was not available.

Mr. HUGHES: Increasing the price will not enlarge the quantity. What chance has a man on the basic wage with two or three children to give them tomatoes at 1s. 6d. per lb. retail?

Mr. Sampson: Or a feed of cherries?

Mr. HUGHES: Yes. There are two factors. I quite agree we should have a minimum price that will guarantee to all concerned in the production an adequate return for their labour. But I do not stop there. I think that is only half-way. We must have a maximum price that will ensure that nobody will get an excessive return for his labour to the detriment of somebody else. If we are to have a guaranteed minimum in times of plenty, so that people will have to pay a high price in times of scarcity, we must have the other angle. We must have a maximum price so that people will not be paying an exorbitant price in times of scarcity. When we reach that stage, instead of metropolitan members having to contest statements made by country members, and vice versa, we shall have a common front. We will be able to tackle the problem in co-operation to the advantage of each. The price of fruit and vegetables in Perth today is extraordinarily high.

Mr. Shearn: What is the price of bananas?

Mr. HUGHES: 3s. a dozen.

Mr. Marshall: Oranges of any consequence are 4s. a dozen.

Mr. HUGHES: Yes.

Mr. Patrick: But oranges are out of season.

Mr. Sampson: That is the price for out-of-season navels.

Mr. HUGHES: I would like someone to be good enough to inform me when fruit is in season in Perth, if "in season" means cheap prices, because I have been in Perth for 30 years and have not noticed that when fruit is in season it is cheap. The prices now are unreasonable, and this is the best season for eating oranges. They are not out of season, and, as the member for Murchison pointed out, oranges of a fair size are 4s. per dozen, while little oranges—scarcely bigger than a plum—are 1s. 6d. a dozen.

Mr. Patrick: I know. I bought some the other day.

Mr. HUGHES: We have to pay 1s. 6d. per dozen for oranges which I venture to say are scarcely bigger than a plum.

Mr. Patrick: You are not a good buyer.

Mr. HUGHES: My information is not altogether derived from buying fruit, because in some cases—like the old man and the taxi—all I can do is to look at it. I can only look at fruit through the shop win-

dows; I cannot buy it. Nevertheless, when going about the streets day by day, I see the prices marked in the various shops. As I came to the House today, I noticed that tomatoes were marked up at 1s. 6d. a lb. I asked someone interested why they were so dear, and he replied that they were 1s. 3d. per lb. wholesale, so that an increase of 20 per cent. on that price does not provide a very great margin for gross profit. The shopkeeper cannot be said to be making an abnormal profit, because anybody who understands anything at all about costing knows that 20 per cent. is not a big rate of profit for perishable goods. Nor can it be said that there has been an increase in rents that is responsible for the increase in the price of fresh fruit and vegetables because, as we all know, rents have been pegged since the war, and consequently the shopkeeper in Perth is not paying additional rent. The wages paid to employees have not increased in the same ratio as have the prices of the goods, nor have the overhead charges of the storekeeper. So why is it, when prices are so high, that the grower is not getting an adequate return? I ask the Minister to make a note of that. Although the member for Greenough said he could buy tomatoes at 6d. a lb., I notice that all the shops in the city are charging 1s. 6d.

Mr. Patrick: I said I had bought them during the last week.

Mr. HUGHES: With regard to strawberries, before the war one could buy a small carton for 9d. The price today is 3s. 9d., an increase of nearly 400 per cent. Somebody must be getting a rake-off. Somebody must be making a fortune out of apples. A friend of mine recently paid 7d. for three miserable apples.

The Minister for Agriculture: The cheapest is 15s. a case.

Mr. HUGHES: Why it is that people in the city have to pay 15s. a case for apples, while those engaged in their production are not getting an adequate return for their labour? The answer to the people who say that the grower is not getting an adequate return is that it is not because people in the city and the metropolitan area are getting commodities cheaper. There must be some other cause.

Member: Faulty marketing!

Mr. HUGHES: It may be. I venture to say that in the whole of the metropolitan

area 90 per cent. of the children do not get sufficient fresh fruit. The children in the wheat belt are probably in a worse position. Fruit is a very important item of diet. The people representing the metropolitan area would be glad—and I suppose every member of the Chamber would be glad—to see the primary producers getting a more adequate return.

Mr. Withers: Do you think the price is due to a shortage?

Mr. HUGHES: If the increased price is due to a shortage, that is a case of profiteering. If, in 1942, we are working on Adam Smith's economics and, because there is a scarcity, certain people are increasing the price, surely that is a case for Dr. Evatt and his black-marketing legislation! If there is such a thing as storage, my opinion is that the people who store these perishables buy them when the market price is very low. They never buy for storage when the price is high.

Mr. Patrick: In this instance, the Apple and Pear Board is storing apples and pears.

Mr. HUGHES: If the Apple and Pear Board were abolished tomorrow, it would not make any difference to the people in the metropolitan area because those people never get supplies of apples or pears any cheaper as a result of the existence of the board. I do not think there can be such a thing as the abolition of the Apple and Pear Board in some States and its retention in others, because there is definitely in the Commonwealth Constitution a section that there shall be no discrimination between the States. There is no legality in the attempt to differentiate between the two small States and the others. The board did not provide apples any cheaper to the people of the metropolitan area.

Mr. Withers: Say, the State.

Mr. HUGHES: Well, the State! I do not suppose there is a shortage in Bunbury. If the growers are not getting a decent return, it is not the fault of people in the metropolitan area, though they seem to be singled out for blame. I agree that we must get down to a system under which there is a guaranteed income for everybody, and not only the primary producer. I do not think the member for Nelson goes far enough. We must guarantee to everybody an adequate return for his labour, and that there will be facilities available to enable him to get an adequate return. When we do that, the other



aspects will dissolve. The branches of the problem will dissolve with the root. I did not want to intervene in a debate on the Agricultural Estimates, but I think I was justified on this occasion in pointing out what the people in the metropolitan area are suffering as a result of the high prices of perishable goods.

Progress reported.

*House adjourned at 6.20 p.m.*

## Legislative Council.

*Thursday, 26th November, 1942.*

		PAGE
Motion: Railway freights and fares, as to suggested increase	1575	
Bills: Medical Act Amendment, 1R.	1579	
Lotteries (Control) Act Amendment, 2R.	1579	
Road Closure, 2R.	1582	
Reserves, 2R.	1583	
Evidence Act Amendment, 2R.	1584	
Health Act Amendment (No. 2), 2R.	1584	
West Australian Meat Export Works, 2R.	1587	
Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act Amendment, 1R.	1592	
Death Duties (Taxing) Act Amendment, 1R.	1592	

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

### MOTION—RAILWAY FREIGHTS AND FARES.

*As to Suggested Increase.*

**HON. C. B. WILLIAMS (South) [2.18]:**  
I move—

That in the opinion of this House, the all-round increase of 12½ per cent. in railway fares and freights—as suggested by Mr. Raynor, Deputy Secretary of the Railway Department—would be an unfair tax on mining, agricultural and pastoral producers; and further, that no increase in railway charges should be imposed without submission to Parliament.

That this resolution be transmitted to the Legislative Assembly with a request for its concurrence therein.

It is three or four years now since this House discussed a similar question, and, by a majority—certainly of only one vote—it disallowed proposed increased freights. The then Government, which is the present one, discovered another way to get around the difficulty. After having dealt with the increasing of freights in Parliament by laying regulations on the Table for many years, it suddenly found there was no need

to do that. After all, the Government, whatever its political brand, consists of only a few members, supported by a majority of men in another place, and those men are responsible to their electors. Any increases in freights and charges that have to be met by the people have to be justified by members of Parliament, no matter whether they are or are not members of the Government for the time being.

In 1939 this House disallowed any increases, and it did that also in a previous session, but still they continued to be imposed. I will read a letter which has brought the matter to a head, so far as I am concerned. Most country members have received a similar communication from the Kalgoorlie Municipal Council. We are guided, more or less, by our electors, and we realise the Government must raise money to carry on the different activities for which it is responsible. But still, when increases in railway freights are being mooted, the interests of people in the outback districts and of producers generally should be considered. This letter is addressed from the Municipal Chambers, Kalgoorlie, and is signed by the Town Clerk—

At a meeting of the council held on the 16th inst., the question of the proposed increase in railway freights and fares came up for discussion.

The news that the change is seriously contemplated was contained in a statement made before the Commonwealth Grants Commission, when sitting in Perth on the 6th November, by the Deputy Secretary of the Railway Department, Mr. P. C. Raynor. He is reported to have said that all-round rises in railway charges of 12½ per cent. were proposed.

The people of the Goldfields desire to be tolerant and co-operate with the Government in any move which is found necessary on account of war-time exigencies, but they cannot contemplate with complacency so great an increase in charges as that suggested.

The people in the outposts of the State, more particularly the Eastern Goldfields, are dependent on the railways, and the charges made for the carriage of goods affect every resident. All the requirements of industry are conveyed by train and food, clothes, furniture and other necessities are influenced in price by transport costs.

In the year 1939, the question of increased railway freights received attention by Parliament, which disallowed a regulation to obtain additional revenue by this method of taxation. However, the expressed opinion of Parliament was flouted and high rates continued to be imposed to the detriment of the people of the Goldfields and other parts of the State. You can realise that there will be a lot of reaction from the people in the country and mining dis-