

## NOES.

Hon. R. G. Ardagh	Hon. C. McKenzie
Hon. H. P. Colebatch	Hon. C. Sommers
Hon. J. Duffell	Hon. H. Stewart
Hon. J. A. Greig	Hon. H. Carson
Hon. V. Hamersley	(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

Question put and passed.

*In Committee, etcetera.*

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment, and the report adopted.

Read a third time and passed.

## ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. H. P. Colebatch—East) [12.14]: I move—

*That the House at its rising adjourn until Wednesday, the 23rd January, 1917.*

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 12.15 a.m.*

## Legislative Assembly,

*Thursday, 22nd November, 1917.*

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## PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the Minister for Railways: Report of the Commissioner of Railways on the working of the West Australian Government Railways for the year ended 30th June, 1917.

By the Premier: 1, Amendments to Regulations of the Education Department. 2, Proclamations under the Shipping and Pilotage Ordinance, 1855. 3, Regulations under "The Fire Brigades Act, 1916."

By the Colonial Treasurer: Regulations under "The Plant Diseases Act, 1914," concerning: (1) wine casks (2); onions; (3) sale of insecticides and fungicides (2); (4) citrus fruit.

## QUESTION—STATE IMPLEMENT WORKS.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN asked the Minister for Works: 1, What was the value of all farming implements and parts sold from the State Implement Works for the year ending 30th June, 1916, including implements and parts not manufactured at the State works? 2, What was the value for year ending 30th June, 1917? 3, The total amount paid as commission to agents for year ending 30th June, 1916, also for year ending 30th June, 1917? 4, What rate per cent. was paid as commission to agents for the years ending 30th June, 1916, and 30th June, 1917?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS replied: 1, Implements of own manufacture, £51,429 9s. 4d.; parts of own manufacture, £5,813 2s. 7d.; implements and parts not own manufacture, £1,633 3s. 6d.; total, £58,875 15s. 5d. 2, Implements of own manufacture, £32,203 3s. 6d.; parts of own manufacture, £6,856 12s. 10d.; implements and parts not own manufacture, £1,536 11s. 4d.; total, £40,601 7s. 8d. 3, Year ended 30th June, 1916, £710 13s. 11d.; year ended 30th June, 1917, £1,374 9s. 2d. 4, to the 30th November, 1916, 5 per cent. on actual agricultural deliveries made, being the outcome of orders directly booked by agents. In order to hold our business together it became necessary from the 1st December, 1916, to the 30th June, 1917, to pay on all agricultural deliveries made within an agent's district, a commission of 5 per cent. In this

The SPEAKER took the Chair at 3 p.m., and read prayers.

connection, and in order that a grasp of the whole position leading up to the arrangement with the Westralian Farmers, Limited, to act as sole agents may be possible, I propose to make a full statement to the House at a convenient opportunity.

## QUESTIONS (2)—REPATRIATION SCHEME.

### *Allotments to applicants.*

Mr. PICKERING asked the Minister for Industries: Can he give definite information upon the following questions dealing with the proposed Repatriation Scheme:—1, The amount set apart for each applicant? 2, The conditions appertaining thereto for (a) land settlement, (b) industrial and general? 3, How much is now available for (a) and (b)? 4, In view of the absolute necessity for the conditions appertaining to (a) being on sound farming lines, will he approve of the appointment to the central board of a nominee from the Farmers and Settlers' Association? 5, In view of the exceptional circumstances appertaining to returned soldier settlers, and assuming that the sum allotted is in the nature of a loan, will he consider the advisability of securing at least 50 per cent. of such amount as a free grant to each selector on completion of a specified term of occupancy and development?

The MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES replied: 1, £500 by the Commonwealth Government. The Agricultural Bank trustees are empowered to make such further advances as in their discretion are necessary. 2, (a) Advances will be made on the usual Agricultural Bank and Industries Assistance Board terms, excepting that the rate of interest payable during the first year is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., increasing  $\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. per annum until the current rate is reached; (b) not yet decided. 3, No funds have yet been provided by the Commonwealth Government, but advances are being made from the funds of the Agricultural Bank and Industries Assistance Board to meet present requirements. 4, There are two departmental boards: the first dealing with land selection and called the Land Board, the second dealing with the qualifications of ap-

plicants and called the Qualification Board. In the latter case the practical men consist of Mr. John Robinson, of the Lands Department, Mr. McLarty, of the Industries Assistance Department, together with Major Milner, representing returned soldiers. It is not considered that further representation is required on these boards. If the hon. member refers to the central board as the board about to be established by the Commonwealth, that board would be a Federal board constituted by the Federal authorities. 5, The money advanced to returned soldiers and sailors is provided by the Commonwealth Government, which looks to the State for repayment. The State is not in a position to make free grants of money as suggested by the hon. member.

### *Interest on Advances.*

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN (without notice) asked the Minister for Industries: When was it arranged to increase the rate of interest above  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. in the first year to soldiers, regarding loans *re* the repatriation scheme?

The MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES replied: I understand an arrangement was come to by the Premiers or Ministers representing the various States at a conference in Melbourne. That arrangement was adopted right through the States and holds good here. Whatever loss there may be is to be divided equally between the Commonwealth and the State.

## QUESTION—MINERS' UNION REGISTRATION.

Mr. MUNSIE asked the Attorney General: Under what clause of the Arbitration Act does the registrar propose to register a second miners' union in the Kalgoorlie and Boulder district?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL replied: No application has been received by the Registrar for the registration of a second miners' union under the Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912. The union referred to has, however, submitted an application under "The Trade Unions Act, 1902."

## QUESTIONS (2)—LUMPING TROUBLE AT FREMANTLE.

### *Attitude of the Government.*

Mr. GREEN (for Mr. Jones) asked the Premier: 1, Do the Government, as a party concerned in the handling of cargo, indorse the action of the shipowners in refusing to meet the waterside workers in conference? 2, If not, will they allow these men to resume work, in relation to State shipping, on the same conditions as existed previous to the trouble?

The PREMIER replied: 1, No, but the Government are in accord with other employers of waterside labour in refusing to sacrifice the national volunteer workers who came to the relief of the Government of the State when the Fremantle Lumpers' Union refused to carry on work essential both to Western Australia and the Empire. 2, No, for the reason given above.

### *Volunteer Workers.*

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN asked the Premier: 1, Have the Government at any time paid the increased cost of providing meals, beds, and other conveniences for men employed on the Fremantle wharves and ships during the industrial crisis? 2, If so, what was the total amount involved? 3, How many employees of the Government, or in the public service, were employed on the wharf during the industrial crisis? 4, Did they receive payment for services rendered both from the Government and shipowners or Harbour Trust? 5, If not, who paid?

The PREMIER replied: 1, Yes, meals and beds have been provided. 2, Cost to date is £2,163 10s., but as a charge has been made since 30th October, £166 10s. has been received. 3, 4, and 5, Inquiry will be made, but this will occupy some time. When information is available it will be furnished.

## BILL—TRANSFER OF LAND ACT AMENDMENT.

### *Second Reading.*

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. R. T. Robinson—Canning) [3.19] in moving the second reading said: This is a very simple Bill, and merely deals with the

substitution of paper for parchment. At the present time the law compels the issue of all titles on parchment. The supply of parchment has become not only very short but also very expensive. Duplicate titles which are issued to the general public are easily replaced, and the original titles, which are kept in the Titles Office bound up in books, might just as well be on good paper as on parchment. This Bill is intended mainly as a measure of economy. The quality of paper obtainable at the present time in substitution for parchment is generally as satisfactory as, and in some respects more satisfactory than, parchment for the purpose of registering titles. Therefore, there seems to be no essential need to continue the use of parchment for this purpose. The number of parchments required per year in the Titles Office is anything up to 10,000 skins, although there is some falling off in transactions at the present time. One would expect that during war time the Titles Office would be very much less busy than at other times, but during the last year no less than 9,000 skins have been used. The Titles Office has at the present time in stock printed parchments to the number of 5,000, with a reserve unprinted of approximately 3,000; but if this Bill is passed it may be quite possible to use the unprinted parchments for other purposes, and then, if they can be profitably used otherwise, they will not be printed. It may be said that the Titles Office has nearly a year's supply of skins; but the Bill, I maintain, is an urgent one, because the securing of parchment takes a long time. All skins have to be examined, and the Titles Office is always obliged to get its stocks of parchment nine or ten months ahead of requirements. Thus, if the Bill is not put through now, immediate steps will have to be taken to replenish stocks in hand, because even if the order is placed at once we cannot hope to obtain supplies of parchments until the end of next year. The cost of parchments to the Titles Office in the year 1909 was £33 per thousand skins; and, as I say, 10,000 skins are used annually.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Does not the person who obtains the title pay the cost of the parchment?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: He pays for his own parchment, but not for the parchment which the Titles Office uses to bind up. Newer parchments will be more expensive, costing £79 per thousand skins. The Government Printer has been consulted in this matter, and he tells us there will be no difficulty whatever in obtaining supplies of paper for the documents required. The samples of paper intended to be used, and recommended by the Government Printer, will cost about £3 per thousand sheets as against £79 per thousand skins; and the paper would be obtained even more cheaply if bought in the full size as manufactured and then cut up locally for use. Turning these figures into something that hon. members will perhaps better understand, I may say that the saving of paper as against parchment, will amount to £76 per thousand titles. It is anticipated that the requirements for the coming year will be 8,000 sheets; they may be 10,000; but on the former basis the saving effected would be £614. If we take the mean of pre-war times, say the year 1909, the saving would be much greater. For the three years prior to the war 11,000 skins of parchment were used annually; and on that basis the saving would amount to £358 per annum. Let me repeat that it is only because of the difficulty in obtaining skins and because of the possible saving of £600 per annum that this measure has been introduced. Whether it would be desirable to keep the measure permanently on the statute-book, practice alone will determine. I quite admit that the members of the general public would probably resent getting a paper—however good it may be—title in place of the parchment title. But, as I have said, we have enough parchment stocks in hand to carry us on for the next twelve months; and if we use paper for the official documents which are kept in the Titles Office and issue parchment only to the public, then we may continue for a longer period than twelve months. If, when the war is over, parchment comes down to the normal price again, I myself would be glad to see the supply of parchment continued, because I think that people have reason for their preference for parchment. They like

to know that their title deeds cannot be destroyed, cannot be torn up.

Mr. Johnston: Insurance policies are documents of very great importance, and they are issued on paper.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: True; but, all the same, there is a prejudice in the public mind in favour of the use of parchment for titles. I submit this Bill in order to save the State from having to order now another year's supply of parchment, the cost of which we cannot ascertain, and as to delivery of which there is great uncertainty. One or two members have asked me whether there can be any amendments to this Bill. That matter, of course, is one purely in the hands of hon. members, as to how they treat the Bill; but I wish to mention that the Titles Office and the Crown Law Department have a number of useful amendments which might very well be made in the Transfer of Land Act. I rather deprecate the bringing forward of any of those amendments this session, because that course would involve a great deal of discussion on a Bill which is otherwise quite simple. Therefore, I ask any hon. members who have in mind amendments to the Act—some of these amendments I have seen, and they appear to me to be quite reasonable—to allow those amendments to stand over, instead of introducing them into a Bill which is, in fact, merely a matter of form. I give those hon. members the assurance that if this Bill passes as printed any amendments wanted in the Transfer of Land Act will be carefully considered and brought forward at a later stage in a comprehensive form. I move—

*That the Bill be now read a second time.*

Mr. THOMSON (Katanning) [3.26]: In connection with this Bill I may perhaps draw the attention of the Standing Orders Committee to Joint Standing Order No. 7, which provides that three copies of any Bill passed must be printed on vellum. Seeing that we are all looking for economies, I suggest that this costly practice should be discontinued, and that the Joint Standing Order be so amended as to permit of the practice proposed by this Bill for titles.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee, etcetera.*

Mr. Stubbs in the Chair; the Attorney General in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1, 2—agreed to.

New clause:

Mr. JOHNSTON: I move—

*That the following new clause be added to the Bill: Transfer of mortgage of lease of town land to the grant in fee.—3. Whenever a grant in fee simple of any town or suburban land is obtained on the surrender of a lease of such land under the provisions of Section 52A of the Land Act, 1898, any existing mortgage of the leasehold interest shall be transferred and apply to the grant in fee simple, in all respects as if such grant had been referred to in the mortgage, and a memorandum of such mortgage shall be endorsed by the Registrar of Titles as an encumbrance on the grant in fee simple and on the folium of the register book on the registration of such grant, and a memorandum thereof shall also be made by the Registrar of Titles on the instrument of mortgage and the duplicate.*

In moving the second reading of the Bill the Attorney General forecasted that he would object to any alteration of this measure. At the same time there is a large number of leasehold blocks held mainly by working men and men with small capital on which they have their homes. Most of these men are prepared to retain the leasehold title, but in some cases it is necessary for them to convert to freehold in order to obtain money for the improvement of their homes. It is on account of the hardship that is being incurred by railway men, and men of small means, that I have brought forward the amendment, and the Minister might well consider it as an urgent matter. A man may have a small property mortgaged and he may wish to make it a freehold, and in these cases at present the Titles Office compels him to face the expense of discharging the mortgage on the leasehold and preparing and registering a new mortgage when the freehold issues. In this respect he is at a disadvantage compared with the holder of a conditional purchase block, because when a farmer desires to make his conditional purchase freehold

he is able to take the action I am proposing, namely, he can endorse on the freehold the existing mortgage without further expense. The necessity for registering the second mortgage also involves risk to the lender's security. I hope the Minister will regard this amendment as urgent in the interests of the people I have referred to and will accept it.

The CHAIRMAN: I would refer the hon. member to Standing Order 391 which reads—

It is an instruction to all Committees of the whole House to whom Bills may be committed, that they have power to make such amendments therein as they shall think fit, provided they be relevant to the subject-matter of the Bill; but if any such amendments shall not be within the title of the Bill, they shall amend the title accordingly, and report the same specially to the House.

I rule that the amendment moved by the hon. member is not admissible because it is not relevant to the subject-matter of the Bill as introduced.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

Read a third time and *passed*.

## BILL—WHEAT MARKETING.

### *Second Reading.*

The PREMIER (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore) [3.38] in moving the second reading said: Hon. members are aware that there is an Act in existence conferring certain powers on the Government of Western Australia in regard to the marketing of wheat for the season 1915-16 and the next following season. There is no need for me to enter into the history of the wheat pool scheme. It is well known to hon. members that Ministers from the different wheat-growing States met together and formulated a scheme which has been in existence since the 1915-16 harvest. The measure now before hon. members is an urgent one because it proposes an extension of the existing legislation which really expires after the 1916-17 harvest has been disposed of. At the present time we have control under the 1916

Act of the 1915-16 harvest, and the 1916-17 harvest now remains on hand, the Act having been extended during last session by proclamation in pursuance of the power given under the Act. Further, by proclamation under that Act, sales of old wheat are prohibited, except to the Minister, to the 31st December, 1917. This prohibition refers only to wheat of the last two seasons and we have no authority to control wheat of the 1917-18 season, and unless this Bill is passed the Government will have no control over the harvest that is just about to be reaped. Consequently, the wheat may be placed on the market and it may cause considerable trouble. Until the proposed Bill is passed, the Minister will have no power to prevent any traffic in wheat. We have on hand the major portion of the 1916-17 harvest, notwithstanding that all the mills are now gristing full time on behalf of the scheme. The supplies would be prejudicially affected if any of the new season's wheat was allowed to come in on the local market to compete, and owners of wheat might be disposed to sell their wheat at 3s. or 3s. 6d. a bushel for cash instead of placing it in the pool and allowing it to take the course proposed for it.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: It would make bread cheaper.

The PREMIER: I do not think it would. I think the majority of members will agree that the pool system should be continued. It has been a great success in the past. I do not know what would have been the fate of the farmers if it had not been for the formation of this scheme to deal with the marketing of the wheat.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The farmers did not think that.

The PREMIER: They do now. Sometimes it is hard to convince a farmer, but once he is convinced you cannot move him. As soon as a Bill become law the necessary proclamation will be issued thereunder, that any sales of wheat except as may be exempted, must be to the Minister under the wheat marketing scheme, and the penalty for default will be £500. Power of acquisition by the Government and control of the wheat in the States, are matters which are necessary as a security for the joint guarantee of the Commonwealth and State Gov-

ernments. For the 1917-18 pool the farmers of this State will receive a minimum price of 4s. per bushel f.o.b. for their wheat. They have been granted this minimum price for that season. Such being the case, it is necessary to pass this legislation so as to bring all the wheat in the State into the one pool and so that every farmer shall be placed in the same position. I am quite certain that they are agreeable to this course. I would point out, however, that it is the intention of the Government, during the present session, to bring in a full machinery measure dealing with the procedure proposed to be adopted for handling the next harvest and making provision for necessary amendments to bring the legislation up to date. Ministers are now in consultation in the Eastern States with regard to the Wheat Marketing Scheme. Hon. members know it is a very complicated matter and requires a great deal of consideration and working up. Full opportunity will be given to hon. members when legislation is brought before the House later on of criticising any proposed amendments or alteration in the management of the scheme or the personnel or powers of the existing advisory committee, or any of the acquiring agents. Hon. members will be given the fullest opportunity of discussing these matters later on. The first payment to the farmers will be 3s. per bushel on rails. The farmers I think are placed in a very good position this year. I understand that arrangements have already been made for paying the farmer 3s. per bushel for his first delivery of wheat at the siding. I think that is a very satisfactory position. Last year the farmer, in the first instance, got 2s. 6d. at the siding. It is only quite recently that he got another 6d., bringing the amount up to 3s. He will really be in a better position for the 1917-18 harvest than he was in regard to the previous harvest. We know the great difficulties that surround us, and the troubles and disappointments that the farmers have to put up with, so that, under the circumstances, I think all those who, like myself, grow wheat in Western Australia, should feel well satisfied I think that we have been taken care of, if I may say so, at this critical moment. The State has come forward to assist one of the

most important industries of the country over the difficulties which confront it. I trust that we shall get back to our normal conditions very shortly. Ever since 1914 troubles seem to have confronted us. We have been through the throes of a drought; we have had rust in our wheat; then we had the war, and this was followed by an unsatisfactory season with a dry September in which the crops suffered. Then again, we have had another year of flood and more disease in our wheat. I do not know whether the war has anything to do with these circumstances or not, and whether it is that the explosions which are taking place on the battle fields of Europe are the cause of them, but there is no doubt that many of these troubles have come upon us at the one time, and I think that the present finances of the country are in their position largely because of these troubles which have come upon us in this way. I am not one of those who look forward with dread or fear to the future of Western Australia. We should hold up our heads in these times and not hang them down. When we are in difficulties then is the time for us to straighten our backs and open our shoulders, and show that we are prepared to meet these difficulties. I am one of those who believe that at the present, though we have to exercise the greatest care, and have to be careful in the expenditure of our money, if we only deal with the business of this country like sane individuals, we will get over these troubles, and Western Australia will surmount her difficulties, difficulties which are found in all countries in these days. I ask hon. members and the people of the country not to feel down-hearted at present, but to forego luxuries and refrain from spending money unnecessarily.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: We can never get any.

The PREMIER: I urge people to husband their resources and not to be wasteful in any direction. We have heard great things to-day. The Hindenburg line, I am informed, has been broken and our gallant troops are through it for many miles. I trust this may only be the beginning of the end. Once our troops do get the enemy on the run I am sure that they will keep them at it. Moreover, I feel

that they have been up against great difficulties for the last three years and have been through great troubles and great tribulation, and those who have been left behind have also suffered on their account. I am safe in saying that all members of the House—and I do not doubt the loyalty of any hon member—delight to hear that our soldiers at the Front are getting some compensation for all the dangers they have been through. I trust that this good news will continue to come to us, and that before long there will be no need for such Bills as I am now asking members to agree to. This is a necessary measure, and it is one purely of urgency. It is a measure which has to be enacted because the price of our wheat is already granted to the farmer for the 1917-18 season, and it is desired to place all growers of wheat on the same basis, as they should be placed. It is, therefore, necessary to extend the present legislation and give the Government of the day the same power in dealing with the 1917-18 crop as they had with the 1916-17 crop. I hope that, although we may have to keep this crop here for some time, at any rate our shipping will soon be placed under normal conditions, and that the wheat may not, after all, remain in Western Australia so long as we at first expected it would.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What about the cheaper loaf while it is here?

Hon. J. Mitchell: It is cheap now.

The PREMIER: I move—

*That the Bill be now read a second time.*

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN (North-East Fremantle) [3.55]: I had expected that some of my friends who belong to the National party, and especially the National Country party, would, according to the paper I have before me, have said something that would have indicated their support of the provisions of the Bill now before us. We know that since the Act was passed the farmers and settlers had a scheme placed before them which showed their dissatisfaction clearly of the handling of the wheat pool by the Government. They came to the conclusion that it was necessary that the handling of the wheat should be given over to an entirely outside body and they thought that the Government had failed in their obliga-

tions so far as the handling of the wheat pool was concerned.

Mr. Harrison: Where did you get that evidence from?

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: The *Primary Producer*. In perusing carefully the report of the conference that was held by the farmers and settlers no one could come to any other conclusion than that the scheme which was placed before them by Mr. McGibbon was not only approved by the farmers and settlers of this State, but approved by the farmers operating in the other States of Australia. I have just perused a long letter received from a gentleman in New South Wales who stated that he placed Mr. McGibbon's speech before well known business men and legal gentlemen, and that they thoroughly approved of the scheme. In other words, the farmers of the State are utterly disgusted with the actions of the Government in the handling of this pool. If the pool had not been brought into existence there would not have been a farmer in the State to-day.

Mr. Johnston: They would have been worse off.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: There would have been very few in existence.

Mr. Harrison: What would Fremantle have done?

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Fremantle would have been doing much the same as it is now, very little indeed. The position is such that I for one could not condemn the pool because I took an active interest, with other of my colleagues, in it, and in making every possible endeavour to protect the farmers of the State, to see that they had a proper return for their products.

Hon. P. Collier: We were responsible for it.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Everyone of us was condemned bitterly in connection with the matter.

Mr. Harrison: You started it.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: We started it and carried it through.

Hon. P. Collier: We had to force it upon the farmers.

The Premier: I never condemned it.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I was applauding the statement of the Premier in regard

to the matter. There were two questions operating in the matter, one was whether we were to deprive the business community and those who had for years been dealing in wheat throughout Western Australia of their businesses, and whether the Government should take charge of them, or whether we were to allow them to continue in their business as agents on behalf of the Government, and the Government to find the money.

[Interjection.]

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: It is all very well for the hon. member to say that now.

Mr. Harrison: You took a wiser course.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: We took a wiser course and allowed certain gentlemen who understood the position to do the work. We allowed them to come in as all sensible people would do. We took good care to see that the State was protected. Since then there has come into existence a new party who do not understand their business.

Mr. Harrison: You say they did not understand their business.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Definitely and distinctly, I say that men who study the insurance business do not know much about wheat. I do not profess to know anything about wheat, but I do say that when we have to bring into the trading concerns political matters, it is time to stop it, and I say that definitely and clearly. In connection with the handling of this wheat and in regard to the answer to the question which I asked yesterday, I say that this business would not have been given to one firm unless politics had been at the back of it.

Mr. Harrison: That is rot.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: We realise that these gentlemen have been handling wheat ever since wheat growing has been in existence in Western Australia.

Mr. Harrison: You object to your Government having taught them.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I want to say this; the Government of which I was a member never taught these gentlemen to handle wheat; they taught those to whom the Government are going to give the sole charge of this business, because these persons did not know anything about it previously. You may call them what you like—the Westralian Farmers or whatever you please, but they are an off-shoot of a political organisation—

the Farmers and Settlers' Association. According to a letter I have here this business is going to cost the farmers of this State this year several thousands of pounds more than would have been the case if the matter had been handed over on a fair basis as was done previously.

Mr. Pickering: They would not accept a fair basis.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: The action which has been taken has thrown out of employment a great number of men. What is going to be done so far as this firm is concerned? We were told yesterday that nothing definite had been fixed, but that the Westralian Farmers had the sole right to take this matter on, yet we find in to-day's paper this advertisement—

Tenders are invited for handling wheat, season 1917-18, labour only. Full particulars apply D. McCallum, Sec. Trayning Farmers' Co-op. Co., Trayning. So that the persons to whom the handling of the wheat this year in all probability will be given have adopted a system which the Government did not do.

Mr. Harrison: That is only stacking.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: The hon. member can read the advertisement. If the Government intended at the outset to give the one firm the sole control of handling the wheat this year their proper method was to have advertised the matter so that every one should have had an opportunity of tendering.

Mr. Harrison: They were invited.

Mr. Johnston: They knew all about it.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: We were condemned very strenuously because we did not call for tenders for the Wyndham Freezing Works. I do not know what the result will be, but it is said here that the farmers have to pay. They were not given a fair chance; no one knew more than that in all probability the Government were going to hand to one firm this work. They did not know what deposit was to be put down and the Minister could not tell us yesterday what the deposit was. Can he tell us now? I am not dealing with the financial position. That has nothing to do with the matter. The position is this—throughout the State to-day people are asking the question, why a certain firm in West-

ern Australia was given a preference. It was not open to competition. As a matter of comparison I asked a question to-day, and we find that with all the business acumen possessed by the Government they will have to pay to the Westralian Farmers, Limited, £4,415 for what we paid £700 to other agents for selling implements, but we are told we had not the business acumen. I want to know how the State is protected in this scheme. I have a doubt, under the conditions which are prevailing, whether we can trust the Government to deal with this matter further. If the farmers wish to deal with the Government they should have an opportunity of doing so, and if the farmers desire to place the control of the wheat in one person's hands, or in any agents appointed by the Government, they should have the option of doing so or otherwise. For that reason I intend to move an amendment. I heard a complaint by a gentleman who is a fairly large farmer. He wanted certain machinery overhauled, but other persons' machinery was attended to while his was not touched. This gentleman said that some of his friends had their machinery attended to because they were members of an association; this shows that fair treatment is not being meted out to all. Some members have not had an opportunity of reading the original Act because they were not in the House when it was passed. The Labour party have always been accused of being extreme socialists. They have been condemned throughout the length and breadth of Western Australia and in all parts of the world for their "socialism run mad." I want to say, whether it is to our credit or not, that the Labour party never introduced a Bill while they were in power which was so strongly in favour of the socialistic idea as the Wheat Marketing Act. No one who reads the Act through and examines the schedule can come to any other conclusion than that certain gentlemen would be appointed to handle the wheat scheme. The schedule gives the name of certain firms as follows:—"Dalgety & Coy., James Bell & Coy., John Darling & Son, Dreyfus & Co., Ockerby & Co., F. & C. Piesse," and so on. Every member who was present in the Chamber when the ori-

ginal Bill was introduced was under the impression that during the existence of the Act those gentlemen would have a fair show.

The Minister for Works: They had an opportunity but they banded themselves together.

Hon. P. Collier: They did not.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: There is another co-operative body in Western Australia—the Mercantile company.

Mr. Hickmott: They do not do business in wheat.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: Three years ago the Westralian Farmers were not in existence.

Mr. Harrison: They have made great strides.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: They have made wonderful strides. I do not know what their capital was but they made a return of 103 per cent. on their capital.

Hon. P. Collier: It was a secret contract.

The Attorney General: You should be the last to talk about secret contracts.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: There is not a firm in Western Australia that would not accept the agency of the State Implement Works on the same conditions as have been given to this company. I would not give it to them, although they offered to do it for less than they are getting to-day. I would not give it to them, because I did not think it was fair to the State and to those persons outside of that political organisation.

Mr. Harrison: Get that out of your mind.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I cannot. I would take the same action with this party as I would with the Labour party. If we had had any connection with a Labour organisation we would have been cried down throughout the length and breadth of the State.

The Attorney General: You would not have known how to manage it. It takes some brains to run that Westralian Farmers, Ltd.

Hon. P. Collier: It took some brains to engineer this contract.

Mr. SPEAKER: I hope hon. members will cease these unseemly interjections. Hon. members will have an opportunity of

addressing themselves to the subject when the hon. member resumes his seat.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: It does not call for very special brains when it is found necessary to pay £4,400 odd for what was previously done for £700. I have the figures from the Minister. The Bill, the operations of which we are asked to extend for another year, gives the Minister power to enter into arrangements with the Commonwealth Government. When this scheme was first brought into existence an understanding was given by the Commonwealth Government that there should be as little interference as possible with the business of those gentlemen previously dealing in wheat. We realised at that time that great powers were being put into the hands of the Government, because the shipping was entirely at the control of the Federal authorities, and any outsider who bought wheat in all probability would not be able to ship it away. At that time we were told by a prominent member of the Farmers and Settlers' Association that there would be no difficulty at all in getting all the wheat away if they had an opportunity of purchasing it or selling it direct. However, the Government were condemned because it was said they hampered the farmers in this respect. Then power was given to the Minister to appoint agents. Those agents were to have the sole right of handling the wheat. Then other powers were inserted in the Bill, such as the prohibition of sales of wheat except by the Minister or his agents. That was devised to give the Minister the exclusive right of dealing in wheat. Then provision was made that the Minister might step in and declare void any contract for wheat for flour. So, too, in regard to mortgages, the power of the Minister was increased. Then, to make the position still surer, it was prescribed that the Commissioner of Railways, although a common carrier, was, under the Bill, to be exempted from the responsibilities of a common carrier. Some thought that was a wise provision; I thought so myself at the time. However, when in Committee I will move an amendment with the object of removing the exclusive right enjoyed by the Government and restoring to wheat merchants and millers and farmers the right of separate dealing in wheat. My

amendment will take the form of inserting after the word "Act" the words "except clauses 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14."

Mr. SPEAKER: I am afraid the hon. member will not be able to move that at this stage.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: No, I am merely giving notice of my intention to move the amendment when in Committee. The Bill really means the whole Bill which we have before us, and which is dead at the present time. If we disallow this Bill the whole lot is gone. I am willing that the Government should have a portion of it. I want to give freedom of action to the farmers, to the millers, and to the wheat merchants; this, because the Government have seen fit for the second time to hand over the control of business exclusively to one firm.

Mr. STEWART (Claremont) [4.24]: I want at the outset to say that I am in general accord with the principles laid down by the member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) in his remarks as to the unwisdom of the Government in handing over or proposing to hand over the handling of the 1917 wheat harvest to the Westralian Farmers, Limited. I want to make clear to the Government, also, that I for one desire to see that they keep on the straight road of nationalism as much as possible.

Hon. P. Collier: You will have a tough job.

Mr. STEWART: It may be so, but these remarks, coming from myself, may appeal to other members who like myself, are less hampered by promises given while on the hustings. The action proposed to be taken by the Government or the Minister for Agriculture in this connection is to me nothing less nor more than a suspicious form of extension of State enterprise. I am sorry to find the Government actuated by this socialistic purpose. These are abnormal times, and we admit that the conditions must be met by change and ever changing alterations, but that is no reason why, in carrying out these conditions, a manifest injustice should be inflicted upon a section of the community hitherto enjoying the confidence of successive Governments. It is true, as Mr. Angwin has stated, that it is going to cost the Government in connection

with the wheat scheme a greater sum than would have been spent by employing agents who have been doing the business for the last three years. In 1914, after the outbreak of war, the Government of the day, in the predicament in which they found themselves, were only too glad to avail themselves of the services of qualified men, and so satisfactory has been the contribution of those firms in connection with this particular matter that until now they have been allowed to take part in this work, which, unfortunately for us, has become an annual work.

Mr. Hickmott: Did not those firms try to get the monopoly?

Mr. STEWART: The firms referred to apparently took some action as the result of what was recommended by the advisory board together with the Honorary Minister. If the action of those firms is to be construed into an attempt to gain a monopoly, then it was done in co-operation with the advisory board and the Honorary Minister. There is no excuse whatever other than this—Mr. Angwin has laid emphasis upon it—that the business side of the farmers of this country is represented by the Westralian Farmers, Limited, just as the political side is represented by the Farmers' and Settlers' Association. That is a clear statement of fact which few will take upon themselves to contradict. What has been the action of the Honorary Minister in his conferences upon this subject? The Premier in his policy speech at Moora clearly stated that a great saving would be effected by eliminating what was known as competition among the acquiring agents. That statement by the Premier must undoubtedly have been suggested to him by Mr. Sibbald, the late general manager of the wheat marketing scheme. Hon. members will note that coincident with the retirement of Mr. Sibbald, the general manager, comes the knowledge of that contract which my friend refers to as the secret contract, the knowledge that this business is to be entrusted entirely to the Westralian Farmers, Limited. And for what reason is this the case? The reason assigned is that connected with the question of what is known as the zone system. The zone system has been operating in the Eastern States successfully and has

been taken up here. The advisory board, together with the Honorary Minister, decided in July, tentatively, that such a scheme as this was desirable in Western Australia. That would have resulted in each of the firms, including the Westralian Farmers, Limited, being allotted particular zones whereby the expenditure would have been minimised by reducing the number of active agents, representing the acquiring agents, to one at each siding, or each group of sidings, or each station. It will be seen that in eliminating competition amongst the agents, as hitherto, instead of the various firms buying wheat, the scheme propounded by the Premier in his policy speech was a justifiable one, and that the Premier was also justified in saying that, by eliminating this competition, there would be considerable gain to Western Australia. In connection with the retirement of Mr. Sibbald, it is noteworthy that no sooner was he got rid of by the wheat marketing scheme here than, according to Press reports, a high value was placed upon his services by the Victorian board, for we see from the Press that he has been appointed to a similar position in that State. That is, I think, sufficient testimony without going into the merits of the case, to convince anyone that, at all events, if we do not in this State set a high value upon the services of that gentleman, the Victorian State does so.

The Minister for Works: You know that Mr. Sibbald resigned.

Mr. STEWART: I know it has been announced that he did so, and that it was through want of harmony between the Honorary Minister and himself. Possibly there was no other honourable course for him to take.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The *Primary Producer* said he must go a fortnight before.

Mr. STEWART: Then no doubt the Honorary Minister obeyed the mandate of the *Primary Producer*. There is a very important principle involved in this matter of selecting the Westralian Farmers, Limited, for this work. The sooner the Government begin to realise that to support their claims for nationalism they must retain the support of those who, like myself, are possibly less hampered by pledges and promises than other hon. members, the better for

them. I do not know what pledges and promises Ministers made in other constituencies, but if they are of a character to bind the party as a whole, I want to enter my protest at this stage against contributing my support if these are the lines on which the Government of the country is to be run. I want to give the Government the most generous support in all matters appertaining to the welfare of the country, but I will not allow to pass unnoticed anything of a particularly class legislation such as is now under notice of the House. If we are to carry on along these lines we shall lay ourselves open to the charge—and I think it will come from the other side of the House—that we are no better in our government than those who previously occupied the Treasury benches last year. I presume that in Committee there will be a further opportunity of discussing this Bill and that it will be possible then to move amendments. The Government must be warned in time against permitting what I look upon as a very serious blunder at the very commencement of the session. I had occasion to be present at a deputation to the Honorary Minister recently, and challenged his attitude with regard to the question of giving this work to the Westralian Farmers, Limited. Unfortunately, one cannot speak his mind sometimes to a Minister in his office without being met with the curt rejoinder that he will not sit there to be insulted. I am sure Ministers who are here this afternoon will not think that I have said anything in the nature of an insult to-day. I said nothing in the course of the interview I had with the Minister of a stronger nature than I have said this afternoon. Ministers must not be touchy on these matters, but must be prepared to listen to the arguments of those who are well qualified to put them forward.

Hon. P. Collier: They were unpalatable, because he had not a good case.

Mr. STEWART: Ministers must listen to the arguments of those who are chosen by their fellows to present views, however inconvenient, and to explain these views to them. I join entirely with the member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) in protesting against this proposal being carried out. I make my protest with

all the vigour of which I am capable against the proposed action of the Government, through the Minister for Agriculture, in transferring entirely to the hands of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, the handling of the 1917-18 wheat. I have it already on the best authority and upon most creditable reports that in the country to-day there is a great deal of doubt amongst the farmers as to the success of the wheat scheme, and already I know that numbers of them are considering the question of cutting their crops for hay instead of harvesting them. I am not imputing any motives against the farmers if they do cut their crops for hay, because I presume that they are endeavouring to get the best return they can from their work, but it does not alter the fact that there is already a very wide feeling disseminated amongst the farmers, a feeling of distrust, as to the success of the wheat scheme. This may be owing to the happenings of the past in connection with the harvest, but it may find its origin possibly in the distrust they have as to who is going to manage the scheme and as to who is to handle the crop. If this country is to be deprived of the machinery and equipment which has been in the service of the country for the last three years by these firms being eliminated who have been engaged in the business, it is certainly going to cause a great deal of doubt and may possibly lead eventually to considerable injury and damage to the farmers' interests. I hope to have an opportunity of dealing with the matter in Committee, with a view to taking out of the hands of the Government the power to place this work in the hands of any one firm.

Mr. PICKERING (Sussex) [4.40]: I have listened with great attention to the remarks of the member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) and the member for Claremont (Mr. Stewart). The member for North-East Fremantle has said that the farmers generally are dissatisfied with the wheat pool, that this dissatisfaction arose not so much with regard to the pool itself but because of the financial side of the question and the bookkeeping arrangements of the pool. It came to me as a great surprise to find members sitting on the opposite side of the House opposing the co-

operative method which has advanced in this State with such great success in such a short period.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: We are not opposing it.

Mr. PICKERING: What has been the attitude of those hon. members in regard to their own selves? Are they not opposed to the taking away of any of the privileges of their own particular unions, and if they are, why should they object to supporting a project which has been demonstrated to be in the best interests of the farming industry throughout not only this State but throughout the world? The difference between giving the handling of this wheat to the Westralian Farmers, Limited, and giving it to other companies is that the small amount of machinery and equipment which the member for Claremont alleges is in the movement will be lost to the State. Set off against this is the money that it is proposed to retain and distribute in the State through the co-operative movement. The more money we can keep within the State, the better it will be for Western Australia and the people in it. The question has been brought up regarding the zone system. It has been stated that the zone system has been adopted throughout the other States. The zone system is opposed to the competitive system, and in this State it would mean killing the co-operative movement which farmers have done so much to develop. The Westralian Farmers, Limited, were prepared to work under the competitive method, but think that the zone system will be cutting at the root of the system of co-operation. It has been alleged with regard to the Westralian Farmers, Limited, that the money goes back only to the shareholders. This is not true. This company is formed on the basis of true co-operation, and all the clients dealing with the company get a proportion of the profits accruing as a result of the business done for the year. The amount of dividends to the shareholders in the company must not exceed in one year 7 per cent. It has been alleged that the Westralian Farmers, Limited, have used their political influence, which we say does not exist, to bring about, with the Minister in charge, this co-called secret contract. On behalf of the company

and its shareholders I deny any knowledge of such tactics. I say that all through the piece the business has rested between the management of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, and the Honorary Minister. I am convinced that the Honorary Minister has given the companies, which have been accorded a very fair deal, every facility to come in on the same basis as the Westralian Farmers, Limited, have come in, and to give the same terms that the Westralian Farmers, Limited, have given in the matter. I defy, here and now, any member of the Opposition to bring forward one instance in which political influence has been brought to bear in this particular connection.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Is it not a fact that the Westralian Farmers, Limited, have received the price which was already tendered by other companies?

Mr. PICKERING: I cannot say whether that is a fact.

Mr. Troy: The Westralian Farmers have actually obtained more.

Mr. PICKERING: The member for Claremont (Mr. Stewart) has alleged that he is here to give the Government most loyal support on all occasions except such occasions when they appear to go against him. No doubt the Government will get a great deal of support of that nature from all of us on this side of the House. But if the hon. member is going to give the Government loyal support, he should do so in the best interests of the State, and I contend that those interests are best served by furthering, by every legitimate means, the development of co-operative trading.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [4.46]: The Premier in moving the second reading of this Bill confined his remarks solely to a justification of what is known as the pool principle.

The Premier: I confined myself to the Bill.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Strictly speaking, perhaps, the Premier confined himself to the Bill, but with a good deal of discretion on his part in refraining from touching on some phases of the pool with which this Bill deals intimately and closely. As to the principle of the wheat pool, there is no difference of opinion to-day in this State or, I suppose, in any part of the Common-

wealth. It is true there was considerable difference of opinion in the early stages of the establishment of the pool. The Government of which I was a member took a very active part in promoting the principle of the pool. At that time some prominent members of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association were not in favour of the principle. As a matter of fact, the Premier's neglect to refer to the contract entered into with the Westralian Farmers, Limited, for the handling of this season's harvest is, in all the circumstances, rather extraordinary. I think it was due to this House and due to the country that the Premier should explain the reasons which have actuated the Government in giving over to one firm or society the complete control and handling of this season's harvest. The matter is of sufficient importance. I think, to have justified an explanation on the part of the Premier when moving the second reading of this Bill. With the member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) I assert that political influence had a good deal to do with the fixing up of this contract; and whether, as the member for Sussex (Mr. Pickering) states, it be a fact that any of the members of the Association interviewed the Honorary Minister in charge of the wheat pool, matters very little. The fact that that Minister was interviewed by the manager or director, or whatever he is, of the company would be quite sufficient in itself to influence the Minister.

Mr. Johnston: He was also interviewed by the managers of the other companies.

Hon. P. COLLIER: He was not interviewed by the managers of the other companies. The position is—and the point is one which the public want to get well into their minds—that the Westralian Farmers, Limited, are a trading concern, are the trading branch of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association. There is no question about that; and contracts or undertakings entered into by the Government with the Westralian Farmers, Limited, need to be very carefully scrutinised in view of the fact that the principal backing and strength of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, lie in their political representation in this House. I repeat, there is no doubt whatever about it.

Mr. Griffiths: There is no connection between them.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Let the hon. member read the report of the parliament of his party, where Mr. McGibbon was cheered, and the assembled delegates sang, "For he's a jolly good fellow."

Mr. Griffiths: He is not member for Toodyay yet.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It would be a good thing if he were member for York. That would be an improvement. The Westralian Farmers, Limited, represent a trading concern, or the trading concern of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association. That is the position, and I assert that in the fixing up of the agreement giving the entire handling of this season's harvest to the Westralian Farmers, Limited, political influence or political pressure was brought to bear.

The Minister for Works: That is not correct.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Let us see. If it is not correct, let the Minister or some other member of the Government explain the reasons for the change of front. The whole difficulty has arisen out of what is known as the zone system in connection with the handling of the harvest. Here let me again remind the House that in Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia, the harvest is being handled this year on what is known as the zone system. That principle has been endorsed by all the boards, commissions, and authorities that have had anything to do with, or any say in connection with, the harvest right throughout the Commonwealth. Further than that, the principle of the zone system for this season's Western Australian harvest was approved by the Government themselves. It was endorsed by the Honorary Minister, Mr. Baxter. It was endorsed by the Premier in his policy speech at Moora. In a letter written on Mr. Baxter's behalf to the various firms on the 3rd August last the following paragraph appears:—

I have also been instructed to advise that as a result of a conference in Melbourne it has been suggested that the agents should be restricted to only one sub-agent at a siding or group of sidings.

The Hon. Minister, however, supported by the local advisory committee—

Let hon. members mark this, "supported by the local advisory committee."

was favourable to the proposal of dividing the wheat handling business of the State into port zone districts, and it was tentatively proposed that if the present agents were to operate allotments would be made as under:—Fremantle zone, the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.; Bunbury, John Darling & Sons; Albany, John Bell & Co.; Geraldton, Dalgety & Co.

That letter is signed "for the general manager of the wheat marketing scheme," and it is dated the 3rd August.

Hon. T. Walker: Where does Esperance come in?

Mr. Johnston: Was there not somebody else for Fremantle?

Hon. P. COLLIER: That does not matter. Here is the fact that on the 3rd August the Minister controlling the scheme on behalf of the Government acquainted the firms in question that the Government were entirely favourable to the zone system of handling the harvest.

The Minister for Works: What about the conditions?

Hon. P. COLLIER: I will come to the conditions. Further, the Premier in his policy speech at Moora took credit to the Government for approving of the zone system. He said that by the zone system the Government expected to make substantial reductions in the cost of handling the wheat for this season.

Mr. Johnston: He has made a reduction.

Hon. P. COLLIER: No; and the hon. member knows he has not. Are not all those who are handling the matter in the Eastern States of the Commonwealth studying the best interests of those concerned, namely, the wheat growers and the public, by adopting the zone system? It is only a common-sense business method of handling the harvest in the circumstances.

Mr. Griffiths: It eliminates competition.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It eliminates useful competition, and thus can only have the effect of increasing the cost of handling the harvest. If the harvest were handled on the zone system, we would have one firm

purchasing within the given area instead of having, as in the past, all those firms maintaining their respective agents to compete with the purchase of the harvest in a particular district. It was with a view of eliminating that unnecessary cost that the zone system was approved of in Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. It was approved of by the advisory committee in this State. It was approved of by the Honorary Minister and by the Premier himself. Now we have the fact that that principle has been abandoned in the agreement made by the Government with the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. Why has it been abandoned? We know that the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.—and this is where the influence comes in—were opposed to the zone system. Under it they would obtain their fair share of the season's harvest, together with other firms who have handled the harvest in the past. But the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., were opposed to the zone system because they apparently knew that by opposing it they would succeed in getting the handling of the whole of this season's harvest. They have eliminated some firms who carried the farmers of the country over bad seasons when the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., were not in existence. That is what they have succeeded in doing. They have eliminated firms that stood by the farmers of this State through the bad seasons of 1914 and 1915, when the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., did not exist. Why do not the Government explain? Why did not the Premier explain, in moving the second reading of the Bill, what actuated the Government in departing from the principle of the zone system? No explanation has been given, neither in the Press nor in this House nor elsewhere. There must have been some influence at work, some subtle influence at work, forcing the Government and the Premier to go back upon the policy announced in the Premier's policy speech at Moora.

Mr. Johnston: The object was to give the farmers the right to deal with their own company.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Did the Government wake up to the need for giving the farmers that right only at the eleventh hour? Had they not considered all the aspects of the

matter when the Premier made his policy speech at Moora? Had they not considered the various interests when that letter was written on the Honorary Minister's behalf as late as the 3rd August last? Had those interests not been considered as recently as the 3rd August? Now on the question of cost. These other firms submitted a price for handling the harvest based upon the zone system. The Westralian Farmers, Ltd., stood out of it, and did not come in. But what happened is this; and it is rather significant: Subsequently to these firms submitting their price to the Government, the Government accepted identically the same price from the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.

The Minister for Works: You are sure of that, I suppose?

Hon. P. COLLIER: Yes. Exactly the identical figure. I wonder was there any leakage from the files of the department whereby the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., became possessed of the knowledge of the price offered by the other firms? I wonder was there any leakage? It is rather significant that from the very outset of this business the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., opposed the zone system, and would not come in. The other firms submitted prices based upon that principle, and eventually the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., got the contract, got the whole business at the exact price at which the other firms had tendered.

Mr. Piesse: That is what hurts.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It hurts the other firms, and justifiably so, and if the hon. member as a business man had been treated in a similar way it would have hurt him too. I wonder what would have been said by our critics in this House and out of it, during the time the Labour Government were in office, if that Labour Government had undertaken a trading side as well as a political side, and had handed over the whole of the Government business to the trading side of the Labour movement without giving other people an opportunity of participating in it? What would have been said? That is precisely the position we are faced with to-day.

Mr. Piesse: You are wrong.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I am not.

The Minister for Works: It is all assumption.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It is like the assumption of the hon. member who says that these firms did not get the business because they were attempting to rook the farmer, to use the Minister's own words. If the prices these firms submitted were such as would result in rooking the farmers, the Government, in accepting the contract at the same price, were a party to the same thing. The Government rooked the farmers by giving the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., the contract at the same price.

Mr. Griffiths: Does not the profit go back into the pockets of the farmers?

Hon. P. COLLIER: No matter where the profit goes, trading firms are business firms and are entitled to a fair deal. They are entitled to have an equal opportunity of tendering for and securing any business that may be going, whether it be in competition with co-operative societies or not.

Mr. Piesse: They have been.

Hon. P. COLLIER: They have not. Will the hon. member explain why the Government departed from the zone system? It cannot be denied that this means an increased cost of handling the harvest. Why is the country being put to this increased expenditure when there is no necessity for it?

The Minister for Works: You have not shown where the increased cost comes in. If the price is the same where does the increase come in?

Hon. P. COLLIER: When the firms subsequently offered to handle the harvest at a lower price than that which they originally submitted—

Mr. Griffiths: After they refused the tender.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Honorary Minister was so annoyed at the firms offering to do the work for less than he agreed to pay the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., that he wrote them an insulting letter and he said he could not agree to accept their offer even though it was lower than that which he had agreed to pay.

The Minister for Works: They refused to do the work.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The hon. member does not know anything about it.

The Minister for Works: I know all about it and that is more than you do.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The hon. member possesses universal knowledge but he is quite wrong in this respect. There was no intimation and there was nothing in the correspondence to show that the price submitted by the firms was final and that it was not irreducible. When they submitted a price, they, as business men, were negotiating for the best terms, but that was not to say that they were not prepared to accept something less. The hon. member would do that. If I asked a contractor to erect a house for me he would first submit a higher price than that which he would be prepared to ultimately accept, and because these firms afterwards said they were prepared to do the work at a lower price which would amount to a saving of £23,000 on the handling of the harvest the Honorary Minister became annoyed.

The Minister for Works: Have you seen the correspondence?

Hon. P. COLLIER: The hon. member need not be fishing about what I have seen.

The Minister for Works: You seem to know all about it.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If I had access to the files and the minutes of the proceedings which took place between the Honorary Minister and the representatives of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., I should be in possession of some very interesting correspondence.

The Minister for Works: Then you would not be making this speech.

Mr. Green: There is work here for a Royal Commission.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Minister for Works knows nothing about the matter. The Honorary Minister said he was not prepared in the interests of the scheme itself to accept the reduced price. Why is he going to hand out money to the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., when there is no need to do that? It must be merely for the purpose of building up the trading side of the Farmers' and Settlers' political association. We are entering on a dangerous phase of public business when a political organisation which is becoming more and

more powerful as the years go on and which launches out in business—

Mr. Piesse: You are wrong.

Hon. P. COLLIER: And just so far as they increase in strength and influence in this House so far too does their trading increase and Government business goes their way. This same company are going to be given £4,400 of the taxpayers' money for handling the implements from the State Implement Works which work was done by the Labour Government for £700.

The Minister for Works: That is entirely wrong.

Hon. P. COLLIER: They are to be given 7 or 8 per cent. for handling, and there is not a farmer in the State who can purchase a machine direct. He will have to buy through the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., and pay commission even though there is no need for doing so.

Mr. Piesse: Increased business.

Hon. P. COLLIER: This company which started business only within the past year or two without any capital at all, if they are fortunate enough to have the present Government in power for the next three or four years, they will become a powerful and influential trading concern in this State. They will succeed in pushing out of business the firms that carried on this State during the bad seasons. Then there is this aspect that when the wheat pool was first formed the Prime Minister called together the wheat buyers or the representatives of these firms, and asked them to give to the Government the benefit of their advice and assistance. These people it was who gave to the country the benefit of their lifelong experience and in return for that the Prime Minister assured them that when the war was over and the pool was disbanded, they would be in the position to resume operations where they had begun, but by the action of the Government of this State in giving the whole of the business to the Westralian Farmers Ltd., the private firms will have lost their organisations, and so, when the war is over, and if the pool no longer exists, the whole of the handling of the harvest will be in the hands of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.

Mr. Johnston: And drive a good deal of capital out of the country.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That will be a very serious matter for the hon. member.

Hon. T. Walker: The millionaire from Narrogin.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I repeat that the House is entitled to some explanation from the Premier as to why he has departed from the policy he enunciated in his speech at Moora, when he claimed credit for reducing the handling charges of the harvest by introducing the zone system, and the first time the public became acquainted with the alteration was when an intimation appeared in the newspaper that the handling of the harvest had been given to the Westralian Farmers, Limited, and when this announcement was read in the Press the Honorary Minister had taken his departure for Melbourne. There was a complete somersault in the course of a few weeks, and a somersault of that description at least requires explanation and justification. I have no doubt that the representatives of the Farmers and Settlers' Association are perfectly satisfied. They have succeeded in eliminating all competition, and they have succeeded in getting from the Government of this country important and valuable business for their own trading concern. Is this the price that the Government are paying for the support that they are obtaining from the cross benches, or is it because this body are powerful and influential and are forcing the hands of the Government into forming contracts of this description? It looks very much like it. There was no talk of this a year or two ago when the representatives of the farmers were not here in such numbers, but to-day the Government meekly backs down and hands the whole of the harvest to this political association, the Westralian Farmers, Limited. It has not been in the best interests of the State because the taxpayers are concerned in it just as much as the farmers. This is not the farmers' wheat alone; it belongs to the taxpayers of the country who have guaranteed 4s. per bushel for it, and it is in the interests of the taxpayers that the wheat should be economically handled. That is not being done. The Government have sacrificed £23,000 by not accepting the lower offer submitted by the firms I have mentioned.

Mr. Broun: It is being handled a long way cheaper than last year.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The point is not that, but whether it is being handled as cheaply as it was possible to get it handled. If the Government had accepted the final offer made by the firms I have named there would have been the big difference of £23,000.

Mr. Broun: The final offer was made too late.

Hon. P. COLLIER: This is the defence of the Honorary Minister: "I cannot accept your offer because I have already accepted the offer of the Westralian Farmers, Limited." Why did they accept the offer of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, without asking the other firms concerned whether their previous offer was final or not? Why did they not give them an opportunity to re-consider their offer? It was the policy of the Government to encourage co-operation.

Member: So it should be.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It is the policy of the Government to encourage co-operation, but it should not be the policy of the Government to give encouragement to co-operation at the expense of fair dealing in business matters of this kind. That is the point.

Hon. T. Walker: There is no co-operation in this case because it is a monopoly.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If the Westralian Farmers, Limited, were prepared to come in and take their share they would be entitled to consideration and encouragement, but they are not entitled to secure a monopoly to the exclusion of all other interests which should be considered just as fairly as those of the co-operative society referred to by the Honorary Minister. In this case, they have secured a monopoly unfairly; and I say they secured it only because of their political power and influence in this House and in the councils of the Government.

Member: That is not correct.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It is correct; my assertion is as good as the hon. member's denial, and I say the statement is correct, and the facts and circumstances show it to be correct. If it is not correct, at least there should have been some explanation of the remarkable somersault on the part of the Government.

The Minister for Works: Do not impute motives.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The hon. member has lived all his life by imputing motives. He owes his position in this House to imputing motives, and now he objects to the introduction of the practice. It is self evident. If an explanation had been given for the change on the part of the Government I may not have had occasion to impute those motives; but, in the absence of any attempt at explanation I claim I am justified in coming to the conclusion I have.

Mr. MULLANY (Menzies) [5.18j: Whilst I am prepared to support the second reading of this Bill I am prepared to do so merely as a small measure providing for the continuation of the Wheat Pool as it at present exists. Before I commit myself to support this Bill, I expect to have an explanation from the Premier in his reply on the second reading of the measure on the several matters which have been brought before us in this debate. I believe every member in this Chamber is prepared to support this short measure, but statements which have been made this afternoon from this side of the House, and also by the leader of the Opposition, are such that I think no member can pledge himself to support the Bill without further explanation. At the same time I think that hon members should recognise that it is absolutely necessary to continue the operations of the Wheat Pool. I believe the leader of the Opposition himself would make no objection to that. But strong objection has been made to the administration of the present Act. I fully expect that there will be an explanation made upon these matters which have been brought forward, but, until I have heard the Premier, who introduced this Bill, on the second reading, I certainly cannot commit myself by saying I am going to support this measure.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. W. J. George—Murray-Wellington) [5.20]: If I were the manager of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, I should rejoice greatly at the debate which has taken place this afternoon, because I should regard it, from a business point of view, as absolutely the greatest advertisement that has been

given to the co-operative movement initiated by that society by any assembly in the world.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Are they the first co-operative society?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No; but the society appears to me to be a step in the right direction.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Hear! hear!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It seems to me only right that the man who toils on the land shall at any rate get a fair deal in connection with the article he produces. I am not a wheat producer, but, as a fruit producer, I hope the operations of this association will be extended to the industry in which I am interested, and that, in the future, we shall not, as has happened during the past few years, witness the spectacle of men interested in orchards being bled and bled and bled until there was nothing left at all to bleed them of. Right through the speeches made by the hon. members for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) and Boulder (Hon. P. Collier) there appears to be an absolute doubt as to the honesty and bona fides of the Government in this transaction.

Mr. Jones: Are you surprised at that?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes, I am surprised. If those hon. members had called for the papers to be laid on the table of the House, they then might have had a foundation upon which to either launch an attack on the Government or to have refrained from the criticism they have indulged in this afternoon, which, I think, they will find was not justified. The member for North-East Fremantle made reference to the arrangement which I myself made with the Westralian Farmers, Limited, in connection with the Implement Works. I do not propose now entering into a full explanation in regard to that, because it would take a long time to give the full facts in order to allow members to form a correct opinion. I will say this much, however, that throughout I was never approached by any member or members of Parliament in any shape or form. The whole of the transactions were conducted by myself as Minister in charge of trading concerns with the manager and a director of the company, and those proceedings might be open to the

whole world. So far as I know there is nothing in them but proper business principles, and there was no departure from business principles at any time.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What was the reason for the higher rate of commission?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I shall not tell the hon. member that now.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Why touch on the subject at all, then; that is the only objection.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I think I can put forward good reasons in support of that, reasons which it seems to me are adequate.

Mr. O'Loughlen: If we had those reasons, we might be satisfied.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: As I have already told the hon. member, that matter is not apropos to this debate at all. The member for Claremont (Mr. Stewart) made a few remarks on this question, and he is a gentleman who is entitled to be considered as speaking with some weight on such a subject. He is in the business, I understand, and is connected with enterprises similar in their activities with Dalgety & Co. and the wheat scheme. Therefore his comments on this subject are valuable, and his criticism of the action of the Government are not only valuable but welcome, as also would be his assistance to the Government if he would give it, as I am sure he will.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Is he the man who was ordered out of the room by the Honorary Minister.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I cannot tell the hon. member. The Honorary Minister referred to is Mr. Baxter, and were he here I have no doubt he would be able to give good reasons. Some time ago I ordered a union secretary out of my room and he went out too. The hon. member for Claremont has stated the operations of the scheme under the arrangement made with the Westralian Farmers, Limited, so far as he knows it, will cost the Government a greater sum than if the old agencies arrangement were in operation. I cannot see that, because if the price to be paid by the Westralian Farmers is the same as paid to the former agents, where can there be any difference?

Hon. P. Collier: The other firms subsequently submitted a lower offer which the Honorary Minister did not accept.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I understand the firms referred to—Dalgety & Co., and other firms—put in prices for certain work under certain conditions which were not acceptable to the Government, and then, when the matter had been completed and arrangements made with another firm, then, at the eleventh hour, those firms had a death-bed repentance and made an offer of another proposition. That sort of thing cannot go on for ever. Supposing the Government had considered this death-bed proposition, then it would have been open to the Westralian Farmers to say, "Yes, we understand there is another offer to cut prices down; our offer now is so-and-so." That is not business; as business it would bring disgrace on an office boy just from school. A member of the Country party interjected while the member for Claremont was speaking, "Did not your company attempt to get a monopoly?" The member for Claremont did not fully reply to that. I did not catch anything from him to say whether his company did or did not.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: They are not in the wheat pool at all.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: "Your firm" would be the firm in which the member for Claremont is interested, and the interests of which the member for North-East Fremantle and the member for Boulder are advocating.

Hon. P. Collier: That is not so.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: One cannot get away from it. There are two parties to this matter; one the Westralian Farmers, Limited, and the other, the other wheat buyers of the State. I do not know whether the member for Claremont had anything to do with these other firms—though if he did I am satisfied that his association therewith would be strictly honourable. The interjection was, "Did not your firm try to get a monopoly?" They certainly did.

Hon. P. Collier: That is not so.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is so; the papers will show it.

Hon. P. Collier: Produce the papers and prove it then.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: They attempted to get a monopoly.

Hon. T. Walker: They attempted; others got it.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The member for Kanowna has many times attempted things, and sometimes he did not get them. There have also been statements made in regard to Mr. Sibbald, and the way in which these statements have been made imply a doubt as to his retirement. It would seem as if the Government had said to Mr. Sibbald, "If you won't fall in with our views, get out." Mr. Sibbald resigned his position.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Of his own volition?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Of course he did. If the hon. member knew Mr. Sibbald he would find him to be a very strong man. Mr. Sibbald would not take orders to resign from any Government, not even a Labour Government. When talking about men, let us treat them as men. Mr. Sibbald resigned his position; he was not retired. The insinuation is that the Government retired him.

Hon. P. Collier: No, they forced him to resign by ignoring him.

Mr. O'Loughlen: He resigned exactly the same as the King of Greece.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member spoke of class legislation. Where is the class legislation? Suppose members of the Country party, representing the men who produced this wheat, said, "We are going to handle our own concerns." What would happen? Hon. members opposite say, "We will handle the matters that touch the people we represent, who are the workers of the State. They must have an Arbitration Act and other things of the sort." That is because they have a mandate from the people who sent them here. The members of the Country party are here to maintain the rights of the people they represent. If it is right for hon. members opposite to deal with questions of labour, is it wrong for members of the Country party here to deal with the products of their own labour and those of their constituents and class?

Mr. Green: And make an undue profit out of the Crown, to which you are a party.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: If the hon. member could see my returns, he would see a good loss. The leader of the Opposition said, "I assert that political influence had a great deal to do with this contract." As far as I know, there has been no political influence brought to bear in the matter at all. I do not believe there has been any, and I feel satisfied that the hon. member himself knows in his heart that it is not so.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Well, explain why you departed from the zone system.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I will leave that to my colleague, the Premier. If I could have a zone system in politics, I would put the hon. member as far away as possible. Then again, the leader of the Opposition wonders if there has been any leakage. Does the hon. member want to insinuate that the honorary Minister, Mr. Baxter, has permitted a leakage of the negotiations he has been conducting with the other firms, to help the Westralian Farmers' Limited? If not that, what does he mean? Does he wish to insinuate that possibly there may be paid agents in the Minister's office to disclose information of use to people outside? He wonders if there has been any leakage. He speaks about it being a dangerous phase of politics. If it is a dangerous phase of politics for the direct representatives of those who produce the wheat to look after the interests of the people they represent, then it is a dangerous phase of politics that hon. members opposite should do as they have done in the past, namely, advocate questions affecting the working man.

Hon. P. Collier: This is a business deal.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Of course, it is.

Hon. T. Walker: It is one of your secret contracts.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am sorry that the hon. member while in England did not acquire some of the English reserve. I wish to point out this: If members opposite have a right to advocate their class legislation in regard to the working people—which I admit—then my friends on the cross benches have equally the right to advocate their views in regard to the working people whom they represent and the products of their work.

Hon. P. Collier: What an analogy—advocating legislation and fixing up a business deal!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: When one has been in politics for some time, one knows that the Opposition has to make an attack.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Tell us why you departed from the zone system?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: My colleague will tell you that. In conclusion I may say I am not a member of the Farmers and Settlers' Association nor of the Country party; I am a Nationalist.

Mr. Green: A real Win-the-War.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am doing my part in winning the war. The farmers have an absolute right, if they choose, to form any company to deal with their products, just the same as those in the fruit industry can form their own organisation to deal with their fruit; but of course hon. members have not the right to use their political position to either drive or coerce Ministers. They have no right to do that, and to my knowledge have never attempted to do it, nor do I believe they ever will.

Mr. BROUN (Beverley) [5.40]: I had not intended to delay the House, but after the remarks made by members of the Opposition, I cannot but speak to the question. I remember distinctly in 1911, when I came into the House as a young member, it was the cry of hon. members then in power that the merchants were out to rob everybody. To-day when the Government have made a reasonable business proposition to assist the farmer and protect him from the middleman, those same hon. members are doing all they can to oppose it. I entirely indorse the attitude taken up by the Government in regard to the handling of our crop for the coming year, and I say straight out there has been no political jobbery whatever. I am going to give hon. members opposite some figures which will probably make them wiser. As all members know, for years we have been paying high prices to those men for handling our stuff. I will admit that on many occasions we have been helped by those merchants. But the time has arrived when we are no longer content to crawl; we want to walk. We hear it said on all sides that to save our country from the financial

stress, we must produce, produce, produce. But is the farmer going to produce if he finds he cannot make wheat-growing pay? He is unable to do it under present conditions, and we have realised that from now onwards it will be necessary for us to form our co-operative companies, not to have a central Westralian Farmers' company, but to have co-operative effort in every town in Western Australia.

Mr. Stewart: Under the protection of the Government.

Mr. BROWN: No, undoubtedly not, and I hope that some day we as farmers will be in a position to occupy the Treasury bench ourselves. We do not need to do it to-day, because we have the sympathy of the National Government; and our sympathy is with them in their endeavour to pull the State out of the financial difficulties for which the Labour Government were partly responsible. It is necessary for us to start handling our own produce, and I hope that before long we will be able to handle it, not only between the field and the port, but right to the consumer's hand, no matter in what part of the world he may be. It is only by doing this, that we shall be able to make farming pay. Hon. members opposite have referred to political jobbery in regard to this transaction.

Hon. P. Collier: Nobody used the phrase.

Mr. BROWN: Well, a phrase of a similar meaning was used. That was the intention. There was no political jobbery. Hon. members have been talking about a monopoly. It was the other side who wanted to create a monopoly. A price was submitted to the Westralian Farmers by the Minister and a price was submitted to the whole of the other merchants, and they were asked to compete. What was the result? Only the Westralian Farmers would take it on. Why? Let me give the House a few figures. Late in 1915-16 the Westralian Farmers, Limited, started to operate in the handling of wheat. Although starting much later than other merchants, they handled one-ninth of the whole of the 15 million bushel crop. In 1916-17, operating in open competition with the merchants, they handled four-ninths of the total crop. To-day we have 64 co-operative companies in Western Australia. Had these been in operation this year in

open competition with the merchants, they would have had practically the whole of the wheat.

Hon. P. Collier: There would have been no objection.

Mr. BROWN: They would have had nine-tenths of it easily. The suspicion arises from the merchants. They were out against the co-operative companies, and thought they were going to step in this year and have the zone system. They said, "We are going to kill the whole of the four co-operative companies, and once we do that we have them down and will keep them down where we want them in order to bleed them."

Hon. P. Collier: The hon. member forgets that the suggestion of the zone system came from the Government themselves and not from the firms.

The Premier: No, pardon me.

Hon. P. Collier: I have the letter from the Honorary Minister.

The Premier: It never came from me.

Mr. BROWN: I want this to be clearly understood. It is no use the Opposition making capital out of this, because the capital they want to make out of it is for political purposes, and to try and upset the National Government. They do this in order that when they go to the country they may have something with which to carry the merchants and the people. I think the merchants have had a sufficient dose of the policy of Labour Government to keep them back for many long years. I remember quite well the time when I was a member of a small opposition of 16 in this Chamber, against a membership of 34 on the Government benches. I remember too, the time that we had, and what we had to submit to during their administration.

Hon. P. Collier: Nine-tenths of the farmers would be off the land to-day but for our assistance.

Mr. BROWN: With regard to the agreement, I feel sure that nine-tenths of the farmers in Western Australia are satisfied that everything is fair and above board in respect to the transactions between the Government and the agents and the Westralian Farmers, Limited. Statements have been made by hon. members opposite, which were refuted by the member for Sussex, to the effect that the Westralian Farmers, Limited,

was a political body. It is not connected with any political body, or with the Country party so far as politics are concerned. This is absolutely true.

Hon. P. Collier: It is a pup.

Mr. BROWN: It is a registered co-operative company. Of the many local co-operative bodies existing to-day, there are members who do not belong to the Westralian Farmers and some who do, but they will all get their proportion of the dividends accruing from the business of the Westralian Farmers. Hon. members say that we are paying £10,000 more for the handling of our wheat this year than if we had given it to the other agents.

Hon. T. Walker: Thirty thousand.

Mr. BROWN: I take it that this statement comes from the agents themselves who should know better than the hon. member.

Hon. P. Collier: Is it not a fact?

Mr. BROWN: That is based on a 12 million bushel yield, which I am afraid we shall not realise after all this year. With regard to the profits made out of this, those who put their wheat into the pool are going to participate in these profits. This goes to show that we are taking a step in the right direction, and I am pleased to see the Government in their wisdom bringing this agreement into force. I hope we shall continue to have the privilege of handling our own produce.

Mr. TROY (Mt. Magnet) [5.50]: The hon. gentleman who has just sat down is I think guilty of the basest ingratitude when he gives this party and this side of the House, remembering all the great favours conferred upon agriculture in this State, which has been chiefly instrumental in preventing its downfall, such scurvy treatment. If the members of this party had refused to interest themselves in agriculture in Western Australia the position to-day would not have been a disastrous one, and in supporting the agriculturist we took on the greatest burden.

Mr. Munsie: We have spoon-fed them for four years.

Member: At what price?

Mr. TROY: It is time to quibble at the price when they have repaid their liability.

Mr. Munsie: They have never paid a shilling of it yet.

Mr. TROY: This fact must be borne in mind. During the time that the Labour party was in office two-thirds of the revenue and of the loans of this country went to the farmers.

Hon. P. Collier: All the money we could borrow.

Mr. TROY: No community in the country north, south, east, or west is so much indebted to the Government as the farmers of Western Australia. The hon. gentleman ought, therefore, to be fair if he cannot afford to be generous.

Mr. Munsie: He should at all events be fair; we do not want him to be generous.

Hon. P. Collier: He had to twist to get into Parliament.

Mr. SPEAKER: This debate cannot continue under existing conditions. Standing Order 136 says—

No member shall interrupt another member while speaking, unless (1) to request that his words be taken down; (2) to call attention to a point of order; or (3) to call attention to the want of a quorum.

I have allowed hon. members just about as much latitude as I can. I hope they will allow the hon. member who is now speaking to address the House more in keeping with the decorum of the House.

Mr. TROY: Those who have known the Minister for Works as long as some hon. members have known him will not be greatly influenced by his heroics this evening. He endeavoured to establish parallel arguments by pointing out how members on this side of the House had urged and encouraged legislation in the interests of their policy, and insists that members of the country party were justified in doing likewise. The cases are not parallel at all. When this party established trading concerns, the action was taken not in the interests of any one party, it conferred no advantage upon its particular organisation, and no advantage upon any particular section of the community. It conferred an advantage upon the great majority of the people of the State, and the profits went and are going to the people. If public money was used by the Government in establishing trading con-

cerns the people of the State must secure the advantage of that, and the profits are being secured by them and incidentally by the Government. In this case, however, the matter is an entirely different one. This concern is being carried on, as it were, under the patronage of the Government, and the Government have given it certain considerations and advantages which it was not entitled to except it be the Government's policy to encourage the co-operative system entirely as against any other system. If the Government were to boldly assert, "Our policy is to bring about a state of co-operation in every industry" then we would accept and support it. I for one would do so. But this Government pretends to be out to encourage private enterprise, and a Government like this cannot justify itself by marching two ways. Their policy must be either one thing or the other, and if they are out to encourage these co-operative concerns by giving them special privileges and advantages and it be the policy of the country so to do we will be with them. I welcome the farmers' co-operative movement. I hold no brief for any of these companies, but the Government of the country are not entitled in any community to give special privileges if they pretend to represent the whole of the community. I do think, and these letters to the Hon. Minister go to prove it, that undoubtedly special consideration was given to this particular company. We are told that this is so because the farmers are going to get the benefit. In this particular wheat scheme the farmers, however, are not the only ones concerned and interested. The people of the country are finding the cash and guaranteeing it, and if there is to be a bonus paid, or a refund from the profits made by the company, the people at large ought to be entitled to their share. That is the position I take up. I do not think either the leader of the Opposition or members of this party object to the encouragement of the farmers' co-operative movement.

Hon. P. Collier: That is not the point at all.

Mr. TROY: No. The point is that the Minister entered into negotiations with certain individuals and companies in the State

who had been handling the wheat harvest. He led them to believe that he was in favour of the handling of the wheat on the zone system. There is no doubt about that and it is proved by the letters. He got these people to submit certain prices. The Westralian Farmers refused to submit prices on the zone system but the other companies did so.

Mr. Pickering: It is *vice versa*.

Mr. TROY: Not at all. The Westralian farmers wanted the whole of the business or none. The other companies were quite prepared to offer it on the zone system. Negotiations went on and the Minister did not summarily dismiss the others and say "I am giving the business to the Westralian Farmers." He continued the negotiations, and the childish manner in which these negotiations were continued shows that the Hon. Minister is no business man. Instead of closing down on the other companies and saying "I am giving the business to this company and no other" he continued the negotiations and apparently gave these people to understand that there was still time for them to offer terms, and that he would be prepared to give them time in which to arrive at a settlement of the bargain.

Hon. P. Collier: Just so.

Mr. TROY: His whole correspondence was one of bargaining for terms and conditions. When, however, he found that these other people submitted better terms than the Westralian Farmers and that Dalgety's and others put in prices better for the farmer, in that they would handle the wheat harvest cheaper the Hon. Minister becomes annoyed about the matter and takes exception to it.

Hon. P. Collier: He is cross over it.

Mr. TROY: He says "How dare you offer such terms. The Government are not going to encourage you to carry in business on those terms." I suppose that the capital of Dalgety & Co. is a hundred times as great as that of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, in the State.

The Minister for Works: They started in a small way, I suppose.

Mr. TROY: It does not matter how they started. Dalgety's were willing to handle the

wheat harvest at a farthing per bushel less than were the Westralian Farmers, but the Honorary Minister said, "I will not encourage that, it is too great a risk."

Member: It is a sprat to catch a mackerel.

Mr. TROY: I pity the hon. member in his simplicity. The duty of the Government is primarily to see that the wheat is handled as cheaply as possible, and the farmers are entitled to say, "If our wheat is to be handled at a farthing per bushel less than it was last year that farthing should go into our pockets."

Mr. Pickering: That is the position under this arrangement.

Mr. TROY: It is the duty of the Government to give a fair deal all round, unless their policy is to take one particular body under their patronage and give to it special conditions and facilities which are not afforded to any other bodies within the State. The leader of the Opposition, giving a parallel case, said, "If the Labour Government had in its organisation a trading concern, and the Labour Government gave that trading concern Government business after calling for tenders and entering into negotiations with others the shutting those others out entirely on the pretence of encouraging the co-operative movement, there would have been a shriek of protest to high Heaven by the Minister for Works." That Minister this afternoon gave the older members of the House cause for amusement by his pretence that he holds in horror innuendoes and accusations, when, if I may say it, his whole stock-in-trade for five solid years was accusation and innuendo.

Hon. P. Collier: Absolutely true.

The Minister for Works: Oh no!

Mr. TROY: I can pick up the newspaper files and *Hansard* and show where the present Minister for Works said that the Nevanas business was a scandal that cried to high Heaven. He arraigned the then Premier; and, before the judge had presented his report he, the Minister, sat cheek by jowl, friendly and in office with that Premier—I refer to Mr. Scaddan, the gentleman he had arraigned. And now the Minister for

Works is shocked. I say here that I have no objection whatever to the farmers' having their co-operative movement. I think it means their salvation. But it is not the duty of any Government pretending to be national, pretending to be straightforward and pure, to give to any body of people in this country, because they have some political influence, special privileges and advantages, and do injury to other people in the State whom they have called upon to assist them in their time of need and whom, even up to a little while ago, they asked to enter into negotiations for this business. The Honorary Minister's reply to these people is the clumsiest attempt at diplomacy that I have ever encountered.

Hon. P. Collier: It is a gem. He went to Melbourne after getting that off his chest.

Mr. TROY: He said to them—

If your last quote to do the business for 1/4d. per bushel less is a *bona fide* business proposition and not made with the desire to harass the Government in its declared policy of protecting the growers and their co-operative societies—

Hon. P. Collier: Harassing the Government by doing the work for less.

Mr. TROY: This is written to the people with whom the Government are negotiating to handle the wheat harvest, in an endeavour to handle it as cheaply as it can possibly be handled. When these people offer to do it cheaply, Mr. Baxter tells them that they are harassing the Government. These people wanted to put into the pockets of the farmers of this country £20,000 out of the scheme; and that, according to the Honorary Minister, is harassing the Government. The letter continues—

nor to compel them to operate at what you have hitherto regarded as an impossible rate, why is it that the terms upon which you were prepared to operate at the inauguration of the Wheat Marketing Scheme, either separately or conjointly, and which you considered were the lowest possible terms at which you could act for the Government, were not based on the cut figures that you have now submitted, and which would have

prevented, in all probability, the co-operative societies—which, once formed, we all pledged as a Government to protect—from coming into existence?

It appears as if the gentlemen who wrote this is not the Honorary Minister but the manager of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. One would imagine that the person who made those remarks was an agent of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., not the representative of a Government negotiating between these people. The manager of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., could have written such a letter. They are exactly the remarks one would have expected from the agent of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. He would be justified in saying, "The other firms cannot do it for less; they merely want to undermine us." The letter would indicate that the Minister is not acting here. The letter indicates that the person who is acting here is the agent of a concern out for the contract and advancing arguments against other competitors. The Minister says that, once the co-operative societies are formed, the Government are pledged to protect them. Here is the reason. The Minister says in effect, "Although you agree to handle the wheat harvest for  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per bushel less than the Westralian Farmers Ltd., the object of your offer is only to undermine a co-operative society which we, as a Government, are out to protect." If Mr. Baxter's policy was to protect the co-operative organisation, why did he negotiate with the other people at all? Why keep them waiting for months? Why have these other men spending their time and their interest and their money in negotiation, if he was out to give the business to the other body?

Mr. Pickering: Even if he did it, was he not justified in doing it?

Mr. TROY: Not as a Minister. He was no more justified in doing that than the member for Boulder, if he were Premier, would be justified in giving to a trades union bakery all the Government orders at a higher price than at which other bakers could supply.

The Attorney General: Or giving £2,000 to the Trades Hall.

Hon. T. Walker: Or bridges over the Swan.

Mr. TROY: To proceed with this extraordinary letter from a Minister of the Crown—

I cannot but think that your action all along, culminating in your letter of the 2nd inst., is but a concerted attempt to drive these societies out of the business.

Mr. Pickering: So it was.

Mr. TROY: I admit it probably was. These are competing firms entitled, under the auspices of the Government, to engage in private competition. We have no time for them, but, while they exist, and the Government enter into negotiations with them, and ask their help, they are entitled to a fair deal, and no Minister has a right to stand up for one trading body as against the other trading body. And that is what Mr. Baxter did. Mr. Baxter, when he found that these other people would do the work for less, immediately took up the position of an advocate of the Westralian Farmers, Limited. There is no question about that. He said to the other firms, "You offer to do the work for  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. less, but all you want to do is to drive these people out of the business." This Minister, who pretends that his duty was to act for the State and get the best terms for the State—which, after all, has to pay the bill—takes upon himself the duty of acting as a special pleader for one of these competitors. That is the thing I object to. If the Government admit that they want to encourage this particular body and wipe the others out, well and good.

Mr. Pickering: These other firms must have been making a good deal out of the farmer, or they would not squeal so.

Mr. TROY: That is not the matter under discussion. The Government say the matter is fair, square, and above board. We say that, on the face of that letter, it is not so. Where the Minister controlling the business makes himself a special pleader for one of the bargainers, for one of the competitors—

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Of which he is a member.

Mr. TROY: Is that a fair and square and decent position?

The Minister for Works: The other side have some special pleaders to-day.

Mr. TROY: I am not associated with any of these people. I have had very

little dealing with any of them. But I do say that in this House my business is to see that the business of the country is done fair and square and above board. When a Minister rises in his place and indulges in extravagant heroics such as the Minister for Works indulged in only a few minutes ago, and pretends that all this is pure and straightforward and honest—

The Minister for Works: Well, is it not?

Mr. TROY: On this letter, unquestionably, the Honorary Minister controlling the business is making himself a special pleader for one of the bargainers, and is annoyed because other people agree to do the work more cheaply, when it is his business to get the work done as cheaply as possible.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

Mr. TROY: Before tea I was discussing the letter written by the Honorary Minister, Mr. Baxter, to whom the arrangements for bringing this scheme to a head were entrusted. The letter was written to the various firms who had previously been operating in the wheat business and who had been negotiating with him for a share of the work of handling the coming harvest. After special pleading for the Westralian Farmers, Limited, he goes on to say—

I cannot but think that your action all along culminating in your letter of the 2nd inst. is but a concerted attempt to drive these societies out of business.

If that letter had come from the agent of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, it would only have been what one might have expected, but to come from the Minister who has to decide between competitors in a scheme of handling the harvest, is, to say the least of it, most extraordinary, and it is that letter which requires explanation. A Minister's business is to justly arrange a scheme in the best interests of the farmers and of the State, and when he calls a number of business men in to compete, he does not stand to consider any particular interest, he stands as a Minister of the Crown, to give a fair deal, and above all, to be impartial. A special pleading for any particular body is not within a Minister's

province. The Honorary Minister concluded his letter by saying—

It is not considered in the best interests of the scheme for the handling of the grain, to ask any agent to operate at what must be a severe business loss.

Just imagine the Government calling for tenders and the lowest tender coming from a reputable firm with a big capital invested in the State, and that firm being told by a Minister of the Crown that the Government had no desire to see it sustain a loss in connection with the handling of the harvest.

Mr. Griffiths: Their tender was too late.

Mr. TROY: The Minister does not say that. The Minister says that it is not considered in the best interests of the scheme to ask this firm to operate the business at a loss. That is their business. It had nothing to do with the Minister. Take Dalgety & Co., probably the richest firm operating in Australia. This wealthy firm has had years of experience in the handling of wheat. The Minister asked that firm for a tender for this particular scheme, and when they tendered he told them that they would sustain a loss. He was not in a position to judge. Anyhow, he insisted that it would mean a loss to them and that it would not be in the interests of the State for the firm to incur that loss. It is a most extraordinary attitude for a Minister of the Crown to take up, and I do not think that there can be found a parallel in the history of this or any other State.

Mr. Hickmott: That was their second tender.

Mr. TROY: That has nothing to do with it. If the Minister had said that on the tenders the Westralian Farmers, Limited, had to get the contract, everything would have been all right, but he continued negotiations, and when the firms submitted a lower price than that of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, he found fault with that price, even though it meant a saving of many thousands of pounds to the people of this country. The honorary Minister wrote—

I might point out that if your counter offer of the 2nd inst. had been one to do the work for nothing I could not recommend Cabinet to accept it.

If Dalgety and Dreyfus & Co. out of patriotism had declared that they would do this work for nothing, the Minister would have declined to accept the offer, preferring to give the work to the Westralian Farmers, Limited, who had undertaken to do it for a considerable sum of money. The Minister for Works challenged the leader of the Opposition, or he pretended that the leader of the Opposition had asserted that the whole business was suspicious. If the leader of the Opposition has stated that, then there may be some reason for the contention. There is the extraordinary coincidence that the tender submitted by the Westralian Farmers, Limited, which was accepted, was identical with the tender submitted by the other firms. Was not that a coincidence? I hold no brief for Dalgety's, Dreyfus, Darling & Co., or anyone else. We find that a Government who pretend to be National, a Government who pretend to stand for a fair deal all round, and a Government who stand for private enterprise and competition, call together a number of men who have rendered some service to the State by their operations in connection with the last wheat harvest, ask them for a tender, negotiate with them over a term of some months, and, when a lower tender is submitted by other firms than the Westralian Farmers, Limited, the honorary Minister finds fault with the tender submitted by the other firms. All we on this side of the House want is an explanation regarding the whole business. I commend the farmers for their advocacy and encouragement of co-operative principles. If the Government business is to encourage co-operation and to shut out established firms let them be straightforward about it and we will not object. Let Ministers act as dignified and responsible officers, not as special pleaders for any individual or company. Then no one will be able to take exception to what may be done. If the Government want to encourage co-operative societies, let them give pound for pound subsidies. The sort of business which we have been discussing to-night, however, is not satisfactory, and is not the kind of thing that will meet with my approval. I would like to see co-operative concerns run all the businesses in the

country, but let them enter into those businesses on straightforward lines. If the Minister had shown any special consideration to Dalgety's, Dreyfus, or any other firm, we on this side of the House would have adopted the same attitude.

The Minister for Mines: When did Dalgety's submit their reduced price?

Mr. TROY: Before the Minister had given his decision.

The Minister for Mines: On what date?

Mr. TROY: The date is not important. We only know that it was before the Minister gave a decision as to who was to get the business.

The Minister for Mines: Before he accepted anybody's tender. I only want your assertion.

Mr. TROY: The Minister for Mines can easily obtain any information he desires. The only statements made on this side of the House are based on the admissions of the Honorary Minister himself.

The Minister for Mines: No; you are criticising his acts of administration.

Hon. T. Walker: The papers show that he had already completed the contract.

The Minister for Mines: What was the exact date, that is what I want to get at.

Hon. P. Collier: It might be more interesting to know the date on which the Minister expected to receive the offer.

Mr. TROY: The Minister for Mines can obtain any information more easily than I can. I will conclude my remarks by saying that the whole business has been underhand; and if members on this side of the House are suspicious I submit they have some ground for their suspicion. As I have previously said I have no quarrel with a Government policy which seeks to encourage the co-operative principle; but if the Government is anxious to assist co-operative societies they should do so on sound and legitimate lines.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. R. T. Robinson—Canning) [7.48]: The House this afternoon has not discussed the Bill itself, but the method of administration of the Pool. I would like to say that the Government have received a telegram from Senator Russell, advising that he has arranged to divert 2,000 bales of corn sacks to this State from overseas. It seems to me that

the whole question we have been discussing this afternoon is really one of competition between the outside firms and the Westralian Farmers', Ltd. The Westralian Farmers' Ltd. is a co-operative society comprising the farmers of this State, and hon. members have given us a graphic outline of the progress of that co-operative movement which has been a matter of great astonishment to the mercantile agents. They handled with the greatest ease practically half of last years' harvest and if they had been in competition for another year would have taken practically the whole of the harvest. That being the state of affairs, we have to see what are the objects of the mercantile agencies; and I have no hesitation in saying that a calm, unprejudiced perusal of the correspondence will show that every move they have made was made with the object of killing co-operation, killing the Westralian Farmers' and their co-operative society. I had expected that in a democratic assembly such as this, that those who would support the co-operative principle would have been my friends opposite; but instead of that, we find that they have ranged themselves alongside the mercantile firms who are opposed to co-operation. This will be fully explained when the Premier gives hon. members the details on the file dealing with this question; but I want to remove an impression members might have. The member for Mt. Magnet (Mr. Troy) laid much stress on the offer made by the mercantile agency, but he failed to tell the House one condition which they insisted on, and that was that they should have a monopoly of the business, that the Westralian Farmers' Ltd. should have no share in the business. If that condition is not objectionable to my democratic friends opposite, it does not appeal to my ideas. Some questions have been asked during this debate on this subject and the information in reply will be given by the Premier. The Westralian Farmers' Ltd. were, from beginning to end, willing to work in competition with anybody in the world; but the mercantile agencies were not; they would kill the co-operative movement or by their own system would control the whole business. On the other hand, the

Westralian Farmers' would welcome competition.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What is your objection to the zone system?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I shall not discuss that at this juncture. The Westralian Farmers, I repeat, were willing to work in open competition all round. The Government have been challenged by members opposite with having done something wrong in supporting co-operation.

Hon. T. Walker: They have been challenged with nothing of the kind.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Members opposite have challenged us for having encouraged a society which stands for the principle of co-operation.

Hon. P. Collier: We have done nothing of the kind.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: If members opposite have done nothing of the kind, then I shall at once withdraw that remark—but the House itself may judge. I want to tell the House and members opposite the attitude the Government has taken up all along on this subject. I have announced long ago that the Government makes advances only on a pound for pound basis to co-operative societies by way of industrial assistance. That is the whole principle. The member for Mt. Magnet (Mr. Troy) and myself are quite in accord as to that; and I go further and say that the principle of co-operation, the value of which the Western Australian farmer is now beginning to learn, is going to revolutionise the world after the war. I make the point that co-operation gives the profit previously earned by the mercantile agencies to the farmers themselves. The mercantile agents, in a publication they have issued, state that the taxpayers of the State lose £10,000 because their offer, which they contend is one farthing per bushel less than is being paid to the Westralian Farmers, was not accepted. But I ask if the Government had agreed to give them a monopoly of the business, who would pay? The taxpayer, think you; no, the farmer would pay.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It would be a better deal for the State.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The agents say that the taxpayer loses this sum

He does nothing of the kind. The farmer and not the taxpayer loses that £10,000. But where does he lose it? He loses it into his own pockets instead of into the pockets of the big mercantile agents; and I may add that in addition to this £10,000 which he puts into his own pocket, sensible man, he is also going to put into his pocket profits which the four other firms would have carried away to other parts of the world. So that the whole of the profits in the handling of the wheat harvest of the State are going to the primary producer himself, and I would like to know who is better entitled to it than he? How has the business of the Westralian Farmers' Co-operative Society grown? No business ever yet has grown by lacking in detail or by slovenliness. The Westralian Farmers' plant will compare with the best of them, and its business has grown because they have given attention to it. If they have been in the position of doing this in competition with others, then I say without hesitation they stand the best possible chance of handling the harvest successfully without competition. I should like to discuss shortly the question of this year's work as compared with last year, because it is on somewhat different lines, and it is as well to be absolutely clear what was done last year, and what is proposed shall be done this year. Last year's business was arranged through agents who had to acquire, store, and protect the wheat for 12 months or until shipped, and for this they received 3½d. per bushel. That included what is known as the responsibility of out-turn; that is to say they had to out-turn to the State at the port of discharge an equivalent quantity and quality of wheat to that which they received. Those shortly were the terms obtaining last year. The present prices which have been accepted from the Westralian Farmers, Limited, are two—1½d. maximum and 1½d. minimum. It is just as well to know what these are for. The 1½d. is for wheat received at sidings and includes temporary stacking there; the 1½d. is for wheat received at sidings, and sent direct to depots. In both instances the price includes the expense of receiving and weighing, and the various documents, up to the issuing of the final certificate.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Who takes the risk for 12 months?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Put shortly the Bill stands for about three things. If we do not have the Bill certain things will happen; if we have it certain other things will happen. The Bill is to prevent what is known as indiscriminate selling. It gives the power to acquire this particular harvest, and it gives the State the security for the guarantee that the State has already given to the farmers for the purchase of the harvest. The Bill itself is intrinsically good. The objections taken to it have been taken, not because of any defects in the Bill, but because the Government have accepted the offer of the Westralian Farmers, Limited, to do the work. I am making that point, because no one has attacked the Bill. All the attacks have been on the Government, or on the Honorary Minister for certain letters and negotiations. I think that when the House hears from the Premier the details of those letters and negotiations, the offers and the counter offers and the final acceptance, there will be no other conclusion arrived at than that the Government did the right thing.

Mr. Troy: Offers and counter offers!

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: You will hear them all.

Hon. T. WALKER (Kanowna) [3.2]: I have a decided objection to the dragging of a red herring across the track as to the approval or disapproval of co-operative societies, as if that were in any sense a material point in this debate. I do not suppose there is an hon. member on either side who is not enthusiastic in his advocacy of co-operative principles.

Mr. Munsie: I doubt if the Government are.

Hon. T. WALKER: I think even they are becoming imbued with the opinion that co-operation is an advantage. But it has no more to do with this issue than has the man in the moon. The whole point is, has the Minister in his ministerial capacity acted fairly and impartially towards all the citizens of the State? That is the issue, and there is no other. Has the Minister sought to give an advantage over other citizens of the State to those who favour his political opinions, has he, in other words, used his office to give an advantage to his

partisans? That is the whole issue, and I submit that the evidence so far as it has gone tends clearly to show that the Minister has acted in a partial capacity, that is, as an advocate, as a champion for a certain section of the community to the disadvantage of other sections. Remember that the moment we get a co-operative society registered as a company, that company is one individual, with no more legal status than has any other company in the State carrying on a similar line of business; and in that capacity merely, as a company it puts itself into competition with other companies anxious for the same class of business. The Minister has to adjudicate between the relative merits of any tenders brought forward by any of these competing companies, having in view only the welfare of the citizens, and holding a disinterested judgment on their behalf. He has not shown that impartiality that is to be expected from a Minister in that position. The letter which he wrote in answer to competitors with the Westralian Farmers—let it not be forgotten that it is a company like all other companies, on the same legal status, having no higher claims to public favours than any other company—I submit that the letter written by the Minister shows clearly that he forgot he was a Minister who should allow no bias, no prejudice, no political leanings or favouritism to sway him. He has forgotten all that and has simply said: "I am a farmers' representative. This co-operative company is a farmer's representation, with its ramifications in other farmers' organisations, and I am going to use my political power and position to give it an advantage over all others." That is the position in which we have been placed by the action of the Minister. The Minister for Works, when speaking, said that that was practically a fair thing, because members on this side occasionally favoured arbitration and other measures that helped the workers. But before this side of the House could help the workers we had to come before this body and lay our matters down in the shape of legislation which had to run the gauntlet of two Houses and the Governor's assent and pass through the regular channel of law-making. On the other hand here is purely a ministerial act, which has written

all over it "Favouritism, partisanship"—political evils. Nothing else but that. Even the speaker who has just resumed his seat sought by a sort of appealing to the gallery to drag us off the track. He told us that those competitors were in this relationship: that Dalgety & Co., or others, wanted the whole monopoly. But he did not tell us how they wanted the monopoly. Did he tell the Chamber that the original proposal for the carrying out of this scheme was on the zone system, and that working on the zone system there must be a monopoly in each particular zone? Did he explain that? It gives the whole show away.

The Attorney General: I was referring to the last one, which was a monopoly of the whole State.

Hon. T. WALKER: I do not know that the hon. member indicated that.

The Attorney General: I meant to at all events.

Hon. T. WALKER: At all events that was how the monopoly first started, and I am reminded that if they asked for a monopoly they asked for it at a cheaper rate than the monopoly now granted.

Mr. Hickmott: No, that was the second tender.

Hon. T. WALKER: What tenders were there? We do not know even now what the nature of this question is. The Ministry have not deigned to inform the House of any of the particulars, or take it into their confidence in any respect. The Minister for Works taunted this side of the House with asking for the papers. It was one of the first things the member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin) did as soon as the House met, namely to ask for the papers and for details. To show how incredible the whole business is, we have only to refer to the questions asked by the hon. member and the answers given. The first question was—

Have the Government appointed the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., sole agents to handle all wheat for the wheat pool for the 1917 harvest?

And the answer was "yes." The monopoly had been granted. Observe that so far all is settled. There is no question. It is to be a complete monopoly. Nobody else

is to have a finger in the pie. The next question was—

If so, what amount of deposit is demanded and put up by the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., as security to the State in case of any damage or neglect?

The answer to that, given only yesterday, was as follows:—

The full terms and conditions of the agreement, including the amount of the bond to be provided, have not yet been determined.

How in the name of goodness could we expect to get the papers when this chaotic condition of affairs obtains?

The Minister for Works: You could have suspended judgment.

Hon. P. Collier: And put the Bill through in the meantime.

Hon. T. WALKER: Now observe the next question.—

Will he have all papers dealing with this question laid on the Table of the House?

And the answer was, "Yes as soon as the agreement is complete." Right up to yesterday the Government had not completed the contract. Here is the scandalous part of it: the Government have given a complete monopoly of the handling of the next harvest, and have not yet agreed upon the terms. They have not made any arrangement with this company for any bond, any sum to be put up as security.

Mr. Harrison: They did not need it.

Hon. T. WALKER: The Minister himself says it is needed, and he is going to tell us about it when it is fixed. It has not been fixed up, however. One would have thought that the actual agreement would not have been made until the terms of the agreement had been arranged. This is a Government which is always taunting this side of the House with lack of business acumen and experience. This contract involves the whole of the harvest of the State.

Mr. Griffiths: How many months did we have to wait after the first agreement?

Hon. T. WALKER: Why this grave anxiety on behalf of the farmer? Inwardly they are feeling that there is a wrong in this transaction. At the very moment that I am speaking the bargain has not been completed. We do not know, al-

though we are asked to pass this Bill, what the actual agreement will be.

The Attorney General: What has the Bill to do with that?

Hon. T. WALKER: It has everything to do with it because it is the administration of that Bill we are now discussing, and, if we cannot have that Bill clearly and justly administered without any scandal to the State or breach of honour, the Bill does not pass so far as I am concerned.

The Minister for Works: That ends it.

Hon. T. WALKER: It ends it so far as I am concerned. I wish to enter my protest against this method of doing business. A grave evil is going to creep into the State if we are to be so complacent towards one section of the community, because that one section of the community happens to be rendering political support to the party in office. If we are to introduce that principle there is an end to honourable government. It would not be tolerated by any party, and those sitting on the cross benches would be the first to raise their voices in objection if these contracts were to be insidiously made and secretly introduced by any party in power that they were not supporting. This happens to favour—

Mr. Johnston: It is the farmers' own company.

Hon. T. WALKER: The farmers are only a section of the people of the State.

Mr. Mullany: These are their own goods.

Mr. Lutey: It is guaranteed by the State.

Hon. T. WALKER: It is for the good of the company.

The Attorney General: No, no.

Hon. T. WALKER: Yes, yes, and for nobody else's good. Those who have shares in the company are the people who are going to get the profits out of this transaction.

The Attorney General: You have been assured that this is not so.

Hon. T. WALKER: I do not care how often I am given assurances in that direction. It is true that this is a company which may shower benefits in a circle wider than its own, but when we are dealing with the contract we are dealing with the company and the company alone, and the advantages

and profits accruing are for the benefit of the shareholders.

The Attorney General: Not in this case.

Hon. T. WALKER: Undoubtedly.

Mr. Griffiths: It is a co-operative association.

Hon. T. WALKER: In which the co-operatives are the shareholders.

Mr. Griffiths: Everyone who does business with the company gets a *pro rata* share of the profits.

Hon. T. WALKER: One can go to Bairds' shop in Perth and get a coupon for every article one may buy and so get some advantage. It is one of the methods of extending business. There is always a danger in giving a monopoly, I do not care whether it is in the case of a farmers' company, a pastoralists' company, or any other industrial or commercial company. Once a monopoly is given at that very moment danger arises.

Mr. Troy: How would it have been if we had given the A.W.U. a monopoly in regard to our wool?

Hon. T. WALKER: Exactly the same thing would apply. It is the same in all industries; we give a monopoly. The monopoly is not a State monopoly, not a people's monopoly, but it is an advantage given to a section of the community only in a private capacity, running a business of its own.

Mr. Griffiths: It is one-third of the community carrying the other two-thirds on its back.

Hon. T. WALKER: No matter, the facts are the same. It is a dangerous innovation, and a return to the old order of things, which has taken years of Parliamentary Government to get rid of in the old country, as well in the dominion parliaments of the world. We have to get rid of that granting of monopolies. What right has a certain section of the community to control and manage a particular business to the exclusion of all others? If the State were to take it over well and good, but to allow a section of the community to do so is inimical to wise Government.

The Minister for Works: How about preference to unionists?

Hon. T. WALKER: How does that apply?

The Minister for Works: Just the same as this does,

Hon. T. WALKER: Not at all. It is in no sense a comparison. I cannot see the sense or wisdom or wit of the hon. gentlemen's interjection. This stands transparent when the whole facts are reviewed, that a certain member of the country party becomes a Minister of the Crown. He is a member of a certain organisation or co-operative society. He is interested in the welfare of this co-operative society, and uses his position as a Minister of the Crown, a man who should be absolutely impartial having only the conscientiousness of equal rights to all citizens of the State in his mind, to further the interests of this co-operative society to which he belongs, and is backed up by the Government of the State, which call themselves national, free from party. This is an exhibition of the most bitter partisanship and favouritism towards that section of the community which grants its support to the Government and keeps it in power.

Mr. DRAPER (West Perth) [8.23]: I did not intend to speak upon this Bill this evening because I regard the passing of the second reading as necessary at the present juncture, but we have had charges made by various members of the House, and these have been made in no measured or doubtful terms. There has undoubtedly been a charge made against the Government that for the sake of obtaining political assistance from the Country party a monopoly was given to the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., for the collection of all the wheat in this State. Mention has also been made of another contract which was given to the Westralian Farmers, upon which I do not propose to speak. It is not the subject matter of the Bill, and the Minister for Works naturally was unable to give any information in regard to the charge. Practically the only issue of the debate so far has been this charge of giving a monopoly, and what we on this side of the House as well as those on the other side would like to have is an explanation from the Ministerial benches as to what the real facts are. Many of the facts do not require any explanation, but there are one or two which in my opinion

do. It is not a question of whether co-operation is a good thing for this country or not. That has been dragged into the debate but has no connection with the subject matter of it. It has no more connection with the debate than preference to unionists, or the fact that the Federal Government have allowed 2,000 bales of cornsacks to be diverted to this State. What we do require is an explanation, and I will state what appears to me to be the position with regard to this point. It has been said, and there is some confusion about it, that it was the wheat collectors of last year excluding the Westralian Farmers, who were anxious to have the zone system instituted. That is not the case, as I feel sure the Premier will state when he discloses the contents of the files to the House. I am only surprised he did not disclose them earlier. It is quite clear from the letter which was sent by the manager of the wheat marketing scheme what was intended. There were several zones outlined. There was to be a Fremantle zone, a Bunbury zone, an Albany zone, and a Geraldton zone. That letter is addressed to those persons who had the privilege of collecting the wheat last year, and asked those firms to tender or state the terms upon which they would be willing to undertake the work again. There can be no doubt whatever that the zone system originated with the Government and originated on account of what took place last year, when the desire of the Federal Government to interfere as little as possible with ordinary business methods was carried out. Whether these four firms were right or wrong, or whether the Westralian Farmers were right or wrong in asking for a monopoly has nothing to do with the House at present. These four firms to whom the letter was sent endeavoured to get the Westralian Farmers to fall in with the suggestion of the zone system. No doubt the object was to split up the State into five zones, in which each of them would operate. But the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.—I do not blame them for it for one moment—said, “No, that would not suit us; we have a better organisation than you; we are in a position to collect wheat at almost every centre in the State, and the zone system, therefore,

does not suit us.” One can quite understand that, and from their point of view they were quite right. I mention this because it throws some light upon the suggestion which has been made that the reason why the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., were given a monopoly was that the other four firms wanted to exclude them. The other four firms endeavoured to get the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., to join with them in the zone system. They failed, and they then made a tender to the Government stating the terms upon which they, these four firms, would be willing to undertake the work on the zone system; and as the zone system necessarily excludes competition, they naturally suggested that their tender was subject to the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., having nothing to do with the work. No doubt, if their tender had been accepted, they would have divided the State up into four zones themselves. Now the first point on which I want explanation from the Premier is, why was it, when the Government had decided, in accordance with the usual practice, that the zone system was to prevail again in this State, that the Government suddenly changed their mind? That is the question which some hon. members on this side, and hon. members on the other side, naturally desire to have answered.

The Attorney General: The zone system has never prevailed here.

Mr. DRAPER: Then I was wrong in that, but whether or not we had the zone system here before is immaterial. The Government had decided to have it this year.

Hon. P. Collier: As part of their policy.

Mr. DRAPER: The Government had made up their mind, and one naturally wants to know why they did not carry out their intention.

Hon. P. Collier: It is the policy all over Australia this year.

Mr. DRAPER: If suggestions which have been made on my right, and which have a very dangerous ring, are well founded, and if certain members' ideas of what the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., are entitled to do are correct, then it appears that when that company becomes more powerful—as it undoubtedly will—it will cease to be a benefit to the State and become a very

serious danger. No doubt all the parties concerned corresponded with the Government, and probably they corresponded with each other, and endeavoured to come to terms. Finally, on the 27th October, a letter was written by the Wheat Marketing Board to the four firms stating that they must send by the 2nd November an answer to the Government as to whether they accepted the terms or not. On the 27th October it is therefore quite clear the Wheat Marketing Board intended that these four firms should understand that the board had not at that date made any definite arrangement with the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. On the last day, the 2nd November, the firms replied making another, lower tender; and on the 3rd November the Minister sent an answer in these words—

Your further counter offer, as set out in the latter portion of your letter, comes too late, inasmuch as, anticipating that the terms set out in your letter of the 28th September were final, I accepted the offer of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.

Now, it is quite true that the Minister for Railways in asking the question as to when the offer was accepted thought this was important. That is exactly the question which I intend to ask the Premier. That date is of the greatest importance. If the tender of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., was accepted before the 2nd November, the last day upon which the four firms were entitled to reply, then undoubtedly the Honorary Minister, Mr. Baxter, committed a breach of faith, and the offer which was made by him was not genuine. I am not asking these questions in any hostile spirit, but I do submit that we are entitled to have some explanation of the facts. If the charge is correct—I do not think for one moment that it is—the determination of such a very serious charge is not the proper subject of this debate. The only issue now before the House is whether the second reading shall be passed or not. Unless some satisfactory explanation is given, the question whether the charge is true or not should be laid before a select committee of this House.

Hon. J. MITCHELL (Northam) [8.36]: I am very anxious to see this Bill carried, and I consider that the present discussion might well have been raised as the result

of some special motion. I am very glad indeed to hear from the Premier that the 3s. advance against next year's wheat has been arranged. When the Premier replies, I should like to hear from him when the farmers may expect a dividend on account of the old wheat. Those two points, I consider, are material to the farmers of this State. From the Attorney General we have heard something about the advantages of co-operation; but I would like to remind the Attorney General that he is not the only man in this State who favours co-operation, and that when I was a Minister in the Cabinet with him I proposed a co-operative scheme which was far more liberal to people undertaking to work on a co-operative basis than the proposal of pound for pound. I shall not enter into any lengthy discussion of the contract with the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., but I was very sorry indeed to hear the Minister speak in the way he did concerning the firms who have been receiving wheat, and particularly concerning such a firm as Dalgetys, who have done a great deal for the State. I wish to remind Ministers that they are merely trustees for the farmer, and that they have no right to enforce their opinion on the farmer of this State. It is not for the Government to decide whether the wheat is, or is not, to be handled under a scheme of co-operation. The wheat pool is compulsory; all the farmers must send their wheat to the pool. We heard to-night that, in competition with these other firms, the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., have been doing remarkably well. As a matter of fact, during the year 1915-16, before the farmers had this system of co-operation throughout the country, the wheat was not handled satisfactorily. There is no doubt about that. However, Mr. Stirling Taylor formed the co-operative company, and last year the work was done very well indeed. It was done well because the management of the scheme was in capable hands. I have no fault whatever to find with the manner in which the work was done last year. In my opinion the Government might well have let the farmers of this State decide for themselves whether they wished to put their wheat through this co-operative firm. After all, it is a question for the farmers, and not for the

Government, to decide. Had the farmers been given that opportunity, I have no doubt they would have afforded very much greater support to the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., than in the past. But I do contend that, unless as against the price quoted by these other firms, there was an advantage to the farmers in the price given by the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., the other firms should not have been shut out. It is perfectly well known by everyone that when the wheat pool was first inaugurated by the Federal Prime Minister, a promise was made to these firms that their business would not be disturbed. Of course it was never contemplated that the scheme would continue for any great length of time. So far as I can see, under the arrangement with the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., the farmers of this State will pay £10,000 more for the handling of their wheat than would have been paid had the other firms got the business. That is a somewhat serious amount to debit against our producers. It is all very well to say that all will share in this amount, and that the profit will be divided. I doubt very much whether the individual farmer will see much of this money. I doubt whether the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., can make very much at the price they are getting. I am practically certain that the farmer, at all events, will never get any of the £10,000. I doubt if there will be any profit. I do not know what the Minister will have to say when he finds that there is no £10,000 returned to the farmers by way of dividend. I do know this, however, that every farmer putting wheat into the pool will lose £3 on every thousand bags by reason of the arrangement, by reason of the fact that the lower offer was not accepted. That point needs some explanation. The Minister would have us believe that the price this year is 1½d. if the wheat is put on trucks, and consigned to a depot, as against 3½d. paid last year. But the responsibilities are totally different. Last year the wheat had to be cared for, stacked, and properly covered and sheeted. Further, there was responsibility in regard to weight and damage. Of course, those responsibilities were worth a considerable sum. I doubt if the farmers will have their wheat handled as cheaply this year

as last year, because sheds will have to be provided, and wheat will have to be stacked at the depots, and there will be additional railway charges, and there will be care of the wheat during the year, and also reloading. However, I hope it will work out all right. Meantime I must confess Ministers have not convinced me that they are right in the attitude they have adopted. I think the co-operative company should come into competition with the other companies that were doing the work in the past. Next I want to touch on the question of the management of the scheme. Hon. members know that when, some time ago, the control of the scheme came into my hands, I felt it necessary to appoint a manager experienced in the work of handling wheat and capable of controlling this great scheme. Mr. Sibbald was appointed, and I regret to say Mr. Sibbald was so treated by the Government that he could not retain his position. He was ignored, time and again, when important matters were being discussed. The result was that he decided he could no longer retain his self-respect and retain the position he was occupying under the wheat board. It is most unfortunate that that should have happened and I do not quite understand why it happened. The manager of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., admitted to me that Mr. Sibbald had been of great assistance to him. Certainly there is a very marked difference between the stacking in 1915-16 and the stacking in 1916-17. The management of the scheme is an important matter, and it must be borne in mind that the management extends to the 1915-16 and the 1916-17 crops. All the points to be settled in connection with both of those crops will have to be settled by someone who understands the business. Is there going to be any demand made for the damaged wheat of 1915-16 and 1916-17, and for the lost wheat? I ask is there to be any demand? The firms have been paid a special fee for the care of the wheat, a special fee for the responsibility which they agreed to undertake. I know that some stacks in the country are in a shocking state, and will involve considerable loss. The loss will have to be made good, and that can be effected only by the manager for the State dealing with the question. I do

not understand why Mr Sibbald was treated in the discourteous manner in which, to judge by the letters appearing in the Press, he was treated; but it is a very unfortunate thing for the farmers that Mr. Sibbald retired. He is a man quite capable of doing the work—more capable, probably, than any man in this State; and it is a great pity that he should have been forced to vacate his position. True, he has been appointed to a position in the Eastern States in connection with the handling of wheat; but it is very unfortunate that he had to go from Western Australia. I would like to know from the Premier what he intends to do in regard to the future management of the scheme. Who is to manage the scheme? Certainly, if Mr. Sutton is to manage the scheme, it will be doing the farmers of this State a great injustice. Twelve months ago it was decided that Mr. Sutton must return to his particular work as Commissioner for the Wheat Belt. He did return to that work, but to-day I find he is back attending to the wheat scheme. I am not going to discuss Mr. Sutton except to say that as wheat commissioner he should be doing his work in the wheat belt. There is disease in wheat this year, and it will cost the State a considerable sum of money, and Mr. Sutton should be attending to this and looking into the question of the varieties of wheat which should be grown, and advising the farmers what to do. During the six years he has been in this State he has devoted very little time to the work he was engaged to carry out. The greater part of his time is devoted to Board work. I hope the Premier will give the House the assurance that Mr. Sutton will be sent back to attend to the work he was brought to this State to perform, and that a capable man will be selected to look after the scheme of handling the harvest. It will be necessary for the Government to show that they did not pay away this £10,000 unnecessarily, and that the offer from the firms came too late. Otherwise, I take it the Government will have to refund the £10,000 to the wheat growers of Western Australia. That would be only justice. I think the whole matter has been badly bungled. The Westralian Farmers, Ltd., would have got just as much of the work if they had

entered into open competition with the other people.

The Premier: The firms would not take it in open competition.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: They certainly did so before. My experience of all the firms, including the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., is that they were perfectly willing to come into the scheme and get as much as possible out of it on every occasion. There is a good deal to be said in favour of co-operation, but all the farmers in Western Australia are not associated with the organisation which has been so much discussed to-night. We want our wheat handled well and cared for properly. It may be that it will be here for two or three years, but however long the period may be we want the wheat to be in a condition that it will be possible to remove it when the time for its removal arrives. It is unfortunate that this question should have been brought up in connection with the Bill before members, but it is necessary that all the interests of the taxpayers should be preserved, and the companies which have been shut out have a perfect right to enter a protest. I would like to hear from the Premier when he replies what is being done in connection with the erection of silos, which of course would be the best means to protect the wheat during the coming year, and also what it is proposed to do with regard to the depots.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [8.50]: I do not intend to occupy much time in connection with the discussion on this Bill, but there are just one or two matters I desire to refer to. First of all let me dispel from the minds of some hon. members opposite that members on this side of the House—and speaking for myself at all events—are opposed in any shape or form to co-operation. If I had had anything to do with determining who should handle the wheat, whether it happened to be a co-operative concern or outside firms, and both tendered for the work at the same price, I would have given preference to the co-operative society. I am a firm believer in co-operation; I believe that the farmers are going on the right track in supporting it. I believe that when tenders were called or suggestions made that the firms should give a price for the handling

of the forthcoming harvest, all the firms were led to believe—and the instructions definitely stated it—that they must tender under the zone system.

The Premier: Oh, no.

Mr. MUNSIE: I may be wrong, but that is the impression I had. As a matter of fact, the private companies, so far as I know, never had an opportunity of offering a price to the Government for the handling of the wheat for the State as a whole. It was to be done under the zone system.

The Premier: No.

Mr. MUNSIE: If I am wrong I stand corrected, but the main point was made by the member for West Perth, and I trust the Premier will reply definitely to the question which was asked by that member. So far as the Bill is concerned, it is rather surprising to me to hear the discussion which has taken place to-night as to whether or not the scheme has been economically managed on behalf of the farmers. But there has not been a single word from any member as to how the consumer of the wheat is getting on. I would like to see an amendment inserted in this Bill such as the one proposed by the leader of the Opposition last session but which unfortunately was ruled out of order. Such an amendment would be in the interests not only of the farmer but in the interests of the people generally because they would get a 2lb. loaf for 3d. The amendment would allow wheat from the pool to be supplied to the millers at such a price as would permit flour to be sold to the bakers who could then retail a 2lb. loaf for 3d. The point with regard to the guarantee as brought forward by the member for Kanowna is an important one. I noticed in *Federal Hansard*, a fortnight ago, that a question was asked as to what loss it was anticipated would result from the wheat pool of Australia. The answer was that the loss to the taxpayers would be just on two millions sterling. I want to know who is getting that two millions. The general taxpayer is paying it into the funds of Australia, and it is not asking the farmers too much, therefore, to assist in the direction I have just mentioned to bring about a reduction in the price of a 2lb. loaf of bread to 3d. I am perfectly certain that more wheat has gone to waste

through the pool than would have been the case if it had been given to the millers to grist into flour, so as to give the people the cheaper loaf. It is the taxpayers of Australia who will have to pay for the wheat that is wasted. I am sorry that, according to the ruling given earlier to-night, it will not be possible to move the suggested amendment in Committee. Personally I think that another endeavour should be made to see that some of the wheat which is rotting in Australia—and there are thousands of bushels rotting in Western Australia—is taken from the pool and handed to the millers, so that the public may get cheaper bread.

The PREMIER (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore—in reply) [8.55]: I am somewhat amazed that we should have had such a long discussion over this Bill. Surely hon. members did not expect me to enter into a detailed explanation of the correspondence which has taken place between the wheat agents and the Government during the past few months, when asking the House to approve of this measure to re-enact the law already in existence.

Mr. Munsie: But this is to be administered under conditions different from those which have existed during the past two years.

The PREMIER: During the past few years wheat has had to be stacked at country sidings, while a certain quantity has been brought down to the ports. This year it is the intention of the Government to improve on that and to have depôts at different points where the wheat will be placed in sheds and protected from the weather and from the inroads of mice and other pests. The leader of the Opposition was good enough to bring me to task and say that I had broken faith, but with whom I do not know. He told the House that I said the Government intended to adopt the zone system with regard to the collection of the wheat. I never said anything of the sort. What I did say with regard to the forthcoming wheat crop was this: "It is not proposed to appoint any new collecting agents for handling the next harvest; on the contrary it is thought that the number will be considerably reduced by eliminating the clearing agents from those millers who will be able to substantially and

economically warehouse the new season's wheat until the present season's wheat is milled." Hon. members may not know that nearly all the millers in this State were also agents, as well as the different firms we have heard spoken of this afternoon, and I may tell the House it is a very bad system to have a lot of agents operating at one siding. It is a disadvantage to the pool, and is certainly a disadvantage to those whom we have to dispose of our products, because those people come into competition one with the other and they are inclined to take wheat in before it is classed as fair average quality and call it fair average quality, so as to induce people to go to them and use them as agents for the disposal of their goods. I know that there was a general scramble throughout Western Australia for this wheat, and as I say the system was a bad one. I further went on to say—

By the discontinuance of competition in receiving at the various country sidings a substantial saving in the cost of acquiring is to be looked for, and a further big reduction in the amount of agents' commission is expected to result from the method of sending the wheat direct from the siding to depôts, with the corresponding limitation of the agents' responsibility as to out-turn in quantity and quality. The Government will put no impediment in the way of the co-operative societies which have already been formed by the farmers themselves participating in the handling of their wheat, but is desirous of encouraging all laudable efforts made by the farmers for the advancement of the great national industry in which they are engaged."

If any hon. member can satisfy himself from that statement that I have broken faith with anybody in not adopting the zone system, all I can say is that he must have a considerable imagination.

Hon. P. Collier: You said you would propose reducing the cost by eliminating some of the competition. How else could the cost be reduced?

The PREMIER: Some of the millers would have to come out.

Hon. P. Collier: But there would still remain five or six firms.

The PREMIER: When I made those remarks, arrangements had not been made, they were not completed until afterwards. The Government pledged itself not to place any impediment in the way of co-operative societies joining in the collection of wheat.

Hon. P. Collier: What is the date of that speech?

The Minister for Industries: The 6th September.

Hon. P. Collier: Then, it is quite contrary to the Honorary Minister's statement. On the 3rd August the Honorary Minister wrote that the Government had decided to adopt the zone system.

The PREMIER: The negotiations went on for a considerable time. A great deal has been said about the commission. My experience is that all agencies are commercial minded, and I may say that I have found it a pleasure to do business with them, not only with the firms but with all of those connected with the firms. But those people are not out for charitable purposes but for business, and naturally they wished to get all the business they can. They saw a young giant growing up which was likely in the future to do them out of a considerable amount of the business they had had in the past. In those circumstances it was only natural that they should endeavour to—if I may use the word—crush the opposition rising up against them. The farmers' co-operative association and all its branches had done a considerable amount of business last year. It was only natural that farmers conveying wheat into the sidings would choose their own association to handle their wheat, because by putting the business through the association to which they belonged, the farmers would be getting the benefit of the business, seeing that all the profits of the association go into the pockets of the shareholders. Personally, I have endeavoured for years past to encourage co-operation, and have urged on the farmers of this country that if they are to be as successful as we all desire they should be, then they must co-operate.

Mr. Munsie: What about co-operation for superphosphate?

The PREMIER: I should welcome that also.

Hon. W. C. Angwin : If the Government would find the money, they would co-operate.

The PREMIER : The Government have not found a single sixpence to finance the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.; the farmers have done it all themselves. I am not a member of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association, and have no interest whatever in the Westralian Farmers' Co-operative Society. At the same time I welcome the society and consider that it is doing excellent work for the farmers of Western Australia. Anything I can do legitimately to further the interests of the farmers or their association, I will at all times be ready to do either in my public or my private capacity. It has been argued by some members that the Government have endeavoured to make political capital out of this matter. I can honestly say that not a solitary member of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association—I shall not call them the Country party, because they are a National party—has approached me on this question of appointing the Farmers' Co-operative Society as sole agents or in any way connected with the agency for wheat this year. One gentleman only has visited me on this subject—I shall not give his name—and he said that in his opinion the best thing that could be done would be for the Government to take on the handling of wheat themselves. That is the only time the matter has been mentioned to me by a member of the Farmers' & Settlers' Association. I had no conversation with the Honorary Minister (Hon. C. F. Baxter), but I am quite certain that he did not favour the Farmers' Co-operative Society any more than any of the other agents, that all he endeavoured to do was to give fair play and do justice between all parties. The negotiations with regard to the handling of wheat took a long time. Firstly, the four agents who had been previously operating were asked to make an offer. The Westralian Farmers', Ltd., were also asked to quote. In the opinion of the Honorary Minister the price paid last year was too high, and he desired in the interests of the farmers to bring down the handling charges as low as possible. The four agents submitted an offer of twopence maximum and 1½d. minimum; that is to say, twopence for

handling the wheat at the sidings, stacking it, keeping it there, protecting it from the weather and sending it to the port of shipment; if on the other hand, they merely had to put it on trucks and send it away, they were to do the work for 1½d. The Westralian Farmers', Ltd., offered to do the work for a maximum of twopence and a minimum of 1½d.

Hon. P. Collier : The Honorary Minister invited them to make their offer on those conditions.

The PREMIER : I do not think he did.

Hon. P. Collier : Have you the file there ?

The PREMIER : Yes. The Hon. Minister declined that offer and the agent came forward without being again asked, and offered to do the work for a maximum of 1½d. and a minimum of 1½d. on condition that the whole of the business was handed to them—the Westralian Farmers were to be out of it altogether. They said, "If you give us the whole of the business, we will do it for 1½d. and 1½d.": Evidently they were afraid of the growing strength of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association and as prudent business people, they endeavoured to get hold of the whole business. I do not blame them. The negotiations continued for weeks and weeks. The Farmers and Settlers' Association then said they were prepared to do the work at 2d. and 1½d. in competition. The Farmers were not afraid of those large firms. The Westralian Farmers then again said they were prepared to quote without competition at 1½d. and 1½d.

Hon. P. Collier : What date was that ?

The PREMIER : I do not know the exact date:

Hon. P. Collier : On what date was that offer accepted; it is shown on the file.

The PREMIER : I think it was not accepted for some time afterwards.

Mr. Troy : The file should be placed on the Table. The Premier is quoting from a file which is not available to members.

The PREMIER : I have to get my information from the file. I am not quoting the exact words on the file at all. If hon. members want me to read from the file I will be only too pleased to do so and to place the file on the

Table afterwards. On the 6th October last the agents were asked if they would do the business in conjunction with the Westralian Farmers, Limited, at 2d. and 1½d., in competition. They would not agree to take this on. They said they would not have competition unless they had the zone system.

Hon. P. Collier: They merely said they were prepared to accept the conditions offered them by the Government in the first instance.

The Colonial Treasurer: They merely said they wanted to crush out competition.

The PREMIER: The Westralian Farmers, Limited, were finally asked the same question on the 27th October; they were asked if they would accept at those rates of 2d. and 1½d. in competition or if any amicable arrangement could be arrived at amongst them all for 1½d. and 1½d. at the different sidings without competition. That was to say, they were asked if, after accepting this arrangement, the agents and the farmers could come together and arrange for Dalgety & Co. to take certain sidings, Darling other sidings, Bell & Co. further sidings, Drevfus certain sidings and the Westralian Farmers still other sidings. If they did that there would be no competition, and each would have the sole monopoly at the different sidings at 1½d. and 1½d. The agents replied that they were not prepared to do this. The Westralian Farmers were prepared to do it in competition, but the agents apparently were afraid that the Westralian Farmers would be too strong for them. The refusal of the four agents automatically handed over the acceptance of the arrangement to the Westralian Farmers. The agents would undertake the work only as a monopoly, the four working as one agent at 1½d. and 7½d. They could not have done it, and I think they knew they could not. They knew they were out of court. They only came in with this finally when they knew the Westralian Farmers had offered the only conditions which could possibly be accepted.

Hon. P. Collier: At the time they submitted the rates they were not aware of the offer of the Westralian Farmers, Limited. That is a fact.

The PREMIER: On the 27th October, two letters couched in very much the same

language, were sent out to the four agents and to the Westralian Farmers. I would like to use the file, but the Speaker will not allow me to read from it.

Mr. Troy: The Premier has already said that he is quoting from the file and that he will place the file on the Table.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Premier said he was quoting extracts from the file and was prepared to lay the file on the Table. In these circumstances the Premier is in order in quoting from the file.

The PREMIER: I have not taken the actual words from the file. How could one get information of this nature without going to the file for it? Where else could one get it? I am not reading from the file.

Mr. Troy: You said the Speaker would not allow you to read from the file.

The PREMIER: I can read from the file and afterwards place it on the Table. I know what has to be done in this House. I am desirous of laying the file on the Table; it would clear up a lot of difficulties.

Hon. P. Collier: There is a strange reluctance to quote the dates from the file.

The PREMIER: I have quoted dates. On the 6th October certain proposals were made to the agents and to the Westralian Farmers. Again, the same proposals were made to them on the 27th October, and on the 2nd November the agents replied that they would not do the business except as a monopoly. I do not know that they used the word "monopoly," but I am using it. They said they would do the business without competition, acting as one agent.

Hon. P. Collier: Only two dates are required, namely, the date of the offer to the Westralian Farmers and the date of its acceptance.

The PREMIER: Here is the letter to the manager of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd.—

Adverting to your letter of 17th instant with respect to your company operating in the handling of the 1917/18 harvest for the partial services referred to in my letter of the 12th instant, I have to advise you that your offer to do the work for the aggregate rate of 2½d. per bushel with competition as set out in your letter of 5th idem is provisionally accepted and subject, of course, to a mutually satis-

factory agency agreement being entered upon. This acceptance is with the understanding that if you are able to operate at any siding or group of sidings without competition your company will, so far as the wheat so handled is concerned, perform the services required at the aggregate rate of  $2\frac{1}{8}$ d. per bushel as agreed to in your letter of the 17th October.

That was on the 28th October. It was accepted. So was the other offer accepted, the offer to Messrs. Dreyfus, Darling, Bell, and Dalgety, who were also written to in the following terms:—

Further to my letter of 6th October and adverting to yours of 8th instant, I have the honour by direction to advise you that the work of performing the partial services for the handling of the 1917/18 harvest, as set out in my letter referred to is open to you either jointly or separately at the rates mentioned in that letter, aggregating  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per bushel, but with competition subject of course to a mutually satisfactory agency agreement being entered upon. If, however, by means of amicable arrangement or otherwise with those whom it may concern you are able to operate at any siding or group of sidings without competition, it is understood that so far as the wheat so handled is concerned the services will be performed at the aggregate rate of  $2\frac{1}{8}$ d. per bushel as agreed to in your letter of the 28th ultimo.

They were both accepted, but the agents wrote back on the 2nd November saying that they were not prepared to do this, but would do it at a much lower rate if they could do it without competition. Naturally then, the offer of the Westralian Farmers was automatically accepted. The agreement is not yet made. There are many details to be arranged. There is no signed agreement with the Westralian Farmers in regard to the matter. Here is the letter written on the 2nd November by Messrs. Dreyfus & Co.—

We beg to acknowledge receipt of yours of the 27th ultimo in regard to the handling of the 1917/18 harvest. In our letter of the 8th October we dealt in detail with our objections to the unsatisfactory

nature of a competitive scheme, and we see no reason to change our opinion.

The reason they objected to a competitive scheme was that they thought that in competition with the Westralian Farmers they would lose the bulk of the agency business. That was their only reason; there is no doubt about it. The letter continues—

We therefore have to advise you that we are not open to accept your offer as set out in your letter under review, but we make the following offer subject, of course, to a mutually satisfactory agency agreement being entered upon. The four firms undersigned are prepared to do the whole of the work in connection with the receiving from farmers and trucking to depôts the whole of the coming crop that is delivered to the scheme. We would charge you for our sub-agents' services  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. where the wheat is loaded direct from the farmers' wagons to trucks and 1d. per bushel where the wheat has to be temporarily placed on the ground pending the arrival of railway trucks. For our own services we require the sum of  $\frac{3}{8}$ d. per bushel. We would accept no liabilities of any kind whatsoever in the matter. For the performance of the work we would select the best agents available from the four firms contracting to do the work, and as these agents would not work in competition this should thus ensure careful sampling and weighing of wheat which they receive from farmers.

The rest of the letter need not be read. They declined the offer, but they said "We will do it at  $1\frac{3}{8}$ d. and at  $\frac{7}{8}$ d. minimum." It was an impossible offer. The Minister decided that the proper people to hand this work over to were the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. That is the position. Personally I regret that the agents should take umbrage at the losing of some of the business they did in the past. The Government were not in any way desirous of benefiting one section of the community more than another. The Government were desirous, at any rate, of seeing that the Farmers Co-operative Society was not crushed, desirous of seeing that this society should live and flourish. I hope it will flourish and become an instrument of great good in Western Australia, that as time goes on it will gain consider-

able strength. At the same time I hope that many of those large agents, to whom we owe a great deal, may also flourish. There is room for all. Ministers have nothing but a feeling of the very kindest nature for all those engaged in the work of the country.

Hon. P. Collier: But why did you kick me downstairs?

The PREMIER: There was no question of doing any injury to any section of the public whatever. They were asked to do so, but would not come into competition with the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. They were given the opportunity over and over again to do this, but they refused to compete with these people. Why should they not compete with them? They had a right to do so. If they had come in and competed with them on even terms everything would have gone on smoothly, and the agents have been able to get a part of the business as in the past.

Mr. Troy: You stated that competition in the scheme was undesirable.

The PREMIER: No.

Mr. Troy: You said that because the agents accepted inferior wheat.

The PREMIER: That was a different competition altogether and that was when we had too much competition. We have had as many as eight or nine agents at one siding all grabbing after the wheat as it came in.

Mr. Harrison: They took anything.

The PREMIER: I think this was most damaging to the interests of the pool and the country, and constituted most undesirable competition. Competition such as that was doing harm. This was particularly noticeable in 1914 and 1915, when we had such a lot of wheat below f.a.q. A farmer might object to go to one agent because he was pretty hard to deal with, and might go to another agent who would be prepared to say to him, "I will not be too particular and will accept your wheat." That is the way in which things were run. Too much competition in a business such as this is not good. I am not going to say that these large firms in any way encouraged that sort of thing. They were not responsible for what might take place in these country districts. The Government stand for co-operation, and desire to see co-operation on the

part of those who are engaged in our primary industries. We believe that co-operation will bring prosperity to these industries, and that the more we can co-operate the better it will be for ourselves and the country. I have no desire to see our primary industries assisted for all time, but I want to see them grow strong and flourish. I want to see them placed in such a position that the country will not have to assist them as in the past. A great deal of this assistance has been due to the unfortunate seasons we have experienced. We desire to see the farmer grow prosperous and strong, so that he can stand firmly on his own legs, and be able to live in greater comfort than in the past. He is engaged in the most sweated industry in Australia, because he has the whole of the community against him endeavouring to keep down as far as possible the price of the commodity he is engaged in producing.

Mr. O'Loughlin: What about the fruit-growers?

The PREMIER: There is no class of people in Australia who get less for the product of their labour than the men who grow wheat alone. It is impossible for a man to live by wheat alone and to prosper. The farmer has to mix his farming as the painter mixes his paint, with brains. If he is able to do that and grow stock, he is going to be successful. Sheep must be the salvation of the farmer, and no farmer who is not in a position to keep sheep will be prosperous. No effort has been made on the part of the Government to favour the Farmers and Settlers' Association or the Westralian Farmers, Limited, against the agents who had been previously engaged in this work; but as the agents refused to come into open competition with the Westralian Farmers, Limited, the Government said, "Very well, we cannot agree to let you in unless you do come into competition." Finally, the letters which I have read were written, the companies refused to accept the conditions, and automatically the offer of the Westralia Farmers, Ltd., was accepted. The agents went out of the business altogether and the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., were left alone to have the business in their own hands. I hope this will be for the benefit, not only of the farm-

ers but of the community at large, and that it will not be doing an injury to the agents. I hope, too, it will be an incentive to our farmers to do their best, to co-operate in their own interests, for if their interests are advanced and they prosper, as I desire to see them prosper, the country also will prosper, and will get over many of the difficulties which we have had to encounter during the last year or two.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee, etcetera.*

Mr. Stubbs in the Chair: the Premier in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Extension to wheat harvest in 1917-1918:

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I regret that Mr. Speaker has ruled that, when a Bill of this kind is brought down, we must accept it in toto without amendment. I regard this as a wrong practice because there may be many clauses of the original Bill which hon. members would like to amend. This is not fair either to the House or to the country. I am not yet satisfied with the position we stand in to-day even after the remarks in reply of the Premier. Members should not be bludgeoned into accepting a thing which they honestly believe is detrimental to the best interests of the State. Although the Premier expressed the hope that those gentlemen who have been engaged in this wheat business for sometime will not suffer from this departure, it appears to me that they have had their businesses taken away from them and must suffer.

Mr. Foley: What clause is the hon. member discussing?

The CHAIRMAN: Clause 2. I understood the hon. member intended to move an amendment.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I rose for the purpose of moving that certain clauses of the Act should be exempted. I have, however, discussed the matter with Mr. Speaker and have been informed that it is impossible for me to do so. I regret very much that we must accept the Bill as it stands.

Mr. STEWART: I thank the hon. member for drawing attention to the impossibility of any amendments being accepted to

this measure to-night. I should like to bring under the notice of the Minister responsible for the administration of the wheat marketing scheme the statement made by the member for Beverley that the whole of the profits arising from the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., were distributed among their clients irrespective of whether they were shareholders or classed as ordinary customers. Section 12 of the principal Act prevents the agent from directly or indirectly allowing any commission or rebate to any person except by way of bona fide remuneration to sub-agents.

The CHAIRMAN: I am afraid I cannot allow the hon. member the latitude he desires. The clause before the Committee refers to the re-enactment of the principal Act, and does not refer to Section 12 of the principal Act.

Mr. TROY: The hon. member may not be permitted to discuss the sections of the principal Act, but surely he can discuss the principle of the principal Act, Mr. Chairman. I gather that the member for Claremont has misunderstood your direction. You are not preventing him from discussing the principal Act, but you advise him not to mention its sections.

Mr. STEWART: The point I wish to bring under the notice of the Minister is that the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., seem to have committed a breach of the agreement in paying away any portion of the profits derived from the handling of wheat. Consequently, a statement is required as to whether this practice will be permitted in the future. The other agents, by reason of the section to which I have referred, were debarred from paying away any portion of their remuneration. Some security or guarantee should be obtained that the offence will not be repeated in the future. Whether the Minister can take any notice of what has been done, I do not know; but the statement has been made in this Chamber and in the Press that the profits have been divided.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The method of re-enacting these annual measures savours of the ridiculous. Here we have an Act comprising 18 sections and several schedules, which has to do with the entire control of the harvest of this State, amounting to several million pounds in value; and yet if, as

the result of experience of the operation of the measure during the preceding twelve months, a majority of members deem it desirable to amend any of its provisions, they are absolutely precluded from doing so.

The Attorney General: But you were told the Premier intends to bring down another Bill.

The Premier: I said so on the second reading.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I missed that. If this Bill goes through, however, the effect will be to re-enact the existing measure for another twelve months. It is absurd that the majority of members should have their hands tied unless the Government agree to amend the principal Act.

The Attorney General: The amending Bill will be brought down this session.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Not knowing what that Bill is to contain, I cannot deal with it. Although quite a number of members on the other side of the House have spoken on the whole question, we have not had from any one of them any explanation whatever of the principal point of objection taken in this debate. Even the Premier himself, in replying, made no attempt whatever at explanation. The Premier, it is true, quoted from his policy speech to prove that he had not favoured the zone system of handling the harvest this year; but, according to his own quotation just now from his own speech, he did say that he expected to reduce substantially the cost of handling the harvest by reducing competition. How is he going to make a substantial reduction of cost except by eliminating competition through the adoption of the zone system? So far as I know, no other means is open to him. The hon. gentleman has not announced any other means. As illustrating the want of unanimity between the Premier and some of his Ministers in the matter, I may mention that, while the leader of the Government said on the 2nd September that he did not approve of the zone system, a letter written four weeks earlier, on the 3rd August, on behalf of the Honorary Minister, Mr. Baxter, says that "the Honorary Minister, supported by the local advisory committee, is favourable to the proposal of dividing the wheat hand-

ling business of the State into port zone districts." The paragraph in which that statement occurs has already been quoted during this debate. The Premier has carefully evaded any explanation of the reasons which actuated the Government in abandoning the policy of the zone system.

The CHAIRMAN: May I ask what the subject-matter which the hon. member is now bringing before the Chamber has to do with Clause 2? Whilst I desire to afford every member of the Committee every latitude when addressing the Chamber, I urge that we confine ourselves as closely as possible to discussion of the question before the Chair.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I submit that I am entirely in order, inasmuch as Clause 2 provides that "the principal Act shall extend and apply to all wheat harvested during the season 1917-18." However, I will not labour the matter. Another point on which I desire explanation is whether the Act applies to any wheat which may be produced in the Esperance district.

The Premier: It would apply to that wheat just the same as to any other wheat.

Hon. P. COLLIER: There is a little wheat grown in the Esperance district; in fact, I am informed the crops are very good there this season. The Esperance wheat growers, having only a small local market, may want to dispose of their produce in Norseman, Kalgoorlie, or Boulder. It would certainly not pay them to cart their produce or ship it to the port, or put in into the pool. Thus, under the terms of the Act as re-enacted by this Bill, they would be prevented from disposing of their wheat except through the pool.

The PREMIER: They could do the same as they did last year. I do not know exactly what they did, but I think they got some special permission. I understand the Minister has special power in that connection.

Clause put and passed.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment; the report adopted.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

## PAPER PRESENTED.

By the Premier: Papers re State Wheat Marketing Scheme.

## RETURN—REPATRIATION LAND SCHEME.

On motion by Mr. PICKERING: Ordered that there be laid upon the Table of the House a return showing: 1, the land available for the proposed Repatriation Scheme; 2, its situation; 3, its distance from the nearest railway siding or port; 4, state of land, whether improved, partially improved, or virgin country.

*Sitting suspended from 10.5 p.m. to  
12.15 a.m.*

## BILLS (6)—RETURNED FROM THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

- 1, Supply.
- 2, Sale of Liquor Regulation Act Continuation.
- 3, Postponement of Debts Act Continuation.
- 4, Land and Income Tax.
- 5, Roads Act Continuation.
- 6, Wheat Marketing.  
Without amendment.

## ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL

The PREMIER (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore) [12.16]: I move—

*That the House at its rising adjourn until Wednesday, 23rd January, 1918.*

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [12.17]: I do not desire to oppose the motion, but I suggest that it would be advisable to meet a little earlier in the new year. I recognise that it will not be convenient for members to return to their duties immediately after the Christmas holidays, but having regard to the fact that we have practically the whole of the business of the session to transact, we should certainly meet before the 23rd January. If we do not meet earlier it is inevitable that we shall be here at least until April, and I think that is undesirable from every point of view. I would urge that we meet say a week earlier, so that

we may get the business over in a reasonable time, and thus not have the House sitting right through the summer, and probably towards the close of the financial year.

The PREMIER (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore—in reply) [12.18]: I would be glad to fall in with the wishes of the leader of the Opposition, but I would point out that the Treasurer will probably have to go East.

Hon. P. Collier: Conference?

The PREMIER: There will be a conference of Treasurers, and hon. members will require a little holiday after the new year. I think therefore, we should adjourn until the 23rd January, and members can then enter on their duties in earnest.

Hon. P. Collier: But think of the late time of the year when we shall be closing the session.

The PREMIER: I think the leader of the Opposition will assist me in every possible way to expedite the business of the House.

Hon. P. Collier: We have not touched the work of the session at all.

The PREMIER: I would like, at the same time, to thank the hon. member for his assistance in bringing the work of the past few days to a close. I thank the hon. member for his courtesy, and I am quite sure that he will not, at any time, raise any factious opposition to legislative proposals, remembering that we are going through the most momentous period in the history of the Empire.

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 12.22 a.m. (Friday).*