

Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 26th September, 1945.

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

QUESTIONS.

WHEAT SILO, FREMANTLE.

As to Use, Cost and Ownership.

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Chief Secretary :

1, Was the concrete silo at Fremantle erected for the purpose of treating weevily wheat with poison gas?

2, Is it being used for that purpose at present, or as a handling and storage unit?

3, Who authorised its construction?

4, Is it correct that the work was started in opposition to the wishes of the State Government and the local representatives of the Wheat Board?

5, What is the name of the contractor?

6, Was he a resident of Western Australia? If not, what State did he belong to?

7, Were tenders called for the construction of this silo?

8, Is it correct that this silo was constructed on a cost-plus profit basis?

9, What was the estimated cost?

10, What was the actual cost?

11, Has the cost of this silo been made a charge against the wheatgrowers of Australia?

12, Is it the intention of the Harbour Trust or State Government to purchase the silo?

13, Does the State Chief Engineer consider this silo is fully suitable as a storage and handling unit?

14, Will the Minister give this House an opportunity to review any proposals for this State taking over this silo before any definite purchase is made?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied :

1, The concrete silo at Fremantle was erected primarily for the fumigation of weevily wheat, and was designated as "Wheat Hospital."

2, It is not being so used at present, but for handling and storage (to a small extent).

3, Australian Wheat Board.

4, Erection was put in hand without consultation with the State Government. The attitude of local representatives of the Wheat Board is unknown.

5, S. Haunstrup.

6, No. Victoria.

7, 8, 9, 10, 11, The State Government has no knowledge of these details. All arrangements were made by the Australian Wheat Board.

12, The State Government has advised the Prime Minister that when erection of the State Government's bulk wheat terminal at Fremantle is commenced, it will be prepared to consider the purchase of the wheat hospital as an adjunct to the terminal based on storage capacity only less the cost of connection to the terminal.

13, This silo as an individual unit is not an economical or efficient storage and handling unit. When the State Government's bulk wheat silos have been constructed, the Director of Works considers this silo might be connected up to act as an additional storage.

14, This will be given the fullest consideration.

TRACTORS.

As to Shortage.

Hon. G. B. WOOD asked the Chief Secretary :

1, Is the Government aware that in Western Australia more than 1,000 farmers are in need of tractor power to work adequately their respective farms?

2, Is the Government aware that a number of tractors are available for release if sufficient wheel centres were procurable?

3, As these centres are procurable only from the Eastern States, will the Government take immediate steps with the Com-

monwealth authorities to authorise the manufacture of these centres in Western Australia?

1, Is the Government aware that a number of tractors are standing idle at Pearce aerodrome, and in the possession of the Allied Works Council at other places?

5, In view of the serious position in regard to shortage of tractive power on farms and the urgency of production of food supplies will the Government act immediately with the authorities concerned?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

1, Yes. Applications for tractors far exceed supplies available.

2, Yes.

3, One engineering firm in this State is manufacturing wheel centres. It is stated that the reason more centres are not manufactured in this State is shortage of manpower and raw material.

4, The number of tractors held in reserve by the Royal Australian Air Force and the Allied Works Council is not known, but it is anticipated that tractors not required will be released shortly.

5, Yes. Urgent need in this State for tractive power on farms has been constantly stressed with the Commonwealth Government and on several occasions the Under Secretary for Agriculture has personally made representations to the Director General of Agriculture and the Ministry of Munitions in Melbourne regarding this matter.

NARROGIN SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE.

As to Boys' Laundry Work.

Hon. A. L. LOTON asked the Chief Secretary:

1, Is the Minister aware that the privately-owned laundry in Narrogin is no longer doing the laundry work for the Narrogin School of Agriculture?

2, What arrangements, if any, have been made to have the laundry work, on the boys' behalf, done at the school?

3, Will the Government give urgent consideration to the erection of a suitable building at the Narrogin School of Agriculture to enable the laundry work to be done?

4, If the Government does not see its way clear to erect a new building, will it take immediate steps to procure for the Narrogin School of Agriculture one of the buildings recently occupied by Army authorities?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:—

1, No; the privately owned laundry in Narrogin is continuing to do as much of the school laundry work as its staff will permit.

2, The balance of the work is being done either by the boys at the school or at the boys' homes.

3, Consideration is being given the establishment of a laundry at the Narrogin School of Agriculture.

4, The matter will form the subject of inquiry.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Hon. H. Seddon (for Hon. C. B. Williams), leave of absence for twelve consecutive sittings granted to Hon. J. Cornell on the ground of ill-health.

BILLS (3)—THIRD READING.

1, Mine Workers' Relief (War Service) Act Amendment.

Returned to the Assembly with amendments.

2, Inspection of Scaffolding Act Amendment.

Passed.

3, Supreme Court Act Amendment (No. 2).

Transmitted to the Assembly.

BILL—GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES (PROMOTIONS APPEAL BOARD).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 20th September.

HON. SIR HAL COLEBATCH (Metropolitan) [4.42]: I am quite free to confess that when this Bill came before the House last session I voted against it, without giving it very much consideration. I did not speak on the second reading and I shared the view, expressed by many members, that the time at our disposal was not adequate for the consideration of a Bill of such importance. Now the Bill comes before us at an early stage in the session, and it certainly does devolve upon us to give it full consideration. I am largely influenced in my attitude towards this Bill by the feeling that never before in the history of this State was there a time when a reasonably contented and efficient Civil Service was as necessary as it is now.

The first question I ask myself is this: Is the present legislation satisfactory? Some 25 years ago—I think it was in 1920—I had the privilege of piloting through this House an Act to establish a Public Service Appeal Board and to prevent the unauthorised cessation of work on the part of public servants. That Act was accepted by the service as giving facilities for appeals against promotion, where there was some civil servant who considered that he had been unfairly treated. The board consisted of a judge, as chairman, a representative of the Government and a representative of the service. I do not know that that Act was seriously contested until 1938, when its legal stability came into question. In disallowing the appeal of a certain civil servant against the promotion of some other civil servant, the chairman of the board, Mr. Justice Dwyer, pointed out that the Act did not give the Public Service Appeal Board jurisdiction in regard to appeals concerning promotions.

Since then I understand a Promotions Appeal Board has been established, but in regard to that we also have the opinion of a judge of the Supreme Court, that the present board is ultra vires the Public Service Act. From that we can come to no other conclusion than that the present position is unsatisfactory and, whether we approve of this Bill or not, it is up to us to try to remedy the position. Having gone through this Bill very carefully I think there are certain directions in which it should be amended; but that, in a general way, it is a step towards establishing a reasonably contented and efficient Public Service. In relation to the amendments that I think should be given effect to, I would draw attention first of all to paragraph (a) of the proviso to Subclause (1) of Clause 5. That paragraph disallows any appeal in respect of an office where the salary or wages, on the maximum rate, are higher than £750. I am free to confess that there is a large number of offices that should be exempt from the operations of this appeal board. If one looks at the interpretation clause one sees that under the heading of "employee," the Chief Justice or any judge of the Supreme Court or the President or any member of the Arbitration Court are exempt. I quite agree that there are a great many other offices that should be exempt, but I contend that instead of saying that every office over £750 should be exempt, the offices that should be

exempt should be set out, and I see no great difficulty in doing that. It may mean setting out several offices, but I do not think there is any sound reason for saying that every office over £750 per annum shall be exempt from consideration by the appeal board.

I understand that at present there are about 56 offices carrying salaries of over £750, and whilst I again say I am prepared to admit that among those there are several that should be exempt from the operations of the appeal board, I think there are a great many that should not be exempt. Then there are another 76 offices carrying salaries not very much less than £750 per annum. I do not think it can be contemplated that we shall have a satisfactory, contented and efficient Civil Service unless those offices are paid well—paid decently, at any rate—and it is a certainty that a great many of those 76 offices, carrying salaries a little below £750, will soon have to be raised to that level. I have a good deal of sympathy with the contention, frequently advanced in the Arbitration Court, that the method of assessing the cost of living, for the purpose of fixing the basic wage, is not satisfactory.

Hon. T. Moore: Far from it.

Hon. Sir HAL COLEBATCH: It is not sufficient to take into account the absolute necessities of life. The amenities of life should also be considered. I am sure that the actual increase in the real cost of living, taking into account all the items that should be included, is considerably more than the 25 per cent. shown as the increase in the basic wage. If we are to learn anything from past experience, we must come to the conclusion that the depreciation in the purchasing power of the Australian pound is bound to continue. It will be the duty of the Government and of the people to endeavour to maintain its value as far as possible, but it is bound to go down. The purchasing power of the Australian pound after the first world war did not deteriorate for something like ten years. These things convince me that the time is not far distant when a considerable percentage of the 76 offices now carrying salaries a little below £750 will rise above that amount.

If that happens, the result will be that something like 300 offices will be exempt from the board of appeal, and it must be agreed that those offices will be amongst

the most important in the State and therefore it is essential that they should be filled by the most efficient officers. This must be provided for by a satisfactory board of appeal, either under the provisions of this measure or in some other way. So it can fairly be contended that, instead of providing that every office carrying a salary of £750 shall be exempt from the operation of this measure, the offices that should be exempt shall be set out in the measure and that it shall be an exemption of office and not an exemption according to the actual amount of salary. The success of the provision made for officers who have been absent on service—and in fact of the whole Act—will depend upon the manner in which it is administered. If we give the Government an Act which permits of satisfactory administration, it should be satisfied. As regards the treatment to be accorded to returned soldiers, I do not know that we can go much further than set out the principles and leave the details to be prescribed by regulation. If any further step that we might take can be suggested, so much the better.

There are two or three other points to which I wish to refer. In Subclause (2) of Clause 13, provision is made for the board to recommend the payment of certain costs incurred by the public servant in making the appeal. The recommendation will be entirely at the discretion of the board, and the board, very properly, has the right to determine whether the grounds for appeal are reasonable. Where the appeal is substantial and the board considers that some of the expenses should be reimbursed to the appellant, it may make a recommendation. I am of the opinion that, added to the items which may be recommended, should be the cost of the agent who appears on behalf of the appellant. The appearance of an agent is provided for in Clause 16. On that point I have one remark to make. When the Bill was introduced last session, the clause contained the words "not being a legal practitioner." In the Legislative Assembly, that provision was attacked and the Government very wisely, in my opinion, accepted an amendment to delete those words. When the Bill came to us, it did not contain provision for the exclusion of a legal practitioner.

I am entirely opposed to the idea of a legal practitioner being excluded from appearing on behalf of anybody. I do not want to open old sores, but we have a State vessel that has been held up in Fremantle for some days because the cooks or the stewards would not allow members of another union to come in and do the job. If there was any justification for the adoption of that attitude, it was that those who objected thought the others could not do the job as well. This being so, why do they protest against members of another union—the barristers' union—being allowed to come in and do this job? It cannot be argued that legal practitioners could not do the work as well as could agents. I am not suggesting that the appellant must be represented by a legal practitioner, but we would not be justified in saying that he shall not be so represented.

In Clause 17, Subclause (3), provision is made that the board shall act "without regard to technicalities or legal forms and shall not be bound by any laws or rules of evidence." Either the laws and rules of evidence are good or they are bad. If they are bad, steps should be taken to reform them, but if they are good they should apply in this case as well as in other cases. I do not profess to be entirely familiar with the laws and rules of evidence, but they are summed up in the old saying that what the sailor said is not evidence. Apparently the idea is to alter this so that what the sailor said shall be regarded as evidence. I should very much like to see those words struck out. The duties of the board are set out fairly clearly in Clause 14. An appeal may be made on the ground of superior efficiency to that of the employee promoted, or equal efficiency and seniority to the employee promoted. I do not think anything could be more disastrous to the Civil Service or any other service than that seniority must always count, even against superior efficiency. The Bill sets out clearly that efficiency must be the first essential. Subclause (3) continues—

Provided that, in the case of an employee who is a returned soldier, the term shall include such efficiency as in the opinion of the permanent head of the department concerned or the board, as the case may be, the employee would have attained but for his absence on war service as such soldier.

That seems to be quite a proper provision. Then we come to this summing up—

For the purposes of Subsection (2) of this section, "efficiency" means special qualifications and aptitude for the discharge of the duties of the office to be filled, together with merit, diligence and good conduct.

As I have stated, whether this measure will prove to be a success will depend entirely upon the way in which it is administered. I am influenced by these two considerations, namely, that the present position is entirely unsatisfactory and cannot be defended, and that it is essential that we have a reasonably contented and efficient Public Service. I believe that this measure, subject to such amendments as the House might see fit to make, will have that effect, and therefore I shall support the second reading.

HON. J. G. HISLOP (Metropolitan) [4.59]: This Bill is almost identical with the one which was placed before us last year, and I do not like it any better now than I did then. I have had months in which to think this matter over, and I am sorry that the Bill has again been presented in almost identical form, because there are alterations that could have been made during the drafting stage but will be very difficult to make now. An attempt must be made, as Sir Hal Colebatch said, to alter it, in certain places. I am convinced that there is need for an appeal having as a background the purport of this measure, as I understand there is considerable dissatisfaction in the service at the moment. If the State is to progress it must have a harmonious Civil Service. The service must be one in which the men employed have faith in it and in the methods of promotion. If this State is to prosper efficiency must be the key word for promotion within the service. Whilst on the surface this Bill appears to place efficiency as the main method of promotion I believe it will end up by meaning that seniority is the only thing that will count.

Last year in the House I read what the Public Service Commissioner of Queensland said on the introduction of a form of appeal very similar in nature to this one. His report stated that seniority had taken complete charge of the Public Service in that State, or words to that effect. I have examined this Bill with that in mind. I am

convinced that as it stands the measure is loaded against the man who has received the promotion, and loaded very heavily in favour of the appellant. Surely that is not what is desired. I will try to make clear my reasons for that statement. The proposed board will consist of a stipendiary magistrate or other independent person, a person who shall represent the authority making the recommendation, and the third person is to be the representative of the appellant. The representative of the appellant will be appointed either by or from the union to which the appellant belongs, but should the union within a short period of time—the time is laid down as 14 days—fail to name a representative, or in the case of a mass appeal the representative for the mass appeal, the appellant or appellants may appoint their own representatives to sit on the board. The board can be stated to consist of a stipendiary magistrate and such other person as is provided for, probably a member of the department which has made the promotion, and a person representing the interests of the appellant.

The person promoted has little or no representation apart from his senior officer, who is to sit on the board to watch his interests and at the same time the interests of the department. The appellant knows that on the board there will be somebody that he has been able to appoint himself or who has been appointed by his union. I maintain that that appellant has a much more direct representation on the board than has the person promoted. It must be remembered that the person nominated by the Minister to represent the authority making the recommendation is very likely to find himself in future in the position of having to work either with the person who has been recommended or the appellant. It is not going to be a harmonious service if the appellant feels that he has won against the recommendation, and that his appeal was successful with his senior officer sitting on the appeal board; nor is the senior officer sitting on the board likely to feel comfortable himself under those conditions.

I suggest that if an appeal board is formed the person recommended should have an equal right with the appellant to nominate his representative on the board. Then it would more or less end up by the inde-

pendent chairman having to view the position. Having reached that stage I ask myself how does the independent chairman make himself aware of the superior or equal efficiency of the appellant? That is the position that must eventually be faced by the board. A person who knows nothing whatever about the recommended officer or the appellant would have to satisfy himself by evidence as to the superior efficiency or the equal efficiency of one or the other. All the senior members of the service to whom I have spoken have very great fears that the decision of the independent chairman will be made eventually, in the big majority of instances, on the basis of seniority.

Of all those to whom I have spoken there is not one who does not believe that under this measure, the position will be made worse than it is. It therefore behoves this Chamber to endeavour to modify this Bill so that we can do what we think is right on behalf of the Civil Service, and we must formulate a scheme under which seniority will not count in comparison with efficiency. Once efficiency has been established as the real basis of promotion I do not think there can be any complaint. There is a great fear in the mind of every civil servant I have contacted that seniority will dominate promotions within the service very shortly after the Bill becomes law. That is a very serious position. I know of one case that occurred recently where the individual had the recommendation of every senior officer of his department and yet lost the appointment on the basis of seniority. If that is to continue we shall have a Public Service that will be much more dissatisfied than it is now, because all the efficient men in it will feel that everything will be influenced by seniority because that factor will dominate promotions in comparison with efficiency.

Hon. G. W. Miles: That has been the curse in the past.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: We must modify that state of affairs in future if we can. Whilst the Bill appears to put efficiency first it is felt that eventually seniority will become the prime factor. In fact, were I a person seeking promotion in the service I would ask the recommending authority in my department not to recommend me but to leave me the right of appeal. Under this Bill I think I would have five or six times

as much chance of obtaining the appointment were I not recommended, as the appellant. That would create in the service a very serious position. I agree on general principles with much that Sir Hal Colebatch has said. If this board is to go into these claims in the manner outlined in Subclause (3) of Clause 17, where it is given power to discard all legal forms and not to be bound by any laws or rules of evidence, we will have promotions decided in an extraordinary manner.

As the subclause is worded it would give the board authority—I do not believe any board would act on it—to discard entirely the evidence given at the appeal and to make its inquiries where it liked and accept hearsay evidence. It could even decide to obtain its own evidence in its own way by asking for individual opinion or writing for such opinion, and basing its decision upon the evidence which it had received outside the constituted appeal. If there is to be an appeal surely one made within the bounds of the law should be sufficient for all concerned, except that we can give the board, as was intended in the original measure, the right to discard technicalities and legal forms. I do not think we should go beyond that and give the board the extended liberty that is intended by this part of the Bill. These are minor points when one looks at the question from the point of view that there is genuine alarm amongst quite a considerable number of civil servants.

Hon. T. Moore: On the part of the heads?

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: Yes, and I have come into contact with many of them. They think this will end up by seniority being the dominating factor in promotions. We should take our time, if the Chief Secretary will allow us, to go into this matter very carefully, individual by individual, and if necessary over the week-end prepare what we believe to be necessary amendments. Everything should be carefully investigated. We should not pass this Bill, which is a very important one, in a hurry. We shall be establishing, by means of this measure, the basis of promotions in the Civil Service for years to come. We should ensure that in doing so we shall establish a harmonious and yet an efficient Public Service.

On motion by Hon. H. S. W. Parker, debate adjourned.

MOTION—TRANS. RAILWAY, KALGOORLIE-FREMANTLE SECTION.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

Debate resumed from the 11th September on the following motion by Hon. A. Thomson:—

That a Select Committee of five members be appointed to inquire into and report upon—

- (a) Whether conditions in the post-war period, including modern transport facilities by air, sea and road, will warrant the construction of a railway of the 4ft. 8½in. gauge from Kalgoorlie to the metropolitan area.
- (b) If such construction is warranted, what route should this State recommend to the Commonwealth Government so as best to make use of the development value of the line and improve transport facilities and minimise traffic congestion.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West) [5.14]: I feel that every member will agree that the standardisation of railway gauges in Australia is very desirable, but there may be some difference of opinion as to how far that standardisation should go, as well as a difference of opinion as to when it should take place. In moving the motion Mr. Thomson averred that the Government, through the Premier, had been stampeded into accepting the present proposals for the standardisation of railway gauges in Australia and, on more than one occasion, he made the statement that, apparently, the Premier had committed this State to the present scheme. I hope to show that there is no truth in those statements. First of all, I point out that this is no new question, but one that has been discussed and considered for many years. I think I am correct when I say that it was first seriously dealt with 25 years ago, in 1920.

Hon. G. W. Miles: You are quite right.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY: At that time a conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers was held and it was decided that a Royal Commission should be appointed to make recommendations to the Commonwealth Government. A Royal Commission was appointed and it made its report to the Commonwealth Government on the 22nd September, 1921. Some members will know that in that year an agreement was drawn up for submission to the various States, and every State of the Commonwealth was approached in regard to this agreement

but, so far as I know, no action was taken by any of the States or the Commonwealth after that was done. I am not aware of the reason why no further action was taken; I just mention that as being a fact. It is, perhaps, rather interesting to note the recommendations of that Royal Commission which were included in the draft agreement submitted to the States at that time. The recommendations were—

(a) That action be taken to secure a gauge of 4ft. 8½in. (hereinafter called the standard gauge) of a railway line from Brisbane to Fremantle; and

(b) That all railway lines of 5ft. 3in. gauge now owned by the parties hereto, be converted to the standard gauge.

The Commission, in its report, estimated that the cost of that work would be £21,600,000. It made a further recommendation, which was also embodied in the draft agreement, as follows:—

(a) To convert to the standard gauge all railway lines of 5ft. 3in. gauge and 3ft. 6in. gauge now owned by the parties hereto; and

(b) to make re-alignments and deviations for the purpose of devising a better main line between Brisbane and Fremantle.

According to the report the estimated cost of that work was £57,200,000. That figure, of course, included the previous amount I have mentioned in connection with the other recommendation. So, when we come to compare what was done in 1921 with what is being submitted today we find that there is very little difference, except in regard to the question of costs.

Hon. G. W. Miles: That is it.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY: Before I sit down I hope to provide the House with some information which I, at any rate, think is interesting from that point of view. Mr. Thomson, in his rather extensive remarks on this subject brought in, to my way of thinking, quite a number of irrelevancies which I do not propose to deal with. But I would like to reply to a statement he made regarding what he called the Stileman plan. He remarked that the Stileman plan dealt with the Brookton-Armadale-Fremantle route and that that route was 40 miles closer to the port than the present one via Spencer's Brook. I understood him to argue that, because Mr. Stileman had made a report to the Government in regard to our railways and had dealt with this particular route—the Brookton-Armadale-Fremantle route—the present proposal should be con-

sidered with a view to seeing whether that route could be incorporated in the standardisation of the railway gauge from Kalgoorlie to Fremantle. I want to suggest to Mr. Thomson that what he called the Stileman plan had nothing whatever to do with the standardisation of railway gauges.

Hon. A. Thomson: I did not intend to convey that.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: The Stileman plan, to which he referred, dealt largely with agricultural railways and access to ports. I want to make that clear because one or two members have asked me if I know anything about this Stileman report, which was so much at variance, apparently, with the opinions of the various experts who have, from time to time, dealt with the question of the standardisation of the railway gauge from Fremantle to Kalgoorlie. Departmental officials have gone carefully into the question of the route of the Kalgoorlie-Fremantle standard gauge link and, having regard to all relevant aspects, it is considered by the department that the line should parallel the Goldfields line between Kalgoorlie and Northam, except for necessary deviations to obtain the required 1 in 80 grade.

Between Northam and Fremantle three routes through the Darling Ranges have been investigated by the department. The question is largely one of suitable grades through the hills, and after exhaustive inquiry two routes appeared to meet requirements. Of these, one route with a grade of 1 in 100 follows the Avon Valley from Northam, through Toodyay, thence through the ranges to Upper Swan and Midland Junction. An independent goods road is provided between Bayswater and North Fremantle to take the goods traffic out of the city, in the event of that route being decided upon. The alternative route is via Northam, on a 1 in 80 grade, down the Wooroloo Brook and thence via Upper Swan on the same route as the other. The route via Avon Valley offers the best alternative from many points of view, particularly that of improving the grade which is very important, as this section constitutes that of maximum traffic density in the State. The present approximate estimate of the cost of the Kalgoorlie-North Fremantle link, via the Avon Valley, including rollingstock, etc., is £9,712,000.

The third route investigated, that is, via Brookton and Armadale, would give a ruling grade of 1 in 80 only, and would greatly increase route mileage, namely, 101 miles from Perth to Brookton via Armadale as against 72 miles 28 chains from Perth to Northam via the Avon Valley. Again, a line from Perth to Brookton via Armadale would cost £700,000 more than one on the Avon Valley route, Perth to Northam, and assuming that a line from Kalgoorlie to Brookton could be provided of a length and at a cost not exceeding that of a line from Kalgoorlie to Northam, which is problematical, the route, Perth to Kalgoorlie through Brookton, would still be 29 miles longer and cost £700,000 more than the Avon Valley route, without any compensating grade advantages.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Are those present-day costs?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Yes. I give that information because, after reading Mr. Thomson's remarks, I came to the conclusion that he would advocate that the line should go via Brookton rather than via Northam. I think we can all agree that if there is to be anything definite done in regard to the proposal for the standardisation of railway gauges we want it to be along the most efficient and economical lines.

Hon. A. Thomson: That is why I want the Select Committee.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I admit that, in view of some of the remarks of Mr. Thomson, it would probably require a Select Committee to satisfy him that the recommendations of Sir Harold Clapp, or of anybody else, were the best under all the circumstances. The matter has now progressed to the extent that Sir Harold Clapp, who was appointed by the Commonwealth Government to inquire into the whole question of unification of railway gauges in Australia, has submitted his report recommending standardisation of Australian railways, with minor exceptions, the first stage being the building of a standard gauge, independent line from Kalgoorlie to Fremantle, a line from Port Pirie to Broken Hill, and the total conversion of all 5 ft. 3 in. roads in South Australia and Victoria.

I submit that there is very little difference between his recommendation in that regard and the recommendation of the Royal Commission which presented its report in 1921.

It is common knowledge that Sir Harold Clapp's report was considered by the Premiers' Conference on the 20th August of this year when certain resolutions were adopted. I propose to read those resolutions, although I think Mr. Thomson mentioned them in his remarks. They were as follows:—

1. That the Conference declares that the work of standardising Australia's railway gauges should be proceeded with as being essential to national defence and development.

2. That a committee be appointed of representatives of the States and the Commonwealth to consider what sections of the recommendations in Sir Harold Clapp's report should be accepted, and what additions or modifications should be made to same.

3. That a committee of representatives of the States and of the Commonwealth confer and report upon the division of financial commitment having regard to—

- (a) the defence value of the work;
- (b) the value of the work for purposes of development.

4. Commonwealth will consider South Australia's representations re North-South line.

I think that the very wording of those resolutions shows there was no truth in the statement by Mr. Thomson that the Premier of this State, Hon. F. J. S. Wise, had committed the Government of Western Australia to these proposals. Immediately following upon the carrying of the resolutions I have read, a further one was agreed to by the Premiers' Conference reading as follows:—

That pending agreement on the matters referred for consideration in the preceding resolution, the following appointments be made to confer with the State Railway Commissioners so that the preparatory work may proceed immediately—

- A Director-General,
- A Director of Mechanical Engineering,
- A Director of Civil Engineering, with necessary staffs.

Any costs incurred in the preparatory work to be initially borne by the Commonwealth subject to adjustment when the basis of allocation of cost has been determined.

There again is proof of the fact that Western Australia has not yet been committed to anything definite in this matter, other than to the principle of standardisation of railway gauges, with which I suggest no person could find fault. Since that conference the Commonwealth Government has given consideration to the resolutions and subsequently a letter, which I have the Premier's authority to read to the House, was forwarded to him by the Prime Minister under date the 15th September last, as follows:—

With reference to the resolutions carried at the recent Premiers' Conference, regarding standardisation of railway gauges, I desire to inform you that Cabinet has approved of the following committees being appointed to deal with the matters mentioned in the resolutions.

Committee to deal with recommendations in report:—

Commonwealth representatives:—Minister for Transport, Minister for Post-War Reconstruction, Minister for Defence.

State representatives:—Minister for Transport, or Railways, of the States.

The committee is to consider the recommendations in the report of Sir Harold Clapp and report to the Prime Minister as to the sections of the recommendations which should be accepted and what additions or modifications should be made thereto, also to consider and report upon any matters relevant or incidental to the foregoing which may be brought forward.

Committee to deal with financial commitment:—

Commonwealth representatives:—The Commonwealth Treasurer, the Minister for Transport, the Minister for Defence, the Minister for Post-War Reconstruction.

State representatives:—The State Treasurers.

The committee is to report upon the division of financial commitment involved in the recommendations of Sir Harold Clapp's report having regard to—

- (a) the defence value of the work,
- (b) the value of the work for purposes of development.

It is desired to have a meeting of the first mentioned committee at Canberra on the 9th October, 1945, and I should be glad of early advice as to whether the representative from your State could arrange to attend on that date.

There again members have further conclusive proof that this State has not been committed to anything definite. On the question of cost, the total estimated cost for the completion of the first section of the plan covering the conversion of existing railways in South Australia and Victoria, the building of an independent line from Kalgoorlie to Perth-Fremantle, and the construction of new lines and certain conversions in Queensland and the Northern Territory, is £77,000,000. The cost of locomotives and rolling stock is included in this figure. I have seen a statement somewhere—I cannot recall where—to the effect that it is anticipated that if this scheme is agreed to and the work is commenced immediately, it will take some 11 years to complete the programme. In other words, it means that there will be an expenditure of £7,000,000 a year for 11 years. The cost of construction of an inde-

pendent standard gauge line from Fremantle-Perth to Kalgoorlie is estimated to involve the following expenditure:—

	£
Cost of line, 419 miles	7,512,000
Cost of construction of locomotives and rolling stock	840,000
	<hr/> £8,352,000

Further it is estimated that the work will take four years to complete. It will be seen that so far as the first portion of the plan is concerned, the actual cost of the work to be carried out in Western Australia stands at the figure I have just quoted, and that the total cost of the first portion will be £77,000,000.

Hon. A. Thomson: What is the length of the present line?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I cannot say offhand.

Hon. C. R. Cornish: The route from Perth to Kalgoorlie is 380 miles.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: We are taking the line to Fremantle for the purpose of these figures, not to Perth. No finalisation has yet been reached regarding the route of the Kalgoorlie-Fremantle link, although, as I have already stated, departmental officials have gone carefully into the question and it is considered the line should parallel the Goldfields line between Kalgoorlie and Northam and follow a route via the Avon Valley and Toodyay to Midland Junction, thence to Perth alongside the existing 3ft. 6in. line with an independent goods road between Bayswater and North Fremantle.

Hon. A. Thomson: Did you say the line was to go to Perth? According to the Press statement with regard to Sir Harold Clapp's report, it was to stop at East Perth.

Hon. F. E. Gibson: At North Fremantle.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I am sorry that we have not a sufficient number of copies of the report to supply to members. We are endeavouring to get some further copies so that members may have an opportunity to consider it if they so desire.

Hon. W. J. Mann: I think Parliament is entitled to have a sufficient number of copies.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: We may think so, but if we cannot get them, what can we do about it? Only a limited num-

ber of copies were made available, and we are now endeavouring, through the Premier, to secure a larger number for members. For the purpose of preparing estimates, the route I have mentioned has been selected as being the most suitable. The Commonwealth has also agreed to provide an amount of £82,000 to cover the cost of surveying the route from Kalgoorlie to Fremantle, on the understanding that this amount will be included in the final costs for allocation between the Commonwealth and the States, and arrangements for putting the survey in hand are being proceeded with. During the course of his remarks when submitting the motion to the House, Mr. Thomson gave the impression that this State was providing money as well as men for the work.

Hon. A. Thomson: That was according to the Press report.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: The position is that we are providing the survey parties that will do the work and the Commonwealth Government is to provide £82,000. Whatever the final decision may be, the cost of the survey work will be included in the total cost and therefore subject to whatever arrangement may be made regarding the allocation of costs as between the Commonwealth and the State.

Hon. G. W. Miles: Have you any definite information as to the allocation of costs? Will it be on the basis of the Commonwealth one-fifth and the State four-fifths?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: The provision of the cost as between the Commonwealth and the States was fixed by the 1921 conference at one-fifth Commonwealth and four-fifths States.

Hon. G. W. Miles: That allocation should be reversed.

Members: Hear, hear!

The CHIEF SECRETARY: There is one question still to be settled, and I think I have shown that it is one of a number of items still to be considered. A special committee has been appointed for the purpose of making representations to the Commonwealth Government as to what proportion the various parties should be responsible for. In that connection I have prepared a small table that I think is very interesting for it serves to demonstrate the very heavy responsibility we have in Western Australia as compared with that to be shouldered by the other States. There can be no doubt about

the important part that railways play in the economy of any country, and I think it would be helpful if a comparison of the position of the various States were placed before members in the form I now propose to present it. The following table provides the information I have indicated:—

	Area. Square Miles.	Esti- mated Popu- lation.	Rail- way Mile- age.	Gauge.	Average Staff Em- ployed 1943-44.
				ft. in.	
Qld.	670,500	1,065,414	6,497	3 6	22,750
N.S.W.	309,432	2,370,950	6,127½	4 8½	52,030
Vic.	87,884	1,997,804	4,751	5 3	25,814
S.A.	380,070	621,998	2,547½	5 3	11,843
W.A.	975,920	485,407	4,381	3 6	8,499

I submit these figures for the benefit of members so that they may analyse for themselves our position in Western Australia. The table is associated with the point raised by Mr. Miles when he asked whether anything definite had been arrived at with respect to the allocation of costs as between the States and the Commonwealth. I agree with him that the understanding which was arrived at in 1921, when it was suggested that the Commonwealth should be responsible for one-fifth of the cost and the States for four-fifths, is entirely out of date.

Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. A. Thomson: I quite agree with you.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: We in this State have great responsibility in endeavouring to develop one-third of the Commonwealth.

Hon. A. Thomson: That is so.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: And while it can be said that the standardisation of railway gauges, including the line from Kalgoorlie to Perth and Fremantle, will be of very great value from a defence point of view and of some value from the point of view of the development of the State, as well as a very great convenience, I have no doubt, in the transport of goods and passengers, nevertheless all these can be purchased at too great a cost to this State.

Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. A. Thomson: That is what I believe.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Our population is less than half a million; the number of taxpayers in this State is, of course, considerably less. Therefore, we can expect that our representative at the conference

which will take place in the near future will be sufficiently alive—I do not think we can complain of the attitude of our Premier in this matter—to see that proper representations are made, so that when it is decided to proceed with this proposal for the standardisation of railway gauges, the allocation of costs will be on a fairer basis than one-fifth and four-fifths. The information which I have supplied I have given on account of the statements made by Mr. Thomson when introducing the motion. I do not raise any objection to the motion itself.

The Government feels that if this House considers it can assist in deciding the question of the particular route which the new standard gauge line shall take from Kalgoorlie to Perth and Fremantle, there is no reason why it should not do so. I therefore feel that the information which I have given—which is as up to date as it is possible for me to obtain—will be of some benefit to the committee when it is appointed. I reiterate that, so far as this State is concerned, it has not yet been committed to any section of the report of Sir Harold Clapp, except the principle of the standardisation of railway gauges. If the time ever comes when the railways of Western Australia—that is, all the railways of Western Australia—have to be standardised to a 4ft. 8½in. gauge, then it will cost many more millions than have at any time, so far as I know, been mentioned. I saw a report a week or two ago dealing with the standardisation of the Queensland and Western Australian railways and in it the cost was stated to be something like £130,000,000. I have no authority for using that figure, but I did see it in the report I mentioned. Members can easily understand, however, in view of the cost which I have already mentioned, that it would be somewhere in that vicinity if all the railways in Queensland, 6,497 miles, and in Western Australia, 4,381 miles, had to be converted to standard gauge.

I suggest that the time is far distant when this State or the Commonwealth could put into operation a scheme involving that amount of money in order to standardise the gauge of all our lines in Western Australia. I hope that the committee, when appointed, will be able to show that its efforts will be of some value to the State. I realise, of course, that a Commonwealth committee is also dealing with this matter, and I can but hope that when all has been finalised and

the standardisation of railway gauges is gone on with, we in Western Australia at any rate will benefit thereby.

On motion by Hon. A. L. Loton, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.54 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 26th September, 1945.

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

QUESTIONS.

SAWMILLS.

As to Manpower Position.

Mr. HOLMAN asked the Minister for Forests:

1, What is the position of the State Saw Mills in respect to manpower?

2, (a) Which mills, if any, are short of manpower?

(b) What number of men are required at each mill?

(c) In what capacity are the men required at each mill?

(d) How many employees over the age of 65 are working at each mill?

3, Is any similar information available as to the Railway Mill and privately owned mills?

4, If so, what is the position in respect to these mills?

5, What steps have been taken to ensure that such manpower as is necessary to bring the mills up to full strength will be made available?

6, In view of the immediate necessity for an increase in the production of timber, and the tremendous strain that has been placed on the employees working in the industry in their efforts to keep up production whilst the mills were working short-handed, will he immediately make further strong representations to the Commonwealth stressing the urgency of the position in Western Australia?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (for the Minister for Forests) replied:

1, Twenty-one experienced men are required. A number of men who are not skilled in the industry have been employed during the war, adversely affecting efficiency. With the return of the regular employees replacing these the output and position generally should materially improve.

2, (a) Pemberton, Hakea and Holyoake; (b) Pemberton 7, Hakea 12, Holyoake 2. (c) Pemberton: 4 navvies, 3 fettlers; Hakea: 3 fallers, 3 navvies, 3 mill hands, 3 experienced yard men; Holyoake: 2 fettlers; (d) Deanmill 3, Pemberton 9, Hakea 3, Holyoake 3, total 18.

3 and 4, (a) The Railway Mill at Bankiadale is actually short of 4 navvies, 2 fallers and 4 mill hands. Three of the employees at the mill are over 65 years of age.

(b) The Government is not aware of the present individual position in respect to privately-owned mills, as men are being released daily, but it is understood that similar manpower difficulties obtain throughout the industry. An investigation in July of all bush mills indicated the following requirements:—Men for falling, hauling and delivering, 114; men for tramline construction and maintenance, 92; mill hands, 180; others, 22; total, 408.

5, List submitted every 14 days to the National Service Office. Constant applications have been made over two years to manpower authorities to release key men from the services, and a large number of these applications are now being reviewed by the Military Department. The Deputy Controller of Timber sponsors all applications for releases from the services.