

pointed to it by the board. Last year's measure was examined by the Road Board Conference and by the secretary of the conference, and ran the gauntlet of both Houses, and finally was approved. If the amendment is necessary, surely it would have been put forward at that time.

Mr. SAMPSON: This new clause was not considered by the Road Board Association, either in conference or in executive meeting. In connection with the 1932 measure this matter was not mentioned either by the Minister in introducing the Bill or by any member in speaking to the Bill. Perhaps the Minister will report progress.

The Minister for Works: You might try the new clause in another place.

Mr. SAMPSON: As the Minister has such a grip of local government, I would greatly prefer that he should deal with this matter. Undoubtedly an error was made last session in rendering it obligatory on a returning officer to come in, many miles perhaps, for a mere formality.

Mr. Latham: He could easily appoint a substitute.

Mr. SAMPSON: Yes; but returning officers do not always make a close study of the Act.

New clause put and negatived.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, and the report adopted.

*House adjourned at 6.10 p.m.*

## Legislative Council,

*Tuesday, 8th August, 1933.*

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

### QUESTION—MINISTERIAL TRAVELLING ALLOWANCES.

Hon. E. H. H. HALL asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What was the total amount of travelling allowances drawn by the Ministers of the Crown in this State during the following periods:—12 months ended 30th June, 1928; 12 months ended 30th June, 1929; 12 months ended 30th June, 1931; 12 months ended 30th June, 1932? 2, How many visits to the Loan Council were made by the then Premier during the above-mentioned respective periods?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1 and 2, Efforts were made some months ago to obtain the information sought, but a recent review, followed by deeper investigation, shows that wider and apparently interminable research would be necessary in order to reach anything like exactitude. Ministerial expenses are so widely distributed according to the department affected and the nature of the business upon which Ministers may be travelling—as in some cases the expenses of one visit may be spread through the ramifications of the accounts of various departments—that it would involve infinite labour to furnish the information with any degree of reliability. Moreover, the allocation of payments which have been made between the cost of separate items such as cars, and the expenses paid to the Ministers, and the segregation of the charges into the various years asked for, present very great difficulties. Again, ministerial car accommodation is normally regarded as a substitute for travelling expenses, conditional on avail-

ability, thus aggravating the perplexities involved in search and examination, due to the circumstance—of which Mr. Hall is fully cognisant—that the members for a district or province, or for both, frequently accompany a Minister when visiting their constituencies, and, while a Minister's trip is a charge on the Treasury, he may not always draw upon the resources of the ear, except for part of his tour—temporary breaks in continuity may and do occur—and, apart from that, it is on some occasions, in isolated instances, a matter for conjecture as to what proportion of this expense the Minister is, personally, but not financially, responsible for, and what proportion may justly be treated as a disbursement, in the public interest, for the entertainment of his guests. It is, therefore, regretted that it is impossible to supply the desired information.

#### QUESTION—SHIPPING, NORTHERN STOCK REQUIREMENTS.

Hon. G. W. MILES asked the Chief Secretary: Owing to the fact that there are thousands of fat sheep at present in the North, for which owners are unable to obtain shipping space to Fremantle, what steps do the Government intend to take to relieve the situation?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: The State Shipping Service has been relieving the situation to the extent of its capacity. Space is still being allotted, and a number of options have not been concluded.

#### QUESTION—WIRE NETTING, TENDER.

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Chief Secretary: As the Minister for Customs stated in the Federal House that the Australian price of wire netting at main Australian ports was as follows:—Wire netting, galvanised. 17 gauge x 1½in. mesh x 42in. wide, price £31 12s. 6d.; and as the Western Australian Government Tender Board, on 22nd June, accepted the following tender:—“Western Australian Government Tender Board, 22nd June, galvanised wire netting, 17 gauge x 1½in. mesh x 42in. wide—W.A. Netting and Wire Products, Ltd., £37 3s. 6d. per mile, less 7s. 6d. per cent. for payment in Perth,” will the Minister explain why a tender for an amount of £2 15s. per mile

above the price stated by the Minister for Customs, as being the Australian price, was accepted, as it represents approximately the sum of £1,375 more than what the Federal Minister said it should cost?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: The price stated to have been quoted by the Minister for Customs refers to “B” grade netting. Recent tenders were for “A” grade netting, and the lowest tender was £37 3s. 6d. less 7s. 6d. per cent., F.O.R., Perth. The position is:—Wire netting, 17 gauge, 1½in. mesh, 42in. wide, “B” grade (approx. 157 lbs. per 100-yard roll) is quoted, at present market rates, £31 12s. 6d. per mile, C.I.F., Fremantle (less 7s. 6d. per cent. for payment in Sydney). The Tender Board accepted the tender of the W.A. Netting and Wire Products Manufacturers, Limited, for wire netting, 17 gauge, 1½in. mesh, 42in. wide, “A” grade (approx. 176 lbs. per 100-yard roll), at £37 3s. 6d. per mile, F.O.R., Perth, less 7s. 6d. per cent. for payment in Perth. It will be noted that a comparison has been made by the Hon. A. Thomson of different grades of netting, and with different bases of delivery. The following comparison will illustrate the respective prices of the “A” and “B” grades at present market rates, worked on the basis of both types, C.I.F., Fremantle:—

“A” Grade per mile—	£	s.	d.
C.I.F., Fremantle .. ..	35	12	6
Less 7s. 6d. per cent. .. ..	0	2	8
Nett, C.I.F. .. ..	35	9	10
Add—			
Wharfage, cartage, storage, and handling costs .. ..	2	0	0
F.O.R., Fremantle .. ..	37	9	10
“B” Grade, per mile—	£	s.	d.
C.I.F., Fremantle .. ..	31	12	6
Less 7s. 6d. per cent. .. ..	0	2	4
Nett C.I.F. .. ..	31	10	2
Add—			
Wharfage, cartage, storage, and handling .. ..	1	18	6
F.O.R., Fremantle .. ..	33	8	8

As the tender in question for “A” Grade netting was let at £37 3s. 6d. (less 7s. 6d.

per cent.), £37 0s. 9d. per mile nett, this really represents an advantage of 9s. 1d. per mile over the wholesale market rate, or a total of £227 1s. 8d. on the 500 miles being purchased, plus freight from Fremantle to Perth. "A" and "B" Grades denote heavy and light weights of the same gauge. As the Government are giving settlers 25 years' terms for repayment of advances made for wire netting, it was decided to purchase and supply the heavier "A" Grade in view of its longer life.

### QUESTION—RAILWAY, LAKE GRACE-KARLGARIN.

#### *Invitations to official opening.*

Hon. J. CORNELL asked the Chief Secretary: 1, Did the Government, or the Railway Department, notify any member of Parliament about the date of the official opening of the Lake Grace-Karlgarin railway, or invite any member of Parliament to attend the function? 2, If so, why were the members of the Legislative Council, who represent the district actually affected, overlooked in any such notification or invitation?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1 and 2, The Government consented to have an official opening of the Lake Grace-Karlgarin railway at the invitation of the Lake Grace Road Board, through the member for the district. No invitations were issued by the Government or the Railway Department, but the Legislative Assembly members for the two districts concerned and one Legislative Council member were present at the opening ceremony.

### QUESTION—PROSPECTING SCHEME.

Hon. J. CORNELL asked the Chief Secretary: Is there any substance in the assertions made in many parts of the Eastern and Northern Goldfields that the activities of men sent out under the Minister for Mines' prospecting scheme are being seriously hampered through delay in issuing necessary tools and other prospecting requisites?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: No noteworthy complaints have been received at Head Office. If the hon. member will give specific instances, inquiries will be made.

### BILLS (2)—FIRST READING.

1, York Cemeteries.

2, Road Districts Act Amendment (No. 1).

Received from the Assembly and read a first time.

### MOTION—RAILWAYS, CAPITAL ACCOUNT.

*To Inquire by Select Committee.*

HON. A. THOMSON (South-East) [4.45]: I move—

That a select committee be appointed to inquire and report upon the capital cost of the Western Australian Government railways with a view to reducing the amount upon which the Commissioner of Railways is expected to find interest and running costs, and to make such recommendations as the committee may deem desirable to co-ordinate the different transport services and enable the railways to meet the competition from motor and other transport.

I trust members will not think that I am guilty of bringing forward a hardy annual. This is the third occasion on which I have submitted the matter for the consideration of the House. On the first occasion the motion lapsed owing to the House adjourning, and on the second occasion it was defeated. Events have moved swiftly during recent months. It is the intention of the Government to introduce legislation designed to protect the Railway Department, and people interested in other forms of transport have asked the Government to afford them an opportunity to state their views before such legislation is introduced. I was not aware that such action was contemplated. I submitted the motion to the House in order to honour a pledge I gave to the electors of South-East Province when I was returned to represent them in this House. Therefore I trust that members will not think I am trying to force the matter upon them. Transport is of vital importance to the country, and particularly to the primary industries. The proposed legislation, if one may judge from the legislation and by-laws in other States, is likely to be of a rather restrictive character and it behoves all interested in the development and progress of our landed industries to scrutinise every avenue that tends to increase the cost of transport and distribute the burden as equitably as possible. Therefore I offer no excuse for again tabling a motion for the appointment of a select com-

mittee to consider the question of reducing the capital costs of the railways and make recommendations for the co-ordination of transport systems. I fully realise the importance of the task that would confront the select committee. If one desired to shirk his duty, he would sit back and allow someone else to tackle the job. Keen interest is being evinced in the project for the co-ordination of transport. A conference has been convened for to-morrow at 3 p.m., various bodies having been invited by the Perth Chamber of Commerce to send two delegates each. It is expected that representatives will attend from the Chamber of Automotive Industries, Royal Automobile Club, Transport Association, Master Carriers' Association, Fremantle Chamber of Commerce, Primary Producers' Association, Chamber of Manufactures, Pastoralists' Association, Wheat Growers' Union, Midland Railway Co., Metropolitan Omnibus Co., Alpine Taxi Co., and several country Chambers of Commerce. The appointment of a select committee would afford the various interests an opportunity to place their views on record, and those views should be helpful to the Government in framing their legislation. I intend to deal briefly with the capital account of the railways. The amount debited to the Commissioner of Railways is £24,937,332, an increase since last year of £523,300. He is expected to find interest charges amounting to £996,233, an increase of £7,060 over the interest bill of last year. The net revenue earned was 3.29 per cent. on the capital charged against the railways. The Commissioner of Railways has recently been approached with a request to reduce his freight charges. It was considered that he was quite willing to do so, and as a matter of fact had prepared reductions in various rates, but apparently something prevented his meeting the altered trade conditions. Considering the difficulties confronting the Commissioner of Railways, great credit is due to him and to his responsible officials for the efficiency of the department. Despite the depression, the loss last year was only £175,681. One wonders by how much the deficit was reduced at the expense of deferred repairs and renewals. I have an interesting report showing that Governments in other States are approaching this question seriously. I do not say that if a select committee were appointed, we would be able to do better than transport committees have done

in other parts of the world, but it would afford people vitally interested in transport an opportunity to record their views, and, with the assistance of the findings of similar committees elsewhere, the select committee should be able to submit recommendations that would be helpful to the Government and to the development of the State. The Commonwealth appointed a Co-ordination of Transport Committee, who reported in 1929. They stated that from 1904 to 1914 railway capital accounts increased by 37 per cent. and the goods traffic by 91 per cent. From 1914 to 1928 railway capital increased by 73 per cent., and goods traffic by only 21 per cent. That indicates an avenue for profitable inquiry in connection with the working of our railways. From 1929 to 1933 the accumulated losses on our railways were £1,328,938. and apart from those losses, no adequate provision was made for depreciation. The losses, it is expected, will be paid by the producers of the State, and I have approached the question of the railway capital account from that angle. The men who are producing wheat, wool, butter and other primary commodities, the men who are producing the true wealth of the State, are vitally interested in obtaining cheap railway freights to enable them to get their goods to market. I think it is the honest desire of every Government, so far as is humanly possible, to grant them that consideration. There are difficulties under present methods and present conditions. The report of the Commonwealth committee stated—

The increase in railway capital expenditure during the last ten years, as compared with the much smaller increase in traffic on the railways during the same period, indicates the need for greater productivity in the areas now served by transport facilities.

The earning capacity of the various transport facilities is greatly lessened, and the operating costs considerably increased owing to the large areas of sparsely-populated and undeveloped country through which they pass.

From a brief examination of the policy in each State it is questionable whether sufficient is being done to induce greater productivity in such areas. Since 1914, capital expenditure in extending railway systems has increased out of all proportion to production. It is considered that a similar rate of railway extension is not warranted in future, but rather a concentration of effort to greater productivity in areas now served by these systems. The developmental road programme should also be directed towards this end.

Those remarks apply more particularly to the older-established and more thickly popu-

lated States like New South Wales and Victoria. While I am quite in accord with the opinion that we should do all in our power to encourage greater productivity along existing railways, we have to bear in mind that Western Australia, if it is to be opened up and developed, must have transport facilities. It is of no earthly use sending men out 40, 50 or 60 miles from the rail head and expecting them to engage in profitable production. I am showing that a select committee would have a wonderful opportunity to submit recommendations. It would be one of the most important committees ever appointed by the House, and great good should result from its investigations. Let us take our own railways. I will briefly refer to one or two points only. As I indicated, we lost last year approximately £175,000, but no consideration is given for services which the Commissioner extends to other departments. For instance, if my memory serves me rightly, I think that in the Estimates a sum of about £1,500 is provided for services rendered to the Government, such as the provision of Ministerial coaches and looking after distinguished visitors, and also for services rendered to Parliamentarians. The Commissioner in his last report submitted that these services cost him £36,000. After all, this may be only a book entry, but I maintain we should be fair to the Commissioner and say, "If you render services to other departments costing you £36,000, your department is entitled to that credit." Take what happens in the metropolitan area. I am not objecting to the carrying of children to and from school at a nominal fee, but we find that the Commissioner has to put on a special train for the convenience of school children. Those of us who have been on the Perth railway station at about 4 o'clock have seen hundreds of children boarding trains to take them to their homes. I understand that in the metropolitan area the Commissioner receives the large sum of 1s. per child per month for this service. I am not suggesting that there should be an alteration in the rate, but I do think it legitimate that a fair charge should be imposed and debited against the Education Department. From that point of view we could assist the Commissioner by making a recommendation in that direction. We have heard a great deal about the low rate at which super is carried on the railways. On looking at the returns we find that the Commissioner last year

received £62,125 for the conveyance of super. We must realise that the trucks have to go into the country to lift the wheat and take it to the ports. But let us look at it from a business point of view. For every ton of super carried by the railways the Commissioner received a return rate of practically ten to one; that is to say, that whilst he received £62,125 for carrying super, the amount collected by him for wheat transport was £662,751. Again, it might be possible for the committee to make a recommendation to follow the course adopted in New Zealand, namely, that the Government should grant a subsidy of 8s. 6d. per ton on every ton of super that goes out. This would enable the Commissioner to make a better showing than he is doing to-day. The total earnings of the railways last year was £2,110,065. We find that the carriage of wool, hay, straw, chaff, wheat, fruit, vegetables, fertiliser and livestock yielded a revenue of £1,103,171. All this freight was paid directly by the primary producer, and of course, as members know, those who live in country districts have to pay freight on their outward goods as well. So it seems that in the interests of our country districts we may reasonably consider the advisableness of reducing the capital cost of our railways, and also consider the reduction of railway freights. Let me return to the report of the Transport Committee, which contains some excellent suggestions. It states—

Railway finance: A problem common to all State railways is that of over-capitalisation. Since the inception of the various systems no systematic provision for depreciation has been made, and the financial position is, consequently, not on a proper basis. It is suggested (a) the finances of the railway systems be separated from the general finances of the State; (b) The capital liability of the railways be reduced by an amount represented by the accrued depreciation of the property which would require to be determined in each State; (c) The interest so saved to the railways be applied towards (i) The establishment of a depreciation fund, of an amount to be determined, sufficient to cover accruing depreciation year by year; (ii) The establishment of a reserve fund to stabilise the finances over lean years; (iii) the ultimate reduction of fares and freights.

When I was speaking on a similar motion previously, I advocated that we should bring in a Bill the effect of which would be that the Commissioner would be recouped any loss sustained from new railways. Let me give an illustration. In another place there

has been submitted a Bill to construct a railway to Dartmoor. A report prepared by the Railway Department shows that the full length of the proposed line is 50 miles, the estimated capital cost £3,250 per mile, or a total of £162,500. The estimated annual results are: earnings £23,000, working expenses £17,000, interest at 5 per cent. £80,100, loss £2,100. Is it reasonable or fair to say to the Commissioner of Railways, "We appoint you as Commissioner and expect you to run our railways to show a profit, but whether you like it or not, we are going to build a railway to a certain district, the estimated loss on which will be over £2,000, and which you will have to make up"?

Hon. E. H. Harris: Are you trying to prejudice the passage of the Bill for the construction of this line?

Hon. A. THOMSON: I have no desire to do any such thing; I merely quoted this particular railway in support of my argument that a Bill should be passed to enable the Commissioner to say, "All right, you build a railway which will show a loss of over £2,000, but you recoup me for that loss." We might also examine the cost of the construction of the proposed line. It is estimated to cost £3,250 per mile. I think the Commissioner's estimate of the average cost of our lines is a little over £5,000 a mile. I should like to quote a railway that was built recently in Queensland. We might inquire why Queensland was able to build a 3ft. 6in. railway at a cost of £1,929 per mile as against our estimated cost of £3,250. The Queensland line was a 14-mile section extending from Tara to Surat, and it was completed for £27,000. The job was carried out under the relief work system and it represents the cheapest stretch of 3ft. 6in. line in the State. We in Western Australia are fortunate so far as railway construction is concerned by reason of the fact that, apart from the ranges and the country around Pemberton, there are practically no engineering difficulties. Therefore the suggested committee could well inquire into the reason for what seems to be a high departmental estimate of £3,250 per mile for railway construction in a district which the report states definitely does not contain engineering difficulties. I repeat that when we take into consideration the fact that the plant is obsolete, that sleepers, railway engines and trucks are worn out, it is an anomalous position to expect the Commissioner to find in-

terest and running expenses on the whole of the capital invested. I am therefore keen that we should be able to introduce a measure to enable the Commissioner to allow for depreciation and incidentally in that way permit him to reduce freights. We know that Queensland has reduced the capital cost of its railways, that Victoria proposes to do likewise, and that in New South Wales a committee has been appointed to consider the advisableness of adopting a similar course. While it may be said that our railways have not cost nearly so much in comparison with those of the other States, if we want to do justice to the people we must strain every effort to enable them to have cheaper freights. We have heard a great deal about competition by motor transport. A carrier recently wrote to the Commissioner of Railways as follows:—

Will you kindly consider the matter of hiring me for one year one 5-ton truck and one 8-ton van. I would require them to be hauled from Perth to Katanning twice weekly with the option of loading both ways. Loading and unloading of these trucks to be done by myself or employees, and all responsibility taken by me. I shall esteem it a favour if you will kindly advise me if you are prepared to consider this matter and let me know at your earliest convenience the charge per annum. I am prepared to pay £1,500 for the above consideration.

There was an offer made to the Commissioner of Railways by a man who is competing with the department, and his desire was to make arrangements that the goods would be loaded in Perth or Fremantle and he would take them at the other end and deliver them.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Did he undertake to do so for the general public?

Hon. A. THOMSON: Yes, for the general public. There is nothing unusual about that, because it is what is actually happening in New South Wales. This man thought that here was an opportunity to follow a similar course. Here is the Commissioner's reply to that offer:—

Dear Sir,—In reply to your letter of the 6th inst., relative to the hire of wagons to run between Perth and Katanning, I am directed to inform you that the Commissioner has given the matter careful consideration, but regrets that he cannot see his way to agree to a proposition of this nature.

I have quoted those letters as showing that these motor people are prepared to meet the railways and act as feeders for them. I

wish to congratulate the Minister for Works on his reply to a deputation from Claremont, who were in favour of a bus running along a certain route. The Minister, it seems, is prepared to approach this important subject with an open mind. He expressed disappointment at the work of the committee appointed by the Chamber of Commerce to go into the question of transport competition. For my part, I thought that committee served a useful purpose in giving their time and ability to this very serious problem. From time to time the commercial community have demanded that their customers should have the right to choose what form of transport they desire, and it is difficult to see how such demands and requests can be refused. In a community such as ours, depending almost entirely on primary products sold overseas, and at a time when the prices of those products are so low, it is essential to national prosperity that the transport charges on those goods to the seaboard should be as low as possible. The committee who prepared the report embodying that sentiment showed that they were imbued with the seriousness of the position and desirous of assisting the Government. That statement regarding primary production is ably borne out by an interview which appeared in the "West Australian" on the 2nd March last, with Mr. W. R. Jeffreys, chairman of the Roads Improvement Association of England, and an authority on all transport problems. That gentleman in his interview said as follows:—

Transport everywhere is in a bad way. Road, rail, air and water transport are, in the aggregate, losing money. It is impossible to say which section is the worst off. If the Empire is to recover prosperity it is necessary to get all forms of transport on a profitable basis. Transport must not seek to secure prosperity at the expense of trade and industry, but, as a junior partner, strive to serve trade and industry and be content with a modest share of the divisible profits.

No country had yet solved the problem of making a success of railway transport and giving trade and industry the full benefit of cheap transport rates by road, Mr. Jeffreys said. The important feature from the standpoint of the Dominions was the fact that there were millions of pounds of public money invested in railways and it was difficult to hold the balance fairly between the railways and other forms of transport with which the State competed. In Australia about £300,000,000 of public money was invested in railways, but road transport was nearly all undertaken by private enterprise.

"How are you solving the problem here?" Mr. Jeffreys inquired. When informed that

road services were required to pay a tax, Mr. Jeffreys said:—"That is a tax on industry. You are putting a heavy burden on primary producers who are using road transport and want to get their products into the market as cheaply and as efficiently as possible. Economists agree that taxation on any form of transport is bad. It is wrong in principle and inequitable in practice."

Mr. Jeffreys added that he found that the total deficits of railways in Australia during the last 18 years amounted to over £75,000,000. No attempt had been made, with the possible exception of Queensland, to adjust the capital account to the value of the assets. Most of the Australian States, in order to protect the public investment in tram and railway services, had passed drastic legislation restricting road traffic and he was anxious to see the incidence of those enactments. He thought that the time was rapidly approaching when the expenditure on the two avenues of transport would be administered as one. Road transport would have to submit to regulation as distinct from restriction, and should not undertake transport at uneconomic rates.

I am going into these various quotations to show that I am not the only one thinking in that direction. In Queensland they have already imposed restrictions, and the fees are based on 1½d. per ton mile of goods carrying capacity, and a halfpenny per passenger mile on the passenger-carrying capacity of the vehicle. These are considered reasonable by their transport board. The Minister for Works, receiving a deputation asking that the Fremantle Highway should be altered, said he was not much worried about financing the undertaking, for the money would come from the metropolitan traffic trust. He estimated that the highway would cost from £20,000 to £23,000 per mile, but he pointed out that it would be a charge, not on the people generally, but upon those who were using the road and who would find the money to pay for the work. We frequently hear that we have to be loyal to our railways and to remember that they belong to the people. But the roads also belong to the people and were constructed out of the people's money. From a revenue point of view, those roads return considerably more than most people think. Last year I asked for information as to the number of motor licenses, and the amount of license fees collected from the various motorists, together with the amount obtained from the Federal Government and from Customs dues on petrol. I learnt that the total amount of license fees, excluding motor cycles, then collected in Western Australia

was £262,977, while the money expended on main roads amounted to £1,932,480. So the fees collected from the motorists show a return to the State of 13.6 per cent., as compared with the 3.29 per cent. afforded by our railways. If we take the total amount of money received from the Federal Government during the period 1926 to 1932, the fees collected from motorists represent a return of 11.45 per cent. on the amount received from the Federal Government and expended.

Hon. Sir Charles Nathan: You mean the amount received by the Federal Government for the same year?

Hon. A. THOMSON: No. The amount is under-estimated rather than over-estimated, because there was £2,296,660 collected from the Federal Government from 1926 to 1932; but for the purpose of showing a comparison with the fees collected to June, 1932, in that year we paid an equivalent of 11.45 per cent. on the total amount of money expended on main roads. And if we take the total Customs duty—not the whole of that money goes into State revenue, because a portion goes to the Federal Government—£304,819, we get 13.27 per cent., while if we combine the duty with the traffic fees collected last year, we get a return of 24.72 per cent. on the money spent on the construction of our roads.

Hon. Sir Charles Nathan: That is the total amount expended, not the amount in that one year.

Hon. A. THOMSON: No, the total amount. It is estimated that the total value of motor vehicles of all kinds in Western Australia is probably in the vicinity of £10,000,000.

Hon. A. M. Clydesdale: Most of them have imported bodies.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Not necessarily. A large number of bodies are being made in Australia because of the duty imposed; in fact, one can safely say that 90 per cent. of the bodies used in Australia are made in Australia, and most of the car parts are made in Australia. It would be interesting to get a return showing the large number of men employed in this industry. We have in every town our motor garages, motor mechanics and oil pumps; and if we could correlate the whole of the money expended in the motor industry, it would be found

that there would not be a very great margin between that sum and the total amount invested in our railways. At all events if we could get that information it would be of great value, because this committee which sat said that the total capital cost of our railways, roads, ports and harbours was estimated at £500,000,000, and that the value of privately owned motor vehicles would be something like £600,000,000.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Under Standing Order 114 I must interrupt the debate unless the Council otherwise orders.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I move—

That the debate be continued.

Motion put and passed.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I now wish to read extracts from a report by the Perth Chamber of Commerce which provides very interesting matter. It says:

The transport of goods in the metropolitan area by motor wagons has increased considerably in the past few years. In 1926 the number of trucks licensed was 2,153, whereas for the year ended June 30th, 1930, the total was 3,808. There is an association of about 40 members engaged in the carriage of goods principally imports landed at Fremantle and transported to Perth. In 1920 less than 10 tons per day were carried by this association. This had increased to about 30 tons by 1922. From 1922 to 1928 a steady increase took place, and it was estimated by the association two years ago that 450 tons a day were then being carried by motor, and the amount was estimated to increase to approximately 1000 tons per day by 1933. This increase may be indicative of the increase in transport of goods by motor wagons as a whole. It is impossible to forecast the increase in this form of transport, but there seems to be no doubt that an increase will take place at probably a slower rate than in the immediate past.

My desire is to show the House the anomaly under which people in the country districts are suffering today. A grave injustice exists. Those who are carrying their goods between Perth and Fremantle on bitumen roads at the rate of 1,000 tons a day would if they had a four-ton truck, pay a license fee to the local authority of £29 a year and a carrier's license of £2, and if they had a 1 ton 19 cwt. trailer in addition they would pay £6 a year. Their total payment would be £35. The man in the country would not only have to pay the £35, but an additional sum to the local authority of £63, and a further £18 for the trailer, a total of £118. Instead of bitumen roads to travel on he



would have to use the ordinary country road, and would have to pay £118 instead of the other individual's £35. I am sure that when the Act was submitted to Parliament members did not think such an extraordinary anomaly would have arisen as I have disclosed. I could have quoted a number of other references, but do not desire to weary the House. I thank members for their patient hearing. This is a matter of grave importance. If a select committee is appointed those who are vitally interested in transport problems will be able to place their views before the House and the country. I am quite agreeable, in the circumstances, to having a joint select committee appointed if that meets the wishes of another place. Organisations have come into existence that are very fearful of the proposed legislation, and do not know what is in the mind of the Minister in charge. An inquiry into this matter will not only be helpful to the Government in the framing of that legislation, but will enable people to put forward a scheme which may lead to a reduction of railway freights and fares. If we are going to compete with the world's markets it is our duty to do all we can to effect a reduction of charges. I commend my motion to the attention of the House.

**HON. SIR EDWARD WITTENOOM** (North) [5.37]: I congratulate Mr. Thomson on his admirable speech and upon the constructive details he has given to us. He put his case very plainly. The subject is so important that it is difficult to make up one's mind about it until one has heard the views of other members. I should have preferred to defer my speech until the question had been further debated. I should be the more inclined to support the motion if the hon. member would agree to add to it something to this effect:—"And also with power to discover some method of preventing the wholesale stealing and pilfering that are taking place on the railways." That is certainly a matter calling for investigation, as disclosed by the following newspaper paragraph:—

Pillaging from trains and railway stations is rapidly assuming serious proportions in this State. Astonishing losses were sustained by the Railway Department during the last financial year, and despite the strictest supervision and careful inquiry, very few of the persons concerned in the thefts were apprehended. A long list of minor articles shown as "stolen" is punctuated with disturbing frequency by such entries as "22 water bags," "21½ gal-

lons of petrol," "20 sleepers," and "20 chains of wire." During the 12 months ended on June 30 last the following railway equipment was reported as missing from carriages and sleeping cars:—175 huck towels, 52 sheets, 19 decanters, 66 pillow slips, 705 roller towels, 1,811 glasses, 335 water-bags, 10 rugs and nine blankets. The Chief Mechanical Engineer reported that during the period 291 electric lamps had been removed from railway carriages in the metropolitan area. The greatest number of glasses was stolen during February, when 199 disappeared, but with the exception of 92 in July and 81 in August, 1932, the thefts of glasses averaged about 150 a month. Apparently the warm weather experienced last January had an adverse effect on the supply of departmental water-bags, for 74 were stolen during the month. The removal of 19 decanters during the year was in marked contrast to the theft of 180 decanters in the previous 12 months.

This is a lamentable state of affairs. I do not think it can be due altogether to professional thieves on account of the variety of articles stolen. It rather indicates a certain amount of immorality and dishonesty on the part of the community. I wonder whether our expenditure of £750,000 a year on education is doing any good when we look at it from this point of view.

Hon. G. Fraser: I wondered when you were going to bring that in.

Hon. SIR EDWARD WITTENOOM: Unfortunately this is not the only example of immorality and dishonest effort. A similar state of affairs exists in connection with the old age pensions. One reason why the railways do not pay is that those who have the spending of large sums of roadmaking money have constructed excellent thoroughfares in competition with the railway system. I would give two instances of this; one is the road from Tenindewa to Northern Gully, over sand plain on which no one is living, and from which no one is producing anything, and through which a railway passes.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Do not people travel over it from the other end?

Hon. Sir EDWARD WITTENOOM: The railway is there all the time, but the sand plain produces no freight. The other instance is the road from Geraldton to Watheroo, though that concerns the Midland railway. A good road has been constructed there, in competition with the railways. When I was in Java recently I looked into this matter. I had to take a long motor trip into the hills to the Nallabar tea gardens. Alongside the railway the

track is as rough as possible and no one would think of using it. The authorities there construct good roads where there is no railway, and leave the tracks alongside the railway just as they were. The consequence of this policy is that the roads are not competing with the railways. The trouble in this State is that huge sums of money have been spent on making roads that compete with our railways. I shall listen with great interest to the remarks of other members, and will reserve my right to vote for or against the motion.

**HON. SIR CHARLES NATHAN** (Metropolitan-Suburban) [5.46]: The House is indebted to Mr. Thomson for the excellent manner in which he has presented the case—a case, I submit, not for a select committee, but, re-echoing what I said last year, a case of sufficient importance to be investigated by a Royal Commission composed of experts. At this moment, however, even that procedure seems inopportune, since we know that the whole subject is receiving the consideration of the Government. In my opinion, the appointment of a select committee of this Chamber to inquire at present into the matters pertaining to the motion would prove abortive. Everyone must admit that the condition of affairs now existing requires to be remedied, and that the Commissioner of Railways has a task set him which should be imposed on no man controlling such an undertaking. We know that he is called upon to run the railway system and at the same time is subject to the control of Parliament. Unquestionably the transport problem is a most serious one in all parts of the world. We recognise that railway systems which are becoming obsolete cannot be permitted to stand in the way of more modern methods of transport. We see our own Government amplifying their methods of tramway transport. The capital expenditure represented by the various methods of transport, all of them operating in competition with each other, is constantly augmented. We realise the necessity for co-ordination. We appreciate the necessity for expert advice. We are also conscious of the need for maintaining the values of our railways so as to enable them to earn profits. The subject, it seems to me, is not one for investigation by a select committee

of this Chamber. With the greatest respect to the members of this House and those of another place, who are we to make an investigation into such a subject?

**Hon. A. Thomson:** We should surely be capable of hearing the evidence and submitting recommendations.

**Hon. Sir CHARLES NATHAN:** While not an inquiry of such a nature as would carry weight outside the House and enable the Government to move? Members of this House and of another place, I submit with all due deference, are not capable of making such a close investigation as is needed. Neither would the limitations of select committee enable the proper evidence to be taken. Consequently, although I have the greatest sympathy with the hon. member in his endeavour to bring about an inquiry, I think now, as I thought last year, that it would be utterly futile for us to attempt such an investigation under the conditions existing, particularly when the whole subject is receiving the closest attention of the Government. In all probability an opportunity will occur when the Government submit legislation for the adoption of certain methods of transport, to suggest the appointment of a Royal Commission, consisting of Parliamentarians and two or three experts, to go into the whole subject. For that reason, much as I appreciate the seriousness of the problem, I personally cannot vote for this motion any more than I felt able to vote for that of last session.

**HON. J. J. HOLMES** (North) [5.51] The mover said he had a pledge that he desired to live up to. I also have a pledge that I desire to live up to, and that is not to be a party to holding up the business of the Chamber. Accordingly, if nobody else is prepared to continue the debate, I am. The mover deserves much sympathy; in fact, he deserves to get somewhere for his determination.

**Hon. A. Thomson:** What do you mean by that?

**Hon. J. J. HOLMES:** That the hon. member deserves to reach some finality. He tells us that the year before last he lost this motion through its being counted out. Last year the House divided on it twice, and it went out. Since then there has been no alteration. The personnel of the Chamber remains the same, and nothing has hap-

pened to cause the House to alter its view on this subject. If a subject is dealt with by Bill, some finality is reached; but a select committee on an abstract motion means, in nine cases out of ten, that the report and the evidence go into the waste-paper basket and are heard of no more. A part of the motion to which I object is that which suggests the writing-down of the capital cost of the Government railways with a view to reducing the amount upon which the Commissioner of Railways is to be expected to find interest and running costs. There may be something in that part of the motion which refers to co-ordinating the different transport services and enabling the system to meet the competition of motor and other transport. However, I cannot support a motion which recommends the writing-down of the capital of the railways. If we can accomplish a writing-down at the Treasury in a legitimate and honest manner, I do not mind; but if the capital invested in our State railway system were written down as suggested by the motion the money would still be owing to the Treasury, and interest and sinking fund would still have to be found in respect of the total capital represented by the railway system, something in the vicinity of 30 millions sterling. While the mover wants the capital cost of the railways to be reduced, he also wants depreciation to be provided for; and I presume that the Commissioner of Railways, whom the motion seeks to benefit, will have the amount of depreciation added to the loss on the working of the system. Any attempt to provide depreciation on the system in a legitimate manner would probably astound the Western Australian people. Depreciation should have been provided from year to year, and the rolling stock maintained in good working order. If one travels from one end of the State to the other, one sees railway stations falling to pieces from the inroads of white ants and for want of attention and maintenance. Let me ask Mr. Thomson, through the Chair, who has been responsible for the building of all the non-paying railways that we have? The various Governments, one and all. One Government has been as bad as the other. On the eve of a general election those Governments, prompted by members of Parliament, and particularly by Country Party members, who in turn were prompted by owners of land on the suggested routes, proposed new lines. So it can be traced back first to the Governments, then

to parliamentarians seeking railways for their particular districts, and thirdly to land owners eager to obtain increased land values. If we want to make our railway system pay, we should compel people owning agricultural land adjacent to railway lines to put it to use. The Government have power to resume land. This House did what perhaps no one expected it to do—gave the Government a Closer Settlement Act that empowered them to take any land anywhere. To put land adjacent to the lines into use is one means of making our railways pay. Instead of building new lines, let us compel the owners of land adjacent to existing lines to put it into use. Let us abandon the foolhardy policy of building roads parallel to our railways and thus encouraging motor traffic to rob the railways of traffic.

Hon. A. Thomson: Do you not want anybody to come to the city?

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: This State has already spent 30 millions for the purpose of bringing people to the city.

Hon. A. Thomson: No, it has not.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Pretty well. If we have money for building roads, let us build them as feeders to the railway system, and not as speedways adjacent to lines for the purpose of robbing the system of traffic. Sir Edward Wittenoom referred to portion of the line from Geraldton to Perth as being a speedway. I think it is now a speedway nearly all the way from Geraldton to the capital. The policy has been to build railways out into the country, and then to build alongside those railways good roads suitable for any vehicular traffic. A little later the Main Roads Board come along and build a speedway along the railway in order to rob it of its traffic. The motion as it reads does not appeal to me, and unless it is amended I shall vote against it. A similar proposal to this emanated from the North-West as to the Wyndham Meat Works. I do not know what the capital of that enterprise is now, but I know it represents a tremendous amount of money. The proposal was to write down the capital to £200,000, reducing it by something like £750,000. With that recommendation of the select committee I disagreed, and my disagreement was based on the same grounds as those which compel me to vote against the present motion. In a minority report I stated—

I entirely disagree with the recommendation contained in the committee's report dealing with the Wyndham Meat Works. I am of

opinion that the capital account should not be written down, and that the interest thereon should remain as a charge to the general taxpayer of the country, in the hope that it will deter any future Government from embarking upon any commercial enterprise.

I shall say no more, except to emphasise the fact that I objected to the writing-down, and I object to this motion. The only thing it would accomplish is that it would relieve country members from having these monuments to incompetence in connection with the railways, pointed out to them by the general public as having been constructed for political purposes, and not for the advancement of the country. I oppose the motion.

On motion by Hon. G. Fraser, debate adjourned.

### MOTION—CORRESPONDENCE CLASSES.

#### *Postal Department's Regulation.*

HON. H. J. YELLAND (East) [6.2]: I move—

That all papers containing the representations of the Education Department to the Postal Department in connection with postal charges on students' correspondence be laid on the Table of the House.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to a report that appeared in the "West Australian" recently and which induced me to ask for the tabling of the papers referred to in the motion. The report stated that representations had been made by the State Education Department to the Federal postal authorities with respect to the letters sent by children to teachers or by teachers to children in the outlying parts of the State, under the correspondence class system. It has been customary for a child in the backblocks, for instance, to write a personal letter to the teacher and enclose it with his work, and for the teacher to enclose a letter to the child with the next batch of papers. The postal authorities investigated the practice and found that the personal letters came within the category of private correspondence, and, therefore, the ordinary postal rate should be paid. The whole question has been gone into, and the objection taken that, as letter rates will have to be paid on the correspondence, the extra charge will

have to be borne by the department. The amount involved will be between £200 and £250 per annum. It seems to me that the charge in question should not be borne by the department. At the same time, if the practice of sending personal letters is discontinued, it will take away from the child in the back country that personal touch, which can be gained only by means of the private letter sent by his teacher. It is the only personal touch that is possible in the circumstances. As the Postal Department has decided that the practice shall not be allowed, it means that the child, deprived of the personal touch that means so much, will be at a great disadvantage. The children are taught writing, reading and arithmetic with, perhaps, a little history and geography. Only the most rudimentary lessons are taught, but one of the greatest assets has been the personal touch between the child and the teacher. I can speak from my own experience, because in the earlier days I had two little girls who received lessons through the correspondence classes, and every month when the work was received, the children looked forward eagerly to the letter from their teacher. That letter was the greatest incentive to the children to do their work thoroughly. Under the existing conditions, if the teacher should write to the head of the house in the third person and say, for instance, in the note, "John's work is remarkably good and you can tell him I am very pleased with it," the communication could be posted at the lesser rate. On the other hand, if the teacher should write direct to the child and convey the same information, then the communication would become a letter, and ordinary postage would have to be paid by the department. The Postal Department only will benefit because of the additional expenditure of £200 or £250 a year, which the Government would provide if they are foolish enough to pay it. It will cost the Postal Department nothing extra, and they will receive that amount for carrying out exactly the same function. They will actually secure the additional money at the cost of the Education Department or at the expense of the interests of little children in the backblocks. The greatest loss will not be an intrinsic one, but that sustained by the little children, who do not receive anything like the same consideration as the

children placed in better circumstances. A mere regulation is made to prevent the postal authorities from extending the consideration I desire to the children in the outer parts of the State. That regulation is to stand paramount and be imposed to the disadvantage of the State and of little children. One can hardly imagine a Federal Department allowing, in this hard-hearted fashion, a regulation to be applied to the detriment of the rising generation. Pressure should be brought to bear on the postal authorities with a view to rectifying the position. The attitude of the Postal Department is petty and avaricious. Already the department can do the work without extra cost, and, merely for the sake of a few pounds, the State Education Department is to be forced to shoulder extra expense, or the little children in the country are to be robbed of the personal touch that means so much to them. This sort of thing shows the lack of co-ordination that exists between the efforts of State and Federal Departments. If such a regulation were to be applied to children in the city, especially to those in a city in the Eastern States, there would be an appalling outcry. The action taken by the postal authorities indicates an utter disregard for the uplift of the masses through the channels of education, and this is the only channel through which education can come to the little children I have in mind. I would remind members of what an eminent American student, Whittier, said when he wrote—

Man is more than Constitution,  
Better rot beneath the sod  
Than be true to Constitution,  
And be doubly false to God.

That is what is being done regarding the little children in the outback centres, when they are compelled to suffer because of a postal regulation.

**THE CHIEF SECRETARY** (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [6.11]: I have no objection to the motion. On the other hand, I am very pleased that it has been moved. I have the necessary papers with me and, should the motion be agreed to, I shall have much pleasure in placing them on the Table.

Motion put and passed.

## ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

**THE CHIEF SECRETARY** (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [6.12]: I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till Tuesday, the 15th August.

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 6.13 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly,

*Tuesday, 8th August, 1933.*

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

## ELECTORAL—SWEARING-IN OF MEMBER.

Mr. W. M. Marshall (Murchison) took and subscribed the oath and signed the roll.

## QUESTION—AGRICULTURAL BANK.

*Projected Royal Commission.*

Mr. MANN asked the Minister for Lands: Does he intend to extend the scope of the Royal Commission on the Agricultural Bank to that of other mortgagees?

The **MINISTER FOR LANDS** replied No.