

annuation scheme. Section 59, Subsection 2, of the principal Act provides that "Out of the fund there shall be paid the cost of administration of the Act." It is now proposed by this Bill, supported by an agreement between the board and the Treasurer as set out in Section 6 of the Superannuation and Family Benefits Act, also to charge to that fund the Transport Board's obligations under the superannuation scheme. As there are only seven men on the staff of the board and as only four of them come under the scheme, it can be seen that the amount of money involved in the Bill is very small indeed.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Are there not any girls employed in the office?

Mr. DONEY: I am accepting what the Minister said when he introduced the Bill, that only seven officials on the staff come under the scheme. As I presume hon. members know, the Government is liable under Section 42 of the Superannuation and Family Benefits Act to make contributions to the superannuation fund in respect of its own employees; and what this Bill does is to authorise the Transport Board to look upon itself, in regard to its own staff, as responsible for making its own payments to the fund. That is a responsibility previously exercised, as I have explained, on the board's behalf by the Government. The Transport Board therefore becomes an authority within an authority, having precisely the same obligations to the fund and to its employees as the Government has to its employees. That seems to me to be right and proper. I can think of no objection to the Bill, and therefore have pleasure in supporting the second reading. I think the measure deserves general support.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

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

House adjourned at 10.22 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 1st October, 1940.

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

THIRD PARTY INSURANCE SELECT COMMITTEE.

Extension of Time.

On motion by Hon. A. Thomson, the time for bringing up the report was extended for two weeks.

BILL—KALGOORLIE HEALTH AUTHORITY LOAN.

Read a third time and *passed*.

BILLS (2)—REPORTS.

1, Licensed Surveyors Act Amendment.

2, Electoral Act Amendment (No. 1).

Adopted.

BILL—PETROLEUM ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 26th September.

HON. H. SEDDON (North-East) [4.37]:

I think the Minister for Mines is to be congratulated upon the improved conditions that this Bill will bring to the legislation governing oil exploration in Western Australia. When the Bill of 1936 was being discussed, though it constituted in many respects an improvement on the provisions of the petroleum section of the Mining Act, 1904, it contained some very grave defects. At that time I pointed out to the House two

of the defects. The first was that the royalties were far too high, and the second was that the areas were far too small. After the measure had been passed, a man interested in oil exploration in Western Australia said to me, "No large oil company will undertake the search for oil in Western Australia under that Act." I warned the Minister during the discussion that I was afraid this would happen. The Freney company was endeavouring to get large capital interested. Members might recall that at the time Dr. Wade's report was fresh in the minds of the public, and the recommendations he made were such as should have induced people interested in the discovery of oil to undertake the large-scale exploration he suggested. Other concerns had been exploring for oil in Western Australia, and I think it might be said of them that they folded their tents like the Arabs and silently stole away. The only concern that has undertaken systematic oil exploration since the Act of 1936 was passed is the Freney company. That company, failing to get other people interested, called up additional capital, and with the very generous assistance of the Federal and State Governments has been able to get a plant, and now is putting down a bore. This Bill gets over those two difficulties. May I explain first of all that under the 1936 Act the State was divided into five oil provinces. The holdings under the Act were three. The first was a permit to explore; the second, a license to prospect; and the third, a petroleum lease. Under the permit to explore there was no limit to the area of any permit which was taken up in any one province, nor was there granted an exclusive right. The permit to explore might be regarded as a miner's right entitling the holder to prospect in that particular oil province. Those provinces have now been abolished, and the limit in point of area of permit is still from the standpoint of the maximum unlimited. On referring to the Bill members will find that an oil permit may now consist of not less than 1,000 square miles. There is no limit as regards maximum. The oil permit of 1936, as I said, did not grant any exclusive right. Two people could be operating closely adjoining each other, and carrying on their work quite independently. But under the new permit an exclusive right is granted; and once a person has a permit and has defined the area of the permit, he has an exclusive

right to that ground. There is no limit under the amending Bill as it has come to this Chamber in regard to the maximum area that can be taken up. All that is provided for is that the permit-holder shall pay a fee of £100. Under the amending Bill it would be possible for one person to apply for a permit to explore the whole of Western Australia, and no one else would have the right to explore anywhere in the State. That is the position under the Bill.

Hon. J. Nicholson: So something has been omitted there?

Hon. R. SEDDON: It may be that the abolition of the oil provinces has to a certain extent produced in effect what has been more or less overlooked; but the fact remains that this Bill, which represents an amendment of the measure introduced into the Assembly, has brought about that position of affairs. The Bill that was introduced into the Assembly contained a limit insofar as conditions were laid down for payment of fees. Under the Bill there was a fee of £50 for 1,000 square miles, and a further fee of £50 for every additional 1,000 square miles, or part thereof, with a maximum fee of £500. This would have resulted in the maximum area of any particular permit being 10,000 square miles. It is interesting to note that the permit under the Commonwealth Oil Ordinance in New Guinea is for 20,000 square miles; so that the Bill evidently did intend to bring our legislation somewhere near the Commonwealth legislation, inasmuch as 10,000 square miles was thus provided in the Bill, when originally introduced, as the maximum area for a permit.

There is another highly important feature, that of having the exclusive right to explore in the area of the permit. I do not think it was the intention of the Minister for Mines to introduce that state of affairs. Not for a moment do I think the Minister had the slightest intention that conditions should exist under which the whole of Western Australia might be reserved for prospecting by one man. I would like the Chief Secretary to look into that aspect. I may be wrong, but that appears to me to be the position under the legislation before us.

In Western Australia there are three known areas where geological conditions favour the possibility of oil discovery.

There is one in the Kimberleys, one near the North-West Cape, and a third one which at present is not receiving any attention whatever, because of being too distant from easy access and disclosing conditions highly difficult for undertaking exploration.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Where is that area?

Hon. H. SEDDON: It is near the Nul-labor Plains. Conditions in New Guinea are far more difficult for oil exploration than they are in Western Australia; but the Commonwealth permit in New Guinea is limited to 20,000 square miles, and three big companies are operating in that territory to-day. The conditions of this Bill regarding leases are very much better. The great objection to the old Bill was the size and number of lenses made available for any one person. The maximum area under the old Bill was 160 acres, and no person was to hold more than five leases. Under the present Bill, the minimum area is four square miles and the maximum 100 square miles for any one lease, and a person can take up any number of leases. Apart from the operations of the company and general working there is a great advantage, a scientific advantage, associated with that. Under the Bill, once oil has been located, a company can apply for and take up the whole of the structure on which that oil exists. One of the greatest evils of oil production in other countries has been the fact that many companies were operating on one oilfield. Once the oil was discovered, every company got down its well as fast as it could, in order to get its share of the oil; and the result was that there was no possibility of restraining production. This had two adverse effects. First of all, the market was flooded with oil. Each company had to get the oil out, because "If I don't get it out, my neighbour will get it out." Another effect was that oil dome pressures, which are highly important with respect to the consistency of the oil and also with regard to the bringing of the oil to the surface, were very soon exhausted, and the fields were not scientifically developed. Much oil was left in the ground, that would have been got out under scientific working. The conditions, which exist in, for example, Persia, where the Anglo-Persian Oil Co. has control of the whole field, are such that the company is able to watch the gas pressure underground and

is able to control the method of extracting oil, so that the maximum extraction is obtained from the oil strata. Under the present Bill it will be possible to bring about a similar state of affairs in Australia. Once oil is discovered, the company that has discovered it will have an opportunity to take up sufficient area to preserve the oil structure and thereby to work it scientifically.

The Bill preserves the reward area for the first discoverer. I am indeed pleased to know that, because much money has been spent and much valuable information accumulated by companies operating in the past, and I think they should be recognised.

The Chief Secretary: Do you refer to the provision with regard to the license to prospect?

Hon. H. SEDDON: Yes. The provision has been improved to this extent: The principal Act provides for a royalty of £1 per acre, and that amount has been considerably reduced. The area remains very much the same, 200 square miles as against 225 square miles maximum. Those conditions will be all to the good. The royalties which under the parent Act amounted to a maximum of 15 per cent. have been reduced to 10 per cent., thus bringing them more into line with royalties obtaining in other parts of the world.

Those are the salient points of the Bill. I would like the Minister to look into the question of the conditions applying to the permit. I do not think such conditions were intended, and possibly an amendment will be moved whereby the area of a single permit will be limited to the area fixed by the Commonwealth legislation, namely 20,000 square miles. That is a very large area and it would give a bona fide company plenty of scope in its exploratory work. If my suggestion is adopted, I think the result will be that two or three big oil companies will become interested in Western Australia. They will work in definite localities with the object of finding oil. The State would benefit, as the companies would be more likely to undertake prospecting under such conditions than under the conditions set out in the Bill. I shall give the measure my support and in the meantime await the reply of the Minister to the points I have raised.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, debate adjourned.

BILL—RESERVES (GOVERNMENT DOMAIN).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 25th September.

HON. J. A. DIMMITT (Metropolitan-Suburban) [4.53]: I had hoped that the joint committee's report would end the controversy on this question of the selection of a suitable site for Government offices. You, Sir, will no doubt recall that the members of this Chamber who were appointed to the committee were elected by a secret ballot. That secret ballot reflected the opinion of a majority of members of this House, who elected three of the most strenuous opponents of this site. In view of the fact that those strenuous opponents have now become champions of the site, I felt that every member of this Chamber would be in agreement at least with the broad principles of the Bill. I refer to the site, although perhaps there might have been some difference of opinion with regard to the details. As a matter of fact, I would support an amendment to delete the roadway which is part of the Bill. For the life of me, I cannot see why a roadway should be incorporated in the Bill. If time should reveal that a roadway is necessary, then it would not be difficult to have a roadway gazetted; but if time should reveal that a roadway is not necessary, then it would be difficult to close an established roadway. Why should this Parliament commit a future Parliament to a difficult situation? Why should this Parliament commit some future generation to a problem that need not be created at all? If at some future time another Government is compelled to acquire the Christian Brothers' College site, then an arbitrator, in fixing the value of the site, would have to give due consideration to the value of 600 yards of roadway along the whole western side.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Six hundred feet.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: Yes, 600 feet. Should it be necessary to create a roadway, the matter could easily be arranged, so I shall support the amendment to delete the roadway from the Bill. Several opponents of the site have spoken against the measure and I want to challenge some of the arguments. One hon. member made what I consider an unfortunate reference to the beauties of the setting of Government offices in Melbourne. He extolled the beauties of the

garden setting of the Treasury building there, but I would remind that hon. member that this plan envisages a garden setting much more beautiful than that of the Melbourne building, with a river frontage and a river outlook of which Melbourne cannot possibly boast. The same hon. member made reference to the proximity of Government offices in Melbourne to the Houses of Parliament. He did this in advocacy of his contention that the Observatory site would be the proper place for Government offices. Whilst it must be admitted that some Government offices are adjacent to the Houses of Parliament in Melbourne, particularly the the Treasury, the Government Printing Office, and the Premier's Department, I cannot help reminding that hon. member that the Crown Law Department, the Stamps Office, the Titles Office and the Taxation Department are situated in Queen-street, A' Beckett-street, and Lonsdale street, about two miles from Parliament House.

Hon. J. Cornell: Two miles?

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: Yes, so the argument loses some of its force owing to the fact that the hon. member's statements are but partly correct. Some country members have said that the funds to be used for these Government offices should be applied for the alleviation of distressed agriculturists. Every member of this House is in fullest sympathy with the farmers in the deplorable condition in which they find themselves to-day. We realise that this Government and the Federal Government must do something about it, but we must also realise that the funds which it is intended to use are virtually trust funds.

Hon. J. Cornell: They are trust funds.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: Yes, and cannot be used for the purpose suggested by some of the country members. Other members who opposed the Bill said that the time was inopportune to erect the buildings. That can be said of any time, and probably will continue to be said of all time; but I suggest that this is a time when the Government should set an example, when it should give a lead, when it could by its actions develop a degree of faith in the future prosperity of Western Australia. By embarking upon a Government building programme, the Government will create employment on the actual building itself. Not only will the Government do that, it will encourage a faith in other people to

follow its example and thus it will stimulate building activity in this State. I consider it is time that the people of this State, and of this Parliament as well, dropped their attitude of despair and despondency, and developed and built up some faith in the future, a spirit of optimism. The British Empire was not built by croakers who said that the time was inopportune to do this or that. It may have been said that the time was inopportune to colonise Australia; it may have been said that the time was inopportune for the purchase by Disraeli of shares in the Suez Canal. But where would Great Britain be to-day without Australia and without command of the Suez Canal? I suggest that if this Parliament shows some faith in the future it will develop that spirit of optimism throughout the length and breadth of this State. Those people who think that the time is inopportune to carry out undertakings are croakers and never will build up Australia. Let us build up the spirit of optimism. Rest assured that we have the certain knowledge that Great Britain is going to emerge victorious from the present great struggle, and we have also this sure knowledge that drought conditions cannot continue for ever. I look forward to the not distant date when we will see the foundation stone of the Government offices laid on the site mentioned in the Bill. I support the second reading.

HON. G. B. WOOD (East) [5.3]: I did not intend to speak on the second reading of the Bill until I heard the remarks of some of the previous speakers. For many years I have advocated the construction of a new building for the Agricultural Department; that has been an obsession of mine, but even so it is a matter for regret that I cannot see my way to vote for the second reading of the Bill. I know that by doing so I shall assist to put off the day when we shall see that important department housed under better conditions. I have inspected the site chosen by the joint committee and I am going to say, as other speakers have said before me, that the present is not the time in which to embark on the undertaking, and as other members have said that the time is not opportune to submit legislation to amend the existing Rural Relief Fund Act. Mr. Dimmitt spoke about faith. I ask him whether, by the erection of new Government offices, we shall establish faith in the country

where the farmers for some years have suffered from the effects of drought and low prices. I am very sorry that I am not able to vote for the second reading of the Bill and that by doing so I shall also be casting a vote against new premises being erected for the Agricultural Department. I know the structure in which that department is now accommodated is a disgrace to the State, but as I have already said, the time is inopportune for the expenditure of so much money on building, and so I shall have to vote against the Bill.

HON. A. THOMSON (South-East) [5.6]: I was sorry to hear the remarks of my colleague who declared that it was his intention to vote against the second reading of the Bill. For the past 25 years it has been an accepted principle that we should have central public buildings. When I had the privilege of leading the Country Party in another place, one of the planks of our platform was that serious consideration should be given to the construction of central public offices. When the Bill was before this House last session I strongly opposed it, or rather I opposed the excision of portion of the Government Domain for public offices. I believed that it would be possible so to reconstruct the present Treasury Buildings that we would be able to house all our departments there. In effect, now I find that the evidence which has been submitted to the joint committee proves my contention to be incorrect, and I have now the available information which the select committee had submitted to it. We have now before us a very vexed question which last year we considered would never be settled. The decision of the joint committee now goes far to prove what I have been advocating and urging for the past 25 years, ever since I have been in Parliament. Under our present system we find the Government—not necessarily the Government now in power—establishing a principle and declaring, "This is our policy, and we propose to construct buildings without consulting Parliament." On this question of selecting sites, I support what Sir Hal Colebatch said, and I contend that if a joint committee of both Houses had been asked to select a site upon which to erect a new Perth Hospital, I do not for one moment believe it would have agreed to the

expenditure of half a million of money on the site determined on by the Government. From my point of view that site is deplorable, because where people are sick they should at least be afforded an agreeable outlook, one that would be conducive to a speedy return to health. That is not likely to be the case where the new hospital is now being erected. I am positive that if a committee had been appointed to consider the question of a site for the hospital the position chosen by the Government would have been the very last selected. Year after year, in this House and in another place, we have discussed this question of new Government offices, and I trust that my colleague will change his mind and vote for the second reading of the Bill. Our policy has been to secure better accommodation for the Agricultural Department the officers of which, everyone will admit, are endeavouring to work under conditions that can only be described as absolutely hopeless. So I contend we are not getting the result that we have a right to expect from the scientific knowledge possessed by those officers.

Hon. G. B. Wood: Why did you vote against the Bill last year?

Hon. A. THOMSON: Because at the time I was opposed to the site. I also opposed the Bill because I considered, and I have always held this view, that in respect of the construction of buildings proper detailed plans and specifications should be prepared and tenders called. Metaphorically speaking, I am continually bumping my head against the brick wall of the Government's policy on the question of day labour versus contract. Of course the Government declares that it intends to carry out its public works by the method it considers to be the best, and as the Government is in power, we have to accept that, just because it happens to be its policy. I declare, however, that that policy is wrong, not only in the interests of the buildings erected but also because, for the life of me, I cannot see that day labour is of any benefit to the workers themselves. The Arbitration Court lays down principles, fixes wages and hours and conditions under which all workers shall be engaged, whether employed by contractors or on buildings being constructed under the day labour system. We know that by the passing of

the Bill now before us we are in effect committing ourselves to the construction of the first portion of Government offices. For many years we have been told in the reports that have been submitted to this House that the Titles Office staff has not the proper facilities to enable it to discharge its duties in a satisfactory manner, and also that the safe accommodation is over-taxed and that more space is needed for the storing of valuable documents. Likewise it is well known to everyone that our Agricultural Department is sadly in need of better accommodation to enable the staff to get better results. Here, then, are also reasons why I intend to vote in favour of the Bill this year, and I am reluctantly compelled to accept the decision of the Government in respect of its policy, though if it is possible to do so I should like a provision to be included in the Bill in the direction of calling competitive tenders for the erection of the building. In this way we would be able to get a fair idea of the cost by tender and the estimated cost under the Government's policy. I am informed that in connection with the Stirling dam a certain firm approached the Government and offered to do the work at one-tenth less than the Government's estimated cost. I understand the departmental estimate was something like 4s. 6d. a yard. Let me point out where that principle is wrong. We have the town of Pingelly, which is definitely languishing for a water supply; we have also a thriving town like Katanning which to-day has no water supply. So I say that if the Government were to adopt business methods and found that it was able to get a particular work done for, say, 1s. or even 6d. below the departmental estimate, the saving effected would go some distance towards providing the two towns I have named with the water supply that is so badly needed. As I said before, I know I am bumping my head against a brick wall, but I am drawing attention to the position and I hope the Government will seriously consider it. What are we going to do with the unemployed contractors? Are we going to put them on sustenance rates of wages because the Government declares there are to be no contracts anywhere? In this way shall we not drive them to the Eastern States where they will have an opportunity

to get employment? I know the Chief Secretary cannot give an assurance on that point.

The proposed buildings are long overdue and must be erected. If it were possible to transfer the money that will be used for the erection of these buildings to a fund for assistance to the farming community, I can assure Mr. Wood that my vote would be against that being done. The money is part of a trust fund, and cannot be taken into Consolidated Revenue, neither can it be transferred to the farming community, much as we would like that to be done. I agree with Mr. Dimmitt, however, that something will have to be done quickly by the Governments concerned to help the farming industry. I could not give a silent vote on this Bill because I opposed the site on a previous occasion. I have given my reasons why I support the measure to-day. We have at last arrived at the solution of a problem that has been a vexed one for many years. Once the site is approved and the buildings have been erected upon it, we shall at last be in a position to house the Agricultural Department, at least, in a manner that will make for very much better results. A considerable sum of State money is involved in the agricultural industry, and we should help it in every possible way and also the department that does so much for it. Insufficient money has in the past been spent on that department. The Bill affords truth of what I have frequently said in this House, that if a public works or public accounts committee had been appointed in earlier years to discuss questions of this nature, hundreds of thousands of pounds would have been saved to the State in numerous directions. If in Committee it comes to a question of eliminating the street that is provided for, I might be inclined to vote for that. As Mr. Dimmitt pointed out, if at a later date it is necessary to declare a street, that can be done. Meanwhile I support the second reading, happy in the thought that at last this vexed question of a suitable site for Government offices has been settled.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West—in reply) [5.18]: Notwithstanding one or two speeches that have been made against the Bill, I am pleased at the general reception given to it. It is not my intention to refer to the site decided upon

and recommended by the committee, except to remark that rather than criticise the committee, members should extend to it their congratulations upon having arrived at a unanimous decision. The House itself should express its appreciation of the manner in which the committee dealt with this question. I do not know of any subject that has been before the House that has brought forth so many diverse opinions than did the question of a suitable site last year. When we find a committee of both Houses, meeting as this one did, devoting its time and abilities in many directions to a comprehensive study of the problem, and then coming forward with a unanimous report, surely that is something we ought to respect. I should like to express my thanks to the committee for what I consider to be the extraordinarily good work it has performed. Only two other points need be mentioned by me. The first is the proposal of Mr. Dimmitt that in Committee the provision for a street might be deleted. I am not sure what the result of such deletion would be, but I know that a street would ultimately be necessary. I am given to understand that although a street is provided for, that does not mean it will be made and completed at once. The first thing to be done is to erect buildings for the two departments—the Agricultural Department and the Titles Office—which have been crying out for many years not only for better but for more commodious accommodation. Whether or not there is anything in the point raised by Mr. Dimmitt, I am of the opinion that, in view of the fact that the Solicitor General has advised it is necessary to make provision for a street, we should not spoil the scheme by tinkering with it at this stage.

Hon. H. Tuckey: What about resuming the corner, and making a job of it?

THE CHIEF SECRETARY: In its report the committee has made the position clear. Very few members of either House would be prepared to say that the time is opportune for the State to resume buildings at the cost of considerable sums of money, or even to resume private property of any kind, more especially when we can acquire sufficient Crown land that will cost nothing in that direction. There is a great deal in that argument. In 50 or 100 years' time it may be that the requirements of the State will call for some additional land for Government buildings, etc., but I am inclined

to think that when that time arrives the necessity for Government House being retained where it is will have passed, and that, if more land is required for this purpose, the probabilities are that the extension will be westward rather than eastward. At any rate we might leave that problem to those who will be dealing with it 50 years hence. With regard to the financial aspect, members know that the proposal is to use some of the reserve funds of the State Insurance Office. One or two members who have referred to this matter may have overlooked the fact that only two years ago this Chamber passed a measure known as the Public Buildings Bill. That gave the Government the right to lease certain land and properties, the money obtained from the leasing of those properties to be used for the payment of interest on money that might be borrowed from the State Insurance Office. The Bill also provided that pending the time when it was possible to lease those properties, the Government should have the right to borrow up to £300,000 from the reserve of the State Insurance Office, paying interest for it, of course, on the basis of the cost of money to the Government at the time it was borrowed.

Hon. A. Thomson: Will not portion of the money come from the Superannuation Fund?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: No. The proposal is to take what is required from the State Insurance Office fund. The Superannuation Fund may be used for the same purpose, but if it is used, the Government will be faced with the same position that it cannot be used for the purpose suggested by Mr. Wood. The amount required for the first part of the buildings, I believe, can be procured from one or other of these sources. There is nothing wrong with such a procedure. The policy has this additional advantage, that by using the funds for this purpose, we are not affecting our loan programme for the year. Were we to use money from other sources, that would have to be taken into consideration with regard to our loan programme, in that the Loan Council would count it as portion of our domestic raisings, and would only approve of the balance being provided in the usual way in which we raise loans. To that extent, therefore, we shall be better off. If I thought that by utilising this fund for this purpose we should in any way prejudice the case of the farmer getting relief either at the hands of the State or the Federal Government, I might be inclined to

think there was something in Mr. Wood's argument. As the position stands, it is a case of cutting off his nose to spite his face. We must have regard for the farming community as well as for other sections. Members might consider new Government offices from the point of view of providing employment for a considerable number of men who would otherwise have no employment. We do not propose to rush on with the buildings and have them finished before Christmas. Employees of the building trade are entitled to just as much consideration in that regard as farmers are entitled to consideration from the Government. Regarding the buildings themselves, due to the fact that the agricultural industry was never more in need of assistance than it is at present, I think it is an excellent argument in favour of the scheme that the department should be housed in buildings that will enable it to do its work in a proper and efficient manner, and to do more for the struggling farming community than it has hitherto been able to do. Members of the farming community have been facing great problems for a number of years. We know that a certain amount of success has attended the research work carried on by the officers of the Agricultural Department, but I feel sure their success has been nothing like what it might have been had they been provided with better and more up-to-date facilities for the carrying on of their work. This is a Bill we might well agree to from all points of view. I express the hope that when it is passed we will have the satisfaction in the not distant future of seeing very beneficial results accrue from the fact that at last we have a definite policy to work to, and that at least two Government departments will be housed in buildings to which they have long been entitled.

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

Ayes	..	..	..	..	19
Noes	..	.	..	..	7
					—
Majority for	..	..	..	..	12
					—

AYES.

Hon. C. F. Baxter	Hon. J. M. Macfarlane
Hon. L. B. Bolton	Hon. W. J. Mann
Hon. L. Crute	Hon. G. W. Miles
Hon. J. A. Dimmitt	Hon. J. Nicholson
Hon. J. M. Irew	Hon. H. S. W. Parker
Hon. G. Fraser	Hon. H. V. Plesse
Hon. E. H. Gray	Hon. H. Seddon
Hon. W. R. Hall	Hon. A. Thomson
Hon. J. J. Holmes	Hon. F. R. Welsh
Hon. W. H. Kitson	(Teller.)

NOES.

Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch	|	Hon. H. Tuckey
Hon. J. Cornell		Hon. G. B. Wood
Hon. V. Hamersley		Hon. E. H. H. Hall
Hon. H. L. Roche		(Teller.)

Question thus passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Hon. J. Cornell in the Chair; the Chief Secretary in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Reserve A. 1149:

Hon. Sir HAL COLEBATCH: I move an amendment—

That in lines 4 and 5 the words “and as to the other part thereof shown coloured red” be struck out.

I shall not labour the matter. My purpose is to indicate two things. The first is that, in the opinion of this Committee, the site as recommended by expert witnesses who mentioned Victoria-avenue should be that adopted, and secondly, that, in the opinion of members, the time is inopportune for proceeding with such an undertaking. I can understand the objection by some members to the use of the argument regarding the time being inopportune. I admit that frequently the argument is used unnecessarily, but I feel there is something exceptional about the times and conditions under which we live to-day. While optimism is to be admired, optimism is one thing and burying one's head in the sand and refusing to see the tremendous difficulties with which one is confronted, is a totally different matter. The statement has been made that the £300,000 involved cannot be spent for any other purpose. It seems to me that was the suggestion. I do not know how the State Government Insurance Office has made £300,000.

The Chief Secretary: I did not say that the work would cost £300,000.

Hon. Sir HAL COLEBATCH: No, but the Minister mentioned an amount of £300,000.

The Chief Secretary: That is under the Act.

Hon. Sir HAL COLEBATCH: The emergencies confronting us to-day are such that we shall require all the resources available to us, and I understand that trust money can be loaned to the Government on the security of the State itself.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I am afraid the amendment will hardly meet the position.

Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch: A further amendment will be necessary.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: An earlier part of the clause would also have to be deleted, and that could not be done in this Committee if Sir Hal proceeds with his amendment.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: That could be done if Sir Hal Colebatch withdrew his amendment.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I suggest amending the clause so that it will read, “All that piece of land being portion of Reserve A.1149 in the City of Perth described in the Schedule to this Act, is hereby excised from the said reserve and shall be set aside as a Class A. reserve for public buildings (departmental offices).” That means that the whole of paragraph (b) will be deleted and the plan itself will be ignored.

Hon. Sir HAL COLEBATCH: I will accept Mr. Nicholson's suggestion, and ask leave to withdraw my amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I move an amendment—

That in line 3, after the word “Act” the words “and as to one part thereof shown bordered green and as to the other part thereof shown coloured red on the plan in such schedule” be struck out.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Needless to say, I shall vote for the clause as it stands. This matter received much consideration last session and during the present session. It was known that a committee of eight members, representative of both Houses of Parliament, had been appointed to endeavour to solve the problem. I thought the committee had done so, but it seems that Sir Hal Colebatch has returned, as it were, fresh from London, and has attacked the committee on the charge of having submitted a report that is contrary to the evidence. I think Mr. Mann dealt effectively with that aspect. Then Sir Hal went on to refer to the improvement in the values of properties on the other side of Adelaide-terrace and adjacent to the proposed new building. He does not seem to object to that, but he objected to the property of the Christian Brothers being improved by the construction of a roadway on the eastern portion of the Government Domain Reserve. I am of opinion that the erection of public buildings does not improve the value of adjacent properties. As members are aware, I was opposed to that site and did my best

to wean some of the witnesses from their advocacy of it by pointing out that in my opinion the development of the city showed a trend towards the west and not to the east. The Surveyor-General admitted in cross-examination that William-street is a more valuable thoroughfare to-day than Barrack-street. The Treasury buildings and D. & W. Murray's buildings have killed Barrack-street. There must be a road somewhere, and it cannot be established at the western end unless Government House is interfered with. In spite of what Sir Hal Colebatch said, and in spite of his picking out evidence to suit his purpose—

Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch: That is not a fair statement. I read the whole of the evidence applying to that block.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The only question before the Chair is as to whether a road should be constructed on this land.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Then I will stick to the straight and narrow path. Sir Hal Colebatch objects to the road which the joint committee in its wisdom thought necessary. That committee consisted of eight men who listened to the evidence which was given. To read a man's evidence and to have the person before you for examination are two different things and I was convinced, as was the whole committee, that that site was the only one available for public buildings and for the establishment of the road. In order to condemn this site—and the site includes the road—the hon. member suggested that the committee had in mind the removal of Government House. That is not so and there is no evidence to that effect. All that need be removed is the lodge. The committee had evidence that if Government House is not renovated in the near future at an enormous cost it will fall down, but that does not come into the matter.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: Assuming that the Bill is left as it stands there will be nothing to stop the road being put anywhere at all on the remaining portion of the land by the Government in power at any future date. The sole effect of the provision is that that portion of the property coloured red cannot be built on. It is far better to leave the whole of the eight acres available for such buildings as may be required and to leave it to the architects to put in the necessary roads as and where required. I cannot see any advantage in retaining in the Bill the portion coloured red.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I understand the committee went thoroughly into the question of the type of building proposed to be erected on this site, together with the surroundings. Having discussed the evidence given, the committee was apparently of the opinion that this proposal is necessary to give effect to the full scheme.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: The amendment will not prevent the establishment of a road on the proposed block.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: That may be so, but I understand the Solicitor General has advised that we must include this area in the Bill if we propose to adopt the recommendation of the committee, and that being so, I do not think we should tinker with the matter. If the committee received sufficient evidence to satisfy it that the proposal is perfectly sound, we should be prepared to stand by the committee and for that reason I oppose the amendment.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Someone has suggested that a road can be established anywhere. The committee had before it the whole plan of the proposed new buildings submitted by the Chief Architect. The complete layout is eight acres and ultimately the scheme will cost a million pounds. I think that the cost of the first building to be erected, to house the Agricultural Department and the Titles Office, is estimated at £200,000. A road cannot be put anywhere. We cannot have a road running past the front of one building and the back door of another.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: You can but you are not likely to.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I opposed this site but Parliament in its wisdom has agreed to it and I do not intend to be a party to tinkering with the position. The road is included in the scheme for new public buildings on the proposed site and therefore I oppose the amendment.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: Although it has been said that the committee made certain recommendations, the only recommendation it included in the Bill was as to where the road should go. The Bill has nothing whatever to do with where the buildings shall be erected. It may be that at some future date for some good reason it may be considered that the buildings should be in a different position, but their erection might be blocked by the existence of the road marked on the plan. I would rather that the authorities of a later time should be per-

mitted to exercise their own discretion as to where the road should be.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: In the plans and specifications submitted to the committee there was provision for a road and the committee had to come to a decision. Some witnesses suggested, and the suggestion has also been made in this House, that the road should be on the western side of the area, but I ask hon. members whether they would agree to a strip being excised from the Government domain to provide for a road which would run between Government House and the Government buildings, particularly when there are only six acres left around Government House. The committee recommended that no land should be acquired for public buildings because the Government cannot afford to pay for it. Another recommendation was that a portion of land should be set aside for a road on the eastern end of the reserve. A further recommendation was that the buildings should be erected on the north-western corner of the land alienated for that purpose. I agree with Mr. Holmes that once public buildings of this description are established the value of adjacent land is immediately reduced. If no land is excised for a road we shall have Government buildings erected overlooking the backyard of the block next door occupied by the Christian Brothers' College. The committee will do a disservice to the State if it strikes out the provision for an area to be excised for a road. The joint committee did not arrive at any decision lightly. The evidence was carefully considered and, as Mr. Holmes has said, the reading of evidence and hearing it given are two different things. The committee, after summing up the evidence, reached a sound decision that I consider reflects credit upon it.

Hon. H. TUCKEY: This land is far too valuable to warrant the setting aside of a chain frontage for a street that will be a dead-end. We do not want a sort of tip-toe alley alongside the Government offices. The Terrace is a wide thoroughfare and will be able to cope with all the traffic. The committee was appointed to recommend a site, not to submit plans and specifications. Having decided that the Government Domain site was the proper one, the committee completed its work, and it should now be the duty of the Town Planning Commissioner to determine the lay-

out of the grounds. In my opinion, the Christian Brothers' block should have been resumed. The policy recommended by the committee savours of cheese-paring. If the time is inopportune to find the money to resume the other block, probably it is inopportune to undertake any of the work. I support the amendment.

Hon. W. J. MANN: I hope the recommendation of the committee will receive support. Quite a number of aspects had to be considered, and some unusual facts were brought to light in the course of discussion. One was that Government House is built partly on a street that has never been closed. The original plan shows Pier-street running through to the river.

Hon. L. CRAIG: It used to run right through.

Hon. W. J. MANN: Nobody appears to have any knowledge of that part of Pier-street having been closed. In the distant future some Government might decide to erect unsightly buildings such as garages or sheds on the eastern end of this site, and the provision for a road would prevent anything of that sort happening. Elsewhere good buildings and good reserves have been spoilt by the erection of unsightly structures near by.

Hon. L. CRAIG: I cannot see that we would be justified in committing future Governments to the construction of a road along the eastern end of this location. Eight acres is a large block of land, and at present the only proposal is to erect buildings on the corner nearer to Barrack-street. From there to the Christian Brothers' block is a long way. Evidently many years will elapse before any building scheme is completed. The proposed roadway will have nothing to do with the buildings to be erected in the near future. I have always envisaged these blocks of buildings as being served by drives from the Terrace to Riverside-drive, not by a thoroughfare. If a roadway at the eastern end of the block is found necessary in future, a strip can be excised for the purpose. I support the amendment.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: When the use of this site was proposed two sessions ago, I strenuously opposed it, but having since considered other available sites, I have reversed my decision. I compliment the committee on the good work it has done, but its work would have been better had

provision been made for the resumption of the Christian Brothers' block. In that event the question of a roadway would not have arisen. Many people consider that the Christian Brothers would ask an exorbitant price for their block, but the price would have to be fixed by the Land Resumption Board and would be reasonable. I cannot support the proposal for constructing a roadway at the eastern end of the block. No building will be erected there for a long time. The buildings proposed are to be erected on the western end, and before operations extend to the eastern end, it might be deemed advisable to resume the Christian Brothers' block. I support the amendment.

Hon. G. FRASER: Did the committee take into consideration that, if the proposed roadway is constructed, there is a possibility of a shopping centre being developed on the block belonging to the Christian Brothers?

Hon. L. Craig: There is a shop diagonally opposite now.

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes. Would it be injurious to Government buildings if the Christian Brothers' block was used for a shopping or residential area?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The amendment seeks to overcome the difficulty occasioned by the plan, which is part of the schedule, showing an area dedicated for a roadway. At this stage it would be highly undesirable to bind a future Government regarding the use to which the land may be put.

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

Ayes	..	..	..	13
Noes	..	..	..	10
Majority for	..	..	..	3

AYES.

Hon. L. B. Bolton	Hon. J. Nicholson
Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch	Hon. H. V. Plasse
Hon. L. Craik	Hon. H. L. Roche
Hon. J. A. Dimmitt	Hon. H. Seddon
Hon. E. H. H. Hall	Hon. H. Tuckey
Hon. V. Hamersley	Hon. H. S. W. Parker
Hon. G. W. Miles	(Teller.)

NOES.

Hon. C. F. Baxter	Hon. J. J. Holmes
Hon. J. M. Drew	Hon. W. H. Kitson
Hon. G. Fraser	Hon. A. Thomson
Hon. E. H. Gray	Hon. F. R. Welsh
Hon. W. R. Hall	Hon. W. J. Mann
	(Teller.)

PAIR.

Aye.	No.
Hon. J. M. Macfarlane	Hon. G. R. Wood

Amendment thus passed.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I move an amendment—

That in lines 6 to 9 the words "to the intent that (a) that part of the land excised as aforesaid, which is bordered green on the plan in the said Schedule" be struck out, and the word "and" inserted in lieu.

This follows on the previous amendment.

Amendment put and passed.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: It is also necessary for me to move the following amendment:—

That in lines 11 to 14 the words "and (b) that part of the land as aforesaid which is shown coloured red on the plan in the said Schedule" be struck out.

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

Schedule—agreed to.

The CHAIRMAN: What is to be done with the plan? Is it to be deleted? There is no need for it. It is not part of the Schedule or of the Bill.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: It automatically goes out.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I call attention to the fact that the plan is referred to in words which have already been struck out. There is a relationship. The carrying of an amendment that the plan be struck out would place on record that the plan is not part of the Bill as sent back from this Chamber.

Hon. Sir HAL COLEBATCH: Having struck out all reference to the plan in the Bill, does not the elimination of the plan follow as a consequential alteration?

The CHAIRMAN: The striking-out of the plan is a consequential amendment, to which the Clerk can attend.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments.

BILLS (3)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Land Tax.
- 2, Income Tax (Rates for Deduction) Act Amendment.
- 3, State Transport Co-ordination Act Amendment.

Received from the Assembly.

BILL—ELECTORAL ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 25th September.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West) [7.41]: This Bill contains what I consider very desirable provisions. Actually, one might say that the main principles of the amendment are taken from the Commonwealth Electoral Act, for in Section 121 of that Act are found almost identical provisions. The section in question was first inserted in the Commonwealth Act in 1918, and, with the exception of an addition in 1922, has not been amended since its insertion. In the Commonwealth sphere, it has been found beneficial, apparently, and its machinery has operated successfully. The sections surrounding Section 121 in the Commonwealth Act are very similar to the sections contiguous to Section 128 of the State Act, after which it is now proposed to insert the new Section 128A. I have not been able to ascertain why such a provision was never inserted in the State Act; but, rather strangely, I have been able to trace a Bill which attempted to insert such a provision. The Bill was introduced as the Electoral Act Amendment Act, 1925, by the then Minister for Justice, the Hon. J. C. Willcock. It was read a first time on the 13th August, 1925, and was passed by the other place; but when it was introduced into this Chamber it was ruled out of order under Standing Order No. 242 on the ground that certain sections of the Bill proposed a change in the Constitution and that there was no certificate that the Bill had passed its second and third readings with the concurrence of an absolute majority of the whole of the members of the Assembly. That Bill contained 69 clauses, and those objected to did not include the clause we are now considering.

Clause 61 of the 1925 Bill proposed to insert a section similar to the one now before us, and that clause was passed by the Assembly without objection. The Minister for Justice explained its provisions, and stated that it followed the Federal Act. His explanation of the necessity for the clause is very similar indeed to the explanation put up by Mr. Hall. The fact that the Bill itself was disallowed in this Chamber on a technicality does not affect the merit of this particular section, the validity of which is beyond ques-

tion, and the reason and necessity for which must be apparent. In my opinion, the Bill, if passed, will improve the Electoral Act. At the same time, it will be necessary, if the Bill passes the second reading stage, for two or three amendments to be made in order to bring it into conformity with the State Electoral Act. Certain provisions relating to nominations and claims, apparently have been overlooked by the draftsman. I hope the House will agree to the Bill with the amendments I have indicated.

HON. J. CORNELL (South) [7.48]: I support the Bill. The measure proposes that where an elector's name was on record before the roll was printed and was inadvertently omitted from it, his name may be written in. The elector might hold the necessary qualifications, but through an error in the Electoral Department his name was not supplied to the printer, or the printer, when printing the roll, omitted the name. The Bill provides that in such a case an elector can, by making a declaration, claim a vote. His vote, however, would not be put into the general ballot box. It would have to be scrutinised at the only place, so far as this State is concerned, where it could be scrutinised, and that is where the records are kept; I refer to the Chief Electoral Office in Perth. If the electors claim is substantiated then his vote will be allowed. When one looks at the matter fairly and squarely, that is a proper provision. The Chief Electoral Officer himself is to-day armed with that power. If the elector discovers that his name is not on the roll and makes representation to the electoral officer or to the registrar of his district, the official will make the necessary representation to the Chief Electoral Officer. A search follows, and if the elector's statement is found to be correct, the Chief Electoral Officer instructs the registrar or the returning officer to write the elector's name in the official roll to be used on polling day.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: That would have to be done before polling day.

Hon. J. CORNELL: Yes. During an election for the South Province, I had occasion to go to the Electoral Department, because I wanted to know why the name of a prominent man at Southern Cross did not appear on the roll. The Chief Electoral Officer inquired, "Is his name dropped?" I replied, "Yes." The Chief Electoral Officer said he would look into the matter and consulted the

index. He then said, "The man's name is on the roll." I said, "It may be on that roll, but the other roll is the only roll on which he can vote; he cannot vote on your card index." The Chief Electoral Officer then said, "The printer dropped the name from the roll and I will rectify that." The man's name was written in the roll and he voted. What might happen—this is an extreme case—is that this measure may result in the declaration of a poll being delayed. This point does not apply so much to the Legislative Assembly, because 60 days or more is allowed for the return of the writ. But in the case of the Legislative Council the matter is different. I remember when the late Mr. J. F. Allen won a contest for the North Province by four votes. There was also on one occasion a dead-heat in the Central Province. The point we must remember is this: invariably Legislative Council elections take place between the 8th and the 14th May. The Chief Electoral Officer issues the writ, but does not determine the date upon which it shall be returned. The date, the 21st May, is fixed by the Constitution, which provides that a member of the Council shall cease to be a member if he is not re-elected. I remember winning a contest in 1924 by 18 votes. A recount was called for and what concerned the chief returning officer, Mr. Mark Saunders, was not whether any votes would be disallowed—he was confident they would not be, because all his officers were competent; not one vote was disallowed—but whether the Ravensthorpe ballot box would arrive in Kalgoorlie in time to make a recount and return the writ to the Chief Electoral Officer before the 21st May. Providence intervened and the box did arrive in time, but the writ was returned to the Chief Electoral Officer only on the morning of the 21st May. That is the only danger I can see in the Bill. I do not know what the position would be if the writ was not returned on or before the 21st May and the sitting candidate was defeated. However, I do not think the case is at all likely to arise; and we have to-day means of communication that did not exist years ago. The returning officer would no doubt be expeditious in sending such votes to the Chief Electoral Officer for confirmation. The measure will certainly give a bona fide elector what he is entitled to, the right to

exercise his vote notwithstanding that his name has been inadvertently omitted from the roll.

HON. E. H. H. HALL (Central—in reply) [7.57]: No words are needed from me in reply. I am pleased to learn from the Chief Secretary that he does not intend to offer any opposition to the Bill. If there were faults to be found in the Bill, I knew one member of the House would find them. He is Mr. Cornell, who, as we all know, is a keen student of our electoral laws. I am extremely pleased to have his approbation of the measure. I quite realise the possibility to which he referred; but I also agree with him that modern means of communication will help to overcome the difficulty. I had the North Province, not the South Province, in mind when framing the Bill. I did not know that a Bill—to which the Chief Secretary referred—had been introduced by the Premier, when Minister for Justice, containing this provision and that it had been defeated. I was not aware of the fact, although I have been a member of this Chamber for 12 years and am an ex-officer of the Commonwealth Electoral Department. I was the first Commonwealth electoral officer in Geraldton, which was then the headquarters of the Dampier Division. With the returning officer, the late Mr. Twine, I conducted the Senate count. My time was fully occupied with other matters and therefore I did not give attention to this phase of the electoral law. It was, however, brought prominently under my notice during the election in May, when I promised several constituents that I would, if re-elected, endeavour to bring our State electoral law into line with the Commonwealth Act in this respect. I trust the second reading will be agreed to.

The PRESIDENT: It is necessary that this Bill should be carried by an absolute majority. Therefore I will order that the bells be rung.

Question put.

The PRESIDENT: As there was a dissentient voice a division must take place.

Hon. J. Cornell: There was only one "no."

The PRESIDENT: It is necessary that in such a case the division be recorded.

Hon. V. Hamersley: I called "no." May I now call off the division as mine was the only "no."

The PRESIDENT: No, there must be a record of the division, and, moreover, the hon. member may not vote contrary to his views.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Well, he can be the teller for the noes.

The PRESIDENT: The Standing Orders are somewhat contradictory in respect of a division in these circumstances. Standing Order 164 says—

In case there should be only one member on a side on a division the President, without completing the division, shall forthwith declare the decision of the council.

On the other hand there is another standing order which says that a vote must be taken where it is necessary that there should be an absolute majority on the second and third readings. Thus the division had to proceed.

Division resulted as follows:—

Ayes	22
Noes	1

Majority for . . .	21
	—

AYES.

Hon. C. F. Baxter	Hon. W. H. Kitson
Hon. L. B. Bolton	Hon. W. J. Mann
Hon. J. Cornell	Hon. G. W. Miles
Hon. L. Craig	Hon. J. Nicholson
Hon. J. A. Dimmitt	Hon. H. S. W. Parker
Hon. J. M. Drew	Hon. H. L. Roche
Hon. G. Fraser	Hon. H. Seddon
Hon. E. H. Gray	Hon. A. Thomson
Hon. E. H. H. Hall	Hon. H. Tuckey
Hon. W. R. Hall	Hon. F. R. Welsh
Hon. J. J. Holmes	Hon. G. B. Wood

(Teller.)

NOES.

Hon. V. Hamersley
(Teller.)

The PRESIDENT: I declare the second reading carried by an absolute majority.

BILL—RURAL RELIEF FUND ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 24th September.

HON. H. L. ROCHE (South-East) [8.10]:

Listening to the debate on the Bill I have been struck by the measure of sympathy that has been expressed by members regarding the state of affairs ruling in the farming areas, and it seems to me very unfortunate that so many of those speakers found it necessary to confine their sympathies to lip service. Although the farmer now finds himself in a tragic position members seem to think that nothing can be done. Some mem-

bers claim to have an intimate knowledge of affairs in the rural areas, and are opposed to this Bill, but I am afraid that that knowledge must have been gained many years ago. They sum up the position by saying that the present moment is inopportune for rendering the relief that is sought. I suggest that that argument has been advanced in season and out of season for the last 10 years, and if the present time is not opportune I cannot conceive when the opportune time is likely to occur. The position has been reached when the Parliament of this State must agree that something will have to be done and done quickly. Not only are the rural areas in a desperate condition, but we have at the moment a Royal Commission on the pastoral industry inquiring particularly into the affairs of the northern part of the State. I have no doubt in my mind that if that Commission brings in a report which will be in the slightest degree effective in reducing the charges and restoring something of security in the pastoral industry, then we shall have to approach the position of the secured debts. The farming community have in the last ten years been carrying on virtually in the position of caretakers for the secured creditors. Without any recognised standard of living, without any future and without any security for themselves they are expected to maintain the properties of the secured creditor. In the main it is fair to claim that farmers have stood up loyally to their job, but we have reached a stage when the average man is asking himself, what is the use of going on indefinitely under such conditions? I believe that a proposal such as that submitted by Mr. Thomson in his Bill is moderate and is likely to meet the existing position. I have not been a member of this House very long, but I suppose that in the time I have been here I have had occasion to discuss with ten or a dozen farmers the action that they should take with regard to their properties, where they have the opportunity of leaving those properties and taking up some other avocation. Some jobs that have been offered to those people have not been particularly enticing, but without exception I have always advised those farmers to leave their properties having regard to the financial circumstances, to the amenities in other walks of life and the amenities in the bigger centres of populations. I consider that that advice was the

correct advice to give them. Hon. members must bear in mind that those people, although I consider they have played the game as agriculturists in this State, are entitled to something better than an existence without any hope or prospects for the future, and so far as I can see the prospects of agriculture in Western Australia are not very promising. There has been ample time since 1930 to show what these properties will produce, and when we speak of the prospects of the future I think that the statements made just recently by the Minister for Lands in this State and also by the Commonwealth Minister for Commerce must convince anyone that whilst there is some prospect of a limited increase in the markets of some of our primary products it would seem that the major products of Australia's principal industry are likely to face a period best expressed by the word "stagnation." The farmers certainly have borrowed the money that is owing to the secured creditors. I submit, however, that the financial institutions were willing lenders on their own valuations. I have not heard of any financial institution which, when lending money, advanced more than 60 per cent. of the value of the property, after the valuation had been made by itself. It is manifestly unjust that because things have gone wrong, because no one could foresee the crisis in the world's affairs, and because the valuation no longer exists in the property, the farmer should be told that he is the only one who has made a mistake and he alone must carry the burden. Even in the cases that would be given relief under this measure, the farmer has lost his equity. The equity has been lost on most of those properties which had substantial equities before the depression struck the agricultural industry of Western Australia. It is only right that these people should be assisted. It is only common sense to recognise that this adamant adherence to a contract entered into in other circumstances merely amounts to an attempt to maintain the paper value of the securities when the value is already gone and the loss has been made. It is a question of recognising that point and extending some help and encouragement to the people who remain on the land. Members must recognise that the generation of farmers who are still on the land has in most cases reached a stage where the heavier work of farming is

rapidly becoming beyond its powers. On the other hand, we are faced with the obvious fact that the youth are leaving the farms. The mainstay of Western Australia's agriculture to-day is largely the aged man who remains on his property. I see no encouragement for most of the youths to remain on holdings to which their parents have given the best of their lives, parents who are in a position to-day where they own nothing and have no security for the future. The system must adapt itself to changing circumstances. There are some who consider that things will alter, that we may at some distant date be able to get back to what I regard as the dear dead days of 1913, and further back beyond that. I believe that most people are looking forward to a new order in our economic and financial affairs, an order that will extend to all sections of the community better opportunities than have been afforded over the last ten years. I am convinced that amongst British people the new order, if it comes, will come by voluntary means, or by the adoption of such economic machinery as we now have rather than by more direct action. That adjustment will have to be made; otherwise the entire system will break down. It is not possible to achieve the adjustment whilst we stand rigidly for something that was conceived and recognised long years ago, and take no heed of circumstances as we find them to-day. Stress has been laid during the debate upon the danger that would arise should this Bill become law, consequent upon a restriction of credit by the financial institutions affected, and how that would influence the current affairs of the farming community.

A good deal of the talk about restriction of credit belongs to the realm of talk, although there may be something more, even a threat, implied in certain quarters. I want the House to approach the question from the point of view of practical common sense. The secured creditor may have a loan of £5,000 on a property, and it may be written down to £4,000 by this legislation, so that £1,000 would be written off. I ask members in all seriousness whether the secured creditor in restricting seasonal credit would throw that £4,000 away by forcing the farmer off his property, because under an Act of Parliament the £1,000 had been written off the value of the security? If

the farmer were properly rehabilitated, I think the assets of the farm, and the current production, would provide in practically every case sufficient seasonal credit to carry on the individual. Storekeepers under the existing legislation have not cancelled credit or withheld credit from the farmer, and yet under existing legislation they had written off anything up to 90 per cent. of the debts owing to them.

Hon. H. Seddon: Many of them have "gone broke."

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: I cannot recall any who have "gone broke" in my district, but some have done so in the newer districts. They would probably have gone bankrupt in any case. The writing-down under the existing rural relief fund legislation has affected the country storekeepers in a particularly savage manner. It was the storekeeper who kept the farmer on his property, to act as caretaker for the secured creditors. Although the secured creditor had a document giving him security, there is such a thing as a moral obligation, whether it is in the form of a written security or whether it is by word of mouth. If a man enters into a contract to pay the storekeeper who supplies him with goods, his word should be as good as his bond. If a man cannot pay the storekeeper—and farmers cannot do so—I fail to see why the storekeeper should be treated so much more harshly than is the secured creditor.

Although there is talk of restriction of credit, and an implied threat that something of the kind may come about, I remind members that the money that is invested in our primary industries cannot be put into a suitcase and taken to the Eastern States, nor can it be taken out of primary industries there. One State has legislation in advance of this State, namely, Victoria. Forty-seven per cent. of the money invested by recognised financial institutions in Australia is invested in agricultural and pastoral securities. If there was anything in the threat that that money would be called up, what would happen to the interest rates? Where would the money be re-invested? On examination I think these scares can be treated with scant consideration. If the Government were really concerned, as presumably it is, about the

restriction of credit, and if this Bill be passed, I suggest that there is a way out. The Minister for Lands had a discussion with members of the Country Party only a few weeks ago. He suggested that, if necessary, amendments could be made to Section 6 of the Rural Relief Fund Act, giving the farmers all the protection they needed, and preserving their current proceeds to enable them to carry on their farms. Both from the practical point of view, and from the point of view that the machinery could be readily made available if it proved to be necessary, I contend that the talk about restriction of credit need not influence the minds of members as much as the opponents of the Bill would suggest.

I mentioned a while ago an implied threat of what might happen if the Bill were passed. I have in mind what took place recently. The Minister for Lands a little while ago circularised the financial institutions of the State interested in agriculture. Amongst other things he proposed a conference of those institutions, with him as representatives of the Government, so that they might consider ways and means of helping that portion of the State so badly affected by drought. All those institutions, except one that is controlled by Mr. Fitzhardinge, Inspector of the Bank of New South Wales, welcomed the suggestion. The gentleman in question said he had just been on a tour of the eastern wheatbelt, where he was shocked to find the conditions that existed. I have obtained that information from the file that was laid on the Table of the House in another place. The gentleman said that he understood a Bill to amend the Rural Relief Fund Act was before Parliament, and that he was not prepared to consider the proposal of the Minister until that measure had been disposed of. Does he imagine that he has the right to legislate for the people of this State. Has not Parliament the right to legislate on matters of this kind? Most of us know that there is widely held in the community the opinion that financial institutions interfere too much with the affairs of State. Their action is likely to accentuate that feeling. If it is not an interference with Parliament to suggest that legislation before this House must be disposed of before this inspector will reply to a responsible Minister who is dealing with this question, I do not know what it is.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: I would point out that he is handling trust money.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: That brings me to another point. I realise, Mr. President, that you do not encourage interjections; but I thank the hon. member for that one. The banking official in question, when giving evidence a little while ago before a select committee, indicated very plainly that the disastrous effect any proposed writing down would have on the financial stability of those institutions was merely talk. A reference to "Hansard" for 1939 shows that during a discussion in Parliament mention was made of the business before that select committee. A member of another place, when dealing with this subject, quoted evidence given by Mr. Fitzhardinge as follows:—

I should like to quote from the answer given to the select committee in 1937 by Mr. B. R. Fitzhardinge, one of the chief officers of the Bank of New South Wales in Western Australia. I refer to Question 301—

Suppose a loss is suffered in regard to any writing down of liability to the bank, would it be possible to deal with that loss without any actual loss to shareholders' capital or depositors' funds?—I should say so. Even if we lost the whole £10,000,000, it would not matter very much.

Let us suppose that a loss is suffered as suggested by Mr. Fitzhardinge, that result would be effected without any actual loss of capital. Of course it would be a loss, but it would be a loss chargeable to the reserve funds of such institutions, funds that have been accumulated out of profits set aside for that purpose. Those reserves are created to offset losses suffered in circumstances such as those confronting the institutions to-day. If that is not so, then I would ask: What are the objects of such reserves? Most decidedly any such losses are met out of the reserves created by additional profits, out of funds set aside for that particular purpose. To my mind the proposals embodied in the Bill are neither iniquitous nor are they new. Legislation passed a few years ago set out that wages, rates of pensions, loan interest, and so on, had to be reduced, all because of a crisis that no one could foresee. The farming community is still affected by conditions arising out of a crisis, and all we ask is that the farmer shall be given some relief from the load of secured indebtedness and something done to recreate the sound, solid body of public opinion that we always thought was representative of the farming

community. That is what we seek instead of the present feeling that is growing apace amidst the rural population, that every man's hand is against them and their hands must needs be against those of everyone else. If anyone moves among them, or is in close contact with the farmers as are the members of the Country Party, who support this legislation, they will be aware of the feeling of hopelessness and helplessness that is so evident in the rural areas to-day.

I have to some extent answered the contentions of those members who have questioned the necessity for such legislation. If I have not already exhausted the patience of the House, I would like to refer to a few points mentioned by previous speakers. I think the Chief Secretary, in opposing the Bill, remarked that it would tend to destroy land values. I do not know what values would be destroyed seeing that to-day properties cannot be sold for amounts approximating the indebtedness on them. The only writing off contemplated under the Bill relates to that portion of the secured debt that has in reality ceased to exist. The mere fact of keeping the farmer tied to the millstone of debt all his life will not achieve anything to the benefit of the State or of creditors. The Chief Secretary asserted that there were three parties concerned, namely, the State, the farmer and the creditor. To my mind, by far the major interest is that of the State. We must approach the question mainly from the standpoint of the interests of the State, although not entirely because the other interests have to be considered. If the present deterioration in the agricultural areas continues, the State will be the greatest loser, because for yet another generation at least Western Australia must rely upon its primary industries. The Chief Secretary also remarked that the values of products during the eight-year period mentioned in the Bill were lower than in any other period of which records were available. I do not know what period the Minister had in mind when he made that remark, but dealing particularly with wheat and wool, which at the moment are the two items mostly affected, the "Commonwealth Year Book" shows that from 1933 to the present time the annual prices of wheat have been 2s. 9¾d., 2s. 7½d., 3s. 1¾d., 4s. 1¾d., 5s. 0½d., 3s. 4¾d., and for last year, 3s. 4d. That gives an average of 3s. 7d. over the years indicated, on the basis of shippers' limits at ports. For the life of me I cannot

see that the industry, unless there is to be a major tragedy long continuing in North American wheat areas, can expect much more than that average price. Then again the prices for wool from the year 1932-1933 onwards have been 8.72d. per lb., 15.84d., 9.75d. 14.01d., 16.48d., 12.51d., 10.39d., and, for last year, 13.4d. That gives an average price of 12.6d. per lb.

Hon. L. Craig: What would you say was a reasonable price for wool?

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: We are not debating that question, but as I suggested during my Address-in-Reply speech, the prices under the appraisalment were low.

Hon. L. Craig: Do you think they were too low?

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: The average price, worked out on the figures I have quoted, gives 12.6d., which is about the price the woolgrower should receive under the appraisalment.

Hon. V. Hamersley: That was the Western Australian price.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: Yes. I think the Chief Secretary, when speaking on the Address-in-Reply, said that he considered the price of wool under the appraisalment should be regarded as very satisfactory. If, in the circumstances, he considered the price very satisfactory, I should think that that price should be a reasonable figure for assessment under the valuation proposed in the Bill. Then, again, I have in mind the statement made by Mr. Troy a few years ago, when he was Minister for Lands. The statement was, so far as my memory serves me, to the effect that he could not see any prospect of extended periods of payable prices and that the most that could be hoped for was alternate periods of low prices with occasional payable years. While that represented only an expression of Mr. Troy's opinion, experience up to the war period seems to have confirmed its accuracy. Thus, when the Chief Secretary says that the last eight years would be favourable to the farmer's point of view, I do not think he has looked so closely into the position as I would expect him to do. As regards the fear expressed by the Chief Secretary and others that no money would be forthcoming with which to carry on the industry, I have already endeavoured to deal with that point.

As for the fear also expressed by some members, that the Bill would result in assistance to the inefficient and ne'er-do-well, I submit in all seriousness that the last 10 years have provided such a testing time that the vast majority of farmers now on their holdings have amply demonstrated that they have farmed their properties reasonably well and are entitled to encouragement. Surely to goodness every farmer is not inefficient; yet 75 per cent. of them to-day cannot sign their own cheques without the consent of their bank manager! I think therefore that objection is really over-emphasised. If members will turn to Clause 7, they will see in sub-paragraph (ii) the trustees have to be of opinion that the farmer to be assisted must have "managed his farm with reasonable efficiency." Sir Hal Colebatch made reference to the meaning to be placed upon the term "efficient farmer." I suggest that the principal Act already has a bearing on that phase, for sub-paragraph (ii) of Sub-section 1 of Section 6 refers to "the farmer in the light of the past conduct in farming operations is deserving of the protection of a stay order . . ." That reference shows some effort to define the type of farmer to be assisted. Then again, Section 10, which deals with the powers of trustees in relation to making advances, includes the following reference to the farmer who is not to be assisted —

(b) who has shown by his past conduct in regard to farming operations that he is undeserving of such assistance.

Thus Parliament has already, in that Act passed in 1935, dealt with the required definition. There should be no valid objection to the same objective in the Bill.

In common with other members, the Chief Secretary admitted the seriousness of the position in which farmers find themselves, but, like many others, seemed to be content to leave the position at that, as he could not see what else could be done. I submit that the Bill represents a reasonable effort on the part of Country Party members who support Mr. Thomson, to provide some alternative to mere lip service. When members refer to the need for further credit for machinery and other requirements, in all seriousness I question the wisdom of such an attitude. In my opinion, one of the factors that has such a hampering effect to-day concerns the unrestricted credit positively thrown at farmers for them to use and

abuse, right to the limit of the creditors' willingness to advance funds. That willingness was most evident up to 1930. I do not think there should be any undue encouragement in the form of credit to farmers to invest in machinery and plant for the carrying on of their farms. One member complained that shareholders in financial concerns would lose. I can only repeat that in actual fact they have already lost. All that they have in the shape of security is a piece of paper of depreciated value. They were willing lenders, but some of them, on the plea of sound finance, will not adopt what I have always understood to be sound finance, namely, the writing-off of worthless assets. If the securities have depreciated, and if creditors wish to maintain a system of sound finance, they should show more readiness to accept the position. Properties have depreciated in value and depreciated to the extent of not being worth the amount owing on them, and the security held by the financial houses, if there is to be a true reflection of the existing state of affairs, must be written down. Having regard to the reserves of the financial institutions, and the precautions they have taken—many of these securities have already been written down in their own books—I find it the more difficult to understand what seems to be a preconceived opposition to any suggestion that help should be extended to a failing industry along the lines Mr. Thomson has proposed. Mr. Holmes indicated that sooner or later this State would reach a point when it would "bust." I think that is the expression he used.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: I think I said there would have to be a general squaring up.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: I do not know how long the hon. member has been thinking along those lines; probably for many years. We have not reached that stage yet, but if the farming industry has to wait until we do reach it, then there will be very few people left on the farms in Western Australia.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: But under this Bill, do not the farmers want to get in first?

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: The farmers are only tentatively and hesitatingly trying to get in last. All other sections of the community have been able so to adapt themselves to conditions as to protect themselves

to a degree not possible to the primary industries. I do not think any section of the community can expect to better itself if it sets out deliberately—as I understood one member to suggest—to fight and oppose the living standard and working conditions of another section. Sir Hal Colebatch, while expressing sympathy with the farmer and saying he was prepared to consider the matter almost entirely from the point of view of the farmer, told us quite definitely that the time was inopportune to do anything. Then he went on to say, I gathered, that the financial policy followed in recent years was all wrong and had to be altered, and that the wages being paid to coalminers under arbitration awards were out of proportion to the rewards received by primary producers. With that I agree, but I cannot agree that the producers, primary or otherwise, can hope to achieve a better standard of living for themselves by destroying the standards established for other workers under Arbitration Court awards sanctioned by the Parliament of this State. Our hope of relief lies in other channels.

Although there has been much opposition to the proposals in the Bill, I submit that they are only a moderate and reasonable approach to a very difficult problem. It is a problem that we cannot disregard much longer. If Parliament will not face it, then before many years have passed it might become too big for us. Reference was made to the Victorian Act. I do not think this measure would carry us nearly so far as the Victorian Act goes. A statement was made that a farmer could contract out of the Victorian Act. Under Section 13, I am informed, if a trustee or the controller of Farmers' Debt Relief certifies that a particular farmer is not likely to need the provisions of the Act, he may contract himself out. In other words, he is never likely to be affected, and therefore is allowed to contract out of the Act. That section, however, should not be construed to mean that farmers are permitted to contract out of the Act in Victoria.

One member stated that the farmers were in difficulties through their own fault. I think that member really believes this to be so, but I ask, if he or any other member has interests other than farming and is in close touch with the control of farmers' affairs if farmers under their control are in

difficulties through their own fault—presumably through mismanagement—why carry them on? For the efficient farmers and the men who are making genuine efforts to carry on, the best thing that could happen would be if those not worthy to be carried on—perhaps five or ten per cent—were closed out. The alternative would be to continue as we are going, and then 500 or 1,000 bankruptcies to occur in the next 12 months. In those circumstances the business people of the community might come to a realisation that they cannot expect Australian men and women to remain living in the bush under rough conditions merely as caretakers on a subsistence basis indefinitely, that they must be given some hope for the future.

Like a previous speaker, I have certain cases in mind, but I do not wish to weary the House by quoting them all. They indicate the treatment that is being accorded to farmers by certain organisations in this State. I will mention only a couple of them. One farmer has received a notice from the bank which concludes, "And take further notice that in default of your making such payments, the said bank will proceed to exercise its power of sale and all other of its powers under the said mortgage."

Hon. J. Nicholson: That is only the ordinary notice required under the Act.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: It is a new one to me.

Hon. J. Nicholson: There is nothing new about it.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: That notice was sent to a man who refused to sign a document to give the local bank manager the management of his farm, the right to lease it over his head. Here is another instance. A man 16 years ago took up a bankrupt estate. He spent £6,000 of his own money on clearing, fencing, buildings and water supplies. He paid £3,000 off the principal; he has paid £7,000 in interest, and to-day he owes almost as much as the original purchase price. He is on a tucker basis, a caretaker carrying on the farm, and he can get no satisfaction from anybody associated with the institution. Yet that man is a good farmer and a good stockman—a man I heard of when I was only a lad. Other cases could be quoted, but those two are indicative of what is happening.

The time has passed when definite action should be taken to control the secured creditors. They want to get the last penny out of an industry that seems to be sinking in order to save something for re-investment elsewhere. All through the State notices are being served to close out farmers. I know of other instances in the Great Southern, men who have been told that their limit is so much, in one case an overdraft of £3,000. The total income is about £500, and the bank is permitting the farmer to spend up to £500 for carrying on this year, but will not advance any portion of that amount. Where he is to get the money Heaven only knows, but he might get it. Next year he must reduce his overdraft by £150, this after a season like the present. That is the sort of sympathetic assistance the farmer is getting from the financial institutions.

In conclusion, I hope that members will suspend any preconceived antagonism to the provisions of the Bill and approach the measure with a sense of the realities of the actual position. We are not trying to bluff the House or to frighten members. Some members feel that to support the Bill would be to vote against their principles, but I ask them to face the position and consider the facts. The industry is sorely afflicted. To my mind, it is rotting from the roots up. The personal equation is the security in this industry, as elsewhere, and the personal equation is deteriorating for the reason, obvious to many of us, that there is no encouragement for a man to try to succeed. The more he does, the more he loses to his secured creditors, and unless some legislation of this kind is put into effect in the very near future, the industry and the State will be the greatest sufferers.

HON. J. CORNELL (South) [8.59]: I wish to make only a few remarks on the Bill. I do not propose to enter the controversy whether the proposals submitted in the measure will be the means of saving the industry, or will precipitate the calamity that several champions of the financial institutions have prophesied. What I want to do, and what I think every member of this Chamber should do, is to commend the motive behind the Bill.

Hon. A. Thomson: The motive has been lost sight of.

Hon. J. CORNELL: The whole point is the motive. That motive is to endeavour to have something done to rehabilitate our agricultural industry. Mr. Drew recently made—as he always does, though not often enough—an excellent contribution to the debate, a contribution full of meat and suggestion. The hon. gentleman recommended that the second reading of the Bill be agreed to and a select committee appointed. I understand that the hon. member in charge of the Bill agrees to that course. It is a reasonable course, one which, if adopted, can lead only in one direction, and that is to ascertain the real facts. I hope the second reading will be agreed to and a select committee appointed.

In passing let me say that I spent the whole of this day in attending a conference of soldier land settlers. Some 36 sub-branches were represented at the meeting. The representatives came from all parts of the State, and were engaged in all forms of primary production. Assuredly they did not draw the long bow. Most of them have been engaged in primary production almost since childhood. This is what they thought of the present drought position. A person engaged in primary production who enlists for active service abroad is given the full benefit of a complete moratorium; that is to say, all his debts are frozen while he is on active service, or during the currency of the war; and what is given to the man who enlists ought to be given to the man who remains here to work and develop his property. That is the viewpoint of the soldier settlers. I venture to declare that anyone who has followed the reasoning of the ex-service men right since demobilisation must give them this credit, that all through the piece they have been a reasonable, peaceable, and law-abiding body of men. Their resolutions of to-day were carried only because they see no immediate solution of the debt problem that faces them, and no guarantee against what might be put over them in some cases to get the little that might be recovered. I do not know whether this House would go so far as those resolutions propose. However, to-day I heard on the best of authority that 85 per cent. of the stock that is threatened with starvation, and even extermination, in the drought-stricken areas of Western Australia is held on bill of sale or lien by the stock agencies operating in this State. And not one of those institutions has come forward with

any offer to supply the wherewithal to feed that stock. They all say the State should do it.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Are you applying that to the agricultural districts or to the State generally?

Hon. J. CORNELL: The drought-stricken areas of the agricultural districts.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: The pastoral areas are drought-stricken too.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I repeat, I heard on the best of authority that in the drought-stricken agricultural areas of this State, where the stock is threatened with extermination because the farmers have neither feed nor the wherewithal to buy feed, 85 per cent. is held on bill of sale or lien by the stock firms. Those firms maintain that either the State or the Commonwealth should find money to feed the stock. Would that be finding the money to protect the security of the men who hold the stock on bill of sale or lien? Would it be finding money to protect the assets of the holders of bills of sale or liens? I hold no brief for wealthy institutions which are prepared to adopt that line of reasoning in the hour of Western Australia's dire distress. The only way to deal with those debts is, as to-day's conference resolved, to let nothing be done with them during the currency of the war.

No question in life so agitates the minds of men who are the backbone of this or any other community—the primary producers. To say that they can stand up and meet their obligations to-day under the old order of things is absurd and preposterous. One can only expect 50 or 60 per cent. of them to cut the loss and come down to town for sustenance. We are living in a fool's paradise. Living entities should not be sacrificed in the interests of the shibboleth of "sound finance." The deliberations of a select committee would, I am quite sure, prove fruitful.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: The Bill will be torn to pieces when it comes back.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I hope that ere long some thoughtful mediation will be forthcoming to the Governments of the Commonwealth and the State; for I know that the Commonwealth is anxious to do something, and also anxious that people more interested in the carrying-on of these farmers should do something as well. As it is, we are drifting in nebulosity, with no stars to steer

by; and in the process the man who needs assistance and should receive assistance is sinking faster than many people realise.

On motion by Hon. H. Seddon, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9.11 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 1st October, 1940.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

Agricultural Industry and Drought Conditions.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [4.34]: I should like to make a statement to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will accept it as a Ministerial statement.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is what it is. Since the debate in the House last week on the motion "that the House do now adjourn," many communications have passed between the Government and the Minister for Commerce relative to the position of farmers in Western Australia. As will be remembered, I mentioned to the House at the time that a preliminary conference had been called by the Minister for Commerce, and that at that conference certain aspects of the case as affecting all the States in Australia were to be consid-

ered. Prior to that conference I had conversations with the Minister for Commerce, and, subsequent to the conference, on Saturday and also this morning I had other conversations with him. Following the conversation on Saturday I received in the mail copies of the resolutions that were carried by Ministers present at the conference in Melbourne on Friday. Those resolutions indicated what had been presented to the Commonwealth by the representatives of the States, and I have been asked to comment upon them. The resolutions decided upon by the meeting of Ministers, in my view, did not fit the circumstances or the needs of this State.

Hon. C. G. Latham: That is a reason why we ought to have been represented.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It would not have made any difference. If the Leader of the Opposition will contain himself for a while I can tell him that the statements submitted by this State had a great bearing on the deliberations of the conference, and perhaps no one's attendance there would have made any difference to the resolutions submitted. The proposals of the Commonwealth emanating from those resolutions are in substance that the Commonwealth be requested, and may agree, to loan to the States a certain sum of money to alleviate the position of farmers, such moneys loaned to be re-advanced by the States to the farmers and repayment to be guaranteed by the States to the Commonwealth Government, the farmers to be asked to give a lien on their crop or crops, or returns from stock or from any source from which they have any income, and for the States to collect such sums and to repay the debt to the Commonwealth. The proposal involves the sharing of the responsibility for interest by the Commonwealth and the States. That means half of the interest being paid by the Commonwealth and half by the States and the interest being chargeable to the farmers. The first year shall be interest free to the farmers, the Commonwealth to accept the responsibility of payment for that year's interest. Other points have been submitted, but this, in brief outline, is the proposal to alleviate the immediate distress of the farming industry in this State. The matter was considered yesterday by the Government, and this morning after a long conversation with Mr. Cameron at about 8 o'clock, our time, and subsequently a long talk with the Secretary of the De-