

the Bank. On further reflection, I think that was a wrong interpretation. Doubtless the Minister will give the House an assurance on that point, but I take it the clause intends that if the commissioners offer to reduce the amount owing to the Bank, they can say to the general creditors, "We will only do this if you agree to forego part of your debts." In other words, no compulsion will be imposed upon the general creditors. If my reading is correct, I think that is an advance in the right direction. Whilst I am opposed to restrictive legislation or the abrogation of contracts, as regards this Bank, which is controlling a large part of the State's moneys, a step in the right direction is the provision of machinery under which if the creditors are willing the commissioners are able to take the lead and bring about a scheme under which the farmers' debts are reduced all round to a stage when they can possibly see some daylight ahead. With regard to private institutions, I am led to believe that process is going on quite substantially. Step by step they are writing down the debts where they can see that the debtor has no hope of meeting them, writing them down to a stage where he has a chance of making good and getting back to economic stability. Whilst that is proceeding, I believe, in private finance, I am personally glad to see in this Bill machinery for the commissioners to make a move in the same direction, by bringing about voluntary arrangements for reducing debts in the case of clients of the Agricultural Bank. There are other details connected with the Bill and the machinery thereof to which I may have to refer at a later stage, but for the time being these are the only aspects of the measure with which I desire to deal.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: A very fair speech.

On motion by Hon. P. D. Ferguson, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 10.23 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 31st October, 1934.

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

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, leave of absence granted for three consecutive sittings to Hon. T. Moore (Central) on the ground of urgent private business.

On motion by Hon. E. H. Angelo, leave of absence granted for six consecutive sittings to Hon. J. J. Holmes (North) on the ground of ill-health.

BILL—INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE ACT CONTINUANCE (No. 2).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 25th October.

HON. V. HAMERSLEY (East) [4.36]: I hope no obstruction will be placed in the way of the passing of the Bill. For many years some of us thought this legislation represented rather an exerescence and should not be continued because it was introduced originally owing to the conditions following upon the drought of 1914-15. With the passing of the years, however, various changes took place, and when blaming settlers for not making a success of their undertakings, we have been prone to overlook the causes of the trouble. At various times, owing to difficulties at the moment, such as scarcity of work and so forth, people were induced to take up land. Many left the public service, and lumpers left the wharves owing to shipping being so slack. From other walks of life men left their usual occupations and participated in the development of agricultural holdings. In many instances they were induced to go to special localities to which the early construction of

railways was predicted. When those settlers become more or less established, changed policies were adopted and these followed possibly upon changes of Government. Frequently the settlers, who had anticipated a railway being constructed within a mile or so of their holdings, found that the line that they expected would serve them had been diverted elsewhere, as a result of which they found themselves 20 miles or more away from the nearest railway. That has been a contributing factor to the non-success of many settlers. Then, again, many were encouraged to work along certain lines that proved unsuited to their particular localities. Naturally, those who were in a position to give advice to settlers could not anticipate exactly the prices that would be forthcoming for their produce, and often settlers were induced to do what proved to be the wrong thing. I have come into contact with settlers placed in the position I have indicated. I have mentioned these matters in this House before and have also discussed them with the departmental authorities concerned. Many of the farmers were placed in a difficult position because the Government, in an effort to economise, would not allow them sufficient money for the purchase of machinery suitable for putting in or taking off a crop. Some farmers had really first-class crops, but their accounts were not in a satisfactory condition, and the departmental officials, in their wisdom, said to those farmers, "No, we will only allow you to have a secondhand machine to deal with your crop. Your proposition is not big enough, and the area is not large enough, in addition to which your account does not warrant us in allowing you to purchase new machines. A number of machines have been offered to the department, and if you like to take one of those second-hand machines, we will allow you to have one." With the procuring of those secondhand drills or harvesters, the troubles of the settlers were merely emphasised. After all their hard work and the care they had exercised, the result spelt ruin for them because the drills were not fit to put in the crops, nor were the harvesters suitable for taking them off. The effect was that half the crop was wasted, and the following year saw wonderful self-sown crops. That has been the experience repeatedly, and it has been the main cause for some of the

settlers getting into such a difficult position. They secured three or four bags to the acre from a 7-bag to 8-bag crop.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: If they had been provided with new machines, it would merely have piled up their liability.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: No, because the farmers would have been able to take off seven or eight bags to the acre, whereas the secondhand machines left the grain on the ground.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: Merely to save a little expenditure!

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: Yes, and that course was followed simply because the settlers' accounts were not good. If new machinery had been provided, the extra crop taken off would have paid for the plant. That position has been recognised by many who are interested in agriculture. Agents have frequently arrived at my farm and expressed their willingness to pay small prices for machines that had been scrapped. I always refused to sell them because I knew that the agents would take the machines away, put a coat of paint on them, add a few fittings, and then pass them on to the department. In turn, those old machines would be passed on to some poor, innocent settlers who would have to take them or go without. When I hear remarks about incompetency on the part of settlers, and that they should have surmounted their difficulties before this, I reply that their troubles are not invariably due to their own mistakes. The building of railways elsewhere than along the routes it was thought they would take has left many settlers stranded probably 20 miles from railway communication, and, as I have already mentioned, the supplying of secondhand machinery has contributed to the failure of many. Certain people have made profitable sales of secondhand machinery. It was useless to the owners, who were glad to get rid of it at any price, and eventually it was passed on to the department and to settlers. Some of the secondhand machines were fairly good, probably quite as good as the settlers required, but many of the machines were not good, and that has been the cause of honest, hard-working men encountering difficulties. I realise that if money is readily made available, some people will accept all they can get and spend it, and when seasons of low prices occur, they are unable to finance their operations.

Hon. R. G. Moore: Did settlers have to accept machines of that kind?

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: Yes. I know of men who refused to take delivery of them and left them at the siding. They were charged demurrage and I went to the department and begged for consideration for those men. Some settlers who had put £1,000 or more into their farms were placed in that position.

Hon. G. W. Miles: Do not you think it is time we wound up the board?

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: No. The Chief Secretary explained that some of the farmers are this year facing as difficult a position as was experienced in 1914-15. Then the price of wheat at least was higher than that ruling to-day. Who could make a success of any farming proposition on the present price of wheat? Large sums of money have been provided by the State for the benefit of people who cannot get work, and surely the men who have been developing the country are entitled to help to keep them on their holdings, rather than have them coming into the towns to swell the number of unemployed. That is what will happen to many of the settlers if further assistance is denied them. Shortly we hope that the price of wheat will improve and that our settlers will be able to make good, but it would be a mistake to cut off assistance at this stage, thus compelling them to vacate their holdings, which would become breeding grounds for vermin. I hope that the second reading of the Bill will be passed.

HON. A. THOMSON (South-East) [4.50]: Though doubtless much of the criticism directed against the general administration of the board is justified, it would be fatal to the welfare of many primary producers if this legislation were not continued. I had the honour of representing the electorate of Katanning in another place when the Original Bill was introduced, and I remember expressing the opinion that the measure would bind the settler body and soul to the board. During that trying period the officers were not ready to handle the business. They were faced with the most difficult position, and the condition of many of the settlers who were compelled to come under the board was indeed a sorry one. I maintained then, as I have done since, that from the inception the Agricultural Bank should have been able to extend the assis-

taunce granted by the board. Unfortunately, we have two institutions assisting the same settlers, and in many instances the board have undermined the security of the Agricultural Bank.

Hon. R. G. Moore: Are not they conducted by the same officials?

Hon. A. THOMSON: No. For a time the board were in a hopeless muddle. Correspondence was not filed. I do not believe that the Government realised what an enormous amount of work devolved upon the men who had to administer the scheme in its initial stages. In the end the present Surveyor-General took control and produced order where chaos had previously reigned. I listened with interest to the remarks of Mr. Hamersley. I can endorse many of the statements he made. While possibly some of the settlers under the board should have been removed from their holdings long ago, there are hundreds of settlers who, by reason of the action of the board, fell deeper into debt than they would have done had they been allowed to manage their farms as they desired. Let me quote an instance in the Katanning district. It is recorded in the report of the Royal Commission on the Agricultural Bank and I can vouch for the accuracy of the details because, when I was a member of another place, I waited on the officer in charge and asked what was the use of compelling the two men in question to grow wheat when their endeavours to do so had reduced them to a parlous position. The reply was, "It is the policy of the Government and I have to carry out that policy." Though many settlers may justly be criticised for their present parlous position, hundreds of men had an increasingly heavy load of debt placed upon them through the manner in which the Act was administered. The Royal Commission, on page 104 of their report, stated—

Your Commissioners inspected the Kwobrup settlement near Nyabing At this settlement your Commissioners inspected the farm of Mr. Shaw, area 1,000 acres. This block was classified by the Lands Department as 965 acres first class, 35 acres second class, and priced at 14s. 6d. per acre.

Nobody could have worked harder than have Shaw and his brother. Yet they had a load of debt forced upon them by the board.

The settler, a Scotchman, relying on the classification, selected the land in 1910, and

has kept on working there since that period. It is a poor, worthless block, and it is a grave pity that this settler and his brother have been chained to this property for so long. The Industries Assistance Board compelled them, before providing sustenance, each year to put in 200 to 250 acres for wheat, and the highest average yield they had in any one year was six bushels. Needless to say the property is still over-capitalised.

The Commission commented—

The Lands Department surveyor who classified this land as first class land should be severely censured.

Hon. R. G. Moore: He should be drowned.

Hon. A. THOMSON: But that would not help the settler.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: It might help other settlers.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Other settlers left the district. If any benefit could be derived from holding up this Bill, I would agree to the adoption of that course, but I cannot see that anything could be gained by so doing. Mr. Angelo quoted from the findings of the select committee. It is to be regretted that the findings of the select committee, of which he was a member, were not more fully put into effect. Mr. Angelo said that perhaps it would be wise to hold this measure up until such time as the House had an opportunity to discuss the new Agricultural Bank legislation. If we do not pass the Bill, there will be no machinery to provide assistance to primary producers, many of whom no doubt are facing a serious future. The Industries Assistance Board is the only means by which the Government, unless they introduce special legislation, will be able to assist settlers and keep them on the land. It is reported that in the Geraldton district there are hundreds, and possibly thousands, of acres of land from which the farmers will get no return this season, although they have farmed their land according to the most approved methods. The failure is due to climatic conditions. I hope that not too many of them will require assistance, but possibly some of them will need financial help to tide over the difficulty. Mr. Hamersley said that many of the settlers, if turned off their holdings, would drift into the towns and would have to be provided with sustenance by the Government. May I draw attention to the different treatment that is extended to a man on a farm and one receiving sustenance through the

Industries Assistance Board, every penny of which is charged up against him. If he is in a position sooner or later to meet his liabilities, the amount of sustenance advanced to him must be paid back. It will thus be realised that that man is in a different position from the settler who, unfortunately, has no assets, and whose position therefore becomes somewhat difficult. I do not wish to labour the question, but I feel that we have arrived at the stage when many of our industries can only be kept alive with the aid of borrowed money. We are borrowing our way out of our difficulties to attain prosperity. We are told that unless we do continue to borrow to provide employment we shall not meet our responsibilities and get out of our difficulties. Western Australia at the present juncture cannot afford to do anything that would jeopardise our primary industries. They are having a difficult time, and I am glad to see that the Commonwealth at last have reluctantly—perhaps I should not use that word—realised that something must be done to assist the primary producer. I am hoping that when the assistance is made available it will not be meted out in the way that has been done with regard to the help given to necessitous farmers, but that it will be given to those entitled to consideration. Take the wheat bounty which is being given to those who did not pay income tax last year. There are many who paid a small sum in income tax and to do which denied themselves of much. By expert management and hard work and with the assistance of what I might term free labour, that is, the labour of their own families, they succeeded in paying a small amount of taxation. Yet those people did not receive anything. We should extend consideration to the hard-working farmer who is struggling to make ends meet and who, perhaps, is getting a little ahead of it. The Industries Assistance Board has an enormous accumulated debt and we have the spectacle of two separate accounts and two sets of officers. Thus one can imagine the heavy cost of administration. Another point that has been lost sight of by members of Parliament and the public as well is that while the Industries Assistance Board has been an excellent institution because of the assistance it has rendered farmers, it also has been an excellent body for the Government in that it has enabled them, if I might use the term, to manipulate their finances. We know what happened in connection with the group

settlements. We were receiving money at an interest cost of $1\frac{1}{4}$ per cent., and the Government were charging the group settlers seven per cent. That made the Treasury returns look very nice. The same thing happened in connection with the Industries Assistance Board in respect of many of the debts charged against the settlers. Land rents were all paid. It was only a book entry, but nevertheless it made the revenue of the Lands Department look very much better than it really was. Road boards and other local bodies received their rates; in fact one could go on analysing the amount of money collected by the Government who were getting credit for payments actually not received. Thus in effect it really was a manipulation of figures. I am not blaming any particular Government, but the point is that a great deal of the indebtedness of the Industries Assistance Board, and of those under its control, in reality consisted of Governmental charges. Let us hope—it may be a pious hope—that this will be the last year we will be asked to renew this Bill, and that in the Agricultural Bank Bill which will shortly be before us provision will be made for the administration of the Industries Assistance Board accounts. I hope the House will not delay the passing of the Bill. The Government must have some machinery whereby they can assist the primary producer, who is certainly deserving of every consideration. While gold mining is very helpful at the present time, the mainstay of Western Australia is the prosperity and success of the primary producer. This applies to the future as it has done to the past. Further, having so much money bound up in the development of the State, this is not the time to say that we cannot give further assistance.

HON. E. H. H. HALL (Central) [5.8]: I feel sure the House will pass the second reading. Right throughout the farming portions of the Central Province during the past few weeks, I have attended meetings of farmers from Nabawa, north of Geraldton, to Yandanooka, south of Geraldton. The crops in those areas have suffered extensively from rust. Last week I met a farmer who told me he had a variety of wheat planted which he had been informed was rust resisting. He, however, did not get one bag of decent grain off what he thought was going to prove a beautiful

crop. I do not wish to play the part of alarmist, but it is no use closing our eyes to the facts. I am pleased that the Minister has promised to make an inquiry, and the only thing I would urge is that that inquiry be expedited, because if it is necessary to seek aid from the Federal Government, we know from the experience we have had in connection with the wheat bounty, how long it will take to set out the procedure. We should not lose any time in finding out just to what extent the individual farmers will suffer as the result of rust. I regret that in the terms of the Royal Commission which investigated the position of the Agricultural Bank, there was no reference to the Industries Assistance Board, which, after all, is a branch of the Agricultural Bank being administered by the Bank officials. Approval or renewal of the systems under the Industries Assistance Act was dependent on the report of Agricultural Bank field inspectors, and therefore I think it was a pity that that institution was not brought within the scope of the Commission's investigations.

Hon. H. V. Piesse: It was.

Hon. E. H. H. HALL: What I should like to know is whether any action was taken as the outcome of the report of the select committee which investigated the affairs of the Industries Assistance Board some years ago. At any rate, I feel sure the House must now pass the second reading of the Continuance Bill, and its still further continuance in its present or some other form will be necessary for some time to come. I urge the Chief Secretary and the Government to render assistance in the cases of those farmers whose crops have been ruined by rust. Action should be taken as quickly as possible to find out the extent to which the farmers will suffer.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central—in reply) [5.12]: Mr. Seddon in the course of his remarks drew attention to the fact that the report of the operations of the board and the balance sheet should have been laid on the Table of both Houses before the 30th September. That is so, and this morning I drew the attention of the department to the omission. A promise was made that the report and balance sheet would be tabled

to-morrow. Mr. Craig said that under the provisions of the Act accommodation interest was being charged. I do not know whether he mentioned this as a statement or whether he put it in the form of a question.

Hon. L. Craig: It was in the form of a question.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: There is no such provision in the Act. Some hon. members suggested that the further consideration of the Bill should be held up until the Agricultural Bank measure was before the House. I consider it would be most inadvisable to do as those members suggested. I am informed, as a result of investigations made by the Lands Department, this has been a very severe season from a wheat-growing standpoint, the most severe experienced since 1914. There have been partial failures, and portions of the State have been swept by red rust. Certainly the farmers will need assistance from the Government. The Commonwealth Government have promised a bounty, and no doubt will grant it, but on what basis we cannot say. It is to be hoped it will cover the whole position. Anyhow, there will be need for this legislative machinery to enable the State Government to grant assistance. Unless the Bill be passed, the Act will expire on the 31st March next, after which it would not be legal to grant assistance under the original Act. Of course it could be done in a way, by making agreements to deal with every individual farmer, to have an agreement covering the whole of the original Act. But it would mean much delay and it would be foolish to do that when we have already on the statute-book an Act covering the whole position. I am just referring to these facts to induce members, if they require inducement, not to hold up the Bill, but to pass it, for the Agricultural Bank Bill has no bearing whatever on the situation.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

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

BILL—FORREST AVENUE CLOSURE.

Received from the Assembly and read a first time.

BILL—ROAD DISTRICTS ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. J. NICHOLSON (Metropolitan) [5.20]: This Bill is designed to amend or amplify the provisions of the Road Districts Act in so far as they relate to the powers of sale contained in that Act. There is in the Act provision which enables a road board, after rates have accumulated on lands for a period of five years, to make application to sell those lands. The procedure is set out in Section 287 and following sections. I understand a deputation from various road boards waited on the Minister for Works with a request that he introduce legislation that would simplify that procedure, which is cumbersome and, moreover, expensive. I have had brought before my notice instances of road boards being considerably out of pocket by following the procedure laid down in the Act, and in some of those instances it would have been much better for the road board simply to have done nothing and so saved money. It is estimated that a sale under the procedure laid down involves an expenditure of from £1 to 30s. per block. In instances where the lands so offered for sale are not in populous neighbourhoods, some of those lands do not even elicit a bid, and so the expenses incurred by the board are lost to the board. The object of the deputation which waited on the Minister was to simplify the procedure and reduce the cost involved. It was a simple and reasonable request, but we find that the Bill, instead of simplifying the procedure, apparently seeks to preserve it, and merely makes an addition to the Act providing that where an order for sale is not carried into effect, all the rights of property in the land offered for sale shall revert to and vest in the Crown. That was not what the deputation meant.

Hon. E. H. Gray: It is what they want.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: From what some of them said to me, it apparently is not what they intended. Of course there may

have been some misunderstanding. I do not for a moment think the Minister for Works would seek wilfully to misinterpret their wishes. But what they have been given in the Bill would in no way reduce the cost of the procedure; in fact it does not even alter it. The effect of the Bill is not only to deprive the road boards of the rates which have accumulated on the land, but also to wipe out all encumbrances on the land and re-vest the land in the Crown free and discharged from all encumbrances, rates and taxes.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: At the expense of the board.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Yes. The position is fully set out in Clause 2 of the Bill, which, after relating the circumstances under which the clause will operate, states—

All rights of property which may have at any time been vested by statute or otherwise in any person whomsoever in the said vacant land shall absolutely cease and determine, and the said vacant land, and all the estate, right and title in law and equity therein or thereto shall by virtue of this section be and become vested in His Majesty freed, released, and discharged of and from all rates and taxes then charged upon or owing in respect of the said land and of and from all encumbrances, and the estate, right, title, interest, claim or demand of any person whomsoever.

Apart from any request I may have received from any board to represent their views in the matter, I certainly could not subscribe to that provision and see that land, which has been encumbered with a bona fide mortgage and with rates accumulated, should vest in this way free from all mortgages by a simple process. Looking into the Bill caused me to refresh my memory in regard to this procedure, and I discovered there is lacking in the Road Districts Act an expressed provision which is in the Municipal Corporations Act, under which latter Act, when any municipality wishes to exercise the power of sale, it is necessary for the municipality to inquire as to what other interests exist in the land. If it be a mortgage or any other claim by any person it is necessary, under the Act, that notice be given of any intended sale to that mortgagee or other person interested in the land. Strange to say there is not a similar provision in the Road Districts Act for the road board or the clerk of the court to give notice to any mortgagee or any other person having an interest in the land.

Hon. E. H. Gray: The mortgagees can look after that part of the business.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The hon. member is quite wrong in making that remark. In many cases the mortgagee does not know of the failure to pay the rates. It is only right that some obligation should be cast upon the road board to give him notice, or give notice to anyone else who may have an interest in the land. Land can easily be sold, and this particular land when sold under the Act would be free of encumbrances. The mortgagee, who may be living some distance away from where the land is situated, may not be aware of the disposal of the property. The matter may be advertised in some local paper which he would have no opportunity of seeing, and he, like many other people, may not read the "Government Gazette."

Hon. W. J. Mann: People do not get an opportunity to read that.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: There is an obligation cast upon the road board to present a petition to the court as laid down in the schedule to the Act. In that petition must be set out the names of the various persons who may have an interest in the land, but I understand that usually no notice is given apart from advertisement to other persons interested. That could be rectified at a later time.

Hon. E. H. Gray: In this Bill?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: No. These parcels of land are going to revert to the Crown in which they would be vested, free from encumbrances. Members will have seen comments on this matter in the Press recently. There was an interesting article dealing with the Canning Road Board in Saturday's paper, and I think in Friday's paper appeared a letter written by some interested road board member. I have received a letter from the Metropolitan Local Government Association, dated 29th October, in the following terms:—

I am desired by the executive committee of the above association to write you in regard to the Bill for the amendment of the Road Districts Act in regard to the clauses relating to the sale of land for arrears of rates, which is now before Parliament. The executive committee considered this matter on Friday night last, and it is felt that the proposed amendment will not be of any value to the road boards, or in any way simplify the existing procedure under the Act for the sale of land.

The effect of the proposed amendment is to provide that where land is offered for sale for non-payment of rates and is not sold, it shall automatically revert to the Crown. It is generally agreed among local authorities, however, that before a local authority is in a position actually to offer the land for sale, expenses amounting to approximately 30s. per block have been incurred, and if the land is to revert to the Crown, the board will be this much out of pocket. In these circumstances, also, the board would have no opportunity of recouping itself for these expenses by again offering the land for sale. Further, if the land reverts to the Crown it will from the date of reversion be exempt from all taxation, and this will result in a loss of revenue to the board. The association feels that it would be much better if the Bill could be amended to provide that the land in certain circumstances, and with proper safeguards, could revert to the board. This would then enable the board again to offer the land for sale. If, however, Parliament feels that it cannot agree to the land reverting to the road board, it would seem desirable that the Act should remain as at present until such time as the whole of the existing clauses in regard to the sale of land could be thoroughly revised. The association trusts that you will bear these points in mind when the amending Bill is before the Legislative Council.

The proposal contained in this letter that the land should revert to the road board is so diametrically opposed to what is in the Bill that I imagine the Chief Secretary could hardly suggest an amendment to cover it. I feel I cannot see my way to vote for the second reading. I should like to strike out of this clause, if the Bill does pass the second reading, the provision therein exempting the land from all liability of rates and taxes if it does revert to the Crown. I realise, however, that the Crown would not want the land with the encumbrances upon it.

Hon. E. H. Gray: They could not sell it.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: There would be difficulty in having the Bill accepted in such circumstances.

The Chief Secretary: What would the encumbrances be on a block that would not at public auction fetch more than 30s.?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: That is not the root of the trouble. Some country lands are regarded as valueless.

Hon. E. H. Gray: There is land in the metropolitan area, the rates owing on which exceed its value.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Such land may become valuable in time. The whole position requires careful investigation. This Bill will not attain the desired purpose and would bring about an injustice. It would certainly be of no advantage to road boards, who would, in fact, be the sufferers. The Government would have the land, and some person who was fortunate enough to be owed money on it would have no chance of recovering it, or getting the land back.

Hon. E. H. Gray: There would not be many of those.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The Bill does not seem to provide a fair and adequate method of dealing with this rather complex situation. One thing that could be done is to provide that unless after notice the mortgagee or any other person interested paid the rates within a specified time, the land would revert to the board. The request of the association that the land should revert to the road boards is well worthy of consideration. If it passed into the hands of the local authorities, it ought to do so with certain safeguards, so that unfair advantage was not taken of the powers given. There may be a chance of these powers being abused, which is something we desire to avoid. It would be better that the matter should be thoroughly thrashed out through the road boards and all views considered, so that a fair and proper method of dealing with this question may be evolved. The Bill will not achieve the desired end, and I shall be compelled to vote against it.

Hon. E. H. Hall: Do you say this Bill does not embody the requests of the deputation which waited on the Government?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I am told that is so by certain persons who have communicated with me.

HON. C. F. BAXTER (East) [5.33]: It is very necessary that the Road Districts Act should be amended but not in the direction that this Bill sets out. I agree with the views of Mr. Nicholson. It is reasonable to expect that notice should be given to the mortgagee or other person interested in the land. An advertisement in a local paper might not be seen by those concerned. Apart from that, however, only on rare occasions will a local authority

force the sale of land, for the reason that it would be running a grave risk of adding to the amount already owing upon it by reason of having incurred expense in forcing the sale. The property may not be sold, and there would be this further indebtedness to add to the total. If the land reverted to the Crown, the road board would get nothing whatever as the result of the effort that was made to dispose of it. The only thing for the local authority to do is to ascertain whether there is a market for the property. A lot of land is held up because there is no market for it. Close to the metropolitan area a large parcel of land which has been subdivided into quarter acre blocks is absolutely useless, and the local authority will not take action for the recovery of rates due upon it because to do so would be waste of money. It must be remembered that in many cases the value of the blocks has been enhanced as the result of expenditure by the local governing bodies in whose districts they are situated. To pass the Bill will mean that when the encumbrances have been wiped out, the blocks will be saleable, thus giving the Government a good return for the outlay of the ratepayers. That is unfair. There is no way of amending the Bill so as to reimburse the local governing body any expenditure incurred, because that would be adding to the burden of the taxpayers, a thing this Chamber should not do. I do not see how we can agree to the Bill, which gives everything to the Government, and nothing to the local authorities that have created the values. I should like to amend the Bill, but do not see how it can be done here. Take a nearby road district, the Perth road district. Within that district, facilities such as roads have been provided, thus making the blocks saleable if the encumbrances mentioned in the Bill are wiped out. But who will benefit? Not the local authorities, who have provided the facilities, but the Government. That is not reasonable. The same remarks apply, in a minor degree, to outlying road boards. The measure has not received the necessary consideration from the Government, or it would not have been so one-sided. The Road Districts Act needs amendment in many respects, but I see no way to amend this Bill so as to make it equitable as between the Government and local authorities. Therefore I must vote against the second reading.

HON. E. H. GRAY (West) [5.48]: Mr. Nicholson sets out that the object of the local authorities is to simplify matters, and then the hon. member suggests a way to increase the cost of selling blocks. I should suppose that the reason why a provision of the nature suggested by him has not been included in the principal Act is that it has not been thought necessary. I cannot imagine any landowner or mortgagee being so careless as to neglect the important matter of inquiring every year whether or not the rates have been paid. A landowner or mortgagee failing to do so would be very slow. I have had to make a report on that matter every year.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: How many officers would be required by the various local authorities if your idea were carried out?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: One even has to send one's receipts forward. The object of the Bill is to free thousands of blocks in the metropolitan area and adjacent districts. The dispute seems to be whether the local authorities or the Government should get the land. There would be owing to the Government water rates and land taxes, and naturally the Government want to obtain payment of what is due to them.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: The Government have never expended anything on the blocks.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Frequently the amount owing to the Government is as high as the local rates owing.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: The Government have not rendered any service in establishing road communication and so forth.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Perhaps the hon. member will let me speak. I remember a case at Claremont in which a couple of blocks owned by a man in San Francisco were to be sold by the local authority. The local authority sent him notice to pay the rates. My house was next to those blocks, and seeing what I thought a favourable opportunity offering I tried to make a cheap deal. I wrote to the man in San Francisco. The value of his blocks was about £30. After consultation with some firm of land agents here, he offered them to me for £350. I did not buy them.

Hon. W. J. Mann: A good thing you lived next door!

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Something must be done to free the blocks from the existing encumbrances. Therefore the Bill should be passed. I fail to see why the Government

should not get the land. The local authorities will not derive a penny of revenue from these numerous blocks, which are scattered throughout the State, until the land has reverted to the Crown. Once that takes place, the local authorities will again begin to collect rates from the blocks.

Hon. H. Tuckey: The boards complain about the trouble and expense of selling the blocks.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: There must be some safeguard in the form of fair notice. I do not see how the sale of such blocks can be simplified under the Act as it stands. This matter is of greater importance in the metropolitan area than many people think. Thousands of blocks are lying idle there: and it is useless to put them up for sale, as their value is frequently about £15 while the rates owing on them often amount to £18 or £20. Until the Bill passes, no progress can be made. Therefore it would be a pity to throw out the measure. The executive of the Local Governing Bodies' Association are ill-advised in commenting in the strain they adopt. They are thereby standing in their own light. In fact, they are greedy and want to grab the lot. I support the Bill.

HON. H. V. PIESSE (South-East) [5.53]: I was amused to hear Mr. Gray's remarks about mortgagees being given notice in regard to rates, and ascertaining that they were paid. A little case in point, which occurred in a country road district, came under my notice a few weeks ago. A man had purchased some land, and had pledged it as security to a local firm for about £70 or £80 on mortgage. The road board had not received any rates whatever on the land in question, nor had they during the last seven years advised the holders of the security of the fact that rates had not been paid. A man who had seen the advertisement in the local paper of sale for non-payment of rates asked me my idea of the value of the land. I looked the matter up, and also made inquiries of a local solicitor; and we discovered that the land was subject to a mortgage. Eventually the mortgagee bought the land in for £80, the overdue rates amounting to £17. There is a case in which no notice whatever had been sent to the mortgagee. Had that course been adopted, the rates, being small, would have been paid.

Hon. V. Hamersley: Had this Bill been in operation, the mortgage would have been completely wiped out.

Hon. E. H. Gray: One cannot help that.

Hon. H. V. PIESSE: Mr. Gray says these blocks at present have no value, but they may become valuable. In conversation recently, I heard of two blocks at Wembley which were offered for sale many years ago on account of non-payment of rates. The rates were afterwards paid by someone who discovered that the blocks could be bought practically for the amount of the rates. He bought the blocks 10 years ago for £15, and sold them a few weeks ago for £125. Had those blocks reverted to the Government, who would have gained the advantage? The Government. But the road board rates would have been wiped out, and the local authority would have received no compensation whatever for their expenditure on roads and so forth.

Hon. G. Fraser: That example is only like a drop in the ocean.

Hon. H. V. PIESSE: I am aware of that; but if the blocks are transferred to the Crown, the road boards have no hope whatever of getting any return for their expenditure.

Hon. G. Fraser: To leave the Act as it is would mean that the boards would never have any chance of getting any payment.

Hon. H. V. PIESSE: Of course they have a chance. I cannot see my way to support the second reading of the Bill.

HON. J. M. MACFARLANE (Metropolitan-Suburban) [5.57]: Everyone who has been associated with municipalities or road boards must have realised the difficulty of handling blocks on which rates have not been paid. I fully understand the desire of the road boards to simplify the conditions under which they work, but in endeavouring to clarify the position they have got themselves into a deeper hole. I am reminded of an experience I had, with others, in applying to the Commissioner of Railways for relief in regard to the cost of transporting goods under the zone system. After we had laid our case before the then Commissioner of Railways, who was quite sympathetic, he said, "You have just brought to my knowledge the fact that the zone rates are far too liberal. While I am sympathetic with you, I must look into the question of those rates." He did so, with the result

that we found ourselves in a far worse position than that which caused us to approach him. And that is the position of the road boards to-day. They are asking for a simplified method of putting blocks on the market so as to recover what rates they can. The Government have realised the position and have said, "If the blocks are to revert to anybody, they must revert to the Crown." There is so much unrateable land in nearly all road districts, particularly those in the metropolitan area, that the local governing bodies are carrying out works without the possibility of deriving revenue from them. The proposal in the Bill will add to their difficulties. Under it the local authorities would be prevented from obtaining any rates at all in respect of those blocks until the Government had been able to effect sales of them. The proposal would get some sympathy from me if the areas to be dealt with were large, but in the metropolitan district it is only a question of blocks here and there. To carry the Bill would be asking the road boards to jump from the frying pan into the fire. They have a right to feel disappointed at the result of their attempt to get the matter simplified. If anyone should derive an advantage, it appears to me that the road boards should be in that position, because their interest in the sale of the blocks is to secure a renewal of the payment of rates in respect of such properties. We have also to remember that when the Government first alienated Crown land, it was disposed of to an individual who cut up the land into building blocks, and thereafter the municipality or road board concerned became involved in costs incurred in rendering ordinary services to such blocks. I really believe, taking all the circumstances into consideration, that, as Mr. Nicholson was able to show by the extracts he read from the circular he had received, it would be better to leave the Act as it is until it is clarified and equity is arrived at between the parties concerned. I cannot support the second reading of the Bill.

HON. L. B. BOLTON (Metropolitan) [6.2]: I regret I cannot support the second reading of the Bill in its present form. My reasons for that attitude are those enunciated by Mr. Nicholson, so I shall not go over the same ground that he traversed. It would be most unfair if land that had

to be sold should be allowed to revert to the Crown without the Crown reimbursing the road board for rates and other charges owing in respect of that land. I would support the Bill if it were amended so that that end would be attained. If it were altered so that the land could be transferred to the road board, in that event the road board should be responsible for reimbursing the Crown in respect of any amounts due to the Government. As the Bill stands, however, I shall vote against the second reading.

HON. H. S. W. PARKER (Metropolitan-Suburban) [6.3]: I shall oppose the second reading of the Bill, because, in my opinion, the matter has not been properly considered. It represents one bite at the cherry. At present land is subject to many forms of taxation, including road board rates, health rates, water rates, and land taxation. Recently a deputation waited upon the Minister who controls road board affairs, and several propositions were placed before him. One was that if no bid was made for a block, it should revert to the road board or else to the Government. Then, an equally important phase, they also wanted the position simplified so as to reduce the expense incurred by a board in selling blocks on account of unpaid rates. That is regarded as a most important matter, if I may judge from the communications I have received from the Road Board Association and from various individual boards. Those communications informed me that the local authorities were not so much concerned as to what was to become of the land, as they were regarding the expense associated with putting the ratebooks in order, particularly in connection with the endeavours to sell land in respect of which rates were owing. There should be one complete measure dealing with water, health, and road board rates. If the land were not sold, then one body could arrange for the disposal of the property. The effect of the Bill, if agreed to in its present form, would be that no road board would ever submit any property for sale unless advice had been received previously that there would be a purchaser. No board would go to the expense of putting land up for sale if the Government only were to reap the benefit. If a road board should decide that a block, on which

rates were owing, was no good for selling purposes, they would decide to sell another block and allow the first one to go until water supply people woke up and effected the sale. That will be the effect of the Bill. When speaking regarding the Bill in another place, a Minister stated quite clearly that the Government were prepared to introduce legislation to permit land to revert to the Crown in the event of no sale taking place, and thus clean up the rate books, but the Government were not prepared to accept the request from the road boards.

Hon. E. H. Gray: And this House would not agree to it.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: I cannot speak for the House; I can speak merely for myself. I would give every consideration to reducing needless expenditure. For instance, why is it necessary to go to a bailiff of the Local Court and pay outside people certain fees, when the work could be just as easily done by road board officials?

Hon. E. H. Gray: Road board officials are usually poor auctioneers.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: I am not speaking about auctioneers.

Hon. E. H. Gray: The bailiff's the auctioneer, and generally he is pretty good at the work.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: The Act states that the bailiff takes possession and the auctioneer is employed to sell.

Hon. E. H. Gray: That is not what happens.

Hon. H. S. W. PARKER: At any rate, that is what the Act says. A rather cumbersome procedure has to be followed in approaching the Local Court. The matter could easily be simplified to the advantage of a road board. I am not satisfied that local authorities should wait five years before being permitted to take action, and a more expeditious procedure should be provided. Very often the value of a block is more than eaten up by the arrears of rates and other charges against the property, with the result that no one would dream of purchasing it. The Bill will not assist in any direction, and I oppose the second reading.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, debate adjourned

BILL—TIMBER WORKERS.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 25th October.

HON. W. J. MANN (South-West) [6.10]: Shorn of all unnecessary references to many people who are already provided for, the Bill represents another attempt to bring under the operations of the Industrial Arbitration Act, a body of men who are engaged in sleeper cutting. The Bill mentions men who were engaged in the timber industry, but does not specifically deal with sleeper cutters as, I contend, it might reasonably have done. Nevertheless it deals almost wholly and and solely with sleeper cutters. The second object of the Bill is to bring the men within the jurisdiction of the Masters and Servants' Act. It is nearly two years since a similar Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly by the member for Forrest (Miss Holman). It was thoroughly debated in that House and, after passing through the various stages, was dealt with in this Chamber and was defeated on the second reading. The Bill now before us is almost identical with the one introduced on that occasion. I am somewhat surprised at the action of the Government in not giving a little more attention to the actualities of the position and introducing a Bill that would more effectively deal with what they desire to achieve. I am inclined to think the Government, bearing in mind the vote taken in this House on a previous occasion, when the earlier Bill was defeated by 13 votes to six—

Hon. C. B. Williams: There are a number of new members here now.

Hon. W. J. MANN: —must be regarded as super optimists.

Hon. E. H. Gray: We have some new members representing the South-West.

Hon. W. J. MANN: And we also have some old members who were not present when that division took place, and whose votes will not be with the Government on this occasion.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. W. J. MANN: I was pointing out that there were really two objectives sought by this Bill, one, to extend the jurisdiction of the Masters and Servants Act to men engaged in the sleeper industry, and the other to bring them under the Arbitration

Act. With the first objective I am in accord. In the past there have been quite a number of unsavoury incidents connected with sleeper contracts. Men have worked for a long period for sub-contractors and sometimes have received only portion of their money and sometimes none at all. On one or two occasions legal proceedings have been instituted, and in the case quoted in another place, not only did the plaintiff lose a number of months' work, but other men had a similar experience. I have before me a budget of letters received from men engaged in the industry. While all of them have much the same tone, they indicate that additional protection is required. I do not propose to weary the House by reading them all, but I wish to quote an extract from one to show what is going on at present. I do not know whether it is a case in which undue anxiety is being felt, but it indicates that the men who go into the bush and work under conditions not at all congenial have to wait unduly long for their money. The writer, I am given to understand, is an elderly man who has been in the timber industry for about 30 years and is regarded as a good hewer and a reasonable sort of man. I believe he is approaching the stage where he feels that he cannot keep pace with the younger men, and he desires the continuation of what he calls the present piecework system so that he can continue to work and earn, if not as much as he did in his heyday, a fair wage.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: I should say he would be in the minority.

Hon. W. J. MANN: Possibly, but quite a number of elderly sleeper cutters are operating. Some men who entered the industry 30 years ago, when I went to the South-West are still hewing, and I suppose they will continue to hew as long as they can stand and as long as there is timber to cut. I have selected the letter of this writer because he, more than others, has been recommended to me. He wrote under date 21st October—

All we want is the right to have a piecework rate fixed and better treatment as regards payment. Just to give you a little idea of the treatment we get at present, since the beginning of July we have been cutting a number of Trans line sleepers. These were passed on the 5th of this month and loaded away four days later. Up till the present we have seen no sign of any payment. These long delays mean we have in many cases to inflict many unnecessary hardships on our families. If you would care to visit us at this centre, we will

tell you of a lot more injustices than I can possibly convey to you in a short letter. I can easily supply you with proof that all the talk of us being contractors is rot.

The word "rot" is underlined. It is quite a debatable question as to what constitutes a contract, but I shall not follow that at the moment. The letter continued—

All we bring to the job is our skill and muscle, and moreover we can and have been put off at the pleasure of the contractor.

For that and the reason I quoted previously I consider that those men are entitled to some rapid method of approaching the court, and while legal members of this House may be able to tell us the advantages of their being brought under the Masters and Servants Act, one benefit that the men claim is that they can act through a medium and need not wait for a month to go to the local court and get their cases adjudicated upon. One man said, "If they are crooks, we can put them where they ought to be."

Hon. G. W. Miles: Will this Bill bring them under the Masters and Servants Act?

Hon. W. J. MANN: That is one of the objects of the Bill.

Hon. G. W. Miles: You are in favour of the Bill?

Hon. W. J. MANN: I am in favour of that provision. I want that to be clearly understood. I do not want the hon. member to anticipate what I am about to say. I will tell him exactly where I stand. For that reason alone I shall support the second reading, and I think members can quite safely follow me in that course, leaving the other and more debatable object to be dealt with when the Bill reaches the Committee stage. On the second objective to bring the men under the Arbitration Act, opinions naturally differ greatly. It is alleged and it has been represented to me that those men are contractors in the fullest sense and that they should be considered in that light only. I have not yet been able to satisfy myself what constitutes a contract. So far as I can understand, for generations men have been making so-called contracts, and lawyers have been contending that they are not contracts and are not worth the paper they are written on. A large section of people contend that the hewers are merely piecework wage earners, and as such have every right to seek recognition in the Arbitration Court. Those who contend that all sleeper cutting is governed in its entirety by contract in which the men

are principals object to the proposal. It has been put to me that the men are contractors in every sense of the word. Consequently, those who argue that way maintain that the Bill is unnecessary. The sleeper-cutters, in reply, insist that the control of the industry and the fixation of rates of pay will not only assist to stabilise the industry, but will afford protection to the reasonable contractor. In this as in other industries, there are good men and men who are not so good. There are men who are prepared to pay reasonable wages and observe reasonable conditions, and there are men who are out to get the last pennyworth from the hewers and take every possible advantage of their perhaps impecunious position and their lack of employment, or take advantage of them in the bush. It is not long since a large body of men in the South-West had a most anxious time regarding the payment for some sleepers cut for the Trans. railway line. The men had to wait not weeks but months for their money, and storekeepers with considerable regret had to tell the men that they could carry them no longer. Consequently the position of the men became extremely serious. Those men should have been paid promptly. The sleepers were cut for the Commonwealth Government and because of some machination—I do not mean to infer that the contractors endeavoured to rob the men or deprive them of their just dues; they were men who had taken on a goodly contract—when it came to paying wages, they had not the money with which to pay the men. That sort of thing should not be countenanced. I would require employers entering the business to put up a bond before they employed men. That would be only reasonable and fair. Sub-contractors who do not take off their coats make arrangements probably with a man who has some jarrah on private land, offering him possibly a lump sum for the timber on an area or offering to pay on a loadage rate, or else they get a permit from the Government to cut on Crown lands and employ men to do the work. Sub-contractors of that kind should be required to prove that they have sufficient cash with which to pay the men their wages. Men should not have to take the risk of not receiving payment. The position of the sleeper-cutting industry is really full of interest, much more than most of us realise. Those of us who occasionally go through the bush often have

cause for wonder. Recently I asked a question in the House regarding reforestation. The question was suggested by some remarks made to me by a man who knows the timber business. To illustrate the interesting position of the timber industry at present, I cannot do better than quote from the report of the Forests Department for the year ended 30th June last. Possibly members have perused it, but in case they have not, I crave the indulgence of the House while I read a small portion of it to show the necessity for protection in the direction of seeing that the timber assets of the State are properly controlled and are not permitted to get into the hands of men who will not do a fair thing. Fortunately at the present time the Forests Department are taking a very fair stand in the proceedings and practically all the timber cut to-day is marked by forestry officials. Before I read the remarks of the Conservator I want members to recollect that until about a year ago the position of the industry was really deplorable. Excepting for the sale of timber in the stacks at the mills, there was nothing much doing in the way of sales. There was practically no cutting, or very little, whilst sleeper-hewing was almost non-existent, so that the figures quoted here are really figures showing the difference between an industry that was temporarily flat out and one that is now showing some progress. Mr. Kessell, in his introductory remarks, says:

A very substantial improvement in the position of the timber industry has taken place during the year under review. The volume of milling timber produced has shown an increase of 37 per cent. over the previous year, and the production of hewn timber increased by 273 per cent.

Hon. G. W. Miles: Was there any production at all in the previous year?

Hon. W. J. MANN: These figures represent a normal output.

The increase in employment in both branches of the industry is greater than indicated by these figures, as monthly production figures have shown further increases towards the end of the financial year. This revival in the demand for jarrah, particularly in the form of railway sleepers, from many parts of the world, directs attention again to the problem of future timber supplies. Practically the whole of the output of sawn timber is obtained from State forests, and the life of several of the largest mills operating on virgin forest is less

than ten years. Although a considerable volume of timber remains on certain areas of cut-over forest, the log supplies from this source will only be sufficient to support mills of much smaller size for limited periods, and there is a serious deficiency in trees nearing maturity in all the more accessible forest districts, owing to an extensive trade in poles, piles, and squared beams in past years. The remaining virgin forests which have not been tapped for sawmilling are few in number, poorer in quality, and at a considerably greater distance from port of shipment. During the past five years the cut of sawmill logs from all State forests has been regulated by Working Plans which aim at a sustained yield of milling timber, and the additional information obtained during this period serves to emphasise the immediate practical importance of careful regulation of cut associated with a vigorous programme of reforestation and fire protection.

The outlook for the hewing industry is still more serious. It is evident that private property supplies are rapidly diminishing. In fulfilling large export orders during the years 1923 to 1929, over 85 per cent. of the hewn timber exported came from private property, while, at the present time, only 50 per cent. is derived from this source, and much of this timber is being obtained by working up odd trees remaining on properties which have been cut through several times during the past ten years. Following an assessment of the volume of hewing timber remaining on State forests, timber reserves, and other Crown lands, an addendum to the general working plan for Jarrah, to regulate the output of hewn timber from these sources, was approved by the Governor in Council in November, 1933. This working plan aims to provide continuity of employment for 250 hewers for a term of five years, but in certain districts difficulty is being experienced already in finding suitable forest, and, if exploitation is continued at the present rate, within two years the question of sleeper supplies for local and Commonwealth railways is likely to become a matter of serious concern. The seriousness of this position does not appear to be appreciated even by those engaged in the industry, and the economy of selling sleepers of the present high standard to overseas countries at the low rates which are operating throughout the industry to-day is a matter deserving careful consideration.

Members will agree that that is a statement that is full of food for thought, and in any legislation dealing with timber and timber workers, these matters should be borne in mind. Following some comments on the questions of royalty and rebates with the object of assisting in the rehabilitation of the sawmilling industry, the Conservator adds—

In the hewing industry the position is somewhat different, and there is reason to believe that competition between local supplies for

overseas business has played some part in bringing and holding prices at their present unreasonably low level. Prosperous conditions in the industry cannot be brought about by low stumpage values, and all associated with the business are entitled to look for a better return from this fast-diminishing export commodity. The present average royalty for hewn jarrah sleepers is considerably lower than the royalty on the recognised durable sleeper timbers in the Eastern States, and is comparable only to the royalties charged in New South Wales on second class hardwoods which have been used to supply China and New Zealand contracts during recent years. The futility of suggesting that jarrah should try to compete with these less durable hardwoods growing in proximity to harbour facilities on the East coast of Australia is indicated by the fact that sleepers are being delivered on wharves in certain New South Wales ports, after the payment of all charges, at a total cost which is below the bare cost of cutting and carting jarrah sleepers to railway sidings.

Again, that is a matter that should be given prominence. We sometimes hear that our timber firms are unable to get contracts for jarrah sleepers. The position is that Western Australia supplies the highest-grade sleeper in the world, and that is saying a good deal. There is just one other matter in the report to which I wish to refer. The Conservator writes—

A number of overseas sleeper orders were obtained during the year, and these, together with Commonwealth and local orders, have given employment to between 700 and 800 hewers, and it is anticipated that orders at present in hand will keep these hewers employed until well into next year.

Members will agree that that statement should be taken into consideration when dealing with this question. The necessity for caution by all engaged in the industry is very apparent. If I thought that the object of the timber workers in seeking the right to approach the Arbitration Court was unduly to force up production costs, then I would not hesitate to urge members to throw out the Bill. But I am not satisfied that the position is such that we should throw it out in its entirety. I have endeavoured to represent to the sleeper-cutters that if anything of that description is in their minds, they are bound to assist in something that will have a boomerang effect; the industry will not be able to stand it, and they will have no orders to cut. I shall keep an open mind on this particular part of the Bill, because I want to hear from other members something about what they

recognise as being the difficulties of contractors in this instance. Even at the present time there are men who are really contractors in the true sense of the word. There are some men who themselves make bargains with private holders of timber land, and men who get permits, and they get out and hew sleepers themselves, sometimes individually, but more often in small parties. Only this morning I made an effort to ascertain the relative percentages of men who claim to be contractors and those who claim to be pieceworkers.

Hon. J. Cornell: Contractors mainly cut on private land.

Hon. W. J. MANN: Mainly. I was not successful in getting anything more than an estimate, and that estimate was lower than I thought it would be. A man associated with the timber industry assured me that not more than 10 per cent. of them were classed as contractors, while the other 90 per cent. were piece-workers. And a point which the sleeper-hewer is urging in support of the contention that he is a piece-worker is that in 95 per cent. of cases where the men are employed there is no written agreement whatever. They are consulted as to the price, but the figure is stated and the worker can take it or leave it. There are some variations to that, but I am told there are men anxious to get the very last out of the sleeper-cutters and grind them down to a price that is neither fair nor reasonable. However, the better class of employers, while they follow the same course, are more amenable to reason and, although they invariably fix the price, they say to the men, "We have some cutting and we will give you so much." And if it can be shown that there are some disabilities in consequence of which the men request an increased figure, the employers are perfectly reasonable and will meet them if their request be justified. For that reason those employers are to be commended. In my opinion it would be a pity to see the Bill defeated without an earnest attempt being made to improve the existing position. We all recognise that, generally, the functions of the Arbitration Court have made for stabilisation of industry. From time to time I have heard people say we ought to do away with the Arbitration Court, but I am sure, if it came to a showdown in this Chamber, there

would not be many of us in favour of it. If we are honest with ourselves, we must agree that the Arbitration Court, in the main, has done valuable work in this State. There is nothing unreasonable about these men presenting their case and urging that they be recognised by the court so that they may approach it with a request for better conditions. I hope the second reading will be passed. If it be passed, and we are unable to secure the amendments that some of us may require, rather than see the Bill entirely lost, I would move in Committee that the one portion of Clause 2 be deleted, while the other portion, that referring to the Masters and Servants' Act, at least be granted to the men.

On motion by Hon. C. B. Williams, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I move—That the House at its rising adjourn until Tuesday, the 6th November.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.6 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 31st October, 1934.

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

MOTION—PUBLIC SERVICE REGULATIONS.

To Disallow.

Order of the day read for the moving by Mr. Needham of the following motion:—

That Regulations Nos. 27, 28, 41, 44, 50, 56, 58, 59, 62, 72, 74, 76, 83, 94, 95, 98, 102, 104,