

Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 26th September, 1916.

	PAGE
Papers presented	213
Question: Sewerage Filter Beds	213
Motion: Private O'Meara, V.C., Congratulations	213
Bill: Supply (No. 2), £848,000, all stages	214
Address-in-reply, fifth day, amendment	216

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

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the Minister for Lands: Amendment of regulations under "The Vermin Boards Act, 1909."

By the Minister for Mines: Statement of expenditure under the Mining Development Vote for year ending 30th June, 1916.

By the Minister for Works: Balance sheet, profit and loss account and trading account of the State saw mills for year ended 30th June, 1916.

QUESTION—SEWERAGE FILTER BEDS.

Mr. HARDWICK asked the Minister for Water Supply: 1, Have the Government taken any steps to remove the nuisance which existed last summer, caused by the filter beds on Burswood Island? 2, Has an extra line of pipe been laid for conveying the effluent into deep water? 3, If so, on whose recommendation was this carried out?

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY (Honorary Minister) replied: 1, Steps have been taken to improve the working of the system by construction of additional filters and alterations to the septic tanks, as recommended by Sir Maurice Fitzmaurice. 2, This is under consideration. 3, Sir Maurice Fitzmaurice.

MOTION—PRIVATE O'MEARA, VICTORIA CROSS, CONGRATULATIONS.

The PREMIER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [4.35]: I desire to refer to the second occasion upon which the Victoria Cross has come to a West Australian soldier. A short time ago we carried a reso-

lution congratulating Lieutenant Hugo Throssell upon his very great distinction. Now we have the case of Private Martin O'Meara, a member of the 12th reinforcements of the 16th Battalion, A.I.F., who has also distinguished himself, and as a result has received the great honour of having the Victoria Cross conferred upon him. Private O'Meara was engaged in the timber industry at Collic, and there won the esteem and respect of a numerous circle of friends. During August, 1915, he enlisted and, having come from Ireland to Western Australia—as his name indicates—full of the martial ardour for which the natives of that part of Great Britain are renowned, he went forth to do his duty on behalf of King and country with the stout determination to, if possible, win the war. I understand that he said to one of his mates that he would do his utmost to bring back the Victoria Cross to Western Australia. I am sure that we all feel great pride in the manly conduct he has evidenced throughout his military career. He ran terrible risks in order to bring in officers and men from no-man's-land during intense artillery and machine gun fire. Undoubtedly he saved many lives, and on one occasion he volunteered to carry ammunition bombs through a heavy barrage to a portion of trench being hotly shelled. He showed throughout that contempt for danger which has characterised so many of our Australian soldiers during the war. The least we as a State Parliament can do is to express our pride and tender our congratulations on an occasion of this sort. In doing so we do not detract from the quality of very many brave men's actions and services which have been and are being rendered day by day as the terrible conflict progresses. I believe there are hundreds of our soldiers who are entitled to this honour, hundreds whose actions would have been recognised had the necessary reports been sent in. Nevertheless, we are proud that on this, the second occasion during the present war on which the Victoria Cross has come to Western Australia, the distinction has fallen on the shoulders of Private O'Meara from the Collic district. I have pleasure in placing this fact on record, and I beg to move—

1, That this House desires to express its pleasure on learning that Private Martin

O'Meara has been awarded the high distinction of the Victoria Cross, and at the same time to place on record its great appreciation of Private O'Meara's merit and gallantry.

2, That the foregoing resolution be forwarded by His Honour the Speaker to Private O'Meara and to the Colonel of his regiment.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON (Guildford) [4.39]: I desire to second the motion moved by the Premier, and to endorse to the full the remarks he has made in connection with the success of this Western Australian soldier. We are all proud of the part the Australians are playing in the war, and delighted to know that their work is securing recognition from all quarters. On this occasion we are particularly gratified that this highest of all military honours should have come to a Western Australian private.

Mr. WILLMOTT (Nelson) [4.41]: I desire to say how much I, also, appreciate the honour that has fallen upon Private O'Meara. We are told that we must drive out from our breasts the spirit of envy, but probably there is none among us who does not envy Private O'Meara the great distinction he has gained.

Mr. A. A. WILSON (Collie) [4.42]: I desire to supplement the congratulations of the Premier, the leader of the Opposition, and the leader of the Country party to my fellow-townsmen, notwithstanding that he is an Irishman. I know Private O'Meara well, and I can say that a more manly and courageous fellow could not be found. Collie is peculiarly situated in having sent to the Front, in proportion to population, more men than has any other centre in the Commonwealth. Moreover the men of Collie who have gone to the Front are all good trades unionists. Private O'Meara was an excellent example of this. Next to his having won the Victoria Cross I am proud to think that he belongs to a trades union. On behalf of Collie, I thank the Premier, the leader of the Opposition, and the leader of the Country party for their praise of Private O'Meara. He deserves it.

Question put and passed.

BILL—SUPPLY (No. 2), £648,000.

Standing Orders Suspension.

The PREMIER AND TREASURER (Hon. Frank Wilson) [4.43]: I move—

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary to enable resolutions from the Committees of Supply and Ways and Means to be reported and adopted on the same day on which they shall have passed those Committees, and also the passing of a Supply Bill through all its stages in one day, and to enable the business aforesaid to be entered upon and dealt with before the Address-in-reply is adopted.

Question passed.

Message.

Message from the Governor received and read recommending appropriation in connection with the Bill.

Committee of Supply.

The House having resolved into Committee of Supply, Mr. Holman in the Chair,

The PREMIER AND TREASURER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [4.47]: I move—

That there be granted to His Majesty on account of the service of the year ending 30th June, 1917, a sum not exceeding £648,000.

In submitting this motion I have certain figures to give to the Committee relative to the present state of the finances, which necessitates the granting of supply. It will be remembered that before the seven-weeks adjournment upon the change of Administration a Supply Bill was put through which was to carry the Government on till the middle of the present month. I wish to point out that the expenditure up to date on account of Consolidated Revenue is £826,954. It is true that there is special expenditure under special Acts, amounting to £309,981, included in that amount; which leaves a net expenditure against authorisation of £517,973. The balance is £130,027. That is, the authorisation which was granted on that occasion has now been exceeded by £130,027. It will therefore be necessary to pass a Supply Bill immediately. This Bill

is only a supply against Consolidated Revenue. At the same time that we got supply previously, we obtained an authorisation on account of General Loan Fund. The authorisation, hon. members will recollect, on that occasion was £350,000. We have expended on account of that authorisation £113,958, and thus have a balance of some £236,000 still to carry on with.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON: Was not the authorisation for £450,000?

The PREMIER: No; £350,000. We do not require any further loan moneys at present, as we have sufficient to meet our loan expenditure for September and October; up to the end of October, at any rate. Therefore we do not propose to ask at present for a further supply as regards loan expenditure. It is necessary, however, that we should have a further supply of £648,000, which this Bill covers, on account of revenue expenditure.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON: To carry you on until when?

The PREMIER: For about two months. On the basis of last year's expenditure this supply now asked for will take us into the early part of November. It is exactly the same amount, the leader of the Opposition will see, as was obtained when the House adjourned some nine weeks ago.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON (Guildford) [4.50]: The Opposition fully recognise that supply must be granted to the Treasurer, but I think that to ask for two months' supply is going a little too far. In my opinion, it would have been wise on the part of the Government to ask for only one month's supply.

The Premier: This month is gone.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON: I am under the impression that the supply previously granted was to carry the Government on till the end of September. The Premier says, till the middle of September. It was, then, a two-months' supply.

The Premier: Till the middle of September.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON: This Bill takes us right on to November. Surely the Treasurer proposes to introduce his Budget and Estimates before the end of November.

The Premier: I hope so, but I cannot be sure.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON: When a long adjournment was granted in connection with the re-election of Ministers, we were led to believe that certain work had to be done and that Ministers desired time for the purpose of doing that work. One would have thought that the main consideration of Ministers would be given to what the Government were elected to do—namely, to straighten out the finances. Yet we find the Premier just drifting as he says the previous Government drifted. There is no indication that anything has been done towards straightening out the finances, other than that the Government have sacrificed a great deal of revenue—fully £100,000 a year. On the other hand, there has been no reduction of expenditure, and there seems to be no anxiety on the part of the Treasurer to introduce his Budget and thereby let the country know what he proposes to do in order to justify the change of Government. It must be borne in mind that the change of Government was, according to some newspapers, absolutely necessary to enable a new Administration to take office in order to straighten out the finances. Here we are to-day with no explanation of this Supply Bill other than the Premier's asking for two months' supply on the basis of last year's expenditure. There is no evidence whatever of any move having been made in the direction of reduction of expenditure. The Premier is asking for exactly the same supply as was required last year; and yet, in the face of that, he has sacrificed fully £100,000 per annum of revenue. If it was a policy of financial drift during the time Labour Ministers were on the Treasury bench, what is it now? One is at a loss to understand exactly where we are going to. If the Premier asked for a less supply, it would be an indication that he had got a grip of the position and was making an effort to reduce expenditure. But he asks for exactly the same amount as the extravagant, reckless, and irresponsible Government who have just gone out of office asked for; and he can give no indication of the date when he will introduce his Budget. I simply desire to take this opportunity of pointing out that up to date the hon. gentleman has utterly failed to do that which he pledged himself to do—namely, to straighten out the finances and

tell the country exactly what his financial policy is to be.

Mr. Angwin: It was two months' supply that was granted by the last Bill; not supply for a month and a-half.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON: Again, it would be as well, possibly, to anticipate the replies to some of the questions submitted by the member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen) this afternoon. While it is true that the Premier is asking for the full amount of expenditure on the basis of last year's expenditure, we hear from all quarters that there is a quiet, but none the less sure, policy of retrenchment in progress in the Government service. The member for Forrest has indicated one or two Government activities in which reduction of hands has taken place, and in which on one or two occasions small retrenchment has been effected. The member for Forrest has not mentioned the Railway Department; and yet in several branches of the railway service considerable numbers of men have been put off already. To-day we learn that quite a number of men with years of service in Government departments are approaching members to ask them if they cannot do something to protect these men against the policy of retrenchment.

Mr. Green: Circulars are sent to those men asking why they are not at the Front.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The men I refer to would not be accepted.

Mr. W. D. JOHNSON: The position is thoroughly unsatisfactory. I take it the only opportunity we shall have of ventilating matters will come when the Budget is introduced; and I hope the Premier will not wait until this supply is exhausted before bringing down his Budget, but introduce the Estimates at the earliest possible moment.

Question put and passed.

Resolution reported; the report adopted.

Committee of Ways and Means.

On motion by the PREMIER, resolved:—
"That towards making good the Supply granted to His Majesty for the service of the year ending 30th June, 1917, a sum not exceeding £648,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Western Australia."

Resolution reported; the report adopted.

Supply Bill introduced, etcetera.

In accordance with the foregoing resolutions a Supply Bill was introduced and, on motion by the Premier, read a first time.

Bill passed through the remaining stages without debate, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Fifth day—Amendment.

Debate resumed from the 21st September.

Mr. WALKER (Kanowna) [5.2]: It seems to me at the present time the whole world is in a throes of disorder in which all the very worst elements of humanity are manifesting themselves, and it does not seem to be confined to Europe; it seems to come nearer home, and we have had a specimen of it very recently in an appeal the Ministers have made to the country and in the present arrangement of carrying on the business of Western Australia. I submit we are in contact, not with these high and noble principles that are supposed to lead the parties under the free Constitution of Britain, but we are in a day of dishonour, if I may use the expression. We are subverting the ideals that should go to the building up of a great nation; principles are bought and sold in the public market when we are sent here not only for the purpose of advancing the welfare of our own constituencies and seeing to the needs and requirements of that part of the world over whose supervision we are granted a trust. But we are sent here to join in the councils of the nation, to build up the welfare of this State as it embraces every individual, every class, every section and every portion of the community. But we have seen the spectacle at a recent date of one section of the community saying we are here for hire, we are ready to accede to the highest bid, our principles, our services to the country, that high trust the people have imposed upon us is open for traffic, and whoever bids the higher price shall have us; and, as a counterpart, we have found another section of the community anxious for power as the Emperors of nations, merely anxious to rule to have a grip on the laws that guide the destinies of the country. They have been

equally willing in part to buy and in part, may I say, to sell themselves. We have in portions of this State those who are interested in one particular avocation, a very important avocation, an industry that is the foundation practically of the welfare of every State, that of agriculture. It decidedly is worthy of consideration, worthy of zeal in the pursuit of its interests.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It has received it.

Mr. WALKER: Worthy of all the aims and ambitions that come from the representatives of a section of the community calling itself an agricultural party. But even that section of the State has to remember that it is only a section of the State, that the persons occupied in agriculture do not comprise the whole people of the State. There are interests in common with others; but outside theirs having an independent existence which should be considered. And yet, we find the party willing to forego and forget every other interest if anything can achieve their goal, if only they can get what they want from the particular party in power. I submit this is a lamentable state of affairs. It is precisely that which is governing the nations at war to-day, to achieve power and dominion for themselves and let the struggling and helpless in national life perish, if needs be to trample them under foot so long as they can achieve their object.

Mr. Griffiths: How about your own party and the James Ministry?

Mr. WALKER: Did you ever find our party or any party in the history of the State so bidding for apportioning the State amongst themselves as the party sitting on the Treasury bench to-day?

Mr. Griffiths: Just the same as your own.

Mr. WALKER: There is no instance of a like character in this or any other State. There have been parties who have been struggling to achieve some great principle and who for that end may have allied themselves for the time being with the party which seems most likely to be with them, but they have not sold their principles in order to achieve that end. They have simply endeavoured to obtain their end from that source from which alone they could get it.

Mr. Griffiths: Your party got what they could for their own section and then cheerfully turned the Government out.

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member will have his own account to make when the next general election comes off. He, too, has sold himself, and I trust that when the ultimate test comes he will triumph over those who have been his detractors. But I am not speaking of individuals. I am speaking of the party who have put themselves up to the highest bidder and who have been bought, and who now are supporting the Government that has given them almost everything they have asked with the exception of dividing the country into constituencies and handing them over as rotten burroughs to the members of the Country party. To know these negotiations are possible is appalling. The members of the Country party at a recent conference wished that certain constituencies should be handed *holus bolus* to certain parties. The fact that they have come to such a decision shows how they have descended in the scale of honour in public life. We have this one fact staring us in the face, that the party of which I have been speaking arose to life for the purpose not of destroying the democracy of the country, the people's party, the party of toil, but for the purpose of humiliating and bringing from their lofty conceitedness the Liberal party, that is the conservative party in this State. The Country party was created to bring the Liberals to their bearings.

The Minister for Railways: They came to curse and remained to pray.

Mr. WALKER: They came to curse and you jumped on them, crushed them and lastly you bribed them.

The Minister for Railways: You should be ashamed of yourself for saying that.

Mr. WALKER: It is a fact that stares us in the face. Here was a party fighting the Liberals to win their seats.

The Minister for Railways: They are still doing it.

Mr. WALKER: These are their inconsistencies. They are Liberals now. They are supporting them and keeping them in power. They are one with the Liberals. The bargain was that there should not be any contests. It did not eventuate quite, but it came near enough. Certain portions of the State were to be mapped out for the Liberal party and certain portions for the

Country party, and the rest could go to his satanic majesty—precisely as if they were theirs in fee simple. This was the bargain, and no one can deny it. Can we say there are two parties when they divide the country between them with the understanding that there was to be no fighting henceforth. There is in the background an independent party of people, but I am not speaking of those. I am referring to those who made plans and drew up the schemes. Those are the people I am referring to in what I now say. At the present moment we know where we are. We have no longer to consider two parties and two sets of principles. We have to consider that we are faced with a position that represents the grab-all, the take-all, and the have-all that the country can produce. Let the toilers, the great mass of the population, the landless, and the have-nots, go utterly despised and neglected. We are in opposition now and we are fighting the forces of wealth and the grabbers for wealth. These are the people that we have in front of us. I am glad now that the line of demarcation is clear; we know for whom we stand and we know who stands against us, and who is opposed to us. Now I see the change, the deterioration, and the sinking back. We find the Government run on the lines of purely buying seats through political agencies. The spectacle we witnessed the other day at Canning was one that should bring the blush of shame to every politician's face. The hon. member opposite may well laugh. He is not guiltless of the same kind of conduct.

The Minister for Railways: What is that?

Mr. WALKER: Offering to the electors promises which could only be granted out of the public treasury with the hope of winning votes.

The Minister for Railways: I made no promise; it was you who went up there and made all kinds of statements.

Mr. WALKER: I made statements that I could stand by, statements that were the truth.

The Minister for Railways: No.

Mr. WALKER: Yes, every one of them. Was there ever a spectacle before of winning seats by the promises of bridges across the Canning River and the construction of tram lines everywhere? Is that the way to build

up a country, or to win an election? Is that a spectacle of which any hon. member, let alone a Minister of the Crown, might feel proud?

Mr. O'Loughlen: He said he would only advocate them.

Mr. WALKER: But he was in a Ministerial position; that is a mere subterfuge, a mere evasion.

Mr. O'Loughlen: But he escapes the responsibility.

Mr. WALKER: He escapes no responsibility. Those were the baits thrown out, those were the promises made.

Mr. Heitmann: They caught fish, too.

Mr. WALKER: What was the purpose of mentioning those bridges?

The Attorney General: You had the opportunity and the money to build them and you neglected to do so, instead of which you went in for State speculations.

Mr. WALKER: We had the power?

The Attorney General: You, yes; you had the power and the money and you squandered the money broadcast over the ocean. Now go on.

Mr. WALKER: The oracle has spoken; the marvellous Apollo of South Perth. We had what money?

The Attorney General: Why did you not contest the Canning seat?

Mr. WALKER: What a fool I would have been. Let me tell the Attorney General that if he wants to contest a seat, if he is so heroic, if he has such magnificent blue blood in that aristocratic heart of his, let him come along and contest my seat. That is the way to challenge another man. Could I stand up against bridges and tram-cars? Was it possible for me to stand up against all the beautiful glitter of his own motor-car? I display a little common sense in the choice of the constituency I want to contest. If the Attorney General is of the type that makes fighters, let him go where there is some risk to run, and that is to any of the goldfields seats. That would be a proper challenge for him to throw out.

The Attorney General: And I thoroughly believe I could win one of them.

Mr. WALKER: I believe that the hon. member believes that he could beat St. Peter for the position of gatekeeper of Heaven.

That is the conceit of the hon. member. He is a little man but the conceit is thick within him. It is a fact, though, that the promises to which I have referred were made, and that votes were obtained by such promises. The elections were carried on by buying agricultural constituencies, by reducing the freights on fertilisers, and by wholesale promises of further and more extended assistance to the settlers, which the Minister for Industries (Hon. J. Mitchell) knows the State cannot afford to grant, and at the same time maintain its normal present expenditure. All these things cannot possibly be done if the Government want to keep their accounts as flourishing as they have promised to do.

The Minister for Railways: Absolutely.

Mr. WALKER: Impossible. What chance is there of getting money in other directions? Has there been one single move that would save expense worth considering? Is it not a fact that at the present rate our deficit will be precisely what it was when the Scaddan Government were in office? Is it not going on at the same rate? Have we not had the spectacle to-night of the Treasurer coming down to ask for supplies, not as the leader of the Opposition put it, on a reduced scale? No; they were submitted precisely on the scale that was adopted when the Scaddan Government were in power. All this prating and shouting to the public, which the Ministry has been guilty of, what is it all worth?

The Minister for Railways: It cannot all be done in five minutes.

Mr. WALKER: Is there any sign of it? If the hon. member were there for five years it could not be done unless we got taxation, and that is the thing which the present Government would not allow us to do when we were in office. We asked to be permitted to make ends meet by fair and equitable taxation.

The Minister for Railways: If we get the revenue that you got, we can easily carry on.

Mr. WALKER: We have heard little else but that kind of talk. The hon. member in the administration of his department has already increased the cost.

The Minister for Railways: Have I?

Mr. WALKER: Undoubtedly.

The Minister for Railways: Do you know I have?

Mr. WALKER: Of course I know it. The hon. member has already established district inspectors and machinery for inspections all over the State. Is that not something of an increment of cost?

The Minister for Railways: Not necessarily.

Mr. WALKER: You cannot employ more men and spread the expense without increasing it.

The Premier: Do you object to it?

Mr. WALKER: I am not objecting to it, but I am showing the hypocrisy of the statements made by the Treasurer himself, and the Minister for Industries when they were before the country. They then promised all kinds of reductions and adjustments, but there is no sign of anything of the kind, nor even a sign of commencing. There are, however, signs of increasing expenditure.

The Premier: You were accusing us of retrenching a few minutes ago.

Mr. WALKER: I am speaking of what can be done in fair and honourable administration. But what has ever been the resort of the party in power, what has always been the case? It has been everlastingly to attack the man who is struggling for existence on a bare living wage of £3 or £4 a week. That is the man who is now being retrenched.

The Minister for Railways: No.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Yes.

Mr. WALKER: Has there not been any retrenchment?

The Minister for Railways: Not as many as you have put off.

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member knows that it was the policy of the Government in power recently to keep employed every citizen of the State.

The Minister for Railways: You did not do it.

Mr. WALKER: We did to the utmost possibility, that is to say, those who were capable of work. There were no unemployed.

The Minister for Railways: Were there not?

Mr. WALKER: No; they were absorbed in every possible way. What is happening

at the present moment? We have sent to the Front an enormous body of workers. I do not want hon. members to forget that the great body of fighters now in France and in Egypt are workers of the State; they are the men from the ranks of the toilers.

The Minister for Railways: Every man who is there is a worker.

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member knows the exact meaning of my words; they are workers in the sense that they belong to the unions of the State; they are toilers of organised labour in this State.

The Minister for Railways: Why set class against class?

Mr. WALKER: Why am I obliged to speak of class? Because it is that class that the Government seizes upon to penalise immediately they get into office; it is because the Government always select that class to practice its economy upon. It is because of the Government's cheeseparer applied to that class. Set class against class? Who is doing that? Those who are in power and who are ignoring this great body of men, and who are forgetting them and their services to the State, and who are putting any burden that is to fall upon the people, chiefly upon the shoulders of these people. The Government are setting class against class. My desire, and the desire of every member of this party, is to abolish all class, and to recognise as the noblest type of manhood that of labour, and the right of the toiler, to live upon an equality with all. Any of the wealthier at any time, by a slight change of fortune, may be back again in the ranks of the toiler. That is the object of our party. The Government are doing a little bit of retrenchment, are saving a mere scrap out of the workers, dismissing them on the railways, dismissing them from the implement works at Fremantle, dismissing them from the brickworks, from the construction of the Esperance line, dismissing them in other directions. I say there may be something in the way of economy in that direction. It will, no doubt, extend further as time goes on. The Government are young in office, not yet having felt their full grip at the present time. As time goes on, and we have seen from history what does happen in like cases, we shall find retrenchment and dis-

missal, and these economists will call upon the workers, the toilers of this State, the civil servants, but in the case of the last named only those who enjoy a certain rank and salary, to assist in their work of so-called economy. That is what we may expect, that is how we may expect them to effect their savings.

The Minister for Railways: One would think you had not gone out of office five minutes ago. Why did you not do all this for the workers when you had the opportunity?

Mr. WALKER: It is the undoing of what we have done that I am complaining of. In the matter of a little bit of fish they dare. In the matter of a butcher's shop they dare. In the big things, however, they dare not; they dare not touch them.

The Attorney General: You wait.

Mr. WALKER: Is that a prophecy that they will be touched?

The Attorney General: Wait and see.

Mr. WALKER: Does the hon. member intend to touch them? Does he intend to touch the State Steamship Service?

The Attorney General: They are all going to be investigated.

Mr. WALKER: It is nothing else but investigation.

The Attorney General: Nothing else. After you have been here it requires a lot.

Mr. Angwin: When you have been there awhile you will have to burn the result of your investigations.

Mr. WALKER: These are the claptrap phrases with which the hon. member tried to win over the thoughtless of South Perth, but they do not go down with common-sense people. Since he has been Minister the hon. member has sniffed his nose in every department with which he is connected, so that matters have gone on in such a manner that it is clearly proved that his administration cannot improve if he continues in office for all time. All this rabid talk about expense and orgies in administration is so much froth, intended only to delude the public. As a matter of fact, in every department the administration of the Labour Government, in the matter of the bare expense of administration, meant a saving in money. Expenses were reduced, departments were run more cheaply—that is absolutely true—

than ever before. I am speaking of the actual cost of administration. True, we launched out into new ventures, and it is those which hon. members opposite have made most capital out of. We introduced what they call socialistic ventures. I have heard people belonging to this immaculate party rail against socialistic enterprises. An hon. member on the Liberal side who, only the other night was speaking in condemnation of the Labour party's policy, said, "long life to that Government." I heard at a public meeting in one of the suburbs of the City a few days ago the same man froth at the mouth in condemnation of what he called, "Government ventures, Government enterprises."

The Minister for Railways: I should think so.

Mr. WALKER: He was the very man who fought tooth and nail in secret and in the open for a railway concession, a socialistic enterprise, in his constituency up as far as Lake Grace and onward, and he was a member of the party for which the Minister for Railways is promising to use the railways of the State in order to carry fertilisers for practically nothing.

The Minister for Railways: Why not?

Mr. WALKER: Because the railways are State enterprises, socialistic enterprises, and they involve the use of the property of the whole State in order to help a section of the State.

Mr. Griffiths: What about New Zealand and freights there?

Mr. WALKER: Hon. members want railway lines in agricultural districts. Who is to build them? The State is to build them. The State has to man them. The State has to lose money on them—

The Minister for Railways: No.

Mr. WALKER: For a time.

Mr. Griffiths: And the producer has to pay for them in the long run.

Mr. WALKER: I am not questioning that. Let the hon. member stick to the principle. He supported and believed in it. We cannot carry our railway lines up through the North-West, but we can carry an iron-moving transit vehicle from Fremantle up to the furthest port by sea. But

that is horrible. We give the North-West the same service by sea that we have carried on terra firma into the agricultural areas of the South-West. Where, then, is the difference?

Mr. Griffiths: Who is growling about that?

Mr. WALKER: Members of the Government. There is no consistency in this sort of thing.

Mr. Thomson: You introduced these steamers to reduce the price of meat, but failed to accomplish that.

Mr. WALKER: These steamers did help to regulate the meat price in Perth. They kept the meat price lower in proportion than was done in any other portion of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Griffiths: Is that according to Knibbs?

Mr. WALKER: Yes. Suppose the price of meat had not been kept down through the agency of the State steamers, will the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson) reproach the proper authors responsible for the rise in the price of food? Let him take the blame to himself. We had, when the Labour Government were in office, a measure at one time passed by both Houses of Parliament for regulating the price of food-stuffs—

The Minister for Railways: You have a Federal measure now in operation.

Mr. WALKER: During the war. The hon. member knows that the Federal and State measures are different things. What, therefore, is his object in interrupting unless it is to pull me off the track, or else to appear wiser than he really is? The hon. member knows that the two things are different, and that whilst we had a law in this State on the subject we could regulate the prices of commodities, and did so.

The Minister for Railways: What about wheat?

Mr. WALKER: We regulated more than the price of wheat. When we brought that measure up again, a measure which could apply to every commodity which is made use of by the consuming public—

The Minister for Railways: There were two prices, Federal and State.

Mr. WALKER: What happened? We had the management of our own State. It is the State's affairs we are sent here to exercise some judgment upon, and this was a State measure. It did not in any way conflict, of necessity, with the Federal measure. We are the people who ought to understand our own affairs, and ought to be conversant with our own requirements and our own needs. That measure was introduced into this Chamber and passed, but when it reached another Chamber, another branch of the same party now in office, another wing of the same conservatism, the measure was destroyed. It was lost in the Upper Chamber. It is to that, and not to the running of the steamers, that the people owe their sorrows and troubles in household management, and to that entirely. It is the inconsistency I am pointing out. When it is a matter of running a State saw mill it is execrable, it is unfair to private enterprises. If it is to supply every possible kind of machinery to help the farmer to grow wheat, the cry is, "Go on, that is all right." What I feel most about the matter is this: All the difficulties, all the real trials the farmer has had, it is said, originated in the Government who have just relinquished office. But, as a matter of fact, the whole principle of giving direct aid to the farmer to carry on, apart from the Agricultural Bank, originated with the Labour party. They gave the first help, and the chief misfortune that befell them in giving was that too many required help, more than the machinery at hand could help. And there were a few blunders, a few failures, a few mistakes, which were unavoidable in entering upon the work, in opening up a new channel, and in undertaking work of such variety and of such gigantic character. As soon as we got these things going we benefited those we kept upon the soil, and have supported even their wives and little children whilst they were struggling against the perverseness of nature. But, for all that, these are the people who turn ruthlessly upon us and take to their arms an enemy which at all times imposes upon them. These are inconsistencies which we meet with in politics in this so-called free country.

Mr. Griffiths: Is it not time you pulled the beam out of your own eye?

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member cannot accuse me of any conduct such as he has been guilty of. Suppose in the past right down to the very root of history we had this sort of thing, is it not about time we got away to something better? Notwithstanding the great industry, the perseverance and the everlasting devotion to study with the midnight oil of the member for York (Mr. Griffiths), may I give him a little grandfatherly advice, namely, to cultivate his own sense of justice a little more, and above all, learn to listen? I am complaining of the want of honour in our political life.

Mr. Griffiths: It is the same in your own political life.

Mr. WALKER: That does not whitewash anyone. It does not whitewash Mr. Monger.

Mr. Griffiths: It does not whitewash you.

Mr. WALKER: I do not need whitewashing. I am glad the hon. member feels a little what I am saying, feels the truth of it. I have no doubt that this ability he is showing to interrupt merely, and to destroy free speech in another, to block the right of utterance in opponents, will stand him in good stead the next time he is conferring with his brothers, with his party confrères; say, in the next conference at York. I have noticed that at his own conferences the hon. member is very humble, very quiet. It is only when he is here, interrupting me, that he shows spirit. I now enter upon another phase of our public life which one cannot but feel to be an unsavoury symptom of the times. We find all our Liberals in particular well to the front and shouting from the housetops admiration for the returned soldiers. I cannot help but feel that there is a good deal of public hypocrisy in the professions of preparation for the reception of the returned soldiers. What does it all amount to now? At the present juncture there is merely a fitful and feverish begging from the general multitude to help the men who have carried with them across the seas the destinies of our State.

Mr. Griffiths: Now you are on something good.

Mr. WALKER: I do not thank the hon. member for his compliments, or for his

rudeness, for his want of common, ordinary decency in a public building. If we had a Government worthy of the respect that one would wish to extend to a Government, Ministers would stand forward and abide by the pledge of earmarking public moneys for the purpose of seeing that every man coming back from the Front to this State meets with the reward, not merely of lip gratitude, but of substantial gratitude in the shape of provision for his future, in the shape of seeing that his future is assured. We have had any number of public meetings, any amount of limelight, and any quantity of taking round the cap until the generosity of the people has been blunted. We are wounding those impulses of benevolence, those desires towards charity, which in a normal community give aid to those who are deserving. On every possible theme about a dozen funds are constantly going, and all hands are begging with a species of intimidation. In our thoroughfares, in our homes, in our offices, in our public places, everywhere we go, it is beg, beg, beg. What is the effect of all this? The unfairness which always results from the existence of a Government like the one now in office. All the burden is put on the weak, all the stress and strain of aiding those who need consideration is thrown on those who, being big-hearted, have already almost exhausted their resources and must suffer loss by giving further charity and further help. That is what has happened. What is the course that should be taken? What we need to-day is that not only the Government of this State, but the Federal Government and all other State Governments, should establish a fund more sacred than all other funds, a fund to be earmarked specifically, a fund of sufficient dimensions to ensure that every man returning wounded from the war, or even returning here from the war in his full health and strength, shall never have cause to regret that he broke up home, sacrificed his dearest associations in life, and ruined all the prospects he had in hand, in order to answer his country's call. No such man ought to be left to say that when he had done his service he was thrown aside like a drained orange.

Mr. Thomson: Why did not you do something when you had the opportunity?

Mr. WALKER: We did something. We had our plans ready for the purpose.

Mr. Thomson: You should have done something two years ago.

Mr. WALKER: The war has been on for only two years. This is the kind of recognition of fact one gets. Apparently, one has no right to tell the truth.

Mr. Thomson: I quite agree with you that something should be done.

Mr. WALKER: Then why does not the hon. member spur on the present Government to do it?

Mr. Thomson: But you had two years.

Mr. WALKER: We did much in those two years. We had a two-years struggle, whilst we were anxious to do our utmost, and whilst we had a solemn pledge from both sides of the House that whilst this war was on, party politics should be sunk and the struggle for political power should be ended.

The Minister for Railways: Who broke that pledge?

Mr. WALKER: The opposite side of the House broke the pledge. There was continual vituperation and scandal-mongering and absolute falsehood from day to day for the purpose of besmirching our characters, ruining our reputations, and destroying our power for good.

Mr. Gardiner: I kept my pledge.

Mr. WALKER: I would not for a moment wish to associate the member for Irwin (Mr. Gardiner) with those remarks. I did not intend to include that hon. member in them. I know that hon. member has fought for the truce which should have been obtained for the purpose of enabling the House to give its best efforts towards conducting the war, so far as we in this Parliament were concerned in its conduct, so that we might draw up our plans calmly and deliberately, with our minds unperturbed.

Mr. W. D. Johnson: The member for Irwin was turned down for keeping his pledge.

Mr. WALKER: Undoubtedly. By every section of the Press he was called every reproachful name that could attach to a politician seeking to lead a party.

Mr. Foley: And one of the Liberals sitting here now was foremost in doing it.

Mr. WALKER: The conduct of members opposite, the method of their fighting, their absolute forgetfulness of the need for pre-

paration whilst they are crying from the house-tops, "Send recruits for the war," are absolutely astounding. They are even applying a mild form of retrenchment in order to compel men in the railway service to go to the war. But, whilst they are everlastingly applauding anyone offering any inducement to men to go to the war, and particularly the labouring section of the community, they take every possible advantage of the absence of those workers at the Front to push on their own political aims. To me that is a horrible thing. I am referring to the means adopted by members opposite to get into power, and possibly force an election when the great bulk of the worker voters, the Labour voters, are at the Front.

The Minister for Railways: Are there no Liberal voters at the war?

Mr. WALKER: There are a few; but out of every 20 men at the Front 19 are from the ranks of the workers.

The Minister for Railways: That is not so.

Mr. WALKER: Collie is almost depopulated.

The Minister for Works: You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Mr. WALKER: The bulk of the men from Western Australia who are fighting for this country and for the Empire are from the ranks of the organised workers.

Mr. Green: Hear, hear. It can be proved by figures.

Mr. Griffiths: Every country town in this State has sent from 200 to 400 men.

Mr. WALKER: Yes; and many of them are of the organised worker's class of which I speak. I include those men. From Kanowna every man fit for service has gone. Norseman the same. Kalgoorlie has sent its thousands. And the same applies to this city of Perth, as regards the ranks of the workers. I have no desire to lessen the heroism or the courage of those who do not pronounce the political shibboleth that I speak. I appreciate the sacrifice of every man who is at the Front at the present day. It is only those who take advantage of the absence of those men that I am attacking. I am proud of the men at the Front, whoever they are—whether they belong to the Liberal ranks, to the farmers, or to the ranks of Labour—who are risking life and limb, who are risking their whole future, who are willing

at any moment to give their dearest drop of life's blood for their country. I appreciate them; I honour them. But I do not like all these things to be made the stalking-horse for the limelight-seekers of a particular party.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): I think you are doing that.

Mr. WALKER: How?

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): By your recent utterances.

Mr. WALKER: I say, no. I say hon. members opposite are doing it in every instance.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): There has never been a more glaring instance of it than has occurred within the last few minutes.

Mr. WALKER: I say that when this war began there was a solemn pledge between both sides of the House, between all parts of the Chamber, that there should be a political truce during the continuance of the war. Let not that be forgotten. That truce was to last while the war lasted; all party aims and party purposes were to be sunk. The Labour Government came down with non-party measures which aimed at meeting the exigencies created by the war.

The Minister for Railways: What about the administration?

Mr. WALKER: The administration was on a par with the purposes of that non-party aim. But any excuse would serve the Opposition—a ship bought for the North-West trade, or a railway to develop an agricultural district. Any paltry excuse was good enough; anything was good enough to afford an excuse for breaking the political truce, a truce in which the sacred destinies of our Empire were involved. That is the point I make. Heaven forbid that I should throw a slur on any soldier who is now in arms for his country's cause.

The Minister for Works: Let it go at that, anyhow.

Mr. WALKER: What is the result of this limelight? What is the result of this determination to raise members' ire by a political warfare which this House has witnessed? What is to be the consequence? The only consequence can be to turn the people's faces away from the seriousness of the national situation. You are turning the minds of the people aside from the great

destinies that are in the balance in this great cataclysm of the nations and you are making people callous. This is the kind of conduct which is raising up an anti-conscription party.

The Minister for Railways: They do not take much raising up; do not apologise for them.

Mr. WALKER: I am not apologising for anybody. I am telling hon. members that while our minds should be united and our aims should be one, our purpose fixed in this great crisis, we are talking about such trumpery matters as steamships. I say that this Government has adopted a policy worthy perhaps of an unprincipled horde, but a policy calculated to create instincts not worthy of great, thoughtful, or serious men. I come now to another portion of their policy. Side by side with the promises which have been given to those who are prepared to offer the Government support is the policy of political revenge on those who oppose them. Those constituencies that promised support to the Government in power are to be given cheaper rates on the railways, cheaper travelling, cheaper fertilisers and concessions of all kinds. But that part of the country which has not supported the Government but has returned members on this side of the House to represent them, is to be penalised in every instance. I say that in that portion of the State where the Government did not get the political support necessary to the realisation of their ambitions, is to be penalised. And I say now that this Government has in project a measure ostensibly to do justice to all by giving us a new Electoral Act.

The Attorney General: We wanted one.

Mr. WALKER: Whilst they are ostensibly making a claim that they want just representation they are now hatching a plot for the purpose of depriving that part of the State which has never given them political support of political power. They are tinkering with the franchise on the goldfields. In several speeches which have been made of late, in the speeches at the Liberal rally, and in speeches delivered by members of the Legislative Council, by no lesser person than the Colonial Secretary, we have had it declared solemnly that there is need for a redistribution which will reduce the representation of the goldfields.

The Minister for Railways: Your Bill proposed the same thing.

Mr. WALKER: Our Bill was based on the principles for which we stand, and we proposed as nearly as possible to give one vote one value, giving to every individual citizen of the State equal power and no more than that in every portion of the State. In the measure we proposed we took into consideration distance from the capital and the accessibility of the Government, and we also took into consideration enormous areas requiring the attention because of their small population. These were the only variations from absolutely popular representation. What is proposed now? What is to be the direction for the guidance of the commission? Is there one member of that (Ministerial) bench who will deny that one of the chief desires is to reduce representation on the goldfields? Is it not desired to get in another sort of bribe to representatives of the party which sits on the cross benches? And I would ask those hon. members if it is not their desire to have greater political power than others? Is it not a fact that the metropolitan area where the population is largest will have its political power reduced? They shall be punished? The policy of dishing their opponents is being adopted by the Government now in power. That is the policy which has been adopted particularly in regard to the constituency which I represent. No sooner was the Government in office than the line which had been authorised by this House and by another House after the fullest possible discussion, after 20 years of advocacy and after repeated investigation, was stopped. This line had been passed, had been commenced, a few miles had been constructed. Instantaneously on the Government's coming into office—the Minister for Works had scarcely become seated in his chair before he wired "Stop the work; destroy that district"—for that is what it means. And some of those supporting the Government on the hustings at the recent election seemed to glory in that sort of thing. The Premier himself may be quoted as a fair sample of the gross misrepresentation on this subject indulged in by the Government. I will quote from a speech made by the Premier and similar language was

used by many other speakers, all of whom were swearing vengeance against this (Labour) party. The report appears in the West Australian newspaper of 18th August of this year. It states—

The Managing Trustee of the Agricultural Bank had declared that the holdings had no mortgageable value. It was the Labour Government and the Goldfields members and the *Kalgoorlie Miner* who had induced the settlers on to these lands. While the Government, through Mr. Walker, had promised to take over their wheat on the main road between Esperance and Norseman, though, so far as he could gather, not one whole bag had been taken over.

Mr. Collier: That is all lies.

The Minister for Railways: It is absolutely true.

Mr. WALKER: I will show the hon. member before I have finished whether it is true or not. I say it is absolutely untrue, and I shall show how it is untrue—

“When the whole file had been sent to

Mr. Walker”—

That is another mis-statement. The whole file was never sent to me, simply the report by Cook, Richardson, and Hewby, and it was on that that I wrote:—

When the whole file had been sent to

Mr. Walker, the member for the district, he had simply written laconically—

“Noted with disappointment.”

The impression which the Premier desired to convey was that I had noted the report on this land as to their being salt in the Esperance land with disappointment. But the truth is I had noted that report with disappointment, and I shall show the reason for it as I proceed.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. WALKER: Before tea I was pointing out how unfair and incorrect was the statement made by the Premier at the Liberal rally when he declared that the Labour Government was solely responsible for the settlement of the mallee country in the Esperance district. I propose to draw attention to the fact that long before the Labour Government were in office those who had been in possession of the Treasury benches for many years past had encouraged settlement in the Esperance district. They not

only accepted applications, but, so long ago as the very beginning of Responsible Government in this State, when Sir John Forrest was Premier, every encouragement was given to land settlement in that district, by the erection of public buildings, and the construction of wharves at Esperance, in addition to which a rough survey of a railway was put in the original maps of that period, and a definite promise given that the railway would be constructed. But I do not wish to go so far back as that. I propose to deal with the period when Sir John Forrest had left the active affairs of this State, and the succeeding Liberal Governments were in power. I wish to show the House that the Liberal Governments gave direct encouragement to settlement in the Esperance district. Mind, I do not blame them for it. They did the right thing. But, in order to score a point, they now make it appear that the Esperance settlers have been misled and duped into accepting homes in the wilderness. The Minister for Agriculture, and the Premier himself, say that the whole blame, if any, for the settlement of the Esperance lands rests with the Labour Government.

Hon J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): You never set an example by going there yourself; you went somewhere else.

Mr. WALKER: I do not see the point.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): You knew something better.

Mr. WALKER: Better than going to Esperance? I was not member for Esperance when I took up my land. Unlike the hon. member, I did not promise them a railway and then go back on it; I did not hold a seat on the strength of a promise of that kind, and then repudiate it, which was what the hon. member did.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): No; the fault was that I would not promise them.

Mr. WALKER: But you did promise them, and you did not perform.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): Never, and you know it.

Mr. WALKER: I know quite the contrary. In the middle of 1910, over 12 months before the Labour Government came into office, the Liberal Government had given encouragement to the Agricultural

Bank to make advances to settlers in the Esperance district. I have here on the departmental file a letter signed by the managing trustee of the Agricultural Bank, which reads as follows:—

Referring to my letter of the 24th inst., I have to inform you that advances will be made by this bank on lands suitable for agricultural purposes in the Esperance-Norseman district.

The Minister for Works: Suitable for agricultural purposes!

Mr. WALKER: What is the good of it if there is none such there? This is a letter of promise that the Bank will make advances. It continues—

Will you please observe that advances will only be made on areas which are considered large enough—

“Large enough,” is the limitation. The letter proceeds—

For successful farming. We are sending an inspector to the district at an early date to report on the land.

The Minister for Railways: No Minister's name is attached to that.

Mr. WALKER: No, it is the Agricultural Bank; but was not a Minister behind it?

The Minister for Railways: No, the Minister had nothing to do with that.

Mr. WALKER: Had the Minister ever anything to do with encouraging settlement in the agricultural districts?

The Minister for Railways: Yes, but not at Esperance.

Mr. WALKER: But on the lands between Esperance and Norseman?

The Minister for Railways: Certainly not.

Mr. WALKER: I have here a minute, a recommendation to Cabinet signed by J. D. Connolly, Acting Minister for Lands, as follows—

I recommend Cabinet to advise His Excellency the Governor in Council to approve of the vacant Crown lands in the Eucla division being thrown open for selection, as provided by Part 5 of the Land Act, 1907, and also Part 8 of the said Act, as amended by the Act of 1906.

That was in 1907. Now here is something over the signature of our friend, the Minister for Lands at that time, Hon. James Mitchell, as follows—

When at Esperance recently a deputation waited upon me and asked that the temporary reserve near Grass Patch be thrown open for selection. In reply I informed the deputation that the reserve would be thrown open, but that if there were any timber on it which ought to be reserved probably that would be cut out, and that it might perhaps be necessary to make some small reserves within the larger area.

The Minister for Railways: That was for travelling stock.

Mr. WALKER: Travelling stock! What other subterfuge? The Minister concluded—

Will you please have the necessary action taken in the matter.

That is our friend—throwing open Crown lands for selection! He now forgets what it was all about. Let me inform him how this matter came up and how the hon. member came to act in that way. He gives orders for the necessary action to be taken. Now I will show how the “Labourites” were at him. Here is a letter addressed to the Liberal, J. T. Glowrey, Palace Hotel, Perth, as follows:—

Dear Sir,—I have received a letter from James Lewis of Norseman Road. He states that he is personally known to you, and he wants you to do what you can to induce the Government to survey a few selections in that district so as to induce settlers to take up land there.

The Minister for Railways: We refused to survey.

Mr. WALKER: The letter continues—His request is a sensible and reasonable one, and I feel sure it will commend itself to you. Yours truly, G. L. Throssell.

The Minister for Railways: But I refused to cut it up.

Mr. WALKER: Nothing of the kind. Here is a letter addressed to the Minister, pursuant to that letter—

Dear Sir,—I herewith enclose you a letter which I have received from G. L. Throssell, Northam, also an extract from a letter by Mr. Lewis of Grass Patch, between Norseman and Esperance. I shall be glad to know if you can comply with Mr. Lewis's wishes. Some years ago I urged the Lands Department to survey a

lot of this land, as I feel sure it would be readily selected.

This was dated 22nd January, 1910.

The Minister for Railways: Before I saw the district.

Mr. WALKER: Every kind of shuffle! Mr. Glowrey's letter continues—

I trust you will see your way to giving instructions at an early date to have this important work put in hand. Yours truly,
J. T. Glowrey, Palace Hotel.

Along with that there was a very long report from Mr. Watkins, the surveyor, on the point. Finally, in pursuance of the same letters, the then Minister for Lands, Mr. Mitchell, in a minute dated 31/5/1910, gives order that the reserve should be thrown open for selection.

The Minister for Railways: Not surveyed though. That is a very different matter.

Mr. WALKER: Thrown open for selection.

The Minister for Railways: Yes.

Mr. WALKER: Another quibble.

The Minister for Railways: It is no quibble.

Mr. WALKER: Selectors are to go upon the reserve. The whole point is, who got the selectors down there? Who gave them the inducement to go there? Who took their cash, and who made the land available?

The Minister for Railways: You did.

Mr. WALKER: The hon. gentleman opposite knows that he is telling now what is not correct. He knows that for what he is saying now there is no foundation whatever in fact.

The Minister for Railways: I told the settlers not to go, and you told them to go; and they took your advice.

Mr. WALKER: Hon. members must know that immediately the Labour Government took office I visited that district for the first time, because it had only just become a part of my electorate. And I found waiting for me at Gibson's Soak, and at what is now called Scaddan, and at Grass Patch, enormous crowds of settlers.

The Minister for Railways: There were only 64 settlers in the district.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): Crowds, did you say?

Mr. WALKER: Crowds for that portion of the State; crowds as big as any to be got in the remote wheat districts at the present time.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): How many formed the crowds—three?

Mr. WALKER: Thirty or 40. There was quite that number at Scaddan and also at Grass Patch. We find, therefore, that Mr. Throssell, Mr. Glowrey, Mr. Mitchell, and other members of the Liberal party strongly supported land settlement in the Esperance district. Successive Governments have had placed before them reports on the matter—

The Minister for Railways: They have not.

Mr. WALKER: Reports of the strongest character in favour of the country. Dr. Harrison, who was the resident medical officer and magistrate for the district under a Liberal Government during a lengthy period, wrote a strong and conclusive report on the character of these lands so far back as the 15th June, 1905.

The Minister for Railways: In 1905?

Mr. WALKER: Yes.

The Minister for Railways: The Labour Government were in power then.

Mr. WALKER: Not at this time.

Mr. Angwin: Yes, they were.

Mr. WALKER: He gives a report describing the soil as light, sandy loam, slightly ferruginous, and with a clay sub-soil. He describes the country as being of the following character—

It is covered with small eucalypts here called mallee, though quite different from the mallee of Victoria. Very few of these trees require chopping before they and the small scrub intermixed with them could be rolled down with a heavy roller. There is no difficulty in getting a burn when this is done; and the natural grass then springs up immediately. I estimate there are at least 100,000 acres of this class of land, which should be sold in blocks of not more than 1,000 acres each at 6s. 8d. per acre payable in 30 years. This area has a rainfall of 16 inches at the 45-Mile, and of 15 inches about the northern end. It can be relied on to give one ton

of wheat chaff and 10 bushels of wheat to the acre.

The Minister for Railways: Dr. Harrison was a lot out, was he not?

Mr. WALKER: No.

The Minister for Railways: He was.

Mr. WALKER: The Minister for Railways gets very irritated, but he need not feel that it is necessary to stop me from speaking in order that he may make mistakes. I intend to proceed, and to show him, not the testimony of Labourists or of Labour men for political purposes, but the honest expressions of opinion of men on the spot and men capable of forming a judgment. Dr. Harrison says—

The salmon gum probably covers 200,000 acres, so that altogether a fair-sized province of 350,000 acres is lying idle and crying aloud for settlement. It is much better than a great deal of the land now being taken up along the Great Southern Railway. And if there were a railway from Esperance to Norseman every acre of the area would be saleable at from 5s. to 10s. per acre.

Such is the testimony of Dr. Harrison. He is not a miner, not a resident of the gold-fields, not a member of the Labour party, nor a member of the Labour Government.

The Minister for Railways: But was he a practical man?

Mr. WALKER: Just as practical as those who have given detrimental opinions concerning the Esperance lands. Dr. Harrison was on the spot and knew the facts of the case. Further he says—

Eventually this district with a railway to the port would be one of the largest wheat exporters in the State.

I mention this to show how unscrupulous, how misleading was the statement of the Premier, just like the present statement of the Minister for Railways.

The Minister for Railways: What is the matter?

Mr. WALKER: The statement as to the Labour Government having misled the settlers now upon the Norseman lands.

The Minister for Railways: You misled them all the time.

Mr. WALKER: That is no use, in view of this strong evidence; and this is not the only evidence we have. There is the testi-

mony of Mr. Johnston, the late Surveyor General. The present Minister for Railways apparently will say anything in order to escape his responsibilities and in order to heap contumely and reproach upon the heads of his opponents. It is not manly. That manner of controversy is not one which hon. members should follow—trying absolutely to deny one's own acts in order to bring reproach upon other people.

The Minister for Railways: I will show you presently how you are shirking your responsibility.

Mr. WALKER: I do not suppose that even the Minister for Works will doubt the honour or the capacity of the late Surveyor General.

The Minister for Railways: No one does.

The Minister for Works: Why do you pick on me?

Mr. WALKER: Because the Minister for Works seemed to sniff some rumour of salt and immediately paralysed his Works Department and stopped a necessary and authorised public work on that account.

The Minister for Works: What did Mr. Heenan tell me when he came up to see me?

Mr. WALKER: Let the Minister for Works tell us what Mr. Heenan said.

The Minister for Works: You know what he said.

Mr. WALKER: I know he said nothing to the detriment of that district.

The Minister for Works: You do not know what his crops were, anyhow.

Mr. WALKER: That may be. But if I went to any part of the world and told the people there what my crops in the wheat belt district, authorised and sanctioned by every member of the Country party and by Ministers themselves, had averaged for the last eight years, the people would say that the country was not worth living upon.

Mr. Hudson: They would say, to pull up the railway.

Mr. WALKER: Yes; immediately. I shall have something to say later about that matter. The Minister for Works surely does not want to attack a country of which he knows nothing.

Mr. Piessé: What about the half-million bags along that line this year?

Mr. WALKER: What about the hundreds of acres of rust in the best land of that dis-

trict this year? The hon. member knows that all round Geraldton and in the Greenough district and in my district—in fact, on my own land—there are lots of crops which promised 20 bushels to the acre and yet had not a grain of wheat in them.

Mr. Piesse: Nevertheless, 600,000 bags of grain were bagged and carted in that district last year.

Mr. WALKER: Every farm was not affected to the same extent—that is quite true. But when one takes a large proportion of farms which had a chance of getting a little, and a small number of settlers, the hon. member, as a fair man, must recognise that the comparison is not a fair one. Mr. Johnston, the late Surveyor General, and Mr. Muir, another authority of no mean character, and an authority whose honour and capacity no member would deny, say—

We may state that this large extent of wheat-growing country, some one and a quarter millions of acres, is the greatest area of wheat land, as far as we know, at present in the State in possession of the Crown with so good a rainfall.

What objection can be taken to that? Is not that testimony of some value? Did the Minister for Works consult these files before he stopped the Esperance railway construction? Did he look back in the files to see what support there was for the character of the soil?

The Minister for Works: Why are you picking on me?

Mr. WALKER: Because the Minister for Works, as head of the Works Department, is responsible for stopping the construction of that railway; and I ask him what grounds he had for that action?

The Minister for Works: Give me an opportunity, and I will tell you.

Mr. Hudson: The Minister for Works did not stop the work. He was told to stop it.

Mr. WALKER: Undoubtedly. I do not suppose he really did stop the work.

The Minister for Works: Yes; I stopped it right enough.

Mr. WALKER: Of course, officially.

The Minister for Works: Yes.

Mr. WALKER: The tap was turned off, as it were, by the Minister for Works; but

the instructions doubtless came from elsewhere.

The Minister for Works: That is possible. You know what Governments are.

Mr. WALKER: I know what Governments are, and I do not put all the blame on the Minister for Works.

The Minister for Works: I do not care whether you do or not.

Mr. WALKER: I do not care whether the Minister for Works cares or not. There is no love lost between us in the matter, and no faith wasted between us.

The Minister for Works: Not on either side.

Mr. WALKER: I have absolutely no confidence in the judgment of the Minister for Works where politics are concerned.

The Minister for Works: Now you have said that, get on with your speech.

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member before stopping the work never consulted those files; he had never seen the report of his own officers, or of the officers of the Lands Department, men of unimpeachable character who would not be guilty of misleading the Government. What report did the Government act upon? I want to draw particular attention to this matter. I have already shown that in 1910 the Manager of the Agricultural Bank gave a definite promise that he would make advances from the bank to agricultural settlers if they took up an area large enough. The area decided upon was not less than 1,000 acres in the block. Each settler must have 1,000 acres before he could expect to receive assistance from the bank. That was 12 months before the Labour Government came into office. When the Labour Government assumed office, we found that in the meantime the Minister for Agriculture (Hon. J. Mitchell), Mr. Paterson, Mr. Johnston, and Professor Lowrie had visited that district. The Minister for Agriculture on that visit should have paid some attention to the country and given some time to listening to what the settlers whom he found there had to report. Mark you, this was before the Labour Government came into office. He found settlers there and he made promises to those settlers.

The Minister for Railways: I did not.

Mr. WALKER: Why, you said so in that letter.

The Minister for Railways: Which letter?

Mr. Collier: He repudiates what he writes.

Mr. WALKER: I know he does. He went through that district just as a man might who wanted an excuse for condemning it.

Mr. Hudson: He was told by Professor Lowrie to stop and do his duty, or the professor would stay and he could go on.

The Minister for Railways: Nothing of the sort.

Mr. WALKER: I have heard that statement repeated more than once; but the Minister denies this just as he denies much that has been proved in the course of this debate. It would be stupid not to pay attention to what every settler along the line reports regarding that notorious trip done in the twinkling of an eye, and most of it, too, in the night time.

The Minister for Railways: That is not true. I was three days driving over the country. You went through by motor as hard as you could tear.

Mr. WALKER: I am not backing my opinion against the opinion of experts on this matter. I depend on the opinions of those capable of forming a judgment, men of experience. The late Surveyor General was capable of forming a judgment, and he did form a judgment. Those who were with the Minister in a minority were capable of forming an opinion and they formed one different to the hon. Minister himself as to the value of the land they went through so quickly and condemned. They were wonderfully observant, capable of judging, they were experienced in all qualities of soil; but the Minister and those with him never discovered any salt, never a grain of salt. I remember that during a debate in this House, whilst this railway was under consideration, the then Premier (Sir Newton Moore) apologised for the Minister for Agriculture.

The Minister for Railways: Nothing of the sort.

Mr. WALKER: The Minister cannot deny it. He can deny it, of course, but he cannot remove my conviction of what I heard. I was in the Chamber at the time and I

heard the statement. The Premier apologised for the Minister and said it was not necessary for an expert to report, or for people to live a long time in the district in order to tell the quality of the soil; they could tell it by noting the growth of the trees. Other members who were here at the time will remember that that was the apology made by the then Premier. The Minister came back to Perth and condemned the country—on what grounds? Not that there was salt in the soil, but that the soil would not hold water.

The Minister for Railways: No.

Mr. WALKER: That was the only argument, that the country would not hold water, the land was too porous, so much so that it would not hold anything.

The Minister for Railways: Who said that?

Mr. WALKER: The manager of the Agricultural Bank. You were with the party. They came back to this House and condemned that portion of the country because they wanted to relieve the Agricultural Bank of the responsibility of administration of affairs in that distant territory.

The Minister for Railways: No.

Mr. WALKER: That is the fact. Does not the hon. member remember in speeches delivered here the argument was used repeatedly that the land would not hold water, that dams could not be constructed as the country was so porous. What are the facts? There are dams there to-day holding as well as dams constructed in any part of the wheat country, and there is less loss except by evaporation. The land is good holding. It was another falsehood bowled out, and then what? Relying on that argument being the only one against the railway, that the country would not hold water, the Labour Government resolved to assist those settlers whom we found there, and who were there when we took office. We resolved to recommend the railway to Parliament.

The Minister for Railways: Who tested the holding capacity? We did; I never doubted it.

Mr. WALKER: Granted your Government tested the holding capacity; but that was the excuse against the railway, that the country would not hold water.

The Minister for Railways: By whom?

Mr. WALKER: By those in power before the Labour Government came into office.

Mr. Green: The Premier made that statement repeatedly.

Mr. WALKER: I know he did. I am surprised. I begin to doubt whether I am among men of intelligence or in some commonplace hotel debating club. What happened then? Our Government resolved that the settlers in the Esperance district should be treated on a par with settlers in other parts of the country. Surely there was nothing wrong in that! Surely they deserved some consideration for their great hearts, their strong character, in going out into the wilderness so far away from established settlement? Surely they deserved some recognition—and we resolved to give it. We recommended the railway and we got it; then we recommended there should be assistance rendered through the Agricultural Bank. It was then, at the last moment almost before our going out of office, that the Agricultural Bank sent down three men to make an investigation. It was no longer any question as to the water holding capacity of the soil. The question now was the quality of the soil in general. Those officers were Mr. Cook, of the Agricultural Bank, Mr. Richardson and Mr. Hewby. Then, for the first time, those men came back and made a report that the crops in the Esperance district had been a failure, that the yields had not been what had been expected and what should be expected, that in short such a yield year by year would not warrant any expenditure by way of advances to farmers. That might be all right if the application of the principle was general. Every hon. member knows that for the last two years in every portion of the State we have had unsatisfactory harvests. There are two or three hundred acres in one patch alone on my property from which we did not get a grain of wheat. Other settlers all around me were in like position, although at the beginning of the year by the abundance of moisture we had a prospect of a prolific harvest. Would we be justified in for ever condemning that portion of the State by stopping railway construction immediately because of that?

I ask why treat Esperance differently from what you do other portions of the State? There were other crops which were complete failures. The year 1914 was absolute disaster all over this State; not in one portion only but in every wheat-growing section of this State there was lamentable slump, and in some cases a complete failure. Are we to stop all public works, close up every railway and condemn the whole of our State on that ground? But that was the principle applied by the hon. member who has charge of the Public Works Department.

Mr. Allen: What about previous years?

Mr. WALKER: We had a succession of bad seasons as the hon member well knows. 1911 was a failure, 1912 a partial failure, 1914 a complete failure, and 1915 a partial failure all over the State. Are we then to stop all our efforts in consequence of that? Would the hon. member go upon the report of those three men whose object was to account for the bad harvest, who were trying to find an excuse for non-intervention by the Bank. The bank did not want the work. It had its hands full with the settlers in other portions of the State. There are farms upon farms everywhere deserted at the present time, and if it were not that the Government has come to the assistance of the farmers—our Government as well as others have helped the farmers in the late bad seasons—if it were not for that, I say, many more farms in the whole of the wheat growing districts would have been deserted before this. Did they give anything to Esperance? The help given was given in a bungling and erratic fashion. We had to work with an organisation that was unsympathetic towards that part of the State. Apart from everything else there are only two years of failures that hon. members opposite are relying upon, and those two years of failures were failures more or less everywhere. Yet on that they try to conjure up an excuse for refusing the assistance of the bank, and then they jump at the conclusion that it is essential to stop the work. Why? Because it was the work in the constituency of an opponent of the present Government.

The Minister for Works: Nothing of the sort.

Mr. WALKER: Undoubtedly. What grounds had the hon. member, then, for stopping the work?

The Minister for Works: You will know in good time.

Mr. WALKER: An eternity twice over would be required. The Minister for Works stopped the work with an impetuous and mad rush, as if he had been stung all his life by bees.

The Minister for Works: I was stung once very badly.

Mr. WALKER: And I have no doubt the effects are there still. The Minister had nothing on which to stop that work except the report of those three men, the representatives of the same institution that had previously condemned that country falsely. At first the bank authorities condemned the country because of the water. Now they had to find another excuse. This time they found salt. They did not find salt, but they had to get hold of Mr. Mann's report on the file, overlooking everything that had been said in support of the line. But they dropped across the analysis of the soils by Mr. Mann. What was that analysis? This was all that was found by the Minister and the Government, marvellous paragons of judgment and discretion—

The soils throughout are deficient in phosphoric acid, and like most of the soils of Western Australia, phosphatic manuring will be required to be a standard portion of soil treatment. Samples 1 to 3, 7 to 10, 12, 15, 18, 20, 21, 23 to 28—that is 18 out of 30 samples—exhibit an amount of salt which is in excess of that generally laid down as the standard of fertile soil, namely .05 per cent., and this is a somewhat serious feature in the soil.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Who selected the samples?

Mr. WALKER: They may have been taken from all parts of the salt lakes in the district. This was quoted by the Premier but what follows was never quoted by the Premier or the Minister for Agriculture and never quoted by the Minister for Works. It is a considerable modification from the pen of Mr. Mann himself.

Mr. Collier: They stopped dead in the middle of a paragraph.

Mr. WALKER: Yes, and that was sufficient to condemn the railway. Mr. Mann goes on—

It had to be remembered, however, that these were all virgin lands which had not been cultivated, and perhaps the salt might have become unusually concentrated on the surface of the soil, and with drainage and cultivation be sufficiently removed as to be no danger to the crop.

Mr. Munsie: Why did they not publish the whole of that statement?

Mr. WALKER: These are the methods used, not to crush the representatives of the last Government, but to crush a very big portion of the State and, inferentially, to damage the whole of the State itself. Could anything be more contemptible from men occupying the high and dignified positions of Ministers of the Crown to so lend themselves for the sake of political revenge to misquote from a report in the way that they have done. It is to me astounding. If one did not meet with these facts in actual life, it would be difficult to credit them. Here we have the suppression of one-half of Mr. Mann's report. Did the Minister for Works have that in his possession when he stopped the construction of the line? Surely to goodness this is no warrant for stopping an important public work. But let me show hon. members further the unfairness of the Government towards the Esperance district. They accused us—and it went the rounds of the Press, and every Liberal journal in the State copied it—that we deliberately suppressed these facts. Mr. Mann himself admits that there are different estimates as to the capacity of the soils to carry salts. He admits that here are authorities holding other opinions as to the exact degree of salt in the soil which vegetation will stand. This admission was suppressed by the Government. But we are accused of suppression. Hon. members may think it is a glorious triumph to use these tactics to attain to power to accuse people of the crime of which they themselves are most guilty. Such a thing is an act either of cowardice or of something worse. There has been no suppression of facts on this matter on the part of the Labour Government.

The Minister for Railways: You never suppressed anything.

Mr. WALKER: I will admit that the only temptation I ever had to suppress anything was to suppress the hon. member, but unfortunately the fates have been against me. From the very days these reports were received they were put upon the Table of the House and they were on the Table during the progress of all the debates on the Esperance railway question. They were on the Table not only of this House but also on the Table of the other House. During the debate in the Legislative Council the then Colonial Secretary gave a report of his own personal inspection of the country, and he is by no means inexperienced on such matters, and he also gave all the evidence up to the point available, pro and con. He also had in the vestibule of that Chamber the whole of the samples which were referred to. All the samples analysed by Mr. Mann were there. Can hon. members credit, after having taken these extreme pains to give the facts that we should be accused of suppression? We are accused only for political ends and by contemptible methods. I say, too, that the evidence of Mr. Mann himself is such that it shows the poor mental calibre of the representatives of the Agricultural Bank, who gave the report, when they had to rely upon one portion of Mr. Mann's statement to condemn that part of the State, and to deliberately suppress the other. When the Minister for Works took his drastic and erratic course—

The Minister for Works: There was nothing erratic about it; it was intensely business-like.

Mr. WALKER: Bee-like and most erratic.

The Minister for Works: I can start it again as soon as I get the word to do so.

Mr. WALKER: I advise the Minister for Works and the Attorney General to run in double harness.

The Minister for Works: We would make a good pair.

Mr. WALKER: Undoubtedly. The hon. member's vanity is marvellous. If he was taken at his own estimation the world could not buy him. He is all brag and empty boast. Let him be judged by his work and not his speech. What he did at Esperance was the work of a madman not of a genius. Here

is what an officer (Mr. O'Brien) says, and this, too, is on the file—

The conclusions I arrive at from the above are—the quantity of salt in our soil samples compares favourably with “the limit of endurance for wheat” given by the American authorities, and a few samples are down to and below the standard adopted by the Government Analyst, Mr. Mann. To this must be added the fact that hay and some wheat have been grown on the mallee belt.

If salt were there it could not grow.

In salty soils so much depends on the quantity of moisture and other conditions that it seems to be impossible for anyone to say how much salt between .03 per cent. and .05 per cent. wheat will stand in different parts of our agricultural areas.

This was what Mr. O'Brien had to say on the subject.

Mr. Collier: He is a better authority on this subject than Mr. Mann.

Mr. Munsie: Mr. Mann does not say there is too much salt there to grow wheat.

Mr. WALKER: I have a report sent to me to-day by the kindness of the Minister.

Mr. Munsie: A reporter in the office to get the information.

Mr. WALKER: This was sent to me to-day and is from Mr. Sutton. If I had been called upon specially to exercise my authority to permit to go on or to stop important public work affecting so many lives and destinies of people as this railway in Esperance, I should have consulted the best authorities available in Perth itself before I took action.

Mr. Collier: Men whom they pay for such advice.

Mr. WALKER: Yes, and who are experts capable, or should be capable, of giving advice.

Mr. Collier: But they called in a political supporter from Northam.

Mr. WALKER: Here is what Mr. Sutton says—

There is evidently a very firm belief that the disappointing results obtained by the settlers during the past four years are due to the injurious quantity of salt in the soil. Though it is possible that the failures may be due to this cause, yet I personally am not at all convinced that such is the

case, for the evidence supporting it is too meagre. Such a conclusion is based upon the assumption that soils containing more than .05 per cent. of salt are infertile. It is, however, by no means certain that such a conclusion is the correct one, and it is upon this point that I wished to consult Professor Paterson, because of his special knowledge of soil chemistry. He has confirmed my opinion that to fix a standard of .05 per cent. as being the limit of endurance for cultivated plants is an arbitrary and unsatisfactory one to take.

There is nothing in that by which to condemn this side of the House and for the Government to exult upon their perspicacity.

Mr. Collier: That is the wheat expert employed by the Government.

Mr. WALKER: Mr. Sutton goes on—

He informs me that an American investigator has found that it is only when soluble salts present in the soil are in the form of carbonates that .05 per cent. is the limit of endurance, when soluble salts are in these forms, that is chlorides, the the limit of endurance; when soluble salts high as .25 per cent.

There is no quotation of that by the Ministers.

Mr. Collier: Not a word.

Mr. WALKER: It is all suppressed. The public has been given none of this.

The Minister for Railways: You knew your files well.

Mr. WALKER: All that is in favour of Esperance is deliberately put out of sight, a mutilated quotation of Mr. Mann's is given to the public, and we are accused of suppression of facts.

Mr. Collier: On the eve of election, too.

Mr. WALKER: These are noble tactics.

Mr. Munsie: This is as near to the truth as they are capable of getting.

Mr. WALKER: Mr. Sutton says—

In the analyses under discussion the salts are calculated as chlorides, not as carbonates. It is therefore obvious that the standard of .05 per cent. is not a reasonable one, and is an unsatisfactory basis for such a belief as the one referred to.

The Minister for Railways: What date is that?

Mr. WALKER: The 4th August, 1916.

Mr. Angwin: Cooke's report was referred to Mr. Sutton.

Mr. Collier: You had it at the time you stopped the line.

Mr. WALKER: They could have got it. They had Professor Paterson, Mr. Sutton, the Commissioner, and other authorities who knew their subject.

The Minister for Railways: Mr. Sutton is not a chemist.

Mr. Collier: Are you going to deprecate Mr. Sutton's qualifications?

Mr. WALKER: They would condemn anything. They would damn the Esperance railway with anything. There is no getting over this statement. The hon. member cannot answer it.

The Minister for Railways: Could I not? we will see.

Mr. WALKER: Mr. Mann says—

Evidence that the crop failures are not due to the presence of salt, is furnished by the fact that the crops at the 30-Mile are just as poor as those at Grass Patch where the rainfall is lower, and in consequence where salt is likely to be more prevalent, and also by the fact that an application of superphosphate makes a marked improvement in the crop.

These are statements upon fact.

The Attorney General: The leader of the Opposition said they had no fertilisers.

Mr. WALKER: They have not had a fair supply of fertilisers. Some of the men have been shamefully treated. Take the case of Mr. Townsend, and he is not the only one who has been badly treated in this respect. The quotation I am giving goes on—

My observation and experience indicate that the discouraging results are just as, or more likely, due to one or more of the the following facts: 1. Unsuitable and primitive methods of cultivation.

He puts that first and I stand by it. I know their methods are not up to date, and that in itself is quite sufficient to explain the paucity of the crop returns. Then he continues—

2. Unsatisfactory sequence of the rainfall.

The third reason he gives is another important explanation. It is quite sufficient to account for any failure of the crops. It is—

3. Defective clearing mallee shoots, and 4, poverty of the soil.

The Minister for Works: It looks as if the wrong class of man has been sent down there.

Mr. WALKER: There may be wrong classes of men there as there are in other parts of the State. There are men who took up farming who were not qualified for it, but they have to buy their experience. There are some men on the Ministerial benches who have had some experience in that respect. But that is no ground for condemning it.

The Minister for Works: No.

Mr. WALKER: Then why does the hon. member condemn it on such slight evidence as shown by the Agricultural Bank report? This should be known about the district—remote from every possible markets, miles and miles away from railways, right out in the bush, and the worst kind of bush in a mallee scrub, these people are seeking to carve out their homes. Anyone who knows anything about the mallee country knows this: that it is not a poor man's country, that it requires a very stout heart to battle against the difficulties of nature, more so than in any other portion of the State. It is not a matter of cutting down a few bits of scrub, and clearing, leaning scrub against trees and watching it burn. It is a case of getting rid of these roots of mallee in the soil which stick there after the fire has passed over and then start up in growth as prolific almost as if the original growth had not been touched. It was in this country amid these mallee roots, without the necessary implements of agriculture to stir the soil that these men had to make their experiments towards getting a crop. Can we wonder that there was a failure? Could we expect a prolific harvest?

Mr. Hardwick: Too much salt.

Mr. WALKER: Too much stupidity over there. These interjections have no value to a debate which has the interests of the State involved in it. Can we expect other results than these? Here it is admitted by the agricultural expert, the Commissioner for the Wheat Belt, that the land is improved by the application of phosphates. But these settlers have not been able to obtain them. Ten or eleven pounds a ton it costs for delivery and

the farmers have had to go a two days' journey in order to get a small supply. I know farmers, and Mr. Townsend was one of them, who went on the promise sent by wire and by letter, that the fertiliser would be in Norseman for delivery at a certain date. They went out, but there was no fertiliser there. They went again a fortnight later and still there was no fertiliser there. A third and fourth time they went, but there was no fertiliser there.

Member: When was this?

Mr. WALKER: Recently.

Member: What about the Industries Assistance Board?

Mr. WALKER: Neither the Agricultural Bank nor the Industries Assistance Board has ever shown any sympathy for the Esperance land, they have never paid more than the slightest attention to that portion of the State. The people there were forgotten, their hearts were broken; and the last and final stroke was when the Minister for Works stopped the construction of the railway for party political purposes and no other.

The Minister for Works: Nothing of the sort.

Mr. WALKER: The whole of this file shows that the reason given was merely a fallacy and an excuse.

The Minister for Works: There was no party purpose in it at all.

Mr. WALKER: The file shows it was fallacy and excuses upon which he acted.

Member: They would have been better off if they had never gone there.

Mr. WALKER: Never mind how much better or worse off they might have been; the railway was started, and if there was any doubt, inquiry could have been made and it would have been removed. What is the position now? The Government is acting merely upon doubt. They will probably say, "It is all right, we are only going to have an inquiry." Inquiry here, there and everywhere. That is the whole of the Government policy, they shunt their responsibilities.

Member: That is only what a business man would do.

Mr. WALKER: If every business man delegated all his responsibility to irresponsible committees, conferences and delegates,

where would he end? That is not the way business men act. They look to the facts and themselves take the responsibility; they do not pass their responsibilities on to others. The present Government accepts no responsibility. They stopped this work before making inquiry. With the material on hand they could have carried the line at any rate as far as Gibson's Soak, or perhaps a little further.

The Minister for Works: We had 10 miles of rails and 17 miles of sleepers.

Mr. WALKER: You could have gone as far as Gibson's Soak with the material on hand; but instead of going on with the construction, as could have been done even while the inquiry was proceeding, they stopped the work and one of the excuses is that they have stacked and stored the material. They dismissed all the workmen and sent away all their officers; and if the work is to be recommenced all that expenditure has to be incurred again. Those are the business men of the Ministry in power! It would have cost nothing more to have continued the construction of the railway pending inquiry as far as the material on the spot would have allowed construction. But to have done this would not have given the Government the opportunity of pointing at the Labour Government and saying, "What horrible people those are, they suppressed the facts about the salt in the soil; see how courageous we are to stop the line."

The Minister for Works: What would you have done in the circumstances?

Mr. WALKER: If I had doubt I should have said I have no justification for stopping a work that has been authorised after repeated investigation by Parliament itself. I should have put in hand construction as speedily as possible as far as the material on hand would allow, and I would have instituted inquiry.

The Minister for Works: I take the responsibility.

Mr. WALKER: Of course you do. What does it matter who suffers by it.

The Minister for Works: Not you.

Mr. WALKER: Nobody suffers but the people of Esperance, and they cannot hurt the hon. member or any member of his Gov-

ernment; they will not cause the hon. member to lose his sleep.

The Minister for Works: You need not worry; they are not opposed to us.

Mr. WALKER: They are his political opponents.

The Minister for Works: That is why you sent one of them to see me.

Mr. WALKER: Mr. Speaker, I sent this man to see the Minister just as I would send any other of my constituents.

The Minister for Works: Why did you not come yourself?

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member told me that it was no use. Am I to waste my breath when a Minister tells me it is no use?

The Minister for Works: You told me you had another engagement and asked me if I would see the man by himself and I said yes.

Mr. WALKER: I tried to make another appointment with him for myself alone. He told me it would be no good. My time is too valuable to waste on the hon. member. If the hon. member is capable of reasoning, all the evidence was before him. They had the previous reports by the officers of the Agricultural Bank who had made an investigation, that the land would not hold water. Did he inquire whether the water in the dams was salt? If there were salt in the soil obviously the water would not be fresh. Their own testimony denies their action. The water in the dams is fresh. So far as I am concerned, it would not surprise me if they did find a little salt in some portion of the land. There is not a part of our country free from salt. There is salt in parts all over the Wheat Belt. Are there not portions of the Wheat Belt which would not grow a shrub because of the presence of salt in the soil? There are miles on miles of country between Kellerberrin and Northam and further eastward where not a blade of grass will grow, and not a shrub can flourish because of salt.

Member: There is salt water running east of Northam.

Mr. WALKER: Undoubtedly. On the same grounds upon which the Minister for Works stopped the construction of this railway he could shut up the whole of the Wheat Belt.

The Minister for Works interjected.

Mr. WALKER: That remark is better suited to a tap-room than to a House of Assembly. I know country in the vicinity of Quairading and Kunnunoppin—the member for Toodyay (Mr. Piesse) will know that district—where in the course of half a mile you can get absolutely salt water and good wheat yields.

Mr. Gardiner: You can get salt water almost anywhere on the sand plains.

Mr. WALKER: Undoubtedly, you can get salt water anywhere. And yet one part of the country is boosted by the Government and another part is condemned for the same reasons. I want to know what the Government is going to do, and what the members on the cross-benches intend. Will they tolerate this invidious treatment of one portion of the State? I repeat that the settlers in the Esperance district were induced to go there on the strength of promises made as far back as 1910 and further. Every Government which has been in power induced people to go there; but immediately the Labour Government came into office we fixed a reserve for selection along the whole length of the proposed route for the railway. Inside of that reserve we stopped settlement. It is now proposed that we shall have a commission. I interjected the other evening that before this commission commences its work there should be added to it an expert on soils and someone who knows something about mallee country. In my opinion, it would not be inadvisable even if the Government were to bring over from the Wimmera or Pinneroo country, an expert who knows something about mallee country in Victoria and South Australia similar to that of the Esperance district. I have here an extract from a newspaper in the form of a letter which I commend to the consideration of the commission. It is headed "Esperance lands," and is signed "J. S. Crawford." Mr. Crawford is a surveyor. He says—

I notice that the executive of the Farmers and Settlers' Association suggests that the commission appointed to inquire into this question should have as members an agricultural expert and an analyst. These additions may be necessary, but I should have much more confidence in the commission's report if its members comprised

gentlemen with some knowledge of the working of mallee lands in the Eastern States in the earlier stages of settlement, or if evidence concerning such were obtained from old Victorians or South Australians. As far as I know, there are only a couple of holders of land at Esperance who know the Wimmera lands thoroughly. From an experience of the early settlement of the Wimmera mallee, I am certain that if the rainfall records of the Esperance district are correct, the capability of the land to grow wheat successfully when fertilisers can be obtained at a reasonable cost is beyond question. The reported salinity of the land is, I contend, not borne out by the surface water, and is less than in most of the Wimmera mallee, where it was very difficult to get fresh water in some districts. I am prepared to give evidence on the subject before the commission, as I feel sure that up to the present time the Esperance mallee has not had a fair trial.

I commend that letter to the commission and suggest further that there should be on the commission itself a representative of the mallee country; that is one who knows something about the character of the soil in regard to which the commission is to make investigation. When I asked the question the other evening whether an expert and a mallee settler were to be appointed on the commission I was told no, that their place would be to give evidence. Everybody who knows anything about commissions of inquiry should know what kind of evidence is to be looked for, and how that evidence is to be obtained. A man who knows the mallee country would be of assistance. I am not going to say one word against the personal character of the members of the commission. Mr. Dempster I know to be an up-right and honourable man, but I question if he knows anything about mallee farming, and he has to get the evidence out about the mallee farming. How can that be done unless there is someone on the commission who is competent to ask questions on the subject? With all due deference to the members of the commission it is a farce, and whether or no, there is no justification for stopping the railway until they have made their investigation. The country that will

grow rich mallee scrub cannot be saline or poverty stricken. Vegetation itself would not grow there if the country were as salt as has been reported. Everything is present to refute the statements of the Government, yet the railway must stop as a punishment to the Labour party. The Government must sneer at the constituency that has the temerity to elect a Labour representative.

Mr. Thomas: Do you think that is the reason?

Mr. WALKER: What else can be the reason?

Mr. Thomas: Surely politics have not descended to such a depth?

Mr. WALKER: In some parts of the world politics are as low as the warfare of the Huns.

Mr. Thomas: Not on this side of the House, I hope.

Mr. WALKER: Furthermore, if the land from Esperance to Norseman were saturated with salt so that everything was prevented from growing, the railway itself would be a necessity. It is part of the natural requirements of the goldfields of this State. Those great centres of Kalgoorlie and Boulder and the centres further north have a right to an easier approach to that part of the coast. Moreover, for the purposes of defence the line is necessary. We cannot foresee what may happen after the war is over. There are other reasons besides the character of the soil for stopping the construction of the line, and the action which has been taken would not be tolerated in any other part of the Commonwealth—the people would be up in arms against isolation such as that. The people down there have borne their burden for many years and trusted to the fulfilment of the promises made from the days of Sir John Forrest up to the present time. Now the severest blow of all has come. The suggestion has been made that these people should be removed from that part of the State and settled somewhere else—a sort of suggestion that we are to still further deplete the population of that place and to make it impossible for them to have a voice in asking for the development of it.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: An Act of Parliament is worth nothing.

Mr. WALKER: The authority of the State, the command to build this railway, has been frustrated by the fiat of a Minister just new to office. Under these circumstances I ask the Government whether they are going to reconsider their position—whether they are going to keep that work hung up, or whether they are going to complete it. Shall I be put to the necessity of asking every hon. member of this House to vote honestly on this question?

The Minister for Works: They all voted honestly before.

Mr. WALKER: But if it is a matter of ousting the Government, they will prefer to vote with the Government in order to keep them in and not fight as they fought before on this question. If there be no matter of party politics in it, they may vote as they previously voted. That would be what I would call an honest vote—a vote not dictated by either party in the House. That is the kind of vote that I have a right to ask should be taken on this question. Will the Government give me an opportunity of obtaining the direction of the House in regard to this matter? Will the Minister for Works allow that course to be taken?

The Minister for Works: I will give you the facts.

Mr. WALKER: We know what the hon. member's facts are. The facts which I have submitted cannot be disputed and I ask, upon those facts, will the Government allow a vote to be taken without attaching to it any party significance? Every hon. member should vote as he feels on this subject.

The Minister for Works: The Government cannot stop them voting as they want to on this question.

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member must admit that he has done a deed which is reckless, daring and unprecedented in the history of Government—a deed which was rash and wanting in common sense.

The Minister for Works: I am sorry I do not agree with you.

Mr. WALKER: A deed which is damaging even to the country itself.

The Minister for Works: I do not admit even that.

Mr. WALKER: A deed that will brand him for ever as willing to sacrifice a whole

district in order that he might revel in a few political puffs of pride.

The Minister for Works: Again I would like to agree with you but cannot.

Mr. WALKER: The district is not a small one. Its extent is over two million acres.

The Minister for Works: It will be treated fairly.

Mr. WALKER: Yes, but when? From to-night? From to-morrow or when?

Mr. Allen: You had five years in which to treat it fairly.

Mr. WALKER: We tried to put them on an equality with others. We endeavoured to put the settlers down there on the same footing as the settlers elsewhere.

Mr. Smith: Why did you not build the railway faster?

Mr. WALKER: We could not get the material and we had to build the railways in the order in which they were authorised by Parliament. To delegate such an important question—a research of that kind—to three men with special attainments, means that Parliament counts for nothing. This has been done for political purposes.

The Minister for Works: It has not.

Mr. WALKER: Then let us have an assurance.

The Minister for Works: Yes, when it is necessary.

Mr. WALKER: It is necessary now. The people down there are suffering from the action of the Government.

The Minister for Works: That is your opinion.

Mr. WALKER: That country has been kept back and checked too long.

The Minister for Works: If you had not squandered a million and a half they might have had a better chance.

Mr. WALKER: So that is the excuse then, is it? It is not the soil now. The Government do not want to construct that railway so that they might build other works in their own constituencies. I repeat what I said at the commencement, that it is the result of that part of the State returning a Labour supporter. The whole thing is a slander on the State. It is a publication to the world that we are farcing with our land—that we are playing with the people's destiny. It is a method of falsely advertising

to the world that we have an enormous bulk of our country a desert—that is is not fit for people to live in. What the East said only a few years ago that we have no land whatever in this country fit for cultivation or farming—that it is all sand, is now being supported by the action of the present Government. That view had been dissipated and we had shown by actual facts that it was not true. Now from our own citizens comes the accusation that this enormous area—practically a State in itself—is useless and valueless as a waste, and that it is fit merely for the habitation of the dingo and the wild beast.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [9.15]: I have listened to the hon. member on this question of Esperance lands for the last four hours and I venture to say that such an exhibition has never before been made in this House. If the hon. member had had a case of any sort to put up he could have done it in the course of a few minutes. The building of the line has been temporarily suspended because the Government found on the file a report which raises considerable doubt as to whether people can profitably live on the mallee land of Esperance. The hon. member knows that if this line is not to be built eventually Parliament must be consulted and the Act rescinded. And, representing this district as he does, and knowing the settlers there, he must know what their experiences have been, and whether or not their crops have been profitable. He would have us believe that the Esperance mallee land is Western Australia. I may tell the hon. member that I shall be delighted if we find that the Esperance district is capable of being profitably farmed. The belt of country extends, not only north and south, but east and west for probably a couple of hundred miles. If this land is good we will certainly open up a very large tract of country by extending the railway east and west for over 60 miles.

Mr. W. D. Johnson: We heard this from you four years ago.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: And you'll hear it again to-night.

Mr. W. D. Johnson: Why did you stop the railway?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I propose to show that the hon. member who has just sat down has related scarcely a single fact.

Mr. W. D. Johnson: He read your minutes.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: He may have misread them. I will show from the files that Mr. Mann is the only scientist who has been consulted about this soil, the only man capable of expressing an opinion on the subject. He is a specialist, a chemist, but Mr. Sutton is not. Mr. Mann was consulted in 1912, and the Government in power ever since then have never taken the trouble to verify or refute his report. I will show that of 128 samples of soil tested, 98 contained more than .05 of salt. Mr. Mann definitely asserted that this made the question of settling these lands hazardous. In 1912 he recommended the making of experiments with a view to testing the country, yet the late Government, although so anxious to settle this portion of Western Australia, did not act upon that report.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: The settlers are satisfied.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I am going to show that Mr. Mann's report was suppressed, deliberately suppressed by order of a Minister.

Mr. Collier: You cannot.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I will show that the settlers on the Esperance land asked for it but did not get it. I will show that it was determined that this information should be kept confidential, and I will show further that the crops grown in Esperance have fully borne out Mr. Mann's statements in regard to salt. Hon. members opposite have had authority to build the line ever since early in January of 1915, notwithstanding which they have not built two miles of it.

Mr. Collier: You know perfectly well that rails could not be obtained.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: They have not built two miles of the line. They have neglected this district all the time. Will they tell me that if they had desired to advance more money than was advanced they could not have done so? The member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker) quoted largely from Mr. O'Brien's report. But Mr. O'Brien is not

an authority on the subject. He is a skilful engineer, but he does not pretend to do more than criticise Mr. Mann's report.

Mr. W. D. Johnson: Mr. Mann's analyses were right, but his conclusions were wrong.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Mr. O'Brien merely quotes a Californian authority which he got from an encyclopædia. Mr. O'Brien's opinion ought not to weigh with the House. No matter how clever an engineer he may be, he is no better qualified to express an opinion on the Esperance soils than is any member of the Chamber.

Mr. W. D. Johnson: We would all prefer his opinion to yours.

Mr. Collier: Mr. O'Brien is a thoroughly capable officer.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: When these interjections cease—

Mr. SPEAKER: There are too many interjections altogether.

Mr. Collier: There was a long string of interjections when the member for Kanowna was speaking, but no notice was taken of them.

Mr. SPEAKER: The member for Boulder is not justified in making that remark. It is a reflection on the Chair. If the member for Kanowna had protested he would have been protected. If I were to suppress all interjections, it would be unfair to the House, but members will realise that continuous interjections are not criticism. They merely embarrass the member addressing the House and confuse his remarks. If any member asks for my protection he must have it.

Mr. W. D. Johnson: The Minister did not appeal.

Mr. SPEAKER: Yes, the Minister appealed twice. I do not wish to prohibit interjections, but I desire to give the hon. member an opportunity of addressing the House.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I wish to know why a competent analyst was not asked to either confirm or refute the statement made by Mr. Mann. It is useless to submit to other than an expert a question which is essentially one for an expert. Mr. Mann, a trained analyst, had these soils sent up by Inspector Middleton, and tested them himself.

Mr. Hickmott: Does vegetation, trees, bushes and the like, grow on the land?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes; mallee grows on the land.

Mr. Hickmott: Then wheat will grow.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: This land crops very poorly. The hon. member knows that trees will grow on land that is too salt for crops.

The Premier: The hon. member must know also that some vegetation grows in the sea.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Mr. Mann, in his report, said that the land was rich in humus, very good in lime, good in potash, but poor in nitrogen, and that its great fault was that it had too much salt. If land rich in these plant foods were not troubled with salt, or something of the sort, we should have a very much better crop from it. Out of 30 samples 18 contained a quantity of salt which Mr. Mann said was in excess of that laid down in the standard of fertile soil. He said further that he had tested 128 samples, of which 98 contained salt above the limit of safety, whilst only 32 were below the standard. He said also that he tested the subsoil with the same result, and that these results confirmed his suspicion that the country generally is salt. Mr. Mann was very definite in all those statements.

Mr. Gardiner: I seem to remember that Mr. Mann was very definite when he went Home to revolutionise whisky distillation.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Mr. Mann said that the standard which he adopted, namely, .05, was the same as that used in some of the Eastern States, and had been generally confirmed by the experience he was able to gather in this State, and also by some experiments conducted a few years ago. He said it was true the experiments were not as complete as he could have wished, but that it was surprising in a country such as Western Australia, where salt is an important factor, definite steps had not been taken by the Department of Agriculture to confirm results. That was in 1912, and we do not know the result even to-day. Mr. Mann said there was every reason to believe that .05 was a reasonable standard, and remarked that although it varied very considerably from others to which he had referred, those others, in many instances, had been framed in countries having a much greater rainfall than our own, and having

that rainfall spread over a greater portion of the year. He urged that a low standard must be adopted here owing to the long dry summer, which would lead to the concentration of the salt in the surface layers of the soil. He repeated that the settlement of the Esperance land must be considered hazardous, unless its adaptability for wheat growing was proved. No one has disputed the correctness of Mr. Mann's analyses. Indeed no one could do so, for the simple reason that no one with sufficient experience to make the test has ever been consulted. We are dealing with half a million of money in this light fashion, but as responsible men let us take the opinion of the only man who has been consulted. I am just as anxious as any member of this House to see the railway built if this land will grow wheat.

Mr. Underwood: None of it will grow wheat.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I am also anxious to see that these men are not kept on the land if they cannot make a living upon it.

Mr. Underwood: What does Mr. Sutton say?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: If they had come to me and I had been in the position of Ministers in 1912 I should have had these experimental tests made as was suggested. Ministers neglected their duty over all these years, and allowed the people who are down there to go on with their work believing that the country would grow crops, although Mr. Mann says very definitely that it is very doubtful whether they will or not. No matter what late Ministers may say about making this report public I say that no member of the House knew of Mr. Mann's report being made at the time. It was clearly the duty of Ministers to have brought this report before the House, and members should have been told that Mr. Mann had put in this report.

Mr. Green: I read it on the Table of the House myself.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: If the hon. member did so he should have informed other members.

Mr. Green: There was plenty of stuff there to refer to.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: His duty was neglected. He allowed us to face

the question of building the line, knowing that there was considerable doubt as to whether the land would be good or not.

Mr. Green: Mr. Sutton's testimony upsets that.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: No, it does not.

Mr. Green: He is an authority as an agriculturist. The other man is not.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Mr. Sutton is a good practical agriculturist, but at Mr. Mann's work Mr. Sutton is no good at all.

Mr. Gardiner: Mr. Sutton would know how much salt wheat would stand under certain conditions.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes. I will show the result of the tests which have been made. I wish the House to know all that there is to know.

Mr. Angwin: You expected us to read through all these papers.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The hon. member wishes to attach blame to members because they did not read through all these papers. The House has a right to expect to be informed upon all that which members know regarding every proposal for the expenditure of money, particularly in connection with the building of railways. The responsibility was with Ministers, and they should have informed hon. members.

Mr. Angwin: They were informed.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: They were not.

Mr. Munsie: The Colonial Secretary in another place read Mr. Mann's report to the House.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The report was dated 17th June, 1912. On the 5th August, 1912, the secretary of the Goldfields Esperance Land League wrote to the Minister for Lands as follows:—

I have been asked at a meeting of the above league to request that you have sent (for publication) to the League, any reports of your officers recently obtained in connection with the Esperance and Fitzgerald districts, the results of analyses of soils, or anything of interest for publication.

They evidently were suspicious. What happened to that request? Hon. T. H. Bath minutes to the Under Secretary:—

Will you please ask the Commissioner for the Wheat Belt whether it would be advisable to make known the information regarding the analyses of soils in these districts at the present juncture.

Mr. McNulty says to Mr. Sutton—

Will you please express your views?

Mr. Sutton replies—

Please inform the hon. the Minister that I think it would be better if full reports could be made available.

Mr. Mann's report is full enough, in all conscience. Mr. McNulty then writes—

I heard incidentally yesterday that the Mines Department officials have submitted to the Minister for Mines some voluminous information concerning the Esperance district and its agricultural possibilities from a water supply and other standpoints. This, I understand, is regarded as confidential, and that this is in the hands of hon. Mr. Collier. I would suggest that nothing of the matter on this file be published in the meantime, and that a copy of the above report should be obtained for the information of this Department.

Mr. Bath then says—

I will speak to the hon. Mr. Collier on the matter.

Mr. McNulty writes again to the Minister for Agriculture—

As soon as you deem it advisable to make these reports available, I think Mr. Sutton should be given an opportunity to digest them.

The Minister for Mines again is written to. I do not know if he is Acting Premier or not—

Have you reports in hand as mentioned on previous page? If so I would be glad if you could see your way clear to make them available for perusal.

Mr. Collier replies to the Minister for Lands—

Reports herewith. I think the information should be regarded as confidential for the time being.

It has really been kept from the public until now.

Mr. Taylor: When was that?

Mr. Angwin: In June, 1912.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: This deals with matters relating to what occurred from the time when the application

was made by the League for Mr. Mann's report.

Mr. Taylor: When was the first time that the report was presented?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Mr. Collier's report is dated 27th September, 1912. To most men it would appear strange that all this time has been allowed to elapse without the slightest attempt at an experiment upon the country, and that men have been allowed to go on all this time without being told that this report exists. I have here some interesting figures.

Mr. Taylor: Do you believe that the settlers did not know of the existence of that report?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I am sure the hon. member did not know.

Mr. Taylor: I did not.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Then how could he expect selectors to know? This district has been helped to the extent of £14,000 by the Agricultural Bank, and the Seed Wheat Board. This money has been advanced for clearing, seed wheat, superphosphate, and for various other purposes. I have here a report that will interest hon. members very much indeed. It shows that although the Government have not made experiments, experiments of quite a satisfactory character have been made by the farmers themselves, and I will show with what result. We were told by the member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker) to-night that the land had been badly worked. I have here reports from the bank inspector of the district, Mr. White. I will read this, as I think it is advisable the public should know of it—

The 1912 crop was in the greater number of cases drilled in on land which had been previously cultivated with a light disc cultivator. Subsequently most of the crop was put in on land which had been ploughed, whether treated as fallow, or simply ploughed up and put in. Most of the fallow and ploughing generally was done at a shallow depth, say from three inches to four inches. Up till 1914 very little cultivation was done on the ploughed or fallowed land prior to seeding. After this year (1914) most of the fallow land was well worked. In

1914, practically one half the crop was sown on fallow land. In 1915 nearly 25 per cent. was put in on fallow. In cases where the disc cultivating plough was used to fallow the land, and it was afterwards cross-ploughed with the same implement, rather better results were obtained.

Then he refers to the sucker trouble. He says that the land has been fallowed and well worked 'under the most approved method. In nearly all cases superphosphate had been used to the extent of 50 to 60 pounds per acre. We were told by the member for Kanowna that fertilisers were not used. Let us see what the result of all this has been. In 1912 the yield was 4 bushels 15lbs. of wheat, 7 cwt. 37 lbs. of hay. In 1913-14 4.6 bushels of wheat, 6 cwt. 12 lbs. of hay. In 1914-15 2.75 bushels of wheat, 5.22 cwt. of hay. In 1915-6 they had 6 to 7 bushels of wheat and half a ton of hay. This result was achieved with some of the land fallowed and practically the whole of it fertilised. Here are tables showing the crops for the years 1912 to 1915 inclusive. This is upon land which has been fallowed and worked and fertilised. Will hon. members bear that in mind? Although the country has not made experiments, experiments have been made. This information should have been given to the House when the Railway Bill was submitted. Hon. members voted because they did not know the position. In 1915 the area stripped in one case was 30 acres and the result was 90 bushels. Then we have 40 acres for 120 bushels, 35 acres for 500 bushels, which was apparently the best ever grown. Then we have 10 bushels to the acre from 53 acres, where the ground was well worked and well fertilised.

Mr. Taylor: On the new areas?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: On the mallee belt.

Mr. Angwin: The report came in in 1915. It should have been introduced here previously.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Here are more figures. Thirty five acres produced 14 bushels to the acre, 53 acres produced 10, 80 acres produced 12, 90 acres produced 4, 26 acres produced 2, 86 acres produced 5, 75 acres produced 5, 73

produced 4, 140 produced $7\frac{1}{2}$, 60 produced 4, 100 produced $7\frac{1}{2}$, 150 produced $5\frac{1}{2}$, 77 produced 6, 60 produced 4, 145 produced $5\frac{1}{2}$, and 70 produced 9. I would like hon. members to realise that this is the fourth crop sown on this land, and that the inspector's report pointed out that at least a fourth of the land was well worked and fallowed and practically the whole of it was sown with fertiliser. Ministers knew this when they made their statement. When the leader of the Opposition spoke he must have known this, and the member for Kanowna must have known it, because the late Government advanced for fertiliser and seed. I have no wish to deceive the House or even endeavour to sway the opinion of the House unduly. I wish the House to know what the position is, and I think every member will agree that this is the correct attitude for the Government to take up.

Mr. Taylor: You do not always do that, though.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: So far as we have information, we always give it fairly and honourably to the House. It would be an unworthy Minister who would suppress information. Going back to 1912, it will be seen that returns are down to three bushels, with one of nine bushels. The crops were very bad indeed. It has been said that certain pastoralists want this land for stock; but everybody knows that there is not a vestige of grass, and never has been, in this mallee country except when the land has been improved. Even at Grasspatch, which is a favoured area, there are few milking cows and very few sheep.

Mr. Taylor: How did Grasspatch get its name?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is the grass patch of the district. I ask, in view of Mr. Mann's report, in view of the fact that the test has been made by the farmers and the land found wanting, was it not the duty of the Government to hold up the construction of the railway pending further inquiry?

Mr. Hickmott: In the Eastern States there are tens of thousands of acres which have not given greater returns than these. I have been in the mallee myself for years. I can prove my statement as to returns by scores of people in this State.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: But even the interjector will not say that if one cannot do better than has been done in the Esperance district one should go on farming in that area.

Mr. Angwin: Most of those years quoted have been bad years.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The mallee country of the Eastern States, so far as I know it, is much heavier than the mallee country here.

Mr. Hickmott: For 10 years my average in the mallee country was not more than $4\frac{1}{2}$ bushels to the acre.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I do not think the hon. member will argue that railways can be constructed in country whose production is not greater than I have shown. At any rate, it is the duty of the Government to let the House know what the position is regarding the land before proceeding with the railway. The expenditure on the railway would be large, and a good deal of money would have to be spent on the port. The amount involved is practically half a million of money, and we are also dealing with the lives of some farmers. There were 64 farmers in the Esperance district; there are now 23; but they have to be considered. If the returns are as shown by the figures in these reports, we have no right to keep those farmers there.

Mr. Green: You have always been against this railway.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I have always been perfectly honest in my opposition, and I am endeavouring to be perfectly honest and fair to-night.

Mr. Green: You opposed the Esperance railway at Northam because its construction meant opening another port.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: If I were as petty-minded as the hon. member, I might have such thoughts. However, I certainly went to see the district with an open mind, so far as the land is concerned. I say unhesitatingly to-night that if it is a question of diverting the trade of the district from Western Australia to South Australia, I am not going to throw away any Western Australian trade. If the member for Kalgoorlie (Mr. Green) is willing to throw away the trade, if he is willing to deprive men here of work in order to give that work

to men in the Eastern States, let him do it. I will not do it.

Mr. Green: Now you are showing your nature.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Let me come to this report. Every step the Government take is misrepresented. We have appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the Esperance lands. What else could we do, in all the circumstances? We have selected Mr. Dempster, of Esperance, who is known to be favourable to the construction of the railway.

Mr. Munsie: And has also publicly expressed an opinion against it.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: That is a bare assertion, and I will venture to take the liberty of saying I do not believe it.

Mr. Munsie: I do not care whether you believe it or not. It is a fact, all the same.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Here is a letter from Mr. Dempster, dated Esperance, 13th May, 1912, published in the *West Australian* of the 21st May, 1912. In this letter Mr. Dempster takes Mr. Marwick, Mr. Lynn, and Mr. Sommers to task for having publicly expressed opinions adverse to the Esperance railway. He declares emphatically for it in this letter.

Mr. Green: What does he say?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is a miserable thing to be in a House where members will doubt one's word. At this late hour, I am not disposed to read the whole of the letter.

The Premier: Oh, read it.

Mr. Green: Read the whole of it. Do not read it as you read Mr. Mann's report.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: As regards Mr. Mann's report, I did not read the signature, nor the few introductory words; but I read every word of importance. The hon. member interjecting can himself read the lot. I protest against the hon. member's suggestion. I read every word of the important parts of Mr. Mann's report. Why cannot we be treated as honest in this House?

Mr. Green: The member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker) proved that you omitted vital portions of Mr. Mann's report. Vital portions were omitted from the report as pub-

lished in the *West Australian*—omitted by your Government.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is a sorry thing if the business of the country is to be carried on by men who behave as the member for Kalgoorlie is now behaving.

Mr. Green: It was a political job.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I am afraid the Esperance line has always been a political job. The line will cease to be a political job only when it is finished. However, it will never be finished by our opponents, because, when they build it, its usefulness will cease, so far as they are concerned. I will read the concluding part of Mr. Dempster's letter.

Mr. Green: Read the lot.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The hon. member himself can read the lot. The letter concludes—

Generally I wish to express my disapproval of these would-be politicians who would lock up a country that should be carrying its hundreds of thousands of population, because the opening up of the port and the construction of 126 miles of railway may interfere with the vested interests of Perth and Fremantle.

That is Mr. Dempster.

Hon. J. D. Connolly (Honorary Minister): The chairman of the commission.

Mr. Green: That condemns your attitude.

The Premier: But it proves you wrong, anyhow.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Mr. Dempster ever since, when talking with me, has expressed his belief in the Esperance district, and has denounced the party with which I am connected for opposing the construction of the Esperance railway. That is one bogey disposed of. Another bogey was that the Government wanted the land for pastoral purposes. The land will not carry a bandicoot; it never has carried a hundred sheep. Next we have Mr. Padbury, of Toodyay, absolutely independent and quite capable of judging whether or not this land is good, a gentleman quite capable of getting and weighing evidence.

Mr. Green: Have you a Labourite on the Commission?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: We have Mr. McDonald. I do not know what his politics are.

Mr. Green: And yet you talk about spoils to the victors.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Mr. McDonald is an officer of the Taxation Department, a man of vast experience in land. He has been an inspector of the Agricultural Bank, and has valued land for the Taxation Department. He has farmed. He is an unbiassed, independent man who would give an independent judgment. I doubt whether a better selection could have been made for this Royal Commission. Then, I promise hon. members that the Royal Commission have unlimited scope to inquire and report, and are not influenced in even the slightest degree by the Government. I shall be delighted if the enquiry proves satisfactorily that the land is good.

Mr. Green: You will.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I know the member for Kalgoorlie cannot understand what it is to be honest.

Mr. Green: I cannot understand your being honest.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The hon. member cannot understand anyone being honest; but I assure him that I am honest. At any rate, that is the position; these are the men who form the Royal Commission. As regards the attack on the Government by the late Attorney General, who railed at us for 3½ hours, I cannot be expected to remember much of what he said. If we were as he painted us, we would not be fit to remain on this bench.

Mr. Taylor: Have you any idea when the Royal Commission will report?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I have not. They must, of course, have their own time for inquiring and reporting. As regards the strictures of the member for Kanowna, I believe that we are far more fit to be on this bench than the hon. member ever was. The question of the Esperance lands has always been clouded. The question is kept alive for political purposes, and regardless of the interests of the men on those lands—there is no doubt about that. I was asked to make a visit to the district, and I did so. I went through the district; and, of course, when I did so, the *Kalgoorlie Miner*

and other papers of that ilk said that I had already determined against the Esperance railway. I made the visit, and I spent three days with a Mr. Johns, the coachman who drove us through. He was subsequently interviewed by the *Kalgoorlie Miner*; I do not mind that.

Mr. Green: The fairest paper in the State.

Mr. Taylor: Since when?

Mr. Green: You ought to be over on the other side of the Chamber. You have been casting slurs from this side all night in favour of the other side.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I was accompanied by Mr. Lewis, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Thomson, and I went through their properties. All three gentlemen were on good country, Mr. Rogers on salmon gum. I told them definitely, and in a manner which provoked hostility, that I would not recommend the construction of the railway, on the ground that I did not think the country justified it. I was abused by hon. members opposite from the moment I expressed that opinion. I said there was an inclination on the part of interested people to push the farmers into that district. I spoke promptly and definitely, and I am not to be blamed for what happened afterwards. It is quite true that I withdrew a reserve on land in that district. It must be remembered that it is 20 years since the South-Western division was fixed, and that one can take up land either on pastoral lease or under freehold conditions from Eucla Bay to the Murchison River. Certain land had been reserved in the Esperance district, probably when some proposal was being discussed. The Esperance people asked me to lift the reserve, and I did so because I thought there was no object to be served in retaining it. Settlers might take up land there if they chose and take the risk. He advised them against my advice, and I advised the hon. gentleman accordingly.

Mr. Angwin: When did he advise them?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: All the time he was in office. He was really responsible for putting those men there. And if he had made known Mr. Mann's report they would not have gone on. If the matter

is looked into, it will be seen they went there since 1912.

Mr. Taylor: How did those men get down there after the Seaddan Government had stopped selection?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I did not know that they got there after selection had stopped; they may have selected their lands while it was still open. The strange part of it is that though the Government had stopped selection, only last year portion of this country was cut up.

Mr. Taylor: They removed the reservation after the passing of the Railway Bill.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: What they did is what is always done in similar circumstances. They reserved land on both sides of the proposed railway. That is always done and the land is cut up when the line has been determined upon.

Mr. Taylor: The point I want to make is those men have not gone there since; they went there in your Government's time.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: How do you know that?

Mr. Taylor: I do know it.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: If you refer to this map, you will see they went there in 1912. They had a perfect right to go there. They could take up land there to-day, you cannot stop them. Every member of the House is aware I was denounced because I said this country was not suitable for settlement; and yet the late Attorney General now states that it was I who sent these people there. My information is that 40 out of 60 have gone away, and that those remaining are having an awful experience. This much may be judged from the crop results. The late Government cut up 30,000 acres of this land only last year, all the time suppressing the report which had been made on the quality of the soil.

Mr. E. B. Johnston interjected.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I am told that there are only 22 people remaining in the district out of 64. The member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker) reflected on the honesty of the gentlemen who made this report. I can tell him that there are no better men than the trustees of the Agricultural Bank. They are capable men and men who will express an honest opinion. It is

unfair for any member to attack civil servants in this House. If they were not worthy men, why were they retained in their positions as officers of the Agricultural Bank? I have nothing further to say in connection with the Esperance land question. I have endeavoured to put the position correctly.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Will you get the report of the commission this session?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I hope so. While we wish that the report shall be in as soon as possible, we do not propose to hurry the commission. Members will get the report and I believe that when presented it will be an honest report.

Mr. Taylor: You do not expect the commission to last as long as the Collie Coal Commission?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I do not. The commission will report as soon as they can, but they must take ample time so as to get all the evidence available. If the report satisfies us that the railway is justified, it will be gone on with. The late Attorney General has remarked that the Liberals are making a political fight whilst the war is on. The member for Kanowna knows full well that we were perfectly willing when war broke out to assist the Government of the country. We did come to an agreement, but there was no formal truce. But immediately afterwards we were told that the Government had spent a considerable sum in the purchase of a boat. We were never consulted and Parliament was never consulted. Our questions on the subject even were not answered, and yet the late Minister charges us with having broken a truce, and with want of political faith. He accuses us, and he also accuses the Country party. He accuses the Country party because they have supported the Liberal party. The members of the Country party are quite entitled to support a Liberal Government if in their opinion the Liberal Government is worthy of support. I should be sorry indeed to have to believe that all the democrats in this House are constituted amongst the gentlemen opposite. One has only to read the newspapers during the last few weeks to learn how many prominent Labour people have been treated by their own supporters. Every Government must be supported by a

majority in the House; otherwise they cannot remain in office. It is the duty of members of this Chamber to select the best Government possible, and a majority of members of this House have deemed it wise to place the present Government on the Treasury benches. They having done so, it is impertinence on the part of the hon. gentlemen opposite to attack members of the Country party because they have seen fit to support the Liberals. By a stretch of imagination members opposite have claimed that that support is being given because of what is expected from the Government. The fact is that the Country party know they may expect from the Liberal Government that to which they are clearly entitled. But when a member talks about buying and selling in the manner in which the member for Kanowna has referred to the Country party for supporting the Liberals—

Mr. Angwin: They did not do it, their bosses did it.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: He had no right to say it. The Country party have as much right to support the Liberal Government as the hon. gentleman has to support his own party; and they have expressed their willingness at the present time to permit the Liberals to form a Government. The member for Kanowna referred to the fact that 19 out of every 20 men at the Front are organised workers. When a man joins the ranks it is no longer a matter of politics or of unionism. We all know that men in every walk of life have done their duty, that men from every walk of life are in the ranks and fighting to achieve the greatest victory the world has ever known or die the death of great men. It is the duty of every man who is physically fit to do what he can in this war. Another great orator who lived a few hundred years ago said to his people, "Go whilst there is yet time; go stand in the ranks every one of you and participate in the greatest victory or die." I wish now to say a word or two about the Industries Assistance Board. I want to tell hon. members just what has happened. I found the board in a disorganised condition. I have fixed on a policy which will protect the country now. The disorganised condition of the Board is a matter of common knowledge.

Everyone knows that some men who should never have been given assistance were rendered help, and others could get no help at all who deserved it. The whole country was crying out about the system and the disappointments. The management of the board was centred in Perth in three gentlemen, men of experience, who were given a free hand. Notwithstanding this, there was a very considerable loss, amounting to £200,000, in addition to a loss of about £37,000 on imported bran and pollard. The latter was due to what was known as cash sales: farmers were charged a flat rate calculated to cover cost; and on wheat there has been a profit of £6,000. The cash sales system was illegal under the Industries Assistance Board Act.

Mr. Angwin: What have you done with the stuff?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I say that the Industries Assistance Board Act should not have been applied to this transaction. They were not, in fact, cash sales at all, as purchasers were not called upon in many cases to pay until 18 months after the sale. I would like to justify the appointment of the inspectors. We know that there was no supervision over crops. These are some of the cases which came under my notice. There is one case of a man having cropped 106 acres and who got £244. Another man cropped 10 acres and got £57. Another one cropped 50 acres and got £140. And so on all along the line. It has been said that the cost of administration will be very much increased by the appointment of inspectors. The average expenditure for the past two years was £12,219 per annum, and on the basis of the July, 1916 expenditure was £13,140 per annum. We anticipate that the amount required will be £12,960 which will be gradually reduced. Then we must adjust accounts in connection with the old board's operations.

Mr. Angwin: You will have some difficulty in getting in some of the accounts.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: We shall have to do our best. Something has been said about Mr. Paterson, the chief executive officer. There were three highly paid officials working on the premises but now a new board has been appointed on the same

lines as the members of the Agricultural Bank. Mr. Paterson, who was attacked the other evening by the leader of the Opposition, has straightened out this business with the help of Mr. McLarty and Mr. Simpson of the bank. Mr. Paterson has managed the Agricultural Bank for nearly 22 years, and he has managed it very well; in fact, there is no better managed institution in any part of the world. If he had been given a free hand he would have managed the business of the board just as well.

Mr. Angwin: He had a free hand.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The Minister refused him enough bookkeepers to keep the accounts. Mr. Black, the Chief Controller of Accounts, had some hand in it, so that Mr. Paterson was not responsible for everything that happened. I do not cast any blame on Mr. Morris, Mr. Camm, or Mr. Oliphant; it is the Minister whom I blame. Under the new Government Mr. Paterson was able to get the whole business on a proper basis within a few days, and hon. members will find that there will be no great loss in the future. Some, of course, there must be always. The Minister must take the blame if the officer does not carry out the work he wants done, and when the Minister is entirely to blame it is unfair to attack the officer. Mr. Wilson, the Accountant, is a first class man. I think that members, even when they sit in Opposition, should remember that it is not possible to get good work done if Ministers shelter themselves behind their officials to the extent that the leader of the Opposition did the other evening. We have changed the whole policy. We take the whole of the farmer's crop and we find sufficient money to enable the farmer to carry on and live in comfort.

Mr. Angwin: No crop, no money.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Would the hon. member do less than I propose to do? Would he take every grain of wheat the farmer produced and not give him enough to enable him to carry on for a year? So long as we take the crop he produces, we will recognise that we have a responsibility to him. The outside creditors are forbidden to press for payment and it is our duty therefore to protect them. I have

no wish to detain the House any longer. I hope we shall be able to do something for this country during the coming months. There is financial stringency and the Government cannot escape from interest payments, which are far more important than anything else. That notwithstanding, we can make this country a great place. With the magnificent opportunities of the North, the wonder is that something has not been done long since. The policy of the present Government will be to extend the term of new leases there. Turning to the South-West, we know that there, too, unlimited opportunities exist, as well as in the wheat areas, and I have no doubt that many times the present population could be speedily provided for. No amount of taxation and no kind of economy that can be practised will get the country out of the trouble it finds itself in, but I do know that with development, and an increased population, after the war is over, the face of the country will be speedily changed and the general outlook will be considerably improved.

On motion by Mr. Foley debate adjourned.

BILL—SUPPLY (No. 2) £648,000.

Returned from the Legislative Council without amendment.

House adjourned at 10.25 p.m.