

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 4th October, 1923.

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

PINJARRA-DWARDA RAILWAY EXTENSION SELECT COMMITTEE.

Extension of Time.

Hon. J. A. GREIG (South-East) [4.33]: As we have been unable to get certain information with regard to surveys, I move—

That the time for bringing up the report of the select committee be extended till Thursday, 11th October.

Question put and passed.

MOTION—ESPERANCE NORTHWARDS RAILWAY EXTENSION.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN (South) [4.34]: I move—

That in the opinion of this House, the Government should seek the necessary authority this session to extend the Esperance northwards railway, now in course of construction, so that it will junction with the main railway system of the State at Norseman.

I do not intend to speak at length on this question because it has been before the public for a long time, and members must be familiar with the facts. I am one of those who, for a great many years, strongly advocated the construction of the Esperance railway. Ever since I have been in public life, I have lost no opportunity to impress upon the people the valuable asset they have in the lands lying south of Norseman. With two or three exceptions, everyone who has visited that district has been greatly impressed with the fertility of the soil and its great agricultural resources. I know the country well, and have always felt a great mistake was made by those in charge of the affairs of the State in not having constructed this railway long ago, because that would have been in the best interests of the whole State. It would have caused one of our vacant spaces to be filled with a large population. One feature of the district is its fine climate; there is no better climate in Australia. It is not so cold as that of Albany and the intense

heat of other portions of the State is not experienced there. The south coast is washed by the waters of an ocean and fanned by breezes that come from the great Antarctic regions, uninterrupted by any barrier. One can appreciate what such a climate must be in contrast to that of a coast washed by the tropical and semi-tropical waters of the Indian Ocean. I am convinced that a large number of people formerly of the goldfields but now settled in the Eastern States, some of them on land for which they have paid high prices, would to-day be living in the Esperance district had railway facilities been granted and had they been sure of receiving similar encouragement to that meted out to people in other parts of the State. The area comprised in the Esperance northwards district and East Coolgardie goldfields has a population of roughly 45,000. I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that, had the Esperance railway been constructed 20 years ago, the population of the district would now be not less than 145,000. It would have meant the opening up of a great province and that would not have adversely affected the population or prosperity of the rest of the State. In fact the population of the State as a whole would have been vastly greater to-day. It is quite likely, too, that the population of Perth would have been greater, because it is impossible to open up any portion of a great country or add to its prosperity without the capital benefiting. Consequently there may not have been the present deplorable position that of a population of 350,000, 48 per cent. of the people live in the metropolitan area. It may be said the district has a railway. True, a railway 68 miles north from Esperance is approaching completion. I hold in my hand a small railway map of Western Australia and it reveals the most extraordinary thing that can be found in the railway map of any country in the world. We have a railway running 68 miles directly north from Esperance, and another railway running from Coolgardie directly south to Norseman, Norseman being the terminus of our main railway system, and between the head of the Esperance northwards railway and Norseman there is a gap of some 60 miles. That gap is generally known as the centralisation safeguard, and it came about years ago when members of Parliament did not exhibit the broad vision they do to-day.

Hon. A. Burvill: There was no Country Party at that time.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: Quite so. As one who is not a member of the Country Party, I say they have done much good for Western Australia, inasmuch as they have broadened the vision of the people and made them realise that the whole State is not comprised in what can be seen from the steps of Parliament House. One of the main objects of the Country Party is decentralisation, and in no country of the world is decentralisation so much needed as in Western Australia. In no country of the world, proportionately to

its vastness, is so large a proportion of the population located in the metropolitan area. Western Australia consists of one-third of a vast continent, and it is deplorable that 48 per cent. of its people should be living within a short radius of this House. That fact has been frequently emphasised by the Country Party, and I account this as one of the advantages that have accrued from the presence of the Country Party in the public life of this State. I would also like on this occasion to pay a tribute to another party to which I do not belong—the Labour Party. The Labour Party of this State have always taken a broad, Western Australian view of this question. They have sought to look at it from the point of view of the whole State, and irrespective of the particular localities that they represented. I have always known them to support the Esperance railway. It is the linking up of that gap that is the purpose of my motion to-day. In requesting hon. members to pass the motion to ask the Government to remove that extraordinary blot—because it is a blot—upon the railway map of Western Australia, I would remind them that the Esperance northwards railway is approaching completion. The workers are all on the spot, and the plant is there, and now is the time to push on with the work, when all arrangements are complete for the continuance of the line.

Hon. J. Duffell: What is the estimated cost of your proposal?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: The distance to be bridged is about 60 miles, and the hon. member will, of course, be able to judge for himself what the cost may be.

Hon. J. Duffell: I do not know that country at all. Is it hilly?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: The distance to be bridged is only some 60 miles. The survey was made years ago—and to proceed with the work now is far better than to delay.

Hon. J. A. Greig: How long is it since Parliament passed the Act for the construction of the part just completed?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I will come to that in a few moments. I wish further to point out that experience not only in Western Australia, but everywhere, shows that sectional railways are very expensive to work. We need only call to mind the cases in our own State of the Ravensthorpe and Port Hedland lines. The isolated railway running directly northwards from Esperance, unless it be linked up with Norseman, has little chance of paying. At the time the Bill for that railway was introduced, those of us who favoured the Esperance railway pointed out that the proper course was to build a line right through from Norseman to Esperance. Three times a Bill for that purpose had been introduced by the then Labour Government, the Scaddan Government, and three times it had been defeated. However, we learned from one or two opponents of the Esperance railway that they would be in favour of a railway running some 60 miles north of Esper-

ance, and those of us who wanted the Esperance line preferred half a loaf to no bread. Therefore we accepted the position. But at the time we thought it was an economic mistake, and not the right way to build a railway. I know of no instance where any of us said that if that line of 60 miles were built, we would not continue the movement for the furtherance of the line to Norseman. I remember I was sitting in the seat now occupied by Mr. Seddon, when Mr. Moss gave me to understand that he would vote for the Esperance Northwards railway if a promise were given that the construction of that line would complete the railway ideals of the people of that part of the State. I told him I would not be justified in making any such promise on behalf of those people. I said further that so far as I was personally concerned, I would never be satisfied until the railway was completed to Norseman, because I did not think the requirements of the district would be met otherwise. Therefore it was on the clear understanding that the movement for the completion of the line would be continued, that the Esperance Northwards Railway Bill was passed in this Chamber—by a very narrow majority. As to past troubles, there is no use in reviving them. I am prepared to let the dead past bury its dead. The position now is that we ought to view facts exactly as they are, and make the best of circumstances; and because I am quite convinced that in the interests of the whole State, including even the interests of the constituency represented by Mr. Duffell—

Hon. J. Duffell: Tell us what your proposal is going to cost. Give us an idea.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I am convinced that a mistake was made in not constructing the Esperance railway long ago. Yet it is never too late to rectify a mistake. A still greater mistake will be made if the centralisation gap is not linked up. Mr. Greig asked me when the Bill for the construction of the Esperance Northwards railway was passed. It was passed early in 1915. The Scaddan Government, who introduced the measure, after a certain delay proceeded with the construction of the line. Earthworks were built, and some 12 miles of rails were landed at Esperance. Then the Wilson Government came into office, and the Wilson Government consisted of men all of whom had been all their lives strong opponents of the Esperance railway. They discovered that something had not been brought forward that they thought should have been brought forward in connection with the matter. It was that the land was too salty to grow wheat. There has been a long series of bogeys raised in connection with the Esperance country. I remember one before the salt episode. A departmental officer after visiting the Esperance district reported that he could not favour the construction of the railway on the ground that, in his opinion, water could not be conserved in the district. He declared that the country was too porous, and that if dams were made they would not hold water. The

extraordinary thing about it is that there is no part of Western Australia where better dams can be constructed than in the Esperance district. Subsequent to that statement being made, some 20 or 30 dams were constructed in the Esperance country, and those dams have held water as tight as a bottle. Mr. Maley, the Minister for Agriculture, during his recent visit also testified to the extraordinarily good holding capacity of the Esperance country for dams. However, that feature was demonstrated by the actual construction of dams. Then the salt bogey was brought forward, and on that plea the Wilson Government, who had always strongly opposed the construction of the railway, decided that they must stop all construction work and submit the question to a Royal Commission. The Royal Commission was appointed, and its personnel consisted of gentlemen well known in this State—Mr. Dempster of Esperance, Mr. Matthew T. Padbury of Koojan, and Mr. Ronald McDonald of the Taxation Department, Perth. Those three gentlemen were appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the advisableness of constructing the Esperance northwards railway. They examined a considerable number of witnesses; they travelled through the length and breadth of the Esperance district and of the State; and they even journeyed to the Eastern States in order to see the mallee lands of South Australia and Victoria. In the result their report fully satisfied the most enthusiastic advocates of the Esperance railway. Subsequently to their appointment an outcry arose, and the Government were accused of intentionally delaying the construction of a work to which Ministers had always been opposed. The then Premier and the then Minister for Works gave the distinct assurance that if the report of the Royal Commission were favourable, the work would be proceeded with at once. In the statements then made it was assumed that the Royal Commission would have completed their work within a few months, and that the delay in the construction of the line would be merely temporary. However, the Royal Commission were so conscientious over the matter that the inquiry lasted for some nine months. Then the recommendation came in for proceeding with the railway at once. I think I may read that recommendation—

That the construction of the line authorised by Parliament be proceeded with as early as practicable, with a view to its ultimate continuation to Norseman for the purpose of reaching the goldfields market.

The report was made six years ago, and owing to a long series of procrastinations, the railway that was favoured by this report, the Esperance northwards railway, the Bill for which was passed in 1915, is only now approaching completion. The report submitted by the Commissioners is one that is available to every hon. member. I am not going to weary the House by read-

ing it at length, but there are two or three points in it to which I desire to draw the attention of members now. One of the objections which have always been advanced by the few people who are opposed to the Esperance railway is that the crops in the district have been very light. No one reading this report, and reading also the explanation which has been advanced by the Royal Commissioners, can doubt that there is very good reason indeed for the lightness of the crops. No one reading the report and the explanation can come to any other conclusion than that one should be surprised, not at the lightness of the crops, but at their not being still lighter. This report is six years old. Before I conclude I will bring the position up to date. Here is a paragraph equally applicable to-day, and it will be applicable even after the line is constructed—

Amongst other difficulties under which settlers are labouring, lack of capital has in no small measure been responsible for low results. It is noticeable that many of the settlers are poorly equipped with horses and machinery, inadequate quantities of seed and super have been used, and proper farming methods have not been followed, in most instances because of the expense. The difficulty of obtaining labour is naturally felt in this district as in others, and many of the settlers have had their difficulties accentuated by the loss of the help of sons and brothers who have left for active service with the forces. Heavy freights on machinery and super, and high cartage rates, have also proved hindrances to progress.

During the year immediately preceding this inquiry the average yield of wheat at Esperance was 9.6 bushels to the acre, the total yield being 12,000 bushels. For 1915-16 the yield was as low as 5.3 bushels. The Commission went to the Eastern States. What they discovered there was that the early yields on the mallee lands of Victoria and South Australia were always very low, in some instances down to one bushel per acre; and, furthermore, that the average yield of mallee country was always low for several years after the opening up of the district. It was not that there were not individual cases of improvement; but a new settler on the land had a low yield for the first year, and a better one for the next, and as other settlers came in and took up land the initial yields secured by the newcomers reduced the average for the district, and so for years that general average remained very low, although the average for the older settlers was always good. Let me read the following paragraph from the Commission's report—

In departmental reports, and during the course of evidence, frequent allusion has been made to the comparatively light yields recorded in the Esperance mallee district. For example, Mr. Cooke (trustee of the Agricultural Bank) stated in evidence that good crops were grown in the

Eastern States in the early days of mallee settlement, notwithstanding the presence of mallee suckers and stumps. It has been established from statements and reports of reliable witnesses in the Eastern States that the local experience regarding yields is normal, mallee lands, as a rule, producing very light crops during the first few years; indeed, until the mallee has been completely eradicated, substantial returns cannot be expected. Good crops are obtained only from land that is fallowed and cultivated, which system cannot be applied in mallee country until the sixth or seventh year after a start has been made. There will be for some years after mallee land is opened up, a large proportion of holdings in the initial stages of cultivation and yielding small returns. This naturally reduces the average of the district as a whole, but the average is adjusted when all holdings reach the same stage of cultivation.

Then follow a number of tables, rather difficult to quote. Here is a paragraph of interest:—

If still further evidence is required that low yields in the early days of development are usual, it is to be found in the testimony of Mr. J. Turiff (Manager for Mr. E. H. Lascelles, at Hopetoun, Victoria), before the Pinnaroo Lands Royal Commission of 1902. The late Mr. Lascelles, it may be mentioned, was familiarly known as "The father of mallee farming" in Victoria, and a memorial in his honour is being arranged for with the concurrence of the Victorian Government. He was intimately connected with the mallee farming lands, and had extensive interests in them from the date of their establishment. The evidence of his representative is therefore of value. He stated that the returns of the district had been as under—

Then the report gives details of a $3\frac{1}{4}$ bushel crop, of a crop under one bushel, of another just over 4 bushels, and of one over $7\frac{1}{4}$ bushels. Then the Commission go on to say:

Compared with these low yields of 20 years it is interesting to note that the Hopetoun district has, during the past few years, been enjoying an average of about 18 bushels, which shows the improvement that mallee land manifests with age and by the use of superphosphates.

To my mind, that is a satisfactory explanation of the yields in that district being so low. The Commission were fully satisfied on that point, and their report generally has been most favourable.

The Minister for Education: What was the yield in Victoria in the early days?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: It is given here. In the Victorian mallee country, over an average of 28 years the yield was 7.7 bushels per acre. In South Australian mallee country, in the Albert district, the average was 6.60 bushels, in the Alfred district, 8.41 bushels, in the Chandos district 8.90 bushels and in the Eyre district 7.60 bushels.

The Minister for Education: And that has improved up to 18 bushels?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: Yes. The Commission points to this as showing how much better are the conditions in Western Australia. There are in the Commission's report some general observations regarding mallee country which I should like to read. Here is one of them—

The pessimistic opinions of the Esperance mallee lands voiced from time to time are in a measure natural and justified. The country in its virgin state is admittedly unattractive, and during the early period of cultivation disappointing returns are usual. Similar views were held by prominent public men in the other States many years ago. Before the various Royal Commissions, numerous witnesses voiced unequivocally adverse views as to the value of the lands, yet we now find that such views were erroneous, and to-day the mallee districts support large and prosperous communities, and constitute the principal wheat producing areas of the State. Having made exhaustive inquiries into the question, we are convinced that a large area exists in the mallee belt and the Esperance district which is adapted for wheat growing and general farming.

And the Commission go on to say—

Undoubtedly all the settlers selected land in the belief that a railway would be built. Railway and market facilities, good roads, and adequate water supplies are factors essential to successful farming, and the isolated situation of the Esperance lands precludes the possibility of successful farming being conducted until such facilities are provided.

I may point out that the men who have made good in the mallee district of Esperance were not assisted by the Agricultural Bank or the Industries Assistance Board. Both those institutions, for reasons best known to themselves, positively refused to extend to that district the consideration given to other districts of the State. However, a number of farmers have made good in the Esperance district.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: Does the good land extend to Norseman?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: When I ask that the line be extended to Norseman, naturally hon. members want to know what is the nature of the country between the present terminus of the railway and Norseman. The Commission gave details of the rainfall in that locality. In Norseman for 20 years the average annual rainfall was 10.66 inches. At Gilmore's (Lake View) the average annual rainfall for 13 years was 11.16 inches. The average over the growing period in both Norseman and Gilmore's is highly satisfactory, as indicated by the Commission's report. The average rainfall for the growing period, April to October, at Norseman is 7.15 inches; and at Gilmore's 7.53 inches. Both those districts are outside the mallee areas, are in salmon gum country. Concerning the value of the district, I will

quote no less an authority than a colleague of the Minister for Education, namely, the present Minister for Agriculture. His views upon that district have been quite as favourable as any that have ever been expressed by this most enthusiastic advocate of the line.

Hon. J. A. Greig: How far east of the line are the three million acres which the Minister for Agriculture rediscovered?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I think the hon. member is referring to land to the south, some 150 miles from the Esperance railway. I do not wish at the moment to enter into the question of the value of that land. Suppose all that country which was rediscovered were a sand patch that did not produce a blade of grass or a grain of wheat, my argument would not be affected. I have never been to that part of the district, but I have heard men say the report of the Minister of Agriculture was quite correct. Mr. Baxter, who has been there, expressed a different opinion. That is not the point in connection with this railway. The land is 150 miles from the particular area I now refer to, and regarding which the Minister for Agriculture was so enthusiastic. I understand my colleague, Mr. Cornell, persuaded the Minister for Agriculture to pay a visit to the district. Mr. Maley went through, I am sure, with an unbiased mind, and with no other desire than to give a fair report. When the Scaddan Government were in power, I think all the Ministers visited the district. I was there with Mr. Drew. His report was on almost similar lines to the report of Mr. Maley. I do not know, however, that Mr. Drew's report was quite enthusiastic. One thing that impressed Mr. Drew was the extremely valuable subsoil that the district possesses. He had a spade in the motor car, and was constantly stopping and digging into the subsoil. He explained how excellent a thing this was from the agricultural point of view. Although he was there during the summer time, whenever he dug down a foot or two, he found the subsoil holding moisture, the rest of the country, however, being dry.

Hon. V. Hamersley: Perhaps that indicated salt.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: If I had read a portion of the report dealing with that question, I could have satisfied the hon. member there was nothing in the salt argument.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: Perhaps the salt was on the tail.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I did not deem it necessary to read that portion of the report.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: The subsoil would be in the salmon country, where there is no salt.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: All along the track he found the subsoil to be excellent.

Hon. J. Mills: What was the time of year?

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: It was during the dry season. Mr. Maley's report was published in the "West Australian." I understand he is a farmer born and bred. This is what he said—

I say without hesitation that agriculture will spread successfully east and south from Norseman over a vast tract of territory.

This is the particular country to which I wished this line to go.

In the past this south-eastern corner of the State has had little chance of development, but it cannot longer be kept back. Its isolation must be removed. Esperance must inevitably be linked with Norseman by the construction of the remaining 60 miles of railway.

Then the Minister looked into the future, and predicted what that country will be. In asking for this line, I am not asking for something that will benefit a few hundred settlers, or something that is small. I claim that the line will ultimately be for the benefit of thousands of settlers, and will add tremendously to the importance of the State. What the Minister saw evidently fired his imagination, for he says—

Then, as agriculture spreads further east, the country in the direction must be served either by rail from a new port, to be established east of Esperance, or by spur lines from the Esperance-Norseman railway, with improved harbour facilities to cope with the growing needs of the district. With the provision of essential railway facilities, and the application of the best farming methods to the land, this province must become the most important belt of wheat-producing country in Western Australia, and probably in the whole Commonwealth.

I take it that the Government are influenced by the opinions of their Minister for Agriculture. I am only asking this House to pass a motion requesting the Government to complete this link with "the most important belt of wheat-producing country in Western Australia, and probably in the whole Commonwealth." The Minister for Agriculture continues—

While motoring down from Norseman yesterday, the quality of the country from that town southward until the mallee belt is reached appealed to me as being uniformly good. The timber consists mostly of black butt, yate, salmon gum and horce, with small scrub and salt bush. An examination of the rainfall records in the eastern country throws an interesting light on its agricultural future, and is surprisingly satisfactory. At Fraser's Range records kept over 20 years show an average annual rainfall of 12.50 inches, while the seasonal average between April and October is 8.20.

One feature of the country that particularly impressed Mr. Maley, and this feature has not been brought forward by other visitors to the locality, was the value of the coastal influence upon it. This is what he says on the point—

What appeals to me most on an analysis of these figures is that the whole of this country from Norseman right east through Fraser's Range and Balladonia down to Eyre comes under the coastal influence, with the result that the climatic conditions are relatively not nearly so harsh as those

existing in our wheat belt from Merredin eastward.

He goes on to repeat much of what I have quoted, but I will quote a couple of sentences of his that may be worth giving—

With the application of proper methods of farming to the Esperance mallee and the whole of the agricultural country in this corner of the State, I have not the slightest doubt about the success of farming throughout the whole of this wonderful belt of country running east and south of Norseman, which amounts in all to many millions of acres.

This is the exact country which cannot be served by the Esperance-Northwards railway.

Everything points clearly to the fact that we have here awaiting development a huge belt of uniformly good country in which water conservation by means of dams has proved effective, particularly in the mallee. Last year a great number of dams throughout the east and north-eastern wheat belt were dry, but every dam in the Esperance country was full to overflowing, and I am informed that the town dam at Norseman has never been dry since it was first constructed many years ago.

Mr. Maley goes on to say—

The old bogeys which had been raised against the Esperance Norseman district had been effectively disposed of. The quality of the Esperance mallee belt had been proved beyond question. In that portion of the State he believed that there was enough high-grade agricultural land to satisfy land selectors for an indefinite number of years ahead.

The Minister added—

He could assure them that as the result of his visit, Esperance had gained a new champion, because he was convinced of the greatness of its future.

I ask the Government, in the face of these reports, why, with so much excellent agricultural land awaiting development and crying aloud for settlement, they are hesitating about continuing the line to Norseman. Everything is ready for the continuation of the work. It does not involve the settlement of a few hundred people. It means opening up an enormous tract of agricultural country. We advertise to the world the value of our agricultural land. I met a Federal Minister and another member of the Federal Parliament on the train going to Kalgoorlie during the last week end. These two members did not know I was in any way interested in the Esperance country. They talked about that Esperance country, and told me there were scores of farmers in the Eastern States who had sons. If this Esperance country was opened up, and they were satisfied with the Government methods of development, these sons would come over, and none of them would have less than £1,000 a piece. One of the members said, "If the railway is going through, I will guarantee to get any number of settlers myself." I will

give the Minister for Education the names of both these members.

The Minister for Education: I wish you would.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: He can then write to them himself. If the Minister makes inquiries, through these members, of mallee farmers in the Eastern States, he will find that many of them are waiting for the opening up of this mallee belt.

Hon. J. A. Greig: That is quite correct.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: If the Minister inquires from his own officers, he will find this is so. When men are seeking land in this State this is the one place they are not shown. These two Federal members said to me, "They did not show us the one place we wanted to see." I said, "Where is that?" and they replied, "The Esperance country." They both told me that they are coming back again to go quietly over that part of the State because from all they have heard they think it is a wonderful country. They also have in view the possibility of becoming interested in it themselves. These are things known to us here, but it is a long way to Perth. It is a case of "out of sight, out of mind." We have a splendid asset in that part of the country.

Resolved: That motions be continued.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: As long as I have been in Parliament, the dominating factor in influencing me has been the question of finance. From the time I first became interested in public affairs, I have always been convinced that government is finance. I have viewed everything from the point of view of the finances. I would not bring forward a proposal such as that I am presenting to the House now if I did not think it would be of great financial benefit to Western Australia in the future. If I ask the House to sanction the expenditure of money involved in the construction of 60 miles of railway, I do so only because I am convinced that the work will improve the finances rather than place them in a worse position. The Esperance proposal is not like others which have been submitted in the past. It is not similar to the Wyndham Meats Works proposal, which has meant such an immense loss to the State. When I hear of the hundreds of thousands of pounds that will be lost through the Industries Assistance Board, I feel sorry that, instead of having settlers battling along on the land where they were placed, that sum of money was not being spent in the Esperance district.

The Minister for Education: The man is responsible sometimes.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I know that the personal factor comes into the question, but I have heard of many cases where men have been put upon land that has not been productive, and they have had to be moved from those localities. Had these large sums of money been spent in the Esperance district, the results would have been different. It is

with a firm conviction that this proposal is in the best interests of the State that I present it to the House.

On motion by Minister for Education debate adjourned.

MOTION—WATER SUPPLY DEPARTMENT BY-LAW.

To Disallow.

Debate resumed from the 27th September on the following motion by Hon. A. Lovekin:—

“That by-law 132 (4a), made under the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage, and Drainage Act, 1909, be and is hereby disallowed.”

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE (Metropolitan) [5.35]: I have been interested in the statements made by Mr. Lovekin in support of his motion and in the reply by the Minister. Last session, in my innocence, I concluded that a resolution of the House would be the final word in instructions to the Water Supply Department as to what price should be charged for excess water during the year. I have become somewhat wiser and I recognise that full effect has not been given to the decision of this Chamber. Mr. Lovekin is right in pursuing the matter farther. The point at issue between the Minister and Mr. Lovekin is whether the department can supply water at 1s. per thousand gallons. Mr. Lovekin says the department can do so and the Minister and his officers hold a contrary opinion. I propose traversing the departmental report with a view to enlightening the House on the questions at issue. Mr. Lovekin based the greater part of his argument on the question of departmental maladministration, contending if the administration had been more effective and more economical, there would be no question about the department effecting such savings as would enable water to be supplied at 1s. per thousand gallons. I believe the water supply business should be kept separate from the sewerage activities. It should be based on its own revenue earning capacity. As to the argument between the Minister and Mr. Lovekin regarding the possibility of a reduction in the price of water, the Minister seemed to sidetrack the question submitted to him by Mr. Lovekin. The position is shown in the summary to the departmental report and discloses that profits were made in connection with the water supply and stormwater services and a loss on sewerage.

The Minister for Education: That has been changed now.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: Then the position is all the more favourable to the case put forward by Mr. Lovekin. The Leader of the House did not support, nor did he deny, the statements made in the departmental summary. He produced other figures to show that there were losses in connection with the water supply and storm-

water services. I have the figures in the report and they show a loss on the sewerage operations. The House would be well advised to accept the figures Mr. Lovekin has placed before members. The deficit on the whole concern is given as £29,000 and the accumulated profits on the water supply amount to £59,000. It would take a long time for the loss of £6,000 per annum, which the Minister says would be occasioned by the change, to cut out the accumulated surplus. The Minister for Education: I put up figures contradicting that.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: Then the Minister contradicts the report of the department.

The Minister for Education: The figures are there.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: The figures are there, and then people juggle them!

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: I have taken my figures from last year's departmental report—the latest statement obtainable, apart from the Minister's own utterance the other day. It is necessary to clear up some points in the minds of country members, otherwise it will be assumed that we will get water at too cheap a price if it is supplied at 1s. per thousand gallons. Some country water supplies are rated on the basis of 2s. 6d. or more. The positions, however, are not analogous. If the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Department were placed under the control of a board, the scheme could finance itself. If it were run in that way, it would be possible to supply water at 1s. per thousand gallons without any difficulty.

Hon. J. Nicholson: Do you think it could finance itself on the present capital expenditure?

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: I think so, if we had capable management.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: Who will you get to manage it? Will you get Moses, seeing that he was the man who made the water run?

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: Perhaps we might get somebody with a little more experience than Moses on local matters; someone with common sense and interested in water.

Hon. F. E. S. Willmott: Are you referring to Tommy Walker?

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: As to the suggestion that the administration is at fault, occasioning the excessive charges that are levied, I have been searching “Hansard” to find a statement I remember having been made about an inspection of a department where chief officers were found sitting down with their feet upon the tables, reading newspapers, while the rest of the staff walked aimlessly about the room. I have been unable to find the quotation.

Hon. A. Lovekin: The Minister for Works can tell you that is a fact.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: There has been no construction work in connection with sewerage operations for some time past, and if the same body of engineers be retained at the present time, there must be some

ground for the statement that there is maladministration.

The Minister for Education: The Minister does not admit that.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: I am giving the statement that was made in Parliament.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: Does he admit that members of the staff are not working?

The Minister for Education: He would not admit what the hon. member says, for one moment.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: Mr. Lovekin made the statement last session.

Hon. A. Lovekin: The Minister will confirm it.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: I feel I should mention these matters to give hon. members another point of view.

Hon. A. Lovekin: I was with the Minister when he saw that going on in the department.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: I will take the Minister's word regarding the loss in connection with the sewerage. I can quite understand that those losses should be spread over a long period. I recognise, too, that interest charges have increased. I believe that some of the charges against water supplies, particularly in connection with sewerage operations, are not properly chargeable, but should be kept separate and distinct. No doubt in time the losses on the sewerage works will be overcome. The accounts of the water and sewerage branch should be kept separate from the others, and each should be made to balance, and accordingly pay for itself. Certainly house connections cannot be charged up with any of the loss on sewerage, because we are informed that out of an advance of £394,000 no less a sum than £384,000 has been repaid. Therefore house connections cannot be said to be contributing to the losses sustained on sewerage.

Hon. A. Lovekin: They will show a profit in time.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: They should not be brought into the question of the water at all.

Hon. A. Lovekin: They are paying interest all the time.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: There was also an argument between the Minister and Mr. Lovekin on the subject of costs, and in this, too, I have no doubt members are interested. I am inclined to agree with Mr. Lovekin that the costs should be charged on the rating, and when it comes to excess water the pumping costs should be cheaper. Another matter is that year after year we get increased assessments in the metropolitan area, and in this way the department receives huge sums which are never taken into account by the public. It is shown clearly that in the last ten years, in Greater Perth alone, the assessments have increased enormously and are still increasing so much that the revenue is conspicuously different. In the Municipal Year Book for 1922 we find that the rateable assessments in 1922 amounted to

£826,000, and in 1923 they had increased to £943,000. A rate of 1s. in the pound would, on that increase, produce a revenue of £4,650. The municipal authorities inform me that the assessments are still on the increase, and on the basis of recent figures we can form an idea of what the position will be this year. The returns will be augmented by a considerable sum. I have the figures here for the past ten years, and they are available for inspection by any hon. member. Another point that was argued related to the charges for industrial purposes. The Minister tried to justify the existing rates for excess water for industrial purposes. I view the high rate levied by the Government with some concern. If the department imposed a flat rate, that would be fair. The returns show that the department, in the past, charged 1s. 6d. per thousand gallons in Perth and 1s. at Claremont and Fremantle.

The Minister for Education: The rate is the same now.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: During the past few years the amounts have been balanced, but the fact remains that in those days, when most of the secondary industries were in the Fremantle area, it was recognised that it was worth while doing something to help them along, and for that reason they were charged what was a reasonable rate for excess water. But in later years the department, in their eagerness to acquire funds to meet the State's deficit, increased the rate and bludgeoned the industrial concerns into paying more for excess water.

The Minister for Education: It is a question of our inability to supply the water.

Hon. A. Lovekin: There is plenty of water if you will only pump it.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: My grievance against the Government, not only the present Government but many which preceded it, is that all knew what was likely to happen, and right throughout no effort was ever made to meet a difficulty that was so apparently approaching. The present Government is equally culpable with past Governments.

The Minister for Education: We are doing it now.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: No definite statement has been made in that respect.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: They have bought a few pipes.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: As the consumption for industrial purposes in the Greater Perth area is one-twelfth of the total quantity used, the proposal outlined in the motion is worthy of every consideration. At the present time most of the business firms are compelled to sink wells in order to augment the supply. Fortunately it is possible to do this. I have been obliged to do it, but in my case the principal object was to obtain water at a low temperature. It is impossible to get that from the Government mains. I must have water for my business that does not exceed

70 degrees. The temperature of the water supplied from the mains is 90 degrees. It will be seen therefore that water from the mains is of no use for my business.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: Moreover, you require clean water and you cannot get that in summer.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: Yes, we get it by filtration. Until to-day I was under the impression that the charge for water for domestic purposes was 1s. per thousand gallons.

Hon. A. Lovekin: That is in the new regulations.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: To-day I received an excess water rate notice which reads—

15th June, 1923. Meter registration notice No. 13080. 12,400 gallons: 6,200 gallons at 1s. 6d.—9s. 4d.; 6,200 gallons at 1s. 3d.—7s. 9d.

It will be seen, therefore, that the resolution passed by this House last session has not been given effect to in respect of water used for domestic purposes. In my case the rate was paid in time to secure the rebate of 3d. The Minister should have a word with the department and ask why it is that rate notices are still going out in this manner. If Parliament passes a resolution, we expect that it shall be given effect to. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. A. Lovekin, debate adjourned.

BILL—ELECTRIC LIGHT AND POWER. AGREEMENT AMENDMENT.

Read a third time and passed.

House adjourned at 6 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Thursday, 4th October, 1923.

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

QUESTION—SOLDIER SETTLEMENT.

Commission's Report, Assembly's Resolution.

Mr. WILSON asked the Premier: 1, As this House, on the 26th September last, adopted the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Repatriated Soldiers of the A.I.F. under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, 1918, is it the intention of the Government to give early effect to them? 2, If the answer is in the negative, do the Government intend to allow the present Soldier Settlement Board to sit in judgment on the errors they committed in permitting such heavy costs in regard to clearing and purchase of some estates, or do the Government intend to appoint a new board to specialise in these cases? 3, As regards the reference made by the Premier on the adoption of the report by the House, "It is not worth the paper it is written on," will he explain to the House what he meant?

The PREMIER replied: 1, Yes. 2, The blame for the heavy clearing cost of the land referred to, on which a total of £39,152 was expended to provide employment for out of work returned soldiers, cannot be attached to the Board. The purchase of estates was satisfactory except in a very few instances. 3, I withdraw the words "It is not worth the paper it is written on," and say that the report is worth the paper it is written on.

QUESTION—NORTH-WEST, EXPENDITURE.

Public Works and Road Board Subsidies.

Mr. DURACK asked the Minister for Works: 1, What amount of money has been expended by the Public Works Department out of Revenue and Loan Account, respectively, in connection with the North-West during each of the years 1919, 1920, and 1921, being the three years prior to the North-West Department taking over? 2, What was the amount of subsidy provided by the Minister for the various road boards throughout the North-West for the years 1919, 1920, and 1921?